

THE MARMAGGI AFFAIR. THE MOST IMPORTANT DIPLOMATIC CONFLICT BETWEEN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE HOLY SEE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

EL ASUNTO MARMAGGI: EL CONFLICTO DIPLOMÁTICO MÁS IMPORTANTE ENTRE CHECOSLOVAQUIA Y LA
SANTA SEDE EN EL PERIODO DE ENTREGUERRAS

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| Abstract |

The present study examines the Marmaggi Affair of the summer of 1925, which represents the most significant diplomatic conflict between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See during the interwar period. This incident serves as a crucial point of analysis for understanding the complexities of Czechoslovak-Vatican relations during that era. The author situates the affair within the broader context of these relations in the 1920s while thoroughly examining its causes, reconstructing its course, and reflecting on its long-term consequences.

The study reveals that the dispute between Prague and Rome was largely a side effect of a long-standing misunderstanding between the Czechoslovak and Vatican parties. This misunderstanding threatened to escalate into an open conflict as early as during the diplomatic service of Marmaggi's predecessor, Clemente Micara, in the early 1920s. The tensions were fueled by differing political interests and cultural misunderstandings that complicated the bilateral relationship.

In conducting this research, the author draws on a wide range of primary sources, including documents from the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the National Archive, the Archive of the T. G. Masaryk Institute, the Vatican Apostolic Archive, and the Historical Archive of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See. These documents are critically compared with relevant academic literature, particularly works of Czech provenance, providing a comprehensive understanding of the affair. This study ultimately contributes to the broader discourse on international diplomacy in the interwar period and highlights the intricate dynamics between church and state.

Keywords: Holy See; Czechoslovakia; Papal politics; Apostolic nuncio; Francesco Marmaggi; 1925.

| Resumen |

El presente estudio examina el Asunto Marmaggi, ocurrido en el verano de 1925, que constituye el conflicto diplomático más significativo entre Checoslovaquia y la Santa Sede durante el periodo de entreguerras. Este incidente sirve como un punto de

análisis crucial para comprender las complejidades de las relaciones entre Checoslovaquia y el Vaticano en esa época. El autor sitúa esta problemática en el contexto más amplio de estas relaciones en la década de 1920, examinando a fondo sus causas, reconstruyendo su desarrollo y reflexionando sobre sus consecuencias a largo plazo. El estudio revela que la disputa entre Praga y Roma fue, en gran medida, el resultado de un antiguo malentendido entre las partes checoslovaca y vaticana. Este contencioso ya había amenazado con convertirse en un conflicto abierto durante el servicio diplomático del predecesor de Marmaggi, Clemente Micara, a principios de la década de 1920. Las tensiones se vieron alimentadas por intereses políticos divergentes y malentendidos culturales, lo que complicó la relación bilateral.

Para llevar a cabo esta investigación, el autor recurre a una amplia gama de fuentes primarias, entre ellas documentos del Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de la República Checa, el Archivo Nacional, el Archivo del Instituto T. G. Masaryk, el Archivo Apostólico Vaticano y el Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Estado de la Santa Sede. Estos documentos se comparan críticamente con la bibliografía académica pertinente, en particular con obras de procedencia checa, lo que proporciona una comprensión integral del asunto. En última instancia, este estudio contribuye al discurso más amplio sobre la diplomacia internacional en el periodo de entreguerras y pone de relieve la compleja dinámica entre la Iglesia y el Estado.

Palabras clave: Santa Sede; Checoslovaquia; Política papal; Nuncio apostólico; Francesco Marmaggi; 1925.

| Introduction |

Although numerous Czech and Slovak studies have addressed the “Marmaggi Affair”, we believe that none of them reflects the current state of research in terms of the sources and literature available today on the personality and activities of Francesco Marmaggi, the Apostolic Nuncio to Prague. Currently, the most basic research sources in order to write a study on Marmaggi include in particular the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the National Archive, the Archive of the T. G. Masaryk Institute, the Vatican Apostolic Archive, and the Historical Archive of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See.

We believe that the existing studies represent a rather partial view of the analyzed affair or a certain reflection of it¹, without there being a detailed and comprehensive analytical study of the causes, course and consequences of the Marmaggi Affair that places the event in the context of Czechoslovak-Vatican diplomatic relations in the 1920s and the

