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**CIANO'S
DIPLOMATIC
PAPERS**

CIANO'S DIPLOMATIC PAPERS

Being a record of nearly 200 conversations held during the years 1936-42 with Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Goering, Ribbentrop; Chamberlain, Eden, Sumner Welles, Schuschnigg, Lord Perth, François-Poncet; and many other world diplomatic and political figures. Together with important memoranda, letters, telegrams, etc.

EDITED BY MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

TRANSLATED BY STUART HOOD



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	xiii
1936	
I	
SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED	3
<i>12th June—30th July</i>	
Conversations with the Diplomatic Representatives of Great Britain, France, Argentina, Turkey, Germany, Haiti, Poland, Switzerland, Austria, Rumania, Mexico and Belgium.	
II	
CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN	25
<i>3rd—17th August</i>	
Conversations with the Diplomatic Representatives of France and Great Britain.	
III	
LINKS WITH BUDAPEST AND VIENNA	33
<i>7th—15th September</i>	
Conversations with M. Avenol, the Hungarian Minister and the Austrian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Schmidt.	
IV	
SHAPING THE AXIS	42
<i>23rd September—6th November</i>	
Conversation between the Duce and Herr Frank; with von Neurath, the Fuehrer, and the British and German Ambassadors.	
V	
ITALY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY CONFER	63
<i>9th November—28th December</i>	
Conversations with Schuschnigg, Schmidt, Horthy, Darányi, and Kánya; and with the Ambassador of Japan, and the Yugoslav Minister.	

CONTENTS

1937

VI

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE 75

6th—23rd January

Conversations with the Ambassador of Great Britain, and between the Duce and President Goering in the presence of Count Ciano.

VII

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA 92

4th February—26th March

Conversations with the Turkish Foreign Minister, the Yugoslav Prime Minister and the Rumanian Minister.

VIII

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED 106

22nd April—22nd May

Conversations between the Duce and Chancellor Schuschnigg, in the presence of Count Ciano; between the Duce and von Neurath; and with Darányi and Kánya.

IX

LONDON UNVISITED 121

2nd—26th June

Conversations with the Ambassadors of Great Britain, Turkey and Germany.

X

'VERY BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY' 129

19th—31st July

Conversations with the Ambassador of Japan.

XI

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS 132

15th August—2nd October

Conversations with the Ambassadors of Great Britain and Spain and with the British Chargé d'affaires.

CONTENTS

XII

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT 138

20th October—8th November

Conversations with the Ambassadors of Japan, the Soviet Union and Brazil; and with Herr von Ribbentrop and the Duce.

XIII

MANOEUVRING FOR POSITION 148

8th November—13th December

Conversations with the Hungarian Minister, the Polish Ambassador, and M. Stoyadinovitch.

1938

XIV

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN 157

3rd January—19th February

Conversations of the Duce with Count Bethlen; letter to, and report from the Italian Ambassador to London, Count Grandi; conversations with the Ambassador of Great Britain and with the Prince of Hesse.

XV

CHAMBERLAIN TRIES AGAIN 186

22nd February—26th March

Conversations with the Ambassadors of Great Britain and the United States of America.

XVI

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS 200

15th April—2nd May

Conversations with the German Ambassador and the Yugoslav Minister.

XVII

EUROPEAN TENSION 206

18th May—20th August

Conversation with the Diplomatic Representatives of Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Turkey and France; Memorandum of the

CONTENTS

Italian Government in reply to the Note of the British Government of 20th June, 1938; conversation between the Duce and the Hungarian Prime Minister, Imrédy, and the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Kánya, in the presence of Count Ciano.

XVIII

CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS 232

13th September—28th November

Conversations with the Diplomatic Representatives of Yugoslavia, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain and Rumania; telephone conversations with the Reich Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop.

XIX

HITLER PROPOSES A MILITARY ALLIANCE . 242

28th October

Conversation between the Duce and the Foreign Minister of the Reich, von Ribbentrop, in the presence of Count Ciano.

XX

ITALY AND FRANCE 247

9th November—2nd December

Conversations with the French Ambassador; letter to the Ambassador in London, Grandi.

1939

XXI

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME 257

2nd—12th January

Conversation between the Duce and Chamberlain; letter to the Reich Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop.

XXII

CIANO VISITS BELGRADE AND WARSAW . . 267

18th January—25th February

Report on his journeys to Yugoslavia and Poland and of his conversation with the Prime Ministers, Stoyadinovitch and Beck.

CONTENTS

XXIII

- THE CROATIAN QUESTION 276
17th March—7th April
Conversations with the German Ambassador and the Yugoslav Minister; letters between the Reich Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, and Ciano.

XXIV

- PACT OF STEEL 282
6th May—2nd July
Conversation with the Reich Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop; telegram to the Minister in Sofia, Talamo; letter to the Ambassador in Berlin, Attolico.

XXV

- CONVERSATION WITH FRANCO 289
19th July

XXVI

- SALZBURG 296
11th—13th August
Conversations with the Fuehrer and with the Reich Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop.

XXVII

- ONE LAST TRY 305
14th September—1st October
Letter to Lord Halifax; conversations with the French Ambassador and with the Fuehrer.

XXVIII

- ITALY ON THE BRINK 317
8th November—6th December
Letters to the Ambassador in Berlin, Attolico, and to Lord Halifax; conversation with Dr. Ley.

XXIX

- ATTEMPTS AT BALKAN APPEASEMENT 328
22nd December, 1939—7th January, 1940
Letter to the Minister in Budapest, Vinci Gigliucci; conversations with the Foreign Ministers of Rumania and Hungary.

CONTENTS

1940

XXX

THE MISSION OF SUMNER WELLES TO EUROPE 335

24th February—16th March

Letter to the Ambassador in Berlin, Attolico; conversations between the Duce and Sumner Welles in the presence of Count Ciano; conversations between the Reich Foreign Minister and the Duce in the presence of Count Ciano and the German Ambassador, von Mackensen.

XXXI

THE BRENNER MEETING 361

18th March

Conversation between the Duce and the Fuehrer in the presence of Count Ciano and von Ribbentrop.

XXXII

LAST EFFORTS AT MEDIATION 366

1st May—8th June

Conversations with the Duce and the United States Ambassador; letter to the Italian Ambassador in Berlin; letters to Serrano Suñer.

XXXIII

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE 372

19th June—7th July

Conversations with von Ribbentrop and the Fuehrer.

XXXIV

RUMANIA DISMEMBERED 380

20th July—9th September

Conversations with the Fuehrer, and between the Duce and M. Gigurtu in the presence of Count Ciano; letters to the Hungarian Regent, Serrano Suñer and the Lieutenant-General in Albania, Jacomoni.

XXXV

SPAIN AND THE AXIS. 388

19th September—28th October

Conversations between the Duce and von Ribbentrop; between the Duce and Serrano Suñer; between the Duce and the Fuehrer; and with the German Chargé d'affaires.

CONTENTS

XXXVI

- RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA 405
4th November
Conversations with the Fuehrer and von Ribbentrop; letters to the Italian Ambassador in Berlin.

1941

XXXVII

- MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO 417
19th January—12th February
Conversation with von Ribbentrop; between the Duce and the Fuehrer; letters to Serrano Suñer and von Ribbentrop; conversation between the Duce and Franco.

XXXVIII

- CREATION OF THE CROAT STATE 431
25th March—30th April
Conversations with the Fuehrer and with von Ribbentrop; letter to the Poglavnik of Croatia, Pavelic.

XXXIX

- MORE ATTEMPTS TO PERSUADE SPAIN 440
4th May—3rd June
Letters to Serrano Suñer; conversation with von Ribbentrop.

XL

- RUSSIA INVADED 445
15th June—25th August
Conversation with von Ribbentrop and between the Duce and the Fuehrer.

XLI

- 'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY' 453
28th September—3rd December
Letters to von Ribbentrop and the Italian Ambassador in Berlin; conversation with the Fuehrer; conversation between Count Ciano, the Fuehrer, Goering and von Ribbentrop; between the Duce and the Japanese Ambassador.

CONTENTS

XLII

DARLAN AND PAVELIC 468

10th—16th December

Conversation with Admiral Darlan and the Poglavnik of Croatia, Pavelic.

1942

XLIII

THE WAR GOES ON 477

15th January—30th April

Conversation with the Regent, Horthy, the Prime Minister and other Hungarian political personalities; letter to the Hungarian Prime Minister; conversation with von Ribbentrop.

INDEX 485

INTRODUCTION

THOUGH essentially a shallow and rather vulgar character, Ciano is likely to have a more vivid place in history than many of his contemporaries who seemed, when they were alive, of far greater importance. Ribbentrop's last complaint at Nuremberg before his execution, according to the American psychologist, Dr. G. M. Gilbert, was that he would be unable to write his 'beautiful memoirs'. It is doubtful, however, if the memoirs, supposing they had been written, would have been particularly beautiful, or even interesting. There is about Ribbentrop's writings a typically German heaviness, a pomposity and long-windedness which makes it extremely doubtful if he would have been able, even if given the opportunity, to write an entertaining, or even a serviceable, account of the events in which he was so deeply concerned. Those long directives which he used to send out (a good example is the long letter, dated October 3rd, 1940, which he addressed to Stalin, and which is included in the State Department publication 'Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-41') must have been deciphered with many a sigh and read with many a yawn. Ciano, on the other hand, is seldom dull. There is a sort of vivacity about him, even at his most foolish. He is somehow a character. Like Boswell, if he had been more worthy as a man, he might well have been less entertaining as a chronicler. Although so deeply involved in the lunacy of Italian Fascism's last phases, he managed somehow to maintain a fitful objectivity. Reading him one comes, in a way, rather to like him—not for anything he was or did, but because of some twist in his character; a disparity, sometimes almost as vast as in Cervantes's Knight of the Woeful Countenance, between what he was and what he purported to be.

As the Duce's son-in-law and sedulous admirer, Ciano was certain to receive promotion, but after failing as a journalist, and being only mildly successful as a diplomat, even he may well have been surprised when he was appointed Foreign Minister at the early age of thirty-three. Though his father, Constanzo Ciano, was an eminent Fascist, who had managed to acquire a very considerable fortune as well as a patent of nobility, it was quite on the cards at one point that Ciano himself might have turned against Fascism and joined the ranks of the Liberal intelligentsia. Whatever faint struggle he may have engaged in to resist acceptance of the Fascist

INTRODUCTION

creed, when he did accept it, it was wholeheartedly. Even so, but for his marriage to Edda Mussolini, it is doubtful if much would have been heard of him. He scarcely had the makings, on his own account, of more than a subordinate.

The dynamic of his life was personal ambition, and a flamboyant taste for adventure. He had neither a religion nor a political philosophy, though there is no reason to doubt his personal courage or his devotion to what he conceived to be the interests of his country. His character was, on the whole, unedifying, and, as Foreign Minister, he was inevitably the instrument of the Duce's fluctuating purposes. Whatever he may have said in private conversation with Mr. Sumner Welles and others, there is no single recorded case in which he ventured to oppose the Duce, or even to disagree with him, to his face. If, however, he was bound in all circumstances to follow Mussolini's directions, within the strict limitations this imposed, he displayed a certain ability and shrewdness. He was from the first distrustful of the Axis policy, and felt that Italy should resist being wholly drawn into the orbit of Germany. Even so, when, after the fall of France, he thought Germany's victory was assured, he was in no way behindhand in pressing Italy's claims. At his meeting with Ribbentrop at Munich on 19th June, 1940, he indicated the generous share Italy expected to get of the immense loot which he supposed would be available for distribution in Europe, Africa and Asia, and reminded Hitler of these claims when he saw him in Berlin on 7th July, 1940.¹

He was, in many ways, a typical product of this age. That he was a Fascist was more the result of his being born an Italian than anything else. If he had been a German, he would have been a Nazi; if he had been a Russian, he would have been a Communist, and the result, in the different context, would have been much the same. When there are neither religious values nor an accepted manner of behaviour to impose a moral pattern on life, all that is left is the pursuit of power as such. Into this pursuit, both in his personal and ministerial capacity, Ciano threw himself with zest and enjoyment. As long as it lasted it was thoroughly satisfying. He had no qualms whatsoever about breaking treaties, or practising deceit, or otherwise seeking through perfidy an advantage for himself or for Italy. If, on the whole, he disliked the Nazis, it was for personal reasons. There was no element of moral disapprobation in his dislike. He resented their arrogance, but did not deplore their behaviour. It never occurred to him that there was anything wrong

¹See Chapter XXXIII.

INTRODUCTION

in the use of terror as an instrument of authority—not, at any rate, until he, too, at last fell a victim to terrorism. He was as much a child of disintegration as a Frank or a Vishinsky. His Catholicism, even his occasional somewhat naïve exhibitions of snobbishness, were as unreal as Goebbels's love of culture, or the Politbureau's concern for the toiling masses. The focus of his life and thought was power. Mussolini represented power, and therefore he attached himself to Mussolini. The instrument he helped to create proved at last to be his own destroyer, but among his bitter regrets there is no trace of any sense that the pursuit of power had itself been mistaken. The only thing he minded, or that such characters ever mind, was failure. Even so, we may be grateful to him that out of vanity, or some faint residue of his early literary ambitions, he took the trouble to keep so careful a record of the affairs with which he was concerned. For those who wish to piece together the shape of this strange time, this record is, and will ever be, invaluable.

* * * * *

Though by the time Ciano became Foreign Minister Italy's course had already largely been set against the Western democracies, the Axis as a formal instrument remained to be forged. Marshal Badoglio's troops had entered Addis Ababa; the Negus had fled, and Mussolini, on 9th May, made the triumphant announcement that Italy had at last got the African Empire she deserved. The Abyssinian war, in which Ciano commanded a bomber squadron, was as good as over. At the Palazzo Chigi, the first task which confronted the new Foreign Minister was to deal with the political consequences of this military success. Sanctions, which had been instituted by the League of Nations in the autumn of 1935, were officially still in operation. It is true that they had never been particularly effective. The shutting of the Suez Canal and the cutting off of oil supplies, which might well have seriously impeded Italy's military operations, were not undertaken. In other words, the League Powers had alienated Italy for the sake of measures which could not, and did not, prevent the conquest of Abyssinia. This, unfortunately, was typical of their whole policy.

When the fighting was over, a move to bring to an end the show of imposing sanctions developed. Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who was to become Prime Minister in May, 1937, referred to them in a queerly mixed image, which was characteristic of his subsequent performance in the field of foreign affairs, as 'the very midsummer of madness'. The 92nd Session of the Council of the League of

INTRODUCTION

Nations, which had on its agenda the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, was prudently postponed from 11th May to 15th June: It was obvious that a general feeling existed at Geneva in favour of accepting as an accomplished fact the defeat of the Negus's armies. What was looked for was a face-saving device to cover up the unhappy face of the League's efforts to check an aggressor State in accordance with the obligations undertaken under Article XVI of the Covenant. Thus, no great difficulty confronted Ciano in procuring the cancellation of the feeble efforts which had been made to brand and punish Italy as a Covenant-breaking Power. Aggression in Abyssinia had proved from every point of view a complete success, and he was easily able to crown it with the approval, or, at any rate, the acquiescence, of the League States.

Looking towards Europe, a more complicated and hazardous picture presented itself. Two months before Ciano became Foreign Minister, Germany had re-occupied the Rhineland, thereby finally destroying the last vestiges of the Versailles settlement, and, what was more serious, at the same time, in effect, repudiating the freely negotiated Locarno Pact of 1925. It was clear now to all who had eyes to see that German aggression would have to be reckoned with. Mr. Eden, who had risen to fame as an earnest apostle of the League of Nations, felt bound to call the attention of his colleagues to the growing seriousness of the German danger. On 3rd March, a White Paper had been published setting forth what was proposed in the way of rearmament, and later Sir Thomas Inskip was appointed Co-ordinator of Defence—an appointment which, in the House of Commons, understandably evoked uproarious laughter, and little concern in either Rome or Berlin.

Ciano's own personal predilection, as has been said, was to sit on the fence, profiting from the fears of the Western democracies without wholly throwing in his lot with Germany. Such a policy would have been difficult to execute even if the Duce had been of the same mind. As it was, Mussolini had become increasingly intoxicated with the idea of German might, and of what he might gain by attaching Italy's fortunes to it. His mind, as we now know, was already largely made up even before he committed the supreme folly of agreeing to the Anschluss—an act which, understandably, procured him Hitler's gratitude, and involved him in a course which ended in his humiliating 'rescue' by S.S. parachutists from the hands of his own countrymen. It is just possible that exceptionally astute British statesmanship, combined with resolute and lavish rearmament, might have lured Mussolini away from the Axis. When there was confused appeasement, and a complete dis-

INTRODUCTION

harmony between the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary in their views on foreign policy, with Sir Thomas Inskip responsible for co-ordinating defence, it seemed only too obvious to Mussolini that the course of easy glory and huge profits was to go in with Germany, and so deserve a goodly share of the British Empire in the great carve up which he was confident might be expected.

Another matter which was greatly to preoccupy the Palazzo Chigi was Italian participation in the Spanish Civil War, with the attendant farce of the Non-Intervention Committee. Mussolini was intent to keep Spain as his preserve, and firmly believed, as Ciano noted at the time of Serrano Suñer's visit to Italy in July, 1939, that Franco was 'completely dominated' by his personality. The secret agreement which he signed with Franco on 28th November, 1936,¹ indicates the extent to which he hoped to profit from Franco's victory in the Civil War. When, however, the time came to draw on these reserves of goodwill, Franco proved recalcitrant. At the Hitler-Mussolini meeting of 28th October, 1940, the Fuehrer professed himself extremely dissatisfied over his exchanges with Franco a few days earlier at Hendaye, and asked for the good offices of the Duce in persuading the Caudillo to take a more co-operative attitude. Mussolini readily undertook the mission, particularly as, in his transactions with Hitler, the boot was usually on the other foot, with the Duce looking to the Fuehrer for help. As it happened, however, Mussolini had no better luck with Franco than Hitler. The report of their Bordighera meeting² is highly diverting, and indicates very clearly that Franco was not, at that stage, at all prepared to throw in his lot with the Axis to the point of joining them in the war. His professions of friendship and fidelity were as plentiful as his specific undertakings were scarce. As was disclosed at Nuremberg, General Jodl, in analysing the causes of German setbacks in the war, put as a major disaster Franco's refusal to agree to the transit of German troops through Spain and to undertake the capture of Gibraltar. It is, without a doubt, an ironical circumstance that, at a time when the Russians were providing the Germans with substantial assistance to win the war (Ribbentrop gives some interesting details of this in his conversations with Ciano and Mussolini in March, 1940³), Franco was responsible for putting in their way a major, and perhaps decisive, obstacle. None-the-less, a few years later Spain was regarded as a pariah among 'free' nations, and Russia as one of the pillars of

¹See page 75 and following.

²See Chapter XXXVII.

³See page 337 and following.

INTRODUCTION

the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter. This curious development may well puzzle future historians when they put side by side Hitler's dealings with the Russian Government between August, 1939 and June, 1941, and his dealings with Franco as described in the Ciano Papers.

* * * * *

English readers of the Ciano Papers will naturally be particularly interested in the light they shed on the conduct of British foreign policy. Even now, when 'appeasement' is a word so discredited that it has almost passed out of current usage except as a term of obloquy, the full details of Mr. Chamberlain's disastrous dealings with the Italian Government make almost inconceivable reading. Mr. Churchill, in his war memoirs, is somewhat vague about what happened, doubtless because he did not wish to disparage too greatly the memory of one who was his predecessor as leader of the Conservative Party, and who became his loyal colleague in the War Cabinet. Nor has Mr. Eden ever explained the precise circumstances which led to his resignation.

Everything becomes perfectly, indeed tragically, clear with the publication in this volume of Count Grandi's despatches from London to Ciano,¹ describing his relations with the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. In particular there was a meeting at Downing Street on 18th February, 1938, which must have been a decisive factor in Mr. Eden's resignation two days later. The Anschluss was pending; and if ever there was a time for a show of firmness, for clarity in thought and resolution in action, it was then. Grandi himself was extremely uneasy about the situation. He fully expected that at last the confusion in British policy, which had proved so advantageous to the Axis, might now give place to decision. In any case, he was preparing himself for a difficult time, when his relations with the British Government, as he supposed, would inevitably be strained.

What happened astonished even the Italian Ambassador. He expected a rebuff, and he received a welcome from Mr. Chamberlain so overwhelming that he almost suspected there must be some trick in it. The Prime Minister received him in the company of Mr. Eden, and the two proceeded, in his presence, to engage in a heated controversy. As Grandi put it:

'Chamberlain and Eden were not a Prime Minister and a Foreign Minister discussing with the Ambassador of a foreign

¹See Chapter XIV:

INTRODUCTION

Power a delicate situation of an international character. They were—and revealed themselves as such to me in defiance of all established convention—two enemies confronting each other, like two cocks in true fighting posture. The questions and queries addressed to me by Chamberlain were all, without exception, intentionally put with the aim of producing replies which would have the effect of contradicting and overthrowing the bases of argument on which Eden had evidently previously constructed, or by which he had attempted to justify, his miserable anti-Italian and anti-Fascist policy in opposition to Chamberlain and before his colleagues in the Cabinet.'

Lest there should be any doubt in Grandi's mind as to what was intended, the Prime Minister's own confidential man was sent to reassure him. Grandi describes a fantastic meeting they had in a taxi. Mr. Chamberlain, that is to say, by-passed his own Foreign Secretary, and, in a fatuous effort to appease the aggressors, made war certain.

In that taxi, had they but known it, the personal emissary of Chamberlain and the representative of Mussolini ensured that the conflict they were endeavouring to avert would infallibly take place, to the ruin of all concerned.

Even now, when the consequences are so bitterly present, it is difficult to believe that anyone exercising the high responsibilities of Prime Minister could have been so utterly misguided as was Chamberlain. It is doubtful if, in the whole course of this country's history, anything has cost the British people so dear as his unhappy incursion into the unfamiliar realm of foreign affairs. The fact that his intentions were so entirely honourable, and his mood so entirely sincere, cannot palliate the enormity of the harm he unwittingly inflicted on his country. It is still sometimes suggested by ideologists of the Left that Chamberlain was engaged in a Machiavellian conspiracy to turn German aggression eastwards, and save the British Empire by sacrificing the Soviet Union. Actually, there is not a scrap of evidence to sustain any such proposition. The fact is, Chamberlain had no policy at all. He really believed, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that an assurance from Hitler was reliable, and that it was possible to win over Mussolini with kind words and complaisant actions. On this point, Grandi's dispatches are entirely convincing. If ever a great empire fell at a critical moment into fatuous and guileless hands, it was on this occasion. The Duce was looking only for indications of some counterforce to the German pressure which would shortly reach the Brenner Pass. He was met with the maundering goodwill of a Mayor of Birmingham addressing a Rotary lunch.

INTRODUCTION

In the present troubled international situation, following upon six years of ruthlessly destructive war, and a still unconcluded peace, it is pertinent to ask whether the lesson of these terrible transactions has even yet been fully learnt. If there are any who still believe that broken undertakings are best mended by concluding new ones, that the pursuit of power is best checked by making concessions, that war can be prevented by withdrawing before the threat of force, and that unreason will be pacified by persistent reasonableness, let them read in Ciano's Papers the melancholy tale of the essays of this sort made between 1936 and 1939, and then consider what the consequences have been in suffering and deprivation and destruction. What failed so conspicuously in the Palazzo Chigi will also fail in the Kremlin. Before aggression there are only two courses possible; to surrender or to resist. To attempt, as the unfortunate Chamberlain did, a middle course of appeasement, invited all the consequences of surrender, with the certainty that resistance would, at last, still be inevitable when its chances of succeeding were enormously diminished, and its cost in life and treasure enormously enhanced.

* * * * *

In Ciano's Diary there are frequent references to memoranda filed elsewhere. The substance of these 'pièces justificatives', as Professor Namier calls them in his *Diplomatic Prelude*, was not, in the great majority of cases, repeated in the Diary entries. Thus, there are important gaps in Ciano's day by day account of his conduct of Italian foreign policy. Some of the memoranda in question appeared serially in the *Corriere della Sera*. Later, the whole collection was published in Italy in a volume entitled 'L'Europa verso la Catastrofe' on which this English edition is based. Certain changes have been made to suit English readers, but the system of chronological order has been retained, with explanatory matter where it is necessary to provide a coherent narrative.

In conjunction with the Diary, the Papers provide a complete picture of the development of Italian foreign policy in the heyday of the Axis. They go back to 1936, whereas the Diary so far published only begins in 1939. Thus the Papers cover, as the Diary does not,¹ the three crucial years before the war's outbreak. They comprise some 200 documents, and are, for the most part,

¹Ciano began to write his Diary in June, 1938, when he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. The earlier portion has been published in Italy (*Diario—1937-39*, Cappelli), and will doubtless in due course be made available in this country.

INTRODUCTION

minutes of conversations which Ciano had, or was present at, with various foreign statesmen and diplomats, and of reports, telegrams and other correspondence which passed between the Italian Foreign Office and Italian diplomats abroad. There are certain tantalizing gaps—for instance, between 23rd September and 22nd October, 1938, during the period of the Munich Conference. Whereas the Diary continues until Ciano's dismissal in February, 1943, and even includes an entry during the period of his imprisonment at Genoa shortly before he was executed, the Papers only provide the scantiest documentation for 1941-42, when they end. There is very little about the Anschluss, and little about the Munich negotiations. When the meeting, already referred to, between Mussolini and Franco took place at Bordighera on 12th February, 1941, Ciano himself was away on three months active service at the time, so the report must have been prepared by another hand, perhaps by the Duce himself.

The Papers are naturally less outspoken, less personal than the Diary, which, in theory at any rate, was intended only for Ciano's private eye. Actually, as we now know, Mussolini was aware of the Diary's existence, and so was Mr. Sumner Welles, to whom Ciano read an extract from it in the course of their interview on 26th February, 1940. Mr. Welles, in his *The Time for Decision*, records how Ciano 'took out of a safe his famous red diary in which he recorded in his own handwriting his daily activities.' The Papers, on the other hand, were for the official record, and, though highly confidential, were available for inspection. On the whole, they present a more formal Ciano than the Diary. In his Diary entries Ciano was particularly concerned to be pungent and original and personal; in the Papers the impression he seeks to convey is more that of a statesman, serious and understanding. There is, inevitably, a certain amount of overlapping. When, as in the case of the official record of his Warsaw visit in February, 1939, Ciano was particularly pleased with the way a report was written, he was liable to include it almost verbatim in the Diary.

Confirmation of the authenticity of the Papers was provided at Nuremberg, where they were several times referred to, though usually in summarized or incomplete texts. Some of the same ground is covered in the correspondence between Mussolini and Hitler, part of which has been published in Italy. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the Papers as completely reliable and objective just because they were intended for the official archives. Reporting is, in all conceivable circumstances, done with an eye to the reader or readers for whom it is primarily intended—in Ciano's case, Mussolini. Under totalitarian conditions even

INTRODUCTION

archives are liable to provide grounds for a charge of lack of zeal, or even unorthodoxy—which means disloyalty. Totalitarian reporting, therefore, tends to be as obsequious as totalitarian oratory. Anyone who reads, side by side, Ciano's account (which, incidentally, he knew he would have to pass to Ribbentrop), of his conversations with Mr. Sumner Welles, and Mr. Welles's account of the same conversations, will see what I mean. Ciano gives the impression that he received his American visitor haughtily, and that in all he said Mr. Welles showed a becoming sense, in particular, of Ciano's importance as Italian Foreign Minister, and, in general, of Italy's might as a Great Power. Mr. Welles's account, on the other hand, suggests that Ciano was distinctly apologetic, and went out of his way to be vehemently anti-German and even critical of the Duce. The Diary account is a little nearer Mr. Welles's, but not much. By the same token, Grandi's dispatches from London describing his encounters with Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Eden would be written with a view to ingratiating himself with Ciano, and above all with Ciano's father-in-law. They would naturally stress Mr. Chamberlain's complaisance and Mr. Eden's obduracy, because that was how the Duce wished the situation in London to be, Grandi had to be shown as calling the tune, not only to satisfy his personal vanity, but also because Mussolini had to be made to feel that his representative in London could call the tune.

Even so, when all this is said, and due correctives are made, the fact remains that the Papers do indubitably convey the authentic climate of the Palazzo Chigi under Ciano, and the process whereby the Duce became finally and fatally entangled in his own Axis policy. No one can afford to neglect them who wishes to understand how and why the war of 1939-45 came to pass. They are indispensable, both because of the light they shed on the principal characters who appear in them—Mussolini, Hitler, Ribbentrop, Franco, Ciano himself, Chamberlain and Eden, as well as a host of miscellaneous Balkan figures—and because, more cogently, perhaps, than anything hitherto published they expose the futility of the misguided, if well-meaning, efforts of the Western democracies to detach Italy from Germany. The whole, sad picture of pre-war Europe is contained in them—appeasers and appeased moving with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy to a common ruin.

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE.

1936

I

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

12th June—30th July, 1936.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 12th June, 1936—XIV

I received the French Chargé d'affaires,¹ who brought me greetings from the Ambassador, Chambrun,² who is in Paris.

Ambassador Chambrun had taken the opportunity to instruct him to tell me that he is engaged in negotiations about which he will inform me next Thursday, and that he hopes to obtain a favourable result.

Apparently the Ambassador had also told his Chargé d'affaires that the Stresa Conference has been postponed.

I have asked Cerruti³ for confirmation on this point.

P.S.—Telephoned to Cerruti, who, having consulted Léger⁴ says that his information is that the Conference is still called for the 22nd June.

CONVERSATION WITH THE ARGENTINIAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 15th June, 1936—XIV

I received M. Cantilo,⁵ Argentinian Ambassador, to whom I made a statement similar to that made by order of the Duce to Grandi concerning his conversation today with Vansittart, and relating to the memorandum which will be sent to Geneva.⁶

M. Cantilo drew my attention to the following:

¹Jules Blondel, later Minister to Sofia; from 1st December, 1942, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs in de Gaulle's National Committee of Liberation in London; August, 1945 appointed French Ambassador to Oslo.

²Count Louis Charles de Chambrun, French Ambassador to Rome from 1934 to 30th October, 1936.

³Vittorio Cerruti, Italian Ambassador to Paris from 1935 to October, 1938.

⁴Alexis Léger, Secretary-General at the Quai d'Orsay from March, 1933 to 18th May, 1940.

⁵José Maria Cantilo, Argentinian Ambassador to Rome from 1933.

⁶An allusion to the Italian note sent to the President of the League of Nations Assembly the following June, which recapitulated the causes of the Abyssinian campaign, the measures taken in favour of the natives and stated the Italian Government's intention of resuming collaboration with the League at the earliest possible moment.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

1. That it would be advisable to make some reference in the memorandum to the Saavedra Lamas¹ Treaty.

I told him that, while I reserved the right to decide on this point, there was no obstacle (in fact, in the version at present being drawn up there is such a reference).

2. He again spoke of the advisability of nominating a commission to keep contact with the Italian Government for the examination of any documents sent to Geneva on operations in Abyssinia.

He insisted strongly on the necessity of finding a delaying formula whereby the South American countries could avoid linking the question of non-recognition with the concrete problem of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.

On this point I gave no definite answer. I did, however, exclude the possibility of our accepting any commission on the spot.

M. Cantilo leaves for London on Friday, to make contact with the second delegate, M. Malbron.

During his stay in London he again hopes to meet His Excellency Count Grandi, to whom he could give further information.

CONVERSATION WITH THE TURKISH AMBASSADOR.

15th June, 1936—XIV

I received the Turkish Ambassador, who returned my visit and used the occasion to call attention to the advisability of our participation in the Montreux Conference. He said that Turkey would be content with a formula which, without committing us in any way, would give the impression that we were formally participating.

I told him that our abstention from the Montreux Conference is a result of the situation in which Italy has been placed by the judicial error at Geneva.

I repeated that, until sanctions have been lifted and justice done, Italy will abstain from any form of international collaboration.

The Turkish Ambassador, who was extremely anxious for our intervention, insisted further and asked me to call the Duce's attention once again to the extreme importance which the Turkish Government attaches to our presence.

I gave him no ground for hope.

¹Carlos Saavedra Llamas, Argentinian Foreign Minister since 1932, promoter of the pact of non-aggression and conciliation concluded on 10th October, 1933, between Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay.—The Italian note of 29th June contained in fact the following reference to that pact: "The Italian Government declares that it is ready once more to collaborate effectively with the League of Nations. . . . It is in this spirit that Italy has, among other things, adhered to the Rio de Janeiro Treaty of 10th October, 1933."

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR

Rome, 16th June, 1936—XIV

I received the British Ambassador,¹ to whom I repeated what Grandi² had said to Vansittart³ on the subject of the memorandum to be sent to the Assembly.

Sir Eric Drummond told me:

(a) that, as far as sanctions are concerned, he believes they can be abolished.

(b) that it is not possible, on the other hand, to count on immediate recognition of the Empire.

He spoke of a commission at Geneva which is to be given the task of studying the Italian documents and which will have no other purpose than to allow time to pass and thus facilitate recognition itself.

The similarity between his arguments and those of the Argentinian Ambassador (who had called earlier in the day) leads one to think that the two Ambassadors had come to an agreement between themselves.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 18th June, 1936—XIV

I received the German Ambassador⁴ who, on his return from Berlin, paid me his courtesy visit.

He stressed that in Berlin he found a very favourable attitude to collaboration with Italy, an attitude common to all circles, from leaders of the Government and of the Party to the military chiefs.

The recent victories in East Africa have—in his opinion—made a profound impression on the German people.

The Ambassador told me that it was clouded only by a widespread suspicion in Berlin that Italy might be working to facilitate the Habsburg restoration. He considered he had been able to counter this state of mind by stating that from his conversations in Rome he had gained the impression that Italy was not working in this direction. I confirmed this.

He asked me to explain the despatch of the Italian note to Geneva. I repeated more or less the same statement as that already

¹Sir Eric Drummond, later Lord Perth, British Ambassador to Rome from 1933 to 1939.

²Dino Grandi, Italian Ambassador to London from 1932 to July, 1939.

³Sir Robert, later Lord Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1930 to 1938.

⁴Ulrich von Hassell, German Ambassador to Rome from September, 1932, to March, 1938. Involved in anti-Nazi conspiracies and arrested after the abortive attempt on Hitler's life of 20th July, he was sentenced to death and executed on 8th September, 1944.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

made to the other diplomatic representatives who had questioned me on the subject.

The German Ambassador told me that in Berlin the question had been raised whether German recognition of the Empire would be more opportune now, or, on the other hand, more convenient later on. In general, German opinion inclined towards the second solution.

On the very day of the conversation with the German Ambassador, Anthony Eden¹ informed the House of Commons that the British Government had decided on 17th June to move at Geneva the abolition of sanctions against Italy. He added, however, that the mutual assistance agreements would remain in force even after the event, as long at least as the period of uncertainty following that step might last. This, evidently, is the obscure point to which Chambrun referred in the following conversation.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 24th June, 1936—XIV

Today I received the French Ambassador, who arrived yesterday evening in Rome.

He immediately began to speak to me about the abolition of sanctions and stressed that, while Eden's speech contained some obscure points, there would be none in M. Delbos's² speech.

He said that the reason France had not taken the initiative in the abolition of sanctions was to prevent the British Government, to save its face at home, from throwing the responsibility on to the French Government and the French people. He asked me what we intended to do at the next meetings at Geneva; I then briefly explained what I had already communicated to the other Ambassadors on the subject of the memorandum we will send to the Assembly.

He spoke of the Mediterranean Agreements.

I then asked him his opinion on the agreements reached by the putting into force of Article 16. In spite of what he had said before about Delbos's speech he was unable to go further and say that France considers such agreements to be at once nullified by the abolition of sanctions. After some reticence he admitted that France considers them more or less operative until a new agreement is reached in which Italy too would participate. I did not hide from him in the least my disappointment at his point of view, and added that the first condition for beginning to consider the possibility of

¹Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary from November, 1935 to 20th February, 1938.

²Yvon Delbos, French Foreign Minister from June, 1936 to March, 1938.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

a new Mediterranean agreement was to clear away past agreements which, having been concluded in order to put pressure on Italy, cannot be considered by us with anything but hostility.

Chambrun insisted that France had adhered to these agreements only to make England's action 'collective' instead of 'individual' and to avoid greater complications.

He finished the conversation by saying that he had received instructions from M. Delbos to inform us that he desires relations between France and Italy to be increasingly cordial, that this accord has a practical and concrete basis, and finally to guarantee that the French Government will not raise questions affecting internal politics or party matters.

The Ambassador, while stating that in future he would maintain contact solely with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed to me the wish to be received in audience by the Duce.

CONVERSATION WITH THE MINISTER FOR HAITI.

Rome, 25th June, 1936—XIV

The Minister for Haiti, M. Laraqe, visited me and made the following statement:

'Our attitude at Geneva was entirely due to a personal error on the part of our delegate who, in the absence of instructions from his Government, initiated a policy of racial solidarity with the Abyssinians, which the people of Haiti rejects.'

He then expressed the wish to present formal apologies in the name of his Government, and to declare that in future it will be ready to make any gesture that would make amends for the harm wrought by its delegate.

On 26th June the Council of the League of Nations met, but only to adjourn again in view of the forthcoming meeting of the Assembly, which had been fixed for the 30th. On that occasion the Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, presented a note from his Government expressing the view that the application of sanctions had proved futile and that therefore nothing remained but to record the fact.

CONVERSATION WITH THE POLISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 27th June, 1936—XIV

The Polish Ambassador¹ called and informed me that in Warsaw today the Cabinet decided to abolish sanctions immediately. Orders have already been given to implement this measure and it is expected that in a few days time sanctions will have been done away with.

¹Boleslav Wienawa.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

I did not fail to express to the Polish Ambassador our lively pleasure at this gesture, as well as at the statement made yesterday at Geneva.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR

Rome, 29th June, 1936—XIV

Chambrun came to see me and asked for further details on the note sent by us to Geneva.

I let him read the last two paragraphs.

He stated that the tone of our note and the contents of it had created a very favourable impression at Geneva.

He then gave the French point of view on a possible reform of the Covenant. In short, Chambrun's idea, which he expresses in a purely personal capacity and not as an official assignment from his Government, would be to limit the reform to the interpretation of certain articles. In practice it would mean the formation of regional military aid pacts, supplemented by the general application of economic and financial sanctions.

I, for my part, told him that we had not yet undertaken a study of the reform of the Covenant but had confined ourselves to noting, on the basis of those reports which had appeared, the various points of view of the Governments which had already spoken on the subject. The view expressed by the Chilean Government, and already supported by other governments, on the localisation of the conflict, seemed to us not without interest.

M. Chambrun continued the conversation by asking me persistently whether any political and military agreements had lately been reached between us and Germany. I denied it, without however, concealing that the way in which the present situation had developed, particularly because of the actions of England and France, had led to many cases of mutual understanding between the two peoples.

Chambrun insisted strongly on the necessity of finding a way of re-establishing relations with Italy in a more intimate form, repeating several times a personal idea of his that in Europe 'horizontal' agreements bring peace, while 'vertical' ones would inevitably lead to war.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR

Rome, 29th June, 1936—XIV

This evening I received von Hassell who told me—in strict confidence and with the request to bring it to the notice of the Duce personally—that the Fuehrer had instructed him to inform us that when the question of recognition is considered ripe he will

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

be willing to give it favourable consideration at once, and without asking us for any equivalent.

I naturally thanked von Hassell for his communication and told him that it constituted a new contribution to good Italo-German relations.

I drew the attention of von Hassell to the speech made in Paris by Mr. Duff Cooper¹ and informed him what the Duce said to me two days ago. This greatly impressed von Hassell, who said he himself had already noted the unmistakable import of Duff Cooper's speech.

I finally allowed von Hassell to read the last part of our note, which he fully approved.

CONVERSATION WITH THE SWISS MINISTER.

Rome, 30th June, 1936—XIV

I summoned the Swiss Minister, whom I addressed in a very sharp tone, in accordance with instructions received from the Duce.

He attempted to justify the Swiss attitude by saying that a unilateral gesture, similar to that made by Poland, would have caused Switzerland to lose all the influence which she still exerts at Geneva and which could be used towards the solution of the problem of sanctions. However, the arguments put forward by M. Ruegger were very weak, and I did not fail to dispose of them appropriately.

The Swiss Minister was impressed and told me he will cable Motta² at once and that it is his fervent desire that a Swiss gesture might remove from the Duce's mind resentment against his country.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 30th June, 1936—XIV

The British Ambassador visited me. I took the occasion to allow him to read the note sent to Geneva.

Sir Eric Drummond approved it and told me that in his opinion it would help greatly to smooth the way.

¹Alfred Duff Cooper (later Sir Duff Cooper), Secretary of State for War from 1935 to May, 1937, then First Lord of the Admiralty in the Chamberlain Cabinet from 1937 to 1938. In the speech delivered in Paris after a banquet held in his honour by the Anglo-French Association on the evening of 25th June, he had said that Anglo-French friendship was a matter of life and death for the two countries, and had made a clear reference to the common frontiers of Britain and France. The speech produced a tremendous effect, occasioned reactions in Germany and led to debates in both Houses of Parliament from which it emerged that the text of the speech had been read and approved beforehand by the Foreign Office.

²M. G. Motta, Swiss Minister for Foreign Affairs.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

I took note of his statement but pointed out that the intervention of the Negus in the debates of the Assembly constituted a new obstacle. It had created a painful impression on the Italian Government and people. The delegations responsible at Geneva must, however, realise the gravity of the affair and prevent any demonstration which might appear outrageous to Italy and which might have serious consequences here.

Sir Eric Drummond replied that he took note of our reaction, that, for his part, he advised us to ignore the intervention of the Negus which had not been of importance, and that he had cabled to his delegation asking them to avoid demonstrations favourable to the ex-Emperor of Ethiopia.

Contrary to the soothing forecasts of the British Ambassador in Rome, the opening session of the League Assembly, called to decide upon the revocation of sanctions against Italy, was tempestuous and discordant. The session began with the reading of the Italian note already mentioned, which ended with the suggestion to remove, without further delay, 'the obstacles which have prevented and continue to prevent Italy from putting into practice the international collaboration which she sincerely desires'—a clear reference to the concentration of the Home Fleet in the Mediterranean, to the mutual assistance pacts and to sanctions. The Assembly then listened with considerable interest to the views expressed by the Argentinian Ambassador to the Quirinal, and this speech was immediately followed by the theatrical though not entirely unexpected entry of Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia. The appearance of the Negus caused a veritable uproar. The Italian journalists present began to whistle, Titulescu, the Rumanian Minister, shouted to the President of the Assembly, van Zeeland: 'In the name of justice, silence these savages!'¹ and supporters and opponents of sanctions exchanged insults until finally the Geneva police intervened and ten of the Italian journalists were arrested. On 10th July, the Assembly repealed sanctions with 49 votes against one (Ethiopia). South Africa, Chile, Panama and Venezuela abstained, and the Mexican delegate was not present when the vote was taken. Since unanimity had not been achieved the Assembly's decision had only the force of a recommendation; the member states were under no statutory obligation to shape their policies in accordance with it.

CONVERSATION WITH THE SWISS MINISTER.

Rome, 2nd July, 1936—XIV

I brought to the notice of the Swiss Minister the gravity of keeping under arrest the Italian journalists arrested yesterday in

¹On 2nd July *Le Temps* published a somewhat milder version according to which Titulescu had merely said: 'Cessez ces procédés de sauvages!'

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

the Assembly chamber; I did not fail to point out to him first that their action, which took place as the result of a series of very grave provocations, was in no way of such a nature as to come under article 43 of the Federal Code.

I told M. Ruegger that in the interests not only of good relations between Italy and Switzerland, but also of the League of Nations itself, it was necessary for the incident of the journalists to be disposed of by taking immediate steps for their release. I reminded him that in a cinema on the 28th October of last year the renegade A. Prato whistled at and insulted the Duce's image and that, in spite of the testimony of ten spectators, Prato had not even been admonished.

Finally I told M. Ruegger that, should Switzerland not take immediate steps to liberate them, we would be obliged to take reprisals by expelling from our territory a corresponding number of Swiss journalists.

M. Ruegger assured me that he would raise the matter immediately with M. Motta with a view to obtaining their liberation, but made some reservations concerning the possibility of obtaining their immediate discharge from prison should the judicial authorities oppose the step. He asked me, however, to abstain as long as possible from any reprisal.

I then called the attention of the Swiss Minister to statements which appeared this morning in the *Journal des Nations* reserving the right to advance a formal protest as soon as I am acquainted with the exact text of the publication.

M. Ruegger entirely agreed with me as to the gravity of the matter and said that, for his part, he would be willing to support any request by us for action against the *Journal des Nations*.

CONVERSATION WITH THE AUSTRIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 2nd July, 1936—XIV

I received the Austrian Minister,¹ who is leaving this evening for a short holiday in Styria. He mentioned the frequency with which he has been visited by the French Ambassador. The latter has in particular stressed to the Austrian Minister the danger to which, in his opinion, Czechoslovakia is exposed from a move by Germany. Chambrun urged the Austrian minister to exert pressure on us to

¹Baron Egon Berger-Waldenegg, formerly Minister of Justice and Foreign Minister, and one of the leaders of Starhemberg's Heimatschutz; Minister to Rome from May, 1935 to March, 1938. Recalled by Seyss-Inquart's quisling Government after the German invasion of Austria, he refused to obey orders and remained in Italy. Proscribed by the Gestapo as the leader of a 'Free Austrian Movement,' he went underground when the Germans entered Italy.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

induce us to take action in favour of Czechoslovakia, similar to that undertaken in favour of Austria.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 4th July, 1936—XIV

The French Ambassador called and informed me that he had received a telephone call from Delbos who wished to inform us that the resolution adopted at Geneva had been the result of a long effort by the French delegation to have a formula agreed to which would also be as acceptable as possible to Italy. He stressed that even if there should be certain points which might not be to our liking, yet, in substance, the resolution had been on the whole favourable to us since:

- (i) it decreed the abolition of sanctions,
- (ii) it made no mention of recognition and thus in practice left the states free to adopt any measure they liked.

I confined myself to thanking the Ambassador for his communication. He then added that, in M. Delbos's opinion, it might have been better had the Italian press not attacked the resolution for being less favourable to us, but had confined itself to noting its positive side.

I did not commit myself on this point, saying however that the academic gathering at Geneva left us absolutely indifferent, and that any verbal or theoretical product of the Assembly would have very little influence on the trend of our foreign policy in the future.

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 4th July, 1936—XIV

I saw the Rumanian Minister, M. Lugosianu, who called to express all his 'bitter feelings' at the violent press campaign conducted against M. Titulescu.¹ I replied that it was merited and added that, for our part, we had maintained an attitude of absolute restraint towards M. Titulescu for two years, and that as it had been he who had broken the truce with his outburst at Geneva, our reaction was more than justified. I therefore considered that the affair had ended in a draw.

¹Nicola Titulescu, Rumanian Foreign Minister up to 30th August, 1936, had declared at Geneva on the 2nd November, 1935, in the name of the Little and Balkan Ententes, that peace between Italy and Abyssinia should be brought about only by means of the League, and had shown himself one of the most determined supporters of sanctions against Italy.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

M. Lugosianu urged that further attacks should not occur. I repeated that the past was closed. But I showed him some press notices and telegrams which had reached me from Geneva in which it was stated that Titulescu had taken up an attitude hostile to us at the recent meetings of the Bureau. That might have caused fresh reactions by the Italian press.

M. Lugosianu again urged that complications in relations between the two countries must not be allowed to arise from a deplorable personal incident. I explained to him that the Italian people made a sharp distinction between Rumania, towards whom its feelings were unchanged, and M. Titulescu who, in order to insult us, had elected himself champion of the blacks.

CONVERSATION WITH THE MEXICAN MINISTER.

Rome, 4th July, 1936—XIV

I received M. Ortiz, the Mexican Minister. I told him that the attitude of his country's delegation could not but have a sinister effect upon Italo-American relations, and that only as a result of positive steps by Mexico would we be able to continue to believe in their boasted friendship towards us.

The Mexican Minister was greatly put out by what I said and by the extremely cold tone I used towards him. He said that, for his part, he would do everything in his power to remove the unpleasant memory of his delegation's attitude at Geneva.

Four days after the revocation of sanctions, on 8th June, London announced the withdrawal of the Home Fleet from the Mediterranean. On the same day Léger informed the Italian Ambassador to Paris that the French Government had informed London that with the abolition of sanctions the Mediterranean mutual assistance agreements should also be considered to have lapsed. Thus, one after another, the obstacles to international collaboration referred to in the Italian note of 30th June, to the President of the League Assembly, disappeared.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 9th July, 1936—XIV

I received the French Ambassador who asked me for precise information on the Vienna negotiations for a *modus vivendi* between Austria and Germany.

I gave him a vague and indefinite answer, saying that we too had heard that negotiations were in progress but that I could not say whether any positive conclusion had been reached.

M. Chambrun was preoccupied by rumours of the restoration of the monarchy in Austria. On this topic I felt that I could give him ample assurances, and even went on to say that the Government in Vienna was annoyed by the insistence with which the press of the Little Entente, and particularly of Rumania and Yugoslavia, discussed the matter. There is no question of a Habsburg restoration at present.

Mediterranean Agreements. The Ambassador asked me what I thought of the French attitude in this matter. I replied that the statements made by Léger to Cerruti had produced a good impression with us. I reserved the right, however, to check by suitable sounding of opinion in London, Belgrade, Athens and Ankara, whether the French point of view was shared by the others.

*Meeting at Brussels.*¹ He asked me if Italy had decided to accept the invitation to Brussels. I said that, although no decision had yet been taken, I still made—indeed increased—the reservations I had made during our last conversation on the possibility of our participating in a meeting of the Locarno Powers from which Germany was absent. I asked him whether meetings of this kind served the cause of peace, or whether they did not rather tend to widen divisions and splits.

M. Chambrun finally pressed, in a personal capacity, for the re-admission into the Kingdom of Italy of the *Petit Niçois*—a paper in which the Under-Secretary of State to the President, M. Tesson, is particularly interested. There is, properly speaking, no decree banning this paper, but the frontier authorities have been instructed to be obstructive. I told Chambrun that the paper had in difficult times taken up an attitude which was very displeasing to us, but that we would, nevertheless, as an experiment, remove restrictions on it.

When leaving, M. Chambrun, by way of conversation, mentioned to me how useful 'political probity' would be to Fascist Italy, in that it would assure a straightforward and reliable line of conduct. He was obviously referring to our position as guarantors for Locarno. I reacted with a certain liveliness, saying that, as far as political probity went, Fascist Italy required no lessons from anyone and that on the contrary we had been able to establish that in recent events the straightforwardness of our conduct had not always been paralleled by others.

Chambrun went home.

¹The Belgian Prime Minister, van Zeeland, had invited to Brussels for 22nd July the representatives of the French, Italian and British Governments, for a re-examination of the situation caused by the military re-occupation of the Rhineland by the Reich.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 11th July, 1936—XIV

I received the French Ambassador, who drew my attention to the fact that Marshal Graziani¹ had summoned Bodard,² the French Minister, and had addressed him very sharply as 'an enemy of Italy'. In the matter of radio, too, Marshal Graziani had adopted a 'strong and firm' attitude towards the French representative, declaring that the latter used the radio to spread alarmist news.

M. Chambrun told me that he did not intend to make Graziani's action a question of State, but that he was forced, nevertheless, to call the serious attention of the Fascist Government to the attitude of its Viceroy.

I allowed M. Chambrun to read the note³ sent by us to the Belgian Chargé d'affaires. He did not attach much importance to the paragraph on agreements already in existence in the Mediterranean, but dwelt instead on the question raised by us of the necessity of inviting Germany also.

He asked me two things:

(a) if we had agreed on a reply of this nature with the German Ambassador.

(b) if there existed any sort of agreement with Germany.

To both questions I was able to reply in the negative.

He finally asked me whether, if Germany were invited to the meeting of Locarno Powers and if all conditions for our participation were met, I would be disposed to have an exchange of views with him on a purely personal level before the meeting. I told him that, for my part, there was nothing against it.

On the subject of the Austro-German *modus vivendi*, of which he had vague information, I limited myself to telling him that we, on our side, had followed its development from the beginning.

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 11th July, 1936—XIV

The Rumanian Minister drew my attention to the following:

1. That Titulescu has received a letter from his colleagues in the Little Entente and in the Balkan Entente absolving him from

¹Rodolfo Graziani, commander of the troops stationed in Italian Somaliland during the Abyssinian war, had been nominated Governor-General and Viceroy of the occupied territories on 11th June, 1936.

²Bodard, French diplomat, Minister to Addis Ababa.

³In the note, the Italian Government had refused the invitation to the Brussels Conference, giving as a reason the existence of the Mediterranean pacts and expressing the opinion that Germany ought to be invited to take part even in the preparatory stage of the forthcoming meeting of the Locarno powers. 'The absence of one of the states signatory to the Locarno Treaty,' the note concluded, 'would in fact complicate rather than resolve the present situation.'

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

responsibility for the Geneva incident in so far that—as they affirm—he did not address the famous offensive words to the Italians. I replied that these expressions had been attributed to him by the international press, and by the Geneva press in particular, and that Titulescu had not made any denial. A simple denial would have sufficed to suppress the incident at birth. But in fact no denial has been forthcoming.

2. He drew my attention to the total suspension of orders for Rumanian petrol and asked for the reason behind our decision. I told him that it was strictly connected with the fact that Italy must, of necessity, review her economic policy after eight months of blockade by sanctions; that undoubtedly the friction caused by M. Titulescu's attitude and expressions had not made us more favourably disposed towards active renewal of commercial relations with Rumania itself. However, I advised M. Lugosianu to wait, and to suggest to his Government a policy friendly to Italy, this being the only means likely to facilitate and produce full resumption of trade with our country.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 11th July, 1936—XIV

The British Ambassador officially informed me of the withdrawal of the Fleet and of the reduction of the British Air Forces in the Mediterranean. He expressed the belief and hope that this gesture by Britain might produce a great improvement in Anglo-Italian relations.

Mediterranean Agreements. On this subject he said that there was perhaps a misunderstanding. The Mediterranean agreements, properly speaking, ceased to be in force with the end of sanctions. On the other hand, Britain considers that the unilateral declarations made to assist the smaller Powers (Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia) in the event of aggression by us are still in force. These declarations promising British aid involve no reciprocal undertaking; therefore, in Drummond's opinion, one cannot speak of Mediterranean agreements. I then pointed out to him that the origin both of agreements and of declarations was to be sought in the tension caused in the Mediterranean by the Abyssinian war. I added that to clear the air once and for all, these declarations, too, which by their very nature cast the suspicion of aggressive intentions on Italy, must be done away with.

Drummond made the objection that he did not think it would be easy to achieve this immediately, since the mood of the small Powers was one of lively concern regarding the possibility of an act

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

of aggression or revenge by Italy. He said that any declaration by us which relieved Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia of this fear, would certainly help to facilitate an understanding, and England would the more easily be able to cancel existing declarations. I replied that I intended to consider his suggestion and that for the moment I could give him no definite answer.

Addis Ababa. Drummond, too, complained of Graziani's attitude and bearing towards the English diplomatic representatives, and protested at the sending of carabinieri into the Legation premises to forbid the use of the wireless transmitter. He left me two notes on the subject which I passed to my department for examination and reply if necessary.

Locarno. I allowed Drummond to read the note sent to the Belgian Chargé d'affaires. As far as our original motive for refusing to participate is concerned—that is to say the existence of the Mediterranean agreements—the question had been discussed previously. On the subject of the omission of an invitation to Germany, however, Drummond pointed out that Germany cannot be placed in the same category as the other Locarno Powers since she has not fulfilled her undertakings under the Locarno Treaty.

The prospect of an early settlement of the Abyssinian question had relieved the general tension and it was with a feeling of increased confidence that the principal European Chancelleries continued to exchange their views on the agreements that were to replace the Treaty of Locarno, the latter having lost all practical value with Hitler's unopposed march into the Rhineland. However, the relief was not of long duration. The sanctions against Italy had hardly come to an end (15th July) when, on the evening of 17th July, the first reports of 'events of the utmost gravity' came in from Spanish Morocco. The military rising against the Madrid Government had begun.

For some time, in fact since the General Elections of 16th February, 1936, the growing bitterness of the political struggle in Spain had been common knowledge. The Government and its supporters, the Popular Front, whose leadership was clearly moving more and more towards the extreme Left, had launched a violent campaign against the Opposition whom they accused of plotting against the Republic and of actively preparing a Fascist dictatorship; the opposition parties, on the other hand, had reacted with increasing vigour. The latter claimed that the Popular Front had not obtained legally more than just over two hundred seats in a Parliament of 473 members, that the Government represented therefore only a minority and that the Popular Front's parliamentary majority was the result of large-scale electoral fraud, of Government-sponsored mob terror and intimidation, of the arbitrary annulment of all election certificates in many Right-wing constituencies, and of the expulsion, the arrest, or even the assassination, of many

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

legally elected deputies of the Right. According to the opposition the real enemies of the Republic were not on the Right but on the Left; Spain was in imminent danger of falling under a Communist dictatorship, and therefore by fighting the Popular Front they, the Opposition, were merely doing their duty in defence of law and order and of the freedom and the fundamental rights of the Spanish people.

All this was no secret, but the actual outbreak of the Spanish civil war, following so soon after the Abyssinian crisis, nevertheless surprised and shocked European public opinion.

CONVERSATION WITH THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 22nd July, 1936—XIV

I sent for the Spanish Ambassador¹ this morning.

I acquainted him with the text of the telegram received yesterday from H.M. Consul-General in Barcelona, and explained to him that the Italian Government had felt it necessary to take steps to despatch two warships for the protection and eventual embarkation of Italian nationals residing in that city.

I told him that H.M. Ambassador in Madrid² had been requested by cable dated yesterday evening to inform the Spanish Government officially of this decision. Should, however, still more disturbing news of the situation in Barcelona be received, it would not be possible to wait until all necessary formalities had been observed, and the vessels would enter the port to ensure timely protection for our colony in that city and thus to avoid more serious incidents.

The Ambassador replied that he noted all that I had said, thanked me and assured me that the Spanish Government would have no reason to consider our action other than friendly.

He agreed that the situation in Spain was serious and asked me to pass on to the Press a *communiqué* containing reliable news which had reached him yesterday from the Madrid Government. He also expressed the hope that newspapers and radio would maintain an objective attitude to the course of events.

The Spanish events made the task of replacing the obsolete Treaty of Locarno by a new agreement between the Great Powers more urgent as well as more difficult than it had been before. On the diplomatic plane the Anglo-French attempts to bring Nazi

¹Aguirre de Carcer, who resigned on 30th July, and along with other officials of the Spanish Embassy in Rome relinquished the diplomatic representation of Republican Spain.

²Orazio Pedrazzi, who left Madrid shortly after to withdraw to the French border, abandoning contact with the Spanish Republican Government.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

Germany into a system of mutual assistance agreements had, up to the end of the summer, been fruitless. France and Great Britain stuck to the decision taken on 19th March; thereafter efforts to overcome the obstacles, whether on the German side (Hitler's plan of 30th March), or on the French side (the counter proposals made by Paris on 8th April), had proved to be fruitless. The project for a pre-Locarno meeting at Brussels, favoured by France, Great Britain and Belgium, in which Italy, too, was to have taken part, had failed because of the objections raised by Rome, which were based on the continued validity of the Mediterranean agreements and on the exclusion of Germany from the meeting. Faced with the Italian refusal, the three Powers decided to meet in London on 22nd July, to examine the situation together. After two lengthy sessions, they published a communiqué on 23rd July, in which they stated that they 'wished to take the necessary steps to organise a meeting between the five Locarno Powers.' In consequence the three Governments proposed to enter into communication with the Italian and German Governments.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR AND THE CHARGÉS D'AFFAIRES OF BRITAIN AND BELGIUM.

Rome, 4th July, 1936—XIV

received the French Ambassador and the British and Belgian Chargés d'affaires, who presented me with three identical notes.

When delivering the note, the French Ambassador, who also spoke in the name of the other two representatives, informed me that a similar communication had also been made to the Government of the Reich, to which an invitation to participate at a forthcoming Five Power Conference had also been addressed.

Ambassador Chambrun expressed the hope that the Italian Government would be willing to accept at once an invitation to work towards the peaceful reconstruction of Europe.

On receiving the notes, I limited myself to stating that I would inform the Duce on a suitable occasion, and said that, in principle, should the obstacles which we had indicated in our note to the Belgian Government be removed—that is, should the Mediterranean agreements be abolished and an invitation sent to Germany—Italy would have no difficulty in resuming that effective policy of collaboration and of reconstruction which it had always traditionally followed.

I said that I would shortly issue an official reply.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 25th July, 1936—XIV

I received the Ambassador, von Hassell, who informed me of the decision by the Government of the Reich to close the German Legation at Addis Ababa and replace it by a Consulate.

I noted this with pleasure and thanked him for this important communication.

The German Ambassador asked me for news of the conversations in progress for the abolition of the Mediterranean agreements. I informed him confidentially that, early next week, the British Foreign Minister was expected to declare invalid all agreements and declarations concerning the Mediterranean.¹ On the subject of the note presented by the Ambassadors of the 'three democracies', I told him, at his request, that once the obstacle of the naval agreements had been removed and Germany had been invited to the Conference, we would be disposed to take part in any meeting that might be held.

We desired, however, that the official meeting should be preceded by an exchange of views through diplomatic channels, particularly with Germany.

Von Hassell informed me that the note had been presented in Berlin yesterday evening. The Director-General, who is in charge of the Ministry in the absence of von Neurath, thanked the Ambassadors of Great Britain, France and Belgium, for the invitation extended to Germany and stated that Germany is willing to participate in the meeting on the following conditions:

- (i) that the five Locarno Powers should take part.
- (ii) that Germany should participate on terms of complete parity.
- (iii) that the Conference be preceded by an exchange of views through diplomatic channels.

Von Hassell added that he had been instructed to inform us that such an exchange must in the first instance take place with Italy.

Having thus once more established the complete parallelism between German and Italian policy we agreed to meet next week to exchange information on any steps to be taken or agreed upon.

Von Hassell spoke to me about the situation in Spain, and

¹After the French statement of 9th July, both Greece and Turkey had stated on 17th and 19th July respectively that, as far as they were concerned, they considered the Mediterranean mutual assistance agreements to have lapsed. Great Britain, in turn, had let it be understood that she was disposed to follow suit in order to reach a complete European *adente*, which had been made more urgently necessary by the unforeseen complications resulting from the Spanish Civil War. It was not until 27th July that Eden announced to the Commons that he was 'happy to recognise and announce that, in the view of H.M. Government, there is no longer any need to maintain the assurances' given to friendly Governments during the most acute phase of the Abyssinian crisis.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

expressed the concern of his Government at a possible victory of the Communists in the Iberian peninsula. He told me that the Reich Government learns from a reliable source that the French Popular Front is preparing to help the Spanish Popular Front by supplying arms on the Continent, and perhaps also by intervention of French troops in Morocco. I told von Hassell that we, too, were following the question with great interest and that we shared the concern of the Reich Government at seeing the Soviet establishing itself at the gates of the Mediterranean.

On this subject, too, we intend to keep each other informed, and I assured von Hassell that, until such time as two German ships arrive in Barcelona, I shall instruct our authorities, in case of need, to protect the German colony which, like our own, is the object of particular persecution by subversive Spanish elements.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 29th July, 1936—XIV

The French Ambassador today asked me when we would send a reply to the invitation to the Locarno Conference. He did not conceal his concern at the delay, and stressed the fact that the conditions laid down by Italy for her participation having been met, there should no longer be cause for delay. I told him that the reply would be prepared quite shortly, and that for the moment I saw no difficulty on our side that would prevent acceptance of the invitation.

I had, however, to draw his attention to the gravity of the situation which is developing in Addis Ababa owing to the presence of foreign legations there. It is true that the country is completely calm and that only a few marauding formations maintain a state of guerrilla warfare, but it is equally true—and this we have on irrefutable grounds—that it would all come to an end if the foreign Ministers and the armed legation guards left Addis Ababa. The continued presence of foreign diplomatic representatives in the former capital of the Negus gives rise in the native mind to the illusion that a return to the past is not completely impossible. That, obviously, cannot be tolerated by us. For the time being there is no question of an official request, but I drew the French Ambassador's attention to the advisability of bearing in mind our desire to see this problem resolved as soon as possible. Germany had given a good example. The sooner the others followed it, the more we would appreciate the gesture.

The French Ambassador told me that he would faithfully transmit our conversation to his Government.

With regard to the supply of arms to Spain, he told me that the

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

French Government and French firms will not furnish war material. He had, however, to admit—in reply to questions—that some private firms are to furnish planes. I pointed out to him that technically the bomber and the transport-plane are very similar.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 30th July, 1936—XIV

The German Ambassador informed me that his Government intends to answer the invitation to the Locarno Conference today or tomorrow. He told me that the oral response will be favourable in principle, and gave a list of some specific reservations exclusively concerned with Germany's attitude to clauses which contradicted the invitation itself.

No objections on our side to these reservations.

He went on to say that, on the basis of point 10¹ in Hitler's plan, the negotiations ought to develop under the co-ordination of London. The Ambassador stressed that it was a question of pure formality, since he had received instructions from his Government to inform us that the course of the Conference would mean maintaining contact first and foremost with Italy.

I immediately objected that I saw no necessity for Germany to give England this honour; that the very spirit of the pact put Italy and England on an equal footing; that, finally, this 'advance', which had not been requested by London, was not likely to make a favourable impression.

The Ambassador told me that a gesture of this kind, which should be interpreted as a pure act of courtesy, was intended to attract England increasingly towards the group of anti-Communist countries at the moment when the Bolshevik menace was casting a deeper shadow over Europe.

I persistently repeated to von Hassell that I did not see either the necessity or the advisability of such a gesture. Von Hassell told me that he will communicate my point of view to his Government but will, however, request that, should the proposal have been made verbally, no mention of it be made in the *communiqué*. He will give further information on the date of the German reply and on the point of controversy mentioned above during the course of tomorrow morning.

¹Point 10 of Hitler's plan, put forward on 30th March, immediately after the military re-occupation of the Rhineland, read as follows: 'Germany, Belgium, France and the two guarantor Powers agree to begin consultations immediately, or at the latest after the French elections, under the direction of the British Government, for the conclusion of a pact of non-aggression and security of 15 years' duration between France and Great Britain on the one side and Germany on the other.'

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 30th July, 1936—XIV

The Rumanian Minister protested at the publication of a statement by the *Giornale d'Italia* and copied by other newspapers, according to which Italy has cut purchases of petrol from Rumania because of M. Titulescu's well-known utterances. Lugosianu said that if this information corresponded to the truth it must be interpreted as an act of economic warfare, which would produce serious reactions in Rumania.

In agreement with Guarneri,¹ I told Lugosianu that the news had no official character, that purchases of petrol had been suspended because Italy's financial resources made it advisable not to take new supplies, and that, finally, it was a case of a general and provisional measure which must be seen against the whole process of the revision of our economic relations with foreign countries. Lugosianu asked for a *communiqué* to this effect.

I replied that there was no question of issuing a *communiqué* in view of the fact that no such step had been taken by the Italian authorities, and that it was merely a matter of a newspaper article. In principle, a Rumanian newspaper could report what I had stated to the Rumanian Minister as a news item of its own.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH
CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 30th July, 1936—XIV

The British Chargé d'affaires² protested at Marshal Graziani's request to foreign legations to deposit their ciphers at the post office and urged that representatives in Addis Ababa should be granted the right to cable in cipher, a right universally accorded to diplomatic and consular representatives in all countries of the world.

As agreed with Lessona,³ I replied to Ingram that instructions had been sent to Graziani to the effect that he should allow foreign representatives to cable in cipher to their own Governments, but only to their own Governments, using the Italian wireless station.

I took the opportunity to draw Ingram's attention to what I told the French Ambassador last night about the danger and

¹Felice Guarneri, Under-Secretary of State for Finance, and then Minister until 1939.

²Edward Maurice Ingram, Counsellor in the British Embassy in Rome from 1935 to 1937.

³Alessandro Lessona, Under-Secretary for the Colonies from 1929 onwards and later Minister until November, 1937.

SANCTIONS UNSANCTIONED

annoyance caused to us by the situation arising from the continued presence of legations and foreign guards in Addis Ababa.

Ingram noted the argument I advanced and told me he will cable to his Government immediately. He asked me, by way of explanation, whether a possible conversion of the British Legation into a consulate would be considered by us to be an act of recognition.

I replied that obviously we would welcome this solution, but that we would not put on it any interpretation other than that which the British Government itself might possibly wish to attach to it.

II

CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN

3rd August—17th August, 1936.

At the end of July the civil war which had been tearing Spain apart for two weeks appeared to be stagnating, resolving into a series of small clashes between more or less equal forces. On both sides difficulties of supply were already becoming evident. Simultaneously ever more numerous and urgent approaches were beginning to be made both by the Madrid Government and the Nationalists, in order to obtain aid. In this phase of the civil war the Italian and German Press had shown singular reserve; but the aid of Rome and Berlin for Franco had not been long in arriving. The Madrid Government, for its part, urged in Paris that planes and munitions should be sent without delay; and many military planes had already left France for Spain. To the journalists who asked for confirmation of the news circulating about the aid which France was sending to Spain, the War Minister, Daladier, had replied: 'Go and ask the Prime Minister, who is the only one who knows.' That was enough to make the struggle between the Axis and the Western Powers, which had barely died down, flare up violently again, and once more threaten the peace. Being aware of this danger, France then took the initiative to limit the effects of the Spanish Civil War, and addressed an urgent appeal to the principal Governments interested urging 'the speedy adoption and rigorous observance with regard to Spain of the normal standards of non-intervention.' During the session of the French Chamber on 31st July, both Delbos and Blum made it clear that France regarded the Madrid Government as the only legal Spanish Government, and a friendly Government; but if we are supplying arms, they said, others are doing the same.¹

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 3rd August, 1936—XIV

I received the French Ambassador, who transmitted to me the French Government's urgent appeal that a non-intervention agreement should be reached on the Spanish question—an agreement

¹The first substantial shipments of war materials to reach the Madrid Government forces came from the Soviet Union.

which should in the first instance be between France, Italy and Britain, and be open to all other countries. In practice it would be a question of undertaking not to furnish to either of the contending parties in Spain arms or material liable to nourish the civil war.

I confined myself to acknowledging the invitation addressed to me by the French Ambassador, and stated that, in the Duce's absence from the capital, it would be difficult to give an immediate reply.

In the matter of the two Italian planes which had come down in Morocco,¹ the French Ambassador told me that he intends to let me have in a personal *aide-mémoire* all the details which his Government has provided. He added that it is his wish to be able to reach an amicable solution of this question as soon as possible.

I, for my part, replied that the competent authorities were conducting an inquiry, but that I was able to deny that the Fascist Government was implicated in any way, even indirectly.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 5th August, 1936—XIV

The French Ambassador informed me that his Government has received the British Government's reply to the move to reach a preliminary agreement on non-intervention in Spanish affairs between the three major Mediterranean Powers. The British reply is favourable in principle. Britain believes that the agreement, as well as including the three Mediterranean Powers, should initially also be concluded with Germany and Portugal. Later, all such Powers as are interested should adhere to it. England is ready to make a declaration of complete non-intervention in Spanish affairs, provided that a similar declaration is made by the French and Italian Governments. Chambrun also informed me that, as a result of a *démarche* in Berlin, the Government of the Reich has declared itself ready to examine methods of arriving at general rules for non-intervention in Spain. Chambrun admitted that this is a vague reply.

Finally, Chambrun spoke on the question of the Italian aeroplanes brought down in French Morocco. He left me all the technical details, which I am passing to the Air Minister with whom

¹On the morning of 29th July, a squadron of military seaplanes, painted white and without markings, were flying over the Moroccan coast near the Spanish zone, when two of them broke formation. One crashed on the beach, the other landed undamaged at the mouth of the Moulouja nearly two kilometres from the Spanish frontier. The survivors, who were a mixture of Italian military personnel and civilians, were arrested for having violated flying regulations that should have been observed in that area. The planes had taken off from the aerodrome at Elmas in Sardinia and were making for Franco's H.Q.

I am preparing a reply. I informed Chambrun at once that, although an inquiry was at present in progress, I could state that they were not planes serving with an Italian air force unit, but machines supplied by a private firm to private Spanish citizens and that, finally, the Government had absolutely no knowledge of the affair.

I thanked the French Ambassador for the funeral given to the dead airmen and raised the question of those at present kept prisoner and of the machine now being held at Moulouja. I told him that since it was a case of a landing obviously caused by *force majeure*, it was impossible to insist upon the contravention of the rules governing flight over French territory, and that I therefore expected that the French Government would settle the question as soon as possible by returning the plane to the flyers and by giving them liberty to depart.¹

On 6th August, Ciano communicated verbally to the Ambassador, de Chambrun, the Italian answer, which was summed up in four points:

'(1) Italy adheres in principle to the thesis of non-intervention in the Civil War which is harrowing Spain; (2) Italy asks whether the solidarity which has found and still finds expression in public demonstrations, press campaigns, subscriptions of money, the enrolment of volunteers, etc., does not already constitute a flagrant and perilous form of intervention; (3) Italy wishes to know whether the non-intervention undertaking will be universal in character or not, and whether it will be binding only on Governments or also on private citizens; (4) Italy wishes to know if the Government making the proposal has also in view any method of control of the observance of non-intervention.'

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 6th August, 1936—XIV

I received the British Chargé d'affaires who handed me the attached *aide-mémoire* relating to the French proposal for an agreement on non-intervention in Spanish affairs.

The British Government has informed the French Government that it is in favour of an agreement of the kind between all Powers which could furnish arms and munitions to Spain. The agreement should consist of an undertaking not to furnish Spain with arms and munitions and to prevent the supply of such materials from the countries concerned. Initially the agreement should be between France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and England. Later it might, as

¹On the 11th August the crews were tried by the tribunal at Oudjda, which sentenced them to a month's imprisonment with the right of appeal and to a fine of 200 francs.

CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN

the British Government hopes, also be signed by other Powers.

I replied to the British Chargé d'affaires in the terms of the statement made by me to the French Ambassador shortly before. That is to say, I made it clear to him that Italy adhered in principle to the idea of non-intervention, but that such non-intervention would be efficacious only if extended to all the States interested, and above all if it were not limited to the supply of arms, but extended to propaganda and all other methods of support. There was a form of intervention and of warfare more dangerous than that which appeared to be preoccupying the French Government—it was the struggle which was fought on the ideological and spiritual plane; this type of warfare and this type of intervention must be prevented at the same time as, and concurrently with, the supply of arms.

AIDE-MÉMOIRE

As is doubtless known to the Italian Government, the French Government has addressed itself to the British, German and Portuguese Governments, as well as to the Italian Government, for the purpose of arriving at a co-operative effort to settle the question of the supply of arms to Spain.

In reply, the British Government has informed the French Government that it would regard favourably the rapid conclusion of an agreement between those Powers capable of furnishing arms and munitions to Spain to the effect that they will abstain from so doing, and will prevent the supply of arms and munitions from their respective territories on the basis of the principle of non-interference in Spanish affairs.

The British Government is, however, of the opinion that an agreement of this nature must, from the beginning, be simultaneously accepted by those Governments—such as the French, German, Italian, Portuguese and British Governments—which have permanent material interests in Spain or geographical proximity to it.

It is to be hoped that at a later date the other Powers interested will accede to the agreement.

In bringing the above to the knowledge of the Italian Government His Majesty's Embassy has received instructions to express the British Government's desire to support the step taken in this connection three days ago by the French Government.

Rome, 6th August, 1936.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 7th August, 1936—XIV

The French Ambassador this morning handed me the draft declaration which is intended to commit the signatory Powers to

maintain neutrality towards Spain.¹ He told me that from the beginning six countries were expected to adhere to the plan, namely:—France, Italy, Britain, Germany, Portugal and Russia.

With regard to the queries made by us in our reply, the Ambassador said that in practice points 3 and 4 were already answered in the draft declaration, and that the French Government was ready to examine any modifications or suggestions which might come from the Fascist Government.

With regard to point 2, however, the Ambassador said that the French Government is not unaware of the importance of the demonstrations of moral solidarity which are causing concern to the Fascist Government. It notes, however, that such demonstrations take place in favour of both parties, and that it seems difficult to consider them in a declaration which has, and must have, an essentially practical character.

I told the Ambassador that I maintained the utmost reserve towards his answer, which was not such as to reveal the precise attitude adopted to the question submitted by the Fascist Government to the French Government. The reply he had given me did not, in actual fact, meet our point—that is to say to take steps towards spiritual disarmament, which we considered just as necessary as the embargo on arms, if not more so. With these reservations, I said, I would inform the Duce of the above and give an answer as soon as possible.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 10th August, 1936—XIV

I handed to the French Ambassador the draft declaration, and, in addition, the article dealing with the recruiting of volunteers and with financial subscriptions. I also told him that we, on our side, did not consider the exchange between Governments of information on the measures taken to prevent the exportation of arms to be sufficient control, but believed, on the contrary, that in conformity with our request, it would be necessary to make the guarantee more precise. We therefore awaited concrete proposals.

¹Draft Declaration. (In French). 'The Governments of . . . deploring the tragic events of which Spain is the theatre, being resolved to abstain rigorously from any interference direct or indirect in the internal affairs of that country, and being animated by the wish to avoid any complication prejudicial to the maintenance of good relations between the peoples, make the following declaration:

- (i) the Governments named above forbid, as far as they are individually concerned, the export to Spain, to Spanish possessions or to the Spanish zone of Morocco, of all arms, munitions and war materials, as well as of all aircraft, assembled or not assembled, and of all warships.
- (ii) this embargo applies to those contracts at present being carried out.
- (iii) the Governments of . . . will keep each other informed of all measures taken by them to make effective the present declaration, which comes into force immediately.'

Naturally, during the course of my conversation with Chambrun I did not fail to go over the list of documents which show that France has supplied, and is continuing to supply, arms and munitions to the Red Government in Madrid. Chambrun took note of my statement and, in his turn, asked if it was true that Italy was preparing to dispatch 20 flying-boats, at present concentrated at Orbetello, to General Franco. I immediately denied it. On the subject of the trial of the airmen held prisoner in French Morocco, I told Chambrun that sentence and condemnation would naturally have the most unfortunate repercussions in Italian aeronautical circles and on our public opinion. The Valle-Denain agreements¹ might themselves be seriously affected. The Ambassador took note of my statement and assured me that for his part he would do his utmost to prevent the trial from taking place; on the contrary, in conformity with my request, he will attempt to facilitate the release of the imprisoned pilots and of the aeroplanes at present detained. He was, however, still awaiting our reply on the familiar question of those planes which had landed on French colonial territory.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 14th August, 1936—XIV

I received the French Ambassador who told me that his Government had instructed him to inform us of its agreement in principle to the proposal advanced by us to prevent subscriptions and the recruiting of volunteers for Spain. Their adhesion was, however, purely theoretical since, on the pretext that it would have taken too long to make the other Governments accept our formula, the French Government made the following proposals:

- (a) the adoption of the non-intervention declaration as proposed by France;
- (b) Italy would add unilaterally that it upheld its request for the prohibition of subscriptions and of the recruiting of volunteers;
- (c) the French Foreign Minister would inform our Ambassador that France agreed with him on the advisability of not sending either men or money to Spain.

I replied that this French proposal appeared absolutely unacceptable to us. By its means an attempt was being made to transform into a unilateral recommendation pure and simple what had been a formal request on our part—a recommendation, moreover, which, while it tied Italy's hands and perhaps to some extent France's, left other countries—such as the U.S.S.R.—completely

¹They dealt with Franco-Italian collaboration in matters of aviation as provided for by the agreements of 7th January, 1935.

free, though these same countries were the prime movers in the matter of subscriptions, and of collective and popular action in favour of the Red Government in Madrid.

I informed the French Ambassador that I would communicate his statements to the Duce, but that I felt it my duty to express my complete reserve on the acceptability of the French proposal. I added that while we, by abandoning our insistence on limitation of Press and radio campaigns and on the prohibition of public meetings, had gone a long way towards meeting the French proposal, it appeared to me that the other side, on the other hand, had rigidly maintained its position and that nothing was being done to advance agreement with us.

At the end of the conversation I also spoke to him of the necessity of immediately releasing the Italian plane which had landed in Morocco.

The French Ambassador assured me that he would exert his influence in Paris.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 17th August, 1936—XIV

The French Ambassador returned this evening to request our answer to the proposals made by him during his last visit on Friday. He left with me the texts of the letters exchanged between the French Foreign Minister and the British Ambassador on the subject of the non-intervention agreement.¹

Chambrun repeated the usual appeals for a decision by us in favour of the French proposals, assuring me—as Ingram did—that our supplementary proposals will be dealt with in a second and comprehensive agreement. I told him that I would reserve a reply until I had received instructions from my chief.

In the meantime I drew his attention to some serious demonstrations by the French which were such as to compromise any platonic theory of 'non-intervention': the speech by the Minister of the Interior, the speech by M. Duclos, Vice-President of the Chamber, and the journey to Spain of M. Jouhaux, who had stated before leaving that he was going to Madrid 'to participate in the triumph of the workers over the Fascists.'²

¹The exchange had taken place in Paris on 15th August between Yvon Delbos and the British Ambassador, Sir George Clerk. The letters respectively gave and took notice of the declaration by the French Government on the embargo already in force on the direct or indirect export of arms and war materials to Spain.

²The French Minister of the Interior, Salengro, had on 16th August made a speech in Lille, of which town he was mayor, in which he had said: 'I realise my responsibility and am weighing my words: as a Frenchman first of all, and then as a member of the Government of the Republic, I hope that the legal government of a friendly nation may win beyond the Pyrenees.' Duclos had taken part on 13th August in a meeting

CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN

The Ambassador was forced to agree that these were serious and dangerous demonstrations, but, in his opinion, they should increase appreciation of M. Blum's effort to uphold and plan a policy of non-intervention.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 17th August, 1936—XIV

The British Chargé d'affaires today called to urge in the name of his Government Italian acceptance of the French proposals on non-intervention. He added that acceptance would represent the first stage in the agreement, since at a later date the Italian suggestions to prevent subscriptions of money and the enrolment of volunteers might be the subject of another and wider agreement.

He left an *aide-mémoire* summarising his arguments.

On his referring to current rumours concerning the possibility of an agreement between Italy and General Franco for the cession of certain Moroccan territory, I presented him with a complete denial.

Finally I said that I noted his appeal, and that I would reply to the French Government on receipt of the necessary instructions from the Duce.

In the face of Anglo-French pressure, the unbending attitude of the Fascist Government at last gave way. On 21st August the Italian reply delivered to the French Ambassador followed in fact, both in form and substance, the French plan, and confined itself to 'retaining its observations on the enrolment of volunteers and public subscriptions.' It seemed to indicate the beginning of an understanding.

in Paris where immediate intervention in favour of the Madrid Government had been advocated. Jouhaux, Secretary-General of the C.G.T., had said in a public meeting that 'those who defend absolute neutrality have adopted an anti-French position', and that 'there is no neutrality for a class-conscious worker.' On his return from a journey to Spain, he stated on 17th August that 'quick and effective aid' was necessary if one wished to save the democratic regime in Spain,

III

LINKS WITH BUDAPEST AND VIENNA

7th September—15th September, 1936.

On 24th August Hitler signed a decree raising the length of service for all arms to two years. It gave a new impetus to the arms race which had begun in Europe after 16th March, 1935, when Germany had introduced compulsory military service in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The repercussions were immediately evident and far-reaching. France found in it a motive for further rearmament (this was announced on 7th September); and once more Britain and France strove to reduce to a minimum and, if possible, eliminate friction with Italy by disposing of the Abyssinian question in a manner that would save face all round. At the beginning of September, the Secretary-General of the League, Avenol, went to Rome to spy out the land.

CONVERSATION WITH M. AVENOL.

Rome, 7th September, 1936—XIV

Today I received M. Avenol. Our first topic was Italy's return to Geneva.

I at once made it clear to him that before resuming our collaboration we were waiting until the point concerning the Ethiopian delegation had been cleared up.

M. Avenol said that, in his opinion, it was unlikely that a delegation from the Negus would appear at Geneva. The Negus left the last time in too distressed a state to try once again. However, even if a delegation should present itself, M. Avenol declares, on the strength of information furnished to him by the best jurists, that the delegation would be removed, since the validity of its powers was not recognised. In fact Avenol considers that it would be very dangerous for the League of Nations to turn itself into a '*rifugio della legittimità*.' There would be too many ousted Governments which might be tempted to cite the Ethiopian precedent in an attempt to be represented at Geneva by self-styled delegations. The League would obviously not gain thereby either in prestige or in power.

M. Avenol is further of the opinion that no national representative will rise to defend any Ethiopian delegation whose powers

are not valid. He says that at the present moment all the delegates are too preoccupied with more important and serious events, which are even now taking place and which threaten the peace of the world. All will be happy to consider the out-of-date Italo-Abyssinian question finally closed.

I told him that I took note of his statement. However, it did not appear advisable to me that our representatives should take part in the Council or in the first sitting of the Assembly, that is to say, at a time when the Ethiopian delegation might still make an appearance. We would have representatives at the second meeting of the Assembly should the Ethiopians not have appeared at the first meeting, or, if they had appeared, had been made to withdraw.

As far as concerns the reform of the League, M. Avenol told me that it is his impression that no country will be willing at the present moment to push for a decision in this matter. If the topic is broached it will be only formally and without any positive conclusion being reached.

He then raised the question of Pilotti, and told me that the League of Nations would consider his loss extremely grave, for he is considered one of the best of the League's officials (this made me all the more convinced of the necessity of removing him from these circles!). Avenol therefore in the first place asked us to reconsider the arrangement confirming Pilotti in his present post. Should that not be possible he asked as a personal favour that Pilotti be left at his disposal for a few more months, since, with the nomination of Rosenberg as Ambassador to Madrid and that of the other delegate as Ambassador to London, he had lost all his collaborators in the course of the last few days.

I made him clearly understand that it would not be possible to reconsider the decision taken over Pilotti, but that, in view of his personal request, I might be able to consent, once I had obtained the approval of my chief, to Pilotti's remaining until March.

Avenol again made some reservations when Rocco was mentioned, not because the latter did not appear to him acceptable, but because he obviously wished to affirm the principle that the choice and nomination of the delegate was definitely his concern, whereas we were limited to suggesting a name.

While confirming that we wished to see Rocco at Geneva, I acceded to his desire to re-examine the question together shortly.

At the end of the conversation Avenol pressed to be allowed to present his compliments to the Duce.

I told him that the Duce will be able to receive him, and that I will be available to accompany him in the course of the next few days.

Avenol is staying in Rome until Thursday.

It was not only the Western Powers which were concerned at the continued deterioration in the European situation. Thus one

LINKS WITH BUDAPEST AND VIENNA

of the consequences of the German decision to raise the period of service to two years was the reshuffle in the Bucharest Government which took place on 29th August. Nicola Titulescu was brusquely replaced by Victor Antonescu. For many long years Titulescu had been the exponent of a policy of strict observance of the League Covenant and of complete understanding with France; nor had he hesitated, at the opportune moment, to inaugurate a good neighbour policy with the U.S.S.R. Titulescu's spectacular fall was the pre-condition of rapprochement with Italy, and even more so with Germany.

On the other hand, the rapid increase in power of Hitler's Reich had already attracted the attention of the two Danubian capitals most sensitive to developments in Germany. Both Austria and Hungary were linked with Italy by the so-called Rome Protocols, which were signed for the first time on 23rd March, 1934, and renewed and amplified on 23rd March, 1936. The Italian divisions which had been despatched to the Brenner had dissuaded Hitler from pushing to its conclusion the coup de main which had cost the life of Chancellor Dollfuss. Italian support had allowed Hungary to overcome the exceedingly difficult situation created by another assassination—that of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and of the French Foreign Minister, Barthou. Then, too, Mussolini was the only European statesman who had pronounced the word revision in favour of a Hungary 'mutilated' by the Treaty of Trianon. Finally, Rome bought the Hungarian grain which—at that price—would not easily have found buyers elsewhere. In spite of all this, at the beginning of the Abyssinian crisis and after the German re-occupation of the Rhineland, the head of the Hungarian Government, General Gömbös, had envisaged Hungary in the role of a mediator or even arbiter between Rome and Berlin, playing Italy off against Germany or vice versa as occasion arose. With this aim, Horthy had gone to visit Hitler, Gömbös having previously torpedoed the scheme for a regional Danubian pact of mutual assistance, which would have been particularly displeasing to Berlin. The new turn in events led the colleagues of the General to seek confirmation of the closeness of relations with Italy, they did not, however, cease to parade the fact that there was an atmosphere of cordial understanding between Budapest and Berlin.

CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 7th September, 1936—XIV

The Minister, Villani,¹ called today on his return from Hungary. He discussed the following topics:

1. *The Regent's visit to Rome.* The Minister has been

¹Baron Frederick Villani, Hungarian Minister in Rome from 1934 to 1941.

instructed by his Government to inform the Duce that the Regent¹ accepts the invitation with pleasure, and that he is ready to come to Rome any time after October 15. He is awaiting information as to which date will be most acceptable to His Majesty and the Duce.

2. *My visit to Hungary.* In the name of his Government, M. Villani was anxious to inform me that a visit by me to Hungary would be particularly welcome. He insisted strongly that on that visit I should be accompanied by my wife, to whom the Hungarian Government wished to give a particular welcome. He wished to suggest that on the occasion of this visit—which could take place in November—the meeting of the three Foreign Ministers of Italy, Austria and Hungary should be held in Budapest, as was foreseen in the Rome Protocols.²

I replied that there was no obstacle on my side to the idea of my visiting Budapest, and that I would inform him of the date and other arrangements after receiving the necessary instructions from the Duce.

3. *Hitler-Horthy Meeting.* Villani at once informed me that the Hitler-Horthy conversation had been chiefly due to the Regent's personal desire to make the Fuehrer's acquaintance and have direct contact with him, since he is head of a nation for which the Hungarian people have a warm feeling of friendship. The visit was entirely unpolitical in character, and the Regent, who never personally handles political problems, was not accompanied by any Minister or by Foreign Office officials. During the conversation, however, the following points were touched upon:

(a) *Austro-German Agreement.* The Regent congratulated Hitler warmly on the conclusion of the agreement, which has produced a state of *détente* in Central Europe and in Hungary has removed a source of grave concern by allowing the re-establishment of cordial relations between Italy and Germany—countries equally dear to the Magyar people. Hitler concurred with Horthy and said it is his intention to make the ties which unite the German and Italian peoples ever closer and more binding.

(b) *Communism.* The Fuehrer and the Regent found themselves at one in recognising in Communism the greatest peril to Europe and to peace. The Fuehrer revealed to the Regent his intention of following an active anti-Communist policy. He said that in Spain it was working effectively, and that, in this connection,

¹Nicolas Horthy de Nagybánya, elected Regent of Hungary from 1st March, 1920, to 15th October, 1944; former Admiral and C.-in-C. of the Austro-Hungarian fleet in the last year of the 1914/18 war.

²On 17th March, 1934, the Italian, Austrian and Hungarian Governments had signed three protocols in Rome. In the first they pledged themselves to consult on all problems of a general nature in a spirit of friendship; in the other two they undertook to develop their mutual economic relations by setting up a permanent commission of three experts. On 23rd March, 1936, again in Rome, three protocols were signed which consolidated the collaboration of the three countries in political, economic and cultural fields.

he was happy to be able to provide further proof of the good relations between Italy and Germany, since the operation in Spain in support of General Franco had been carried out in common.

(c) *Czechoslovakia*. The Regent found in the Fuehrer a strong feeling of resentment against Czechoslovakia. He stated, however, that he (Hitler) was ready to conclude a pact of non-aggression with the Czechs should they abandon their friendship with Russia.¹ Horthy came away with the impression that, as soon as she has finished arming, Germany proposes to show her enmity to Czechoslovakia by some concrete gesture.

4. *League of Nations*. Hungary has prepared a memorandum, of which Villani handed me a copy, relating to the revision of the Covenant. This memorandum will not be delivered immediately, but at a later date. In the meantime he would like us to inform him in writing of any observations or criticisms we might wish to make. The Hungarian delegation at Geneva will be led by Kánya.² Although the final decision has not yet been taken, it seems certain that Kánya will raise the question of Hungarian rearmament. On this subject, too, he would like to have our opinion on the advisability or otherwise of raising the question at present. Germany has promised full diplomatic support. M. Villani told me that the Hungarian people places full reliance on the promises of aid more than once made by the Duce, should the Little Entente have occasion to mobilise.

5. *Yugoslavia*. The conversations between M. Stoyadinovitch³ and the Hungarian Minister in Belgrade are being actively continued but with little result. In order to reach an agreement, Yugoslavia wishes Hungary to declare that she has no interest in the minorities under Serbian rule. This declaration Hungary will not be able to make, primarily because it might in turn be invoked by Rumania and Czechoslovakia. However, M. Villani believes that it will be possible gradually to reach a strengthening in relations between Hungary and Yugoslavia, even if only temporarily.

6. *Rumania*. The Hungarian Government has watched Titulescu's removal with pleasure, but is now concerned at the growing influence of the Iron Guards,⁴ which, should they come to

¹On 16th March there had been signed in Prague by the Czech Foreign Minister Benes, and the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary, Alexandrovsky, a treaty of mutual assistance of five years' duration.

²Kálmán de Kánya, Hungarian diplomat, from 1933 to 1st December, 1938, Foreign Minister in the cabinets of Gömbös, Darányi and Imrédy.

³Milan Stoyadinovitch, head of the Yugoslav Government and Foreign Minister from 24th June, 1935 to 4th February, 1939.

⁴A Rumanian movement of an authoritarian and anti-semitic character founded in 1927 by Codreanu, but which spread only from 1933 onwards. Forbidden in 1931, 1933 and 1935, declared to be dissolved in 1938, and re-formed each time, it never, in fact, ceased its secret activity. After the assassination of Codreanu on 30th November, 1938, under their new leader Horia Sima, and during the pro-German dictatorship of Antonescu, the Iron Guards were able to function openly.

power, would be prepared to follow a very severe policy towards the Hungarian minorities. In this connection M. Villani requested intervention in favour of these nationalities by our representative should occasion arise.

I replied that recently our relations with Rumania had been rather strained. M. Antonescu's gesture had obviously brought about a formal improvement, but so far there was nothing concrete. However, should our intervention appear useful and opportune, it will certainly be forthcoming at the appropriate time in favour of Hungary.

Even more obvious worries beset the Government in Vienna, which was anxiously following Germany's offensive tactics and the widening of the ideological and political gulf in Europe. The Austro-German agreements of 11th July had not yet given grounds for recriminations and protests—it was still too early for that. But Schuschnigg had no illusions, and he feared the effects of the increasingly obvious parallelism which was at the basis of the policy of Rome and Berlin. He therefore sought to secure for himself some foothold in the other camp, by delaying, for example, a decision regarding his attitude towards the Spanish conflict; he also followed with attention the journey to Warsaw of General Gamelin, which came to an end without official communiqués after five days of visits and conversations, and the journey of Marshal Smigly-Rydz to France immediately after. (During these weeks Paris was exerting an effort to re-activate the languishing Franco-Polish alliance.) On that occasion Daladier toasted Poland 'our friend and ally in the task of safeguarding peace.' On 5th September there was signed at Rambouillet a Franco-Polish protocol, which re-affirmed the alliance between the two countries, defined the terms of collaboration of their military staffs, and settled France's financial contribution towards the defensive organisation of Poland. On 7th September, after the departure of Smigly-Rydz, the French Council of Ministers published a communiqué which added to what was already known that these meetings had served to create a détente in relations between Czechoslovakia and Poland, which had up to then always been precarious because of questions of territory (Teschen) and of minorities. Poland, they said, had come to recognise the uselessness of fortifying her frontiers with Czechoslovakia. Warsaw was less explicit, and stressed the economic agreements arranged by these meetings; but it issued no démenti. Shortly before, Schuschnigg had already informed the Fascist Government, through his minister in Rome, that along the German-Czech frontier and within German territory important troop movements, as well as the construction of barracks, roads and military works, were being observed. It was meant as an indirect warning, but was without any influence on the increasing rapprochement between Italy and Germany. However, in Schuschnigg's eyes Italy still seemed the

LINKS WITH BUDAPEST AND VIENNA

only pillar with which to support effectively Austria's independence. So Guido Schmidt, Austrian Foreign Secretary, made an appointment with Ciano for a meeting in Rome.

CONVERSATION WITH HERR SCHMIDT.

Rome, 15th September, 1936—XIV

In the course of my conversation yesterday with the Austrian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs¹ the following topics were discussed :

Spain. The Secretary of State expressed to me his concern at the conditions in which Austrian subjects resident in Spain find themselves and will find themselves in the future. Some time ago steps had been taken for the establishment of an Austrian legation in Madrid. Now, before going further in the matter, the Austrian Government wished to learn our attitude.

I told Schmidt that in the present state of affairs I thought it extremely inadvisable to set up diplomatic representation with a Government which, in all probability, will shortly be finally deposed. If, as everything leads one to suppose, Franco achieves victory, we will when necessary be able to place before the new Nationalist Government, with which for obvious reasons the most cordial relations will be established, our support for the wishes and interests of Austrian citizens.

Poland. Herr Schmidt wished to obtain some particulars or other information on the result obtained by General Smigly-Rydz² from his recent visit to Paris.

I allowed him to read the report of the conversation held at Venice between the General and Under-Secretary of State, Bastianini.³

Herr Schmidt, while admitting that some improvement in rela-

¹Guido Schmidt, Austrian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from July, 1936 to February, 1938, then Foreign Minister until the *Anschluss*. Widely regarded as Hitler's *homme de confiance* in the Austrian Cabinet, and as chiefly responsible for the Austro-German Agreement of 11th July, 1936, with its unhappy consequences, and for undermining Schuschnigg's resistance to German pressure, he was arraigned before an Austrian People's Court in 1946 on a charge of high treason; after a trial lasting many weeks he was however acquitted for lack of evidence.

²Smigly-Rydz, General, later Marshal of Poland, recognised as Pilsudski's successor on the latter's death (12th May, 1935). On 15th July, 1936, a decree bestowed on him the title of 'first person in the State after the President of the Republic.' From 30th August to 6th September Smigly-Rydz had returned the visit of General Gamelin, Chief of the French General Staff, who had visited Warsaw between 12th and 17th August. In Paris, in addition to an exchange of views of a military nature, there was signed an economic and financial agreement which aimed at giving new life to the Franco-Polish alliance.

³On 7th September, Marshal Smigly-Rydz arrived in Venice where he met Bastianini, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The next day he left for Vienna and Warsaw.

tions between France and Poland had resulted from the visit, considers that there is no substantial change in Polish policy.

Having received confirmation from me that the relations existing between the Italian Government and the Government in Warsaw are markedly cordial, particularly as a result of the Polish gesture of unilateral abolition of sanctions, he stated that it was the Austrian Government's intention to develop the already friendly relations which exist between Warsaw and Vienna.

Czechoslovakia. I confirmed at his request that the commercial *modus vivendi* recently signed at Rome contains no clause particularly advantageous to the Czechoslovak Government, and that it is completely analogous to the other commercial agreements reached after 15th July with the other former sanctionist countries. No change has taken place, nor is any foreseen, in normal relations between Rome and Prague.

U.S.S.R. He asked me if the breaking off of the trade negotiations had also a political significance.

I told him that the trade negotiations had broken off because Russia asked us to deviate from a line of conduct which we adopt towards all other States and which aims at achieving parity in our balance of trade. The breaking off of negotiations has certainly had a weakening influence on political relations between the two countries—relations which have recently grown cooler, as the continual and violent Press campaigns prove, particularly as a result of the Spanish revolution and of the Moscow trials.¹

Yugoslavia. Herr Schmidt told me that M. Stoyadinovitch had already several times informed Chancellor Schuschnigg² of his desire to meet him. Schuschnigg has not replied one way or the other because Austria wishes to model its relations with Yugoslavia on Italo-Serbian relations as they are now and will be in the future. There are no substantial grounds of disagreement between Yugoslavia and Austria except the Habsburg question on which the Government in Vienna intends, however, to take no action, and the attraction which the Austrian capital exercises on the Croat people. Nevertheless, since there are many indications that relations of particular cordiality are being established between Berlin and Belgrade, Schmidt wonders whether it would not be advisable to bring about an agreement—which in his opinion should not be difficult—so as to draw Belgrade more into the Italian sphere of influence.

¹During the summer of 1936 Stalin had suddenly arrested on the charge of conspiracy and intelligence with foreign powers, the most prominent leaders of the Trotskyist group. A trial followed which ended with death-sentences on Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smirnov, Ter-Vaganjan, Mrackovsky, Reingold, Evdokimov and Bakaev, and with the deportation of many others.

²Kurt von Schuschnigg, Austrian Minister of Justice and of Education from 1932 to 1934 in the cabinets of Buresch and Dollfuss. After the assassination of Dollfuss, Chancellor of Austria from July, 1934 until the eve of the German invasion (13th March, 1938).

LINKS WITH BUDAPEST AND VIENNA

I told Schmidt that we too had considered the problem from this aspect and that in the very near future, when our new diplomatic representative was in Belgrade, we would examine the possibilities most carefully and with due caution, and subsequently take a decision.

Economic Relations between Italy and Austria. In the name of Chancellor Schuschnigg, Herr Schmidt appealed strongly for economic relations between our two countries to be maintained in their present state. The support given by Italy to Austria in this field has been, and still is, of profound importance in maintaining her autonomy and independence from Germany.

I assured Herr Schmidt that economic relations between Austria and Italy will always be guided by political good sense and will bear the stamp of the friendship which binds the two countries.

Revision of the Covenant. I confirmed to Schmidt that we have not prepared any plans for revision; we are however opposed to any modification of the Covenant which aims at increasing the offensive power of the League of Nations.

I told him, however, in accordance with what Avenol has recently said, that I did not consider that the problem would be thoroughly discussed with the intention of reaching positive results at the next Assembly meeting.

Meeting of Italian, Hungarian and Austrian Diplomats at Vienna. I informed him that through the Minister Villani I had requested the agreement of the Hungarian Government to this meeting. In principle we agreed to fix it for a date in the first ten days of December. The agenda will be agreed upon through our diplomatic representatives.

IV

SHAPING THE AXIS

23rd September—6th November, 1936.

On 9th March, 1933, the Fascist Grand Council, hailing the decisive electoral victory won by Hitler four days earlier, declared in an order of the day that it saw 'in the Fascist trend which is developing beyond the frontiers of Italy, a new spirit asserting itself, one which directly or indirectly, draws its substance from that solid system of doctrines and institutions by means of which Italy has created the modern state.' It is possible to recall other similar demonstrations from that period and later, always on the Italian side; manœuvres of Fascist diplomacy, too, which aimed at supporting or assisting or exploiting corresponding manœuvres in Hitler's diplomacy. The Axis, however, was not the fruit of Italian initiative. Nor did its roots go so far back. From 1934 to 1936 Italo-German relations were entirely dominated by the question of Austrian independence, and when they were not strained never succeeded in being anything more than correct. The Axis was essentially the product of the European crisis brought on by the Abyssinian conflict.

For a considerable period of the war in East Africa the attitude of Germany was very cautious. Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland, taking advantage of the differences between Italy, Great Britain and France, who were signatories of the Versailles Treaty and guarantors of the Locarno undertakings. The Abyssinian campaign had, from the military point of view, not yet produced very favourable results, thus confirming the attitude of the German General Staff which had an undisguised contempt for Italy as a military factor. And at that time Hitler attached much weight to the opinion of his General Staff. When, in the spring, military operations speeded up, the German attitude changed, became warmer; then feelers were put out and flattery was applied with the aim of reaching a closer understanding between the two totalitarian regimes. Mussolini, being sure of himself, and free to choose, consented; the agreement between Germany and Austria of 11th July, removed the first and most obvious difficulty in relations between Rome and Berlin. Then there came the war in Spain to offer a further basis for common action and understanding. The principal plank in their common policy—apart from the similarities of their internal regimes—was anti-Communism against which Fascism and Nazism had

SHAPING THE AXIS

joined to make a common front. Along with this went dislike of the League of Nations after the League's rejection of German claims in the matter of armaments and its threat to Fascist Italy with the weapon of sanctions. To this was added a common belief in the inevitable and imminent decline of the great democracies.

During the first half of September, Nazi propaganda had particularly stressed the anti-Communist theme. At the National-Socialist Congress in Nuremberg on 13th September, Hitler had said that Nazism and Bolshevism were 'two worlds which can only diverge, but never approach each other.' This served as an ideological justification of aid to Franco, especially after Giral's Government had been replaced on 4th September by a Government presided over by the secretary of the U.G.T. (Union General Trabajadora), Largo Caballero,¹ with del Vayo in the Foreign Ministry—a government completely dominated by elements of the extreme Left. But it also had the effect of isolating Fascist Italy even more from the Western Powers and forcing it to march with Hitler Germany. It is true that Pius XI, the very day after Hitler's Nuremberg speech, had in his turn warned the world against the perils of Communism, which, he said, must spread from Spain to set fire and destroy all Europe; but the Pope had not failed to add that a similar peril came from anti-Communist states, like Germany, which fought against religion and the Catholic Church. There was still some way to go before reaching a formal definition of a programme common to Rome and Berlin, among other things because London, during the same period, was making an effort to restore normal relations with Italy. But Anglo-German competition for the friendship of Italy was not in reality a serious contest. London displayed amiability without strength or any coherent purpose, and this was sufficient to convince Mussolini and Ciano that there was nothing to be expected from that quarter, with the exception of concessions and recognitions of accomplished facts following on unilateral action.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND HERR FRANK.

Rome (Palazzo Venezia), 23rd September, 1936—XIV

The Minister² began by offering the Fuehrer's greetings to the

¹Speaking at a meeting in Zaragoza Largo Caballero had declared: 'When the hour of revenge is at hand we shall not leave one stone upon another of this Spain that we shall destroy, to rebuild our own.'

²Hans Frank, Minister of Justice from 13th April, 1933, then appointed Minister without Portfolio in December, 1934. After the occupation of Poland was nominated in September, 1939 Governor-General of Polish territory. Executed at Nuremberg in 1946.

SHAPING THE AXIS

Duce and expressing thanks for the work done by the Italian consular authorities, by the steamship crews and by the authorities in Italy, in aid of the German refugees from Spain.

He then went on to express to the Duce the Fuehrer's desire to receive him in Germany at the earliest possible moment, not only in his capacity of head of the Government but also as founder and Duce of a party with affinities to National Socialism.

He also said that the Fuehrer wishes to be able to make personal contact with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and that he was therefore instructed to invite him to come to Germany.

Concerning Spain, Herr Frank gave an assurance that Germany is giving aid to the nationalist parties solely because of solidarity in the field of political ideas, but that it has neither interests nor aims in the Mediterranean. The Fuehrer is anxious that we should know that he regards the Mediterranean as a purely Italian sea. Italy has a right to positions of privilege and control in the Mediterranean. The interests of the Germans are turned towards the Baltic which is their Mediterranean.

One problem to which Herr Frank wishes to call the attention of the Duce is that of colonial claims, a problem which is based on the economic needs of the German people. The Fuehrer does not conceal the fact that on this point he will meet with open British hostility. The despatch of Ribbentrop¹ to London represents the final attempt to make Great Britain understand the needs and position of Germany. It is clear, however, that any approach to Germany on the British side must be followed by a British approach to Italy. However, the Fuehrer has few illusions about such a possibility.

Direct contacts between the Nazi hierarchy and the Fascist hierarchy are necessary over and above diplomatic channels. The actions of both countries, like that of both parties, are specially directed against Bolshevik propaganda and the Bolshevik peril.

In German Government circles the Austrian question is considered to have been settled by the Austro-German Agreement of 11th July, to which the German Government intends to adhere strictly. Proof of this is that Hitler refused to receive the representative of the Austrian Nazi party at Nuremberg.

With regard to Hungary, Frank declares that Germany's relations with Hungary are good, and that they should be taken as a new example of collaboration with Italy.

As far as Geneva is concerned it is the Fuehrer's intention to keep step with the Fascist Government, and Herr Frank adds that

¹Joachim von Ribbentrop, appointed German Ambassador to London on 11th August, 1936, and from 4th February, 1939, Foreign Minister. Executed at Nuremberg.

Germany is ready to grant recognition of the Abyssinian Empire whenever it is considered advisable.

Herr Frank concluded by expressing his own belief and that of the Reich Government in the need for increasingly close collaboration between Germany and Italy.

The Duce answers that we in Italy are in no hurry to see the Abyssinian Empire recognised; that is a matter for the other Powers rather than for us.

He appreciates, however, the German Government's intentions, and points out that the proposed recognition if made on the occasion of a special event, such as for instance the visit of the Foreign Minister to Berlin, would assume particular importance.

As regards Geneva, Italy has for all practical purposes left it, and it may be that in a few hours it will also have left it legally—should the League of Nations, in the presence of the Italian delegation, give preference to the self-styled Abyssinian one.

Relations with Austria are and continue to be most friendly. The agreement of 11th July was based upon the suggestions which the Duce himself made to Schuschnigg on 5th June, advising him to support an understanding with Germany because Austria was, in the first place, a German country, and further, because it was too weak a country to pursue an anti-German policy.

He is happy to note how much relations between Austria and Germany have improved.

As far as France is concerned he states that, with the present internal political conditions in that country, it is not possible for us to develop any common policy with it.

France is sick and old. It thinks only of eating; it is a country in which the cuisine has become 'an art of the State.' Its demographic decadence is terrifying. In France the population figure falls by two thousand every week.

During the last few days the Radicals attempted a revolt, but the Communist forces are impotent. If Blum were to attempt to get rid of them, the Communist party would probably come out on the streets.

France is of no interest until such time as the internal crisis is over.

In Spain the two fronts have formed—on the one side the Germans and Italians, on the other the French, Belgians and Russians. The Duce agrees with Hitler that the formation of the two fronts is now an accomplished fact.

Italy has helped the Spaniards, and at the present moment numerous acts of help are being performed without conditions, though much Italian blood has been shed and the Balcarics were saved only by Italian men and Italian material. For the present it is necessary to win. After the victory we will ask nothing of Spain which might modify the geographical situation in the Mediterranean,

but will only ask her to follow a policy which is not contrary to the interest of Italy.

Our actions in Spain are an effective proof of our participation in the anti-Bolshevik struggle.

As far as England is concerned, the Duce believes that Hitler was right to make the attempt with Ribbentrop. But it will not succeed. Ribbentrop will accomplish nothing. The alignments are already clear: France and Russia, and along with France, England. Hence London will never be able to have a common policy with Germany. There is between England and France an old pact whereby the two countries, the bosses of the League of Nations, have undertaken to pursue a common policy. Now and again they may clash, but they will never come to a rupture. It is a case of historical solidarity between two rich, conservative and democratic countries.

There is in the possession of the Duce a document¹ from which Ribbentrop, when he becomes familiar with it, will be able to form an idea of what the results of his mission are likely to be. England intends to live with Germany only in so far as it will give her time to achieve rearmament.

Our relations with London are very bad and cannot improve. Every British measure provokes a counter-measure by us. When the English sent the fleet to Alexandria, the Duce sent five divisions to the borders of Cyrenaica. Now that the English are preparing new naval bases, we are preparing opposing bases. Mastery of the air in the Mediterranean is, and will always be, Italy's.

If, however, England should wish to adopt a new policy towards us, we might even welcome it. But in the present state of affairs there is no indication which leads one to foresee such an eventuality. One must bear in mind, along with the other symptoms, the

¹A reference to a dossier of 32 documents dating from 26th April, 1933 to 8th January, 1936 collected by Eden for limited circulation to the members of the British Cabinet and entitled 'The German Peril.' In his preface to the dossier Eden stated that he believed it would furnish a useful introduction or background for the study of the German problem. The outstanding characteristic of the reports was the clear proof they gave of the steady and undeviating development of German policy under Hitler's guidance along certain well-defined and pre-established lines.

Hitler's foreign policy could be described as combining the destruction of the order established by the peace, and the re-establishment of Germany as a dominant power in Europe. The means of putting that policy into action were of two kinds: (a) internally, by militarisation of the entire nation; (b) abroad, by economic and territorial expansion. The form and direction of this expansion were the sole factors still uncertain in Germany's plans for the future.

From the reports Mr. Eden drew two conclusions:

- (1) It was vital for Britain to speed up and complete her rearmament in order to be ready to face any eventuality.
- (2) Parallel with her rearmament it would be well for Britain to consider whether it was still possible for her to reach some *modus vivendi* with Hitler's Germany, a *modus vivendi* which, while being honourable and safe for Britain, would contribute towards lessening the growing tension in Europe caused by the growth of Germany's power and ambition.

A copy of this dossier was conveyed to Mussolini by the Ambassador to London, Dino Grandi, on September 3rd, 1936.

SHAPING THE AXIS

nature of the journey made by Edward VIII,¹ who, just as he avoided touching Italy, has with equal care avoided touching Germany.

As far as the colonies are concerned, the Duce considers that the Germans are right to raise the question and agitate about it. The Germans, like the Italians, are a people without living space. At the opportune moment, Italy undertakes to support them. It is already known what answer English democracy is preparing to give to the German request: those populations which for twenty years have enjoyed the benefits of the liberal English system must not be put under autocratic German rule. It is obvious that in the colonial field, on one pretext or another, Germany will always have England against her.

The Duce further advises the rejection of the conference on raw materials.² It would settle nothing. Raw materials in national or colonial territory are paid for with simple state currency, but if they are procured abroad they must be paid for in gold.

As far as the visit to Germany is concerned, the Duce said that it was his wish to undertake it. It must, however, be well prepared for, so as to produce concrete results. It will cause a great stir and must therefore in its results be historically important. That will follow from the meeting of the heads of two related movements and philosophies. The visit will also be prepared for from the point of view of official diplomacy; it must define and mark not only the solidarity of the regimes, but also the common policy of the two States, a policy which must be clearly outlined as it affects the East and the West, the South and the North.

Herr Frank addresses another question to the Duce; he wishes to know how Italy has succeeded in making its relations with the Church normal, while in Germany the question bristles with difficulties.

The Duce replies that the struggle against religion is useless, whether Catholic or Protestant (not against the Jews, because there it is a question of race), since religion is as intangible as mist. For the State, it is important to divide the task clearly with the Church: 'You priests, your concern is religion not politics, the soul not the body. The citizen belongs to the State; the Church looks after only that portion of him which is religious.'

After the Concordat there was in Italy a rather grave crisis, and the Pope came close to using excommunication; but the struggle ended with the triumph of the State. Education is in the hands of the State, the Church provides the chaplains, who confine themselves to saying Mass. They must not have anything to do with sport

¹In the summer Edward VIII had undertaken a Mediterranean cruise which had touched at the Côte d'Azur and Dalmatia among other places, and had extended as far as the Bosphorus.

²The proposal had come from the British Government.

SHAPING THE AXIS

or gymnastics, nor with recreational activities: theology is the ecclesiastical field. Since 1st September, 1931, Catholic Action in Italy has practically ceased to exist.

It is necessary, however, to be continually vigilant. The Catholic Church is like a rubber ball; pressure must be constantly exercised in order to maintain the results of pressure, otherwise the ball re-assumes its original shape.

Herr Frank finally speaks of his cultural projects and of the intention to found at Munich a Palace of Justice in which there will be an institute of Fascist legislation to which the best law students in Germany will be admitted. Our Minister Solmi¹ will be invited to the opening ceremony.

He finally asks the Head of the State what, in his opinion, should be the relations between State and Party.

The Duce replies that in Italy the problem was solved by making the Party an organ of the State, in fact a civil militia under the orders of the State.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 26th September, 1936—XIV

Mr. Ingram, the British Chargé d'affaires called on me and after having expressed his pleasure at the calm attitude preserved by Italy during the recent deliberations at Geneva, spoke to me about the situation in the Mediterranean.

He stressed, in the name of Vansittart, that all the recent British activities in the Mediterranean such as the King's voyage, the voyage of Sir Samuel Hoare,² the voyage of the Minister Stanhope,³ the despatch of troops to Palestine, the visit of the Turkish fleet to Malta, were not and are not at all in the nature of an anti-Italian policy. They must, on the contrary, be regarded as normal manifestations of British activity.

According to him the bad interpretation placed on these events is due to the Italian journalists in London, and particularly to the correspondent of the *Tribuna*. These journalists wish to make people believe in an attempt at encirclement aimed at Italy which is not being considered nor has been considered by England.

¹Arrigo Solmi, Professor of Law, Senator, from January, 1935 Minister of Justice and member of the Fascist Council.

²Sir Samuel Hoare, now Viscount Templewood, Secretary of State for India from 1931 to 1935, then Foreign Minister in Baldwin's Government from 7th June to 18th December, 1935. Nominated First Lord of the Admiralty in June, 1936, he was later Home Secretary in Chamberlain's Cabinet from May, 1937 to 4th September, 1939; thereafter Ambassador in Madrid.

³Lord Stanhope, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs from 1934 to December, 1935, then First Commissioner of Works; from 1937 to 1938 President of the Board of Education. On 27th October, 1938 became First Lord of the Admiralty.

SHAPING THE AXIS

I confined myself to listening to what Ingram said, contradicting him only when he made a vague reference to possible relations between the Fascist Government and the heads of the Arab movement in Palestine, a reference which he withdrew immediately I reacted. With regard to the Press, I answered that it was not only our correspondents who had put this interpretation on the events under discussion, but almost the entire world Press.

Mr. Ingram was anxious to underline that England, for her part, is neither considering nor desires an anti-Italian policy.

But de Kérillis¹ whom I received a few minutes later and who has come from England, also informed me that anti-Italian sentiments are deeply rooted in the whole English nation, which nourishes an 'unbending hatred' towards Italy.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 3rd October, 1936—XIV

I had the following conversation with the Ambassador, von Hassell.

My Journey to Germany. The Ambassador, von Hassell, officially invited me to travel to Germany between the 18th and 22nd of this month.

He was aware of Attolico's² instructions on the drawing-up of a *communiqué* at the close of my visit in which the following topics were to be touched upon: Locarno, the League of Nations, colonies, Communism, recognition of the Empire. He stated, in the name of his Government, that he agreed in principle, but reserved the right to approve the details later and to edit the text.

Locarno. On the question of Locarno, von Hassell informed me that the German Government intends, first and foremost, to approach the problem in full accord with Italy.

The Germans propose to reply to the British memorandum³ but not before the Assembly has risen. I made the remark that it would be advisable to postpone the reply until after my visit to Berlin. Von Hassell took note of this and said he would communicate with his Government in due course.

The Reich Government states that in principle its attitude towards the completion of a Western Pact is positive. As far as relations with the Soviets are concerned, the German attitude continues to be negative, although it is not considered advisable, for

¹Henri de Kérillis, noted French journalist and writer belonging to the nationalist movement.

²Bernardo Attolico, Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. from September, 1930 to July, 1935. From 26th July, 1935 Ambassador to Berlin.

³In conformity with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Locarno Powers on 1st April, 1936, the British Government had addressed to the German Government on 6th May a request for enlightenment on some points of the German memorandum of 31st March. No answer was ever given to the British questionnaire.

the present, to make any gesture which might reveal that attitude. It will suffice to state that initially only the Western agreement is being considered, any Russian participation being excluded.

Germany's test of the terms of the Pact remains that of total renunciation of war between Germany, France and Belgium. Should France, however, propose exceptions, the Government of the Reich would reserve the right to consider them point by point.

No grounds must be given for overlapping between the new Locarno Pact and the League of Nations Covenant.

These are the general principles. The Ambassador added that in the forthcoming reply to the British note—a reply which will be of a preliminary nature—the Government of the Reich proposes to say only that Germany remains faithful to the idea of guaranteeing peace in the West by means of a Pact in the spirit of the old Locarno. But von Hassell himself wonders if a note of this kind would be considered a real and true answer to the English memorandum, or whether, instead, it would be looked upon as a delaying move.

I told von Hassell that it was necessary to examine the whole problem together and at greater length, and that the text of the German reply itself should be directly influenced by the text of the *communiqué* to be agreed upon as a result of my visit to Berlin.

Spain. The Ambassador told me that the German Government does not for the present intend to reply to Franco's telegram,¹ since a reply would have the force of recognition. It was intended to do so only after the occupation of Madrid, in suitable agreement with us.

Conversation with the Duce. Von Hassell finally told me that he had some matters to bring before the Duce on the Fuehrer's personal instructions. He therefore requests that a conversation be arranged for him, after which he will resume the conversations with me on the preparations for the journey to Berlin and the reply on Locarno.

If the Duce authorises it, I propose to accompany von Hassell to the Palazzo Venezia on Monday afternoon.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 7th October, 1936—XIV

The British Ambassador, who has recently returned from two months' leave at home, called on me today.

He told me, first of all, that he had been impressed during his leave by the excellent conditions in his country, where he has noted an exceptional recovery in activity and of business. Rearmament is

¹On the occasion of his nomination as Head of the State and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces on 30th September, Franco sent a telegram of greetings to Mussolini and Hitler.

proceeding actively and rapidly, and, as far as the Navy and Air Force are concerned, no difficulties are being met either in materials or in manpower. There are difficulties, however, with recruitment for the land forces, where there are shortages; but the British Government is determined to overcome all possible obstacles in this field, too.

Before leaving, Drummond had a long conversation with Eden, who personally instructed him to inform us that the interpretation placed on some aspects of British political life is false. It is the British intention to resume good relations with Italy as soon as possible, and to consider the Abyssinian question closed.

I pointed out to the British Ambassador that the interpretation of the Press was not only Italian in origin, but that of practically all foreign papers. I documented this statement for Drummond with some articles from the foreign press. I stated that I noted what he said, but that it would obviously have been better had the English press, in order to counteract the effect of what had been printed, made known publicly what Drummond had told me through diplomatic channels. I received no real reply.

Drummond then spoke to me of British concern at the policy we are pursuing in Egypt and Palestine, stressing in particular our anti-British propaganda in Egypt. He told me that his Government has proof of this, but I had the impression from the conversation and from the fact that Drummond's statements were very vague, that there are no such 'proofs'. However, I denied any intervention by us in the Arab movements in Egypt and Asia Minor.

Finally Drummond and I discussed the Locarno Memorandum. Having stated beforehand that the question was still under consideration and that I was therefore not in a position to inform him of our final attitude on the subject, I stated and explained to him the reasons why we are opposed to a formula which aims at transforming the Locarno Pact into a combination of tripartite regional pacts.

