

Magda Ádám

The Little Entente and Europe

(1920–1929)



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by
Wanda Adams

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Magda Ádám

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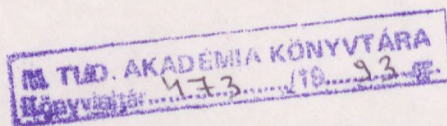
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To my daughter Kate

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Preface

The present volume deals with the international relations of the Little Entente from 1920 to 1929, the first stage of its history. In this period the alliance consisted of three bilateral political and military conventions independent from one another. The first trilateral contract was actually signed only in 1929.

This period of the Little Entente is but poorly documented. The numerous contemporary publications were written without primary sources, often with emotional motives. With few exceptions they do not therefore stand the test of rigorous criticism.

When looking at the reasons for World War Two, the historiographers – including the author of the present work – have concentrated their attention on the thirties. This period was actually described in a series of publications based on public subventions, while the systematic examination of the twenties was pushed into the background. In fact, the peace-system of Versailles and its consequences, began to be treated intensively only in the last decades. Of course, this was also due to the fact that formerly secret records became available for research.

The opening of the western, primarily of the French archives was of basic importance for the composition of the present book as well. My former writings mainly dealt with the thirties. The period following the occupation of the Rhineland, actually represented a turning-point in the history of the Danube basin, by indicating that post-war Central and South-Eastern Europe was about to change into a pre-war area. In my former works I have analysed these changes and tried to find their motives, notably an answer to the question, why was Hitler able to realize with comparative ease his plan of "*Drang nach Osten*". However, it became more and more evident that to obtain an answer I would have to reach back as far as the twenties, the peace-treaty of Trianon and its consequences. As a matter of fact, there is much truth in the following words of Oszkár Jászi: "... what is being made in Paris – he wrote – is the preparation of a new war and not of universal peace".

For a better understanding of the thirties I thus had to examine the situation after the World War One the establishment of the successor states, the institution of the Little Entente and its policy during the twenties.

The present book is the result of investigations for many years and was written mainly on the basis of Hungarian, French, Czechoslovak, Italian, Austrian and American archival records. (In regard to the twenties, the Hungarian archival sources are most deficient.) Unfortunately I had no access to the Romanian and Yugoslav archival sources, but I could partly fill the gap by documents to be found in the relics of Nicolae Titulescu and Prince-Regent Paul in the United States. After having finished my work I had the chance to study the papers of the Public Record Office. The results of these researches were subsequently added only where it was absolutely necessary.

By supplementing the archival sources with documents, special literature and memoirs published in Hungary and abroad, I try to outline a more subtle and authentic aspect of the Little Entente, of the circumstances of its foundation, of its international role, of the relations of its members to one another, to the Great Powers and to Hungary, and to illustrate more precisely the first stage of its history, from 1920 to 1929. Since the book relies essentially on primary sources – a product of basic research –, its conclusions often differ from opinions current in historiography and common knowledge. In order to authenticate the new and sometimes even bewildering opinions and to present an overall view of the historical events and processes, I have documented in detail and examined with utmost care any fact that was previously unknown or contradicted our present knowledge. I therefore alternately used the synthetizing, the analytical and the descriptive method.

Although substantially a traditional history of diplomacy, the book outlines the economic structure of the three member-states of the Little Entente, their ethnic composition and their commercial relations with one another, to the Great Powers and to Hungary. It also points out changes in domestic politics which affected the foreign policy of the states in question.

This work tries to draw a more realistic and exact picture and to offer thereby a lesson to the interdependent countries and peoples of the Danube basin who had to bear the grave consequences of the faults and crimes they committed. In fact, there is hardly any other region where the geographical, economic and political conditions create such a wide-ranging interdependence of the peoples as in the Danube basin after World War One, and where the chances of co-operation have been missed with such thoughtlessness. The tragic consequences appeared but later, in the thirties, when the Third German Empire took a vigorous part in the struggle for control over the area. While fighting, weakening and abandoning each other, emphasizing their real or imagined interests, the small Danube states were throwing themselves one after the other into the arms of Nazi Germany. It is a basic aim of this work to call the reader's attention to this lesson.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my friends and colleagues for their assistance, first of all to the late György Ránki and István Diószegi for their useful advice, and to Vera Jelinek, with whom I had many useful conversations during my study tours in Italy and the United States on questions treated in this

book, and who made available to me those Italian archival sources I could not myself obtain.

I am much obliged to St. Hilda's College, Oxford University which elected me in 1982 its visiting fellow and offered me the facilities to carry on research work in the Bodleian Library and in the Public Records Office.

Finally I have to mention the archives which were of special importance for the composition of this book; I owe thanks to all those who have promoted my investigations by their kind assistance. These institutions are: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques (Paris); Hoover Institution for War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University; Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí; Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri; the Bakmatieff Archives, Butler Library, Columbia University.

Magda Ádám

Antecedents to the Formation of the Little Entente

Co-operation of the Leaders of National Liberation Movements against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

The Little Entente was created by the situation following World War One, although its formation undoubtedly had some antecedents as well.¹

"The idea of the Little Entente was already in the air in 1918" – noted an outstanding personality of the emigré movement, T.G. Masaryk.² The war was still at its height, when the exiled leaders of the national movement established close contact with each other. Their co-operation was aimed at assisting the liberation struggle of the Czech, Slovak, Romanian and Southern Slav nationalities living in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and at obtaining from the Entente the recognition of their right to independence as well as its assistance in developing constitutional forms which, however, were in striking contrast with the right to self-determination, with the ethnographical principles and with the doctrine of historical political law they had themselves proclaimed, i.e. precisely with the slogans they adopted in their struggle against the dualistic system. Until the outbreak of World War One every trend of the national movements relied upon the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.³ As far as 1914, even Masaryk advocated the Monarchy's integrity in the interests of the Czech people – later, as we all know, he was to become a champion of the dismemberment of the Monarchy –, because "if Austria collapsed in a European conflagration, the Czechs would be attached to Germany", he said.⁴ He therefore proposed a policy

¹ The historiography of the states of the Little Entente between the two world wars regarded as an antecedent of the Little Entente the struggle of the oppressed minorities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Serbs, Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks) for their rights.

² T.G. Masaryk: *Světová revoluce za války a ve válce 1914–1918* (World revolution under war conditions and during the war, 1914–1918). Praha, Čin a Orbis, 1925, p. 442.

³ *Národní Listy*, the journal of the National Democratic Party, wrote with enthusiasm that the nations of the Monarchy had forgotten about the national conflicts and had started a fight for the Monarchy. The leaders of the Slovak People's Party declared, in the same vein, at the outbreak of the war: "It is of utmost importance to us that the unity of our country and the Monarchy should endure, that the war should cause no harm and should end with a victory." *Istoriya Tsechoslovakii II*. Moscow, 1960, p. 234; M. Hronský: *K slovenskej politike v období prvej svetovej vojny 1914–1918* (On Slovakian politics during World War One). *Historický časopis*, 1969/4, p. 476.

⁴ Masaryk: *Světová revoluce...* p. 420.

keeping in view the fate of the Monarchy, without even questioning its monarchical structure. Only in 1914 did he change his standpoint. In a secret memorandum sent to the British government in October 1914 he suggested for the first time the necessity of forming an independent Czech state.⁵ In this document he did not mention the union of the Czechs and Slovaks, although this idea preoccupied him from the very moment he turned against the Monarchy.

It was an important task of the Czech national movement in exile to exert an influence on the home movement and to strengthen the relatively loose contacts with it. As a matter of fact the Czech national movement was not homogeneous; several opposed trends were contesting each other. The Catholic circles continued to support the Habsburg Monarchy and demanded reforms only within its framework. The Social Democrats wished to change the social structure of the Monarchy, while maintaining its territorial integrity. The home national movement was strongly influenced by the Russophile trend led by Karel Kramář, imagining the independence of Bohemia and later of Czechoslovakia with the support of Russia. Up to 1917 this movement significantly counterbalanced the activities of Masaryk and Eduard Beneš. Only after the Russian Revolution in February 1917, which seriously damaged the Russophile movement persecuted by Vienna as well (Kramář was arrested), could the contacts between the emigration and the home movement be strengthened; this led to the radicalization of the latter. In this situation the Czech Federation representing an important section of the Czech bourgeoisie and making so far pro-Austrian statements, arrogated the practical realization of the right to self-determination – still within the Austrian Monarchy –, and after the Austrian Government rejected the claim, the majority of the Federation turned against Vienna. The consequence thereof was the reorganization of the national assembly, which essentially accepted Masaryk's programme. The next step was the unification of the Czech national movements active at home and abroad, and the development of a common platform.

The next task consisted of connecting the Czech and Slovak home movements. So far, Slovakia had not been included in the programme of any trend of the Czech home movement, since the rights of the Holy Crown (of King St. Stephen) were recognized and honoured till 1917, and the attacks against dualism were not directed against them. Although the idea of a Slovakia united with the Czech state had been repeatedly suggested since the outbreak of the war, it had not been included in any official programme.

Only at the end of 1917, after the Entente note of October also mentioning Slovakia, did Masaryk plainly raise this question. Henceforth he demanded the formation of a Czechoslovak state by referring to the ethnical unity of the Czech

⁵ We know about this from an indirect source only: from the records of Seton Watson. In 1914 Masaryk was forced to emigrate. He was active first in Paris and then in London, and maintained close contacts with leading politicians. Negotiations with the latter were leading him to the conclusion that in the given situation one could expect but the support of Czech autonomy. H. Hanák: *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War*. London, 1962, p. 102.

and the Slovak peoples. In this struggle he was substantially supported by Eduard Beneš, a former lecturer at the Charles University in Prague, who had also gone into exile in 1915. The ideas of Masaryk and Beneš were backed by Milan Rastislav Štefánik, who had lived in France since before the war and served after its outbreak as a major in the French Army. Through Štefánik, Masaryk and Beneš got in touch with influential French politicians, such as Briand, who allegedly promised in February 1916 that he would support the attainment of Czech independence.⁶ With full knowledge of the situation it is rather difficult to believe that the French Premier would have committed himself at that time to the dismemberment of the Monarchy. Even the pronouncedly pro-Czech Berthelot, who met Beneš at the beginning of 1916, did not support the latter in this question. Only a year later, in January 1917, in a letter written to President Wilson in the name of the Allies did he mention for the first time that the liberation of Czechoslovakia was one of the war aims of the Allies.⁷

Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik started to plan an integrated Czech and Slovak national action. Their work was impeded by the fact that there was no central organ that could have co-ordinated the Czech and Slovak national movements existing in the different countries. Thus they founded, in February 1916 in Paris the Czechoslovak National Council with Masaryk as its president, Štefánik as vice-president and Beneš secretary-general. In their proclamation they emphasized that their main task was the formation of an independent Czechoslovak state. On the initiative of the Council, committees were set up in Britain, Russia, Italy, the United States and Switzerland, which were directed from Paris.

Special care was bestowed on setting up Czech and Slovak military units. Masaryk and the others had no doubt about the important role which such an armed force could play not only in obtaining recognition of an independent Czechoslovak state, but in its practical realization as well. As we shall see – they were not mistaken.