¹ Vecera, P. (2008). The Marmaggi affair: The role of Catholicism through the lens of the left-wing press of the time [Marmaggiho aféra: Úloha katolicizmu optikou dobových tistených médií levice]. In P. Marek (Ed.), *Theory and practice of political Catholicism 1870–2007* [Teorie a praxe politickeho katolicizmu 1870–2007] (pp. 205–225). Brno: CDK; Kotyk, J. (2009). Karel Kramar and the Marmaggi affair [Karel Kramar a Marmaggiho aféra]. In L. Velek & J. Bilek (Eds.), *Karel Kramar (1860–1937). Life and work* [Karel Kramar (1860–1937). Život a dílo] (pp. 486–489). Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR; Zmatlo, P. (2010). The response to the Marmaggi affair in the pages of two Slovak dailies [Ohlas Marmaggiho aféry na stránkach dvoch slovenských stranických denníkov]. In J. Hanus, P. Macala, & P. Marek (Eds.), *Churches of the 19th and 20th centuries in Slovak and Czech historiography* [Cirkve 19. a 20. storočia v slovenskej a českej historiografii] (pp. 493–521). Brno: CDK; Zmatlo, P. (2009). The Marmaggi affair in party newspaper of the time in Slovakia [Marmaggiho aféra v dobovej straníckej tlači na Slovensku]. *Ruzomberok Historical Proceedings* [Ruzomberský historický zborník], 3, 173–204; Pehr, M. (2011). Marmaggi's affair seen by Eduard Jelen [Marmaggiho aféra pohľadom Eduarda Jelena]. *Journal of the National Museum. Historical series* [Casopis Národního muzea. Rada historická], 180, 12–31. *historická*] 180, 2011, pp. 12–31; Ehrenberger, T. (2002). The 1925 Hus celebrations as a cause of the diplomatic conflict between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican [Husovy oslavy v roce 1925 jako příčina diplomatického konfliktu mezi Československem a Vatikanem]. *Marginalia Historica*, 5, 157–200; Ehrenberger, T. (2002). The Hus celebrations as a cause of the diplomatic conflict between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican [Husuv svatek jako příčina diplomatického konfliktu mezi Československem a Vatikanem]. *History and the Present Day. Cultural and Historical Review* [Dejiny a súčasnosť. Kulturné historická revue], 24, 23–27; Vnuk, F. (1999). Crisis in Prague-Vatican relations in 1925 [Kríza vo vzťahoch Praha-Vatikan v roku 1925]. *Historical Proceedings* [Historický zborník], 9, 59–70; Malagyi, J. (2011). The relationship between the First Czechoslovak Republic and the Vatican – The Marmaggi affair [Vztah I. ČSR a Vatikánu – Marmaggiho aféra]. In M. Bezák, I. Hauerlandová, & M. Vlha (Eds.), *Academic accents. Proceedings from an academic conference with international participation held on September 9, 2010* [Akademické akcenty. Zborník príspevkov z odborného seminára s medzinárodnou účasťou konaného dňa 9. septembra 2010] (pp. 68–74). Bratislava: Paneuropeska vysoká škola.

work of Apostolic Nuncio Marmaggi. The present study thus aims to contribute to the alleviation of this “debt” and to describe and interpret the affair within its scope. It does not aspire to provide a detailed analysis of the events, as that is a far greater task, which will undoubtedly require a separate monograph to accomplish.

| Diplomatic Strains: Czechoslovakia and the Holy See |

Czechoslovakia came into existence as a successor state to Austria-Hungary at the end of World War I in October 1918. The painful experience of World War I and its consequences had strongly radicalized the population, which significantly contributed to the harsh and sometimes violent stance against the Catholic Church and the symbols of Catholicism in the Czech Lands. A part of society perceived the Catholic Church as an accomplice of the centuries-long Austrian oppression and associated the Church's organization with the former monarchy. Therefore, after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia, the initial anger of a part of Czech society was directed against the reminders of the Habsburg's power and the influence of the Catholic Church, resulting in many valuable historical landmarks falling victim to this.

The situation was even more complicated, as the posts of Residential Bishops were mostly held by Church leaders of aristocratic origin, conservative mindset and pro-Habsburg orientation. After 1918, these dignitaries thus often regarded the fall of the *Catholic* Habsburg monarchy as the loss of an established confessional society and the end of State support for religion, which they perceived as a tragedy and personal defeat. In the west of the Republic, i.e. in the Czech Lands, two important archbishopric thrones – in Prague and Olomouc – were refilled. In the east of the country, i.e. in Slovakia, five of the six thrones were refilled, as they had been occupied by Church dignitaries of Hungarian origin, who had little sympathy for the new State regime based on the principles of republican democracy.

The prevailing tension between Czechoslovakia and the Catholic Church, which was greatly exacerbated by the reform demands of a part of the Czech clergy and the journey of its delegation to Pope Benedict XV in 1919, contributed to the establishment of the Czechoslovak Church, independent of Rome, in January 1920. This resulted in the exodus of thousands of the faithful of the Catholic Church and affected daily life in the country. The foundation of the new Church was the culmination of the long-standing efforts of reformist priests within the Catholic Church who had demanded a number of reforms, which had been refused by Rome. The new Church was ceremonially proclaimed on Sunday, January 11, 1920 in the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in the Old Town Square, Prague. This had been preceded by the ceremonial proclamation *To the Czechoslovak Nation* a day earlier, delivered by priest Karel Farsky, a prominent figure of the new Church, who later became a Patriarch (Farsky, 1920, pp. 39-41).

From the perspective of Czechoslovak-Vatican diplomatic relations, it is somewhat surprising that Pope Benedict XV recognized the legitimacy of the successor states in

Central Europe, including Czechoslovakia, as early as in November 1918, shortly after the end of the war. He then called their representatives to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See through the agency of the Apostolic Nuncio to Vienna, Teodor Valfrè de Bonzo, who was considered a profound expert on Central European affairs. Bonzo's activities led to the official establishment of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See in October 1919. Bonzo's Secretary, Clemente Micara, subsequently became the first Vatican Envoy to Prague, while Kamil Krofta, a historian, university professor and diplomat, was appointed as the first Czechoslovak Envoy to the Holy See².

