

Businessman – The Case of Ossoinack Family and Fiume*

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ABSTRACT

On October 18th 1918 Andrea Ossoinack, the representative of the city of Fiume in the Parliament of Hungary, gave a speech in which he claimed the right of self-determination for his city in the events that led to the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. This claim was a basis for Woodrow Wilson's 1919 proposal of establishing Fiume as a free state, although Ossoinack himself objected it, favouring annexation to Italy. Less than 14 years earlier, Ossoinack was regarded by Hungarians as a staunch supporter of close ties between Hungary and Fiume, opposing the Autonomist Party and its claims of separate Fiuman identity, despite the fact that the Autonomist Party was founded and financed by his father Luigi, a wealthy Fiume entrepreneur. The history of Ossoinack family, Slavic by origin and Italian by language, with ethnical identity and affiliations influenced by the economic situation of any given moment in time, demonstrates that even during the period of awakening nation states, a question of ethnic identity was only secondary to business interests. The paper tries to illustrate the rise of the Ossoinack family, mainly focusing on Luigi's business achievements, and Andrea's later strivings to ensure the family business survive through the turbulent times of Fiume in the first half of the 20th century, choosing whichever identity necessary in order to achieve that goal.

Key words: ethnic identity, Fiume, Italian irredentism, Austria-Hungary

Introduction

The city of Fiume (today's Rijeka in the modern state of Croatia) boasts a remarkable and turbulent past, closely tied to its status as a port city of strategical importance for landlocked Hungary. However, being a port on the Adriatic Sea, its population has always reflected its geographical position, showing a mixture of Italian, German, Slovene and Croatian-speaking population, with Hungarian ethnic element trailing far behind. The city itself was predominantly Italian-speaking, with people from different ethnic backgrounds having a good command of the language. However, speaking Italian did not automatically entail the sense of 'feeling' Italian – that will occur in Fiume only with irredentism at the end of the 19th century, and even then it will initially be of limited scope in comparison to Fiume's autonomism.¹ Fiume's identity was mainly focused on the city itself, on its multiethnic and multicultural population, where signs of personal wealth were more important for one to be considered worthy of citizen's status, than it was

someone's origin (there was a saying in Fiume at that time quoting "He who does not have a box in the theatre and a tomb in the cemetery, is no gentleman").² Personal wealth was one's ticket to esteem and honour, so it was less important to lose one's ethnic identity (often already compromised by the fact of one's parents' different ethnic backgrounds) than to suffer a financial loss.

One of the most powerful and influential families in Fiume, especially during its heyday period (last two decades of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century), was certainly the Ossoinack family, especially father and son Luigi and Andrea Ossoinack, whose economic success laid a foundation for reshaping Fiume's political scene, which in turn left a powerful impact on Fiume's destiny after the First World War. But who were the Ossoinacks, how did they come to build such a powerful economic enterprise and how did that success influence their political affinities and alignments? These are the questions we would try to present in this article.

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The Ossoinack family

The Ossoinacks appeared for the first time on the stage of history during the 18th century in Volosko, a tiny fisherman village west of Fiume, on the eastern coast of Istria. Their origin is unknown, although the etymology of the name suggests Slavic (either Slovenian or Croatian) origin – the word *osoj* means „shady side (of the mountain)“, and there is a village called Osognaki („Ossoinacks“) near Matulji, about halfway between Fiume and Volosko. The first known member of the family is Andrea (Andrija) Ossoinack, sea captain and trader of olive oil and wine, about whom it is known that he lived in Volosko in 1774.³ His son Giuseppe (Josip) continued his father’s business, trading between Fiume, Dalmatia and the Italian lands. He owned several sailships that were all unfortunately destroyed, one of them burned by the French near the island of Vis, and the rest of them lost in the British siege of Fiume in 1811. The loss of the ships led to Giuseppe’s financial breakdown and he subsequently moved to Fiume in the 1820s, after the death of his first wife, who bore him 12 children. Giuseppe’s youngest son was Natalin Gennaro, born in 1816, in the middle of his father’s bankruptcy, complemented by the death of his mother only a year later. In such circumstances Natalin had to become independent early, so already as a teenager he started working for his older brothers, accumulating capital to become a wine merchant and buy a house with a tavern on Fiumara, in the centre of Fiume, where ships bringing wine from Dalmatia would dock. He achieved all of that by his early twenties. He married Marija Repak, a daughter of a large carpentry shop owner, who also used to have a small spirit distillery. Her mother was originally from Pesaro, and was a distant relative of the composer Gioacchino Rossini. They had three children before Marija succumbed to cholera in the 1849 epidemic. Natalin afterwards remarried and had further five children.

Apart from the family house on Fiumara, Natalin also owned two other houses in Fiume, and in 1848 he bought an estate in Lopača, north of Fiume, where he built a family villa. He also used the estate as a source of export timber for his ships. Natalin had six sons and two daughters. Three of the sons became seafarers, two became merchants, while the youngest son, Antonio, graduated in chemistry and started working in petroleum industry. He would eventually end in Baku, becoming an owner of an oil refinery and then disappearing as a class enemy after the October Revolution. Among the three sons who became seafarers, two of them (Giuseppe Nereo and Martino) died at sea, with only Giovanni, the oldest son from Natalin’s second marriage, left. After his career as a sea captain, Giovanni became a deputy in Fiume’s city council, first as a supporter of the Autonomist Association, later leaning towards irredentism. A talented speaker, he engaged in many communal works, while at the same time being very selfish privately, trying to appropriate all the family wealth after his father’s death. He died childless.

Two of Natalin’s sons that engaged in trade were Luigi and Enrico. While we would focus more on Luigi’s life and achievements later in this article, we should here only briefly address Enrico’s fate – he was also not lucky to live for a long time, dying of heart disease at a young age of only 28 and leaving three children. Those children would, together with the three children

of Giuseppe Nereo (Natalin’s oldest son, who died at sea), become custody of their uncle Luigi, along with his own children.