The organization of the Czechoslovak legion began in 1916 and intensified in 1917. Recruitment was carried out among soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army who had fallen into captivity and among Czech and Slovak exiles in the West.

In terms of purpose and radicalism the political life of Slovakia fell far behind the Czech movement, since its political and economic situation was far more difficult within Hungary than that of Bohemia within Austria. The preconditions for a national movement, such as an intellectual middle class, had more difficulties in developing. Whereas in Austria the contacts between the nations and Vienna were loosened gradually, without major conflicts, Hungarian government circles did their utmost – even in the bourgeois-democratic period – to ensure that the practical realization of the right to self-determination – actually necessitated by

⁶ E. Beneš: *Světová válka a naše revoluce III* (The world war and our revolution). Praha, 1927, pp. 109–110.

⁷ Cf.: P.S. Wandycz: *France and her Eastern Allies 1918–1925*. The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1962, p. 10.

history itself – should not result in the separation from Budapest. The measures taken to prevent such development and including both concessions and rebuffs certainly contributed to the timidity and weakness of the Slovak national movement. In fact, no political trend openly demanded the secession of Slovakia. Though from spring 1918 all of them advocated the right to self-determination – many of them, particularly the social democrats, on the basis of integration – they wished to realize this within the frontiers of Hungary. Even the most radical wing of the Slovak national movement led by the People's Party which was undoubtedly prepared to dissolve the “millennial unsuccessful marriage with the Hungarians”, formulated this intention in its resolution of May 1918 in an indirect way only by emphasizing that it was relying upon the right to self-determination and fighting for the creation of the Czechoslovak state.⁸

It proved to be a still more difficult task to organize the Ruthenian national movement and to win it over to the Czech conception. The idea of uniting Ruthenia to the future Czechoslovak state was included in the programme of the Czech independence movement even later than the union with Slovakia. Until 1918 the Czech leaders did not even think of this territory. However, after Masaryk had convinced himself that this solution would be welcomed by political circles in the United States, he extended his territorial claims to the Carpatho-Ruthenians as well. He did it mainly out of strategic considerations, for Czechoslovakia would thus have a direct contact with Romania. He also wanted to obtain the support of the Ruthenian leaders living in the United States in order to exert an influence on the home movement which was initially not favourable to his ideas. There was first of all an important trend which did not want to separate Ruthenia from Hungary; it gained particular strength when Ruthenia was granted autonomy in December 1918 by the government of Mihály Károlyi. Another group advocated the setting up of a great Ukrainian state. The third and weakest faction who wished to attach the area to Czechoslovakia. This trend had its origins in the United States.⁹

Activity similar to that of the Czech and Slovak exiles was also displayed by the leaders of the Yugoslav national movement. Headed by the Croatian politician Ante Trumbić, a Yugoslav Committee was founded in 1915 in London, with the aim of dismembering the Monarchy.

Trumbić expended much energy on uniting the Southern Slav movements existing abroad and at home. He had to face as an additional difficulty the fact that the Serbian government hindered his activities for a long time. It managed more than once to influence the South Slav movements abroad and within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, winning them over to the idea of a Great Serbia. Already at the very beginning of the war, in 1914, it proclaimed that the aim of the war was not only the safeguarding of Serbia, but the liberation and the union of the

⁸ M. Hronský: *op. cit.* p. 513.

⁹ V. Mamatey: The Slovaks and the Carpatho-Ruthenians. In: *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*. University of Kentucky Press, 1967, pp. 241 – 242.

Serbs, Croats and Slovenians as well.¹⁰ In August 1915 Britain, France and Russia promised to Serbia the occupation of Bosnia, Herzegovina, part of Dalmatia, Slovenia, Croatia, Fiume, Batschka and Banat – i.e. considerable parts of the Austrian provinces and of historical Hungary.¹¹ These promises, motivated by military aims, were taken seriously in Belgrade: its foreign policy, diplomatic activity and its relations with Trumbić were determined thereby. The London Yugoslav Committee was not recognized and its activities were counteracted both in the West and in the Monarchy.

The Southern Slav movement within the Monarchy was also anything but homogeneous, with the representatives of several trends fighting one another. One of them envisaged the union of the Southern Slavs in a homogeneous Yugoslav state within the Monarchy, another wished to achieve this by a union with Serbia, the third by joining Croatia. The comparatively strong first trend which remained faithful to its pro-Monarchic principles was constantly exposed to the attacks of the Belgrade government and the London Yugoslav Committee. And although Trumbić, the leader of the Committee, was opposed to the centralism of Belgrade, he nevertheless joined forces with the Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić against the Southern Slav politicians unwilling to break with the Monarchy. The co-operation of the two politicians was promoted by Italy's ambitions, i.e. by the fact that the secret London agreement promising Italy considerable territories inhabited by Slavs had become well-known meanwhile.¹²

In fact, they also obtained knowledge of the claim of the Italian government to parts of the Balkans and to Fiume. This fact certainly played a major role in the decision of Trumbić in 1917, to follow the political line of Pašić and to abandon his own platform. The result was the declaration of Corfu envisaging the establishment of an independent Yugoslav state under the Karadjordjević dynasty. Trumbić now established close contacts with the corps of Serb diplomats accredited to the Entente Powers and co-operated with them in the interest of the common target. However, the effectiveness of the Yugoslav exile movement led by Trumbić fell behind that of the Czechoslovak National Council, because the long-lasting dispute with Pašić absorbed much attention and energy.

The Romanian exile movement was considerably different, due to the particular situation of Romania, which actually joined the Allies in 1916 only. Up to this date there were two disunited political groups with different opinions about the country's relation to the war and about the subsequent territorial arrangements. First, there was the pro-German line. The strongest and most influential

¹⁰ *Notes and Documents*, collected by A. Arnatović. *Ligue des universitaires Serbo-croato-slovenes* 1919. Paris, 1919, pp. 4–5; I. Lederer: *Jugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study in Frontier-making*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1963, p. 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² In the London Treaty of April 26, 1915, the Entente Powers offered Italy not only Southern Tyrol, but also the Adriatic coast, i.e. considerable areas and islands near Gorizia and Trieste, inhabited by Slavs.

trend headed by Prime Minister Ion Brătianu, advocated a policy of wait and see, wishing to take decisions, pending the prevailing situation. Later, there was a pro-Entente group urging that Romania "change sides". Two outstanding politicians belonged to this group: Take Ionescu and Nicolae Titulescu, who were to play an important role in the history of the Little Entente.

Although the occupation of Transylvania had priority among the aims of the Romanian government, it did not initially support the local movement for independence. Its tactics concerning Transylvania were dependent on the war issue, for an inconsiderate step, it was feared, would hinder the realization of the plan. A change in its standpoint took place only in 1916, when Romania went over to the Allies, who highly appreciated this step. A secret agreement signed in Bucharest on August 17, 1916 manifested this appreciation by recognizing the claim of the Romanian government to Bukovina, Dobrudja, Bessarabia, Transylvania, the region on the left bank of the Tisza as far as Debrecen (including the cities of Szeged and Orosháza), as well as the province of the Banat which had been promised to Serbia.

After the Bucharest agreement the Transylvanian independence movement made rapid strides. Some of its leaders were forced to emigrate – Paris became the centre of the Romanian exiles. With the substantial support of Toma Ionescu and Nikolae Lupu who already lived in the French capital, they founded the newspaper *La Roumanie* and wrote therein considerable propaganda for the annexation of Transylvania by Romania.

In June 1918 the National Committee of the Transylvanian and Bukovina Romanians was established in Paris. This committee was soon reorganized, and renamed: The National Council of Romanian Unity. Take Ionescu was the new president of the Council; its vice-presidents being Vasil Lucaciu and Octavian Goga.

As for its size and effect, the Romanian exile movement fell far behind its Czechoslovak and Yugoslav counterparts. This was due not only to the fact that the Romanians started their activities in the West much later than the Czechoslovak and Yugoslavs, i.e. in the second half of 1917, but also to the lack of support for the Romanian movement, a backing which was readily granted to the Czech, Slovak and Yugoslav representatives. The reason was that Romania continued to manoeuvre even after the Bucharest agreement: it constantly threatened to retire from the war and conclude a separate peace with the Central Powers. This outlook was motivated by the endeavours of the Entente to maintain the territorial integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for in this case Romania would not receive the promised territories even if the Allies were to win. Romania's vacillation also affected the exile movement, which maintained close contacts with the Bucharest government.

While threatening to retire from the war and taking concrete steps towards concluding a separate peace with the Central Powers, the Romanian government incited the Romanian exiles to intensify the struggle and to co-operate with the other exile organizations. It also began to organize Romanian prisoners of war

confined in the Ukraine, in order to set up a force similar to the Czechoslovak and Serb legions.

From 1917 on Masaryk made considerable efforts to unify the movements for independence in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (i.e. the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), including the soldiers in captivity.

In spring 1916, he managed to establish co-operation with the Yugoslav committee. He reconciled his programme of action with Trumbić, who became his friend, in regard to their Western activities and the establishment of a common legion.

Masaryk made a point of strengthening the loose contacts with the Romanians. For this purpose he went to Jassy in October 1917, where he had talks with Brătianu and King Ferdinand and agreed with them on questions concerning co-operation. "Our personal acquaintance and co-operation with the Romanians laid the foundation of the Little Entente" – wrote Masaryk later about this meeting.¹³

After the Russian revolution in February 1917, Russia became an important centre of the exile national movement, because the provisional Russian government supported the formation of independent small states. In November 1917 a conference was arranged in Kiev with the participation of the representatives of all nations living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and opposed to the dualistic regime; Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Romanians, Poles and Italians – but not the Hungarians and Germans. This meeting prepared the congress of nationalities which was to take place somewhat later in Rome on a much larger scale.

The most significant meeting of the independence movement was the congress of the oppressed peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Rome. The Czechoslovak, the Yugoslav, the Polish and the Romanian exile movement as well as the Serbian government were represented there. Romania did not send a delegate, nor were the Transylvanian Romanians represented at the congress. At that time, the latter had but a small organization without any distinguished leader. So the Romanian exiles from Transylvania were represented by Lupu and Mironescu, both originating from the Regat, i.e. the Romanian kingdom to the East of the Carpathians.¹⁴ The congress adopted several resolutions emphasizing the right of every oppressed nation to establish an independent united state and to its territorial completion. The participants declared that the basic conditions for the practical realization of national rights did not exist in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and they urged a common struggle against a common op-

¹³ Masaryk: *Světová revoluce...* p. 442.

¹⁴ It was stated at the Congress that the separate peace treaty concluded by the Romanian government with the Central Powers had been refused.

pressor. Finally, the congress set up different commissions for accomplishing the practical work.¹⁵

During the consultations serious differences occurred between the Yugoslav and the Italian delegations, for the Italian Foreign Minister took the floor at the plenary session and expressed his misgivings about a possible conflict between the planned united Yugoslav state and Italy. Finally, however, a common declaration was published, emphasizing that the creation of a united, independent Yugoslavia was in the interests of both states.¹⁶ Although the resolutions and aims of the congress were welcomed by the Italian Foreign Minister, who agreed to the said declaration, Italy continued to observe with uneasiness the activity of the Serbian government and the Yugoslav exile committee.