However, Micara's diplomatic mission was short, lasting only until the summer of 1923. The Nuncio himself ended his mission voluntarily and at his own request, after his diplomatic talks with the Czechoslovak government led nowhere and he saw no way out of the deadlock. The protracted and fruitless discussions on political-religious issues in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia between 1921 and 1922, when an acceptable compromise was only reached after months of negotiations, exhausted the Nuncio and he no longer wished to stay in Prague. This was further exacerbated by Micara's declining prestige among the domestic clergy, the Czechoslovak government and the representatives of political Catholicism³. Shortly after the conclusion of his Czechoslovak mission, Micara was appointed as Apostolic Nuncio to Brussels and Internuncio to Luxembourg, remaining there until 1946 when he was created Cardinal. The former Apostolic Nuncio concluded his earthly pilgrimage in Rome, dying there at the age of 86 in March 1965 (Smid, 2015, pp. 385-386).

| Diplomatic Renewal: Marmaggi's Mission in Czechoslovakia |

Micara's successor arrived in Prague in August 1923. The new Apostolic Nuncio, Francesco Marmaggi, a native of Rome, had experience from his diplomatic mission in Romania, as well as from his teaching activities at the Pontifical University of St. Apollinare in Rome. In 1900, he had been ordained as a Priest in the St. John Lateran Archbasilica. Prior to his entry into the service of the Roman Curia, he taught at the aforementioned university. In 1904, he served as an articled clerk at the Secretariat of State of the Holy See; from 1908 to 1917, he held the post of Under-Secretary of the Section for Relations with States, which is the external section of the Secretariat of State, concentrating on diplomacy and relations between the Catholic Church and foreign governments. At that time, Marmaggi even briefly deputized for Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri (Smid, 2015, pp. 67–70). His extensive education, teaching qualifications, energetic character and many years of experience in the Roman Curia convinced high Vatican dignitaries that he was one of the most qualified men to handle the difficult office in Czechoslovakia.

² Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Segreteria di Stato, rubrica 289, fascicolo 1.

³ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 5, fascicolo 19; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1922–1923, Pallier September 1, 1922, and January 31, 1923.

The tasks of Marmaggi's mission in Czechoslovakia were predetermined both by Micara's concluding report and the instructions of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See. The Secretary of the Holy Consistory, Gaetano De Lai, gave the new Nuncio brief instructions on his priorities before the first meeting with the Czechoslovak side. Based on this, Marmaggi continued the activities of his predecessor immediately after his arrival in Czechoslovakia, informing the Holy See about the situation in dioceses, especially in the east of the Republic. Gaetano De Lai also informed Marmaggi about the spiritual atmosphere in the country, the political situation, the Church-religious attitude of important politicians, etc., as the young Republic was facing many difficulties that also affected the Church-religious sphere⁴.

Based on the suggestions of the Holy See, Marmaggi's main tasks were to maintain the unity of faith against the dangers of schismatic agitation, develop pastoral practices among the population, promote meetings of the faithful in parishes, proceed with the struggle against Sokol, increase the interest in priestly vocations, maintain as much of the Church property as possible, and to solve the questions of Karel Anton Medvecký, a priest and Officer for Religious Affairs in the Ministry with Power of Attorney to administer Slovakia, who spoke out strongly against the Bishop of Kosice, Augustin Fischer-Colbrie. In addition, Marmaggi received information on how to proceed in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where there were different religious conditions from the rest of the Republic, as it was a completely religiously, ethnically and socially heterogeneous territory, which was also extremely backward and poor⁵.

Prior to Marmaggi's departure for Prague, the new Czechoslovak Envoy, Vaclav Pallier, met with him in Rome at the beginning of the summer of 1923. The former Apostolic Nuncio, Clemente Micara, attended the meeting as well. Pallier discussed with both Church dignitaries the Church-religious situation in Czechoslovakia and the current affairs of Czechoslovak-Vatican diplomatic relations. As Pallier's report of late June 1923 indicates, Marmaggi made a good impression on him as an uncomplicated and modest man, but Pallier was rather reserved about Micara⁶.

The diplomatic representative of the Holy See, Francesco Marmaggi, arrived in Prague on August 23, 1923, where he was awaited at Wilson Station (today's Prague Main Railway Station) by prominent representatives of the political, religious and cultural life of the country. Among others were Prague Archbishop Frantisek Kordac, and the Chairman of the Provincial Executive Commission of the Czechoslovak People's Party in Bohemia, Bohumil Stasek, who welcomed the new Nuncio to Czechoslovakia with sincere joy. A month later, Marmaggi submitted his credentials to President Masaryk in Prague Castle⁷. Marmaggi thus became the second Apostolic Nuncio to Prague after 1918.

⁴ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 30, fascicolo 135, f. 141, De Lai to Marmaggi June 30, 1923.

⁵ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 30, fascicolo 135, ff. 143–146.

⁶ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1923, Pallier June 30, 1923.