Ciano left for Berlin slightly behind the schedule originally transmitted by the Ambassador, von Hassell, and arrived in the capital of the Reich on the evening of 20th October. He was received with an organised but not excessive display of enthusiasm by the crowd. A protocol had already been prepared by the Chancelleries of both countries; the meeting between Ciano and Neurath was to serve only to give it the finishing touches and provide the opportunity for signature. It was understood that the protocol would remain secret. The decisions relating to Spain, among others, could not be made public without at once destroying the fiction of non-intervention with unforeseeable consequences. Moreover, the announcement of the signing of a protocol, in other words of a veritable and formal pact between Italy and Germany, would have 'given rise to too many unfounded hypotheses', and so have been

SHAPING THE AXIS

unwelcome to Germany because of the effects on Anglo-German relations. These were conditioned not only by the bitter quarrel between Ribbentrop, who aspired to become Foreign Minister by exploiting a diplomatic success gained in London, and Neurath, who was anti-British to spite Ribbentrop, but also by Hitler's determination not to repeat the errors of the Kaiser's Reich. The Axis was therefore shaped on German initiative, but also, as far as Great Britain was concerned, with German reservations. Mussolini, who sensed this, had therefore armed Ciano with the documents which Grandi had procured for him from London shortly before—the collection of telegrams and of reports of the British Embassy in Berlin which illustrated step by step the development of the Nazi Policy of expansion and of domination, and gave frank comment on its possible consequences. Mussolini instructed Ciano to hand these documents to Hitler personally, and this was not the least of the reasons why, after the conversations with Neurath in Berlin, Ciano went to Berchtesgaden to visit the Fuehrer.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER, VON NEURATH.

Berlin, 21st October, 1936—XIV

Together with the Minister, von Neurath,¹ we re-examined the various items of the Protocol and in turn expressed our points of view on the various questions.

Locarno. Neurath and I confirmed that we would keep in touch in the future as in the past, having once more discovered our identity of views on the question. Germany—according to von Neurath's statements—is not disposed to accept tripartite pacts, nor to countenance a situation arising in which the old Locarno Pact is revived plus a tripartite air pact between Britain, France and Germany. Further, the German Government does not intend that there should be any connection between the new Locarno, the situation in the East and the Covenant of the League of Nations.

We agree that the recent Belgian attitude is useless for our purposes;² Germany, too, will inform Brussels that this is her opinion.

The discussion on the possibility of a Western Pact brought the German Minister and myself to examine the relations of our two countries with England. I told Neurath that we were not pursuing

¹Baron von Neurath, Ambassador to Rome from 1922 to 1930, then Ambassador to London, and in 1932 Foreign Minister. He retained the post even after Hitler's coming to power until 4th February, 1938.

²On 14th October, King Leopold had made a speech before the Council of Ministers in which, referring explicitly to the threat constituted by German re-armament, he announced Belgium's determination to pursue a policy which would be 'exclusively and completely Belgian' and based on a new regime of armed neutrality. This policy was restated in a Belgian note sent to the Foreign Office on 23rd October.

nor did we intend to pursue an anti-British policy, but we had to take notice of English activities directed at us. If England continues this policy we are determined to face up to her, and the necessary preparations are already in hand. Neurath said he entirely agrees with us in thinking that England is attempting to pursue a policy of encirclement against Italy. But England's policy, with regard to Germany, too, is far from being clear or friendly. Neurath has never had illusions on this score; he knows that England regards Nazi Germany with hostility.

I then thought it advisable to tell him that there are in our possession certain documents (which, by order of the Duce I shall send direct to the Fuehrer) which definitely prove Britain's intentions towards Germany. Neurath said that he is very pleased that these documents are to come into the Fuehrer's possession; for the Fuehrer will then be able to discard with more peace of mind those remnants of the illusions which Ribbentrop inspired in him, according to which England wished to follow a policy of friendship and sincere collaboration with Germany. But even the Fuehrer has lately been able to see how fallacious Ribbentrop's forecasts were.

League of Nations. Both Neurath and I fully confirm the contents of the agreement in the Protocol on this subject. I tell von Neurath that our decision to remain in the League is far from final; in due course, and when certain military police measures in Abyssinia are concluded, we will re-examine our attitude to Geneva. Neurath noted this, but for his part does not insist on our immediate withdrawal, since, while we remain members of the League of Nations, we can if necessary carry out a programme of sabotage which would aid our common ends.

Communism. The contents of the Protocol are confirmed.

Spain. Neurath informs me of the German Government's intention of proceeding to recognise the Franco Government immediately after the occupation of Madrid. I agree.

I ask von Neurath what information he has on the military situation of the revolutionary forces. He has no precise information but believes that they are passing through a critical phase of inactivity. I tell him that this is also our opinion, and that the Duce has instructed me, in this connection, to tell the Fuehrer that he intends to make a decisive military effort to bring about the collapse of the Madrid Government. He wishes to know if the Fuehrer is ready to associate himself with this operation. On our side, over and above the new air forces which we will send, we can also furnish two submarines capable of clearing the sea of the Red forces.

Neurath says that the Fuehrer will certainly agree; however, the question will be finally dealt with during the Berchtesgaden conversation.

The following points are fixed between Neurath and myself on the subject of Spain:

SHAPING THE AXIS

- (i) an immediate joint military effort
- (ii) recognition after the occupation of Madrid
- (iii) joint action, to be defined in due course, to prevent the setting up and consolidation of a Catalan State.

Austria. We confirm the contents of the Protocol.

Neurath expresses his satisfaction at recent events which have led to complete consolidation of Schuschnigg's position. I fully concur with what he says.

I ask him what the German Government's intentions are concerning the elevation of their diplomatic representation to the status of Embassy. Neurath answers that he is against it, that he has given von Papen¹ instructions to that effect, but fears that the latter may have succeeded in obtaining from the Fuehrer—who does not attach much importance to this particular technical question—permission to put forward the proposal in Vienna.

I say that we, too, are against it. However, we agree that should it come to the elevation of the Legations to the status of Embassies, we would act in full accord and the measure would be taken on the same day.

General Economic Policy. I explain to von Neurath the reasons which have led us to devalue the currency.² Von Neurath states that he fully understands, and says that the Reich has not devalued its currency at present for special unforeseen circumstances, but that it is preparing to do so as soon as circumstances permit.

Economic Collaboration in the Danube Basin. We confirm the reference in the Protocol to the advisability of allowing the technical bodies to define—as soon as possible—the form and the limits of such collaboration.

The subject leads us to make a rapid examination of political relations with the various Balkan states. We dwelt in particular on relations with Yugoslavia, and Neurath, noting the recent *détente* between Rome and Belgrade, tells me that it would be in our interests to establish good relations as soon as possible with Yugoslavia for two reasons: the first, which was of common interest, being concerned with the advisability of reinforcing the 'barrage' against Communism by Yugoslav adherence; the second of particular interest to Italy, being concerned with the advantage of attracting Belgrade away from British influence, in view of the fact that the Government of the Reich has reliable information that the English intend to build up friendship with Yugoslavia so as to

¹Franz von Papen, Reich Chancellor in 1932. On 30th January, 1933, he became Vice-Chancellor and Commissar for Prussia in the new Hitler Government. From 1934 to 1938 he was Envoy Extraordinary in Austria. On 18th April, 1939, nominated Ambassador to Ankara, where he remained until 1944. Acquitted at the Nuremberg Trial.

²The Italian Government had, along with a number of measures approved by the Council of Ministers during the session on 5th October, 1936, taken steps to devalue the lira.

secure the Dalmatian bases in the event of conflict and to complete the attempt at anti-Italian encirclement.

I reply that there is no serious cause of dissension between ourselves and Yugoslavia and we intend to reach an agreement.

With regard to Rumania, Neurath says that once agreement with Belgrade has been reached, she will inevitably draw closer to us.

Neurath says finally that the Albanians have repeatedly informed him of King Zog's¹ desire to set up a legation in Berlin. The German Government would like to have the Italian opinion on the subject. I reply that there is no objection in principle and that I shall take the liberty of informing him of any observations to be made on the subject.

Abyssinia. The Protocol is confirmed and I tell von Neurath that with regard to losses suffered by German citizens in Abyssinia he should furnish me with a list. I will see to it that the Viceroy on the spot will take steps to satisfy those who have suffered loss by *ex gratia* measures.

Manchukuo. Neurath says that the Fuehrer wishes to take the step of recognising Manchukuo² but that he intends to delay this gesture for some time so as not to compromise certain German economic interests in China. Relations of close collaboration have, however, been established between Germany and Japan, and in confidence he informs me that shortly they will proceed to the signature of two protocols—one public, containing an anti-Bolshevik agreement, and another secret, containing a clause guaranteeing benevolent neutrality in any eventuality.

By common agreement Neurath and I postpone the signature of the protocols until the next day; we intend furthermore to agree upon the statements to the Press and the information to be given to the diplomatic corps.

In principle we consider it inopportune to state that a protocol has been signed. That would give rise to too many unfounded hypotheses. It will, however, be necessary to say that the subject of our conversations have been recorded in an appropriate memorandum signed by both parties.

The conversation, which Neurath was anxious should be characterised by complete, I should almost say, exceptionally marked cordiality, lasted from 11.20 to 13.05.

¹King Zog I., President of the Council in 1922, had been elected President of the Albanian Republic on 30th December, 1925. Proclaimed King of Albania on 1st September, 1928. He left the country on the Italian occupation in April, 1939.

²On 17th February, 1932, the territory known as Manchukuo, formerly belonging to China, and long contested by Russia, China and Japan, proclaimed itself an independent Republic with the aid of and at the wish of the Tokyo Government. The new State was recognised *de jure* only by Japan and Salvador on 15th September, 1932, and 21st May, 1934, respectively. In actual fact numerous other States maintained relations with Manchukuo through their consulates. On 30th April, 1936, Germany reached an agreement with it on trade questions.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Berchtesgaden, 24th October, 1936—XIV

The conversation took place in Hitler's private study on the second floor of his villa.

The Fuehrer expresses his pleasure at my visit to Germany and declares himself pleased with the results achieved through the collaboration of our two countries. I thank him and tell him that I am instructed to bring him a special greeting from the Duce who has always, even at difficult moments, nourished feelings of cordial sympathy for Hitler and displayed lively interest in his work.

The Fuehrer appears to be greatly touched by these statements coming to him from 'the leading statesman in the world, to whom none may even remotely compare himself'. During the imposition of sanctions England several times tried to lure Germany with promises, sometimes also with flattery, and to attract her into the sphere of anti-Italian activity. The Fuehrer never gave way to these flatteries because he has always had in mind Mussolini's immense services to his country and to the world, and because he was aware of Britain's intention of separating our two countries and then striking at them one at a time. An alliance headed by England against Italy would be the precursor of an alliance headed by England against Germany and vice-versa. The democracies have formed amongst themselves an automatic bloc which finds a sort of cement and yeast in Bolshevism. These forces are equally hostile to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

On the Fuehrer's asking me what is the present state of our relations with England, I give a rapid account of the situation, making it clear that it is part neither of our intentions nor of our programme to carry out an anti-British policy intentionally, but that it would be stupid and criminal for us to shut our eyes to the continual indications of anti-Italian preparations by the British Government.

Our manœuvre in reply to the attempt at encirclement is rapid and decisive. Should England aim at forming a ring round Italy in order to suffocate her, our reaction would be immediate and very violent. But, I added, Germany must have no illusions. British policy is directed equally actively against her. If there are no positive and direct indications of this, it is because England is trying to gain the time necessary to complete her rearmament.

At this point I present to the Fuehrer, as a special despatch from the Duce, the documents¹ mentioned before. The Fuehrer immediately reads Eden's circular and Phipps² telegram, in which the

¹See page 52.

²Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador in Berlin from 1933 to 1937, then in Paris from 1937 to 1939.

SHAPING THE AXIS

English Ambassador expresses the opinion that the Government of the Reich is composed of dangerous adventurers. The letter produces a profound impression on the Fuehrer, who reacts violently after a moment's silence.

'According to the English there are two countries in the world today which are led by adventurers: Germany and Italy. But England, too, was led by adventurers when she built the Empire. Today it is governed merely by incompetents.'

Reading the two documents has roused the Fuehrer. He proceeds to say that one must oppose to the understanding between the democracies another understanding led and guided by our two countries. But we must not confine ourselves to an attitude of passivity. We must take up an active role. We must go over to the attack. And the tactical field on which we must execute the manoeuvre is that of anti-Bolshevism. In fact many countries which are suspicious of Italo-German friendship for fear of Pan-Germanism or of Italian imperialism and would join the opposing camp, will be brought to group themselves with us if they see in Italo-German unity the barrier against the Bolshevik menace at home and abroad.

In Spain, Italians and Germans have together dug the first trench against Bolshevism. Germany has committed herself to the full in the Spanish question without any territorial or political aim: the Mediterranean is an Italian sea. Any future modifications of the Mediterranean balance of power must be in Italy's favour. Thus, since Germany must have liberty of action towards the East and the Baltic, by directing our respective energies in completely opposite directions, it will never be possible for there to be a clash of interests between Germany and Italy.

I point out to the Fuehrer that since 1919 Mussolini has kept high the anti-Bolshevik banner in the world, and that the policy applied internally has been such as to cause the complete disappearance of any Communist menace in Italy. Even the Spanish revolution, in spite of its having awakened much sympathy in the world, has not caused the slightest repercussions among the working classes and peasantry of Italy, who have definitely abandoned a Marxist and Communist ideology.

I state that our operations in Spain have also no territorial aims: we merely wished to bar the road to Bolshevism which was attempting to install itself at the entrance to the Mediterranean. We are now ready and determined to make a greater effort if only the Madrid Government can be overthrown. I tell the Fuehrer of the Duce's intention of sending another 50 aeroplanes and two submarines. The Fuehrer entirely approves, and says that he is willing to make any effort to ensure that the way is not left open to Moscow and assures me that he will give instructions to that effect to his military authorities. If it were necessary he would even be

willing to send some units. I tell him that at the time of the struggle for the Balearics we had already two battalions of Blackshirts in readiness.

The Fuehrer then propounds to me the line of action that should be followed. In his opinion there is no doubt that England will attack Italy or Germany, or both, if she feels that she can do so with impunity or with ease. These countries, which represent young forces whose aim is to obtain a better and more just distribution of wealth, are the natural enemies of England, the conservative Power, who finds it convenient to accuse them of wishing to disturb the peace of the world only because they represent a threat to her established interests and because she would like to see these rights consolidated by a crystallisation of the present world situation.

But—and this is the active side of the policy proposed by the Fuehrer—if England sees the gradual formation of a group of Powers which are willing to make common front with Germany and Italy under the banner of anti-Bolshevism, if England has the feeling that we have a common organised force in the East, the Far East and also in South America, not only will she refrain from fighting against us, but she will seek means of agreement and common ground with this new political system.

If then England were to continue to form offensive plans and merely sought to gain time to rearm, we would defeat her on her own ground, since German and Italian rearmament is proceeding much more rapidly than rearmament can in Great Britain, where it is not only a case of producing ships, guns and aeroplanes, but also of undertaking psychological rearmament, which is much longer and more difficult. In three years Germany will be ready, in four years more than ready; if five years are given, better still. But the military power achieved by our two countries will, even in the latter case, be such as to make England desist from any aggressive attempt.

Germany is already actively working to create this system of friendship throughout the world. We must look for something more solid and profound. The agreements made must arise from spiritual affinities and identity of interests. When these conditions have been brought about it is an easy matter, if necessary, to mark up on the map what already exists in fact.

Germany has already, in fact, made considerable progress with her agreement with Japan. Even with Poland very good work has been done. But the Fuehrer is somewhat sceptical of the real possibilities of Poland since that Government, far from being based like the German and Italian Governments on popular consent, maintains itself only 'with the bayonet'. A country with which Germany is on good terms and which it is hoped may soon arrive at a solid understanding with Italy is Yugoslavia. Rome must in the first place work on Budapest so as to advise the Magyars to

direct their irredentism against Czechoslovakia rather than against Yugoslavia. Germany has given similar advice. On the other hand, one must recognise that Hungarian claims on the Serbs are very modest, while those on the Czechs are of extreme importance. Yugoslavia is concerned at aggressive intentions which Italy might have against her. It will suffice to give her assurance on this score to win her over to our system, finally draw her away from the French influence and above all frustrate British intrigues to make Belgrade a centre of anti-Italian activity.

I assure the Fuehrer that our efforts are such as he has described, and that, in fact there has lately been a notable *détente* between Italy and Yugoslavia. And we are ready to go much further—to reach a real and true understanding.

Concluding the conversation, the Fuehrer repeated his pleasure at the agreement reached in Berlin and his desire to eliminate always in future any difficulty which may in practice arise between Italy and Germany. When the stake is so big we must remove obstacles of detail.

The Fuehrer then called von Neurath into the room and quickly summarised our conversation to him. Neurath who has always during the conversations with me shown a decidedly anti-British attitude—particularly so during the last few days—again turned the conversation to England. This gave the Fuehrer occasion to repeat that he had no illusions as to the intentions which Great Britain harboured against us and against him; he merely intends to be extremely prudent so as to gain time and attain such a state of military preparedness as to give him absolute assurance of success.

I once again spoke to the Fuehrer of the state of our military preparations, and noticed once again that he was deeply impressed by them. When we left the villa later, Neurath told me that the firmness with which I had expounded to the Fuehrer the Duce's intention to collaborate for peace, if it is possible, but at the same time to prepare us firmly for war, if it is necessary, had greatly struck the Fuehrer.

The conversation lasted two and a quarter hours. Hitler, who talked slowly and in a low voice, had violent outbursts when he spoke of Russia and Bolshevism. His way of expressing himself was slow and somewhat verbose. Each question was the subject of a long exposition and each concept was repeated by him several times in different words.

As I have said above, the principal topics of his conversation were Bolshevism and English encirclement. On this last point, however, he showed some uncertainty. Neurath says that it is the work of Ribbentrop, who every so often attempts to inject Anglophil optimism into the Fuehrer. But the Foreign Minister of the Reich is very sceptical of the results of the policy which Ribbentrop pro-

SHAPING THE AXIS

poses to follow in London. Yesterday evening at table Neurath said the following (I quote): 'Ribbentrop will soon discover that in London it is easier to have compliments paid to one as a representative of a brand of champagne than as representative of the Government of the Reich.' At all events Neurath today seemed entirely won over to the Italian side, if for no other reason, then for personal ones. The duel between him and Ribbentrop is common knowledge, and in Germany everyone is waiting to see the outcome now that Neurath has succeeded in sending his opponent to work in a field which he himself described as the best for the development of German policy. Any success for Ribbentrop in London, which, by the way, is most improbable, would be failure for Neurath. The latter knows it and is ready to use any weapon to prevent it.

Of France the Fuehrer spoke—as do the other Germans—only superficially and with slight contempt. Some abuse of the Jews who govern her and nothing further. In their opinion France has ceased—at least for the moment—to be an active factor in foreign policy.

The Fuehrer showed himself particularly cordial towards me, repeatedly asked for information on the Duce's life and activities, and finally entertained to lunch the entire party to whom he was attentive and polite. During the break in the discussions he twice telephoned to Munich to receive a report on the reception arranged for me, for which he had personally given the most detailed instructions.

Ciano's journey had put the finishing touches to the Axis, but it fell to Mussolini to baptise it. In his speech in the Piazza del Duomo, Milan, on 1st November, he used the following words: 'The Berlin meetings have resulted in an agreement between the two countries on certain specific problems, some of which in these days are burning ones. This agreement . . . this vertical line joining Rome and Berlin . . . an axis round which all those European States which are animated by a desire for collaboration and peace may work together.'

In this speech Mussolini did not speak only of Germany. A long passage towards the end was directly concerned with Great Britain. Mussolini observed that Italy is 'an island which juts into the Mediterranean' and if for Great Britain this sea is 'a road, one of the many roads, a short-cut rather whereby the British Empire reaches more rapidly its outlying territories', for Italy, on the contrary, 'it is life'. 'We do not intend', he went on, 'to threaten that road, we do not propose to interrupt it, but, on the other hand, we demand that our rights and vital interests should also be respected'. And he concluded that if a clash between the two Powers was to be avoided—a clash which would immediately take on European proportions, there was only one solution: 'Frank, rapid, complete

agreement on the basis of mutual recognition of interests'. It was at once an invitation and a threat to London, and an attempt to outdo Berlin in winning Britain's favours. Eden immediately disputed Mussolini's arguments, claiming that for Britain the Mediterranean was not a short-cut, but an important main road, and that freedom of communications in these waters was a vital interest for the British Commonwealth.

But he admitted that there was a sincere desire for collaboration with Italy, which the British Ambassador to Rome was instructed to prove by examples and documentary evidence without delay—this was the starting point for the first fruitless attempt to restore normal relations between Italy and Great Britain, which culminated in an exchange of statements on 31st December.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 6th November, 1936—XIV

After the signature of the Trade Agreement with England,¹ Sir Eric Drummond requested to stay behind and talk with me.

He told me the following:

1. That the British Government wishes to withdraw the guard on the Legation at Addis Ababa as soon as we can guarantee to take all the measures necessary to protect the officials and property of the Legation.

I felt I could give Drummond such an assurance at once, adding that Addis Ababa was completely protected by the Italian police and troops.

Drummond said he would pass this on to his Government and that the matter could be made public.

2. He spoke of Eden's speech as a new gesture which England intends to make towards conciliation (a slip of the tongue which he at once corrected as 'towards an agreement').

In reply to some observations which I made on the text of the speech itself he answered that probably the translation by the Italian papers did not faithfully reflect the spirit which had animated Eden's speech, a spirit which he was authorised to state was one and the same as that which had animated Halifax's speech the day before.

He added that it would be most advisable for our Press to give a welcome—even of the most limited cordiality—to the Minister's words, so as to be able to make England's progress towards an

¹On 6th November, after long weeks of negotiations, there were signed in Rome by Ciano and Drummond two Anglo-Italian trade agreements, one dealing with the procedure to be followed to balance payments between the two countries; the other, laying down the quotas on the basis of which United Kingdom imports were to be allowed into Italy. The agreements came into force on 16th November.

SHAPING THE AXIS

understanding easier. Complete reserve, or worse still an attack, would cause new and unnecessary complications in the situation.

I told Drummond that I took note of his statements and that I was glad, moreover, that he had been instructed to add these explanations to what emerged from the speech as published.

3. Finally he told me that a Turkish naval mission is preparing to come to London solely to conclude an agreement similar to the naval treaty of 1936,¹ such as had been already concluded with Germany, Russia, etc. He had been instructed to stress the purely technical scope of the journey so as to avoid our putting on it an interpretation both erroneous and harmful to good relations between Great Britain and Italy.

I consider it my duty to add to the subject matter of the conversation given above that I found a decided alteration in Drummond's tone and attitude. For the first time he spoke, and that with urgency, of the need for the renewal of good relations between Italy and Great Britain, of the friendship between the two peoples, of the existence of reciprocal interests, etc.

¹After the lapse of the treaties of Washington (1921) and of London (1930), naval armaments had been controlled by the Treaty of London of 25th March, 1936. This was binding only on Great Britain, the United States and France. The British Government which had already signed a naval treaty with Germany on 18th June, 1935, immediately entered into negotiations to extend the application of the 1936 treaty to Germany and the USSR. The negotiations ended on 17th July, 1937. Ciano therefore erred in believing that the Anglo-German and Anglo-Soviet treaties had already been concluded.

V

ITALY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY CONFER

9th November—28th December, 1936.

As had been arranged, but with a delay of some weeks because of the death of General Gömbös which occurred on 6th October the first conference of the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Austria and Hungary met in Vienna. Ciano arrived in the Austrian capital on 8th November amidst an open display of coldness by the population, and devoted the first two days of his visit to conversations with Schuschnigg and Schmidt. The Austrian Chancellor expounded the fears which Nazi encroachments aroused in him—encroachments which, though hardly begun, were none the less threatening. He showed himself unwilling to leave the League and to come out on Franco's side. At the 3-Power conference Ciano met an old acquaintance, Kánya, who had retained the post of Foreign Minister in the new Hungarian Cabinet under Darányi. The main object of the conference was the adoption of a secret protocol which provided for benevolent neutrality, and was intended to strengthen the links between the three countries. There were no difficulties or surprises, but the latent unsatisfactoriness of the Austrian situation dominated the sessions. Then Ciano went on to Budapest on an official visit to the Hungarian Government.

CONVERSATION WITH SCHUSCHNIGG, SCHMIDT, HORTHY, DARÁNYI, AND KÁNYA.

Vienna-Budapest, 9-16th, November, 1936—XIV

Both Chancellor Schuschnigg and the Secretary of State, Schmidt, immediately asked me for detailed information on my recent journey to Germany and were anxious to be reassured that the Berchtesgaden agreements have in no way modified our policy towards Austria. Having obtained this assurance and having expressed their satisfaction, they said that relations between Austria and Germany have not recently undergone any considerable change. There are, however, on the part of Germany, important and repeated attempts to infiltrate more and more into Austrian national life—particularly by Goering who has offered to hand over to Austria without payment as many as 600 aeroplanes and to accom-

ITALY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY CONFER

moderate the Austrian Air Force officers in German camps, even having their pay issued by Germany. Naturally these offers have been refused, but Chancellor Schuschnigg has left himself open to accept certain supplies of arms.

Schuschnigg strongly urged—and perhaps this is why he greatly stressed Goering's offers—the resumption by us of military supplies.

I gave him assurances to this effect, all the more since he confirmed his desire to sign an agreement with us guaranteeing benevolent neutrality.

League of Nations. As far as the League of Nations is concerned, I found Schuschnigg very doubtful of the possibility of Austria's leaving the League. He realises that it is practically impossible for Austria to continue to take part in a society of nations which Italy has left, but wished to draw my attention to the advantages we could derive from retaining a faithful observer at Geneva in the person of the Austrian delegate. At all events we agreed that the question will be re-examined when Italy has taken a decision to abandon the League.

In our general review of the European situation nothing of particular importance emerged. With regard to Spain, too, the Chancellor expressed his grave concern over the situation, but when I told him of the Italo-German agreement to proceed to immediate recognition of the Franco Government after, and if necessary even before, the occupation of Madrid, Schuschnigg—although he did not say so openly—gave me to understand that Austria does not intend to take steps to recognise the Burgos Government so rapidly.

Czechoslovakia. Both Schuschnigg and Schmidt greatly stressed the need for Austria to maintain close economic and commercial relations with Czechoslovakia, but stated it was not their intention to come to any political agreement with that country.

Yugoslavia. Relations between Austria and Yugoslavia are normal, and recent months have produced no change in one direction or another.

Armaments. Austrian rearmament is proceeding rather slowly. I found a certain concern due to delays on our part in the despatch of arms. I gave an assurance that after the signature of the undertaking of reciprocal benevolent neutrality I would not fail to call the Duce's attention to Austrian requirements. On this subject I must add that when the agreement referred to above was signed both the Hungarian Foreign Minister and the Austrian Chancellor expressed the desire that a meeting of Chiefs of Staff should take place at an early date to examine the practical situations that might arise and to reach the necessary agreements.

I felt I could agree in principle to this request.

Three Power Meeting. During the three power meeting nothing of particular interest emerged. The Austrians repeated more or less what I have summarised above; I, on my side, have explained the

latest events and developments in Italian foreign policy. The acceptance and signing of the Protocol in the form and text proposed by us took place without encountering too many difficulties, except in the case of the undertaking to leave the League of Nations, on which many reserves were expressed, particularly by the Austrians.

I have the impression, which Kánya shares, that it is Schmidt who is chiefly responsible for putting spokes in the wheels; every day he shows himself to be more of a haggler, careerist and fop. He thinks—and has allowed it to be understood—that he will find scope for his ambitions on the Geneva platform. He dreams of a League success *à la* Titulescu or *à la* Benes. I must admit that although on this occasion, too, I found in Chancellor Schuschnigg solid qualities of mind and character, Schmidt's influence is becoming preponderant and often obstructive.

CONVERSATIONS IN BUDAPEST.

I do not consider it worth while to refer other than rapidly to the conversations which I had with the Regent. He is very little informed on international affairs, while on the other hand, according to what they say in Budapest, he continues to exercise a decisive influence on matters of internal policy. In short, he confined himself to expressing his pleasure at the conclusion of the Italo-German understanding and to re-affirming, on the basis of old recollections of a personal nature and of anecdotes from his career, his very high regard for the German people.

During the conversations with Darányi¹ and with Kánya I was first asked to inform the two Hungarian statesmen of the exact progress of the principal international questions at present under discussion. Thereafter Kánya told me about the situation in Hungary. In the first place he was anxious to explain why he had wanted to weaken the paragraph of the Protocols dealing with equal rights. He told me that he finds the present position useful, since it allows him to rearm as he sees fit without, on the other hand, depriving him of the useful weapon—particularly for internal political purposes—of throwing on to the Little Entente the blame for any difficulties Hungary may meet. Further he fears that an explicit decision on rearmament would create new and more difficult situations with regard to the Hungarian minorities.

As far as concerns relations between Hungary and neighbouring states, Kánya made the following statements to me:

Yugoslavia: Relations between Budapest and Belgrade are really improving and he considers that in the last analysis it is possible to reach an agreement, and even a cordial one, between the

¹Koloman Darányi, was nominated Prime Minister on 1st October after the death of Gömbös. He retained the post until the end of May, 1938.

two countries. However, he believes that this is a road which must be followed with much calm and with the utmost caution. Stoyadinovitch is a man of great flexibility and of great ability, who has succeeded in the course of a relatively short time in creating an excellent international atmosphere for Yugoslavia. In fact Belgrade today lives on terms of friendship and good neighbourliness with the adjoining countries; there has been a *détente* with Budapest and Rome; there has been no slackening of the ties with France; there is close collaboration with Berlin, and there is no lack of polite offers from London aimed at making Yugoslavia join in the game England wishes to play in the Balkan and Mediterranean areas. Kánya is in favour of the policy initiated by us of *rapprochement* with Belgrade, but for this very reason advises us to proceed with extreme vigilance. It would undoubtedly be to the advantage of Hungary, too, if lasting and well defined relations between Belgrade and Rome were successfully established. But he considers, until it is proved to the contrary, that Stoyadinovitch—while willing to reach a marked *détente*—is not, on the other hand, anxious to give precise and formal undertakings in view of the fact that he intends to continue 'to have his fingers in a large number of pies.'

Rumania: Relations with Rumania are passing through a phase of relative calm. The Milan speech gave rise to certain suspicions, suspicions which died down, however, when it was realised that the Duce's statement did not involve any immediate, practical action.

Kánya realises the difficulties presented by revision with regard to Rumania and thinks that for the moment it would be advisable to reach a *modus vivendi* with Bucharest. He considers this very difficult in view of the bias and nervousness of certain Rumanian circles, but he does not despair of success.

Czechoslovakia: Relations are formally correct, but in actual fact they are extremely bad, and it is the intention of the Hungarian Government to give apparent proofs of good will while avoiding for the present any relations between Budapest and Prague. In substance the old policy continues. The drive of Magyar irredentism must be entirely directed towards Czechoslovakia which is the point of least resistance. On the other hand it is from there that threats continue to be directed against Hungary. There are Czech airfields—one day, perhaps, Russian ones—from which it is possible to reach Budapest in less than ten minutes' flight.

Kánya's information is that the Czech position is a matter for concern. German pressure is increasing daily. Goering, with his blunt sincerity, has said that in less than two or three years Czechoslovakia must cease to exist. It is evident that, in these circumstances, Hungary must continue to keep in the forefront of her policy her territorial claims on the Czechs. Since news had reached Kánya

of possible agreements and of negotiations in progress between Rome and Prague, I confirmed what I had already had occasion to inform him—namely that our relations with Czechoslovakia continue to be very vague and that no *rapprochement* is projected or even foreseen.

Russia and Communism: Kánya repeated that Communism at home is being fought with extremely energetic measures, and that Hungary is always willing, even in the international field, to take up a position openly alongside the anti-Communist states.

As far as Russia is concerned, it is evident that the Magyar Government cannot look on such a Power with sympathy. However, a Communist regime in Moscow, so long as it does not aim at spreading beyond its national frontiers its political and ideological influence, is preferable to a Czarist regime which might become the rallying point and at the same time the instigator of brutal and uncoercible Panslavism.

Germany: With Germany, relations continue to be extremely cordial, and the agreement between Rome and Berlin has had the effect of putting Hungary in a privileged position, much more pleasant than it was in the past.

Finally both Kánya and Darányi expressed their gratitude for what the Fascist Government has done on all occasions for the Hungarian people, and told me of the exceptionally favourable reaction which the Milan speech has produced in Hungary.

This I had opportunity to observe during my visit. The welcome which was provided by the Hungarian people, not only by those in Budapest who were organised in associations and in any case instructed by the Government, but also by the rural population and by the small groups of persons whom we met on the way in thinly populated and remote regions, proved how dear and popular the name of the Duce and of Italy is to the Hungarian nation.

This enthusiasm contrasted with the frigid attitude of the population of Vienna. On no occasion—and many presented themselves—did the citizens of Vienna make any gesture of friendship and sympathy towards Italy. In the streets dense groups of people gathered during the official ceremonies and watched correctly and calmly, but never a salute, never any applause, never a shout (with the exception of a few Roman salutes accompanied by a 'Heil,' which bore the pure Nazi hallmark). In the theatres, an equally cold reception and, particularly noteworthy, the Italian national anthems were never played at the opening or end of a performance; perhaps they were not even sure of the public's reaction. On the other hand I must say that Schuschnigg was, as usual, loyal, correct and cordial towards us. But I have the impression—and all those who were with me shared it—that his policy of friendship towards Italy is not at all popular.

Local diplomatic circles followed the progress of the Conference

and the stages of my Budapest visit with the most lively interest. In general I received a great deal of courtesy in those circles and particularly from the German representatives. Both von Papen in Vienna and Mackensen¹ in Budapest were present even at those receptions which were not limited to the Diplomatic Corps. They asked in a correct manner for information on the progress of the work, but did not display either disquietude or suspicious curiosity. Particularly worth mentioning, on the other hand, is the following: the British Ministers in Vienna and Budapest were the only ones who, on the repeated occasions which were offered, never had themselves presented to me. This did not go unnoticed and caused some comment. The French diplomatic representatives were very cordial.

The report that follows, which is inserted at this point in order to maintain chronological order, has no apparent connection with those that precede or follow it. It is interesting for two reasons. Ciano's conversation with the Japanese Ambassador took place exactly one week before the announcement of the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact concluded between Germany and Japan in Berlin on 25th November. Secondly, it was Japan which took the initiative in order to produce closer relations between the two countries 'in the economic, cultural, political and military fields.'

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 18th November, 1936—XIV

I received the Japanese Ambassador² who communicated the following to me:

1. The Japanese Government has come to the decision to transform the Legation at Addis Ababa into a Consulate and ask the Government of H.M. the King of Italy, Emperor of Abyssinia, to take equivalent steps.

This is considered equivalent to recognition of the Empire, for the Japanese Government makes no distinction of any importance between recognition *de facto* and recognition *de jure*.

The Ambassador, in the course of making his communication, asked for assurances for Japanese interests and trade in Abyssinia, which I did not fail to provide.

2. The Japanese Government informs us that the Hsing-King Government³ has expressed its pleasure at the opening of a Consulate in Manchuria at Mukden. The Japanese Ambassador advises the following procedure: to instruct Auriti to send a note to the

¹H. von Mackensen, formerly Minister to Budapest, Ambassador to Rome from March, 1938.

²Yotaro Sugimura, Ambassador to Rome from 1935 to April, 1937; then Ambassador to Paris until January, 1939 when he was recalled to Tokyo.

³Hsing-King, seat of the Manchukuo Government.

⁴Giacinto Auriti, Italian diplomat, Ambassador to Tokyo from 5th January, 1933.

Ambassador of Manchukuo in Tokyo asking for an exequatur for the new Consulate.

The Japanese Government draws attention to the advisability of keeping the two gestures distinct so that they may not appear to be a case of a *quid pro quo*. Therefore, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow—that is when confirmation has arrived from Tokyo as a result of my assurances to Sugimura—we will be able to give the Rome press the *communiqué* on the Japanese decision to recognise the Italian Empire. Two or three days later one could publish the news of the opening of the new Consulate in Mukden.

The Japanese Ambassador was also anxious to inform me that his Government wishes to achieve a consolidation of the good relations which have been established between Italy and his country, by tightening the bonds which unite the two nations in the economic, cultural, political, military fields, etc.

He told me that he has already prepared a plan to this effect, and that he intends to speak to me about it as soon as he has received some instructions on points of detail from his Government. I, on my side, encouraged him, saying that an agreement with Japan is both desired and hoped for by the Italian Government.

Before leaving the Ambassador was eager to express his own pleasure and that of his Government at our policy which aims at combating the Bolshevik peril in the world by means of the struggle being waged in Spain.

Whilst, as the year drew to its close, the agreement in principle between Rome and London, which was intended to pave the way to a wider and more lasting understanding, matured, Fascist diplomacy was making more and more approaches to the Yugoslav Government led by Stoyadinovitch, in order to link it with the policy of Rome, thus removing it from French and British influence, not to mention the incipient ambitions of Germany. Indeed, many factors in relations between Italy and Yugoslavia had lately changed. The feeling that mutual hostility was inherent and irreconcilable, had given way to a better understanding of mutual interests. Belgrade, it is true, had adhered to the Mediterranean mutual assistance agreements during the period of sanctions, and had subscribed to sanctions. But its attitude was one of ostentatious correctness. With the end of the Abyssinian War and the lapse of the Mediterranean agreements, contacts between Rome and Belgrade became closer. Trade was the first beneficiary under this new orientation. Then came political developments. Commenting on the economic and financial agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia on 23rd September, Stoyadinovitch said that it allowed one 'to look forward with greater faith to the development of relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. We are entering upon a new period of collaboration.' In reply, Mussolini stated shortly after in the Piazza del Duomo in Milan that there now existed 'moral, political and economic relations

between Rome and Belgrade on a new basis of concrete friendship.' In the capital of Yugoslavia, the first conversations between the Italian Minister and Stoyadinovitch began in November. In the middle of December the situation was ripe for the opening of proper negotiations, which both parties wished to keep strictly secret until their conclusion.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV MINISTER.

Rome, 18th December, 1936—XIV

I received the Yugoslav Minister¹ who allowed me to read a letter which has reached him from Stoyadinovitch. He begins by saying that he agrees with us as to the advisability of beginning *pourparlers* by the representatives of our Governments, without, for the time being, fixing the limits of the agreement. They must, on the contrary, be a product of the progress of the meetings. For his part, Stoyadinovitch is very optimistic about the results of these conversations and believes that the agreement may be far-reaching.

He went on to apologise for the delay and explained that it was due to the absence of Prince Paul² from Belgrade; as soon as the Regent returned he was informed of the preliminary conversations which had taken place, as well as of the *modus procedendi* agreed upon. Regent Paul was entirely in agreement.

Stoyadinovitch ended his letter by instructing the Minister, Ducic, to inform me that he would very shortly nominate two official delegates, one for political questions and the other for economic questions, so that conversations can begin. He accepted Rome as the meeting place and recommended that the utmost reserve be still maintained.

M. Ducic asked me if we wished these representatives to arrive between Christmas and the New Year, or whether we considered it advisable for them to arrive at the beginning of January. I left the choice to him.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV MINISTER.

Rome, 28th December, 1936—XIV

The Yugoslav Minister called, bringing a message from M. Stoyadinovitch.

M. Stoyadinovitch is anxious to inform us that the delay in beginning official *pourparlers* with us is due solely to the necessity

¹Jovan Ducic, accredited to the Quirinal from 15th August, 1935, to September, 1937.

²Prince Paul Karageorgevitch of Yugoslavia, Prince Regent for King Peter II, after the assassination of the latter's father, from 19th October, 1934 to 27th March, 1941, when a military *coup d'état* conferred full powers on King Peter, then a minor.

ITALY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY CONFER

for him to prepare the ground internally and to arrange the necessary material for the forthcoming conversations. He contradicts statements by certain papers to the effect that a *rapprochement* between Italy and Yugoslavia would be conditional on a previous Anglo-Italian agreement.

M. Stoyadinovitch has nominated as his delegates for the negotiations with Italy, M. Milivoy Pilya¹ and the Minister Plenipotentiary, Dr. Subotic.² They will arrive at Rome at the beginning of January.

¹Milivoy Pilya, a high official of the Yugoslav Minister of Commerce.

²Subotic, a former Minister of Justice.

1937

VI

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

6th January—23rd January, 1937.

On 31st December, 1936, there took place an exchange of notes between Ciano and the British Ambassador, on the subject of the status quo in the Western Mediterranean. On 2nd January, Ciano and Sir Eric Drummond signed a common declaration—better known as the 'gentlemen's agreement'—in which it was recognised that Italy and Great Britain had equally vital interests in the freedom of the Mediterranean, and that there could be no question of any alteration in the status quo in that region. The event was an important one and not unexpected, although it to some extent anticipated general expectations. Great Britain was preoccupied with the turn affairs had taken in Spain with the influx of thousands of 'volunteers' to aid one or the other side, and worried over the possible repercussions of a change in the political and territorial structure of the Iberian peninsula through the victory of one of the contending forces. First of all, there was the question of sovereignty over the Balearic Islands, which are an extremely important strategic position for effective control of the Mediterranean. Mussolini had made them into the principal naval and air base for operations against the Spanish Republic; and there was a persistent rumour that Franco had ceded them or had pledged himself to cede them in return for the aid which the Duce had furnished to him in the now exhausting Civil War. There were those who went so far as to state that after the recognition of the Franco Government a secret agreement had been drawn up between Burgos and Rome. In fact there was a secret agreement, which had been signed on 28th November, 1936, but any cession of territory was excluded.

The terms of this agreement were :

'The Fascist Government and the Spanish Nationalist Government, united in solidarity in the common struggle against Communism, which at the present moment more than at any other menaces the peace and security of Europe, animated by the desire to develop and reinforce their own relations and to further with all their strength the social and political stabilisation of the European nations, have examined in detail the questions affecting the two states through the agency of their respective representatives in Rome and Burgos, and have agreed on the following points :

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

'1. *The Fascist Government will in future pledge to the Spanish Government its support and aid for the conservation of the independence and integrity of Spain, including both metropolitan territory and colonies, as well as for the re-establishment of social and political order within the country itself. Technical agencies of both parties will in future maintain contact to this end.*

'2. *Convinced that close collaboration between them will be useful for both countries and for the political and social order in Europe, the Fascist Government and the Spanish Nationalist Government will maintain close contacts with each other, and will concert their actions on all questions of common interest, particularly on those concerning the western part of the Mediterranean on which it may prove necessary to co-ordinate their respective actions, and will lend each other mutual support in the effective defence of their common interests.*

'3. *Each of the two Governments undertakes not to participate in any other grouping of Powers, or agreement between Powers, which might be directed against the other party, and will not contribute directly or indirectly to measures of a military, economic or financial nature, directed against one of the contracting parties. In particular, they undertake not to permit the exploitation of their territories, ports and inland seas, for any kind of operation directed against one of the contracting parties, or for the preparations for such operations or for the free passage of the materials or troops of a third Power. With this end in view, the two Governments undertake to consider all agreements previously concluded and incompatible with the present text to be invalid, and to suspend the implementation of all undertakings arising from the above mentioned agreements.*

'4. *The Fascist Government and the Spanish Nationalist Government have agreed on the subject of Article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant, concurring in the opinion that the manner in which it has recently been interpreted and applied is full of grave dangers to peace, and that it must therefore be abolished or radically modified. In the event of one of the contracting parties finding itself involved in a conflict with one or more Powers, or if collective measures of a military, economic or financial character are applied against one of the parties, the other Government undertakes to adopt towards the first-mentioned Government an attitude of benevolent neutrality, to guarantee it the necessary supplies, to put at its disposition all facilities, the use of ports, of air-lines, of railways and roads, as well as the maintenance of indirect commercial relations.*

'5. *With this object in view, the two Governments believe it is of value to lay down, with effect from the conclusion of peace, the method to be adopted for the exploitation of their own economic resources, particularly raw materials, and of the means of com-*

munication. The technical agencies of both Governments will shortly conclude the agreements necessary to this end.

'6. The Fascist Government and the Spanish Nationalist Government consider it possible and in accordance with the interests of both parties to develop as much as possible all forms of economic relations and sea and air communications. With this object in view, and having regard to their particularly friendly relations, they concede each other all possible facilities for exchange of goods, for the mercantile marine and for civil aviation.'

*Ciano, therefore, had not lied when he signed the declaration of 31st December and the ensuing 'gentlemen's agreement'. Great Britain could feel at ease on that score and the French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, rejoiced publicly, with almost unseemly haste, over the conclusion of these agreements, but later, speaking before the Senate on 23rd February, he revealed the reason for that haste: 'The Anglo-Italian agreement,' he said, 'has produced a détente in the relations between Rome and London, but nothing more. Indeed, how could it be possible to think of solving the Mediterranean question in its complexity without the aid of France?' Three weeks later, on 19th January, Eden told the House of Commons that 'there is not a word, line or comma in the Anglo-Italian declaration which can give any foreign Power the right to intervene in Spain, whatever the nature of that Government, or in whatever part of that country.' But Eden's official optimism, too, probably outstripped itself. Exactly twenty-four hours before, Mussolini had given an interview to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and presented with the question 'Could the proclamation of a Soviet Republic in Spain, or in a part of Spain—for example Catalonia—assume the significance of a threat to the status quo?' he had replied: 'Obviously.' Eden had gone on to say that if Britain's primary interest with regard to the Spanish war was the maintenance of the political independence and territorial integrity of Spain, the second was the strict limitation of the conflict to that country's territory. On this point the Anglo-Italian agreements had made no explicit provision, but the matter was covered by implication. Limiting the conflict clearly meant, among other things, preventing the flow of volunteers. On Christmas Eve, London and Paris had addressed a note to Rome, Berlin, Moscow and Lisbon, asking them to participate in common action to attain this end. On 8th January, Rome had still not replied, and all too soon the clear sky of the Anglo-Italian agreements was clouded over.*

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 6th January, 1937—XIV

The British Ambassador came to speak to me today and to leave me a note in which is expressed the concern of the British Govern-

ment over the question of the volunteers in Spain. He repeated verbally the contents of the note.

I replied :

1. That our reply on the question of volunteers¹—a reply agreed on with Germany—is now almost ready and that I would in due course convey it to the British Ambassador, probably some time tomorrow. This reply, which once more contains an exact chronology of our attitude to the question of volunteers in Spain, is inspired by common sense and by the sincere Italian desire to avoid any greater complications.

2. That I must once again point out that we had been the first to urge the necessity of preventing volunteers from going to Spain. But now, as things are, and until such time as England is in a position to prevent all countries, in particular France, Belgium and Russia, from sending volunteers to the help of the Communist forces, we will allow our volunteers to enter Spain. We do not send them. We put no pressure on the volunteers. The national spirit of Italy is such that even without an appeal from the Government all Italian youth desires, as soon as it feels itself engaged in an anti-Communist struggle, to take part in the fight. We are again very willing to prevent the movement of volunteers to Spain if similar steps are taken by the other countries. Otherwise our volunteers will continue to leave and will be in a proportion of ten to one.

3. That the reference to 'ambiguity' contained in the last line of his *aide mémoire* could not be directed at us. Our line of conduct has always been correct and loyal. It will not be possible to accuse my statements today of ambiguity.

The British Ambassador noted what I said, recognised the logic of our policy and expressed his pleasure at our repeated attempts to render possible a peaceful settlement and to avoid greater and more serious complications.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 11th January, 1937—XIV

This morning I received the British Ambassador, who communicated the following to me:

1. The British Government informed us that it was its wish to register the recent Mediterranean agreement with the League of Nations. It asked if the Italian Government intended to do likewise.

I replied that we, on our side, could not prevent the British

¹The Italian and German Governments replied simultaneously on 8th January with two notes similar in content. The two Governments declared themselves 'willing to agree that the question of volunteers should, as requested, form the subject of a special agreement which would prohibit their recruitment and departure as from an early date'. The agreement must, however, be of a 'general character, that is be accepted by all Governments and further be subject to effective control.'

Government from taking what steps it thought fit; but we would not register the agreement at Geneva.

2. The Ambassador told me that in the former British Legation at Addis Ababa there were deposited five cases containing personal property of the Negus. Two of these contained gold to the value of five or six thousand pounds; the others, on the other hand, contain objects of no particular value. The British Government wished to ask the authorisation of the Italian Government to remove these belongings from Abyssinia in order to return them to their owner.

When making the request, Sir Eric Drummond stressed that the British officials could have sent off these goods without informing us, simply by using their diplomatic privilege. They had wished, however, to inform us as a mark of good faith, trusting to the Fascist Government's goodwill and understanding. The British Ambassador also recalled a conversation in which the Duce had promised to treat the Negus with generosity as a result of the way in which the latter had behaved towards the foreign press.

I replied to Sir Eric Drummond that it was not within my power to give a reply, that I would hold it over until a time in the near future, but that in principle I must immediately register the objection that the Negus's personal belongings left in Abyssinia were subject to confiscation by Italy and that, moreover, specific laws forbid the exportation of gold from Italian territory.

In principle I gave Sir Eric Drummond to understand that there were many difficulties in the way of giving an answer in the affirmative.

3. Sir Eric Drummond handed me the new British note on the subject of volunteers.¹

While waiting a reply, he told me that he had been instructed by his Government to ask whether we would be willing to prohibit henceforward the departure of new contingents of volunteers, in view of the fact that the recent disembarkation at Cadiz had produced a deep impression.

I replied to Sir Eric Drummond that while I confirmed the intention of the Fascist Government to prevent any further departures as soon as the conditions referred to in our note had been met, I could not give any undertaking of the nature he had requested. That would have left the field open to other countries bordering on Spain which continue to allow innumerable Communist volunteers to enter the Red zone every day. I told him that we were informed recently that by the Perpignan railway alone 45,000 men had been carried.

¹Following on the Soviet reply of 29th December, 1936, the Portuguese reply of 5th January, 1937, the Italian and German replies of 8th January, the British Government drew the attention of the Governments of Moscow, Lisbon, Rome, Berlin and Paris to the scheme for the organisation of a control system in the Spanish ports and on the land frontiers of Spain, which had been drawn up by the London Committee and submitted for examination to both parties in the conflict.

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

Sir Eric Drummond noted my reply and himself admitted that—according to his information—more than 500 persons crossed the Franco-Spanish frontier daily.

Two days later, on the evening of the 13th, Goering arrived in Rome. In many quarters, international public opinion had considered the Anglo-Italian agreements, not without relief, as a weakening of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Goering's journey to Italy was therefore in the nature of a demonstration, or at least, that was one of its aims. During the five days of his stay, the Prussian Prime Minister was received by the King and by Mussolini; he met the most important personalities of the regime. On the 18th he went to Naples and visited the heir apparent, Umberto. On the same day he withdrew to Capri to rest until the 22nd. He found occasion, however, to make several statements. Among other things: 'The most important thing is to state how cordial is the relationship—or rather the friendship—between the two countries, and that it is becoming ever stronger. I believe that from this point of view my journey has been an effective contribution.' On the 23rd, Goering returned to Rome, had another meeting with Mussolini for a 'recapitulatory conversation'—as the official communiqué published that evening expressed it. The communiqué added that the conversation had lasted two hours.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND PRESIDENT GOERING, IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO AND HERR SCHMIDT.

Rome (Palazzo Venezia), 23rd January, 1937—XIV

In answer to a question from the Duce on his impression of his Italian Journey, Minister-president Goering replied that he will take back to Germany a very deep impression of all that he has seen and heard; he had been particularly impressed by his visit to Guidonia.¹ He has observed that the Italian Air Force is inspired by a spirit of great optimism, which is perfectly natural and to be welcomed. But therein also lies a certain danger of overestimating the fighting power of the Air Force as compared with the Navy. In Germany, too, much attention is being given to the question of the relative power of the Air Force; he (Minister-president Goering) does not believe that an air force can destroy a naval fleet in a truly decisive manner. In this connection trials were made with 250 kilogramme bombs on the Spanish cruiser Jaime; although the ship received a direct hit, such as to cause even the magazines to explode, it was able—although with a heavy list—to make port and to be repaired

¹Aerodrome near Rome called after the General of the Technical Service of the Air Force, Alessandro Guidoni, who died when experimenting with a new parachute on 27th April, 1928.

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

so as to be put back in service. From this experience it would appear that aeroplanes are not capable of destroying armoured vessels.

The Duce admitted that he, too, had some doubts on the employment of the Air Force against the Navy. In Italy, too, this subject is still under discussion.

Ministerpresident Goering then stressed the very great defensive power of ships in proportion to the surface area to be protected, in view of the fact that warships are provided with a large number of anti-aircraft guns. There is the further difficulty that ships are difficult to hit from high altitudes, while bombs dropped from too low an altitude have not the necessary penetrating power. It has moreover been found that torpedoes launched from aeroplanes very often pass under their target since—given their point of departure, which is higher than that of ships' torpedoes—they very often submerge instead of remaining immediately under the surface of the water. Nevertheless it must be remembered that an Air Force can tire and wear down naval forces by continually chasing them out of port. Aerial forces could not, however, destroy a naval fleet. The Fuehrer had officially asked Ministerpresident Goering if it would not be better to use the money necessary for the construction of a ship of 35,000 tons for the construction of aeroplanes. In spite of his office as Air Minister he had not, after considered reflection, been able to advise against the construction of the 35,000 ton ship. As the best solution he had merely proposed the construction of the ship and the allotment of the same sum for further development of the Air Force. It is necessary to keep naval armament in view at all costs, in consideration of the fact that England is building five battleships over and above her normal programme.

The Duce replied that very soon Italy will have four new ships, that is, two converted ships and two new ships of 35,000 tons, so that Italy will finish by having eight battleships in all. To these are added 24 ships of 8,000 tons of the *Condottiere* class, as well as 100 submarines.

Ministerpresident Goering then pointed out that Italy with eight battleships, Germany with another eight, and Japan with at least 12 more, would constitute a very considerable naval force compared with other countries.

In Germany, on the other hand, they are extraordinarily glad that Italy has been able to find a *modus vivendi* with England.

The Duce underlined the importance of a strong fleet since only that can assure for Italy freedom in her continental policy.

Ministerpresident Goering then added that, by its Abyssinian campaign, Italy had shown that it could carry out its policy even without England, a thing which in the past had always been considered impossible.

The Duce stated that Italy is maintaining as reserved an attitude as possible towards England, without failing to recognise

that Eden's last speech,¹ for instance, which was directed at both Italy and Germany, was particularly bad. The Duce is of the opinion that when the Fuehrer speaks shortly he should deliver a very strong speech ('eine sehr starke Rede'), since Germany has a strong army and Air Force and will soon be extremely strong at sea, too. In English speeches one continually sees coming up again the old plan of offering Germany economic advantages in return for concessions in the political field. This is a disgusting trick which England has also repeatedly tried out elsewhere.

In this connection Minister-president Goering expressed the conviction that in his next big speech before the Reichstag,² the Fuehrer will very strongly underline the Rome-Berlin Axis and will stress, with numerous examples from past years, the falseness of the policy pursued by the democratic states. It will further be necessary to refute the pretension that Eden, in England's name, can assume the airs of 'governess' to the world, by declaring that advice of this nature from England is of no interest to Germany. It is of little interest to the German Government if something arouses a good or bad impression in England; German policy is based on purely German interests. Germany's attitude to new conferences on world economy or raw materials is one of great distrust, and in this connection she continues to wait and see. Germany has been unofficially informed that they would be disposed to make concessions, but on condition that she first abandoned the four year plan.

With regard to French policy, Germany is somewhat in the dark. Lately France has given more signs than usual of wishing to reach a *modus vivendi* with Germany. The Fuehrer's reply to these approaches is that he has already several times shown his good will in this matter, and that France must make concrete proposals. Germany would, moreover, oppose all attempts to link economic advantages with political equivalents. On the German side it is the intention to treat economic questions on a purely commercial basis, since they are of the opinion that the solution of political questions should take place separately from the settlement of economic ones, and only on the basis of reasonable agreements.

In the present situation the sole guarantee of peace, however, appear to be those States which have at their head men who have behind them the whole people, and who can therefore also assume definite undertakings in the name of and with the approval of the peoples themselves. In the democratic countries one never knows if a Government with which one has reached an agreement today

¹On 19th January, Eden had made a speech in the House of Commons, in which, referring to the Mediterranean and to Mussolini's Milan speech, he had reiterated that for Britain that sea was 'not a short-cut but an important main road.'

²The speech was made on 30th January; in it Hitler declared that "the period of so-called surprises is over. Germany, in possession of her equal rights, conscious of her European task, will loyally collaborate in the solution of those problems which interest us and other nations." He then referred in passing to 'the excellent and close relations with Italy' and then went on to make at some length a bitter attack on Eden.

will still be at the helm tomorrow.

At this point the Duce said that, as he sees it, the only true democracies are Germany and Italy; he also referred to the forthcoming speech by Blum in which the latter will very probably define his attitude to the question of volunteers.¹

Ministerpresident Goering said that he had received reliable information that the Burgos² Government has instructed its representative in Berlin not to accept more volunteers for Spain.

The Duce noted this with satisfaction and declared that he, too, held that the Spanish National Government had now sufficient men and arms at its disposal. The joint note by Germany and Italy to Franco has meanwhile been delivered; further, on Monday, in the capitals of both countries, there will be delivered to the British diplomatic representatives the almost identical reply by Germany and Italy to the last English note.³ These notes in reply will be published by the press on Monday afternoon.

Ministerpresident Goering then asked the Duce why Italy has not left the League of Nations. It had been perfectly understood in Germany that during the Abyssinian undertaking it was to the advantage of Italy to remain in the League. But in view of the fact that that undertaking was now successfully concluded, it is believed in Germany that Italy could leave the League; it is foreseeable that Hungary, Austria and some South American states would then follow. The League of Nations would then either break up, or would be openly reduced to what it had been from the beginning—a body representing Anglo-French interests.

The Duce replied that the Abyssinian question does not yet appear to be concluded. Recognition of the conquest by the League of Nations is still lacking; Italy wishes to wait for it. It is in a manner of speaking a dose of castor-oil which the League of Nations will have to swallow sooner or later.

Ministerpresident Goering then referred to the fact that Germany would be willing to return to the League of Nations within the framework of a new Locarno agreement; but that if in the meantime Italy were to state that she no longer wished to collaborate with the League, that would represent for Germany a fresh situation and her return to the League would not even be discussed. The question is not of present interest, but if Italy should reach a final decision with regard to the League, he would

¹On 24th January, the French Premier, Léon Blum, made a speech at Lyons in which he drew a picture of the internal and foreign policy of France.

²Provisional seat of the Spanish Nationalist Government.

³On 25th January, the Italian and German Governments replied to the British memorandum of 6th January (vide page 78, note 1) with two notes of similar content, in which the two Governments declared themselves ready to support and accept 'any proposal which aimed at ensuring an authentic and general policy of non-intervention and its rigorous, effective and complete application, in the interests of the Spanish people and the supreme causes of peace and civilisation.'

request her to inform Germany of it so that the latter could decide on the position to adopt.

The Duce replied that *de facto* Italy has left the League of Nations, and that she has no longer any sympathy for the institution at Geneva. Italy could therefore at the present moment also leave the League *de jure*. It must be remembered, however, that a member of the League of Nations, which has given notice of its desire to withdraw, remains a member for two more years during which it must pay its quota and participate in certain League activities.¹ In view of the fateful moment, which must come sooner or later, when the League of Nations will have to recognise the conquest of Abyssinia, Italy believes she will damage the League much more by continuing to belong to it. If the League recognises the conquest of Abyssinia, that will be almost tantamount to its own liquidation. If, on the other hand, the League does not recognise the conquest of Abyssinia, Italy will leave the League of Nations.

In answer to a question by Minister-president Goering as to when the League will have to take this decision, the Duce replied that the moment should come during the next League Assembly, if not before, at an extraordinary Assembly which is expected to decide on the admission of Egypt.²

Italy is convinced, on the other hand, that Austria, Hungary and Albania cannot for the moment follow her in the event of her leaving the League. Italy does not even wish to put pressure on these countries since the sacrifice would be too heavy for them. In view of strong Masonic influences Turkey will probably continue to remain in the League, unless there should be a strong disagreement with France on the question of the Sanjak.³ England will naturally support the League of Nations to the last since she sees in it a guarantee of her world-wide dominion.

As far as the Duce's personal point of view is concerned, he believes that his contempt for the League of Nations—a contempt

¹Article 1 of the League Covenant read: 'Any member of the League of Nations may withdraw from it, subject to two years' notice being given, provided at the time of withdrawal it had fulfilled all its international duties and all the obligations arising from this covenant.'

²On the basis of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 26th August, 1936, Egypt requested on 8th March, 1937, to enter the League, and was in fact admitted to the Assembly, which had met in an extraordinary session, on 26th May.

³The controversy which had arisen between Turkey and France—the mandatory power for Syria—over the political regime to be given to the Sanjak of Alexandretta, had been examined by the League Council in December, 1936, when it was decided to send a Commission to the spot. On 22nd December a meeting took place in Paris between the two Foreign Ministers, Rustu Aras and Delbos, which did not, however, lead to a basis for agreement. Negotiations were resumed on 21st January, 1937, and led on the 28th to a plan for settling the affair which was approved by the League Council and which recognised the autonomy of the Sanjak, while its foreign relations were entrusted to the Syrian Government. On the more important questions the Damascus Government was obliged to reach prior agreement with the Council of the League.

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

which he expressed anew in his last speech in Milan—is sufficiently known throughout the world.

Again asked for his impressions of his journey to Naples and Capri, Goering stated that he took with him a profound impression of the demonstrations of sympathy by the population, and expressed the hope that relations between the two countries might become ever closer and might find their expression in that clear line of common policy of which he had spoken to the Duce in more detail during their previous conversation.

The Duce replied that the common front of the two peoples had found its expression in the common military front in Spain. It was his wish that it should continue in the future.

Ministerpresident Goering then asked the Duce what he thought of political developments in the immediate future.

The Duce said that first of all the situation in Spain must be cleared up in accordance with the political interests and ideals of Italy and Germany. The policy of parallel action, which has existed between the two countries for two years with good results, must be continued. The two countries should continue to re-affirm their desire for peace; at the same time, however, they should perfect their armament so as to avoid any surprise. The anti-Bolshevik policy should be continued and, above all, any Russian influence in the West must be eliminated.

Should it be possible to reach a Franco-German *rapprochement*, Italy would be glad, since Germany would then have a free hand in the East, which is not the case at present. If German policy should succeed in severing the links between Paris and Moscow that would certainly be a very great success. He (the Duce) considers, however, that it is very difficult. At all events, Italy would be willing to give all possible support to that endeavour.

If a *rapprochement* between Germany and England were possible, Italy would be equally happy. But naturally such an agreement can be reached only on the basis of complete parity of rights and on a reciprocal basis, as indicated by the Fuehrer.

Above all, however, uniformity must be maintained in Italo-German policy, since this uniformity is the preliminary condition of assuring the independence of such a policy.

At this point Ministerpresident Goering asked what situation would arise if it should be impossible to reach agreement on the embargo on volunteers to Spain. In the Spanish question, Germany intends to go only to the limits of what is possible, thus preventing a general war from developing from the complications in Spain. It is to be feared that Moscow may make the Spanish question into a question of prestige and support the Spanish Red forces with her own troops to an ever greater extent.

The Duce replied that there are various possible solutions. First, Franco might gain a complete military success, in which case

the Spanish question would be solved on the purely military plane. This would naturally be the best outcome. Second, there was the possibility of a compromise between the two sides in Spain with the exclusion of the extremists.

On the question of forbidding volunteers, the position of Italy and Germany is in any case favourable. Either an embargo is reached, and in that case the maximum possible effort has been made by Italy with the recent embarkation of strong forces: the number of Italian volunteers has reached 44,000. Or an embargo is not agreed upon, and in that case Italy will continue to send volunteers to Spain. In the Spanish question, Italy intends to push matters to the limit without, however, running the risk of a general war. In any case, he does not believe in the possibility of such a conflict during 1937. Léon Blum and his collaborators wish to avoid it, and if they are shouting for 'aeroplanes and arms for Spain', they are doing it purely for reasons of internal policy. England, too, fears a general conflict, and Russia will certainly not let things go beyond the limit.

On the other hand, Russia has sent no cadre of volunteers, but only commanders and material, and would certainly adapt herself even to accepting a defeat of the Reds. It must be borne in mind that the aid to the Reds from the Communist side was intensified at the moment when the Spanish Reds had in any case stopped Franco in front of Madrid; in the Left-wing camp, spirits had therefore risen somewhat. If the situation should deteriorate for the Reds, the enthusiasm of the volunteers too would cease, for they stand by themselves and there will be no-one willing to have himself killed for a lost cause.

Count Ciano observed that the Italian Ambassador to Moscow,¹ who is at present in Rome, had informed him that the Bolsheviks are slowly preparing for a Red defeat in Spain and that they were exclusively concerned with reaching an international agreement to use on their own people as an excuse for the failure of their action in Spain. In short, Litvinov² is looking for a sort of alibi under the guise of an international agreement.

The Duce drew attention to the difficulty of the internal situation in Russia and repeated again that Russia has never sent her own troops to Spain. She had confined herself to sending the Communists of France, Belgium and Switzerland to join the Reds in Spain.

Minister-president Goering then spoke of England's intentions, asking the Duce what he thought of the possibility of England's attempting to create an invisible, but in certain circumstances effective, front including Russia against Italy and Germany.

¹Augusto Rosso, appointed Ambassador to Moscow in November, 1936; he remained there until June, 1941.

²Maxim Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 21st July, 1930 until 3rd May, 1939; later Ambassador to Washington.

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

In this connection the Duce referred to the difficulties which exist between England and Japan, and agreed in passing with Ministerpresident Goering's opinion that the League of Nations already represented for England a sort of invisible alliance against Italy and Germany. There would, however, be no reason to worry since there is no reason why the machinery of the League, having failed at least three times, should suddenly function at the fourth attempt. It would, however, be advisable to treat English public opinion with a certain respect. The English Conservatives have a great fear of Bolshevism, and this fear could easily be exploited politically. This task would fall principally on Germany, since it is rather difficult for Italy to convince the English Conservatives in view of events in the Mediterranean.

Ministerpresident Goering drew attention to Germany's attempts to reach a *rapprochement* with English Conservative elements. In this connection it was necessary to bear in mind that the present English Government is fundamentally not Conservative but has outright Left-wing leanings. At all events, Germany is always willing to come to an agreement with England while maintaining good relations with Italy. For the rest, she was basing her security on a large increase in her land, sea and air armament, as well as in large scale economic autarchy for the attainment of which she is working with the maximum energy.

The Duce fully approved of this increase in power. He further declared that, as he saw it, the next great surprise for England will be provided by the growth of English Communism. That would be a good lesson, particularly for Mr. Eden himself.

Ministerpresident Goering said that the common people in England nourished feelings of sympathy for Germany. Conservative circles, it is true, are concerned at Germany's strength, but their greatest fear is Bolshevism, and even that fact does not in effect allow one to consider them as definitely willing to collaborate with Germany. The Foreign Office, on the other hand, whether for idealistic reasons or on grounds of tradition, maintains a position of absolute hostility to Germany. Moreover, a further obstacle to Anglo-German collaboration is to be found in the strong influence of Freemasons and Jews in the British Empire.

In this connection the Duce referred to the close connection between England and France. It is impossible to separate England and France. In spite of all the discords which arise now and again the two countries have too strong interests in common. The financial ties, too, are extraordinarily strong.

Ministerpresident Goering confirmed the close collaboration between the Quai d'Orsay and the Foreign Office. The two Ministers would not do anything without having previously made contact by telephone. Recently he (Goering) had refused English visitors particulars on German aviation and the possible direction of German

expansion because within 20 minutes the whole material would have been passed by telephone to the Quai d'Orsay by the Foreign Office. The English had to admit that he was right.

The Duce added that no opportunity should be lost of hampering Anglo-French friendship; such attempts should, however, be made with the utmost prudence so as not to produce the opposite result from that desired. Goering was in full agreement.

Ministerpresident Goering then said that the Fuehrer would be extraordinarily happy if the Duce would care to pay a visit to Germany. It would not only strongly underline the common policy of the two countries, but would give the Duce the opportunity of learning the situation in Germany at first hand, with his own eyes.

The Duce replied that a visit to Germany by him is within the bounds of possibility in view of the fact that he wishes to see the Fuehrer again and to confirm with his own eyes Germany's development.

Ministerpresident Goering said finally that, in his own personal opinion and in accordance with the close relations between Germany and Italy, it would certainly be useful if the Italian Government exercised its influence on the Austrian Government to cause the latter to adhere more faithfully to the Agreement of 11th July. The Austrian Government is exercising strong and completely useless pressure on pro-German circles in the country. If Chancellor Schuschnigg describes National Socialism as Public Enemy No. 1, he runs the risk of provoking internal reactions in Austria without the least interference on the part of Germany. It would therefore be advisable for the Austrian Government to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards these circles.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the Austrian Government is neither Fascist nor National Socialist, but clerical. It is therefore extremely possible that, one fine day, it may give way to a large extent to those Left-wing tendencies which continue to exist in Austria in considerable strength. The Austrian Government, in view of its exaggerated attitude towards National Socialism, fails to recognise the Communist peril. He (Goering) refers to all this solely with the desire to do what he can to avoid an internal conflict in Austria, which might, for example, occur in the event of the resignation of Glaise-Horstenau¹ or of other nationalist² ministers. These are the reasons which lead him to express the desire that the

¹Glaise von Horstenau, former colonel in the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, in which capacity he betrayed during the first World War—according to German sources—Austrian military and political secrets to the Germans. The allegation was never denied. Under the Republic he served as director of the Austrian War Records Library in Vienna. As a result of the Austro-German Agreement of 11th July, 1936, Schuschnigg was compelled to include Glaise in his reconstructed cabinet, officially as Minister without Portfolio, unofficially however as spokesman and protector of the illegal Austrian Nazis. As Minister of the Interior (November, 1936—February, 1938) Glaise was largely responsible for Nazi infiltration into the public services. After the invasion of Austria he was rewarded with the rank of a general in the German

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

Agreement of 11th July be more carefully observed by the Austrian Government.

The Duce replies that the relations of Italy with Austria are based on the principle of respect for the independence of that country with due regard to its sensibility. He (the Duce) is perfectly aware that the Austrian people, in large part, has no sympathy for Italy; should he wish to influence the Austrian Government he would therefore have to proceed with great caution so as not to expose himself to the danger of an unpleasant reply. In view of the fact, however, that Ministerpresident Goering expressed a desire to that effect, he will attempt to influence the Austrian Government in the manner suggested, adding that full execution of the Agreement of 11th July is also in the interest of Italy, particularly since at the time the Agreement was concluded at Italy's wish. He (the Duce) has both personally and by implication pointed out to Schuschnigg that, in view of the German character of Austria, it would be absurd to pursue an anti-German policy. Regular implementation of the Agreement of 11th July is, on the other hand, of the utmost importance from the international point of view. Any new conflict between Germany and Austria would, for example, be immediately exploited by France and there would once again be talk of the 'watch on the Brenner'. Italy does not intend to allow herself to be bound in any way on this point.

Ministerpresident Goering remarked that the Austrian Government does not enjoy popular sympathy and maintains itself in power exclusively by employing brutal measures. But even these measures would have been of no avail to her if Germany had not abstained in the most absolute manner from intervening in Austrian internal affairs. On the German side, there was even willingness to help the Austrian Government. In accordance with a promise made to the Undersecretary of State, Schmidt, Goering had stressed in his Goslar speech that the Austrian Government must not be considered anti-German. On the same day, Schuschnigg described National Socialism as Public Enemy No. 1. In Germany, there is the impression that Austria is being deliberately held in reserve by as yet unidentified forces like a sort of hand grenade which, at the opportune moment, would serve to blow up the Italo-German front. In France, in England and in Russia they were probably of the opinion that the Italo-German agreement is not dangerous so long as there exists the possibility of blowing it up by means of Austria.

The Duce replied that an attempt of that nature would not be dangerous in so far as the aims of these obscure forces—which close Italo-German collaboration is capable of dealing with—are

Army and later served as German military representative in Zagreb, capital of Croatia. Placed on the list of war criminals both by the Austrians and the Yugoslavs he has, presumably, been executed in Yugoslavia.

²Nationalist, as used here by Goering, and on other occasions, refers, of course, not to Austrian nationalism, but to Pan-Germanism.

now known. It is sufficient to let it be known to the Austrian Government that it must in no case lend itself to any attempt at such a breach on the part of France, England and Russia.

Ministerpresident Goering said that this was one of the points on which there exists a certain divergence of views between Germany and Italy—the evaluation of the forces at work in Austria. Germany is of the opinion that the dominant tendencies in Austria are more internationally inclined than is apparently believed on the Italian side. For Germany's part, he can at all events give the assurance—and he believes that this is also true of Italy—that there will be no surprises as far as Austria is concerned. The Duce gave the same assurance, stressing that the guarantee is to be found in the very continuity of contacts between Italy and Germany.

Ministerpresident Goering fully confirmed, on his side, the need for continuous contacts between the two countries. He stressed that the Fuehrer had, in his presence, given the Minister for Foreign Affairs the directive to remain in continual contact with Count Ciano and to give visible evidence of this liaison—as a counterweight, as it were, to intimate Anglo-French collaboration—so that everyone would know in advance not to expect from Germany and Italy a different attitude to common political problems.

The Duce declared that their common policy applied above all to the great political problems of the world, and in the second place, to secondary matters, among which Austria is included. Here, too, continual contact can guarantee uniformity in policy, particularly since the two Powers must adapt their actions to the incessantly changing situation. He believes in 'evolution' in political forces and does not allow Italian policy to become 'mummified'. If, then, continual contact is maintained between the two countries, neither surprises nor conflicts will occur, and instead unity and collaboration will be attained.

Ministerpresident Goering referred to the Habsburg question, which, if it should actually arise, would involve points of the utmost importance. Germany would not in any event be able to tolerate the restoration of the Habsburgs in Austria, whatever might be the form (Kingdom, Regency, etc.) under which it was attempted to bring it about. That would mean the end of Austria.

The Duce replied that, for easily comprehensible historical reasons, the House of Habsburg finds no sympathy in Italy and that the restoration of the Habsburgs would produce a very bad impression on the Italian people. He has always warned the rulers of Austria not to play with the restoration, pointing out to them the moral dangers which Austria ran in this connection. Even to the leader of the Legitimists, Count [*sic*] Wiesner,¹ he had expressed himself very explicitly to that effect.

¹Friedrich von Wiesner, former diplomat; took part in the peace negotiations of Brest-Litovsk (December, 1917—March, 1918).

GOERING PUTS HIS CASE

Ministerpresident Goering stressed that the Habsburgs will always be anti-Italian and that on their return to Austria they would logically attempt to regain those territories which formerly belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Duce replied that he was perfectly aware that in the event of their restoration the Habsburgs—in order to minimise internal difficulties—would from the beginning have to seek a foreign enemy; it is to be foreseen that the bogey selected in this case would be Italy. He has, on the contrary, written an article against Otto von Habsburg and can give an assurance that all the information concerning plans for a marriage between Otto and Princess Maria¹ is completely unfounded. Princess Maria on the contrary, asked him personally to give a vigorous denial.

The conversation ended with some words of farewell from the Duce and renewed thanks from Ministerpresident Goering for the courteous welcome in Italy.

During the journey from Rome to Berlin—January, 1937.

Sgd. Schmidt.

¹Youngest daughter of Victor Emmanuel.

VII

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

4th February—26th March, 1937.

Surrounded by secrecy, the Italo-Yugoslav conversations decided upon in December had begun in January. Simultaneously one of the first results of the 'gentlemen's agreement' came to a head. During the Abyssinian war, Turkey had been one of the pillars of the Mediterranean system of mutual assistance promoted by Britain as a precaution against possible Italian reactions to the application of sanctions. London had obtained the adherence of that country all the more promptly since from 1932 onwards relations between Rome and Ankara had gradually deteriorated. Italo-Turkish trade had not developed according to expectation; and the military installations completed by Italy in Leros and in other islands of the Dodecanese had aroused the suspicions and fears of neighbouring Turkey. Ankara did not forget what had preceded the London agreement—Italian aspirations to the Smyrna area and to Adalia. The agreement of the limits of territorial waters round the island of Castelrosso in 1932 had remained an isolated instance of mutual trust. The war in Abyssinia had seemed a confirmation of the expansionist tendencies of the Fascist regime, a development of the political programme which Mussolini had enunciated a year before the Abyssinian affair. On that occasion, Mussolini had said that the historical objectives of Italy were Asia and Africa, the south and the east. In this the Turks had seen a confirmation of Fascist designs on Anatolia. Finally, Italy had remained absent from the Montreux Conference and had refused to sign the diplomatic instrument which restored to Turkey full sovereignty over the Straits, and gave rights of passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the fleets of the States bordering on the Black Sea. All this amounted to a series of important modifications and innovations in the balance of power in the Mediterranean; but in the second half of 1936 the situation had changed. The 'gentlemen's agreement' had relaxed the attention which had been focused on the Mediterranean; the possibility arose of obtaining Italy's adherence to the Convention of Montreux. When the opportunity of meeting Ciano presented itself to him, Rustu Aras did not require to be asked twice. The meeting was decided on in Ankara before the departure of the Turkish Foreign Minister for Geneva whither he

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

was summoned for the League Council. The choice of place fell on Milan; not so much for reasons of proximity to Geneva, as because ten years before in the same city, Rustu Aras had met Mussolini in order to bring into being a friendship pact between Italy and Turkey, which it was now a question of reanimating. But Rustu Aras did not know, even if he perhaps half suspected it, that the Milan meeting had its place in a vaster scheme of Fascist policy, of which Belgrade was the first goal.

CONVERSATION WITH THE TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER, RUSTU ARAS.

Milan, 4th February, 1937—XV

The first conversation with Rustu Aras¹ was devoted to the examination of relations between the two countries and a review of the general situation.

Rustu Aras began by making exaggerated and clumsy declarations of friendship for Italy and of admiration for the Duce. I refrain from describing the series of acrobatics he performed in order to demonstrate, by citing a list of instances—all of them negative—his supposedly constantly favourable attitude towards Italy. I replied that, when we were about to begin a new page in Italo-Turkish relations, it was not worth while passing judgment on the past, on which we had definite views and documentary evidence—a fact which did not allow us to modify our mature conclusions.

I summarise briefly the various topics dealt with:

Montreux Conference. I recapitulated the reasons which had prevented us from initial participation in the Montreux Conference. He was aware of them. I said that, for the future, we foresaw no difficulty of any importance in the way of giving our support, but that we alone considered ourselves the proper judge of the choice of the opportune moment. Naturally we would give our support on two conditions: first, that we attained a status identical with that of the original signatory States; second, that we formulated the same reserves as Japan concerning the links between the Covenant and the Montreux Convention.

Aras approved our point of view without further debate and showed his satisfaction at our decisions.

I then drew his attention to the fact that, with regard to the Abyssinian situation, Turkey had not yet proceeded to a *de jure* recognition, while the other member States of the League had

¹Rustu Aras Tewfik, Foreign Minister from March, 1925 to November, 1938. From January, 1939 to February, 1942 he was Ambassador to London.

already done so. Aras told me that on his return to Constantinople he will attempt to settle the question by adopting in practice the Japanese formula, namely that which makes no difference between *de jure* and *de facto* recognition. He also said that, when recognising the Empire, as Turkey did some months ago, it had been his intention to make a gesture which was complete both formally and in substance.

I then spoke to him about the fortification of the Dodecanese. It is unpleasant for us, and quite futile, that the Turks should keep on protesting against these fortifications, regarding them as a threat aimed at Turkey. The Dodecanese are one link of the communications of the Empire whose security we intend to provide for in the most efficacious and complete manner.

Aras noted my statements and assured me that Turkey places complete credence in what had been said and that in future all polemics on the militarization of Leros¹ will be avoided.

Status quo in the Mediterranean. Aras expressed his very great satisfaction at the reaching of the 'gentlemen's agreement' between Italy and England. He re-affirmed that Turkey intends to develop her entire policy on the following basis: Black Sea, collaboration and friendship with Russia; Mediterranean, close understanding with England and Greece; friendly collaboration with England; respect for other countries. The only pacts which Turkey has in the Mediterranean are those binding her with Rome² and Athens.³ with Italy and Greece; friendly collaboration with England; relations are based on parallel interests and activities. Relations with France have improved as a result of the agreement on the Sanjak. Paris is now pressing to have a treaty with Turkey, but Ankara is not in favour of it, and, in any case, the matter must be postponed until more favourable times. Nothing will be done without previous consultation with Italy. As far as Spain is concerned, notwithstanding the solid bonds of friendship which unite Turkey with Russia, the Turkish Government would not be at all favourable to the setting-up of a Soviet State in the Iberian Peninsula. In practice, Turkey has, in recent months, refused supplies to Russian transports which have instead found bases, supplies and support in France. Turkey while having no particular reasons for or against, would see with pleasure the consolidation of the Franco Government—for ideological reasons if for no other.

Balkan Situation. Friendship with Greece is the basis of all Turkish policy in the Balkans; then good relations with Yugo-

¹Island in the Dodecanese.

²The Italo-Turkish Treaty of 30th May, 1928, for which a meeting between the head of the Italian Government and the Turkish Foreign Minister, Rustu Aras, held in Milan on 3rd April of the same year, had prepared the ground. That Treaty helped to create an element of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and to determine, *inter alia*, the limits of territorial waters between Castelrosso and the Anatolian coast.

³The Greco-Turkish Treaty of 1930 which put an end to the long period of distrust and tension in relations between Turkey and Greece.

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

slavia. These have not been altered by the recent terms of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav treaty¹—on the contrary. Aras, personally, was very much in favour of this peaceful settlement between anti-Bolshevik Slavs, but he makes many reserves as to its solidity and stability. He stated that he views with pleasure our *rapprochement* with Yugoslavia, because it also facilitates the *rapprochement* between Yugoslavia and Hungary, a nation to which the Turkish people is attached by deep feelings of friendship. In accordance with the wish of the Yugoslavs I did not in any way discuss with Aras the present negotiations of which he is not informed.

During the second conversation, which took place during the afternoon, outstanding local questions or questions of administration were dealt with in detail.

Rustu Aras gave the fullest assurances of a favourable solution. We shall see.

He, in his turn, spoke of certain secondary problems, and—this is a matter of some importance—mentioned to me the plan for a telephone cable connecting Ankara-Athens-Tirana-Rome, the aim being to route through Italy all communications from Greece and Turkey which at present pass through central Europe and Paris. The project is interesting, all the more so since our contribution would be confined to laying the cable across the Adriatic.

At the conclusion of the second conversation, the journalists, to whom Aras made the statements with which we are already familiar,² were received. The *communiqué* drawn up by us beforehand was approved by him in its entirety, and he stressed his satisfaction that it served the purpose of giving an exact idea of the results of the conversation and of preparing the way for further developments of the collaboration which had already begun.

The visit had the air more of a ceremony of expiation than of a political meeting.

Rustu Aras knew he had come to Italy chiefly to make an act of contrition. One must admit that he recited the *mea culpa* with amazing impudence.

If he were still in the Government we would now see Titulescu, too, languidly mounting the steps of one of His Majesty's Prefectures.

After leaving Milan to return to Turkey, Rustu Aras stopped for a day—5th February—at Belgrade. He saw Stoyadinovitch and took the opportunity to examine the political situation, which,

¹Signed on 24th January, 1937, in Belgrade by Stoyadinovitch and the Bulgarian Premier and Foreign Minister, George Kiosseivanov, the Treaty put an end, for the time being, to a traditional enmity which had its roots in the Macedonian question.

²He alludes to the statements made to the Press by Rustu Aras on the same day, 3rd February, as a comment on the official *communiqué* published at the end of the conversations, in which he had said that 'from detailed and friendly examination and exchange of views it has clearly emerged that there is no question dividing Turkey and Italy.'

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

particularly in the Balkans, seemed to be going through a stage of rapid change. The signing of the Bulgar-Yugoslav Pact of 24th February, was symptomatic. The Balkan States, too, were feeling the results of the crisis produced by the civil war in Spain and were compelled, although reluctantly, to take up a position and to reveal their interests and sympathies, whether the moment was suitable or not. Episodes of purely secondary nature acquired a critical importance. For instance, the funeral of two Iron Guards, who had fallen in Spain fighting the 'Reds,' was solemnly celebrated in Bucharest. The Italian Minister, Sola, took part in the ceremony, and his gesture was interpreted not so much as a demonstration of solidarity with the Franco regime as an unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of Rumania. The clamour of the Opposition forced the Tatarescu Government to approach the Italian Government at the very moment when Italo-Rumanian relations showed signs of improving after the removal of Titulescu. The embarrassment of the Rumanian Government was obvious. The Rumanian Minister in Rome did not conceal it when Tatarescu ordered him to go to Ciano to have the incident cleared up.

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 17th February, 1937—XV

The Rumanian Minister called in connection with the incident caused by the attendance of Sola¹ at the funeral of two Iron Guards who had fallen in Spain.

M. Lugosianu gave me a long telegram signed by Tatarescu² to read, in which the facts were set out with remarkable objectivity. The telegram was very balanced. In it, among other things, Sola's services in facilitating good relations between Italy and Rumania were recognised, but the telegram concluded—evidently under pressure from Parliament and the Opposition Press—by asking the Minister Plenipotentiary to request from us a gesture which would settle the question.

Concentrating on this last request, the Minister then asked me if I would be prepared to recall Sola temporarily to Italy for consultations.

¹Ugo Sola, Italian Minister in Bucharest from January, 1933 to March, 1939.

²Gheorghe Tatarescu, Rumanian statesman. After the fall of the Duca Cabinet on 5th January, 1934, he formed a new cabinet which remained in office until 20th December, 1937. On 10th February, 1938, he had been appointed Foreign Minister in the Cabinet led by the Patriarch, Miron Cristea, and remained in office until 30th March. From December, 1938 to June, 1939 he was Ambassador to Paris; from 23rd November till 4th July, 1940, head of the Government. He became once more Foreign Minister after the liberation in the Groza Government; resigned, to be succeeded by Anna Pauker, after non-Communist elements in the Government were ejected.

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

I said, No. Sola's departure from Rumania, even for a few days, would mean to world opinion the sacrifice of our representative. That would have harmful repercussions on relations between the two countries.

I told him that, first, Sola had attended the ceremony in a private capacity and on his own initiative, in civilian clothes and unaccompanied by any member of the Legation; second, that he had refrained from taking part in the political procession which had followed the religious ceremony; third, that the Fascist Government, far from disowning the action of our Minister, approved it in view of the fact that the two Legionaries had fallen fighting for a Government legally recognised by the Government in Rome. For those reasons we could not share the interpretation placed on it by the Rumanian Government and found nothing either irregular or at variance with diplomatic custom in Sola's action.

M. Lugosianu took note of my statement, which according to him would give President Tatarescu—who is animated by good intentions—something to hold on to in his efforts to settle the incident in a friendly manner.

In order to avoid aggravating the present situation we agreed that it would be advisable for the Press of both countries to avoid or cease making controversial statements about the incident.

Towards the middle of March the Italo-Yugoslav conversations reached their conclusion. Both the text of the political agreement and that of the economic agreement were now settled. The political agreement pledged Italy and Yugoslavia to respect their common sea and land frontiers, not to have recourse to war as an instrument of national policy in their mutual relations, and not to tolerate or support on their territory any activity directed against the territorial integrity or the established order of the other country. In other words, an end was called to Italian irredentism aimed at Dalmatia, and to Slav irredentism aimed at Istria and Venezia Giulia. It was an undertaking of prime importance, if sincerely carried out, but at all events of the utmost importance in the eyes of Italy at that particular moment, since three days after the signing of the agreements, on the occasion of the exchange of ratifications, King Victor Emmanuel invested Prince Paul, Regent of Yugoslavia, through Count Viola di Campalto, master of ceremonies of the Foreign Ministry, with the insignia of the Order of the Annunciation, the highest Italian order. Vaguer and less binding were the terms in the political agreement referring to 'cases of international complication'; it was not for nothing that Stoyadinovitch told Ciano that he considered these agreements as a point of departure rather than a point of arrival. His ambitions to bring into being the Rome-Belgrade Axis may have accounted at least partly for this statement. The trade agreement was intended to increase the volume of goods exchanged, and committed the two Governments to the immediate

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

setting-up of a permanent Italo-Yugoslav economic committee, which had been proposed in vain since April, 1932.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV PRIME MINISTER, STOYADINOVITCH.

Belgrade, 26th March, 1937—XV

Before proceeding to signature of the documents already agreed on in Rome, M. Stoyadinovitch and I carried out a broad general review so as to exchange information on the foreign policy directives of both countries and to agree upon the steps to be taken in the future.

I first of all talked to M. Stoyadinovitch with great clearness, without pretence or reserve, attempting to explain to him that it was the Fascist Government's intention to give the Italo-Yugoslav agreement wide scope and real meaning.

After he had learned our attitude, our plans and our programme, he spoke with equal frankness. He began by saying that, given Yugoslavia's geographical position and in view of his country's political possibilities, he abandons the idea of adopting a European policy, far less a world policy, wishing instead to retain for Yugoslavia the principal and decisive role in the Balkan peninsula. Titulescu, who was led by personal vanity to wish to attempt things which were beyond him, often placed Rumania in a difficult position, from which even today the Rumanian Government has perhaps not succeeded in extricating itself.

Relations with Italy are henceforth defined by the agreements signed on the 25th March. But these agreements are no more than the first and most difficult step towards the alliance of the two countries, which Stoyadinovitch considers natural and inevitable for reasons of economic, political and historical necessity.

With France Yugoslavia's relations are now weakened. Recently France proposed to the Little Entente the conclusion of a military alliance which would aim at defending Czechoslovakia from a threat of German aggression. By all manner of pretexts Stoyadinovitch delayed an answer for four months. He now intends to delay it no longer, and proposes to make known his decisions on the occasion of the forthcoming meeting of the Little Entente, which will take place in Belgrade on April 1st.¹ It is to be a completely negative reply, as negative as will be the reply to the possible and probable proposal for bilateral alliances between France and Yugo-

¹The meeting took place in Belgrade on 1st and 2nd April. An official *communiqué* was issued which, after recalling the traditional policy of the three States, said that their examination of events authorised 'the three Ministers to state that a certain improvement had taken place in the international situation, which allows them to hope that, in spite of the difficulties which remain to be overcome, the most difficult period is already past.'

slavia, and between France and the other countries of the Little Entente.

Stoyadinovitch explains the reasons for his new policy thus :

'We have not received anything from France and are not receiving anything now. Economically the value of the Little Entente to Yugoslavia is nil. Financially we have contracted debts with France which we pay regularly at a usurious rate. Militarily, France, together with Czechoslovakia, has been the principal source of arms. But the French Government has not presented us with a single bayonet. What we have had, we have paid for; just as we will pay Italy, in view of the fact that we intend in future to concentrate our orders for war materials in your country and in Germany.

'I will add that the moral and cultural influence which France has up till now exerted on our country has become truly deleterious and disruptive; Press and literature are the expressions of the Jewish, Masonic and Communistic mentality of the France of Blum.

'Moreover, when we committed ourselves to a military policy of collaboration with France, the situation was entirely different. It was foreseen that, as a result of a German offensive against Czechoslovakia, Italy's reaction would have been anti-German, and that she would have allowed French troops—or so they said in Paris—to cross the valley of the Po in order to fight against the troops of the Reich in Austria. All that has gone. Should Germany attack Czechoslovakia, we would, with weak and uncertain Rumanian aid, have to invade Hungary to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia. But even supposing that we could occupy all Hungary (and I consider it very unlikely) we would reach the Czech frontier in time only to meet the remains of Prague's defeated army. At our back we would have Hungary, ravaged and hostile. Before us, the victorious German armies. An unpleasant encounter and a risk which we cannot allow the Yugoslav people to run; all the more since it has no hostile feeling towards Hungary and no solidarity with Czechoslovakia. The forthcoming meeting at Belgrade will produce a further cooling-off in relations between France and Yugoslavia, and perhaps an open clash. I will be accused of selfishness. The French always accuse of selfishness anyone who is not disposed to let himself be killed for them. That leaves me completely indifferent since I have succeeded in concluding with Italy an agreement, which I consider fundamental for our country's policy.

'As far as the Little Entente is concerned, I consider that, formally at least, it will not undergo any transformation. It is entirely in Czechoslovakia's interest to let matters lie, so as not to make it obvious where the rift in the lute is, how it came there and how big it is. One thing is certain, that whereas relations between Yugoslavia and Rumania will remain unaltered, that is to say, firm and cordial, those between these two countries and Czechoslovakia will, on the contrary, be reduced to an empty formality.

'Benés¹ has told me that when it is clear that it is impossible to count further on the Little Entente, on France and on the League of Nations, he will always find a means of coming to an agreement with the Germans. I for my part, advised him in that sense and will so advise him in future. Those—that is the French and the English—who advise him to resist Hitler to the last are the very people who advised the Negus to offer armed resistance to Italy. But for them, Haile Selassie would probably still be in Addis Ababa. Mussolini would have left him there as a dependent. The situation facing Czechoslovakia is analogous; should things become really complicated and should Germany go over to direct action, those who today are encouraging Prague's hostility to Berlin would go off, and Benés would find himself alone.'

Going on to examine Yugoslavia's relations with Austria, M. Stoyadinovitch said that he considers the *Anschluss* inevitable. Austria, as things are, has neither the moral nor material conditions for living. Nevertheless, we must delay it as long as possible. But this delay must be done by methods calculated not to provoke a conflict or even friction with Germany.

On the other hand, he had contemplated the Pan-German problem with greater equanimity ever since he considered an agreement between Yugoslavia and Italy possible in the first place, and alliance possible in the future. Once the *Anschluss* is an accomplished fact, all those countries who must oppose the German descent towards the Adriatic or along the Danube valley, will polarise around the Rome-Belgrade axis. The bloc which will arise will be such as to dissuade the Germans from any mad attempt.

It must be added that the fact that Germany has urged both in Rome and Belgrade an agreement between the Italians and Yugoslavs argues very favourably for the intentions—even the long term ones—of the German people. If Nazism were aiming at the Adriatic, it would have been unpardonable shortsightedness to facilitate a union, which was bound to come into operation in all sectors in the event of a Germany threat. On the contrary, in that case the policy would have been to make the misunderstandings and conflicts between Italy and Yugoslavia irremediable.

All that, however, applies to an unpredictable and certainly very distant future. At the present moment, relations between Yugoslavia and Germany are excellent. Whatever the world may think of them,

¹Eduard Benés, former teacher, joined Prof. Thomas Masaryk's secret anti-Austrian organisation after the outbreak of war in 1914. Left Austria illegally in 1915 and worked together with Masaryk and the Slovak *émigré* Stefanik for the creation of an independent Czechoslovak State. Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1935, and from 1921 to 1922 also Premier. Elected President of the Republic in 1935. Resigned after Munich and went into exile, where he soon reassumed the rank and title of President. Always a strong supporter of Pan-Slavism he visited Moscow before Germany's defeat and resumed his former position under Russian auspices. Soon after the 1948 Communist coup he resigned on grounds of ill-health and died, a broken man in September of that year.

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

they have for some time been much better than relations between Yugoslavia and France. A great deal of military and commercial activity is developing between the two countries. Belgrade's collaboration with the Rome-Berlin axis may be considered ensured, for the further reason that that axis represents the effective bulwark against the menace most feared by Yugoslavia—that of Communism.

The influence of Reds has been harmful for all the peoples, but it appears particularly dangerous to Belgrade, where identity of race, affinity of temperament, the similarity of the language, would make the task of such Bolshevik propagandists as might succeed in carrying the infection of their ideas to the South Slavs particularly easy.

Communism—according to Stoyadinovitch—is not yet widely spread in Yugoslavia. It has taken a certain hold among the University students in Belgrade, where they claim a couple of hundred of the seven thousand youths who attend the University. It has fairly strong roots among the Croats and also, to a lesser degree, in certain Slovene centres. The Government is reacting energetically to this threat and above all makes active use of the solid and healthy barrier constituted by the small country proprietors and of the great agricultural masses who form the backbone of Yugoslavia.

Relations with Hungary have improved and tend to improve still further. Recently the Budapest Government offered Stoyadinovitch a unilateral pact of non-aggression which he finds acceptable in principle. Once that pact is concluded, Yugoslavia will after a short interval bring out a new statute for the Hungarian minorities which ought not to appear to be a pendant to the former, but which would, in actual fact, be agreed on with Hungary when it seemed advisable.

Stoyadinovitch intends to follow this line. I encouraged him, adding that the improvement of relations between Belgrade and Budapest will have a positive and beneficial effect on relations between Rome and Belgrade.

As far as Rumania is concerned, Stoyadinovitch displays greater optimism than he showed when Titulescu was Foreign Minister. He spoke of the latter in hard and contemptuous terms. He accused him of linking Rumania and Russia for personal ends, and perhaps because he had been corrupted outright by the latter. Titulescu had agreed with Moscow to the passage of Russian troops across Bessarabia,¹ for the purpose of attacking Germany. But King

¹Bessarabia, which belonged originally to the Principality of Moldavia, then under Turkish suzerainty, was first taken by Russia in 1812. Returned to Rumania after the Crimean War, the province was retaken by the Russians in 1878, as the result of Turkey's military defeat and the decisions of the Congress of Berlin. In 1918 Bessarabia was occupied by the Austrians who left the administration, pending a plebiscite, to the Rumanians, although the population had already shown a strong desire for a status of autonomy, if not full independence from Russia as well as Rumania. The plebiscite, however, never took place, and in 1919 the Rumanian Government declared Bessarabia to be an integral part of the national territory. The U.S.S.R. never

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

Carol¹ and Tatarescu confirmed during the recent conversations with Stoyadinovitch that this policy has now been completely disavowed and that they will not allow Russian troops to enter Bessarabia, which once invaded by them they would continue to occupy as oppressors in disguise, or even as open enemies.

Rumania is at present pursuing a policy of friendship with Yugoslavia and Poland, with an evident anti-Russian aim. But a pro-Yugoslav policy is particularly indispensable to the Bucharest Government. Stoyadinovitch does not attach much weight militarily to the Rumanians. But he attaches great importance to their agricultural resources and their unlimited reserves of petrol. 'In any event,' he said, 'either Rumania joins our system, and then we will have the grain and the oil wells at our disposal, or Rumania will be against us and, in a short time, we will have the wells just the same.'

I replied that our friendship with the Magyars prevented us from going too far in our relations with the Rumanians, although, apart from Hungarian revisionism, there is no dispute between Italy and Rumania. On the contrary, we had recently concluded a commercial treaty which almost trebles our trade. If one day, as I hoped and believed possible, there was a *modus vivendi* between Bucharest and Budapest, we would be able to do much more. For the time being, however, Stoyadinovitch could tell Antonescu² that, given the new situation which is developing in the Balkans and the Danubian region, Italy is willing to look on the Rumanian nation with more attention and greater cordiality than in the past.

Stoyadinovitch, who is optimistic over the pact between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, believes that relations between the two peoples will develop with increasing cordiality and that the union effected between Bulgarians and Serbs is destined to keep the future destinies of the two Slav nations parallel.

Good relations exist today between Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece; but, in reality, these relations are not very close, nor from what I was led to understand, lacking in numerous mental reserves for the future.

Today Yugoslavia is a country which is satisfied territorially. It is the one which gained most from the Great War. In 1912 Serbia had 2,400,000 inhabitants. After the Balkan war it rose to four

recognised the annexation, and for 20 years the question of Bessarabia remained a Russo-Rumanian bone of contention. In June, 1940 a Russian ultimatum forced Rumania to cede Bessarabia (and Northern Bukovina) to the Soviet Union. Both provinces now form part of the Ukraine.

¹Carol II., King of Rumania, a Hohenzollern prince. In 1926, when still heir apparent, renounced the throne. On the death of his father, Ferdinand I., he was therefore succeeded by his own son, Prince Michael. At the beginning of June, 1930, he returned to his own country and was proclaimed king on 8th June, 1930. He abdicated on 8th September, 1940.

²Victor Antonescu, Rumanian diplomat, Minister to Paris during the first World War, Minister of Justice from 1933 to 1936. On 30th August of the same year he succeeded Titulescu in the post of Foreign Minister, which he filled until 20th September, 1937.

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

millions. Now the Yugoslavs number more than 15 millions and the birth rate is very promising. The problems which today confront Yugoslavia are not those of territorial expansion. For at least ten years the construction of public works, the development of the national economy, the raising of the spiritual and cultural level of the people will be the aims of the Government. But when one day horizons and new outlets will be required by the vigorous life of the young Yugoslav people, I think that it will be exactly in the direction of Greece and Turkey that the march will begin.

Stoyadinovitch dealt very little with Albania. The latter, he said, was of great importance when European diplomacy succeeded in keeping Italy and Yugoslavia apart and hostile. For us it represented a weapon aimed at our flank. But today, when the atmosphere is different, the Albanian problem returns to its true proportions: that of an unimportant local problem. I agreed with Stoyadinovitch. And as good faith demanded, I told him I was preparing in a few weeks' time to visit King Zog, just as I had visited the capitals of all allied and friendly countries. No objection on Stoyadinovitch's side.

Of the great and distant countries M. Stoyadinovitch spoke only of England as the one which, without any direct cause, claims or aspires to exercise a considerable influence on Yugoslav policy.

'During sanctions England attempted to thrust us much further than we went in the policy of hostility to Italy. When sanctions were over England continued to flatter us and to promise us aid in the Mediterranean. We have no need of it. Meanwhile I wonder if England is in a position to help us or any other country in the Mediterranean, in view of the fact that she has so often had to solicit our aid when she found herself at daggers drawn with you. And then, I have no faith in British re-armament. Poker is an Anglo-Saxon game and we all know that bluff is very often used in an attempt to save at least part of one's money. Even if England carries through her material re-armament, it will not mean that she has re-assumed her role in the world. She has depended too long on miracle-working by the League to be capable of grasping the sword. I set no store by the League of Nations. I belong to it, and must continue to do so, more owing to the force of public opinion and the force of inertia, than to personal conviction. I have the honour never to have been at Geneva, and that honour I intend to maintain always. The pact which I have formed with you, and which in spite of possible quibbles on interpretation is certainly a pact outside and perhaps even contrary to the League of Nations, is another proof of my meagre sympathy for Geneva. The formal recognition of the Italian Empire is another. When the French and English protest at what they call recognition *de jure*, I will reply that I had no means of making a recognition *de*

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

facto. And if they bewail the fact that I took this decision without informing them I will reply that not even London and Paris informed me when they closed the Legation at Addis Ababa. Similarly I propose to reply to France, whom I have never informed of the course of the Rome negotiations, in spite of the Havas *communiqués*, that the suggestion for an agreement with Italy actually came from their President of the Council. Then it was Laval,¹ now it is Blum. It is not my fault if in France the Government and opinion change so often.'

I have attempted to summarise at some length my conversations with M. Stoyadinovitch. They reflect his personality, which made a truly profound impression on me. Stoyadinovitch is a Fascist. If he is not one by virtue of an open declaration of party loyalty, he is certainly one by virtue of his conception of authority, of the State and of life. His position in the country is pre-eminent. With the support of Prince Paul, who declared to me that he had unlimited confidence in and cordial sympathy for him, and through working at the head of a party which includes the great majority of the country, Stoyadinovitch already has the marks of dictator in Yugoslavia, and is preparing to display them even more in the future. He is inspired by an unbending will and has a clear and open mind. His plans are fairly obvious from what he told me and what I have summarised above. With regard to Italy, he certainly intends to push on with the work of union and collaboration. Moreover, by signing the pact of 25th March, he has clearly undertaken—and he told me so—to follow this road. And from the impression I gained during my short stay in Yugoslavia I became convinced that there is a great advantage for us in intensifying communication with our Eastern neighbours.

In the economic field, too, Stoyadinovitch foresees even greater possibilities. As far as the military autarchy of the Italo-Yugoslav system is concerned, our neighbour's raw materials and our industrial equipment complement each other in a happy manner.

With this in view, Stoyadinovitch and I agreed to remain in contact so as to prepare and submit to the Duce, in due course, a vast plan of action.

With the Belgrade agreements, and above all in the atmosphere which Stoyadinovitch created at Belgrade, I believe that Italo-Yugoslav collaboration is destined to develop and to play a dominant role in the Balkan peninsula and the Danubian region. We, for our part, must now develop well-planned activity so as to make the most of these favourable conditions. Meanwhile we must take a long and broad view and not linger over little problems

¹Pierre Laval. From 27th January, 1931 to 12th January, 1932, leader of a Right-Centre Government, then Foreign Minister from 9th October, 1934, in Flandin's Cabinet, and from 7th June, 1935, to January, 1936 also President of the Council. On 22nd June, 1940, he became Minister of State and the Vice-President of the Vichy Government. Executed for collaboration with the enemy on 15th October, 1945.

AGREEMENT WITH YUGOSLAVIA

of a personal character, which certain interested parties are attempting and will attempt to keep alive in order to compromise the growing friendship and the future alliance between Italy and Yugoslavia.

We agreed with Stoyadinovitch to dispel immediately, and openly, any misunderstanding which might arise in the future or any suspicion which those powers, disappointed at our union, will inevitably attempt to instil into our minds in an attempt to trouble the waters, which we intend to keep untroubled.

With this in view, and in addition to normal diplomatic channels, Stoyadinovitch has accredited to me for any confidential and urgent communications that might arise his brother, who is closely associated with him. For similar cases, I suggested Anfuso¹ to him.

Furthermore, in view of the short distance, we will be able to see each other with a certain degree of frequency. In August he proposes, and I encouraged him, to spend a few days at the Venice Lido. Later, in November, he will be in Rome to pay his respects to the Duce. It is also possible to contemplate, in the future, a visit by the Regent Paul.

Industry, the banks and culture must adjust themselves towards this new, natural and unique outlet for Fascist Italy. In Belgrade I found, as in no other capital in the world, a profound knowledge of the Italian language and culture. Not only among old people of the higher classes, but also in the younger generations—those who came into the world when the conflict between the two Adriatic nations was at its most violent—some accurate knowledge of Italian was almost universal.

If that has been possible during the twenty years of bitter friction, there is every reason to believe that in the new atmosphere produced by the agreements—and which they will continue to produce—Italy will shortly be able, to our advantage, to take the place in Yugoslavia of France herself—the France which has always tried to keep us out with such care.

¹Filippo Anfuso, Italian Diplomat, personal friend of Ciano, whose *chef de cabinet* he became, a post he filled until 1942 when he was appointed Minister to Rumania.

VIII

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

22nd April—22nd May, 1937.

In the first months of 1937 the perils which threatened Austrian independence began to be spoken of persistently and with a note of alarm. Nazi pressure was obvious, sheltering behind the agreements of 11th July and violating them systematically in letter and spirit day after day. The German annexionist drive, which had ample means at its disposal and did not hesitate to incite use of violence and fraud, kept the country in a state of continual unrest bordering on civil war. The Austrian Fatherland Front, on which Schuschnigg relied, contained this drive with ever greater difficulty as the Austrian Nazis, though representing only a minute fraction of the population,¹ were organised and led by numerous, highly trained German agents and agitators. They also had the open support of the entire German propaganda machinery, whereas Austrian patriotic propaganda was shackled by the July Agreement which Schuschnigg was determined to observe rigorously. Under such circumstances, and compelled to remain strictly on the defensive, it was virtually impossible for the security forces to maintain law and order; more or less violent incidents and clashes between patriots and Hitler's fifth column occurred almost daily. However, Austrian resistance was in any case strong enough to draw the attention of the European Chancelleries, and of world opinion, to Germany's campaign against her small neighbour—a campaign that had been going on almost without interruption since the day of Hitler's rise to power; and that resistance also induced Berlin to take every step that might help to terminate a situation which, if prolonged, would prove extremely embarrassing for the Reich. It was therefore decided that the Reich Foreign Minister should visit Vienna at the end of February. Von Neurath arrived in the Austrian capital on the 22nd of that month and stayed until the next day. His arrival was preceded by an announcement in the Berlin Deutsche Diplomatisch-Politische Korrespondenz in which it was stated that after the Agreement of the 11th July it was not necessary to proceed to any further formal contracts between the two countries. What required to be done to 'render relations between Austria and Germany normal' had, in fact, been done on

¹On the eve of the German invasion (13th March, 1938) the Nazi party in Austria had just under 80,000 registered members, i.e. about 2% of the adult population.

11th July, 1936. *It was a question, on the contrary, of giving practical expression to the principle then laid down: 'In view of the exceptional circumstances which obtained before the 11th July, it is clear that, from that point of view, there is still something to be done.'* This was a clear warning that Germany was far from satisfied with the advantages she had gained in the course of a few months. In fact, Austrian independence was in greater peril than ever because for economic and military reasons,¹ as well as for reasons of prestige, the 'liquidation of the Austrian problem' had become for the Reich a matter of pressing urgency. On the day after Neurath's arrival tumultuous incidents took place. The Viennese Nazis staged a demonstration which led to clashes and arrests, and provoked an immediate counter-demonstration of the Fatherland Front. Schuschnigg continued to resist desperately. A great open-air rally of the Front gave him an opportunity for a speech in which he declared in unequivocal terms that he would 'not cease to insist, as was natural, on the full and unlimited national sovereignty of our State'; and once again he addressed an appeal to Italy, whose constant understanding he could vouch for 'with quite exceptional satisfaction.' On the same occasion the Chancellor also formulated the question of a Habsburg restoration in precise terms, declaring that it was an internal affair of the State and not a subject 'for experiment'; it would be resolved if and when possible and opportune. This was another bid to secure the support of Rome, which was averse to the restoration, particularly since the Germans had both hinted and clearly stated that they would not hear of it.

Then Schuschnigg went to Budapest to accompany President Miklas, and took the opportunity to inform the Hungarians of his worries. He found more sympathy and understanding than on previous occasions. The policy of Gömbös, in spite of official declarations to the contrary, had had its day. Kánya watched the development of the international situation with uneasiness and was not indifferent to hints from London. Schuschnigg stayed in the Hungarian capital from 18th to 19th March. When he left an official statement had been agreed upon in which it was stated that the collaboration of the signatories of the Rome Protocols was 'the surest defence against any attempt to upset the peaceful development of Europe.'

¹The most impatient annexationist among the members of the Reich Government was Hermann Goering, whose responsibilities included the execution of the Four Years Plan. At Cabinet meetings he repeatedly stressed the urgency of the *Anschluss*; the proposed development of Germany's industrial and military potential would be much delayed, or prove altogether impossible, unless the Reich obtained very soon full control of Austria's financial and industrial resources and of her raw materials and man power. Of course, German propaganda continued nevertheless to present Germany's economic situation as infinitely more favourable than that of Austria, and the *Anschluss* as the only means to save Austria from an economic catastrophe.

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

On 25th March, Ciano signed the Belgrade agreements. How was this to be reconciled with the policy of the Rome Protocols? Was it not the sign of a change in Fascist foreign policy, and of a perilous detachment, if not absolute indifference to events in Central Europe? Probably it was not altogether by chance that the next day Hodza, the Czech Prime Minister, arrived in Vienna on a private visit. That told on the nerves of Berlin, and of Rome to a lesser degree. But Schuschnigg appeared to have decided to play all his cards without exception. On 9th April, Beck, too, visited Vienna. Then, on the 22nd Schuschnigg himself set off to meet Mussolini in Venice, where he had with him conversations lasting two days.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND CHANCELLOR SCHUSCHNIGG, IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Venice, 22nd April, 1937—XIV

Chancellor Schuschnigg began by stating that any change in the lines of his foreign policy, a change which has been recently referred to on several occasions, is entirely out of the question. Austrian policy continues to be guided by the Rome Protocols and, as far as possible, by the Agreement of 11th July. It is a fact that to-day relations with Germany are correct, but one must distinguish between relations with the Government and with the Party, which in its propaganda and actions is attempting to overstep the limits laid down in the Agreement of 11th July. The Press, too, with regard to which a useful truce had been observed, has in recent days resumed its attacks for trivial motives and with unprecedented violence. That makes the Chancellor's collaboration with Germany very difficult, since the radical elements of the National Front¹ take offence at these polemics and rebuke the Chancellor for his *rapprochement* with Berlin. Germany ought, at this moment, to make a gesture of goodwill to Austria, a gesture which has been long awaited. The circles which up to the present have shown themselves to be most easily influenced are the military ones; cordial relations have been established between the armed forces of the Federal Republic and of the Reich, but the Party, on the other hand, is continuing its policy of intensive propaganda, which very often takes on an anti-Italian tinge.

Nevertheless, the Chancellor intends to continue to pursue a policy of collaboration and peace with Germany, and to that end he pledges himself to apply the Agreement of 11th July in its entirety.

¹Meaning the Austrian Fatherland Front.

He mentions the rumours current in Venice referring to Prince Rohan's¹ journey to Italy, and states that, as a result of these rumours, the negotiations which were in progress with National Socialist circles have come to a halt. (The Duce makes clear what Rohan did in Rome, and in particular that he did not even receive him, confining himself to reading the *aide-mémoire* left with the Foreign Minister by Rohan himself).

Austrian *émigrés* in Germany still have permission to carry on considerable activity. Their number remains very high, and it is calculated that there are between ten and twenty thousand.

Granted all the above, the Chancellor states that there is no possibility of authoritarian Austria's aligning herself with the ultra-democratic Paris-Prague axis. That would entail a change in internal policy which must be excluded.

There has been a great deal of talk recently of relations between Austria and Czechoslovakia. The two countries have, in fact, a common interest—that is, not to be attacked by Germany. It is obvious that a German attack on Czechoslovakia, leading to the semi-encirclement of Austria, would also be fatal to the latter. Nevertheless, no agreement of a political character exists or is foreseen between the two countries.

During his last visit to Vienna, Hodza² sketched the Czechoslovak position as follows: no military pact with Russia as yet; a tendency to improve relations with Poland; the impossibility of reaching an agreement with Hungary; constant German pressure; should all other ties fail, Czechoslovakia will have to throw herself into the arms of Russia. But that can still be avoided by other friendships; and that preferred above all others would be friendship with Italy.

As regards the much debated question of the Restoration, the Chancellor says it should be quite clear that he is never inspired by sheer obstinacy; but in view of the present international and internal situation, it must also be clear that this problem is not a real one (the Chancellor expressed himself in this sense to Neurath, too, during his recent visit to Vienna). Therefore, in practice, no surprise move will be forthcoming in that direction, but, as a matter of principle, he cannot renounce the Restoration. He confirms that the problem is of an internal character and that he has never thought

¹Prince Karl Anton Rohan, editor of the *Europäische Revue* and founder of the Federation Internationale des Unions Intellectuelles. One of the earliest Nazi 'fellow-travellers' in Austria. Regarded as rather eccentric, he had little influence, and was taken seriously only by a small circle of semi-intellectuals.

²Milan Hodza, Slovak politician; one-time intimate of the heir-apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, with whom he prepared plans for the federalisation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Czechoslovak Premier from November, 1935 until the Munich crisis, and from December, 1935 also Foreign Minister. Advocated plans for close economic co-operation among the Danubian States, and also for a political combination Prague-Vienna-Budapest. Resigned on 26th September, 1938, and left the country.

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

of asking for Italian intervention. In actual fact, nothing has occurred in Austria to justify all the Press campaigns and polemics which have arisen over the monarchy. That proves that his opponents have taken advantage of these arguments to create difficulties for him, since in the struggle the Fatherland Front is waging against Nazi propaganda, the collaboration provided by the monarchists must be considered most useful and indispensable. The Chancellor informs the Duce that Neurath had made specific objections to the Habsburgs and Wittelsbachs;¹ if the problem arose, he would accept Liechtenstein.² The reason given by Neurath for Germany's opposition to the Restoration is the danger represented by the attraction a monarchy in Austria would exercise on the South Germans.

In conclusion the Chancellor stresses that he is seeking and will continue to seek friendship with Germany. No conflict need separate these two States because their interests are and should be identical, provided the differences caused by the religion, culture and the national spirit of Austria itself are respected. The threat to independence must today be considered substantial. If, however, the Germans mean to talk of an *Anschluss* planned for an indeterminate future, he makes no objection. But it is certain that the present generation wishes to preserve the independence of the country, the loss of which would constitute a loss for Germany herself and for German culture.

Such being the state of affairs, he hopes—and has never doubted—that Italy's political line with regard to Austria neither has been nor is about to be modified. Recently it has been often repeated that Italy has adopted a new policy, and this has produced in Austria a state of nervousness which it would be well to remove at once by demonstrating instead that Italy is maintaining her old attitude, since there is nothing in Austrian policy or in the Austrian situation to suggest fundamental changes.

The Duce replies to the Chancellor that on the occasion of his last conversation with Goering he had to confirm to him that our attitude towards the Austrian problem was unchanged, being based, as always, on the necessity for Austrian independence. Goering said that the question of the *Anschluss* was not officially under consideration, but he must stress how badly Austria was behaving to Germany by applying the agreement of 11th July inadequately and with so many mental reservations. When passing through Austria, he himself had had to travel with drawn curtains, and the Nazi population had been kept away from the stations to prevent their demonstrating in his favour. Goering had reaffirmed that Germany could not be uninterested in the fate of seven million pure Germans, just as she could not be uninterested, if in certain cases only with

¹Bavarian ruling house, whose last sovereign, Ludwig III, abdicated on 7th November, 1918.

²Francis I, Prince of Liechtenstein, born 28th August, 1853, died 25th July, 1938.

respect to their spiritual and cultural life, in all the other German groups which exist in Europe. But that had been recognised as legitimate even by us and by the Schuschnigg Government itself, which stated—like all previous Austrian Governments—that Vienna could not pursue its policy without Berlin, and even less against Berlin. It was important to reaffirm, however, that it was unnecessary to raise the problem of the *Anschluss* at present, and that it was necessary instead to stress Austrian independence and integrity.

Speaking of the problem of the Restoration, the Duce states that on this subject he had expressed the opinion that it was impracticable, ever since the time when he had discussed it with Chancellor Dollfuss¹ and General Gömbös.² He reaffirms his faith in the monarchical system, but also says that the Restoration in Austria would presuppose an international atmosphere which does not exist today, and would represent a grave danger of disorders.

The attitude adopted by the *Giornale d'Italia* some time ago to this problem was due to the alternative which the Anglo-French Press had presented us: Italy must choose either the *Anschluss* or the Restoration. This manoeuvre was evidently prompted by the desire to provoke a clash between Rome and Berlin, and to make difficult the negotiations then in progress with Yugoslavia, which has been and continues to be hostile to the Restoration, particularly because of the effect the monarchy would have in Croatia. When the *Giornale d'Italia* said it was out of the question that the Fascist Government should favour the Habsburg restoration, international speculation went on to state that the *Anschluss* was therefore desired by Rome. That is false. The alternative does not exist. Neither of the two solutions is urgent; Austria can continue to live, as it has lived up till now, with its federal Government, and must look to the future, which is still obscure, to see what new elements may be brought into play.

The situation in Europe is today characterised by the existence in practice of two blocs which have automatically come to be formed on an ideological basis, and whose divergence has been accelerated and increased by events in Spain. It is impossible to conceal that the Bolshevik peril exists today and that it would become much more serious if the Comintern were to achieve victory in the Spanish struggle.

¹Engelbert Dollfuss, Christian Social Party leader, was elected Federal Chancellor on 29th May, 1932, and took over also the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Defence, and Agriculture. His sincerity and his courage and determination in the face of the growing German menace soon made him the most popular figure in Austria, and even the events of 12th February, 1934, when he permitted the use of armed forces to put down a rising of Left-wing Socialists, did little damage to his personal prestige. The great Austrian nationalist and patriotic movement, later organised under the name of the Fatherland Front, was his creation. On 25th July, 1934 Dollfuss was assassinated by a gang of Nazi terrorists. The complicity of members of the German Government and other leading Nazi functionaries has been established.

²Jakfai Gömbös, Hungarian Minister for War from 1929, and Premier from 1932 until his death on 6th October, 1936.

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

In that eventuality there is no doubt that France would move even more markedly to the Left, and that would certainly cause a revision of British policy since, historically, London has always opposed any openly revolutionary movement among her French neighbours.

To be precise, the reasons which make the Rome-Berlin axis solid are of two kinds. The first is a matter of foreign policy in so far as Italy must assure herself of a solid continental position in order to be able to continue to face the scarcely concealed British hostility in the Mediterranean. The 'gentlemen's agreement', signed in January, merely had the effect of producing a brief period of calm in relations between Rome and London, but very soon the situation became difficult again, and the two countries have shown that they continue to nourish mutual suspicions and distrust.

The other reason is the solidarity of the authoritarian regimes. It is obvious that between Fascism and Nazism there are substantial differences. We are Catholics, full of pride and respect for our religion. We do not admit the racial theories, particularly in their juridical consequences. In economy, too, we follow different systems. But on the positive side, the two regimes find themselves confronted by the same enemies, since the democratic bloc, whose active existence is being revealed increasingly openly, is attempting to isolate the two Powers in order to be able to eliminate them. All the speculation in the Press on the recent Degrelle¹ case, which was no more than an electoral fight, proves how the democracies wish, by any means, to limit the area of the countries with authoritarian regimes. In the failure of Degrelle they wished to see a defeat for Fascism and Nazism.

It is evident that the more they try to isolate us, the closer the two countries will come in a common ideological and national policy. In that case, the separation of Rome and Berlin would be most serious for both countries, since the democratic coalition would have a much easier task.

But it is here that the Austrian problem presents itself in its full importance. It is often thought that Austria must represent the point of friction in Italo-German relations, and therefore international speculation works to create difficulties.

The policy pursued by Austria up to now has produced good results; therefore she must continue to follow the same path. In Vienna, while emphasising Austria to be a German State, it will be necessary to affirm that there exist substantial differences due to religion, culture and a different *Weltanschauung*, and that friendly relations with Germany will be improved by Austrian national inde-

¹Léon Degrelle, leader of the Rexist movement in Belgium, whose programme resembled closely those of the totalitarian regimes. After a spectacular electoral campaign Degrelle was defeated by 275,000 votes against 69,000. His victorious opponent was van Zeeland who stood for the Government of National Union and the existing constitutional order.

pendence. And since even in the Reich there are strong influences in favour of a *détente* with Austria, it is necessary to rely on them and consolidate them. The improved relations between military circles are certainly significant and promising. It is necessary to work actively in this direction.