Up to this point, it is hard to establish without doubt what was the ethnic sentiment of the Ossoinacks, partially because it was not a pressing issue at the time (early and middle 19th century) and partially because most of the family members were pursuing their business interests (some of them abroad) and not being interested in the politics of the city. The only mentioned exception is Giovanni, who himself entered politics only after the Fiuman autonomist movement had already been formed, and who also shifted his identity and inclinations during his political work. The facts we can be sure about are that the origin of the surname Ossoinack is Slavic, that most of the family members were multilingual, with fluency in Croatian, Italian, German, Hungarian, some even in English (which itself is nothing strange, considered they were traders living in a multilingual city), and that the mother of Natalin’s first wife was of Italian origin, meaning that at least his first three children could partly consider themselves Italian (but we cannot be sure if they indeed did so). The language the family members used among themselves was Italian, which can be established from the family correspondence – yet, Italian was the *lingua franca* of Fiume at the time. The names of Natalin’s children were also Italianate (i.e. not just Italianized, like Ivan > Giovanni, but typically Italian, like Nereo or Francesca). Still, as already mentioned, we cannot for sure imply that there was any Italian or irredentist feeling among the Ossoinacks before Giovanni started leaning towards irredentism – in fact, there was not much of it in the whole city before the end of the 19th century. It is highly probable that, if someone had had a chance to ask a member of the Ossoinack family what their identity was, he would have gotten a simple answer: „Fiumani“.

By the end of the 19th century, the Fiuman identity would develop from just a mere statement of the obvious fact that one was living in a city of that name into a political question, reflecting the situation that emerged in Fiume after it became the single port city of Hungary. The government of Dezső Bánffy started a process of powerful Magyarization, trying to centralize a multiethnic country in which Hungarians formed only about a half of the population. Expectedly, it met a staunch opposition in Fiume, whose inhabitants always thought of Hungary primarily as of a political protector of the city’s autonomous rights and not as of some kind of romantic national homeland. Out of this opposition grew the Autonomist Party, a political subject that would gather most of the Italian-speaking elite of Fiume. The key financier of the party was again one of the Ossoinacks – Luigi.

Luigi Ossoinack

Luigi Ossoinack was born in Fiume on June 26th 1849, as a third child of Natalin Gennaro Ossoinack and his first wife Marija. He was only a few weeks old when his mother died and about two years of age when his father remarried. After finishing elementary school in Fiume, he went to college in Laibach (Ljubljana), and then to the Superior Academy of Commerce in Graz. Afterwards he lived in Trieste, Odessa, Hamburg, London and New York, learning about international trade, especially maritime one, and perfecting his language skills (he was a fluent speaker of Italian, Croatian, German, English and French, while

also having usable knowledge of Hungarian and Russian language). After coming back to Fiume in 1874, he became a general agent for Genovese and Neapolitan maritime traders in the city. In 1877 he would be a key person in establishing a direct shipping line between Fiume and Liverpool, later becoming an agent for *Cunard* and *Bailey&Leatham* lines, whose steamers would then start plying between Fiume and London and later also North America, playing a crucial role in the emigration process during the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1881 he established a rice hulling plant, which became the biggest food industry plant in Fiume, producing also rice starch. He also had influence in establishing an oil refinery in 1882. In 1885 Luigi Ossoinack became a member of the city's trading board, rising into prominence with his ideas of maritime development and modern industrialization. In fact, it was him, along with Ettore Catinelli and A. F. Smoquina, who created the Hungarian maritime strategy based on Fiume, which would become the official policy of the Hungarian government. He is credited with the opening of the first modern port warehouse in Fiume. Together with Eugenio Bacchich he also established a factory producing wooden barrels and chests. He was a major shareholder of the Royal Hungarian Sea Navigation Company *Adria* (which was formed after the *Adria Steam Ship Company*, an enterprise which started as a union of *Cunard*, *Bailey&Leatham* and *Burrell and Son* companies in Fiume, was taken over by the Hungarian state), and in 1891, with a support from the then-Hungarian minister of trade Gábor Baross and investment capital from the United Kingdom, he established his own shipping company called *Oriente (Orient Magyar Hajózási Részvénytársaság)*, buying three steamships and starting trading with Asian countries, in order to facilitate the rice supply. Both *Adria* and *Oriente* would later move into a huge palace built in Fiume's central quay. It was the beginning of an independent Hungarian merchant marine. In order to achieve that, it was important to remove the Austrian *Lloyd* shipping company based in Trieste from the favourable position with the government, what was also lobbied for by Ossoinack in the city's trading board, finally catching Baross's attention and gaining his support for the idea. *Adria* would also give kickstart to the export of Hungarian flour overseas, which was conducted mostly in the barrels produced in Ossoinack's factory in Fiume.⁴

Luigi Ossoinack was also a supporter and financier of the cultural scene in the city. As a young man he was singing a tenor in the city's orchestra, later abundantly financing city theatre and arts. He was engaged in multiple economic and political functions, among others being a deputy in the city council for 25 years. For his merits in the development of Fiume's economy he was awarded the Order of Franz Joseph and a title „*cavaliere d'industria*“. The novelty he practiced was that all his workers received a share of the company's profit, thus increasing satisfaction and work motivation.

Since his economic enterprises were tied mostly to the Hungarian capital (for example, *Adria* and *Oriente* were subsidized by the Hungarian government) he was politically inclined to the interests of the Hungarian state, although never supporting radical nationalist views. His support for the Hungarian influence in Fiume always regarded his personal business interests. But when Bánffy's government increased efforts to Magyarize Fiume, Luigi Ossoinack would turn into a firm defender of the

city's autonomous rights – foremost the right of Italian as the official language – and would establish, together with several prominent figures of Fiume's cultural and political life (among them the then-mayor Giovanni de Ciotta and the mayor-to-be Michele Maylender), the Autonomist Party (later to be renamed Autonomist Association), to which he would be a key financier. After a political split between the moderates and the radicals in the party in 1901, Ossoinack became a supporter of a young Riccardo Zanella, a perspective radical politician who was also employed at Ossoinack's and who was the leader of the protests against Hungarian inscriptions on the Fiume trams two years earlier.