⁷ Masaryk, T. G. (2007). *The path of democracy* [Cesta demokracie] (Vol. 2). Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR; The People's Paper [Lidové listy], II, Nr. 217, September 21, 1923, p. 1 The Inaugural Audience of Apostolic Nuncio Marmaggi with the President of the Republic [Nastupní audience papežského nuncia Marmaggiho u prezidenta republiky]; National Paper [Národní listy], LXIII, Nr. 259, September 21, 1923, p. 3 The Inaugural Audience of the New Apostolic Nuncio [Nastupní audience nového papežského nuncia]; The Czech [Čech, XLVIII, Nr. 259, September 21, 1923, p. 1 The Inaugural Audience of the Apostolic Nuncio [Nastupní audience papežského nuncia]; Archive of the President's Office [Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky], fund T, sign. T1249/23 Marmaggi.

After his arrival, Marmaggi continued the work of his predecessor, in which he was assisted by the Secretary of the former Nuncio, Antonino Arata. Marmaggi observed with interest the political, religious, economic, cultural and national conditions in the country, reporting on the situation to the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Pietro Gasparri. For example, he commented on the municipal elections of September 1923⁸, the young Czechoslovak Church and its first Congress in August 1924⁹, the Unionist Congress in Velehrad at the turn of August 1924, which he attended in person, and the situation in Slovakia (Zlamal, 2010, p. 73; Hrabovec, 2012, p. 71). His experience as a pastor in the poor working-class Trastevere district of Rome, as well as his contact with the non-Christian environment in the Balkans literally predestined him for a mission in the industrial Czech Lands.

In diplomatic terms, the appointment of Marmaggi as Apostolic Nuncio to Prague signaled a new period in Czechoslovak-Vatican relations. Through the agency of this higher official of the Roman Curia, the Holy See sought to launch more intense negotiations with the Czechoslovak government on the political-religious situation in the country, particularly on the question of the filling of dioceses and the demarcation of their boundaries, which had led to a dead end under Marmaggi's predecessor. We can thus assume that Marmaggi acted as a vigorous and decisive representative of the Holy See, with clear instructions, balancing the influence of the rather indecisive and compliant former Nuncio Micara. Marmaggi's agenda was relatively extensive, so it encompassed the spiritual life of most of the dioceses in the country, both among Roman and Greek Catholics.

For example, in the spring of 1924, Czechoslovak-Vatican diplomatic relations were affected by the question of the Bishop of Brno, Norbert Klein, about whom the clergy of his diocese allegedly complained to the Vatican. They criticized him for neglecting his pastoral duties, not devoting himself to Church affairs, and maintaining an anti-State mindset. The Czechoslovak Envoy to the Holy See, Vaclav Pallier, believed that if those accusations proved to be true, Prague should urge Klein's removal from office¹⁰.

Another difficult negotiation concerned the question of monks, particularly the Piarists, Premonstratensians and Redemptorists, whose religious houses were to be united in a single Czechoslovak province. Their representatives complained in Rome about the Czechoslovak government, which had burdened their estates by a considerable confiscation of property as part of land reform. However, the negotiations dragged on, encountering the frequent absence of the general superiors of these orders in Rome, as well as the wishes of the monks for the establishment of a separate Slovak vice-province, which would not be united in a single province¹¹.

⁸ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 49, ff. 26–27, Marmaggi to Gasparri October 25, 1923.

⁹ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 3, ff. 47–54, Marmaggi to Gasparri September 10, 1924.

¹⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier, May 1, 1924; Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 37, file 222, ff. 9–10, Nitz to Arata September 26, 1924, and ff. 19–20, Nitz to Arata December 29, 1924.

¹¹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier May 1, 1924, and November 4, 1924.

Although most of Marmaggi's negotiations took place in Prague, more serious issues were discussed in Rome with other Church dignitaries of the Holy See. In May 1924, Foreign Minister Benes himself traveled to the Eternal City in order to hold talks with Secretary of State Gasparri and the Secretary of the Section for Relations with States, Francesco Borgongini Duca. The subject of their discussion concerned the question of the Czechoslovak dioceses that were still administered by bishops of foreign nationalities. Based on the mutual agreement, the dioceses were to be filled with new Apostolic Administrators and their boundaries delimited in accordance with the State borders. However, the Vatican expected the Czechoslovak side to exclude Church estates from land reform, that is to exempt them from the high taxation, so that the income derived from the estates for charitable and cult activities would not be reduced¹².

However, the priority of Benes's journey to Rome was to meet with the Italian government, with which he concluded a Czechoslovak-Italian Treaty on May 15. By signing the document, Czechoslovakia was trying to balance its hitherto one-sided attachment to France, while Italy sought to strengthen its influence on the Little Entity. Nonetheless, due to the ongoing Matteotti crisis, the treaty was signed only by the Czechoslovak Envoy to Italy, Vlastimil Kybal, on behalf of Czechoslovakia on July 5. Given the further development of relations between the two countries, the agreement between Czechoslovakia and Italy had little effect¹³.

The Fourth Unionist Congress in Velehrad was an extraordinary event in the spiritual life in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1920s. It was the first meeting of its kind in the democratic environment of the Czechoslovak Republic in the summer of 1924. The Congress was attended by prominent Church representatives from Central and Eastern Europe. The absent Pope Pius XI was deputized for by Nuncio to Prague Marmaggi and the Czechoslovak government was represented by the Head of the Church-political department of the Foreign Ministry, Arnost Rostocil.