As far as France is concerned, the Duce said that our relations can be summarised as follows: the further France moves to the Left, the further it moves away from us. It is a strange situation in view of the fact that there are no questions outstanding between the two countries; but, on the other hand, the attitude of concealed and irritating hostility is still unaltered. We realise that France is very annoyed by the existence of the Rome-Berlin Axis. If we think back to the war we shall see what importance the Italo-German agreement can have in French schemes. It was solely owing to Italy's benevolent attitude that the German advance was halted by French resistance. There is no doubt that even now the only dominating thought in the French mind is the security of the Rhine. That security seems uncertain if Italy has ties with Germany. However, one should not consider that Germany is preparing to attack France. The Germans boast of no territorial claims in that direction, and are well aware that to break the French defence line it would be necessary to sacrifice millions upon millions of men. It must be thought, on the contrary, that their energies will be directed entirely towards the East.

Another pawn which the Austrian Government must not neglect in its game for the maintenance of national independence is that represented by the good relations which exist between Budapest and Berlin. For very many reasons the Magyar Government must consider itself to have an interest in the existence of Austria; it should therefore be possible to bring Magyar influence to bear on the Government of the Reich. It is true that of late relations between Budapest and the Reich have cooled somewhat as a result of the strong Nazi propaganda which has been carried on, particularly among the groups of Germans resident in Hungary; however, it must be borne in mind that relations between the two countries are very close and that the line of conduct adopted by Hungary towards the possibility of the *Anschluss* would be given due consideration by the rulers of Germany.

Finally, explaining the trends and aims of the recent Belgrade agreement, the Duce runs rapidly over the history of the vicissitudes through which our relations with Yugoslavia have passed in recent years; one must, however, also consider the Belgrade Pact—apart from its having been suggested by the advisability of maintaining cordial relations with an adjoining country—in relation to our strategic situation in the Mediterranean. The political importance of Yugoslavia is evident, and everyone remembers that one of Britain's principal preoccupations, when tension arose in our relations with

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

London, was that of grouping under a single system of anti-Italian agreements Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece. It is true that, with the termination of sanctions, the agreements were declared to have lapsed, yet it seemed to us most useful to produce a new situation favourable to us. There are no questions outstanding between Italy and Yugoslavia. On the contrary, economic interests which are easily adaptable to trade and are mutually complementary, suggest and facilitate an agreement.

With regard to Albania, too, we have been able to reach an agreement. This question, which at one time was of prime importance to Italo-Yugoslav relations, has now been solved to our complete satisfaction. Albanian independence, which up till now has been guaranteed only by Italy, is today assured by Rome and by Belgrade. For that reason, too, the agreement has been favourably received in Albania. Furthermore, one must not forget that Yugoslavia has concluded a far-reaching and important political pact outside the framework of the League of Nations.

Finally, as regards the relations between the Belgrade Agreement and the Rome Protocols, the Duce considers that it may shortly be possible to make Yugoslavia adhere to the agreements between Italy, Austria and Hungary.

Summing up the conversation, the Duce concludes by saying that Italy confirms its policy aimed at maintaining Austrian independence and integrity, synchronising it and bringing it into harmony with the Rome-Berlin Axis.

In the next conversation, which took place on 23rd April at 11 o'clock between the Duce and Schuschnigg, the agenda relating to political questions having been exhausted, the following topics were discussed:

1. *Italo-Austrian Commercial Relations.* The Chancellor requested that, for political reasons, Austro-Italian trade should not be reduced, or at least not so as to be felt too much. The Duce said he would give instructions to Guarneri to examine the problem not only from the economic and financial points of view, but also bearing in mind the political needs of the moment.

2. *Treatment of the German-speaking Minorities in the Alto Adige.* Chancellor Schuschnigg requested and obtained information of our undertakings to the Yugoslavs on the treatment to be given to the Slovene minorities. He requested the setting up of a German language school at the Austrian Consulate but received the reply that such a request could not be considered since the Reich, too, would put forward a similar request, and it would be impossible for us to refuse.

Without going into details, the Chancellor requested and received the assurance that German-speaking minorities will not in any event receive treatment inferior to that given to non-Italian-speaking Slovenes.

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

Finally, some questions of minor importance also relating to the minorities of the Alto Adige were examined and satisfactorily solved.¹

Two weeks later von Neurath went to Rome from 3rd to 5th May. The visit took place after a long series of meetings between Fascist and Nazi personalities, and another trip by Goering who had spent the last week of April in Italy and had had another conversation with Mussolini lasting three hours. (Goering had at that time a peculiar predilection for Italy; from 14th to 16th May he was in Venice where his stay was of a somewhat mysterious 'private' nature). It was on the eve of the first anniversary of the foundation of the Empire. A week later there was to take place the coronation ceremony of George VI of England, from which only Fascist Italy would be absent, because the Negus, too, had been invited.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND VON NEURATH.

Rome, 3rd May, 1937—XIV

Spain. Baron von Neurath states that the Fuehrer has decided to despatch the 40 anti-tank guns requested for the Italian troops.

The Duce thanks him for the information and makes some observations on the slow progress of the war on Franco's side. It is his intention to continue to aid General Franco until the end of May; then, should nothing new transpire, he will offer him the following alternative: either a rapid advance or the withdrawal of the Italian troops. Therefore the Duce proposes that at the beginning of May a meeting should take place at Rome, in which the accredited representatives of the Fuehrer would also take part, to examine the situation and decide what action should be taken.

Baron von Neurath agrees and accepts the proposal.

Locarno. Baron von Neurath draws attention to the British attempt to separate Germany from Italy in the Locarno question by substituting for the old pact a series of bilateral pacts from which Italy would be automatically excluded.

Austria. Baron von Neurath states that the Fuehrer intends to keep as the basis of his policy towards Austria the Pact of 11th July. Although the question is the subject of lively interest, it is not considered by the Germans to be acute. They make one exception,

¹On the second day of the Venice meeting Mussolini found it necessary to leave his Austrian guests to their own devices whilst he inspected a German 'Strength-through-Joy' ship which, dressed overall and flying an outsize swastika flag, had tied up not far from the Chancellor's hotel. Nor was he at the station when the Austrian party took the train to return to Vienna, 'urgent affairs of state' having recalled him, a few hours previously, to Rome. These two gestures amply confirmed what some observers had already begun to suspect, that the Duce had definitely made up his mind to abandon Austria to her fate.

however—that of the Habsburg Restoration, which would involve an immediate revision of German policy.

The Duce outlines to von Neurath the results of the recent meeting at Vienna, which may be rapidly summarised thus: Austria—a German state which cannot pursue any anti-German policy; no Austrian policy towards Prague, since it would cause Austria to be brought into the democratic system, and undermine the Rome Protocols; Restoration considered impracticable at any time, but Schuschnigg is unable to make a declaration of principle to that effect in view of the internal nature of the problem.

The Duce tells von Neurath that at bottom the Austrians have no other wish than to live in the shadow of mighty Germany while preserving their independence, and draws attention to the advisability of granting them treatment similar to that which Germany has given to the Poles with whom a *modus vivendi* has been reached, even if only by means of a mere *mariage de convenance*.

As far as Nazi collaboration in the Schuschnigg Government is concerned, the Duce says that he has advised Schuschnigg to accept representation of the Nationalist parties. He stresses, however, that there must be a difference in systems between Austria and Germany, since it would be impossible in Austria to adopt an anti-Catholic or too markedly anti-Semitic attitude.

Relations with the Church: Baron von Neurath, after having summarised the events which led to the acute state of tension between the Holy See and Germany,¹ says that it is the German Government's intention to reach a settlement with the Holy See on a basis similar to the agreement concluded between the Holy See and Italy.

The Duce agrees and advises action to be taken to this end—that is towards reaching an agreement on the following lines: politics are reserved for the State, religion is reserved for the Church.

England: Baron von Neurath says that English policy is being revealed with increasing clarity—to strike Italy first and then Germany, or even both countries together. British insistence on collective pacts aims at tying the hands of both authoritarian States. Germany is not disposed to accede to the proposals for collective pacts.

The Duce confirms that the Italian line of conduct is identical.

Rumania: Baron von Neurath says that Germany, too, now considers it advisable to attract Rumania into the political system of the Rome-Berlin Axis. He points out, however, the difficulties which will arise from the Hungarian side.

¹Relationship between the Holy See and the Nazi Reich had begun to deteriorate almost immediately after the signing of the Concordat which the German Government disregarded more and more openly. The crisis here referred to arose from the publication, on 14th March, of the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* in which the Pope protested against flagrant violations of the Concordat and condemned the Nazi racial theories as utterly incompatible with Christianity.

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

The Duce states that, for his part, he is unwilling to take any action involving the Rumanians if the Hungarians have not first signified their approval.

Baron von Neurath is of the same opinion and they remain in agreement to that effect.

After a short discussion, during which internal conditions in Russia and relations between Germany, Italy and Japan are examined, the conversation ends.

In the second half of May Victor Emmanuel and Queen Elena returned the visit paid by Admiral Horthy in the preceding autumn. Ciano accompanied the sovereigns to Budapest and met Kánya, who had just returned from the coronation of George VI.

CONVERSATION WITH DARÁNYI AND KÁNYA.

Budapest, 19th-22nd May, 1937—XV

During my conversations with President Darányi and his minister Kánya, we made a wide review of affairs, examining all problems which directly or indirectly concern the policy of both countries. I must first state that from the beginning of the conversations I noticed in Kánya a certain perplexity, due in particular to certain doubts he harboured over our policy towards Austria, our negotiations with Rumania, and our relations with England. These doubts were apparently not shared by President Darányi.

Later I shall say how I was able to give the necessary assurances to Kánya, with the result that at the end of the conversations, he explicitly stated that no uncertainty now existed in his mind with regard to our lines of action.

Central Europe: I told my interlocutors the results of the Venice conversations. My statement was, they said, in complete agreement with that already made by Schuschnigg on the occasion of his visit to Budapest.

During his conversations in London, Kánya had been repeatedly told by the English that, occupied in Africa with our colonial and pan-Islamic policy, and in Spain with the anti-Bolshevik campaign, we were preparing to cease to show any interest in the Austrian problem, which was entirely to the advantage of Nazi Germany. Eden has openly advised Kánya to attempt to form a breakwater against German pressure along with Austria and Czechoslovakia.

He had at the same time allowed it to be understood that English interest in events in Central Europe could not be other than platonic. Kánya, on the other hand, had replied that Hungary, while concerned at the possibility of the spread of German power towards the borders, neither believed it possible to change, nor intended to change, her line of policy, which was based on friendship with Italy and collaboration with Germany.

Kánya, however, had doubts over our active interest in Austrian independence, and Gayda's¹ article in particular had gone far to confirm him and (so he said) many Hungarian and Austrian circles in the opinion that Italy was gradually withdrawing from her position on the Austrian question.

I countered this with the familiar arguments, and told him that only one possibility would immediately jeopardise our support of Austria: that is Vienna's alignment with the Democratic-Bolshevik axis of Paris-Prague-Moscow.

Kánya noted my statement and appeared to be highly satisfied by it.

As far as relations with the Little Entente are concerned, I recounted the conversations with Stoyadinovitch with a wealth of detail and great precision, and illustrated the results of the Belgrade Pact. As far as Rumania is concerned I confirmed that, in spite of all rumours, in spite of the real interest we might have in bringing her into our system, we had no negotiations in hand nor did we intend to begin them until such time as Hungary had informed us that the situation produced by a pact between Rome and Bucharest was not only admissible, but was considered useful and acceptable to Hungarian policy.

Kánya, while sketching Hungarian relations with the three neighbouring States, told me that he had welcomed the Belgrade Pact with understanding, and that an absolute majority of Hungarians too, had realised the important reasons which had produced it and the beneficial results which it might have for the Magyar nation. Kánya further welcomed with the liveliest satisfaction my statements on our policy *vis-à-vis* Rumania. As far as the present situation of Hungary is concerned, he stressed that the only State with which it could draw up a pact at any moment is Czechoslovakia, which continually renews its offers. But that is not, for the present at least, amongst the intentions of the Hungarian Government. With Yugoslavia, relations have undergone a remarkable strengthening, but for the moment, as a result of the recent agreements reached in Belgrade at the meeting of the Little Entente, a separate agreement with Belgrade must be considered out of the question.

Relations are more difficult with Rumania, where the pressure on the Hungarian minorities is daily becoming greater and more painful, and where public opinion is distinctly anti-Hungarian in attitude.

As things are, Kánya does not foresee the possibility of an immediate development in the situation. There has been talk in some Hungarian circles of the possibility of carrying on negotiations with the three States simultaneously so as to arrive at bilateral

¹Virginio Gayda, director of the official daily paper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, and, in particular, mouthpiece of the Foreign Minister.

pacts with each of them, leaving it to time to allow those pacts to survive which had some vitality in them, and to allow the one which is not wanted in Hungary to perish—that is to say, the pact with Czechoslovakia. However, no decision has been taken for the moment, and Kánya confirms that before initiating negotiations in any direction he will make contact with the Fascist Government.

Relations with England: During his London journey Kánya had conversations with Eden and Vansittart who declared that England earnestly desired to reach an understanding with Italy, and that in their opinion there should now be no substantial obstacle to it.

So much for what Kánya told me. But I believe, that, in reality, the two English politicians described our attitude to England as that of someone who aims at provoking a conflict, and that had deeply impressed Kánya. The latter repeated to me several times numerous reflections on English strength and on the democratic alliances which would automatically surround Great Britain were she attacked by us.

Darányi, who is less of a diplomat and more openly friendly towards us, then asked me the explicit question: 'Does Mussolini want to make war on England?'

I replied by listing the series of gestures made by us to make the resumption of relations with Britain possible, and the incontestable series of numerous provocations which have recently come from Britain. In the future, too, we wish to do our best to render relations with England normal, but meantime our eyes are not closed to reality, and, in the face of English preparations, our preparations are proceeding methodically and surely. Similarly there is no possibility of Italian withdrawal before any British aggression.

Relations with France: The Hungarians repeated that there have been renewed French attempts to weaken the political system of the Rome Protocols and to detach Hungary from the Rome-Berlin Axis, but French action has been only sporadic and principally with English support. Relations between Hungary and France remain on a completely conventional basis, all the more so since the Hungarian people feels no bond of sympathy with the French nation.

What were perhaps more persistent and better organised efforts were those made by the Paris Government on Schmidt, but Kánya assures me that the latter's behaviour was absolutely irreproachable during the visits to Paris and London.

Delbos was given clearly to understand that any strengthening of relations with France and even with Czechoslovakia was possible in the economic field, but that it was out of place to talk of new political ties.

As a result of requests addressed to me by Darányi in particular I gave assurances that, in spite of the new commercial treaty with

AUSTRIAN INDEPENDENCE THREATENED

Yugoslavia,¹ Hungarian interests will be given special consideration by us. This was all the more favourably received since some Hungarian circles had been afraid of Yugoslav competition and had feared serious and damaging results from it.

Both Darányi and Kánya were anxious to express to me on more than one occasion their satisfaction at the conversations held during my stay in Budapest, and that they had served to dispel any uncertainty which might have arisen over our political aims.

During a conversation I had with him in the Royal Palace, Darányi clearly gave me to understand that he no longer had complete faith in Kánya. He is considering removing him from the Government, exercising great tact. This may occur in October, Kánya's disturbed state of health being taken as a pretext. Either Count Bethlen² or the present Hungarian Minister³ in Bucharest may be called upon to take his place.

¹This treaty had been concluded along with the political agreement of 25th March, 1937.

²Count Stephen Bethlen, leader of the Government from 14th April, 1921 to 19th August, 1931, then head of the Conservative Opposition.

³Lászlo Bardossy, Minister to Bucharest from 1934.

IX

LONDON UNVISITED

2nd June—26th June, 1937.

In May and June the tension in Anglo-Italian relations had begun to become a matter for anxiety. The causes were numerous. One was Rome's policy towards the Moslem world, which Mussolini had underlined in his pompous speech of 18th March in Tripoli when he declared that Fascist Italy intended to 'show her sympathy towards Islam and towards Moslems throughout the world.' Other factors were the British rearmament programme, the progressive consolidation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and, of course, profound differences of opinion and attitude regarding the war in Spain. Continual polemics in the Press had aggravated the situation until on 8th May the Fascist Government ordered the recall of all Italian journalists in London, while entry into Italy was forbidden to the English Press with only a few exceptions. Then at the end of May there came the Barletta incident. An Italian auxiliary vessel, attached to the maritime control organised by the Non-Intervention Committee was attacked on the 24th and 26th May in Palma, Majorca, by aircraft of the Valencia Republican Government and suffered casualties, including six officers killed. It was clear that the matter had nothing to do with London, particularly since alongside the Barletta there were also British ships which had run the same risk. The British Government sought even in these delicate circumstances to avoid a break.

CONVERSATION WITH THE TURKISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 2nd June, 1937—XV

The Turkish Ambassador called on me and communicated the following to me by order of his Foreign Minister:

1. During a conversation with Eden at Geneva, Rustu Aras gained the conviction that the English Government intends to make every effort necessary to reach a complete understanding with Italy. If there is a delay, it is due to the fact that large sections of English public opinion are still hostile to Fascism. Eden had, however, declared that as soon as the recent controversies had subsided, it was his intention to make a statement to the Commons aimed at restoring in full the Mediterranean Agreement of January and at preparing the basis for a wider Anglo-Italian understanding.

2. Rustu Aras was greatly annoyed by the attitude adopted at Geneva to the question of recognition of the Empire by the Polish delegate, Kormanisky.¹ The procedure followed by the Pole was such as to prevent the Assembly from taking a positive decision. If Rustu Aras had been warned in time he would not have failed to gather round himself all those elements who favour the liquidation of the Abyssinian affair in order to make an effective demonstration within the League itself. He did not associate himself with the gesture because he considered that this would have been of little use and preferred, instead, to hold himself in reserve for the month of September when the question will come up again.

I did not omit to point out to the Turkish Ambassador that Rustu Aras's solitary support for the Polish gesture, even if it had had little practical effect on the recognition of the Empire, would have been very well received in Italy and would certainly have reinforced the bonds with Turkey.

Meanwhile a new incident had aggravated the situation. In circumstances similar to those of the Barletta case a German war-ship—the light battleship Deutschland—had been bombed by Republican planes, resulting in 23 dead and 83 wounded. Two days later a German naval squadron had retaliated by shelling the port and town of Almeria, causing heavy loss of life and widespread damage; simultaneously the Reich Government had published a statement to the effect that Germany withdrew from participation in the control system and would no longer take part in the business of the Non-Intervention Committee; and Italy had promptly followed this lead. However, on 3rd June the British Government opened negotiations with Rome, Berlin and Paris with a view to obtaining guarantees for the continuation of international control in all ports of Spain. This step incidentally, was not approved by all sections of public opinion. There was considerable public indignation over the shelling of Almeria and many would have preferred action against Germany. On 12th June agreement between the four Powers was in fact reached, and the Italians and Germans resumed their places on the Committee. The success of the British Government appeared to justify the invitation which it had sent to von Neurath to visit London, even if this might give offence in Rome.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 14th June, 1937—XV

The Ambassador, who called on the pretext of presenting the decoration, informed me that von Neurath has received an official invitation from the British Government to visit London at the end

¹Kormanisky had declared that his Government considered the Abyssinian question finally closed.

LONDON UNVISITED

of the month. 'Since it was a matter of an official invitation, von Neurath was unable to refuse.'

The Ambassador was also instructed to tell us that Neurath wishes to know what he can do in London in our favour.

I received the news with great coldness and pointed out to von Hassell that Neurath's journey to the British capital will undoubtedly give rise to interpretations which it would have been more convenient to avoid. If the mere presence of von Blomberg,¹ a military and non-political member of the Government of the Reich, on the occasion of a formal event like the coronation had the effect of causing rivers of ink to flow, I wondered what effect the Foreign Minister's journey—which cannot be denied to have a political nature—will have and what explanation will be given of it.

I asked von Hassell if an agenda for the conversations had already been prepared. The Ambassador replied that he was not aware of this, but that he would request information from Berlin at once. He is of the opinion, however, that nothing has even been considered since in the view of both the German and British Governments the road from London to Berlin is blocked by a large number of perhaps insurmountable obstacles. He added, finally, that he will do all he can to prevent any interpretation being put on Neurath's visit to London which might tend to weaken the Axis.

But today von Hassell, when giving me the news, could barely conceal his pleasure at the forthcoming political activity of his Minister, to which he has always actively contributed as far as lay in his power.

P.S. I have thought over the occasion when von Neurath recently told us that it would have been better for us to leave the London Committee after the bombardment of Almeria.

Was not the pretext for the journey he announced to us today perhaps already being prepared?

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 16th June, 1937—XV

Von Hassell, who asked to see me this morning, made a communication identical in content, and therefore confirmed that:

- (a) it is a question of English initiative;
- (b) that no agenda has been decided;
- (c) that the conversations will probably be of a general nature, and related specifically to Spain.
- (d) that Neurath will make it clear to the English politicians that no *rapprochement* is possible between Berlin and London, without Rome.

¹Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, War Minister of the Reich from 30th January, 1933, to 5th February, 1938.

LONDON UNVISITED

It was probably no mere chance that on the following day the Popolo d'Italia published an article entitled 'Guadalajara' which once more went over events that were half forgotten and no longer subjects for journalistic controversy. It was from the pen of Mussolini and extremely violent in tone. It described the attitude of the international Press to the operations of 8th March as 'a vituperative campaign of lies and calumnies,' stated that 'in this act of brigandage the British Press has been second to none' and ended with the threat that 'even the dead of Guadalajara' would be avenged. By attempting to torpedo the German cruiser Leipzig on 18th June, the Republican Government did its part towards facilitating Rome's plan and upsetting the proposals put forward by London. It was sufficient to dispel whatever harmony had been achieved between the four Powers, and to lead von Neurath to postpone the journey to London fixed for the 25th June, a journey now fated not to take place.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 19th June, 1937—XV

I received the Ambassador, Drummond, who had requested an audience on the pretext of thanking me for the gift sent on the occasion of his daughter's marriage.

He asked me if I had read the reply given by Eden in the House of Commons following a Labour question on missionaries in Abyssinia. I answered in the affirmative, and Drummond then added that the feeling of moderation which had guided the British Foreign Minister could certainly not have escaped me.

He then went on to speak to me about the article entitled 'Guadalajara'. He began by stating that he spoke in a purely private capacity and therefore with complete frankness. For some time Drummond, who has been advocating to his Government the necessity of quickly reaching an improvement in Anglo-Italian relations, has been giving assurances that the Duce was in favour of an understanding with Britain and that the Italians harboured no aggressive and threatening intentions towards England. The article on 'Guadalajara', which speaks openly of not far distant vendettas, had caused him to reflect and to ask himself if, in his desire to reach an agreement with Italy, he had not allowed himself to be misled.

I replied that he was certainly correct. Since last November the Duce has given proof of his wish to return to normal relations with Great Britain, and the conclusion of the 'gentlemen's agreement' was decisive proof of his desire. Even today I believe I may state that Mussolini is willing to come to an understanding with Great

Britain on the basis of an agreement which is complete and clears up all points—beginning naturally with recognition of the Empire in order to remove any possibility of misunderstanding and friction in the future.

As far as the 'Guadalajara' article is concerned, it will certainly not have escaped the British Ambassador what a wave of enthusiasm its publication caused in Italy. But far from making a *rapprochement* with Britain more difficult, I think it ought to facilitate it. In fact, as I had occasion to tell Drummond after the press incidents over the Bermeo¹ question, the Duce had been deeply wounded by the statements made by English papers about the Italian Army. The publication of the 'Guadalajara' article served, in my opinion, to clear up finally an episode on which so much had been erroneously and slanderously said; it also served, as far as the Duce himself is concerned, to allow him to consider relations with Great Britain with the calm which comes to a man who has been able to express completely what was in his heart.

As far as the 'vendetta' is concerned, Drummond must not forget that our volunteers are still in Spain, and it is obviously on Spanish soil that action is envisaged. The taking of Bilbao is an indication.²

Drummond replied that he noted my point of view with much pleasure and that, for his part, he intended to push on the work of conciliation as much as possible. However, he saw no possibility of arriving at juridical recognition of the Empire before the spring meeting at Geneva. He asked me if I had any suggestions to make in this connection.

I replied that I had no formula ready to place before him, but that I would in any case think over his request; that, for the moment, I confined myself to thanking him for what he had said and telling him that the statements which Eden had recently communicated to me through Grandi had been received with pleasure.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 25th June, 1937—XV

The Ambassador, Sir Eric Drummond, visited me to draw my attention to today's article by Farinacci's *Break off Relations*, and in particular to the last two paragraphs of that article. Drummond pointed out that the author is a member of the Fascist Grand

¹Bermeo had been occupied on 30th April by a 'Black Arrow' battalion. It remained besieged, however, by Republican forces and was only liberated on 3rd May.

²The Franco offensive in Biscay Province, which had begun on 31st March, had reached its final objective on 19th June with the occupation of Bilbao by the Navarra and 'Black Arrow' brigades, and another brigade of Italian 'volunteers'.

³Roberto Farinacci, Secretary of the Fascist Party until 1926, member of the Fascist Grand Council from 1935.

LONDON UNVISITED

Council, and therefore a personality who has a definite political responsibility. He added that the article was an infringement of the agreement reached on Press relations between the two countries, an infringement which might produce reactions in the British Press. Finally he told me that he was particularly concerned over the fact that Farinacci is occasionally credited with being selected by the Duce to act as a kind of *avant-garde* against certain specific objectives.

I replied to Drummond that the article reflected nothing beyond the opinion of its author, who had written on his own initiative and without any prompting. I most emphatically rebutted the possibility of Farinacci's being considered a mouthpiece of the Duce, who—as Drummond well knows—has no need of interpreters, but is accustomed to express his thoughts and proposals with directness and with great clarity. In the case in point I could add that I was informed that the Duce had no knowledge of the article until it was published, and that he had not given Farinacci instructions of any kind.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 26th June, 1937—XV

Von Hassell talked to me this morning on the following points :

1. *Volunteers.* The Ambassador asked me for our attitude to the proposal advanced in London for the withdrawal of an equal number of volunteers from both sides, under British control. Although the German Ambassador was not very definite on the subject, he did not conceal that von Neurath wished to avoid any position which would place a great responsibility on Germany.

I replied that, as things stood, we did not, in the main, intend to withdraw the volunteers from Spain. I realised that we could not simply put this proposition before the London Committee but that we had to entrench ourselves under cover of delaying and obstructionist tactics. It must first of all be borne in mind that, since the system of control was practically disrupted, one could not talk of total or partial evacuation of volunteers until a new system of control had come into force so as to give us a guarantee that any forces which were withdrawn did not then re-enter in secret elsewhere. On the other hand, we, who had been the first to advance the idea of prohibiting the departure of volunteers and political agitators, were in a strong position for maintaining that those who were today fighting in Spain on the Nationalist side went there of their own free will, and that therefore we cannot use force to withdraw them from an enterprise to which we did not commit them. The withdrawal of volunteers should be requested by the parties to the struggle; only then could it be considered, bearing in mind,

LONDON UNVISITED

however, that the composition of the Red volunteer forces is too heterogeneous to guarantee that a withdrawal could take place in an effective and completely satisfactory manner.

I told von Hassell that by using these arguments we could certainly delay any decision on the subject of volunteers for a long time. Von Hassell noted what I said and assured me that on the German side everything will be done to sabotage the discussion.

In reply to my specific question, he said that, according to his information, the Fuehrer is personally opposed to the withdrawal of volunteers; von Neurath less so, if only from the technical point of view.

2. *Control System.* The German Ambassador inquired what our programme and attitude was in view of the situation which has arisen since the withdrawal of Italy and Germany from the control system. He knew of various proposals, which are being aired in London and Paris for filling the gaps caused by the withdrawal of Italian and German components; the Reich Government, for its part, has instructed Ribbentrop not to put forward any proposals, but to confine himself to preventing any new situation producing a disequilibrium in favour of the Valencia Government.

I told von Hassell that we considered that no alteration to or substitution in the control system could be made other than by the Non-Intervention Committee, on which the Reich and Italy are represented, and that therefore, in practice, no decision to replace us can be taken without our consent. I then went on to point out to von Hassell that the actual position in which we are placed by withdrawing our forces from the control system has turned out to be completely unfavourable to ourselves, since the control is in practice reduced to an Anglo-French blockade against the Nationalist Government. By immediately making the gesture of withdrawal along with Germany, the Italian Government had intended to give the Government of the Reich a proof of its absolute solidarity. But today we must call the attention of the Reich Government to the situation which has been created.

Von Hassell agreed on the practical disadvantages which the abandonment of the control system by Germany and Italy has entailed for us and the Nationalist Government, and asked me if we had elaborated any proposal as to the line we should take in the future so as to redress the balance.

I told him that no proposal had in fact been studied by us, but that, after discussing the question with the Duce and receiving instructions from him, I would reserve the right to return to the subject with von Hassell, and therefore requested him to transmit to his Government our point of view on the present situation.

He confirmed that the German Government intends to act in full accord with the Fascist Government.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 26th June, 1937—XV

I again received the Ambassador this evening and communicated the following to him:

1. *Volunteers*: I confirmed, on this subject, what I had already said in our previous conversation about our intentions and plan of action.

2. *Control*: In view of the fact that no decision can be taken outside the Non-Intervention Committee, Italy and Germany will have to oppose the proposal aimed at transforming the international control into an Anglo-French blockade to the prejudice of White Spain. This would inevitably occur if France and Great Britain or satellite Powers of theirs were intended to fill the gaps caused by Italo-German withdrawal. Our representatives in London must let it be clearly understood that if such an eventuality should arise, Italy and Germany would be constrained to denounce the whole Non-Intervention Agreement and withdraw from the London Committee itself.

In order, however, to make an offer of constructive collaboration, Italy and Germany may state that they are willing to study a new system of control. In such a system, freed from the imperfections which led to the present crisis, our two countries could resume their positions.

I told von Hassell that the above represented our suggestion for the line of conduct to be mutually adopted. Naturally we were waiting to learn the opinion of the Reich Government and its objections, if any.

Von Hassell learned of our proposals with much interest and, in principle, showed himself to be distinctly in favour of their acceptance.

At his request I replied that, as far as the new control system was concerned, we were not preparing to submit concrete proposals for the examination of the committee, but that we would, on the contrary, consider it more convenient to wait for a scheme from France and Britain.

X

‘VERY BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY’

19th July—31st July, 1937.

While the situation in Europe became graver and more involved, from the Far East there came rumours of war. On 26th February, 1936, a group of young Japanese officers had killed some of the most prominent members of the Okada Government and attempted a coup d'état. The Hirota Cabinet had not succeeded in solving any of the major problems which beset the country, from the financial one due to the increasing demands of the military to that of stabilising relations with China. The Cabinet had imagined it could escape from the isolation in which it had found itself since the beginning of hostilities in China by entering into the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany. But the only result had been a deterioration of relations with the U.S.S.R. The elections of 30th April, 1937, had not led to any improvement. On the contrary they had led the Hayashi Government to take up an openly unconstitutional attitude. The nomination of Naotake Sato, Japanese Ambassador to Paris, as Foreign Minister, had seemed like the prelude to a radical change in Japan's foreign policy—a disposition to treat China on a basis of parity and to establish more intimate relations with Great Britain and the United States. But that change had not in fact taken place. The military regained the ascendancy, and after the fall of the Hayashi Cabinet on 4th June, the Government formed by Prince Fumimaro Konoye could not be described as different in outlook from its predecessors. The replacement of Sato by Hirota in the field of foreign politics spoke only too clearly for itself. Shortly afterwards there occurred near Peking the incident of the Marco Polo bridge—an exchange of shots between Chinese and Japanese troops, as a result of which the Sino-Japanese war was to flare up again.

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 19th July, 1937—XV

I received the Ambassador, Sugimara, who was paying a farewell visit.

Referring to the situation which has arisen in Northern China,

VERY BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY

he told me that the Chinese attitude is such as to make one consider the outbreak of the conflict almost inevitable. The Japanese are concentrating numerous divisions, and since their transport requires a certain time, an immediate beginning of operations is not to be expected. But, unless Chinese policy changes, it will inevitably take place shortly. It is the Japanese conviction that, behind the Chinese, Moscow is carrying on its anti-Japanese manœuvres. It is, therefore, not to be excluded that the Chinese conflict may at a given moment spread also to the Soviets. On this topic, however, Sugimara made many reservations, since he considers that the Russians will be wary of attacking the Japanese, and since, in his opinion, Japanese military circles themselves would prefer to improve their armament before measuring themselves against Russia. Meanwhile, and this he told me in strict confidence, the first Japanese action will aim at cutting the line of communication which exists between Irkutsk and Peking, so as to prevent the Russian and Chinese forces from joining up.

This being the case, Sugimara drew my attention to the fact that the Chinese Air Force is instructed by Italian officers, and largely composed of Italian material. He said, he quite realised that if the Italians had not gained a footing in Chinese aviation the same work would have been done by the English, the Americans, or even by the Russians themselves. He felt, however, he must call my attention to the position of our officers in the event of an open conflict between China and Japan.

I replied that in China our activities had been purely instructional and commercial, and that, in any case, our pilots were not obliged to participate in operations with the Chinese forces. I assured him that, while for the moment the problem did not arise, we would not fail to examine and solve the problem, bearing in mind the firm bonds of friendship which unite us with Japan and its anti-Bolshevik activities in the Far East.

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 31st July, 1937—XV

I received an official visit from the Japanese Ambassador, M. Hotta,¹ who, on instructions from his Foreign Minister, handed me the attached a letter. Further to the contents of the letter, M. Hotta told me that the Japanese Government would, in order to develop the conversations previously held with Sugimara, be very happy to give more concrete expression to the excellent relations existing between the Italian and Japanese empires.

¹Masaaki Hotta, Japanese Ambassador to Rome from 3rd July, 1937 to October, 1940.

VERY BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY

On my enquiring what proposals he intended to put forward, M. Hotta told me that in the opinion of the Japanese Government it would be possible and convenient to bring about an agreement of an anti-Communist nature between Italy and Japan, of the kind previously reached between Tokyo and Berlin. This understanding could then be completed by a secret agreement which M. Hotta defined as being one 'of technical collaboration in the military field.' Repeating in part what our Ambassador, Auriti, had cabled to us some months ago, M. Hotta stressed the advisability of establishing very intensive collaboration in the military field between Italy and Japan, collaboration which would allow each country to avail itself of the other's aid, but would above all allow Japan—in view of the very high level of Italian technique—to benefit from our collaboration in the naval and aeronautical field. Japan, in fact, obtains large supplies of arms from abroad; by means of an agreement of this nature it would be the intention of the Japanese Government to concentrate these purchases in Italy and also to make use of the technical experience of our specialist officers.

Such an agreement would automatically carry with it a pact of 'very, very benevolent neutrality.'

In Japanese opinion such an agreement would be of great advantage to both peoples. In Tokyo, too, there is a great desire to reach an agreement with England, and they are very pleased at present at the more favourable turn taken in relations between Rome and London. It is considered that the sensation caused by firm friendship between Italy and Japan, coming as a supplement to that already existing between Rome and Berlin and Berlin and Tokyo, must exercise a salutary moderating influence on the London Government, which will be reminded of the harm it suffers from collaboration with the Bolshevik or Bolshevising system represented by Moscow and Paris. I thanked the Ambassador for his communication and said I would not fail to answer as soon as possible the courteous letter which the Foreign Minister had addressed to me.

As regards the proposal advanced by him of closer and more concrete collaboration between Rome and Tokyo, I would talk to him again after having placed the matter before the Duce and receiving orders from him. For the present I could tell him, however, that there is among the Fascist Government and people, a lively feeling of sympathy and friendship for Japan, whose loyal recognition of the Empire will not therefore be forgotten. Of this sympathy, moreover, there is an obvious proof in our attitude during the present Sino-Japanese crisis.

I agreed with the Japanese Ambassador that I would resume contact with him in the course of the next few days.

XI

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS

15th August—2nd October, 1937.

During August a gradual improvement in relations between London and Rome had led to an exchange of autograph letters between Chamberlain and Mussolini, dated 27th July and 2nd August respectively. Chamberlain had expressed his regret that 'Anglo-Italian relations were still far from the old feeling of mutual trust and affection' and stated that the British Government was 'willing to begin conversations at any time' in order to do away with any misunderstanding or suspicion. Mussolini had reciprocated by declaring that he was prepared to resume conversations 'to ensure an understanding' between the two countries. They had even gone as far as to fix the date for the opening of the conversations—the beginning of September, when Sir Eric Drummond would be back in Rome after his summer leave. Subsequent statements by Ciano—'the road is now clear' on 4th August—and by Mussolini in Palermo on 20th August—'I think it may be possible to reach a lasting reconciliation'—gave the impression that the clouds were really about to lift from Anglo-Italian relations. But it was in the second half of August that the series of accidents began which were to render navigation in the Mediterranean dangerous for some time. A number of ships were torpedoed by mysterious submarines. The connection with the Spanish Civil War was evident. Barely camouflaged, these Italian submarines were ordered to carry out an extremely disagreeable and dangerous task. There was talk of pirates and piracy, and it seemed that in the Mediterranean a new and more serious conflict was developing. The rapprochement between Rome and London suffered a new setback.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

The Chargé d'affaires, Ingram, called and discussed with me the position in the Far East, saying that the British Government wished to know if, from personal experience, I had any suggestions to make on the situation which has arisen in Shanghai and which appears so similar to that in 1932. In any event, the British Government wished to learn our point of view, and asked if we were willing to

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS

take part in collective diplomatic action by the Western Powers to attempt to improve the situation in the Far East.

I replied to Ingram that I thanked the British Government for the courteous question, but that I did not consider that I could make any suggestion since it was precisely my Chinese experience which told me that in the Far East apparently similar situations may be substantially different. Events of 1932 should therefore be kept in view only up to a certain point. As regards our general attitude to the Sino-Japanese conflict, I drew Mr. Ingram's attention to the fact that Italy, being bound by friendship to both the warring countries, intended to maintain an attitude of strict neutrality while expressing the wish that rapid settlement of the conflict might be achieved. More urgent still is a settlement in that difficult sector, Shanghai. I had sent instructions to that effect to H.M. representatives in the Far East, refraining, however, from giving detailed instructions and preferring to trust to their judgment on specific situations, since my very knowledge of the countries and of Far Eastern circles suggested to me that it was advisable to give a free hand to H.M. representatives up to a certain point, so as to permit them to deal with events which might develop with extraordinary rapidity.

I finally assured Mr. Ingram that, while we did not consider it was for us to take the initiative, we would be willing to support any diplomatic action by the Western Powers which aimed at re-establishing peace and order in the Far East, or even at limiting and isolating the area of the conflict.

Mr. Ingram thanked me cordially for my statement, and during our conversation was eager to stress particularly the great importance which England attaches to close collaboration with Italy in all departments of international life.

CONVERSATION WITH THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 15th August, 1937—XV

Señor Conde informed me that he had received instructions from the Salamanca Government to draw our attention to the distant and somewhat unfriendly attitude of Vienna towards General Franco. He was also instructed to call attention to the attitude of the Austrian representative on the Non-Intervention Committee, who has frequently shown himself not only cold but frankly hostile to Nationalist Spain, and completely subservient to England; the Austrian Government has always avoided making any gesture which might express sympathy for and solidarity with the Nationalists.

General Franco therefore turns to us and asks us to intervene in Vienna and let it be known that greater sympathy with Nationalist Spain would be most advisable. Spain desires the following: if

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS

possible, full recognition of the Franco Government; if not, recognition of belligerent rights; finally, should it be impossible to make even that concession, the acceptance of an official agent of Franco, such as Switzerland accepted recently.

A similar approach is being made simultaneously by the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin.

I assured Conde that I would not fail to take appropriate action in Vienna to have the Generalissimo's wishes accepted, as far as possible, by the Austrian Government.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 23rd August, 1937—XV

The British Chargé d'affaires, Mr. Ingram, after stating that what he was about to say did not represent a formal approach, wished to call my attention to events which have lately occurred in the Mediterranean and are still occurring.¹

First, the air attack on a British steamship, an attack which, according to information reaching the British Government, had been carried out by aircraft based on Palma, and which some would even identify as Italian planes.

Second, for some days there had been repeated cases of torpedo attacks and shelling aimed at ships of various nationalities. British ships had, in fact, not been molested, but some captains had reported that they had been followed and watched with particular assiduity by Italian surface vessels. The British Government was careful not to connect the two, but could not but be concerned at the continual incidents in the Mediterranean. The actual spot at which the two steamships had been torpedoed and sunk—which was very far from Spanish bases—led one to reflect on the situation.

Mr. Ingram was anxious to inform me that the British Government did not wish to make the least protest to us through his communication. It merely wished to inform us of its earnest desire that the atmosphere between Great Britain and Italy, which had so fortunately been cleared, should not be troubled by unforeseeable and deplorable complications.

I replied to Mr. Ingram that we, for our part, intended, like the British Government, to maintain the peaceful atmosphere which existed between the two countries as a result of recent diplomatic clarifications.

¹On 10th August, the British steamship *British Corporal* had been attacked by aircraft in the Mediterranean at the same time as the Italian vessel, *Mongioia*. On 17th August, the Spanish Republican steamer, *Ciudad de Cadix*, had been sunk by a submarine of unknown nationality close to the Turkish coast. On 19th August, the Spanish Republican vessel *Armuro* had been hit by a torpedo, again from a submarine of unknown nationality, off the Turkish coast.

As regards the incidents of which Ingram had spoken to me, I was not in a position to give him any explanation. On the same day on which their steamship was attacked, the *Mongioia* was subjected to a bombing attack by unidentified aircraft, an attack which was in its effects much more grave than that experienced by the *British Corporal*. Since the *Mongioia*, besides flying the national flag, had also painted on its sides two tricolours, which were visible from a great distance, I could not admit that it was a case of misunderstanding, and must therefore maintain my opinion that the attacker was a Red plane. Since the attack on the English steamer occurred more or less at the same time and in similar circumstances, everything led one to presume that those responsible belonged to the same side.

As regards the torpedoing of ships in the Mediterranean, I was happy to state that up to the present England and Italy could not be involved, since no vessel belonging to those two Powers had been subjected to an attack by Spanish nationalist vessels.

While quite unable to give Ingram any information on the increased activity of the Franco Navy, I must reply, as regards the attacks at the entrance of the Dardanelles, that modern submarines can very easily operate at great distances from their bases. As far as encounters between British vessels and Italian warships were concerned, I limited myself to pointing out that in the Mediterranean it is very easy to come across units of our fleet which, particularly at this time of the year, are frequently on the move in connection with their exercises.

I noted with pleasure that his communication to me was in no sense an official approach. On the contrary, I recognised in this exchange of views, which aimed at maintaining a favourable atmosphere between the two countries, a fresh proof of the real desire for collaboration.

Ingram said he was fully satisfied with my answers.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 27th August, 1937—XV

The British Chargé d'affaires, Mr. Ingram, informed me, following instructions received from the Foreign Office, that, because of the death of his brother, Sir Eric Drummond will not be able to come to Rome at the end of September. That naturally will entail a delay in the beginning of conversations. The Foreign Office, while expressing its regret at this delay, was anxious to state that there is absolutely no new element in the intentions or wishes of the British Government, and that the delay must be attributed solely to the

above-mentioned fact of Drummond's inability to return to his post.

To Ingram's inquiry as to what could be done to avoid false interpretations of the delay, I replied that, in my opinion, there was nothing that could be done except to publish his statement to me in some English paper. The Italian Press would pick it up.

Ingram asked me for details of the Duce's visit to Germany.¹ I replied that it had been decided on in principle and that it would take place in the last fortnight in September. For the moment I was unable to give him further information.

Finally, Ingram, having first stated that he spoke in the same spirit as in our last conversation—that is with the aim of avoiding any incident in the Mediterranean which might disturb the atmosphere between our two countries—presented me with an *aide-mémoire* relating to observations carried out by our Air Force on British vessels. I replied to Ingram that such reconnaissances form part of the normal duties of the Air Force, and that I did not grasp what 'harm' they could have caused to British shipping. Ingram agreed that it was not a question of incidents worthy of note, and stressed the English desire to eliminate any future possibility of misunderstanding.

On the 6th September the French and British Governments addressed to all the Powers concerned an invitation to a conference, to be held at Nyon, near Geneva, with the aim of agreeing on the measures required to stop acts of aggression in the Mediterranean. But on the same day the Soviet Chargé d'affaires in Rome handed Count Ciano a note which attributed to Italy responsibility for the torpedoing of two Soviet ships, and, in consequence, requested compensation for the loss suffered. Ciano rejected both the responsibility and the request. On the 8th Russia returned to the charge, without receiving a reply; but Mussolini used it as a pretext for refusing to participate in the Nyon Conference. 'It is obvious,' said an Italian note to the Governments in London and Paris, 'that the Fascist Government must postpone any decision of an affirmative nature until the incident which has arisen from the dispatch of the Note of the Soviet Government—on the subject of whose invitation to the Conference certain reservations should be made—has been satisfactorily settled.' The Nyon Conference was held all the same; the agreement with which it concluded in practice excluded Italy from control activity in the Mediterranean—with the exception of the Tyrrhenian Sea (the Adriatic had not been discussed). This produced further sharp reactions by Rome, which refused to recognise the agreement, and wordy battles followed. But in the meantime no other incidents had occurred, and the U.S.S.R. had not been allowed to take part in patrolling the Mediterranean.

¹Mussolini visited Berlin from 25th to 29th September.

MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 2nd October, 1937—XV

The Ambassador, Sir Eric Drummond, who remained alone with me after the departure of the French Chargé d'affaires, told me that during his absence from Rome he had seen with deep regret the progressive deterioration in Anglo-Italian relations which last summer had seemed to be moving towards a favourable solution. Observing the situation from England, he had been able to see that two facts in particular had brought about the new crisis in Anglo-Italian relations:

- (i) the telegram of congratulations sent by the Duce to Franco after the conquest of Santander,¹ and
- (ii) Italy's refusal to participate in the Nyon conference at which direct contact with the British and French Foreign Ministers would have allowed many obscure points to be cleared up and would have produced an improvement in international relations.

However, since the British Government earnestly desired to re-establish Anglo-Italian relations on a cordial plane, he left me an *aide-mémoire*.

In order to avoid opening a discussion, I confined myself to noting the delivery of the *aide-mémoire* and to telling him that I would not fail to examine it with care and to pass it to the Duce for instructions.

¹Mussolini had replied to the telegram sent to him by Franco on 27th August on the occasion of the taking of Santander as follows: 'I am particularly glad that during ten days of hard fighting the Italian legionary troops have made a valiant contribution to the splendid victory of Santander, and that that contribution finds today, in your telegram, the recognition to which they aspired. This comradeship of arms—now so close—is a guarantee of the final victory which will liberate Spain and the Mediterranean from all threats to the civilisation we share.'

XII

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

On 25th November, 1936, at the conclusion of secret negotiations which had lasted several months, Ribbentrop, who was still Ambassador to London, and the Japanese Ambassador, Mushakoji, signed in Berlin an Anti-Comintern Pact, which pledged both states to collaborate in the repression of Communist activity by the exchange of information, consultations and the adoption of severe measures against all those, at home or abroad, who placed themselves at the service of that organisation. Germany and Japan further agreed to address to those other States which felt themselves threatened by the activities of the Comintern an invitation to adhere to the agreement. The invitation to Fascist Italy could not be more obvious, all the more so since the signing of the pact between Germany and Japan took place shortly after Ciano's visit to Berlin and the signing of the secret protocols between Germany and Italy, in which the anti-Communist note—with an eye on the Civil War in Spain—was very pronounced. The development of the European situation led Hitler, with forthcoming developments in the Nazi policy of expansion and hegemony in view, to ensure the support, or at least the consent, of Fascist Italy.

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 20th October, 1937—XV

The Japanese Ambassador, after apologising for the long delay, informed me of what has passed between himself and his Government on the subject of the projected anti-Communist agreement between Italy and Japan. He told me that he had first of all received instructions from his Government to proceed to an anti-Communist agreement with Italy, adding verbally that Japan undertook on her honour to maintain benevolent neutrality and to enter into discussions in the event of a conflict. Correspondence with Tokyo was continuing in order to transform this oral pledge into a written agreement or, at any rate, into something more precise, in accordance with the wishes I had expressed to him, when he was informed by his Government that the situation had assumed a new aspect since the German Government inclined towards stipulating a three

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

Power pact. He therefore informed me in advance of Ribbentrop's visit, and added that the Japanese Ambassador¹ to Berlin will also arrive tomorrow. He could not add anything, since he was not acquainted with further details. But he requested me to be so good as to resume contact with him after having met Ribbentrop.

The conversation between the Japanese Ambassador and myself was therefore continued on other topics connected with the situation in the Far East, and he showed himself confident in the inevitable military success of his compatriots.

As far as the Nine Power Conference² is concerned, he told me that he quite realised the advisability of Italian participation, by means of which it would be easy for us to render useful service to the Japanese cause.

I then received the German Ambassador who was accompanied by Herr Raumer, Ribbentrop's Chief Counsellor, with whom I had had brief contact last year on the subject of anti-Communist action. Herr Raumer handed me the outline-protocol and the supplementary protocol which are attached.³ I asked Herr Raumer whether, since it was a question of our adhering to a pact already existing between two other Powers, he was in a position to inform me what other agreements of a confidential nature existed between Germany and Japan, in view of the fact that I had frequently heard such agreements spoken of by official German personalities.

Herr Raumer was either unwilling or unable to reply, stating that it was for von Ribbentrop to enter into a discussion on this subject. For my part, I thanked him for his communication and reserved any reply until I had received orders from the Duce.

CONVERSATION WITH HERR VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 22nd October, 1937—XV

During today's conversation with von Ribbentrop we discussed the German proposal for Italy's adhesion to the anti-Bolshevik Pact between Germany and Japan, which in consequence would be transformed into a tripartite pact. After sketching to him our relations with Japan, I told Ribbentrop that the Duce was in principle in favour of acceptance after examining the formula proposed to us by

¹Kintomo Mushakoji.

²The Conference was held in Brussels from 3rd to 24th November. Japan alone declined the invitation, stating in a note on 27th October that it rejected the accusation of having violated the 9-Power Treaty, and that it could arrive at a policy of collaboration in China only when the Nanking Government had revised its attitude. On 15th November a resolution was presented by the United States, Great Britain and France, condemning the Japanese argument—a resolution to which the Italian delegate declared himself sharply opposed. A stalemate having been reached, the conference was adjourned *sine die* without any results having been attained.

³These documents reproduced in substance the text of the protocol and the supplementary protocol signed by Germany and Japan on 25th November, 1936, in Berlin.

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

Raumer. On the other hand, since we were about to enter an already existing political system, I considered it advisable for Ribbentrop to explain to us what other relations of a confidential nature exist between Germany and Japan. I also told him that at the beginning of our conversations with Japan we had let it be known that we would, for our part, be in favour of completing the anti-Communist pact with a secret agreement providing for benevolent neutrality in all cases, and for consultations in some special contingencies. The Japanese Ambassador, when informing me that his Government did not at the present moment contemplate putting such a formula in writing, told me, however, that he was authorised to give verbally the Japanese people's word of honour to that effect.

Ribbentrop confirmed that there also exists between Germany and Japan a sort of 'gentlemen's agreement' which, while it is based on the identical ideologies of these countries, was developed by constant contact and force of circumstances. Recently it has been decided to set up an air line from Tokyo to Berlin. There is technical liaison between the members of the two General Staffs. Relations between the two countries are becoming closer in every field. This gives rise to collaboration which finds expression in the political field. The general nature of the 'gentlemen's agreement' was anti-Russian. Ribbentrop said that, for the present, he was not in a position to tell me whether the Japanese Government were ready to give an undertaking of a political nature to Italy and Germany. He had, however, cabled to Tokyo putting forward that proposal. However, even should it not be accepted immediately, Ribbentrop is not excessively worried since he sees in a possible Tripartite Anti-Communist Pact the basis for a very wide and far-reaching understanding between the three nations. I agreed with Ribbentrop that we would meet again in the Duce's room at 18.30.

The signing of the protocol containing Italy's adhesion to the Anti-Comintern Pact was delayed until some days later than expected and did not take place in Munich but in Rome. On 6th November, in the Palazzo Chigi, Ciano, Ribbentrop and Hotta put their signatures to the document and immediately published the text which referred to the 1936 protocol and drew attention to the statement that Italy had been considered 'an original signatory' along with Germany and Japan.

CONVERSATION WITH THE DUCE.

Rome, 22nd October, 1937—XV (18.30 hrs.)

After having presented the Fuehrer's personal greetings to the Duce, Ribbentrop gave an account of the genesis of the pact between Germany and Japan. He described how he had wished to learn by means of his mission to London how far England would be willing

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

to go towards meeting Germany's wishes, and towards recognising her vital interests. Today he must frankly admit that his mission failed. Several recent British gestures—among them the Conservative Party vote against the cession of Colonies to Germany—have proved that the interests of the two countries are irreconcilable. At one point he had even thought of attracting England into the sphere of the anti-Communist countries. That has been impossible, since in England the Communist peril is neither felt nor fully understood.

He went on to put forward the reasons in favour of transforming the pact between Germany and Japan into a Tripartite Pact by the adherence of Italy.

The Duce said that, for his part, he was willing and happy to accept the German proposal. He also added that it had first been his wish to complement the anti-Communist pact by a political clause stipulating neutrality and consultations. He realised, however, that it was undesirable to press Japan, thus avoiding the impression that we wish to take advantage of the very special situation in which that country finds itself as a result of the Chinese conflict, and to extort special concessions from her.

Von Ribbentrop approved of the Duce's decision, repeating what he had already said to me on the subject of the inevitable development of a Pact such as we were about to make. When negotiations between Germany and Japan began it was said that it was a question of constructing a small wooden bridge so as to be able to build later a great permanent iron bridge between the two nations. That is a formula which can be usefully repeated.

As regards the signing of the Pact, it has been decided that it will take place during the next few days, probably in Munich, since Ribbentrop—in view of his position as Ambassador to London—could not sign a pact of this kind in Italy. It was agreed in principle that the complete text of the protocol will be published. On these last two questions, however, von Ribbentrop reserved an answer until he had received the Fuehrer's approval.

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 6th November, 1937—XV

The Japanese Ambassador, who wished to confirm what he had heard from German sources concerning the Duce's acceptance in principle of the Tripartite Anti-Communist Pact, asked for an audience.

I told him that the Duce had in fact expressed himself to Ribbentrop in these terms, and that it now rested with the Chancellories to agree on certain secondary formal questions while awaiting approval from Tokyo, which had not yet arrived.

The Ambassador repeated that Tokyo agrees in principle and

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

that it reserves the right to suggest certain slight modifications in the text which will be communicated to us as soon as possible. Meanwhile he wished to repeat that even if the Italo-Japanese Pact was about to be replaced by a Tripartite Pact, the verbal pledge of benevolent neutrality and collaboration in case of international difficulties was still in full force. He had instructions to say that the Japanese people will never be able to forget the proof of solidarity which Italy is giving at this moment in their history, and will not let the occasion pass without indications that they were ready to repay their debt of gratitude to us in full. The Ambassador added that he regretted that for the moment it was not possible to make a pledge to that effect in writing. Italy must however believe that Japan's word is as good as any formal document.

I thanked the Ambassador for his communication, which I noted, adding that, in my opinion, circumstances and events will suggest and determine the inevitable future development of the friendship between the two countries.

CONVERSATION WITH THE DUCE AND HERR VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 6th November, 1937—XV

The Duce, having stressed the great importance of the three power anti-Communist pact concluded that morning, declared that, in his opinion, it represents the first basic gesture which will lead to a much closer understanding of a political and military nature between the three powers. Meanwhile, since we are henceforth so deeply interested in events in the Far East, we must carefully examine what is happening there. Since the Brussels conference is doomed to failure, the Duce wonders whether it would not be advisable for Germany and Italy to examine the possibility of mediation by us to put an end to the conflict. A settlement in the Far East would be useful in order to maintain Japan's military power intact for any future anti-Russian operation. On the other hand, it must prove acceptable to China too, for having offered resistance which was rendered possible by the 'critical period of disembarkation,' she has no means of halting the Japanese advance.

Ribbentrop says that he agrees with the Duce on the advisability of a settlement in the Far East. During a recent conversation with the representative of Prince Kanin, Chief of the Japanese General Staff, who is in actual fact the man who forced through these military operations against the will of the Anglophile and Liberal Foreign Minister, he learned that the army, too, wishes to end operations as quickly as possible, but only after having decisively defeated the Chinese forces. Peace with the Government of Chiang Kai-shek is impossible. It is therefore necessary to

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

establish a new government in Nanking. Approaches have been made to the German Embassy in Japan with a view to obtaining mediation. But the Japanese General Staff is completely ignorant of these approaches. The Fuehrer would be favourable to mediation, which would have to be based on two points: China's adherence to the Tripartite Anti-Communist Pact and a Japanese undertaking to respect all foreign interests in China.

The Duce agrees with this point of view, and says that any eventual negotiations of that nature will have to be conducted in the most absolute secrecy, with the condition that once its aim has been achieved, the mediation shall be made public. Any indiscretion would be prejudicial to success.

Ciano points out that in a few days time there will arrive in Rome the Chinese Propaganda Minister, Che Kung-po, who is very influential in Kuomintang circles, belongs to a group which is sharply hostile to Chiang Kai-shek, and is a friend of Wang Ching-wei.¹ Possibly M. Che Kung-po could be presented and we could take advantage of his presence for confidential conversations.

The Duce and Ribbentrop agree.

They then go on to discuss the repercussions which the Anti-Communist pact will have in other countries.

Ribbentrop considers that British reaction will be more lively than is expected, since the Pact will be interpreted as the alliance of the aggressive nations against the satisfied countries. England will increase her efforts to have closer relations with America. But that would probably have happened even without the Tripartite Agreement.

The Duce agrees with the view that American ill-humour will be increased by an agreement with Japan, which is considered, for no apparent reason, to be the United States' traditional and potential enemy. However, once again the Americans will do nothing. When Freemasonry was suppressed violent reactions were threatened. But none were forthcoming; just as they are not forthcoming now when we are conducting a very determined and increasingly intense anti-Semitic campaign directed by Farinacci, who enjoys considerable popularity in Italy, and who already has two organs of the Press in Rome—the *Tevere* and the *Quadrivio*—and a large number of followers, particularly in the university world.

They then go on to discuss the Spanish situation.

The Duce recapitulates the present state of our forces and declares that, unless there is some unforeseen development, he will send no more men to Spain since Franco, who has recently released the 1908 class, has no need of them. Our Volunteer Corps will again be used in Aragon in the forthcoming battle, which may be decisive.

¹Wang Ching-wei, politician who favoured Japanese expansion in China. Expelled by Kuomintang, and from 30th March, 1938, head of the collaborationist Nanking Government.

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

Thereafter we are willing to begin evacuating the infantry, leaving in Spain, on the other hand, the specialists belonging to the Engineers, the Artillery, the Tanks and the Air Force. From now on Franco has victory within his grasp, and will speedily attain it, since it appears from accurate information and many other symptoms that the Reds are demoralised and resistance in the interior of Bolshevik Spain is reduced to the minimum. If, however, some new factor were to threaten Franco's position, and if the attainment of victory required a further effort, the Duce is willing to make it, even if it meant sending new regular forces. Meanwhile we are dealing effectively with the naval blockade, having handed over to Franco six submarines and four surface vessels.

England's attitude to Franco is worth considering at this stage. There is no doubt that London realises it has backed the losing horse, and is now trying to carry out a rapid change of attitude towards Nationalist Spain. Italy and Germany must be very much on their guard, because the problem is of particular interest to us from two points of view: financial and political. First of all, we have spent about four and a half milliards in Spain. German expenditure, according to what Goering said, is in the region of three and a half milliards. We wish to be paid and must be paid. But there is also over and above that a political aspect. We want Nationalist Spain, which has been saved by virtue of all manner of Italian and German aid, to remain closely associated with our manœuvres. On the other hand, the financial aspect of the problem is linked with the political one—only if Spain remains within our system will we be able to count on complete indemnification.

Rome and Berlin must therefore keep in close contact so as to act in such a way that Franco will always, and to an increasing degree, follow our policy. Franco has given proof of possessing qualities remarkable in a Spaniard. He is calm, discreet, a man of few words. Towards us he has maintained—particularly recently—an attitude of lively sympathy. However, there is no denying that he is already feeling certain negative influences, such as that of the great landowners and the upper clergy. Nor must one forget that the head of his diplomatic cabinet, Señor Sangroniz, has shown himself to be an Anglophile and of Liberal tendencies.

Ribbentrop would like to know our exact position in Majorca and what agreements there are concerning it.

The Duce replies that by concentrating the whole fleet at Palma Franco wished to give public proof of his sovereignty over the island. It is a fact that we have established at Palma a naval and an air base; we keep ships permanently stationed there, and have three airfields. We intend to remain in that situation as long as possible. In any case, Franco must come to understand that, even after our eventual evacuation, Majorca must remain an Italian base in the event of a war with France; that is to say, we intend to keep

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

all the installations ready there so as to be able in a few hours to bring the island of Majorca into effective play as one of our Mediterranean bases. If we use the base in Majorca, that in Pantelleria and others already in existence and equipped, not one negro will be able to cross from Africa to France by the Mediterranean route.

On the other hand, there are already fifty thousand men at present, and there will be twice as many in the future, holding down the French and English forces on the Libyan borders. One can foresee that the most important part of the next war will be played out in France. The English do not like land warfare and hate barracks. For this reason we must impose land warfare upon them. When the Home Fleet entered the Mediterranean, seven divisions were at once sent to Libya. It was thus certain that the Fleet would not act. This gesture of ours was considered a provocation by some; it was, on the contrary, a guarantee. It must be added that English land forces cannot survive long in Egypt, and in particular could not operate there. Those which were moved towards our frontiers on the occasion of the Abyssinian conflict, were very soon smitten by dysentery and had very heavy losses.

Turning to the attitude of Franco, the Duce affirms that he must necessarily remain attached to our political system, first because our pressure will prevent him from breaking away, and also because, his ideology being close to ours, he has taken a path from which he will not be able to retreat.

Franco will now give battle in Aragon. On this occasion, too, which may prove decisive, Franco can count on our support. Immediately afterwards we will make contact to define clearly his political relations with us. First, he must adhere to the anti-Communist Pact. Second, we will make a Tripartite Pact, whereby Franco will undertake to bring Spanish policy into line with that of the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Ribbentrop, who has lately had frequent contacts with Turkey, describes how Turkish circles are still anxious over the Italian attitude towards that State. He says that Turkey would be a good card in our game, and, in his opinion, it should still be possible to win it. He asks the Duce for an explanation of the present state of our relations with Turkey.

The Duce, after summarising the course of Italo-Turkish relations during the last few years, repeats that Turkey has not the slightest reason to be anxious over Italy and authorises Ribbentrop to inform responsible circles in Ankara that he is willing to give a further guarantee and renew the declaration that Italy has no anti-Turkish aims. A proof of this is given by the fact that we renewed the Treaty¹ when it lapsed. We might under certain circumstances

¹The treaty of neutrality and conciliation between Italy and Turkey, signed in Rome on 30th May, 1928, was automatically renewed every five years, unless denounced after six months' notice had been given. (Article 6).

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

be willing to strengthen it.

Finally, Ribbentrop discusses the Austrian question.

After stating that he is speaking in a purely personal capacity, he points out to the Duce that in the grand policy of Rome and Berlin, Austria now represents an element of secondary importance, and that he considers that at a certain moment it will be necessary to settle finally a question on which the enemies of the common Italo-German policy still speculate. The Duce replies that Austria is a German country by race, language and culture. The Austrian question must not be considered as a problem affecting Italy and Germany, but, on the contrary, as a problem of an international order. For his part he has stated, and repeats it now, that he is tired of mounting guard over Austrian independence, especially if the Austrians no longer want their independence. The Duce sees the situation thus: Austria is German state No. 2. It will never be able to do anything without Germany, far less against Germany. Italian interest today is no longer as lively as it was some years ago, for one thing because of Italy's imperialist development, which was now concentrating her interest on the Mediterranean and the Colonies. It must be added that the fact that the Austrians have not modified in the slightest their cold and negative attitude towards us has contributed to the decrease of Italian interest in Austria. According to the Duce, the best method is to let events take their natural course. One must not aggravate the situation, so as to avoid crises of an international nature. On the other hand, France knows that if a crisis should arise in Austria, Italy would do nothing. This was said to Schuschnigg, too, on the occasion of the Venice conversation. We cannot impose independence upon Austria which, by the very fact that it was imposed, would cease to be independence. On the Austrian question, therefore, it is necessary to abide by the formula enunciated during the conversation with Goering in the Karin hall: nothing will be done without previous exchange of information.

The conversation, which began at 17.30, ended at 19.00.

CONVERSATION WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 7th November, 1937—XVI

I immediately sent for the Japanese Ambassador, to whom I expressed myself in accordance with the orders received from the Duce, and to whom I showed a copy of the telegram sent to our Ambassador, Auriti.

The Japanese Ambassador said that from the start Japanese reactions were against acceptance of the invitation. He repeated that the Tokyo Government was ready to begin conversations with China, but they must be direct and completely outside the frame-

ITALY SIGNS THE ANTI-COMINTERN PACT

work of the conference. He was sincerely moved by the proof of solidarity given him by the Duce on this occasion, and told me, that in his opinion the Tokyo Government will greatly welcome it if Italy takes steps similar to those indicated in the telegram to Auriti, which is attached.

CONVERSATION WITH THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 8th November, 1937—XVI

This morning I received the Soviet Ambassador, M. Stein, who made the following statement to me: 'By order of my Government I inform you that the U.S.S.R. considers the terms of the Tripartite Pact between Italy, Germany and Japan, to be contrary to the pact of friendship, non-aggression and neutrality which exists between our two countries.'¹ It further considers your adherence to the anti-Bolshevik pact to be an unfriendly gesture towards Moscow. I have nothing further to say.'

I replied as follows: 'I note your statement and I shall inform the Duce. I, too, have nothing further to say.'

I then rose and accompanied him to the door.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRAZILIAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 8th November, 1937—XVI

This morning I received the Brazilian Ambassador, who called to discuss with me the question of the supplying of submarines, a matter on which negotiations are already in progress with the Minister for the Navy.

In the course of the conversation, the Brazilian Ambassador was anxious to congratulate us on the conclusion of the anti-Communist Tripartite Pact and told me he hopes—and has already worked on his Government to this end—that Brazil, which is very interested in the fight against Bolshevism, may adhere to the Pact. Speaking personally, he asked me whether the adherence of Brazil, the largest South American State, would be well received by the three signatories.

¹The pact of friendship, non-aggression and neutrality between Italy and the U.S.S.R. had been drawn up in Rome on 2nd September, 1933. After the contracting parties had declared themselves in the preamble to be 'determined to continue their policy of complete abstention from any interference in their respective internal affairs', they laid down in Article 4 that 'each of the high contracting parties pledges itself not to enter into an agreement of a political or economic nature or into any grouping directed against one of them.'

XIII

MANOEUVRING FOR POSITION

8th November—13th December, 1937.

In spite of the direct assurances received from Ciano on numerous occasions, the Hungarian Government watched the development of the international situation with growing anxiety. Not that Budapest was insensible to the attractions of 'revision'; but the collapse of Austrian independence was too much against Hungary's interests for her not to attempt to prevent it by all possible means. The new Italian policy, which had begun with the Rome-Berlin Axis, and continued with the Belgrade Agreements, was not calculated to allay Hungarian fears in the field of foreign policy; and there were too many rumours current of imminent German action against Vienna. Budapest, therefore, sought to bring about a new conference of the Rome group at the same time as it prepared for a visit to Berlin by Darányi and Kánya, fixed for 21st November.

CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 8th November, 1937—XVI

This morning I had a conversation with the Hungarian Minister, Villani, who, on Kánya's orders, wished to apologise for the behaviour of certain Hungarian papers towards us; at the same time he made it clear that there was no governmental responsibility in the matter since, so far, the Government itself lacks the means of restraining the Press, which is largely Jewish.

With the principal aim of stopping French and English insinuations concerning a decrease in solidarity in the group of States which signed the Rome protocols, Kánya proposes to announce as soon as possible one of the periodical meetings of the three Foreign Ministers, in view of the fact that the last took place in Vienna exactly a year ago. This time the meeting should take place in Budapest, but Kánya would be willing to come to Rome should that appear more convenient to us. He would suggest as a date for that meeting, to which he attaches much importance, next December or January.

I replied to Villani, reserving any final decision for the Duce, that I saw no objection in principle to the meeting, but that I did not, however, consider it possible to hold it in December in view of already existing commitments.

MANOEUVRING FOR POSITION

Villani said that his Government would welcome an answer on this point as soon as possible.

Stoyadinovitch, on the other hand, was also taking precautions in view of events whose consequences, he had shown in the other conversations, he clearly foresaw. The agreements with Italy must secure his western flank in the event of German expansion in Central Europe—an expansion which he coldly took for granted. The friendship and trust of Rome were also necessary to him in connection with the internal policy of his own country, where the two opposition groups of Serb Liberals and Croat autonomists, in Belgrade and Zagreb respectively, were working for the creation of a common front against the rule of the Yugoslav Radical Union of which Stoyadinovitch was exponent and director. Nevertheless, the head of the Yugoslav Government had not omitted to renew the treaty of alliance with France, and had gone to Paris for that very purpose. There, on 12th October, Chautemps and Delbos had welcomed him warmly, and on the 13th the President of the Republic, Lebrun, had had a long conversation with him. The validity was thus reaffirmed of a diplomatic instrument which Fascist Italy, when it was signed on 11th November, 1927, had considered to be a hostile act. Nor did Stoyadinovitch stop here. He had gone as far as London on an official visit, had met Chamberlain and Eden, had let it be known that he did not underestimate contacts with the great democracies, without however committing himself too far. Thus he had turned down Delbos's invitation to adhere to a pact of mutual assistance to be drawn up between France and the three countries of the Little Entente, and when Delbos set out on a grand tour of the friendly capitals of Central and Eastern Europe—the French Foreign Minister arrived in Warsaw on 4th December and his programme included visits to Bucharest, Belgrade and Prague—his Yugoslav colleague decided to return Ciano's visit made in the previous March. Thus on 5th December, Stoyadinovitch arrived in Rome, where he was received by Mussolini and Ciano. He ostentatiously remained in Italy until the 9th and was just in time to take the train and hasten to Belgrade to receive Delbos, who was arriving from the Rumanian capital.

CONVERSATION WITH M. STOYADINOVITCH, YUGOSLAV PRIME MINISTER.

Rome, 11th December, 1937—XVI

During the conversations which took place in the Palazzo Venezia on 6th and 7th December, M. Stoyadinovitch began by stating that Yugoslavia intends to continue on the path laid down by the Belgrade Agreements of last March. Up to the present the results of the Pact have been excellent. More intense collaboration

in all fields will be possible in the future. Meanwhile. Stoyadinovitch stated he was instructed by the Regent Paul to tell the Duce that in future, in any political circumstances, Yugoslavia will never be found in the camp hostile to Italy.

The Duce noted these declarations and, on his side, confirmed the intention of bringing about a progressive and continuous strengthening of the bonds of friendship between Italy and Yugoslavia.

Spain: M. Stoyadinovitch asks to be informed of the Duce's opinion on the Spanish situation. The Duce sketches the situation and concludes by saying that General Franco has, in the past, had definite proofs of Italian friendship and that that friendship will sustain him until the attainment of victory, which no longer appears in doubt.

M. Stoyadinovitch says he has followed our attitude to Spain with lively sympathy and informs us that Yugoslavia has decided to send a diplomatic agent to Salamanca. He adds that, on the other hand, since the outbreak of the revolution Yugoslav relations with Madrid have been practically non-existent.

England and France: M. Stoyadinovitch speaks of his recent journey to Paris and London. That journey produced no practical result. In London he gained from conversations with the most eminent politicians the conviction that England, while she is preparing to reconstruct her fleet and air force, will never be in a position to possess an army, in view of her strong objection to compulsory military service. That will place England in a position of inferiority. Stoyadinovitch noticed that there exists at present among the English the liveliest concern with regard to Italy. He recalls that during the Abyssinian war, the Military Attaché at Belgrade confided to him that the English fleet would not be able to act against Italy for fear of the so-called aerial death squadrons. The Duce explains the state of our relations with London and says, that, for his part, he is willing forthwith to agree with England on condition, however, that that agreement include all questions outstanding and be of a lasting nature.

As far as France is concerned, M. Stoyadinovitch does not conceal his deep dislike for the activities of the Popular Front. He points out, in particular, that there are numerous opposing trends which prevent any positive decision. The Army itself, by reason of its exclusively defensive nature, may one day face a profound material and psychological crisis.

France has lately urged that a pact of mutual assistance be formed between Paris and the three countries of the Little Entente. This is also the object of Delbos's present journey. Stoyadinovitch formally opposed such a pact and will offer firmer resistance to fresh pressure, which will be applied. An agreement of that nature, besides being unnatural and in practice impossible to fulfil, would

produce unbelievable absurdities and contradictions; one has only to think of the situation arising from the pacts which link bilaterally some of the States which would have to form part of that combination of powers.¹

M. Stoyadinovitch informs us that France, which is concerned at his foreign policy, has in the past stirred up a strong opposition campaign against him. With the aid of the Regent he has overcome the crisis, and the hostile forces have been crushed. He will profit by this situation to expand the basis of his Government by the formation—which is already proceeding—of a large party which will have as its chief aim the organisation of Yugoslav youth. All that will produce an increasingly marked approach to the political system formed by the authoritarian countries and a break away from France.

Hungary and Austria: Relations between Yugoslavia and Hungary have markedly improved recently. M. Stoyadinovitch believes that, after the elections,² even Tatarescu will consider possible conversations with Hungary, with a view to reaching an understanding between Budapest and Bucharest. He is encouraging him to pursue this path because it would also render possible an understanding between Rumania and Italy. The Duce says that, in fact, relations between Rumania and Italy are cordial and that economic relations are being developed more and more. However, no formal agreement will take place without the consent of Budapest, to which Rome continues to be attached by close and cordial bonds.

When interrogated on the Austrian question, the Duce describes the situation and our point of view on the subject, as it results from conversations held with the rulers of the Reich on various occasions and with Schuschnigg in Venice last April. M. Stoyadinovitch fully agrees with our formulation of the question.

Czechoslovakia: Before he left for Rome, the Prague Government asked Stoyadinovitch to discover, in the course of his conversations, if there were any possibility of collaboration between Italy and Czechoslovakia which might serve to improve the latter's international situation. In informing us of the above, Stoyadinovitch adds that he himself perfectly understands Czechoslovakia's difficult position and that, in making the communication, he himself adds nothing in the way of recommendation or of pressure.

The Duce replies that Italy neither can nor wishes to intervene on behalf of Prague in any way. Czechoslovakia finds she must face

¹An allusion to the joint declaration by Germany and Poland which had placed relations between the two countries on a new basis and inaugurated a policy of mutual friendship and collaboration.

²The Rumanian elections, held in 20th December, did not produce the expected results. The bloc of parties led by Tatarescu obtained only 38 per cent. of the votes; in consequence the Liberal Minister resigned on the 28th to give way to a nationalist and anti-Semitic cabinet led by Goga.

a most difficult situation which does not interest us directly, whereas it ranges against Czechoslovakia our German and Hungarian friends. Italy has therefore no alternative but to ignore any advance made by Prague.

Balkan Entente: M. Stoyadinovitch sketches his relations with Athens and Ankara. He also says that Rustu Aras asked him to inform Rome of Turkey's friendly sentiments, but personally he adds a severe criticism of the Turkish Foreign Minister.

The Duce reviews the course of our relations with Ankara and Athens in recent years. He says that we, on our side, intend to maintain a distinctly cordial note in our relations with these countries, but he must observe that, particularly after the signature of the Belgrade Pact, there has been apparent both in Greece and in Turkey, a more marked state of nervousness and a note of distrust not only towards Italy, but also towards Yugoslavia. That results from the fact that the Turks and Greeks now feel more strongly the Slavs' gravitational thrust towards the Bosphorus and the Ægean. Stoyadinovitch states that an impression such as the Duce's is corroborated by many proofs. Relations between Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and Greece and Turkey, on the other, although formally most correct, have recently altered as far as their sincerity is concerned. Stoyadinovitch adds that with regard to Greece and Turkey, too, he intends to bring his policy more and more into harmony with Rome's.

League of Nations: The Duce informs Stoyadinovitch that it is his intention to leave the League of Nations on 11th December.¹ He would have already made this gesture some days ago, had the Yugoslav Premier's visit to Rome not been in progress. If Stoyadinovitch believes that our withdrawal from the League of Nations immediately after his departure from Italy may give rise to polemics which would be harmful to him, the Duce is willing to delay the event for some days. The Yugoslav Prime Minister unconditionally approves the Duce's decision and says he will personally write the commentary on the event, to the effect that, with the departure of Italy from Geneva, the League of Nations ceases to have any use or power.

After an examination of points of minor importance, the desire for close collaboration in all fields is re-affirmed, and, with the aim of increasing trade between the two countries, it is decided to send a number of Yugoslav military and technical missions who will be able to gain a more detailed knowledge of our productive powers and make more direct contact with our armed forces.

¹This did, in fact, take place on 11th December, by decision of the Fascist Grand Council. 'We are leaving without regret the tottering temple where they do not work for peace but prepare for war,' was Mussolini's comment made from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia. 'Italy's departure from the League of Nations is an event of historic importance, the consequences of which cannot be foreseen. It will take more than this to make us abandon our fundamental political directives which aim at collaboration and peace.'

CONVERSATION WITH THE POLISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 13th December, 1937—XVI

The Ambassador, Wysocki,¹ called to inform me, on the instructions of his Government, of the course and results of the conversations between Delbos and Beck.² He began by saying that the sole result of the visit of the French Foreign Minister had been to bring out more clearly the differences between France and Poland in their judgment of the international situation and the course to be adopted. Delbos showed himself to be particularly attached to the system of collective security and has faith in the activities of the League; he did not, however, put any pressure on Beck, who, on the other hand, reaffirmed Poland's faith in treaties and bilateral pacts.

The conversations also touched on relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia, but Beck gave Delbos to understand that the problem, in his opinion, was one to be dealt with directly by the two countries interested without the intervention of third Powers. As far as concerns relations between Poland and Russia, the Polish Foreign Minister said that, while not adhering to the Anti-Communist Pact, Poland does not intend to modify her relations with the Soviets—relations which are marked by reserve and coldness.

The colonial question was touched on incidentally only in the last stage of the conversations. No territorial claim was put forward. Beck confined himself to pointing out that, in the event of revision of the colonial problem, Poland intends to bring up her need for raw materials.

So much for his Government's communication. In a personal capacity the Polish Ambassador, who frequently wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour and spends his holidays in France, added that Delbos, according to information he had from private sources, had left a good impression.

¹Alfred Wysocki, appointed to the Polish Foreign Office in 1928, became later Secretary of State. Secretary to the Berlin Embassy from December, 1930 to 1933. In August, 1933 was nominated Ambassador to Rome.

²At the end of the conversations with the Foreign Minister Beck, with the President of the Council, General Skladkowsky, and with Marshal Smigly-Rydz, an official *communiqué* was published which stated that 'all problems relating to Franco-Polish relations, and more generally, to the maintenance of peace in Europe' had been examined. It went on to say that the Franco-Polish alliance of 1921 continued to be 'an essential and permanent factor in the policy of the two countries.'

1938

XIV

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

3rd January—19th February, 1938.

The aide-mémoire which Sir Eric Drummond, now Lord Perth, through his brother's death, had left with Ciano on 2nd October, 1937, as a summary of Anglo-Italian conversations, had had no effect. Mussolini did not intend to accept Eden's conditions. The British Foreign Secretary's refusal, in particular, to recognise the Italian Empire in Abyssinia was taken by the head of the Fascist Government as a personal affront, and once he was hurt in his amour propre he became almost incapable of reason. The British Prime Minister made, nevertheless, another attempt to break the ice. Speaking at the Lord Mayor's banquet on 9th November, Mr. Chamberlain said that it was the British Government's sincere desire to see relations with the two great Axis Powers 're-established on a basis of mutual friendship and understanding', and he added that such an understanding could have 'extremely important repercussions on the restoration of confidence and security in Europe.' He refrained, he said, from making any further statement because he thought that in the circumstances the goal would be more easily attained 'by private conversations than by public utterances'. There was an immediate retort in the Informazione Diplomatica on 10th November in the usual offensively supercilious style which Mussolini, the journalist, affected when he wrote anonymous articles in the Popolo d'Italia. 'In Roman circles,' it ran, 'it has been noted that Chamberlain has ceased to believe in or hope for a weakening of the Rome-Berlin Axis, therefore it would be useless and absurd to overlook this fact if one wishes to reach a settlement of the outstanding questions.' And after other observations on the scope of the Anti-Comintern Pact, which had occasioned 'long commentaries, sometimes inconsistent with one another, from circles in the so-called democracies', he ended on a decidedly petulant note. 'In Roman circles,' the note concluded, 'it is thought that one should not delay in holding conversations and reaching a conclusion through the normal diplomatic channels—a method which has always been preferred by the Fascist Government—otherwise one will be forced to believe that all this is being done to gain time, as a sort of anæsthetic. That is an error in judgment, since no-one will allow himself to be chloroformed or surprised.' Nevertheless contacts had not been broken off. On the contrary, little by little,

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

between the end of November and the beginning of December some approaches had been made, and before Christmas the Fascist Government presented to the British Government a complete programme, suggesting how the agreement could be reached to which the 'gentlemen's agreement' of 2nd January, 1937, had been intended as a mere prelude.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 3rd January, 1938—XVI

The British Ambassador called and told me that, following the conversation between Eden and Grandi on 2nd December and the communication made to the British Government by Crolla¹ on 23rd December, his Government is studying the situation. Since Crolla's communication spoke of a complete settlement of relations between Britain and Italy, including therefore the question of recognition of the Empire, the British Government, which had made no reference to that problem in the communication made by Drummond in October, must examine the question closely. Perth was instructed to tell me that the English delay in informing us of their point of view was due not to the fact that they wished to exclude that topic from any future conversations, but to the necessity of examining the possibility with care. I replied to Perth that I took note of the statement he had made to me, and practically repeated to him what Crolla had said to Eden concerning the advisability of having an agreement to settle the questions affecting Italy and Great Britain without leaving any obscure points or grounds for suspicion.

Perth told me that, for his part, he was entirely in favour of a comprehensive solution, but that, while awaiting further instructions from his Government, he was anxious to inform us that Britain's recent silence did not at all indicate a change of programme as far as the possibility of conversations with Italy was concerned, and that it is no part of Britain's intentions to make futile attempts to 'put them in cold storage'.

CONVERSATION OF THE DUCE WITH COUNT BETHLEN.

Rome, 5th January, 1938—XVI

In a conversation with the Duce, Count Bethlen expressed his conviction that in the event of conflict between Italy and England, England would run a very serious risk in view of her inferiority in armaments.

¹ Guido Crolla, Counsellor at the Italian Embassy in London.

With regard to Austria, Bethlen said that 80 per cent. of the population is Nazi and the remainder is in favour of the *Anschluss*.¹ This increases the instinctive distrust of the Hungarians where Germany is concerned, particularly since the German attitude towards the German minorities in Hungary is far from sympathetic. The Hungarians fear that Goga's² advent to Power may constitute the beginning of a new Little Entente based on Berlin rather than on Paris. This is a matter which is causing the Magyars even greater concern, in view of the fact that Germany has made anti-revisionist statements against Hungary—statements which have not been denied. It is necessary to add that the German papers which appear in Transylvania are markedly anti-Magyar. The Hungarians, on the other hand, are by no means sure of Germany's revisionist attitude towards them or towards Czechoslovakia. Hungary's only political hope is Italy.

* The Duce said that the agreement reached by Italy with Yugoslavia is very favourable to Hungary because it is clearly understood in Belgrade that we will not allow the Serbs to attack Hungary in defence of Czechoslovakia. That is in any case very improbable, since Stoyadinovitch is sceptical of the vitality of Czechoslovakia, which he himself described as a 'sausage state'.

Count Bethlen admitted that, of the three States of the Little Entente, Yugoslavia is the easiest to negotiate with.

The Duce confirmed to Bethlen that we will do nothing with Rumania without prior approval from Budapest—that is to say without a previous agreement between Rumania and Hungary on the treatment of minorities.

Bethlen considers that a protocol similar to that drawn up between Poland and Germany would be satisfactory. He would like, however, a declaration in favour of Hungary similar to that made by the Duce also to be made by Germany. As far as Czechoslovakia is concerned, Count Bethlen said that the Hungarians consider an agreement impossible, since they consider it to be a necessary condition that they should carry their frontiers to the Carpathians in order to make a junction with Poland and thus contain German pressure the better.

The Duce told Bethlen that any possible conflict between Italy and Great Britain would let loose German pressure in Central Europe and the whole Danubian balance of power would be thereby altered.

¹The purpose of this statement, which Bethlen knew to be entirely untrue, can only have been to please Mussolini by providing him with another 'moral justification' for his *volle-face* on the Austrian question.

²Octavian Goga, Rumanian statesman of Transylvanian origin, man of letters and poet, holder of several ministerial offices, founder, together with Prof. Cuza, of the National Christian Party, which was violently nationalistic. Prime Minister from 28th December, 1937 to 10th February, 1938.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 8th January, 1938—XVI

The British Ambassador asked me whether Italy was contemplating the cession of Jubaland to Germany. If this were so, he drew attention to Article 5 of the Anglo-Italian Treaty of 1924.¹

I replied that Italy was not contemplating the cession of any territory to any State. In the course of fifteen years of Fascist rule we had hoisted the flag over a great deal of territory. Nowhere had we lowered it.

While the Anglo-Italian conversations were slow in getting under way, held up as they were by a divergence of views between Chamberlain and Eden, the situation in the Mediterranean was again becoming difficult. British ships had again suffered from torpedo attacks outside the territorial waters of Republican Spain. This time, however, agreement between Italy, France and Great Britain for a further increase in vigilance against the activity of pirate submarines was very rapid, and appeared a good augury for agreement between Rome and London. Indeed, the haste with which the Fascist Government had met the British proposals on that occasion, showed in an unequivocal manner Rome's desire to dispel any reason for distrust or suspicion as to her real aims in the Mediterranean. Agreement on the reinforcement of the control measures accepted at Nyon was reached on 4th February. On the same day Hitler reshuffled the chief posts in the regime so thoroughly as almost to give the impression of a coup d'état. In the diplomatic field, Ribbentrop succeeded Neurath, and von Papen was recalled from Vienna where he was the Fuehrer's Ambassador extraordinary. Within twenty-four hours von Papen left the Austrian capital to report to Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The same evening he returned to Vienna and had highly secret conversations with Schuschnigg, and less secret ones with Dr. Seyss-Inquart, who belonged to the 'Volkspolitische Referat' representing the Austrian Nazis, and with Guido Zernatto, the Secretary-General of the Fatherland Front. Hitler now insisted on a meeting with Schuschnigg which he had already proposed at the beginning of November, 1937, and again in December of that year. He also desired closer 'collaboration' between the Fatherland Front and the Austrian Nazis.

On the evening of 11th February, Schuschnigg and Schmidt secretly left Vienna; the next morning they were in Obersalzberg.

¹Article 5 of the Anglo-Italian convention of 15th July, 1924, concerning the cession of the territory beyond the Juba, stated: 'If the Italian Government should at any time desire to relinquish in whole or in part the territory transferred to it above, that Government undertakes to offer it to the British Government on similar terms.'

'In the event of a disagreement between the two Governments on the conditions of such a transfer, the question shall be made the subject of arbitration, in conformity with such procedure as the Council of the League of Nations may lay down.'

There they were awaited by the Fuehrer, with Ribbentrop, von Papen and three generals, including Keitel and Reichenau, in attendance. The discussion was long, dramatic and painful; it lasted until nightfall. Schuschnigg returned to Vienna overwhelmed and desperate. The drama of Austria was about to enter upon its last phase. On 15th February, at a meeting of the leading officials of the Fatherland Front, Schuschnigg revealed the German demands. To begin with Hitler had demanded a plebiscite, which Schuschnigg had refused; but he had been forced—almost literally—to accept a political programme which meant in practice the complete Nazification of Austria, the reason being that (to quote his own words) 'I found myself internationally isolated, and because the Chancellor of the Reich had stated to me that in the event of refusal he would not be able to guarantee normal relations.'

The coup de grace to Austrian independence had been delivered in a brusque and unexpected manner. Even the Fascist Government had been surprised by it, and one might even say put into a panic. It was then that Ciano wrote a letter to the Ambassador to London, Grandi, instructing him to attempt to reach quickly a full and final agreement between Italy and Great Britain.

LETTER TO THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO
LONDON, COUNT DINO GRANDI.

Rome, 16th February, 1938—XVI

Secret and Personal.

Dear Dino,

You will have gathered from my telegram of the 15th what the attitude is here to the understanding with London and what are the consequent intentions. I would have nothing to add if in the meantime something new had not arisen which—even if it does not alter the situation basically—still makes a discussion of tactics useful. The new fact is the Berchtesgaden meeting and what has followed it. The Nazification of Austria may now be considered—if not complete—certainly very far advanced. That was foreseen; just as it is now easy to foresee that there will be still further bounds forward in the Nazi offensive. When? That is the question which seems difficult to answer. And it is precisely in relation to this uncertainty that the present state of the Anglo-Italian negotiations must be considered. To use a phrase of the Duce's—which is as usual most effective—we find ourselves in the interval between the fourth and fifth acts of the Austrian affair. When will the fifth act begin? It is impossible to foresee. But it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the tempo may increase.

This interval, and this interval alone, can be used for the negotiations between us and London. Today any possible con-

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

cessions and transactions take their place in the normal give and take of diplomacy and, if negotiations are begun, no one can talk in any way of pressure at the gates or of water about to close over our heads. But tomorrow, should the Anschluss be an accomplished fact, should Greater Germany by then press on our frontiers with the weight of its whole seventy million, then it would become increasingly difficult for us to reach an agreement or even talk with the English, since it would be impossible to prevent the entire world interpreting our policy of *rapprochement* with London as a journey to Canossa under German pressure.

Therefore it seems the time has come when one must speed up the conclusion of these *pourparlers* which up to now have proved static and therefore useless. One thing I must make plain: it is not that the Duce is any more anxious today than yesterday to grasp the English by the hand. As before he wishes an understanding if that is possible; as before, he is ready to face any trial, even the hardest, if that appears necessary. The conclusion of the *pourparlers* may therefore be either positive or negative. It is not for us alone to assume that responsibility; the English must take a corresponding share. But there must be a conclusion—and that quickly. For should still further delays be caused by the Chinese wall of prejudices and conditions, should the Nazi march into Austria in the meantime make its final advance and present us with a *fait accompli*, then there would exist no alternative and we would have to direct our policy in a spirit of sharp, open, immutable hostility towards the Western Powers.

I am telling you this for your guidance. I am certain that you will find a way of making the English understand, as and when you see fit, that if we wish to make an effort to bring our relations into port like a vessel in distress, then we must decide to do it soon, since time presses and we cannot always hold all the cards between us.

CONVERSATION WITH THE PRINCE OF HESSE.

Rome, 18th February, XVI—1938

I have had a conversation with the Prince of Hesse¹ in connection with the Fuehrer's journey.²

He told me that Hitler, on learning the general outlines of the programme, expressed his complete approval. He added in confidence that the Fuehrer, once the official visit was over, might possibly wish to pass a few more days privately in Italy at the sea or in the mountains. We would be informed of any such decision in time so as to be able to arrange his stay which the Fuehrer up to

¹Influential member of the Nazi party; husband of Princess Mafalda, daughter of King Victor Emmanuel III.

²The journey took place between 3rd and 9th May.

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

now has not mentioned to anyone, and the plan for which he asks us to treat as a matter of the strictest confidence.

We also discussed with the Prince of Hesse the situation which has arisen after the recent events in Austria. Since the Prince of Hesse will have the opportunity of seeing von Ribbentrop tomorrow evening (19th February), I thought it well to make the following three points to him in a personal and friendly manner.

1. Official Italian reaction to the meeting between Schuschnigg and Hitler and the consequences thereof is familiar to the German Government which will certainly have recognised in it a cordial and concrete proof of friendship.

The Prince of Hesse said that our attitude did, in fact, call forth lively approval in German circles.

2. Granted that, however, I had to point out to him frankly that the way in which things had occurred could not be considered by us to be altogether agreeable. In view of the close bonds between the two Axis countries, if one kept in mind the exemplary correctness of our policy towards Germany, and considered the verbal agreements which exist on the subject of Austria containing the pledge not to do anything without mutual consultations, we had every reason to believe that, before bringing about a meeting with such important consequences, the Fuehrer would have informed us in time and asked us to express our opinion. It was naturally advisable that my present remarks should be kept in mind by the German Government in future. I stressed that we had never failed to inform the Government of the Reich of even the smallest details of matters which were very far from having as much importance for the Germans as the Austrian problem has for Italy.

3. The impression produced throughout the world by recent events has undoubtedly been profound. However, for the purposes of the overall balance, it was still of the utmost importance how the Fuehrer expressed himself on the subject in his next speech. I hoped that in that speech the independence of Austria would be explicitly mentioned. We are all agreed in recognising that Germany has made an important step forward by enlarging her influence in Austria, nevertheless it would be well to declare that Austria continues to exist as an independent State, since the threat of a final absorption of Austria would produce reactions in world opinion which are at present neither easy to forecast nor prudent to arouse.¹

¹Almost at the end of his Reichstag speech on 20th February, Hitler said: 'In recent days a further agreement has been reached with that country which for various reasons is particularly close to us. It is not only that we are the same people, but above all it is a long common history, a common culture, which unite the Reich and German Austria. The difficulties which arose when attempting to bring about the agreements of 11th July obliged us to attempt to clear away for ever the misunderstandings and the obstacles to a final reconciliation. It was, in fact, clear that a situation which had become impossible might one day, wittingly or unwittingly, give rise to the pre-conditions for a very grave catastrophe. Sometimes it is not within human powers to succeed in curbing destiny when carelessness or imprudence have set it in motion. I

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

The Prince of Hesse, who expressed very moderate opinions on the Austrian problem, said that he would not fail to make suitable mention of the matter to Ribbentrop. Personally, after having spoken with Goering, who was not yet completely informed of what had happened and who declared that it had been the Fuehrer who promoted and arranged the Berchtesgaden meeting, the Prince of Hesse considers that the Reich will halt on the present positions without—for a time at least—opening an offensive against Austria's now very limited independence. He fears, however, that the internal situation in Austria is liable to undergo new and serious developments.

REPORT OF THE AMBASSADOR TO LONDON, COUNT GRANDI

N 1023/466.

Italian Embassy,
London.
19th February, 1938.

His Excellency
The Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Rome.

My Meeting with Chamberlain.

Further to my telegram of yesterday evening¹ I am dispatching this morning further details of my meeting yesterday with the Prime Minister.

In order to understand clearly the motives which led to this meeting and the course it took, it is above all necessary to bear in mind events in internal and international politics during the last two weeks. To be precise—

1. The sharpening of the differences between the two trends in the British Cabinet, the one in favour of an agreement with Italy (Chamberlain), the other against an agreement with Italy (Eden).

2. The reaction provoked in England by recent events in Austria.

It is against this political background that my meeting yesterday with Chamberlain is set, and this political background must be kept in mind when judging what happened at the meeting, what con-

am happy to be able to state that this opinion was also shared by the Austrian Chancellor who asked to pay me a visit. There therefore existed the idea of creating . . . a more far-reaching agreement between the two states by means of ever closer and more friendly collaboration . . . All this is a finishing touch to the agreements of 11th July. At this point I should like to express before the German people my sincere thanks to the Austrian Chancellor for the great understanding and the ready warmth with which he accepted my invitation and strove with me to find a way which is as much in the interests of both countries as it is in the interests of the whole German people whose sons we all are, whatever our birthplace. I believe that we have thereby made a contribution to European peace.'

¹The telegram, which summarised the conversations, had been despatched at 1 a.m. on the morning of the 19th and reached Rome an hour later.

clusions must be drawn from it, and the repercussions on the internal politics of Britain.

As I have told you in my telegram of the evening of the day before yesterday, on Wednesday 16th instant and again on Thursday 17th instant, Eden invited me to visit the Foreign Office, saying that he required to speak to me. I replied that I could not do so and added that it was preferable, in any case, to await new instructions for our conversation, which I was informed were already on the way to London.¹

On Thursday 17th instant, Eden telephoned again, insisting on seeing me and talking to me that same morning. I put him off again, bringing up as a pure excuse that I had a golfing engagement (I hate golf but pretend to play it when necessary). I wanted Eden, in fact, to understand clearly that I did not wish to go to the Foreign Office, and confer with him at a time when international politics seemed to be dominated by news of the events in Austria, and when a visit by me to Eden on Wednesday or Thursday might easily have been exploited, directly or indirectly, by the Foreign Office in order to produce, in comment on it, the simple *canard* they are looking for about Anglo-Italian 'consultations', arising from events in Austria. That would have allowed Eden to escape from the position of obvious embarrassment in which he has found himself for three days in the Commons,² and would have cast a shadow on the Rome-Berlin Axis. These were Eden's obvious aims. And, precisely in consideration of this fact, I thought fit to react to his manoeuvre.

I have also informed Your Excellency that after my having refused, on the pretext mentioned above, to present myself at the Foreign Office, there came to see me on Thursday afternoon the confidential agent of Chamberlain, who, since the month of October last year, has been functioning as a direct and 'secret' link between myself and Chamberlain. This agent, with whom one may say I have been in almost daily contact since the 15th January, told

¹In order to hasten the arrival of the special courier who was given the mission of carrying Ciano's letter of 16th February, Grandi arranged for 'a special air service' which, leaving Paris at dawn on 18th February, arrived in London in the early morning.

²The debate on Austria had begun on the 16th. When interrogated on the scope of the Berchtesgaden Agreement Eden had confined himself to giving the facts already known, and stated he would return to the subject later. Under persistent questioning from a number of Members he had been forced to admit that consultations had not yet taken place with the French and Italian Governments, who were signatories along with the British Government of the various declarations on Austrian independence. This statement had greatly disappointed the House. On the 17th and 18th Eden had continually put off the expected statement on Austria, saying that the information received by him through diplomatic channels did not add anything to the facts as known. The Government, Eden declared, had been given notice on 11th February by the Vienna Government of the Berchtesgaden meeting, but it had not been asked to express an opinion. In view of the fact that the guarantees of Austrian independence were collective ones, he said, the British Government did not wish to take the initiative, which depends on Italy and France, with whom conversations were in progress.

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

me he was instructed by Chamberlain to draw my attention to the fact that it would be opportune not to avoid the conversation requested by Eden, since 'it was very probable' (these are the exact words used) 'that the Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, would himself take part in the conversation.' I sketched the reasons why I, for my part, considered I must avoid a meeting with Eden at the present time. I simply could not lend myself, I said, to anything which might possibly be exploited, in England or abroad, as a manœuvre against the Rome-Berlin Axis, and against the solidarity of relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. If the Prime Minister thought fit to have personal contact with me, I was ready to present myself at Downing Street at any minute. The agent immediately consulted Chamberlain, and later in the evening, at 8 o'clock, there reached the Embassy, direct from the offices at 10, Downing Street, Chamberlain's telephoned invitation to present myself at 11.30 the following day for a conversation with the Prime Minister.

I have thought it best to set down the above, which is really necessary as a setting to the conversation.

Chamberlain received me very cordially, and began by saying that he had thought the Foreign Minister should also be present at this meeting.

I naturally answered that I was very pleased.

After the usual general introductory remarks which the English always make, exactly like the Turks and Chinese when they have something particularly important to say, Chamberlain went straight to the point with the following words: 'The situation in Europe and particularly the news of events in Austria during the last few days is very disturbing, don't you think?'

I replied to Chamberlain, very calmly, that the situation in Europe has been disturbing for a long time and not merely for a few days. I made no further remark.

Chamberlain remained silent a little as if waiting for me to say something more. Then he himself, seeing that I continued to maintain silence, broached the thorny question—Austria. He said that events in Austria, that is to say the news reaching London of the sudden German action to Nazify by force the Austrian State, had had in London the most serious and unpleasant repercussions. 'The German action against Austria,' Chamberlain continued, 'is evidently intended to produce changes in the European balance of power, and one must ask what remains today, and above all what will remain tomorrow, or in a short time, of Austrian independence. The latter still exists formally, but it is clear that if Germany continues, as she seems determined to do, on the course she has begun and speeds up the Nazification of Austria, Austrian independence will shortly be definitely and permanently compromised.'

Chamberlain went on to say that the Italian attitude to events in Austria was at present the subject of particular attention and

also of the most varied and contradictory inferences and interpretations. 'I myself,' he said, 'although I take a great deal into account, cannot understand this passive attitude on the part of Italy. I should be sincerely grateful to you if you could explain it to me and cast some light on it.'

I replied to Chamberlain that Italy's position was simple, clear and correct, in the Austrian question as in all others, and that I therefore considered it superfluous to proceed with an explanation such as he had requested. 'Moreover,' I continued, 'I have no instructions from my Government on this point, nor do I feel myself authorised to discuss this topic, which has no apparent connection with the projected Anglo-Italian conversations and is one on which I have no wish at all to open a discussion of that nature.'

Chamberlain then said that he had received a telegram from Lord Perth from Rome, in which the latter informed him of a short conversation with the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, during which the Minister had referred to a letter of instructions despatched to London to Ambassador Grandi. Lord Perth added that he had concluded from the remarks of the Italian Foreign Minister that, in this letter, reference was made to recent events in Austria. Chamberlain asked me whether, in fact, I had received such instructions, and if I could communicate their contents.

I replied to Chamberlain that I had, literally a few minutes before leaving for Downing Street, received a letter of instructions from my Minister, but I did not consider myself bound to make any formal communication to the British Government, and refused in any way to discuss the problem of Austria.

At this point Eden intervened, observing that after all Italy has never denounced the Stresa Agreement which provided for consultation between Italy, France and England on the Austrian problem.¹

I answered Eden dryly that between Stresa and the events in Austria today there had intervened exactly three years, during which some events had taken place of considerable international importance; they themselves made clear and evident the reasons for the difference between the Italian attitude in April, 1935, and the Italian

¹On 14th April, 1935, there had been signed by the representatives of Italy, France and Great Britain, a 'common declaration' which stated in paragraph 3: 'The representatives of the three countries have carried out a fresh examination of the Austrian situation. They confirm the declarations by Britain, France and Italy of 17th February and 27th September, 1934, whereby the three Governments recognised that the necessity of maintaining the independence and integrity of Austria will continue to inspire their common policy.' Referring to the Franco-Italian protocol of 7th January, 1935, and to the Anglo-French declarations of 3rd February, 1935, which confirmed the decision to consult on measures to be taken in the event of a threat to Austria, they agreed 'to recommend a meeting at an early date between all the Governments enumerated in the Rome protocols of 7th January, 1935 (they were in the first place Italy, Austria, Yugoslavia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and then France, Poland and Rumania) in order to conclude agreements relating to Central Europe.'

attitude in February, 1938, and that no one could understand that better than he, Eden, himself.

Chamberlain intervened in this, my first passage of arms with Eden, by saying that he took into account the changed situation and also my formal refusal to discuss with the British Government the Austrian problem. 'It is necessary, however,' Chamberlain continued, 'that I, as Prime Minister of Great Britain, in order to make a definite decision on what British policy towards Italy will be, and in order to be able to form an exact opinion of the prospects of future Anglo-Italian relations and the advantages or otherwise for England of an effective agreement with Italy, should at this moment have from you, in your capacity as Italian Ambassador to London, a precise and clear statement. The situation makes it necessary and urgent. Tomorrow will perhaps be too late. I do not ask you to discuss the Austrian problem. You have lately refused to do so, and I take into account the motives which lead to your refusal. But that does not mean to say that you cannot and do not wish to help me to understand the reasons for the present Italian attitude to the events of this week. The Italian attitude,' Chamberlain continued, 'has, as I have said, given rise to the most varied conjectures and interpretations. The British Government has been informed, for example, and the importance of the information is such that the British Government cannot neglect it' (at this point Chamberlain looked Eden in the face) 'of the existence of a secret agreement between the Fuehrer and the Duce whereby Italy is said to have given its assent in advance to German and Nazi intervention in the internal affairs of Austria and in the consequent progressive absorption of Austria, in exchange for definite and specific undertakings on the part of the Germans to support certain Italian designs in the Mediterranean and in Europe. I must know definitely from you what truth there is in all this.'

- I replied to Chamberlain that the information given to the British Government was false.

In reply Chamberlain said that it might be that even I, as Ambassador in London, might not know all the particulars of the relations between Rome and Berlin; he was therefore constrained to ask me whether I made this outright denial in an absolute sense, from direct knowledge of the facts, or only 'as far as I knew'.

I answered that I denied in the most decisive and absolute manner, on the basis of the contents of those very communications transmitted to me by your Excellency this morning, any such information.

Chamberlain was visibly satisfied by my reply and glanced at Eden, who made no move. Chamberlain repeated the wording of my denial, saying that he wished to be certain that he had understood my statement accurately and literally. He went on to say that he noted my denial with satisfaction, and felt himself authorised on the

the basis of it to consider as false and tendentious the information which had reached the British Government. 'Nevertheless,' Chamberlain went on, 'there are some points and aspects which render Italy's attitude of ostentatious passivity in the face of the serious events in Austria in the last few days incomprehensible, and I require, always with the aim of defining English policy with a view to a possible definite clearing-up of Anglo-Italian relations, to inform myself fully of the reasons behind the Italian attitude and to inform myself of Italy's present position.'

I replied that I had no difficulty in doing this, all the more, I said, as it was merely a matter of repeating, listing in chronological order and showing how one followed the other as cause and effect, events which everybody knew.

I began by recalling the attitude of Fascist Italy to the Curtius-Schober project for an Austro-German Zollverein in 1931.¹ The good relations between Italy and Germany even at that period and Italo-German collaboration in the matter of disarmament, abolition of reparations and revision of treaties, did not prevent the Duce from making a decisive stand against that projected union between Germany and Austria, which was apparently economic, but in fact political. I then recalled the Duce's tenacious, constant, personal endeavour to bring to life, one after another, the various Austro-Italian protocols by which the Duce, with considerable economic and financial sacrifices, has nourished day by day Austrian centres of resistance to the German menace and given consciousness and strength to Austria's spineless sense of patriotism. All this—I added—in the face of systematic opposition, as far as the task of adjusting Austrian internal policy was concerned, from France and her allies who, blinded by petty anti-Fascist, anti-Italian envy, always sought to impede directly or indirectly the Duce's policy as applied in Austria—a policy which was obviously to the common advantage. France and her satellites have clearly shown themselves, particularly during the last few years, to be the most effective supporters of these very German aims. I recalled the open protection given by the Duce to Chancellor Dollfuss, his assassination under circumstances known to everyone, the Italian mobilisation on the Brenner in July, 1934, while France and England, busy chattering about the Austrian question but cautious in deeds, confined themselves to a verbal note as compared to the measures taken by Italy, whose example they took good care not to follow. All Europe knows that if the plot which began with the assassination of Dollfuss was foiled and Austrian independence saved at that time, that was entirely due to the Italian

¹On 21st March, 1931, there had been signed by the German Foreign Minister Curtius and the Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister Schober an agreement which proposed a customs union between the two countries. This agreement was opposed by the League, and was declared contrary to Austria's international obligations by the Permanent Court of International Justice, whose opinion the League had asked.

divisions in arms on the Austrian frontier. Then there came, in April 1935, the Stresa Conference with its protocols and simultaneously the conflict between Italy and Abyssinia with all that followed, which was common knowledge. While England and France declared themselves, in the diplomatic protocols, ready together with Italy to guarantee Austrian independence, it was England and France themselves who promoted and put into operation those sanctions which have been a real war waged by 52 nations against Italy, the exclusive aim being to inflict, under the pretext of an economic war, nothing more nor less than a military and political defeat.'

'After the triumph of Italian arms in Africa and the victorious resistance of Italy to sanctions,' I continued, 'instead of immediately accepting this fact and seeking as far as possible to patch up the solidarity which existed at Stresa, England and France, have, under all sorts of pretexts, above all under the pretext of Italian intervention in Spain, shown with increasing evidence their determination to take political action 100 per cent hostile to Fascist Italy. What is happening today in Austria,' I concluded, 'is the direct consequence of English and French policy during the last three years. The Western powers have undoubtedly been the most effective supporters of the expansionist programme of Nazi Germany and bear the responsibility for what is happening in Austria. The explanation of the Italian attitude in the face of present events in Austria is not, therefore, to be sought in absurd plots between Rome and Berlin, but only in the policy of London and Paris.'

Chamberlain listened to me attentively and showed that he did not at all dislike this type of philippic, although it was condensed into a chronological list of facts and events, and when Eden was about to speak, Chamberlain intervened saying: 'This does not seem to me to be the moment to begin a discussion on responsibility. I might perhaps also say that I cannot share certain of your judgments. But let us examine the present situation. What is Italy's attitude at this moment and what will it be in the future not only to events in Austria but above all to the major European problems? To what extent must Austrian independence be considered compromised by the German action begun four days ago? Is it quite certain that this German operation, which aims at the complete absorption of Austria, cannot be stopped or at least slowed down?'

I replied to Chamberlain by saying that I did not intend to discuss the Austrian question with the British Government, and that he should confine himself to taking note of my complete denial of the existence of alleged contracts or agreements between Germany and Italy on the subject of Austria. 'But,' I continued, 'since you set me questions on the position of Italy in general European politics I am ready to expound the ideas of the Fascist Government on the basis of the instructions I received this morning from Rome.'

In fact, I believed that the moment had come in the conversation

with Chamberlain to do so, and on the basis of my instructions to put to the British Government, with force and clarity, the Italian position following recent events in Austria. My aim was to demonstrate the urgent need of reaching a rapid, all-embracing and definite agreement with Fascist Italy, an indispensable premise being recognition by Britain of the Italian Empire in Ethiopia. I told Chamberlain, in these very words, that the complete denial of the existence of a European agreement of a secret nature between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy referred to the present *but not to the future*. The future attitude of Italy to the general problem of peace in Europe and to the future European settlement depended exclusively, I said, on Britain's real attitude to Italy in the immediate future. Up to the present moment the attitude of Great Britain has been deliberately hostile to Italy. The entire Italian people is aware of this and convinced it is true; moreover, Britain's actions and initiative go to confirm it daily. Events in Austria this week have undoubtedly introduced an increased *tempo* into the European drama. No country can wait longer. Italy, for her part, can wait no more and demands to know immediately, and once for all, in deeds and not in words, if England intends to remain an enemy country or if it has decided to conclude a chapter in Anglo-Italian relations which has lasted for three years, and to come to an overall, conclusive agreement—an agreement without any obscurities or cause for future friction or differences with Fascist Italy. 'One must not believe,' I told Chamberlain—expressing myself in your Excellency's very words, since I could not have found any more effective—'that the Duce is more anxious to clasp England's hand than he was yesterday. As before he desires an understanding, if that is possible; as before he is ready to face any test, even the hardest. The conclusion of the *pourparlers* may therefore be positive or negative. It is not for Italy alone to assume such a responsibility; England, too, must take a corresponding share. I require that there should be a conclusion and that rapidly; since, should new delays again be caused, Italy would have no alternative and the Duce would definitely have to direct Italian policy in a spirit of frank, open, unshakable hostility towards the Western Powers.'

Chamberlain showed that he was listening to my remarks with still greater attention and said 'I wish to be sure that I have fully understood what you have been saying to me—that is, that if it should not be immediately possible to clear up finally the present state of Anglo-Italian relations, Italy would feel itself irrevocably forced in future to assume, once and for all, a political position and to give undertakings, which may turn out to be hostile to the great Western Powers.'

I replied that such was the case and that he had understood perfectly.

Chamberlain looked at Eden and resumed the conversation by

asking me what practical suggestions could, in my opinion, bring about positive results between England and Italy.

I replied: 'The immediate beginning of official conversations in Rome without further procrastinations and prejudicial conditions—whether these conditions be openly stated or disguised and then presented apparently in another form, but actually identical in substance.'

At this point Eden emerged from the hostile silence he had maintained up till now and intervened directly, in a sharp tone, in the discussion between myself and Chamberlain. Eden began by saying that this problem of the official opening of Anglo-Italian conversations had been, as the Prime Minister knew, the subject of several conversations during the past week between himself and the Italian Ambassador. 'Evidently,' Eden continued, 'between last week and today a new fact has emerged, and that is Austria, and above all the fact that the Italian Government, at least according to what Ambassador Grandi states, refuses to discuss the Austrian problem on the basis of the Stresa protocols. The Italian attitude,' Eden continued, 'at least until such time as it is further clarified, compels the British Government to go back over some of the points already covered in my conversations with Grandi during the last week. We must go back to the starting point and, before touching on any other problem, go thoroughly into the Austrian problem. Since the Anglo-Italian conversations must cover all the points of misunderstanding between the two countries, it is clear,' Eden continued, 'that the examination of the Austrian question must be given precedence over all others. Now Ambassador Grandi has declared that he refuses to discuss this problem. . . .'

At these words of Eden's Chamberlain gave visible signs of disappointment and irritation, but said nothing.

'After the Austrian problem,' Eden continued, 'there is the question of Spain. It is useless and dangerous—this must be said clearly—to pretend to ignore this problem, which is of fundamental importance to Anglo-Italian relations and prejudicial to them. What is the use of official conversations in Rome and London, if they are not preceded by a precise agreement and if a satisfactory solution of the Spanish question has not been reached? In January, 1937, an agreement was reached between England and Italy, which has shown itself in practice to be sterile and useless, solely because the Spanish question was merely touched upon in that agreement, and not discussed and settled so as to avoid the possibility of its constituting, in the future, the source of possible friction and disagreement between the two countries. To declare open official conversations between Rome and London without previous agreement on the Spanish question, means giving rise to dangerous illusions and exaggerated prospects of the course of the Anglo-Italian negotiations. This would cause a distinct deterioration in Anglo-Italian

relations, as already happened after the conclusion of the "gentlemen's agreement" of January, 1937. This is particularly likely if the Italian Government intends to insist on its prejudicial *sine qua non*—namely, that any Anglo-Italian agreement must include British recognition of Italian sovereignty in Ethiopia. To open official conversations after having declared on our side that we accept the Italian condition of recognition of Abyssinia, and without Italy giving any corresponding undertaking on Austria or Spain, means giving Italy all she asks without any corresponding guarantee on our part.'

At this point Eden dwelt on an absolutely arbitrary reconstruction of the course of the Spanish conflict this year: 'In January there was the signature of the "gentlemen's agreement" and some weeks later six thousand Italian volunteers were sent to Spain. In July after the exchange of letters between Chamberlain and Mussolini' and the agreement on the opening of the Anglo-Italian conversations we had the incidents in the Mediterranean, which once more gravely upset the atmosphere of Anglo-Italian relations. It is therefore above all necessary to create a situation which will guarantee that these "unfortunate coincidences"' (Eden's actual words) 'will not take place. Under present conditions and in present circumstances the British Government cannot come to any agreement with Italy, and particularly not to an agreement which recognises the right of Italian sovereignty over Abyssinia.'

I firmly replied to Eden that I could not but be disagreeably surprised by his words and added that I was ready to discuss the Spanish question with him, in the presence of Chamberlain, from top to bottom, in all its aspects, none being barred, and in all its phases and its entirely artificial repercussions on Anglo-Italian relations. But I thought it unnecessary to do so within the limits of today's conversation: I was, however, always prepared and ready to do so at any minute. I wished, however, to contest in the most formal manner certain of Eden's statements, which were contrary to the most elementary truths. To be precise, the letter from Ciano to Drummond accompanying the 'gentlemen's agreement' of the 2nd January covered the entire field, and answered implicitly all the possible questions and inquiries which might eventually arise in Anglo-Italian relations as a result of the Spanish conflict.

I recalled to Chamberlain (a thing worth while repeating, because the English like to forget it) that the Fascist Government before and after the 'gentlemen's agreement' had asked insistently and in vain on the Non-Intervention Committee for the application

¹On 27th July, 1937, Chamberlain handed Grandi a handwritten letter addressed to Mussolini, in which he expressed his regret at the unsatisfactory state of Anglo-Italian relations, his faith in their improvement and the wish 'to enter into conversations to that end.' Mussolini replied on 2nd August with a handwritten letter addressed to Chamberlain accepting 'the proposal that conversations begin to ensure agreement' between the two countries.

of measures to prevent the influx of volunteers into Spain. To my denunciations of Russia, who was organising the Red anti-Fascist brigade at Madrid, and was causing Red volunteers to flow into Spain from all parts, the British delegate, Plymouth, answered in the Plenary Committee that the influx of foreign volunteers was not considered in the Non-Intervention Agreement. It was only after and in consequence of the influx of volunteers from Russia, France, England, Czechoslovakia, etc., and the formation of the Red International Brigade, which has proved to be far from negligible in efficiency—so much so as to halt Franco's victorious advance before Madrid—that the Legionaries left Italy, their only object being to counterbalance intervention which international anti-Fascism had already dangerously initiated in support of the Spanish Social-Communists.

I recalled to Eden his statements of 15th March, 1937, in the Commons, in which he declared that the British Government was informed that the volunteers on either side in Spain were 'equal in number.' If, therefore, the so-called 'spirit' of the 'gentlemen's agreement' of January, 1937, has been broken, the responsibility, I said, for the alleged breach lies not with Italy but with the Allies and associates of England herself, with the acts of sabotage which the British Government has always sought to further directly or indirectly.

'Such a situation,' I continued, 'arose in the month of August. At this point I quoted Eden's own words in the Commons' when he admitted the enormous influx of material and aid which, in the very months of July and August, had reached the Spanish Reds from Soviet Russia—'a fact which naturally,' I continued, 'made necessary drastic and efficacious action by the Salamanca Government to hinder this serious contraband traffic.' There are, it is true, 'coincidences,' to use Eden's word, but these are not among the alleged contradictions in the Italian attitude; on the other hand, a strange and significant coincidence occurred whenever Anglo-Italian relations were moving towards positive improvement. There were first the moves towards an Anglo-Italian agreement, and then the moves made immediately afterwards by international anti-Fascism (including British anti-Fascism), which aimed at serious and scandalous intervention on the side of the Spanish Reds, and at simultaneously whipping-up an artificial campaign of lies against Italy, the only object being to destroy and wreck the attempts at agreements between Italy and England. Italy has the right to ask if many of the steps initiated during the Spanish conflict by the Governments in London, Paris and Moscow—for example, the Nyon Agreement—did not conceal a programme whose terms were laid down by a military action directly hostile to Italy, whose limits and proportions surpassed the limits and proportions of the Spanish

¹Grandi is referring to statements made by Eden in the autumn of 1937.

conflict, and which recalled by a strange and symptomatic coincidence recent experiences at Geneva of the sanctions bloc against Italy.

'Fascist Italy, it is worth recalling, is today on the side of General Franco,' I went on, 'for the same reasons and in circumstances absolutely analogous to those which, a century ago, led England to send the Duke of Wellington and English troops to Spain to fight alongside the Spaniards against the French. Once Spain was liberated from the tyranny of the French invasion, the Duke of Wellington went off saying that he had safeguarded the interests of England through the mere fact of saving Spanish independence.'

Chamberlain intervened between Eden and myself saying that to him it appeared useless to continue with polemics of this nature, but that instead the most useful thing was for both sides to examine in a calm state of mind the possibilities of an effective and final clearing-up of the situation, seeking to remove the mutual difficulties in a spirit of mutual trust. Obviously the Spanish question could not be excluded *a priori* from an examination of the problems affecting Anglo-Italian relations. 'The Fascist Government,' said Chamberlain, turning to Eden, 'has never shown a desire to exclude the examination of any question which interests the two countries, and therefore had not excluded the examination of the Spanish question. Other questions will naturally have to be examined, for example—the situation as it affects both parties in the Mediterranean, the forces in Libya, the situation of both parties in the Red Sea, etc. What the Fascist Government is asking,' Chamberlain continued, still addressing Eden, 'is that we declare that England recognises Italian sovereignty in Ethiopia and that thereafter one should pass on to the examination of all the problems which must form the subject of the general agreement between the two countries, an agreement of which the recognition of Abyssinia must naturally form an integral part. I am in agreement and accept this. Italy further asks that no conditions or proviso should be made and that all the problems should be discussed together and on the same plane. I do not see how this can prejudice British interests and I do not see how the British Government can decline to accept the Italian point of view.'

Eden showed that he did not like these statements by Chamberlain in the least, and addressing the Prime Minister directly—as if I were not there—countered that he did not see how one could reconcile the simultaneous carrying on of Anglo-Italian conversations and the work of the Non-Intervention Committee. It was above all necessary, Eden continued, to wait until the Non-Intervention Committee had reached a definite agreement with definite undertakings by all the Governments taking part on the fundamental problem under discussion—that is on the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from Spain, but as a prerequisite of any agree-

ment it was necessary in the first place that the foreign volunteers should in fact have left Spain. 'Until that has happened,' Eden continued, 'I do not see what use there would be in official Anglo-Italian talks, which cannot but be influenced by the progress and the final outcome of the forthcoming discussions in the Non-Intervention Committee. On this matter no concrete proof of goodwill has been given on the Italian side. Italy continues to give evasive answers and makes no secret of it. For example,' Eden went on, 'ten days ago, I put before Signor Grandi a compromise formula on the question of volunteers and belligerency, and on other questions Plymouth has also spoken to the Italian Ambassador. We have been waiting for an answer for ten days. Is Signor Grandi in a position to acquaint us with the reply of the Fascist Government to the British formula?'

I answered Eden dryly by reminding him that three nights ago in Birmingham he declared that it was necessary to go slowly.¹ The Fascist Government had taken him at his word. The British formula is at the moment the subject of careful examination between Rome and Berlin.

At this point Chamberlain intervened, this time with the air of being thoroughly annoyed and said, turning to Eden: 'That is all very well, but one must not forget that between your conversations with Grandi and today there have been new events in Europe, and those new events instead of putting things back to where we started from should make us think again and lead us to the very opposite conclusions.' Then addressing me directly: 'I am asking a definite question—do you really consider that the fact of declaring publicly that the conversations foreseen in the letters exchanged between myself and the Duce might, as you say, in itself produce a favourable atmosphere, and in itself contribute to a rapid attainment of an agreement between the two countries?'

I replied to Chamberlain that I did think so.

Chamberlain went on: 'Very well. I think we might usefully continue our conversation this afternoon, thus allowing me to consult with my Foreign Minister on the matter we have discussed. If you agree, we can resume our conversation this afternoon at three o'clock.'

I agreed and with that our morning conversation came to an end.

At three in the afternoon the conversation was resumed.