The leaders of the independence and unification movements considered the acquisition of the support of the Allied Powers as one of their primary tasks. They concentrated their attention on the United States, which was playing an increasingly important role in the war effort. And they did it all the more so, as they had learnt that President Woodrow Wilson did not recognize the various secret treaties that had been signed during the war, and wished to preserve the unity of the Empire. Quite until the last year of the war, neither France, nor Great Britain contemplated the break-up of the Monarchy, as they considered that it still played an important role in the European balance of powers. As opposed to the Americans, however, they wished to fulfil their obligations under the secret treaties that had been signed during the war. It is not unlikely that, had it been in their military and political interest, e.g. Austria could have been detached from Germany, they would have not, or would only partially have fulfilled them. It is no coincidence that the Czechoslovak National Council was only recognized after the failure of the secret negotiations with Austria.

This attitude of the Allied Powers urged caution on the part of the leaders of the independence movements within the Empire, and prompted more resolute action from the émigré leaders. Besides their activities in Europe, the latter also sought contacts with American politicians, especially with President Wilson. They did all in their power to be admitted into the White House. How successful were their efforts? It is necessary to comment on this briefly, as various false perceptions survive both in historiography and in popular thinking. Wilson, in fact, did not receive the leaders of the various national independence and unification movements, who arrived in Washington. Why not? Not only because he wished to detach Austria from Germany, but also – and this was the crucial point – because he regarded the establishment of the small nation-states irrational. He feared that the small states would not be able to attain economic self-sufficiency, successfully replace the Monarchy, and counterbalance the ambitions of Germany and Russia. Wilson hoped to preserve the economic and political unity of

¹⁵ T.G. Masaryk: *La résurrection d'un Etat. Souvenirs et réflexions. 1914–1918*. Paris, 1930, p. 4; Robert Machray: *The Little Entente*, London, 1929, pp. 73–75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the Empire in a new, federal structure. He modelled his plans on the American federal system. The President made his intentions clear with regard to the preservation of the Monarchy one month before the entry of the United States into the war. Shortly after the entry into the war, he created from a group of experts the Commission of the Inquiry Group, the task of which was to work out plans and guidelines for the post-war settlement of the problems of the world, with the aim of securing a long lasting peace. The Commission Group was to work under the direction of E. House, an advisor and friend of Wilson, whose views on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were similar to those held by the President. The plans and explanatory notes regarding the federalization of Austria-Hungary written by Charles Seymour (member of the Inquiry Group, , and later of the American Peace Delegation) also reflected Wilson's ideas. Seymour signed the document containing his plans on May 25, 1918, 5 months before the end of the war.¹⁷ According to these plans a federation of states containing Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Ruthenia and Transylvania, would be established on the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Wilson's policy towards the various movements of national independence and unification was fundamentally determined by the plan for the preservation and federalization of the Monarchy. That is why only the Polish ambitions from among the Central European independence movements received his support, while he ignored the others. An independent Poland did not contradict his plans regarding the future of the Empire. One can encounter the view in some historical works according to which Wilson only supported the Polish independence movement because its leader, I.J. Paderewsky, had close ties with his advisor, E. House, who would have influenced the President in this particular direction. Others believe that the President ignored the rest of the national movements, because these were lacking strong and prominent leaders. I cannot accept either of these views.

President Wilson's relations with the independence and unification movements were neither determined by personal contacts, nor the existence or non-existence of prominent leaders in these movements. If we discuss the whole problem in the context of his concept of the Central European settlement, we can see his actual preferences. The President did not take notice of those independence movements, which were in contradiction to the efforts at the preservation of the Empire. Therefore he tried to avoid meetings with their leaders. That is why he did not receive M.R. Štefaník, the Vice President of the Czechoslovak National Committee, either. M.R. Štefaník arrived in Washington in August 1917, in order to have the Committee that had been established in Paris recognized by the American Administration, and to recruit volunteers among the Czech and Slovak émigrés. He planned to establish an independent Czechoslovak Legion. The

¹⁷ National Archives and Records Service. Records of the Inquiry Group 265. Reel 28. doc. 505. For more details see Magda Ádám: Woodrow Wilson and the Successor States. *Danubian Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1987.

American political and military leadership did not support any of his plans. The Vice President of the Czechoslovak National Committee left the United States with extremely bad impressions. He developed an intense dislike towards President Wilson. He called him "Satan", and never altered his opinion of him.¹⁸ Masaryk's first attempt to see the President was also unsuccessful. It was only in June 1918 that he could enter the White House. Wilson only received him when he was forced by the circumstances to give up his plan for the preservation of the Empire.¹⁹

The situation was similar with regard to the Yugoslav movement. President Wilson refused the Serbian Prime Minister, N. Pašić's request that he should receive the Yugoslav Committee. He did not wish to negotiate with a committee whose foremost aim was to procure his support for the annexation to Serbia of the Southern Slav territories of the Monarchy. Nevertheless, the Committee eventually arrived in the United States. Its members, H. Hinković and B. Vošnyak, however, only acted as private citizens. They recruited followers and volunteers among the members of the Yugoslav colonies in the United States, and their efforts did not meet with much success. One reason for this lack of success was the strongly divided nature of the Yugoslav movement in America, which also characterized it within the Monarchy. Its leading circles did not wish to annex the Southern Slav territories of the Monarchy to Serbia. Wilson, who did not recognize the territorial promises made by the Entente to Serbia, endeavoured to counteract the propaganda of the Southern Slavs through his Administration. Characteristically, for quite a long period he took no notice of the Treaty of Corfu, which was signed by N. Pašić and A. Trumbić in 1917, and which aimed at the establishment of a Yugoslav state under the leadership of the Karadjordjević Dynasty. Similarly, he took no notice of the Congress of Rome either.²⁰

Shortly after the foundation of the Yugoslav Committee in London, Trumbić sent Franko Potocnyak, one of his closest aides, to the United States. The aim of his mission was to recruit followers for the cause of the establishment of an independent Yugoslav state. As he could not establish contacts with the official circles, he concentrated his activities on winning the sympathies of the Southern

¹⁸ Štefanik's hatred of Wilson only increased when he learnt that the President had reservations about the Pittsburgh agreement, which had declared the union of the Czechs and the Slovaks. Wilson's views were based on the fact that the Slovaks of the mother country had not yet decided to vote for the secession, and this was true, as the declaration of Liptószentmiklós (Liptovsky Mikulaš) on May 1, 1918 only indirectly expressed their wish in this respect.

¹⁹ Masaryk arrived in Washington at the beginning of May 1918. As Wilson did not receive him, he left for Chicago at the end of May, where he concentrated on gaining the support of the local Slovak community.

²⁰ There is no reason to believe that it was due to Wilson's influence that the State Department – where the news of the Corfu agreement had arrived – did not pass this news on to the press, and that they only took notice of the congress in Rome in March 1918 of the subjugated peoples of the Monarchy after the change in Wilson's conception of the Empire had taken place.

Slav movement in the United States – which was generally loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – for the idea of an independent Yugoslav state. They stood on the platform of integration and their national aspirations remained within the limits of this platform. Potocnyak played an important role in the fact that in Chicago – where the Croatian colony was the strongest – a congress was convened, which established the Yugoslav National Council. The congress accepted a resolution, which proclaimed that the aim of the movement was the breaking up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the establishment of a democratic Serbo-Croat-Slovene state.²¹ (During this period Trumbić still believed in his conception.) They informed President Wilson about their decision by telegram. Wilson, however, took no notice of this, as he did not wish to detach the Southern Slavs from the Monarchy. Potocnyak returned to Europe without having received any backing or commission from the official circles in the United States.

Romania's attempts were no more successful. The Romanian Government and the Court made strenuous efforts to gain President Wilson's support for their ambitions of unification, i.e. for the acquisition of Transylvania. They had accurate information on the fact that the President did not recognize the secret Treaty of Bucharest, and Romania's territorial demands against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Romania's claim to Transylvania was considered to be unfounded in Washington. This was partly due to the reports sent by the American Chargé d'Affaires D. Andrew from Jassy. Andrew, who could not be accused of excessive sympathies for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, reported that the Romanian efforts at unification were not based on solid foundations: while Romanians accounted for 60 to 65 per cent of the population of Transylvania, only half or a quarter of them wished unification with Romania. Only a small fraction of the population of Transylvania welcomed the Romanian entry into Transylvania.²²

Prime Minister Brătianu and the Royal Court endeavoured to bring round as speedily as possible to their views the American official circles, and the Romanian émigrés living in the United States, who were mainly of Transylvanian descent. (The majority of the latter did not favour the transfer of Transylvania.) The ambitious Queen Mary decided to travel to the United States in person. However, as a result of objections from President Wilson and Secretary of State Lansing, she had to cancel her visit.²³ Following this, without any prior announcement, a Romanian delegation arrived in the United States in June 1917. Its members were the Reverend Vasile Lucaciu, Ion Mota and Lieutenant Vasile Stoica, all Transylvanian émigrés. They arrived from Jassy via Siberia and Japan,

²¹ J. Prpić: The South Slavs. In: *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*, p. 177.

²² V. Mamatey: *The United States and East-Central Europe 1914–1918*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1957, p. 124.

²³ Lansing did not share Wilson's views concerning the preservation of the unity of the Empire. Still, he did not agree either with the plans to detach Transylvania.

and their task was to promote the idea of unification among the Romanian émigrés in the United States, and to form a Transylvanian Legion from Romanian volunteers, which would fight on the Western Front. Their activities were unsuccessful. However, they did not regard this as a failure, nor did they leave with the feeling of having been wronged, as Štefanik had done. Although they could not get a hearing from Wilson, after a protracted series of attempts, they were received by Secretary of State Lansing and Defence Secretary Baker. However, they did not receive support either for the unification plans or for the formation of a Transylvanian Legion.

The leaders of the independence and unification movements were much distressed and disappointed. They knew that the reasons of this series of refusals lay not only in what President Wilson and the American Government had told them, i.e. that the United States was not officially in a state of war with the Monarchy. Still, they hoped for a positive turn of events after the declaration of war in Vienna in December 1917. Once again, they had to be disappointed. Shortly after the declaration of war, on January 8, 1918, President Wilson announced his famous Fourteen Points in Congress. Point 10 reads as follows: "The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development."²⁴ As can be seen, Wilson got round the idea of Austro-Hungarian integrity.

It became clear from the President's statements that he preferred autonomy to the creation of independent nation-states. The existing dismay was only exacerbated by a speech made almost simultaneously by the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, in which he said that he agreed with President Wilson in that the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was not among war aims of the Allies. The nations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy should be accorded autonomy based on democratic principles.²⁵

The Fourteen Points and Lloyd George's speech caused enormous disappointment in Romanian and Serbian Government circles and despair among the leaders of the independence and unification movements. "We were no longer in doubt: Wilson did not favour the dissolution of the Monarchy, his plan for the liberation of the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was not aimed at the creation of independent states, but the establishment of autonomies or some kind of confederation," – reads Beneš's note.²⁶

²⁴ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1918, I, p. 791. *House Intimate Papers*, Vol. III, Boston, 1917, pp. 334–336.

²⁵ This statement was made by Lloyd George on January 5, 1918, i.e. three days before Wilson's speech in the Congress. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the two politicians worked in close harmony in this question.