The important Congress was attended by leading figures of Czechoslovak and foreign spiritual life, e.g. the Director of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, Michael d'Herbigny, the Prague Archbishop and Czech Primate, Frantisek Kordac, the Archbishop of Olomouc, Metropolitan of Moravia and President of the Congress, Leopold Precan, the enthusiastic supporter of Czechoslovak Unionism, regular participant of the congress in Velehrad and supporter of the Apostolate of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Nitra Bishop Karol Kmetko, the Bishop of Spis, Jan Vojtassak, the Bishop of Kosice, Augustin Fischer-Colbrie, Slovak politician and lawyer, Martin Micura, the Chairman of the Slovak People's Party, Papal Chamberlain, priest and deputy, Andrej Hlinka, Catholic intellectual and journalist, Alfred Fuchs, the Hegumen of the Greek Catholic Redemptorist Monastery in Stropkov, Dominik Metodej Trcka, and others.

¹² Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 52, ff. 20–23, Marmaggi to Gasparri June 16, 1924; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier May 31, 1924.

¹³ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1924, Pallier, June 30, 1924.

In addition, more than 30 Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots and Prelates, both local and foreign (Yugoslavia, Poland), and a number of university professors, priests, monks and Catholic laymen arrived in Velehrad in Moravia. Present were also Church dignitaries from Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania, Lithuania, Ukraine, the United States, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Historians mention more than 400 participants in the Congress from the ranks of Church dignitaries. As for religious orders, the reports of the time mention the Benedictines, Premonstratensians, Franciscans, Jesuits, Assumptionists, Redemptorists and Basilians. In terms of number of attendees, the Congress had the highest attendance of Church dignitaries in the history of unionist congresses (Salajka, 1924/1925, p. 13).

The Holy See perceived the Congress as an intellectual cultivation, scientific debate and Christian manifestation of faith against the threats that Czechoslovakia had been facing since its creation, particularly the dangers of Hussitism¹⁴ and modernism. In the spirit of earlier congresses, the Holy See supported the efforts of its organizers to bring all Slavs together in faith¹⁵.

| Deteriorating Ties: Marmaggi and the Hus Commemoration |

Czechoslovak-Vatican diplomatic relations and the position of Nuncio Marmaggi deteriorated in the spring of 1925, when the question of the Hus celebrations and its organization was brought up. The celebrations were preceded by a series of turbulent controversies in Parliament, where the Law on the Holidays and Memorial Days of the Czechoslovak Republic (Law No. 65/1925 Coll.) was adopted on April 3, 1925, abolishing some Church holidays (e.g. three Marian feast days) and introducing new ones (St. Wenceslas, St. Cyril and St. Methodius, Jan Hus)¹⁶.

The Catholic Church perceived as especially unacceptable the introduction of a new public holiday on July 6, the anniversary of the 15th-century burning of Master Jan Hus, who was regarded mainly as a heretic and fighter against Rome in Church circles. Among others, Nuncio Marmaggi protested against the Bill, reproaching the Czechoslovak government for not discussing with the Holy See the question of the abolition and establishment of public holidays and suggesting that the Czechoslovak side should hold a private celebration instead of the planned grand celebrations. Secretary of State Gasparri then labeled the Hus celebrations as an expression of *hostility towards Catholics*

¹⁴The Czechoslovak (Hussite) Church, founded on the reform demands of the Czech clergy and inspired by the ideas of 15th-century Hussitism (including the use of the national language in the liturgy, communion under both forms, the abolition of celibacy, and the free election of bishops, among others), was established on January 8, 1920, at the National House in Prague. Although most of the priests who voted for independence from the Catholic Church in January 1920 did not join the Czechoslovak National Church, the movement gained widespread support across various segments of Czech society. In a short time, the Church had already attracted 200 000 followers. According to the 1921 Czechoslovak census, the new Church had 525 346 members, and by the 1930 census, its membership had grown to 793 385. Its members adhered to the figure of the Czech priest, religious thinker, and reformer John Huss, who criticized the moral decline of the Catholic Church. In 1415, he was burned at the stake in Constance. For better context regarding the significance of the Hussites at the time, see: Smid, M. (2020). *Mission: Apostolic Nuncio in Prague. Czechoslovakian-Vatican Diplomatic Relations Between 1920 and 1950*. Prague: Karolinum, pp. 221–226.

¹⁵ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 40, file 247, f. 28, Kordac to Gasparri March 15, 1924.

¹⁶ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Pallier April 1, 1925.

and the Holy See¹⁷. The Czechoslovak Envoy to the Holy See, Vaclav Pallier, therefore met with Secretary of State Gasparri and high officials of the Roman Curia, Francesco Borgongini Duca and Giuseppe Pizzardo, in order to explain to them the Czech view of the national and cultural importance of the personage of Jan Hus, who was recognized especially by the left-wing bloc.

Through the lens of the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy See regarded the introduction of the Jan Hus holiday as a hostile gesture towards Catholicism. In April 1925, they therefore summoned Marmaggi to Rome to report in person on the situation in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak government, on the other hand, perceived the Nuncio's attitude towards the approval of the Law on Public Holidays as incorrect, considering it a gross interference in the internal affairs of Marmaggi's host country (Ehrenberger, 2002, pp. 173–174).