In 1875 Luigi married Ana Bačić, a niece of a wealthy grain trader from Fiume. They had seven children, but Luigi was also a custodian of six children from his deceased brothers. The most successful of his children would be his second son Andrea, who will be dealt with as the central figure of this article. As he was getting older, Luigi became more and more secluded and dissatisfied. He was suffering from syphilis and spent most of his days at the family estate in Lopača. The illness probably affected his nerves, since on the 29th of October 1904 he committed suicide by shooting himself with a rifle.

In Luigi's political views we can for the first time in the history of the Ossoinack family see a doubtless expression of identity as a political subject. Luigi's economic interests turned him into a „political Hungarian“, a concept developed by Lajos Kossúth during the Hungarian revolution of 1848, where it was not important what one's native language was – as long as one was living within the borders of Kingdom of Hungary, one was Hungarian. Luigi's command of the Hungarian language was not perfect, he was more fluent even in English and German (although he considered Italian his native tongue), however he did not see it as an obstacle to his loyalty to the Hungarian government and its achievements in Fiume. But when Bánffy's government set the Magyarization of the non-Hungarian regions of Hungary its top priority, implying that in Hungary there can be no place for those unwilling to learn or speak Hungarian, he did not agree with the implications such view would impose on those who felt as Hungarians but whose mother tongue was different. The loyalty to the government was tied mainly to the fact that its achievements brought prosperity to the city, but even that factor was never strong enough for the most of Italian-speaking inhabitants of Fiume to abandon their mother tongue in favour of Hungarian. Luigi was no exception, his wealth and social influence making him a perfect figure to become one of the pillars in resisting the government's attempts to Magyarize Fiume (that idea being very important for the Bánffy's projected image of Magyar Hungary, since it was Hungary's only seaport and as such, a gateway to the world, a model city of a nationalist state). After the fall of Bánffy, the new government again permitted the exercise of the city's autonomous rights, which somewhat softened the Autonomist Association's struggle, leading to a split between the moderates (who were satisfied by the outcome) and the radicals (who believed it was just the first step in the struggle for the real autonomy). The danger of Magyarization however continued to loom over the city, since Hungarian nationalists considered Fiume's radical autonomism a mere pretext for separatism and Italian irredentism (whose ideas also began to slowly permeate Fiume, although never gaining as much support as the

autonomism – the multinational character was too deeply rooted in the culture of the city to allow nationalist ideas to bloom at that time), seeing the Magyarization as the only means to counter it. The autonomist newspaper *La Voce del Popolo* came under constant attack of the city's Hungarian-language newspapers, and it was the aforementioned Riccardo Zanella who was regarded by the Hungarians as the greatest danger for the Hungarian Fiume. In 1901 Zanella was narrowly defeated in the election for the city representative in the Hungarian parliament, but during the next four years his popularity grew steadily, and he became a likely winner of the following election in 1905. The pro-Hungarian part of the electorate mobilized in order to tackle Zanella on his way to the victory, however, it was hard to find anyone with a charisma and popularity even close to Zanella's. In an interesting twist of serendipity, Zanella's opponent in the election would be Andrea Ossoinack – the son of the very Luigi Ossoinack who helped establish the Autonomist Association and who chose Zanella as his political protégé.

Andrea Ossoinack and his political path

Andrea Ossoinack was Luigi's second son, born on February 18th 1876. After finishing schools in his native city, he studied at the Academy of Commerce in Pozsony (Bratislava), in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and at the Academy of Applied Arts in Munich. It was his father's idea for Andrea to obtain a Hungarian language education. He initially wanted to engage in the arts, but then accepted his father's offer to help him with the affairs, went to study economics in England, and by his early twenties he already worked at his father's company branch office in London. Returning to Fiume at the time of the conflict between the autonomists and the loyalists, he initially joined the Autonomist Association, but after disagreement with the radical faction of the party, whose stance he thought might jeopardize his business interests (especially after his father's death), he left the party, taking a less rigid approach towards Hungary. The opposition between Zanella and Ossoinack reflected an earlier clash between liberalism (deákism) and radicalism (kossúthism) in Hungary, which has been lingering since the Revolution of 1848. The Compromise of 1867 was a big win for the liberals, who advocated the moderate stance towards Hungarian statehood, admitting that the personal union of two states was in a better interest of Hungary than full independence. The same stance, *mutatis mutandis*, was taken by Ossoinack, who considered that Fiume's position as the only Hungarian seaport is the most advantageous for the city and that severing ties with the government in Pest might come out disastrous for its economy, at that time generously showered with investments from Hungary. In fact, as a businessman, he considered the city's economy and welfare much more important than the statehood or the question of identity, and saw the political course of the Autonomist Association as harmful to the interests of Fiume and its citizens. He did not abandon the struggle for the city's autonomous rights completely (after all, he was still Italian-speaking, although Hungarian-educated), but emphasized the need for a closer collaboration of Fiume and Hungary, claiming that it would benefit all the citizens of Fiume, regardless of their political position. He thus joined the Liberal Party for the election of 1905, and posed as a countercandidate to Zanella in a race for the city's representative in the Hungarian parliament. He was

in fact considered also as a possible candidate by the Autonomist Association, but was rejected as the party did not regard him as a worthy successor of his father's deeds. Ossoinack received support from Baron Ervin Roszner, the then-governor of the city, and the Hungarian-language media in Fiume. His program for the election was based on reestablishing the parliamentary order and ensuring the regular functioning of the parliament, as the current state of affairs (a parliamentary crisis in Hungary at the time) damaged the commercial and economic situation, preserving Fiume's autonomy, fostering harmonious relations between the government and Fiume, and amicable and peaceful coexistence of Fiume's autochthonous population (both Italian and Croatian-speaking) and Hungarian settlers. While both Zanella and Ossoinack stressed the importance of preserving city's autonomy in their programs, for Zanella the interests of Fiume always came first, the interests of Hungary following only if they were compatible with those of Fiume; for Ossoinack, however, there were no interests of Fiume separated from the interests of Hungary. Ossoinack's ideas were not met with enthusiasm in Fiume, since in the end he lost the election, receiving 673 votes to Zanella's 860. For the next few years he would focus on business, trying to maintain the empire conceived by his late father, as the cleavage between the moderates and the radicals grew deeper. He became a consul of Mexico and the grand master of Sirius masonic lodge.