Chamberlain began by telling me at once that he had examined

¹On 12th February—not therefore 'three nights ago'—Eden had made a speech to the Junior Imperial League, in which he had said that in foreign policy Great Britain, while not abandoning the ideals of collaboration, of mutual assistance and international justice incorporated in the League of Nations, must at the same time give proofs of a spirit of tolerance and adaptability. One must take care, Eden had added, not to sacrifice principles and shed responsibilities with the sole object of obtaining results which were rapid but not lasting; at the same time, however, understanding between the democracies and dictatorships must not become impossible, in spite of differences.

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

the situation carefully with Mr. Eden and that he had come to the decision to accept my point of view, subject to the approval of the Cabinet, which he hoped to call for the next day, Saturday, so as to lay before his colleagues what had been discussed today between himself, the Italian Ambassador and Eden. 'The Cabinet,' Chamberlain continued, 'must be informed by me of the details of our discussions, and make its final decision. I will ask the Cabinet to be allowed to announce that the Anglo-Italian conversations have been officially begun without waiting for a previous solution of specific problems or other pre-conditions. In order to facilitate my attempt to obtain a unanimous decision by the Cabinet I nevertheless ask the Duce to see whether he can declare himself to be in agreement with the British formula¹ put forward by Plymouth and Eden on the specific subject under debate in the Non-Intervention Committee concerning belligerency and volunteers—bearing in mind,' Chamberlain continued, 'the possibility of a speedy and complete Anglo-Italian agreement for which a previous general understanding has already been reached between the two Governments on the fundamental points. We would,' Chamberlain went on, 'then proceed as follows: Official opening of the Anglo-Italian conversations to be simultaneous with a statement on the Italian side that the Fascist Government agrees with the British Government on the formula to be submitted later to the Non-Intervention Committee for discussion and approval.'

I asked Chamberlain to make it clear whether he meant by that that the conversations would begin immediately and without awaiting whatever might be the outcome of the British proposal in the Non-Intervention Committee.

Chamberlain replied that I had given an accurate interpretation.

I replied to Chamberlain that I did not yet know what the Duce and Your Excellency thought of the formula on volunteers and belligerency proposed by Plymouth and Eden in the course of our conversations last week, and that I could therefore give no definite commitment before having consulted Your Excellency and receiving instructions.

Chamberlain replied that he understood my difficulty and that, for his part, he wished before himself replying with a definite acceptance of this projected agreement to make clear to the Cabinet the reasons which had prompted him to make this decision and to have it approved. He therefore proposed that I should cable Rome so as to be in a position to give him a reply by Monday. He would reserve similar confirmation on his side until Monday—that is after the Cabinet meeting.

¹On 14th July, 1937, the British Government had submitted to the approval of the Non-Intervention Committee a control scheme which under point 3 proposed recognition that both sides in Spain were juridically in a position which allowed them to exercise the rights of belligerents at sea, and under point 7, the withdrawal of volunteers.

I assured Chamberlain that I naturally would not fail to place his proposal before Your Excellency in the terms indicated by him and that I would give him a reply by Monday in accordance with the instructions received from my Government. I thought it was well worth while—if only to give weight to a possible acceptance by Italy of the proposal for a compromise on the topic of volunteers and belligerency which was presented to us ten days ago by Plymouth and Eden—to make clear to Chamberlain in a personal capacity, the reasons why I considered that formula considerably to our disadvantage, since under certain circumstances, it could act with excessive discrimination to the advantage or harm of one of the two parties in Spain. I therefore expected that the Fascist Government would go cautiously before accepting the formula itself. For that very reason, I said, the Fascist Government has thought fit to undertake a careful and accurate examination of all the possibilities. The above-mentioned formula, I continued, means that the members of the Committee pledge themselves to accept in advance—by an automatic process—the results of the works of the two Commissions which have been sent to Spain. Now it is evident that on the Nationalist side, it will be easy to determine the number of volunteers since the foreign volunteers are easily identified in the legionary formations. The Red authorities in Barcelona, precisely with a view to a possible inquiry of an international nature, some time ago proceeded to dissolve the International Brigade, scattering its components through the various units of the Red Spanish militia. That will render the task of the Commission which is instructed to ascertain the number of foreign volunteers very difficult and complex—even admitting that one can presuppose absolute good faith—and might easily lead to errors. If the Commissions should discover a number of Red volunteers lower than the number of volunteers on the Nationalist side, a relatively small difference in the calculation could, in certain circumstances, work out unjustly and unfairly as far as Franco was concerned and have an effect which went beyond even the clauses contemplated by the British plan of 16th July¹ and by the Resolution of the Non-Intervention Committee of 4th November.²

It was necessary—I continued—for me to point all this out to Chamberlain in order to avoid from now on responsibility for possible difficulties in the future, and also because the blame must not be put on Italy later if such difficulties arise through the fault

¹The plan bears the date of 14th July. It was presented to the Committee on 16th July.

²On 4th November the Non-Intervention Committee had approved two resolutions: the first authorised the President of the Committee to enter into contact with both sides in Spain in order to obtain their agreement to co-operation in the withdrawal of all foreign volunteers under international control; the second referred to steps to be taken to get round the consequences of the Soviet Union's refusal to recognise Franco as a belligerent.

of a third power. It is all the more necessary to repeat this, I concluded, in view of the tendency clearly demonstrated by Mr. Eden to consider that the collective results of the Committee of Non-Intervention are capable of modifying the Anglo-Italian negotiations either positively or negatively. Which means in practice—I repeated—either that one recognises beforehand that third powers can at any moment compromise the results of the Anglo-Italian negotiations, or else that one admits an even more absurd hypothesis, which is that in order to reach an agreement with Britain, Italy might find herself compelled to accept all the conditions which Russia and France saw fit to make and to put forward in the Non-Intervention Committee, even if they had no other aim than to engineer a breakdown of the Anglo-Italian negotiations either before they started or when they were in progress.

Chamberlain listened to me and said that it was rather difficult for him to follow in detail the complicated and abstruse formulæ which emerged one after another from the hair-splitting debates in the Non-Intervention Committee, but that in any case he estimated at its just value the general sense of what I had told him, and was certain—he concluded (looking at Eden and turning towards him with a slightly bantering air)—that the Foreign Minister did the same.

'It is now necessary,' Chamberlain continued, 'for us to agree on the spot where the official negotiations, which must naturally be as speedy as possible, will take place.'

I replied that I did not see how there could be any doubt on that subject. The official negotiations must take place in Rome.

Chamberlain replied that he was puzzled at the choice of Rome. He sincerely preferred—Chamberlain said—that these conversations should continue here in London where they had in fact already begun in the course of the week at the Foreign Office, and had continued today at Downing Street. 'Even if it is agreed to call them preliminary and exploratory,' Chamberlain continued, 'there is no doubt that from many points of view we have already got to the heart and substance of the problems under discussion. On the subject of British recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia, there is nothing further to be discussed. I confirm to you today that the British Government no longer insists on the objection communicated previously to the Italian Government in the months of September, October and December of last year—which means to say that British recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia must be an integral part of the future Anglo-Italian Agreement. On the question of anti-British propaganda, too, the British Government has withdrawn its statement that it considers a solution of this question a condition, and accepts the Italian point of view that incidents on either side which may disturb the friendly atmosphere between the two countries should be examined during the general

negotiations. Mr. Eden has informed me, moreover, that on this point discussions were already begun during last week's conversations. There remain other questions of undoubted importance which have not been touched on, and all of them could be discussed here in London. I myself might possibly be able to take part personally with a view to hastening the issue of the conversations should difficulties arise.'

Eden intervened to state that, for his part, he considered it absolutely necessary that the official conversations—if (Eden stressed) *they do actually take place and when they take place*—should in any event be held in London. Eden added that the choice of London as meeting-place appeared all the more natural since it is in London that the discussions of the Non-Intervention Committee are held and will continue to be held, and it was evident that any Anglo-Italian conversations *which might take place* would have to keep in step with the work of the Non-Intervention Committee.

I replied that I appreciated the reasons for which the Prime Minister considered London preferable as the meeting-place, but that I could not, on the other hand, accept the reasons which led the Foreign Minister to consider it necessary to choose London and not Rome. What Eden had said, I continued, had made me all the more convinced of the advisability if not of the necessity of holding the negotiations in Rome, as had been expected since July of last year. For the very reason, I said, that London is the scene of the labours of the Non-Intervention Committee it is advisable that the negotiations should be conducted in Rome, that is to say apart from and independently of the work of the Non-Intervention Committee. I cannot accept, I said, the arguments put forward this morning by Mr. Eden, according to which the outcome of the Anglo-Italian negotiations should be contingent upon the collective results of the Non-Intervention Committee. That would mean, I repeat, to give Russia and France, for instance, the right to wreck the Anglo-Italian negotiations at any minute by means of an action of sabotage or by means of manœuvres in the London Committee, which are only too easy. The Fascist Government is willing to discuss any subject which may affect Anglo-Italian relations directly, but it is clear that it cannot allow its attitude and goodwill to be dependent on or subordinate to the ill-will of third powers which are notoriously hostile to Italy, and which are obviously interested in opposing any agreement between England and Italy. That would mean, in other words, making Russia and France arbiters in the Anglo-Italian conversations; which is absurd. If this is what Mr. Eden wants, it is as well to clear up this point explicitly and before going any further. And if this were the case, I should have to draw the conclusion that the British Government has no serious intention of reaching positive results. What I am saying applies, moreover, not only to the connection which is asserted to exist between the Anglo-Italian

conversations and the work of the Non-Intervention Committee, but also and above all to any Anglo-Italian discussions on the Spanish question which may at any time take place. The claim that merely in order to create conditions favourable for an agreement with England Italy should modify her policy of support for General Franco, or cease to counterbalance the scandalous intervention by Russia and France, would mean, in other words, that the British Government is not looking for the basis of a definitive agreement with Italy, but is merely attempting to immobilise Italy, to favour French and Russian intervention and to aid the Spanish Reds in a decisive manner. Especially of late, I continued, French intervention has assumed such scandalous proportions as to make Italy's position once more really difficult in so far as her aid to Nationalist Spain is concerned—aid which is both necessary and her bounden duty. I do not believe—I continued—that the Fascist Government can remain silent much longer on the subject of this continual intensification of French intervention in Spain.

Chamberlain replied that as far as either the question of volunteers or of all the other questions connected with non-intervention are concerned, it is obvious that the British Government always intends to apply an accurate standard of reciprocity to both sides, without discrimination of any kind between Salamanca and Barcelona. As regards the question of volunteers more specifically Chamberlain added: *'When I say foreign volunteers I mean the volunteers on both sides.'*

At this point, after this necessary digression, we returned to the question of the place in which the Anglo-Italian discussions will take place.

I once more insisted on Rome, showing by obvious arguments, and several times over, the necessity of conducting these negotiations in the Italian capital. There is a definite agreement between the British and Italian Governments, which is familiar to everybody, and there is no doubt that the Italian public would be very puzzled to learn at the last moment, and for reasons which cannot readily be explained, that this agreement has been modified. That would incur the risk of immediately creating an atmosphere unfavourable to these conversations.

Eden intervened to say that one could not speak of an agreement in the true sense of the word between the British and Italian Government on a meeting in Rome; it had been spoken of as a possibility, but he did not believe that there was an agreement in the true sense of the word.

Chamberlain, a little embarrassed, said that he did not in fact remember whether this subject had been discussed during the conversations with me in July.

I replied that it had been discussed and that Chamberlain had then consented to the conversations, which then seemed imminent,

taking place in Rome. 'Moreover,' I added, 'I am in a position to produce documentary evidence to that effect.'

At this point I produced two documents¹ which I had brought with me in case they might be useful. In both documents the British Government confirms that the seat of the forthcoming conversations is to be Rome and not London.

Chamberlain examined these documents and then said to me that it would be possible to find a middle way—that is to say, to continue the conversations already begun in London with the proviso that during their course the advisability of transferring them to Rome be examined. Or, continued Chamberlain, the British Government could address an invitation to Count Ciano to visit London and he could on that occasion himself finish the conversations and sign the agreement.

I replied that Count Ciano would without doubt have appreciated the invitation from the British Prime Minister and that, in favourable circumstances, I was sure that he would have been glad to accept that invitation. But, in present circumstances, all factors made it preferable not to alter anything in the programme already fixed; that meant that the conversations anticipated in the exchange of letters between Chamberlain and Mussolini be carried on in Rome, in accordance with the agreement personally reached between Chamberlain and myself during our meeting in July last.

At this point, as at the end of the morning's discussion, Chamberlain addressed the following question directly to me: 'You really believe, then, that the fact that these negotiations are carried on in Rome, may favourably influence their results?'

I replied that there was no doubt that this was so.

Chamberlain finished by saying that he agreed to Rome, and the conversation then finished.

I have made and hasten to send to Your Excellency this faithful and detailed photographic record of these two conversations, which lasted three hours in all, because I consider that no impressions and no commentary could reproduce the various aspects of the political situation in these days better or more efficiently than the documentary picture of my meeting with Chamberlain and Eden, giving its chronological development, its successive stages and phases, the questions and answers, the arguments and clashes between Chamberlain, Eden and the undersigned.

Certainly this discussion of yesterday was one of the most paradoxical and extraordinary in which it has been my lot to take part.

Chamberlain and Eden were not a Prime Minister and a Foreign Minister discussing with the Ambassador of a Foreign Power a delicate situation of an international character. They were—and

¹The *aide-mémoire* dated 6th August, 1937, handed to Count Ciano by Sir Eric Drummond, and the record of a later conversation between the British Chargé d'affaires in Rome and Count Ciano on 27th September, 1937.

revealed themselves as such to me in defiance of all established convention—two enemies confronting each other, like two cocks in true fighting posture. The questions and queries addressed to me by Chamberlain were all, without exception, intentionally put with the aim of producing replies which would have the effect of contradicting and overthrowing the bases of argument on which Eden had evidently previously constructed, or by which he had attempted to justify, his miserable anti-Italian and anti-Fascist policy in opposition to Chamberlain and before his colleagues in the Cabinet.

Eden, for his part, did not scruple to reveal himself fully in my presence as what he has always been and what I have always described him as: an inveterate enemy of Fascism and of Italy.

At the end of these three hours conversations the two men whom I had had in front of me gave the indelible impression that, behind the words, the arguments, the differences of opinion and even the questions under discussion, they were playing, or preparing to play for the high stakes of their future destiny in the Government and in the Conservative Party, and that they were forging their debating weapons for the Cabinet meeting which is taking place at the very moment when I am writing this report, a meeting which for them may be a decisive battle.

Chamberlain, in fact, in addressing his questions directly to me, expected from me—this was obvious—nothing more nor less than those details and definite answers which were useful to him as ammunition against Eden. This I at once realised and naturally tried to supply Chamberlain with all the ammunition which I considered might be useful to him to this end. There is no doubt that in this connection the contacts previously established between myself and Chamberlain through his confidential agent proved to be very valuable. Purely as a matter of historical interest, I inform Your Excellency that yesterday evening after the Downing Street meeting, Chamberlain secretly sent his agent to me (we made an appointment in an ordinary public taxi) to say that he 'sent me cordial greetings, that he had appreciated my statements, which had been very useful to him, and that he was confident that everything would go very well next day.'

I would not wish either to leave Your Excellency the impression which some statements made by Chamberlain in the course of the discussion suggest—namely that Chamberlain has in mind any plan for resisting Germany over the Austrian question. The British attitude to events in Austria has been and, I believe, will remain that which I have always reported to Your Excellency—that is to say, an attitude of what I shall call 'indignant resignation.' To the question of Anglo-German relations in consequence of events in Austria I will return later in a separate paper.

In any case it is not Germany or Austria which is the battleground between Chamberlain and Eden at present. It is Italy alone.

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

Chamberlain wants to put finished to the chapter on Abyssinia, to recognise the Italian Empire and to conclude with Mussolini's Italy a lasting agreement based on respect and mutual friendship. Eden wishes to continue with his policy of hate and vendettas, to pave the way for war with Italy at some date sooner or later, and to pose—as he is now doing—as a sort of new Pitt facing the Napoleon of Italy.

To say that Chamberlain will have an easy task would be inexact. Eden has on his side the man in the street, or the 'historical beast' which is always lurking in a large section of the British people, the Left-wing parties, French anti-Fascism and Masonry, who see in him the head of the future British Popular Front.

All through today, Saturday 19th, the political atmosphere in London and in the House of Commons is the same as in the days preceding the Hoare-Laval crisis of December, 1935.¹

Today, in February, 1938, it is over the *subject of Italy and of policy towards Italy alone* that parties and opinions are excited and divided exactly as they were then, in December, 1935.

Churchill, who is a personal enemy of Chamberlain, is this morning once again gathering together the Left-wing Conservative members in order to declare his solidarity with Eden and to attempt to instigate a 'pronunciamento' in the Commons in favour of the latter.

Let us hope that Churchill's solidarity will bring Eden the same good fortune as it did to the ex-King Edward VIII during the abdication days. Chamberlain, for his part, has mobilised and is mobilising the City, the Right-wing and Centre members and all the political forces at his disposal. One certainly cannot say that the situation this morning is lacking in real interest and in dramatic qualities. But old Chamberlain, there is no doubt about it, has shown that he has a tough hide like his cobbler forefathers in Birmingham. Let us hope that this time our luck is in.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 19th February, 1938—XVI

The Ambassador, Lord Perth, told me that he had not yet had any instructions on the subject of the proposed Anglo-Italian conversations, but that he had instead urgently to call the attention of the Fascist Government to the question of two Italian military posts which had been set up some months ago on territory belonging to Kenya and to the Sudan, and of which the British Government

¹The British Foreign Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare (now Lord Templewood), and the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, had drawn up a joint plan to solve the crisis between Italy and Abyssinia. This plan was made public prematurely, and produced strong reactions in Britain and France, which compelled the Prime Minister, Baldwin, to replace Hoare by Eden. The plan was naturally dropped.

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS EDEN

requested 'the immediate withdrawal.' He left a note on the subject.¹

I told the Ambassador that I shall collect the material on the matter. On my remarking to him incidentally that it seemed to me that too much importance was being attached to the subject, the Ambassador *told me that he, too, would have confined himself to transmitting the request to the Italian Foreign Office had he not received direct and personal instructions from the Secretary of State to present the protest personally and to use the formula he had adopted.*

I believe this is worth reporting since it may have great significance, having taken place the day after the conversation between Grandi, Chamberlain and Eden.

Before withdrawing the British Ambassador asked me if I had had any information on yesterday's talks and on the probable date for the opening of the conversations. I told him very briefly what Grandi had reported to us. Lord Perth again stated his desire to be able to begin the negotiations soon, a desire which recently he has always repeated to me with warmth.

¹In the Note, which was marked 'Immediate', the British Government drew the attention of the Italian Government to the two following facts: (a) an Italian military post had recently been set up at Kangalimoru, 25 miles within Sudanese territory; (b) another Italian post had been discovered by British frontier guards north of Kokoi, near the east bank of Lake Rudolf, some 25 miles within Kenya territory. In consequence the British Government made 'formal protest' against the unauthorised occupation of these points and asked for 'the immediate withdrawal of the posts at Kangalimoru and Kokoi'.

XV

CHAMBERLAIN TRIES AGAIN

22nd February—26th March, 1938.

Immediately after the conversations with Grandi, the struggle between Eden and Chamberlain flared up again. Chamberlain had on his side the great majority of the Ministers, Eden was practically alone. Nevertheless the Prime Minister made an effort to preserve the unity of the Cabinet. He was anxious to avoid differences of opinion with his Foreign Minister from having spectacular consequences, which would also inevitably have their effect in international affairs. But all efforts were in vain. On Sunday, 20th February, the Cabinet met three times. Not even during the period which preceded Britain's entry into the war at the beginning of August, 1914, had the Cabinet met on a Sunday. There was a great crowd outside Downing Street, excited and restive. Leaflets were being circulated bearing the slogans 'No Agreement with Dictators', 'Send Arms to Spain'. When Eden left the second Cabinet meeting to return to the Foreign Office for the last time he was pale and serious. The crowd guessed that he had handed in his resignation, but it was not until 10.25 in the evening that Eden announced it to the journalists, adding that Chamberlain had accepted it. That day Mussolini was at Terminillo, in the Abruzzi, for the winter sports. He received the news which had been despatched urgently to him from the Palazzo Chigi at five past eleven. He could go to bed satisfied; his most determined personal enemy had been put in a position where he could not harm him—at least for some time.

The way was thus paved for the rapid development of the conversations between Rome and London. The new British Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax, shared the convictions, the hopes and illusions of Chamberlain. This was indeed, as Grandi had written on 19th February, a lucky time for Italy—or so it seemed.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 22nd February, 1938—XVI

I received the Ambassador, Lord Perth, who, on the eve of his departure for London, whither he has been recalled to receive instructions for the forthcoming opening of the Anglo-Italian conversations, wished to make direct contact with me to express his

satisfaction at the situation which has arisen and which he has long desired.

He asked me in a purely personal and exploratory manner whether I had any suggestions to make on the agenda of the forthcoming conversations. He, for his part, considered that subjects of discussion should be those with which we are already familiar. I replied that I agreed with him. The same subjects as had been discussed at the time of the 'gentlemen's agreement' could be the subject of examination with the exception of some which had in the meantime lapsed, such as the problem of the Balearics, and others, such as the problem of Spain, which had been transferred to another body. Naturally, on the Italian side, the question of legal recognition of the Empire was being added.

Lord Perth expressed himself in agreement and reserved the right to add any topics which might be suggested by London, such as, for example, military reinforcements in Libya.

At the end of the discussions, Lord Perth foresees that the best method of giving concrete form to the agreement would be to draw up a memorandum, similar to that signed in Berlin by Neurath and myself. I, too, declared myself in principle in favour of a document of this sort.

Lord Perth, who leaves for London this evening, expects to return on Tuesday or Wednesday of next week, and wishes to open the conversations immediately on the basis of the instructions received from his Government.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 8th March, 1938—XVI

Lord Perth began the conversation by stating that he was authorised by the British Government to open the conversations with the aim of reaching an agreement between his country and Italy, and added that he was happy to deliver to me a personal message from Lord Halifax.¹

I thanked him for the message and assured him that I would not omit to convey a reply to the British Foreign Minister at the earliest possible moment.

Continuing the preliminary conversation, Lord Perth was anxious to repeat, in the name of his Foreign Minister, that no particular

¹The message dated 3rd March addressed to 'My dear Count Ciano,' took advantage of Lord Perth's return to Rome to convey to Count Ciano, through the Ambassador, a personal word of greeting. Lord Halifax said he was led to do so not only because he had just assumed the post of His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs but because the moment coincided with the opening of conversations which, he trusted with all sincerity, would lead to the rebirth of that old friendship between the two countries—a friendship which, he maintained, had been until recent times the cardinal factor in the policy of them both.

importance ought to be attached to the interview granted to the Negus. The British Government cannot, in the present situation, avoid having contacts with the representatives of the former Abyssinian Empire, nor could it refuse a request for an audience from the Negus.¹ We will certainly have noticed that the Press passed over this event in silence.

I replied by stating that I noted his statement, but added that I was not, for my part, altogether in agreement with the opinion that the Negus's request for an audience had to be accepted. However, I stressed that the Italian Press, too, had, in accordance with the desire expressed by the British Government, abstained from any polemics on the subject, although the event had not escaped general notice and, particularly in France, had called forth comments which were both absurd and displeasing.

Lord Perth spoke to me about the propaganda carried on by the Press and asked that during the course of the negotiations propaganda activity on our side should be limited. Halifax, for his part, has already addressed an appeal to the British Press, with the exception naturally of the opposition one, to avoid anti-Italian campaigns. I pointed out to Lord Perth that for some weeks past the tone of our Press has been substantially modified and the radio, too, is following a policy which cannot give rise to any trouble.

Perth said that a change in tone towards France, too, until the end of the negotiations which were to follow, would be useful. This was, however, to be considered as a personal suggestion. I replied that the polemics between ourselves and France are due rather to ideological reasons in view of the character of the French Government—that obviously makes a change in our attitude more difficult. As far as international problems are concerned, with the exception of the Spanish one, there are no grounds for serious contention between Italy and France. Continuing with the preliminary conversation, Lord Perth said that the problem to which British public opinion attaches the most importance is that of the evacuation of volunteers from Spain. It would therefore be necessary to achieve concrete progress on this subject as soon as possible. He suggested in a personal capacity the possibility of evacuating our forces from the Balearic Islands, in view of the fact that, in his opinion, a gesture of the kind would be certain to arouse a most widespread and favourable response among the British public. I replied that this

¹The Negus, alarmed by the possibility that Britain might recognise the Italian Empire in Abyssinia, had asked to be received by Lord Halifax, and his request had been granted. On 2nd March the British Embassy in Rome was instructed to bring immediately to the notice of the Italian Government that it was customary for a newly appointed Foreign Secretary to receive all the heads of Missions accredited to the Court of St. James's. The Foreign Secretary could not guarantee that the British Press would not come to learn of these interviews, but he was confident that the Italian Government would appreciate his difficulties, and that the Italian Press would refrain from commenting on the matter in a tone which might prejudice the result of the forthcoming important conversations between London and Rome.

suggestion appeared strange to me, since, as is well known, we have no land forces in the Balearics and that, at least up to now, the discussions of the Non-Intervention Committee have dealt only with land forces. At all events it appeared to me that such a proposal could not be considered. Lord Perth did not insist. Continuing the preliminary conversation, he repeated that the British Government is anxious to give any agreement reached between the two countries the character of a gesture destined to facilitate the general pacification of Europe. I replied that we too shared this point of view.

Lord Perth then handed to me the agenda for the Anglo-Italian conversations. When accepting it I drew his attention to the fact that I reserved the right to add any subjects which the Duce might order me to discuss.

We then proceeded to an examination of the eleven points which constitute the agenda.

1. *Spain.* The examination of this subject postponed until paragraph 11, in connection with the recognition of the Italian Empire in Abyssinia, had been dealt with.

2. *Confirmation of the Mediterranean agreements of 1937 including the exchange of notes.*—I told Lord Perth that I saw no objection on our side to confirming what we had signed last year.

3. *Extension of the articles concerning the status quo in the Mediterranean to the other Mediterranean powers.*—Lord Perth reserved the right to advance a formula which would state that Italy and England would accept with pleasure a declaration by the Mediterranean Powers in accordance with paragraphs 4 and 5 of the 'gentlemen's agreement.' The paragraphs in question run as follows: 'The Kingdom of Italy and the Government of the United Kingdom . . . will not consider any proposal to modify or, as far as they are concerned, to see modified, the *status quo* as it affects the national sovereignty of the territories of the Mediterranean basin; they pledge themselves to respect their respective interests and rights in that area.'

I asked Lord Perth what idea was behind this suggestion by the English. He replied that it was simply an attempt to reach a guarantee for the maintenance of peace and equilibrium in the Mediterranean.

While reserving any reply until I had received orders from my Chief, I pointed out that an invitation of that nature opened the way to that Mediterranean Pact, which, by reason of its collective nature, is not considered sympathetically by the Italian Government. I added that we, on our side, had no need of a declaration of the sort in view of the agreements which bind us to the other Mediterranean States and which were completed after the signing of the 'gentlemen's agreement' by the Pact of Belgrade, which set the seal on the excellent relations existing between Italy and Yugoslavia. I finally pointed out that such a request to the other Powers would

be the subject of controversies where the Spanish Government was concerned, since, while we have formally recognised the Franco Government and only the Franco Government, the English on the other hand maintain official diplomatic relations with the Red Government. Lord Perth had to admit the strength of this last point and reserved the right to refer the matter to his Government.

4. *Italian Forces in Libya*.—Lord Perth began by saying that this is a question to which the British Government attaches the greatest importance. Without actually putting forward a specific and formal request the British Government asks an assurance from us that we will reduce the forces stationed in Libya. I replied to Lord Perth stating that I reserved any decision on the question for the Duce; I added in a personal capacity that the concentration of the forces in Libya must be considered as a result and not as a cause of the friction between Italy and Great Britain. The British Government had at one time concentrated the Home Fleet in the Mediterranean: military preparations had been answered by military preparations.

5. *Exchange of Military Information*.—This was a suggestion by His Excellency Count Grandi, which the British Government had received with sympathy, being willing to arrange a periodical exchange of information on the forces in the Mediterranean and Red Sea areas. As a preliminary it presented us with an *aide-mémoire*¹ concerning forthcoming moves of British forces.

6. *Naval Treaty*.—The British Government asks the Fascist Government to adhere to the Naval Treaty,² since it considers this would further a general settlement, and would have a great moral effect which it would be felt particularly strongly in the United States.

7. *Palestine*.—While the British Government undertakes to respect the interests of Italians in that region, it requests the cessation of the activity of Italian agents or agents in the service of Italy at present there, and wishes to obtain from the Italian Government an undertaking that it will abstain from any attempt to create difficulties for the British Government in its decisions on the policy towards Palestine and the administration of the country. In other words, Lord Perth said that Palestine must be excluded from the undertaking to maintain the *status quo* in the Mediterranean should changes take place in that area on the basis of the Peel Report.³ On this point I expressed the greatest reserve.

¹This consisted of two typewritten pages giving a list of (a) troops dispatched to Egypt, and (b) men and equipment dispatched to the R.A.F. in Egypt.

²The Naval Treaty of 25th March, 1936.

³The British Government had set up a Commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Peel, whose task it was to ascertain the causes of strife between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and to suggest ways of appeasement. On 30th June, 1937, the Government approved the report submitted by the Commission. It contained, *inter alia*, a plan for the partition of Palestine, according to which certain districts would remain under British mandate whilst the rest was to be divided between a Jewish and an Arab State.

8. Requests similar to those on Palestine are put forward on *Syria* also.

9. *Arabia*.—Lord Perth hands me a formula according to which the two Governments undertake, as far as they are concerned, not to do anything to disturb the territorial *status quo* in Arabia as well as to abstain from seeking privileged positions on the Arabian coasts of the Red Sea.

This formula is considered by Lord Perth to conform with the already existing agreements on the subject between Britain and Italy.

10. *Propaganda*.—Lord Perth states that he will later place before me a draft formula on the cessation of all anti-British propaganda activity. This formula will reach him from the Government in London.

11. *Abyssinian Question*.—(a) Recognition of the Empire.—Lord Perth hands me a formula which states: 'If agreement is reached on all the principal questions which exist between His Majesty's Government and the Italian Government, the British Government will, at the earliest opportune moment, take steps at Geneva to remove the obstacles to the recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia.'

Among the outstanding questions Lord Perth definitely places the Spanish question and says that the agreement may be regarded as reached when concrete progress has been made on the question of the evacuation of volunteers.

I pointed out to Perth that I seemed to distinguish a distinct difference between what he was communicating to me and what had previously been communicated to us by London. Unless I were mistaken Mr. Chamberlain had requested, in order to open conversations with us, a declaration that we accepted the British formula on volunteers. Such an acceptance had been given by us. Now, on the other hand, there was talk of substantial progress in the actual withdrawal of volunteers. That might cause a considerable delay, since the matter did not depend solely on us and on our good will, but on the good will of all members of the Non-Intervention Committee. I therefore asked Perth:

(1) What he meant precisely by concrete progress in the evacuation of volunteers; (2) What the British Government intended to do if a certain period of time elapsed between a possible agreement between the two Governments on the various points submitted for our examination and the solution of the Spanish problem; (3) When and how the British Government intended to raise the question of recognition of the Empire at Geneva.

On the first point Lord Perth replied that he was not in a position to give me precise information and that he would therefore in his turn raise the question with London; on the second point, he stated that any agreement reached between Italy and Britain could

be held in suspense until the moment when the solution requested to the Spanish problem had been reached; and that finally the British Government intended to raise the problem of recognition of the Empire at the next session of the Council of the League of Nations which will be held in Geneva next May.¹

On all these points I expressed the utmost reserve. Lord Perth, too, reserved the right to ask further instructions from his Government.

(b) Frontiers of the Empire.—The British Government proposed to postpone the discussion on the fixing of the frontiers until after the recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia. In the meantime a good neighbour agreement could be reached.

(c) Lake Tana.—The British Government asks that we reaffirm our recognition of British interests in this region, as was done previously.²

(d) Recruiting of Armed Natives.—The British Government asks us to confirm the assurance given in our note sent to Geneva on 29th June, 1936, to the effect that Italy is in favour of accepting the principle that the natives should not be liable for other military service than that in the local police and for territorial defence.

(e) Treatment of Missionaries in Abyssinia.—The British Government asks that Article 11 of the Treaty of St. Germain be applied, which confers liberty for the spread of religion to missionaries of all denominations while placing them under the control of the police authorities and the local laws.

(f) General Interests of British Commerce in Abyssinia.—Just as the Commercial Treaty of 1883 applies to the Kingdom and the Colonies, the British Government asks that, once the legal recognition of the Empire has taken place, that treaty may be extended to the Empire.

Such are the points contained in the agenda. Finally Lord Perth raised the problem concerning the person of Tafari; while not wishing to include a matter of that nature in those officially put forward for discussion, Lord Perth gave me to understand that the British Government wishes to know our intentions with regard to the aforementioned gentleman.

I replied that I could not consider such a topic officially. I was therefore speaking in a purely personal capacity and began by saying that in Italy the deepest contempt is felt for this individual who, after having produced a conflict, deserted his post, removing money

¹On 9th April the British Government did in fact send a letter to the Secretary-General of the League asking that the question of the consequences arising from the situation in Abyssinia be included in the agenda for the next session of the Council. The question was discussed on 12th May.

²On 3rd April, 1936, and again on 31st December of the same year the Italian Government had assured Britain that 'it was fully aware of its obligations towards the United Kingdom on the question of Lake Tana'. These obligations arose out of the rights which Great Britain had secured by her treaty of 15th May, 1902, with Abyssinia.

and property belonging to the Abyssinian people. The fate of this deserter did not interest us. I therefore excluded in the most formal and absolute manner the possibility of the Italian Government's being in any way disposed to make any political concession where the ex-Negus was concerned, such as to allow him and his descendants to return to Abyssinia. Lord Perth asked if we would be willing to do anything towards meeting his economic needs. I said that this appeared a question of secondary importance and that it might perhaps be considered according to the attitude of Tafari.

I agreed with Lord Perth that a second meeting will take place when new and more detailed instructions have reached him.

Before Ciano and Lord Perth met for the second time the Anschluss had become an accomplished fact. On 9th March, Schuschnigg had attended a rally of Fatherland Front leaders in Innsbruck and told his audience that four days later, on Sunday 13th March, a plebiscite would be held in which every Austrian would have the opportunity to cast his vote for or against the maintenance of the country's independence and sovereignty. This totally unexpected announcement had been received, by the great majority of the population, with enthusiasm and with full confidence in the outcome of the plebiscite, but within 24 hours after Schuschnigg's speech it had become clear, too, that Hitler would not permit an event to take place which would have demonstrated to the whole world Austria's refusal to be 'liberated' by the Nazis, and her determination to remain free. In the afternoon of 11th March a special envoy from Berlin had handed to the Austrian Government an ultimatum demanding, under threat of immediate invasion, the cancellation of the announced plebiscite and the replacement of Dr. von Schuschnigg's administration by a new Government under Seyss-Inquart. These demands had not been entirely unforeseen and earlier on that day the Austrian Government had, in fact, taken military measures to meet the German threat; Army reserves and men of the Militia had been called up and preparations made to defend the area bordering on Germany. However, the Federal President, Wilhelm Miklas, with whom the final decision rested, was not a man of strong determination, and though some of his advisers had urged him to remain firm and had pointed out that armed resistance might alter the whole course of events because even Hitler would find it difficult to wage war on a country which he had so often claimed to be 'German', the President had decided, in the end, for submission. Schuschnigg himself had made last-minute efforts to obtain intervention by foreign Powers, but his frantic appeals to Rome, Paris, London, Prague and Budapest had been fruitless. Only the Hungarians had shown full sympathy, but they, too, had refused to commit themselves, and had asked for time to consider the Chancellor's request for immediate military

CHAMBERLAIN TRIES AGAIN

assistance—and time there was none. Shortly before 8 o'clock in the evening of 11th March Schuschnigg made his farewell to the Austrian people and announced personally over the radio his resignation. He was soon followed at the microphone by Seyss-Inquart, who informed the country that he had formed a new Government consisting exclusively of 'German-minded' men, i.e. Nazis and crypto-Nazis. But even before this announcement was made Seyss-Inquart, acting upon previous instructions from Berlin, had sent a telegram asking the Reich Government to dispatch troops 'to maintain order' in Austria. Next morning at dawn the advance guards of the German army of occupation crossed the Austrian frontier on every available road, for the purpose, as the German official announcement said, of paying Austria 'a friendly visit'. At the same time German bomber squadrons roared over Vienna. It was the end.

Mussolini heard of the impending momentous event only a few hours before it was due to happen. On 11th March Prince Philip of Hesse had arrived in Rome by air with a personal message from Hitler which conveyed 'the news of a decision which seems to have been dictated by circumstances and is now inalterable', and, further, the assurance that the Fuehrer regarded Germany's new frontier on the Brenner as final. Thus faced with a virtual fait accompli, the Duce preferred to be 'out of town and not available' when Schuschnigg later in the afternoon tried to reach him by telephone. This readiness to oblige his Axis partner was rewarded with a telegram containing Hitler's assurance that he would 'never forget'.

In the morning of the 12th Lord Perth returned to the Palazzo Chigi for a second meeting on the preliminaries to an Anglo-Italian agreement.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 12th March, 1938—XVI

This morning at eleven o'clock there took place the second conversation with the British Ambassador, Lord Perth.

Returning to certain points in the discussion which had taken place previously, he informed me that:

1. The British Government was not yet in a position to inform me precisely what it understood by 'substantial progress' in the withdrawal of volunteers. Lord Perth would give me a fuller explanation at the earliest possible moment. I, for my part, replied that when we signified our acceptance of the British formula, we had done so in full good faith and with the best will in the world. It was therefore our aim to be able to put into practice what had been agreed on in principle. But I pointed out to the British Ambassador that the work of the Non-Intervention Committee was not a matter which depended on us or on them alone, and that

therefore to make the results of the Anglo-Italian conversations depend on the amount of progress made in the Committee itself might present grave disadvantages. Lord Perth agreed and said that the British Government is devoting its attention to this very point.

2. As regards the reserve expressed by me on the advisability of inviting the other Mediterranean powers to show their support for the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean, Lord Perth informed me that the British Government has decided to put this question aside for the time being. I suggested that, since I considered that Italian opposition on this point was final, the British Government should not attempt to return to this proposal.

Lord Perth finally put forward a proposed formula concerning the exchange of military information.¹ I said that I would submit it to our military experts for examination.

Lord Perth also told me that Mr. Rendel, a British expert on Palestinian, Syrian and Arab questions, will arrive in Rome at the beginning of next week. He will make contact with our representative whom I designated in the person of Signor Guarneschelli.² I agreed with Lord Perth that at the beginning of next week we shall begin the point by point examination of the questions to be discussed.

I called the attention of Lord Perth to the fact that England proposes to submit the question of the Empire to the Council of the League of Nations. I asked what England's programme was should the Council make difficulties. Lord Perth said he was not in a position to reply, but that at all events the British Government assumed complete responsibility for the solution of that problem.

Before leaving, Lord Perth asked what our attitude was to the Austrian situation and handed to me the attached copy of the telegram addressed to the British Ambassador in Berlin by the Foreign Office.³

I also informed him of the arrival of a personal message from the Fuehrer to the Duce containing some very important points on the Austrian question, particularly with regard to relations between Germany and Italy.

¹According to this formula the two Governments were to exchange, annually, information regarding any proposed redistribution of their respective armed forces in those of their overseas possessions which were bordered by the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and also in certain parts of the African interior. The same was to apply to decisions regarding the establishment of new naval or air bases in the eastern Mediterranean or in the Red Sea and its approaches.

²Gianbattista Guarneschelli, Italian diplomat, deputy director-general of political affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

³The telegram which bore the date London, 12th, 23.59 hrs. requested the Ambassador to point out immediately to the German Government that, if their information was correct, H.M. Government felt it its duty to protest in the strongest terms against the use of coercion accompanied by force against an independent State with the aim of creating a situation incompatible with its national independence. It went on to say that Ribbentrop (who was in London at the time) had already been told that such action was liable to produce the gravest reactions whose development it was impossible to foresee, and that the French Government was being informed about the protest, in case they intended to take similar action.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH
AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 16th March, 1938—XVI

Yesterday the third conversation with the Ambassador, Lord Perth, took place. He brought with him Mr. Rendel, an expert in Arab and Palestinian problems. I put him into contact with our officials to discuss these questions in detail.

Lord Perth handed me the formulæ proposed by the English on the subjects of propaganda, the treatment of missionaries in Abyssinia, Lake Tana and British trade in the Empire. I stated that I would examine them at a later date and that I would submit them to the Duce for consideration.

I then discussed with Lord Perth point 1 on the agenda—that is, Spain. He again repeated his proposal for the withdrawal of the forces from the Balearics. I replied that we had no land forces in the Balearics. He referred to the air force. I said that this is a topic which has never been discussed by the Non-Intervention Committee and not included in the British formula for the withdrawal of volunteers; it ought not, therefore, to be raised in the course of the Anglo-Italian conversations. Lord Perth dropped the subject. He then asked to be able to repeat to his Government the assurance that Italy is not sending and will not send new drafts of volunteers to Spain. I confirmed this. He further asked me to confirm the assurance given at the time of the 'gentlemen's agreement' that once victory has been won by Franco's troops Italy does not intend to maintain military forces in Spain. I confirmed this.

Since no formula has yet been proposed on Spain, we went on to examine the other points.

Both Lord Perth and myself expressed our agreement with point 2 on the agenda—that is to say the confirmation of the 'gentlemen's agreement' as contained in the agreement of 2nd January, 1937.

By mutual consent there was no further talk of sending invitations to third powers asking them to express their support for the maintenance of the *status quo*.

Italian forces in Libya—Lord Perth told me that British public opinion attaches the greatest importance to this question. The British Government points out to the Fascist Government its desire to see our forces in Libya suitably reduced. According to information in possession of the British Government there are at present in Libya two metropolitan Corps and one native Corps. The British Government would desire one Corps to be withdrawn or very sensibly reduced in strength. The Ambassador added that even a limited withdrawal during the course of negotiations would be of great assistance to his Government in dealing with public opinion.

I told Lord Perth that the Fascist Government was in principle willing to take into consideration the possibility of reducing those

CHAMBERLAIN TRIES AGAIN

forces, but that I was not in a position to give him any answer before having received precise instructions from the Duce.

On points 5 and 6 dealing with the exchange of military information and our adhesion to the Naval treaty,¹ I told Lord Perth that I am waiting to learn the suggestions of the experts and the decision of the Duce.

I agreed with the British Ambassador to meet again on Friday at 6.30 p.m. to continue the discussion.

CONVERSATION WITH THE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 24th March, 1938—XVI

The Ambassador, Phillips, called to present an invitation in the name of his Government to join in the formation of an International Committee for the purpose of facilitating the emigration from Austria and Germany of political refugees.

I replied to the Ambassador that, while I would inform the Duce when I thought fit, I considered that I could give a most definite and categorical refusal to a move which was at variance not only with the directives governing our international activity, but even more so with our political morality.

The American Ambassador noted my reply and said that it would not, however, be understood by the American Government which is animated by 'high and noble humanitarian aims'.

Continuing with the conversation, the Ambassador asked me for information on the situation in Spain in particular reference to the impression produced in the United States by the bombing of Barcelona.²

I replied on the lines of my answer to Lord Perth on 20th instant.

At his request I also supplied him with vague indications of the progress of the Anglo-Italian conversations, and he repeatedly told me the American Government attaches the utmost importance to the favourable outcome of these conversations.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 26th March, 1938—XVI

Lord Perth gave me a memorandum³ in which he asks permission

¹The Naval Treaty of 25th March, 1936.

²On 20th March the French and British Governments had addressed to the Franco Government a protest note on the air-raids on Barcelona, bringing up the question of the bombing of civilian targets.

³In this memorandum it was pointed out that many members of the House of Commons distrusted Italy's true intentions towards Spain, and that it would greatly assist the Foreign Secretary's efforts to dispel that distrust and to create an atmosphere

for the British Secretary of State to make a statement to the effect that we have renewed the assurance concerning the complete withdrawal from Spain at the conclusion of the war of volunteers as well as of all war materials. At my request he specified that war materials sold or otherwise granted to Generalissimo Franco are not comprised in this request.

He would further like to request the publication of a diplomatic statement designed to express satisfaction at the references made by the Prime Minister regarding the assurances already given by the Italian Government as well as the intention of that Government to carry out any undertakings entered into by it.¹

I reserved a reply until after receiving instructions from the Duce.

He then handed me a formula dealing with the introduction to the Protocol. This formula, which appears to be acceptable in principle, contains a reservation on the date by which the document must come into force. That date is to be fixed when the British and Italian Governments have carried out their respective undertakings on the recognition of the Empire and on the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain.

On the subject of the recognition of the Empire, Lord Perth pointed out that his Government could not accept the formula proposed by us containing the phrase 'the British Government considers the Abyssinian question to be closed'. That would be interpreted as a full recognition *de jure* and would call forth grave opposition to the Government in Parliamentary circles and would perhaps also make a solution more difficult at Geneva.

Lord Perth advanced the following proposals:

1. The document should not contain any clause referring to Spain and to the question of the recognition of the Empire.
2. These two questions should be the subject of an exchange of letters between myself and Lord Perth to be made public simultaneously with the publication of the agreement.
3. Perth's letter on the recognition of the Empire would be drawn up more or less in the terms of the first formula proposed by the English. In confirmation of it the British Government would at the same time inform the press of its request to have the solution of the Abyssinian question included in the agenda of the Council of the League of Nations.

favourable to the conclusion of the Italo-British agreement if he were in a position to assure the House, on the strength of Ciano's formal undertaking, that all Italian volunteers and war material would be withdrawn from Spanish territory as soon as the civil war in Spain was ended.

¹A note meeting that request was in fact published on 27th March, three days after Chamberlain had spoken in the House of Commons, with optimistic references to the Anglo-Italian negotiations. The note expressed satisfaction and reaffirmed the Italian Government's intention to withdraw the legionary forces from Spain as soon as the French and Russians had taken similar steps.

4. Our letter on Spain should be drawn up in terms of the formula already practically agreed to.

I reserved any reply until after instructions from the Duce.

Lord Perth again drew attention to the advisability of a withdrawal of a certain number of troops from Libya, and informed me that his Government will consider the reduction of our two corps at a later date from war-time to peace-time strength satisfactory.

Lord Perth spoke to me about the Abyssinian refugees in the British colonies and of some Eritrean and Italian deserters who are on British colonial territory. He asked me what their fate would be in view of the fact that some of them had expressed the wish to return to Europe.

I replied that as far as the deserters were concerned we would not fail to apply the law in all its rigour; as far as the refugees were concerned, on the other hand, I would approach the Minister for the Colonies (not being at the moment in a position to give an answer myself), but that in principle I considered that the treatment accorded would vary from case to case according to the personal position and the responsibility of each refugee.

Lord Perth then drew my attention to the anti-French propaganda being put out by Bari. I replied that it did not seem to me that this question entered into the agenda of our discussions.

Lord Perth expressed agreement and stated that he had mentioned it to me merely in an informatory manner.

Other questions of secondary importance were then dealt with.

XVI

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS

15th April—2nd May, 1938.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV MINISTER.

Rome, 15th April, 1938—XVI

I had a conversation with the Minister, Christic,¹ who has returned from Belgrade. In Stoyadinovitch's name he was anxious to express thanks for the Art Exhibition which has had even greater success than had been expected and has contributed greatly towards rendering friendship with Italy popular. Christic states that he himself has in fact noticed during the last few months that under the pressure of recent political events Yugoslav public opinion has turned towards our country with the most marked and sincere sympathy.

Stoyadinovitch wishes to meet me next summer; in order to do so he plans to come and spend a few days in Venice or at some other Italian coastal resort in order to make the meeting absolutely spontaneous in character.

The *Anschluss* has caused no noticeable disturbance in Yugoslav political life, although there were strong repercussions in public opinion, offset in part by the existence of the understanding with Italy. Stoyadinovitch personally had long foreseen the event and is completely undisturbed by German intentions—at least for what must, if one is making a political and not a historical judgment, be regarded as a considerable period of time. On the occasion of his last journey to Berlin, too, he had the pleasure of hearing the Fuehrer repeat that he considered Germany's frontiers with Italy and with Yugoslavia 'sacred'. There have been certain unpleasant repercussions among the German minorities in view of the fact that some more intolerant elements have raised their heads and have begun a type of propaganda which Yugoslavia does not intend to tolerate. It is recognised, however, that the German Government is in no way connected with that activity. The Yugoslavs agree with us in believing that the German Government must not however remain passive towards such irredentist movements but must stifle them at birth by some forceful gesture.

¹Bozko Christic, Minister Plenipotentiary to Rome; previously held the same post at the Hague.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS

Stoyadinovitch intends to continue in the future that policy followed in the past—relations of very good neighbourliness with Germany, close, cordial and profound understanding with Italy.

The Yugoslav Minister then desired to learn our attitude in the event of a German move with regard to Czechoslovakia. I answered that we did not consider the Czechoslovak question to be one that interested us directly, and we did not anticipate taking any action.

The Minister said that Stoyadinovitch intends to bring his policy into complete harmony with ours and to follow an identical line of conduct. He is of the opinion that Germany will sooner or later proceed to the annexation of the Sudetenland, that Hungary and Poland will settle their scores with Prague and that the outcome will be the creation of a small Czech state with a neutral character. Stoyadinovitch raised no objections to a plan of that nature and does not intend to take any action. He asks us to consider this view of his as strictly confidential.

I finally informed the Minister of the results of the Anglo-Italian negotiations and Christic, in the name of his Government, expressed his congratulations on an event which Yugoslavia considers will greatly help peace in Europe.

For all its eagerness to please its German partner the Italian Government could not entirely ignore the fact that the Anschluss, and particularly the ruthless manner in which it had been brought about, had upset and alarmed Italian public opinion to a considerable degree, and this was one of the reasons why Rome soon undertook steps to obtain a settlement of the many questions connected with Italian interests in Austria. These interests—Austro-Italian economic co-operation had greatly developed during the preceding years—concerned the State as well as numerous companies and private individuals, and the thoroughness with which the Germans proceeded from the first to exploit their new 'Austrian colony', putting their hands on the most valuable assets whilst refusing to recognise liabilities, imperilled the rights and the property of 'friends and allies' hardly less than those of the Austrians themselves. The Italians, presenting their claims, found little evidence on the German side of that good will to which they thought they were entitled, and the Fascist Government had to employ all its energy before any results could be achieved.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 24th April, 1938—XVI

I received this evening the Ambassador, von Mackensen, who made the following statement:

(The statement was in French.)

'I followed the telegram of which I spoke to Your Excellency last time by another in order to inform Berlin of our last conversation and to stress the fact that the Duce is dealing with the question personally and is very anxious that matters develop in such a manner as not to harm Italian interests in Austria. Herr von Ribbentrop himself dealt with the question and has just instructed me by telegram which arrived this morning to communicate the following to you and to ask you to inform His Excellency the Duce.

'It goes without saying that with regard to the steps to be taken in Austria to bring into accord measures in force in Germany as it was formerly and those in force in Austria, we are entirely disposed to respect Italian interests as far as possible. In all cases where for reasons of absolute necessity it would scarcely be possible to avoid touching these interests, we will postpone such measures until Italy has an opportunity of discussing them with us on the occasion of the talks which are about to open. For this reason we are anxious that these discussions should begin not later than 9th May.

'The programme we sent to Rome is merely a list of particularly interesting points for discussion which, of course, leaves Italy full liberty to indicate on her side all those points which are of particular interest to her.

'With regard to the question of the declaration of foreign assets, we have again postponed the date to after May 9th, that is to say, the moment when discussions are due to start, and have thereby shown our willingness to find a common solution even if there are in this case, on our side, matters of very grave concern and questions of principle affecting our economy.

'Similarly the postponement of tariff measures in Austria until the opening of discussions with Italy is causing us very serious losses and is preventing us from setting up unified tariffs in the interest of peaceful economic development. It is for that reason that we very much hope that the discussions which we have proposed should be held on the 25th at Munich will lead to an agreement on details.'

The German attitude towards the obligations which the Reich had incurred by the annexation of Austria was most clearly expressed in a speech of the Reich Minister for Economics, Walter Funk. Addressing a meeting of representatives of Austria's creditors Funk had the impudence to declare that 'the overthrow of this regime (i.e. the destruction of Austria as a political entity) by a unanimous manifestation of the will of the Austrian people' constituted a transformation so radical in nature that it was not possible to establish a juridical link between the previous constitutional system and that obtaining since the Anschluss. Nevertheless, after two months of arduous negotiations between Rome and Berlin a series of agreements were reached—and signed on 28th May—which

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS

covered the whole complex of Austro-Italian financial, economic and traffic relations that had been affected by the annexation.

However, though these problems were now to be regarded as settled the Italian Foreign Minister was not willing to consider the matter as closed also in the political field. In Ciano's view Italy was *viv-à-vis* the Reich in the position of a creditor, but he realised that her credit was not likely to increase in the course of the following months and he therefore thought it advisable to create as soon as possible an opportunity for settling accounts. Such an opportunity Ciano hoped to find by attending the forthcoming wedding of Ahmed Zog, King of Albania, whose marriage to the Hungarian countess, Geraldine Apponyi, could be taken as an indication that he intended to disengage himself, at least within certain limits, from Italian tutelage. With this question in mind Ciano, as Italy's representative, proceeded to Tirana, and it was in the Albanian capital that he prepared, with the assistance of a large staff of advisers and experts, the plan that was to produce in the following year an Italian pendant to the Anschluss.

After his return Ciano submitted a lengthy written report to the Duce. In his memorandum, dated the 2nd May, the event which had provided the occasion for the visit to Albania, namely the royal wedding, was barely mentioned. Much space, however, was devoted to an enumeration of that country's natural resources—real or imaginary—and to the advantages Italy could derive from their exploitation. Attention was further drawn to the fact that in ancient times Albania had been densely populated; now it was practically uninhabited, but as a result of Italian enterprise and organisation the present population of approximately one million could well be doubled or even trebled.

After this introduction which presented Albania as a very worthwhile objective for an Italian imperialistic drive, Ciano went on to suggest various methods which could be used to draw that country into the Roman orbit. The King and the Royal family, he explained, were highly unpopular; Zog was accused of 'nepotism and money-grabbing' and the flashy extravagance of his sisters as well as the high cost of the royal wedding were much resented. The Italians, on the other hand, were distinctly popular wherever they had contact with the natives, and the Army, too, was Italophile with few exceptions. It would, however, be a mistake to overlook the strong traces of former Austrian influence in Albania, and the danger that Germany, reinforced by the Anschluss,—though the Anschluss had certainly not increased pro-German sympathies among the Albanians—might attempt to take and expand the political and economic positions which (Imperial) Austria once held in that country. This danger as well as Italy's prestige and interests all pointed to the necessity of an operation which would have to be carried out at the opportune moment: the annexation of Albania.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS

Many Albanians—according to the memorandum—were beginning to regard such an 'operation' as probable and perhaps inevitable; some, and they were 'not the worst', even desired it. Like their ancestors, who willingly served the Turkish Sultan, 'the better section of the Albanian youth'—the others did not count, in Ciano's view—would gladly welcome the opportunity of service under the Fascist Empire which could offer them a career and a future unattainable in their own small country. Another favourable factor was the utter inefficiency of the Albanian Army whose training was in the hands of an Italian military mission. In order further to reduce the possibility of armed resistance to the proposed coup it would be advisable to increase 'discreetly' the number of Italian military instructors 'with the specific mission to create annexionist cells' in the Albanian Army. Preparation for that coup should, further, include intensified economic and cultural infiltration. Every new centre of Italian interest, every addition to the number of Italian residents and of Albanians on the Italian pay roll would be of value. To win the upper classes for the idea of union with Italy 'our agents'—to use Ciano's own words—'should work discreetly on a personal basis with expressions of mutual interest, with promises, and with corruption'.

Though Ciano referred in his memorandum to the eventuality of having to share the prospective Albanian spoils with Greece and Yugoslavia—the lion's share was in any case to be reserved for Italy—he made it quite clear that calculated annexation, without the participation of other countries, should be the goal. Even so he was careful to point out that a friendly understanding with, or 'better still the complicity of' Yugoslavia would be essential for the success of the enterprise.

Ciano anticipated no difficulties in producing a suitable pretext for the suggested invasion of Albania. It would merely be necessary to exploit the existing dissension between Court and people, and to foment and aggravate these conflicts 'by suitable means'; this would be an easy task. Nor would it be difficult to have the Albanian Italophiles ask the Italian Government for intervention 'to restore order', and then—'order' having been restored—to 'persuade' them to offer the Albanian crown to the King of Italy. Following the acceptance of this offer the final step would be 'to give the affair validity by means of a plebiscite or something of the kind; a procedure after the manner of the Anschluss.'

Ciano concluded his memorandum with a surprisingly frank reference to Italy's rather unhappy military history. Though hardly tactful this note fulfilled its purpose by flattering the vanity of a man who longed to see himself in the Cæsarian role of a great conqueror and military leader. 'Albania, which saw the destinies of the Roman Empire decided on the plain of Crui (battle of Pharsalus, 48 B.C.) between Cæsar and Pompey, reminds us that in recent times Italian

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ANSCHLUSS

troops withdrew hard-pressed by the ragged bands of Malissori and that the retreat was so hasty as to resemble [sic] flight.¹ In spite of all that has happened since, this picture has remained in the minds of too many Albanians, and it is a memory which tells against us still. The Duce will see to it that it is obliterated, just as he obliterated others² of the same nature and of greater seriousness.'

¹During the latter part of the first World War, when both Austrian and Italian armies had invaded Albania, many Albanian tribesmen sided with the Austrians, and it was partly due to the prowess of these 'ragged bands', ill-disciplined and unreliable though they often were, that the Italians were thrown from the hills and had to seek refuge in their fortified camps of Durazzo and Valona.

²A reference, presumably, to the Italian rout at Adowa, in the Abyssinian campaign of 1896, and possibly also to the debacle of Karfreit (Caporetto) in October, 1917.

XVII

EUROPEAN TENSION

18th May, 1938—20th August, 1938.

The Anglo-Italian negotiations were concluded on 1st April with the signing of an agreement, later referred to as the Easter Agreement, because it was signed on the eve of that festival. It was not, however, laid down when it would come into force. That depended on the fulfilment of two conditions: the recognition of the Abyssinian Empire by one of the signatory Powers, and the clarification of its attitude towards Spain by the other. As to the former, the British Government had on 9th April sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the League, asking that the question of the consequences arising from the situation in Abyssinia be placed on the agenda for the next session of the Council. As a result the Council approved, on 12th May, a formula conforming in substance with the British proposal that the members of the League should be free to recognise, or not to recognise, the Italian conquest. It seemed, therefore, that nothing remained in the way of final elimination of this much debated issue between Rome and London when there came Mussolini's speech in Genoa on 14th May. It was at the time when the first Czech crisis was coming to a head; Europe was full of rumours of German troop concentrations on the Czech frontier, of military measures by France, which was bound to Prague by a treaty of alliance. At Genoa Mussolini extolled the collaboration between the Nazi and Fascist revolutions which were 'destined to leave their imprint on this century', but he also referred again and again to the sanctions 'which we have not yet forgotten', and to the fact that between 1934 and 1938 'much water had flowed under the bridges over the Tiber, the Danube, the Spree, the Thames and the Seine'. Speaking of the recent Anglo-Italian agreement, he observed that 'the last speech pronounced by the British Prime Minister was an attempt to escape from the tangle of commonplaces and to recognise Fascist Italy in all its majesty and might', but the Duce's phraseology was even more unfortunate when he came to the topic of Italy's conversations with France, which had begun a few days before with a meeting between Ciano and Blondel. Admitting that such conversations were in progress, he declared: 'I do not know if they will reach a conclusion, if for no other reason, because in an operation which is very much to the fore, that is the war in Spain, we are on opposite sides of the barricade.' They desire the victory of

Barcelona; we, on the other hand, desire the victory of Franco.' This was sufficient to render impossible the fulfilment of the second condition for the entry into force of the agreements of 16th April; even if one overlooked the now customary final threat that if the 'so-called great democracies' were really preparing an ideological war, the totalitarian states would immediately form a bloc and would march together to the end.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 18th May, 1938—XVI

I received the British Ambassador who told me he had received instructions from his Government to speak to me as a result of the speech made by the Duce at Genoa.

He must first state that the communication was to be considered a proof of the extraordinary importance which the British Government attached to the agreement reached with Italy; and it was precisely because of this importance that the Government in London was anxious about the results which the speech had had not only in England and France, but throughout Europe.

Mussolini had spoken for the first time since the signing of the Anglo-Italian agreement. In England it had been explained and praised by Chamberlain, while Halifax had done the same at Geneva. The initiative had been immediately taken by Britain—with the support of the French delegate—to remove the obstacles to recognition of the Empire. The British Government now felt it its duty to let it be known that the expressions used by the Duce were not those which had been expected in London.

In a personal capacity, Lord Perth added that it had been hoped that the Duce would express himself publicly as he had done to him, that the agreement was of great importance for relations between the two countries and was fundamental to the pacification of Europe.

It must not be forgotten that Chamberlain has encountered very serious parliamentary difficulties in order to bring about the agreement with Italy and that even today the opposition has not been disbanded. The chief argument used by Chamberlain to support his policy was that the agreement would contribute effectively towards improving the European situation.

Another hope which inspired the British Government was that the agreement between Italy and England would facilitate an understanding between Rome and Paris. The Genoa speech has made a profound impression on the French Government and Chamberlain is not blind to the fact that this hoped for *détente* is now becoming more difficult. In this way he fears that the Government which will

score the greater success will be the Soviet one in view of the fact that Moscow has striven at Geneva and elsewhere to raise any obstacle to prevent a *rapprochement* between Italy and France.

Both Chamberlain and Halifax have requested Lord Perth to inform us that they eagerly desire to see the difficulties which have arisen in the Franco-Italian negotiations overcome and that their actions are and will always be directed towards preventing the establishment of blocs based on opposing ideologies.

I replied to Lord Perth that as far as Great Britain was concerned I was surprised at what he had communicated to me. The statements of the head of the Government had been cordial with regard to his country and contained a high tribute to the Anglo-Italian Agreement. I saw no divergence between the phrases used publicly by the Duce at Genoa and those spoken to Lord Perth on the occasion of the conversation of 14 April. I further explained the question of the ill-timed applause of the children and the misunderstanding to which the hilarity of a section of the public might have given rise.

As far as France is concerned, however, I informed Perth that the Duce took a very firm stand on the position he had assumed which is as follows: the word 'Spain' must not, for any reason or in any way, enter into any possible agreement between Italy and France; second, that he does not intend to transform into a three power agreement the bilateral one on the Red Sea and Arabia.

Dwelling particularly on the first point I drove home all the reasons which have induced the Duce to take up such an attitude, which must be considered final. The British Government if it really wishes to make a contribution to the progress of the Franco-Italian negotiations, must make Paris understand that on the question of Spain the Duce does not intend to modify in any way the attitude assumed from the beginning of the conversations.

Perth, who personally showed a clear understanding of the Italian point of view, will in due course report to his Government.

During the following days events in Czechoslovakia drew the attention of all the European Chancelleries. With the imminence of the Czech municipal elections which acquired a particular political importance because since 19th May, 1935, no expression of popular opinion had taken place, Czechoslovakia's internal and international situation rapidly became tense. Prague moved troops to the German frontier and recalled a class of reservists. Paris was put in a state of alarm, and Poland seemed to be holding itself in readiness to profit from any possible clash between Czechoslovakia and Germany, and not in any case to be averse to fanning the flames in her own interests. May 21st marked the peak of the crisis. Czech soldiers killed two Sudeten Germans in Eger; reprisals were feared, and direct intervention by the Reich was considered probable. It was then that London made a move.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR

Rome, 21st May, 1938—XVI

Lord Perth left me a memorandum¹ in which the activity of the British Government in relation to the Czechoslovak crisis is summarised.

He allowed me to read the communication which the English Government has made to Ribbentrop through the Ambassador to Berlin. He did not leave me a copy of the document which may be summarised as follows:

In view of the tense situation in the past few days, the British Government considers that it would be advisable to have an announcement made by Henlein's² Party to the effect that conversations between himself and the Prague Government for the solution of the Sudeten problem will be begun as soon as possible. Lord Halifax deeply appreciates the assurances given by the German Government that no troop movements towards the Czech frontier are taking place, but must stress that rumours to that effect continue to circulate with alarming persistence. On the other hand, the German Government has not concealed its intention to intervene with arms should incidents involving further bloodshed occur in the Sudetenland. The London Government feels it its duty to recall the German Government to a clear sense of responsibility.

Halifax has caused active steps to be taken with the Czechoslovak Government with the aim of bringing the situation back to normal and has been happy to verify that the Czech Government has given proofs of goodwill and is preparing to do its best in the direction desired. It is hoped that proof of equal goodwill will be given by Berlin.

Should a conflict break out, in spite of all the above, it is now certain that France will intervene on the basis of its agreements with Czechoslovakia. Confirmation of this was recently given by the French Ministers on the occasion of their visit to London. Should such an eventuality arise, 'the British Government cannot guarantee

¹The memorandum referred to the view of the Reich Government, as expressed to the British Ambassador in Berlin, that the Czechoslovak crisis was an internal affair of that country and that the acceptance or rejection of proposals which the Prague Government might make in order to find a solution rested solely with Henlein. Taking a similar view London was advising Prague to enter as soon as possible into direct negotiations with the leader of the Sudeten Germans. The Prague Government—as President Benes had assured the British Minister—was fully aware of the urgent necessity of reaching an agreement. The opening of negotiations between the two parties was to be expected in the near future, and the British Government hoped and believed that Henlein would show moderation and a conciliatory spirit.

²Konrad Henlein, a former professor of gymnastics, became at the age of 25 (in 1923) head of the Association of German Gymnasts in Czechoslovakia. Intensely nationalistic in its aims this Association formed the nucleus of the Sudeten-German Party which, under Henlein's leadership, gained more votes at the elections of 1935 than the Czech Agrarians, who had hitherto been the largest political party in Czechoslovakia.

that England will not be involved by circumstances in the conflict.'

Lord Perth added that the conversation which took place yesterday in Berlin between von Ribbentrop and Henderson, the British Ambassador, was not such as to dispel the grave concern felt by the members of the British Government. On the contrary, the British Ambassador was much impressed by the state of over-excitement in which he found the German minister.

I thanked Lord Perth for his communication to us and told him that, for our part, we were continuing to observe the situation with the greatest calm and that up to now no new information of an alarming nature had reached us.

The Czech crisis having been overcome for the time being, new attempts began to make the Easter Agreement effective. But the Genoa speech had caused a coolness in British official circles and had strengthened the Parliamentary Opposition which was in any case very much against any agreement with Fascist Italy. Recognition of the Empire, therefore, failed to be forthcoming while the Italian volunteers in Spain showed no sign of returning to their own country. Mussolini was not for that reason less disposed to avail himself of the advantages offered by the agreement of 16th April. He therefore attempted to force a decision from the British Government by making Ciano give a speech with a different note from the Genoa one. In Milan on 2nd June, Ciano paid homage to the courageous goodwill of Chamberlain and Halifax, and made an effort to reassure London regarding the honesty and clarity of the Fascist Government's intentions. 'The Anglo-Italian Agreements,' he said, 'have the virtue of having cleared away the rubble of the past. Nothing is more dangerous than to conclude agreements which hide behind ephemeral compromises, misunderstandings, reservations and secondary aims. It is not in Italy's interests, it is not in anyone's interest. Above all it is not in the interests of peace, which demands the recognition of various historical situations and the firm intention to respect them. These are the factors,' he concluded, 'which give force and vitality to the Anglo-Italian agreements.' It was the first move in a new manœuvre by Mussolini which was followed up next day in more strictly diplomatic surroundings at the Palazzo Chigi.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 3rd June, 1938—XVI

I received Lord Perth who thanked me for what I had said at Milan with regard to the British Government and his country. I answered that these statements had been made by me on the orders of the Duce, who intended to underline once more the importance which he attaches to the Agreement of 16th April.

Lord Perth then spoke to me of the bombing attacks carried out by Franco's planes on towns and villages and, recalling what we had done to stop the raids on Barcelona, asked us to use our influence to persuade Franco to cease this type of military operation which is arousing hostility in Great Britain.

I replied to Lord Perth that we had no first hand information of such attacks, but in any case I did not see how one could blame Franco, who had to face the situation created by France through the despatch of continual reinforcements of men and materials to the Reds. Once again the responsibility for any possible excess on the Nationalist side falls on the French Government which is arousing a just feeling of resentment in the Nationalist Government.

I assured Lord Perth that I would in any event collect information and report to the Duce what he had said.

Since Lord Perth had no further communication to make to me I began to discuss the question of when the Anglo-Italian Agreements came into force. I first indicated that I was speaking in accordance with official instructions from the Duce and requested him to be good enough to call the particular attention of his Government to what I was about to communicate to him.

In the opinion of the Duce, the time has now come to put into force the Agreements of 16th April. Italy, for her part, has already completely fulfilled her pledges in a loyal manner. She has withdrawn very large forces from Libya, as was demonstrated by a strength return which I showed the British Ambassador. She has suspended all anti-British propaganda activity. She has adhered firmly to the British plan for the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain; it is now only a question of time before complete evacuation is achieved, a period of time, however, which we cannot shorten. Everything in our power has been done.

The other condition which caused a delay in the entry into force of the Agreements was the necessity of achieving freedom of action from Geneva. This was obtained several weeks ago. England is free to act. Every day we receive numerous recognitions of the Empire.¹ It is obvious that every delay on Britain's part has the effect of diminishing the value of the action. On some sides the hypothesis is being advanced that a pre-condition of the entry into force of the agreements exists but has not been expressed, namely that of the achievement of a similar understanding with France. Personally I did not believe in this possibility, particularly since I recalled that it was no other than Lord Perth who, throughout the long negotiations, had always been anxious to keep the two questions apart, and that recently too he had given me confirmation of this attitude. But such a hypothesis could not but produce a profound

¹According to the *Informazione Diplomatica* of 5th January, 1938, eleven States had already given *de jure* recognition to the Empire; another eleven, including France and Great Britain, had recognised it *de facto*.

impression on public opinion. I wish to state in any case, that the conversations with France must be considered to be interrupted for a long period. In the first place this was due to the reasons which had already been explained to Lord Perth in previous conversations and which were concerned with the French requests on the subject of the Red Sea and Spain; it was further due to the constant bad faith of the French Press, and not only of the Press, which attempted to make out that agreement between Rome and Paris would have an anti-German significance and the Axis would thus be undermined.

The Duce does not intend to resume the conversations with the French so long as these incorrect methods are adopted.

Lord Perth, who followed my statements with great interest, replied that he was not in a position to inform me of the intentions of his Government with regard to the time when the Agreements of 16th April will be brought into force, but that he was anxious to place on record that Italy had completely satisfied the conditions and fulfilled the pledges arising from the agreements.

In a personal capacity he also added that he agreed with the opinion that the mode of conduct adopted by the French, whether in their method of carrying on the negotiations, or in the Press, was wrong. Still in a personal capacity he told me that Chamberlain, too, is anxious to bring the agreements into force, but that naturally, as far as Spain is concerned, he must have a sound reason for declaring that the problem is moving towards a final solution. This might perhaps be represented by the departure for Spain of the Commissions nominated by the Non-Intervention Committee.¹ Lord Perth will, however, place the Duce's point of view before his Government and give it his support; he will take the liberty of informing us of Mr. Chamberlain's intentions as soon as possible.

In the second half of June the Yugoslav Premier paid a private visit to Venice and on this occasion he and Ciano once again had a personal exchange of views. Stoyadinovitch wished to learn the real intentions of the Fascist Government in the event of a second German coup in Central Europe. The lesson of the Anschluss had not been wasted on him, and he intended to be prepared.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV PRIME MINISTER, STOYADINOVITCH.

Venice, 18th June, 1938—XVI

Stoyadinovitch said that the main aim of his journey to Italy was to learn our policy by means of a general review of the situation,

¹On 26th May two neutral Commissions of three members each had been appointed. They were to visit the opposing camps in Spain and establish the number of foreigners, fighting—voluntarily or otherwise—on either side.

to inform us of his intentions and to 'synchronise' his international activity with ours completely.

The question which appeared most urgent to him at the moment was that of Czechoslovakia. I informed him of our attitude towards it and our intentions. Stoyadinovitch agreed and assured us that should a crisis arise and Italy make no move, Yugoslavia would do the same. He has not the least intention of dragging his country into a conflict with Germany in an attempt to save Czechoslovakia, which is both unfriendly and an artificial creation, and even less of pleasing France, which is openly hostile to him. He asks of us only that we use our influence to prevent Hungary from taking the initiative in the attack. In such a case Yugoslavia would be obliged, much against its will, to abide by its pledges; it obviously would not be Fascist Italy, which has proved that it respects its plighted word at all costs, which would reprove Yugoslavia for having this intention. But if, as will happen in reality, Hungary does not take the initiative in the attack, and instead takes advantage of a crisis produced by Germany, Yugoslavia will remain completely indifferent to the fate of Czechoslovakia.

I assured Stoyadinovitch that we, for our part, had always advised Hungary in these terms and that I was in a position to confirm that the Hungarians had no intention of provoking the conflict in Prague.

Stoyadinovitch showed pleasure, however, when I told him that, on the basis of what had been communicated to us on various occasions by the Reich Government, we did not consider the Czechoslovak crisis imminent, and that, on the contrary, we considered that if Prague took up a reasonable attitude to Henlein's demands, the situation could be more or less maintained for a considerable period of time. He displayed all the more pleasure since he makes no effort to conceal the fact that the *Anschluss* has caused a very marked reaction in Yugoslav public opinion, which is alarmed not so much by the event itself, which was foreseen and partly taken for granted, as by the method adopted by the Germans and by the agitation which had taken place among the German minorities concerned. Now the situation has become easier, and the most obvious result of recent events has been to give friendship with Rome the maximum popularity. Those who last year were attacking the Government for having signed the Belgrade Pact were now attacking Stoyadinovitch for not having gone still further in his commitments to us. Given that state of affairs, Stoyadinovitch thinks that a new reinforcement of Germany by the incorporation of three million Sudeten would not be desirable, not even if our ties with Berlin are of the most cordial. In his opinion, the problems which the Germans have in mind are the following: Austria, already solved; Sudetenland, moving towards a solution; colonies, postponed for the moment; Polish corridor, postponed *sine die*; and

finally, although it is discounted with apparent sincerity by all responsible elements, an outlet to the Adriatic. Although, as he said, the latter is an aim which for the moment cannot be in any way proved by the German attitude, Stoyadinovitch considers that we must not altogether forget it and that Italy and Yugoslavia must continue, closely united, to watch German policy at all times. All this must be done, naturally, while maintaining the close friendly relations with Berlin, in view of the fact that both countries intend to maintain as the basis of their international activity collaboration and friendship with Nazi Germany.

As far as *England* is concerned, Stoyadinovitch after having been informed of the state of our relations, told me that his relations with London are cordial, although they became much cooler from the time of the signing of our Pact. By way of information he added that if up to some months ago the language of the British Government and its representatives was distinctly hostile to Italy, a profound change can now be observed. Nevertheless he takes the liberty of advising the utmost caution. In the eyes of international public opinion, the Rome agreements represent the defeat of Britain. Many British circles have not forgotten it and perhaps do not consider that accounts have been settled. Personally he has the utmost faith in Chamberlain and considers that he is acting in good faith in wishing a stable and lasting agreement with Italy. But Chamberlain's position is a parliamentary one which he might at any moment give up to someone else for one reason or another. Many indications lead one to think that England intends to strengthen her position in the Mediterranean. The loan to Turkey has been interpreted in Yugoslavia as a straightforward gesture to that end, and has not produced a good impression in that country in view of the fact that, in spite of appearances and the bonds of the Balkan Entente, relations between Belgrade and Ankara have cooled greatly. The same may be said with regard to Greece. The recent pact¹ between Greece and Turkey has the air of being an instrument directed against Yugoslavia in particular, because of her close relations with Italy and of the policy of collaboration with Bulgaria. Moreover in Belgrade, too, there has not been any increase in recent times of sympathy for Greece and Turkey, and the question of an outlet to the *Ægean*, although not considered of immediate importance, is always present to the Yugoslav people.

France is openly on very bad terms with Belgrade. Personal aversion to Stoyadinovitch contributes greatly to this and leads the French to expend considerable sums in an attempt to weaken his position in the country. That leaves him absolutely indifferent, in fact it makes him resolve to continue his policy of independence

¹This treaty, which was in addition to the treaty of friendship, conciliation and arbitration of 30th October, 1930, and to the pact of understanding of 14th September, 1933, was signed in Athens on 27th April, 1938.

of Paris with greater decision. On the other hand, Yugoslav public opinion is also becoming more and more detached from France, since it realises the state of profound decadence in which that country finds itself and feels pride at its ability to follow an independent policy. The agreement with France has been a heavy burden on Yugoslav life. The French have been very heavy-handed with Belgrade and have let it be understood that Yugoslavia was of account to France only so long as she lent itself to being a pawn in France's game. The time is gone for good when Yugoslav policy was laid down by a telephone call from Paris. Stoyadinovitch further was able to add at this point that he has greatly appreciated the Duce's tact when dealing with him; he is very well aware of the relative power of the two countries and for this very reason finds it significant that Italy has never attempted to make its friendship a burden. This feeling is shared by the whole Yugoslav people.

He told me that on *Albania* he has no observation to make and that he approves of our activities in that country. He has recently received from Tirana an offer to form a Pact of friendship with Yugoslavia; it is a matter of indifference to him and he abides by our judgment. When I told him that the Albanians had informed us of the matter attributing the initiative to the Government of Belgrade he reacted with complete frankness and added that to prove how much they were in error, he will not form the Pact. On the other hand, he added, the Albanian problem represented an important question at a time when relations were strained. Today, in the present fortunate situation, he does not attribute any particular importance to the Albanian question, but he recognizes that Italy has an absolutely exceptional position with regard to that state.

After having reviewed the general situation and having examined questions which concern relations between our two countries less directly, Stoyadinovitch confirmed his intention of bringing his policy into complete harmony with the Duce's at all times and in all circumstances, and told me to inform the Duce himself that he requests him to consider Yugoslavia as a State which is bound to Italy by ties stronger than those which could result from a written pact of alliance, which, on the other hand, should circumstances require it, could be achieved in the course of a few hours. As far as trade relations between the two countries are concerned, he intends to intensify them to the maximum, and that also as a defence measure in the face of heavy German pressure. With that end in view, he will on his return to Yugoslavia personally examine the question of the military estimates and will see to it that the bulk of the supplies is ordered from Italy.

After having expressed his thanks for the cordial reception he had received, Stoyadinovitch stated his desire to maintain frequent personal contacts, and invited me to visit him in a purely private capacity at a time yet to be fixed, towards the end of the year, and

to pass a few days as guest in his hunting lodge near Belgrade. I accepted his invitation provided the Duce gives approval.

The British reply to the step taken by Ciano in the name of Mussolini on 3rd June did not arrive until three weeks later. In the meantime Chamberlain had had to fight a stiff battle to overcome the reactions of public opinion to the repeated bombing of British merchantmen in the ports or territorial waters of Republican Spain. In the House of Commons the Opposition multiplied its attacks and questions, demanding effective reprisals: blockade of the Balearics, bombardment of the Majorcan aerodromes, sinking of a Spanish Nationalist ship for each British ship sunk, and other measures. Accusations were also freely made against the German and Fascist Governments. It was difficult in these conditions to talk of the entry into force of the agreements of 16th April. Yet Chamberlain made another effort. In the Commons on 14th June he declared himself resolutely opposed to any form of reprisal which would inevitably have caused the conflict to spread (Flandin, two days before, had given evidence in a speech of the aid which the Blum Government was continuing to send to Spain); and through diplomatic channels he asked France's support for the launching of a last proposal for the settlement of the Spanish conflict which would at the same time allow the conditions attached to the validity of the Easter agreements to be completely fulfilled.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 20th June, 1938—XVI

I received Lord Perth, who after saying that he had been instructed by his Government to give an answer to the communication made by me during our last conversation concerning the possible entry into force of the Anglo-Italian agreements, handed me a note¹ as a form of personal memorandum and for the purpose of ensuring greater exactitude.

After having examined it and stating that I was speaking in a purely personal capacity, since I reserved the official communication until after having taken orders from the Duce, I told Lord Perth

¹In this *aide-mémoire* Lord Perth informed Count Ciano that the British Government appreciated the frankness of Ciano's language and the fulfilment of pledges given by Italy, but it felt that some more far-reaching step should be taken in order to bring about the liquidation, or at least contribute towards the liquidation, of the Spanish problem. Three alternatives presented themselves for this purpose: (a) Execution of the plan of the Non-Intervention Committee; (b) Unilateral withdrawal of the Italian forces sent to Spain; (c) Armistice in Spain. In view of the difficulties (a) and (b) would present the British Government strongly favoured alternative (c) and had already interested the French Government in this proposal. It was hoped that the Italian Government, too, would give this plan its most serious attention for the sake, not only of ending the war in Spain, but of restoring the traditional good relations between Italy and Great Britain.

that I was very sceptical of the possibility of any of the British proposals being accepted. Leaving aside, as for that matter the English themselves did, the possibility of a unilateral withdrawal of the Italian forces, I considered that it would be very unlikely that the Duce would agree to a proposal to put pressure on Franco in order to reach an armistice. It is well known that Franco is sharply opposed to such an eventuality. He has let it be known publicly and he informed us of this directly some weeks ago. The recent course of the war has certainly not been such as to induce Franco to modify his intransigence. I must further stress that, when drawing up the Anglo-Italian Agreements, the hypothesis had never been put forward of a settlement of the Spanish question by means of an armistice, which, apart from anything else, appears in practice to be impossible of attainment. The Duce will decide on the answer to be given; but I believe now that he will not be willing to put pressure on Franco in the direction proposed by Britain, unless the armistice is preceded by complete surrender by the Reds. In that case the Duce will be able to exercise his gracious influence on Franco in order that the treatment of his adversaries may be kept within bounds, an influence which it may, on the other hand, be more difficult to exert should the end of the war occur through the inevitable defeat of the Reds.

Lord Perth was impressed by my statements and said that the war threatens to last for another year or perhaps longer. He asked me whether, in view of this prospect, it was not in our interests, too, to reach some compromise which, while not ensuring that Franco came to power, would have as its basis the elimination of the possibility of a Communist Government in Spain.

I replied, still in a personal capacity, that the world should by now have sufficient proofs of the honesty and firmness of Mussolini's policy for it no longer to entertain such absurd ideas.

Lord Perth then handed me the second memorandum,¹ enlarging on it verbally, and stressed the solidarity of relations between France and England; he again advised a quick resumption of negotiations.

On this topic, too, I was very explicit in my reply, and while reserving any further decision for the Duce, told Lord Perth that the attitude taken up by France at the beginning of the Ciano-Blondel conversations—an attitude which revealed the true motives

¹The memorandum expressed concern over the existing tension between the Italian and French Governments. Anglo-French relations being of a special nature, that tension placed the British Government in a difficult position. Whatever Italy's feelings may have been in view of French assistance to the Spanish Republican Government, the French, too, were offended by Italy's attitude which they considered as unjust and humiliating. It was true that until recently supplies of material had been crossing from France into Republican Spain, but now it seemed reasonably certain that the frontier had been closed and that the French Government was anxious to facilitate a settlement of the Spanish question. The British Government therefore hoped that the Italian Government would reciprocate by proposing a resumption of the conversations with France, in which case the French could be expected to show themselves reasonable and moderate.

of her policy—as well as her activities in Spain and the claims advanced in every sphere had led me to consider the negotiations with France to be not merely suspended but rather broken off.

Lord Perth replied that the French Government, which states that it is extremely offended and annoyed with Italy because of the way in which she has behaved, might take drastic decisions on the Spanish question and come to help the Reds more openly and on a larger scale.

I replied that a French decision of that nature would lead to an immediate re-examination of our policy in Spain, and that France was the country which would have to bear all the responsibility for an intensified crisis.

After having at Lord Perth's request briefly discussed the recent conversations in Venice, I agreed with the British Ambassador that I should give him an official answer in the course of the next few days, when I have received orders from the Duce.

CONVERSATION WITH THE TURKISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 23rd June, 1938—XVI

I received the Turkish Ambassador who has returned from a journey to Ankara. After having repeated the usual expressions of friendship from Rustu Aras, he told me that the latter, with the aim of intensifying political relations between Italy and his country, had been considering proposing the formation of a Pact for the Eastern Mediterranean—a pact to which, in addition to Italy and Turkey, the other interested Powers would also adhere.

I answered that I would report the suggestion to the Duce, but that, in a personal and preliminary manner, I had to point out to him that as far as its contents were concerned such a pact seemed superfluous, in view of existing international undertakings, and contrary to our diplomatic policy by reason of its collective nature. Apart from that, I did not see why we should require a new instrument for closer relations with Turkey as relations between the two States are at present correct and no obstacle exists to prevent them from being still better.

The Ambassador finally spoke to me of the situation in the Sanjak¹ and told me that Ankara considers next week to be

¹The Sanjak of Alexandretta, formerly a district of the Turkish *vilayet* of Aleppo, was annexed to Syria as a result of the first World War, but it remained the object of Turkish aspirations, 40 per cent of its population being in fact Turks. After the conclusion of the Franco-Syrian treaty of alliance of 9th September, 1936, Turkey reclaimed the Sanjak openly. The League of Nations intervened, and in November, 1937, France agreed to give that district an autonomous status. Neither Turks nor Arabs were satisfied with this concession, and the situation remained tense until 1st July, 1938, when France and Turkey signed a treaty at Ankara, which provided for condominium and a mixed Franco-Turkish garrison for the Sanjak. On 29th June, 1939, six days after the conclusion of the Franco-Turkish pact of mutual assistance, France withdrew her troops and the Sanjak returned under full Turkish sovereignty.

crucial for that question. In fact, if the French Government will not allow Turkish troops to enter, they will in any case enter by force. This is now decided, and all possible consequences have been foreseen and allowed for. In Turkey it is considered that France will not react. However, even if the French Government should react, the Sanjak will in any case be entered.

For my part, I made a point of confirming the Ambassador in his opinion that France will not act, even if sharply provoked and discreetly incited the Turks to action. Whatever situation may arise, it will resolve itself into a grave crisis for France, and in any event into a grave loss of prestige throughout the Middle East. Such, at least, is the opinion of Ankara.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 28th June, 1938—XVI

Lord Perth, after stating that he was not speaking officially, called my attention to the effect on British public opinion of the bombing-attacks carried out by Nationalist planes against British vessels. Since it is known that almost all the planes operating in Spain are Italian, just as the crews are Italian, strong feeling against our country is growing in Parliament and among the public. The Italian Press, which has on more than one occasion extolled the recent operational flights of the Italian airmen, has also helped to produce and keep alive this state of excitement in London.

England continues to give proof of great patience, and in spite even of what has happened in the last few days intends to abide faithfully by the policy of non-intervention. But public opinion is demanding more energetic action from the Government. The accusation is being openly made against Chamberlain that he is unable to protect the interests of his own country, and what is most serious is that that accusation is not being made by the Opposition alone but also by a section of the Conservative Party. Chamberlain's personal position has suffered thereby. If his policy should be condemned, the consequences would certainly endanger the good progress of Anglo-Italian relations.

Lord Perth concluded his statement by saying that he renewed the request to the Italian Government to be good enough to use all its influence on Franco with the aim of stopping these bombing-attacks. I replied to Lord Perth that we had always exercised such an influence as far as possible, but that one must bear in mind that the employment of the weapons of war and the conduct of the war itself is, for obvious reasons, left to the Spanish Command (at this point Lord Perth interrupted me to say: 'If instead you had directed it yourselves, it would have been over long ago'). The British Government must realise the hard necessities of warfare which

EUROPEAN TENSION

impose on Franco drastic action against those who, by furnishing the Red Governments of Barcelona and Valencia with arms and munitions, cause the conflict to be prolonged. Those vessels which are in the ports cannot be considered as genuine British ships. They are nothing but smugglers. However, my information was that Franco had taken the following measures to facilitate a solution of the present crisis: (1) prohibition of attacks on any British vessel when under way, (2) an attempt to be made, as far as possible, to distinguish between the nationality of the shipping in the ports in favour of the British flag, (3) a free port to be established to which international shipping could put in to furnish permitted goods to the Red Governments of Spain. It is obvious that such concessions already meant a large gap in what should have been a rigid blockade system. However, Franco was willing to make this sacrifice in order to facilitate good relations with London. It did not appear possible to me to demand from Franco other limitations to his freedom of action beyond those stated.

Lord Perth thanked me for my statement and urged me to call the Duce's attention to the gravity of the situation which is arising.

When going out he asked me when I would be in a position to give him a reply to the two queries made during our last conversation. I replied that I was still waiting for orders from the Duce and that I believed I could see him again in a few days' time. He added that he was informed that Bonnet is very favourably inclined towards Italy and personally suggested that an opportune moment should be used to reopen conversations with France, particularly since the Chamber is not in session. I did not indicate that I accepted his suggestion in any way.

MEMORANDUM OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT IN REPLY TO THE NOTE OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF 20th JUNE, 1938.

Rome, 1st July, 1938—XVI

1. The Fascist Government notes the recognition on the part of the Foreign Office that the Fascist Government has already applied the clauses of the Agreement which chiefly interested Great Britain—thus demonstrating its good faith in the clearest possible manner; these are the withdrawal of troops from Libya, cessation of interest in the Palestine question, the suspension of all displeasing propaganda in the Press or over the radio.

2. The Fascist Government must, on the other hand, state that no equivalent action has been taken by Great Britain, not even after the Geneva decisions on the Abyssinian question nor after the acceptance by Italy of the English plan concerning the withdrawal

of volunteers from Spain—a plan which has so far not been put into action not because of Italy but because of the attitude of other States on whom, and not on Italy, responsibility in the matter must fall.

3. On the three hypotheses advanced by the Foreign Office the Fascist Government makes the following statement:

(a) that the idea of suggesting an armistice to Franco is inadmissible unless the Reds surrender at discretion, in which case Italy could, as it happened after the fall of Bilbao, represent a moderating element;

(b) that, at the present moment, the idea of a unilateral withdrawal of Italian volunteers is no less unacceptable;

(c) that one can therefore only await the development of events in Spain, either through the Committee of Non-Intervention, or through the progress of the war, in order to apply the agreements of 16th April. The Fascist Government is obliged—not without regret—to say that this delay, which is not due to Italy, risks compromising the moral effects of the agreements themselves.

4. As far as France is concerned, the Fascist Government confirm that there is not and cannot be any connection between any possible Franco-Italian agreements or even the mere resumption of Franco-Italian conversations, and the application of the Anglo-Italian agreements. To establish today any connection of the kind—a connection which was never put forward either at the beginning of the Anglo-Italian negotiations or during their course but was, on the contrary, formally excluded—would mean running the risk of wrecking the Anglo-Italian agreements also. The reopening of the Franco-Italian conversations may possibly take place after the application of the Agreements of 16th April, not before, and that for reasons so obvious that it is not considered worth while putting them forward.

The Fascist Government has therefore decided to wait in the hope that an excessive and unjustified delay may not lessen or cancel the value of a step which—like that of 16th April—was saluted, not only in Italy and England but throughout the world, as an event essential to peace.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 2nd July, 1938—XVI

I handed Lord Perth the document drawn up by the Duce, and did not omit to stress its fundamental point. Lord Perth read it with profound attention and while he was reading it his face betrayed signs of uncertainty and preoccupation. When he had finished reading, I told him that I wished to add verbally certain points which

had not been laid down in writing by the Duce, but which also represented his wishes on the matter.

1. He requested a precise answer to the contents of the memorandum.

2. He reserved the right to resume complete liberty of action with regard to the conditions already punctually observed by us—liberty of action which he would maintain until such time as the British Government had put the Agreement into effective execution.

3. The Duce, in order to enlighten international opinion on the course of the recent negotiations, should it appear necessary, wished to reach an agreement with Lord Perth on the publication of the documents which we had exchanged, including the one today.

I finally added that the Duce was very much annoyed at what was taking place in many sectors of international affairs, that certain British activities in the Mediterranean and in the Balkans could not but appear ambiguous to any impartial observer, and that Italian public opinion (of which the Duce was not, like some other people, 'the slave,' but which he must nevertheless bear in mind, being alternately its interpreter and moulder), was becoming hourly cooler in its attitude towards the real scope of the agreements of 16th April.

Lord Perth attempted to argue about the suspension of the withdrawal of troops from Spain. I immediately replied that that was a thousand times within our rights by virtue of the agreements, and also because of the fact that—going beyond the letter of what had been agreed—we had withdrawn at least 20 thousand men from Libya. Lord Perth asked me: 'Does that mean that the Duce will send forces back to Libya?' I replied: 'Any decision will be taken by him in accordance with events. For my part I have to confirm that he reserves the maximum liberty of action.'

Lord Perth turned to the subject of the agreement with France, and said that in his own document it was repeated that the Anglo-Italian Agreement and any future Italo-French Agreement were not connected. I replied that British insistence in talking to us of the negotiations could not pass unnoticed, in view of what we had clearly and precisely stated from the beginning of the conversations. Further, we could not ignore all that is being said and written on the subject in Paris, where an attempt was being made to give these statements an official character to the effect that the Anglo-Italian agreement will not come into force unless preceded by a similar Italo-French agreement. As a recent and undeniable proof I cited the article published three days ago by the *Temps* which is more than 'inspired'.¹

¹The article to which Ciano refers is one of 26th June: 'The Dangers of the Spanish Crisis.' Referring to a *démarche* by the Spanish Republican Government in London on 24th June, whereby reprisals for bombing attacks by Franco's forces on objectives outside Spanish territory were threatened, the journal expressed its doubts as to the

EUROPEAN TENSION

Lord Perth expressed all the heartbreak he felt at this moment, and added that the bulk of the British people would suffer a tremendous disappointment at seeing an agreement on which so many hopes had been founded jeopardized. I pointed out to him that, as far as we are concerned, a similar sentiment was expressed in the Duce's document, and that the publication of the *aide-mémoire* was requested precisely in order, if necessary, to impress on international public opinion the responsibilities of such an event.

Lord Perth left my room much depressed. Even when he was going out he repeated: 'I am afraid we are moving towards a difficult situation as regards the Agreement.' He led me to understand that he would consider asking the Duce for an audience if matters should become still more complicated.

I also sent a copy of the memorandum to von Mackensen, and gave him a brief account of my conversation with Lord Perth. Von Mackensen expressed his thanks for the promptitude with which the Duce had desired to inform Berlin, and repeated his faith in the manner in which the solidity of the Axis is being daily and increasingly affirmed.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 6th July, 1938—XVI

I received M. Blondel who informed me that having in error crossed the frontier near Colurine, in the Abries district when out walking, the French subjects Payen, an artillery lieutenant in mufti, and Delaytre, house-doctor in the Paris Hospitals, found themselves five or six metres inside Italian territory when a rifle-shot was fired without warning. They drew back and when they were 150 metres inside French territory more rifle-shots were fired, one of them striking M. Delaytre in the back causing a very serious wound. It has been proved that the bullet which struck Delaytre is one from an Italian army rifle, and that Italian army cartridge cases have been found twenty-five metres inside the French frontier.

At the end of his statement he told me that the French Government would put forward the request that adequate steps be taken to deal with the guilty persons and that instructions be given to the frontier militia to exercise greater prudence in similar cases, especially during the summer season since large numbers of tourists cross the frontier line in complete good faith.

advisability of the *démarche*, particularly now that the Government in Rome had decided to bring about the entry into force of the Anglo-Italian agreement as soon as possible, an event which, on the other hand, could not come about without a useful resumption of the Italo-French negotiations.

Finally he reserved the right to request possible compensation for the wounded man.

I replied to M. Blondel that I was not in a position to give him any reply, not having the necessary details. An enquiry would be opened into the case; I would reserve the right to inform him of our attitude after it was over.

The French *démarche* was made in an extremely humble and courteous manner. When leaving my room, M. Blondel even specifically called my attention to the advisability of not allowing the incident to be artificially built up by the Press in order to create a baseless controversy. I replied that our Press would certainly not attach any particular importance to the question unless a campaign was begun by the French Press, as indeed some papers had already done.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 11th July, 1938—XVI

I received Lord Perth. He told me that, in order to avoid a long explanation and by reason of the cordiality and good faith with which negotiations between us had always been conducted, rather than make a long speech to me he preferred to read to me the instructions which had reached him from his Government. These instructions, which were contained in a long message, were composed of seven points. On the basis of notes made by me during the course of his reading of them they may be summarised as follows:

1. The British Government expresses its surprise at the contents of the *aide-mémoire* presented to Lord Perth during the preceding conversation, as well as at the verbal statements made by Count Ciano when presenting it. However, the British Government does not intend to begin a controversy on the subject nor to make the situation more difficult. It agrees with the Italian Government in expressing its displeasure at the delay which has arisen in the application of the Anglo-Italian agreement, as well as in reaffirming its willingness to find an acceptable way out.

2. It was clearly laid down in the documents exchanged on 16th April that the British Government considers the settlement of the Spanish question as a condition *sine qua non* of the entry into force of the Anglo-Italian Pact. The Pact was warmly welcomed in England and its application will be welcomed still more warmly. But the Italian Government must remember the nature of the undertakings given as well by the British Government to Parliament with regard to the volunteers, of whom an effective withdrawal is requested. (In this connection Lord Perth repeated to me that the

Italian thesis which regards as a 'settlement' of the Spanish question our adhesion to the British plan of evacuation cannot be accepted by the British Government, which reaffirms its attitude on the evacuation of volunteers).

3. The British Government cannot share the point of view expressed by the Italian Government to the effect that London has done nothing to balance the real concessions already made by Italy. British activity at Geneva must be considered an important contribution in return. On the other hand, the British Government considers that undertakings concerning the reduction of the Italian forces in Libya, the settlement of the Spanish question, the initiative to be taken at Geneva in order to remove the obstacles which stood in the way of the recognition of the Empire, and adhesion to the Naval Treaty all came into force from the time of signature. (I expressed the most formal reservations on such a statement, since the withdrawal of the forces from Libya is a unilateral concession made by the Duce by virtue of the good relations re-established by the agreement and naturally conditioned by the latter—a concession, which the Duce can suspend or withdraw at any moment. As far as the Naval Treaty is concerned, it is obvious from the text itself that the British interpretation is wrong).

4. The British Government believes that its declaration concerning France has not been properly interpreted and reaffirms that the coming into force of the Anglo-Italian agreement has no connection with the eventual drawing-up of an Italo-French agreement. It must, however, once more stress that the Duce's decision to postpone the conversations between Italy and France until after the application of the Anglo-Italian Pact is causing the Government in London serious preoccupation. The latter stresses that if the Pact should come into force while a state of tension still continues between Rome and Paris, the agreement would lose much of its effect and could not represent such an outstanding contribution to world peace as had been hoped. If, on the other hand, Signor Mussolini's decision should become public knowledge, it would be impossible to prevent many sections of public opinion from seeing in it an attempt to separate Paris and London. Since such certainly does not enter into Signor Mussolini's intentions and 'in view of the fact that nothing of the kind is possible', it is useless and harmful to make any gesture which may lend support to a supposition of the kind.

5. Since therefore no other alternatives remain, the British Government arrives at the conclusion that nothing can be done except to wait until the evacuation plan is put into action. At the same time the British Government reaffirms its willingness to shorten the time as much as possible, and in this connection stresses the advisability of not making gestures which can in any way

produce new delays. The speech at Aprilia,¹ as well as the tone of the Italian Press, and particularly of certain articles by Gayda, are not such as to improve the atmosphere and facilitate a solution of the problem.

6. The British Government does not believe that the delay in putting the Anglo-Italian Pact into execution can diminish or annul its value. It is, on the other hand, concerned at the idea advanced by the Italian Government of publishing the confidential documents exchanged in the course of the last conversations between Ciano and Perth. These documents have had the character of diplomatic *aide-mémoires* destined for internal use in Chancelleries, just as the conversations and contacts have always been inspired by a complete frankness which would become impossible if it were known beforehand that everything is destined to be made public. A particular difficulty would be represented by relations with third powers, and particularly with France which has so often been discussed in the course of the previous negotiations.

7. The British Government wishes to inform the Italian Government that whenever the latter has fresh suggestions to put forward, it will be very happy to examine and perhaps accept them. The problem is so important that the British Government does not intend to lose itself in minor questions and reaffirms that it is fully decided to solve it as soon as it seems possible.

During the reading of the cable I confined myself to making to Perth the observations and reservations already noted in the memorandum. At the end I said I would inform the Duce of the above and added, in a personal capacity, that I considered it would be impossible for him to be at all satisfied with the points made.

After the disappearance of Austria and the collapse of the system of the Rome Protocols, the Hungarians soon became conscious of the increased weight of the now adjoining German Reich. Eyeing their new neighbours with apprehension they could find but little comfort in the thought that Czechoslovakia might share Austria's fate. It was true, they had grievances against the Czechs and important territorial claims, but conditions attached to a share in Czechoslovakia's dismemberment might prove too onerous, and perhaps ruinous. Therefore Imrédy, having taken Darányi's place as Prime Minister at the very moment when the

¹On 7th July Mussolini had made a short speech at Aprilia in the course of which he had said: 'In these days . . . the most recent and most odious speculation of the anti-Italian and anti-Fascist front, in which there are banded together the outcasts of all nations, is collapsing in shame—their speculation on the hunger of the Italian people as a result of the failure of the grain harvest . . . The Italian people will have the bread necessary for its life. But even if it had been lacking it would never, I say never, have stooped to ask for aid from the so-called great pluto-democracies. Their calculations have failed. But these enemies of Italy . . . are being pointed out to the Italian people so that it may remember them at all times and in all circumstances, whether in peace or in war.'

first Czech crisis was at its height, had hastened to declare in Parliament on 14th May, that 'the framework of the Rome protocols has certainly been altered as a consequence of the withdrawal of one of the contracting parties but it still exists and continues to function unaltered as far as Hungary and Italy are concerned.' The importance of Italy to Hungarian foreign policy was due to yet another cause. Rome had reached an agreement with Belgrade whereby Italian influence could make itself felt across the Adriatic, and Hungary wished to secure her rear in the event of being forced to take the initiative against Czechoslovakia. A journey to Rome might be an indispensable prelude to the first and perhaps imminent revision of the Peace of Trianon, which Hungary had always obstinately attacked, not always with discernment. In the middle of July, Imrédy, accompanied by Kánya, arrived in Rome.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
HUNGARIAN PRIME MINISTER, IMRÉDY, AND THE
HUNGARIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, KÁNYA, IN THE
PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 18th July, 1938—XVI

Imrédy,¹ after having thanked the Duce for the welcome he had received in Italy, speaks on some matters of a commercial nature and makes some statements on the internal position in Hungary, a situation which he defines as generally calm in spite of the agitation of some parties of the extreme Right. The Hungarian Prime Minister confirms his intention, however, of maintaining order at all costs and of continuing politically on the path he had begun.

The Duce gives assurances that he will consider with the greatest good will the requests of a commercial nature. As far as internal policy is concerned he advises Imrédy to defeat his political adversaries by announcing and applying programmes of social reform more concrete than those advanced by his opponents. He gives information on the development of the Italian corporative organisations, the *Dopolavoro* and Italian assistance schemes.

The subject of foreign policy is broached by Kánya. He says that at the present moment the question on which Hungarian attention is focused is the Czech one. Although it is not possible to foresee the exact moment when the crisis will come, it is never-

¹Béla Imrédy, Hungarian politician of the Right; Minister of Finance from 1st October, 1932 to 6th January, 1935, President of the National Bank 1935-38; Prime Minister from 14th May, 1938 to 15th February, 1939. Founded in 1940 the Party of National Resurgence; Minister without Portfolio in the Sztojaj Cabinet from March to August, 1944; executed in 1946.

theless obvious that a solution must be reached. Germany represents the main factor in the Czechoslovak problem. Hungary will never take the initiative in the action against Czechoslovakia. She will, however, intervene shortly after the conflict has been begun by Germany. The Budapest Government intends to learn the intentions of Yugoslavia. Kánya has no faith in the declarations made by Stoyadinovitch. Up to now Hungarian attempts to reach an isolated agreement with Yugoslavia have always come to grief because of the courteous but unyielding opposition of the Yugoslav Premier. Hungary requires a military guarantee against a possible Yugoslav attack. Without this guarantee no responsible government could take the military initiative against Czechoslovakia.

The Duce recalls what Stoyadinovitch said on the subject of Czechoslovakia, which the Yugoslav Prime Minister himself defined as an *état saucisson*. The application of the Pact, which has now little more than a year's life, has been satisfactory. Those questions which existed between the two countries have been liquidated in a manner helpful to both. Calm has been achieved in the Adriatic.

On the basis of Stoyadinovitch's declarations, the Duce considers that Hungary, by intervening in the conflict after the German attack, will run no risk of attacks on the part of the Little Entente. On the other hand, the surest solution of the Czech problem lies in speed of action.

Ciano explains the results of the Venice conversations and confirms the decision of M. Stoyadinovitch to co-ordinate his policy with Italian policy. The only case in which Yugoslavia would be obliged to intervene by reason of Pacts signed by her, would be that of a unilateral Hungarian attack on Prague.

Kánya states that this is out of the question.

The Duce declares that he is convinced that, even if Germany attacks Czechoslovakia, no European crisis will arise. Neither the French nor the English will intervene. On the other hand, France will have taken our attitude into account. Our position will be one of clear and positive support alongside Germany. He has told Hitler that Italy will give complete support to the German policy. If a mobilisation suffices to pin down France, Italy will mobilise and, if necessary, will go to war. No written military pacts exist between Italy and Germany, but they may come about very shortly when the understanding between the two peoples, which is rapidly spreading, is still more complete. On the other hand, relations with Germany do not require written documents; there exists a complete solidarity in their regimes. The Duce advises Hungary to adopt towards any crisis that may arise an initial attitude of waiting, and to seize the favourable opportunity after Czechoslovakia has been broken up.

Kánya dwells at length on the dangers represented by the unknown factor of Yugoslavia's attitude and again asks what

guarantees can be obtained in this direction. The Duce considers that a request can again be put to Stoyadinovitch. Italy can also inform Stoyadinovitch of her desire that relations between Hungary and Yugoslavia should be placed on a basis so normal as to allow of Yugoslavia's adherence to the Rome protocols in due course. It will also be possible to inform Stoyadinovitch that Italy is favourable to an increase in Hungarian power.

At Kánya's request the Duce agrees that it be stated in the *communiqué* on the Italo-Hungarian conversations that the Rome protocols retain their economic and political force as far as relations between Italy and Hungary are concerned.

After a general survey by the Duce, during which he deals with the situation in Spain, Anglo-Italian relations and Italo-French relations, the conversation is concluded.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 26th July, 1938—XVI

Lord Perth informed me that he intends to leave for a holiday in England in the course of the next few days, and that he will stay there for some weeks.

After having expressed the British Government's pleasure at the satisfactory solution of the Mohammed Ali affair¹ and after having thanked me in particular for the part played by H.E. Enrico Cerulli² Lord Perth spoke briefly of the situation in Spain. He said that since Barcelona had already accepted, it would, in principle, be convenient if Franco, too, would announce his acceptance of the plan for the withdrawal of volunteers. He was also anxious to inform me that Franco had informed the British Government of his satisfaction at the closing of the Pyrenean frontier, which had proved to be effectively sealed. The British Government, in informing us of the above, expresses the hope that the Italian Government, too, may desire to maintain a rigid embargo on men and arms. If this were not the case, the Daladier Government³ would be placed in a difficult position.

Speaking of the Anglo-Italian agreement, he told me, in a purely personal capacity, that it seemed to him that the paragraph on the exchange of military information should be at once applied in practice. Should we agree with him, he would place the proposal before his Government. I replied that I would duly inform the Duce

¹Mohammed Ali was a chieftain from British Somaliland who, after having started a seditious movement against the British authorities, had sought refuge on Italian colonial territory.

²Enrico Cerulli, a high official in the Ministry for Colonies.

³Edouard Daladier, Radical-Socialist deputy from 1919; frequently held ministerial posts; War Minister in the French Popular Front Cabinets of Blum and Chautemps; Prime Minister and War Minister from 10th April, 1938.

EUROPEAN TENSION

of his idea, but that I advanced preliminary reservations as to the possibility of acceptance. It is obvious that the Pact is a complete unit, and that one cannot apply fragments of it and leave the rest in suspense.

Finally, Lord Perth asked whether I had anything to communicate to Chamberlain. I replied that I could confirm what I had to tell him during the last conversation—that the Duce has accepted the solution proposed by the British to wait for a still unspecified period before putting the Pact into operation. He will wait. But he is not blind to the fact that every day which passes causes the Pact itself to lose in importance and political appeal.

Lord Perth indicated that he might possibly ask me for another audience before leaving for his holiday.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 20th August, 1938—XVI

Having received orders from the Duce, I today sent for Sir Noel Charles, the British Chargé d'affaires, to whom I gave the following answer concerning the last two notes which he has handed me on the supply of Italian arms to General Franco.

(a) The fact that the Italian air force is very active in Spain does not prove that there has been an increase in the number of our planes. On the other hand, the Italian Government has never concealed the existence in Spain of a legionary air force, and frequent bulletins are published by us to provide evidence of the activity of the Italian air force in Spain.

(b) As far as the despatch of arms and munitions is concerned, the British Government must bear in mind that we have a contingent of volunteers in Spain and that we are willing to withdraw this contingent when the plan of the Non-Intervention Committee takes final shape. Up to the moment, however, our volunteers will continue to fight, and, as well as the daily expenditure of men there is, on a larger scale, that of material. It is obvious that the Italian Volunteer Corps cannot fight armed with olive branches. Therefore we furnish and will continue to furnish those arms which are indispensable to the volunteers if they are not to be massacred by the enormous military supplies which, as the British Government knows, are daily furnished to Red Spain by France.

Sir Noel Charles noted my reply and, in a personal capacity, gave me to understand that he considers it logical and sensible. He asked me if it is true that we are sending further contingents of volunteers, as has been reported from various sources. I said this was inaccurate.

EUROPEAN TENSION

Sir Noel Charles pointed out to me that recently the Italian Press has again assumed an attitude of general hostility towards Great Britain, and asked me whether it was intentional. I answered in the negative, pointing out, however, that the Press reflected the objective aspects of the situation. In my turn I asked him to give me details of papers which had published matter displeasing to the British Government. Sir Noel Charles said he could not give a list of specific cases, but that it was a matter of general tone.

After having referred briefly to the Czechoslovak situation and to the Far East, the Chargé d'affaires took his leave.

XVIII

CZECHOSLOVAK CRISIS

13th September, 1938—28th November, 1938.

At the beginning of September, the second Czechoslovak crisis, which had developed early in August, took a turn for the worse. After a visit by Henlein to Berchtesgaden on 2nd September, where Hitler had worked out a plan of action with him, the Sudeten Germans assumed an intransigent and openly provocative attitude. Czechoslovakia sought to gain time, but found herself isolated. Now it was not only Berlin which pressed openly for the annexation of Sudetenland; Rome echoed the demand, striving to magnify the problem and to satisfy other minority claims, chiefly those of Hungary, so as to lessen to some extent the range and the consequences of the new German inroad into Central Europe. Even London now seemed resigned,¹ though still refusing to countenance a solution by force, whilst Paris reacted more and more feebly to the appeals of France's Czechoslovak ally. Thus, on 12th September, when Hitler proclaimed at Nuremberg that his patience was exhausted, and Henlein prepared his final ultimatum, the conditions already existed which made possible the fateful agreement of Munich.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV MINISTER.

Rome, 13th September, 1938—XVI

I received the Yugoslav Minister, who has returned from leave in Yugoslavia. After having in the name of Stoyadinovitch renewed the invitation to visit Yugoslavia to hunt towards the beginning of January, as was agreed at Venice, he asked what our attitude was to the situation which has arisen in Europe as a result of the Sudeten question. I read the *Informazione Diplomatica*² to the Minister.

¹On 7th September *The Times* published a leading article in which the opinion was expressed that Czechoslovakia would become a more homogeneous State, and actually gain in strength, if certain strips of territory were lopped off and ceded to that country to which their population belonged by race. The article created a world-wide sensation and was taken as a clear warning that Great Britain had in fact abandoned the defence of Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity.

²Note No. 20 of the *Informazione Diplomatica*, published on 13th September, stated the possible solutions of the Czechoslovak problems as follows: 'There are now two possible solutions: The first is to give the Sudeten the power to decide their own destiny; the other, to deny that right. To give the Sudeten the possibility of breaking away from Prague, is to choose the way of justice and, above all, that of peace; the other solution is that of disorder and war.'

The Minister then told me that Stoyadinovitch had entrusted him with the following message: he intends to make the attitude of his Government conform with that of the Fascist Government. When transmitting this message to me the Minister asked me, in a personal capacity, whether we would go to war. I replied that it was premature to speak of this, in view of the fact that the present crisis still allowed of peaceful solutions. I added, however, that although we are not bound to Germany by any military pledges, we had not recently or in the course of this extremely grave development relaxed our ties with Germany in the least, but had publicly given clear proofs of our solidarity with our comrade in the Axis.

M. Christic, still speaking in a personal capacity, told me that he does not consider that Yugoslavia can support Germany in a war. He says, however, that it is out of the question that she will oppose Germany. In his opinion, Yugoslavia will preserve a state of neutrality very favourable to the Axis countries and particularly to Italy. He was anxious, however, to underline that these were his personal impressions: the instruction he had received were limited to the message given above.

M. Christic then also spoke of relations with Hungary which have greatly improved and underlined the necessity of Hungary's not being the first to take up arms against Prague. That would oblige Yugoslavia to keep faith with its pledges to the Little Entente. Should Hungary, however, support and follow up a German intervention, Yugoslavia would consider herself freed from all obligations. I assured Christic that the Hungarians would refrain from taking the initiative in the attack; during the recent conversations in Rome we again had confirmation that such was precisely Hungary's intention.

M. Christic, speaking of the internal situation in Yugoslavia, told me that Stoyadinovitch's position is continually growing stronger in the country in spite of the huge sums which France and Czechoslovakia are at this moment spending to reinforce and galvanize opposition to the Prime Minister.

During the following days events developed with whirlwind rapidity. On the 15th Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden to discuss with Hitler personally the solution of the Czechoslovak problem; on the same day Henlein announced that the Sudeten Germans intended to 'return to the bosom of the Reich.' On the 18th, Daladier and Bonnet responded to an urgent call to London and accepted the British idea of detaching the German minority from Czechoslovakia provided that any solution by force was avoided. Should Prague accept this plan, Great Britain would take part in an international guarantee of the new frontiers in the event of unprovoked aggression. Meanwhile all European States took feverish military precautions; France began partial mobilisation; Britain concentrated units of her fleet. The Anglo-French note was transmitted

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN CRISIS

to Prague on the 19th; the next day the Czech Government replied proposing arbitration. On the night of the 20th/21st, the British and French Ministers in Prague made a further approach to obtain Czech consent to the plan agreed on between Paris and London. There was nothing for it; Prague capitulated at five in the afternoon. And on the 22nd Chamberlain took a plane again to lay before Hitler the particulars of the plan accepted by Prague.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 22nd September, 1938—XVI

I received the German Ambassador, who was instructed by the Fuehrer to transmit to the Duce the expression of the profound personal gratitude of Hitler and the whole German people for the 'historical' role played by the Duce in the present international situation.

On the orders of his Government, the Ambassador further informed me that during the Berchtesgaden conversations the Fuehrer asked the Hungarian Ministers and the Polish Ambassador¹ to express before the whole world their wishes as regards the solution of the Czech question and advised them to intensify their irredentist activity as well as the necessary military preparations. The Fuehrer informed the above-mentioned Polish and Hungarian representatives that he intends, in accordance with the formula suggested by Mussolini, to reach an integral solution for the other minorities also.

The Ambassador added that the Prince of Hesse was expected to arrive in Rome shortly with a personal message from Hitler to the Duce.

CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 22nd September, 1938—XVI

The Hungarian Minister handed me the attached copy of a note² from the Hungarian to the Czechoslovakian Government. M. Villani further informed me, in strict secrecy, that, during the recent conversations in Berchtesgaden. Imrédy and Kánya again expressed

¹Hitler received both Imrédy and Kánya, and the Polish Ambassador, Lipsky, on 20th September.

²The note referred to an already published statement in which it was contended that the various nationalities inhabiting Czechoslovakia did not enjoy equality of rights. This, the note pointed out, was a state of affairs incompatible with the recent declaration made by the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, and the Hungarian Government hoped and expected that the Magyars in Czechoslovakia would be accorded, without delay, the status to which they were entitled on the strength of the President's promises.

to Hitler their firm determination to reach a solution of the Hungarian question. With this in view, it is proposed to cause incidents to occur in the areas inhabited by Hungarians and in Slovakia itself. The Fuehrer encouraged them and showed 'complete understanding of Budapest's point of view.' For my part, I did not omit to express myself to Villani on the lines of the instructions sent to Vinci¹ this morning—that is to say, that it is in Hungary's interest to make the question of the minorities a continual subject of agitation, to be ready to follow up and to support the German or Polish initiative, but not to be the first to attack in order to prevent the ties of the Little Entente from coming into play.

The Minister, to whom I had already spoken several times in this vein, declared that he was in complete agreement with our attitude.

CONVERSATION WITH THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 22nd September, 1938—XVI

I received the British Ambassador on his return from a long leave in England. His visit was paid in order to resume contact and had no specific aim. Discussing the situation, he told me that in spite of the good prospects arising from Chamberlain's initiative, he is still not entirely optimistic, because he is afraid that the Germans want to go too far in their demands and perhaps in their actions. Some papers were talking of the dispatch of German forces to Prague; should this be true, the situation would again be obscured because, in that case, France would probably take action and England would follow her. Chamberlain has done his best to safeguard peace, but one must not shut one's eyes to the fact that he is very much tied in his own country and that after an initial dispersal the opposition forces have re-formed and have organised a strong offensive against the Prime Minister. The nation is unanimous in considering that, should Germany intend to push its ambitions beyond the bounds laid down by justice, it would be necessary to settle the affair by arms.

For my part, I told the British Ambassador that we, as had been repeatedly and unequivocally stated by the Duce, aimed at an overall solution of the Czechoslovak question—that is to say that Hungary and Poland, too, should receive due satisfaction. In our opinion it would, in fact be childish and dangerous to settle the Sudeten question and leave the question of the Hungarian and Polish minorities still open which could in a short space of time again imperil the peace of Europe.

Lord Perth said that he is in complete agreement with us. He

¹Luigi Vinci Gigliucci, Minister in Addis Ababa until October, 1935; Minister in Budapest from September, 1936, to March, 1940.

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN CRISIS

does not, however, know what the proposals are which Chamberlain will advance to the Fuehrer, and is, therefore, not in a position to inform us of the intentions of his Government. In a personal capacity, he asked me whether we were willing to guarantee the frontier of Czechoslovakia once all the questions concerning the minorities had been settled and the remaining Czechoslovak Republic had been neutralised by adoption of the Swiss system.

I answered that such a problem had not yet been examined by us and that I could therefore not give any official answer.

In a personal capacity, I could, however, tell him that the question might be examined in a most favourable spirit. What I did rule out completely was the possibility of an Italian guarantee before the Hungarian and Polish questions had been solved.

No other question was discussed with the British Ambassador.

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN MINISTER.

Rome, 23rd September, 1938—XVI

I received the Rumanian Minister to whom I protested very strongly at the matter published by *Curentul* and other Rumanian papers, and threatened reprisals on our side. The Minister, Zamfirescu, appeared deeply upset by this step, disassociated himself from the paper and the author of the article and undertook to take the most energetic steps in Bucharest to cause such absurd publications to cease.

At the same time the Rumanian Minister made the following secret communication with which he had been entrusted by his Government:

1. Rumania has been the subject of very strong pressure to allow the free passage of Soviet troops across her territory in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia. Rumania has opposed, is opposing and will continue to oppose any such request.

2. Rumania is aware that Hungary may shortly have those parts of its territory formerly subject to the Prague Government restored. Given the present course of affairs, the Rumanian Minister finds that this is logical and natural. He requests the Italian Government, however, to be good enough to use its influence on Budapest in order to ensure that, on the Hungarian side, no impulsive action is taken which would render difficult Rumania's position in relation to its Little Entente Agreements.

3. Rumania, while it understands and justifies the return to Hungary of purely Hungarian territory, would have to review its attitude should claims be advanced by Hungary to territory inhabited by other population groups—for example Slovakia. The

Rumanian Minister is confident that the Italian Government will be willing to exercise a moderating influence on Budapest.

I thanked the Rumanian Minister for his communication to me, which I noted. In a personal capacity, I told him that, as from today, it seemed to me that Rumania could consider herself freed from the bonds of the Little Entente, in view of the fact that one of the contracting parties—Czechoslovakia to be precise—has already been so substantially changed as to render null and void any previous contract. M. Zamfirescu told me that he considers that this is also the point of view of the Rumanian Government.

A Press cable on the friction which has arisen between Warsaw and Moscow having arrived during the conversation, I raised the question with the Minister of the attitude which Rumania would adopt should an open conflict break out between the U.S.S.R. and Poland. Zamfirescu said without hesitation that Rumania would side with Warsaw and that in any event the alliance with Poland would take precedence over any pledge to Prague.¹

As appendixes to the Munich Agreement of 30th September there are two annexes, the first of which was due to Italian initiative. It laid down the opening of direct negotiations between Prague, Warsaw and Budapest to solve the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities incorporated in the Czechoslovakian State. Warsaw immediately settled her dispute with Prague by sending an ultimatum on the very day of the signing of the Munich Agreement. With Budapest things took a different turn. In Prague, the Czechs at first were evasive, then they consented to send to Komarom a delegation led by the Slovak, Monsignor Tiso, the right hand man of another priest, Hlinka, who led the strongest Slovak party which was Catholic and nationalist. On 9th October the delegation met the Hungarian representatives and hastened to offer the immediate concession of two railway stations on the border 'as a token of faith in the success of the negotiations.' But after five days of discussions no further progress had been made. The Hungarians lost patience, broke off negotiations and on 14th October sent Count Csaky to Rome. On the same day Hitler received the new Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Chvalkovsky, and on the 15th the Hungarian ex-Prime Minister, Darányi. The Germans now gave the impression of being almost more inclined towards Prague than towards Budapest, and showed a remarkable reluctance to meet Hungarian aspirations. The encouragement given at Berchtesgaden scarcely three weeks before seemed to be forgotten. It was then that Hungary turned to Italy and asked for arbitration by Italy and Germany.