Before the Hus celebrations in July 1925, Nuncio Marmaggi surveyed the current attitudes of the highest State officials, including President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, hoping that they would moderate their radical stance. However, when he learned that the celebrations would be carried out according to plan and with the presence of the highest political figures, he informed the Vatican about it. Foreign Minister Benes assured Marmaggi that the character of the celebrations would be national, without any ambitions to “irritate” the Church, but the attitude of left-wing politicians, including President Masaryk himself, a well-known socialist anticlerical, aroused a suspicion of the opposite.

On July 3, Secretary of State Gasparri protested to the Czechoslovak Envoy to Rome, Vaclav Pallier, regarding Masaryk's protectorate over the celebrations and Svehla's honorary presidency, threatening him with the removal of the Apostolic Nuncio from Prague. Nuncio Marmaggi also protested to Foreign Minister Edvard Benes. In order to emphasize the importance of the actions of the Holy See, Jan Sramek, Chairman of the Czechoslovak People's Party and Catholic priest, threatened the government with the resignation of the party members¹⁸.

As the celebrations approached, Nuncio Marmaggi requested another audience with Foreign Minister Benes. However, Benes delayed the audition, receiving the Nuncio no sooner than on July 6 at 10 a.m. The Foreign Minister stated in front of the Vatican representative that the President and Prime Minister's participation in the celebrations was unofficial, and repeated that the Czechoslovak side did not see the celebrations as an attack against the Holy See. However, the Nuncio regarded the celebrations as an insult, regardless of their informality. He complained about the inadequate explanation of the incident by the government and told Benes that he had to go to Rome immediately at the Pope's insistence¹⁹.

¹⁷ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 55, f. 16, Gasparri to Marmaggi March 1, 1925.

¹⁸ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 57, f. 6, Marmaggi's typewritten diary.

Sramek's resignation would have led to the withdrawal of the Czechoslovak People's Party, the Catholic political party, from the government. As a result, this could have triggered the radicalization of the governing camp or prompted further attacks against Catholics in Czechoslovakia. It could also have led to a deterioration of relations between Czechs and Slovaks.

¹⁹ Ibid., f. 7.

The course of the celebrations confirmed the darkest fears of Catholic Church leaders. The Hus celebrations were a nationwide event and, in many places, actually turned into anti-Catholic demonstrations, although neither President Masaryk nor Prime Minister Svehla delivered speeches during the official celebrations in Prague's Old Town Square. The decisive and loyal Francesco Marmaggi thus followed Pius's instructions and, despite his personal doubts about the wisdom of the gesture, left for Rome on the evening of July 6, 1925²⁰.

The Vatican considered Marmaggi's recall from Prague as a strong formal protest against the participation of the government in the commemorative gathering in a predominantly Catholic country. They certainly did not see the Nuncio's departure as the severance of diplomatic relations, as they put Marmaggi's former Secretary Antonino Arata in charge of the Prague Nunciature as chargé d'affaires. Four days after the celebrations, Czechoslovak Envoy Vaclav Pallier left Rome and the diplomatic representation to the Holy See was entrusted to chargé d'affaires Eduard Jelen.

| Radicalization and Reaction: The Marmaggi Crisis |

The Nuncio's sudden departure, the explanation of which was published in the press on July 7 1925, radicalized Czech society which understood Marmaggi's action mainly as a provocation on the part of the Holy See. Subsequently, these events gave rise to what was known as the Marmaggi Affair, which culminated in July and August 1925, paralyzing the political and social life of the country. However, the affair resonated mainly in the Czech Lands and to a lesser extent in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which remained mostly immune to changes in Church-religious affairs.

The personage of the Apostolic Nuncio as well as the Holy See and Catholicism in general were harshly attacked by the press, especially left-wing newspapers such as *Ceske slovo*, *Moravske slovo*, *Vecernik Prava lidu*, *Rude pravo*, which ran dozens of passionate and emotional articles about the attitude of the Vatican representative and the significance of his action for Czechoslovakia²¹. They used the Nuncio mainly for anti-Catholic attacks and to manifest the break of the nation with the outdated clericalism, which they wanted to replace with democracy, progress, modernity, secularism and perhaps even atheism. In this, they were successfully aided by liberal circles, which soon resulted in the politicization of the affair. Hundreds of articles in Czech and dozens more in international languages were published about Marmaggi in the summer and fall of 1925, as the sensitive subject also resonated abroad, particularly in Germany, Italy and France.

²⁰ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 57, f. 11, Gasparri to Marmaggi July 4, 1925.

²¹ Some articles were apologetic: "Our people, and our state, do not deserve to be treated as an inferior people. If our state is considered an unwelcome presence in the broader concept of Roman papal politics, it does not justify its representatives humiliating us." These were understandably fewer in number, while others quickly shifted to counterattacks: "Let the power of Rome fall by the elemental force from below, and let the political clerical power be swept away... To battle! Charge and persist in the attack!" However, the low quality of these articles interestingly reflects the passions that this political-religious issue stirred in the summer of 1925, when the figure of Francesco Marmaggi became a symbolic center.