²⁶ Eduard Beneš: *Souvenir de guerre et de révolution 1914–1918*, Paris, 1928, p. 549. In spite of this, both in popular thinking, and in the historiography of the victorious successor states during the

Wilson's 10th point caused the greatest alarm in Romania. On January 12, 1918, the American Envoy, Vopicka, sent a telegram to Washington, indicating that Wilson's peace plans had created a critical situation. The Romanian Government was of the opinion that if it did not get Transylvania, there was no reason why it should carry on fighting, and there was a demand for the immediate conclusion of peace with Germany from all quarters.

The French and British Governments did their utmost to avoid this separate conclusion of peace. They reassured Brătianu: if his country continues the fight, they can occupy Transylvania in the event of victory. However, this guarantee did not satisfy the Romanian Government, as the United States represented a different policy, being opposed to the annexation of Transylvania by Romania.

On February 12 a joint Franco-British-Italian telegram was sent to Washington, warning the American Government that Romania would conclude a separate peace immediately unless it sent a declaration to King Ferdinand, assuring him that the Allies would fulfil all the commitments they had made to Romania. The dispatch stresses the urgency of such a declaration, as the only means of preventing Romania from concluding a separate peace with Germany. President Wilson refused this request from the European Allies. The American declaration which was sent to the Romanian Government only assured Romania of the American readiness to protect its sovereignty.²⁷ Such a declaration was not sufficient, as it "only" promised the protection of sovereignty and not Transylvania.

On March 7, 1918 Romania acted upon her threats and signed a separate peace with the Central Powers. "Prime Minister Brătianu and his successor, General Averescu, named yesterday, both argued that there was no further need for Romania to keep on fighting because according to the speeches of President Wilson and Lloyd George even if the Allies win Romania is not to get additional territory" – reads the report of the American Chargé d'Affaires sent from Jassy.²⁸ In spite of the Allied requests, Brătianu stopped fighting, with the intention of joining the winning side at the end of the war.

The Romanian emigré circles distanced themselves from this step of the Romanian Government in March 1918. They continued their fight for Transylvania, as did Vasile Stoica in the United States, who established the Rumanian League of America in June 1918. President Wilson, however, remained unimpressed.

At the end of May 1918, Wilson had to give up his defence of the unity of the Empire and his plans for federation. Why and how did this change take place? In May 1918, Clemenceau – presumably with the assistance of the Czech lobby – made public the Emperor-King Charles's letters to Prince Sixtus of Parma.²⁹

interwar years, the American President featured as their saviour. They attributed their liberation and the realization of their ambitions of national unification to him.

²⁷ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1918, I, p. 756.

²⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 757.

²⁹ In May 1917, Clemenceau made a statement in which he declared the necessity for the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. France was the first Power to recognize officially the

These letters revealed that the Emperor was ready to conclude a separate peace with the Allies. This step by Clemenceau unavoidably led to the immediate breakdown of the secret negotiations. Wilson was exasperated by this act of folly on the part of the French Prime Minister, which resulted in the collapse of the talks in which the United States was also represented.

Therefore, the idea of detaching the Monarchy from the Central Powers had to be abandoned. All this created a new situation. Advocates of the dissolution of the Monarchy, like Secretary of State Lansing himself, considered that the time was ripe for action. "I hesitate to include the question of independence for the nationalities within Austria-Hungary, such as the Czechs, Ruthenians and Southern Slavs, because the President, excepting in the case of Poland which is mostly outside the empire, had indicated a purpose to preserve the Dual Monarchy intact. I do not believe it is wise to do this. I think the President will have to abandon this idea and favor the erection of new states out of the imperial territory and require the separation of Austria-Hungary. This is the only certain means" – writes Lansing – "of ending German power in Europe."³⁰ The Secretary of State expected a straightforward answer from President Wilson. After the final decision had been made in Great Britain and France to favour the policy of the dissolution of the Monarchy, both Powers recognized the Czechoslovak National Council (France in June and Great Britain in August 1918), and the fate of the Monarchy was sealed. Taking into consideration Italy and Pašić, they also recognized the Yugoslav Committee. In these circumstances, Wilson's plans for a confederation became unrealistic. The President retreated from the line he had held step by step. This meant that he was not willing to recognize the national committees for a long time to come. However, with regard to his policy concerning the Empire, a kind of duality can be perceived until the end of the war. This is also reflected in his relationship with Masaryk. When, at last in June 1918, he resolved to see the President of the Czechoslovak National Council, their negotiations did not concern the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state, but mainly the activities of the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia. Masaryk himself conceded that he had no influence whatever on the President, as he could not achieve one of his most important aims, i.e. the recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council. This only took place much later, in September 1918. (During the summer of 1918, Wilson still differentiated between the Czechoslovak, the Yugoslav and the Polish national aspirations. He "sympathized" with the former

right of the Czechoslovak nation to establish their own state. S. Pichon, the French Foreign Secretary, announced this decision of the Government in a letter to Beneš, dated June 13, 1918. He also stated that until the formation of a more permanent Czechoslovak Government, the Czechoslovak National Council would be regarded as such. Masaryk: *Světová revoluce...* p. 606; E. Beneš: *Souvenir de guerre...* p. 231; P. Renouvin: *Histoire des relations internationales*, Paris, 1957, p. 113. The Czechoslovak question – writes Victor Mamatey – was the question of the survival of the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy.

³⁰ *War Memoirs of Robert Lansing, Secretary of State*. Indianapolis, 1935, p. 261.

two, and strongly "supported" the latter. Meanwhile, he took no notice of the Romanian national unification movements.)

Masaryk arrived in the United States with the intention of returning to Europe soon. His unfavourable experiences (Wilson did not recognize the Czechoslovak National Council and likewise did not wish to detach Slovakia from Hungary, though an ambivalence could be observed in connection with the latter question during the summer), however, made him stay until the end of the war, more precisely until December 1918. Although Wilson recognized the Czechoslovak National Council one month before the end of the war, and there was no longer any ambivalence concerning the status of Slovakia either, there was still a high degree of uncertainty in the question of the boundaries of the new Czechoslovak state, and above all, in the question of the corridors which would connect Czechoslovakia with Romania and Yugoslavia.

During the summer of 1918, Masaryk was focusing on winning the Slovaks living in the United States for his ideas. It was due to his activities that the Pittsburgh Agreement between the Slovak League and the Czech Alliance was reached. The Agreement proclaimed the union of Czechs and Slovaks in one independent state as the goal of the signatories. According to Masaryk's own draft proposal, Slovakia would have its own government and judiciary, and Slovak would be its official language. After Albert Mamatey from the Slovak League had requested a Slovak parliament, Masaryk conceded this as well, and signed the modified convention.³¹ One of the important functions of the Pittsburgh Agreement was to influence American policy-makers.

Masaryk's other important task was to win the support of the American Ruthenians. Their national movement there agreed in many respects with the movement in the mother country. One of the common characteristics was, e.g. that the Czechoslovak solution did not feature among their political options. The strongest faction, led by Yury Zatkovitch, established their own organization, The American National Council of Uhro-Rusinst in June 1918. The Congress organized by the Council accepted a resolution, according to which the Carpatho-Ruthenians had to receive full independence. Should this prove impossible, they would have to unite with their brethren in Galicia and Bukovina. If the latter could not be achieved either, they would have to be given autonomy. However, they did not indicate which state they would belong to.³²

In October 1918, when the days of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were already numbered, Wilson received a delegation led by Zatkovitch. The fact that he granted a personal reception to Zatkovitch – treatment not accorded to every Central European politician – increased the prestige of the Council. The President told the delegation on this occasion: The Allies did not welcome the first two solutions mentioned in their programme (neither the one referring to inde-

³¹ After the war the Czechoslovak Government ignored the Pittsburgh agreement.

³² V. Mamatey: The Slovaks and the Carpatho-Ukrainians. In: *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*, pp. 241 – 242.

pendence, nor the one suggesting union with the Ukrainians of Galicia and Bukovina). He advised them to endeavour to achieve their third option, i.e. the creation of an autonomous region.³³ It is probable that Wilson, who had by this time been in close contact with Masaryk, suggested the Czechoslovak solution. On October 23, 1918, at a meeting of the National Council in Philadelphia, Carpatho-Ruthenians were declared a separate ethnic group, and the participants distanced themselves from the Ukrainians. A few days later Zatkovitch suggested to Masaryk that Carpatho-Ruthenia should be a member of the planned Czechoslovak federal state. Masaryk welcomed this proposal. He assured Zatkovitch: if the Ruthenians decided to join Czechoslovakia, they would receive wide-ranging autonomy, and they would also be satisfied with the delimitation of their frontiers. (This refers to the frontiers between Slovakia and Carpatho-Ruthenia.) Following this, the National Council of the Uhro-Ruthenians passed a resolution: "The Uhro-Ruthenians would join the Democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia as a state but with a wide-ranging autonomy."³⁴ Copies of the resolution were sent to President Wilson, Secretary of State Lansing and Masaryk.

A State Department Memorandum, dated November 21, 1918 stated that: "The Uhro-Ruthenians while not being Czechoslovaks, have Slav origins, and therefore can be included in the confederation from racial, territorial and political considerations."³⁵

Thus, Masaryk's efforts to create a common border between Czechoslovakia and Romania were successful. However, the idea of a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav border, facilitated by a corridor, was most resolutely rejected by Wilson, and he remained committed to this policy throughout the Paris Peace Conference.

Wilson's reluctance to embrace the idea of the establishment of new small states diminished by the autumn of 1918. By the end of the war he gave up his original conception of a Central European Confederation. However, he entertained the hope, till the last moment, that the Austrian Emperor-King Charles, might still win the leaders of the various nations of the Monarchy to the idea of its federalization. His note to Vienna on October 18, 1918 still reflected this. Although he refused to accept the Emperor-King's proposal that his 14 Points be used as a basis for starting the negotiations, he did not commit himself to the secessionist ambitions of the leaders of the national movements either. He regarded this as an internal affair of the Empire, which had to be negotiated with the national leaders. The latter had to judge whether they were satisfied with the autonomy which had been offered to them.

Wilson's above mentioned note caused great consternation in Romania, as the American President, while talking about the Czechs and the Yugoslavs, made no

³³ *Op. cit.*

³⁴ *Op. cit.*

³⁵ See: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, I, p. 783; V. Mamatey: The United States and East-Central Europe 1914-1918, p. 377.*

mention of the Romanians. The Romanian Government went into action again. It requested information from the American Envoy, Vopicka, about the American standpoint on Transylvania almost every day. The Romanians stressed that for them the question of Transylvania was a question of life and death, and therefore, they wished to put the fate of Romania into the hands of the United States. Vasile Stoica, who was in the United States at the time, also greatly intensified his activities. He delivered a memorandum to the State Department on October 24, 1918, which was supplemented with maps, and statistical data that were far from the actual facts of reality. Washington, however, disregarded these Romanian steps. Stoica's efforts to get a hearing from the President remained unsuccessful. Lansing, however, received him on October 31, 1918. The Secretary of State told Stoica that the Romanians of Transylvania had not yet requested secession from the Empire and Hungary. However, the Romanian Government took the necessary steps to solve this problem as well. By the beginning of November 1918, the State Department was ready to support the cause of Romanian national unification, *but not the special demands*. Initially, Washington had reservations about the Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) resolution.