¹Three treaties had been signed between Rumania and Poland. On 3rd March, 1921, in Bucharest a defensive alliance; on 26th March, 1926, a treaty in the form of a guarantee superseding the preceding alliance; on 15th January, 1931, at Geneva, a new treaty on the expiry of the second. As far as Prague was concerned the undertakings arising from the Little Entente treaties were valid.

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN CRISIS

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 22nd October, 1938—XVI

I was called to the telephone by Ribbentrop who told me that he had received the Hungarian proposal for possible Axis arbitration in the Czech-Hungarian question. Ribbentrop had not yet been able to consult the Fuehrer, whom he would meet late that evening. He wished, however, to acquaint me immediately with his feeling of regret at the Hungarian attitude; according to him the proposals made at Prague had had the full approval of Darányi and Imrédy. Apart from that, Ribbentrop seemed sceptical of the possibility of solving the Czech-Hungarian question by arbitration. He was afraid that it would end by displeasing both parties and that perhaps we would be forced to have the decisions arrived at by arbitration applied by force. This Germany did not intend to do.

I told him that we, for our part, had informed the Hungarians, as a preliminary step, that we had no objections to arbitration, but that in all events any decision would have to be taken in full agreement with Germany. As far as the execution of the award of the arbitration by Czechoslovakia and Hungary was concerned, it seemed to me that any danger of recourse to force was out of the question, since arbitration could take place only on a previous undertaking by both parties to accept the awards without reservations or objections.

Ribbentrop then indicated that Prague might perhaps prefer to have the Four Power Conference called—the meeting could take place in the near future in a North Italian city. He wished to know our opinion on this subject.

I replied that I would inform the Duce on a suitable occasion and receive orders from him, but I reminded him that some days ago we had been in favour of such a possibility, but that it had been since discarded because of opposition for which we were not responsible.

Ribbentrop informed me that he would, if necessary, telephone me again after having consulted the Fuehrer. He was anxious to give the whole conversation a note of marked cordiality towards us and obvious resentment against Hungary. He was more openly the advocate of Prague than might have been expected.

CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN MINISTER

Rome, 23rd October, 1938—XVI

The Hungarian Minister has received instructions from his Government to inform us that, in view of the impossibility of pro-

ceeding to immediate arbitration, the possibility of new direct contacts with the Czechs is being considered afresh in Budapest. Such conversations will, however, be resumed in an atmosphere of complete scepticism; it is considered that after a day or two of negotiations they will be again interrupted.

In Budapest they are also of the opinion that France and England would be in favour of Axis arbitration, since these countries do not intend to concern themselves any more with the disputes between Czechs and Hungarians.

Since the idea of arbitration has not been received by Germany with unconditional approval, but at the same time has not been completely discarded, the Hungarian Government considers that, were Italy to push the idea in Berlin, the project of a solution by arbitration might be adopted. The Hungarian Government reserves the right to inform us of its wishes again at the opportune moment in order to obtain our aid. For the time being it is merely a question of 'facilitating as far as possible the creation of an atmosphere favourable to Axis arbitration.

The Minister also informed me confidentially of the quarrel between Ribbentrop and Darányi, caused by a difference in interpretation of the conditions laid down at Munich for the solution of the Czecho-Hungarian dispute. The Hungarians persist in saying that it is not they who have tampered with the cards but the Germans. Darányi has always affirmed the absolute necessity of the cession to Hungary of the three eastern towns,¹ while Ribbentrop says the opposite. The Hungarian case is said to be supported by the testimony of the German Minister in Budapest² himself, but he, for obvious reasons, cannot make his statement public.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 23rd October, 1938—XVI

In the evening Ribbentrop telephoned me from Berchtesgaden.

1. Attributing to the Fuehrer the opinions and arguments already used by himself during the telephone conversation of yesterday evening, he confirmed the German opposition to the possibility of Axis arbitration.

Since—as emerges, moreover, from my conversation this morning with Villani—there is a possibility of renewed direct contacts between Prague and Budapest, Ribbentrop proposes that we send an identical message to the Hungarian and Czechoslovak Governments to encourage them to continue with direct negotiations. I

¹Kassa (Kaschau, Kosice), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo). The three towns had for many centuries belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary.

²Otto von Erdmannsdorf, Minister to Budapest from 1937 to 1941.

reserved my answer until I had received orders from the Duce.

Ribbentrop added that should direct negotiations again fail, the Fuehrer considers that the question should be dealt with at a Four Power Conference, in which only the Foreign Ministers would take part, and which would be held in a North Italian city.

2. Ribbentrop said that he had personally to convey a personal message from the Fuehrer to the Duce, and that he intended to come to Rome for that purpose in the second half of the present week. He wished to suggest as the best days Friday or Saturday. His stay in Rome is to be very brief and of an unofficial character.

I replied that I would inform the Duce and would let him have a reply as soon as possible.

Following up this message Ribbentrop arrived in Rome on 27th October. Though his visit was 'private' it gave Ciano the opportunity to persuade the Reich Foreign Minister that the Czecho-Hungarian dispute should be settled by the two Axis Powers. This involved an open violation of the very recent Munich Agreement, which provided for consultation between the four signatory Powers in case a satisfactory understanding between Prague and Budapest should not have been reached within three months.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Palazzo Chigi, 28th November, 1938—XVI

The two Foreign Ministers examined the dispute between Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Count Ciano wished to make clear to von Ribbentrop the value and the influence the settlement of the question by Italo-German arbitration would have in Europe. He pointed out that, while one might have thought that the British Government would not be in favour of such arbitration, it emerged from a communication made to him yesterday by Lord Perth that, on the contrary, London would regard intervention by the two Axis Powers, in the capacity of arbitrators, not only without prejudice but with satisfaction. Such being the case—Count Ciano continued—there is no doubt that a statement of this nature would recognise that Germany and Italy had a right to settle Central European questions and would at the same time confirm the exclusive influence of the Axis in the eyes of both the Czech and the Hungarian populations. Von Ribbentrop, who in the course of a preceding conversation had already revealed to Count Ciano his hesitation to accept the idea of arbitration, allowed himself to be won over by the arguments of Count Ciano and recognised that it was not only in the German interest but also offered the possibility of reconciling Hungarian and Czech differences in the

name of the Axis. He added that, on the basis of Count Ciano's explanations, he would in the course of the day put new proposals before the Fuehrer—who up to that time had not been inclined to the idea of arbitration—and hoped to obtain his assent. As far as the Hungarian demands and Czech resistance to them was concerned, Count Ciano, after tracing chronologically the various phases of the Hungarian demands and of the respective interventions by Italy and Germany in Prague and Budapest and explaining the essential points of the Hungarian requirements, proposed to von Ribbentrop to set out, in the meantime, an agreement in principle between Italy and Germany to serve as a basis of understanding for the future arbitration. Count Ciano was of the opinion, from the examination of the documents and from the conversations he had had with the Hungarians, that Hungary and the Hungarian Government itself could be satisfied—thereby assuring Hungary's gratitude to the Axis—by persuading Czechoslovakia to cede to them three of the towns at present disputed, to be precise, those in the eastern districts: Kassa, Munkacs and Ungvar. As far as Pozsony and Nyitra were concerned, Count Ciano considered that it would not in fact be possible to give way to the Hungarian demands. But it seemed to Count Ciano that the Hungarians were already reconciled to renouncing their claims to these two towns, and it was for that reason that he saw in the cession of the three localities above mentioned—especially of Kassa, to which the Hungarians attached particular importance—the possibility of settling the dispute. In exchange the Hungarians would have to renounce their claims on Slovakia and Ruthenia. Von Ribbentrop objected that a solution of this nature would provoke a reaction on the part of Slovakia and possibly movements with a nationalist background which Germany and Italy, as arbitrators and guarantors, would have to meet with force of arms. Count Ciano replied to his objection that a case of this nature was not likely to arise in view of the fact that, apart from the agreement on the subject between the Slovaks and Prague, he did not see what interest Slovakia had in going to such extremes.

Herr von Ribbentrop, after having indicated what Darányi's demands had been—demands which led to a fundamental difference of opinion which has lasted until now—finished by giving attentive consideration to the thesis advanced by Count Ciano and—linking it with the possibility of an award and repeating that this possibility was being referred to the Fuehrer in the course of today—concluded by saying that the plan for arbitration together with the general line of satisfying the Hungarian demands sketched by Count Ciano, might constitute the most solid basis for the solution of the dispute between Czechs and Hungarians.

XIX

HITLER PROPOSES A MILITARY ALLIANCE

28th October, 1938.

Ribbentrop, as he had informed Ciano by telephone, had not come to Rome merely to solve the dispute between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He had a personal mission to Mussolini to discharge. His haste in setting out and the attendant secrecy alone showed that he was bringing important news, and that the German dictator attached particular weight to them. Mussolini was not disappointed.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE REICH, VON RIBBENTROP, IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 28th October, 1938—XVI

Ribbentrop expounds the views which lead the Government of the Reich to consider the formation at the present moment of a military alliance between Italy, Germany and Japan very useful. The Fuehrer is convinced that we must inevitably count on a war with the Western Democracies in the course of a few years, perhaps three or four. After what occurred at Munich, the Axis is in an exceptionally favourable position, so favourable that in our countries there are some who are unable to grasp it fully. Today the alliance must be considered a useful and prudent step; it must be kept in mind that an alliance exists between France and Great Britain and that, although weakened, the Franco-Soviet Pact¹ is still in force. Any future alliance in accordance with the German proposals would merely bring us into line with the others.

The Fuehrer has up to now hesitated to propose the alliance for the following reasons:

1. He considered that the great democracies would have intensified their rearmament and that those people in France and

¹The treaty of mutual assistance which France and the USSR had signed in Paris on 2nd May, 1935, was to remain in force for five years, unless renewed.

England who represent the trends towards conciliation with the Totalitarian States would have had their positions weakened. The Fuehrer has now come to the conclusion that, independently of any new political event, France and Britain have made and will continue to make the maximum effort as far as armaments are concerned. Nevertheless the advantage gained by Germany and Italy is so great that we can no longer be overtaken. As far as the positions of Chamberlain and Daladier are concerned, they are fairly well placed, and even the formation of a Tripartite Alliance could not bring about their fall.

2. America. It is considered by some that the Tripartite Alliance would encourage an alliance between Great Britain and the United States. The Fuehrer has come to contrary conclusions. The United States will increasingly seek isolation if a threat of war arises. The Czechoslovak crisis has proved that America is the country which can make the most complete and rapid withdrawals. The Japanese, too, share this view; the United States will not wish to involve themselves in any conflict—still less so if Japan were also involved.

Since 1933, Germany has been pursuing a policy of great friendship and collaboration with Japan. Today, Japan's position is formidable; she has, or will shortly have, complete control over China. From now on, the immediate objective of the Japanese is not Russia but Great Britain. In the event of war with the Western Democracies, the Japanese military alliance would be extremely valuable. It is necessary to prepare for military collaboration with that nation from now on. It must, however, be kept in mind that in Japan there are two opposed trends of thought: the imperialist trend and what might be called the big business one, which would be more in favour of an agreement with the democratic Powers and of creating the conditions for a long period of calm. Hitler considers that since Japan has now offered this Pact one must accept it, because otherwise the conservative forces might carry the day and impose an agreement with England.

The Czechoslovak crisis has shown our power. We have the advantage of the initiative and are masters of the situation. We cannot be attacked. The military situation is excellent; as from the month of September we could face a war with the great democracies. From the start Germany could put 98 divisions into the field.

He then gives the state of the armed forces: a very strong army, a very strong air force, the navy, which will shortly be large enough to cause a considerable part of the British fleet to be committed in the North Sea, in the course of rapid development.

As far as the political situation is concerned, Czechoslovakia can be considered as liquidated. In September it would have required two weeks to carry out the invasion, today forty-eight hours would suffice. The German frontiers have been brought so close together

that at some points the artillery has been withdrawn several kilometres to prevent it from firing on the German artillery formations on the other side of Czechoslovakia.

With regard to Poland, the Reich intends to continue to develop its policy of friendship, keeping in mind Poland's vital requirements, first and foremost, the outlet to the sea. There are other countries which want to form still closer bonds with the Axis: Yugoslavia, Rumania and Hungary. To the East, Russia is weak and will be for many years; all our energies can be directed against the Western Democracies. This is the fundamental reason why Germany proposes the Pact and considers it is now timely.

The Duce agrees that in the course of a few years there will be war between the Axis, France and England. The trend of history is in that direction. There has been an irreparable break between the two worlds. It must be recognised that a defensive alliance exists between London and Paris similar to that which is now being proposed by Germany. Further, technical contacts between the General Staffs are already in progress. On the other hand, between Italy and Germany there exist no written pacts, since, from now on, the Berchtesgaden protocols, which dealt with immediate problems, can be considered out of date. There does exist the Anti-Communist Pact signed in Rome, in which the ideological side predominates and by which Italy as well as Japan is fully committed. It must not be forgotten, however, that between Italy and Germany there is a solidarity of regime, as well as mutual interest in helping each other, even if the undertaking is not recognised in an official document. The attitude of Italy has been clear in the past and will always be so, even should the fate of the two empires be at stake. He believes that this alliance ought to be drawn up but makes a definite reservation as to the moment at which the Pact ought to be made. He states that he will express himself with the frankness which is called for between friends, and that he considers the alliance to be a sacred pledge to be respected and fulfilled in its entirety. For that reason it is necessary to examine the position of Italy. The Axis is now popular; the Italians are proud of this political system which has already stood the test so wonderfully in the course of recent world events. But with regard to the military alliance, some sections of public opinion would be unprepared. The air force is in favour of it; the navy moderately in favour; the lower ranks of the army are in favour of it, while in the intermediate and particularly in the higher ranks there are still large sections who are reserved in their judgment. It is, of course, thoroughly understood that, when the Government decides on the alliance everyone will obey and no objections will be raised.

The peasants and the workers, too, are sympathetic towards Nazi Germany and would view with favour any new undertaking. The bourgeoisie on the contrary, less so. The middle classes continue

HITLER PROPOSES AN ALLIANCE

to look to London with a certain interest for this reason, that the middle classes erroneously identify power with riches. Another cause of coolness towards an alliance with Germany would be represented by the struggle between Nazism and Catholicism, whereas the agreement would become very popular if an understanding in religious affairs could be arrived at in Germany.

The Duce states that it is his wish to make this alliance whenever the idea has been allowed to mature for the necessary period among the great mass of the people. Today this is not the case. The Italian people have reached the stage of the Axis; but not yet that of the military alliance. They may, however, reach it very rapidly.

The Duce goes on to state that the Axis itself implies—as has been proved by recent events—a sense of military solidarity even without a Pact of allegiance. When this Pact is formed, the spiritual preparation of the Italians must be carried out in such a way as to ensure an enthusiastic welcome for the event.

Ribbentrop asks if the Italian people could not already recognise in a Pact of the kind an instrument for the defence of and expansion of the Empire. The Duce believes that this is so. Moreover the nation is convinced that the utmost solidarity does in fact exist between Italy and Germany. In September we had mobilised 400,000 men on the French frontier and were ready to attack France. He is convinced that one day we will have to settle a number of accounts which cannot be written off without war. France respects only those nations which have defeated her.

Ribbentrop repeats certain arguments of a military character, and says that, in the event of war, Italy and Germany could put into the field 200 divisions, which under the command of the Duce and the Fuehrer would find their power doubled. The Duce agrees in believing that the Italo-German forces are invincible if united, not only because of their material preparedness but because one is dealing with political armies, and history has proved that armies fight differently when they are the bearers of a political faith. He stresses the fact, however, that the conditions for an alliance must mature. He does not consider it beyond the bounds of possibility either, that the Pope, with whom our relations are rather strained, may make some gesture with regard to the alliance which would place many Catholics in a difficult position. He gives an assurance that in the meantime nothing will be done between ourselves, France and England. With England there exists the April Agreement, which comes into force shortly, but which has in the meantime lost much of its importance. With the French the situation continues to be extremely difficult.

When the alliance between Germany and ourselves seems to be ripe, it will be necessary to lay down its objectives. We must not make a purely defensive alliance. There would be no need of one, since no one is thinking of attacking the totalitarian States. Instead

HITLER PROPOSES AN ALLIANCE

we wish to make an alliance in order to change the map of the world. For this it will be necessary to fix the objectives and the conquests to be made; for our part, we already know in what direction we must go.

Ribbentrop agrees with the Duce on this conception of the alliance, and confirms that the Mediterranean is destined to become an Italian sea. Germany intends to work to that end. Twice Italy has given proofs of her friendship to Germany. The whole of German public opinion is extremely favourable to the understanding and also to the alliance with Italy. If there are still some people who murmur in certain of the middle classes, it is necessary to bear in mind that it is a matter of people who no longer count for anything in the life of the country and who are also enemies of National Socialism. He adds, confidentially, that the Fuehrer is preparing another thorough purge which will recall that carried out on 4th of February.

Passing to other topics, the problem of Czecho-Hungarian relations is examined and a decision is taken in favour of arbitration by the Axis to be given in Vienna on Wednesday, 2nd November.

With regard to Spain it is decided to continue to aid Franco by the dispatch of arms and of other war supplies.

The conversation finishes at 8 p.m.

XX

ITALY AND FRANCE

9th November, 1938—2nd December, 1938.

After Munich international tension seemed to relax; but this was a short-lived illusion. Hardly a week had passed since the signing of Chamberlain's and Hitler's joint declaration of goodwill—hailed also among the masses of the German people as a turning point in the history of Anglo-German relations—when Hitler began to utter new threats, whilst the Nazi Press discovered pretexts for a renewed anti-British campaign of particular violence. The discouraging impression produced by this display of instability, and of the precarious nature of relations between the Great Powers, completely overshadowed a simultaneous attempt to achieve a détente between Rome and Paris.

Since October, 1936, when Chambrun was recalled, Rome had not seen a French Ambassador, and relations between the two capitals had gone from bad to worse. In fact, after Mussolini's Genoa speech, which marked the abrupt end of the conversations between Ciano and Blondel, it had seemed on more than one occasion that an open conflict between France and Italy was imminent, both countries appearing equally determined in supporting the opposing sides in Spain. However, shortly after Munich, on 4th October, the French Government decided to appoint an Ambassador to Rome, which necessarily implied recognition of the Empire. It was a gesture of goodwill and pacification, and the choice, too, of François-Poncet, for many years Ambassador to Berlin, seemed a happy one. The moment was approaching for the coming into effect of the Easter agreements after ten thousand Italian volunteers had embarked at Cadiz on 15th October in order to return to their own country. The Fascist Government had thus given proof of compliance with the preliminary undertakings which conditioned the application of these agreements, and this, too, was a favourable circumstance in view of the intimate relations between Paris and London. But François-Poncet arrived in Rome on the very day that the German Embassy Secretary, vom Rath, was shot dead by a Polish-Jewish émigré. The deed was at once seized on in Germany as a pretext for ferocious reprisals on the Jews—another reason for a new stiffening in relations between London and Berlin. It was not a happy augury.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 9th November, 1938—XVI

I received the French Ambassador, François-Poncet. He at once began by stating that his presence in Rome must be considered in the light of the Munich meeting; one must recognise in his nomination, France's desire to contribute to clearing the atmosphere in Europe once and for all by improving relations between France and Italy. After having gone over the various stages of his personal career and of his political activity, François-Poncet went on to state that he intends to base his activity on essentially realistic considerations: the Rome-Berlin Axis is effectively and solidly real and he will take care in the course of his mission to make no attempt to weaken the links which exist between the two totalitarian States. However, friendship with Berlin must not be considered to be exclusive. Italy can resume cordial relations with France thus contributing to the *rapprochement* between the two political systems in existence in Europe—a *rapprochement* which is desired by all, since a general understanding throughout the Continent will only follow as a result of agreement between Italy, Germany, France and England. With this aim, he proposes to examine thoroughly with the Italian Government those problems which have rendered relations difficult between Paris and Rome, with a view to clarifying them as soon as possible.

I noted François-Poncet's communication and replied by confirming Italy's sincere desire to facilitate an understanding in Europe. The Duce's action at the time of the crisis was decisive and is now universally recognised as such. As far as relations between Italy and France were concerned, I briefly summarised what has occurred in recent times. But, in order to avoid misunderstandings, I immediately drew the French Ambassador's attention to the fact that there still exists one great unsolved problem between France and Italy: the question of Spain. As far as the Spanish problem is concerned, the respective positions of Rome and Paris are still laid down in the Genoa speech—on the opposite sides of the barricade. In this field, too, Italy has recently given proof of her goodwill and in particular of the true nature of her intentions in Spain. But it would be an error to believe that one could see any change of direction in our policy: Fascist Italy has been, is and will continue to be solidly on the side of Franco until his complete victory, which would have been already achieved if certain countries had not continued to support the Red republic of Barcelona artificially by means of all kinds of help. Italy has given certain pledges to the Non-Intervention Committee. It will always scrupulously abide by these pledges and has, in fact, partly anticipated the possible decision of the Committee by withdrawing ten thousand

volunteers unilaterally. Now the problem of recognising Franco as a belligerent will arise. It is obvious that he has a right to such recognition. Italy expects that recognition to be given. Summing up, I told François-Poncet that it would be difficult to start exhaustive conversations on the subject of our relations with France until the Spanish affair had been disposed of.

François-Poncet said that it was expected that this obstacle would be encountered. He is not blind to the fact that the solution of the Spanish question is still more difficult in view of the fact that strong currents in French public opinion support the defence of the Barcelona republic to the bitter end. On the other hand, it is well known that the Government, and particularly Daladier and Bonnet, would be in favour of sending a diplomatic agent to Burgos. They might have been able to do so after the Munich meeting. They lacked the courage. Now the matter appears more difficult. However, François-Poncet was glad that I had made such a frank statement, since it would give him the means for putting pressure on his Government to reach a rapid solution of the Spanish problem. François-Poncet further asked me what I thought of the possibility of mediation or an armistice.

I replied that Franco had already stated that he was sharply opposed to such a resolution and that Franco's point of view was completely accepted by us. Any armistice could take place only after the surrender of the Reds and recognition of Franco's undisputed position as winner of the war.

The Ambassador, François-Poncet, again expressed his willingness to do useful and helpful work with the aim of *rapprochement* between the two countries. He asked to be helped to make contact with institutions and people who will allow him to learn the achievements of the regime as thoroughly as possible. I replied that I would do so. On his remarking, however, that in Germany he had been particularly friendly with members of the Party and that this had helped him greatly to carry out his diplomatic activities, I contrived to let him understand that in Italy it will be best for him not to adopt such a system, since foreign policy is laid down by the Duce alone and carried out under his orders by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR IN LONDON,
GRANDI.

Rome, 14th November, 1938—XVI

N9161

Secret.

Dear Dino,

As you know, the Anglo-Italian Pact will come into force on the 16th and one of the hardest and most glorious chapters in our

history will thus be brought to a close. As I sign it, my thoughts cannot do otherwise than turn to the work you have done—work which has at all times and at all stages of this truly remarkable development been so efficacious.

But having reached this point it is not, as you can imagine, the intention of our Chief to halt even for one minute. There is another problem which immediately presents itself and which we must consider in the light of the regime's achievements in the Empire. I speak of our relations with France.

Henceforward it is clear that, since the political, military and even geographical conditions of our country have changed substantially, future conversations with France cannot be resumed on the previous basis. The claims which we once kept unspoken can now shortly be brought into the open. The fundamental points of our policy towards France are three in number: Tunisia, Djibuti and the Suez Canal.

As far as Tunisia is concerned, one cannot contemplate going back to discuss what were once known as the Laval Agreements.¹ We are now on quite a different plane. We intend to effect a sharp, decisive and lasting improvement in the position of our working masses, who have represented and who still represent the only vital force belonging to the white race in that area. It is not a case of claiming purely and simply the cession of territory, as some foreign papers are already saying. To begin with at least we will be satisfied if we reach a form of condominium which would ensure the fruitful development of our activities.

As far as Djibuti is concerned, the situation is still clearer. What significance has that port if it is cut off from the Empire? It is clear that we cannot continue to make French institutions and organisations grow fat with our labour and our traffic. Therefore certain points must be settled: the railway must be completely Italian; the port must be entirely administered by both countries. Here, too, in practice it is necessary to arrive at a form of condominium. Otherwise we would have to direct our economic and trade currents in quite another direction and the port of Djibuti, deprived of the life-blood which comes to it from Italy and the Empire would rapidly wither and die.

The third point affects the Suez Canal.² We do not intend now that our traffic to the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific is

¹The Laval-Mussolini agreements signed in Rome on 7th January, 1935, included among other things the settlement of the questions left outstanding by the French denunciation in 1918 of the 1896 treaty between France and Italy on Italian interests in Tunisia. This settlement involved important concessions by Italy.

²The Suez Canal Company, registered in Paris in 1856, had paid no dividends up to 1874, but from 1880 onward it showed exceptionally high returns, the charges for passage through the Canal having been very considerably increased. British shipping companies had repeatedly protested at the exorbitant burden of these charges, and after the occupation of Abyssinia the Italians, too, joined in these protests.

increasing so rapidly, we do not intend, I repeat, to remain subject to the disgusting exploitation of the Canal Company. At a given moment every undertaking passes under public control. All the more so if the capital invested in it has been repaid at a rate which can be described as a thousand times more than usurious. We do not ask for that. But we firmly desire that the Canal tariffs undergo revision and that the charges be fair and honest. All those countries which have an interest in trade with the East cannot but share our attitude and support our just request.

I am writing this to you, dear Dino, not only so that you may be informed of the directives affecting the line of our foreign policy in the future, but also because from now on I ask you to give your collaboration. The Duce wishes you to begin—in whatever manner you may consider is indicated and with your very great personal ability—to let it be understood by the English that these problems exist for us and that no one must be surprised if, at a certain moment, we put them forward clearly for discussion. There is no question of making a *démarche*. It is sufficient to drop a hint at the opportune moment. Let it be seen that something of the sort is bound to come. Predispose English opinion—if it is impossible actually to prepare it. I cannot at present tell you when and how all this will happen; we shall see that from the development of events. But it is definite that the Duce has now set himself these targets and that alone means that every attempt will be made to attain them.

Yours affectionately,

On 30th November Ciano spoke in the National Assembly and gave an account of the most recent international developments. Coming to the subject of Italy's desire to consolidate he said: 'This consolidation is the highest goal of our policy, and we will move towards it with tenacity and realism, not unaccompanied by that circumspection which is indispensable when one aims at safeguarding with inflexible firmness the interests and natural aspirations of the Italian people.' At this point the assembly, rising to its feet, interrupted the speech with the cry of: 'Tunis, Djibuti, Corsica!' thus going further than the programme which Ciano had sketched to Grandi only a fortnight before.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 2nd December, 1938—XVI

The Ambassador, François-Poncet, told me that he had received instructions from his Government to discuss with me at some length two points connected with the anti-French demonstrations which

had taken place in the Chamber of Deputies the day before yesterday.

1. He pointed out that, in the course of a session, numerous deputies, taking as their cue an otherwise unexceptionable phrase in the speech delivered by the Foreign Minister, had loudly demanded the cession to Italy of numerous pieces of territory which form part of the French Republic, of its colonies and protectorates. The French Government, while expressing its regret at such demonstrations, felt bound to add that this regret was increased by the fact that the Head of the Government and those Ministers present did nothing to disassociate themselves from the deputies who were demonstrating.

2. The French Government reminded the Italian Government of the existence of the 1935 Agreements which, among other things, settled the Tunisian question. These agreements have never been put into execution, although ratified. With regard to yesterday's incident, the French Government wishes to learn from the Italian Government if it considers these agreements to be at present in force and if it believes that it can use them as a basis for relations between France and Italy.

M. François-Poncet spun out these two basic demands into a long speech which aimed at showing the absolute necessity of bringing on to a plane of cordiality relations between Italy and France, 'that is between two countries which can do good to each other and which can also inflict the greatest mutual harm on each other.' I must add that M. Poncet was anxious to give the conversation a cordial note and to exclude from his *démarche* anything in the nature of a protest.

As far as the first request was concerned, I replied to M. Poncet that the Government cannot accept responsibility for cries uttered by Fascists, whether uttered in the Parliamentary Chamber or in the open streets. It confines itself to taking note of them as an accurate indication of the state of mind of the Italian people, for one must bear in mind that, contrary to what the French Press has asserted, no demonstration had been previously organised; it is not the Government's custom to take any action in the Chamber to disown possible interruptors—discipline in the Assembly Hall is maintained by the President of the Chamber, who, as M. Poncet himself saw, rang his bell several times to call the interruptors to silence. The only demonstration for which the Fascist Government is responsible was represented by the text of my speech and in it no one could pick out anything aimed at insulting France.

As far as the second request was concerned, I told M. Poncet that the question which he had asked me was of too obvious importance for me to be able to accept the responsibility of giving a reply forthwith and that I would therefore have to take orders from my Chief. However, in a preliminary and personal manner, I

ITALY AND FRANCE

had to call his attention to the fact that the 1935 Agreements had been reached on the basis of suppositions which had not been realised in practice—in the first place there was the unfriendly attitude of France during the Abyssinian campaign. I therefore wondered if the whole question should not be re-examined in a new light.

1939

XXI

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME

2nd January, 1939—12th January, 1939.

On 28th November, 1938, it was announced that the British Prime Minister, having accepted the personal invitation tendered to him by Mussolini in Munich, would visit Rome early in the New Year. The date of that announcement seemed well chosen. The Agreements of 16th April had, at long last, come into force, and Italy's adhesion to the London Naval Treaty of 1936 was imminent. It actually took place on 2nd December. However, shortly before that date Chamberlain and Halifax had visited Paris and the official communiqué issued at the end of their visit had made no secret of the fact that the Anglo-French conversations had covered also military questions affecting the two countries. Though this had not been well received in Rome, Anglo-Italian relations had nevertheless remained unchanged during the remaining weeks of 1938, but the general European situation had continued to deteriorate.

The latent Franco-Italian tension had again reached an alarming point. To Ciano's speech on 'natural aspirations' the French had replied with a very sharp 'no,' and this had been followed by Italy's denunciation of the Laval-Mussolini Agreements of 7th January, 1933, and the Quai d'Orsay's retort. Soon after this heated exchange the French Premier had embarked on an official tour of Corsica, Tunisia and Algeria—a demonstration which the Italians could hardly overlook—and his speeches at Ajaccio, Bastia and Tunis had expressed, in unequivocal terms, France's determination not to give way to the Fascist demands. At the same time relations between France and Germany had worsened considerably, in spite of the agreement which Bonnet and Ribbentrop had signed in Paris on 6th December on the pattern of the Hitler-Chamberlain declaration of 30th September. The colonial claims advanced by Hitler in a speech at Munich on 8th January—'we have often stated that we want absolutely nothing from these countries (France and Britain) except the restoration of the colonies which have been unjustly taken from us'—had produced most energetic reactions in Britain, culminating in the statement to the Commons by the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, that the Government of Tanganyika, a former German colony, had been informed that Great Britain did not foresee the transfer of any mandated territory, and finally in two very outspoken speeches by Chamberlain in December. France, for her

CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME

part, had hastened to associate herself with Britain. Munich, with all its uncertainties and equivocations, was soon no more than a memory whilst the policy of rearmament was intensified, and the Reich and Fascist Italy discussed the terms of their military alliance with a view to new ventures in the near future.

LETTER TO THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 2nd January, 1939—XVII

Secret.

Dear Ribbentrop,

In the course of the conversation which took place in the Palazzo Venezia on 28th October, the Duce, while accepting in principle the plan put forward by you to transform the Rome Anti-Comintern Pact into a military aid pact, made a reservation as to the point at which such a fundamental act could actually take place. He expressed himself recently in similar terms to the Japanese Ambassador to Berlin, General Oshima, to whom he further made the statement that he would make a definite decision during the month of January. I believe that General Oshima has informed you of the above. Withdrawing his reservation, the Duce is now of the opinion that the Pact can be signed and proposes as the time for the signing of it the last week of January. He leaves it to you to choose the place for the ceremony as well as to lay down the procedure to be followed and to reach an agreement with General Oshima, as you have done in the past.

One must not see in the decision of the Duce to proceed forthwith to the formation of the assistance pact any reflection whatsoever of our political relations with France. Italian claims on France are of two kinds. The first, of a temporary nature, refer to those questions which, in part at least, were the subject of the 1935 Agreements, now denounced by us; they are the status of the Italians resident in the Tunis Protectorate, the granting of a free port at Djibuti, the control of the Addis Ababa-Djibuti railway and Italian participation in the administration of the Suez Canal. We consider that these can be solved by normal diplomatic negotiations in which we do not, however, intend to take the initiative.

The other claims are of a historical nature and concern those territories which geographically, ethnically and strategically belong to Italy and to which we do not intend to renounce our claims conclusively. But this is a problem of a different scope, which would require for its solution measures of a very different nature and which we cannot, therefore, for the present put forward. But one can henceforward say one thing with certainty—the tension between

CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME

France and Italy has made the idea of the alliance with Germany very much more popular in Italy, and that, for our purposes, is a positive and concrete result.

The real reasons which have led the Duce to accept your proposal at this point are as follows:

1. The existence—now proved—of a military pact between France and Great Britain;

2. The acceptance of the possibility of war in responsible French circles;

3. The military preparations of the United States which are intended to furnish men and above all materials to the Western democracies in case of necessity.

Such being the case, the Duce considers that it is now necessary for the Anti-Communist triangle to become a system; the Axis will be able to stand up to any coalition if it has within its orbit and bound up with its destiny those European countries which can furnish it with raw materials—that is to say, in the first place, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Rumania.

The Agreement, as you yourself proposed, must be presented to the world as a pact of peace, which ensures to Germany and Italy the possibility of working in complete tranquillity for a very long time to come.

I beg you, my dear Ribbentrop, to be good enough to regard this decision by the Duce as absolutely confidential, just as it will be necessary to keep the formation of the pact secret up to the very moment of signing.

Since you indicated verbally that you wished the signing to take place in Berlin, I wish to inform you that, from 23rd January, on which date I return from Belgrade, until the end of the month, I can come to your capital whenever you wish. But we shall have an opportunity to arrange all that in more detail later.

The letter ends effusively with the best wishes to 'my dear Ribbentrop' and expressions of great cordiality.

On the morning of 10th January Chamberlain and Halifax left London and stopped for a few hours in Paris, just sufficient time for a meeting with Daladier and Bonnet. It was a short meeting, but no less significant for that. In the evening they continued on their way to Rome which they reached on the 11th, and on the same day they had their first meeting with Mussolini and Ciano.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND CHAMBERLAIN.

Rome, 11th January, 1939—XVII

The Duce, after expressing his satisfaction at seeing Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax as guests in Italy, states that he

wishes to define certain fundamental points of Italian policy.

1. Italy wishes peace, and will conduct a policy of peace not only for general reasons, but also because Italy wishes to reap the benefits of her overseas possessions.

2. Italy will apply the Agreements of the 16th April with the utmost loyalty.

3. The fundamental guiding principle of Italian policy is the Rome-Berlin Axis. That Axis, however, is not of an exclusive nature, and has not prevented Italy from establishing cordial relations with England, or Germany from improving her relations with France. Italy does not exclude the possibility of wider and more permanent understandings between the four Western Powers, but does not intend to take the initiative in the matter.

4. Relations between Italy and France are governed by our denunciation of the 1935 Agreements. That shows in what terms the difference between France and Italy must be expressed. However, there is one question which must be considered to prejudicial matters: the liquidation of the Spanish question, which we envisage only in terms of a complete victory for General Franco. It is clear that Italy has no direct ambitions in Spain; it wishes only that that country should finally find order and peace under the guidance of a strong government. The troops in Spain have not been increased from our side during the last months, on the contrary, as is well-known, ten thousand men have been withdrawn without our requesting an equivalent move on the other side. The Italian volunteers represent only three per cent of Franco's forces, and also as far as the artillery and planes are concerned there has been no increase on the Italian side. If, however, the campaign for mass intervention, which certain organs of the Press and certain parties are conducting in France, should produce a large scale French intervention, we too would have to examine our policy anew and take fresh decisions.

5. Since the question of disarmament frequently comes up, it is an opportune moment to state clearly that Italy does not believe that it is possible to attain effective disarmament, but only a limitation of armaments, which might in the first instance be qualitative and later quantitative. That would also allow agreements to be made on humanising war.

Chamberlain agrees on the possibility of attaining an understanding for the limitation of armaments. He believes, however, that as well as the four Western Powers, Russia, too, should take part in any such understanding, since in the case of aerial and naval armaments the non-participation of one State makes the agreement of all the others impossible.

The Duce states that he shares this opinion.

Chamberlain asks the Duce if he has any proposals or suggestions to advance on the question of refugees.

The Duce, referring to the problem of Jewish refugees, informs

Mr. Chamberlain of the message received by him recently from Roosevelt, as well as of his replies to the American Ambassador, which were later confirmed in a letter sent direct to the President of the United States. Mr. Chamberlain agrees with the conclusions reached by the Duce and with the solution proposed by him. He says, however, that meanwhile it would be necessary to reach an agreement to facilitate the emigration of the Jews from Germany. It is clear, however, that no State will wish to take these Jews if the German Government will not agree to make some sacrifice by permitting them to bring out with them a sum of money, even a modest one, with which to establish themselves.

The Duce states that he agrees with Mr. Chamberlain and, for his part, considers that the German Government, since it intends to solve the Jewish problem in a totalitarian manner, will be able to make some sacrifice in order to further the total exodus of the Jewish masses from German territory. One must not demand too heavy sacrifices from the German people, which has suffered greatly because of the Jews, particularly in the period immediately after the war.

On a reference by Chamberlain to the question of political exiles, the Duce replies that he can see no practical solution for them, particularly since the question of political exiles has always existed, since the victory of one party has always led to the removal of a certain number of the opposing party.

Mr. Chamberlain expresses his desire to reply to the points defined by the Duce and thanks him for his statement on the necessity of following a policy of peace. He recognises that Italy requires such a policy for the development of the Empire and for continual progress in social conditions. It is with the deepest disappointment that he personally has seen the British Government spending on armaments the money which he had accumulated by means of an extremely prudent financial policy—money which he would have liked to earmark for improving the standard of living. He also expresses his thanks for the Duce's statement of his desire to apply the terms of the Anglo-Italian pact with complete loyalty. Neither Chamberlain nor Halifax have ever doubted the good faith of the Duce.

As far as the Axis is concerned, he agrees that it is the fundamental basis of Italian policy; for that reason he does not intend to do anything in the least contrary to it, particularly since the Axis will not interfere with the co-operation between England and Italy, just as that co-operation does not tend to diminish the closeness of relations between Great Britain and France. In these conditions it is necessary for the four great Powers to pursue a policy of peace and, through cordial relations, to establish the actual conditions of peace. After the Munich conference he believed it possible to engage in new conversations with the Germans, but unfortunately he was

CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME

unable to obtain any effective expression of friendship on Germany's side and no negotiation has been begun. In spite of what has occurred, however, he retains his desire to improve relations between Germany and Great Britain.

It is with great regret that he notes that relations between Italy and France are difficult. After 1935 the English Government considered that there was no further ground for controversy between Rome and Paris. There is, it is true, the Spanish question, but this, too, the British Government wishes to see solved as soon as possible. Although it is not possible to foresee the duration of the Spanish civil war, which has already gone on too long, Mr. Chamberlain believes that he may state that there is no longer any danger of Bolshevism in Spain.

The Duce says that he does not agree with this statement. He learns from accurate information reaching him from General Franco himself that the Russian police has complete control of the zones in Red Spain, and that if the O.G.P.U. did not stiffen the resistance, the conflict would have been finished long ago.

Mr. Chamberlain asks the Duce if he considers it possible to adopt the Non-Intervention Committee's plan once the offensive at present developing on the Catalonian front is over. Mr. Chamberlain fully realises that it would be useless to ask General Franco to adopt the Non-Intervention Committee's plan at the time of such an important military action.

The Duce replies that in his opinion, if the offensive in Catalonia reaches its long-range objective, the conflict may be considered to be more or less liquidated. He also considers, however, that at that point the Non-Intervention Committee's plan may be applied, provided the withdrawal of foreign volunteers is closely controlled and that the Franco Government is granted belligerent rights.

The conversation ends at 7.30, and will be resumed at 5.30.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND CHAMBERLAIN.

Rome, 12th January, 1939—XVII

The Duce begins the second conversation by stating that he intends today to give the British Prime Minister a precise account of our position with regard to France, bearing in mind that this topic is one of interest to public opinion throughout the world and on which Mr. Chamberlain might be questioned on his return to England. The demonstration made by the deputies on 30th November is well known. That demonstration was spontaneous and the Italian Government was in no way concerned. The first official move took place on 17th December with the denunciation of the

Agreements of January, 1935. In that denunciation we also re-affirmed the possibility of an agreement by diplomatic negotiations. The French reply, on the other hand, was a *fin de non recevoir*. In the present circumstances we do not wish a conference, we do not ask for intervention or mediation. We believe that when the Spanish war is over it will be possible to settle the present controversy by direct methods, through conversations with France. We must, however, in all honesty point out one danger—that represented by the French Press. That Press can attack individuals, including the Duce, and it will have no effect, but it must not wound the military honour of the Italian people, since in that case any reaction is possible. It must be further underlined that in military circles there is very lively hostility towards France.

Chamberlain expresses the hope that a quick solution of the Spanish question may allow an understanding between Italy and France to be reached as soon as possible. A long wait might present dangers. Relations between England and France are similar to those which exist between Italy and Germany. England does not wish to mediate, but, since it is very anxious to maintain cordial relations with Rome, looks forward to an improvement in relations between Italy and France. He notes what the Duce has said on the subject of the Press and hopes that the Italian Press, too, will not wish to make the controversy more bitter since, in view of the fact that one must some day come to discuss matters, it is necessary to reach that point in a more benevolently disposed state of mind. On the other hand Chamberlain has many doubts as to the stability of the French Government and would not like to see a weakening of Daladier's position bring the Left to power again.

The Duce gives general assurances and states that he has nothing more to add on this subject. He therefore proposes that, in application of the Anglo-Italian Agreements, a start should be made on the settlement of those small colonial questions still outstanding.

Chamberlain agrees.

Chamberlain then requests to speak on a question which he describes as delicate. As he had occasion to say yesterday, he hoped after Munich to be able to lay the basis for better international collaboration and above all for a deeper understanding with Germany. That has not been possible. At the same time he must point out that great anxiety has arisen in world opinion as to Hitler's real intentions. The rearmament which Germany is feverishly carrying out, the rumours of mobilisation manœuvres, lead the world to think that the Fuehrer has in mind some new *coup* which might be dangerous for the general peace. Some persons believe that the Fuehrer is planning action against the Ukraine in order to use it as an independent State in order to break up Russia. Others think that the attack might take place towards the West against France and others, towards the East against Poland. Such actions would

produce a conflict with Poland or with Russia or with both. That is not to say that such a conflict could not be localised, but the state of disquiet which uncertainty as to the real German programme produces in world opinion must be considered as dangerous as it is extremely unpleasant. Can the Duce cast any light on the matter?

The Duce recognises that Germany has rearmed and is rearming on an imposing scale, but this rearmament must be considered in relation to the rearming of all other nations and particularly in relation to Russian rearmament, on which there is no precise information but which must be considered to be on a large scale. He believes that Hitler wishes a long period of peace in order to be able the better to amalgamate the new territories of the Reich and to develop Germany's great productive powers. It is probable that there are irresponsible elements who desire the break-up of Soviet Russia and he adds, personally, that if Bolshevism disappeared it would be no misfortune for humanity and certainly a blessing for the Russian people. But from the information in his possession, he is able to rule out the possibility that Hitler is meditating an attack on the Ukraine. This rumour may have arisen as a result of the Ruthenian question.¹

But it must be made clear that Italy, too, is opposed to the question of a common frontier between Hungary and Poland, since the Vienna award was based on ethnical concepts and there is no doubt that Ruthenia is inhabited neither by Poles nor Hungarians. He most definitely rules out an attack towards the West. He has several times had occasion to hear the Fuehrer repeat that he does not in the least intend to send German youth to fall in masses for a frontier which he considers is now fixed. Moreover, the agreement recently signed in Paris puts that eventuality out of the question.²

Beck's recent visit to Germany and the plan for a journey to Warsaw by Ribbentrop also give rise to optimism on the subject of relations between Germany and Poland.³ It must be borne in mind that all the rumours hostile to Germany have been started by anti-Nazi propaganda, which would like to isolate the German Reich.

Chamberlain admits that a great anti-German propaganda campaign has been carried on, but must repeat that Germany's imposing rearmament gives people reason to be suspicious. Germany

¹The Ruthenian question had arisen after Munich when Czechoslovakia, as a result of the Vienna award of 2nd November, 1938, had to cede the southern strip of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. The latter had claimed all Ruthenian territory in order to be able to make direct contact with Poland and to restore the old historical and geographical boundaries. But Germany had opposed this, and serious tension had arisen between Berlin and Budapest.

²On 6th December, 1938, a joint French and German statement had been signed by Bonnet and Ribbentrop which said under point 2 that 'the two Governments declare that no question of a territorial nature remains open between their two countries and solemnly recognise as final the frontier traced between their countries.'

³The Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, had been in Berlin the week before; on January 5th Hitler had received him in the presence of Ribbentrop. At the same time a visit to Warsaw by Ribbentrop had been announced.

is now strong enough not to fear any attack. No attack can come from France or from England, and, as far as Russia is concerned, even if that country has certain defensive capabilities, it has no effective prospects of attacking.

The Duce reminds Chamberlain that Germany has every right to fear a coalition of nations. When considering Germany's rearmament one must finally bear in mind that it is proportionate to the large population and that, when carrying out their rearmament, the Germans started from scratch, and have had to create artillery, an air force, etc. *ex novo*. On the other hand, the defensive nature of German rearmament is proved by the construction of the Siegfried line opposite the Maginot line.

Chamberlain declares himself convinced only up to a certain point, since, according to his information, Germany's scale of armament is too imposing to have only a defensive aim. However, since the Duce has said that his information is that the Fuehrer wishes a long period of peace, can one expect that the Fuehrer will state this publicly?

The Duce does not exclude the possibility of the Fuehrer's eventually making a statement to that effect and calls attention to the fact that the statements made today to the *Corps Diplomatique* have also an essentially peaceful character. On the other hand, the Fuehrer must bear in mind that in some countries there are political trends which would like to see the destruction of Germany and he must therefore act accordingly. Further there also exist the Franco-Polish and Franco-Russian alliances which are a remnant of the Geneva system of encirclement. All this justifies Germany's policy of defensive armament.

Chamberlain asks if once the Spanish war is over and normal relations have been re-established between Italy and France, the Duce considers it will be possible to call a conference for qualitative disarmament.

The Duce declares himself to be in agreement, but says that any conference should first be fully prepared through normal diplomatic contacts, otherwise it would be a failure. He adds that he has precise ideas on the possibility of limiting armaments qualitatively and reserves their exposition for the opportune moment.

Mr. Chamberlain brings the discussion round to the question of the guarantee to Czechoslovakia, and asks if Italy, in view of the Munich decisions, is in favour of the guarantee being given and whether it should be given by the four powers.

The Duce replies that he has no objections in principle, but that he considers any decision on the matter premature for the moment, particularly because of a number of practical considerations. Before speaking of a guarantee to Czechoslovakia and of studying in what form it must be given, the country must have put itself in order internally by means of a new constitution, must have

CHAMBERLAIN IN ROME

made a declaration of neutrality, and finally the new frontiers, which for the moment are marked only on the map, must also be established in reality.

Chamberlain accepts the Duce's point of view.

Chamberlain informs him that Great Britain will take part in the World Exhibition in Rome in 1942 and states that he has no further topics for discussion.

After mutual expressions of thanks for the information exchanged in a cordial spirit of co-operation, the conversation ends.

XXII

CIANO VISITS BELGRADE AND WARSAW

18th January, 1939—25th February, 1939.

The fourth meeting between Ciano and Stoyadinovitch took place on 19th January at Belje—the former seat of Archduke Frederick of Austria, and famous for its plentiful game—where the Italian Foreign Minister had been asked to join a shooting party. The shoot lasted three days; on the 21st, Ciano and his host left for Belgrade where the former had the opportunity of a long interview with Prince Paul. On the 23rd the visit was over, and Ciano returned to Rome convinced that Stoyadinovitch was as firmly as ever in the saddle. He did not suspect that the Prime Minister who had ruled the country for four years would be out of office in ten days' time; an event which Stoyadinovitch himself failed to foresee because he underestimated the strength of Croat nationalism and anti-Serb feeling.

REPORT ON MY JOURNEY TO YUGOSLAVIA AND OF THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, STOYADINOVITCH.

18th—23rd January, 1939—XVII

First of all I wish to stress the exceptionally cordial reception I received both from official circles and from the masses of the people. Whereas on the occasion of my first journey in 1937, the official reception formed a remarkable contrast to the frigid behaviour of the population, this time the attitude of the crowd appeared to be completely identical with that of the Government. Everywhere there were warm demonstrations for Italy and the Duce; in no country—including Hungary after the Vienna award—have I heard the name of the Duce uttered with such frequency and such warmth.

Internal Situation: I spoke at some length with Stoyadinovitch about the internal situation of the country, in view of the numerous alarmist rumours which have been spread by the French Press in particular. Stoyadinovitch stated that he was completely calm as

far as the internal situation and his personal position were concerned. It is true that the elections, which were carried out by Korosec¹ under conditions of exaggerated, incomprehensible and unjustified freedom, have given the opposition remarkably favourable results, but one must bear in mind that, immediately after the voting, the opposition forces split into the 17 groups which compose it, while Stoyadinovitch's electors grouped themselves in a single party, which draws its main strength from old Serbia and from the most warlike and determined elements of the Nationalist youth.

The Croatian question does exist and is of such a nature as not to be capable of solution in a short period of time. Only the years and the passing of generations will be able to modify a state of affairs which calls to mind the friction which long existed between Prussia and Bavaria, between North and South Italy. However, Stoyadinovitch is convinced that, given the present parliamentary situation, which allows him complete liberty of action, he will be able to take steps calculated to improve even this situation. He is proceeding with the greatest energy with the formation and the organisation of the Yugoslav Radical Party, which is modelled both in aims and form on the Fascist Party. On the occasion of my visit to the Belgrade central branch I was able to observe closely the military formations of the Party, all of them in uniform, drawn up like the Italian organisations and including some young people with arms. In the Party offices, the only photograph of a foreign personality which is to be seen is that of the Duce standing beside Stoyadinovitch at the demonstrations in the Foro Mussolini. The reception at the Party rally was exceptionally warm.

The monarchy is supporting Stoyadinovitch in his activities. Speaking to me of the internal situation, Prince Paul told me that in spite of some difficulties he regards it with great optimism, and stated that Stoyadinovitch is the Serbian politician who towers above all the others.

Foreign Policy: According to what was said to me by the Regent Paul, the Prime Minister, Stoyadinovitch, and other politicians, and to what I was led to understand by contacts I made with other circles, Yugoslav public opinion is dominated, as far as foreign countries are concerned, by two feelings: a sense of profound satisfaction at the consolidation of friendly relations with Italy, and widespread and deep anxiety at the short and long range aims of German expansionism.

Speaking of the situation in general, Stoyadinovitch repeated that for Yugoslavia it is indispensable to maintain relations of good neighbourliness and close collaboration with Germany. But while

¹Anton Korosec, for many years member of the Austrian Parliament and leader of the Slovene opposition under the Empire; in 1918, Premier of Yugoslavia; from 1935, Minister of the Interior and Vice-Chairman of Stoyadinovitch's Yugoslav Radical Union.

realising the necessity of this, the country feels uneasiness at the proximity of Germany, at the political and economic pressure of so immensely powerful a neighbour, which is aggravated by the cases of friction produced, very often involuntarily, in various Yugoslav circles by German policy. This feeling has had the effect of impelling the Yugoslav people more and more strongly towards Italy. Everyone understands that neither France nor Great Britain, who are geographically remote and militarily of dubious strength, will protect the Yugoslav people from Germany. The only country which can do so is Italy. This conviction combined with the natural attraction which Roman civilization has for the Yugoslav people, results in a desire for an ever greater strengthening of the ties with Rome, so that Yugoslavia may find a balanced situation and security within the political framework of the Axis.

These feelings have the effect of making an improvement in relations with Hungary to be eagerly anticipated. Belgrade therefore greets with great pleasure the friendly hint contained in the toasts exchanged on the occasion of my visit to Budapest.¹ At the same time it must be stressed that there are elements in Hungary which still maintain an attitude of hostile reserve which cannot encourage the Yugoslav Government in its progress towards final and open conciliation. However, Belgrade is ready to go a great length in this direction, and would consider with favour the possibility of concluding a pact of good neighbourliness, collaboration and friendship with Budapest, if on the Hungarian side hostility towards Rumania were not—particularly recently—being accentuated. That is hindering the formation of a Yugoslav-Hungarian Pact. One must bear in mind that Rumania is bound to Yugoslavia by a Pact of alliance and that a diplomatic agreement with Hungary at this moment, after the dissolution of the Little Entente, would be regarded by everyone as an act of desertion by Yugoslavia towards her oldest ally. It is not in accordance with the nature or the morals of the Yugoslav people to act in that manner. No one can understand and appreciate this point of view of the Yugoslavs better than the Duce, who has given exemplary and unforgettable demonstrations of international political good faith. At all events, so as to reach understanding which appears to be indispensable in the Danube Basin, among other things—and perhaps principally—in order to resist the increasing German pressure, Yugoslavia is willing to improve still further her relations with Hungary as well as to influence the Rumanian Government by all possible means so that better treatment of the Hungarian minority may allow of an improvement in relations between Rumania and Hungary. But, should Hungary make frontier

¹The visit took place from 19th to 20th December, 1938. During the toasts at the end of the banquet given to Ciano on the evening of the 20th, Count Csaky, the new Hungarian Foreign Minister, said that Hungary 'true to the saying that "My friend's friend is my friend," intends to establish, maintain and develop relations of the greatest friendship with those States which cultivate friendly relations with the Axis Powers.'

revision a condition of that improvement, the Yugoslav Government must at once stress that its goodwill would not suffice to solve such a problem, which could create the gravest complications. Stoyadinovitch further repeatedly underlined the importance of Rumanian friendship for the Italo-Yugoslav system; the country is rich in those raw materials which are indispensable in peace and war. Given the political situation of Rumania, it is easy to obtain by a clever move advantages of an extremely important magnitude.

Having thus defined the most important points in the politics of the Danube Basin, Stoyadinovitch restated the basic directives of Yugoslav policy: increasingly marked attachment to Rome and thereby inclusion in the Axis; complete *de facto* abandonment of the League of Nations by the withdrawal in May of the delegation which is still in Geneva and by non-participation in the meetings of the League; examination in a favourable spirit of possible adhesion to the Anti-Comintern Pact, particularly if Berlin informs Yugoslavia that her adhesion would be welcomed in Berlin.

Albania: Some days ago I had already made a reference to the Albanian situation to the Minister, Christic, and therefore found M. Stoyadinovitch already prepared to hear the topic discussed. I told him that the internal unrest in the country, the hate which is piling up against King Zog and the many obscure points which have been noted in Zog's policy lead us to regard the future of Albania with a certain degree of anxiety. This anxiety was increased for us by the very considerable number of interests which have gradually been created in that country, as for instance the oil wells, which are of fundamental importance for Fascist Italy. We could not, therefore, leave our interests at the mercy of events and wished to watch the development of the situation with the utmost attention. After stating that we considered the Albanian problem to be one which affected solely and exclusively Italy and Yugoslavia, and that we were sure that no other Power either could or would wish to intervene in the matter, I confirmed to him that the Duce did not intend to make the slightest move without previous agreement with our friend, Yugoslavia. Stoyadinovitch said that his sources, too, had informed him of the unrest which has increasingly laid hold of the Albanian people and spoke of Zog in terms of the utmost contempt, giving me to understand that, in recent times, he has even made advances to Belgrade, offering to place himself in the pay of Yugoslavia for work against us. He told me that, in his opinion, Zog would be perfectly capable of serving France and England at a moment of crisis for Italy. Our anxiety was therefore fully justified. In his opinion two solutions presented themselves: (1) that of replacing Zog by someone more fitting, but he added that he was not in a position to state by whom; (2) that of proceeding with the partition of Albania between Italy and Yugoslavia as had been suggested on other occasions. He added, however, that at the

moment he was not prepared to discuss the matter thoroughly since he was not acquainted with the details of the problem. I replied that I, too, did not think that the matter was one to be discussed at present and that it was sufficient to have made contact on the subject. At the opportune moment, we could make direct communication and take the decisions required. Stoyadinovitch approved and stated that he would not wish to allow negotiations of this kind to pass through Legations but rather through confidential and personal agents whom we had appointed in the persons of the Minister Plenipotentiary, Anfuso, and of the brother of Stoyadinovitch himself. Stoyadinovitch also dealt with the possible reactions of other Powers, but concluded by recognising that if Germany made no objections—he is convinced that, in their heart of hearts, the Germans will regard our occupation of Albanian territory with great disappointment—the operation will be relatively easy. I told him what advantages Yugoslavia would derive from that event: (1) the agreement on the demilitarisation of the Albanian frontier; (2) a military alliance with Italy, which will be rendered possible at that juncture and justified in the eyes of Germany by the fact that we, too, will become a Balkan power; (3) a number of considerable corrections in the northern frontier of Albania; (4) the elimination of an Albanian nationalist centre which is continually fomenting agitation in Kossovo; (5) finally, the promise of Italian support on the day when Yugoslavia decides, by the occupation of Salonica, to assure itself of an outlet to the Mediterranean.

I avoided stating clearly to Stoyadinovitch which areas might be occupied by Yugoslavia and which by Italy. But while he talked of partition of Albania, I always talked of the correction of frontiers. However, the problem seems to me to be on the way towards a favourable solution; Stoyadinovitch, who seems to be attracted by the idea of being able to provide his country with the concrete advantage of an increase in territory, asked me to mention the matter to Prince Paul. In his case, too, I met with a favourable reception. In fact he showed himself to be less interested than Stoyadinovitch in the piece of territory to be allotted to Yugoslavia. 'We have already so many Albanians inside our frontiers,' so he said, 'and they give us so much trouble that I have no wish to increase their number.' By these conversations the ice has been broken as far as the Albanian problem is concerned and I believe that when the Duce considers the situation ripe, the question can be dealt with in a conclusive manner. Nor do I believe that we will encounter too many difficulties over the delimitation of the frontiers—first of all, because I do not believe that the Yugoslavs have exaggerated claims and secondly because it does not seem to me of excessive importance whether we have 1,000 sq. kms. of Albanian territory more or less, whereas the fact that we definitely install ourselves there, in the Balkan peninsula, in a position which

is of more strategic value than all others, is of fundamental importance.

Economic and Cultural Relations: The passage in the official *communiqué* given to the Press which deals with the future development of economic relations between Italy and Yugoslavia was the personal wish of M. Stoyadinovitch, and must also be judged in relation to what has been stated above concerning anxiety over Germany. Yugoslavia refuses to have only one client or to be herself the client of a single State. In this field, too, she sees her safest course in collaboration with us, and that—if it were possible—in an even more open manner than in the political field. Stoyadinovitch repeated the wish to form indissoluble ties with Italy. With this in view, he began by completing the contract for half a milliard lire which had been previously discussed but not settled, and assured me that he will specially direct the orders of the War Ministry and of the Ministries for Transport and Railways to Italian industry.

As far as cultural relations are concerned, activity will in future be intensified. While a project for a cultural agreement, which will allow our language to be spread and to become known on a very large scale, is being studied, cultural institutions, the exchange of students and exhibitions will be inaugurated, and in general all steps taken which are likely to develop intellectual intercourse.

In the months of January and February, 1939, shooting parties were widely used as cover for diplomatic meetings in those parts of Europe where the Axis Powers already predominated or were making efforts to do so. Thus, at the end of February, Ciano went shooting in the Polish forests of Bialowicza at Beck's invitation. A certain importance was attached to the visit because it took place after Beck, on his return from the Côte d'Azur, had met Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 5th January, and Ribbentrop in Munich on the following day, and after the latter, in his turn, had visited Warsaw at the end of January. The question of satisfying German aspirations on the Eastern frontiers of the Reich had already been raised on 24th October, 1938, when Ribbentrop had suddenly summoned the Polish Ambassador from Berlin to Berchtesgaden. Warsaw had given an evasive answer and had put matters off until the end of the year. On 5th January, Hitler had returned to the subject, attempting to convince Beck, and offering him in return for the annexation of Danzig by the Reich a guarantee of existing frontiers and an extension of the German-Polish Pact of 1934. In Warsaw, Ribbentrop had made similar attempts. But on both occasions Beck had avoided entering into negotiations, and had said that Danzig could not be touched. Ribbentrop had left empty-handed on 27th January; and relations between Germany and Poland had ceased for good to be 'one of the most reassuring phenomena in the political life of Europe', as Hitler described them three days later in the course of

CIANO VISITS BELGRADE AND WARSAW

his annual speech in celebration of the National Socialist revolution. In these circumstances Ciano's Polish journey could be, and was in fact interpreted by many observers to be an Italian attempt at mediation and reconciliation of rival forces in order to strengthen the internal equilibrium of the Axis. But such was not the case.

ACCOUNT OF MY JOURNEY TO POLAND AND OF THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, BECK.

25th February to 3rd March, 1939—XVII

On the way to Warsaw I stopped for some hours in Vienna. I note that the city looks rather sleepy and tired. The Consul General, Rochira, says that the luxury standard of living in the central districts has sunk markedly, but that the great mass of the people is all employed, lives better and shows itself more and more in favour of the new regime. Reception by the authorities and by the public is good.

On the morning of the 25th I arrive in Warsaw. The reception by the population is marked by curiosity and perhaps also by lukewarm sympathy. The city is flat, grey, very sad, although—a most unusual thing—the sun is shining on the streets of this characterless capital. I am informed that, for some days, little anti-German demonstrations have been breaking out here and there in all Polish cities. They have been provoked by circumstances which are peculiar to Danzig. Poland, in spite of all the political efforts of Beck, is fundamentally and constitutionally anti-German. Her traditions, her instincts and her interests put her against Germany. A Catholic country with large Jewish centres, sprinkled with strong German minorities, she has inevitably all the seeds of conflict with Teutonic imperialism. I do not fail to point out to the Polish authorities that anti-German demonstrations put me in an embarrassing situation. I receive the answer that it has been established that they are due to French propaganda activity by elements opposed to the National Government. The police have acted energetically by proceeding to arrest eighty students (many of them Jews) and by dismissing four officials who had shown weakness towards the demonstrators.

As far as we Italian are concerned, on the other hand, there are positive signs of sympathy, but it is a case of vague sympathy, which is therefore without effect. They love our art more than our way of life. They know our monuments better than our history. We have too long been represented in Poland by painters, sculptors, architects, and we have been represented with the inevitable servility of the artist who, in a far country, finds foreign patronage. In Poland, they still are more in love with the grace of the brush than with

the force of our arms, in which they do not yet completely believe.

I have conversations with various politicians, but particularly with Beck. The conversations are rather vague in character. Poland will continue with its policy of the balance of power imposed by its geographical position. With Russia, nothing more than those contacts strictly necessary. With France, a defensive alliance in which, however, she does not place unlimited faith. Terms of good neighbourliness with Germany, preserved with difficulty in view of the large number of factors, both spiritual and material, which clash. With regard to Danzig, the firm intention of reaching a definite and clearer solution. But Beck wants this to arise out of free diplomatic negotiations, thereby avoiding any useless, harmful and artificial pressure on public opinion. Still lively anxiety over the Ruthenian question. Poland is not resigned to considering the Czechoslovak frontier as final and still hopes to attain a common frontier with Hungary. Preoccupation with the Ukrainian question still silently dominates the heart of Poland, although Beck frequently underlined—with satisfaction and without conviction—the assurances received from Hitler. Speaking of the present situation in Czechoslovakia he described it as 'a temporary arrangement which may even last a long time, without however ceasing to be a temporary arrangement.'

I confined myself to a general survey of our policy, underlining very strongly the strength of the bonds which unite us to Germany and stating that the Axis is and continues to be the permanent basis of our foreign policy.

I visited several military organisations, in particular the air force, which made a good impression on me. Industry is administered directly by the State and the results appear satisfactory. The material which was shown to me was very modern, well made and of a solid nature. The staffs seemed good.

I cannot say much about the internal regime, since I did not see much. But the very uneasiness produced by the student demonstrations, the anxiety which the necessity of restraining them aroused in the Government, the equivocal attitude of a large part of the Press, themselves confirm that there is a long way to go to an authoritarian and totalitarian State. The only voice which counts in Poland is that of a dead man, Marshal Pilsudski, and there are too many who claim to be the true heirs of his teachings. The fact that the country is still governed by a posthumous dictator proves that a new force has not yet made itself felt and perhaps has not even arisen.

Summing up my impressions and bringing them into relation with our interests, it seems to me fair to conclude that it would be dangerous to affirm lightly—as is done in certain German circles—that Poland is a country which has been won over to the system

CIANO VISITS BELGRADE AND WARSAW

of the Axis and the Triangle, but it would also be unjust to describe Poland outright as an enemy country. When the great crisis arises, Poland will for long remain with her arms at rest, and only when the outcome has been decided will throw in her lot with the conqueror. And by so doing, she will, from her own point of view, act wisely, since it is a country which has interests and sources of friction, friends and enemies, on both sides.

XXIII

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

17th March, 1939—7th April, 1939.

On 15th March, 1939, there took place the third stage in the process of German expansion in Central Europe. In the early hours of the morning German troops crossed the Czech border at five points and by 9 o'clock Prague was firmly in their hands. The Czechoslovak State was wiped off the map and replaced by the 'Protectorate' of Bohemia-Moravia. Slovakia had proclaimed her independence already the day before, and on the 16th hastened to place herself under German protection. The Hungarians, in their turn, had crossed the boundary of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia on the morning of the 15th, and by the 18th they had completed the occupation of that region. Installed on the Carpathian watershed they could now join hands with the Poles.

The unexpected and brutal liquidation of Czechoslovakia completed the destruction of the central European system planned and set up in Paris in 1919. The Munich Agreement was torn to pieces. Even amongst those who had benefited from Hitler's new venture, apprehension rather than satisfaction prevailed. In Budapest it was, if not Csaky, then certainly Count Teleki who looked to the future with undisguised anxiety. And in Rome chagrin at having been once more duped mingled with the fear of seeing German uniforms descend from the mountains of Croatia along the Adriatic. Now anything seemed possible under the Nazi pressure; even the disintegration of Yugoslavia along the ethnical lines dividing a nationally heterogeneous population; and Macek, the victor in the elections of 11th December and determined opponent of Stoyadino-vitch, who had fallen from power just a month before, might have some surprises in store.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 17th March, 1939—XVII

At 7 p.m. I receive the German Ambassador, von Mackensen. I tell him that I wished to speak to him in order to draw his attention to certain Press reports which are beginning to circulate and which concern a question which is for us a very delicate one—the Croatian problem. In the course of yesterday's conversations I had occasion to inform the German Ambassador of the Italian point of view with

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

regard to the occurrences which have taken place in Czechoslovakia—these occurrences have been considered by us to be in the spirit of the Axis and an almost inevitable development of the events which occurred in September and October last. On this occasion, too, Italy's supporting action emerges clearly from the attitude assumed officially and through the Press.

But today there begins to be talk of the possibility of direct German interest in the Croatian question. Croat agitation, which has grown particularly intense lately, has undoubtedly been nourished anew by the events in Bohemia and Slovakia. There is talk of the possibility of Macek's appealing to Berlin to receive from thence German aid to carry out his programme of autonomy or of independence. While not having any precise and definite information on the subject, I considered it necessary for the sake of clarity and of that spirit of good faith which has always characterised relations between the two Axis Powers, to inform him that, while Italy had taken practically no interest in what had happened in Czechoslovakia, it could not possibly adopt the same attitude towards any events which occurred in Croatia. We are pursuing—in full agreement with Germany, who has done the same—a policy of close and cordial collaboration with Belgrade and we consider the *status quo* in Yugoslavia to be a fundamental factor in the equilibrium of Central Europe. Moreover, the Fuehrer has always proclaimed Germany's lack of interest in the Mediterranean in general, and in particular in the Adriatic which we intend in future to consider as an Italian sea. I requested the Ambassador to be so good as to inform the Fuehrer of our point of view.

The Ambassador, von Mackensen, replied that he considered all the rumours of German intervention in Croatia to be without foundation. While he had no specific information on the subject he considered that even should Macek make a request, it would meet with a definite refusal in Berlin. He confirmed that the Fuehrer had always declared that Germany had no interest in the Mediterranean and he did not consider that this fundamental principle of Hitlerian policy could have undergone any change in recent times. He added finally that the Reich, too, has always desired and aided the national consolidation of the Yugoslav Kingdom. He would, however, make it his duty to inform the Fuehrer of what I had said and to inform me of his reply, as to the tenor of which, however, he had no doubts.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 20th March, 1939—XVII

I receive the German Ambassador who makes the following communication to me with reference to the conversation of 17th March:

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

1. He confirms that Germany has no aims in any area of the Mediterranean, which is considered by the Fuehrer to be an Italian sea.

2. Germany denies any rumour of her interest in Croatian affairs. The problem does not in any way concern the German Government and people.

3. He takes note of the Italian statements that she cannot be disinterested in possible modifications in the *status quo* in Croatia. He adds that just as Italy was disinterested in the Czechoslovak question, which has been solved by Germany in accordance with her needs and interests, similarly, should the Croatian question arise, it will be Germany's turn to be completely disinterested in that problem and to leave the solution of it to Italy.

LETTER FROM THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP, TO COUNT CIANO.

Berlin, 20th March, 1939.

Personal.

My dear Ciano,

On my return from Prague and Vienna I wish to use my first free hour chiefly in order to thank you warmly for the attitude of your Government to recent events, an attitude which was full of understanding and friendship. I am firmly persuaded that our action, which has produced lasting calm and order on the south-eastern frontier of the Reich, signifies an important strengthening of the Rome-Berlin Axis and that the latter will reveal its effectiveness more and more clearly as affairs develop. That the rapid course of the action and its result may have been—as you recently indicated to Herr von Mackensen—something of a surprise to you, I can well understand. The decisions of the Fuehrer had—when in the last weeks matters came to a head in a manner which was surprising even to us—to be taken very rapidly and without long preparations being possible. However, as far as was possible under the pressure of whirlwind events, I always kept the Italian Ambassador, Attolico, informed and in Prague was happy to be able to give full information to your ex-Minister there.

Today, however, I am anxious to inform you in the clearest and most unequivocal manner of our point of view with regard to the Croatian question which you mentioned to Herr von Mackensen. You are aware of the decision of the Fuehrer that, in all questions affecting the Mediterranean, the policy of the Axis must be laid down by Rome, and that, therefore, Germany will never pursue in Mediterranean countries a policy independent of Italy. This decision by the Fuehrer will always be an unalterable law governing our

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

foreign policy. Just as the Duce did not intervene in Czechoslovakia, so we have no interest in the Croatian question and will, in any event, take action in that direction only in the closest harmony with Italian desires. It was therefore a complete surprise that on this subject—as Herr von Mackensen informs me—rumours of a different nature had reached your ears, and I immediately made personal inquiries to discover where these rumours could have originated. I thus established that, some four weeks ago, certain Croatian personalities had contact in Berlin with an official organ and attempted to obtain from it something more definite on the German attitude. This official organ did not give the Croatian visitors the least ground to believe that, in this connection, there is any possibility of independent German action and made it clear that, moreover, the German attitude will be governed by Italy's wishes. This and other details I communicated verbally to Attolico today before his departure.¹ It may perhaps be possible that the Croats, as frequently happens in the course of the journeys of politicians of that kind, have also attempted to sound some other irresponsible organ. This, too, I will investigate and put a stop once and for all to anything which might give rise to false rumours as to German intentions or to misunderstandings.

Today I further gave Attolico detailed information on all current questions and also saw the Fuehrer along with him; the latter also explained his standpoint on those questions which principally interest Italy, for the Duce's benefit and for your own.

I should be very grateful to you if you would bring the contents of this letter to the knowledge of the Duce and convey to him my most sincere greetings.

With the most cordial greetings, my dear Ciano,

I remain,

Your most devoted

RIBBENTROP.

LETTER TO THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 24th March, 1939—XVII

Dear Ribbentrop,

The Ambassador, von Mackensen, has handed to me your letter of 20th March by means of which you wished, on your return from Prague, to inform me of the circumstances which led to Germany's recent action in Bohemia and Moravia.

I immediately acquainted the Duce with the contents of the letter.

I noted with great satisfaction your statements on Mediterranean

¹Attolico had been recalled to Rome for consultations on the new situation which had arisen in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of Czechoslovakia.

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

questions in general and the Croatian one in particular. They confirm the comprehension on Germany's part of Italy's problems and needs, as well as the Fuehrer's decision that, in all questions affecting the Mediterranean, Axis policy must be laid down by Rome.

Attolico brought me your greetings which I return with sincere cordiality, begging you to convey to the Fuehrer my devoted respect.

It was then Italy's turn to carry out an act of aggression which had long been premeditated and was particularly dear to Ciano—the conquest of Albania. Mussolini had remained hesitant until after the disappearance of Czechoslovakia. He thought the occupation of Albania might cause a profound change of feeling in Yugoslavia from which only the Third Reich would have benefited. He finally made up his mind when he believed he had received from Hitler the necessary assurances that Croatia would be regarded as belonging to the Italian sphere of influence. On 25th March, a draft treaty was dispatched to Tirana whereby Albania consented to accept an Italian protectorate. Zog attempted to gain time, but let it be understood that he was against it. Mussolini and Ciano then altered the text of the treaty so as to make it more acceptable to the king, but caused it to be presented in Tirana along with an ultimatum which expired at midday on 6th April. Zog continued to give evasive answers while the usual paid disorders broke out, and Italian citizens resident in Albania were placed on board ship with the declared object of protecting them. On the morning of the 7th, Italian troops landed at four points on the Albanian coast. The columns pushed on without meeting serious resistance. Zog, meanwhile, took to the mountains, fleeing towards Greece with his wife and a son born only four days before.

CONVERSATION WITH THE YUGOSLAV MINISTER.

(The report of the conversation was drawn up by Anfuso.)

Rome, 7th April, 1939—XVII

At 11 o'clock in the evening, the Yugoslav Minister requested to see H.E. Count Ciano, to whom he made an urgent communication on the subject of the Italo-Albanian dispute, which H.E. Count Ciano summarised under the following four points:

1. M. Christic asks H.E. Count Ciano what the aim of our occupation is and what the intentions of H.M. Government are in this respect.

H.E. Count Ciano replies that it is our intention to occupy immediately the four Albanian ports and from these bases to begin a progressive cleaning-up operation which would be conditioned by such considerations of a general nature as might present themselves to our Military Command, by the attitude of the Albanian Govern-

THE CROATIAN QUESTION

ment and above all by the need to safeguard the lives and interests of our fellow-countrymen. Count Ciano added that in the proclamation which was issued to the Albanians it was specifically stated that the occupation by our troops was of a temporary character and had as its principal aim the re-establishment of peace and order in Albania.

2. In reply to Christic's question as to what the frontiers of Albania would be and as to the limits set to the extension of the occupation in their direction, Count Ciano said that he could not commit himself.

3. M. Christic then asked on what basis H.M. Government would be prepared to come to an agreement with Yugoslavia on the subject of the occupation itself.

Count Ciano answered that he would be very pleased to meet Markovic¹ to discuss that question and promised to deal with that problem with him.

4. Count Ciano was anxious to assure the Minister, M. Christic, that the formula adopted by Italy for her present action in Albania had been inspired by respect for the independence and integrity of Albania, while the form of Government which would be conferred on Albania would be the expression of the popular will.

M. Christic asked one further question in a personal capacity with the aim of learning what the attitude of H.M. Government would be in the event of the occupation of some points on the frontier by Yugoslavia.

Count Ciano stated that he could not reply to this question, which raised the whole problem of the military occupation, which was strictly governed by the development of events.

Count Ciano said that Christic, who while making this communication appeared visibly depressed, made a point of telling him that Yugoslav opinion was somewhat upset by the development of events, the course of which it was following with lively attention.

¹A former diplomat with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary and member of the Board of the Yugoslav National Bank.

XXIV

PACT OF STEEL

6th May, 1939—2nd July, 1939.

The news of the occupation of Albania had not produced a very noticeable reaction on the part of the Great Powers, nor even in the neighbouring countries. Yugoslavia and Greece raised no objections even though they felt a certain uneasiness, which the thought that Italy was now fully committed in the Balkans, and therefore inevitably opposed to a further German advance towards the South, was unable wholly to dispel. In fact, the Italian coup had occurred at a time when British foreign policy was already aimed at new, long-term objectives. Its reorientation had begun on the day the swastika flew for the first time from the flagstaff of the old Imperial castle in Prague, and the attack on Albania could not influence its basic direction, even if it provided a motive for employing greater speed and taking even more definite decisions. Thus it had become, for Great Britain, a matter of secondary importance that the occupation of Albania constituted a flagrant violation of the Easter Agreements, the latter having expressly stated the desire of the two contracting parties to respect and defend the territorial and political status quo in the Mediterranean.

On 18th March, the British Ambassador in Moscow enquired officially what the attitude of the U.S.S.R. would be in the event of German aggression against Rumania. In reply the Soviet Government suggested a conference of the States most interested in warding off the German drive; but this proposal was for various reasons ignored.

On 30th March, the British Government gave Poland a guarantee that was to become automatically effective in the event of any action threatening Polish independence, resistance to which the Polish Government would regard as imperative in the national interest. A similar Anglo-French guarantee was given to Greece on 13th April, and on the same day London and Paris agreed on a guarantee to Rumania. These purely defensive steps were interpreted by Hitler as measures preparing Germany's encirclement, and he used this interpretation, which was shared by Mussolini, as a forceful argument for the speedy conclusion of an Italo-German military alliance. The meeting in Milan, on 6th and 7th May, during which Ciano and Ribbentrop announced the imminent conclusion of the 'Pact of Steel', was not in fact intended

PACT OF STEEL

by the Italian Foreign Minister to have that aim; the course of German-Polish relations had taken such a threatening turn that he felt it advisable to obtain a clear picture of the situation before accepting new commitments. But Mussolini, having been informed by Ciano that the meeting was proceeding satisfactorily, suddenly gave orders to ask for the immediate conclusion of a military alliance between Italy and the Reich. Ciano was not enthusiastic, nor was Ribbentrop, who wished first to make sure of Japan's adhesion, but Hitler gave his approval and that settled the matter.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Milan, 6-7th May, 1939—XVII

I acquainted Ribbentrop with the memorandum drawn up by the Duce and expanded each single point in it.

Ribbentrop took careful note of it and gave the following answers:

1. *Conference proposed by the Pope.* The Fuehrer has received the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignor Orsenigo, and has listened to his proposal. He avoided, however, giving any definite answer since he intended to consult 'his friend Mussolini' first. The Fuehrer is of the opinion that the idea of the Conference is not acceptable, in the first place because it would always place Germany and Italy in the unpleasant position of being numerically inferior, since England, France and Poland on the other side would presumably form a single block, and, in the second place, because he considers that, in the present circumstances, the Conference could not achieve any practical result and would, on the contrary, aggravate 'the Poles' hysterical state of mind.' The Fuehrer proposes to inform the Vatican that we are grateful for the Pope's move, but that it is not considered possible to accept it, since the artificially created atmosphere of hostility to the Axis Powers does not allow one to hope that the Conference will produce useful results.

2. *Poland.* Ribbentrop considers that the Polish Government, and in particular Beck, are the victims of the internal situation as a result of their having in recent times permitted too active propaganda against the Germans. The Poles, who are by nature megalomaniacs, have been stirred up to the point where they no longer grasp the most elementary fact which is, that in the event of a military clash a few German divisions and German air power would suffice to finish off the conflict on the eastern front in less than two weeks.

The proposals for an agreement made by Hitler are particularly favourable since no German politician except himself could ever have faced the unpopularity caused by accepting the corridor and

guaranteeing it. When the Fuehrer made known his proposals, a movement was noticeable in the Reichstag itself which indicated very clearly the surprise and perhaps also the reaction of the audience. But the Fuehrer is determined to follow the path of conciliation and insists on obtaining the extra-territorial Autobahn, since this would also have the effect of altering Germany's psychological attitude. On the other hand, the Fuehrer cannot and does not intend to give up Danzig, the violation of whose frontiers by the Poles would be considered equivalent to the violation of the German frontier itself. The Germans will make no further offers to Poland. But they do not therefore consider the door closed on negotiations. Their programme is not to take the first step; time is working for Germany all the more since in France and England one can see signs of fatigue where the Polish question is concerned, and it is certain that within a few months not one Frenchman nor a single Englishman will go to war for Poland. Ribbentrop confirms, however, that it is Germany's intention to allow the matter to mature while remaining ready to react in the sharpest manner should there be an attempt on the part of Poland to pass over to an offensive policy.

3. *Period of Peace.* Germany, too, is convinced of the necessity for a period of peace, which should not be less than four or five years. The German Government intends to use this period very actively for the preparation of the army, with regard both to armaments and to cadres, which are at present incomplete, as well as for the construction of the navy which, in the course of four years, will be—if not extremely imposing from the point of view of tonnage—very efficient from the operational point of view.

This does not mean to say that Germany is not ready for war before that period has elapsed. Should we be forced to it, the Fuehrer intends to attempt to decide it by means of rapidly executed operations. But if that is impossible, preparations are being made to carry on a war of several years' duration. He considers, however, that the initiative still rests with the Axis, whose military and political situation has been greatly strengthened recently by the solution of the Czechoslovak problem and the occupation of Albania. From the diplomatic point of view, he considers further that the conclusion of a Pact of Non-Aggression with the Baltic States and later with the Scandinavian countries will be very much to the advantage of Germany and Italy.

4. *Great Britain.* Ribbentrop notes my information on our relations with London.¹ He has nothing of note to tell me with regard to Anglo-German relations.

5. *France.* Ribbentrop is completely in agreement with the policy which the Duce intends to follow. He does not, however,

¹They remained more or less at the point where they had been left by the two conversations between Chamberlain and Mussolini on 11th-12th January, 1939.

PACT OF STEEL

consider that an isolated war between Italy and France is possible, since Great Britain would not allow her Continental ally to be beaten without making every effort to save her. That would automatically provoke German intervention.

6. *Spain.* The German Government is satisfied with the attitude of Franco. It agrees that it is necessary to continue to work in common with Italy to strengthen still further the bonds between the Axis and Spain; it might even be necessary to reach a proper alliance since, while not making any unreasonable claims on the Spanish armed forces, it would be very useful for us to be able to pin down some French Army Corps for the defence of the Pyrenean frontier.

7. *Switzerland.* It is agreed to consider Switzerland to be a nation which is fundamentally hostile to the Axis, and it is also agreed that it is advisable not to raise the matter publicly and formally until further notice.

8. *Yugoslavia.* In Berlin they were very satisfied with the conversations with Markovic who repeated what he had already said in Venice—Yugoslavia will, in any event, maintain neutrality while supporting the Axis powers economically.

Ribbentrop considers that, in the present state of affairs, it is in our common interests to preserve the *status quo* in Yugoslavia. Should, however, the dissolution of the triple Kingdom come about by an internal process, Ribbentrop confirms that Italy as a country which has completely dominant interests in Yugoslavia, must be in charge of the solution of the crisis.

9. *Greece.* Ribbentrop considers that, after the occupation of Albania, the importance of Greece has greatly diminished and that it is in any case easier for the Axis to exercise an influence on that country. With this in view it will be necessary to replace the present King,¹ who is very hostile to the Axis, by the Heir Apparent, who has completely opposed ideas. That ought not to be impossible given the chaotic internal situation and the very numerous hostile currents which converge on the person of the present King.

10. *Turkey.* Wait to see the scope of her undertakings to England.²

11. *Bulgaria.* Continue to follow a policy of collaboration with the principal aim of preventing Bulgaria from adhering to the

¹The King of Greece, George II of the house of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg Glücksburg, had become King of the Hellenes on 28th September, 1922, as a result of his father's abdication. Deposed on 18th December, 1923, he had been recalled to the throne on 10th October, 1935.

²Statements made on 12th March by the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons and the Turkish Premier, Refik Saydam, in the Turkish Assembly, revealed that the two Governments had reached a preliminary understanding on the question of mutual assistance. Pending a final agreement Great Britain and Turkey were committed to render each other every possible assistance in case of an act of aggression liable to lead to a conflict in the Mediterranean. The understanding provided also for mutual consultation on all questions affecting the *status quo* in the Balkans.

Balkan Pact as is continually being requested by Turkey and the Western Democracies.

12. *Russia.* Ribbentrop is convinced that any favourable occasion which presents itself must be seized to prevent the adhesion of Russia to the anti-totalitarian bloc, but agrees at the same time on the absolute necessity of carrying out this step with great discretion and with a strict sense of proportion. Any exaggerated pro-Russian demonstrations would have negative results. He insists, however, on the necessity of continuing and increasing the *détente* which has arisen between the Axis and the Soviet Union.

13. *Alto Adige.*¹ I discussed this problem with Ribbentrop with great frankness and gave him a number of particulars with which he was not familiar. I formed the conviction that until today the problem had never been presented to him in its entirety and full seriousness.

Ribbentrop, after restating the Reich Government's lack of interest, now and in the future, in the Alto Adige, informed me that he intends to begin work with Attolico immediately in order to solve as soon as possible that problem, at least, which concerns the evacuation of the 10,000 ex-Austrian Germans. Today Attolico will confer with Mastromattei² and immediately on his return to Berlin will make contact with Ribbentrop in order to find a concrete solution to the problem.

14. *Military Alliance.* As far as the military alliance is concerned, Ribbentrop intends to send us as soon as possible a draft of the treaty of alliance which should be examined and discussed by us. He proposes that the signing of the Pact should take place in Berlin as soon as possible and in the most solemn manner. Ribbentrop, who has not altogether abandoned the idea of winning over Japan to the military alliance, greatly appreciated the Duce's suggestion to formulate the alliance in such a way as to make a pact which would allow of the adhesion of such States as intend to take part in it at a later date.

¹Alto Adige, the Italian name for the German-speaking part of South Tyrol. The problem here referred to existed, with varying intensity, ever since the end of the first World War, when as a result of President Wilson's war-time promises to Orlando, the region of the Tyrol south of the Brenner was allotted to Italy. The incompetence of Italian administrators and the haste, and often cruelty, with which they sought to italianise their new province, made it almost impossible for the South Tyrolese to accept permanent separation from their fellow countrymen in the north, and to forget their historical traditions which they had shared for almost 600 years with Austria. Though perhaps even less sympathetic towards the Nazi Reich than some non-German-speaking peoples, they regarded the *Anschluss* as a possibly decisive step towards the restoration of the Tyrol within its old boundaries. They made no secret of these hopes, and their restlessness, and the appearance of German troops on the Brenner pass, caused anxieties in Italian official circles which Hitler's solemn promise to 'respect the inviolability of the Brenner frontier' did not suffice to allay.

²Giuseppe Mastromattei, Prefect of the province of Bozen (Bolzano) from 1933. Because of his intransigence and petty chicaneries he was much hated by the South Tyrolese. After the *Anschluss* the solution of the 'problem of Alto Adige' was nevertheless entrusted chiefly to his care.

PACT OF STEEL

Four days after the announcement of the forthcoming conclusion of the Italo-German alliance, the British and French Governments jointly gave a new guarantee of assistance—this time to Turkey. At this period Hitler attempted to oppose to the Anglo-French policy of unilateral guarantees his own policy of bilateral non-aggression pacts. But he did not meet with the same understanding or success. He turned to the Scandinavian States; but, on 18th May, Oslo and Stockholm refused with courtesy and firmness. Only Denmark, in view of her common frontier with the Reich, declared herself willing to sign an agreement. The 'Pact of Steel', however, continued to occupy the central place in Nazi foreign policy; and finally, on 22nd May, the Pact was signed in Berlin by Ciano and Ribbentrop.

TELEGRAM TO THE MINISTER TO SOFIA, TALAMO.

Rome, 30th May, 1939—XVII

I received the Bulgarian Minister who wished for information on the development of the international situation. Our conversation dealt in particular with the position Bulgaria must take up towards the alignment of Powers, which is becoming increasingly clear. I told the Bulgarian Minister that the geopolitical situation of his country allowed of no doubt as to the necessity of the Bulgarians taking up a definite position alongside the Axis. While showing that he shared our point of view in principle, he pointed out that Bulgaria is not yet completely ready as far as military preparations are concerned. I told him that both Italy and Germany are willing to help Bulgaria's military preparations by the supply of arms, but that that could take place only when Sofia had clearly defined its international position. I added that on the other hand, since from the military and strategic point of view Italy has now assumed a role of first class importance in the Balkans, the Bulgarian Government ought to tighten its bonds with us in order to be able to consider immediately what preparations should be made in case of military complications.

I am sending you this communication so that you may be properly informed. You will be able to continue to carry on conversations on this theme with responsible circles there, pointing out: (1) that Bulgaria must not for any reason enter into any Balkan combination which would mean her legal encirclement; (2) that she must decide to march openly alongside the Axis Powers, which will be able to assure her that her aspirations and claims will be met, just as the Axis Powers have met those of friendly Hungary.

PACT OF STEEL

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN,
ATTOLICO.

Rome, 2nd July, 1939—XVII

Personal.

Dear Attolico,

The present state of international affairs and its possible developments lead us to consider it advisable, in the interests of the Axis itself, to be informed with the utmost accuracy possible what the German intentions with regard to the problem of Danzig really are.

I have before me what you said on the subject in your latest reports. You must now discuss it with Ribbentrop himself, and he must inform us how they regard the situation there and what their real plans are on the subject—and this also applies, should the Danzig question be settled by a movement within the city.

Your conversation with Ribbentrop must be of a purely informatory nature, which is quite logical in view of the fact that we, who naturally do not shrink before any possibility—not even the gravest—wish to know, in time, how matters stand, so as to be able to take the necessary measures, whether military or moral.

As soon as you have had the conversation with Ribbentrop, report its content at once.

XXV

CONVERSATION WITH FRANCO

19th July, 1939.

After the fall of Barcelona and the subsequent breach of the Catalan front in the first fortnight of February, the Civil War in Spain had rapidly moved to a close. General Franco could now consider himself certain victor in the conflict. As early as 3rd February the Paris Government had sent Senator Bérard to Burgos on an extraordinary mission to negotiate French recognition of the Spanish Nationalist Government, which had up to then been firmly withheld. But he had laid down a series of conditions, among them the immediate withdrawal of all Italian volunteers. Franco had answered with a definite refusal. Bérard had to return to Burgos a second time and make concessions to the Caudillo's wishes. On 27th February, London and Paris recognised the Government of General Franco and at the beginning of March their Ambassadors arrived in the Spanish capital—Marshal Pétain for France, Sir Maurice Petersen for Great Britain.

Having won this diplomatic victory, which meant for the Republican Government the loss of any standing under international law, Franco strove to consolidate his position. On 17th March, he concluded a pact of friendship and non-aggression with Portugal; on the 27th of the same month, he began to honour his pledges to Fascist Italy and the Third Reich by joining the Anti-Comintern Pact; on 8th May, Spain left the League of Nations. Three weeks later Madrid fell; on 1st April Franco declared that the Civil War was at an end. Europe might have had cause for relief at the conclusion of that long and bloody struggle, which had more than once endangered the peace of many other nations; but its end came at a time when it could no longer bring real relief. A week after the announcement that fighting had ceased in Spain, Mussolini invaded Albania. At the end of May, the foreign volunteers began to leave from Vigo and Cadiz for Germany and Italy. The first Italian volunteers disembarked at Naples on 6th June, accompanied by the Spanish Minister for the Interior, Franco's son-in-law, Serrano Suñer. Ciano was there to receive him. It was their first meeting. On 15th June, the Italian airmen arrived in Genoa accompanied by the Spanish Air Minister, General Kindelan. During an interview the General uttered some serious words: 'The union of the Italian and Spanish air forces,' he said, 'has made the

CONVERSATION WITH FRANCO

Mediterranean into a lake which cannot be traversed by the enemy. I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but no arm of the Spanish services, particularly not the air force, will be able to remain idle if the Italian forces are engaged.' A few days later, Ciano published, in his turn, an article in the Government review Gerarchia in which he draw up the balance sheet of Italy's participation in the victory of the Falange in Spain: 3,227 dead, 11,227 wounded, 5,318 bombing raids. The article concluded: 'A true comradeship in arms with the Italian people has been born of this war which we have fought in common.' Such was the atmosphere when, on 10th July, Ciano left for Spain, now certain that he would see Franco and Suñer before Goering and not, as he had feared for some time, after him. The journey lasted a week. It took him all over Spain, and at its conclusion he met, at San Sebastian, the head of the Spanish State.

CONVERSATION WITH GENERALISSIMO FRANCO.

19th July, 1939—XVII

Instinctively Generalissimo Franco tends to shift the conversation from the political to the military plane. He is still more head of an army than head of a State. Political problems, which, in the course of his life and of his military career, he has touched on only superficially, now—together with the new responsibilities of Caudillo of a revolution and of a nation—present themselves to his mind with the imperious urgency of a duty, but still present themselves in a confused manner; and he himself does not conceal his difficulty. To deal with, Generalissimo Franco is the same man as one has learned to know from his achievements, his words and his very photographs. There are no surprises and no disappointments. A man, simple in his bearing and his thought, calm in his examination of questions and in his judgment, he limits his conversation to a lucid account of events and of the situations arising from them without ever venturing beyond them.

He spoke of his gratitude to the Duce and to Italy in terms which allow of no doubt as to his sincerity. He knows and states that he owes his victory in the war to Mussolini's collaboration, just as he understands that Fascist aid is necessary to overcome the considerable difficulties which present themselves, and will still more present themselves, to the consolidation of his regime. Franco's forthcoming meeting with the Duce he looks forward to—as do his best collaborators—as the basic event which must lay down the lines along which new Spain will march, particularly as regards internal and social policy. On the other hand, foreign policy seems—in spite of some hesitation and uncertainty, which find their natural explanation in the presence of many elements from the old regime and in the

necessity of overcoming some immediate difficulties—seems, as I was saying, to be clearly laid down. Franco—while stating that for some time yet he must '*ménager*' France, chiefly in order to get back the wealth exported by the Reds, which amounts to more than five milliards—confirmed his firm intention to follow more and more definitely the line of the Rome-Berlin Axis while awaiting the day when Spain's general condition and military preparations will allow him to identify himself with the political system of the totalitarian countries. With this in view, he wishes a period of peace, and was happy to learn what had been said to Serrano Suñer¹ on this subject by the Duce and confirmed to himself by me. Only it is necessary to bear in mind that Spain's requirements go further than the two or three years anticipated. Franco considers that a period of peace of at least five years is necessary, and even this figure seems to many observers optimistic. If, in spite of what is foreseen and in spite of goodwill, a new and unexpected fact should hasten on the testing time, Spain repeats her intention of maintaining very favourable—even more than very favourable—neutrality towards Italy. (I say towards Italy and not towards the Axis not because Franco does not approve of, or is in any way cool towards the Rome-Berlin system, but because the Spanish are anxious to underline a distinct difference in their feelings towards Italy and towards Germany.) But Franco himself realises that neutrality could be maintained only for a short time, that is to say, in the event of a short-term war. But in the event of a long war it would not be possible; events would lead Spain to take up a more definite position. The Franco revolution, which finds its bases in the reawakening of the national and imperial spirit of Spain, would not consent to remain for long in a position of moral inferiority in Europe after the manner of the democratic and decadent Spain of the monarchy. Spain must take sides in the interest of its own future existence. What alternatives can a conflict present? The victory of the Axis, and in that case a neutral Spain would have only a wretched future in a Europe strictly controlled by the totalitarian Powers which—in default of Spain's contribution—would rightly remould the European situation solely to their own advantage. Or the victory of the democracies, and in that case the survival of the Franco regime after the defeat of the other and older totalitarian regimes is out of the question. Therefore Spain must speed up her armaments programme. First and foremost at sea. Franco is in full agreement with the suggestion made by the Duce to Serrano Suñer to decide on the construction of four battleships of 35,000 tons. Without the existence of a strong nucleus of battleships, one cannot conceive of a Spanish fleet capable of having real importance in the control of the seas. He therefore intends to put two battleships

¹ Ramon Serrano Suñer, Minister of the Interior up to 17th October, 1939; then Foreign Minister up to 3rd September, 1942.

on the stocks at once, and in order to save time asks if we are willing to furnish him with the plans of our *Vittorio Veneto* class which he will have constructed at Ferrol with the help of Italian engineers. Over and above the time gained, there would be the further advantage that, since they were of the same class, they would permit of closer and more efficient collaboration in all respects between the Italian and the Spanish squadrons, which would thus form a homogeneous group. He awaits our answer on this point at the earliest possible date. Of the many military problems he considers this the most urgent.

He then spoke of the organisation of the air force, confirming that he intends to develop this arm to the utmost, and that he therefore considers that it should form a separate organism and not be divided between the Navy and the Army. Italian collaboration in the air, which was one of the decisive factors of victory, must also, in future, constitute one of the principal guarantees of Spanish development in the air.

As far as the Pyrenees are concerned, Generalissimo Franco has already begun to have a considerable amount of fortification carried out, but he will enlarge and carry out the full programme of military preparations in that zone as soon as the questions at issue with France have been settled. I, personally, had the work in progress on the frontier at Irun checked by our officers; their information is that a large number of small forts are being constructed.

Generalissimo Franco told me little of the internal situation in Spain. He confined himself to dealing with those topics which the Duce had raised in his letter. As far as the monarchy is concerned, while avoiding a full discussion of it, he stated with unequivocal frankness that Spain cannot now return to old formulas of the past; the country is breathing new air, it intends to move towards material and spiritual reconstruction. Any person or institution from the past would act as a brake and would perhaps halt its march. And I must add that, in the circles close to Franco, I found an almost identical attitude to this question. Only some generals, whose prestige and influence is rapidly waning before the increased power of the Caudillo and who also have time against them, since they are all very advanced in years, have dynastic longings which they do not, however, succeed in translating into acts, and perhaps do not even intend to. One must also take into account the population, an absolute majority of which is strongly anti-monarchist. Passing through eight Spanish cities and traversing many hundreds of kilometres of countryside, in villages and large sections of the population I never heard a shout or saw a sign which might show the country's monarchist sentiments. The central factor in the country is now the Falange. It is a party which is still only beginning to build up its formations and activity, but it already has

grouped round it the youth, the most active elements and in particular the women. The Falange is anti-monarchist; from the Secretary of the Party to the National Councillors and all the influential members of the party who spoke to me, I never heard anything but expressions of hostility towards the dynasty and towards the monarchical system, which towards the end was the expression of a negative and decadent policy. I must add that the Falange and the whole Spanish people is dominated by a feeling of intense hatred towards the democratic countries on which the monarchy, on the other hand, long relied. It is not a theoretical and vague hatred; it is the hatred of people whose feelings and bodies have been harrowed, who still bear the scars and the mourning for recent losses—losses the responsibility for which is entirely attributed to France and England. Widows and disabled men, combatants and children, united in a single upsurge when a cry of hostility to Paris and London arose. Serrano Suñer told me that anyone in Spain who attempted a policy of *rapprochement* with the democracies would be overwhelmed by the fury of the people. I am convinced that he is right, and this is also the conviction of those elements whose attitude to the Revolution is moderate, such as the Foreign Minister Jordana,¹ and who, by calculation or by temperament, support a cautious policy towards the Axis, while not being in any way animated by Francophil or Anglophil sentiments. For the Spanish people as a whole, our lively controversial attitude towards France is another bond to add to those already formed between Italy and Spain.

The Caudillo is determined to carry out a policy of great social reforms; he wishes—to use Mussolini's formula—to go out to the people. In fact, efforts in that direction have already been made and that with fairly concrete results. Social services, the single course meal, a series of voluntary or obligatory contributions, already showed the regime's determination to improve the condition of the masses. In all the cities I passed through, except in the suburbs of Madrid, where the attitude of the population aroused strong doubts as to their sentiments, support of the regime seems full and complete.

The problems which face the new regime are many and serious; first of all there is the so-called question of the Reds. Of them there are already 200,000 under arrest in the various Spanish prisons. Trials are going on every day at a speed which I would almost describe as summary. They are carried out on the following principles: those responsible for crimes are shot; Red organisers who prepared and led the revolution without, however, staining their hands with dishonourable offences are condemned to sentences which vary from ten to twenty years; soldiers of the

¹General Jordana, Foreign Minister in the first Franco Government up to 17th October, 1939; resumed the same post on 3rd September, 1942.

Republican army who were compulsorily enrolled and who had no personal responsibility during the war are set at liberty and sent back to their homes, where they live under the strict surveillance of the Falange and the Police. Those condemned may, however, redeem themselves and shorten their sentences by working on reconstruction projects; each working day equals two days of their sentence. I myself saw numerous squads of prisoners busily engaged in repairing bridges and roads; the treatment given to them is good, which is proved by the fact that there are only very few attempts to escape. The sons of Reds executed or killed in the war are treated with a spirit of great humanity; they are mixed with the sons of Nationalists in the youth organisations of the Falange. It would be useless to deny that all this still causes a gloomy air of tragedy to hang over Spain. There are still a great number of shootings. In Madrid alone between 200 and 250 a day, in Barcelona 150; in Seville, a town which was never in the hands of the Reds, 80. But this must be judged in terms of the Spanish mentality and one must add that even in the face of these events, the populace maintains an impressive spirit of calm coolness. During my stay in Spain, while more than ten thousand men already condemned to death awaited in the prisons the inevitable moment of their execution, only two, I repeat two, appeals for pardon were addressed to me by families. I may add that the Caudillo granted them forthwith.

As I indicated before, Franco enjoys great prestige and authority throughout the country and among all classes of the population. As the Duce foresaw when he opposed the various attempts to mediate, Franco's strong situation today is due to the fact that he was the victorious wartime commander. Even the prestige of the other generals paled before the positive and concrete fact that he was able to deposit in the Cathedral of Toledo, beside the sword of Alfonso VI, the liberator of the Capital, his own sword as general and conqueror of Madrid. He will still have many difficulties to overcome in the way of internal reorganisation. The population, which has undeniably rediscovered its most lofty traditions of heroism, is still suffering from that state of torpor to which it was for centuries abandoned. The work of reconstruction is chaotic, if enthusiastic. More interest is taken in the reconstruction of sanctuaries than in the restoration of railway traffic, which is still in an extremely bad condition. The clergy tend—albeit under the form of extreme nationalism—to resume their old influence. The speech made by the Cardinal of Toledo, a man of the greatest authority in the country, allows of no doubts on this score.

The present direction of the government is weak. To a great extent it does not correspond to the spirit which has been created in the country and Franco must surround himself with men who express in themselves the revolution and the war. He is being strongly pushed in this direction by Serrano Suñer, whose actions

CONVERSATION WITH FRANCO

are very impetuous and helpful, if not always prudent and skilful. However—as the Duce sees clearly before having come to know the man—Serrano Suñer is the factor on which our policy must be based. He aspires to become Foreign Minister, and it is in our interest that this should come about. Serrano Suñer himself, who spoke to me with even greater confidence than we are used to in Rome, said that this could easily be brought about if Franco received a hint from the Duce to that effect. I, too, am convinced of this. Franco is completely dominated by the personality of Mussolini and feels that he requires him to face the peace just as he did to win the war. His journey to Rome—which will be followed immediately by a journey to Berlin—will be an event of fundamental importance in the Caudillo's political life. He expects from the Duce—and he repeatedly said so in the conversations he had with me—instruction and directives. And he himself spoke to me of an even greater event, which I, too, hold to be indispensable in order to complete the work carried out in Spain by our victorious legions—the Duce's journey to Madrid, whereby Spain would be definitely united to the destiny of the Roman Empire.

XXVI

SALZBURG

At the beginning of August European tension reached its peak. The controversy over Danzig which had raged for months between Berlin and Warsaw was in its last stages. On 4th August, the Warsaw Government intimated to the Senate of the Free City that the threatened expulsion of Polish Customs officials from the territory of Danzig constituted a violation of international agreements which Poland would not tolerate. On the 9th Berlin intervened with a deliberately violent note, declaring that a repetition of Polish demands in the form of an ultimatum to Danzig would produce a crisis in Germano-Polish relations for the consequences of which the responsibility would rest exclusively with the Polish Government. The next day Warsaw replied that it regarded the German step as devoid of any legal foundation and that any further German interference with the rights and interests of Poland in Danzig would be considered as 'an act of aggression.' This was a clear reference to Chamberlain's speech of 10th July in which the Prime Minister had reaffirmed Britain's determination to abide by her pledges, and to go to Poland's assistance in the event of an obvious threat to that country's security. It was, therefore, certainly not Poland's fault if Ribbentrop persisted in the illusion that Germany could assault her without unleashing a general conflict.

On that same 10th August Ciano left for Salzburg to meet the Reich Foreign Minister. Caught, as he was, between the soothing assurances of the Wilhelmstrasse, the easy optimism of his brother-in-law, Magistrati, First Counsellor in the Italian Embassy in Berlin, and the scepticism of the watchful and suspicious Ambassador, Attolico, he had hesitated for some time before undertaking this journey. In his recent telegrams and reports Attolico had shown growing concern over the imminence of another German coup which might involve Italy in a conflict of unpredictable dimensions, and, in order to obtain a clearer picture of German intentions, he had suggested that Mussolini and Hitler should meet on the Brenner. This meeting had been fixed for 4th August, and the Duce already dreamed of a second Munich. However, on 26th July Ribbentrop let it be known that Berlin was opposed to the calling of a new European conference, and five days later Hitler himself cancelled the Brenner meeting. Thereupon Ciano, now thoroughly alarmed, decided to visit Ribbentrop and to gather personally what information he could. On 7th August Attolico received instructions

SALZBURG

to arrange the meeting between the two Foreign Ministers, and in the morning of the 11th Ciano arrived in Munich. In the late afternoon he reached Schloss Fuschl¹ near Salzburg where Ribbentrop was awaiting him.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Salzburg, 11th August, 1939—XVII

From the first moments of our meeting, von Ribbentrop did not conceal that he considered the situation to be extremely grave, and that, in his opinion, the clash between Germany and Poland is inevitable. I must add that he gives an impression of an unreasonable, obstinate determination to bring about this conflict. I cannot say that he produced any new facts; he attempted instead to dramatize events with the now familiar picture of the persecutions undergone by the Germans in Poland and the castration inflicted on some men of German race by Polish soldiery. But no new facts. He affirms that the honour of Germany is now at stake (at times he also said the honour of the Axis) and that therefore it is impossible for a Great Power not to proceed to react in a fitting manner. Ribbentrop starts off from two assumptions which it is useless to attempt to discuss with him since he answers by repeating the same axioms, and avoiding any discussion. These axioms are:

1. The conflict will not become general, and Europe will be an impassive spectator of the merciless destruction of Poland by Germany.

2. That, even should France and England wish to intervene, they are faced with the physical impossibility of injuring Germany or the Axis, and the conflict would be certain to finish with the victory of the totalitarian Powers.

I repeat that it is useless to begin a discussion with Ribbentrop on these topics. I several times stated our point of view. I showed that everything in present European politics leads one to consider armed intervention by France and England inevitable together with the support or the direct aid of numerous other countries. It was useless. Ribbentrop takes refuge in the negative, pure and simple, saying that 'his information and above all his *psychological knowledge* of England make him certain that any armed British intervention is ruled out.'

In the general survey he gave me of the European situation

¹Schloss Fuschl, the property of a well-known Austrian patriot, Herr von Remiz, had attracted Ribbentrop's attention even before the *Anschluss*. Immediately after the invasion of March, 1938, Herr von Remiz was arrested by the Gestapo and put to death, whilst Schloss Fuschl passed by way of confiscation into the hands of Ribbentrop.

today, he made the following statements:

1. Russia will not intervene in the conflict because the Moscow negotiations have completely failed,¹ and because (and this he told me in strict secrecy) conversations of a fairly definite character are now in progress between Moscow and Berlin. (I wish to observe that the so closely guarded secrecy on the progress of these negotiations is difficult to reconcile with the terms of our alliance and with the complete loyalty we have shown towards Germany).

2. France and England cannot intervene because they are insufficiently prepared militarily, and because they have no means of injuring Germany, while the latter—particularly by virtue of its air force, which is very much stronger than the other two air forces put together—is in a position to strike at all the Anglo-French centres.

3. Belgium and Holland intend to maintain strict neutrality and are ready to defend the inviolability of their territory against all comers.

4. Turkey will not be able to make any concrete contribution and many indications reported by von Papen lead one to believe that that country is dissatisfied with the path she has taken.²

5. Rumania does not intend to do anything definite. She will continue to get along by a balancing trick, but she still does not cause any military worries since the Hungarians and the Bulgarians are more than sufficient to liquidate her.

6. Yugoslavia is faithless. In London, Paul has carried on activities and made statements of a character distinctly hostile to the Axis. But that country, too, is very weak, and Ribbentrop hopes that Italy will wish to take advantage of the Polish affair to settle its account with Yugoslavia in Croatia and Dalmatia.

7. As far as America is concerned, Ribbentrop notes—particularly after a propaganda campaign carried out by him through the medium of the printed word—a profound change in public opinion which is more and more inclined to maintain neutrality and isolation.

In this state of affairs Ribbentrop sees a particularly favourable situation for Germany to act. He admits that, in our previous conversations, he had always spoken of two or three years' preparation in order to be in a position to strike the enemy with complete certainty of success; but today, he says, new situations have arisen which will probably precipitate events. In that case Germany will

¹Anglo-Franco-Soviet conversations on the subject of a pact of mutual assistance and of a joint guarantee, to be granted to Poland and to Rumania, had begun in Moscow on 15th June, and by 15th July it had been agreed that the General Staffs of the three Powers should establish direct contacts. But the Russians, reluctant from the beginning, showed increasing unwillingness to commit themselves and no further progress was made. Negotiations continued nevertheless until 23rd August, when the signing of the Soviet-German pact of non-aggression made all further talks pointless. The Anglo-French military mission left Moscow on 26th August.

²A reference to the recent Anglo-Turkish agreements.

march with the utmost determination.

For my part, I spoke to him with the utmost frankness in accordance with the Duce's orders, and produced written evidence in support of the reasons for which the avoidance of a conflict today is entirely in the interests of the Axis countries, which up to now have always had the advantage of the initiative and of surprise—an advantage which in the present situation is entirely lost.

Ribbentrop listened to my arguments and noted my evidence without, however, wishing to open a discussion on the subject, and when I put to him the advisability of making a gesture which would change the present difficult, controversial situation decidedly in our favour, that is to say, by making it known that the Axis Powers still consider it possible to solve the crisis by normal diplomatic negotiations, he opposed it. I showed him the draft *communiqué* and set out patiently and at length the thousand and one reasons which lead us to consider this procedure the most advisable and most useful. Ribbentrop found only one objection, an absolutely unfounded one—that such a gesture would be interpreted as weakness on the part of the Axis. I replied that this was mistaken since the terms of the *communiqué* sound a warning to our adversaries rather than announce a withdrawal of our positions. Ribbentrop had to admit that the gesture would be useful tactically. But, wrapped up in his obstinate and unreasonable desire for battle, during the course of my long conversations with him on the 11th he always attempted to refuse the gambit, repeating mechanically and without any plausible explanation the phrases that the conflict will be localised and that even in the event of its becoming general the victory of Germany is one hundred per cent certain.

When I asked him for details of Germany's immediate plan of action—in view of the fact that according to him events are pressing on with increasing rapidity—he either could not or would not answer. And even when I drew his attention to the fact that the imminence of the crisis had not been brought to our notice in any way, on the contrary, had been denied during the recent conversations with the Ambassador, he still replied that he was not in a position to give particulars of what was about to happen because all decisions were still locked in the Fuehrer's impenetrable bosom.

But, after ten hours of continual conversation with Ribbentrop, I left him with the profound conviction that he intends to provoke the conflict and that he will oppose any initiative which might have the effect of solving the present crisis peacefully.

FIRST CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Berchtesgaden, 12th August, 1939—XVII

Hitler began by explaining to me with the aid of maps Germany's situation with regard to her frontier fortifications. The Siegfried

line, which has recently been completed, runs from the Swiss frontier to the point where the Rhine enters Dutch territory. This line is considered to be unbreachable, especially at those points where historically enemies have broken in to invade Germany. The whole Belgian frontier is also covered by this fortification. The Dutch frontier, on the other hand, is only partly covered. But that does not worry Hitler, in view of the fact that Belgium and Holland are ready to ensure their neutrality by force of arms in the face of any invasion, and, at all events, in the case of violation of that neutrality by France or Britain, the Germans could occupy Dutch territory more rapidly than the enemy and cause it to be flooded by breaking the dykes. As far as the eastern front is concerned, the work of fortification is far from being so advanced. The only area in which works of particular importance have been carried out is on the Polish frontier immediately opposite Berlin. But in the east, it is not a case of putting oneself on the defensive. One must take the offensive and that with the utmost rapidity. The forces are already concentrated and so disposed as to make the attack possible at any minute. The Fuehrer does not give the exact strength of the forces concentrated against Poland but refers to the figure of a million soldiers. The only time he gave an exact figure was when he said that there are 11 very seasoned divisions in East Prussia, of which some are motorised. When the moment for the attack on Poland comes—and that moment will come as the result of the outbreak of a serious incident or else because Germany will force Poland to define her position—the German forces will strike simultaneously at the heart of Poland from all points along the frontier where attacks are launched and follow routes well laid down in advance. The Polish forces are insufficient to resist such an attack even for a short time. The air force is very small, the artillery is poor, there is a complete lack of anti-tank weapons. The most suitable period for the attack, from the meteorological point of view, is that which, beginning now, ends on 15th October. Later, rain and mist would protect Poland better than any other arm. Hitler states that he has decided to clear up the situation before 15th October. He says that he is forced to act in this way for the following reasons:

1. Because Poland has provoked Germany, has offended her honour, continues to do so daily, and a great nation like the German one cannot tolerate such a state of affairs any longer without losing prestige. He repeats at least twice, and with great energy, that the withdrawal of the German-speaking population from the Alto Adige was a hard blow to German prestige and to his own. This gesture cannot be taken as a precedent by anyone; on the contrary, it obliges him to be more intransigent towards Poland.

2. Because the terror under which the German minorities in Poland are forced to live—and they are now subjected to the most

violent brutality (castrations, killings, rape)—has roused German public opinion, which demands war on Poland.

3. Because he has precise information that Poland is preparing to occupy the city of Danzig after 15th October and in due course to destroy it. At that time of year, Germany could not go to the help of its own threatened sons except at the expense of much greater sacrifices and, naturally, with a less certain result.

4. Because Poland represents a threat in Germany's rear and therefore in the rear of the Axis. Even if a policy of peace and collaboration was pursued with Poland, this would not serve to modify the situation profoundly, and when Germany and Italy found themselves—as they would inevitably find themselves one day—fighting the western democracies, Poland would find an occasion to stab Germany in the back. In this connection, he at once stresses that Italy is in a similar situation with regard to Yugoslavia. There are definite signs that Yugoslavia will preserve its neutrality towards Italy only so long as that State is in a good position. Should difficulties arise, however, Yugoslavia would attack it in the rear. For this reason Hitler advises Italy to seize the first favourable opportunity to dismember Yugoslavia by occupying Croatia and Dalmatia (I wish to underline that he did not mention Slovenia).

When I asked what development he foresaw in the general situation as a result of his attack on Poland, Hitler repeatedly stated that he is convinced that the conflict will be localised and gives the following reasons: France and England will certainly make extremely theatrical anti-German gestures but will not go to war, because their military and moral preparations are not such as to allow them to begin the conflict. Hitler repeats that one day it will be necessary to fight the Western democracies, if only to do away with the old assumption of moral superiority which France and England nourish with regard to Germany and Italy. But he considers it out of the question that this struggle can begin now. At the most, the English can set up a blockade in the North Sea between the coasts of Scotland and those of Scandinavia and at the mouth of the Channel. They might even attempt some air action against German centres, but that is not probable, either for fear of reprisals (Ribbentrop tells me, however, that it is not even certain that such reprisals would be carried out by the Germans, at least to begin with), or for fear of the German anti-aircraft defences which are excellent and such as to ensure the almost complete inviolability of all urban centres, except Berlin, the great area of which renders it more open to attack. No other country will be able to make a move. The Baltic States are, by definition, neutral and their neutrality would in any case be to Germany's advantage. Swiss neutrality, too, can be considered certain. The Swiss will fire on anyone who tries to violate their territory. As far as the east is concerned, what has to be said has been said already. One must add

that a friendly Hungary along with Bulgaria, to whom Germany has furnished and continues to furnish arms, will have the effect of neutralising Rumanian hostility, which is in any case far from certain. Yugoslavia and Greece will be immobilised through fear of Italy. Russia will not make any move. The Moscow negotiations have been a complete failure. The Anglo-French military missions were sent to Moscow only to cover up the great political failure. On the other hand, Russo-German contacts are proceeding very favourably, and in the last few days there has been a Russian request for the despatch of a German Plenipotentiary to Moscow to negotiate the friendship pact.

All these reasons lead the Fuehrer to affirm with the utmost certainty that the conflict will be localised and that Germany will definitely be able to settle her account with Poland without further complications, thus rendering 'a great service to the other Axis Powers, since any strengthening of one member of the Axis must be regarded as a strengthening of the Italo-German political system. Germany took pleasure in the fact that examples of individual initiative which have been crowned with success, such as Abyssinia, Spain and Albania, have, by increasing the power and prestige of Italy, given the Axis increased weight in the world.'

It was then my turn to speak and I began by thanking the Fuehrer for the very frank and detailed statements which he had been pleased to make to me, adding that my interest had been increased by the novelty of the information which he gave me, since in our preceding conversations the general situation and the individual problems had been examined from a different point of view. In fact, it had been agreed to allow a period of two or three years to pass before taking steps which might entail war, the reason being to increase the military preparedness of the two countries.

The Fuehrer interrupted me to say that what I was saying was very true and that he, too, agrees with Mussolini in considering that two or three years—but not more—would be useful to the Axis to improve its position and preparations. He would have waited as had been agreed. But the provocations by Poland and the deterioration of the situation had made German action urgently necessary. But that action would not provoke a general conflict. The Fuehrer is therefore certain that, as far as Italy is concerned, he will not require to ask for aid under the existing agreement.

I take note of the Fuehrer's statements and continue to explain the reasons why Italy prefers a general conflict to be postponed for the period of time already laid down. I develop my explanation and arguments on the basis of the notes drawn up by the Duce beforehand and of the orders I had received.

I then discuss the possibility of issuing a *communiqué*, in accordance with the instructions given to me by the Duce, with the aim of letting it be known that there is still a chance of resolving in a

SALZBURG

peaceful manner the disputes which are disturbing the political life of Europe. I explain in detail the various advantages which the Axis would derive from a step of the kind.

Hitler listens with attention. He says that he has already had a copy of the *communiqué* from Ribbentrop, but that he has not yet been able to examine the proposal thoroughly. He thinks it advisable to arrange a conversation for the next day. In view of the late hour he breaks off the meeting, not without having first restated his determination to act quickly against Poland and his complete certainty that the conflict will be localised, so that Italy will not find herself involved for any reason.

SECOND CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Berchtesgaden, 13th August, 1939—XVII

• Hitler asks if I have anything to say.

I thank him and reply that I am waiting to learn his decisions. Hitler then begins to speak and tells me that, after long reflection, he does not consider it advisable to issue any *communiqué* on the Salzburg meeting. 'That leaves our hands freer for any decision or solution.' He more or less repeats what he said the day before on the necessity of settling the conflict with Poland in a totalitarian manner. The incidents are recurring and increasing in number. German honour and prestige are affected. Any delay is harmful not only from the political but also from the military point of view. The objectives of the operation against Poland are now fixed in his mind. The German people requires to ensure for itself the space and the materials which are the guarantee of its existence. The operation against Poland demonstrates the true road along which the German people must march. Italy, which is, on the other hand, the most important nation in the Mediterranean, must affirm and enlarge its dominion over the shores of that sea. There is no possibility of a clash between the two imperial systems. He recalls that Bismarck, too, wrote a letter to Mazzini to state this truth.

Germany will take action against Poland as soon as possible. That action will be rapid, decisive, implacable. The Western Powers will not intervene. And if—to grant a hypothesis which he considers absurd—the Western Powers were to intervene, that would mean that 'they had now decided on the fight against the Axis and that, even without the German attack on Poland, they would not have allowed those years of preparation to pass which Italy and Germany might find useful.'

I take note of the Fuehrer's assertions and ask, should he be able and willing to tell me, when the operation will begin.

Hitler says that that is not yet fixed. However, everything is ready and, should the operation have to begin as the result of a serious

SALZBURG

incident, it could take place at any minute. If, on the other hand, the operation is to have a different origin, one can put it a little later. *The last date for the beginning of the operation is the end of August.* As a last resort for justifying the attack, and in case no other opportunity offers, he will consider as serious one of the many local incidents which occur daily in Danzig and in the Corridor. No delay would be possible in view of the fact that the German General Staff consider four to six weeks necessary to liquidate the Polish question militarily, and in view of the fact that, after 15th October, mist and mud make the roads and aerodromes on the Polish front unusable. He says that he has nothing further to communicate to me.

The conversation ends with a cordial exchange of greetings. Hitler makes a point of repeating to me several times his desire to meet the Duce, but he does not refer to political matters and says that 'he would be pleased to have him as his guest some time at the Bayreuth music festival.'

XXVII

ONE LAST TRY

The German onslaught on Poland began at 5 a.m. on 1st September. On the 3rd Great Britain and France declared war on the German Reich. Five days later the German vanguards stood at the gates of Warsaw, and on that same 8th September the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, Gryzybowski, had to inform his Government that the U.S.S.R. had turned down Poland's urgent request for the delivery of war materials of which she was in desperate need. Any doubt about Moscow's reasons for this refusal was removed on 28th September, when the Soviet Union and the German Reich proceeded to partition between themselves the entire territory of the Polish Republic.

It was obviously too late to put an end to the conflict on the basis of a compromise; yet, fostered by the memory of the experiences at Munich, some shred of hope remained. On 15th September, the Council of Ministers in Rome had announced Italy's non-belligerency, and for a few days it was to Italy above all that the eyes of all those were turned who hoped for a last-minute settlement and the avoidance of a general conflagration. Once more London, still trusting in spite of so many disappointments, took the lead, whilst Paris followed, not without hesitation.