The unpleasant case was also reflected in the press of the Holy See. For example, the Vatican *L'Osservatore Romano* ran a brief report on the incident on July 12, condemning Hus's heresy and declaring him as an inappropriate national symbol in a predominantly Catholic country. The members of the Diplomatic Corps in the Vatican also showed great interest in the incident, seeing in Marmaggi's departure the decisiveness of Pius's actions²².

The reaction of the Holy See to the events of July 6 was criticized by practically all newspapers, except for the Catholic press. Deputies of the Czech National Social Party even labeled the Nuncio's departure from Prague as an attack against Czechoslovakia and demanded a complete severance of diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Some radicals even requested the separation of Church and State²³.

Czech and Moravian bishops subsequently took the side of the Holy See, and in their pastoral letter of August 1, 1925 they emphasized the following: *Being oriented by the light of objective truth and faith, Czechoslovak Catholics are not going to be made to believe in the traditionalist prejudices of Protestantism and non-belief, including Hus, whose literary and national merits they acknowledge. They tolerantly let everyone have their own religious beliefs, but they despise unworthy campaigning at public meetings, and protest against the abuse of official positions of responsible corporations to promote the apostasy from the Catholic Church*²⁴.

Foreign Minister Benes believed that the confrontation line between the Catholic bloc on one hand and the socialist and liberal blocs on the other would harm the young Republic, so he was prepared to calm the turbulent emotions of Czech society and to reject the "cultural fight", which threatened to break out in the summer of 1925. It was only thanks to his extraordinary abilities that Czechoslovak-Vatican relations were not suspended, and the dispute did not escalate into a complete rupture, although the Czechoslovak government made an official declaration on July 18, 1925, refusing responsibility for the existing incident and the Nuncio's departure from Prague²⁵.

Despite the instructions of the Holy See, Sramek's Czechoslovak People's Party remained part of Svehla's Coalition and did not leave the government, as Sramek knew that the absence of members of his Party from the government would lead to further anti-Church and anti-Catholic campaigning. Hlinka's Slovak People's Party also took the side of the Holy See, as well as Czech and Moravian bishops, who issued a pastoral letter on August 1, 1925, opposing the official perception of Jan Hus and the abuse of his name for anti-Catholic attacks²⁶.

²² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1925, Jelen August 3, 1925.

²³ Archive of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Parliamentary press Nr. 5 259 (259 (First Election Period)).

²⁴ The National Archive, fund Ministry of Foreign Affairs – newspaper clipping archive (the Vatican and Czechoslovakia), box file I 595, Czech [Cech] August 19, 1925.

²⁵ National Paper [Narodni listy], volume 65, Nr. 196, July 19, 1925, p. 1.

²⁶ However, unlike Slovak bishops, not all Czech bishops were united. For example, the Bishop of Litomerice, Josef Gross, and the Bishop of Brno, Norbert Klein, protested against the publication of the letter. Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 59, f. 50, Arata to Gasparri August 6, 1925, and ff. 87–88, Arata to Gasparri August 21, 1925; The National Archive, fund Ministry of Foreign Affairs – newspaper clipping archive (the Vatican and Czechoslovakia), box file I 595, Czech [Cech] August 19, 1925, The Czech Word [Ceske Slovo], August 18, 1925, National Paper [Narodni listy] August 19, 1925.

| Restoring Relations: The Path to Reconciliation |

In early October 1925, the Secretary of the Nunciature, Antonino Arata, thoroughly analyzed the diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovak government and the Prague Apostolic Nunciature, in order to find a way out of the crisis. In his commemorative letter to Rome, Arata expressed the view that the behavior of the Czechoslovak government had been shaped by the prejudice against Rome and the desire for the separation of Church and State, which had strongly resonated in the country shortly after its creation at the turn of the 1920s²⁷. He also expressed the hope that, with many months of hindsight and insight into the consequences of the Hus celebrations, even President Masaryk was eager to settle the dispute and restore diplomatic relations with the Vatican²⁸.

The Holy See was first to take a forthcoming initiative after the departure of the Apostolic Nuncio. In order to improve the cold relations with the Vatican, they sent Pietro Ciriaci, Under-Secretary of the Section for Relations with States, to Czechoslovakia, who was to restore the broken diplomatic bonds. In this difficult task, he was assisted by 41-year-old diplomat Saverio Ritter, a former co-worker of the Pope at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, who was to replace Arata as Secretary of the Prague Nunciature in the case of the failure of Ciriaci's mission (Dejmek, 1994, p. 269).

It was mainly to Arata's credit that the 1926 Hus celebrations took place in a peaceful atmosphere and calmed the still indignant Holy See, although the members of the Sokol physical education organization, which was protected especially by President Masaryk, were planning a big anti-Catholic manifestation.

Prior to the Hus celebrations, (Arch)bishops Frantisek Kordac, Leopold Precan, and Karol Kmetko visited the President and Foreign Minister and, as representatives of the Czech, Moravian and Slovak Episcopate, asked them to maintain peace and prevent any misuse of the personage of Jan Hus in attacks on the Holy See and the Catholic Church²⁹.

