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TURKEY.

[November 20.]

CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION 3.

[E 12946/27/44]

No. 1.

*Sir R. Graham to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston.—(Received November 20.)*

(No. 1057.)

My Lord,

Rome, November 15, 1922.

I HAVE the honour to report that on the 12th instant, upon hearing that the French Ambassador was to be received by Signor Mussolini, I telephoned to the latter to remind his Excellency that it was he who had at our first interview suggested and pressed for a preliminary inter-Allied exchange of views before the Lausanne Conference. I expressed my hope that he would in no case depart from this attitude. I gather that he did in fact maintain it in his conversation with M. Barrère.

In the afternoon I saw M. Barrère and discussed the situation with him. He said that he could not believe there would be the slightest chance that the Italian Government would authorise him to speak for them at any meeting, as had been suggested in your Lordship's telegram to Lord Hardinge No. 421 of the 10th November. In the evening the Secretary-General to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs confirmed this view, and said that such a solution was out of the question. It would in no sense satisfy Italian public opinion, which was especially sensitive on the question of participation in inter-Allied conversations of this nature.

Your Lordship's telegram to Lord Hardinge No. 428 indicated that you contemplated a separate conversation with M. Poincaré with a view to deciding a common front with France on all the main issues, and assumed that Italy would doubtless follow suit. In my telegram No. 372 I ventured to warn your Lordship that such a meeting might be misconstrued here, and that Italian feeling on the subject was extremely susceptible. A little later in the day Signor Mussolini telephoned to me that he had seen the news of the proposed meeting in a Havas telegram. He was himself unfortunately unable to attend, and if it took place without Italian participation, the effect throughout the country, and more especially on his own political position, would be deplorable. He was therefore sending the Marquis della Torretta that night post haste to London, and hoped that he would arrive in time to be present and to represent the Italian point of view.

In the meantime news and comment on the subject began to accumulate in the Italian press. I have the honour to transmit extracts from the "Messaggero" of yesterday in the shape of a message from their Paris correspondent, and a bitter leading article. Moreover, the press was flooded with Havas messages and telegrams from the Paris correspondents of the Italian newspapers, all of which endeavoured to show that your Lordship had wished to have a separate conversation *à deux* with the French President of the Council, and that this humiliation to Italy had only been averted by the attitude of M. Poincaré.

The absurd Sforza incident in September last will have shown your Lordship how easily the Italian public will swallow misrepresentations. It produced a painful impression here, which no subsequent explanations have been able to dissipate, and it was extremely desirable to avoid a repetition of any similar misunderstanding on the present occasion.

I called at once at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and drew the attention of the Secretary-General to the misleading and unfair impression which the "Messaggero" and other similar articles were calculated to convey to the Italian public. Your Lordship had repeatedly invited Signor Mussolini to meet you in London or Paris or elsewhere, and had shown a special desire that this meeting should take place. If Signor Mussolini had, owing to his parliamentary obligations, been prevented from accepting, this was no fault of ours. Moreover, if there had ever been any reluctance to a meeting of the three Ministers it had come from the French side. Signor Contarini entirely agreed and promised that he would have a communiqué inserted in the evening's papers. A paragraph then appeared in the "Tribuna" to explain the reasons for the sudden departure of the Marquis della Torretta for London, but it was couched in ambiguous terms. It concluded by saying that there had been a tendency to think that your Lordship's invitation to M. Poincaré signified a desire to leave Italy aside.

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