The economic crisis and the events that would gradually lead to the Great War reflected in Fiume as well. Although Zanella's victory and parliamentary mandate did not last for too long (the kossúthists won the parliamentary election of 1905, but the king rejected the result, the elected parliament was dissolved and a new government was formed by the military; the kossúthists were allowed to form government only after giving up their demands on separate Hungarian military and tariffs), his position as the leader of the radical faction of the autonomists strengthened. The final split between the moderates and the radicals within the Autonomist Association would happen in 1911, after the death of Michele Maylender, one of the founding fathers of Fiume's autonomism. A group of moderate autonomists distanced themselves from Zanella and formed the Autonomist League (*Lega autonoma*), a party favoured by Fiume's businessmen maintaining close ties with the government (Ossoinack included). Ossoinack would eventually rise to the rank of the leader of that party. By that time the Hungarian government, led by Károly Khuen-Héderváry, managed to politically constrain the radical faction of the autonomists, the local political bodies came under a strong influence from Pest, and the final straw was the suspension of the city council by the governor in 1913. Although both the Autonomist Association and the Autonomist League objected the move, their mutual antagonism was so strong that they could not reach an agreement on a joint candidate, thus paving the way for Zanella's comeback as a new mayor. His election was however rejected by the king, increasing frustration within the city electorate, and pushing many of the radical autonomists further towards irredentism. The new mayor became Francesco Gilber-to Corrosacz, a more moderate ally of Zanella.

When the war broke out, Fiume's autonomy took a heavy blow. The city itself was spared from bombing (except once), but the industry was reorganized for military production, the port traffic dropped drastically and many Hungarian banks and enterprises

moved back to Budapest. The Ossoinack's business empire also shrank, especially *Adria* and *Oriente*, whose ships were either sunk or confiscated. The situation worsened after Italy entered the war on the Entente side, the Fiume Italian-speaking population thus coming under suspicion of the Hungarian government. Many Italian-speaking Fiumani left the city for Italy, those who were mobilized (including Zanella) swiftly defected, the press was censored or even stopped publishing... The city council formally continued to gather, although it had to comply the directives from Budapest. After the city council was dissolved in 1915, the Autonomous League managed to grab the power in the election, with Antonio Vio, Fiume's representative in the Hungarian parliament, becoming the new mayor. Vio's successor in the parliament, elected by acclamation rather than through regular election, was Andrea Ossoinack. Three years later, as the war luck worsened for the Central Powers in the summer of 1918, and as the outcries for the right of self-determination became stronger throughout Austria-Hungary, Ossoinack would hold a speech in the Hungarian parliament on October 18th 1918, stressing that citizens of Fiume, in accordance with all the other citizens of the Monarchy, also had the right of self-determination in face of the South Slavic aspirations towards the city. The speech caused negative surprise in Hungarian public, ranging from claims that Ossoinack must have given an incomplete statement (somehow omitting the fact that self-determination implies the remaining of Fiume within Hungary), to claims of betrayal of his homeland. However, these reactions did not have any significant impact, since only 10 days later Austria-Hungary collapsed and a new reality, the one where Fiume became a fighting ground between Italy and the new South Slavic state, emerged. Ossoinack's position as the last representative of Fiume in the Hungarian parliament and the speech he gave would give him an opportunity to become Fiume's representative at the peace conference in Paris in 1919 (together with Antonio Grossich and Antonio Vio).

How is it possible for a man who was considered a faithful ally of Hungarian politics in Fiume to make such a political turn? Was he then at all sincere 13 years earlier, while he swore in his good Hungarianness and loyalty during the 1905 election campaign? It is of course not possible to establish Ossoinack's (in) sincerity as a historical fact, but, given other circumstances, we might shed some light on the situation he was going through. To completely understand the situation, one must bear in mind that the Italian-speaking population of Fiume had, for almost a century, been under constant pressure from the surrounding South Slavic population (mostly Croats) striving to annex Fiume to the areas under the authority of Croatian *ban*. In 1779 an imperial decision by the Austrian empress Maria Theresa declared Fiume a free port of Hungary, which was underlined by Joseph II's carving out of Fiume and its surroundings into a special administrative unit called the Hungarian Littoral. After the period of Napoleonic wars the Hungarian Littoral was re-established in 1822 and it was at that time that many Italian-speaking Fiumani started stressing their loyalty to Hungary, as a means of defense against advances of the newly arisen Croatian nationalism. Hungary was a warrant of Fiume's cultural and political particularity. At that time being Hungarian did not mean being Magyarized, i.e. culturally and linguistically assimilated, but strictly politically loyal to the Crown of St. Stephen. Thus, Hungarian authority was just strong enough to save the distinguished identity of the city from Croatian aspirations, while still distant

and weak enough to not carry out the assimilation itself. Even the aforementioned Kossúth's idea of "political Hungarianness" was not at odds with the position held by many Fiumani – they were loyal Hungarian citizens, protected from Croatian pretensions towards their city, while at the same time allowed to speak their own language. The Fiumani loyalty to the Hungarian government was further strengthened with the end of the 19-year Croatian occupation of the city (1848-1867), when Hungarian authority was re-established and the economic development of the city and its port began. It was mostly financed by the Hungarian government and companies, and its *raison d'être* was the need of Hungarian economy to reach the overseas markets. In order to become as little dependent on neighbouring Austria as possible, especially under the ministry of Gábor Baross, Hungary invested bountifully in its only port city, trying to take marine traffic over from Trieste, which at the time was the main port city of Austria and indeed the whole Monarchy. In a span of only thirty or so years, Fiume was reached by two railways, the existing port facilities were expanded and modernized, a new timber exporting port was built, electric street lighting introduced, many new industries and a modern shipyard opened, by the end of the century the city will get its first trams...all financed mostly by Hungarian money. As Giovanni de Ciotta, a mayor of the city throughout most of that period, put it: "I do not personally have anything against Croats, but had Fiume remained under Croatian rule, it would probably still have had only half a pier".¹ Thus, by the last decade of the 19th century, Hungary was a political protector and a key financier of the city's economy, a reason for the welfare of most of its middle and upper class inhabitants. What could have possibly been the reason not to love and support the Hungarian rule?