President Masaryk, who attended the Hus celebrations of July 1926 with his daughter Alice and son Jan, did not deliver a speech there, so many contemporaries felt that the Vatican had won the clash. The Hussite flag was not raised on Prague Castle, as it had been the previous year, but hung only on the Old Town Hall in the city center and on

²⁷ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 60, ff. 65–72, Arata October 1, 1925.

²⁸ The conflict was reportedly to be resolved on the occasion of the anniversary of Czechoslovakia in October 28, 1925. The President allegedly said: *I hope that we will finally ... put an end to it! I myself wish to have good diplomatic relations with the Vatican and to have a Nuncio in Prague ... I believe that the Nuncio will be able to return.* However, considering Masaryk's belligerence and critical remarks about the Vatican diplomacy in the late 1920s, we believe that Antonino Arata deliberately informed the Secretary of State in such a manner, so that the future settlement of relations would begin with the 'humiliation' of Czechoslovakia. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 34, file 178, ff. 65–70, Arata to Gasparri October 29, 1925.

²⁹ Segreteria di Stato (Vaticano). Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati, fondo Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, file 71, ff. 12–16, Arata to Gasparri April 1, 1926, and ff. 62–64, Arata to Gasparri May 14, 1926, and ff. 78–81, Arata to Gasparri June 9, 1926; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1926, Gasparri August 4, 1926, and Jelen November 12, 1926.

some houses in the Old Town. Moreover, the celebrations of the important day were not attended by any prominent political figures. However, there was a significant shift – the historical and spiritual side of Jan Hus was emphasized, and his personage was not used for attacks against Rome³⁰.

In view of the events of 1925 and 1926, it was clear that Catholics represented an important force in the country, one to be reckoned with in the future. Furthermore, the positive electoral outcome of the 1925 parliamentary elections, which brought gains for Christian parties throughout Czechoslovakia, proved that the second big wave of *apostasy* from the Catholic Church highlighted the position and role of the People's Party, which benefited from it. At the same time, the more peaceful 1926 summer celebrations helped to alleviate the tension between both sides, so that they could come to the negotiating table again and begin diplomatic talks a few months later.

The Marmaggi Affair was definitely closed at the turn of 1928 with the signing of the *modus vivendi*, which was a weaker form of an international agreement. The question of the future of the Apostolic Nuncio was not resolved until the end of 1927. Secretary of State Gasparri promoted Marmaggi's return to Prague, but domestic Church and political leaders convinced him not to do so, in view of the position of the Catholic Church in the country.

Francesco Marmaggi officially held the post of Apostolic Nuncio to Prague until 1928, when he was appointed as Apostolic Nuncio to Warsaw on February 13, remaining there until 1935 (Pease, 2009, p. 85; Kitchen, 2006, p. 207; Rothschild, 1974, p. 109; Bosl, 1979, pp. 263, 268.) In 1935, he was created Cardinal. In March 1939, Marmaggi participated in the conclave in which Pope Pius XII was elected, and later that year was appointed by the new head of the Catholic Church as Prefect of the Congregation of the Council. After almost 50 years of priestly service, Francesco Marmaggi died in Rome on November 3, 1949 at the age of 73. Subsequently, the aforementioned Pietro Ciriaci, who had participated in the difficult negotiations on the *modus vivendi*, became the third Apostolic Nuncio. He remained in Czechoslovakia until early 1934 (Smid, 2013, pp. 55–73).

| Conclusion |

How should we evaluate the Marmaggi Affair? We believe that the dispute between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See in the summer of 1925 was the mistake of Vatican policy, which decided to advance its goals among Czech progressionists by means of radical confrontation, but failed to achieve any change in Czechoslovakia. We also consider the reaction of the Czechoslovak representatives, who wanted to benefit from the departure of the Nuncio, particularly by not filling the Apostolic Nunciature and by accepting a modified *modus vivendi*, as hasty.

³⁰ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, fondo Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 53, file 454, f. 184, Arata to Gasparri July 6, 1926, and ff. 271–283, Arata to Gasparri July 8, 1926.

However, both sides showed a forthcoming attitude towards negotiations already in the fall of 1925, when the Holy See probed the willingness of the Czechoslovak side to settle the dispute, which would allow for a Vatican representative to return to Prague. Still, it took a long time before all the disputed questions were clarified and the necessary compromise was reached³¹.

Nevertheless, the affair damaged the image of the Catholic Church in the country, as the radical confrontation with the left-wing bloc certainly did not increase the popularity of Catholicism. The Holy See failed to fully understand, or rather to assess, the real political situation in the country, so the departure of the Nuncio insensitively affected the relationship with Czechoslovakia, when the Holy See sought to promote the Church's interests in a radical way. Similarly radical were the ideas of the Czechoslovak side, which wanted to benefit from the departure of the Nuncio, especially by not filling the Nunciature, its subsequent degradation to an Internunciature and by accepting a more Czechoslovak-friendly version of *modus vivendi*. In view of the events of the 1930s, it seems more logical to say that the conflict between Prague and Rome was only a side effect of the long-term misunderstanding between both sides, which threatened to escalate already during the diplomatic service of Marmaggi's predecessor, Clemente Micara, in the early 1920s. We believe that the dispute was probably a pretext for an open conflict, which would have nonetheless occurred under other circumstances and in other times.

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