Did those who made the decisions command the support of the people of Transylvania?³⁶

Wilson's rational plan for the federalization of Central Europe was made unrealistic by the new international and military situation that had developed by the end of the war.

In the middle of October 1918, when the situation of the Central Powers had become critical and was deteriorating by the hour, a concession was made in Vienna, which is unparalleled in the modern history of the Habsburgs. On October 16, the Emperor Charles of Austria made a proclamation to all the peoples of the Monarchy, in which he gave his consent to the transformation of the Empire into a federal state. The manifesto called upon the various national councils to co-operate with the Imperial Government in the establishment of a federal state. As a result of the strong resistance shown by the Hungarian leaders in Budapest, the Emperor's proclamation only referred to the Austrian provinces of the Empire. History, however, had overtaken this plan. Neither the objective, nor the subjective preconditions existed for its realization. The Empire could no longer be saved. The peoples that had been fighting for decades for the rights envisaged in the proclamation of October 16, and not much earlier would have regarded it as a major victory for themselves, all refused this manifesto.

Defeat in the war, the oppressive privations, which were ubiquitous in the Empire, and the struggle for social and national rights, in the end, led to the collapse of the Monarchy. The answer to President Wilson of Count Gyula Andrássy – Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Austro-Hungarian Government – was made public on the morning of October 28, 1918. In the document, Count Andrássy informed the President that his Government was ready to start ne-

³⁶ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1918, I, p. 368.

gotiations about a separate ceasefire and peace, and that he shared the President's views regarding the rights of the peoples of the Empire, especially concerning the Czechs and the Southern Slavs.³⁷ This ambiguous, diplomatic wording shows that Vienna did not give up all hope of enlisting Czech and Southern Slav support for their federal plans. (This is why they allowed the representatives of the Czech and Croatian national movements of the Empire to travel to Geneva and negotiate with the leaders of the Czechoslovak National Council and the Yugoslav Committee.) The nations of the Empire – including the representatives negotiating in Geneva – interpreted Andrassy's note in a particular way; immediately after the publication of the note, one after another, they announced their secession from the Monarchy. On October 28, the Czech National Council proclaimed the independence of the Czechoslovak State.³⁸ A day later the Croatian Sabor proclaimed its secession and its union with the Serbo-Croat-Slovene state. At the beginning of November, the National Council in Zagreb, which had not originally wished to join Serbia, under the pressure of the events, and not insignificantly affected by Italy's designs for the occupation of Dalmatia, came to a similar decision. On October 9, a meeting was held – initiated by France – by the representatives of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – Pašić, Anton Korošec and Trumbić –, where a declaration was signed about the union of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The establishment of the Kingdom of Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia was declared on December 1 in Belgrade.³⁹

While the separation of the nations under the Austrian Crown went ahead without major complications, in Hungary this process was a source of serious conflict. The leading statesmen of the country: Wekerle, Tisza and Andrassy, even at this decisive moment, in the last minutes of the Monarchy, contrived to defend the dualist structure. They would not retreat a single inch from their myopic policy on the nationalities, which had contributed to the country's running into catastrophe. They still lived under the spell of the concept of the Crown of St. Stephen and Hungarian supremacy. They did not even think of trying to find a rational solution along the lines of the policies followed in Vienna. On the contrary: they demanded that the Imperial Manifesto of October 16, which recognized the right for self-determination, should not refer to Croatian and the other non-Hungarian nationalities of the Kingdom of Hungary. In Budapest even the granting of national autonomy was considered to be dangerous for the unity of the Hungarian state. They were defending Hungary's integrity, but their devices and policies in fact strengthened the forces of disintegration. In the internal and external political situation of the autumn of 1918 it was hardly possible to rectify

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

³⁸ On the origins of the Czechoslovak state see J. Opočenský: *La fin d'Autriche et la genèse de l'Etat Tchécoslovaque*, Praha, 1928, p. 17; F. Kavka: *Bílá Hora a české dějiny* (The White Mountain and Czech history), Praha, 1960, p. 144.

³⁹ *Notes and Documents...* pp. 19–20, 60; L. Kővágó: *A magyarországi délszlávok 1918–1919-ben* (The Southern Slavs of Hungary in 1918–1919), Budapest, 1964, pp. 60–61; Lederer: *op. cit.* p. 52.

the grave consequences of decades of mistaken Hungarian policy concerning the nationalities.

Therefore, as a result of the simultaneous effect of various objective and subjective factors, the secession from Hungary of the Slovaks, Romanians, Southern Slavs and Ruthenians did not coincide with the collapse of the Monarchy as happened in the case of the nations which had been under Austrian rule. The non-Hungarian peoples of Hungary did not have the opportunity to express their views openly on the question of their right of self-determination. Their relatively feeble national movements did not have the courage to tackle the policy of integrity based on the principles of economic unity and Hungarian historic rights, which was declared by the Crown Council on October 22 and 28. And they were further discouraged, as, in their particular situation, and later also, the representatives of the nationalities in Hungary thought it expedient to leave two doors open. As we shall see, in every case, without exception, they needed external – Czech, Romanian and Serbian – armed intervention to achieve secession.

Nevertheless, the events of October and November 1918 mobilized the nationalities of Hungary as well. After the Imperial manifesto – which, as has been mentioned, did not refer to Hungary because of the Hungarian intervention – the representatives of the Slovaks, Romanians, Southern Slavs and Ruthenians made a joint protest against the fact that the Hungarian Government had made statements in their name in Vienna. However, they rejected the manifesto. The representatives of the Slovaks, the Southern Slavs and the Ruthenians demanded the right of self-determination in declarations at meetings and in the Hungarian Parliament. It became evident that very similar processes had got under way in Austria and in Hungary. Shortly after this, the Slovak National Council on October 30, the Romanian National Council on December 1 and the Yugoslav National Council in Zagreb in the name of the Southern Slavs of Hungary on November 25, declared their secession from Hungary and their union with the neighbouring states.⁴⁰

In the autumn of 1918, the revolutionary upheavals, which shook Central and Eastern Europe, also affected Hungary and swept away the Wekerle Government, whose internal and external policies were equally myopic, and were pushing Hungary towards further ruin. The “Revolution of the Michaelmas Daisies”, so called because of the flowers worn by the homecoming soldiers, was victorious

⁴⁰ On October 19 the Yugoslav National Council issued a declaration in Zagreb in which – as a practical implementation of the right of self-determination – they demanded the creation of an independent national state of Yugoslavia on the territories inhabited by Slovenes, Croats and Serbians. The declaration was also made in the name of the Serbs living in Hungary, in spite of the fact that the National Council had no contact with them whatsoever until the end of October. It was only at the very end of October that Vasa Stojić, a Serbian politician from Voivodina, arrived in Zagreb. Almost simultaneously, the Romanian Vaida-Voevod and the Slovak Juriga, Members of Parliament, referring to the right of self-determination, declared the secession of their nations from Hungary in the Budapest Parliament. *Notes and Documents...* pp. 14–18; Kővágó: *op. cit.* pp. 60–61; K. Krofta: *Histoire de la Tchécoslovaquie*. Paris, 1934, p. 144; Machray: *op. cit.* p. 81.

on October 31. The National Council took over the government, and immediately declared Hungary's independence and the end of the association with Vienna. Almost simultaneously, the Austrian Provisional National Assembly approved a provisional constitution for Austria. Thus the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had ceased to exist before they could have signed the armistice.

War Ends, the Struggle Continues

Long years full of privation and struggles had to pass after the end of the war until a genuine peace and an orderly life could be established. Europe's political and geographical map was radically changed by the World War One as well as by the social and national revolutions which took place. Three empires – the Russian, the German and the Austro-Hungarian – were broken up. This resulted in a profound differentiation in Europe's social and political structure. In a significant part of Russia the first socialism-oriented country in history was established: Soviet Russia. The social structures established on the territory of the two other empires were marked not only by heterogeneity, but also by commotion and change. From the victory of the short-lived Soviet republics of Hungary and Bavaria over the Czechoslovak, Austrian, Weimarian and Hungarian bourgeois democracies to monarchic rule in Romania, Yugoslavia and in Admiral Horthy's Hungary, practically every political system could be found in the region.

In opposition to the socialist and bourgeois democratic systems, the early twenties were marked by strong tendencies aimed at creating a fascist or extreme rightist social system (see Italy, Hungary and Bavaria). In addition to the contrasts due to social differences, we have also to consider the fact that some states finished the war as losers, others as winners or on the side of the victors and had to endure or to enjoy the consequences accordingly. A battle continued even after the war had finished, primarily against Soviet power in Russia and later against similar attempts in Hungary and Bavaria, as well as for the restoration of the Romanov-, Habsburg- and Hohenzollern-dynasties. The struggle continued for the expansion of the socialist revolution, for the consolidation of the bourgeois democratic system, and for the liquidation of movements aimed at socialist transformation. Others struggled for the territories which the Allied Powers had promised them during the war, for the new frontiers, and for their definite confirmation on the map. Finally, arguments were raised about whether to keep or restore the former frontiers – the scene switched between battlefield and conference room, the press and public.

A major uncertainty could be observed among the victorious powers as far as the future of Central Europe was concerned. Every power wished to achieve an arrangement in accordance with its own interests. Differences between the allies of yesterday became more and more acute. Traditional Anglo-French antagonism resurfaced and left its mark on the solution of almost every unsettled question. The quarrel between the victors which started right after the armistice, ag-

gravated Central Europe's situation unstable as it was, and opened the door to arbitrary actions by the newly constituted small states. A fierce struggle began for the contested territories between almost every Central European state. Romania quarrelled with Yugoslavia for the districts of Banat and Batschka, Yugoslavia with Italy and Austria for Fiume and Trieste, Czechoslovakia with Austria, Poland and Romania for Silesia, Teschen and the parts of the Ukraine inhabited by Romanians, while almost everyone fought with a Hungary unwilling to renounce its historical frontiers.

Károlyi's policy was aimed at saving Hungary from utter breakdown resulting from the war. He made efforts to solve the social and national conflicts and carried out important social reforms to this end. On the basis of Wilson's 14 points, he also tried to solve the national question. He opposed the idea of Hungarian supremacy and was ready to grant substantial rights to the different nationalities, but only without territorial losses to Hungary. His nationality programme, which brought him much criticism, including the accusation of high treason, was aimed at establishing a confederation within which every national would have autonomy. This concept, however, proved to be both unrealistic and belated in the prevailing constellation of domestic and foreign policies.⁴¹

Károlyi knew very well that when the Allied Powers agreed to the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states and to the occupation of Transylvania, Banat and Batschka by Romania, they decided at the same time the fate of Hungary as well. Nevertheless, he tried to come to an agreement with the leaders of the nationalities living in the areas subject to "de-annexation". Within the national movements of Slovaks, Romanians, Ruthenians and South Slavs there still existed significant Hungarophil groups ready to remain within Hungary's frontiers under certain conditions. By now, however, the leaders of the exile movements were much more resolute and energetic than the national leaders ready to co-operate with Budapest. The governments in Belgrade and Bucharest acted: on November 3, 1918 Romania again declared war on the Central Powers, thus cancelling the separate peace treaty signed just half a year before. The Romanian army began the occupation of Transylvania.