The problems arose when it became clear that the Hungarians did not mind particular interests of Fiume when they did not suit Hungarian plans and interests, such as when it was decided to build a cargo railway track along the city's main waterfront, because it was the easiest access to the timber exporting port from the main railway station. The citizens objected, because such track uglified the recently built waterfront, but the tracks were nonetheless laid. The things went for even worse when Bánffy became prime minister and introduced his policy of Magyarization. As already mentioned, that was the time when an opposition to the government policy in Fiume started to form – the autonomist movement. But the autonomists were not monolithic – while some of them were happy to restore the earlier state of affairs between the government and Fiume, where the city's autonomous rights would be respected and the government would deal with the economical strategy and finances (preferably taking particular interests of the city more into consideration), the others wanted more autonomy for the city, claiming that Fiume is a separate land of the Crown of St. Stephen, equal in rights to Hungary proper and Croatia, but responsible only to the king. Andrea Ossoinack was the representative of the former faction, Riccardo Zanella of the latter. They both agreed that the Hungarian rule was at the time still protecting Fiume from Croatian pretensions (they even appeared together on the list of the autonomist candidates compiled by the Commission of Hungarian Voters for the 1907 local election, with an outcry that this list is the only chance of resisting Croatian advances in tearing off the city from Hungary – several months earlier the Croatian nationalist *sokolists* marched through the city, destroying shops with

Italian inscriptions and breaking into mayor's house), but did not agree on how much of a threat Hungary itself posed to Fiume and its interests. For Zanella, it was always Fiume first, even if it meant getting at odds with the government; for Ossoinack, the benefit of Fiume at that time relied only on the benefit of Hungary. This is not strange, considering that Ossoinack was at the head of a business empire heavily dependent on a healthy Hungarian exporting economy.

It thus seems one cannot doubt Ossoinack's sincerity in his support for the Hungarian rule, if not for the same reasons the Hungarians would have wanted. But once the situation had changed for the worse and the Hungarian position as Fiume's protector was about to weaken (in the last days of the First World War there were serious talks and plans about the rearrangement of the Monarchy in case it would survive; the rearrangement was about to form a third federal unit, a South Slavic one, whose extent was not finally defined, but it was sure that it would in any case include the surroundings of Fiume, increasing the Croatian pressure to include also the city proper into the new unit), Andrea Ossoinack did not want to stand idle and actually moved to the position so far advocated by the radicals. His speech in the parliament was a clear statement that, whatever would be the fate of Austria-Hungary (whether rearrangement or collapse), he considered Fiume to be a political subject on its own, having a right of self-determination. He stressed that Fiume had always been and always would be Italian in its character, and that it was a political fact as much as it were Hungary or Yugoslavia. Considering that the Hungarian side also had its own plan for Fiume in case it won the war – a strengthening of the city's Hungarianness (i.e. a new wave of Magyarization) – Ossoinack was aware that Fiume's future would not be bright whichever side would rule the city, so taking a radical stance was the only way to strengthen Fiume's position in the course of events.

The last days of the First World War in Fiume were particularly tumultuous. On October 23rd Croatian soldiers took siege of the city, forcing Zoltán Jékelfalussy, the last Hungarian governor of Fiume, to flee the city six days later. When the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was proclaimed on October 29th 1918 in Zagreb, encompassing all the South Slavic territories of Austria-Hungary (including Fiume), a commissioner of the People's Council, a self-declared representative body of the new state, was sent to Fiume to negotiate annexation of the city to the newly proclaimed state. The next day, the Italian-speaking population of the city (constituting about 62% of the total population), led by Antonio Grossich, the president of the newly proclaimed Italian People's Council of Fiume, held a huge popular gathering (a plebiscite, as it would later be called), comprising about 30 000 people who voted for the city to be annexed to Italy. Although the Treaty of London promised Italy to get a substantial area of the eastern Adriatic coast, Fiume was excluded from that area and was to become part of Croatia (or whichever state would succeed Austria-Hungary on that territory). Despite that, the will of the clear majority of population favoured the altering of the treaty and that was the position Andrea Ossoinack was going to defend at the Paris Peace Conference. The situation in Fiume during the autumn and winter of 1918/19 was in a state of constant conflict between Italians and South Slavs, who exchanged control of the city on a daily basis, latter joined by British and French troops trying to maintain peace.

In January 1919 Andrea Ossoinack wrote a pamphlet (or, as he himself put it, an open letter to his fellow citizens) titled *Why should Fiume become Italian (Perché Fiume dev'essere italiana)*, in which he tried to explain his political positions and motives for his actions in the Hungarian parliament and afterwards.⁵ The position he takes in the pamphlet clashes with almost all of the statements he advocated in 1905: he condemns Austria-Hungary as an oppressive state which held its nations in captivity, adopts the stance of Fiume as a subject equal to Hungary and Croatia (advocated earlier by Zanella and rejected by Ossoinack) and stresses the undeniable Italianity of the city, going as far as to consider the Romance culture superior to the South Slavic one. His tone comes nothing short of chauvinism, mentioning that Fiume has for a long time been under a constant influx of Croatian population, mostly doing servant and manual labour, and that this influx impeded a national development of Fiume, through the "dissonant and irritating note" of Fiumani being served by people who spoke only Croatian, and who, besides that, were on such a low cultural level that they did not at all want to engage in the cultural life of the city, let alone strengthen its Italian character. He further accuses Hungarian government for allowing Croatian traders to settle in Fiume, enabling those servants and workers to shop at their establishments and thus driving the Italian traders out of business or weakening them. (It seems he was unaware of, or maybe ashamed by, the fact that he himself was an offspring of one such trader, albeit the one who Italianized after moving to the city.) He then addresses the Hungarian rule, claiming that there were no benefits from it for the citizens of Fiume. He describes that, although many offices and civil services were opened in Fiume at that time, the jobs were mostly taken by Hungarians, and that the Italian element was "excluded, impoverished and humiliated". Hungarians encouraged the infiltration of "foreign and hostile elements" into the city. He further states that Hungary was in reality ruled by the banks and not by the government, and that these banks were the most responsible for the destruction of the country (in fact, there were allegations that he himself accumulated quite a wealth during the First World War through stock market speculations, fostering good relations with Hungarian banks and getting hints about the market early enough to gain advantage over the competition; subsequently, he drove many small shareholders and savers to bankruptcy by such speculations⁶). He points out an inequality of representation in the parliament, where 8 million Hungarians were represented by 406 seats, 2,5 million Croats by 40 seats while 9,5 million of other ethnicities had only 7 national deputies. He welcomes the new Hungarian republic's condemnation of the earlier politics, and assures his support for the port of Fiume to always be open for Hungarian maritime trade. Summing it up, Ossoinack says that "if Hungary, 600 kilometres away, knowing and recognizing the Italianity of Fiume, was chauvinist enough to impose Magyarization on the city, then Yugoslavia, at the gates of Fiume and denying any national liberty to its citizens, would without any hesitation destroy the Italian character of the city". (Unfortunately, the later history would indeed prove this claim more right than wrong.) He claims Yugoslavia would not only destroy the city culturally, but also economically – being less developed than Italy, it would not be able to properly use the full potential of Fiume's port, especially since it would lose the already established system of regular trade shipping lines connecting Fiume to the rest of the world, mostly