LETTER TO THE BRITISH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, LORD HALIFAX.

Rome, 14th September, 1939—XVII

N. 6398

Dear Lord Halifax,

I have received your letter of 8th September and wish to thank you for the courteous words you address to me. For me, too, it was a pleasure to be able to maintain direct and personal relations with Your Excellency during the days which preceded the outbreak of war, and although our efforts to maintain peace in Europe have not been crowned with success, I have, nevertheless, much appreciated the spirit of collaboration which you and your Government have shown towards us.

In your letter, you recall the cordiality of the contacts which took place between myself and Sir Percy Loraine,¹ and remark that these

¹Sir Percy Loraine, Lord Perth's successor as British Ambassador to the Quirinal, in which post he remained until 1st June, 1940.

contacts took place on a personal and friendly basis and not simply between an Ambassador and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. That is so, and is in great part due to the good will which inspired Sir Percy Loraine in his assiduous activity. It is a pleasure to me to assure you that in the future, too, our contacts will be of that nature.

The Duce—whom I immediately acquainted with your letter—and who was pleased at what you say in Mr. Chamberlain's name and your own—is following the development of the grave events which are disturbing Europe with that attention and in that spirit with which you are familiar. He, more than any other, sees with profound anxiety the possible consequences of this war in the social field, and recognises in it a factor particularly favourable to a re-awakening of all those forces which are destructive of European civilisation. In his opinion, it is not sufficient, in order to combat this peril, to strike at the germ-carriers among the organisers and organisations of international subversion—the germs of social subversion are themselves in the air, in the disorders and the sufferings which the conflict has produced and will produce to an ever greater degree.

While postponing to another time and another place any consideration of what has happened, you express the wish to continue to collaborate in the same spirit in the common interests of our two countries and for the even greater aim of an international understanding. This is also precisely our attitude. I consider it a fitting occasion to assure you that the Duce intends to do all that he can, both now and in the future, not only to prevent any spread of the conflict, but also to limit it and bring it to an end as soon as those physical conditions exist which will enable the peoples of Europe—who, without exception, have the utmost need of it—to be assured of twenty years of peace.

With my best regards to Mr. Chamberlain, I am, believe me, dear Lord Halifax,

Yours sincerely,

CIANO.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 16th September, 1939—XVII

This morning I received the French Ambassador, François-Poncet, on his return from Paris. He told me that in France he had conferred with Daladier and with the other most important members of the Government, and that after these conversations he had formed the conviction that, in France, any idea of reaching an agreement with Germany within a relatively short space of time has now been abandoned, and that they were preparing to carry on the war until one side was exhausted. Nevertheless, he was still of the

opinion that one should not *a priori* discard the possibility of an agreement; in fact, if Hitler, having won the war in Poland, had put forward reasonable proposals, he, François-Poncet, would have recommended his Government to examine the possibility of an agreement with care. This agreement would have been all the more possible if the Duce, who in his own person and as Head of Fascist Italy represents the only effective force in Europe today, had been willing to take in hand the control of the negotiations. He felt it his duty to add, however, that the Duce would, on the other hand, have had to abstain from any intervention if Hitler's proposals had not appeared from the beginning to be such as to render the agreement possible. Mussolini's prestige is too valuable a card to be thrown away for nothing.

François-Poncet is unable to say at the present day what conditions in post-war Europe should be or what shape should be given to it internationally in order to ensure a long period of peace to its peoples. He is, however, of the opinion that the only solution is to bring into existence a European Directorate of the Great Powers.

As far as relations between France and Italy are concerned, M. François-Poncet said that the attitude assumed by the Fascist Government has been greatly appreciated in Paris, and that every effort will be made to ensure that that attitude is maintained. France will therefore seek to take every precaution to avoid any incident which might compromise relations between the two countries, just as she will avoid confronting Italy with precise questions as to its attitude and intentions. I replied to François-Poncet that—as I had already done in the case of the British Ambassador—I noted what he had communicated to me with great pleasure; I had, in fact, to stress that any attempt to place Italy with her back to the wall would only result in a stiffening in our attitude and in our being forced to take up a position directly opposed to that country which had attempted to impose a line of conduct upon us.

François-Poncet said that he fully understood what I had told him and that our situation had been understood by everyone in Paris. General Gamelin, who had personally had occasion to tell him that Italy would emerge from her neutrality strengthened, both militarily and economically, and that this strengthening of Italy's position could not but be pleasing to France, had shown himself to be particularly in favour of the Italian attitude.

François-Poncet then added that the French Government is ready to consider discussions in order to reach a solution of those problems still outstanding between France and Italy. He has had instructions on the subject and can begin negotiations at any minute with the hope of speedily arriving at a satisfactory understanding. However, in view of current events, France is not taking the initiative in proposing the negotiations; she leaves it to Italy to choose the opportune moment.

M. François-Poncet then explained to me the concern of the French Government over possible complications in the Balkans. He asked me if I had any news of a possible Russian intervention which, from many indications, now seemed probable to the French Government. I replied that I had no precise evidence to judge by, but that it was undeniable that some indications had in the last few days suggested that possibility.

François-Poncet said that the French Government has serious reasons to fear that, once Poland is beaten, Germany is thinking of a rapid action to occupy Rumania. Should this happen, it is evident that the whole equilibrium in the Balkans would be upset and that the war would automatically spread to that sector. Italy herself could not be indifferent to the event in view of the predominant interests which Italy has in the Balkan peninsula. In the event of a German attack on Rumania, France proposes to send an expeditionary corps to the Balkans to oppose the German invasion. For this purpose she is concentrating forces in Syria under the command of General Weygand.¹ In view of the Italian interests in the Balkan region, however, the French Government is anxious to let it be known that it will take no steps in the Balkans, even purely defensive ones, without previous agreement with the Fascist Government.

I took note of what M. François-Poncet had communicated to me, and in answer to a question by him, said that we had no information of any German intention of attacking Rumania.

After having examined some questions of secondary importance with M. François-Poncet, we parted with the agreement to maintain such contacts as are rendered necessary by the present situation but for obvious reasons to avoid publicity being given to them through the Press.

M. François-Poncet made a point of giving the whole conversation a tone of cordiality inspired, in particular, by the faith which France places in the loyal attitude of Italy.

Towards the end of September it was rumoured that Ribbentrop was about to make another trip to Moscow. There was talk of a formal military alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union, of the annexation of Bessarabia and other Balkan provinces by the U.S.S.R., and of Rumania proper—including the oil fields—by the Reich; but nothing definite was known, not even in Rome, where Germany's silence caused amazement and growing anxiety. On 26th September Ribbentrop, who was preparing to leave for Moscow, refused to receive Attolico on the pretext that he had no time. Two

¹General Maxime Weygand, from the end of 1917 C.G.S. of the Allied Forces in France; 1919, Secretary-General of the Allied Military Committee at Versailles; 1923, High Commissioner for Syria; from 1931 to 1935, Vice-President of the Supreme War Council. Recalled to France in 1940, C.-in-C. of the French armies during the second phase of the battle of France; later, under the Vichy Government, in command of the French Forces in North Africa.

ONE LAST TRY

days later it was learned that Berlin and Moscow had reached agreement on a series of points, including the fourth partition of Poland. In Rome it was believed that the Germans intended to make these agreements the basis of a final attempt to break off the war in the West; an attempt for which they would certainly have to enlist Italian support. This conjecture was proved correct on the 30th, when Ribbentrop telephoned Ciano proposing a meeting between Mussolini and the Fuehrer; his alternative suggestion was that Ciano should visit Berlin where the Fuehrer would be happy to see him. So as not to bring Mussolini into play too soon it was decided that Ciano should accept the invitation to Berlin, and—so great was the Duce's and his Foreign Minister's worry over Hitler's secretive and disloyal policy—that he should go at once. Thus at 6 o'clock in the evening of the same day he left for the German capital.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Berlin, 1st October, 1939—XVII

The impression produced on the German people by the announcement of my visit was that of a new peace move. I must add that there also contributed to the creation of this state of mind the fact that many extraordinary measures taken on the outbreak of hostilities with Poland such as the black-out in the cities, the prohibition of dancing in public places, etc., were slackened or abolished outright on the same day. And it is perhaps to this impression that the particularly warm welcome is to be attributed which was reserved for me both during the journey and on my arrival in Berlin by the crowds which had spontaneously assembled near the stations and along the line.

Ribbentrop, who, from our first meeting, made a point of giving our conversations a markedly cordial tone, said that he did not wish to anticipate any of what Hitler would communicate to me in person. He added that he, personally, was sceptical as to the possibility of settling the crisis between Germany and the Western Powers, and that, with complete confidence in the triumphal success which German arms would win in the conflict, it was hoped that the solution of the dispute would be entrusted to force.

Hitler received me in the new Chancellery. He looked more tired than usual but seemed calmer than he had been when the Salzburg conversations took place. Throughout the whole interview, which lasted for some three hours, he was extremely cordial and every time the Duce was mentioned took the occasion to repeat his expression of friendship and of personal sympathy for the Leader of Fascism.

The first part of Hitler's statement was devoted to an explanation of what happened in Poland.

Germany began the operations with a force of 120-121 divisions, not counting the territorial forces. Of these divisions, 70 were sent to the east but not all to the Polish front, since some were moved towards Lithuania and others were placed in depth in the direction of Posnan. The number of divisions actually employed for the offensive was 60, but only a part—35 or 40—had real contact with the enemy. The losses up to 26th September amounted to 5,200 dead and 22,000 wounded, but, bearing in mind that there are also some hundreds of missing, it can be estimated that the German dead reach the figure of 6,000. These losses are considered negligible compared with the scope of the operations, for which 120,000 dead and 250,000 wounded had been allowed. Since the reserve divisions to replace these estimated losses were already in a state of readiness, Germany's effective forces amount to 152 divisions, each composed of 20-22 thousand men, without counting Corps troops—that is to say a regiment of heavy artillery, and specialist units from the engineers, railway companies, etc.

The Polish forces defeated by the German army amounted to 35 divisions, 36 cavalry regiments—whose behaviour was described by Hitler as simply heroic—15 fully armed reserve divisions and 15 reserve divisions with incomplete armament and no training. The material losses of the German army were very small and in any case largely made up for by material captured from the enemy. The number of Polish prisoners amounts to 650,000, while from two to three thousand have fallen into the hands of the Russians.

Hitler said that he was particularly anxious to give me these very precise figures on the operations in the east on 1st October, the day on which—with the surrender of Hela—the action against Poland could be declared definitely at an end.

He therefore wished to examine the situation with regard to the west. What has happened up to now on the French front has been characterised by a series of more or less theatrical efforts to make people believe in the existence of operations which, in actual fact, have not even been attempted. The French attacks have been on a very small scale and have not had the effect of making even a single German outpost withdraw. The situation on the front is such that the possibility of an Anglo-French attack cannot be entertained. If the war persists on this front it will be Germany which will have to find—and will find—the solution.

The war at sea is being waged by German submarines, which today are very numerous and efficient, but which in the course of a few months will be so numerous as to be able to hinder Anglo-French shipping effectively. Shipping sunk up to date amounts to 290 thousand tons. But this has been while observing the laws of a chivalrous war. It is obvious that, should the conflict continue, it will no longer be possible for these laws to be observed by the Germans, who will conduct the war at sea with the utmost decision

and all ships will be destroyed without previous warning and without over-much regard for the passengers, of whatever nationality, who may happen to be on board.

German superiority in the air is, of course, very evident. The Anglo-French Air Forces together are numerically and qualitatively too inferior to the German to represent a serious obstacle to mastery of the air. Up to now, the English have attempted only two attacks: the first time they lost 11 out of 24 planes; the second, 5 out of 6. On the very day when the Fuehrer was speaking to me 14 planes had been brought down on the Western front, of which 12 were English and 2 French, while the Germans had lost only 2 fighters. The proportion of losses up to now is 1 to 9. The first fighter squadron to operate on the Western front has shot down 44 Anglo-French machines and has had only 4 losses.

In these circumstances, and since for the last fortnight steps have been in progress to transfer the bulk of the German forces to the Western front, Hitler can at any minute begin effective operations against France. These operations cannot but have an offensive character and it is not permissible to have any doubts as to their results. None of the obstacles which France believes to be able to oppose to the march of the German army is such as to cause any anxiety. The Maginot Line can be overcome and that perhaps with much greater ease than had been expected. Hitler repeats that, should the war have to continue, he does not intend to make the country weary by a long period of waiting and even less to give his enemies the advantage of time, which they are feverishly seeking. He is ready for the offensive and will take advantage of his lead in preparedness with the utmost speed.

Having first made these statements on the military situation, Hitler went on to talk of the political situation which has arisen in the east as a result of the break-up of Poland and the conclusion of the agreement with Russia. He considers that agreement to be very strong indeed, and such as to prevent the possibility of friction between the Germanic and Slav worlds for a long time to come. Clarity was the basis of every decision—the Russian and German zones of influence were marked out beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. It is to the common interest of Germany and Russia to live in a state of peaceful collaboration from which both nations will derive inestimable advantages. Germany is completely uninterested in what Russia will do in the new territories assigned to her. Russia is the same as regards German decisions on this side of the Bug. Today, Hitler has still not definitely fixed what status he intends to give to the Polish territory which has remained in his power. In principle he is willing to ensure to Poland a form of State which will guarantee 'the peaceful development of Polish national life,' but there are three fundamental conditions to which that organism must conform.

Firstly, it must be confined within frontiers which will ensure the return to the Reich of all the German minorities even where they have to a large extent intermingled with the Slav population.

Secondly, this State must not, for any reason, be able to become a centre of propaganda and intrigue against Germany.

Thirdly, it must not represent an obstacle to Soviet-German collaboration.

On my asking whether he intended the future Polish State to be, although in a reduced form, a sovereign State, he did not give a definite answer, but added to the conditions given above that this State must never be a military power and that it must recognise German political and economic interests to be predominant and protected as such. (At this point Ribbentrop intervened in the conversation to say that the future Polish State ought not to have the power to maintain contacts with foreign Powers, but should leave that task to Germany. Hitler more or less assented.)

The Fuehrer said that he does not intend to take over direct control of Polish national life because the misery of the country is terrifying and perhaps not even a century's work would be sufficient to alleviate it. He is not, however, willing to permit any form of State organisation until after the peace settlement with the Western Powers, and until the ethnographic situation of his country has been improved as a result of large population movements which he is at present studying and which he proposes to carry out as quickly as possible. It is in connection with these movements that he will find some areas particularly suitable to receive 'the Dolomite Germans' who are preparing to leave Italy, as well as the German minorities from Hungary and 'from other eastern countries'—minorities which he intends to bring home for ever within the territory of the Reich.

In reply to a question by me, he answers that the new Polish State might contain between 8 to 10 million inhabitants; the remainder would remain within the German frontiers, except for some two million which have now passed under Soviet rule. (It is worth while underlining that the Germans now put the Polish population at only 14 to 15 million inhabitants. I recall that at Salzburg Hitler himself always spoke of 20 million Poles.)

These are, in general, the ideas which the Fuehrer is elaborating on the future of Poland. In the speech which he will shortly give to the Reichstag, he proposes to announce them to the world, together with his decision to collaborate with the other Powers, when peace has been established, for the solution of those problems which are disturbing the equilibrium of the world, and in particular disarmament, security, free trade. The speech which Hitler will make to the Reichstag will represent the last—I repeat, last—warning he intends to address to France and England before passing to action. He does not have too many illusions as to the possibility of his

offer being accepted. But it will have the effect of placing the responsibility for the continuation of the conflict on the democracies. Thereafter, he does not intend to take any other steps and has decided to settle the dispute by resource to force 'to such an extent and in such a form as will surprise even those who up to now have had the most complete faith in the superiority of the Reich.'

'I have already informed the Duce that he can render me a valuable service by forming and heading a bloc of neutral States. It is in these neutral States that one may notice at present, owing to the discomforts and difficulties they have to face, markedly bad conditions which are being exploited by Anglo-French propaganda. The Duce, by making himself leader of these States, will counteract that activity, and the German cause will greatly gain thereby. But the Duce must bear in mind that, if Germany fights, the struggle will decide not only the destiny of Germany but also of Italy. The fate of Fascism is closely bound up with the fortunes of National Socialism. I tell you now—as I told you at Salzburg—that with regard to the Western democracies, even when allowance has been made for all the aid they may receive from third powers, I am mathematically certain of victory. Germany today is different from Germany twenty-five years ago; nothing has been overlooked, everything is ready down to the smallest details. Our offensive weapons are such as to overcome any enemy resistance, our defensive weapons such as to counter any action attempted against us. In any case, repeat to the Duce my conviction that Italy's absence from the struggle and the defeat of Germany represent for Italy the end of her great imperial aspirations in the Mediterranean.'

Ribbentrop: 'I am of the opinion that in the present circumstances, Germany must proceed forthwith to settle the situation by means of force.'

Hitler: 'Many people think like Ribbentrop. Particularly the army, which is now impatient to fight against the French and which considers victory already won. I will still make the speech to the Reichstag and that will be the last attempt, but I tell you that if Italy were willing to march with me immediately I would not even pronounce that speech, but would have resource to force at once in the certainty that Italy and Germany united can, in a very short time, beat France and England and settle their accounts with these countries once and for all. I know that one of the principal reasons which has held back the Duce from immediate intervention in the conflict has been the lack of anti-aircraft defence in Italy. Tell the Duce from me that the best protection is not artillery but the terror at the reprisals which we are ready to carry out. If today not a single bomb has been made to explode on German territory that is not principally due to the fact that we possess a large number of excellent anti-aircraft guns, but rather to the certainty that, four hours after an attack on a German city, I would carry the offensive into

the heart of England and of France in such a way as literally to devastate London and Paris.'

At this point, I began to speak in order to explain to the Fuehrer the reasons which underlie Italy's present line of conduct and to stress that we have never made a declaration of neutrality but confined ourselves to stating that we would not take the initiative in military operations where Germany herself had not taken it, and, on the contrary, stated that she did not intend to do so. I further stressed that a large part of the French forces is contained on our continental and African frontiers; I stressed the fact that many States have remained neutral as a result of our attitude, and finally spoke of the very intensive military preparations which Italy is carrying out precisely with a view to developments in the conflict, and to the possibility that she may have to reconsider her attitude to it.

Hitler made a point of informing me in the most explicit and cordial manner that he considers that the attitude taken by Italy has up to now been more useful to Germany than an immediate intervention by us in the struggle. He believes, however, that at a certain moment, Italy will have to profit from the favourable possibilities which will present themselves in order to join resolutely in the fray.

To deal more directly with the development of the situation in the near future, he confirms that after having made the speech in the Reichstag he does not intend to make any further advances nor does he wish them to be made. He will wait to see the Anglo-French reactions. Thereafter, he will find it extremely welcome and useful to learn the opinion of the Duce, and then fresh contact—possibly between the two leaders themselves—may be extremely useful.

On my turning to the topic of the advisability of as far as possible preserving the form of the new Polish State's constitution so as to allow France and England the opportunity of negotiating and yet saving their faces, he repeated that he had not yet made his final decision on the subject, but that he did not, in any event, intend to concede anything beyond what he had previously stated.

In the course of the conversation other topics were touched on more quickly.

Balkans: He does not consider that anything is likely to occur in that region for the moment. The constitution of a block of neutrals may have the effect of crystallising the present very useful situation. As far as Rumania is concerned, any attack by a foreign Power can be excluded in the present circumstances. That will hold good so long as Rumania maintains her attitude of strict neutrality. Should, however, Bucharest modify that line of policy, Germany will encourage the attack on Rumania and will help Russia, Hungary and Bulgaria, which will be the countries destined to liquidate the Rumanian situation, with all means available. Germany has no

ambitions where Rumania is concerned. Just as was the case with Italy, so too with Russia, the spheres of influence have been fixed and Germany intends to respect them strictly. He took the opportunity to tell me once again that he considers Italy to be the country which must become the absolute master of the Mediterranean with predominating interests in all those countries of the Balkan peninsula directly in contact with the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. Germany is not interested in these parts and is, on the contrary, ready to support any Italian initiative which aims at increasing our sway.

America: The Fuehrer is fully aware of the fact that America may be considered completely won over to the cause of the democracies. He says, however, that American aid may be very small once submarine warfare—conducted by methods which he intends to adopt—rapidly deprives the United States, as well as her associates, of the ships necessary for large scale transport.

Japan: Hitler considers that Japan is for the moment too much taken up with its problems in Asia to intervene in the conflict. He is, however, equally certain that as soon as Britain's position is made insecure by the blows which will be inflicted by the Reich, Japan will profit by the favourable opportunity to improve her situation and expand at England's expense.

The conversation, which, as I have said, lasted for almost three hours, was marked by frank cordiality on the part of the Fuehrer, who wished several times to underline his appreciation of the collaboration given to him by Italy, while not concealing a feeling, which I would define as one of regret, at the fact that we did not at once enter into the armed conflict at the side of Germany. I cannot conceal the fact that when he spoke of 'the end of Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean' in the event of a German defeat, he gave me the impression of addressing to Italy an invitation to collaborate militarily with him, but I must add that this was done with extreme delicacy and without exerting the slightest form of pressure.

If I were to state that the Fuehrer unreservedly prefers a solution by war to a possible political agreement, it would be arbitrary and perhaps imprudent of me. While, with regard to Poland, he did not even psychologically leave open an approach to the possibility of conciliation, the same does not now hold with regard to the Western Powers. On the fields of Poland he has won that military prestige—he himself said so—which National Socialism needed. Today, to offer his people a solid peace after a great victory, is perhaps an aim which tempts Hitler. But, if in order to reach it he had to sacrifice, even to the smallest degree, what seem to him the legitimate fruits of his victory, he would then a thousand times prefer battle. Certainty of his superiority over the adversary is a factor which encourages his intransigence, just as the influence of

Ribbentrop, who does not conceal his extreme views on military matters, has the effect of making the Fuehrer's attitude more rigid towards the Western Powers.

Nothing of particular importance arose from the succeeding conversations which I had with Ribbentrop. He is more and more infatuated with Russia, on the subject of which he expresses himself in apologetic terms while making the greatest reservations as to Soviet efficiency. He got to the point of saying that among the members of the Politbureau and of the Comintern he felt himself as comfortable as amongst the old guard of Nazism or the old squadristi . . . And when I asked what value one must attach to the Anti-Comintern Pact, he dropped the question saying that the Comintern no longer exists and that Stalin has become in effect the champion of Russian nationalism. Concurrently with the growth in Ribbentrop's heart of this new love for the Soviets, his old passion for Japan, which is no longer (as he used to say) one of the fundamental forces in the modern world, an invincible nation, a heroic people, etc., etc., but is instead some Asiatic State or other which has the misfortune to be governed by a clique of not very intelligent and very backward militarists, has disappeared.

In the last conversation I had with Ribbentrop, he showed himself—perhaps owing to the Fuehrer's influence—less extreme than he had been in the preceding conversations and said that he, too, should it appear possible, will favour a peaceful solution. Nevertheless he still remained doubtful of the possibility of achieving it.

In the practical field and as far as the immediate future is concerned we agreed on the following:

1. No move will be made before Hitler's speech, which will be made on Thursday or Friday.
2. Once the speech has been made and the first Anglo-French reactions have appeared, Ribbentrop and I will again contact in order to exchange information on the new situation.
3. When events render it advisable, a new meeting can take place. Ribbentrop, in a personal capacity, urges that in that case it should be the two leaders who meet on the Brenner.

XXVIII

ITALY ON THE BRINK

8th November—6th December, 1939.

The 'phoney war' had now lasted for two months in the west and the positions of the opposing armies were almost exactly those of the first days of the war since, in October, German troops had retaken the forest of Wandt, which had been occupied by the French in the month of September. Everything was at a standstill, as if awaiting something, although there was no longer any reasonable prospect of compromise and of a peaceful settlement. On 6th October, the Fuehrer had spoken in the Reichstag offering peace 'before millions of persons shed their blood for no reason and property worth millions is destroyed.' But he had completely avoided dealing with the concrete problems, with the restitution which London and Paris demanded, now not only in regard to Poland, but also Austria and Czechoslovakia, the other victims of Nazi aggression. The French and British Governments declared, on the same evening, that they were not prepared even to discuss unsatisfactory and evasive proposals. Only the U.S.S.R., in the Baltic region, hastened to collect the fruits of the agreement of 24th August; while, in Italy, Fascism was an undecided spectator of events, subject to the pressure of public opinion, which was averse to the German alliance and even more hostile to a war fought at Germany's side. Ciano put pressure on Mussolini to make up his mind to draw the inevitable conclusion from German behaviour in the last few months. But he was more anti-German in word than in deed. He vacillated without coming to a decision, concerned at possible German reaction to his abandonment of the policy of close collaboration and tormented by the fear of losing the share of the booty which he believed was due to him.

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ATTOLICO.

Rome, 8th November, 1939—XVII

No. 7574

Personal.

Dear Attolico,

From the conversation you had with Ribbentrop on 2nd inst. and to which you made reference in your report of the 6th, it emerges that in spite of the evidence of the events which took place

in the days preceding the outbreak of the conflict, and in spite of the fact that there was subsequently no lack of clarity on our side (see the Goering-Teucci conversation), there exists in these circles a strange misconception of what our attitude was.

The continued existence of this state of mind in Ribbentrop is particularly unjustified, since he knows perfectly, in every detail, Italy's activities, and has been a witness of the perfect and scrupulous loyalty with which Italy always expressed her thoughts, indicated the perils of the situation in a timely manner and, finally, used all the weight of her diplomatic influence, for which the Fuehrer himself has expressed his thanks to the Duce.

It is quite probable that, as you say, Ribbentrop is chiefly concerned with justifying himself. But we cannot allow interpretations and states of mind, which are today perhaps fluid and undecided, to crystallise to our disadvantage in contempt of the most elementary truths. It is therefore necessary for you, once and for all, to make it clear to Ribbentrop that his statements on the causes of England's intervention—attributed by him chiefly to the knowledge of Italian neutrality—are completely arbitrary, and categorically contradicted by the diplomatic history of those days.

Indeed, quite apart from the fact that England, long before the last crisis in August, had repeatedly and officially stated her decision to go to war should an attack on Poland by the Reich take place (a point which was repeatedly underlined by me during the Salzburg conversations), it is an established fact that, at the decisive moment, England's decisions could not be influenced by the Italian attitude since Italy's non-belligerency was learned of only from the *communiqué* of the Council of Ministers of 1st September, that is to say when the German troops had already invaded Poland, thus giving rise to the automatic fulfilment of that Anglo-Polish Assistance Pact which—it is worth repeating—was signed as far back as 25th August.¹

Again, the military measures taken by Italy in prompt support of the German action certainly could not convince the English of Italy's abstention, of which absolutely no one could be informed before the Duce himself had decided on it on 1st September, and this is proved, among other things, by the fact that, on the evening of 31st August, the English Government interrupted telephone and telegraphic communications with Italy as well as with Germany and did not re-establish them until next day. The reasons for Italy's abstention, as Ribbentrop well knows, are set out in documents²

¹On the 25th August there had been signed in London an Anglo-Polish treaty of mutual assistance which put on a permanent basis the collaboration between the two countries provided for in the assurances of unilateral assistance given by Great Britain to the Polish Government on 31st March, 1939, and in the preliminary mutual assistance agreement with Poland of which Chamberlain informed the House of Commons on 6th April, 1939.

²Obviously a reference to the *aide-mémoire* by Mussolini, which Ciano had brought with him to the Salzburg meeting on 12-13th August.

which are irrefutable, if not familiar to the public.

To attribute England's intervention to Italian non-belligerency is therefore to state a falsehood, and that same loyalty which we have always maintained towards Germany makes it imperative for us not to allow any misunderstandings to exist on this score. Moreover, misunderstandings should not exist since, in his telegram of 1st September (which the Government in question has not yet wished to make known to the German people), the Fuehrer thanked the Duce for the diplomatic and political aid furnished to Germany by Italy.

Please draw Ribbentrop's attention to the above and do not fail to inform me of his reaction to this statement of ours, which is by its nature fundamental to our present and future relations with Germany.

• LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN,
ATTOLICO.

Rome, 24th November, 1939—XV₁₁₁

No. 8070

Strictly personal.

Dear Attolico,

As you will have seen from yesterday's *communiqué*, the Grand Council has been called for 7th December in the Palazzo Venezia.¹

It will certainly not pass unnoticed what importance this meeting of the supreme body of the Regime—the first which has taken place since the beginning of the conflict—will assume in the present circumstances, and it would undoubtedly be extremely useful if by that date it were more clear what the intentions of German governing circles are with regard to plans of campaign and to diplomatic action.

I therefore consider it advisable for you—without however making it the subject of a *démarche*—to find an occasion to draw the attention of Ribbentrop to these circumstances and to the advisability—given the imminence of the meeting of the Grand Council—of giving us a clearer idea of Germany's intentions.

You can add that this request is due to the fact that, the meeting of the Grand Council being close at hand, you would consider it necessary to come to Rome for consultations, in particular in order to produce all the conclusive data on the intentions of the Reich.

I add for the sake of clarity:

1. That you must not make any *démarche*;
2. That you must, instead, ask for information without putting forward any suggestion on our side.

Yours cordially, . . .

¹The meeting of the Grand Council did in fact take place on that day. At it the following were reaffirmed—the Italo-German alliance, the Italo-Albanian union, non-belligerence and the decision to protect Italian maritime traffic.

The measures taken by Great Britain to ensure the sea blockade of Germany produced towards the end of November serious difficulties for Italian shipping, particularly in the case of the transport of coal from the Rhine ports to the peninsula. This traffic was of capital importance for the Italian economy in so far as the greatest part of her coal requirements was imported by sea from Germany. A reduction of it or a slowing-down would inevitably have an adverse effect on Italy's entire productive capacity. On several occasions the British Ambassador to Rome and Ciano dealt with the matter, but in a spirit of marked moderation on both sides, since this was the period when Ciano and others were convinced that Italy could be detached from the alliance of 22nd May.

LETTER TO THE BRITISH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, LORD HALIFAX.

No. 8311

Rome, 3rd December, 1939—XVIII

Dear Lord Halifax,

I greatly appreciated your letter of 25th November, and am happy to assure you that I cordially reciprocate your sentiments. I have already resumed the conversations with Sir Percy Loraine on the questions which interest our two countries, and am sincerely convinced that these exchanges of views will continue in the same spirit of trust which has characterised them up to now.

In this spirit, and following your suggestion of friendly collaboration between us, I wish to draw your personal attention to a question which I consider most serious and urgent.

You are certainly aware of the grave difficulties which our merchant shipping encounters as a result of the French and English control system at sea. These difficulties had, up to a certain point, been foreseen by us from the beginning of hostilities; and to diminish them and avoid friction and incidents we have since then shown our willingness to co-operate with the British authorities and have received your proposals favourably, particularly as regards ships voluntarily putting in at the control ports. This was done on your side and on ours on the clear understanding that it would make the control operations more easy and more rapid. But I must say that the results have so far been extremely unsatisfactory. Those of our ships which have gone spontaneously or have been directed to your ports have been held up in these ports for a longer period than can be considered reasonable and necessary, and the procedure followed during the inspections is assuming a character which I do not hesitate to define as annoying.

I attach a list of those of our ships which have been held up in your ports for varying periods of time and you yourself will be able

ITALY ON THE BRINK

to establish that detentions of these ships have always lasted several days and often some weeks.

You certainly realize the grave losses which these delays entail for our shipping and for our commerce and even for our normal supplies, and I consider it necessary to stress these facts. But I wish to call your particular attention to the gravity of this question and to the irritation which these losses and the obstacles placed in the way of our trade are causing among the Italian public, and the unsatisfactory result which they have on Anglo-Italian relations. I consider that this must be avoided and am sure that you share my opinion, and that our collaboration—to which both of us attach great importance—will allow this matter to be settled in a satisfactory manner.

With renewed thanks for your letter, believe me . . .

Italo-German contacts continued to take place, although they were increasingly cool as a result of the attitude of the Reich towards the Finnish war, which had broken out on 30th November on the margin—as it were—of the 'phoney war.' Dr. Ley, leader of the Arbeitsfront, came to Italy at the beginning of December in order to meet the Minister for Corporations, Cianetti; but probably also to ascertain personally the significance of the large scale reshuffle of the Fascist Government carried out by Mussolini at the end of October, in which several personal friends of Ciano figured. Ley met Mussolini, and naturally Ciano, too, who did not have an excessively high opinion of him.

CONVERSATION WITH DR. LEY.

6th December, 1939—XVIII

Count Ciano points out to Dr. Ley that the Duce was greatly interested in his statement on the situation and intentions of the Reich, and particularly appreciated what Dr. Ley told him of the Fuehrer's thoughts on current events. The Duce has paid special attention to the most recent expressions of German policy and in this connection Count Ciano asks Dr. Ley for some details on the future, as a State, of the Polish territory occupied by the Reich and on its future administration. Dr. Ley begins by stating that the frontier between Germany and the U.S.S.R. remains the River Bug. That boundary has been definitely established. But it will be necessary to make a distinction between the frontier of the Reich properly speaking and the boundary of 'the interests' of the German Empire. The true boundary of the Reich includes the provinces of East Prussia, of West Prussia, the Wartegau and Silesia. These are the unalterable frontiers of the Reich. That territory, on the other hand, which is contained between the River Bug and the German State

above mentioned is Polish. In all this region, which is inhabited only by Poles, the Polish State will be set up. Between the Bug and the Vistula a province has been outlined which will be inhabited only by Jews to whom it will be forbidden to cross the Vistula, while they will be provided with the material necessary for the development of their interests in that region.

In reply to a question by Count Ciano as to the regime it is intended to give to this Polish State, Dr. Ley answers that, while not having any details on the subject, it can already be said that it will be a sort of Protectorate which, since it contains such great Polish centres as Cracow, Czestachowa, Warsaw and Lublin, will be able, firstly, to be called 'new Poland.' In order for this Poland to live, it is necessary, according to what the Fuehrer told him personally, that it should not become 'the base for actions directed against the Reich.' The Fuehrer makes this an indispensable condition for the existence of 'new Poland' and the authorities of the Reich will see to it that it is respected.

Count Ciano asks Dr. Ley what the Reich Government thinks of the situation in the Baltic and refers specially to the present moment in Finland. Dr. Ley refers to what the Fuehrer told him 'that is to say that Russia is not a problem of capital importance for the German people.' We neither overvalue nor undervalue Russia, says Ley. From the ideological point of view, anything the U.S.S.R. may attempt against the spiritual solidarity of the German people leaves us completely unaffected. Germany is and will in future be anti-Bolshevik. There has been talk of Soviet might, and the importance of the Soviet army has also been vaunted. We know the Soviet army and know that it cannot stand up to any decisive blow. On the contrary, to put it in one word, it is useless.

In reply to Count Ciano's specific question as to the fate of Finland, Dr. Ley answers that the Reich has no interest in the future of that country. We cannot say—he continues—that the behaviour of Finland towards Germany has been friendly. Not only has she never treated us well, but she has never been in the least grateful to Germany for the very great contribution she made to her independence.¹ The Fuehrer thinks that, similarly, Italy should have no grounds for sympathy with the Baltic States. The Fuehrer himself recalled that it was the Swede, Sandler,² who proposed sanctions

¹After the abdication of Czar Nicholas II., the new Russian Government in 1917 restored the parliamentary regime in Finland. But that almost immediately became the cause of conflict between Russians and Finns, since the former were unwilling to grant the latter too much autonomy. As a result on 6th December, 1917, Finland declared herself independent; but she had, immediately after, to ask for help against the double pressure of the Russian forces and the Finnish Red guards, who favoured a policy of settlement within the Russian State. Having met with a refusal from Sweden, Finland was helped by Germany which sent a corps of 12,000 men under the command of General Rudiger von der Goltz to support the Finnish White Guards commanded by General Mannerheim. Having entered Helsinki on 13th April, von der Goltz then defeated the Reds at Lahti between 30th April and 2nd May, 1919.

²R. J. Sandler, leading Swedish Social Democrat, Foreign Minister in the Hansson Cabinet from 1932 to 15th June, 1936, and again from 20th September, 1936.

against Italy. There has, moreover, always been a distinct ideological aversion towards Italy and Germany on the part of the Baltic States. We, however, would view the end of the conflict between the Soviets and Finland with satisfaction.

Count Ciano asks Dr. Ley what he thinks of that possibility, and the latter replies that the result is, in fact, problematic, whereupon Count Ciano wishes to know from Dr. Ley whether he does not consider that the U.S.S.R. has aims on the mineral riches of Sweden, underlining the fact that should the U.S.S.R. become involved in a conflict with Sweden, it might have some surprises since, although the Swedes have not fought for a hundred years, they are good soldiers, as history shows, and might put up a serious resistance. Dr. Ley says that he does not believe that Russia has aggressive aims against Sweden, and adds that, to his way of thinking, excessive importance is being attached to the Soviet's capacity and capabilities, thus attributing power to a country which is hampered by too many social and ethnical ills to be able to carry out a real expansionist policy.

Count Ciano observes that, in effect, Asia has come closer and closer to Europe. The danger is greater—he says—certainly not for a power like Germany, but chiefly for the small States and above all for the deficient organisations of the Balkan States. He cites the example of Bulgaria where Bolshevism coupled with Slavism can produce a real overthrow of the Government, and gives some details of Communist propaganda in Bulgaria, particularly in the student class, which impress Dr. Ley who insists, however, on the fundamental theme of German ability to tame the Slavs easily anywhere. In support of this assertion, Dr. Ley refers to Czarism, which, although having at its disposal a large organisation, did not frighten Germany in so far as its driving force was provided by Slavs. Still less—says Ley—does the Soviet Government, which has less vital energy and is practically disorganised, cause them to fear. Certainly Bolshevism has reached a decisive moment in its process of transformation and we must watch it closely, but realising, as we watch it, that the positions have not changed; Fascism and National Socialism are still in perfect antithesis to Communism and Marxism. The struggle between these ideologies will be decided not in the East but in the West. Both the Russian problem and the Balkan one will be resolved by the magnitude of the power which will result from the elimination of the Western democracies.

Dr. Ley dwells at length on the task which has fallen on Italy and Germany of settling this ideological conflict by defeating the democratic Powers. Once the Western democracies have disappeared—says Dr. Ley—there is no doubt that Russia will have to accept our conditions. At present the struggle has reached a point where it is simply a case of 'to be or not to be.' We cannot make any comparison with the last war nor attempt to portray the future on

the model of Versailles or of the other pacts which were drawn up in '19, since now the problem which presents itself is nothing more or less than the destruction of one side or the other. In a word: England or us.

On Count Ciano's asking if they are not thinking of a peaceful solution in Germany, Dr. Ley replies that that is now no longer possible. The Fuehrer—adds Dr. Ley—wanted peace and showed it up to the last by his attempts to settle the conflict. It is now clear that England wants war and that to the end. Count Ciano shares this opinion. Dr. Ley confirms that Germany is now firmly decided to carry on the war to the bitter end, always considering England as its real great enemy.

Obviously—says Dr. Ley—if the U.S.S.R. wished to take advantage of any moment in the conflict and, playing an incredible game of prestige politics, attempt in some way to upset our arrangements for our operations against England, then we should be forced to take up a position.

On Count Ciano's asking him if the U.S.S.R. can do anything of that nature, Ley replies that he has no definite information on the subject, and in answer to a specific question as to his opinion on a possible Soviet attack in order to take possession of Bessarabia, Dr. Ley responds that he, personally, does not believe that the U.S.S.R. wishes to undertake such a venture. In Finland—he says—the Russians have miscalculated. They believed that Finland would give in and now they are involved in an incident which inevitably leads to large scale warlike operations. 'But I repeat that consideration of the U.S.S.R.'s task cannot make us lose sight of our essential goal; that is that we must eliminate the Western States in order to form another and decisive grouping of forces. It would be an immense danger if England and France were to emerge unscathed from the struggle. I do not know what Moscow wants, but we will do everything to turn her towards Asia and if possible to keep her in Asia, to which she belongs by reason of both her spiritual make-up and her interests.' Count Ciano, at this point, points out to Dr. Ley that Japan will not be able to watch indifferently the attempt to make Russia emerge as the dominating factor in the political life of Asia. Dr. Ley says that he has not been able to speak to the Fuehrer on this subject, but that his personal opinion is at all times based on the necessity of eliminating England at all costs before one can face the Soviet problem with its repercussions in Asia and Europe. Count Ciano brings the conversation round to the immediate war aims of Germany, to the probability of an offensive and to the period when he presumes that this will be undertaken. Dr. Ley says that the Fuehrer is of the opinion that a good National Socialist, that is to say a good soldier, cannot obtain successes by defensive action. The life and tactics of the Fuehrer teach this very point: successes are obtained only by offensives. The

West Wall¹ was not made to be a lair. We have constructed it solely in order to launch an attack from it. The Fuehrer has firmly decided to eliminate England and he is disposing his forces—and he is sure of success—so that within a year no ship will be in a position to leave the English ports. In a word, we want to do away with the bridge-head which the English have built on the French coast and thus to eliminate England's base of operations in Europe. Dr. Ley states at this point that German military power has been increased from 152 to 176 divisions. This increase of 24 divisions has been brought about by the tactical necessities of the Western front and all the 176 divisions are in the West, since only territorial troops have been left in Poland.

On Count Ciano's asking where the bulk of the army is at present concentrated, Dr. Ley replies that he cannot say precisely, not having been told by the Fuehrer.

Coming to speak of Belgium and Holland, Count Ciano asks Ley what foundation there is for the recent rumours of a probable passage of the German troops through these two States. Count Ciano recalls in this connection that to him the Fuehrer had almost ruled out the possibility of the General Staff's raising the question. Dr. Ley replies that it is the intention of the Fuehrer to respect Belgium and Holland so long as these two States are really neutral. The recent case of Stevens and Best² has shown us only too well that Holland is far from neutral. As the Duce has said, the Chief of Staff of the Dutch Army has been dismissed as the result of the arrest of these two Englishmen. The person who was killed in the exchange of shots which followed the arrest of the two Englishmen was no other than a Dutch officer. Indeed Germany has protested to the Hague in this connection. At all events the Fuehrer is very critical of the attitude of Holland.

To a specific question by Count Ciano as to whether the relations between Holland and the Reich must be regarded as unsatisfactory, Dr. Ley answers 'I cannot say because the question is outside my sphere. The neutral States hate us but I must say that they also hate Italy. Moreover, neither you nor we can expect any benefit from them. I wish to recall that during the last war Holland was always on Britain's side. It is necessary to state that Best, now arrested as an agent of the Secret Service, was as far back as 1917 in charge of the department for anti-German espionage there.

Count Ciano then asks Dr. Ley what resistance he believes

¹The West Wall was ostensibly intended as an answer to the Maginot Line, and as evidence of the Reich's policy of non-aggression towards France. It was begun in 1938 and was feverishly continued until the outbreak of war and beyond it.

²Stevens and Best were two British intelligence agents in Holland. They believed themselves to be in touch by wireless with subversive elements in Germany, but their communications were in fact controlled by the Gestapo. In obedience to a faked message they attended a rendezvous at the Dutch-German frontier and were there captured and taken to Germany. A Dutch officer who accompanied them was shot dead.

Holland can put up, especially if she puts into operation her system of flooding. Ley answers that he cannot express any opinion on the subject because he is not informed, but referring to Germany's need to have at all costs a foothold in France which will allow her to beat England, he says: 'I am convinced that the Maginot Line can be overcome, and I am convinced that we possess the means to overcome it.' And on Count Ciano's asking him whether Paris is included in the plan of this advance, he replies that he is not in a position to know, but that doubtless Germany will do everything in her power to gain possession of a large coastal strip of France. To Count Ciano's other questions as to the possibility of a winter operation, Dr. Ley says that he is not in a position to reply, since he is not familiar with the military plans; but his information is that the Fuehrer is determined to watch for the most propitious moment.

Dr. Ley agrees with Count Ciano that one must calculate that France and England are building up their strength. But one must not for that reason forget the prospects which present themselves to the German people, who have the firm intention of fighting to the end and are equally firmly convinced that they do not want to go to sleep behind the West Wall. As to the specific plan for military operations, he says that he is not in a position to speak of it, since such details are known only to a very narrow circle of persons. His reserve must therefore be considered more than understandable.

On the subject of a probable intervention by the United States and Japan, Dr. Ley, replying to a specific question by Count Ciano, first states that he has not spoken of it with the Fuehrer but adds that he considers that neither the United States nor Japan will attack. His assumption is based on the opposed interests of the two nations, and in the case of Japan on the line of conduct she followed in the last war and on the assurance which Tokyo demanded before entering the conflict. Dr. Ley adds that if the United States make a move against Germany, then Japan will certainly come to an agreement with the U.S.S.R. and put into operation a programme of anti-American naval activity in the Pacific. As far as United States aid to France and England is concerned, Dr. Ley considers it problematic since, although America is supplying a large quantity of modern arms to France, the latter has not sufficient manpower to use them. 'The Fuehrer'—continues Dr. Ley—'is convinced that the probability of victory has never in all history been so evident to Germany as now. Her armament, starting from the artillery, is excellent and has been brought to a pitch of perfection. Her military cadres are perfect and her troops numerous and well-trained. Her internal unity is complete, whatever the foreign Press may say about it. The last threads of the French spy net are now in the hands of the German police. In Warsaw we definitely discovered that French and Polish espionage used the same men and the same systems. We have therefore eliminated it

and with it the men who composed it. The Secret Service met its end with the arrest of the two Englishmen in Holland. Nor do we fear risings by Czechs or Poles; the Slav is fundamentally inactive and any seditious movement which may be attempted in the occupied territories causes no concern whatsoever. I add that the Skoda works and those in Viscoviz are working as they never worked in the days of Czechoslovakia.'

'I wish to conclude by saying that I have not come here to ask for help, but as an old friend of Italy to whom I have given infinite evidence of affection. I have lately had occasion to have long meetings with the Fuehrer and have often had the honour of being on intimate terms with him, of being admitted to his circle of close friends. The Fuehrer speaks of the Duce in terms of unequalled esteem and friendship. He has only one desire—to fortify and strengthen that friendship even in the course of the present whirlwind events. And the aim of my visit is no other than to make known this spirit of understanding, which is prevalent in all German ruling circles and is the wish of our leader.'

Count Ciano thanks Dr. Ley for his friendly expressions, requests him to convey to the Fuehrer his respects and adds that the position of Italy with regard to Germany, as the Duce said last night, is clear, being that defined in the Fuehrer's telegram to the Duce.

Dr. Ley expresses his thanks for the welcome he has received in Italy and requests Count Ciano to convey once again to the Duce his gratitude for his communication.

XXIX

ATTEMPTS AT BALKAN APPEASEMENT

22nd December, 1939—7th January, 1940.

As a result of the Munich meeting, as well as of the Vienna award of 2nd November, 1937, the international position of Hungary had undergone profound changes which were not settled until after the collapse of Czechoslovakia. On that occasion she had completed the revision of her north-eastern frontiers, making contact with Poland on the Carpathians. This took place, however, too late to give rise to the close understanding between Poland and Hungary which had been desired in vain for twenty years—but more by Budapest than by Warsaw—an understanding which would have worked in two ways: as a counterweight to the German thrust towards Eastern Europe, and as a barrier to Russian pressure towards the Balkans. Six months had not passed when, by virtue of the Soviet-German agreement, there appeared on the Hungarian frontier on the Carpathians, in place of the Polish frontier guards, the soldiers of the Red Army. And on 2nd February, Moscow had broken off relations with Budapest, three weeks before Hungary adhered to the Anti-Comintern Pact. On the other hand, at the beginning of the Polish campaign Hungary had refused to allow the passage of German troops which Berlin had requested in order to take the Polish positions in the rear. She did not intend to compromise herself in the eyes of the French and English nor to depart too far from prudent parallel action with Italy. It was an uncomfortable and always dangerous position which did not, however, prevent many Hungarians from insistently casting their eyes on Rumania, which in 1918 had incorporated in her territory the whole of Transylvania. A few days after the arrival of Russian soldiers on the northern frontier of Hungary, diplomatic relations were actually resumed between Moscow and Budapest on 22nd September; meanwhile the spheres of influence which Germany and the U.S.S.R. had mutually recognised in Eastern Europe were becoming clear. Rumania began to fear the development of Soviet defensive expansionism which could not but aim at the reconquest of Bessarabia and at least that part of the Lower Danube which Russia had lost in 1918. It would have been a good moment for a Hungarian-Rumanian bloc, which would also have suited Fascist policy, which was for a space interested in the formation of a group of neutral—or at least non-belligerent—states in the Balkans and the

ATTEMPTS AT BALKAN APPEASEMENT

Danube region, strong enough to keep in check any attempt at threatening the territorial or political independence of any of its members. Budapest and Bucharest were not averse to the plan; only Budapest wanted to make the price of her collaboration with Rumania the cession of Transylvania, although it was known that Bucharest would always turn down any proposal of that nature. This clash embarrassed and annoyed Rome.

LETTER TO THE MINISTER TO BUDAPEST, VINCI GIGLIUCCI.

No. 8750

Rome, December 22nd, 1939—XVIII

Dear Vinci,

In spite of the intense and dramatic events of the last months, which have direct repercussions on the Balkans and the Danube region, it is a long time since there have been meetings or direct contacts between the rulers of Italy and those of Hungary. It is true, on the other hand, that the Hungarians have never ceased to express in various forms their desire to maintain close contact and liaison with us.

As you know, I declined for obvious reasons, the invitation recently addressed to me by Horthy to hunt in Hungary. It would, however, be useful if Csaky,¹ taking as his excuse the need to rest for a few days, were to come to Venice at the beginning of January. In this way I could, as if by chance, profit by his presence in Italy to have a meeting lasting two or three days with him, which is necessary for a first-hand examination of the situation.

Express yourself to this effect, maintaining for the present the utmost reserve on the subject, and cable the result of your conversation.

Many cordial greetings.

CONVERSATION WITH THE RUMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, ANTONESCU.

Rome, 30th December, 1939—XVIII

On 26th December I received Antonescu; he explained to me the familiar Rumanian point of view and appealed to Italy. As regards Italy's general attitude to the Balkans, I repeated to him what I said in my recent speech.² Italy takes a direct interest in everything that

¹Count Stefan Csaky, Hungarian diplomat, from 1935 *chef de cabinet* of the Foreign Minister, Kánya, whom he succeeded on 10th December, 1938.

²In his speech to the Chamber on 16th December, 1939, Ciano had said on the subject of the Balkans: given that 'Italian policy towards that region is dictated by an interest whose reasons are to be sought in history, geography and tradition, as well as in fact that Italy, through the union with Albania, has also become a Balkan

happens in that part of Europe. She regards with the most profound sympathy any sign of the desire of the Danubian and Balkan countries to solve in a friendly manner the questions outstanding between them, and is ready to give her advice and her help to that end. More particularly with regard to Rumania's relations with Hungary, I told Antonescu that I am willing to speak to Budapest, recommending moderation and a spirit of conciliation. However, Rumania must also give evidence of good will, and it was particularly important to do things quickly and thereby hasten the understanding with Budapest which, in my opinion, represents the best which that country can possibly do in the present situation to reinforce its international position effectively. I added that should Russia attack Rumania and the latter offer armed resistance, Italy would not omit to give her assistance with all possible means.

CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNGARIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, COUNT CSAKY.

Venice, 6th—7th January, 1940—XVIII

With Count Csaky I made a general review of affairs, dwelling particularly on the following questions:

Russo-Hungarian Relations.—I told Csaky that in the event of a Russian attack it was impossible for us to supply the aid of large armed forces unless the question of freedom of passage between Italy and Hungary had been settled.

Count Csaky told me that, according to Hungarian information, a Russian attack on the Hungarian frontiers is not to be expected. On the contrary, such a possibility is said to be out of the question. In any case, in view of the performance of the Russian forces in Finland,¹ the Hungarian Government feels itself able to counter

Power, Italy, while she reaffirms her lively desire to see order and peace in the Balkans and the Danube region maintained and consolidated, does not consider that the formation of blocs of any kind can be useful either to the countries which would form them, or to the higher aim of hastening the re-establishment of peace.'

After having observed that the relations of Italy with Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary did not require 'new adjustments', since they were, in varying degrees, cordial and friendly, Ciano concluded: 'It is in the common interest of all these countries to preserve and secure the maintenance of peace in the Danubian and Balkan regions; for that reason Italy regards with profound sympathy any sign of the desire of these nations to solve in a friendly manner the questions outstanding between them, and is ready to give her advice and help to that end.'

¹Immediately after the end of the German campaign in Poland and the fifth partition of that State between Germany and the U.S.S.R. on 28th September, 1939, the Moscow Government asked on 5th October to begin negotiations of a political nature with the Finnish Government. They were begun in Moscow on 21st October, but faced with Finland's refusal to form a pact similar to those signed by the U.S.S.R. with the Baltic States, the Moscow Government denounced the non-aggression pact with Finland of 21st January, 1932, refused American mediation and invaded Finnish territory on 30th November. The resistance of the Finnish troops surpassed general expectations. More than a month after the beginning of operations Soviet progress was slight and their losses heavy.

any Russian attack provided she were supplied with help in the form of arms and possibly specialists.

Relations between Rumania and Hungary.—I placed Italy's verdict on the situation before Count Csaky and received the following reply. Hungary cannot make an agreement with Rumania which does not give complete satisfaction. By that is meant the complete cession of Transylvania up to the Carpathians. The maximum formulation of the programme contemplates 78,000 square kilometres with a total of 4,200,000 inhabitants, of whom, on the basis of Hungarian statistics themselves, only 37 per cent are Magyars, 50 per cent Rumanians and about 10 per cent Germans. The minimum programme contemplates, on the other hand, the cession of 50,000 square kilometres of territory with a population of 2,700,000 inhabitants, consisting of an almost identical percentage of Hungarians and Rumanians.

Csaky says that any agreement with Rumania which did not bring with it these territorial concessions would produce a revolt in Hungary and that no Government would be able to impose it on the country. However, the Hungarian Government is conscious of the needs of the moment and is prepared to postpone to a more propitious date the settlement of accounts with Rumania. For the present, she will do nothing which can weaken Rumanian resistance to Russia. Therefore Count Csaky requested me to inform the Rumanians of the following:

If Russia attacks Rumania and Rumania resists sword in hand, Hungary will adopt an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards Rumania. On the other hand, Hungary would immediately intervene should one of the three following cases arise:

1. The massacre of the minorities;
2. Bolshevik revolution in Rumania;
3. Cession by Rumania of national territory to Russia and Bulgaria without fighting.

Csaky added that even in that case nothing will be done without previous consultation and agreement with Italy.

From Csaky's statements I formed the conviction that the Hungarians are continuing and will in future continue to threaten the Rumanians, but that they will do nothing concrete and will take no military initiative unless they are certain of not meeting armed resistance.

Croatia.—Count Csaky expressed his concern at Italian activity in Croatia. According to information which has reached him—he says from Macek—Italy is preparing for moves in Croatia. Again according to this information, Italy is very unpopular in Croatia. The propaganda of the democracies has also had the effect of causing this unpopularity. In Csaky's opinion the Croat nation wishes to set up an independent state aligned more with Hungary. At all events, he fears that any Italian action in Croatia would have the

effect of setting the Balkans ablaze and compromising Hungary's situation itself. He therefore requests us to be good enough to postpone any move.

I replied that although we can count in Croatia on the sympathy of the broad masses of the people, and although we are aware of the details of the strong separatist movement in Zagreb, yet we are not carrying out nor do we intend to carry out at the present stage any action with the intent of disturbing the maintenance of peace in that sector. I had, however, to stress that Italy could not remain indifferent in face of the danger of Bolshevism asserting itself in Yugoslavia and particularly in Croatia. In such an event, we reserved the utmost liberty of action. I clearly reaffirmed that—in any case—Italy considers Croatia, Dalmatia and the adjoining regions to form part of her sphere of vital interests in which she does not allow interference by third States.

Relations with Germany.—I explained to Count Csaky the exact state of our relations with Germany, with which he was, however, already familiar from information received from his Minister in Rome. He fully agrees with our point of view and our attitude.

As far as Hungary is concerned, relations with Germany remain correct, although there is in public opinion a strong current of hostility—which is not unknown to Berlin—against the Reich. Csaky recognises that German pressure has relaxed recently, but that has not been sufficient to lessen the strong suspicions which exist among the Hungarian people as to Hitler's real intentions.

Relations with the Democracies.—Few contacts with France; closer and more cordial relations with London. In Budapest, too, an agreement of a commercial nature has recently been reached, which aims at lessening the difficulties caused by the application of the blockade.

In conclusion, Count Csaky repeated that Hungary intends to act in the closest agreement with Italy, thus giving rise to the feeling both in Germany and in the rest of the world that Hungary represents a force which is manoeuvred only by Rome. To this, as well as for internal reasons, he renewed the request in the name of the Regent that I should visit Budapest early in the spring. The Regent is very anxious to give a definite impression to the country and the outside world of the continuity of contacts with Rome and almost of directives emanating from it.

In connection with Italo-Hungarian relations, Count Csaky spoke of other questions on which I intend to present a verbal report.

1940

XXX

THE MISSION OF SUMNER WELLES TO EUROPE

24th February—16th March, 1940.

The delicate balance which Italy had maintained for some months was to all intents and purposes brought to an end in the month of February. Ciano was still rebellious, but with less and less conviction. On 3rd February the British Government put forward proposals for a trade agreement with Italy which would permit of the sale of war materials to Britain, and on the 8th February Ciano was forced to inform Sir Percy Loraine that Mussolini refused to sell war materials, although he realised that this meant that any possibility of acquiring raw materials within the British Empire was ruled out. London's answer was immediate. On the 17th, meeting him at a reception, the British Ambassador gave Ciano prior warning verbally that as from 1st March, his Government had decided to order the confiscation of the cargoes of ships carrying German coal direct to Italy. It was a very hard blow, but it would have been possible to avoid extreme measures had the Germans not skilfully fanned the flames of Mussolini's ill-repressed ambitions. Goering made no mystery of his distrust of the ally who yesterday was ready to march and was now instead, passive and reticent; and in Salzburg Ribbentrop likewise made his contemptuous attitude only too apparent.

It was still difficult to estimate the extent of the rupture between London and Rome, when the American Under-Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, arrived in Europe and visited the Italian capital. He was sent by Roosevelt to acquire first-hand knowledge of the European situation, but was not to give undertakings on behalf of the American Government, nor to advance proposals in the name of the United States. The information he acquired was to serve only to determine the general conduct of the United States towards other countries and the propitious moment for the conclusion of the peace. Sumner Welles's mission formed part of the development of American foreign policy, which for some time had been moving away from its traditional isolationism. In any case, isolationism was out of the question in view of the emergence of the United States as a world Power after the first world war. In his message to Congress on 3rd January, 1940, Roosevelt said that he hoped, in view of the world situation, there were not many 'American

THE MISSION OF SUMNER WELLES

ostriches.' Throughout 1939 Roosevelt continued to insist on the desirability of an honourable and democratic settlement of European problems. Several times he had gone out of his way to protest against the policy of violence, and at more than one fait accompli of the totalitarian Powers. Once the conflict had broken out, he had attempted to find a means of collaborating with all those forces sincerely desirous of peace, and had for this reason addressed a letter to the Pope on Christmas Eve. The message ended by expressing a wish to send a personal representative to the Vatican so that his and the Pope's efforts for peace might be co-ordinated. The Pope had replied on 7th January 'with grateful joy' to Roosevelt's initiative, recognising in it 'an exemplary act of fraternal and warm solidarity between the new and the old world, and as a defence against the cold blast of atheistical and anti-Christian, aggressive and destructive tendencies, which threaten to dry up the sources to which civilisation owes its birth and vigour.'

The language of the Pope was as clear as that of the President, but they could not hold back the Fascist machine on the slope it had begun to descend, irrevocably and disastrously. Towards the end of February Sumner Welles arrived in Rome.

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ATTOLICO.

Rome, 24th February, 1940—XVIII

No. 1-1358

Strictly personal.

Dear Attolico,

The note by Teucci on his conversation with Goering, which you transmitted with your report No. 1500 of the 17th instant, has been read here with great interest and the most important passages have been picked out.

In one of them it is reported that Goering had supposed initially that Italian non-belligerence was determined by 'strong pressure of an internal nature.'

Goering himself—as Teucci later reports—then changed his mind. It would not be at all out of place if you, and possibly Teucci, should the occasion present itself, were to find means to point out to Goering that the reasons for our non-belligerence—as he knows—are of a purely military nature. This has not, on the other hand, prevented and does not prevent the continuation of those relations of intimate friendship which unite the two countries and of which we are continually giving proof to Germany within the limits of our powers.

I should be glad of an indication from you in due course of the steps you have taken as a result of my instructions.

Many cordial greetings.

FIRST CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND
MR. SUMNER WELLES IN THE PRESENCE OF
COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 26th February, 1940—XVIII

Mr. Sumner Welles thanks the Duce for having received him and begins by saying that President Roosevelt wishes to eliminate once and for all the misunderstandings which have long existed between the United States and Italy. He is happy to state that the President of the United States has requested Congress to allocate two million dollars for the 1942 Exhibition, and also wishes to see a Trade Agreement concluded between the United States and Italy.

The Duce thanks him for this communication and confirms that work on the 1942 Exhibition will be carried on whatever the political situation. He, too, is in agreement with the advisability of drawing up a normal trade agreement, all the more since commercial relations with other countries have been rendered more difficult by the present state of war in Europe. The Duce does not consider that the question of recognition of Abyssinia and Albania can now be raised by the United States, in view of the fact that the countries most directly interested have now granted that recognition. Mr. Sumner Welles says that such recognition may take place as 'part of a whole' when steps will be taken towards a general settlement of the world, including the Far Eastern question. The Duce replies that that would entail a long delay, and that in the meantime it would be useful to establish a *modus vivendi* on a broad basis which will allow of the intensification of trade.

Mr. Sumner Welles presents the Duce with an American memorandum on the possibility of improving the general conditions of international trade and of arriving at a limitation of armaments, pointing out at the same time that many of the ideas contained in that memorandum were expressed by the Duce himself in his speech to the Chamber in 1934.¹

Mr. Sumner Welles asks the Duce whether he would not be willing to proceed immediately to an exchange of views between the neutral countries in order to lay down the conditions for an economic peace, which would be taken into consideration as soon as political peace had been re-established in the world.

The Duce, while agreeing on the necessity of readjusting economic relations between States on a new basis, points out that he considers that the order of things cannot be reversed—that is to say, he considers that economic peace must follow, but cannot pre-

¹Sumner Wells was referring to the speech made on 18th May, 1934, in the Teatro dell'Opera, on the occasion of the second quinquennial assembly of the regime, in which Mussolini reviewed the country's economic problems with special reference to their international repercussions, and to the problem of armaments.

cede, political peace between the various States. He adds that Italy was easily last to join in the economic war; only in 1934 were measures laid down for bills of exchange, etc., while the first instance had been provided by the United States before the time of the Roosevelt administration, and by England with the Ottawa Conference,¹ which divided humanity into two parts: that belonging to the British Empire and that excluded from it.

Mr. Sumner Welles notes the Duce's statement and declares that he is satisfied with the Duce's undertaking to make his contribution to economic peace-making between the States when the political situation allows of such a development.

Coming to speak of the situation in Europe, Sumner Welles asks the Duce if he sees any factor which permits one to consider an agreement between the warring States possible.

The Duce replies that Hitler's last speech contains two points of vital importance: the statement of Germany's right to living space in Central Europe, and the request for the old colonies. The Duce goes on to say that many of the Allies' war aims must be considered absurd: first and foremost, the re-establishment of an independent Austria, Austria being nothing more or less than an old province of the Reich. Czechoslovakia, too, in the form in which it had been invented by the democracies, represented an artificial structure intended to threaten Germany. As far as Poland is concerned, one must recognise that certain regions and cities are clearly German and must stay with Germany. The other part of Poland, on the other hand, can constitute a Polish national State, in a form to be subsequently defined. It is certain that, should it be wished to reconstruct Poland within its old frontiers, it would be necessary to make up one's mind to fight not only Germany but also Russia, who has occupied a very considerable and important part of Poland itself.

Mr. Sumner Welles notes what the Duce has said, and asks if he considers that the conditions still exist for a possible contact between the belligerent parties. The Duce replied that it was not out of the question provided that the war remained in its present static state; but should battle be joined on a large scale with heavy losses on both sides the difficulties would certainly be insurmountable. But at this point the Duce feels he must point out that in the event of an agreement the Italian question would also be raised. Italy is a prisoner in the Mediterranean and will be so until such time as it has free access to the oceans. The very steamer on which Mr. Sumner Welles travelled was subject to control at Gibraltar. There is no doubt that this state of imprisonment is becoming more and more awkward with the growth in Italy's stature and power.

¹At the Imperial Economic Conference on 21st July to 20th October, 1932, fifteen bilateral tariff agreements valid for five years and based on a system of Imperial preferences were concluded.

The Italian question has not yet been raised so as not to upset still further the already very disturbed political conditions in Europe, but that does not mean to say that it does not exist in reality and in the consciousness of the Italian people.

Mr. Sumner Welles, after having thanked the Duce for what he had said to him, says that at the end of his European journey he will once again pass through Rome in order to embark on an Italian steamer at Naples. The Duce invites him to come again to confer with him if at the close of his journey he should have any important items of information.

At the beginning of March a forthcoming German offensive began to be spoken of insistently. Before it in fact began, Hitler wished to make sure of Italy, eliminating any possible vestige of Anglo-Saxon or ecclesiastical influence on Mussolini's decisions, although he already knew, because Ciano had informed Mackensen of it, of the tenor of the conversation with Sumner Welles. One symptom had been the official German communiqué which appeared on the day of Sumner Welles's arrival in Berlin—1st March. The communiqué drew up a proud balance of the position of Germany after six months of war, and concluded by stating 'that conscious of her military superiority and economic invulnerability' she looks forward to the outcome 'which is hoped for not only by Germany but by all the peoples of Europe, first among them Fascist Italy.' So on 8th March, Ribbentrop unexpectedly announced his arrival in Rome on the 10th, saying that he was the bearer of Hitler's reply to a letter which Mussolini had sent to him at least two months before—on 3rd January—giving him unsolicited advice and inviting him to consider the 'catastrophic repercussions' on Italy of a further strengthening of Soviet-German relations. This letter had up to now remained unanswered.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE REICH FOREIGN
MINISTER AND THE DUCE IN THE PRESENCE OF
COUNT CIANO AND OF THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR,
VON MACKENSEN.

Rome, 10th March, 1940—XVIII

The Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs handed over, together with the most cordial greetings from the Fuehrer, the latter's letter in reply to the message which the Duce had addressed to him some time ago. Some time has had to pass before the answer could be drawn up because—as he had already let it be known here through the Ambassador, Attolico—he intended himself to have an exact picture of the situation before setting out his answer. That had taken place only in the last few weeks, and the German point of view

had been exhaustively stated in the Fuehrer's letter, which contains everything which can be said on those questions which are of importance at the present moment. The Fuehrer has instructed the Reich Foreign Minister to give explanations of the letter, wherever the Duce had questions to ask with regard to it, and to bring out its principal points.

Among those points worthy of particular mention the Reich Foreign Minister dealt with the question of coal. The Fuehrer has been greatly incensed by the measures recently adopted by England to prevent the sea transport of German coal to Italy.¹ He considers such measures to be an unheard of attempt by the pluto-democratic States, aimed at strangling Italy economically. Germany is naturally both in a position to and willing to meet all Italy's requirements in coal. Herr Clodius² who has accompanied the Reich Foreign Minister, can give his appropriate Italian colleagues all the necessary information of the plan proposed by Germany to settle that question. He also brings with him proposals for the solution of the very difficult question of transport. Replying to a reference by the Duce to the difficult question of railway trucks, the Reich Foreign Minister stated that Herr Clodius, as a result of negotiations with the military authorities, is now in a position to obtain additional trucks and to guarantee the entire coal transport.

On the Duce's objecting that the question of coal represents a matter of absolute necessity as far as Italy's plans are concerned, and observing that 'without coal there are no guns,' the Reich Foreign Minister replied that the Fuehrer is of the opinion that two men like the Duce and himself are always capable of dealing with such a question.

Moreover, the difficulties in Germany with regard to coal have lessened with the end of the cold season. The hard winter has been a splendid proof of the unity of the German people. Although the population in Germany has suffered greatly from the cold, there has been no sign of discontent, and everyone has willingly put up with the difficulties.

In this connection the Duce said that it has been a proof of the discipline of the German people.

The Reich Foreign Minister added that, should other wishes of an economic nature be expressed by Italy, Herr Clodius would be ready and willing to have discussions on the subject with the com-

¹Italy had a pre-war requirement of about 12 million tons of coal annually, in view of the fact that her internal resources—the mines at Arsa, in Istria, and in Sardinia—were quite insufficient even if their exploitation had been highly developed. With the outbreak of war, the situation had become critical, since coal was largely imported by sea from the Ruhr. Great Britain, pushed on by the necessities of war and by the attitude of the Fascist Government, which was increasingly favourable to Germany, had begun a rigorous control of ships bound for Italy. The result was a threat to cut off the coal supplies indispensable for Italy's industry at any time.

²Karl Clodius, German Minister Plenipotentiary, in charge of agreements of an economic and financial nature between Germany and other States.

petent Italian officials. The Germans are acquainted with the general wishes of the Italians, and the Fuehrer has instructed him, the Reich Foreign Minister, to state to the Duce that in this respect Germany will do everything possible to satisfy the Italian wishes.

Passing to the general situation, the Reich Foreign Minister observed that the Fuehrer does not believe that peace is at all possible, and that he has decided to attack England and France this year with the certain conviction that he can discomfit the French army in the course of the summer and still chase the English out of France before the autumn. The Fuehrer has made this firm decision because he does not believe in the possibility of any solution, given the mentality of the French and English. It is a question of principles, it is the struggle of one system against another.

In order to make clearer the mentality which reigns among the enemy, the Reich Foreign Minister handed to the Duce in the Polish original and the German translation, some reports by the Polish Ambassador in Washington, addressed to Colonel Beck, which were found in the Polish archives. From these reports two facts emerge in particular: (1) the enormous responsibility of the United States with regard to the war; (2) the profound hatred of National Socialism and Fascism and the pitiless determination to destroy the two regimes.

The Duce objected that the documents are certainly interesting but contain nothing substantially new, since it was known already that France, England and the United States are hostile to the authoritarian regimes.

The Reich Foreign Minister stated that from the documents the sinister part played by the American Ambassadors Bullitt, Kennedy and Drexel Biddle,¹ who have influenced even the English attitude, is particularly clear. In that one sees again the activity of a Jewish-plutocratic clique whose influence reaches as far as Roosevelt through the Morgans and Rockefellers.

At this point the Duce observed that it is in fact a question of that group of three hundred men who rule the world and of whom Rathenau² spoke.

The Reich Foreign Minister went on to say that no one in Germany has any illusions that the will to destruction of these circles is not real, and that everything that happens serves only to reinforce their determination.

As the Fuehrer has already had to inform the Duce, the visit of

¹William Bullitt was United States Ambassador in Paris from 1936 to 1941, having previously been in Moscow; Joseph Kennedy was United States Ambassador in London from 1938 to 1940 and Drexel Biddle was United States Ambassador in Warsaw in 1937.

²Walter Rathenau, Minister for Reconstruction in 1921. Foreign Minister, 3rd January, 1922. In that capacity he took part in the Geneva Conference and drew up the Treaty of Rapallo with the U.S.S.R. on 16th April, 1922. He was assassinated on 24th June, 1922.

Sumner Welles to Berlin produced nothing new. In Germany people are asking what Roosevelt actually meant by that step.

The Duce observed that it must principally be a question of an internal American matter.

The Reich Foreign Minister, in confirmation of what he previously adduced, read the report of January, 1939, of the Polish Ambassador in Washington, Potocki.

After the Reich Foreign Minister had finished, the Duce observed that Roosevelt has modified his own ideas considerably, since the American people is against war and it is difficult to make them change this state of mind.

The Reich Foreign Minister assented, referring again to the interesting revelations contained in the report read by him.

He then brought the conversation round to the Russian problem. In his letter to Mussolini the Fuehrer has set out all there was to say on the matter. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Reich adds, that, from his experience during his two stays in Moscow, he has reached the firm conviction that Stalin has renounced the idea of a world revolution.

‘Do you really think so?’ the Duce then asked.

The Reich Foreign Minister replied in the affirmative, and declared that the adventure in Spain was the last attempt at world revolution. To the Duce’s question whether the Third International had given up all revolutionary ideas, the Reich Foreign Minister replied that, in his opinion, the Third International was carrying out purely propaganda activity and the supply of diplomatic information. He has the impression that Russia is not only aiming at, but is even fairly far advanced on the road towards being a national and normal state. In the central administrative organs there are no longer any Jews, and Kaganovitch, of whom it is always asserted—although he has never been able to check up on it—that he is of Jewish blood, is a Georgian at the very most. With the removal of Litvinov, all the Jews have left the controlling positions. During his second stay in Moscow he had the opportunity of talking to the members of the Political Bureau (Politburo) during a dinner given by Stalin. On the German side there were present also old members of the Party, like Gauleiter Forster, who at the end of the ceremony stated that everything had gone off as if one had been speaking to old comrades. And he could not avoid the same impression himself. This may appear somewhat singular, but, as he sees it, the attitude of the Russians—which is naturally Communist and as such cannot form the subject of discussion for a National Socialist—has no longer anything to do with world revolution. Stalin had set himself to organise the Russian Empire on the basis of centralism, and that aim he has largely achieved, since nothing now happens in Russia other than what he wishes. To this end he has employed methods which have been current in Russia since olden times. And

if one looks at the portrait of Czar Alexander, which is still hung in the Kremlin, one has still—as far as these aspirations of his are concerned—the impression of going to see a Czar and not Stalin.

The Duce observes that in fact Stalin thinks he is the successor of Alexander. The Reich Foreign Minister goes on to say that the Political Bureau (Politburo) is made up of authentic Muscovite elements who are no longer interested in other countries and are said, on the contrary, to tend towards separating Russia from the rest of the world.

Russia does not represent a danger, whether from the point of view of internal or external policy, for National Socialism or Fascism. In fact, since the conclusion of the Russian Pact, no further attempt at Soviet interference in German internal affairs has been met with in Germany. The Fuehrer sets out from this point of view that there naturally is a sharp distinction between Bolshevism and National Socialism, but that nevertheless it is possible to conclude a favourable trade agreement with Russia and to have several divisions free in the West, which otherwise one would have had to employ as a covering force against Russia. By virtue of the understanding with Russia, Germany has her rear free. Russia is going through a great historical transformation. She has renounced world revolution. Her relations with the Third International—from what Germany learns—have become less close, and the Russian representatives in the Third International are treated with coolness.

In the field of foreign policy, Russia is not considering any action. Her eyes are entirely turned towards the interior of the country because of the organisational transformation which she has undergone as a result of the Bolshevik regime.

Russia—and this is known with complete certainty in Germany—was dragged into the Finnish war. The Finnish Foreign Minister, Tanner, a Menshevik, was a bad adviser to his country, and finally English interference created a situation which involved Russian prestige, thus forcing her to go to war in the heart of winter. To begin with, she proposed to conclude with Finland agreements similar to those made with the Baltic States.¹

¹Immediately after the conclusion of the German campaign against Poland, the U.S.S.R. made, on 28th September, 1939, a treaty of mutual assistance with Esthonia, which in Article 3 allowed the U.S.S.R. to occupy the islands of Saaremaa (Osch), Hiiumaa (Dago) and the town of Paldiski (Baltischport), as Soviet naval bases, and to occupy a number of airports, while safeguarding under Article 5 Esthonia's sovereign rights, her economic system and her constitution. On 5th October, 1939, the U.S.S.R. had concluded a similar mutual assistance treaty with Latvia: under Article 3 the latter ceded the bases of Liepaja (Libau) and Ventspils (Windau) as well as several airports, with the same guarantees as in Article 5 of the Soviet-Esthonian treaty. On 1st October, the U.S.S.R. finally made a treaty of mutual assistance with Lithuania. In it the U.S.S.R. on the one hand ceded to Lithuania the city of Vilna and the surrounding territory, the U.S.S.R. having fallen heir to the sovereign rights of Poland to that territory as a result of the Soviet-German pact of 4th October, 1939; Lithuania, on the other hand, granted the U.S.S.R. the right to station Soviet military forces on her territory in limited numbers (Article 4) always provided the sovereign rights of Lithuania and the integrity of her economic and social system and of her constitution were respected.

In these circumstances the Russians would not represent any danger, not even to the Balkans. Stalin would naturally be willing at any moment to conclude an agreement with Rumania which would secure him Bessarabia in whole or in part. He would, however, certainly not allow himself to be involved in a conflict with Rumania because of the incalculable repercussions which that would have in other countries, and of the spread of the conflict throughout the East, which would certainly follow.

The decisive point is that the men of the Political Bureau (Politburo), as for example the head of the OGPU, with whom the Foreign Minister of the Reich had had a long talk, are Muscovites who have not the slightest wish to hear of Paris, Washington and London and who, since they are inclined towards Russian—but not pan-Slav—nationalism, would dearly like to obtain some territorial revisions.

The Duce admitted that the Third International could not, in fact, undertake a world revolution because, as a consequence of the Russo-German agreement, great confusion, which he defines as the end of the Communist movement throughout the world, had arisen in the Communist parties of the Western States. Communists in the West would keep well in mind that 'it was Stalin who went to Berlin' and not vice versa.

The Foreign Minister of the Reich stressed in this connection the firm attitude of the members of the Party in Germany, who, inspired by the realistic thinking developed by National Socialist teaching, have approved the Russo-German pact without reservation.

In this connection the Duce observed that he had already written to the Fuehrer that he fully recognised the political necessity of that agreement, which relieved Germany of one front and freed her rear. Although Russia is not completely up to standard on the military side, it can still operate with great masses, and the mass is always a force. It is simply mad of the Western Press to attempt to pass off the Russian army as a 'rabble', as Herriot¹ is supposed to have put it. That is completely mistaken propaganda. The Foreign Minister of the Reich agrees and stresses that, in his letter to the Duce, the Fuehrer has described English propaganda as idiotic. The English would always give their own propaganda a wrong angle. With their recently stated aims of destruction they have put the Germans behind the Fuehrer to a man.

The Duce described the activities of the English Ministry of Information as a real catastrophe.

This English propaganda—continued the Reich Foreign Minister—makes it more difficult to conclude a peace. In the Finnish con-

¹Edouard Herriot, leader of the French Radical-Socialist Party, Prime Minister in 1924, Minister without Portfolio in the Doumergue Cabinet in 1934 and in the Flandin Cabinet in 1934-35; from June, 1936 President of the Chamber of Deputies.

flict, too, England showed herself to be extremely annoyed immediately after the beginning of hostilities, but now she is just as obstinately against the conclusion of peace.

The Duce pointed out that England is very much against a possible peace treaty between Finland and Russia, but that Finland cannot choose any other solution because she cannot receive any help.

The Reich Foreign Minister agrees; Sweden and Norway would do everything possible to remain neutral if they knew that, in the event of Anglo-French intervention in Scandinavia, Germany, too, would intervene.

In reply to a question by the Duce as to whether the Reich Foreign Minister believes that there is any possibility of peace, the latter replied that it is difficult to give an answer to that question. If the Finns were clever they would make peace now with the Russians. The Finns have followed a bad policy all along. The Reich Foreign Minister conveyed to them before the conflict broke out that they should seek a peaceful solution. He well remembers that one day news came either from Helsinki or from Moscow that agreement had been near.

Then the influence of England and France came into play to counter the work of the ex-Foreign Minister of Finland, Tanner, and that had led to the war. Twenty-four hours after the outbreak of the conflict, the Finnish Minister Plenipotentiary in Berlin told the Foreign Minister of the Reich that the Finns were ready to accept all the Russian requests. This shows how badly Finnish policy was conducted.

The Reich Foreign Minister then turned the conversation to the state of the German army. He repeated that the Fuehrer does not believe in the possibility of peace. Sumner Welles's initiative can perfectly well be explained from the point of view of American internal politics. According to other versions it was to be explained as an attempt, carried out in agreement with England, to ensure that certain German plans were put off. But even if, bearing in mind the anti-war attitude of the American people, one does not want to deny to Sumner Welles's initiative the nature of an attempt in good faith, yet the enemies of Germany are too deeply involved to compromise on their so often proclaimed war aims, which are based on the destruction of Germany. In view of this situation, the Fuehrer has decided to shatter the enemies' destructive urge and will therefore attack France and England at what seems to him the opportune moment. It is always difficult to be a prophet; yet he, the Foreign Minister of the Reich, can state that on the German side it is hoped that the French Army will be overthrown by the beginning of autumn and then not another Englishman will find himself on the Continent, except as prisoner of war.

The Reich Foreign Minister then recalled that at Salzburg he had

in fact stated to Count Ciano that he did not believe that England and France would support Poland immediately; but that he had, however, always calculated on the possibility of an attack by the Western Powers. He is now satisfied with the course of events *primarily* because it was always clear that the clash had to come and was inevitable. As for the moment when it would occur, on the German side—bearing in mind too the state of Italian preparedness—it had been thought that the conflict would have broken out in two or three years time. This had also been the point of view of the Fuehrer. On the other hand, it had been remarked that it would be better to bring the conflict to a conclusion while the Duce and the Fuehrer were both living. That the life of a statesman often hangs by a thread the Munich attempt has proved, and the Fuehrer was therefore led to find a solution to the problem at a period when he can count on the fullness of his powers.

In the second place, the Reich Foreign Minister is satisfied with events because, from the moment when England introduced conscription, it was evident that the proportion between the various forces would not alter in favour of Italy and Germany. This was a decisive factor in the Fuehrer's decision to solve the Polish problem even at the risk of intervention by the Western powers. But the most important factor in the decision was that a Great Power cannot tolerate a certain kind of behaviour.

The Foreign Minister of the Reich has brought Mussolini documents on the Polish atrocities, and will in due course supply him with the Italian translation. The course of events, which have always been serious—he added—had taken such a turn that Polish chauvinism had in recent months almost excelled itself with the stupid boast of a march on Berlin, while terrorism against the German minorities continued. In August, the Poles had addressed such impudent notes to Germany that, had they been published, firing would have started spontaneously, such would have been the indignation of the German people. One cannot go beyond a certain degree of patience. The German-Polish Agreement of 1934 could only be concluded thanks to the Fuehrer and had from the start been unpopular in Germany. But instead of taking advantage of that agreement to smooth out the controversies between the two countries, the Poles had taken the occasion to act to the detriment of the Germans in the most incredible manner. This was naturally known in Germany, and public opinion was so excited that in the summer the Fuehrer was faced with a dilemma—either to accept a long winter campaign in Poland or to strike a lightning blow. In view of the circumstances, the Fuehrer could not but adopt the second solution.

'In that case, events have justified the Fuehrer,' the Duce noted.

At this point, the Foreign Minister of the Reich referred to the profound faith of the German people in victory. There is not a

German soldier who does not believe that victory will be attained this year—a circumstance which the Duce noted with much interest. The patriotism of the Germans is not a patriotism of idle chatterers but is based on a most firm resolve. Germany's situation is favourable. The blockade has shown itself to be ineffective. With the aid of the reconquered former provinces of the Reich, requirements in food are guaranteed. The German people is forced to limit itself only as far as fats are concerned, which cannot, however, but be beneficial to health. On the basis of the trade treaty, Germany receives from Russia, in the first year, a million tons of cereals, a quantity which can later be increased to a million and a half to two millions. In confidence, the Foreign Minister of the Reich can announce that, as far as the supply of raw materials is concerned, Russia is very generous and is in part using her own gold for the acquisition of the raw materials necessary for Germany. Apart from this, the through traffic is of great help; large quantities of important commodities are in transit across Russia from Manchukuo. The Balkan countries, too, like Rumania, are collaborating to supply Germany, and the economic help of Italy, for which the Reich Foreign Minister, on the instructions of the Fuehrer, expresses particular thanks, is also very important. In conclusion, supplies of foodstuffs and raw materials cannot cause Germany any anxiety, not even in the event of a long war.

The Reich Foreign Minister then remarked that in England he is very much discredited because the English claim that he had stated that it would never come to a war against them. In fact, he had in 1937 requested the Fuehrer to send him to London as Ambassador, thus cancelling another decision taken shortly before. On that occasion, he stated to the Fuehrer that he considered war against the English certain and saw only in King Edward a slight—the only—possibility of avoiding it, although he had immediately added that he considered that Edward would not intervene. Such being the case, in that same year, 1937, he put the chances of war to the Fuehrer at 10 to 1. If he had then been asked under what circumstances he would wish to conduct that struggle, his wildest fantasy could not have suggested to him a situation so favourable as that in which Germany finds herself today.

To the Duce's question: 'What is the programme for your stay in Rome?' the Foreign Minister of the Reich replied that he was completely at the Duce's disposal. The latter then proposed to arrange a further conversation for Monday at five in the afternoon. He, the Duce, would then state the situation from the Italian point of view, examining the future also, and would produce some documents.

The Reich Foreign Minister informed the Duce in confidence that Germany would attack with 205 perfectly equipped and trained divisions. He referred to the results of the experiences so far gained

by Germany on the Western front and in particular to the lightning attack on a British advanced post during which 16 English were taken prisoner. These had turned out to be very badly armed and extremely badly trained. The superiority of the German infantry to the English can be expressed in the ratio of 3 to 1. The English are in no way prepared for a modern war like this, based on fortifications. It is not possible to dress civilians in uniform and claim to send them to the front as soldiers after insufficient instruction.

The Duce put the English troops at the front between 50 and 60 thousand men (out of a total of 200 thousand), while the remainder are occupied on the lines of communication.

The Reich Foreign Minister spoke of the experiences of the world war. During the last war, the English were very badly led. Some picked troops might be good, but the general level was very inferior to that of the German Army. The French army—according to the results of contacts on the Western front—is no longer in the condition of 1914.

The Duce noted at this point that the French have a purely defensive mentality. So long as they are in their dugouts everything is all right, but as soon as they have to come out into the open the effects of demoralisation make themselves felt even among the French troops. When the Duce referred to the Communist movement in France and to the fact that Communist papers are still being published there, the Reich Foreign Minister remarked with a laugh that some of these papers are printed in Germany.

At the same time, the Duce referred to the low level of morale in England, where a pacifist meeting was recently held before a large crowd, and where, moreover, the number of those who declared that they have 'conscientious objections' to the war has risen to 25 thousand. The Reich Foreign Minister added that, in a recent by-election, election was secured by the candidate who took up an anti-war position.

The Fuehrer today enjoys excellent health—the Reich Foreign Minister continues—and is keen to fight. The Duce then added that the Fuehrer is right when he states that the fates of the German and Italian nations are bound up together. The Western democracies make no distinction in their hostility to the two countries.

The Reich Foreign Minister observed that the attitude of the democracies finds its ultimate cause in the fear that the German and Italian conceptions might spread to other countries and prepare the end of the plutocratic ruling classes in the United States, in England and France. It is clear from the Polish documents shown to the Duce that the plutocrats profoundly hate the Duce and the Fuehrer. This is partly due to their bad consciences and in part to fear that the ideas of Fascism and National Socialism may catch on. The Duce also observed that Germany and Italy represent the proletariat, while in a certain sense the other countries are con-

servatives, and it must never be forgotten that the latter will do everything to defend their system to the last. Yet their morale is very bad and they have no officers. The Reich Foreign Minister replied that he was profoundly convinced that the French and English armies are faced with the greatest catastrophe in their history. It is fully understood in Germany that the campaign will not be as easy as in Poland, but the Fuehrer calculates with great prudence and, after an accurate comparison of the effectiveness of the opposing armies and a profound examination of the general situation, he is definitely convinced that France and England will be beaten and annihilated.

In answer to a question by the Duce as to whether Germany believes that she can pierce the Maginot Line, the Reich Foreign Minister replies that the German General Staff has carried out a study of the subject, which has perhaps lasted too long, but has shown itself to be all the more exhaustive, and has reached the conclusion that the Maginot Line no longer constitutes an insurmountable obstacle. The methods of fighting in which the German troops have been trained during the last twelve months and their special weapons will get the better even of the Maginot line.

At the end of the conversation the Duce said that he intends to reflect on all the problems and concluded: 'I believe the Fuehrer is right'.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
REICH FOREIGN MINISTER IN THE PRESENCE OF
COUNT CIANO AND THE AMBASSADOR, VON
MACKENSEN.

Rome, 11th March, 1940—XVIII

After exchanging greetings the Duce, referring to the visit of the Reich Foreign Minister to the Pope, observed that it is not much use having the friendship of the Church, that the enmity of the Pope is really not dangerous, but can, however, become unpleasant, as he knows, moreover, from personal experience.

On the subject of the memoranda handed over the day before on the manœuvres of Otto of Habsburg, the Duce observed that as the Emperor Charles had acquired the nickname of 'Charles the Headstrong', so Otto, because of his completely senseless plans, had acquired that of 'Otto the Dreamer'. Otto's plans can only be described as a 'twilight of the mind'. He will publish them in the Italian Press, and Gayda has already spoken of them in the *Giornale d'Italia*.

The Duce further thanked the Reich Foreign Minister for the clarification he had given during the previous day's conversation

of the Fuehrer's letter, a letter which he (the Duce) had read three times. The Duce then expressed himself as follows on the various problems of the present political situation:

As far as Russia is concerned, the Duce recalled that the Fascist Government had, first among the Governments of Europe, recognised the Soviets as far back as 1924, and that he himself had signed a far-reaching pact with Litvinov ten years later. On that occasion, too, a banquet was offered to the Russians, but no toasts were drunk in the course of it. So far everything had gone well. On the Italian side, however, a very clear distinction had been made between the political side and the ideological side of such relations. As far as the ideological side was concerned, the Duce was completely intransigent. 'I am and I remain anti-Communist,' the Duce energetically stated, because Communism is the exact opposite of the spiritual and economic—that is to say, the natural—basis of life. The Reich Foreign Minister assented and pointed out that Communism is completely unnatural, while the Duce observed that nature herself more and more puts before our eyes the principle of inequality.

According to the Duce's way of thinking, Russia will not carry out any propaganda for a certain period, because, as he said yesterday, as a result of the pact between Russia and Germany terrible confusion has arisen among Communists in all countries. But as soon as Russia's difficulties in foreign policy have been overcome, the Bolsheviks will immediately begin to make propaganda again. As he stated in his letter to the Fuehrer, Germany did well to form the pact with Russia, since such an agreement ensures that the Reich will have to fight on one front only, which is a factor of prime importance.

Because of some controversial matters, there is at present a rupture between Italy and Russia. On their side, the Russians tend to exaggerate this attitude and neglect, for example, the fact that in his speech on 15th December, Count Ciano spoke neither of Russia nor of Finland. In the not very distant past the Russians had made enquiries about the possibility of having ships built in Italy. The fastest cruiser in the world, the *Tashkent*, was built at Leghorn for the Russians. On that occasion contact was resumed between the Italian and Russian authorities. If the Russians wish to establish normal relations again, the Duce is ready to do so.

The Reich Foreign Minister pointed out that it would be to the interest of the Axis if relations between Italy and Russia again became good.

On the Russo-Finnish conflict, the Duce observed that the conclusion of peace is in the interests of Germany and of Italy. He added that Germany and Italy are interested in ensuring that Russia takes no steps against Rumania, since if Russia marched against Bessarabia an extremely complicated situation would arise

and all the Danube basin would run the risk of being dragged into the conflict, which is certainly not in Germany's interest as far as the problem of supplies is concerned. The Reich Foreign Minister stressed in a marked manner that Germany, too, wishes peace in the Balkans.

The Duce further declared that he had advised the Hungarians to keep quiet and not to raise the question of Transylvania, it being very complicated because of the various nationalities to be taken into consideration. It is interesting to note that the German minority in Transylvania is more inclined towards the Rumanians than to the Hungarians. The Reich Foreign Minister confirmed this, and added that the German minority in Rumania has had far fewer complaints to make than the German minority in Hungary.

The Duce asked whether Russia could not be induced by Germany to leave the Balkans in peace and to confirm that intention by a declaration or some sort of gesture. Something of the kind would also have the effect of creating favourable conditions for a resumption of good relations, firstly of an economic and secondly of a political nature, between Russia and Italy.

Passing to Italy, the Duce stated that the English cannot even for a moment have the slightest doubt that such requests for the supply of guns, tanks or bombers, as they have already made, would receive an absolute negative as an answer from Italy.

'They won't get a single nail for military purposes.' As far as raw materials, such as mercury, sulphur and hemp are concerned, Italy will be able to make some concessions. He has, moreover, caused a communication on that subject to be sent to Germany so as to define the position Italy would have to maintain up to the moment when it would be necessary to break definitely with the English and French.

Passing to the position of Italy, the Duce stated that at the moment of the outbreak of war, on 3rd September, Italy was not ready. He is very grateful to the Fuehrer for the telegram in which he stated that he did not require Italian military aid for the campaign against Poland. It would have been a good thing, the Duce added, if this telegram had also been published in Germany, since it ought to be well known there that the theory according to which Italy would eventually fight at the side of France and England is ludicrous and offensive. Italy today is completely different from the Italy of former days. The Reich Foreign Minister strongly confirmed that no one in Germany thinks otherwise. In this connection, the Duce underlined that it is in practice impossible for Italy to keep out of the conflict. At the given moment she will enter the war and will conduct it along with Germany and in line with her, because Italy has problems of her own to solve. He had stated the problems of her land frontiers, now he must turn to the problem of her maritime frontiers. The necessity for Italy to have free access to the

ocean has never been so strikingly revealed as now. No country is entirely free if it does not have absolutely free access to the sea. In a certain sense, Italy is enclosed in a prison of which the windows are Corsica, Tunis and Malta, and the walls of which are represented by Gibraltar, Suez and the Dardanelles. Italy is very patient and will remain so until she is ready, just as the boxer in the ring must at certain moments be able to take a great many punches. The duration of that testing period is become shorter and shorter. Italy has made great progress with her own armament and he will shortly allow the Italian people to see with their own eyes what has been achieved in that field. He has sacrificed almost the whole of civilian production in order to be able to make progress with armaments.

The Italian fleet will shortly be the largest as far as big battle-ships are concerned since she will have at her disposal four vessels of 35,000 tons as compared with only two on the English side. One hundred and twenty submarines will be ready in May, and in April it will be possible to mobilise 150,000 men for the Navy.

Italy has also achieved a great deal in the Air Force. Work in that field is being carried out under the direct control of the Duce, because it has proved necessary to deal personally with the activities of the technicians.

In May the land forces will reach the figure of two millions, of which one million can be considered to be perfectly trained and to have a high Fascist morale and excellent fighting spirits (classes of 1917, 1918, 1919 and 1920).

The Duce has often asked himself whether, just as events have shown the Fuehrer to be right, they have not also shown him (the Duce) to be right. He must answer this question in the affirmative. If Italy had entered the war on the 3rd September, she would have had to ask for help from Germany. The Reich Foreign Minister agreed, and observed that the Fuehrer has himself declared that it was better that Italy had not entered the war.

The Duce went on to say that in the mother country, as in Libya, the Aegean, Albania and in Africa, Italy would have had to fight not only a war on two fronts, but a war in each of these sectors. Under these conditions, the war would immediately have spread and would have reached the Danube basin, especially since the Anglo-French pact with Turkey¹ is directed against Italy, and Weygand's army is prepared solely for use against Libya. If we are asked whether the behaviour of Italy was in the spirit of the alliance and designed to aid Germany's war effort politically and economically, it must be admitted that Italy acted like a perfect ally. Especially as regards the economic field, Italy's aid in the supplying of foodstuffs must be stressed, particularly of those which contain the important

¹The treaty of mutual assistance between France, Great Britain and Turkey of 19th October, 1939, put the finishing touches to the provisional agreements brought into being by the declarations of mutual assistance by England and Turkey on 21st May, 1939 and between France and Turkey on 23rd June of the same year.

vitamin C, without which organisms cannot develop. According to his statistics, in the month of February alone there were sent to Germany 9,000 waggons of foodstuffs and he hopes to be able to reach the figure of 10,000 waggons as soon as possible. (The Duce handed over a memorandum on this subject).

Militarily, Italy has tied down a considerable number of Anglo-French troops—either from the home country or from the colonies—in various parts of Europe and Africa. The Duce handed over some papers which give exact figures and underlines that in this way a great mass of enemy troops are tied down elsewhere.

In answer to a question by the Reich Foreign Minister as to how many French divisions are on the Italian frontier, the Duce replies between 10 and 12 divisions, and on the Reich Foreign Minister remarking that on the German side it was considered that the figure was lower, the Duce confirmed the figure he had given and explained that the lower figure was temporary and due to the large quantity of snow caused by the hard winter, which made larger numbers of troops useless on the frontier. The figure will rise at once when atmospheric conditions change.

The Duce then went on to discuss the question of when Italy can enter the war. This is the most delicate question since he wants to enter the war only when he is completely prepared, so as not to be a burden on his comrade. At all events he must at once declare with complete frankness that Italy cannot stand a long war financially. She cannot afford to spend a milliard lire every day like England and France, whose expenses are certainly even higher. Even these countries will feel financial difficulties but Italy cannot stand anything of that nature.

The Duce stated that he is convinced that France and England are against Germany and against Italy and that they make no distinction between the two countries. As soon as one was destroyed it would be the turn of the other, because in the Western States Fascism and National Socialism are considered to be one and the same thing, hence the community of interests between Germany and Italy. Italy represents the reserve which will do its duty at the right moment, and she wishes to be so regarded. At the present moment Germany has just as little need of Italian aid as during the campaign against Poland since, with the exception of patrol fighting, the struggle on the Western front against France and England has not yet really begun. Considering the spirit of the alliance, the Italian attitude is favourable both to Germany and Italy herself, since Italy has been able to arm twice as fast as would have been possible in any other way. She is working on armaments with all her energies. As far as the spirit of the Italian people is concerned, the Duce could with all sincerity state that it is a lie to consider that the Italians are pro-French or pro-English. The Italians despise France and England, and have not forgotten sanctions. The Italian people has

a realistic attitude to things. The Duce has educated it to this level of realism and the Italian people knows that it can solve its problems only with Germany and never against Germany.

The Reich Foreign Minister observed in this connection that this is a very realistic statement of the position, and that it also represents the Fuehrer's views and his own.

To this the Duce observed that he would reply to the Fuehrer's last letter with a short written message. He judges a man by his deeds. What matters is that his deeds should prove him to be right.

The Reich Foreign Minister thanked the Duce for his frank statements, of which he will give an exact account to the Fuehrer, and in his turn asked some supplementary questions. For his first question—one already brought up by the Prince of Hesse and also mentioned in the Fuehrer's letter—he asks what possibility there is of a meeting between the Fuehrer and the Duce in the near future. The Duce replied that he was ready to meet the Fuehrer. The Reich Foreign Minister observed that it was the Fuehrer's wish,—in view of the long time which had passed since the last meeting—to confer with the Duce anew. The middle of March was therefore suggested as the time for the meeting, after the 19th of the month. The Brenner was fixed as meeting place since it is not easy—as the Reich Foreign Minister stated—for the Fuehrer to leave Germany in time of war. Even before the Reich Foreign Minister left, the Fuehrer observed to him that certain ideas cannot be explained in writing, but that what is required is a personal exchange of views.

In the course of further conversation, the Reich Foreign Minister summarised the statements of the Duce as follows. If he has understood him aright, it is the Duce's opinion that Italy would enter the war. The English would, in the Duce's words, behave in an increasingly impudent manner. On the other hand, the Fuehrer does not believe in the possibility of peace, but thinks that at a given moment the opposing armies on the Western front will clash. When that will occur the Reich Foreign Minister does not know, since the Fuehrer has not told the details of his military plans even to the Foreign Minister himself. At all events the Fuehrer is of the opinion that the war will soon be won in the field. In this connection, he wishes to know from the Duce how the latter sees the future development of affairs from the Italian point of view. The English have made increasing difficulties recently. They have attempted to put economic pressure on Italy for the supply of war materials and they intend—according to what the Reich Foreign Minister knows of them—to continue the game. He therefore asks the Duce how he foresees the future development of events.

The Duce replies that there are two possibilities—either the situation becomes increasingly tense as a result of the attitude of England and France or, alternatively, he himself would work out the various problems which interest Italy and that in a totalitarian

manner. In either case the moment would arrive when a 'definition of the relations of Italy with France and England' would be necessary—that is to say a rupture with these countries. In reply to a question by the Reich Foreign Minister, the Duce confirms that in both cases developments would lead in the same direction.

In this connection the question of coal was again touched upon; on this topic the Reich Foreign Minister recalled that Herr Clodius is at the disposal of the Italian authorities in order to discuss the problem, as he had indicated yesterday. It would be a question of examining the method of dealing with the coal question to the full satisfaction of Italy through mutual collaboration by the appropriate departments. The Duce was pleased at the possibility of discussions between Clodius and Host Venturi¹ and adds that he intends, as far as possible, to draw the coal 'in its entirety' from Germany, whereupon the Reich Foreign Minister answered that Germany will do everything necessary to this end.

The Reich Foreign Minister further stated that he had understood from the Duce's words that he believes that relations with France and England will become worse. The Duce immediately answered in the affirmative, adding 'it will be very easy' to bring about that deterioration, in view of the fact that the Italian people's attitude of mind is strongly hostile to France and England. Moreover, both countries have committed grave errors. Thus for example the French Press recently stated that the neutrals must decide whether they are with England and France or against them. These two countries were the only ones to have the courage to fight; they must therefore be the only ones to make the peace. The neutrals who have been unwilling to take a decision will not be taken into consideration.

The Reich Foreign Minister added that the neutrals have lately asserted themselves strongly and were not in the least disposed to fight for England. In this connection he repeats his question whether he understood aright that the Duce believes in an essential deterioration of relations with England and France. This attitude is naturally of special importance to Germany for the moment when the German army has to go into action.

The Duce replied that such a deterioration can easily be provoked. According to him there are two possibilities: either the situation develops in favour of Germany, and then it is naturally in Italy's interest to fight with her; or things turn out badly for Germany—and he hastens to say that he considers that possibility to be purely theoretical in view of the considerably higher degree of efficiency which, in his view, the German army has compared with 1914—and then Italy is forced even more to intervene since she herself would be in great danger.

A further question by the Reich Foreign Minister dealt with relations between Italy and Russia. If he understood the Duce

¹Host Venturi, Minister for Communications.

aright, an improvement in these relations would be possible. That would be very favourably received in Germany. The Duce described such an improvement as very possible, and recalled the fears expressed by the Western Press, on the occasion of the visit of the Reich Foreign Minister to Rome, at the possible formation of a bloc between Italy, Russia, Germany and Japan. Perhaps that, too, will be possible.

The Reich Foreign Minister recalled in this connection how, in his letter to the Duce, the Fuehrer had referred to the fact that a strong Japan is in the interests of Italy and Germany, since she can put pressure on England in Asia and at the same time constitute a useful counter-balance to the United States. That this is true, one can also see from the fact that America intervened actively in the World War only after having received from Japan a written assurance that the latter would take no steps harmful to America in the Far East and the Pacific. If America required to obtain that during the world war from a country which was then her ally, she must in present circumstances give even closer consideration to her relations with Japan. For that very reason, instructions have been sent to the German Ambassadors in Moscow and Tokyo to help towards an understanding between Russia and Japan. Stalin himself—with whom the Reich Foreign Minister had discussed the subject—had shown himself to be very reasonable, so much so, that the Reich Foreign Minister was able to state in a Press *communiqué* published after the conclusion of the Soviet-German Pact that that pact made no change in the friendly relations between Germany and Japan.¹

The Reich Foreign Minister asked the Duce if he were prepared to send similar instructions to his Ambassadors in Tokyo and Moscow to help a settlement between these two countries. The greater liberty Japan has *vis-à-vis* Russia, the better she will be able to exercise her useful function as a means of putting pressure on England and America.

The Duce replies that recently he had paid relatively little attention to Japanese policy. He finds that Japanese policy 'is fatally slow-moving'.

The Reich Foreign Minister says that that is to be attributed to the political factions, to the influence of the Army and of the Navy and to the lack of a leader.

In this connection the Duce stated that an agreement between Russia and Japan was to be desired. A *rapprochement* between

¹In actual fact the Japanese Government had on 25th August, two days after the signing of the Soviet-German Pact, sent a protest note to Berlin denouncing the pact as incompatible with the Anti-Comintern Pact, of which Japan was a signatory together with Germany. Only on 28th August did the Japanese Government acquiesce. It was not until 16th September, when, as the result of an unexpectedly accommodating attitude on the part of Russia, it proved possible to arrive at a solution of the Russo-Japanese conflict which had degenerated into armed conflict on the borders of Manchuria, that relations between Japan and Germany were cleared up.

Italy and Russia would greatly facilitate Italian intervention in that direction.

In this connection, the Reich Foreign Minister referred to a telegram which had reached him from Tokyo in which a reliable source stated that Japan was ready to support any action by Italy aimed against England's tyrannous actions at sea.

In the further course of the conversation the Reich Foreign Minister informed the Duce of the Fuehrer's intention of having some submarines ready in the Western Mediterranean to operate solely against English and French shipping. He wishes to give prior notice to the Duce in the spirit of Italo-German collaboration.

The latter replied that he had already heard rumours of this from contacts between the two navies and that he saw no objection.

On the Reich Foreign Minister's observing that the Fuehrer would be interested to have some news of the situation in Libya, the Duce pointed out the substantial improvement in the situation there in comparison with that of last September. There are now 14 divisions in Libya. There is further a double line of defence, and Balbo regards all possibilities with calm. While as late as September Libya was a very weak point, there are now 200,000 men there and two excellent Arab divisions.

In reply to the question by the Reich Foreign Minister concerning Italian submarines in the Mediterranean, the Duce replied that Italy is master of the Mediterranean in that field. The Reich Foreign Minister points out that the English fleet had disappeared from the North Sea; the English no longer risk their own heavy cruisers, far less their Dreadnoughts. The Duce added that, in the event of a conflict, the English would immediately disappear from the Mediterranean.

On the subject of the anxiety which Italy had frequently shown over the inadequate defence of the industrial areas from air attacks, the Reich Foreign Minister recalled the experience of the Germans with enemy bombers. Up to now not a single enemy plane has flown over Germany with a load of bombs, with the exception of the attack in the first days of the war on the Kiel Canal during which at least 32 out of 40 planes were brought down. The enemies of Germany do not drop bombs on German territory because they are afraid of German reprisals. Similarly the enemies of Italy would not risk bombing Italian industrial centres because they know that Germany would immediately proceed to retaliatory actions against England and France. The Duce then referred to the series of Italian strong points in the Mediterranean, mentioning particularly the impregnable position of the island of Pantelleria (which the Reich Foreign Minister described as the Duce's most valuable military discovery.)

The Reich Foreign Minister stated that it could thus be established that both countries, according to the Duce's way of

thinking, have a common destiny, which will, sooner or later, lead Italy to enter the war. Germany and Italy represent the new conception of the world. The other countries represent old conceptions and ideas. Over and above that the old countries suffer from such demographic deficiencies as no longer to be European nations in the true sense of the word. The English boats have Indian crews; the French, Negro ones. Those nations have no longer an *élan vital* and are envious of the young nations.

In reply to a question by the Reich Foreign Minister, whether the Duce believed that the French would again mass strong bodies of troops on the Italian frontier, the Duce replied in the affirmative, and added that among these troops there would be numerous coloured elements, who are impulsive but do not stand up to fighting. No one knows what these African auxiliary troops think among themselves. They communicate between themselves in a language which the French do not understand, and their attitude, in the event of military reverses, might be a danger to France.

The Reich Foreign Minister asked if he had understood the Duce's thoughts aright to the effect that Italy intends to assume an attitude such as will tie down as many French and English troops as possible. The Duce confirmed this and stated that, as far as America's attitude is concerned, the most one can expect, as a repercussion of events in Europe, is a newspaper campaign. He is firmly convinced that the United States will not intervene in this war. In confirmation of this the Duce read an article from the *New York Daily News*, according to which 90 per cent of Americans wish to remain neutral and have no desire to go to war in order to assure England's supremacy in Europe. It is in the interests of America to remain out of the conflict. The Americans have taken up this attitude—the Duce added—because they are doubtful of the victory of the Allies and do not wish to back a losing horse.

And there they are perfectly right, the Reich Foreign Minister admitted. He then repeated that he did not know the exact timing, but that he was certain that the German armies would very shortly clash with the English and French. Even before that there might be an opportunity for Italy to take up an attitude in the nature of a demonstration calculated to help Germany.

At the end, a Press *communiqué* was agreed upon, and at the moment of leave-taking the Duce asked the Reich Foreign Minister for news of the conversation he had had with the Pope. The Foreign Minister replied that both the Fuehrer and the Pope are of the opinion that an agreement is possible between National Socialism and the Catholic Church. In this connection, the Fuehrer had in view not a temporary solution but a lasting one. The matter must be dealt with further with the Nuncio; religious peace has been maintained and, moreover, the Fuehrer has suspended legal proceedings against 7,000 monks. Germany pays the Catholic Church more than

THE MISSION OF SUMNER WELLES

a milliard per annum and has done a great deal for religious peace. If the principle of 'politics for the State, the cure of souls for the Church' were followed, the agreement could be reached gradually. But the Fuehrer does not wish to hurry things on in any way and reach a temporary solution which cannot be made to last. The real trouble is that for scores of years the Catholic Church has been engaged in politics in Germany, and of that the Church cannot completely free itself. Only when there has been a complete clarification on that point and the mutual spheres of influence have been laid down by concrete developments will the conditions exist for building up and concluding a Concordat with the Church.

At the conclusion of the conversation, the Duce asked the Reich Foreign Minister to convey to the Fuehrer his most cordial greetings.

Meanwhile Sumner Welles went to London and Paris, where he made contact with the rulers of both countries, and in the middle of March returned to Rome on the eve of the meeting between Mussolini and Hitler on the Brenner.

SECOND CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND MR. SUMNER WELLES IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

16th March, 1940—XVIII

Mr. Sumner Welles thanks the Duce for receiving him again, and begins by saying that he had not found in London and Paris that intransigence which one might have expected. On the contrary, he found a spirit of moderation and great reasonableness, and people therefore well disposed towards the conclusion of a long and lasting peace. At the same time, however, he underlines that the two Allied Governments are ready to carry on the war to the bitter end should the conflict really begin and should the Allies not be given those guarantees of security which are considered indispensable. In Berlin, he established that the Fuehrer and his collaborators are convinced that the Anglo-French objective is to destroy the Reich and the German people. This is not the case; in London and Paris it is only hoped to obtain conditions of security for the future.

The Duce objects that the Allies have too often attempted to separate the German people and the Nazi regime. That is absurd and a mistake.

Mr. Sumner Welles, after having spoken of the understanding which exists everywhere of the Duce's efforts to preserve the peace of the world, says that it is his opinion that in London and Paris they are willing to come to political peace provided that the necessary guarantees of security are given. He underlines that he has

not been instructed to make any statement, but is merely reporting his impressions. To his way of thinking, a political peace could be made on the following bases: reconstitution of an independent Polish State on a national basis, but the frontiers of which would still have to be discussed as well as the granting of free access to the sea; a broadening of the autonomy and independence conceded to Bohemia and Moravia and, finally, a plebiscite for Austria.

The Duce asks whether on his next meeting with the Chancellor of the Reich he may allude to these personal impressions of Mr. Sumner Welles. The latter answers that for that he requires the authorisation of President Roosevelt, an authorisation which he will attempt to obtain by telephone.

Mr. Sumner Welles wishes to have some idea of the Duce's conception of the security system which might be introduced in Europe. The Duce answers that it is no longer possible for Europe to return to the League of Nations, which had rightly been repudiated by the Americans themselves. Nor does he believe it possible to set up a Federation of all the European States. He considers, however, that agreement between the principal European States could guarantee a period of at least 20 to 25 years of peace. If the French and Poles had not sabotaged the Four Power Pact,¹ Germany's inevitable drive would have been set along evolutionary lines. Hitler's requests were at that time very moderate. Only an international body like that foreseen in the Four Power Pact could assure Europe of a period of peace during which reduction of armaments could be decided upon and the economic reconstruction of the world worked out.

Mr. Sumner Welles repeats that he does not consider it possible for the Allied Governments to conclude any agreement with Germany if a system of guarantees which would ensure the fulfilment of the agreement has not first been found.

The Duce objects that the question which should come first is such as to make any attempt at negotiations fail, in view of the fact that the two parties are poles apart. At all events, he tells Mr. Sumner Welles that, should new factors liable to modify the situation in Europe emerge from the conversations on the Brenner, he will not fail to inform the interested parties and Mr. Sumner Welles himself with a view to subsequent action. At the end of the conversation the Duce confirms his political solidarity with Germany.

¹On 15th July, 1933, there had been signed in Berlin a pact between France, Germany, Britain and Italy, which contained the undertaking by the four signatories, all permanent members of the Council of the League, to carry out within the framework of the League a policy of effective collaboration with the aim of maintaining the peace; to take steps within the limits of their powers, to make articles 1 (integrity and independence of the States), 16 (sanctions) and 19 (revision of treaties) of the League Covenant effective; to make an effort to ensure the success of the Disarmament Conference; and to agree between themselves on every question of an economic nature which was of common interest for Europe and in particular for her economic recovery. The 'Four Power Pact' was not ratified by the signatory powers. Poland, on her side, protested at having been excluded, claiming that she had been recognised to have the rank of Great Power.

XXXI

THE BRENNER MEETING

18th March, 1940.

When Mussolini arrived at the Brenner Pass it was early morning and snowing. Hitler arrived later and got into Mussolini's private coach. At 12.45 the meeting was over; fifteen minutes later the Fuehrer's train was on the way down to Innsbruck. Beforehand, Mussolini had thought of an official communiqué which would at least state the aims of the meeting; but no communiqué was published.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FUEHRER IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO AND VON RIBBENTROP.

The Brenner, 18th March, 1940—XVIII

When the conversation opened, the Fuehrer gave a short historical sketch of the events which led up to the war and of the course of the war itself up to the present day. He once more stated to the Duce that he had made an effort to reach a compromise and an understanding with England, but the latter was determined to go to war with Germany. Perhaps Germany might have been able to preserve the peace for another couple of years if she had accepted, and that immediately, the incredible humiliations inflicted by Poland; but war could not be avoided. And in the long run, the Fuehrer could not expect the German people to stand by and watch the Polish provocations. The Poles, on the contrary, faced with such long-suffering, would have become more and more arrogant. Even if a delay had been possible, there was no doubt, in view of England's determination to go to war—for her the conflict between Germany and Poland was merely a pretext for attaining that end—that the conditions of the struggle would, in two years' time, at best not have become more favourable for Germany. The Fuehrer then referred to a simple comparison of the military power of Germany, on the one side, and that of England, France and their Polish allies, on the other, particularly as concerns effective land forces, the air force, anti-aircraft defence and the navy. On the basis of these considerations it had been decided to take up the gauntlet which had been thrown down.

THE BRENNER MEETING

The Fuehrer then described the strength of the German army at the present moment to the Duce in detail. At the same time he also explained the special importance which the air force has now assumed. The specialists tend to conclude—on the basis of experiences gained in Spain and China—that the air arm has no decisive value, but that the infantry remains, as in the past, the essential factor. Yet the experience of this war seems to lead to other conclusions. Thus, for example, the English have been excluded from the North Sea by the Luftwaffe, and they no longer venture near the German coast. The East Coast of the British Isles has become somewhat unsafe as the recent attack on Scapa Flow shows. The Fuehrer described to the Duce in detail the course of the action and the result obtained by the German airmen in this most recent and brilliant action.

Thereafter the Fuehrer summarised for the Duce his opinions on the Polish campaign, for which he had originally anticipated a duration of one or two months. In actual fact, the Poles had been completely annihilated in only fourteen days. Since the losses in that war were very small and lower than all forecasts, Germany had found herself at the end of the campaign with many hundreds of thousands of well-trained other ranks and officers, and therefore the cadres were available for several supplementary divisions for which no allowance had been made. In the meantime, tens of thousands of young officers have been trained, who represent a fighting force of great courage. The bulk of German officers are, as regards military training, considerably better than in 1914.

The Fuehrer described the organisation and the strength of the German army, which today includes in all 205 divisions, of which the vast majority are of first class quality. Ammunition is available in quantities never seen before. The construction of aircraft is proceeding at high speed. New fighters and bombers are being delivered by the factories in large quantities, so that, in general, German armaments are progressing very rapidly. Confidence in success is extraordinarily high both in the army and among the people, morale is excellent and hatred of the two Western plutocracies unprecedented. As far as the activities of the German navy are concerned, the construction of submarines is progressing, so that, in this sector too, the danger to England is growing from month to month. At the end of next year, Germany will have at her disposal a greater number of submarines than were constructed during the whole of the last war, and that number will be still further increased. The Fuehrer then referred to the new construction for the German navy.

The Fuehrer then went on to examine the future course of the war and stated that he hopes to bring the struggle with France and England to an end sooner than they think. He is determined to pursue the war to the end and to discomfit the enemy. The situation

of Germany, which can at any moment be cut off from its sources of essential raw materials, is in the long run an untenable one. On the other hand, once war has become inevitable he prefers to take the responsibility on himself and on his own Government rather than have to leave the guidance of the German people in that most difficult test to a successor.

As far as the attitude of Italy last summer is concerned, the Fuehrer shows that he understands it. If Italy had taken up a position which could have induced France and England to abstain from the conflict, then it would have been advisable. But if this was not to succeed, it was better that Italy should keep out of the war. The Fuehrer therefore explained with further details why Italy's abstention had a favourable effect for Germany, and in this connection spoke of the value of the fortifications on the Western frontier.

He described those fortifications to the Duce in detail, their formidable reinforced concrete and their depth, and compared them with the Maginot line, which he described as a fortification system of a pacifist and defeatist character. The Fuehrer gave the Duce examples—which it has been possible to pick out from the daily experience of patrol clashes in front of the fortified lines—of the superiority of the German soldiers over the French and English. On the other hand, England and France are trying to wage the war on the perimeter, while Germany can strike her enemy only in the heart. He would have preferred to follow another course, since Germany has now achieved her ends in terms of expansion. Germany needs scores of years for the exploitation of the reconquered eastern territories. The Fuehrer referred to the incredible situation which obtained in those eastern regions, formerly belonging to Poland, and also revealed the terrible episodes of Polish cruelty which he had, in part, seen in person. He requires a great deal of time to reconstruct that region, so that his war aims are tranquillity and peace. Against this war aim one must set the French war aim—the destruction of Germany. For the German people there is no other alternative than to continue the fight until victory.

As far as the attitude of Italy is concerned, the Fuehrer told the Duce that he had not come to ask anything of him, but that he intended simply to give a picture of the situation and to inform him of his own point of view on the future course of the war. The Duce could then, basing himself solely on the facts, make his decisions. Of one thing, however, the Fuehrer is firmly convinced, and that is that the fates of Germany and Italy are indissolubly connected; victory for Germany would be victory for Italy and the defeat of Germany would also imply the end of the Italian Empire.

Passing to the subject of Russia, the Fuehrer pointed out that he did, in fact, in his book *Mein Kampf* state that Germany ought to unite with England. He would always have been willing to collaborate with England on condition, however, that England did

not claim to limit Germany's living space and that Germany had her old colonies restored. But since England wanted the conflict, he had decided on Russia. This decision ripened within him after long meditation, and is unalterable. Along with Stalin he has been able to establish a hard and fast land frontier between the two countries. Germany and Russia have no opposing interests; they are economically complementary in every field, and therefore the Fuehrer has decided to maintain friendly relations with that country in future. As far as the difference in regimes is concerned, it is in reality a matter of two different worlds, but it has been possible to understand one another in the sense of mutually abstaining from interfering in internal affairs. On the other hand, it seems that Russia, too, is undergoing a far-reaching evolution, and the path Stalin has taken seems to lead to a sort of Slav-Muscovite nationalism and to be a move away from Bolshevism of a Jewish-international character.

The Fuehrer then returned to the subject of the present war situation and described to the Duce at some length the possible course of the conflict and the part which Italy might eventually play in it. He, the Fuehrer, is a realist and would not in any way wish the Duce to do anything contrary to the interests of the Italian people. He does not imitate the Englishman who claims that other nations should pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him. But it is with more and more difficulty that England today finds nations ready to play her game. England would have liked—without compromising her own prestige—to accept the peace proposals formulated by the Fuehrer in the month of October, since, as has been stated, Germany would have consented to solve the problem of the existence of an independent Poland. But the British Government turned down these proposals. And in England, remaining unshakably in the same mood, they reacted to Sumner Welles's visit in a purely negative manner. While Sumner Welles was still in Europe it was officially proclaimed that the war aim of England and France was the breaking up of Germany.

The Duce stated that it is with great pleasure that he takes part in this conversation with the Fuehrer. He is convinced that it was impossible for Germany to postpone the war with Poland any longer. A further postponement—admitting that it had been possible to obtain one for some years—would only have complicated matters. If on 1st September he had made a military demonstration, Italy would certainly have been involved in the conflict. The Duce then explained in detail in what a difficult situation Italy would have found herself if she had gone to war last autumn. He himself had deeply felt the limitations which he had had to impose. Now, however, the Fascist Government and the Party feel that it is impossible to remain neutral until the end of the war. A modification of Italy's attitude to France and England is to be excluded. Therefore Italy's entry into the war is inevitable. Italy intends to march

alongside Germany, not in order to give her military aid—as he saw it, Germany had no need of such help either in Poland or now on the Western front—but because the honour and the interests of Italy demand her intervention in the war.

The Duce then went on to the question of the timing of that intervention. He described in detail Italy's military situation, the ever growing power of her war potential and the excellent morale of the troops. The financial situation, however, would not allow her to wage a war of long duration. The Duce regards with favour the *rapprochement* between Germany and Russia, which spares Germany from a war on two fronts. He, too, believes that a danger of Bolshevik contagion does not exist. In this connection, the Duce pointed out that he was the first to recognise Soviet Russia, and even made an agreement with her. In any case he distinguished sharply between politics and ideology. On this last point he will never be able to agree with Russia.

The Duce then referred to the brief conversation he had had with Sumner Welles. He considers that the morale of England and France is bad because the people do not know why they are fighting. He had left Sumner Welles in no doubt as to the absurdity of the Allied war aims as far as Eastern Europe is concerned—for example the reconstruction of Bohemia and Moravia, etc. Anyone who desires a pacific solution to the conflict must accept accomplished facts.