Plans and Attempts at Co-operation

It was evident to the leaders of the national movement that they would have to co-operate in the future in order to surmount the obstacles. During the war they talked and wrote about forms of co-operation and about the question of how to unite the independent small states. Immediately after he had placed himself in opposition to the Monarchy, Masaryk began to concern himself with the idea of

⁴¹ About the foreign policy of Mihály Károlyi cf. Tibor Hajdu: *Károlyi Mihály*. Budapest, 1978; V. Vinaver: *Jugoslavija i Madarska 1918-1933* (Yugoslavia and Hungary, 1918-1933). Belgrade, 1971, pp. 17-47.

opposition to the Monarchy, Masaryk began to concern himself with the idea of the union. The ideological foundations were laid down in his work *New Europe*, but only in 1918 did he begin to put his ideas into practice. He founded the Central European Democratic Union, aimed at promoting the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the co-operation of the free and democratic small nations as well as the cultural and economical reorganization of Central Europe.⁴² Masaryk opposed most vigorously the plans of those who sought to save the Monarchy through its social and economic reformation. He deemed particularly dangerous some social democrat and communist ideas existing within the labour movement, according to which the framework of the Monarchy could be maintained, since the left regarded the question only as formal and secondary, emphasizing – though more radically than others – socialist transformation; a framework, which dangerous anyhow, would thus be given still more dangerous contents. Always adaptable to the prevailing situation and the conceptions of his comrades, Masaryk's plan for the rearrangement of Central Europe was changed several times, but always in a restrictive sense as far as integration was concerned. At first he conceived of an alliance from the Baltic to the Adriatic sea, or even further: including Switzerland as far as France. In the last years of the war he reduced it to five states only: Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland and Greece. After the war was over, the Czechoslovak leaders rejected this plan at once which was actually a variant of the Little Entente. By then, they regarded Poland's participation in the alliance as unacceptable. In November 1918, Masaryk wrote from America to Beneš. He mentioned an alliance between Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia only just hinting at the eventual adherence of Greece. Although he pointed in the letter to his original plan of an all-embracing alliance, he thought that this could only be realized when the complications between the different nations were over.⁴³ Far from being over, however, the complications between the new states became more and more numerous. Returning to Europe at the beginning of December 1918, Masaryk met Beneš in Paris. Together they began concentrated diplomatic action to bring about a reduced system of alliance. They had talks with Raymond Poincaré, Georges Clemenceau and Stephen Pichon, who essentially agreed with their project, but regarded Poland's participation as absolutely necessary.⁴⁴ At the same time, Masaryk conferred with Trumbić and Take Ionescu and, at the request of the latter, had a meeting with E. Venizelos. He hinted at these conferences later, when he wrote that the idea of the Little Entente was already in the air in 1918. However, there were already conflicts looming ahead. Hinting at them, Masaryk wrote that the

⁴² The Democratic Union held a conference on October 23–26, 1918 in Philadelphia, where the post-war co-operation of the Central and Eastern European states was discussed.

⁴³ Masaryk: *Světová revoluce...* p. 442.

⁴⁴ Masaryk and Beneš had serious reserves in this respect. The Czechoslovak-Polish conflicts had considerably sharpened by then. Masaryk and Beneš claimed the historic frontiers of Bohemia – the Poles protested and wished to attach Silesia to Poland.

organizers of the Little Entente had already begun to reckon with the difficulties caused by territorial problems.⁴⁵ Opened shortly afterwards, the peace conference demonstrated plainly that the obstacles were insuperable, that the plans for co-operation and the union of independent states – as imagined during the war – were unrealistic, because the actual reality proved to be far more complicated than was thought during the negotiations and talks. Even the forming of an alliance reduced to three states encountered grave difficulties. The co-operation of these three states was actually disturbed by the territorial disagreements which had existed between them since the moment the Monarchy collapsed and the independent states came into being; the fact that they were founded on, or enlarged by, the Monarchy's territory, became the source of common interest, but of conflict as well. All this became obvious at the peace conference.

The Successor States and the Peace Conference

The peace conference opened in Versailles on January 18, 1919. The representatives of the victorious powers came together in order to discuss the fate, the geographical and political image of Europe, as well as the means of preventing the outbreak of a similar war and the expansion of the Central European revolutionary movements. They assembled to deliver judgement against countries and nations, to delete former frontiers and draw new ones on the map, to grant freedom to some peoples and to deprive others of it. For long months, salons in the suburbs of Paris were the scene of hard debates. As a matter of fact, the partition of Europe proved to be anything but easy. How far the territorial ambitions of the new states attending the conference could and must be fulfilled; was it possible, and to what extent, to consider the economic, strategic and traffic aspects when tracing the new frontiers; what about the question of the Austrian and Hungarian plebiscites; what about the reparations, could they be imposed on the successor states now on the side of the Allies, etc. In addition to the victorious Great Powers, the newly constituted so-called victorious Central European states – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom – were represented at the conference. The losers and Soviet Russia were excluded. Although the Russian question was not included in the official programme of the conference, it was present in the conference rooms, in the discussion of almost every problem and in the decisions made.

The position of Romania was only cleared immediately before the opening of the conference. There was a lengthy discussion about the right of the Romanian government to take part in the conference on the side of the victors, together with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. According to rather widely held opinion, Romania deprived itself of this right by withdrawing from the war in March 1918, and by signing a separate peace with the Central Powers, and re-declaring war

⁴⁵ Masaryk: *Světová revoluce...* p. 442.

practically at the end of the conflict. Mainly with the help of Take Ionescu's close contacts with the Entente, Brătianu finally managed to obtain permission to sit side by side with the Allies. In spite of all his efforts, however, the validity of the secret agreement of Bucharest was not recognized.

In January 1919, the three states presented their territorial demands in writing. A considerable part of the territory was already occupied by them, now they asked for the approbation thereof as well as for the addition of further areas. Unmindful of the right to self-determination and ethnographical principles – the bases of their struggle against the multinational Monarchy –, they announced territorial ambitions inconsistent with these principles and resulting in the establishment of new multinational states. In order to protect their interests, they put forward now ethnographical and historical, now economic and strategic arguments. "Whenever Beneš demanded the annexation to Czechoslovakia of a population which would have decided for its union with another state on the basis of the peoples' right to self-determination, he simply ignored the facts and reduced their importance,"⁴⁶ recorded Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Great Britain. This was characteristic of the attitude of the other delegates as well.

At the peace conference the three states were preoccupied with the representation of their own interest and the substantiation of their claims, with some territorial ambitions opposing the interests of the others. This was already causing some tension at the conference. For strategic reasons Masaryk and Beneš advocated in the interest of the suggested alliance a common frontier between Czechoslovakia on one side, and Romania as well as Yugoslavia on the other, to be realized with the help of two corridors through Ruthenia and Burgenland, respectively.⁴⁷ Thus, they announced their claim on Ruthenia, while the area of the Burgenland corridor was supposed to be divided with Yugoslavia. Romania was rather upset about the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Czechs envisaging the annexion of the entire Ruthenia, for it wished to draw the Czechoslovak-Romanian frontier not at Máramaros, as conceived of by Prague, but much further to the west. It was also unwilling to share the areas of Banat and Batschka with Yugoslavia, although the latter definitely aspired after these territories. The conceptions were also contradictory as regarded the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav frontier as well as the Czechoslovak-Polish and Yugoslav-Italian claims. The territorial claims of the states on the side of the Allies confronted the peace conference with a difficult task – most difficulties were actually caused by the new frontiers to be drawn between them. It was natural that their representatives spent the most time on these problems.

On the other hand, the standpoint of the Allies was considerably different on these questions. The United States refused to recognize the agreements concluded before its entry into war, i.e. those of Bucharest and London. The former was not recognized by the other Allies either. At this stage of the conference,

⁴⁶ D. Lloyd George: *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. London, 1938, p. 205.

⁴⁷ Masaryk: *Nová Evropa*, p. 303.

Wilson and Lloyd George still insisted on the principle that the frontiers had to be drawn so that the smallest possible foreign ethnic groups would be annexed by the new states. "There won't be any peace in Europe – said Lloyd George –, if we burden the new states with irredentism."⁴⁸ Their opinion was the same in regard to the defeated states. Under such circumstances Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania did their best to take possession of the claimed territories before the peace conference was convened. For the most part, they managed to realize this scheme. On the one hand, these measures consolidated the unstable internal position of their newly formed governments and permitted them to concentrate the revolutionary forces on the accomplishment of national tasks – this leading *a priori* to the weakening of the social movements. On the other hand, they could isolate or relentlessly liquidate the movements aimed at expanding the social revolution. In all three states the national successes contributed considerably to the possibility of consolidating the internal situation within a bourgeois framework. In Hungary it was just the opposite: the territorial annexions carried out by the three states undermined the position of Károlyi's government and promoted its downfall. For these reasons also, Károlyi was unable to stabilize the bourgeois democratic system and to stop the expansion of the revolutionary movements. In March 1919, the proletarian revolution triumphed in Hungary.

The Successor States and the Hungarian Soviet Republic

The proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic produced a strong effect on the further development of Central Europe's history. It gave a further impulse to the revolutionary movements in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia alike. Everything was in motion. Although the Berlin uprising was crushed in March 1919, the expansion of the revolutionary movement went on. Its climax was the proclamation of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Except in Hungary, however, the movement was unable to break national bounds and become international. The nationalistic trend surviving within the labour movement also played a significant role therein. Finally, international collaboration was achieved by the anti-Bolshevik groups which were thus able to localize the revolutionary centres and to eliminate them one after the other.

The centre of the anti-revolutionary struggle was Paris. The efforts of the peace conference were now aimed at the suppression of the revolution. Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia tried to benefit from this situation, and, as guardians of the "order" in Central Europe, demanded more forcefully the fulfilment of their claims. In his letter of March 25, Beneš warned Clemenceau of the danger to which Czechoslovakia had become exposed by the triumph of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as well as by the upsurge in the German, Austrian and Polish revolutionary movements, asking him at the same time

⁴⁸ Lloyd George: *op. cit.* p. 20.

to support his claims against these three states for the sake of maintaining the internal order.⁴⁹ Bucharest and Belgrade argued in the same way – the arguments were both logical and effective. A way out of the crisis was feverishly sought in Paris. Every possibility was taken into consideration, ranging from military intervention against the Hungarian Soviet Republic through the establishment of contacts and negotiations with it with the economic and political support of the Central European states. The last of these proposals based on the conception of Wilson and Lloyd George did not include discriminating between winners and losers. Moreover, since the United States and Britain were opposed to open military action by the Allies, the French government gave Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia the role of starting military intervention against Hungary. This conception was adopted by Italy too, last but not least in order to counterbalance France. It was at the same time ready to enter into negotiations with the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Preparations for the Czechoslovak and Romanian intervention were started in strictest confidence. Yugoslavia joined neither the preparations nor the subsequent action in spite of all the efforts made by Paris, Prague and Bucharest to this end.⁵⁰ Recognized also by Béla Kun, the Belgrade agreement complied on the whole with the territorial claims of Yugoslavia on Hungary. On the other hand, Italy's active role in the preparation of intervention disturbed Yugoslavia, since it was evident that Italy wished to strengthen its Central European position under the pretext of fighting against Bolshevism. Yugoslav-Italian relations continued to worsen at the peace conference, because the Italian government was unwilling to make any compromise, kept to the territories promised in the London agreement and was definitely against the realization of a Yugoslav-Czechoslovak corridor. Border incidents were a common occurrence on the Yugoslav-Italian frontier. But since the situation was rather tense at the Romanian and the Bulgarian frontier as well, Yugoslavia had to concentrate its forces on the struggle with these countries.