held by Italian companies. To put it shortly, it would be more beneficial for Yugoslavia to use Fiume as its exporting port without actually having political control over it. By that, it would contribute to the development of Fiume, instead of ruining it. A similar unfavourable situation would happen if Fiume became a free port: it would have to have much lower operating costs in order to be able to compete with the others, and that would not be possible without a state backing it. Fiume's economic success was hitherto based on Hungarian state subsidies – leaving the city to its own devices would clearly mean putting it into a disadvantageous position. Being a small city of only 50 000 people, the expenses of maintaining a free port would put an enormous financial strain on Fiume and it would have nowhere to turn for financial support. Instead, Ossoinack suggests Fiume should become a free trade zone, politically within the borders of Italy, but offering Yugoslavia (and possibly Hungary) a chance for customs-free export of its goods. The free trade zone would also be good for the city itself, attracting new industries and developing commerce. The pamphlet finishes with yet another underlining of how big a step backwards (both culturally and economically) would be allowing Fiume to fall into the hands of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and by a call to the states of the Entente and USA to respect the liberty of the people and to not allow for one foreign ruler over Fiume to be substituted by another one.

Here we have what seems to be a further swing in the political direction of Andrea Ossoinack. While his speech in the Hungarian parliament was still in line with the autonomist stance he more or less advocated during his political career in Hungary (albeit more radical than earlier), this pamphlet is already clearly leaning towards irredentism and anti-Slavism (and, to a lesser extent, anti-Hungarianism, although mostly addressed to Hungary within the Dual Monarchy). The fear of Fiume being annexed to newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is understandable for its unfavourable economic consequences (Ossoinack has a point arguing that the underdeveloped Yugoslavia would not be able to match the investments Hungary made in Fiume, whereas Italy might be), as is the will to defend the right of self-determination of local population and autonomous rights of the city of Fiume – yet the antagonistic and denigrating tone in which Croats and their earlier role in the life of Fiume are described is too far-fetched for that objective. While the main tactics of the autonomists in the struggle against Magyarization was appealing to the Hungarian respect for sovereign rights of Fiume, here we have a complete distrust that the same tactics of negotiating would have any effect with the government of Yugoslavia, should it manage to get hold of Fiume. To be completely honest, the Italian-speaking population of Fiume did have an opportunity to witness the weakening of the Italian ethnic and cultural element in Dalmatia, where indeed the future did not look very bright for it against the Slavic one; however, it was exactly Andrea Ossoinack who back in 1905 advocated mutual respect and compromise with both Croats and Hungarians as the most beneficial strategy for Fiume. 14 years later he would degrade Croats and other South Slavs to a level of barbarians impossible to negotiate with. The reason for this turn is probably his disappointment by the ethnic clashes between Croats and Italians/Fiumani in the meantime, especially the riots in 1906 and 1907, when the Croatian *sokolists* wreaked havoc on the streets of Fiume.

Moreover, Ossoinack never believed in the Fiuman identity as a base for true statehood – for him the autonomism was only a means of keeping the city's Italian character in the face of Magyarization or Slavisation. As long as the Hungarian government respected Fiume's rights, there was no need for it. And there was no need for it either when an opportunity arose for the city to be annexed to Italy. After all, Ossoinack was a businessman, considering politics as a means to the end – keeping business going. Annexation to Italy was the most favourable option to achieve that goal. Unlike Zanella and his faction, he did not bother to pay much attention to ideals such as homeland or patriotism.

As already mentioned, Andrea Ossoinack appeared at the Paris Peace Conference with a claim that the majority of Fiume's population favoured the annexation to Italy. At the meeting of the Council of Four (Woodrow Wilson, Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Vittorio Orlando) on April 3rd 1919, Wilson strongly opposed the annexation, stressing that it would isolate the city from its natural hinterland, turning it into an economically unviable backwater – unless it became a free port. He repeated these claims on a meeting with Ossoinack the next day. Ossoinack himself produced the aforementioned economy-based counter-argument about the unviability of a free port city-state and the urge to have a state that would step in to back Fiume's port. Since it was clear that the population of the city was absolutely not in favour of joining the new South Slavic state, only Italy was left as a possible candidate, and it was exactly what the population wanted.

Ossoinack's argument and popular will were however to no avail – Wilson was unwilling to cede Fiume to Italy whatsoever, and the solution he finally proposed was declaring the city an independent buffer state, which might even pose as a seat of the League of Nations, a new international organization whose establishment was also proposed by Wilson. Ossoinack was angered by such development and sent a letter of protest to the Senate of the United States, appealing to it as a representative of freedom, universal democracy and social justice, and asking whether it approves Wilson's decision, and if it does, whether it is willing to share the historical responsibility for the fate Fiume will face.⁷ He also promised that Fiume would fight for its existence and liberties, unwilling to accept its fate being decided without its consent.