Speaking of collaboration between Germany and Italy, the Duce repeated that, as soon as Germany has by her military operations created what the Fuehrer describes as a favourable situation, he would lose no time in intervening. Should the German advance develop with a slower *tempo*, the Duce would wait until the moment when his intervention at the decisive hour could be of real use to Germany.

The Fuehrer then revealed to the Duce some of his strategic ideas in the event of a joint conduct of the war, remarking in this connection that the Maginot Line does not today represent an insurmountable obstacle to the German Army; that great progress has been made in the defence of the Ruhr—which is a vital necessity for Germany—against air raids, long-range artillery, etc.

Today the German army, navy and air force are ready as never before. He (the Fuehrer) and with him all his people of eighty-two million souls are firmly convinced that they will completely defeat the Western Powers.

XXXII

LAST EFFORTS AT MEDIATION

1st May—8th June, 1940.

From the middle of March Fascist Italy slid more and more quickly into war. The meeting on the Brenner had been more fruitful than appeared at the time. It had been followed by the successful occupation of Denmark and Norway. Mussolini was once more certain of a German victory and believed that it was near. Therefore he prepared to enter the conflict before it was over. On 21st April, the Duce had confined himself to saying from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia that the order of the day 'from the Alps to the African seas' was 'work and weapons'; but a few minutes later he had let it be understood by the representatives of the Fascist confederations that the hour of the great decision was near, and that Italy would enter the fight at the side of Germany. Roosevelt again attempted to intervene, encouraged probably by Sumner Welles, to whom, on March 19th, after the meeting on the Brenner, Ciano had given assurances that nothing was altered, nor were alterations foreseen in Fascist policy.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 1st May, 1940—XVIII

The United States Ambassador made the following verbal communication to the Duce in the presence of Count Ciano.

After stating that, in view of the urgency of the matter, this means of communication was being used rather than the despatch of a letter, President Roosevelt drew the attention of the Duce to the fact that in the last few weeks two neutral nations had been overthrown by a belligerent Power.

He was happy to be able to acknowledge that Italy's non-belligerence had contributed to the maintenance of peace in the Mediterranean area, and if two hundred million persons had not been dragged into war that was due to this decision of the Duce.

He must underline that a possible extension of the war, which dragged into the hostilities other nations hitherto neutral, would call forth serious and unforeseeable repercussions in the countries of

the Near and Far East, in Africa and in the three Americas.

No one can foresee what consequences an extension of the conflict would have, but it is certain that some countries, which up to now have every intention of preserving their neutrality, might find themselves obliged to intervene in the war.

The European nations, which are so close to the conflict, find themselves in a position where it is difficult to judge its developments with accuracy, while America can, by virtue of her geographical position, have a more accurate and comprehensive view of events.

It is impossible to foresee the future, but it is certain that no nation or group of nations can think of dominating the continent, or worse still, a large part of the world without meeting with unpredictable and unsurmountable difficulties.

President Roosevelt concluded his message by reaffirming the opportunity which Italy and the United States have, as neutrals, of exercising a profound influence on world events and on the re-establishment of a just and fair peace as soon as conditions allow a glimpse of the possibility of negotiations.

Mussolini answered Roosevelt in a manner that was at once arrogant and evasive. He had now made up his mind. The English, too, were convinced of this, and on 10th May they decided to divert their ships from the Mediterranean. The German offensive was awaited in the West, and in London and in Paris there was no longer any doubt that Mussolini would lose no more time. At dawn on 10th May, von Mackensen brought to the Villa Torlonia a letter from Hitler which announced to Mussolini the beginning of operations in the West. The next day a report of the intolerable obstacles placed in the way of Italian shipping by the British and French authorities, and on the interference of the Anglo-French censorship with Italian mail, was published. The report ended with the following words: 'My short notes on the functioning of the control are, I believe, sufficient to give an approximate idea of the very serious damage which the economy of the nation suffers, not only from the fact of the control as such, but from the way in which it is carried out. At this point the question ceases to belong to the strictly technical and administrative field, and, in its aspects and development, acquires an entirely different degree of importance.' On 13th May, Mussolini announced to his closest collaborators his intention of intervening immediately in the conflict. Conscious of the tremendous gravity of the dangers which faced the democratic Powers in these fateful days, Roosevelt sent another message to the head of the Fascist Government stressing the imperative need of contributing to the final pacification of the world. It was not the last message, because he was to send another—as will be seen later—on the 27th. That very day the Germans had reached Soissons, and a little later Antwerp and Brussels fell. Mussolini no longer listened to the

LAST EFFORTS AT MEDIATION

voices which reached him from across the Atlantic. He had even—in order to concentrate all his energies on the imminent operation in the West—abandoned his long prepared plan for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia for which the tools were Croatian separatism and Ante Pavelic, who had for years had a villa near Siena. This, of course, did not prevent him from taking certain precautions with an eye to the future.

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ALFIERI.

N 1/03388

Rome, 26th May, 1940—XVIII

Dear Alfieri,¹

The ambiguous attitude of Yugoslavia is certainly well-known to Berlin circles. If necessity obliges her to show sympathy and friendship for the Axis Powers, her sentiments in reality lie elsewhere, and there are frequent indications of this, even if they are prudent and controlled.

It is now considered advisable that you should work to awaken and keep alive in political and military circles in Berlin the conviction that Yugoslavia is a country which is essentially hostile, and therefore ought to be considered as a potential enemy of the Axis.

You will have no lack of arguments and examples to quote for this purpose. The notorious and pronounced Anglophile sentiments of the Regent and court circles, and the frequent pro-French demonstrations by all sorts of groups, have indicated the true spirit of Yugoslavia in regard to pressing events in Europe. All this must be pointed out, and Yugoslavia's profound, radical hostility to Germany and Italy impressed on German opinion.

Keep me informed of the activity you carry out to this effect as well as of its results.

Many cordial greetings.

CONVERSATION WITH THE UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR.

Rome, 27th May, 1940—XVIII

This morning I received the United States Ambassador who asked to speak with the Duce urgently on the personal instructions of President Roosevelt. Following the Duce's instructions to me

¹Dino Alfieri, Under-secretary of State for Corporations from 1929 to 1932, Under-secretary of State for Press and Propaganda from 1935 to 1936, then Minister for the same department until 31st October, 1939. Ambassador to the Holy See from 1939 to 1940, later Ambassador to Germany until 25th July, 1943.

that he did not wish to have personal contact with foreign representatives, I asked Mr. Phillips to deliver the communication to me.

President Roosevelt's message was more or less as follows:

'In the name of the American people he was anxious to confirm his desire that the war be kept out of the Mediterranean basin. He understood, however, Italy's wish to obtain satisfaction for certain just national aspirations, and the need for her to do so. That being the case, President Roosevelt proposed that the Duce inform him of Italy's desires and aspirations. President Roosevelt, in his turn, would bring them to the notice of the French and English Governments. Should it not be possible to reach an agreement on the basis of these proposals, President Roosevelt would request France and England to give an undertaking to uphold these conditions at the end of the war, and guarantee to Italy that she would take part in the Peace Conference on the same footing as the belligerents. On his side, Mussolini would have to give a guarantee not to increase his own claims at a future date, as well as to maintain neutrality until the end of the conflict.'

After having received orders from the Duce, I informed the United States Ambassador that, while expressing thanks for the courteous offer, the Italian Government did not consider it possible to avail itself of it. In fact, while it is true that there exist national desires and aspirations to be satisfied, one must also bear in mind that Italy is bound to Germany by a treaty of alliance and that she does not in any way intend to enter into negotiations which may prevent the possibility of her keeping faith with her pledges. Italy therefore intends to maintain her liberty of judgment and action, and points out that any possible future offers similar to those made today could not, for reasons which should be obvious, but have a negative reception.

Even this was not Roosevelt's last message. He sent another to Rome on the 31st, twenty-four hours after Mussolini had written and despatched a letter to Hitler in which, after his congratulations on the capitulation of Belgium, he informed him of 'the decision to enter the war as from 5th June' unless his ally should wish the Fascist intervention to take place some days after that date. Roosevelt's feeler was considerably stronger than the previous one; it recalled the existence of American interests in the Mediterranean and forecast a more active contribution by the United States to the Anglo-French war effort. Italy's intervention was delayed at Hitler's request, and, after some uncertainty, finally fixed for the 10th. Everything was, or seemed to be, ready. Nor had Rome neglected to keep Spain in mind. A return could be made for past services rendered to Franco at a suitable moment.

LAST EFFORTS AT MEDIATION

LETTER TO THE SPANISH MINISTER FOR THE
INTERIOR, SERRANO SUÑER.

N 1/3555

Rome, 3rd June, 1940—XVIII

My very dear Minister and Friend,

I was very pleased to receive your letter of 24th May, and wish to assure you that I will keep Señor Gimenez Armau in mind for the eventualities foreseen by you.

I also wish to tell you that I am following with great interest the activity which is being carried on by your Press and by intellectual circles for the recovery of Gibraltar. The historic hour through which Europe is passing, and the grave events which are in store, cannot but have profound repercussions on your country, which is so deeply involved in the Mediterranean order, both present and future.

I also take the liberty of giving you one piece of advice—namely that, for internal and other reasons, your country should intensify the irredentist campaign more and more. It is only by setting up and making the most of foreign political objectives that the moral unity of a nation forms and gains strength, and Spain, which has emerged from its great struggle for liberation to a new life, will rally round the objective of Gibraltar, as if round a standard, her best forces and her best impulses.

It is with pleasure, dear Serrano Suñer, that I again express to you my most cordial friendship.

LETTER TO THE SPANISH MINISTER FOR THE
INTERIOR, SERRANO SUÑER.

N 1/3659

Rome, 8th June, 1940—XVIII

Dear Serrano,

A group of our bombers, returning from an important operation, will have to break their flight on one of your aerodromes to carry out the refuelling necessary for returning to Italy. The group is under the command of Ettore Muti, Secretary of the Party, Spanish Legionary and your friend.

I am now turning to you to ask you to be good enough to request the Generalissimo to give the necessary instructions so that our air-men may find the necessary help on the Spanish field to enable them to leave again immediately. To this request I also add one asking you to give the matter your personal attention which is, I know, more effective than anything else.

I shall be grateful if, when transmitting this request to the Caudillo, you are good enough to stress the following points in my name:

LAST EFFORTS AT MEDIATION

First: The operation is of an entirely exceptional character and does not in any way constitute a precedent which may be followed at a later date.

Second: Should the operation produce an international outcry, we will assume the entire responsibility and deny the existence of any previous agreement between us.

Third: We undertake to preserve the utmost secrecy over the matter.

I am sure, dear Serrano, that on this occasion, too, you will be willing to give me a new proof of your friendship, which I know to be profound and sincere. I follow the work for the reconstruction of Spain which you are carrying out at the Caudillo's side with great interest, and fully share your faith in the success of your labours and in the destinies of your country.

I hope that you will visit us at a not far distant date; having come to know the face of Italy at work, you will now have the opportunity of knowing that of Italy at war. The Duce—who instructs me to greet you—will also be happy to see you. At any time you will be my most welcome guest.

XXXIII

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE

19th June—7th July, 1940.

In the week following the Fascist Government's declaration of war on Great Britain and France, the French army was broken by the German armies. On 17th June, a Government was formed by Marshal Pétain, and at once applied to the German High Command to learn the conditions laid down by the conqueror for the cessation of hostilities. The fight went on because Pétain did not formally offer capitulation, limiting himself to requesting information; but it was obvious that France was, for the time being, effectively defeated. Having received Pétain's communications, Hitler summoned Mussolini to Munich for a preliminary examination of the conditions to be imposed on France. Mussolini had in mind extremely stiff conditions which contemplated, among other things, the occupation of Tunis and Corsica and the handing over of the entire fleet. But Germany alone had conquered in the field, for the Italian army had not moved from its positions, and had entered the lists only a week before. Hitler, therefore, had other views on the solution of the French problem in terms of German interests, and not at all the same as those in which Mussolini believed for Italy. At Munich separate conversations took place between Hitler and Mussolini, and between Ciano and Ribbentrop.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Munich, 19th June, 1940—XVIII

In the first place von Ribbentrop spoke to me of the armistice with France. He said it was the Fuehrer's intention to avoid offering conditions to the French such as would give a pretext to refuse to conclude the negotiation and to transfer the Pétain Government to England or Algeria whence it could 'proclaim the holy war' and continue hostilities for an indefinite time. In particular he was pre-occupied with the question of the French fleet, an elusive factor, which rather than give itself up to the enemy, would certainly go over to England or America, whence it would be able to come into play again at the opportune moment.

Ribbentrop then went on to speak of possibilities which might arise with regard to England. He said that, in the Fuehrer's opinion, the existence of the British Empire as an element of stability and social order in the world is very useful. In the present state of affairs it would be impossible to replace it by another similar organisation. Therefore the Fuehrer—as he has also recently stated in public—does not desire the destruction of the British Empire. He asks that England renounce some of her possessions and recognise the *fait accompli*. On these conditions, Hitler would be prepared to come to an agreement. England has already been informed of the above through the confidential channel of the Swedish Legation. After the armistice has been reached with France, the decisions for the future will be taken. If England chooses war, it will again be total war, pitiless, decisive, until the destruction of England and the Empire. If England chooses peace, the Fuehrer will be happy to be able to collaborate in the reconstruction of a Europe in which order and peace are assured for the space of some generations.

I must add at this point that von Ribbentrop expressed himself in terms which are absolutely new in his vocabulary. He spoke of humanity's need for peace, of the need for reconstruction, of the need for bringing together the nations, whom the war has separated so much, to live together in harmony.

I put the question to him bluntly: Does Germany at the present moment prefer peace or the prosecution of the war? Without hesitating Ribbentrop replied: 'Peace.'

We then went on to speak of the Italian claims. He asked me what claims we had on France. First stating that I was speaking in a purely personal capacity, reserving any formal request for the Duce, I said that we consider the minimum requests to be as follows: Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, French Somaliland. I excluded Savoy, which, being outside the Alpine ramparts, is not considered by us as Italian territory, while everything included within them is considered as national territory. Ribbentrop underlined this statement of principle with much interest. I also spoke of Algeria and Morocco, pointing out Italy's need for an outlet to the ocean.

As far as the first requests are concerned, Ribbentrop said, that in his opinion, the Fuehrer is in agreement. As far as Algeria and Morocco are concerned, however, he has not pronounced an opinion. He asked me what actual interest we had and what rights we could claim in Algeria. I replied by recalling the work carried out by Italians there, particularly in certain centres, and by pointing out Italy's political and strategic interest in being assigned such a long coastal area of North Africa. At all events, I based the right to the Tunisian claim on the rectification of the frontiers so as to include the mineral-bearing region (iron, phosphates). As far as Morocco is concerned, Ribbentrop made a brief reference to the now historical ambitions of Germany with regard to that

territory,¹ and spoke to me at great length of the Spanish claims on French Morocco. He added that in Europe, as reconstituted after the peace, Italy and Germany will have to represent the gendarmes of the order which will be created. If to Italy and Germany a satisfied Spain is also added as a keeper of law and order, for a very long time it will not be possible to alter the future European *status quo* under any circumstances.

Ribbentrop did not give details of Germany's colonial claims. He said that the Reich claims back all her colonies,² that it considers the Belgian Congo politically and economically necessary to complete the German Colonial Empire, and referred also, but not in a precise manner, to the demand for other French colonies in West Africa. On the other hand, he formally ruled out any claim to territories in India, the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China, because such distant possessions would oblige Germany to bear proportionally great and difficult burdens. He added that it is the Fuehrer's intention to create a free Jewish state in Madagascar to which he will compulsorily send the many millions of Jews who live on the territory of the old Reich as well as on the territories recently conquered.

Ribbentrop said nothing on the future continental organisation of Europe, except that it is Germany's desire that the *status quo* in the Danube and Balkan regions be preserved. In reply to a question by me he said that he does not consider any territorial change necessary, not even where Hungary is concerned, and he spoke in correct, if no longer cordial, terms of Russia, with regard to whom he believes Germany will for long be able to maintain the present line of policy.

'From this war,' he concluded, 'we will gain such advantages and such tasks will arise that we must not create new problems for ourselves nor nourish ambitions which are out of proportion to the real possibilities. For some generations after ours they will be busy organising and exploiting the conquests we have made.'

Herr von Ribbentrop finally spoke of America. He said that if

¹Germany displayed interest in Morocco at the beginning of the century, when, as a consequence of French penetration of that territory, Kaiser Wilhelm II ostentatiously landed at Tangier on 30th March, 1905, and made a speech demanding the independence of Morocco, which ought to be open to the peaceful rivalry of all nations. The reactions provoked by this gesture led to the conference of Algeciras from January to April, 1906, and to the protocol of the same name which gave limited satisfaction to the German demands. The second Moroccan crisis provoked by Germany took place five years later when the gunboat *Panther* put in at Agadir on 1st July, 1910, on the pretext of protecting German nationals against native violence. This was also a gesture of protest against the occupation of Fez by the French. There was a moment of dangerous tension, but then Berlin came to an agreement with Paris, receiving in exchange for recognition of French preponderance in Morocco, a part of the French Congo adjoining the German colony of the Cameroons. Germany renounced all her rights to Morocco by her signature of the Versailles Treaty.

²Before the first World War the German colonies were: German South-West Africa, German East Africa (now Tanganyika), Togoland and the Cameroons, Kaiser Wilhelm's Land in New Guinea, as well as the concession at Kiau-Chiau in China,

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE

the war with England is to go on, it is probable that America will later intervene. However, he says it is out of the question that this decision will be immediate. He recognises the great industrial and economic capacities of the United States, but says it is impossible for them to come into play sufficiently quickly to save England from the inevitable disaster of a real war. He confided to me that he has still at his disposition 'three cards of exceptional importance in the game' against Roosevelt, among which there is, above all, a compromising document which will be made public shortly.

He concluded the conversation by inviting me to keep in very close touch with him during the next few days, and by repeating his wish to have me as his guest so as to pay a visit with him to the Western front.

The Armistice with France was signed, significantly, in two stages; with the Germans on the 22nd, with the Italians on the 24th. The first armistice was signed on the same spot where, on 11th November, 1918, the armistice had been signed which put an end to the first World War. The scene of the Italian armistice was the Villa Incisa, not far from Rome. On the Continent all was over for the enemies of the Axis. But the sweets of victory lasted only a few short days. Already on the 22nd, when the French were signing the armistice, Mr. Winston Churchill had said that the British Government was firmly resolved to continue the war by land, sea and air to a victorious conclusion. De Gaulle was already making his first wireless appeals to the French people. Something new also was maturing in the East. At Munich, Hitler had assured Mussolini that the U.S.S.R. would make no move to claim Bessarabia from Rumania, but on the 29th, Moscow was already sending an ultimatum to Bucharest which brooked no delay. Berlin and Rome had reluctantly hastened to advise the Rumanians to give way in order to avoid dangerous complications in the Balkans.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FEUHRER.

Berlin, 7th July, 1940—XVIII

I summarise briefly my conversation with the Fuehrer on the 7th July. The conversation lasted from 12.30 until 2.30, and took place in the Chancellery.

The Fuehrer began by saying that he has been considering the advisability of making another gesture of psychological and propagandist importance. He has not yet made a decision: however, he considers such a gesture useful in principle, although he is now convinced that the war against England will continue. He takes pleasure in stressing that the conditions of the Italian armistice have facilitated the agreement with France. Even had the conditions been different Germany would not have put her agreement into force until

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE

the Franco-Italian armistice had been signed. He is, however, pleased to underline how much the moderation of our requests, and the clause which leaves the French their disarmed fleet had contributed to creating the present favourable situation. It is, however, necessary to bear in mind that France still continues to be the enemy of Italy and Germany, continues to be a country which, if the opportunity arose, would attempt to damage to the utmost the two Axis Powers. Therefore France will have to pay, and pay dearly for her responsibility.

As far as the attack on England is concerned, the Fuehrer says that the question is at the present moment being studied by the General Staff. The problem presented is a very delicate and difficult one, since it is certain that the war will extend to other fronts and will require complicated operations. In the present state of affairs he is not yet in a position to say in what form the attack against England will develop, but he is certain that if, as he believes, the war continues, the attack must be carried through with the utmost speed. When the results of the General Staff's studies have been drawn up and when the line of action can be defined, the Fuehrer will consider making contact with Italy, and will possibly suggest a meeting with the Duce on the Brenner in order to lay down the respective tasks of the two countries. The Fuehrer then said that he had no other statements of a general nature to make, and asked me to speak.

First of all, I dealt with France, and told the Fuehrer that the Duce, too, was concerned at the French attempt to make their way unnoticed into our camp and thus evade the consequences of their past policy. I could not, therefore, but note with lively satisfaction what the Fuehrer had said to me on the subject of France. I added that, in the present state of affairs, the idea of a separate peace with France might, in the Duce's opinion, begin to be considered.

Hitler said that a separate peace with France would undoubtedly present many advantages for our two countries, but that there are two arguments against it. First, German inability to occupy the colonies which would, as a result of the peace treaty pass from France to Germany, for example, the Cameroons—colonies which would probably be occupied in the meantime by the English; second, the necessity of keeping the west coast of France in German hands, on the one hand, because that coast was indispensable for the attack against England, on the other, in order to maintain communications with Spain—a country which was most useful for the Axis game whatever happened, and indispensable should one wish to make an attempt on Gibraltar.¹

¹As early as June, 1940, according to a report by the German Ambassador to Madrid, Stohrer, dated 8th August, the Spanish Government had declared itself prepared to abandon its position of non-belligerence and to enter the war on the side of the Axis Powers, on certain territorial, economic and military conditions, among them the restoration of Gibraltar. These conditions, however, were too stiff to be acceptable—according to subsequent declarations of Franco, deliberately so.

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE

I took note of the Fuehrer's statement and expressed to him the Duce's keen desire to have Italian forces take part in any attack against Great Britain. I informed him that Italy can send a land force up to 10 divisions strong and an air contingent up to 30 squadrons strong.

The Fuehrer replied that he noted this wish of the Duce but that he was not in a position to give an answer until the planning stage was over, and the resulting decisions of the German General Staff had been taken. Although he did not commit himself in any way, he did, however, show himself friendly and favourably inclined to our request.

I then spoke to the Fuehrer about the forthcoming Italian operations in North Africa,¹ which he approved, adding that he was more-over willing to send us—as he already offered to our Ambassador, Alfieri—long-range bomber formations to operate against the Suez Canal. I also laid before Hitler the difficulties we are meeting with in Greece. He, too, agreed on the possibility of England's occupying the Ionian Islands in order to convert them into anti-Italian bases, and declared himself decidedly in favour of our operation to anticipate any such action by the English. On this occasion, and several times during the conversation, he repeated that everything concerning the Mediterranean, including the Adriatic, is a purely Italian matter, in which he does not intend to interfere, since he approves *a priori* any decision taken and any operation which may be carried out.

We then spoke of Yugoslavia. Hitler declared himself to be in absolute agreement with the necessity of liquidating 'this problem in a manner favourable to Italy', but insisted that the operation be carried out when the situation appears favourable. He fears that an operation by us against Yugoslavia may set the whole Balkan peninsula ablaze, provoke Russian intervention and eventually even set up a community of interests between Russia and England. (It must be noticed that on the subject of Russia he avoided a thorough discussion, but did not lose the opportunity of letting his distrust of that country be seen. And Ribbentrop associated himself with him). The Fuehrer says that once the English problem is liquidated, or at least on its way to being easily liquidated, it will be a very simple problem to settle the Yugoslav question. He, too, considers the Regent and the Yugoslav people to be distinctly hostile to the Axis Powers, but for different reasons. However, he considers that Italy should immediately intervene in Yugoslavia should an outbreak arise elsewhere in the Balkans for other reasons.

Reserving the right to submit the question to the Duce for a decision, I considered I could state it as follows:

1. It is established that Yugoslavia, as she is now, will not be

¹The Italian offensive towards Mersa Matruh began on 14th September, but had to halt at Sidi Barrani on the 18th.

able to have the right to citizenship in the new Europe created by the Axis. It is established that the Yugoslav question must be solved in a manner favourable to Italy.

2. Italy will not take the initiative for the moment, while making strategic dispositions of military materials and forces so as to be able to act with the utmost speed as soon as the propitious occasion presents itself.

3. That operation will be brought about by complications in the Balkans, or by the approach of the collapse of Britain.

The Fuehrer approved, and said that this is the line of conduct he recommends to the Duce, while being certain that any moment chosen by the Duce for action will be the moment most suitable to the interests of the Axis.

With regard to Hungary, the Fuehrer did not hide his disappointment at the somewhat unruly demonstrations of Hungarian impatience. However, accepting the Duce's suggestion, he has arranged for Teleki and Csaky to come to Germany next Thursday to have a tripartite meeting. This meeting will probably take place in Salzburg.¹

Hitler, who gave the conversation a markedly cordial character, expressed his desire to meet me again as soon as my visit to the front is over.

My reception in Berlin has been very warm; Hitler apologised for not being able to have large mass meetings owing to fear of air-raids, which appear to be particularly easy in good weather.

During lunch I was able to have a long conversation with Keitel. He, too, spoke to me about the attack on England and repeated that at present nothing has been decided by the General Staff. As far as the landing is concerned, he believes it possible but considers it 'an extremely difficult operation, which must be approached with the utmost caution, in view of the fact that the intelligence available on the military preparedness of the island and on the coastal defences is meagre and not very reliable.' It appears easier, and in any event necessary, to make a large-scale attack on the airfields, factories and principal centres of communication in Britain. But it must be borne in mind that the British air force is at present still extremely efficient, and the British forces ready for defence and counter-attack are estimated to be in the region of 1,500 planes. Keitel admitted that recently offensive operations by the British air force have been greatly intensified; bombing raids are being carried out with remarkable precision and by formations of up to 30 planes. However, there is a great shortage of pilots in England, and those taking part in operations against German towns cannot be replaced by the new pilots, who are completely inexperienced. Keitel, too,

¹Instead it took place in Munich on 9th July. Hitler received the Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Teleki and the Foreign Minister, Count Csaky, in the presence of Ribbentrop and of Ciano, who had been in Germany since 6th July.

ARMISTICE WITH FRANCE

like Hitler before him, insisted at length on the necessity of striking at Gibraltar as a means of dislocating the British imperial system.

Neither Keitel nor Hitler made any reference to the duration of the war. Only Himmler said in passing that the war must be over early in October.

P.S.—1. Both Hitler and Ribbentrop are now apparently convinced that the war must go on. I emphasised to them that the Duce is definitely in favour of continuing the war, and opposed to any compromise solution.

2. I referred to our claims in Europe, Africa and Asia. Hitler said that he is *a priori* in agreement with us on the settlement in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. During the next few days I shall go into details with Ribbentrop.

XXXIV

RUMANIA DISMEMBERED

20th July—9th September, 1940.

The annexation of Bessarabia and of Northern Bukovina by the U.S.S.R., which had been demanded by Moscow at the end of June, and carried out without delay, had the effect of giving rise to similar demands—all of them at the expense of Rumania—by Budapest and Sofia. The Bulgarian claims related to the North Dobrudja, which had been forcibly acquired by the Rumanians in 1913. But these were neither the most important nor the most painful of the claims presented to Rumania in July, 1940. Much more serious and more far-reaching were the Hungarian requests. In Hungary's case it was a question of the restoration of a piece of territory which since 1920 had been brought insistently and ineffectively to the notice of Europe. Transylvania was a vast and rich region with singular religious and civil traditions; it had been both the shrine of the Hungarian spirit of independence for the 150 years of Turkish domination between the 6th and 7th centuries, and the cradle of the growing Rumanian nation and its culture. Hungarians and Rumanians had any number of historical, ethnological and cultural grounds with which to claim, with equal ardour, the return to their native lands of this country lying between them. In 1848 and 1918 in turn the stronger had won. Now it was once again the turn of the Hungarians to be, or to appear to be, the stronger. Budapest had begun to call the attention of the Axis Powers to the question of Transylvania as early as November, 1938. But the dismemberment of Rumania was not in the interests of Italy or Germany, since it would have reduced that country to a state of perilous weakness, which could open the way to all kinds of dangers. At the end of March, 1940, the German General Staff had asked Budapest for the second time for the right of passage through Hungary to be granted to the German troops ordered to garrison the Rumanian oil-wells. In return for this favour the Germans had promised the Hungarians Transylvania. Count Teleki knew that to oppose the German request meant, sooner or later, armed conflict with the Reich, of which the outcome was not in doubt. But he also knew that to acquiesce in the desires of Berlin meant the loss of independence. Hence arose a state of perplexity which Teleki believed he might solve by asking Italian advice. Mussolini answered that this time, too, they should accept, and the Hungarians gave way. However, the movement across Hungary did not take place immediately.

It came a little later, when the Rumanian crisis had begun, and begun on the initiative of the U.S.S.R. It was natural that, after what had gone before, the Hungarians should once again come forward after the Soviet ultimatum of 28th June. Hitler received Teleki and Csaky in the presence of Ciano on 10th July and gave them complete freedom with regard to the Rumanians, but with this warning—that in the event of a conflict they must not hope for German or Italian aid. Hitler promised, however, to make a démarche to King Carol, to persuade him to make a concession in the interests of Rumania and of Europe. In saying this to the Hungarians, Hitler was certainly thinking of the speech which he would make on 19th July offering once again to shake hands with Great Britain. Ciano went to Berlin on that date, solely to listen to him.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Berlin, 20th July, 1940—XVIII

I summarise briefly today's conversation with Hitler.

1. The reaction of the English Press to yesterday's speech has been such as to allow of no prospect of an understanding. Hitler is therefore preparing to strike the military blow at England. He stresses that Germany's strategic position, as well as her sphere of influence and of economic control, are such as to have already greatly weakened the possibilities of resistance by Great Britain, which will collapse under the first blows. The air attack already began some days ago, and is continually growing in intensity. The reaction of the anti-aircraft defences and of the British fighters is not seriously hindering the German air attack. The decisive offensive operation is now being studied, since the fullest preparations have been made.

2. The Fuehrer still attaches the greatest importance to the maintenance of peace in the Danube and Balkan regions. The letter to King Carol has already reached its destination and a reply has been announced.

Hitler considers it the task of the Axis to induce Hungary and Rumania to negotiate directly, and to advise moderation and prudence to both parties. He does not, however, intend to intervene, even indirectly, in the course of the negotiations, because he wishes to abstain from giving any opinion on the subject. As far as Bulgaria is concerned, he considers her claims moderate and her demands easily acceptable.¹

¹Bulgaria demanded the restoration of the South Dobrudja, which had been lost as a result of the Peace of Bucharest of 29th August, 1913, at the end of the second Balkan War. An agreement was reached on 7th September, 1940, granting the restoration of the territory in question to Bulgaria, and arranging for an exchange of populations for other limited zones. The treaty was negotiated and concluded without recourse to the arbitration of Germany and Italy, as in the case of Transylvania.

3. The Fuehrer expressed his high regard for Italy's war effort. He is very well informed on our combined sea and air operations, and said that he gathers that Italy has already delivered a large number of heavy blows which have been severely felt by the English.

4. As soon as the situation appears quite clear for taking further decisions, and when the military preparations for the next phase of the war have been completed, the Fuehrer will address another letter to the Duce, and preferably, if events allow it, will propose a meeting on the Brenner. I confirm that this, while being a matter for the near future, does not seem likely to take place immediately.

After the Hungarians, it was for the Rumanians to make a move in defence of their rights. The Prime Minister, Gigurtu, and the Foreign Minister, Manoilescu, first went to Salzburg on 23rd July, and then they came to Rome.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
HEAD OF THE RUMANIAN GOVERNMENT, GIGURTU,
IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Palazzo Venezia, 27th July, 1940—XVIII

The head of the Rumanian Government, M. Gigurtu, begins by saying that Rumania is animated by a sincere wish to come to an agreement with neighbouring nations. This agreement seems all the more indispensable where Hungary is concerned since there exists between the two countries an identity of interests due to the fact that the Rumanian and Hungarian peoples are surrounded by Slav nations. Rumania's main preoccupation is at present represented by Russia. M. Gigurtu says that at the present moment Russia is maintaining a calmer attitude towards Rumania, but there is no guarantee that this will continue in the future. He fears that possible territorial concessions by Rumania to Hungary and Bulgaria may be taken as a pretext by Russia for further claims on Bucharest. The Rumanian people intend to remain quiet and to dedicate themselves entirely to their own work and to the exploitation of the country's many resources, which will be put at the disposal of the Axis countries. In order to do this, great tasks of internal organisation face the Rumanian Government, which wishes to carry out the following programme: to blot out all the errors of the past and to bring Rumania's policy into line with the real interests of the country—a programme which is represented by complete adhesion to the policy of the Axis.

The Duce replies that Rumania is traditionally a popular country in Italy in spite of the policy followed in the last few years—a false

policy because based on false premises. First error—faith in Geneva; second—acceptance of the English guarantees.¹ The Duce recalls that he seriously warned Gafencu² on this point when he came to Rome, pointing out to him that the British guarantee, which neglects the fundamental factor, namely geography, had no value, and that, on the contrary, as a French newspaper had written, no greater misfortune can befall a people than to be guaranteed by the English. As far as Russia is concerned, the Duce recalls that this country a short time ago went through a terrible crisis which threatened its very existence. The military and political leaders were shot, but it was France and England who went to Canossa by approaching the Kremlin and who have brought Russia once again into Western politics. There is no doubt that Russia is, in the present circumstances, the country which profits from the European situation. One must bear in mind that the Slav mass in Europe is very large, and that it is continually growing. The Duce agrees with the Rumanians on the advisability of having followed a realistic policy with regard to Russia, and of having avoided a conflict which would have no other outcome than Rumania's loss.

As far as Hungary is concerned, the Duce states that he learns from statements by Teleki himself that the Hungarians are ready to make a compromise solution. In the present state of Europe it is in the interests of all States to make their political frontiers coincide with the ethnological ones. If that makes Rumania territorially smaller, it will make her more homogeneous. Naturally the frontier rectifications will have to be accompanied by an exchange of populations without which the problem would not find a final solution. Thereafter it will be possible to follow a common Rumanian and Hungarian policy such as is indispensable for the life and future of the two countries; otherwise the Slav mass will come beyond the line of the Carpathians, since nowadays one can speak of Pan Slavism combined with Bolshevism. In Yugoslavia, too, Communist propaganda has made notable and dangerous progress.

As far as the agreement with Bulgaria is concerned, the Duce is of the opinion that it will be very easy to reach it in view of the moderation of the Bulgarian demands.

Once the situation abroad has been settled, it will be necessary to take steps to solve those problems of an internal nature. The Duce understands that the Rumanian people are grievously affected

¹On 13th April, 1939, the British Government had declared to the Bucharest Government that it guaranteed unilaterally the territorial integrity of Rumania. In this it was followed by France. On 1st July, 1940, on the proposal of the head of the Rumanian Government, Argetoianu, the Rumanian Cabinet renounced the Anglo-French guarantee. On 18th July, the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. A. Butler, announced in the House of Commons that Great Britain withdrew the guarantee given in April.

²Grigore Gafencu, Foreign Minister from 21st December, 1938 to 1940, when he became Rumanian Minister to Moscow, staying there until 1941, and afterwards writing a useful account of his experiences.

by the great sacrifices which they will have to make from the point of view of territory; but in that very sorrow he sees the evidence that Rumania is a healthy organism. In actual fact, Rumania, which is an agricultural country and has great productive capacities, will always be able by a sound policy to maintain its position as the most thickly populated and strongest state in the Danube Basin.

The Duce also speaks of the need for the Rumanians to eliminate the Jews from the life of the State and to restrict all their activities.

With regard to the single party system, the Duce also makes some suggestions to M. Gigurtu.

The Duce concludes by assuring the Rumanians that once a programme of this nature has been carried out, whether in the field of internal or international politics, Rumania will be able to turn to the Axis which will take into consideration the new situation which has arisen.

M. Manoilescu asks whether Rumania, while not wishing to ask for any promise, can venture to hope that, once she has fallen into line with the policy of the Axis, she will obtain the support of the Axis in all directions.

The Duce replies that the same reasons for which the Axis wishes peace in the Balkans today will have stronger grounds for existence in the future, and that therefore anyone disturbing the situation will meet with the opposition of the Axis.

M. Manoilescu places some requests of a technical nature before the Duce relating to the forthcoming negotiations with Hungary and Bulgaria. Thereafter he produces the Rumanian evidence on the situation of the minorities.

The two documents which follow in order not to break the chronological sequence, do not refer to the Rumanian question; but they do touch on subjects which the Axis Chancelleries were actively dealing with at that period—the alignment of Spain with the totalitarian Powers and the conservation of peace in the Balkans.

LETTER TO THE SPANISH MINISTER FOR THE INTERIOR, SERRANO SUÑER.

N1/4776

Rome, 7th August, 1940—XVIII

My very dear Minister and Friend,

This letter will be brought to you along with my greetings by the Ambassador, Francesco Lequio.

He is arriving in Madrid at a moment of historical importance for the destiny of Europe and for the future of our peoples. Already united by ties of brotherhood by a common and heroic struggle, they now see opening up before them those wider and juster horizons which will reward their efforts and faith.

RUMANIA DISMEMBERED

Tomorrow, as yesterday, our countries will face in a spirit of close comradeship the new tasks which await them on their road to renewed greatness.

I beg you, dear Serrano Suñer, to be good enough to give your personal comradesly assistance to the Ambassador, Lequio, who will be a faithful interpreter of the sentiments of Fascist Italy in Franco's glorious Spain.

I thank you, and take the opportunity to express once again, dear Serrano Suñer, my most cordial friendship.

LETTER TO THE LIEUTENANT-GENERAL IN ALBANIA, JACOMONI.

Personal.

Rome, 22nd August, 1940—XVIII

Dear Jacomoni,¹

The problem of Italo-Grecian and Italo-Yugoslav relations has recently been the subject of close examination within the framework of the European situation arising from the most recent events and their possible development.

The intensification of German operations against England and the rapid, victorious conclusion of our operation in Somaliland have made a matter of the first importance the advisability of concentrating the maximum effort against the vital nerve-centres of the British Empire, one of which—Egypt—is a decisive factor for the outcome of the Axis war.

While co-ordinating the various sectors of our political and military activity under these headings, it has been decided by higher authorities to slow down the pace of our moves against Greece and Yugoslavia. You must therefore take steps to see that—while maintaining in a state of potential efficiency all the dispositions made there with a view to the objectives with which you are familiar—things are not speeded up and that—while keeping the question alive—no steps are taken, until further orders, to produce any sort of crisis. I request you to inform me of the steps taken by you to this end and meanwhile renew my cordial greetings.

While the air offensive against Great Britain was growing in intensity, and the announcement of the invasion of the island was awaited, the dispute between Hungary and Rumania over Transylvania was becoming more acute. The point was reached where the Hungarians gave the impression that they intended to take matters into their own hands by having recourse to arms. This led to the intervention of the German and Italian Governments, which laid down a procedure similar to that already employed to solve the

¹Francesco Jacomoni, Italian diplomat, Lieutenant-General in Albania from 22nd April, 1939.

dispute between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in November, 1938. The parties to the dispute were summoned to Vienna to learn the award of the Axis. On 30th August, Transylvania was split more or less in two, the northern part being given to the Hungarians and the rest being left to the Rumanians. Manoilescu fainted as the award was declared; Teleki next day said that 'one had to put up with it'. No-one was satisfied.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

(Summary cabled to the Duce.)

Vienna, 29th August, 1940—XVIII

1. First the Fuehrer made a point of renewing his congratulations on the victory in Somaliland—'a hard blow to British prestige'. He thanks me for the Duce's letter which he will answer as soon as possible. He is awaiting with lively interest the beginning of operations in Egypt, and received with pleasure news given to him by me of our intended attack should Germany further postpone the offensive against Great Britain.

2. In this connection, the Fuehrer said that, in order to begin operations against England, it was necessary to carry out three stages of preparations i.e. (a) prepare large landing craft and transport; (b) site heavy artillery on French coast; (c) destroy British air force, and especially fighters.

3. While the first two have now been done, the persistent bad weather had hindered the German air force, in spite of flattering exhortations to complete its task. If the weather is more favourable in future, the Fuehrer calculates that two weeks are sufficient to gain that mastery of the air over Britain which is indispensable in order to neutralise British naval superiority and carry out the landing.

4. As regards the dispute between Hungary and Rumania, the Fuehrer intends a conflict to be avoided which would weaken the Axis at a moment when all the forces of Germany and Italy must be directed against a still strong and dangerous enemy like Great Britain. The Fuehrer considers the Hungarian requests¹ exaggerated and illogical and commented severely on them. He wishes a reasonable settlement of the Transylvanian dispute to emerge from the Vienna meeting on the basis of about two-thirds of the Hungarian requests.

5. I must report that both the speeches of the Fuehrer and those of Ribbentrop reveal a marked distrust towards Russia, whose present policy is to exploit to the maximum eventual complications,

¹The Hungarians had requested the return of a large part of Transylvania from the line of the river Maros, and including areas predominantly inhabited by Rumanians.

RUMANIA DISMEMBERED

thrusting forward, with the complicity of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, 'as far as the Straits, the Ægean and even the Adriatic.'

6. On the whole I found the mood firmly optimistic on the future course of events even if now—more than in the past—the difficulties which the attack on the British Isles present are stressed, and they are beginning to admit the possibility that the conflict may last over the winter.

LETTER TO THE HUNGARIAN REGENT, HORTHY.

Rome, 9th September, 1940—XVIII

Your Serene Highness,

I am very grateful for the courteous terms in which you expressed to me the feelings of the Hungarian people with regard to the part played by Fascist Italy on the occasion of the historic award.

Your expressions have increased my satisfaction at seeing at last brought about, in accordance with principles long since enunciated by the Duce, an act of justice which guarantees a lasting peace in the Danube and the Balkans.

I can assure you that the Italian people, bound to the Hungarian people by such close ties of friendship and sympathy, shares to the full its exultation at the realisation of its just aspirations.

It is with these sentiments that I beg you, Your Most Serene Highness, to accept the assurances of my high esteem.

XXXV

SPAIN AND THE AXIS

19th September—28th October, 1940

The German air offensive against Great Britain reached its point of maximum violence at the beginning of September. The damage appeared immense, but the country gave no sign of giving in. In Rome and Berlin the behaviour of the British Government appeared even more impudent than before. On the other hand, the United States had, on 4th September, sold fifty destroyers to Britain—which in effect confirmed Washington's increasingly generous and open aid to London! And as the days passed the invasion of Britain, as Churchill pointed out, became more problematic. The 14th September was drawing near—the first and decisive large scale victory in the Battle of Britain. Hitler realised this so far as to abandon, to all intents and purposes, the invasion plan in order to turn to the consolidation of German hegemony on the Continent, and the organisation of Europe with a view to a long and difficult war. The Reich's diplomatic efforts were in three directions—to paralyse the efficacy of American aid to Britain, and, if necessary, to neutralise U.S. intervention, should it take place, by bringing Japan into the military alliance system of the Axis, which was an old ambition of Ribbentrop's; to ensure the intervention of Spain, which would have made it possible to close the Mediterranean to the English; and finally to cover the rear by a new agreement with Moscow on a far larger scale than the pact of 24th August, 1939. It was a plan which was, taken as a whole, essentially contradictory, based on unverified or arbitrary premises; but something had to fill the gap created by the lack of an invasion of Great Britain.

Ribbentrop telephoned to Ciano to tell him that he would be in Rome on 20th September. He had to discuss two topics with him—America and the conclusion of a tripartite military alliance between Italy, Germany and Japan, to which Spain would be invited to adhere. The latter point had already been the subject of negotiations, but without any conclusions being reached. Franco had seemed to be willing to enter the war as far back as the month of June, at the point when France collapsed. On 8th August, the German Ambassador in Madrid informed Berlin that Franco was still of the same mind, but that he was asking for a number of things. Firstly, the assurance that Spain would receive Gibraltar, French Morocco, that part of Algeria colonised and predominantly

inhabited by Spaniards (Oran), the enlargement of the territory of the Rio d'Oro and of the colonies in the Gulf of Guinea; next, adequate military and economic assistance, because Spain had petrol for 18 months but grain—on the most optimistic estimate—only for eight. In any case, the intervention should not take place, according to Franco, before the landing in Great Britain 'to avoid entering the war prematurely, or a war of a duration which the country could not support and which would, in certain conditions, be a source of danger for us.' At the same time Franco had sent a letter to Mussolini in which he gave a list of Spain's 'legitimate' aspirations, and asked for his support to have them accepted by Hitler. Mussolini replied on 25th August inviting him to decide, as he said, not to stand aside from the history of Europe which the victorious Axis Powers were creating. Persistence in non-intervention was equivalent to prejudicing any moral grounds for the territorial demands. However, he did not force him to take decisions, leaving him free to draw the conclusions which arose inevitably from events, for after France, Great Britain, too, would be defeated ('British rule is built up on one thing only—the lie'). In September, when a defeat of Britain within a short time appeared less and less probable, the attitude of Franco became more cautious. Serrano Suñer went to Berlin, saw Hitler on the 17th, assured him that Spain's attitude to Germany was unchanged, denied that there had been a change of line in Spain's foreign policy. But he added that, to take Gibraltar, Spain needed 380 mm. guns (which Germany could not supply), and insisted on the territorial claims, which were not exactly welcomed by Germany. Hitler replied that he had to bear in mind Germany's colonial needs, and therefore Germany accepted the Spanish demands on Morocco but 'on condition that they assured to Germany, through favourable trade agreements, a part of the raw materials in that region.' This was a roundabout way of hiding the fact that Germany aimed at control of all Morocco, including the Spanish zone—an attitude which Ribbentrop confirmed when he requested the right to establish Germany naval bases on the coast of Morocco.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE REICH,
VON RIBBENTROP, IN THE PRESENCE OF
COUNT CIANO AND THE AMBASSADORS,
ALFIERI AND VON MACKENSEN.

Rome, 19th September, 1940—XVIII

Herr von Ribbentrop begins by making a statement on the present stage of the war between Germany and Great Britain. He says that

the attacks carried out by the Luftwaffe have caused very serious damage, especially at points which the German bombers can reach with fighter escort. British reaction has of late already diminished considerably. The main obstacle has been the weather which has, in an unpredictable manner, remained constantly bad for six weeks. For the further development of air operations, and in order to carry land warfare on to British territory, at least eight to ten days of good weather are necessary; as soon as this comes about the attack—which is already completely prepared both as regards the air force and the landing forces—will be launched on a vast scale.

In these circumstances, one must ask what possible justification there is for the British attitude, which has lately been particularly impudent. The Fuehrer considers that it is an attitude dictated by desperation, and also, in certain cases, by lack of comprehension, as well as by the hope of double intervention in favour of Great Britain—by Russia and America.

It is in order to meet this eventuality, and above all to paralyse America, that Herr von Ribbentrop has prepared, and now submits for the Duce's approval, the project for a tripartite alliance with Japan. The negotiations have been conducted secretly through a personal emissary of the German Foreign Minister, and not through official Embassy channels. In German opinion, the formation of an alliance of that nature should have the advantage of reinforcing the isolationist reaction against Roosevelt's interventionist policy. When presenting the event to world public opinion, it would be necessary to stress that a world bloc against the spread of the conflict is being formed.

It remains to be seen what reactions that event will produce in Russia. Some might think that the formation of the tripartite alliance might throw the Soviets into the arms of the Democracies. Ribbentrop does not think so—for two reasons. Firstly, because the Soviets are still too weak, and know that a large part of the German land forces are now concentrated on their frontiers. In the second place, because Russia is a land Power, and no help could reach her through the agency of the English and American fleets, while the hostility of Japan would bring upon her the immediate burden of the Japanese army in Manchuria.

There is no doubt that recent events have not had the effect of making relations between Russia and Germany cordial. The Vienna award, the guarantee given to Rumania, the setting-up of the Danube Commission,¹ are all events equally displeasing to the

¹Internal control of navigation on the Danube goes back to the Treaty of Paris of 30th March, 1856, which distinguished between the maritime Danube and the Danube proper. The international administrative organisation for the first was the European Commission; for the second, the Commission of Riparian States, which had practically not functioned until the Danube Statute, signed in Paris on 23rd July, 1929, had transformed it into an international Commission composed of the riparian states together with France, Great Britain and Italy, already also on the European Commission. As a result of the outbreak of the Second World War, Germany attempted

Russians. That does not mean that the Axis intends to pursue, or should pursue, a policy of hostility towards Russia. A policy of friendship can be continued, but within definitely established limits. These limits are those laid down at Vienna. The occupation was foreseen and accepted; but any further move which might increase Russian influence in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, or bring Russia nearer to the Bosphorus, would be regarded by Germany in a purely negative manner, and Ribbentrop considers that Italy, too, is of the same opinion.

As far as Greece and Yugoslavia are concerned, Ribbentrop repeats that it is a question of exclusively Italian interests for which it is up to Italy to find the solution.

In Yugoslavia Germany reserves the right only to the district of Maribor. Ribbentrop repeats what he had already said to Count Ciano in Berlin that in the present circumstances it is advisable to direct the main effort against England, and confirms that Yugoslavia and Greece are two zones of Italian interest in which Italy can adopt whatever policy she sees fit with Germany's full support.

Herr von Ribbentrop then reports on his conversation with Serrano Suñer.¹ Spain is ready to enter the war and has informed the German Government of her requirements. They include supplies of grain and raw materials, the dispatch of certain specialised weapons, as well as of a guarantee that at the end of the war the coastal strip of Morocco from Oran to Cap Blanc will be transferred to Spanish sovereignty. The Fuehrer is in principle in favour of making these concessions for the sake of ensuring Spain's entry into the war, which would have as its immediate object the occupation of Gibraltar. For this purpose the German General Staff is preparing papers on the matter, and Ribbentrop will inform the Duce of them during his stay in Rome. If the Duce agrees, Ribbentrop hopes to draw up a protocol with Serrano Suñer on his return to Berlin in order to lay down the conditions for Spain's entry into the war.

In conclusion, Herr von Ribbentrop states that the Fuehrer considers that the war is already won, whatever the future development of the conflict may be.

The Duce declares that he entirely agrees with the Fuehrer's statement. The situation of England is bad, and is becoming still worse as operations against the island are intensified and the from the beginning to exclude France and Great Britain from the two Commissions, and did not conceal a wish also to exclude Italy. The first step was taken with the abolition of the International Commission, which was replaced by a Danube River Council (provisional agreement of Vienna of 12th September, 1940), to which—besides Germany and Italy—there belonged Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Slovakia. Immediately afterwards, the U.S.S.R. expressed a wish to take part in all negotiations concerning the Danube in view of the fact that, with the annexation of Bessarabia, a part of her frontier was now on the Danube.

In 1948 a new conference was held at Belgrade, the effective result of which was that Russia completely dominated the Danube.

¹Serrano Suñer had met Hitler and Ribbentrop in Berlin on 17th September, 1940.

moment for the landing approaches. The British ruling circles continue to bluff, but the people are tired. They don't live, they don't work, and the war of nerves can be considered as won. The south-east of the island has now been lost by the English air forces. And one must not forget that once London is lost, the Empire is lost.

As far as America is concerned, one must bear in mind that the United States are already practically on England's side. He does not believe that they will send armies to fight in Europe, but the sale of fifty destroyers, the continued help given to Great Britain proves that America is already practically against us. That must not, however, worry us particularly. What the United States could do, they have already done.

The Duce expresses his complete agreement with the plan for an alliance with Japan which will have the effect of paralysing American action. One must bear in mind that the Americans are very much afraid of Japan and of her fleet in particular, since the American fleet, while being quantitatively large, must be considered an amateur organisation like the English army.

There remains Russia. It is not important to find out what the Russians will say; it is important to know what they will do. It can be said straight away that they will do nothing. In recent times, Italy has made some moves towards a policy of *rapprochement* with Russia. But the only object was to prevent the English manoeuvre of *rapprochement* with Moscow. In any case Russia's practical reaction will be *nil*, since today the Russians are chiefly worried over losing what they have gained.

There remains the problem of Yugoslavia and Greece. Italy has half a million men on the Yugoslav frontier, and 200,000 on the Greek frontier. The Greeks are to Italy what the Norwegians were to Germany before the April operation. For us, too, it is therefore necessary to take steps to liquidate Greece; all the more since, when our land forces have made further progress in Egypt, the English fleet will no longer be able to remain in Alexandria and will attempt to make for Greek ports. However, the Duce agrees with Ribbentrop that the principal aim is to defeat England.

He also agrees that Spain's entry into the war is an event of great importance. The loss of Gibraltar will be a severe blow for the British Empire, and will ensure that Italy has free passage in the Straits through which we can, at present, scarcely pass with submarines.

Another advantage may be represented by the bases in the Balearics. And finally, Spain's entry into the war will have the effect of liquidating for ever in North Africa the danger of de Gaulle, which in the Duce's opinion, has recently increased, all the more since the existence of contacts between Pétain and de Gaulle cannot be excluded. The French are still so gravely misled as to think that they are not beaten.

Ribbentrop says that, according to the Fuehrer's intentions, France must never again play an important role in the life of Europe.

The Duce says that it remains to be fixed which is the most favourable moment for Spain's entry into the war. The following alternatives present themselves: either the war finishes before the winter, or else it will last on into next year. According to which alternative appears more probable, Spain is a card which must be played in the most convenient way.

Ribbentrop replies that Serrano Suñer did not lay down the date for entering the war. Military circles think that Spain's entry into the war may take place in four weeks time. At all events, the Spanish declaration of war after the alliance with Japan will be a new and formidable blow to England from the psychological point of view. The Spanish declaration of war on England must be made with the first shot fired on Gibraltar.

The Duce asks for information on the attitude of Portugal.

Ribbentrop answers that the Portuguese are afraid of being absorbed by Spain. However, after Spain's entry into the war it will be possible to make an attempt to attract Salazar into the orbit of the Axis and its allies.

The conversation, which began at 1700 hrs., ends at 1900 hrs.

Franco replied to Hitler on 22nd September flatly rejecting Ribbentrop's request for naval bases. Further, he brought forward objections to the advisability of totally expelling the English from the Mediterranean. There are raw materials and products which are not to be found in that area. And finally he introduced a new subject into his elastic and dilatory policy—the question of the Canary Islands. Franco was not certain of being able, with the means at his disposal, to defend these islands from an attack by the English fleet, or even to assure them of indispensable supplies. Spanish intervention threatened to recede like the landing in Great Britain. A few days later, on 28th September, the Tripartite Pact was made, and Ciano went to Berlin for the signing of it. On that occasion, Hitler proposed another meeting with Mussolini on the Brenner, indicated that the landing in England had been postponed, and expressed the view that Spanish intervention threatened to be too costly.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER, SERRANO SUÑER, IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 1st October, 1940—XVIII

Serrano begins by stating that Spain—which from the beginning of the struggle has always given the Axis Powers moral support—is

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CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER, SERRANO SUÑER, IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 1st October, 1940—XVIII

Serrano begins by stating that Spain—which from the beginning of the struggle has always given the Axis Powers moral support—is

preparing to take up arms to settle its centuries old account with Great Britain.

He gives a sketch of the internal situation in Spain, and does not conceal the many difficulties which face his Government—difficulties of an economic nature because the crops show a distinct deficit, difficulties of a political nature because those circles hostile to Franco are still strong and numerous.

However, he is convinced that war would be a factor which would have the effect of reuniting all forces in Spain in one group, since the objectives of Morocco and Gibraltar evoke a deep response from all, and particularly from the youth.

Serrano finally gives an account of his activities in Germany and of his contacts with the Reich Government, and points out what Spain requires to hasten intervention (grain, fuel, special weapons, aircraft, etc.).

The Duce begins by stating that he has always been convinced—since the first days of the struggle—that Franco Spain would not be able to stand aside from the great fight which must decide the fate of the nations for a long period to come. Spain has certain vital needs which the Axis has always recognised; it is precisely in the pursuit of these requirements that the Spanish revolution will complete the process of national unification. These ideas had already been set out by the Duce in his letter to Franco.

It is now a question of settling the time which appears most suitable for Spain's entry into the war. There are two alternatives—that England takes the initiative; that, on the contrary, the initiative remains with Spain. The Duce is inclined to think that the first possibility should be discarded without more ado. England has everywhere too grave difficulties to wish to draw upon itself the burden of a new struggle. There remains therefore only the second; in that case the Duce thinks that Spain must accelerate her military preparation with the help of the Axis Powers, and the intervention must be decided on collectively when it will be as little of a burden as possible to Spain and as great a help as possible to the common cause.

As far as the aid which Italy can give is concerned, it is out of the question—in view of the scanty grain harvest—for us to help to make up the large Spanish deficit. The Italian contribution can, however, be examined and decided on later, but a concentration of air strength can be assured here and now. There is only one possibility which might precipitate Spanish intervention, and that is the declaration of war by the United States, but this does not appear probable at least for some months.

The Duce ends by affirming his faith in the Spanish contribution to the victory of the Axis, and states his intention of examining in time the practical aspects of the question.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
FUEHRER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE REICH
FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP, AND
COUNT CIANO.

The Brenner, 4th October, 1940—XVIII

The Fuehrer speaks and begins by explaining the preparations he has made for attacking the British Isles. All preparations for the landing have been completed for some weeks. These preparations have required much more time since they have extended from the northern coast of Norway to the French ports towards the Spanish frontier. It is further necessary to bear in mind that all communications with France were interrupted, and that the ports were blocked with ships sunk by the Germans themselves. At the beginning of September, the meteorologists had announced that there would be a period of good weather, and on the basis of these forecasts the very large scale air attack, which should have preceded the landing—since an indispensable condition for making the crossing possible for the German troops was to obtain absolute mastery of the air—was scheduled. The period of good weather forecast never came. Nevertheless the aerial action against Great Britain has been carried on with the greatest energy, and one can say that not a day or a night passes without London and other English centres being subjected to a death-dealing raid. While not placing complete reliance on these raids from the military point of view, because among other things they are often carried out at night and from above the clouds without the possibility, therefore, of picking out the targets, the Fuehrer considers that the British people cannot endure the hammering of the German air force indefinitely. One must ask oneself what the reasons are which lead England to prolong such a costly resistance. In the Fuehrer's opinion they are two: the hope of American intervention, and the hope of Russian aid. Both are destined to prove false. As far as America is concerned, intervention is not to be considered probable, for one thing in view of the recent Berlin Tripartite Pact which has reinforced the isolationist trends. As far as Russia is concerned, one must bear in mind that in Moscow they had made calculations on the course of the war which were quite different from the real course of events. There is no doubt that in Moscow they are suspicious about the European situation. However, the Fuehrer does not consider that Stalin can take any initiative in the matter for the chief reason that Germany has moved to her eastern frontiers forces which have stopped the Bolsheviks from having any vague designs. The Fuehrer says that the German forces available amount to 180 armoured divisions in a complete state of readiness.

As far as England is concerned, while avoiding giving precise

details, the Fuehrer states that he will continue the air battle without ceasing in the hope of dealing a decisive blow.

It is in these circumstances that the question of Spanish intervention arises. Hitler briefly summarises the course of his negotiations with Serrano Suñer, and speaks of the protocol proposed by the Spaniards, on the basis of which Germany was to undertake large supplies to Spain in return for the promise of Spanish intervention as soon as military preparations are completed. However, not only supplies have been requested, but also the cession to Spain of Gibraltar and French Morocco from Oran to Cap Blanc inclusive. At this point, the Fuehrer makes the statement that Germany claims a part of the Moroccan coast as a base for its own traffic. That could be Casablanca or Agadir. In view of the fact that the Reich will again have its own colonies, and will form an Empire in West Africa, it needs to possess an intermediate base. But apart from that, the Fuehrer fears that an undertaking to make territorial concessions of that nature to Spain may produce two reactions: firstly, English occupation of the Spanish bases in the Canaries, and secondly, the adhesion of North Africa to the de Gaullist movement. That would be serious, and would involve the Axis in the extension of its own operational fronts.

Lately gestures of distinct hostility have been made to England by the French, and through General Huntziger¹ it has been learned that France would be willing to do more when she knew her fate with accuracy. Fantastic as that may seem, Hitler does not exclude the possibility of having the French forces on our side in a Continental coalition against Great Britain. Naturally, it must not be forgotten that France is the natural enemy of the Axis, and that her politicians are being tried today, not for having declared war, but for not having prepared France sufficiently to fight against Italy and Germany. France must, therefore, never again have a role of primary importance in Europe and must cede to Germany and Italy what is due to these Powers. Hitler will never make peace with France if these conditions are not fulfilled. But as far as Spain is concerned, he does not consider it right to assume undertakings like the Spanish Government's requests concerning Morocco, whereas he agrees to the cession of Gibraltar.

At the end of his statement, the Fuehrer affirms that the war can now be considered won, and that on the side of the Axis Powers every action must be avoided which may not be absolutely necessary for the struggle which we are now conducting from an excellent position.

The Duce replies to the Fuehrer that, in his opinion, the air operations against England have already had profound effects, and

¹General Huntziger, president of the French military delegation which drew up the armistice between Italy and France on 24th June, 1940; Minister for War from 6th September, 1940, to 12th November, 1941, when he was killed in a plane crash.

that the English people will hardly be able to bear what is happening for an indefinite time. The crisis which has recently arisen in the English Government, while not having an absolute and definite importance, goes to show that something is amiss in the British political system, and one may say that with the resignation of the Chamberlain Government the first pillar of the edifice has fallen. He, too, considers that the English are basing their hopes on Russian and American aid, but he does not think that these countries can fulfil Britain's illusions. America has already done almost as much as it is in her power to do. As far as Russia is concerned, he, too, considers that ruling circles in Moscow will not dare to do anything which might lead to a conflict with the Axis.

Serrano Suñer was lately in Rome and repeated to the Duce what he had already said to the Fuehrer on the subject of Spanish intervention. There is no doubt that Spanish intervention can be useful to the Axis, but one must also bear in mind that Spain's internal situation is not good. Indeed in certain regions it is bad, since according to the Spaniards themselves, the Reds still have a following. The question of supplies to be given to Spain also appears very worrying, all the more since the Spaniards themselves are not in a position to say with absolute precision what they want and how much. As far as the territorial question is concerned, the Duce agrees with the Fuehrer on the danger which an undertaking to Spain on the cession of French Morocco would represent today. On the other hand, something must be done to prevent the Anglophile and democratic trends in Spain from gaining strength from a refusal on the part of the Axis to have Spain within its orbit. Therefore, the Duce is of the opinion that Serrano Suñer should be told that we are in agreement with Spain on the subject of her claims on England, and in principle also on a territorial alteration in the case of Morocco, with the proviso that the latter will be defined precisely when peace comes. Beyond that it will be possible to tell the Spaniards that Italy and Germany are prepared to help her military preparations by aid and supplies within the limits of possibility and, as far as the proposed meeting with Franco is concerned, to inform them that the proposal is accepted in principle, subject to the place and date being fixed at some future time.

The Fuehrer states that he agrees with the Duce's proposals.

The Duce then speaks of the possible agreement with France and says that, where Italy is concerned, he confirms the territorial demands which had already been made known, that is to say—Nice, Corsica, Tunis and Djibouti. Of these, only Nice and Corsica affect metropolitan territory. It is a question of only 8,000 square kilometres and the Duce is in favour of allowing the population of these areas the right to opt for French nationality.

The Fuehrer says that he is entirely in agreement with the Italian demands, and repeats that he will never make peace with France

if Italy is not given satisfaction for her demands. Once what has been listed above has been obtained, the Duce states that Italy has no further ground for conflict with France. He considers that the most satisfactory *rapprochement* would be achieved by making a separate peace with the French Government, a separate peace which will naturally leave Germany the right to make use of the French ports as bases against England for the duration of the war. The Fuehrer agrees with what the Duce has said, and adds that he would like to discuss this question at a later date with the French, and possibly with the Ambassador, François-Poncet.

The Duce then puts forward his plan of campaign for Egypt. He says that shortly they will pass over to the second phase of the offensive which will carry our troops on to Mersa Matruh, and explains the strategic importance of that objective. Finally the third phase of the offensive will take place, which will lead to the Nile Delta and the occupation of Alexandria.

The Fuehrer, pointing out that the Italians are contributing to the battle for Britain with air forces, offers the Duce the support of his specialist forces for the attack on Egypt. The Duce thanks him in reply, and says that he needs no help for the second phase of the offensive, while he reserves the right to inform the Fuehrer what he might need for the third phase. At the present moment, however, he can say that the only things which might be needed are armoured cars, a number of heavy tanks and some formations of Stukas.

The Fuehrer states that he is ready to furnish these materials when the Duce informs him that the right moment has come.

At the end of the conversation, Marshal Keitel illustrates with maps the military and political situation of the French Colonial Empire in relation to what was stated above.

The conversation lasted three hours.

Having returned from the Brenner on the 5th, Ciano informed Serrano, who had been waiting for him specially, of the results of the meeting as far as they affected Spain. The situation which was arising in Europe was not calculated to induce Franco to retreat from his position. On 12th October, Berlin announced the despatch of a German military commission to Bucharest and the taking over of the anti-aircraft defence of the oil-bearing region of Rumania. It was not an encouraging sign for the future development of German-Soviet relations. Franco could not know that the German move had led Mussolini—from jealousy and a desire to be even—(Hitler as usual had carried out this step, too, without informing his ally)—to decide on aggression against Greece, which had often been considered but always postponed in preceding months. Franco was probably unaware that in Rome on the 15th Mussolini had hastily called a meeting to examine how the Greek campaign could be carried out, and had even fixed the date for it. Franco knew

SPAIN AND THE AXIS

enough to understand that developments were to be expected in the Mediterranean; and he had before his eyes the outcome of the first Italian offensive against Egypt, which Mussolini had wanted at all costs, and which had bogged down after a week at Sidi Barrani, unable to get any further. Moreover, the insistent pressure of Berlin could not but make him suspicious; it told him that, while declaring themselves victors of the war, the Germans had need—considerable need—of Spain. On 23rd October, Hitler went as far as Hendaye on the Spanish border to meet Franco. They signed a protocol which promised, in the vaguest and most unprecise of terms, Madrid's adhesion to the Tripartite Pact, and Spain's entry into the war, while Germany, on her side, recognised—in no less ambiguous terms—the basis for the Spanish territorial claims. In actual fact, Franco had once more escaped from Hitler's embrace. Round about the same time Hitler also saw Pétain and Laval, attempted to draw Vichy France into the orbit of the Axis, and on the 25th asked Mussolini to meet him in Florence. The meeting took place on 28th October, when the Greek campaign had already begun a few hours before.

CONVERSATION WITH THE GERMAN CHARGÉ d'AFFAIRES.

Rome, 20th October, 1940—XVIII

The Minister, von Bismarck, called this morning to inform me of the following:

1. The German Government agrees with the Italian Government in considering it advisable that Spain should adhere to the Tripartite Pact. The Fuehrer proposes to discuss this adhesion with Franco personally in the course of a meeting which will take place in France, in the occupied zone, towards the end of next week.

2. During his stay on French occupied territory, the Fuehrer will see members of the French Government in order, by preliminary and direct contact with the Vichy Cabinet, to begin that diplomatic approach to France which was the subject of examination during the meeting on the Brenner.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FUEHRER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS, CIANO AND VON RIBBENTROP.

Florence, 28th October, 1940—XVIII

The Fuehrer begins by stating that he had wished to make this journey to Florence to present a report to the Duce on his recent conversations with the Spanish and French Governments, and to

offer his full support for the operation begun by Italy against Greece. Should it appear necessary, the Fuehrer places at the Duce's disposal the parachute divisions which might be used for the occupation of Crete.

As to the conversations, the Fuehrer states that they entail no change in the situation.

At one time he had asked himself the question whether the fight between the Vichy Government and General de Gaulle were genuine or a sham. From various sources, and particularly from the evidence of films of the battles of Oran and Dakar,¹ he has reached the conclusion that the fight is genuine. The Vichy Government has every reason to defend itself against the activities of de Gaulle, who is completely at the service of the English. A report by Abetz² has reached the Fuehrer which states that the intellectuals, the *bourgeoisie*, the Jews and the Communists are for de Gaulle, while the *petit bourgeoisie* and the masses are in favour of Pétain.

It is in the interests of the Axis to see to it that the Vichy Government maintains control of the French Empire in North Africa. If Morocco were to come under the orders of de Gaulle, we should have to carry out a military operation in which success would be difficult, since it would have to be based entirely on the efforts of the air forces. The best way of keeping this territory is to see to it that it is the French themselves who defend it against the English. That is possible since the Air Force and the Navy are in the hands of anti-British commanders and the Army, too, if it feels that it can save something, will be faithful to Pétain.

It is clear that the support of France will be of great interest and great help to the Axis, not so much from a military point of view as from the psychological effect which it will have on the British world when they see a compact Continental bloc against England being formed. In these circumstances, the Fuehrer considered it advisable to make contact with the French ruling circles to learn their reaction.

First conversation—with Laval, whom Hitler describes as 'a dirty democratic politician, a man who doesn't believe in what he says, who turns to us only to save himself.' In the course of this conversation, the Fuehrer told Laval that it is in the interests of France to see to it that the war be shortened as much as possible, since it is obvious that Germany will hold what she has and will remain in France for the whole duration of the war. The hopes which certain French circles are basing on an English victory are ridiculous.

¹On 3rd July, 1940, the French naval squadron under the command of Admiral Gensoul at anchor at Mers-el-Kebir (Oran), having refused the conditions of an ultimatum delivered by Admiral Somerville, the commander of a British squadron, was attacked by the latter. The French had 1,200 dead; one cruiser, the *Bretagne*, sunk; two other cruisers—the *Dunquerque* and the *Provence*—hit. On 8th July and from 23rd to 25th September a British squadron also attacked, under similar circumstances, the French squadron which had taken refuge in Dakar. The battleship *Richelieu* was hit.

²Otto Abetz, German Ambassador to Vichy.

Victory has already been won by the Axis, and the arguments of the British propaganda are ridiculous, since if famine should arise in Europe it will not be the Germans nor the Italians who will die of it. England's illusions are based on the possibility of aid from Russia and America. As far as Russia is concerned, there exist agreements with Germany which make her unable to move. As a guarantee that she will make no move, there are 180 divisions ready to go into action. As far as America is concerned, it is now proved that her military preparations cannot be completed before 1942.

Laval said that he agreed, but stressed the psychological difficulty in the way of leading the French people to declare war on England at once. For the moment, he must confine his activity to defending himself in Africa, and to exploiting every incident to increase the anti-English hatred. Laval also spoke of the French position in North Africa, and attempted to use the usual arguments of raw materials and the needs of French commerce. On this subject, too, the Fuehrer made a point of stressing that it is not possible to accept the present situation, and that a new distribution of the resources of Africa is inescapable.

With Pétain more or less the same things were repeated. Marshal Pétain made an excellent impression on the Fuehrer, but that cannot affect the political conditions of future relations between the Axis and France. France declared war without cause, was beaten and must pay. At this point the Fuehrer twice stated with solemnity that he will not sign any peace treaty with France if all the Italian demands, which must be considered more than modest and certainly lower than the demands the French themselves expected, have not first been met. His information, in fact, is that the French considered that Italy would include Savoy among her claims. That is not surprising since it is well known that the French, in the event of victory, would have imposed conditions of incalculable seriousness on Germany and Italy.

As far as Spain is concerned, the chief impression brought back by the Fuehrer is that of great disorder. Franco appeared to him 'a brave spirit, but a man who has become leader only by chance.' He is not cut out to be a politician or organiser. The Spanish do not realise their position and are setting themselves objectives which are absolutely beyond their powers. While they reserve the right to choose the moment to enter the war, they are beginning to put forward a number of requests of a material nature which—should they be accepted—are too great a burden on the Axis, and have a programme of colonial claims of such scope that acceptance on our part would cause the immediate alignment of the French Colonial Empire with the de Gaullist camp. Now, while the Fuehrer does not intend to make peace before Italian aspirations are realised, he does not feel inclined to assume a similar undertaking with regard to Spain. Suñer is asking for frontier rectifications in the Pyrenees,

and claims French Catalonia. He claims Oran and all Morocco up to the 20th meridian. This formula could not be accepted. Therefore there was compiled a secret tripartite protocol which the Fuehrer submits for the approval of the Duce and which contains, as far as the Spanish claims are concerned, a vague formula. This conclusion was reached with great difficulty after a conversation lasting nine hours, a conversation of such a kind that 'rather than go through it again the Fuehrer would prefer to have three or four teeth taken out.'

This settlement having been made with regard to Spain, and the Tripartite Alliance having been broadened to include Rumania¹ there remains the Russian question to be examined. While the alliance between Italy and Germany is in the natural order of things, collaboration with Russia remains in the purely political field. It must be recognised that 'the distrust on my side towards Stalin is matched by Stalin's distrust towards me.' However, Molotov will shortly come to Berlin, and it will be the Fuehrer's task to direct Russian energies towards India.

With regard to Russia, there are two main dangers—Finland and Rumania.

As far as Finland is concerned, the Fuehrer says that the Finns' resistance to Russian aggression has, in Germany, restored to that nation much of the sympathy which it had previously lost. But German interest in Finland is not merely of a sentimental nature; it is a necessity for Germany to safeguard the mines at Kirkenes, communications with which are principally assured through Finland. For these reasons Germany has lately given large supplies of arms to the Finns, and has also given them five ships taken at Bergen.

As far as Rumania is concerned, he says that the army, although 35 divisions strong, must be considered to be extremely demoralised and incapable of any reaction to a Russian attack. Germany does not intend to send larger forces than have been requested by Antonescu² himself—that is to say four divisions. On the other hand, the despatch of troops is slow because it is being carried out by means of the six trains per day which are being given transit on the Hungarian railway system. There is no doubt that there exist Russian trends which champion an advance towards the Bosphorus. However, Hitler will discourage this tendency to go 'where there are other people' and towards internal seas which are already controlled by other countries. With Russia's *rapprochement* to the Axis, a front will be created which will stretch from Japan to Spain.

¹The protocol containing Rumania's adhesion to the pact was signed in Berlin on 23rd September, 1940.

²Marshal Antonescu, representative of the circles favourable to Germany and to Right-wing Governments, Prime Minister, 4th September, 1940. King Carol abdicated two days later. On 10th September Antonescu gave himself the title of 'Conducator', head of the State; on 11th dissolved all parties; forced from power on 23rd August, 1944 and executed in 1946.

Hitler describes the intensification of the raids on England, and reaffirms his conviction that after one hundred days of attack, English resistance will be broken even if reasons of another nature have prevented the landing. The counter-blockade by submarines is developing with increasing efficacy. He stresses the effective contribution of the Italian submarines; good material, excellent crews. When the General Staff have gained greater experience of the northern seas, they will make an even more valuable contribution to the German Navy. He calculates that every month England loses between 800,000 and one million tons. In these circumstances she will not be able to resist for long. And when even the hopes on which England bases her propaganda have come to naught, we shall see an English collapse as rapid and complete as that which broke France.

The Duce then says that he thanks the Fuehrer for his statement, and wishes to express his full agreement on the advisability of making a coalition of all Europe against Great Britain—a coalition which is the guarantee of our victory. He then goes on to examine the three main topics of the conversation: France, Spain and Russia.

France.—It is clear that France, having lost the war, must pay, and he thanks the Fuehrer for his promise on the Italian claims. They are, in fact, very modest. Nice and Corsica represent a small part of French metropolitan territory and are geographically Italian lands. As far as Tunisia is concerned, our rights are well known, and finally, Somaliland is merely a classic example of desert. He agrees with the Fuehrer in considering that the Pétain regime is the most suitable regime from our point of view. Once France has paid her debt we shall be able to carry out a policy with her, but he does not consider that France's support of the Axis should go further than purely passive co-operation. Once peace has come, France will be able to obtain compensation at the expense of England. The problem now arises whether matters should be settled now or in the future. Hitler answers that, since it is not known what the future has in store, it is necessary to stay in France until the end of the war and to consider the French as sureties for our victory, since, when England has been beaten it will be possible to give the French rewards detached from Britain's possessions but, if the war should finish with a compromise with Great Britain, it is obvious that it is France which must pay for everybody. Therefore, for the moment, he considers that France should be given promises of a vague nature about the modesty of our claims but that it is still too early to define the situation in full. At all events, he considers that present relations with France should be summed up in a three-power agreement; he thinks that when Laval comes to Germany for this purpose the Duce, too, must be present to settle all the points of the provisional agreement.

Spain.—As far as Spain is concerned, the Duce declares himself to be in agreement with the point of view put forward by the Fuehrer, and, after having examined it, approves of the protocol submitted to him by von Ribbentrop. That protocol represents the secret adhesion of Spain to the Tripartite Pact. The Duce considers that that adhesion should become public when all the Spanish military measures have been taken and the country is ready for intervention. The Fuehrer accepts this point of view and proposes a three-power meeting—Mussolini, Hitler and Franco—again to be held in Florence on the day when Spain makes her adhesion to our alliance.

Russia.—The Duce finally speaks of Russia, and says that a *rapprochement* with the Axis by Russia represents a factor of the first importance for the completion of the European coalition against England. It is certain that Molotov's visit to Berlin will be a hard blow to England's hopes. He does not consider that Russia should join our alliance, but it would be useful if something were to happen to prove that the Soviets have now come closer to the Axis system. The Fuehrer declares himself to be in agreement with the Duce, and, while he excludes the possibility of a two-power pact between Germany and Russia, he would regard favourably an agreement between Italy, Russia and Germany. Herr von Ribbentrop then speaks of the possibility of a protocol which could be signed in Moscow in the near future by the Foreign Ministers of the Axis and Japan, and by Molotov. This proposal will be examined and further developed in the course of a visit to Germany by Count Ciano in the near future.

The meeting ends with the expression of the perfect agreement between Italy and Germany on all points.

XXXVI

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

4th November, 1940

Immediately after the Florence meeting, Ciano left for Albania; on 1st November took part in a bombing raid on Salonika, and on All Saints' Day took the train for the Sudetenland. This meeting with Ribbentrop was merely the continuation of the one in Florence and of the preceding ones. Ribbentrop's plan seemed to be on the point of being realised in its entirety. The tripartite bloc was now an accomplished fact, the Hendaye protocol represented a useful compromise for keeping all avenues open, including that leading to intervention. Now it was the turn of the Moscow Pact, of the new and definite undertaking with the U.S.S.R.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN COUNT CIANO AND THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER.

Schönhof, 4th November, 1940—XIX

Herr von Ribbentrop put off speaking to me of current questions until an hour before my departure. Up to that moment he said he was waiting for a telephone call from Hitler on which it would depend whether he would go back to Berlin and I to Rome, or whether instead we should both go to Vienna for a meeting with Serrano Suñer. At a certain point he also referred to a meeting with Laval. Then, two hours before my departure, Ribbentrop informed me that it had not been possible to fix the meeting with Serrano Suñer in such a short time, and that therefore it must be postponed. I then mentioned to him the wish to meet me which had been expressed by Serrano. Ribbentrop showed interest in a possible meeting of this kind, and will be pleased to learn the results of it.

Ribbentrop then produced for signature the Secret Protocol on Spain's entry into the Italo-German Alliance and the Berlin Tripartite Pact, a Protocol which he had already put forward at Florence. At the actual moment of signing, I requested and obtained a modification of article 5, which I shall take the liberty of explaining verbally to the Duce. The document will be sent to Serrano by air so that the Spanish representative may add his signature. Ribbentrop then told me of the programme of diplomatic action which he intends to carry out in the course of the next few weeks. He

made a point of stressing that this huge programme must not be regarded as exclusively directed against England. As far as England is concerned, the war is already won; it is a question of reaching a rapid conclusion. The programme has more of an anti-American character. By presenting America with a European continental bloc which is both united and complete, by supporting this bloc by means of Japan and other Asiatic Powers which will eventually join up with us, we will make America extremely cautious as far as intervention in the struggle is concerned.

The first problem, both in time and in importance, is that which concerns Russia's relations with the Axis and with Japan. Although activity to this end has hardly begun, Herr von Ribbentrop considers it possible to negotiate an agreement between the Tripartite Powers and Russia after Molotov's visit to Berlin, which will take place on the 11th of this month. During the negotiations he will keep in close contact with the Italian and Japanese Governments. Since the possibility of reaching a military agreement with Russia is ruled out, Ribbentrop considers that a political and economic pact should be made based principally on mutual recognition of the territorial situation, on an undertaking by each party never to give aid to the enemies of the other and finally on a broad collaboration and friendship clause. To this Pact two Secret Protocols should be added. The first of the Secret Protocols should fix the areas of expansion of each of the interested Powers: Russian dynamism to be directed towards the South, to be anti-British in character and aiming at safeguarding the position of Afghanistan and Persia as far as possible; Italian dynamism, towards Mediterranean Africa and the Red Sea; German dynamism, toward Equatorial Africa. Ribbentrop stressed that he made no mention of the Balkans; that was on set purpose since he does not intend to discuss the Balkan problems with Russia, considering them to be internal questions for the two Axis Powers. The second Secret Protocol should concern Russia's position with regard to the Dardanelles and the Black Sea. Ribbentrop considers that it would be necessary in practice to go the length of abolishing the Montreux convention and give Russia two things: (1) a declaration that the Black Sea is considered to be an internal Russian sea, (2) free passage through the Dardanelles. In that way, Ribbentrop considers that it should be possible to avoid any Russian attempt to establish herself territorially and militarily on the Dardanelles themselves, a fact to which the Axis Powers would not be able to remain indifferent. In exchange for free passage through the Dardanelles, the four Powers participating in the future agreement would pledge themselves to give Turkey a guarantee to maintain the territorial *status quo*. Ribbentrop stresses that even where Italy is concerned the free passage through the Dardanelles granted to Russia should not give rise to preoccupations, chiefly because Russia is not and never will be a maritime

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Power, and in the second place, because Italy, at the end of the war, will have such a predominating position in the Mediterranean as to be able to control that sea with ease.

Once an agreement has been drawn up with Russia, Ribbentrop would propose certain steps with Turkey aimed at producing a *rapprochement* with the Axis. Von Papen, who was present at Schönhof, assures Ribbentrop that the detachment of Turkey from England is a possibility. The attitude recently assumed by Turkey to the Italo-Greek dispute is also a proof that Turkey's ties with her allies are becoming less and less secure. Ribbentrop might consider also offering the Turks a slight correction of the Bulgarian frontier, compensating Bulgaria with an outlet to the sea at the expense of Greece. Such is the political programme which Ribbentrop intends to carry out in the course of the next few weeks. He would like to learn the Duce's views on it.

As far as Italo-Russian relations are concerned, Ribbentrop agrees on the advisability of some gesture which will have the effect of making relations between the States more cordial, but in expectation of the conclusion of the Four Power Pact he requests us to postpone any step towards bilateral agreements.

I also spoke to Ribbentrop of the provocative attitude of the French in Nice and Tunis. He repeated the words used by the Fuehrer on what must be given to Italy by France and told me that, in the next few days, in the course of a probable meeting with Laval, he will 'water down his wine.'

Ribbentrop expressed the desire to maintain frequent contacts during the coming weeks and during the negotiations with Russia. In his opinion, and provided nothing new arises, the Moscow Pact could be signed within a few weeks.

Molotov went to Berlin on 12th November, where he was received with the greatest consideration. The conversations lasted two days and officially it was said that the usual identity of views between the two countries on all the problems discussed had been confirmed. In fact, the Meeting had been a failure.

The Russians had put forward unacceptable requests, and nothing was settled. The second Moscow Pact was stillborn,¹ though an attempt was made, on the Russian side, to revive it some months later. Rome, too, had reason to lament the turn of events. The Greek campaign was going badly for the Fascist forces, to the astonishment, anger and consternation of Mussolini. Not only had the initial offensive failed, but Greek columns had penetrated into Albanian territory and were maintaining the operational initiative. As a result all Italy's political positions in the Balkans were compromised. Bad weather

¹For full details of these meetings, and of German-Russian relations during the period of collaboration between the two countries, see the United States State Department publication 'Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941.'

had come to the aid of Greece; and to it were added the defection of the Albanian forces, the attitude of Bulgaria, which—according to Mussolini—had allowed the Greeks to withdraw eight divisions from Thrace, and above all Fascist lack of preparation, due to thinking of the Greek campaign as a walk-over. In Rome, they did not yet realise that the days of the Anschluss, of the Czechoslovak crisis and of the conquest of Albania were over. Ciano had to return to Germany on the 18th at the very time when the news from the Albanian front was becoming disturbing. It was not a pleasant trip, but he had to meet Ribbentrop and Serrano Suñer, and later Hitler, before the Vienna meeting called to mark the adhesion of Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia to the Tripartite Pact, which had been fixed for the 20th.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER IN THE
PRESENCE OF THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER,
VON RIBBENTROP.

(Letter to the Duce)
Duce,

Salzburg, 18th November, 1940—XIX

I have had a long conversation with the Fuehrer, of which I summarise the outstanding points, particularly since he intends to write you a letter. If it is ready, he will hand it to me the day after tomorrow in Vienna, which he will be visiting.

The conversation had as its main topic, I would say its only topic, the situation which has arisen in Greece. I must say immediately that I did not find the Fuehrer 'displeased'; which does not mean to say that I did not notice in him—throughout the first part of the conversation—awareness of the dangers which the situation might present. I must first state that there was little or no discussion of the various phases of the fighting, present or past. It does not seem to me that he attributed great importance to what has happened up to now. He sees the problem within the vaster framework of the European conflict.

With a map in his hand he carried out the usual general survey. According to him, the most important point for the future development of the war is the Rumanian oil-bearing region. The concentration of German troops in Rumania was carried out with the definite aim of staving off the Russian peril. To begin with, there was—or appeared to be—no immediate danger from England. Now there is. From information in the possession of the Fuehrer it appears that the English are setting up numerous aerodromes in Greece—at Salonika, Larissa, Arta and Athens. From any of these the Rumanian oil-fields could be attacked. This is worrying Hitler. He wonders what measures should be taken both in the military and diplomatic field.

It is his intention to increase greatly the German forces in

Rumania and he proposes to march on Greece through Bulgaria. But he does not consider he can do so until the middle of March, nor does he consider that, before that date, we can be ready to deal Greece a decisive blow from the Albanian front. The two advances should, therefore, be simultaneous. In the meantime, strike at all the most important points for the enemy with the air force. He does not believe that—once the English forces have arrived—air action can be decisive; but it is at all events very important in order to upset the military preparations of the English. Hitler referred to the advisability of recalling the Italian Air Corps to Italy. While praising the skill and dash of the pilots in very warm terms, he said that our machines can do much more useful service in the Mediterranean than they can in the North, especially in winter.

In Egypt, he considers that every effort must be made, and that as soon as possible, to take Mersa Matruh. Then he would ask you for permission to send to Libya a squadron of new Stukas, which, with their 1,800 kilo bombs, could make life difficult for the big English ships. He also spoke of the need to mine the Suez Canal with the new German torpedoes.

I have mentioned the measures of a military nature which the Fuehrer suggests, but I repeat that they will be indicated more precisely in the letter which he will write to you.

I pass on to the steps to be taken in the diplomatic field. I must say immediately that—after Molotov's visit—there is very little talk of Russia, and, in any case, in a very different tone from that used by Ribbentrop during my recent visit to the Sudetenland. Russia is once more the faithless country whose friendship it is better to win in the present circumstances than her hostility, whose neutrality must be constantly and carefully watched. Now there is a new move towards Spain, and I know that Hitler strongly urged, during the conversation with Serrano Suñer¹—a conversation at which I was not present—that Spain should now play her intervention card without delay. Hitler also wishes us to use our influence to make the Caudillo take the decision to intervene.

Another activity in which he asks for our collaboration is to persuade the Hungarians to allow the largest possible number of German military trains to pass daily, which will allow the rapid completion of that concentration of German troops in Rumania necessary to keep Russia and Turkey at bay and to collaborate with Italy in the attack on Greece.

Then he comes to the Yugoslav problem. To this Hitler attributes the utmost importance, and believes that the future development of the situation depends in great part on the attitude of Belgrade. He started from the assumption that our relations with Belgrade were fundamentally bad, and that it was your intention to make them worse (Mackensen told me that he came to this conclusion after the

¹Serrano Suñer was in Salzburg at the same time as Ciano.

Keitel-Badoglio conversation). The matter was causing him worry and he was very pleased when I told him that Italo-Yugoslav relations had not deteriorated recently and that, on the contrary, you had authorised me to follow up a Yugoslav move for confidential conversations. He changed his manner and tone of voice. He asked: 'Do you think that Mussolini would be prepared to make a pact with Yugoslavia on these three points: Axis guarantee for the Yugoslav frontiers; cession of Salonika to Yugoslavia; demilitarisation of the Adriatic by Yugoslavia?' I replied—while making the fullest reservations as to your decisions—that I had reason to believe that you would accept a pact of that nature. Hitler said: 'But if that is so I am certain we can have Yugoslavia on our side. The Greek affair will rapidly resolve itself into one of the greatest successes for the Axis. Yugoslavia will have Salonika, Bulgaria an outlet to the sea, Italy all the remaining part of Greece. Once Greece is lost and Egypt threatened, England will be practically chased out of the Mediterranean.'

Hitler then spoke at length of the procedure to be followed to bring about closer relations with Yugoslavia. He is of the opinion that, should the confidential contacts to which I have referred not take place immediately, Germany should begin talks with Belgrade. I reserved comment on this subject until receiving your instructions.

To sum up my impressions—during the first part of the conversation, Hitler showed himself chiefly anxious to discover the military measures to be adopted in face of the situation. He did not show 'displeasure', nor did he indulge in recriminations—to be exact I shall add that he said that, by coming to Florence, he had hoped to be able to ask you to postpone the operation against Greece until next spring. On his arrival he knew that operations had already begun, and did not consider it advisable to discuss the question with you.

In the second part of the conversation, after having examined the possibility of an agreement with Yugoslavia, and having found an unexpected agreement in principle on my side, the Fuehrer was in the best of humours, and made a point of giving the conversation *a tone of very marked cordiality*. The formula he kept repeating was as follows: We must give Belgrade an interest in the operation against Greece. And he illustrated with satisfaction the advantages of such an agreement.

When I saw the Fuehrer, who had a conversation with me from five to seven, he had already read your speech and had liked it. My associates inform me that among those accompanying Hitler and Ribbentrop your speech had also produced the most favourable impression from every point of view.

I can say little to you about Serrano Suñer. We saw each other for a short time, and in the presence of Ribbentrop. I know that Hitler catechised him on the subject of Spain's immediate interven-

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

tion in the war, and that Serrano reserved the liberty to consult the Caudillo. It seems that the main difficulty is still represented by the question of supplies, and that, of the many things which the Spaniards lack, it is grain which is causing the greatest worry.

Mackensen spoke to me in the greatest confidence of the Keitel-Badoglio conversation. The latter was anxious to let it be known that he was opposed to the expedition against Greece, that he had considered the forces insufficient, that he had foreseen everything that had happened. He declined any responsibility for what had happened since the decision to advance had been taken against his judgment. I did not omit to give Mackensen the proper answer, and to dot the i's. Mackensen in turn will talk to the others.

For the rest, the *Stimmung* is unchanged, and, on the whole, may be considered optimistic and serene.

Tomorrow evening I shall be in Vienna and shall remain there until Wednesday evening. Since I shall see the Fuehrer again in Vienna I shall await your orders there.

Most devotedly,

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ALFIERI.

Rome, 16th December, 1940—XIX

N.1/06941.

Dear Alfieri,

Rosso¹ refers at length in the telegram, a copy of which I attach for you, to the recent Soviet attitude towards us, which seems to tend to greater cordiality.

As you will naturally have seen, on the 13th Molotov had lunch at the Embassy along with the Commissar for Foreign Trade, Mikoyan, the Vice-Commissars for Foreign Affairs, Vishinsky and Lozovsky and other Soviet functionaries. Rosso ends by saying that, at the present moment, the Soviet rulers show an obvious desire to improve relations with Italy. It would seem to me to be inadvisable to let these good intentions slip without more ado. And since this topic has on several occasions been the subject of our conversations with Ribbentrop and with the Fuehrer himself, I should require to know how the above-mentioned Soviet advances are regarded there and how they could be followed up by us, the point still being that Italy's interest in improving relations with the U.S.S.R. is *principally* dictated by the necessity of resuming those trade movements which at present are practically non-existent and the resumption of which would, in the present circumstances, be of great advantage to our economy.

I beg you to discuss the matter with Ribbentrop, pointing out to him, as opportunity presents itself, the practical interest of the

¹Augusto Rosso, Italian Ambassador to Moscow.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

question and pointing out that, without going very far in the matter, it would still be advisable to bring our relations with Moscow back to a satisfactory level of normality.

With cordial greetings.

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ALFIERI.

Rome, 17th December, 1940—XIX

N.1/6988.

Secret.

Dear Alfieri,

Attached I am sending you a list of those requirements strictly necessary if the country's industry is to be able to continue to carry on with its war production. I must at once stress that the words 'strictly necessary' are not a manner of speech; should these raw materials not be made available, or should the German Government think it can make cuts in the quantities asked by us, industry would come to an inevitable and immediate stop.

The quantities indicated in the attached list represent what the industries use at present for a level of production which is considerably below their productive potentiality.

As soon as you receive this letter of mine, I beg you to ask audience of the Fuehrer and, in the name of the Duce, to present our requests to him personally. In the files of the Embassy you will find the telegram sent to the Fuehrer by the Duce on 26th August, 1939, to point out to him what our needs were then to carry out a twelve months' war. This was due to the fact that the bringing forward of the outbreak of the conflict as compared with the date foreseen in the Italo-German agreements had prevented Italy from accumulating the necessary stocks. As one can see from a comparison between today's requests and the requests in 1939, much has been done and that, for almost all items, our requirements have sensibly diminished as regards the requests from Germany. To this must be added that between 1939 and now a new fact emerged—that is to say German control over almost all Europe. What we asked for then we asked from Germany alone. Today we are asking it from a Germany which controls the mining and industrial production of the whole European continent. When talking to the Fuehrer you can also call his attention to the fact that since it is Italy which is bearing the weight of the conflict with Great Britain at the present time and presumably for the duration of the winter, our consumption has shown a rise which explains and justifies these new requests. From the appendix of requests you will point out that, while for most items we can wait until the second half of 1941, there are some of capital importance—such as manganese, chrome, tin, mica and asbestos, stocks of which will be completely exhausted

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

next January. It is obvious that in the case of these items the urgency is absolute inasmuch as the material must arrive in Italy at least a month before.

I call your personal attention to the importance and urgency of the *démarche* you must make, and beg you to inform me in detail of the results of your activity.

Cordially,

1941

XXXVII

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

19th January—12th February, 1941.

The New Year opened badly for the Fascist forces. In Libya, in the first fortnight of January, Bardia fell and the door was wide open to British penetration; in Albania, Greek pressure obliged the Fascist command to abandon Clisura and to fall back still further under the threat of seeing the Italian bases themselves overrun and the surviving troops pushed into the sea. In these circumstances Spanish intervention could have truly decisive importance. There had been an attempt to carry out the conditions of the Hendaye protocol by agreements and contacts between Germans and Spaniards, but none of these had made Spain take an effective step towards intervention. On 7th December, Admiral Canaris had informed Franco of the German decision to begin operations against Gibraltar from Spanish territory towards the middle of January. Franco, however, had opposed this project in the most decided manner. To get over this impasse, Hitler thought of using Mussolini who had always claimed to have a particular ascendancy over Franco.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Berghof, 19th January, 1941—XIX

Ribbentrop begins by saying that the Fuehrer should have conferred with the Duce before the beginning of the operations in Greece, but that was not possible because of the rapidity with which the action was begun. I object that the Fuehrer had been informed in time by a letter from the Duce. Ribbentrop admits that this is true but adds that they had not believed in the imminence of the operations since General Roatta¹ had stated to a German officer that the action would not begin.

Ribbentrop then goes on to examine relations between the Axis and the various European states.

Relations with Spain² have become appreciably cooler recently.

¹Mario Roatta, Italian Chief of Staff.

²The Spanish Government continued to show reluctance in the face of increasing German pressure for a speedy intervention in the war. It had indeed conceded some aid—for example by the agreement to supply German submarines in Spanish waters (5th December, 1940)—but on the main point it resisted. On 7th December there had

Ribbentrop is of the opinion that the Spanish are moving closer to England so as to derive from her immediate advantages of an economic and material nature, but does not, in any case, consider that Spain intends to intervene in the war on the side of the Axis before the British collapse has begun. On the other hand, he considers Spanish intervention to be of decisive importance, since it would allow the occupation of Gibraltar and the control of North Africa which is intended to paralyse any possible attempt at sedition by the French. Ribbentrop has caused a last *démarche* to Franco to be made by his Ambassador in Madrid.

He therefore considers the possibilities of action by Germany exhausted—but not those by Italy. Therefore he would be in favour—and he reserves the right to discuss the matter directly with the Duce—of a meeting between Mussolini and Franco.

With regard to Bulgaria, a fundamental factor in the forthcoming development of Italian and German action in the Balkans, he is of the opinion that the difficulties have now been overcome. They were based particularly on the hesitant temperament of King Boris, all the more since he does not succeed in altogether concealing some personal sympathy for England 'which is now the home of the Monarchies'. However, Bulgaria will adhere to the Tripartite Pact. Ribbentrop is of the opinion that this may take place towards the end of February so as not to give too much time for the reaction of neighbouring countries. He does not however believe that Turkey can react in the military field. She is too defectively armed to do so. On the other hand, it would be sufficient for the Axis to say a word to Moscow to make Turkey disappear from the map.

As far as Yugoslavia, too, is concerned, Ribbentrop has no particular worries. He does not conceal from himself the fact that public opinion is fundamentally hostile to the Axis, but he is convinced that this hostility will not be translated into any concrete gesture in the political and military field.

The most important question is that of Russia. Ribbentrop read with great interest what Alfieri communicated to him on the subject of our negotiations with the Soviets. He must first say that when he declared himself in favour of an improvement in relations between Italy and the U.S.S.R. he did not think that one could go as far as

been a conversation, which was to have been decisive, between General Franco and Admiral Canaris, who had come to Madrid for the purpose. Canaris disclosed Germany's desire to undertake the attack on Gibraltar shortly. As a result the OKW expected the entry of German troops into Spanish territory to begin in January 1941. Franco replied that this was impossible, at least at that date, and probably at any later date. Spain lacked fuel and food and did not have adequate arms. Spain, Franco assured him, could not risk the certain loss of the Canaries, nor, above all, support a war which lasted more than six months. Faced with these arguments General Canaris had then asked General Franco to indicate a date. But Franco had refused, pointing out that the removal of the difficulties which stood in the way of immediate Spanish intervention did not solely depend on the Spaniards, but on other countries—among them Germany, which had undertaken to send arms, fuel and grain and had not yet carried out these promises.

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

appeared from the first conversations. He is extremely sceptical as to the good faith of the Russians; he fears that Molotov, having found some doors barred to him when he was in Berlin, is now attempting to get round things by means of Italy. This particularly where Balkan problems are concerned. Ribbentrop therefore agrees that a reply must be given to Molotov concerning the various queries raised during the conversation with our Ambassador, Rosso, but prefers that the reply should be of a delaying nature and he himself would also not suggest going to extremes in connection with what was said to Molotov in Berlin—this in order to maintain identity of conduct between Italy and Germany.

Ribbentrop requests us to keep him informed in detail on all questions during the further development of the negotiations with Moscow.

After he had asked for certain information on the military situation in Libya and in the Empire, the conversation ended.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FUEHRER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS, CIANO AND VON RIBBENTROP.

Berghof, 19th January, 1941—XIX

Afternoon.

The Fuehrer speaks at length on the French situation and does not conceal his scepticism as to the stability of that situation. He stresses that there are profound dissensions between Pétain, Weygand and de Gaulle, but there is also a common hatred—that towards the Axis Powers. One cannot, therefore, rule out a surprise in the French attitude, and the Fuehrer is following the situation in North Africa with the most careful attention. In this connection, he considers closer Spanish adhesion to the policy of the Axis and her intervention in the war to be a factor of fundamental importance. He relates with a wealth of detail the preparations made by Germany for the occupation of Gibraltar, preparations which have since been frustrated by the attitude assumed by Spain—a hesitant and faithless attitude which the Fuehrer attributes to the personal activity of the Minister, Serrano Suñer, and to the influence which the Church has regained on the Spanish Government rather than to Generalissimo Franco. The Fuehrer stresses the importance which a personal move by the Duce might have in making Franco decide on intervention. For his part, Hitler denies that he had refused the material help requested by the Spanish Government and declares himself ready to supply the foodstuffs requested by Spain.

The Duce agrees to propose a meeting to Generalissimo Franco, and since on the German side there is insistence on the urgency of

the conversation, it is fixed that in principle the conversation can take place towards the end of the month.

The Fuehrer then goes on to speak of the situation in the Balkans, and explains the present state of German preparations in Rumania in connection with German intervention against Greece. While he postpones until the next conversation, which will take place in the presence of the military experts, defining the situation from the technical point of view, he states that the German action cannot take place before the end of March and that, politically, it can be influenced by the attitude of Russia, whereas he does not have any anxieties of the kind where the attitude of Turkey and Yugoslavia is concerned.

LETTER TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER, SERRANO
SUÑER, MADRID.

N.1/00294.

Rome, 22nd January, 1941—XIX

Dear Ramon,

On the occasion of your last visit to Rome, you spoke to the Duce of the possibility of his soon meeting the Caudillo, and the Duce welcomed your proposal with great pleasure. Succeeding events have up to now made the meeting impossible, just as you and I have had to postpone the idea of a meeting between ourselves which was proposed as far back as November.

In the opinion of the Duce a moment has now come which is very propitious for a meeting between the Duce and the Caudillo, naturally accompanied by yourself. Therefore, in the name of the Duce, I invite you to consider the possibility of a journey by the Caudillo and yourself to Italy—a journey which should be made in the course of the next few days.

Our Ambassador, Lequio, to whom I am entrusting this letter, is instructed by the Duce to put before you verbally the reasons for which the present moment appears the most favourable for the meeting between the Leader of the Fascist Revolution and that of the Spanish National Revolution. Lequio is also instructed, should the Caudillo and yourself be in favour of this proposal, to fix the details of the visit; in principle, I believe that it could take place towards the end of next week, and that the most suitable place is the Ligurian Riviera in the vicinity of Genoa.

I am certain that a meeting between the Duce and the Caudillo at such an important moment in international life will have very profound and useful effects on the present and future relations of our two countries. For my part, I shall be truly happy if I have the opportunity of spending some days in your company, which, as your friend, is always very dear to me.

Accept, dear Ramon, my most cordial regards.

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

LETTER TO THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER,
VON RIBBENTROP.

Rome, 22nd January, 1941—XIX

NI/00295

Dear Ribbentrop,

I am writing to inform you that I have entrusted to our Ambassador to Madrid, who was on leave in Italy, a letter in which, in the name of the Duce, I invite Franco and Serrano Suñer to come to the Ligurian Riviera towards the end of next week.

Serrano Suñer will be in possession of my letter by Saturday and I therefore expect to be able to inform you as soon as possible of the result of my step.

Accept, dear Ribbentrop, my most cordial greetings.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE
CAUDILLO AND THE SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER,
SERRANO SUÑER.

Bordighera, 12th February, 1941—XIX

Morning.

Duce: Expresses his good wishes to the Caudillo and greets him. The Foreign Minister is absent because he is at the Albanian front at a moment of particular military interest. The Duce will consider the present meeting as an anticipation of the visit which Franco will pay to Rome and which will be the first visit after the end of the war.

During his last meeting with the Fuehrer at Berghof, Spain was much discussed. The Fuehrer attaches much importance to the Spanish attitude. The Fuehrer says that, if it were possible for the Germans to occupy Gibraltar, the position of the Axis in the Mediterranean would change radically. At Berghof, the reasons why Spain has not entered the war were discussed. There was talk of grain. According to the Germans the Reich is ready to give the grain, but Spain, they said, had been evasive. The Fuehrer said to the Duce: 'Would you care to have a conversation with the Caudillo?' The Duce said that he had already planned to see the Caudillo and replied in the affirmative.

The Duce gives a detailed exposition of the general situation. It is his profound conviction that the Axis will win the war. He does not say so as an act of faith, but as a profound conviction. Germany today has the Continent with her. All the countries in Europe are either occupied countries, or are in her orbit, or are her friends or allies. In the last war, Germany had the Continent against her. Now it is entirely against England. What are England's hopes? Perhaps Russia. But Russia is out of the game. Stalin is a very cunning man,

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

but one who does not allow himself to be influenced by the Jews, and in any case Germany has 85 divisions on the Eastern frontier. Germany will not permit any attempt either against Finland or Rumania, which are the two flanks of Germany's Eastern dispositions, in the middle of which are these 85 divisions. In Rumania, Germany has 15 divisions. Before the end of the month she will have 15 more. She is already entering Bulgaria in which there have been for some time several thousand Germans in civilian clothes. The attitude of Bulgaria is friendly. As for Turkey, she will not attack if not herself attacked. Rumania can mobilise 30 divisions which the Germans can arm and organise. Outside Europe, the United States must be taken into consideration. Their help is now formidable, and may in the future be even more so, but it will not serve to repair the damage caused by the German air force, and then it is not certain that American aid will arrive. American aid must reckon with the submarines and the air forces of Italy and Germany. Today Germany has 235 divisions ready. She produces about one submarine per day. One can count on 25 to 30 submarines per month. In April she will have 250 submarines. German aeroplane production is very high, even if it has not reached some of the figures given on the subject by the newspapers. Germany has, in fact, tens of thousands of planes, and this force cannot be reached by England. Germany's internal situation is excellent. The nation is united, strong and sure of victory. The economic situation is good. There are restrictions, but everyone has enough to eat. The situation in the occupied countries does not cause any anxiety. It is calm, and, on the other hand, the Germans would not permit risings or revolts.

As for France, she can do nothing against Germany. If she attempted anything, Germany would occupy all France with the exception of a zone reserved for Italian occupation. The de Gaulle movement is quite important, but not such as to have repercussions on the German attitude.

Relations between Italy and Germany are clear, straightforward, intimate. No separate peace. These are senseless fantasies. We bring the Axis a very strong contribution from the point of view of the air and sea. From the point of view of the land, we were to attack in Africa between 15th and 18th December. The English anticipated us. The English attack succeeded because in the front line we had Libyans, who are excellent troops, but not when faced by mechanised forces. We must, however, admit that there was tactical surprise. But as far as the war in general is concerned, the lack of success in Africa is not of great importance. The Germans are now sending a 'holding division'¹ with a large number of guns. Then they

¹The Afrika Division zbV—'special purposes division'—which later became the 90th Light Division and fought through the entire African campaign. The Germans sent two, not one, armoured divisions, the 15th and 21st. The Italian armoured division was the Ariete.

will send an armoured division. This is very useful also from the point of view of the repercussions on the situation in Tunisia and in French Africa in general. We, too, are sending an armoured division to Tripolitania, which, added to the other five divisions already in Tripoli, gives a certain security.

In East Africa they are resisting, but we cannot send help. There are 300,000 men, good generals and an immense area. The enemy's progress cannot be anything but slow.

In Albania it may be considered that the situation will soon be liquidated. We attacked with insufficient forces. In recent history, too, it has happened that other countries attacked with insufficient forces. For instance, Austria against Serbia in 1914. For instance, more recently, Russia against Finland. We attacked with 6 divisions against 15. After an initial advance we were compelled to withdraw, but the losses were not heavy. The prisoners amount to between 10 to 12 thousand, among them some thousands of Albanians, not because they are traitors but because they are not used to modern war. However, the situation in Albania can be considered stabilised. Germany will shortly descend on Salonika, and then the situation throughout the Eastern Mediterranean will be changed. Germany will bring submarines to Salonika.

These are the facts of the situation.

I am led to believe that the English resistance will still be long. Germany will do everything possible to end it in 1941. She has prepared everything for the landing in England, but Germany will attempt the invasion when the blow is certain to succeed. The landing is a loaded pistol aimed at England, but when the shot is fired the target must be struck. It will not be possible to repeat the operation.

Gibraltar: If the Axis could pass through Gibraltar and enter Morocco, the situation in French Africa would be completely changed. Further, our ships could then pass Gibraltar for the raider's war which is much more effective than submarine war.

The Duce recalls to the Caudillo that he has always been very reserved with regard to Spain. He shares the Caudillo's opinion that Spain cannot remain absent, but thinks that the date and form of her participation in the war are matters for Spain herself. Participation in the war is too serious a matter to be requested by others. If tomorrow, to put forward an absurd and inadmissible hypothesis, the democracies were to emerge victorious, the first nation to be hit would be Spain. Spain's African problems would not find any favourable solution; not only that, but England would attempt to disintegrate Spanish unity so as to prevent Spain from following an independent policy. It is the fate of the world for long years to come which is being decided in this war. And Spain cannot remain absent. But, the Duce repeats, the problem is one for Spain. He told Hitler; 'I will speak, but I will not apply pressure.' Hitler said: 'I

am willing to give all possible aid, and will abide faithfully by the Vienna Protocol. It ask only that the German troops should be enabled to take Gibraltar.' Hitler has great personal sympathy for the Caudillo, great sympathy for Spain, a great desire that Spain should join the military policy of the Axis.

Caudillo: Expresses above all his profound gratitude to the Duce and the Italian people for the aid given during the Spanish civil war.

He will speak with complete frankness setting out his thoughts in their entirety and with freedom. He speaks to the Duce, in whom he has complete faith, and whom he considers a great and proved friend of the Spanish people.

When the European war broke out, Spain experienced the bitterness of not being able to participate in it. In fact the war surprised her at a difficult moment. Spain had to realise her victory—that is to say pacify the country, unite the various parties—in order to make the Revolution triumph.

The most important question is that of Gibraltar, an age-old question which absolutely must be solved. Spain has lost no time. The lines are being reinforced round Gibraltar and guns sited. A first battery of mortars has been put into position recently and soon another will be sited. It is the opinion of the Generalissimo that attack from the air can do little against Gibraltar since everything is in the rock or in caves. The opinion of the Germans seems to be different; they believe that the stronghold can soon be taken by bombardment from above. But air attack has an intermittent effect whereas it is necessary for the effect to be continuous. This continuous effect can be obtained only by bombardment with mortars. For this purpose, the tactical situation of the attacker is good since Gibraltar is at the centre of an arc on which all the lines of fire can meet. At present the Spanish General Staff is studying the possibility of increasing the calibre of the mortars from 101 to 120. At least one hundred of such mortars would be required. The 101 mm. mortar alone has a demoralising destructive effect, but the effect of the 120 mm. mortar will naturally be much greater.

All these preparations Spain is making because she is absolutely convinced of the necessity of taking Gibraltar with her own resources. With these, she will destroy the siege-works of Gibraltar, which are strong externally but on the other hand weak inside, and by blocking it, will force the entrance canal.

Last year Spain hoped for a good harvest. Therefore, during the summer the Spanish Government had offered to intervene. It repeated that offer during last September, although Germany did not attach much importance to Spanish intervention, and raised the question of economic concessions (mines, banking concerns, etc.) which did not make a good impression on the Spanish. Serrano Suñer was in Berlin as negotiator, and informed the Caudillo of the conversations from day to day. While Serrano referred to territorial

aspirations and claims, the Germans spoke more of economic problems.

The Spanish demands concern what is due to Spain in Africa for natural reasons, and what France has torn from her, bit by bit, at moments of weakness and political decadence—in particular Morocco. Spain wants nothing gratuitous, she wants to fight, she wants to free herself from English and French domination. She wants her own political and economic independence.

Spain did not turn down the German requests. She invited the *Auswaertiges Amt* to send technical commissions to examine the various problems on the spot. The German technicians studied the problems, not in collaboration with the Spanish, but on their own. At Hendaye, one had the impression that Germany, instead of being irremediably hostile to France, was preparing to attract her into her own orbit and make her a collaborator of the Axis. Now France will never collaborate. There is no ruler capable of keeping the French people disciplined. France is Spain's age-old enemy as she is Germany's; it is the country which, like England, has most contributed to Spanish decadence. Of course, the Fuehrer had his plans; he wanted peace in Western Europe since he had to think of landing his armies in England. But the impression was that Germany did not know the Spanish people and its age-old aspirations well. It almost seemed as if Spain were to take second or even third place. At all events, so that Hendaye might not be a fruitless meeting, Spain agreed to sign the Protocol, which was then completed in Vienna with the signatures of the Ministers, Ribbentrop and Ciano added to it.

What are the problems which must be solved by Spain before entering the war?

Answer: Grain.

1. To obtain the grain from the producing countries.
2. To transport it to Spain.
3. To distribute it among the population within the necessary time.

This year Spain finds herself with a harvest which is half of what had been expected in consequence of:

1. Lack of seed.
2. Lack of manure.
3. Lack of mules.

Spain requires 32,000 mules; an attempt has been made to replace them by tractors (500), by requesting them from Germany, but she replied in the negative.

A few months ago, Admiral Canaris came to Spain to persuade the Spanish to allow German troops to pass through as far as

Algeciras, saying that Spain need not do anything beyond confining herself to remaining passive towards the passage of the Germans. Now, the Gibraltar operation is a Spanish operation and the Spaniards would never allow other troops to replace them. The Caudillo told Canaris this plainly, just as he also said that Spain could not accept an arbitrary date for entering the war since she must first deal with the rationing problem, the railway problem and the fuel problem. He therefore invited Canaris to go anywhere he liked to see for himself that there is hunger in Spain, that the railways in Spain are inadequate, that coal is lacking, that in Spain, where 3 to 4 million tons of goods must be transported from north to south, ships are lacking. Entry into the war meant little or nothing if Spain did not succeed in bringing real aid and instead had to become a burden to Germany.

What is the situation at this moment? Hunger. Only eight of the Spanish provinces have three months' grain; the others are entirely, or almost entirely, without it; the Spanish people are eating bread made with the grain which comes into the country from day to day. An agreement for 500,000 tons has just been made with the Argentine, but even that will not be enough, apart from the fact that months and months will be required before this grain arrives in Spain in view of the fact that the Spanish mercantile marine is extremely short of ships. How many tons have arrived up to now? Fifteen thousand. The requirement for a single day. And what sort of a crisis arises therefrom—Franco concludes—is demonstrated by the fact that he cannot keep under arms more than 300,000 soldiers, since he would not be able to give them anything to eat.

Serrano Suñer: Says that the Germans were spoken to frankly. The Spanish nation is emerging from a terrible war, and it cannot be drawn into the battle except by explaining to it clearly the advantage and the necessity. There are two Spanish problems: the problem of food, and the problem of national aspirations. When grain was mentioned at Hendaye the Germans did not accept the Spanish demand; nor did they behave differently with regard to Spain's claims.

Serrano recalls that when he spoke to the Duce last, and asked him what would be the opportune moment for Spain's entry into the war, the Duce replied with the following formula: 'Spain must enter the war at the moment which entails fewest sacrifices for her and is most fruitful for the common cause'. Now Germany is inviting Spain to enter the war. Serrano is not discussing whether the moment is the most fruitful, but states that it is the most laden with sacrifices. It is in fact five months until the harvest, and in Spain there is bread for only a few days. The Spanish are loyal friends of Germany, but this very loyalty forces them to speak frankly. Serrano must therefore repeat what the Caudillo has said, namely that the offers made by Spain to Germany up to date have not been favour-

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

ably received and have always been linked with economic compensations.

It has been said that Spain did not wish to intervene in the struggle because of the lack of a German landing in England, because of the Italian reverses in Libya, because of a possible intervention by the United States. That is absolutely false. The Spanish, too, believe firmly in the victory of the Axis. Today Germany is triumphant on the Continent, and England is not in a position to be able to resist.

Duce: The moment is still favourable for Spain to enter the war. Germany will in any case solve the food problem of Europe in the best possible way. If necessary, before she dies of hunger, her enemies and ex-enemies will have to starve. The Duce sticks to the formula which Serrano wished to recall, and recognises that a nation which has had three years of civil war cannot go to war again unless it has a good food situation and if it does not obtain compensations for its sacrifices. Up to now, Germany hoped to have France as a collaborator; and one of Germany's aspirations was to show the world that the whole Continent was against England. The Duce has now the impression that Germany no longer believes in France's collaboration. France cannot be coerced. In spirit she is entirely Gaullist, hopes only for England's victory, is working to *grignoter* (as the French say) the armistice, and dreams that some day victory will be snatched by the 120,000 French soldiers who, under the command of Weygand, are awaiting under arms in Morocco the opportune moment for action.

Serrano Suñer: The Spanish intend to enter the war but wish guarantees. At Hendaye they were given nothing concrete. The Vienna Protocol is extremely vague. That Protocol should therefore be modified.

Duce: Repeats that the period when Germany thought of the possibility of French collaboration is past. The man who would have been willing to put this policy into practice is Laval, but Laval has been thrown overboard. As for Darlan,¹ he will give only passive collaboration. He will never put France openly against England. Article 5 of the Vienna Protocol was dependent on a situation which it will be very difficult to bring about—that of a France sincerely prepared to collaborate with Germany.

The Duce believes he may summarise the Caudillo's thoughts as follows:

Spain will enter the war when the following two conditions have been recognised:

¹Admiral Darlan, Minister for the Navy in the Vichy Government 12th July 1940; on 25th February, 1941, assumed the Vice-Premiership and the portfolios for Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Navy and Information. On 17th April, left the Government, and was appointed Head of the Armed Forces of the State. On 2nd November, 1942, landed at Algiers a few days before the Anglo-American landings; on 24th December, assassinated.

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

1. The dispatch of sufficient grain.
2. Acceptance of her colonial aspirations.

Caudillo : Says that that is precisely the case.

Duce : Asks : If the suspicion should have arisen among the Germans that Spain does not wish to enter the war because of failure to effect a landing in England and Italian reverses in Libya, can he assure the Fuehrer of the contrary?

Caudillo : Absolutely. Spanish faith in the success of the Axis is the same as on the first day.

Duce : Let us now try to define Spain's grain requirements.

Caudillo : Spain desired grain not only for today but for the whole period when she will require it. It is not yet known whether the next harvest will be sufficient. If the Germans put at Spain's disposal the 100,000 tons of grain which are in Portugal and are destined for Switzerland, that will be real and concrete aid, but the 100,000 tons will barely last for twenty days. Over and above this initial concession a system should be studied which will be able to ensure that Spain has something to eat in the future as well. Recently a long memorandum was handed to the German Ambassador in Madrid in which the Spanish stated their requirements, not only in food, but in the military field, in the field of transport, industry, etc. The Ambassador, Stohrer, sent it to the Fuehrer by special courier. An answer is awaited.

Duce : Says that in regard to German collaboration with Italy Germany is absolutely loyal. Italy receives a million tons of coal per month, and the volume of trade is in the order of 14 milliards per annum. He recognises that the Spanish are right to concern themselves with the needs of the future as well as with immediate necessities.

(The conversation is broken off to be resumed in the afternoon.)

Duce : Summarises the Spanish point of view thus :

1. Spain believes in the victory of the Axis.
2. It is necessary for Spain, before entering the war, to solve the grain problem.
3. It is necessary to revise Article 5 of the Vienna Protocol, it being inadequate to meet Spanish aspirations.

Asks : If these last two points were met, would Spain go to war and when?

Caudillo : Spain's entry into the war depends on Germany more than on Spain herself; the sooner Germany sends help, the sooner Spain will make her contribution to the Fascist world cause.

The *Caudillo* reads the report handed to the German Ambassador to Madrid, Stohrer, and hands a copy to the *Duce*.

Duce : Asks : If Germany satisfies the requests in the report, is Spain willing to enter the war?

Caudillo : Replies in the affirmative.

It is hoped that Germany will show more comprehension of the

Spanish situation and of the importance which the Spanish factor can assume in the war. He thinks that Germany is not attaching sufficient importance to the alarming situation in Morocco, where the French army is continually improving its armament, and where Weygand maintains daily contact with the United States. He reads some telegrams which illustrate the seriousness of the situation in Morocco and hands them to the Duce.

Duce : Confirms that two months ago Germany had not given up the hope of bringing Pétain to collaborate. That hope is now gone. Hitler stated at Berghof: 'France will always hate us. France is an enemy.' But Germany is afraid that adoption of measures against France, as for example her total occupation, would lead the Vichy Government to move to Algiers and Weygand to rebel. That danger will disappear when Gibraltar is occupied and the German armoured divisions, having passed the Straits, dominate Morocco. Today America can help France only through Morocco in view of the fact that the French Atlantic coasts are occupied by Germany. That possibility will disappear when French Morocco is no longer in the power of France. Only then will this France which has still too much pride, which is convinced that she did not lose the war, that she has suffered a *fausse défaite* because she did not want to fight, be face to face with crude reality.

France still maintains an attitude of pride :

1. Because in spite of the 400 bombing raids which it has undergone, London has not yet capitulated.
2. Because the German landing has not yet taken place.
3. Because of Roosevelt's favourable attitude to the enemies of the Axis.
4. Because of our reverses in Libya.

This pride will soon have a fall. Soon the Germans will enter Bulgaria, and England will have no other base in Europe than Portugal.

Serrano : It is very much to be desired that Germany should grant Spain what she requires and guarantee the realisation of Spanish aspirations. Over and above everything else, there is also the danger that an unfortunate incident might make Spain enter the war unexpectedly, without her preparations being completed, an event which would be injurious to Spain and to the Axis. He refers to a possible English invasion of Portugal. With Germany's aid to Spain, and with the resulting Spanish preparedness for war, the Portuguese danger, too, would become relative. Certainly Portugal's attitude is affected by events. Last June she was much further from England than she is at present. It must be admitted, however, that the Press, the army and the ruling class in Portugal are Anglophiles and Masons.

Duce : Once more summarizes the questions which Spain considers it necessary to solve for her entry into the war. They are :

MUSSOLINI MEETS FRANCO

1. Immediate, at least partial, satisfaction of the wishes contained in the report handed to Stohrer (grain, armaments, transport, etc.).

2. Revision in favour of Spain of Article 5 of the Vienna Protocol.

He will inform the Fuehrer of this.

XXXVIII

CREATION OF THE CROAT STATE

25th March—30th April, 1941.