Czechoslovakia and Romania were not perfectly at ease either, since the recognition of the Belgrade agreement and the refusal of the so-called Vix note by the Governing Council meant that Budapest did not relinquish the territories arbitrarily occupied in December 1918 by Czech and Romanian troops. The difficulties of the Romanian government were enhanced by the fact that the Allied Powers – except France – regarded the Vix note as a false step and blamed Clemenceau, its originator, for the downfall of the Károlyi régime and the formation of the Soviet Republic. At the beginning of April they sent General Smuts to Budapest with a new note including a far more advantageous proposal in regard to the demarcation line. However, the leaders of the Soviet Republic were unwilling to accept a neutral zone unless it was based on the lines stipulated in

⁴⁹ *O československé zahraniční politice* (On Czechoslovak foreign policy). Prague, 1956, p. 48.

⁵⁰ The Belgrade government gave evasive replies. Urged by Paris and Prague, however, it promised to keep certain troops in permanence.

the Belgrade agreement. Direct negotiations between Hungary and the Western powers were thus broken off.⁵¹

The neighbours failed to achieve their purpose by bringing about the fall of Károlyi's government. Wishing to maintain Hungary's integrity, the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in a formal sense, continued to follow the foreign policy of their predecessors. The substantial change was that this policy was regarded by Béla Kun and his comrades as part of the international proletarian revolution, as the realization of the socialist coexistence of the Danubian nations. This, of course, represented an increased danger for the Romanian and Czechoslovak governments. All this encouraged them to act. Sure of the support of France and Italy, the Romanian army thus crossed the demarcation line on April 16, 1919 and advanced as far as the Tisza river. The Czechoslovak government also believed that it was high time to take possession of the Hungarian territories it still claimed, including Salgótarján, Hungary's most important coal basin, under the pretext of fighting against Bolshevism. It also claimed considerable areas of Western Hungary in order to connect Czechoslovakia with Yugoslavia by means of a zone of 250 sq.km. In addition it had to urgently occupy Ruthenia already awarded by the Allied Powers, so as not to be outmatched by the Romanian troops. The Prague government was sure that military intervention would take place and it wished to take part. On March 26, Beneš asked the French foreign minister Pichon to include Czechoslovakia in intervention by the Allied Powers or by France or in any kind of war.⁵² But now, although it was a settled matter that Czechoslovakia, together with Romania and Yugoslavia, should wage war on Hungary in compliance with the French conception, the prevailing situation in internal and foreign policy induced Prague to wait. It was officially denied that Czechoslovakia would join the Romanian attack. Masaryk still did so on April 23. Public opinion had to be suitably prepared. It was certainly not easy to persuade the people to accept a new war hardly six months after the Great War had ended. Time was needed to change public opinion. The government of a democratic state such as Czechoslovakia could not ignore this political necessity, unlike the Romanian government which was not bound by such considerations. Prague's hesitation was certainly also due to the fact that Yugoslavia refused to join the action. Finally, however, the situation created by the Romanian attack – the Hungarian Red Army was retiring along the whole battle-line – offered the Czech government the chance to take possession without any major risk of all the territories it claimed. On April 26, 1919 the Czechoslovak army crossed the demarcation line, occupied Ruthenia within six days – establishing thereby direct contact with the Romanian forces by then already

⁵¹ Cf. Zsuzsa L. Nagy: *A párizsi békekonferencia és Magyarország* (The Paris Peace Conference and Hungary). Budapest, 1965, pp. 79–147; V. Král: *A csehszlovák burzsoázia intervenció háborúja a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság ellen 1919-ben* (The war of intervention of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919). Szlovákiai Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1956.

⁵² *O československé zahraniční politice*, p. 48.

standing along the Tisza river – , took possession of the town of Miskolc and pushed forward to Salgótarján.

The military situation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic became very serious indeed. At the end of April the Governing Council sent a note to Prague, Bucharest and Belgrade, informing the governments of the three states that it did not stand on the basis of territorial integrity, but recognized the territorial claims. At the same time, it urged the Czechoslovak and Romanian governments to immediately stop military operations against Hungary. It also addressed an appeal to Wilson, asking him to take appropriate measures for the cessation of the military intervention.⁵³ The United States and Great Britain were decidedly against the arbitrary action of the two states. On their initiative the peace conference urged Bucharest and Prague in a letter to stop the attack at once.⁵⁴ In the prevailing situation, Romania deemed it advisable to temporarily halt the advance of its forces. This was done all the more, since the ultimatum of the Soviets claiming the military and administrative evacuation of Bessarabia compelled the Romanian government to concentrate its troops on the Soviet-Romanian frontier. As a matter of fact, its territorial claims against Hungary were practically fulfilled, since its army had advanced as far as the Tisza river. As regards Czechoslovakia, the situation was different, since it had not yet achieved one of its main objectives, the occupation of Salgótarján; thus, the attack was continued in spite of the warnings.

Meanwhile the Hungarian Government reorganized and strengthened the Hungarian Red Army which started a counter-attack on May 20. The Czechoslovak army was held and driven out of Hungarian territory. At the beginning of June, the Hungarian army crossed the demarcation line and occupied Eastern Slovakia which had a Hungarian majority population. On June 15, it reached the Polish frontier to the north of Eperjes. (The leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic wished to establish a direct contact with Soviet power.) The next day, on June 16, the Slovak Soviet Republic was proclaimed in Eperjes. The decision of Béla Kun to extend the Hungarian revolution beyond the demarcation line was based on the theory and practice of international revolution.

The position of the Prague government became critical. Romania continued to be unwilling to offer Czechoslovakia military support, that is, to resume its war against Hungary and thus to exonerate Prague. In fact, their collaboration against Hungary was marked by rivalry for Ruthenia. This was demonstrated by the fact that Czechoslovakia decided to launch a rapid military action at the very moment Romanian troops reached the Tisza river and it was feared that they would occupy Ruthenia as well. On the other hand, the Romanians immediately stopped their advance when the Czechoslovak troops were pushing forward and were unwilling to recommence it even during the northern campaign of the Hungarian

⁵³ Zsuzsa L. Nagy: *op. cit.* pp. 79–147.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Red Army, although they were repeatedly asked to do so by the headquarters of the harrassed Czech army.

At the beginning of June, Beneš hurried to Paris for negotiations with Clemenceau and Ferdinand Foch. They were both ready to grant the requested military assistance, i.e. to take measures against Hungary, but only on conditions that "the Serbs, Romanians and Czechoslovaks took joint measures".⁵⁵ In Paris, the action was supposed to be led by Beneš. Masaryk agreed, although he was rather sceptical as far as the fulfilment of the condition was concerned, since the post-war events made it clear that both the Serbs and the Romanians were pre-occupied exclusively with their own territorial aspirations. After the talks with Beneš, Foch outlined an operational plan for the suppression of Hungary, reckoning with the participation of the Czechoslovak, the Serb and the Romanian army.⁵⁶ However neither the Serbs nor the Romanians were willing to accept his plan. The former wished to maintain their neutrality, while the latter, at that time, preferred to concentrate its army on the Soviet-Romanian frontier. So the strategy of Foch was a failure.

On June 13, 1919 the demarcation lines between Hungary and Romania were definitely laid down. In both cases the French standpoint asserted itself. At the same time the Allied Powers urged the belligerents to cease hostilities. The Hungarian government was pressed in an ultimatum to evacuate all territories beyond the indicated demarcation line.⁵⁷ At the insistence of the Western powers the Hungarian Red Army and the Slovak Revolutionary regiments began to retreat behind the demarcation line. Romania, however, ignored the Peace Conference. Instead of withdrawing its troops, it started a new counter-attack and advanced as far as Budapest. Thereupon the Czechoslovak army, reorganized meanwhile with French assistance and reinforced by the returned Czechoslovak legion, also launched a counter-offensive. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was in an extremely hard situation indeed. The Governing Council resigned on August 1, 1919,⁵⁸ while Romania and Czechoslovakia prepared to occupy the whole country, under the pretext of "liquidating the Bolshevik fire-trap". On August 4, the Romanian army marched into Budapest. This brought Romania into conflict with the Peace Conference, but since it enjoyed the tacit support of France, it could delay the decisions of the conference. Unwilling to strain the situation with the Allied Powers, the Prague government did not listen to domestic circles suggesting to follow the Romanian example. It was actually satisfied with the demarcation line as drawn by the Peace Conference on June 13 and with the decision of

⁵⁵ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1938*. First Series, vols. I-VIII, XII. London, 1947-1962 (henceforward: *DBFP*) I, pp. 127-129.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The demarcation line between Hungary and Czechoslovakia as well as Hungary and Romania was definitely fixed in Paris on June 13, 1919. At the same time they were summoned to stop fighting.

⁵⁸ Cf. Zsuzsa L. Nagy: *op. cit.*

June 18 to attach Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia. It rather concentrated its forces in order to assert its position, for the Romanian government rejected the demarcation line drawn on June 13, and accepted the line indicated in the so-called Vix note. It simply ignored the decision of June 13, kept some of the Sub-Carpathian areas occupied and was unwilling to evacuate them, thus delivering them to Czechoslovakia. The victory over Hungary (the entry into Budapest) increased the self-confidence of Romanian military and political circles. They wanted to transfer not only Hungary's material goods to Romania, but those of Ruthenia as well. The Prague government protested most forcibly against this, desiring the immediate evacuation of the territories and compensation for damage.⁵⁹ This affair resulted in grave tension between Czechoslovakia and Romania, intensified by the intention of the Romanian government to conclude a separate armistice with Hungary. Alarming news came from reliable sources, according to which Bucharest had taken into consideration the proposal of the Hungarian government in Szeged, suggesting the creation of a Romanian-Hungarian union. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia protested jointly against Romania's attempt to conclude a separate peace. They lodged their protest in Paris, contending that the Romanian plan was inconsistent with the Belgrade agreement and with the decision of the Allies taken on June 13.⁶⁰ In the first days of August, Romania's relations with Yugoslavia were strained to such a degree that the outbreak of war was feared. In this situation, the new Hungarian trade-unionist government headed by Gyula Peidl tried to make a joint stand with Yugoslavia against Romania. So, while the counter-revolutionary government in Szeged was putting out feelers in Bucharest, the official Hungarian government did the same in Belgrade. On August 4, Peidl sent delegates to Belgrade for negotiations on the normalization of relations between the two countries. However, Pašić received this rapprochement most carefully. He was not at all eager to enter into negotiations with a presumably provisional government that was not yet recognized by anybody.⁶¹

After the suppression of the Hungarian Soviet Republic there was a certain rapprochement between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In September 1919, Beneš discussed with Trumbić the possibility of co-operation between the two states. At the beginning of this co-operation was distinctly directed against Romania. Both were opposed to the Hungarian separate peace or to an eventual alliance. But the decisive reason for the approach was Hungary: the events which took place on August 6, 1919 in Budapest, put an end to the relative peaceful pe-

⁵⁹ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques, Série Europe 1918-1940 (henceforward: AD.), Tchecoslovaquie (henceforward: T.); Letter of Beneš to Osuský, Jan. 15, 1920; *ibid.* Roumanie (henceforward: R.), vol. 50. Note of the Czechoslovak government to the French government, August 1920.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ AD. Europe 1918-1940. Yougoslavie (henceforward: Y.), vol. 62. Report of the French ambassador in Belgrade to Clemenceau, August 8, 1919.

riod between Hungary and Yugoslavia. The trade-unionist government was turned out of office by a right-wing group led by István Friedrich who became prime minister; governor was Archduke Joseph, a member of the Hungarian line of the Habsburgs. The Hungarian coup d'état, considered to be the first step in the restoration of the Habsburgs, alarmed government circles in both Belgrade and Prague. Their anxiety was intensified by secret information, according to which the putsch had been carried out with Romanian assistance and French support.