Indeed, the fight ensued. For the next five years, Fiume was engulfed in a struggle between different factions, each of them having their own vision of the city's future. In September 1919 Fiume was occupied by the volunteer forces (legionnaires, *arditi*) of Gabriele D'Annunzio, establishing the Italian Regency of Carnaro, a *de facto* state, but seeking political unification with Italy. Although D'Annunzio was initially met as a liberator by a majority of Fiume's population, the terror his forces introduced in the city, targeting not only Slavic population but almost anyone who did not share the views of their leader, quickly gained him fierce opposition, not only among the autonomists but among the irredentists as well. Expectedly, the occupation was opposed by the international community, but also by Italy, which in Paris reluctantly agreed on a creation of a free independent state. The Regency of Carnaro was a corporatist state with a strong cult of its leader, an early experiment in a political system that would later in Italy become known as fascism (in fact, the title

duce, later accepted by Mussolini, was for the first time used by D'Annunzio). When the Treaty of Rapallo was signed between Italy and Yugoslavia in November 1920, formalizing the creation of the Free State of Fiume, D'Annunzio proclaimed it an act of treason and declared war on Italy. Italy subsequently attacked Fiume and drove out D'Annunzio and his legionnaires. The Free State was thus established, but its political scene was divided between the autonomists (supported also by a majority of Croats living in the city) and the pro-Italian National bloc. Although autonomists won the parliamentary election in the spring of 1921, their actions were constantly undermined by the National Bloc and supporters of D'Annunzio, who managed to seize parts of the city. By October 1921 the Free State managed to elect its first (and only) president – Riccardo Zanella. His mandate would last only until March 1922, when the supporters of fascism carried out a *coup d'état*, ousting the government that escaped to Kraljevica in Yugoslavia. The Italian government was asked to restore order and the army was sent in to return the control to the constitutional assembly, which at the time consisted mostly of those favouring annexation. However, since the Treaty of Rapallo was still in force, the Free State continued to formally exist until after the fascist takeover of power in Italy in autumn 1922, when all the conditions were met to carry out the annexation. The Free State of Fiume was formally annexed to Italy on the 22 February 1924 by the Treaty of Rome, signed again between Yugoslavia and the now fascist Italy.

Where was Andrea Ossoinack during this political turmoil? In Fiume, of course, as a member of the Italian People's Council. He enthusiastically welcomed D'Annunzio's troops and was disappointed by the subsequent development that led to a conflict between D'Annunzio and Italy. D'Annunzio was expected to finalize the act of annexation whereas instead became a dictator in an experimental state which, despite still officially seeking unification with Italy, was more a vehicle of implementation of D'Annunzio's political ideas than of carrying out the will of its people. After D'Annunzio's ousting, Ossoinack became a member of the National Bloc, a political group opposing autonomists and the Free State (being led by its old nemesis, Zanella). The National Bloc was in a bizarre political position – it was formed after a model of an Italian coalition of the same name (with the same parties included), led by the then-prime minister of Italy Giovanni Giolitti; yet it was Giolitti who signed the Treaty of Rapallo and ordered Italian forces to drive out D'Annunzio and help establish the Free State, the very one against which the Fiuman National Bloc was struggling. After the government of the Free State was established, Ossoinack took satisfaction in attacking it, quoting the current economic situation in the Free State as a key proof for annexation, since Fiume was completely economically dependent on Italy. For him, the Free State was only a political *raison d'être* of the autonomists, while for ordinary citizens its status only made their lives more miserable. He called for another plebiscite, and suggested that Italy, in order to show that it has absolutely no intention in influencing the outcome of the plebiscite, should withdraw its army from Fiume, as well as stop its everyday economic aid. In such way the people of Fiume would presumably realize how important Italian aid was for sustaining Fiume's economy and thus undoubtedly vote for annexation. He even went as far as to say that the Italian rule in Fiume would be more beneficial for the local Slavic population,

since it might give them cultural concessions the Free State would never allow, considering them “insidious and dangerous”.

After the *coup d'état* Ossoinack was one of the members of the National Bloc that were invited to take control of the state when the autonomist-led government escaped the city. That was his last political engagement – he would afterwards gradually retire from politics, especially after the annexation was finally carried out, and would focus on his business enterprises, continuing to advocate the idea of a free trade zone encompassing Fiume and its natural hinterland, including territories in both Italy and Yugoslavia.⁸ He moved to Luxembourg, returning to Fiume in 1939 and leaving it again after the Second World War, when the city fell into the hands of the Yugoslav partisans. He moved to Venice and became an outspoken critic of the Yugoslavian occupation of Fiume, Istria and Dalmatia, frequenting gatherings of the *esuli* and even writing a book *Accusation by the deputy of Fiume Andrea Ossoinack (Atto d'accusa del deputato di Fiume Andrea Ossoinack)*, in which he condemned everyone responsible for “selling” those lands to the Slavs, by denying the popular will expressed in plebiscites. He died in Merano on April 9th 1965. Following his death, the name of this famous and successful Fiuman family vanished from the stage of history.

Conclusion

For free port cities, their main blessing often easily turned into their greatest curse. People flocked in from different regions, ethnical and cultural backgrounds, attracted by opportunities offered by the flourishing economy. Yet this flourishing economy made these cities a wealthy prey in a struggle of emerging nation states. The idea of a nation state was the exact opposite of a free inclusive port city, where everyone was welcome to try one's luck at finding a job or establishing business. When the old multinational empires started to crumble and make their way for new nation states in Europe after the First World War, those cities were left stranded and oftentimes given special political status (think of Danzig, Memmel, even Trieste after the Second World War, but relying on its Austro-Hungarian legacy). The situation with Fiume was even more complicated, since it was an Italian-majority city, surrounded by Croatian-inhabited area, given to Hungary by an Austrian empress, with none of these states having enough authority to undoubtedly claim it. Becoming a successful businessman in such a city meant maintaining good relations with all the sides, while not sticking completely to any of them. That is why among the businessmen and merchants of Fiume a special identity was developed, based on the city itself and not on the state it was currently a part of. As Michele Maylender, the founding father of Fiume's autonomism put it: “if the identity were tied to the citizenship, an average Fiuman family would have changed at least 7 identities in about 400 years”.¹ The Fiuman identity, on the other hand, ensured consistency, albeit, as already mentioned, it started to matter only in the 19th century, when the inter-ethnic tensions began to rise. Although one is tempted to put the sign of equality between the Fiuman identity and autonomism, mainly because the autonomists were the first to turn this into a political question, the history of the Ossoinack family, especially differences between Luigi and Andrea, clearly shows that some of the autonomists never took the idea of a separate ethnic or national identity seriously. Instead, their