For Fascist Italy there had always been a Yugoslav problem, and subordinate to it, a Croatian problem. With the increase in European tension, which was later to spread the war, Rome had more than once thought of finishing with Yugoslavia. Nor had such thoughts been abandoned after the drawing-up of the agreement of 25th March, 1937, although it bore the signature of Stoyadinovitch, on whom totalitarian Italy could count, at least up to a certain point. Once Stoyadinovitch had fallen, and with him the personal and authoritarian regime which he had instituted in Yugoslavia, all scruples with regard to Yugoslavia had disappeared. During the summer and autumn of 1940, Mussolini had been on the point of attacking Yugoslavia. Two factors led him to contemplate this new adventure—fear that Germany would also impose her hegemony on the Balkans, which Italy considered to belong to her sphere of interests, and the desirability of finally removing all anxiety over Italy's eastern flank. The general situation, however, caused the operation to be postponed. As the spring of 1941 drew near, in view of the attack on Greece, the Yugoslav problem presented itself once again in all its real importance. Mussolini was not ignorant of the fact that, in the darkest days of the operation against Greece, the military were saying that the Yugoslav army could have settled all accounts outstanding with Italy in twenty-four hours. Hitler, in his turn, was following with attention the development of Yugoslav policy, and the growing influence of the British Legation in Belgrade. An untrustworthy Yugoslavia would make the movement of a German army across Bulgaria to the Greek frontier a hazardous operation. Hitler therefore decided to make a final effort to attach Yugoslavia to the system of the Tripartite Pact. Bulgaria had adhered to the Pact on 1st March; in the second half of the month the last hesitations of Belgrade appeared to have been overcome.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Vienna, 25th March, 1941—XIX

I placed before the Fuehrer the contents of the note given to me by the Duce on 21st March. The Fuehrer listened with the greatest

attention to the arguments on the reasons for and consequences—on the diplomatic and military plane—of our war against Greece; he then began as follows:

Greece: He considers Yugoslavia's adhesion to the Tripartite Pact of extreme importance in connection with the future German military operations in Greece. An ambiguous attitude on the part of Yugoslavia would leave open the flank of the German army for some 350 kilometres and any possible hostile action by Belgrade would have the effect of producing Turkish intervention, which might compromise the course of German military operations in the Balkans. The advance of the German divisions towards the Greek frontier is proceeding with the greatest regularity and in accordance with the timing laid down, in spite of the fact that a bridge on the Danube has been destroyed by a storm. The greatest difficulties for this march of more than half a million men are produced by the weakness of the bridges, which must all be reinforced, and by the fact that the roads are too narrow to allow the passage of the armoured divisions. However, by the end of the month the German dispositions will be complete and then the attack will depend only on the climatic conditions. In fact, in view of the nature of the ground on which operations must develop it is indispensable to be able to look forward with relative certainty to a period of good weather, if only for a few days. According to the information in the possession of the Fuehrer, the Greeks will resist all along the Thracian frontier, which is a strategic error which will facilitate the breaking of the front by the German forces. The English, on the other hand, are concentrating their defences on the mountain group west of Salonika. But as far as they, too, are concerned, a combined operation with artillery, Stukas and tanks has already been arranged, which they will have difficulty in resisting. A necessary condition for all this is—good weather. Therefore, the Fuehrer cannot say at once what the day of the attack will be; it is sufficient to establish that from the end of March onwards, everything will be ready and that it is a question of good weather.

I mentioned to the Fuehrer the Italian operations in Albania and the preparations under way, but he did not reply and limited himself to saying that he knew that a system of liaison had already been established between the two armies for the moment of operations.

England: The Fuehrer said very little on the subject of England. He only repeated that lately the activity of the submarine force has been intensified and the blows which the British mercantile marine suffers daily are such as to be able to produce very sensible effects within a short space of time.

Spain: Franco recently addressed a letter to Hitler which practically contains a denunciation of the Hendaye Agreements. The pretext for this denunciation is the change in the situation in

France. The Fuehrer proposes to reply and he will send a copy of the correspondence to the Duce in due course.

France: The Fuehrer's attitude of mind towards the Vichy Government is marked by increasing scepticism. The Fuehrer is daily more distrustful of the true sentiments and aims of the French Government and is therefore reinforcing his measures and intensifying his vigilance. Formally, however, he does not believe that he can do anything until such time as sufficient forces have been sent to Libya to give a guarantee against any surprises from the French Colonial Empire. If Franco had adopted a loyal attitude, had allowed the operation against Gibraltar and facilitated the passage of German troops to Morocco, the situation would be completely changed today and the Fuehrer would adopt a very different attitude to the Vichy Government.

Turkey: The adhesion of Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact has already had the most profound repercussions in Turkish circles, but that must not suffice to create illusions that Turkey may readily change her present attitude. Turkish ties with England are still very strong. Nevertheless, the Fuehrer proposes, with extreme prudence and care, to attempt an operation aimed, if not simply at attracting Turkey into the orbit of the Axis, at least at separating her from Britain. For the moment, it is necessary to content oneself with the result already achieved, which is considerable—namely the fact that Turkey will not consider the German operation against Greece as a *casus belli* with Germany. It is, however, undoubtedly the case that any action aimed against Turkey would provoke a military reaction from the Ankara Government.

Russia: The attitude of Russia has lately become more and more hostile. The causes of deterioration in relations have been Germany's unwillingness to give the Soviets a free hand in Finland, her refusal to permit the strangulation of Bulgaria, the guarantee to Rumania and the question of the Straits. Recently Stalin has reached the point of giving a guarantee to the Turkish Government to the effect that Russia would not attack Turkey should the latter be involved in a conflict. A guarantee which Hitler considers to be in complete bad faith since, should Turkey find herself involved in a conflict which was going unfavourably for her, Russia would immediately profit by it to cut off large pieces of Turkish territory to which she has long aspired.

In these circumstances, Hitler considers that 'good relations between Russia and Germany are guaranteed by the divisions drawn up on the frontier rather than by the Pacts in operation', a reason why, before beginning the movement against Greece, the Fuehrer made a point of reinforcing all Germany's military positions against Russia.

Meeting with the Duce: The Fuehrer said that it is his wish, too, to meet the Duce in the very near future and, once Matsuoka's

CREATION OF THE CROAT STATE

visits to Berlin and Rome are over, reserves the liberty of proposing the date for the meeting.

The general atmosphere where we are concerned, good as usual. The Fuehrer, both during the first meeting and during the conversation in the Imperial, was very cordial. He appeared to be serene and good-humoured. Not so Ribbentrop, who was also very cordial towards me, but seemed tired and on several occasions said to me that he did not feel well and that he wished to give up political activity as soon as possible and retire to the country.

The adhesion of Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact ceased to be of any importance the day after the signing of it, which took place in Vienna on 26th March. Zvetkovitch was overthrown, and Paul, the Prince Regent, was forced to relinquish power, which was assumed by King Peter, who was still in his minority. With this coup d'état, Yugoslavia ranged herself against the Axis. Berlin promptly parried the blow; on 6th April, the German troops crossed the Yugoslav frontier and Belgrade suffered a catastrophic raid. Italian troops also penetrated into Croatia and disembarked on the Dalmatian coast. On the 10th, the Hungarians also took the field and on the same day, Ante Pavelic¹ announced the creation of the independent Croat State.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

Muenchenkirchen, 20th April, 1941—XIX

I summarise the main points of what the Fuehrer said to me in the course of the conversation which took place at Muenchenkirchen on the afternoon of 20th April.

Progress of the War : The Fuehrer immediately expressed his most lively satisfaction at the progress of the war in the Balkans, which he now considered to be almost over in view of the fact that he thought any further Anglo-Greek resistance improbable. Hitler was greatly pleased at the positive results obtained by this war, which has allowed the Axis to control positions which make life more difficult for the English in the Mediterranean and 'which bring us considerably nearer to the Suez Canal'.

On my observing that the Duce considers the probable action against the Canal zone just as important as military co-operation against the British Isles, the Fuehrer declared that he completely agreed with this point of view. It remains, however, to be decided how one can attack Egypt.

Spain : If Spain had acted with greater loyalty towards the Axis (and here the Fuehrer expressed himself in very harsh terms on the subject of Generalissimo Franco) the British position in Gibraltar

¹See note on p. 439.

would no longer exist and the attack on the English positions in North Africa would be extremely easy. That has not been the case, and it is to be expected that it will not happen, at least not in time to be of any use.

Turkey: The other route which might present itself for an attack on Egypt would be that through Turkey. The possibility of attempting the operation by force can be ruled out. Independently of Turkish resistance, which would be considerable, the distances would make any military operation uncertain and dangerous. Diplomatically, too, it seems difficult to draw Turkey into the orbit of the Axis, at least within a short space of time. Difficult because there are certain active cliques, which are very hostile to the Axis and which during the war with Yugoslavia had contemplated a *coup d'état* in order to attack Germany; difficult, too, because it is impossible to see what political advantage could be offered to Turkey in exchange. The Fuehrer knows that Turkey would not even like the promise of Syria, and in any case that would raise an infinite series of complications in the Arab world.

Libya: This is the remaining route and is that which the Fuehrer proposes to employ to carry the attack against Egypt. He is not, however, blind to the fact that there are many difficulties, which are represented by the transportation of the necessary divisions across the sea, as well as of the materials which must be accumulated before beginning the venture. The success of General Rommel has been the result of a brilliant action by that general. But the situation in Libya must still be considered fairly fluid, and in any case the Fuehrer, even in the present circumstances, would not feel capable of continuing the operations against Egypt unless he had, in addition to the present forces, at least five more divisions at his disposal.

For that reason, and also in consideration of the hot season which is now approaching and makes it difficult for the Germans to operate on African territory, Hitler does not consider it possible to begin operations before next October. Naturally, it will be necessary to take into consideration accurately any British reinforcements during that period.

Submarine Warfare: Hitler made a brief reference to the results attained by the submarine war, but dwelt on this topic much less than he did in previous conversations, and it did not appear to me that he wished to pronounce an opinion on the progress of submarine warfare and on the results obtained—results in which he placed decisive confidence some months ago.

America: The recent victory of the Axis in the Balkan peninsula as well as the Russo-Japanese Pact,¹ have had the effect of

¹On 13th April a treaty of friendship and neutrality between the U.S.S.R. and Japan had been signed in Moscow. The treaty provided for a mutual undertaking by both States to maintain peaceful and friendly relations, to respect their territorial integrity, to maintain strict neutrality in any conflict which concerned one of the two signatories, an undertaking by the U.S.S.R. to respect the independence and integrity of Manchuria and a similar undertaking by Japan on Outer Mongolia.

strengthening the anti-war trends in America. Up to 1942, American deliveries to England will not be of any great magnitude. Should the war continue into 1942 however, and beyond, American deliveries would increase to such an extent as to merit the most careful consideration. Hitler still considers the Japanese card as extremely important in order, in the first place, to threaten and eventually counterbalance completely any American action. Hence the German desire for the Tripartite Pact to be kept continually in evidence as an active and operative factor in international policy.

Journey by the Fuehrer : Hitler expressed the desire to meet the Duce again in a short time and proposed to come to some part of Italy as close as possible to the frontier.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

(Telegraphic summary to the Duce). *Vienna, 21st April, 1941—XIX*

Today I had my first conversation with Ribbentrop which I summarise as follows :

1. *Slovenia* : Ribbentrop agrees to the annexation by Italy of that part of Slovenia not incorporated in the Reich. But I must point out that the German frontiers are not what one had thought in Rome, but considerably further south; starting from Vrlinka, they pass three kilometres north of Lubjana, then come down to north of Mirna and Costanievica and go up again to the Drave and Petrevec. Ribbentrop specifically repeated that this frontier is to be considered final, since it has been thus laid down irrevocably by Hitler.

2. *Croatia* : Ribbentrop outlined a Croat State on the basis of unofficial requests by Zagreb. This State would include Bosnia and Herzegovina within their old frontiers with the inclusion of large tracts of the Dalmatian coast. I immediately claimed the whole of Dalmatia. To which Ribbentrop replied that Germany considers it Italy's right to negotiate the fixing of the frontiers with Croatia directly, but he easily saw the advisability of creating territorial continuity between Italy and the region of Montenegro and Albania. Ribbentrop gave no details on the relations between Croatia and Italy, but he did not conceal his personal, although disguised, opposition to a project for personal union between the two States. However, he intends to discuss the question with the Fuehrer and will give me further information at a later meeting. Faced with these specific reservations on the personal union between Italy and Croatia, which to Ribbentrop's mind is a State very near to, even if it is not already actually a part of, the political and economic system of the Reich, I reaffirmed our definite decision to claim the whole of Dalmatia for Italy, not even referring to the question of

an outlet to the sea for Croatia—a question which, moreover, was not raised in connection with territorial matters even by the Germans. Ribbentrop asked if we had considered the possibility of giving Hungary, too, an outlet to the sea. I replied that the question might be considered from the economic point of view by means of the concession of a free zone in one of our ports. Ribbentrop approved.

3. *Montenegro*: Ribbentrop agrees on the reconstitution of an independent Montenegrin state, united to Italy by constitutional and political ties which will be defined at a later date.

4. *Kosovo*: During a recent visit by the King of Bulgaria, the Reich Government pledged itself to cede the whole of Macedonia to the Bulgars. I said that we are agreed in principle, but I made a reservation on the precise delimitation of the frontiers so as to claim for Albania those regions populated entirely by Albanians such as Dibra, Gostivar, Tetovo, etc., which had been included in the region promised to the Bulgars, with the aim of obtaining a frontier which was strong and logical from the military point of view.

5. *Serbia*: It is the German Government's intention to reduce Serbia to the lowest possible terms so as to prevent its again becoming an active and dangerous centre of conspiracy and intrigues. With this in view the Bulgarian, Rumanian, Hungarian and Croatian territorial demands at the expense of Serbia are more or less accepted. As far as Albania is concerned, the frontiers foreseen by Ribbentrop do not coincide—at our expense—with the Albanian requests, but I do not consider it difficult to obtain satisfactory modifications in that region.

6. *Greece*: Ribbentrop finally asked what our demands on Greece are. Prefacing my answer by saying that I had as yet no specific instructions on the matter, I said that in principle we demanded the annexation by Albania of the territory already discussed lying within the line Florina-Pindus-Arta-Prevesa, and the annexation by Italy of the Ionian Islands. As far as the rest of Greece is concerned, it would be our intention—once the occupation is completed—to await the further development and the end of the war with England before making further decisions.

Ribbentrop indicated his agreement in principle.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Vienna, 22nd April, 1941—XIX

I had a second conversation after he had reported to the Fuehrer the substance of our preceding conversation.

I summarise below the basic points of this second meeting.

CREATION OF THE CROAT STATE

1. *Slovenia*: Ribbentrop confirmed in the name of the Fuehrer that the frontiers laid down by decree are henceforward to be considered final. Italy is free to take such immediate steps as she sees fit to incorporate that part of Slovenia not included in the territory of the Reich.

2. *Croatia*: The Fuehrer confirms Germany's political disinterestedness with regard to Croatia; therefore, there is on his side not the slightest objection to a personal union being established between the Kingdom of Italy and Croatia. This question must, however, be settled directly between Rome and Zagreb. As far as the annexation by Italy of all Dalmatia is concerned, the Fuehrer also raises no objection, since he recognises that it is a question of exclusively Italian interests. Ribbentrop, for his part—after stating that he was speaking purely academically—pointed out that Dalmatia is populated by an overwhelming majority of Croats, to which I retorted very sharply that we are not claiming Dalmatia on ethnical grounds, but in virtue of the principle of living space and because, over and above any secondary considerations as to the present population of Dalmatia, there are historical, cultural and political reasons which make Dalmatia as dear to the heart of every Italian as any other area of national territory. Ribbentrop accepted what I told him.

On the subject of the procedure to be followed with the Croats, Ribbentrop, in the name of the Fuehrer, suggests that Pavelic should be made to come to Rome immediately in order to fix with him the frontiers between Italy and Croatia and to define the eventual political and constitutional relations between the two states. Ribbentrop also suggests that this should take place as soon as possible in order to prevent the manœuvres, which are already becoming evident, from taking shape, and also because Pavelic has asked to visit Germany and the Fuehrer would like to receive him only after Pavelic himself has defined his territorial and political position with regard to Rome.

3. *Montenegro*: Ribbentrop entirely agrees with the plan put forward by us. He repeats that the Montenegrin question is one which affects Italy alone.

4. *Albanian Frontiers*: In spite of the pledges already given to the King of Bulgaria, the Fuehrer wished to meet our demands as far as Kossovo is concerned. It would, however, be his intention to maintain the Ljitoten salient in favour of Bulgaria and the Mitroviza salient in favour of Serbia because mines under German ownership are included in these regions. Ribbentrop added that the Fuehrer makes a personal appeal to the Duce to understand his special interest in this question.

5. *Greece*: Ribbentrop indicated full agreement with our territorial claims in accordance with my statements yesterday. That is to say: annexation by Albania of the territory included between

CREATION OF THE CROAT STATE

the frontier and the line Florina-Pindus-Arta-Prevesa; annexation by Italy of the Ionian Islands. As for the remainder of Greece, the Fuehrer agrees on the advisability of taking no decision before the end of the general struggle. He feels it his duty, however, to inform the Duce that the King of Bulgaria, in the course of a recent conversation with him, claimed Salonika as a natural outlet for Macedonia. The Fuehrer reserved his answer, but Ribbentrop added that such a request was viewed sympathetically by the Fuehrer.

LETTER TO THE POGLAVNIK OF CROATIA, PAVELIC, ZAGREB.

Rome, 30th April, 1941—XIX

Dear Pavelic,¹

In his letter of yesterday's date, the Duce has informed you of His Majesty's acceptance of the Crown of Croatia for a prince of the House of Savoy.

I wish to tell you how happy I am at this decision, which is the best augury for the formulation of the agreements which will establish close and fruitful bonds between Italy and Croatia.

I shall be very glad to meet you as soon as possible, whenever Dr. Casentano² has concluded with you the negotiations relating to the Treaty and the fixing of the frontiers.

The Government of the Reich has been informed by me of the acceptance of the Crown of Croatia by His Majesty, of the designation of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Spoleto,³ as well as of the conversations at present in progress.

Accept meanwhile, dear Pavelic, together with my cordial good wishes the renewed expression of my sincere friendship.

¹Ante Pavelic, Croat conspirator and terrorist, organiser of the Ustashi movement; one of those responsible for the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia at Marseilles (9th October, 1934); for many years a refugee on Italian territory, had had relations with Ciano through officials of the Foreign Office (Cortese and Anfuso); on 15th April, 1941, was nominated head of the new independent Croat State.

²Raffaele Casentano, Italian diplomat, appointed chargé d'affaires with the Croat Government in Zagreb until such time as the Ambassador, Cortese, arrived; later nominated Minister at the signing of the treaty between Italy and Croatia of 18th May. Later Minister at Budapest from November, 1943 to September, 1944.

³Aimone of Savoy-Genoa, Duke of Spoleto. For an entertaining account of the behaviour of this ludicrous personage see Ciano's Diary.

XXXIX

MORE ATTEMPTS TO PERSUADE SPAIN

4th May—3rd June, 1941.

The Yugoslav question having been solved in the space of eleven days, and the Greek campaign concluded a week later (the capitulation took place on 23rd April), a phase of waiting followed, marked by great uncertainty. On the Continent there no longer existed forces capable of resistance, except those of the U.S.S.R.; and in that quarter storm clouds were piling up. For a long time the accumulation of men and equipment on the Russo-German frontier had been going on silently. Only at the beginning of May did rumours of an imminent German campaign against Russia begin to circulate. The war against Great Britain continued at sea, and there was no sign of the end being near. Spanish intervention thus once more became a subject of the first importance in the war plans of the Reich. Hitler once again attempted to avail himself of Mussolini in order to persuade Franco to intervene in the war and thus to close the Mediterranean before hostilities in the East began.

LETTER TO THE SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER, SERRANO SUÑER, MADRID.

Rome, 4th May, 1941—XIX

Dear Ramon,

On my return to Rome, after having taken part for some months in air operations on the Greek front, I wish to send you a cordial greeting.

I have been following and am following with interest the work which you are carrying out for the rehabilitation of your country. Your last speech was a powerful affirmation and has evoked a very wide response. The Duce, who read it with great attention, stated his approval of it in the most flattering terms. Your intransigence in demanding the rights of the Falange fully corresponds to the revolutionary concept of Mussolini. And as you will certainly recall, the Duce told you that Spain, too, needed a 3rd January,¹ after

¹On 3rd January, 1925, Mussolini, replying to the campaign by the Opposition which challenged the Fascist Government's procedure on moral grounds, declared in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies: 'There comes the moment when one says: Enough! When two elements involved in a struggle are unyielding, the solution lies in force. There has never been any other solution in history and there never will be.' It was the announcement of the dictatorship.

MORE ATTEMPTS TO PERSUADE SPAIN

which you, too, will be able—as was done in Italy in 1925—to adopt that line of political action which was summed up in the formula ‘all power to Fascism’. No one better than you, who are bound to the Caudillo by bonds of such intimate devotion, than you, who have done so much and suffered so much for the movement, no one else can make himself the interpreter and agent of this requirement of the Fascist revolution.

I also admired the energy with which you claimed for Spain the right to activity in the international field and allowed your thoughts on the demo-plutocracies to be publicly known. You know how much the Duce and Italy have respected and still respect Spain’s complete independence in deciding on its attitude towards the conflict. You alone can judge how much it is possible to do for the good of your country and when it can be done. But it is certain that Spain can have no other place than at the side of Italy and Germany, and past as well as future events are destined to make this union ever more intimate and effective. The great new destiny of Spain is to be found in the certain victory of the Totalitarian States.

I hope, dear Ramon, to have at a not far distant date the opportunity and the pleasure of finding myself once more in your company. You know how dear your company and friendship are to me.

Present my respects to the Caudillo and accept for yourself my most cordial greetings.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

The Brenner, 2nd June, 1941—XIX

I summarise the contents of the conversation with Herr von Ribbentrop:

France: Von Ribbentrop states that relations between Germany and France have not changed basically and that there is no intention of changing them. The contacts which have taken place with the Vichy Government are aimed solely at obtaining from France all the possible secondary advantages so as to continue to pursue the war against England. The true French attitude of mind towards Germany is not unknown in Berlin; if France had the opportunity she would with one accord rush to arms against the traditional enemy. The future of France is therefore sealed. However, for the purposes of the war, it is necessary to negotiate with Vichy and in particular to obtain the use of the Tunisian ports for supplies to the Axis in Libya. Ribbentrop requests us to allow the negotiations to be conducted solely by Germany in view of the greater susceptibility of the French with regard to Italy. The fact that the French

MORE ATTEMPTS TO PERSUADE SPAIN

refuse to allow the Italians to land in Tunis must not arouse the slightest anxiety in us. The agreements between Italy and Germany on the subject of Tunis are in full force and will be applied at the end of the war.

Russia: Rumours in circulation on the beginning of operations against Russia in the near future are to be considered devoid of foundation, at least excessively premature. It was the Russians who began the concentration of forces on the German frontier. On the German side the reply was an equally imposing concentration of forces. It is certain that Russo-German relations are not today what they were two years ago. The Axis guarantee to Rumania gave rise to Soviet distrust and hostility. He does not believe that Stalin wishes to commit the folly of attacking Germany, but should he commit it, or should Soviet pressure increase in any way, it is certain that in a short space of time the Russian army would be literally smashed to pieces by the Nazi forces. The main anxiety arises from the fact that the war would interrupt supplies which, apart from liquid fuel, are now developing at a satisfactory pace.

Turkey: The position of this country appeared particularly interesting at the moment of the Iraqi revolution.¹ Von Papen considered he could obtain from the Turkish Government free passage of arms and perhaps of men. But it was a case of an illusion on the part of the Ambassador, Papen. In reality the Turkish attitude is still reserved and, in certain fields, ambiguous. On the German side, attempts will continue to bring Turkey as close as possible to the Axis, even promising her territorial rectification in the area of Adrianopolis and the cession of one or two Greek islands close to the Turkish coast.

Spain: Ribbentrop repeated that the main responsibility for the delay in Axis operations is to be attributed to Spain—a delay which is due to the failure to occupy Gibraltar which, in January-February, could easily have been carried out by the German forces prepared for the purpose. Nevertheless, the Axis must continue activity aimed at ensuring Spanish friendship. With regard to the rulers of Spain, Ribbentrop maintained his reservations both on Franco and Serrano, as well as on all the other political and military ruling circles.

Croatia: Ribbentrop showed his satisfaction and the full approval of Germany at what has been done in Croatia. He repeated that this country is re-entering the Italian sphere. He is therefore of the opinion that the adherence of Croatia to the Tripartite Pact must take place under our ægis in an Italian city in the

¹As far back as 1930, at the time of the proclamation of her independence, Iraq had granted Great Britain a privileged position in the event of war (treaty of 30th May). She had, in fact, undertaken to give Britain free use of her territory, ports and railways. At the beginning of 1941, in Syria and Iran, the Germans had attempted to organise anti-British resistance. On 2nd May a revolt under Rashid Ali broke out in Iraq against the British. Hostilities ended on 31st May, when the revolt collapsed and an armistice was declared.

course of next week. We agreed that I will make arrangements to this effect.

America: Roosevelt's speech has given the impression that the United States are not yet ready, and Ribbentrop personally considers that, if an attitude of energetic loyalty is maintained towards the Axis by Japan, the United States will not go to war. He agreed that, at least for the moment, there must be no polemics with Roosevelt on the Axis side over his speech.

General Progress of the War: According to Ribbentrop, the war will be over within the year, or at least in that space of time England will be reduced to such a condition as to deprive anyone of the illusion of a possible victory by her. That will have the effect of preventing American intervention. Active warfare will be carried on in the Mediterranean and by the submarine arm. The figures of sinkings for the last months, and particularly for May, lead one to believe that within three months England will be reduced to seeking an agreement. That does not prevent the Germans from continuing to consider the operation against the island—an operation which presents, however, very many difficulties and which would have to represent 'a symphony of all military equipment', from the long-range gun to the employment of Stukas and to the overwhelming superiority of the German fighters, without which the operation cannot be contemplated.

On my request, Herr von Ribbentrop undertook to help with our supplies of raw materials and expressed his faith that an agreement will be reached in the course of the next few days at the economic meetings in Berlin.

LETTER TO THE SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER,
SERRANO SUÑER, MADRID.

N1/2291

Rome, 3rd June, 1941—XIX

Dear Ramon,

I am writing to you on my return from the conversation on the Brenner. I think that you will be happy to learn that Spain was discussed with lively interest both by us and by the Germans and that the Axis attributes fundamental importance to friendship with your country.

The events of the last weeks have had an important effect on the course of the war. The Balkans are now liberated from English influence. The British Navy has lost many of its bases and is caught in an ever tightening vice by the forces of the Axis. A day will come—and it is not far distant—when the entire Mediterranean will be liberated from the presence of the English fleet.

Can Nationalist and Falangist Spain remain indifferent and absent in the face of events of such great import for our life and

MORE ATTEMPTS TO PERSUADE SPAIN

our future as Mediterranean Powers? As a sincere and proved friend of Spain I do not think so.

I understand the reasons which have up to now prevented your country from making a gesture of audacity which is in the Spanish tradition and in accordance with your own revolutionary temperament. I understand them, and you know how great Italian respect for your full liberty of decision has always been. But today it seems to me that Spain, even without throwing herself into the conflict, should publicly show that the banner of Falangism is side by side with that of the Fascist and Nazi revolution at this decisive moment of history. In a few days Croatia will become a part of the Tripartite system. The new State which is moulding itself on the model of the Totalitarian States and which is, moreover, meeting those internal difficulties which all fresh beginnings present, does not hesitate to place itself resolutely at the side of the Axis. Why does Spain not do the same? It might be answered that there are already secret agreements, and that is so. But you know that at the present hour what counts is the responsibility which men and countries take on themselves, and it is only by virtue of this that each one will be able to claim his place in the world of tomorrow.

You are familiar with my feelings towards Spain and towards yourself; you must not, therefore, see in my words anything other than a constant interest in the future of your country and for the development of close collaboration.

This and other matters we will be able to discuss when next we meet. I do not know what your commitments are but if it were possible for you to take a few days rest in Rome or anywhere else in Italy, in the next few weeks, I should be happy to have you as my guest.

The Duce often calls you to mind and that with great sympathy. Present my homage to the Caudillo and accept, dear Ramon, my most cordial friendship.

(Hand written addition by the Duce).

I confirm the above.

Spain must *at least* adhere to the Tripartite Pact and that before other adhesions take place. By subscribing to the Tripartite Pact, Spain comes once more into line as far as tomorrow's European settlement is concerned.

I take the occasion to remember myself to you and to add my most cordial expressions of friendship.

XL

RUSSIA INVADED

15th June—25th August, 1941

While negotiations for a new trade agreement with Italy were laboriously proceeding in Berlin, Hitler was putting the finishing touches to the preparations for the war against the U.S.S.R., keeping Mussolini entirely in the dark as to his intentions. Relations between the two Axis countries were going through a difficult phase. The conclusion of the Balkan campaign had given rise to many problems. Croatia was the main point of friction. The new Croat State should have gravitated into the Italian orbit, and instead the Germans were behaving there like masters. On 15th June, Ciano and Ribbentrop met in Venice for the ceremony of Croatia's adhesion to the Tripartite Pact. But it was no victory for Rome. The Germans conceded something to form, but they never surrendered the substance.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Venice, 15th June, 1941—XIX

I summarise what Ribbentrop said to me during his stay in Venice.

France: Ribbentrop stressed the grave difficulties which he is encountering in the way of the development of a policy of collaboration with France.

The French requests are becoming more and more pressing; and the Germans lack any means of effective reaction. Any gesture of force would have as its immediate effect the separation of North Africa where Weygand is carrying on activities openly hostile to Pétain and the Axis. The German Government again requests the Italian Government to be good enough to avoid any specific cause of friction with France and, in view of the fact that it is easier to deal with the questions by means of German action, Ribbentrop once again points out the advisability of the smallest possible number of claims against France being raised directly by the Armistice Military Commissions. That will not in the least result in a modification of Italy's final position *vis-à-vis* France, all the more since the diplomatic game which the Germans are playing

with Vichy has had the effect of convincing them of French bad faith and of their fundamental, unalterable aversion to the Axis. But for the purposes of the war, and during it, it is necessary to *ménager* France.

*Syria:*¹ The French have fought 'with considerable courage.' But one cannot consider that their resistance will be able to continue much longer, nor in the present circumstances can one see how the Axis can send aid of effective value to Syria.

Turkey: The Turkish attitude still remains somewhat uncertain, but there have recently been indications from which it is possible to argue that the Turks wish to slide over from the position of England's ally to the less dangerous one of declared neutrality. If that should come about, it must be considered an extremely important result.

Russia: Russo-German relations have considerably deteriorated recently and tend to be still more aggravated by reason of the strong concentrations of troops formed by the Soviet Government on the frontiers. In this state of affairs the emergence of a crisis is more than probable—it is now almost certain. The Fuehrer will shortly be forced, and that presumably towards the end of the month, to make certain requests to Russia having the character of an ultimatum. If they are refused, Germany will find means of receiving justice herself.

The tone and the words used by Ribbentrop are such as to leave very little doubt as to the decision which the Fuehrer has now taken to attack Russia.

Ribbentrop does not forecast either the course or the duration of the struggle; he merely said to me, 'I am sure we will break through.'

Spain: I allowed Ribbentrop to read my letter to Serrano and his reply. While agreeing on the opportuneness of our having made a gesture which will help to maintain contacts with Spain, Ribbentrop showed himself to be sceptical as to Spain's real intention to take up a position openly at the side of the Axis. He remarked that the arguments brought forward by Suñer in his letter are exactly the same as six months ago. Ribbentrop considers that, for the moment, it is necessary to leave the Spanish full liberty of action and not to push them until the general situation in Europe has become clearer.

*Bose:*² While being of the opinion that Bose must be helped in

¹In close connection with events in Iraq, and as a result of the Hitler-Darlan meeting at Berchtesgaden on 12th May, hostilities had begun in Syria between the Vichyist troops under the command of General Dentz and British and Free French troops. Meanwhile, eighty German planes had arrived in Syria. The operations lasted until June. On 14th July an armistice convention was signed at Saint Jean d'Acre which put an end to the hostilities.

²Subhas Chandra Bose, former Congress leader and Mayor of Calcutta, whose Free Indian Government had been recognised on 1st November, 1942, by all the States of the German-Japanese system. He was reported to have lost his life as a result of an accident in Penang on 18th August, 1945.

his propaganda work by putting the necessary means at his disposal, Ribbentrop considers premature any public declaration on the part of the Axis on the subject of the future settlement in India. The Fuehrer did not receive Bose, precisely to avoid any definite commitment on the subject. On the other hand, Bose has had contact with Ribbentrop and will maintain contact with the various departments in connection with his anti-British activity.

Trade Negotiations: I mentioned the trade negotiations in Berlin to Ribbentrop, but I did not press matters since he immediately told me that this matter was at the time being settled by Clodius and Giannini¹ in a spirit of mutual understanding.

Ribbentrop was in a good humour, indeed I should like to stress that I have seldom met the Reich Foreign Minister in such a serene and expansive mood. The welcome in Venice, which was well organised and very warm, certainly contributed to this. Ribbentrop, who would have liked to stay until Monday and perhaps Tuesday, suddenly announced his departure as the result of a communication which reached him from Berlin on Sunday evening. He told me that this communication was connected with the increase in tension between Russia and Germany, and at the moment of leaving let it be understood both by myself and by Prince Bismarck, that the new conflict is imminent.

Rome was informed of the opening of the Russian campaign when the German troops had already crossed the borders of the U.S.S.R. at 3 a.m. on the morning of June 22nd. Mussolini was on holiday by the Adriatic; the Soviet Ambassador was also at the seaside near Rome. The flare up of the conflict in the east had no noteworthy repercussions on the internal organisation of the Axis; among other reasons because, after the first successes, the German troops met with more and more tenacious and organised resistance. The forecasts of the German General Staff, which assured Hitler that the duration of the campaign would not be more than eight weeks, proved to be completely unfounded. Meanwhile an alliance had been made between London and Moscow, and relations between Washington and Berlin had become openly bad. All the United States consuls had left or were about to leave Axis-controlled territory.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FUEHRER.

Fuehrer's H.Q., 25th August, 1941—XIX

During the first conversation with the Duce immediately on his arrival at the H.Q., the Fuehrer drew the Duce a general picture of

¹Amedeo Giannini, head of the Trade Department of the Foreign Ministry.

the situation together with a detailed exposition of military events.

The Fuehrer began by informing the Duce that it had been a wise plan to liquidate Greece and, along with her, Yugoslavia before the Russian campaign. Greece and Yugoslavia were in fact two potential enemies of the Axis and to have eliminated them in time was a great advantage at the moment when action against Soviet Russia became necessary in order to eliminate the great Bolshevik menace and to obtain effective control over Europe.

The Fuehrer then explicitly admitted that, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict, the German military intelligence service has not functioned. It did not, in fact, inform him that Russia had at her disposal an excellently armed and trained army, formed for the most part of men who are animated by fanaticism, so that, in general, in spite of the mixture of races, they fight with blind obstinacy. In general, the Bolshevik army may be considered to be formed of two great masses—the one, the predominant one, formed of peasants who fight with unconscious stubbornness; the other formed for the great part of workers who believe in the Marxist gospel and fight fanatically. For opposite reasons both fight to the last man—the first from barbaric ignorance, the second because they are led on by the Communist *mystique*.

The Fuehrer declared that he does not intend to fall in with the Russian attempt to prolong the struggle in the cities by street fighting, for which the Russians are specially prepared. He does not intend to destroy the great urban agglomerations but wishes to make them fall after having won the battle which will annihilate the Soviet military forces around them. This is what he intends to do in the case of Leningrad, whose urban area contains some four million inhabitants and whose fall will take place shortly after the completion of the destruction of the Soviet troops surrounding the city. By avoiding street fighting, which does not lead to any useful result, one, above all, saves important forces.

The Fuehrer has in any case no doubt as to the outcome of the fight. He does not consider it opportune to dwell, for the moment, on the possible future line of Soviet resistance; but he is inclined to believe that the Red military force must be finally broken up, at the latest by October, under the repeated blows which are being and will be inflicted. To this there will also gradually contribute the conquest, which has already taken place in part, and in part is on the point of taking place, of the great industrial centres and of the great Soviet industrial area in the Don Basin. Whether this collapse takes place within a short space of time or next spring may be considered a secondary matter, since the instruments of victory are now in the hands of the Germans. Meanwhile, the German losses have up to now been—in spite of the bitterness of the fight—confined to the modest figure of 68,000 men, and the war material which has fallen into German hands is so huge—and so much exceeds the require-

ments of the armed forces of the Reich—that the Fuehrer has decided from now on to concentrate the productive effort on the construction of submarines, tanks and anti-aircraft guns alone.

As far as military plans for the future are concerned, the Fuehrer told the Duce—in absolute secrecy—that, once the Russian campaign is over, he intends to deal the final blow to England by invading the island. To this end he is preparing the necessary forces by getting such naval and land equipment as is necessary for the landing. To the Duce's way of thinking, that should be the last act of the conflict.

On the subject of France, the Fuehrer considers that it is not advisable to deal with that problem as long as the battle with Russia lasts. He confirmed his feelings of mistrust towards the French, whom he is watching carefully and towards whom he intends to maintain a negative attitude. The French question will be re-examined at the end of the war.

Returning to the Russian campaign, the Fuehrer stated that the grain harvest of the Ukraine has for the most part fallen into the Germans' hands. But one must bear in mind that next year the Russian harvest must serve chiefly for the supply of the occupied countries. The Fuehrer repeated his praises of the Finnish troops, who are fighting admirably, and also had some words of praise for the Rumanians, the Hungarians and the Italians, of whom the latter have already stood up brilliantly to the first engagements.

The Fuehrer's statement was made in an orderly and precise manner, giving the impression of calm and absolute serenity. For this reason, the Duce considered it advisable to allow the Fuehrer to develop his views freely, postponing to a later conversation the formulation of more precise questions on the progress of military operations and of certain definite territorial problems.

SECOND CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE FUEHRER.

Fuehrer's H.Q., 25th August, 1941—XIX

During the second conversation with the Fuehrer on the evening of the 25th August, the Duce put forward his point of view on specific questions of particular importance.

Turkey: Turkey, the Duce pointed out, continues to follow a wavering policy between the Axis and England, which is being attentively watched. It is perhaps possible—he said—to make some further attempt to bring her on to our side by offering her some reward and trading on her military sensibility. The Fuehrer agreed with the Duce's way of thinking. The attitude of Turkey is naturally influenced by the course of the campaign against Russia. It is, however, possible to consider perhaps offering her a slight frontier

RUSSIA INVADED

rectification on Bulgarian territory and some future concession in Syria at the end of the war. An offer of German armoured forces can also be considered.

Crete: The Fuehrer informed the Duce of his desire for an Italian division to be sent to Crete to replace the German Alpine Corps which he intends to send to the Russian front to be kept for operations in the Caucasus. The Duce stated that he was in agreement.

Spain: The Fuehrer employed bitter terms against Spain and affirmed that this country has proved a real disappointment to him.

In the French Juras there is a mountain resembling the rock of Gibraltar on which German specialist units have been practising for a long time with particular enthusiasm and efficacy. If in January or February Franco had been able to come to a decision the special 620 mm. mortars (of which the Duce saw two specimens, 'Thor' and 'Odin', during his visit yesterday to Brest-Litovsk) would have done outstanding work against Gibraltar with the extraordinary penetrating power of their 2,000 kilogram projectiles.

The Duce, while agreeing with the Fuehrer's way of thinking, observed that in practice—given the particular and the special characteristics of Spain—it is useless to exercise further pressure to induce her to intervene. There is no doubt that her interests force her and will force her still more to side with the Axis, and it is therefore useful to hold her in reserve for the present in expectation of the moment when it is possible or necessary to play the Spanish card in our game.

France: Concerning France, the Duce put before the Fuehrer the abnormality of the situation which has arisen in relations with that country. They are at present controlled by the Armistice Convention which in reality no longer functions, having been made out of date by the development of events. It is therefore necessary to decide—at a given moment—to speak to the French, also taking advantage of the fact that Pétain is up to his neck in the infinite internal and external problems with which he is struggling.

The Fuehrer repeated to the Duce that he nourishes feelings of antipathy and distrust towards the French and that he is perfectly aware of what the Duce has pointed out as to the abnormality of relations between that country and the Axis Powers. He considers, however, that it is advisable to postpone for the moment real conversations because it is necessary—in order to deprive the French of any hopes and illusions—for the campaign against Russia to be indisputably at an end.

Sweden: The Fuehrer expressed himself in sharp terms on the subject of the Swedes, whom he described as villains. That country is maintaining an attitude which is craftily hostile to Germany and is raising infinite difficulties to the German requests for the passage of troops.

Switzerland: The Fuehrer also spoke in unfavourable terms of Switzerland which, although with great caution, nourishes feelings of definite aversion to the Axis.

Japan: The Duce put forward his point of view on Japan, observing that that country has an internal political situation which is complex and strained—which is the basis of the uncertainties in her foreign policy. There is, however, no doubt that Japan is fundamentally animated by a nationalistic dynamism which tends to make her gravitate towards the Axis and has—in a certain sense—a more straightforward line of conduct than Spain. It is therefore necessary to assess realistically her potentialities in order to judge her present and future attitude.

United States: The Duce pointed out that the Potomac meeting has not, if one adds everything up, helped Roosevelt's policy, and his shares seem to have dropped somewhat after the famous declaration.¹ However, the attitude of the United States is now very clear and—such being the case—it appears preferable to avoid useless controversies.

The Fuehrer gave a detailed account of the Jewish clique which surrounds Roosevelt and exploits the American people. He stated that he could not, for anything in the world, live in a country like the United States whose conceptions of life are inspired by the most grasping mercantilism and which does not love any of the loftiest expressions of the human spirit such as music.

Mediterranean: The Fuehrer stated that he is pleased with the situation in the Mediterranean which appears to have improved. The Duce agreed, pointing out that the new front opened against the English in Iran has caused a slackening of English pressure in the Mediterranean.

Italian Participation in the Campaign against Russia: The Duce informed the Fuehrer of his lively desire that the Italian armed forces should take part on a larger scale in the operations against the U.S.S.R. Italy—the Duce said—has abundance of men, and can send another six, nine or even more divisions. The Fuehrer said that he deeply appreciated this offer for which he thanked the Duce very much. However, he observed that the great distance of the Russian front from Italy and difficulties of a logistic nature make the problem of transport and the functioning of huge military forces a matter of no small difficulty. The Duce confirmed, on his side, that Italy can make a contribution on a larger scale to the war against Russia and suggested that further detachments of Italian troops should be used in the place of German troops sent on leave. The Fuehrer noted this proposal, which will be examined further, and referred to the possibility of employing the Italian troops in the Ukraine where the average winter temperature is not, generally, lower than 6 degrees below zero.

¹The Atlantic Charter, signed by Roosevelt and Churchill on 14th August, 1941.

RUSSIA INVADED

The Fuehrer finally touched again on the idea expressed in the preceding conversation, that is to say that he does not intend to carry on a war of prestige or destruction—but a war to annihilate the armed forces of the enemy so as to free Germany and Europe from the recurring threat of conflicts and to create the necessary basis for the construction of the new order in Europe. He concluded by expressing the most lively desire to be able to come to Italy—when the war is over—in order to pass some time in Florence, a city dear to him above all others for the harmony of its art and its natural beauty.

This hope was warmly welcomed by the Duce, who immediately invited the Fuehrer to come to Florence at the end of the war, assuring him of the sympathy and friendship with which Italy will receive him again as its welcome guest.

XLI

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

28th September—3rd December, 1941.

Ciano was away from the Ministry for about two months, from the end of July until the second fortnight in September, for reasons of health. He had not, therefore, taken part in Mussolini's meeting with Hitler on 25th August. In the interval Italo-German relations had not improved, nor had the military situation on the Eastern front. The German advance continued without, however, achieving any conclusive success; the war, it was clear, was not over yet.

LETTER TO THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

N1/3922

Rome, 28th September, 1941—XIX

Dear Ribbentrop,

Your friendly words, which caused me great pleasure, reached me at the moment when once again I took up my work in the Palazzo Chigi.

I was very sorry not to have been able to see you again last August, but I have followed the development of events in these last weeks with particular interest, just as I have followed with great admiration the victorious activities of the German armed forces in the anti-Bolshevik struggle.

I, too, shall be very pleased to meet you as soon as you consider it advisable in whatever German city is most convenient to you. There are some questions which we can usefully discuss, making use of the occasion to have—a considerable time after our last conversations—a fruitful exchange of views.

Until such time as I can personally shake hands with you please accept, dear Ribbentrop, my renewed friendly greetings.

Cordially yours, . . .

LETTER TO THE AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN, ALFIERI.

N/03987

Rome, 6th October, 1941—XIX

Dear Dino,

I have read your report on the attitude of German public opinion towards Italy and in particular the repercussions (which

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

have been negative as far as we are concerned) of the news circulating in Germany on the subject of the work in progress on the Littorio Wall.¹

In connection with what you have reported to me on the subject, I need not tell you that the anxiety you mention—which I cannot believe has arisen in other than irresponsible circles—has no serious foundation since no work of an unusual nature is being carried out at present on the Italo-German frontier.

I can support my statement by bringing to your knowledge some figures which you can make known there if the occasion and the opportunity arises.

Of a total of 22,741 workmen at present working on the Littorio Wall along all our frontiers scarcely 2,510 are employed on this work in the Province of Bolzano. The smallness of the figure itself demonstrates that the work in that sector is absolutely normal in character.

With cordial greetings.

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

(Summary telegraphed to the Duce)

Fuehrer's H.Q., 25th October, 1941—XIX

The conversation with the Fuehrer took place this morning; I found him in excellent physical and mental condition and very favourably disposed towards us. Shall send you by courier report on conversation of which I meanwhile summarise the principal points for you.

1. Military operations against Russia have achieved results beyond expectations. Leningrad will not be subject further attacks in expectation fall of city through lack of food. Moscow will be invested and surrounded as soon as weather improves. Operations in south will be developed after communications re-established and ammunition dumps built up.

2. Air offensive against England will be resumed in one or two months and Atlantic battle intensified.

3. I particularly discussed with Fuehrer question increase our military participation in fight against Russia and he, in principle, showed himself in favour and particularly when operations move towards the Caucasus and beyond.

4. Rintelen² will be bearer of a letter of 28th instant from Fuehrer to you, and will arrive Rome next Wednesday.

¹The Littorio Wall—Vallo del Littorio—was the name given, in imitation of the West Wall, to the system of fortifications carried out on the Alps along the Italian frontier.

²General Rintelen, military attaché to the German Embassy in Rome.

‘EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY’

CONVERSATION WITH THE FUEHRER.

(Letter to the Duce)

In the train, 26th October, 1941—XIX

Duce,

I add some details to the telegram which I sent you. My meetings both with the Fuehrer and with Ribbentrop were very cordial. They on their side made a point of being especially attentive and both asked about you and spoke of you with great insistence.

The whole of the first part of the conversation—I was with Hitler uninterruptedly from 11 to 4—was devoted by the Fuehrer to a minute description of the operations against Russia, to a demonstration of the reasons why that country can now be considered to be out of action, to the proof of the absolute necessity of the anti-Bolshevik war, without which the future of the Axis would have been threatened and extremely obscure.

When you were at Main H.Q., Hitler put before you his plans of campaign. He has not written to you since because frequently the course of the battle has been such as to leave him not a minute for days on end. He will do so shortly—once the victorious conclusion of the operations has been reached—and Rintelen will be the bearer of the letter when he returns to Rome shortly.

Why must Russia now be considered out of the fight? First of all because of the losses in men and materials. Counting dead, wounded and prisoners, it is a question of some ten million soldiers. The corps of non-commissioned officers almost in its entirety. Still more imposing are the losses of material which are such as to make any calculation difficult for the present. Hitler repeats that, if before the campaign he had had the slightest idea of Russian armament, he would perhaps not have acted as he did.

At present it is difficult to give the size of the Russian forces which are still in an efficient state. Perhaps sixty or seventy divisions. The armoured divisions have been decimated; there still exist, however, groups of 52 to 56 ton tanks which, owing to their exceptional characteristics, can still cause a lot of trouble in some sectors.

The military programme is, in brief, what I indicated in my telegram. To maintain the siege of the Leningrad area without, however, carrying out large scale operations, both because the winter is approaching with all its rigours and in order to allow the powers of resistance to grow weaker by natural processes. To invest Moscow where the resistance is at present very stiff and where the climatic and topographical conditions are hindering, without however preventing, the further execution of the manœuvre. To continue to advance in the south, and there the principal difficulty is not represented by the enemy but by the bad communications and by the weather. However, much progress has been made with the restoration of roads, railway lines and bridges. When the necessary dumps

of ammunition, food and fuel have been built up, it will be possible to begin a new thrust to the east of no less military importance than that made after the battle of Kiev. Then the southern forces must wheel towards the region of the Caucasus and from there proceed in accordance with the further development of the war. In these regions, they will meet with the first of General Wavell's English divisions. Very well: that is what the Fuehrer desires in order to be able once more to grapple with the English on the Continent and to relieve the Mediterranean, since he cannot exclude the possibility that the British, being unable to do any damage elsewhere, are planning to do some 'dirty work' in that very sector.

Meanwhile what is going on in Russia behind the front, in the rear? There is not a great deal of information. It seems that Stalin has decided upon the migration of vast masses of workmen towards the Urals and Siberia in order to ensure the industrial production of the nation at war. Hitler rules out the possibility of this succeeding. The evacuation of these communities of workmen is proceeding under disastrous conditions, with scanty means of communication, under the lash of a pitiless climate. If one of the sides in this winter campaign must suffer the fate of the Napoleonic armies, it is certainly not Germany which must fear that threat. Hitler denies the possibility of a State in which everything is extremely centralised, in which 'even the distribution of toothbrushes, supposing that the Russians brushed their teeth, is controlled by the Government'—denies the possibility of a State of the kind being able to create a new command centre hundreds and hundreds of kilometres away, and after having suffered the greatest military disaster which history records.

Moreover, even in England and America, Russia is considered to have lost. Recent information from British sources proves that the English and Americans intend in future to direct all their flow of supplies to the port of Archangel. But it is well known that the port of Archangel will be completely frozen over in a few weeks' time and its choice merely proves how little desire there is on the part of the Anglo-Saxons to give Russia further help in a battle which has already been decided against them. On the other hand, those arms from the democracies which did go to the Russians would automatically be deducted from the rearmament of the democracies themselves. It must further be added that, in order to replace the amount of arms lost by Russia, five years' work by the Anglo-American war industry would hardly suffice. To imagine that Russia today can continue the war is like imagining that Germany could do so after having lost the Ruhr, Upper Silesia, 90 per cent of her arms factories and 60 per cent of her means of communication.

The principal problem—that of the struggle against England—now remains to be faced. But this is a problem which Hitler, for the

moment, confines himself to stating without specifying either the method of action or the dates. He said only that, in a month or two, the British Isles will experience air attacks of infinitely greater weight than those in the past, while the long winter nights will favour the submarine war in the Atlantic. He is not blind to the importance or the scale of American armament in the future. But he considers that it is aimed rather at ensuring a large share of the legacy of the British Empire after the collapse has taken place than at preventing the collapse itself.

He said little about France, and that was that the French are maintaining an attitude of waiting which, basically, is not friendly to the Axis and are avoiding taking up any position until they have seen in which direction the balance of the war is finally going to tip. After Kiev, after the German victories in the central sector, the French became more courteous. But one must not indulge in any illusions. The true spirit of France is that which causes the German officers in the occupied zone to be stabbed in the back. A serious question mark is represented by the conduct of Weygand in the French Empire. The possibility that Weygand may shortly be removed from his present command cannot be ruled out.

I discussed with the Fuehrer the three subjects on which you gave me special instructions—that is to say the position of the Italian workmen in Germany, the internal situation and the food situation of our country and our participation in the war in Russia.

As far as the workmen are concerned, Hitler said that he understood the difficulties which inevitably arise when such a huge mass of men is moved to areas so different in climate, habits and customs, from those from which they come. On the other hand, he is of the opinion that the incidents which have occurred between Italians and Germans and the shortcomings of the workmen should not be dramatized. In general, it is a question of incidents and one must above all not forget that both among our workmen and the German population there are still anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi elements which have every interest in creating reasons for difficulties and distrust between the two allied countries. Finally, he agrees on the repatriation of all those elements which have shown themselves unwilling to settle down and which are more harmful than productive.

On the question of the Italian internal situation, he has always rejected any defeatist rumours, just as he rejects the defeatist rumours on the subject of the German internal situation. The league of gossips and grumblers—which is an international association—exists everywhere, and its numbers vary with the ups and downs of events. Even in Germany, there is no lack of those who gather round a table in a café or in a sittingroom to run down everything that happens. If the troops advance in Russia, they say it is imprudent to send them so far into enemy territory where they are exposed to the worst surprises. If the troops stop, they rub their

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

hands with pleasure at being able to say that this time the obstacle is a big one and that no attempt is being made to advance. These are the elements in Germany which speak ill of Italy. But what they say does not correspond to the profound feeling of the great mass of the population, does not at all correspond to the very high opinion which the Fuehrer, and with him the whole German ruling class, has of the Italian contribution to the war.

Finally, as far as larger scale participation in operations in Russia by our armed forces is concerned, I found in the Fuehrer an immediate understanding of your desire. He said that, especially after the crossing of the Caucasus, larger use will be made of intervention by the Italian forces in territory where our soldiers are more suited to fighting than the German for reason of local and climatic conditions. I also referred to the possibility of sending Alpine divisions for the forcing of the Caucasus, to which he replied: 'I know that we are talking of excellent divisions.' If our General Staff makes contact on the subject with the proper German organisations, it does not seem to me that they should now meet with either difficulties or objections.

These, Duce, are the principal points of my long conversation with the Fuehrer, which, I repeat, took place in an atmosphere of most marked cordiality. The subject which, for the moment, seems to be uppermost in Hitler's thoughts is the liquidation of the conflict with Russia. And it is here that one can point to certain contradictions in what he says; since, while on the one hand, he insistently asserts that the Soviet game can be considered to be up, on the other, he continually stresses the incessant surprises which this war has held in store for him. Surprises of a military nature, since the armament, the training of the troops, the ability of the Staff have shown themselves to be infinitely superior to any forecast or information in his possession. Surprises of an industrial nature, in view of the fact that up till a few days ago the very existence of plants in which up to 65,000 men work was unknown. Finally, surprises of a political nature, since the conduct of the soldiers in battle and the very attitude of the population in the country have shown much more complete support of the regime than it was possible to predict.

Now Hitler—and this he does not say but it can be understood from the insistence with which he tries to persuade others and himself that the campaign is really ended—seems to wonder if this series of surprises is really finished or whether instead the very vast area which remains under Stalin's control does not still contain possibilities of resistance and struggle which for the moment cannot be estimated.

Why, if all the Russian forces are broken, is the plan for operations to be carried out next March in order to cut the Murmansk and Archangel railways and cut the U.S.S.R. off from

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

these supply routes already being studied now? And why stop at investing the two great cities—Moscow and Leningrad—and postpone the occupation which would bring with it advantages of incalculable importance, if only from the point of view of morale? Sufficient justification seems to be found in the fact that the cities are sown with radio-controlled mines and are so full of booby-traps that—as Hitler said—it is even dangerous 'to turn on the water tap and pull the chain in the lavatory because—as happened in Odessa—that often causes an explosion'.

After my long conversation with the Fuehrer, the impression which I bring back is that Russia has, in fact, received a series of formidable blows which have brought her down and deprived her of any possibility of initiative, but that the 'knock-out' is still to come. There will be a Russian front during the winter, and not just in a manner of speaking, but such as to involve a large number of German divisions with all the problems which that brings. Perhaps this is the principal reason why Hitler—in distinction these days to numerous other conversations from the beginning of the war onwards—avoids making forecasts of the future course of the struggle. In the present circumstances he is not drawing up any programme, or—if he has drawn it up—does not state it.

In the past we have seen in turn the flowering and decline of a series of slogans which are born in the mind of the Leader and are repeated all the way down to the lowest-ranking of his collaborators. We first of all heard talk of the landing in Britain, then of the air attacks, then of the submarine war. Now the fashionable slogan is that of 'European solidarity'. Europe—the Fuehrer said—besides being a geographical expression is a cultural and moral conception. In the war against Bolshevism the first signs of continental solidarity have shown themselves. That must be borne in mind. Once Russia is beaten, the whole of Europe, under the guidance of Germany in the North and Italy in the South, will be able to organise itself politically and economically and constitute the great unity which is destined to bar the way to tomorrow's real danger which is American imperialism. This is what the Fuehrer puts forward. This is what all those near him repeat.

And since they cannot look to the Prague¹ trials, the Serbian insurrection or the shootings in Nantes, for the most convincing elements in this European solidarity, German interest is once more turning in a special manner towards Italy and towards you. I have already stressed the cordiality of this meeting; I add that I had up till now never found in the Germans such a lively, attentive, comradely interest in our affairs, nor had I for long heard the Fuehrer and Ribbentrop express themselves in such explicit terms

¹In the past weeks there had been trials in Prague of Czech resisters; in Serbia the Chetnik resistance organised by Mihallovitch was developing; on 22nd October twenty-two hostages had been executed as reprisals in Nantes, fifty in Bordeaux and twenty-seven in Chateaubriant.

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

on the importance of our participation in the conflict and on the role which Fascist Italy will play in the world of tomorrow. And this is the asset of the situation today.

The German offensive against Moscow began on 1st October. Hitler announced it in a long speech at the Berlin Sportpalast and spoke of the speedy destruction of the Soviet enemy. Operations proceeded favourably for the space of about three weeks. On the Black Sea, Odessa fell to the Rumanians. On the 13th, Ribbentrop invited Ciano to Berlin for the 25th of the following month. He had still no doubt as to the final outcome of the battle then in progress. It was not one of the usual invitations for conversations à deux, or at least for meetings confined to Italy and Germany. The pretext was the formal celebration of the Anti-Comintern Pact with the participation of the representatives of all the signatory States. And the aim was to confirm Nazi hegemony over the Continent under the pretext of 'European solidarity'.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN COUNT CIANO AND THE FUEHRER, FIELD-MARSHAL GOERING, AND THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Berlin, 24th-27th November, 1941—XX

The Berlin meeting was intended to be the first demonstration of that European solidarity which Germany has been extolling for some time as the strongest weapon against the Anglo-Saxon bloc. At the moment it is not easy to say how far the demonstration succeeded, but the anti-Communist character of the meeting was, if nothing else, the highest common denominator of those present, even if it did not suffice to silence the internal discords and did not, for instance, prevent Bardossy,¹ Tuka and Mihai Antonescu from using every speech to intensify a cordial campaign of mutual denigration.

Germany, first of all in the person of Ribbentrop and later in the person of the Fuehrer, had taken upon herself the supreme and absolute control of affairs. Nor was that difficult, since all those present were fully convinced that things could not be otherwise. Even in this conviction it was naturally very easy to recognise distinct gradations of spontaneity; from the ceremonious enthusiasm of the Slovak President to the measured correctness of the Danish Minister,² as indifferent to what he heard and said as his ceremonial dress differed from the uniforms of the S.S.—which did not, however,

¹Laszlo Bardossy, Hungarian Foreign Minister from 4th February, 1941, to 2nd April, 1941. From 3rd April, 1941, Prime Minister as a result of the suicide of Count Teleki. Resigned 7th March, 1942; executed in Budapest in 1946.

²The Foreign Minister, Scavenius.

prevent him from staying where he stood and thinking that, in the last analysis, things might have gone worse with his country and himself.

Special treatment was reserved for Italy. I leave aside the courtesies of a personal nature which—as previously on the occasion of my last journey—were quite exceptional. Ribbentrop is now anxious to stress the existence of a friendly intimacy. I refer only to political matters. If I were to say that the plane on which we were placed was the same as that of Germany I should not be telling the truth, but if I were to put it on the same level of that of the other countries—including Japan—I should do an injustice. All possible attentions were paid to us, and not only formally. While in conversation with me, Hitler and Ribbentrop reaffirmed with great clarity our right to territorial claims and policies. In public too, they continually praised Italy and the Duce, and, for the first time, I heard Italian military valour spoken of with enthusiasm. In a few days 'Ariete', 'Savona' and 'Trieste' have done us more good in Germany than ten years of propaganda. Strategically speaking the successes in Libya are attributed to Rommel, but largely to us where fighting, sacrifice and valour are concerned.

Serrano Suñer had two conversations—one with Ribbentrop and the other with Hitler. My presence was requested at both in order to stress—as the Fuehrer said—that everything concerning the Mediterranean comes into Italy's direct sphere of influence and that nothing can be done without our decision. Nothing much new was said in these conversations, at least where we are concerned. Hitler and Ribbentrop gave long expositions on the political and military situation of the Axis, arriving at the familiar conclusions—the war has already been decided in our favour, may still be long, hard from some points of view, but there are no doubts as to its conclusion. No pressure was applied for Spanish intervention. Hitler complained at not having been able to attack Gibraltar last winter, and that gave Serrano the cue to tell of all the difficulties with which his Government is struggling, beset as it is by monarchists, seditious militarists and by dormant Reds. He ended by saying that Spain will intervene because she cannot do otherwise, but that the work of moral and material preparation is very far from being complete. The Fuehrer eulogised the Blue Division, but there was more lip service than conviction; it seems the Spaniards are brave but indisciplined and given to grumbling. At present they have been given a rest under the polite heading—defensive position.

The atmosphere of the Spanish conversations was cordial but not warm, although better than before. Serrano has not yet discovered the proper tone for speaking to the Germans, and does not even seem very anxious to find it. He says things with a brutality that

¹The Ariete armoured division and the Savona and Trieste infantry divisions were in action in Cyrenaica.

makes one jump in one's chair. When leaving he commented: '*No ay duda que este hombre es muy pesado porque tien fuerza militar enorme. Pero non es muy interesante. El hombre de nuestra epoca non es él; está en Roma.*'¹

With Ribbentrop, I discussed the topics which are at present of interest for our policy—France, Croatia, Greece, Albania. Pétain had recently asked to speak to Hitler, but the latter had refused and it will be Goering who will go to France shortly. In any case, distrust of France has grown in proportion to the disappointments experienced; while some months ago importance was attached to the resumption of relations with the French, Ribbentrop now attaches little value to the scope of their eventual collaboration. There is no belief in the sincerity of Vichy, and even the recall of Weygand is considered to be merely a gesture of passing opportunism under the continual pressure of Berlin: 'Moreover,' the Fuehrer said, 'there are so many Weygands in France that any one of them could take over the role of the old retired general tomorrow'. Ribbentrop has noticed that the French want to change the cards on the table and to let it be forgotten that they are a conquered country. This is a game which they cannot be permitted to play. Therefore, while Ribbentrop shows himself favourable to a meeting with Darlan, he considers that one should not go further than a simple establishment of contact without any far-reaching political discussion. He asks—and I naturally gave him an assurance to that effect—to be informed of what is said during the conversation when it takes place.

I spoke frankly to him about Croatia. He immediately replied that on the German side nothing has changed as far as the Vienna agreements are concerned. Croatia is and must remain an Italian sphere of influence. He does not exclude the possibility that German elements may have worked locally in another direction, but they are not in any way authorised persons and they act without and contrary to instructions. He himself is willing to deal with them if we are able to give him information and proofs. He heard rumours of these difficulties some days ago and sent a message summoning the German Minister to Zagreb in order to refresh his memory, and during the Berlin meeting he spoke to Lorkovic² in a manner which cannot allow of misunderstandings. I do not know what results this move will have, but I must say that Ribbentrop's statements were made with force and spontaneity.

I informed him of the Greek situation. He did not know much about it and did not show close interest, but on this question too,

¹I have no doubt that this man is very formidable because of his enormous military power. Even so, I don't find him interesting. He is not the man of this epoch, who is in Rome.'

²Lorkovic, formerly an active member of the clandestine organisation headed by Pavelic; Foreign Minister of the Croat State up to 24th April, 1943, then Croatian Minister to Berlin.

he said that he was willing to consider all proposals coming from our side in a spirit of perfect collaboration. Greece, too, is Italian *Lebensraum*.

Finally, he had interested himself in the satisfactory solution of the Mitrovitza question, but did not know the details. The fact that this problem arose must be attributed to the initiative of some local functionary or commandant and it is not to the German Foreign Minister that the blame for what has happened can be attributed.

The tone of the conversation with Ribbentrop was very cordial and marked by a frank and respectful desire to collaborate with Italy.

With the Fuehrer, whom I found in excellent physical condition, I discussed in the first place the question which the Duce has most at heart—our participation in the war on the Russian front. Hitler gave a detailed exposition of the military situation which, in its main outlines, does not differ greatly from that which I heard on the occasion of my trip to his H.Q. Further he indicated the immediate objectives of the war, which are as follows:

1. *Occupation of Sebastopol.* The heavy artillery has recently completed its dispositions and is about to go into action. The fall of Sebastopol should not be far distant. With it, any serious possibility of Russian naval interference in the Black Sea will collapse.

2. *Southern Offensive.* To continue the offensive in the South until the Volga is reached and Stalingrad occupied. No great military difficulties are being met, but transport is extremely complex because the roads are impassable, the railways torn up and the bridges blown. The delays are due solely to logistic worries.

3. *Encirclement and investment of Moscow.* Although military resistance has been met with and groups of armour of considerable size are still appearing, yet the investment of Moscow would already have taken place if the climate had been more favourable. The operations are continuing at present, but it is not possible to make forecasts in view of the fact that the most serious obstacles are those opposed by nature.

4. *Attack on Leningrad.* In this sector, too, it is the cold which is causing the greatest difficulties. The fight is continuing, however, and even if the German troops have to go into winter quarters it will not mean the suspension of operations. Hard and continuous blows will be dealt along the whole front to prevent the adversary from making any attempt at reorganisation—an undertaking which, on the other hand, no power in the world could accomplish.

5. *Attack on the Caucasus* and beginning of the great march to the East which—crossing Iran, Iraq, Syria and Palestine—will lead to the conquest of one of the key positions of the British Empire: Egypt.

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

In view of this programme, the Fuehrer says that the presence of Italian armoured divisions on the Russian front does not seem to him either necessary or advisable, all the more since our tanks require different ammunition from the German ones and that would complicate the already complicated transport system. If Italy is in a position to furnish new armoured divisions, she might usefully station them in Tripolitania where a French threat cannot be altogether excluded. On the other hand, the Fuehrer would favourably welcome the presence of Alpine divisions on the southern sector of the Russian front—Alpine troops which he knows to be excellent and which in collaboration with the Germans and the present Italian forces, for whom he had words of praise, would have to attack the Caucasus. Once the mountains were overcome and the operation in the East begun, Italian participation will necessarily have to assume larger proportions, particularly because the battle will have moved to a sector destined to form part of Italian living space.

This is the most important statement made to me by the Fuehrer. For the rest, he spoke with great enthusiasm of Libya and expects a considerable result from the course of the battle both in England and in America, against whom he now uses much more hostile or violent expressions than against England herself.

The Fuehrer's tone was friendly and comradely. His temper serene, often jovial.

I also met Goering several times. He gave a reception in his Berlin house. The form observed was that used for sovereigns; the guests, lined up in the entrance, awaited his arrival which was announced in a loud voice by a master of ceremonies. During this first meeting, our conversation was somewhat general. Another day, on the other hand, after having discussed a question on which I will report verbally, Goering gave the conversation a really friendly character such as I had not encountered in him for a long time. His praises of the Italian military forces, especially of those in Libya, had all the marks of his impetuous and enthusiastic temperament. He then spoke of Greece and of his anxiety at the famine towards which that country is moving. But on the German side—he said—there is nothing to be done. Food difficulties are beginning to make themselves felt in numerous sectors, and if a little grain remains over he prefers to give it to the Finns, who are fighting well and having heavy losses. He is considering the possibility of making an appeal to President Roosevelt, who has taken on the role of father of humanity, to allow some shiploads of South American grain to go direct to the Greeks. If Roosevelt refuses, the responsibility for any consequences will be his. 'On the other hand,' he added, 'we cannot worry unduly about the hunger of the Greeks. It is a misfortune which will strike many other people besides them. In the camps for Russian prisoners of war, after having eaten everything

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

possible, including the soles of their boots, they have begun to eat each other, and what is more serious, have also eaten a German sentry. This year between 20 and 30 million persons will die in Russia of hunger. Perhaps it is well that it should be so, for certain nations must be decimated. But even if it were not, nothing can be done about it. It is obvious that if humanity is condemned to die of hunger, the last to die will be our two peoples.'

I had not been in Berlin for 14 months. I found the city markedly more sluggish in its movement and in its traffic. Many more disabled men are to be seen in the streets and many fewer party uniforms. There are also few young men to be seen. The crowd did not show any particular interest in the ceremonies which took place. The square in front of the Chancellery, which on other similar occasions filled with applauding or at least inquisitive people, was this time almost deserted. If one speaks to people one finds that there is a feeling—it is wide-spread—of war-weariness, but it cannot be said that there is any fatigue and even less that faith in victory has diminished. Morale is high even if external signs of enthusiasm are lacking. It is true that the prospect advanced by Ribbentrop of a war which may even last many years has certainly not been the cause of rejoicing, but neither has it worried or shaken any of the numerous people from various classes and of different outlooks whom I chanced to meet during these days.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR IN THE PRESENCE OF COUNT CIANO.

Rome, 3rd December, 1941—XX

At 11.30 the Duce, in the presence of Count Ciano, received the Japanese Ambassador who read the following communication:

'On the instruction of my Government, I have the honour, Your Excellency, to inform you of the course of the conversations between Japan and America which have been taking place since the middle of last April. The conversations have been in progress for almost six months, during which time the Japanese Government has always strictly observed the Tripartite Pact, which has become the basis of our immutable national policy, and has proposed to raise the problem of the settlement of relations between Japan and America in the spirit of and according to the terms of the Tripartite Pact, with the firm resolve to prevent American intervention in the European war.

'In consequence, the present Government has continued the conversations on the basis of justice, preserving the dignity and the existence of our Empire. Although there have been some difficulties,

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

among them an acute difference of opinion caused by the question of the withdrawal of the Japanese troops from China and French Indo-China, the fundamental obstacle is provided—if one considers past experience—by the United States' fundamental and traditional approach to the discussion of international problems—an approach which emerged clearly from the Anglo-American conversations in the Atlantic. In other words, America's real intention is to hold back and retard the reconstruction by Japan, Italy and Germany, of the new order in Asia and in Europe, which is the objective of the Tripartite Alliance, and America dares to assert that friendly relations will be impossible so long as Japan maintains her alliance with Italy and Germany. From this point of view, the American Government proposed to ask Japan to renounce the Tripartite Pact. Since this, Your Excellency, became clear in the latest phase, the Japanese Government was compelled to recognise that further conversations would be useless.

'The proposal which was advanced by the American Government on 26th November showed its attitude most clearly and, in particular, the American Government put forward the clause to *agree not to consider the fundamental aim of this agreement to be at variance with any Convention existing between one of the two Governments and a third country for the maintenance of peace throughout the Pacific region.*

'This was intended, according to what they proposed, to limit our interpretation of the obligations imposed by the Tripartite Pact and to force Japan to abstain from aiding Italy and Germany should America enter the European war.

'From this clause alone, not to mention other questions, the Japanese Government recognises that the American proposal cannot be accepted as the basis of conversations.

'Moreover it is clearly a fact that the American Government has had frequent talks with Great Britain, Australia, Holland and China, during the course of the conversations. It can therefore be asserted that the American Government, together with the above mentioned Governments, considers Japan with the same hostility with which it considers Italy and Germany.'

Consequently, the Ambassador added, the outbreak of a conflict between Japan and the United States, and simultaneously with Great Britain, must now be considered possible and due to start immediately. In view of this, the Japanese Government, invoking the relevant clause of the Tripartite Pact, asks that the Italian declaration of war should follow at once. It further asks that an agreement be signed on the basis of which the two Governments undertake not to conclude an armistice or a separate peace with the United States of America or with Great Britain. The Ambassador adds that similar requests have been simultaneously advanced to the Reich Government.

'EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY'

The Duce replies that the Japanese communication does not represent any surprise for him, since he has followed closely the course of the negotiations between Japan and America carried on by Admiral Nomura¹ and the Ambassador Kurusu.²

Our Ambassador in Washington,³ who had followed the conversations on the spot, has confirmed him in his conviction that the negotiations could not make headway because of the intransigence shown by the United States and Roosevelt's desire to unleash war. Roosevelt cannot accept the political principles of Japan in so far as that country intends to set up a new order in Asia, and has already laid the foundations of that order, whereas American plutocracy intends to consider Asia as an area of exploitation.

The Duce, knowing the pride of the Japanese people, has always been convinced that all the attempts by the United States to separate Japan from the countries of the Tripartite Pact would be fruitless. After these remarks the Duce then states:

Italy will do everything to contribute militarily to the struggle which Japan is preparing to begin with the United States and the British Empire. This will chiefly be done by containing in the Mediterranean the largest possible number of British naval units. At present, about a third of the English naval forces is contained in the Mediterranean by the Italian naval forces, and a combined Italo-German naval and air force is in the course of formation which will oblige the English to increase their naval forces in that sector.

The Duce declares himself prepared to sign the proposed agreement stating that a separate armistice may not be signed, but on this point, as on that of the declaration of war, he intends to consult the Government of the Reich and to synchronize his own action with it. He adds, however, that as far as Italy is concerned he has no objection to the declaration of war on the United States in view of the fact that that country is already, in fact, at war with us and even during the present battle in Marmarica some American officers, who were with the British troops, were taken prisoner.

¹Admiral Kikisaburo Nomura, Japanese Ambassador to Washington.

²Saburo Kurusu, appointed Japanese Ambassador Extraordinary to Washington in November, 1941, in order to attempt to reach an agreement with the United States.

³Prince Ascanio Colonna.

XLII

DARLAN AND PAVELIC

10th December—16th December, 1941.

In November, operations in Libya took an extremely unfavourable turn for Italy, and at the same time increased the friction which already existed between Italians and Germans. The appointment of Rommel as commander of the troops in that theatre of war aroused resentment which was not confined to Italian military circles. On the other hand, the situation demanded closer attention to the position of France. After the armistice of 24th June, 1940, Italo-French relations had been characterised by the subordination of Rome to the Nazi directives governing German policy towards Vichy—a policy which aimed at preventing any disturbing interference on the part of Fascist Italy. Relations had, therefore, never developed greatly. Now the moment seemed to have come for Italy to take a hand on her own account. A meeting between Ciano and Darlan took place in Turin, two days after the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States.

CONVERSATION WITH ADMIRAL DARLAN.

Turin, 10th December, 1941—XX

Admiral Darlan began by expressing his satisfaction at this meeting, which permits the resumption of contacts between Italy and France after a long period of misunderstandings and friction, due solely to 'the stupid policy of the various French Governments'. He declares that he has no specific question to submit for examination at this meeting; it is, however, obvious that two nations like the Italian and the French, who have both a number of questions and interests to settle and develop cannot continue to turn their backs on each other indefinitely. He repeats what he has already said several times and even recently to the Germans, that France is in a strange position in view of the existence of an armistice which is being prolonged for a period much longer than the duration of the war itself. He realises that it is not possible to make a proper peace between France and the Axis Powers, but it is equally his desire to escape from the present situation which renders impossible any further development of French policy towards that collaboration which he believes to be indispensable for France, and equally indispensable for Italy and Germany. He informs me of what was

said during the recent conversations at Saint Florentin between Goering, Marshal Pétain and himself. Germany still raised numerous objections to the behaviour of the Vichy Government, and perhaps cannot understand all the great difficulties which the Vichy Government is meeting in its attempts to make French public opinion understand the substantial and profound reasons for such a fundamental reversal of the policy of the country. When the Italian press said that France was *pourrie*, it was right; only since Admiral Darlan became head of the Government and engaged in political activities has he been able to see precisely how profound was the corruption of parliamentary and ministerial circles in the old French regime. All that was shattered by the defeat. Now the Vichy Government must be given sufficient time to reconstruct the new French ruling class and to reshape public opinion.

Admiral Darlan then referred to the question of the Tunisian ports as bases for the transport of material to Africa. Such transport must be excluded *a priori*. He is afraid that any concession made in this direction would bring about an English attack on the French Colonial Empire and particularly on Dakar. In any case, an important concession would have to be made in return, particularly in order to face public opinion, which is very susceptible on this subject. I interrupted to tell him that I had neither the intention nor the instructions to deal with this topic, but since he had referred to it, I pointed out to him, while leaving to the technical Commissions any eventual discussion or negotiation on the subject, the importance of this question for Italy and for the Axis and the importance which it also has for France, in view of the fact that the victory of the German and Italian forces in Libya will also be to the advantage of France. That in itself represents a not inconsiderable compensation.

Admiral Darlan continued his general statement by declaring that France intends, 'after having paid her debts', to take an active part in the reconstruction of the new European order, which will obviously be concentrated under the direction of the Axis Powers, but which will not be able to develop without the full and sincere collaboration of all the countries of Europe. With regard to Italy, France's chief interest is to reach a final solution of the Mediterranean problem, which has always been poisoned by the presence of the English. On the subject of England, he expressed himself in the sharpest of terms and with particular hostility. He said that he had never loved the English for hereditary reasons but that he hated them profoundly after having seen their behaviour in Flanders. Even if he had not been in agreement with Marshal Pétain, and had not abided by the terms of an armistice such as was made in June, 1940, he would never have handed over the fleet to England. He would rather have withdrawn to South America or elsewhere, particularly since there was 45 milliards in gold on board

which would have allowed the French fleet to be self-supporting for many years. Towards America, too, he showed his profound resentment. He calls Roosevelt a madman and believes that in the course of operations between America and Japan, the former is destined to have a series of resounding defeats which will be depressing for the Anglo-Saxon world. He has not hesitated to describe the American armed forces to Marshal Pétain as comic opera soldiers.

As far as we are concerned, he repeats that he has for the moment no particular topic to discuss and that he has come to Turin without documents, memoranda and so forth. He wanted the ice to be broken and for it to be possible to find a means of communication between the two countries other than that provided by the Armistice Commission, whose activities are now to increase as far as the application of the armistice clauses is concerned.

I confined myself to noting what Admiral Darlan had said and repeated that on our side, too, it was intended to give to this Turin meeting the nature of a resumption of contacts. As for the method of continuing such contacts in the future, I agreed with him on the advisability of establishing representation at Vichy on condition that the character and form of this representation would be laid down later, naturally in full agreement with the Germans.

Admiral Darlan says that he wishes to have an Italian representative at Vichy, all the more since the Germans have numerous political channels, both economic and military, through which relations between the two countries are dealt with, while relations between Italy and France have for the last eighteen months passed only through the channel of the Armistice Commission which is not the most suitable for political questions. He would be happy if Italy sent an Ambassador, but should Rome not consider it advisable to send a person of such high rank he will receive our representative in whatever guise he is sent.

I said that, in principle, the matter was being favourably considered and reserved the right to inform him of further Italian decisions which, naturally, could not be taken unless in full agreement with the Germans, in view of the fact that all Italy's political activity is marked by intimate, sincere and complete collaboration with Germany. Admiral Darlan made a point of stressing his good personal relations with the Fuehrer, Goering and von Ribbentrop, of whom he spoke in terms of friendship and admiration.

He then put forward the proposal for a three-cornered meeting—Darlan, Ciano, Ribbentrop—a meeting which he considers particularly useful since the large number of problems could in that way be brought nearer to a solution. He asked me to bring this suggestion of his to Ribbentrop's notice.

Such is, in short, the summary of the conversation which took place in Turin with Admiral Darlan, during which other topics were touched upon, but only in the course of conversation, such as

the progress of operations in the Pacific, the internal situation in the Balkan countries, the influence of the clergy in French political life, etc.

Darlan showed marked cordiality towards us and also towards Germany; he did this not so much by direct statements as by repeating every other minute his unbending hatred of England, and his conviction in the victory of the Axis and his prayers for it. Although that victory may impose costly sacrifices on France, it will prevent her—he said—from becoming a colony in the Anglo-Saxon world, and will prevent the return of Blum, of the corruptors, of the Jews, and will permit her to build up once more an honourable position in the Europe of tomorrow. Naturally not all Frenchmen yet understand the soundness of this policy of his, and it is hard work making his many opponents understand it. He hopes that the good will of Germany and Italy may facilitate his task, which is in their common interest, and this is what he asks of the Axis within the limits of possibility.

In Libya operations continued to be disastrous for Rommel, and in Russia Axis arms were in scarcely better plight. In the southern sector the Germans had had to withdraw before an energetic Russian counter-attack, and the battle for Moscow was now practically lost. In these circumstances the Germans felt the need to concentrate their forces which were stationed all over Europe, and they slackened their grip on Croatia, thus providing Rome with a cheaply gained advantage.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN COUNT CIANO AND THE POGLAVNIK OF CROATIA, PAVELIC.

Venice, 16th December, 1941—XX

During the conversation with Pavelic the following topics were discussed:

Situation of Pavelic's Government. The Poglavnik said that, in those areas not infested by war, the powers of the State are gradually being organised and asserting themselves. The most urgent problems are being dealt with; chief amongst these that of the Jews. The latter, who when the Ustachis¹ took power numbered 35,000, are now reduced to not more than 12,000. (Young Kvaternik² explains this decrease with the word 'emigration' accompanied by a smile which does not leave any room for doubt). Apart from the Communist movement and the activities of the Chetniks,³ of which

¹Military terrorist organisation created by Pavelic; after the formation of the Croat State became a militia with police functions similar to the S.S. It was recruited chiefly from Croats.

²The nephew of Kvaternik, Croatian War Minister, agent of the Secret Police.

³Serbian military formations—from 'ceta'=battalion—intended as assault troops. After the collapse of Yugoslavia the Chetniks began the resistance against the Germans in Serbia under the command of General Mihailovitch.

more later, Pavelic views the attitude of the population with comparative calm. The Catholic clergy, which is particularly influential in Croatia, maintains a very favourable attitude in its lower ranks and less so in the higher grades of the hierarchy. Some of the bishops are openly hostile.

Relations with Germany. I informed Pavelic of what Ribbentrop had said to me during the recent conversation in Berlin. The Poglavnik stated that Ribbentrop had expressed himself similarly to the Minister, Lorkovic. In actual fact official German activity has lately greatly diminished in Croatia; in certain sectors it may be said to have disappeared. The Gestapo has confined its activity to the surveillance of German elements and even the military mission resident in Zagreb, which in numbers is reduced to tiny proportions, is not carrying on any disquieting activity. The Poglavnik, therefore, shows himself to be less preoccupied with regard to Germany than he once was, and that may make his hands freer in his policy towards Italy.

He also discussed with me the question of the German minorities. He says that it is out of the question that the Statute granted to them may put them in a condition such as to constitute a state within the State and to form in any way a pole of attraction for Croatian elements which are not of German origin. According to him, the opposite is taking place, namely that representatives of many villages, populated by inhabitants who are ethnologically German, have come to him to be exempted from having to form part of the German minorities.

Relations with Neighbouring Countries. Hungary, after her occupation of the Medjomurje,¹ continues to pursue an unfriendly policy towards Croatia. It is obvious that the idea of the Crown of St. Stephen is still alive in the minds of the Hungarians. It is only a few days since Cardinal Seredi's² speech in which he said that, on a not far distant day, the union of Hungarians who do not speak the Magyar tongue will be formed; with these words the claims to the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen are confirmed, beginning naturally with Croatia. That is absurd, since no power in the world could make the Croat people accept a solution of the kind. Pavelic says that, if he himself were to speak of the incorporation of Croatia into the Crown of St. Stephen, he would not remain in power even for 24 hours.

Relations with Italy. The Poglavnik spoke at length on the question of the civil powers in the second zone.³ He considers that the return—or at least the partial return—of these powers would

¹The Mura region, inhabited chiefly by Wends.

²Cardinal Seredi, Archbishop of Esztergom, Primate of Hungary, nominated Cardinal Primate on 1st December, 1927.

³Croatia had been divided into three zones—the second was administered directly by the Italian occupation forces. The zone included the region of the Lika and a part of Bosnia.

have the effect of increasing the *rapprochement* between Croatia and Italy. While he has the highest praise for the bearing and work of our troops, he considers that many officers, especially those of subaltern rank, do not have the ability to exercise civil powers in places where they know neither the people, the language nor the customs. I must add, however, that instead of putting forward precise requests, the Poglavnik confined himself to stating his point of view on the situation. Apart from the matter of the civil powers, however, he is convinced of the necessity of using strong measures against the Chetniks and the Communists and of undertaking decisive operations against them in the course of the winter; if one were to delay longer the season would come when the woods become thick again, thus forming a natural and useful refuge for any rebel formation and rendering operations extremely difficult and costly for anyone who undertook them. He further recommends us to reinforce our military forces, particularly in the region of Southern Bosnia and Montenegro, because it is there that he expects the most dangerous surprises.

No change where the question of the monarchy is concerned. Pavelic—and with him the absolute majority of Croats—is convinced of the necessity of the monarchy and is glad that the Crown is to be entrusted to a prince of the House of Savoy. He considers that the moment of the Prince's arrival in Zagreb must be chosen with great prudence. For the moment it cannot be discussed. The King must arrive in Croatia when the State has begun to function through its normal organs. Perhaps the most suitable moment would be the day when peace is declared, but since everything now points to a war of long duration the advisability of hastening the arrival of the Sovereign may be considered. However, there is no point of discussing it until next summer.

Pavelic finally spoke of what is being done in various fields to bring about an increasing *rapprochement* between Croatia and Italy. I shall report on some points verbally. For the moment, the principal question is the introduction of the Italian language alongside the German language as a compulsory language in the Croatian schools. This has already been done in numerous institutes. In the Military Academy, 65 per cent of the pupils opted for Italian and 35 per cent for German.

The scarcity of teachers represents a difficult problem. Pavelic would like some to be sent from Italy provided it was a matter of elements of Italian race and not of Croats from Istria or, worse still, of Slovenes.

Note is made in a separate report of the many economic, commercial, etc. questions which were the subject of further discussions with Pavelic and his collaborators.

1942

XLIII

THE WAR GOES ON

15th January—30th April, 1942.

The two last recorded conversations took place in the early months of 1942, the first in Budapest, the second in the castle of Klessheim, near Salzburg; the first during the terrible winter which saw the fatal wearing down of the German armies in Russia, the second on the eve of Germany's last attempt to finish the war in the East by thrusting towards the oil wells of the Caucasus. Ciano went to Budapest in order to revive Italian influence in the Danube region, which was threatened by the Germans and had suffered from the decline in Italy's military prestige; his other aim was to speed the aid Rome had asked for in the shape of food.

CONVERSATION WITH REGENT HORTHY, THE PRIME MINISTER BARDOSSY AND OTHER HUNGARIAN POLITICAL PERSONALITIES.

Budapest, 15th-18th January, 1942—XX

I summarize briefly the conversations I had with Hungarian politicians during my recent stay in Budapest.

Regent Horthy: I found the Regent in fairly good health in spite of the fact that traces of the illness he had during the last few weeks were evident. He has become very much thinner and looks older. He has lost some of the vivacity which used to distinguish him and frequently, both on ceremonial occasions or during conversations and when hunting, showed signs of sudden fatigue.

He spoke chiefly of the situation on the Eastern front. He considers that, in spite of the serious situation which the Russian offensive has produced for the German army, it is possible to form a winter line not too far back, which will allow the offensive to be resumed in the spring. During Ribbentrop's stay in Budapest strong pressure was put on Hungary to take the step of general mobilisation. The Regent is willing to intensify participation in the war, but does not intend to go as far as general mobilisation. The reasons which keep him from doing so are two-fold: (1) because Hungary has no surplus of labour power—she has no prisoners of war, cannot bring in foreign workers, etc.—and too large a call-up would have a most serious effect on the economy of the country; (2) because

the attention of Hungary is still principally taken up with Rumania. It is true that the frontiers of Transylvania are guaranteed by the Axis under the Vienna awards, but the Regent is equally convinced that, if some unpredictable event were to modify the military situation in Europe profoundly, the Rumanians would not hesitate to turn their coats for the *n*th time and would attack the Hungarians. Hence arises the necessity of maintaining a strong military force available for use against the Rumanians. The Regent repeats every other minute his conviction that the Axis will emerge victorious from the war, but from his way of speaking there is implied—and often clearly appears—a deep-seated bias which often amounts to hostility towards the Germans. He allowed it to be understood that von Ribbentrop's requests are put forward in a form which he does not much like and he expects from Keitel's arrival in Budapest shortly still greater pressure. Towards Italy he reaffirms with undoubted sincerity his old and confirmed friendship; he hopes that the outcome of the world conflict will still allow Italy to exercise an effective influence in Central Europe and the Danube region. Therein he sees the best guarantees of the political and moral independence of the Hungarian people.

Bardossy, too, expressed himself in terms more or less similar to those used by the Regent. In spite of the fact that the news from the Russian front was not particularly favourable during the time of my stay in Budapest, and although there were even from inside Germany rumours of discontent and hardships, which are received in Hungary with undeniable pleasure, Bardossy is convinced that, once the difficulties of the winter have been overcome, Germany will overwhelm the Russians and that, admittedly after a war which will still be long and hard, the Axis will emerge victorious from the test. On the other hand, he is watching the development of the situation in the Balkans with marked anxiety. He considers that Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and perhaps Bulgaria itself may have unpleasant surprises in store for the future; he therefore considers it necessary for his country to keep itself ready to counter the threat which may arise in the Balkan countries and which would assume very much larger proportions if the English successfully gained a foothold in Greece or Bulgaria.

All the other Hungarian politicians with whom I had occasion to speak expressed themselves in a more or less similar manner. Of my numerous conversations, that with Count Bethlen seems to me worth recording. He came to see me to say—after having expressed thanks for Italy's effort in favour of his country—that the rumour is circulating about him that he has Anglophile sentiments. He was anxious to deny firmly this absurd and unjustified piece of gossip. Bethlen is convinced that if England won the war she would abandon the whole of Balkan Europe to the Russian influence and would arrange the Central European system by means

of a new form of Little Entente based on Belgrade and Prague and aimed at smothering the Hungarian dynamism. Therefore as a Magyar patriot he cannot but deprecate such a possibility and wish with all his heart for the victory of the Axis.

I believe that it is worth while noting this statement by Count Bethlen because, although he has no official position today, he is still considered the most outstanding politician in Hungary, and the Regent himself, when speaking to me of the uncertain state of health of Bardossy, which might even lead to his giving up his post, referred to the possibility of Count Bethlen's return to the Government.

One does not feel the war in Budapest. One does not feel it from the material point of view because the city is illuminated, the traffic appears almost normal, there are few restrictions on goods, and these are more formal than effective. Bread is white, exactly like before the war and as abundant as it then was. Nor does one feel it from the moral point of view, since the effort made by the Hungarians up to now has been extremely small. At the present moment even the small military force sent to Russia has taken up winter quarters in comfortable villages in the third line. It must at once be added that no-one is anxious to do any more, even if Hungary is now preparing for a greater share in the conflict. But this is accepted *obtoro collo* under the continual and unwelcome pressure of Germany.

The Hungarian attitude towards us—excellent. Where the Germans are concerned, formally perfect; in actual fact, bad. Two things have gone to make them so: (1) fear of growing German influence on Hungary such as to destroy—at least *de facto*—that national independence to which the Hungarian people is attached with frenzied patriotism; (2) the preferential attitude shown to Rumania by the Germans on more than one occasion. The Hungarians are incapable of understanding how the Germans can now forget Rumania's policy of hostility to Germany, which lasted twenty years, and how they can show such faith in a nation which, in Hungarian opinion, is ready to betray them at the first crowing of the cock.

However, in spite of the large number of reservations and the numerous spiritual discomforts under which the Hungarian nation at present labours, it is certain that Hungary will march side by side with the Axis until the end.

The problem which never fails to recur in every conversation is that of the succession of the Regency. Some weeks ago the pessimistic opinion of the doctors placed this problem on the immediate order of the day; it is now hoped that it can be postponed and such is the hope of the whole Hungarian nation which is, with one accord, grouped round the person of Admiral Horthy.

At all events, the candidates who have appeared are two in

number. The Archduke Albrecht¹ who has behind him—so it seems—the approval and the support of Germany and the Germanophiles; Stepan Horthy, the Regent's eldest son, who receives by far the largest support. Everyone agrees in saying that, if there exists in the world any individual who has not one of the most elementary qualifications for assuming such a lofty dignity, then that individual is precisely young Horthy, who at the age of forty has not given the slightest proof of having any positive qualities. But he is a pure Hungarian. And that is sufficient for even the legitimists at present to prefer his candidature to that of a Habsburg Archduke, behind whom there appears the dreaded shadow of the Reich.

LETTER TO THE HUNGARIAN PRIME MINISTER,
BARDOSSY, BUDAPEST.

N1/881

Rome, 17th February, 1942—XX

Dear Prime Minister,

The friendly conversations which I had with you during my stay in Budapest and your courteous references to the possibility of increasingly efficient collaboration between our two countries lead me to address myself personally to you to consult you on a question in which H.M. Government is particularly interested and the favourable solution of which would undoubtedly have the most happy repercussions here.

It is a question of the supplies of grain for Italy which, at the present moment, are assuming a character of extreme urgency, and for which it would be desirable to obtain from the Hungarian Government a further exceptional assignment of 500,000 quintals. I perfectly understand the difficulties with which such a request may present you, but I believe I may suggest to you that this further amount should be discreetly spread over the normal consignments periodically sent to Italy so as to be reckoned with them, thus avoiding possible worry on the part of the Hungarian Government.

As for the method of payment, you know that a large amount of lire are available in Hungary and therefore the consignments in question might facilitate the process of bringing the clearing account back to normal. I wish, however, to add that, should this form of payment not be well received, we would on our side also be prepared to take into consideration a payment in gold.

I am sure that you will understand the serious reasons which lie behind my personal and confidential request and I do not doubt that—in the spirit of the close friendship between Italy and Hungary—you will do everything possible to give this new, concrete proof of the lively and effective collaboration between our two countries.

¹Son of Archduke Frederick, and nephew of the Archduke Joseph, of the Hungarian branch of the Habsburgs.

THE WAR GOES ON

In expressing to you now my sincere appreciation of your interest in the matter, I beg you to accept, dear Prime Minister, together with my profound esteem, the expression of my cordial comradely friendship.

The meeting at Klessheim where Hitler met Mussolini separately, and Ciano had a separate conversation with Ribbentrop, was organised at the request of Germany—like almost all the others—and without, as usual, laying down an agenda because Hitler preferred to preserve full liberty of action and surprise. The invitation arrived on 24th April; Mussolini would have liked to put it off until the beginning of May. But Hitler insisted that he could not change the date 'for reasons independent of his own wishes'. And Mussolini had to obey.

CONVERSATION WITH THE REICH FOREIGN MINISTER, VON RIBBENTROP.

Salzburg, 29th-30th April, 1942—XX

In the course of the conversations held at Salzburg with Herr von Ribbentrop on the 29th and 30th of April, he spoke in particular of the situation on the Russian front. It is the Russian problem which now clearly dominates the political scene in the minds of the rulers of the Reich. Ribbentrop does not hesitate to say that, during the months of December and January, a 'catastrophe' comparable in its causes and effects to the Napoleonic one, but on a vastly greater scale, would have occurred on the Eastern front but for the personal activity of the Fuehrer, to whom alone it is due that the German army has been able to perform the real miracle of remaining to all intents and purposes in the positions it had reached, in spite of a winter of indescribable rigour and the fury of the Russian attacks, which were carried out by determined men with adequate equipment. Although Ribbentrop avoids going into military details he gave me to understand that the German army is not likely to make efforts against Leningrad and Moscow, whereas it will direct its pressure towards the South, in the direction of the Caucasus. Principal objectives of the offensive—the oil wells. These are objectives which, besides being military—are essentially political, since Ribbentrop considers that Russia, thus deprived of her indispensable source of fuel, may be considered practically strangled and that will have the effect of bringing the conflict to an end. In this sense—once Russia has been immobilised (while not desiring to put forward the most favourable hypothesis of an armistice requested by the Soviets themselves) England will have to see that there is no longer any possibility of effective resist-

ance on the Continent. England's hopes are now concentrated solely on Russia; America, which at one time seemed to English eyes to be destined to play a decisive role, now appears to be 'a colossal bluff'. In any case English and American interests are already at variance in many sectors and it is not to be excluded that England—once the Russian alliance is gone—will realise the necessity of asking the Axis for the conditions of peace. That is all the more probable if the Conservatives are again in power. They are beginning to realise that every day that passes makes a stone crumble from the Imperial edifice which they wish to attempt to salvage, if only partially, in any way possible. Such an eventuality would, on the other hand, be excluded should the government be taken over by the Labourites who continue to reveal themselves as the most obstinate supporters of war to the death. Therefore, according to Ribbentrop, the future plans for the war are as follows: to concentrate every effort against Russia in order to bring the Bolshevik colossus practically to the ground with the chance that there may also arise from this victory the possibility of a satisfactory conclusion to the conflict. Naturally, the Axis could not conclude any peace which did not give full and complete satisfaction to the just aspirations of Germany, Japan and Italy, where both England and France are concerned.

And should the Russian collapse not have the effect of producing a request for negotiations from England? Should the Anglo-Saxons, having lost entirely or in part their Bolshevik ally, wish to continue to wage war against the Tripartite Powers, what road should be followed, according to the Reich Foreign Minister? To this question the answer is vague, extremely vague. Ribbentrop confines himself to saying that once Russia is defeated Germany will move the great bulk of her air force to the Western front and with it batter England until it leads to surrender. Along with war in the air, submarine warfare will be intensified; most accurate calculations prove that if the submarines of the Tripartite Powers succeed in maintaining the rate of sinkings at 7,000 to 8,000 tons per month, England and America will be finally laid out by the end of the year. In short, they have gone back to the formula of air and submarine warfare as decisive factors in the struggle, a formula which was adopted by the Germans as far back as the summer of 1940 and was later abandoned, at least after the failure of the air offensive against London.

France is the object of Germany's suspicions, not of her sympathy. Even in comparison with the conversations which I had with Ribbentrop on this subject in November last, I found a distinct hardening of tone. The Laval Government¹ came into being without

¹It was formed on 18th April, 1942; besides being Prime Minister, Laval was also Minister for the Interior and Foreign Minister. Admiral Darlan was no longer included among the Ministers.

the knowledge of Berlin, against Berlin's wishes, not to say in outright opposition to Berlin, which would have preferred to keep Laval as a card in reserve for some time still. Abetz himself, whom Ribbentrop confesses he has to hold back by the scruff of the neck to keep him from rushing into the Utopian realms of collaboration, has to admit that the French collaborators are—on the best hypothesis—only five per cent of the population. The others are de Gaullists, openly or secretly; of course, they call themselves *attentistes* or some other name, but they have all the common denominator of unshakable hatred for Germany and the Axis. Such being the case, no possibility of collaboration can be seriously considered. So every so often France has to be given a bouquet—as for example the permission for Scapini¹ to stay in the Embassy without, however, granting him the rank of Ambassador, or some improvement in the treatment of the prisoners, which may go so far as the granting of special leave to the most deserving, but nothing more. And one must keep one's eyes skinned so as to be ready to react with the utmost energy to any attempt which the French might try to make to snap at the heels of Germany and Italy, when they are engaged in a life and death struggle on the Eastern front.

Ribbentrop is less optimistic about Turkey than the Fuehrer has declared himself to be. He is convinced that Turkey nourishes fundamentally hostile sentiments towards us, which she succeeds in hiding by the clever use of Oriental hypocrisy. He does not, however, exclude the possibility that, after the successes which the summer has in store for the Axis armies, Turkey may—under the pressure of events—take up an attitude favourable towards us. But it will mean to say that she could not do otherwise. Hungary and Rumania are, for the moment, two very useful allies and it is therefore necessary to prevent friction between them bursting into open conflict. Once the war is over, if they still really want to react against the Vienna verdict on one side or the other—very well, they will have to be given the liberty to fight. And Ribbentrop believes that, in spite of the rhetorical exchange of fire, both Hungarians and Rumanians will avoid making use of that liberty.

In German opinion, Rumania's shares have fallen greatly while Hungary's shares have risen, but not to the same extent.

Little interest was shown in Spain which, at the present stage of the conflict, seems to have become a factor of secondary importance.

Since Ribbentrop—again in Salzburg—for the first time pronounced the word 'war' in August, 1939, this was my twentieth meeting with the Reich Foreign Minister. Every time I found his attitude a mirror of the times and, even more, in his words the faithful echo of Hitler's thoughts at the time; whatever he said he had always heard or was about to hear from the mouth of the Fuehrer.

¹Scapini had been sent to Berlin as representative of Vichy France.

THE WAR GOES ON

This time I found a Ribbentrop who is neither the intoxicated Ribbentrop of the French campaign nor the gloomy Ribbentrop of last November. He is stern, conscious of the hard times which are yet to come, but he is also very serene and convinced that he will reach port and reach it with all sails set.

Towards us his attitude is perfect. Better than on any other preceding occasion. He does not let slip any opportunity to stress that the fight is being waged by Germany, Japan and Italy on a plane of perfect equality, that the contribution of each of them is equally indispensable for victory and that, finally, the world of tomorrow will be controlled by the association of these three countries, which—after the war—will have to be made permanent by new and still closer ties.

INDEX OF PERSONALITIES

In general, the office or title given in each case is that held or used during the period with which the book is concerned. Exceptions and the reasons for them will, it is hoped, be clear.

- ABETZ, Otto.** German Ambassador to Vichy, 400, 483
Albrecht, Archduke, 480
Alexander, King of Yugoslavia, 35, 439
Alexandrovsky, S. S. Russian Minister Plenipotentiary for Czech Pact, 37
Alfieri, Dino. Italian Ambassador to Germany, 368, 377, 389-393, 411-3, 418, 453-4
Anfuso, Filippo. Foreign Office Official, Secretary to Ciano, 105, 271, 280, 439
Antonescu, Marshal Ion. Head of Rumanian State, 37, 402
Antonescu, Mihai. Rumanian Minister of Justice, later Foreign Affairs, 460
Antonescu, Victor. Rumanian Foreign Minister, 35, 38, 102, 329
Apponyi, Countess Geraldine, 203
Argetoianu. Rumanian Prime Minister, 383
Armau, Gimenez, 370
Attolico, Bernardo. Italian Ambassador to Germany, 49, 278, 279, 286, 288, 296, 308, 317-9
Auriti, Giacinto. Italian Ambassador to Japan, 68, 131, 146-47, 356
Avenol, Joseph. Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 33-4, 41
BADOGLIO, Marshal Pietro, 410, 411
Bakaeu, execution of, 40
Balbo, Marshal Italo, 357
Baldwin, Earl, 184
Bardossy, Laszlo. Hungarian Minister to Rumania, 120, 460, 478, 479, 480-1
Barthou, Louis. French Foreign Minister, 35
Bastianini, Giuseppe. Italian Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 39
Beck, Colonel Jozef. Polish Foreign Minister, 7, 108, 153, 264, 272-5, 283, 341
Benes, Eduard. President of Czechoslovakia, 37, 100, 209
Bérard, Léon. French Senator, 289
Berger-Waldenegg, Baron Egon, Austrian Minister in Rome, 11
Best, Captain. Kidnapping of, 325
Bethlen, Count Stephen. Hungarian Statesman, 120, 158-9, 478-9
Biddle, Drexel. U.S. Ambassador to Poland, 341
Bismarck, Prince Otto von. Counsellor to German Embassy in Rome, 399, 447
Blomberg, Field Marshal Werner von. German War Minister, 123
Blondel, Jules. French Chargé d'affaires in Rome, 3, 206, 217, 223-4, 247
Blum, Léon. French Statesman, 25, 32, 83, 86, 104, 229
Bodard. French Minister to Alyssinia, 15
Bonnet, Georges. French Foreign Minister, later Minister of Justice, 220, 233, 249, 257, 259, 264
Boris, King of Bulgaria, 418
Bose, Subhas Chandra. Indian Nationalist, 446-7
Bullit, William. U.S. Ambassador to France, 341
Butler, R. A., 383
CABALLERO, Francisco Largo. Spanish Politician, 43
Canaris, Admiral. Head of German Secret Intelligence, 418, 425-6
Cantilo, José Maria. Argentinian Ambassador to Italy, 3-4
Carcer, Aguirre de. Spanish Ambassador to Italy, 18
Carol, King of Rumania, 101-2, 381

INDEX

- Casentano, Raffaele. Italian Diplomat, 439
- Cerruti, Vittorio. Italian Ambassador to France, 3, 14
- Cerulli, Enrico. Official at Italian Ministry for Colonies, 229
- Chamberlain, Neville, 149, 157, 160, 164-186, 207-8, 210, 212, 214, 216, 219, 230, 233-4, 235-6, 243, 257, 259-266, 285, 306 *et passim*
- Chambrun, Count Charles de. French Ambassador to Italy, 3, 6-7, 8, 12, 13-15, 19, 21-2, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31-2, 247
- Charles, Sir Noel, 230, 231
- Chautemps, Camille. French Premier, 149, 229
- Che Kung-po. Chinese Propaganda Minister, 143
- Chiang Kai-shek, 142, 143
- Churchill, Winston S., 184, 375
- Chvalkovsky, Frantisek Karel. Czech Foreign Minister, 237
- Cincar-Markovic, Alexander. Yugoslav Foreign Minister, 281, 285
- Clodius, Karl. Head of Economic Section, German Foreign Office, 340, 355, 447
- Codreanu, Corneliu Zelea. Leader of Rumanian Iron Guard, 37
- Colonna, Prince Ascanio. Italian Ambassador to U.S.A., 467
- Conde. Spanish Ambassador to Italy, 133-4
- Cooper, Sir Duff, 9
- Cortese. Italian Foreign Office Official, 439
- Cristea, Miron. Patriarch and Prime Minister of Rumania, 96
- Christic, Bozko. Yugoslav Minister Plenipotentiary to Italy, 200-1, 232-3, 270, 280-1
- Crolla, Guido. Counsellor at Italian Embassy in London, 158
- Csaky, Count. Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 237, 269, 276, 329, 330-2, 378, 381
- Curtius, Julius. German Foreign Minister, 169
- Cuza, Professor A. C. Founder of Rumanian National Christian Party, 159
- DALADIER, Édouard, 25, 38, 229, 233, 243, 249, 259, 306
- Darányi, Koloman. Hungarian Prime Minister, 37, 63-7, 117-120, 148, 226, 237, 239, 241.
- Darlan, Admiral J. F., 427, 446, 462, 468-471, 482
- Degrelle, Léon. Leader of Belgian Rexists, 112
- Delaytre. French Doctor, 223
- Delbos, Yvon. French Foreign Minister, 6, 12, 25, 77, 84, 119, 149, 150, 153
- Dentz, General. Vichy Commander in Syria, 446
- Dollfuss, Engelbert. Austrian Chancellor, 35, 40, 111, 169
- Drummond, Sir Eric. *See* Perth, Lord
- Ducic, Jovan. Yugoslav Minister to Italy, 70
- Duclos. French Communist, 31, 32
- EDEN, Anthony, 6, 20, 46, 51, 56, 61, 77, 82, 119, 121, 149, 157, 160, 164-184, 185, 186 *et passim*
- Edward VIII, King of England, 47, 48, 347
- Erdmannsdorf, Otto von. German Minister to Hungary, 239
- Evdokimov, execution of, 40
- FARINACCI, Roberto. Member of Grand Fascist Council, 125, 143
- Flandin, Pierre Étienne. French Politician, 216
- Forster. Gauleiter, 342
- Franco, General Francisco, 289-295, 388-9, 399, 401, 421-430 *et passim*
- François-Poncet, André. French Ambassador to Germany, then Italy, 247, 248-9, 251-3, 306-9
- Frank, Hans. German Minister without Portfolio, 43
- Franz Ferdinand, Archduke, 109
- Funk, Walther. German Minister for Economics, 202
- GAFENCU, Grigore. Rumanian Foreign Minister, 383
- Gamelin, General Maurice Gustave, 38, 39, 307
- Gaulle, General Charles de, 375, 392, 400, 419, 422

INDEX

- Gayda, Virginio. Director of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 118, 226, 349
- Gensoul, Admiral, Commander at Oran, 400
- George II, King of Greece, 285
- George VI, King of England, 115
- Giannini, A. Head of Trade Department, Italian Foreign Ministry, 447
- Gigliucci, Luigi Vinci. Italian Minister to Hungary, 235, 329
- Gigurtu, Ion. Rumanian Prime Minister, 382-384
- Giral, José. Spanish Prime Minister, 43
- Glaise von Horstenau, E. Austrian Minister of Interior, 88
- Goga, Octavian. Rumanian Prime Minister, 151, 159
- Goering, Hermann. 80-91, 460-5, 469 *et passim*
- Goltz, General Rudiger von der, 322
- Gömbös, General Jakfai. Hungarian Prime Minister, 35, 63, 107, 111
- Grandi, Count. Italian Ambassador to Great Britain, then Minister of Justice, 158, 161-2, 164-183, 185, 249-251 *et passim*
- Graziani, Marshal Rodolfo, 15, 17, 23
- Gryzbowski, Waclaw. Polish Ambassador to Russia, 305
- Guarneri, Felice. Italian Under-Secretary of State for Finance, 23, 114
- Guarneschelli, Gianbattista. Deputy-Director-General of Political Affairs, Foreign Ministry, 195
- HABSBURG, Prince Otto von. Pretender to Austro-Hungarian throne, 91, 349
- Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia, 10, 79, 100, 115, 188, 192
- Halifax, Lord, 61, 186, 187, 207-210, 259-266, 305-6, 320-1
- Hassell, Ulrich von. German Ambassador to Italy, 5-6, 8-9, 20-1, 22, 49-50, 122-3, 126, 128
- Henderson, Sir Neville. British Ambassador to Germany, 210
- Henlein, Konrad. Leader of Sudeten Germans, 209, 213, 232, 233
- Herriot, Édouard, 344
- Hesse, Prince Philip of. Special Emissary to Rome, 162-4, 194, 234, 354
- Himmler, Heinrich, 379
- Hirota. Japanese Premier then Foreign Minister, 129, 130
- Hitler, Adolf, 56-60, 299-304, 309-316, 361-5, 375-9, 381-2, 386-7, 395-8, 400-4, 408-411, 419-420, 431-6, 447-452, 454-465, *et passim*
- Hlinka, Andrej. Leader of Hungarian Catholic Nationalist Party, 237
- Hoare, Sir Samuel. *See* Templewood, Lord
- Hodza, Milan. Czech Premier and Foreign Minister, 108, 109
- Horthy, Admiral Nicolas. Regent of Hungary, 35, 36, 37, 63-5, 117, 387, 477-480
- Horthy, Stepan. Son of Admiral Horthy, 480
- Hotta, Masaaki. Japanese Ambassador to Italy, 130-1, 140
- Huntziger, General Charles L. C. Vichy Minister of War, 396
- IMRÉDY, Béla. Hungarian Prime Minister, 37, 227-9, 234
- Ingram, Edward Maurice. Counsellor to the British Embassy in Rome, 19, 23, 24, 27, 32, 48-9, 132-6
- JACOMONI, General Francesco. Lieutenant-General in Albania, 385
- Jordana, General Count Francisco Gomez. Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, 293
- Jouhaux, Léon. French Politician, 131
- KAGANOVITCH, Lazare Moiseyevich. Soviet Politician, 342
- Kamenev, execution of, 40
- Kanin, Prince. Chief of Japanese General Staff, 142
- Kánya, Kálmán de. Hungarian Foreign Minister, 37, 63-8, 107, 117-120, 148, 227-9, 234, 329.
- Keitel, Field Marshal Wilhelm, 161, 378-9, 398, 411, 478
- Kennedy, Joseph. U.S. Ambassador to Britain, 341

INDEX

- Kérillis, Henride. French Journalist, 49
 Kindelan, General Alfredo. Spanish Air Minister, 289
 Kiosseivanov, George. Bulgarian Premier and Foreign Minister, 95
 Konoye, Prince. Japanese Prime Minister, 129
 Kormanisky. Polish Delegate to the League of Nations, 122
 Korosec, Anton. Yugoslav Minister for the Interior, 268
 Kurusu, Saburo. Japanese Ambassador Extraordinary to U.S.A., 467
 Kvaternik. Agent of Croat Secret Police, 471
- LARAQUE. Haitian Minister to Italy, 7
 Laval, Pierre, 104, 184, 250, 257, 401, 403, 407, 427, 482
 Lebrun, Albert. President of France, 149
 Léger, Alexis. Secretary General, French Foreign Office, 3, 13, 14
 Leopold II, King of the Belgians, 52
 Lequio, Francesco. Italian Ambassador to Spain, 384-5, 420
 Lessona, Alessandro. Italian Minister for the Colonies, 23
 Ley, Dr. Robert. Head of German Labour Front, 321-7
 Liechtenstein, Prince Francis I of, 110
 Lipsky, Josef. Polish Ambassador to Germany, 234
 Litvinov, Maxim. Russian Diplomat, 86, 342, 350
 Loraine, Sir Percy. British Ambassador to Italy, 305-6, 320, 335
 Lorkovic, Croat Foreign Minister, 462, 472
 Lozovsky, Alexander. Soviet Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 411
 Lugosianu, Ion. Rumanian Minister to Italy, 12, 13, 15-16, 23, 96
- MACDONALD, Malcolm, 257
 Macek, Vladimir. Croat Leader, 276, 277, 331
 Mackensen, H. von. German Ambassador to Italy, 68, 201-2, 223, 234, 276-8, 339-359, 367, 389-393, 409, 411
 Magistrati, Count Massimo. Counselor at Italian Embassy in Britain, 296
 Mannerheim, Marshal, 322
 Manoilescu, Mihail. Rumanian Foreign Minister, 382-4, 386
 Maria, Princess. Youngest daughter of King Victor Emmanuel, 91
 Markovic. See Cincar-Markovic
 Mastromattei, Guiseppe, Prefect of Bolzano, 286
 Matsuoka, Yosuke. Japanese Foreign Minister, 433
 Michael, Prince (later King) of Rumania, 102
 Mihailovitch, General. Chetnik leader, 459, 471
 Miklas, Wilhelm. President of Austria, 107, 193
 Mikoyan, A. I. Soviet Commissar for Foreign Trade, 411
 Mohammed Ali. Anti-British Somali leader, 229
 Molotov, V. M., 407, 409, 411, 419
 Motta, M. G. Swiss Foreign Minister, 9, 11
 Mrackovsky, execution of, 40
 Mushakoji, Viscount Kintomo. Japanese Ambassador to Germany, 138, 139
 Mussolini, Benito, 43-8, 56, 80-91, 108-116, 124, 140-1, 142-6, 150-3, 158-9, 227-9, 242-6, 259-266, 283, 337-368, 382-4, 389-404 *et passim*
- NEURATH, Baron Konstantin von. German Diplomat, 51, 52-5, 60, 106, 109, 110, 115-7, 122, 123, 124, 126, 160, 187.
 Nomura, Admiral Kikisabura. Japanese Ambassador to U.S.A., 467
- ORLANDO, V. E., Former Premier of Italy, 286
 Ortiz, M., Mexican Minister to Italy, 13
 Oshima, General Hiroshi. Japanese Ambassador to Germany, 258
- PAPEN, FRANZ von. German Diplomat, 54, 68, 160, 161, 298, 407, 442
 Paul, Prince, Regent of Yugoslavia, 70, 97, 104, 105, 150, 151, 267, 268, 271, 298, 434
 Pavelic, Ante. Croat Puppet Ruler, 368, 434, 438, 439, 462, 471-3

INDEX

- Pedrazzi, Orazio. Italian Ambassador to Spain, 18
- Peel, Lord. (The Peel Report), 190
- Perth, Lord. Formerly Sir Eric Drummond, British Ambassador to Italy, 5, 9-10, 16-17, 50-1, 61-2, 75, 77-80, 124-6, 132, 135, 136, 137, 157, 158, 160, 167, 173, 184-199, 207-212, 216-226, 229-230, 235-6, 240 *et passim*
- Pétain, Marshal Henri Philippe, 289, 372, 392, 401, 419, 429, 450, 462, 469-470
- Peter, King of Yugoslavia, 70, 434
- Peterson, Sir Maurice. British Ambassador to Spain, 289
- Phillips, William. American Ambassador to Italy, 197, 366-9
- Phipps, Sir Eric. British Ambassador to France, 56
- Pilotti, Massimo. Deputy-Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 34
- Pilsudski, Marshal Josef, 39, 274
- Pilya, Milivoy. Official of Yugoslav Ministry of Commerce, 71
- Pius XI, Pope, 43, 47, 116
- Pius XII, Pope, 336, 349, 358
- Plymouth, Lord. British Representative on Spanish Non-Intervention Committee, 174, 176, 177, 178
- Potocki, Count Jerzy. Polish Ambassador to U.S.A., 341, 342
- RASHID Ali, Al-Gailani. Iraqi Anti-British leader, 442
- Rathenau, Walther von. Former German Foreign Minister, 341
- Rath, Ernst vom, murder of, 247
- Raumer, Ribbentrop's Chief Counselor, 139, 140
- Refik Saydam. Turkish Premier, 285
- Reichenau, General Walter von, 161
- Reingold, execution of, 40
- Remiz, von. Austrian Patriot, 297
- Rendel, George William. British Diplomat, 195
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von, 44, 139-140, 142-6, 238, 239-241, 242-6, 257, 258-9, 264, 272, 278-280, 282, 283-7, 296-9, 309-316, 339-359, 361-5, 372-5, 389-393, 395-411, 417-421, 436-9, 441-3, 445-7, 453, 455-465, 481-4 *et passim*
- Rintelen, General von. German Military Attaché in Rome, 454-5
- Roatta, General Mario. Chief of Italian General Staff, 417
- Rocco, Guido. Italian Diplomat, 34
- Rochira, Ubaldo. Italian Consul-General in Vienna, 273
- Rohan, Prince Karl Anton. Austrian Nazi, 109
- Rommel, Field Marshal Erwin, 435
- Roosevelt, President Franklin D., 335-6, 337, 341, 342, 366-7, 369, 443, 451
- Rosenberg, Marcel. Soviet Under-Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 34
- Rosso, Augusto. Italian Ambassador to Russia, 86, 356, 411, 419
- Ruegger, Paul J. A., Swiss Minister in Rome, 9-11
- Rustu Aras Tewfik. Turkish Foreign Minister, 84, 93-5, 121, 122, 152, 218-9
- SAAVEDRA LAMAS, Carlos. Argentinian Foreign Minister, 4
- Salengro. French Minister of Interior, 31
- Sangroniz y Castro, J. A. de, Marquis de Desio. Spanish Diplomat, 144
- Sandler, Richard J. Swedish Foreign Minister, 322
- Sato, Naotake. Japanese Ambassador to France, 129
- Scapini. Vichy Representative in Berlin, 483
- Scavenius, Harald. Danish Foreign Minister, 460
- Schmidt, Guido. Austrian Foreign Minister, 39-41, 63-5, 89, 160
- Schmidt, Gustave Paul. Hitler's Interpreter, 80, 91
- Schober. Austrian Foreign Minister, 169
- Schuschnigg, Kurt von, 38, 39, 40, 41, 45, 63-5, 89, 106-115, 116, 117, 146, 151, 160-1, 163, 193, 194
- Seredi, Cardinal Archbishop. Primate of Hungary, 472
- Serrano Suñer, Ramon. Spanish Minister of the Interior, later

INDEX

- Foreign Minister, 289-291, 370-1, 384-5, 391, 393-4, 396-8, 401, 405, 409-411, 419-430, 440-4, 446, 461-2
et passim
 Seyss-Inquart, Artur von, 160, 193-4
 Sima, Horia. Leader of the Rumanian Iron Guard, 37
 Skladkowsky, General. President of the Polish Council, 153
 Smigly-Rydz, Marshal. Polish Premier, 38, 39, 153
 Smirnov, execution of, 40
 Sola, Ugo. Italian Minister to Rumania, 96
 Solmi, Arrigo. Italian Minister of Justice, 48
 Somerville, Admiral Sir J. F., 400
 Spoleto, Duke of. Italian "King" of Croatia, 439
 Stalin, Joseph, 342, 343, 344, 364, 421
 Stanhope, Lord. English Statesman, 48
 Stein, B. E. Soviet Ambassador to Italy, 147
 Stevens, Major, kidnapping of, 325
 Stohrer, E. von. German Ambassador to Spain, 376, 428, 430
 Stoyadinovitch, Milan. Yugoslav Premier, 37, 40, 70-1, 95, 98-105, 149-152, 159, 200-1, 212-6, 228, 229, 232-3, 267-272, 431.
 Subotic, Dr. Yugoslav Minister Plenipotentiary to Italy, 71
 Sugimura, Yotaro. Japanese Ambassador to Italy, 68-9, 129-131

 TALAMO Stenolfi di Castelnuovo, Marchese Guiseppe. Italian Minister to Bulgaria, 287
 Tanner, V. A. Finnish Foreign Minister, 343, 345
 Tatarescu, Gheorghe. Rumanian Premier, 96, 151
 Teleki, Count Paul. Hungarian Prime Minister, 276, 378, 380-1, 383, 386, 460
 Templewood, Lord. British Ambassador to Spain, 48
 Ter-Vaganjan, execution of, 40
 Tessan, François de. Under-Secretary of State for the Presidency, 14
 Teucci, Colonel. Italian Military attaché in Berlin, 318, 336

 Tiso, Joseph. Slovak Leader, 237
 Titulesco, Nicola. Rumanian Foreign Minister, 10, 12, 13, 15-16, 23, 35, 37, 95, 98, 101
 Tuka, Professor Bela. Slovak Separatist, 460

 UMBERTO, Prince of Piedmont, 80
 VANSITTART, Lord. (Formerly Sir Robert V.), 3, 5, 48, 119
 Vayo, Alvarez del. Spanish Foreign Minister, 43
 Venturi, G. Host. Italian Minister of Communications, 355
 Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy, 80, 97, 117, 162
 Villani, Baron Frederick. Hungarian Minister in Rome, 35, 41, 148-9, 234-5, 238-9
 Viola di Campalto, Count Guido. Italian Diplomat, 97
 Vishinsky, A. J. Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 411

 WANG Ching-wei. Head of Nanking Puppet Government, 143
 Wavell, Field Marshal Lord, 456
 Welles, Sumner. President Roosevelt's Personal Envoy, 335, 336-9, 342, 345, 359-360, 366
 Weygand, General Maxime, 308, 419, 457, 462
 Wienawa-Dglugoszowski, General Boleslav. Polish Ambassador to Italy, 7-8
 Wiesner, Friedrich von. Austrian Monarchist, 90
 Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 374
 Wilson, Woodrow. President, 286
 Wysocki, Alfred. Polish Ambassador to Italy, 153

 ZAMFIRESCU. Rumanian Minister in Rome, 236-7
 Zeeland, Paul van. Belgian Premier, 10, 14, 112
 Zernatto, Guido. Secretary-General of Austrian Fatherland Front, 160
 Zinoviev, execution of, 40
 Zog I, King of Albania, 55, 103, 203, 270, 280
 Zvetkovitch, Dragisha. Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, 434

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