opinion of autonomism was that it was a more pragmatic and less militant version of irredentism, although for the same objectives as the latter (irredentism was spreading mainly among the younger population of Fiume, whereas autonomism was the option of the older middle and upper class population). Luigi Ossoinack knew that, despite his talent for business, he was still heavily relying on Hungarian governmental subsidies in *Adria* and on Hungarian mills producing flour he would pack into the barrels made in his factory and then export on his ships. He needed capital from Hungarian banks, he wanted Hungarian market to buy his rice and starch... Yet, he was very well aware that Budapest was 600 kilometres away and its interest in Fiume was purely economic. For Luigi Fiume was his true homeland, and when Fiume's identity was endangered by Magyarization, he showed his priorities. By establishing the Autonomist Association he admitted his loyalty to Hungary, but not under any conditions. His economic power and influence were strong enough for Hungarians to not hold grudge against him for playing a crucial role in actively resisting Magyarization. Even after his death, Hungarian press treated him with respect, while at the same time viciously attacking Zanella, who was in fact his protégé (although more passionate in his speeches).

Andrea Ossoinack, on the other hand, did not have the same business charisma as his father (to be honest, he also lived in harsher times for doing business), so he had to be more politically flexible, swinging during his political career from a moderate deákist to a staunch irredentist (similar to his uncle Giovanni). Being Hungarian educated, he was much more open to Hungarian economic and political influence in Fiume, rejecting Zanella's radicalism and considering it harmful for Fiume and its development. Once this development halted, he was eager to immediately drop his loyalty to Hungary, considering it too weak to either protect Fiume or pose a threat to it. Economically speaking, he sold his shares the moment he realized their value was going to drop. Even his most important historical legacy, the speech in the Hungarian parliament in October 1918, was carried out thoughtfully: capitalizing on the fact that Zanella was absent from the political scene at that time (after defecting from the Austro-Hungarian army, he settled in Rome, coming back to Fiume only in the end of 1918), he took accolades for showing the courage to openly proclaim Fiume's right of self-determination, an act that would make him the hero of both radical autonomists and irredentists and gain him the position of the leader of the Fiume delegation in Paris.

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For most of his political life Andrea Ossoinack was on the opposite side of Zanella, and thus, presumably, also of his own father (we may only wonder what would Luigi think of the 1918-1924 events had he lived to see them, but considering his position on the Fiuman identity he would more probably be inclined to Zanella). While Zanella remained more or less faithful to the idea of a separate Fiuman identity and statehood he had been advocating throughout his political career (encouraged after witnessing the events of 1918/19), Ossoinack sided with the opinion that the Fiuman identity was in fact just a temporary solution of Fiume Italians in the times when the city was firmly embedded within Austria-Hungary, with no possibility of politically joining Italy. Whereas Zanella eventually admitted that Croats (and to a lesser extent Slovenes, Austrians, even Hungarians) also formed a part of the Fiuman identity, for Ossoinack Fiuman equaled Italian. It is thus no wonder that he rejected any intermediary identity after getting a chance to openly express himself as Italian, as well as to articulate his opinion about Slavs and their cultural influence on Fiume. He considered the Free State of Fiume as a fail, both politically and economically. Having finally achieved the political goal he was fighting for, he was wise enough to leave the political scene, concentrating on his main interest, doing business. In fact, he managed to keep such a low profile that there is hardly any information about him after 1924. His luck ran out in 1945, when the results of both his political and economic struggle were lost – not only was the city of Fiume taken over by South Slavs and their “inferior” culture, it was also an introduction of socialism, a system which considered industrialists like Ossoinack enemies of the people. This time, there was no opportunistic option to prevent him from losing both his homeland and his business (although he managed to escape the fate of his uncle Antonio).

Andrea's struggle to shift political options in order to save the family business finally contributed to Ossoinacks' disappearance from the stage of history in a quite disgraceful way. As already mentioned, one cannot blame it entirely on him, his life coinciding with probably the hardest political and economic period of Fiume's history, yet the chronology of his political engagement leaves certain questions about his morality open. We did not take into consideration the unproven accusations of him being on payrolls of different political subjects during his career,⁶ we only focused on his speeches, letters and articles, which clearly demonstrate this opportunistic nature of him. One can only wonder whether his father would have done the same given the circumstances...

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NARODNOST: BIZNISMEN – SLUČAJ OBITELJI OSSOINACK I RIJEKE

SAŽETAK

18. listopada 1918. Andrea Ossoinack, zastupnik grada Rijeke u ugarskom parlamentu, održao je govor u kojem je istaknuo pravo svoga grada na samoodređenje u okolnostima koje su dovele do raspada Austro-Ugarske. Taj je istup bio temeljem Wilsonova prijedloga iz 1919., po kojem bi Rijeka postala slobodna država, iako se Ossoinack pobunio protiv toga, zagovarajući priključenje Italiji. Manje od 14 godina ranije, Ossoinacka su Mađari smatrali gorljivim zagovornikom bliskih veza Rijeke i Mađarske, koji se suprotstavljao Autonomnaškoj stranci i njenim stavovima o zasebnom riječkom identitetu, unatoč činjenici da je Autonomnašku stranku osnovao i financirao njegov otac Luigi, bogati riječki poduzetnik. Povijest obitelji Ossoinack, slavenskoga porijekla i talijanskoga jezika, na čiji je narodni osjećaj i sklonosti u svakom trenutku utjecala gospodarska situacija, pokazuje kako je čak i u doba buđenja nacionalnih država pitanje narodnosti bilo drugotno u odnosu na poslovne interese. Članak pokušava prikazati uspon obitelji Ossoinack, uglavnom se fokusirajući na Luigijeva poslovna postignuća i Andreine kasnije pokušaje da osigura preživljavanje obiteljskog poslovnog carstva u nemirnim riječkim vremenima prve polovice 20. stoljeća, birajući pritom bilo koji identitet potreban da bi se postiglo taj cilj.