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia blamed France for its policy towards Romania and the Archduke Joseph, and tried to find a remedy through Great Britain and the United States. At the Peace Conference, Prague protested on August 12, Belgrade on August 13 against the taking of power by the Archduke. They declared that a Habsburg restoration would imperil the security of their states, and asked the Conference, not to support these moves and not to recognize the Archduke Joseph.⁶² Wilson and Lloyd George opposed everything that delayed the re-establishment of peace in Central Europe and formulated a protest at the Peace Conference against the self-appointment of the Archduke. When Italy learned that Paris had played a role in the putsch, it also supported the Anglo-American motion. France had no alternative but to take notice of the situation. The so-called "February Note of the Conference of Ambassadors" was thus formulated, where the Allies blamed Habsburg ambition and informed the Hungarian government that the restoration would not be tolerated.⁶³ The Archduke Joseph was forced to resign, but the French did not give up hope of putting him on the throne.

Preparations for the Treaty of Trianon and the Successor States

In 1919, most of the defeated states signed the peace treaty: in June Germany, in September Austria, in November Bulgaria, only Hungary and Turkey were left. The most difficulty was caused by the treaty to be concluded with Hungary, and certainly not by chance, since the peace terms were the most rigorous in her case. The Hungarian peace-negotiations were convened in January 1920. Each of the interested states was rather uneasy, because difficult negotiations were to be expected. Hungary's neighbours had already been informed before the conference that the Hungarian delegation headed by Count Apponyi would demand the re-establishment of territorial integrity, without renouncing any territory except Croatia. Beneš urged the governments in Belgrade and Bucharest to co-ordinate

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *DBFP*, vol. I, 1919.

their activities, because "hard work is awaiting us in Paris, if we want to safeguard our interests."⁶⁴ His suggestion was accepted. Having so far gone their own way and even fought against each other, the three states were brought together by the common danger and induced to co-operate. In a joint memorandum they laid down their claims on Hungary and gave a collective answer to the petition of the Hungarian government concerning the draft treaty of Trianon.⁶⁵ The name "Little Entente" became current at that time, although the alliance itself was not yet formally concluded in spite of the efforts of Beneš. Trumbić and Take Ionescu rejected the Czechoslovak proposal to conclude a treaty, "which would provide us with security against the Hungarian danger."⁶⁶ They regarded it as superfluous, since the peace conference had rejected Apponyi's territorial claims and his demand for a plebiscite; moreover, the frontiers they desired were essentially sanctioned. Without support from any great power, living in complete political isolation and exhausted in both military and economic respects, Hungary was no threat in their eyes. All the more dangerous were Italy and Soviet Russia! Romania's vacillations were also due to the fact that it was anxious about the formation of a bloc dominated by Slavs. These worries were intensified by the Italian government from the very beginning. In Rome the formation of a strong Slavic bloc was regarded as contradictory to Italy's interests, because – so it was said – it would be detrimental to the non-Slavic peoples. In reality, the Italians feared most of all the strengthening of Yugoslavia's position.⁶⁷ At this time Italo-Yugoslav disagreement became most acute. In September 1919, Italian troops occupied Fiume and were unwilling to evacuate it even after protests from their allies. As a matter of fact, Italy resorted to every means to weaken Yugoslavia. For Yugoslavia, Italy was the main danger, engaging all its force and attention.

On account of the arbitrarily occupied Bessarabian areas, Romania was on bad terms with Soviet Russia and so its policy was concentrated on safeguarding these territories. The reduced system of alliance as suggested by Beneš would have been no real support. Take Ionescu wanted to set up an alliance protecting Romania's eastern and Balkan frontiers as well and insisted therefore on the adherence of Poland and Greece. But Beneš rejected his proposal, being unwilling to trouble the Little Entente with the thorny problems of Romania, and this with the adherence of a country such as Poland which had territorial disputes with Czechoslovakia and would have jeopardized its leading role within the bloc. But

⁶⁴ *Diplomatické dokumenty o spojeneckých smlouvách Republiky Československé s Královstvím Srbů, Chorvatů a Slovenců s Královstvím rumunským* (Diplomatic documents on the Alliance Agreement of the Czechoslovak Republic with the Serb-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom and with the Romanian Kingdom). Praha, 1923 (henceforward: *Diplomatické dokumenty MD*).

⁶⁵ Stefan Osuský: *Malá dohoda* (The Little Entente). Praha, 1933, pp. 10–11.

⁶⁶ AD. Europe 1918–1940. T. vol. 65. f. 43.

⁶⁷ Archivio Storico del Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Seria politica 1919–1939 (henceforward: ASMAE). Report of the Romanian minister in Rome to the foreign minister, March 10, 1921.

Yugoslavia also rejected the Romanian plan, since Italy was for it the main danger, and neither the minimum plan of Beneš, nor the maximum plan of Take Ionescu would have served as protection. The agreement envisaged in Belgrade was supposed to protect the Italo-Yugoslav frontier too. But at no time was any partner found for such an alliance.

Franco-Hungarian Rapprochement and the Successor States

We have seen on the preceding pages, how much the relations between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania were strained by the contradictory interests of the three states. This was particularly the case with Romania and Yugoslavia. During the whole of 1919 co-operation between the three successor states was very loose and could be realized only by two states at the time: by Czechoslovakia and Romania in the first, and by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in the second half of the year. Significant collaboration including all three of them took place only at the beginning of 1920 when Albert Apponyi had to be prevailed from enforcing the claims of the Hungarian peace delegation. Once this was done, the three states again went their own way.

At that time Yugoslavia and Romania still opposed the formation of the Little Entente as suggested by Beneš. However, the pressure of events induced first Yugoslavia and then Romania to accept the proposal of Beneš to set up an alliance — the former possibility thus became reality. Later, we will examine in detail the factors which played the role of catalyst in the creation of the Little Entente. These factors were both local and European in character, and were linked with the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement and the plan for a Transilvanian confederation, on the one hand, and with the attempt at a Habsburg restoration as well as with the Bulgarian crisis, on the other. In other words with all the events which made the "Hungarian danger" a reality.

In the present chapter we shall trace the turning-point in the domestic policy of France, examining its background and its aims. We shall present the Franco-Hungarian negotiations and the resulting agreement, which was to play a decisive role in the formation of the Little Entente. The forces which acted separately and collectively against the French intentions and which finally got the upper hand will be examined. The course of the negotiations will be reconstructed, all the more, since their importance was significantly exaggerated both in the contemporary press and in diplomatic circles.

For months, the world's press wrote about the secret Franco-Hungarian economic and political agreements. In Budapest and Paris diplomats protested officially against the overtures regarded as a violation of the peace. For a long time historiography was also most vacillating about this question. Apart from some documents — picked out of their context — published in 1927, which will be men-

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tioned later on, the chance of elucidating the question was first offered by the source-book published in 1939 by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹ Of course, the documents included – although still describing the events, except a few cases, generally in a correct way – still present a disproportionate, sometimes even distorted image of the question as a whole. The dossiers of the Quay d'Orsay now available, make it possible to regard the events in a more comprehensive and authentic way.

The turning-point in the French Danubian policy actually had many causes. An important role was played by changes in domestic policy following the presidential election in January 1920. Poincaré and Clemenceau were replaced by Paul Deschanel and Alexandre Millerand. The new President and Prime Minister, and especially the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Maurice Paléologue, began to take seriously the idea of setting up on the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under French influence a reliable, economically united Danubian power under French influence, which would be a support to their German and Russian policy. They believed that this power could block Germany's expansion to the East, while neutralizing at the same time the Bolshevik danger menacing from the East. It can be seen that French aims remained unchanged. Poincaré and Clemenceau fought for the same, by arms at first and by diplomatic means later on. These aims were always kept in sight, whether military action contemplated, or peace conditions were to be imposed. The change appeared in the means of realization: the question of how to achieve these aims. There were manifest differences within French political circles from the very outset. There were two trends opposed to one another. One group wished to achieve its aim by imposing strict peace conditions, by weakening the former enemy as far as possible and by strengthening the eastern allies. The partisans of the other group, the so-called "reconciliation trend" regarded as unsatisfactory a security policy relying only on the victorious successor states. In their eyes, an economically and politically dismembered, "Balkanized" Central Europe would be inadequate for counterbalancing the German and the perceived Russian menace. The new leaders of the Quay d'Orsay wished to unite the small successor states, whether "winners" or "losers", either within a Danubian confederation or with help of a Habsburg restoration. For a while the two concepts existed simultaneously. At the beginning the first one was tried, and later, when it turned out that all Danubian states were opposed to this French scheme, the second was pushed forward.

¹ *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary*, vol. I. Budapest, 1939 (henceforward: *PDH*). Relying upon this source, Mario Toscano wrote in 1941 his study "L'accordo revisionista franco-ungherese del 1920" (*Politica fasc.* CXLII–CXLV. 1941). An enlarged and rewritten version of this study appeared in 1963 in *Pagini di Storia Diplomatica Contemporanea II* (Milano, 1963), in the chapter "Le origine della Piccola Intesa". About the Franco-Hungarian negotiations cf. Mária Ormos: *Francia-magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban* (Franco-Hungarian negotiations in 1920). *Századok*, 1975, Nos. 5–6; Magda Ádám: *Dunai konföderáció vagy kisantant* (Danubian confederation or Little Entente). *Történelmi Szemle*, 1977, Nos. 3–4.

In Paris, there were two confederative plans at hand: a maximum and a minimum one. The maximum plan envisaged the union of five Danubian states: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, the minimum only Hungary, Romania and Poland. The former was dominated by anti-German, the latter by anti-Soviet trends.

According to the French plan, the independent and partly reconciled small states were to be interlinked at various levels, ranging from economical preferences to a customs union within the confederation. In Paris only the question of economic integration was handled concretely, while political integration was regarded as a prospect to be taken in hand only after the economic problems had been settled. The primary task was supposed to be the convocation of an economic congress of the successor states, where the parties concerned would come to a direct agreement with one another on the development of commercial relations and the internal division of labour, while contracting a customs union and a common currency.

Thus, the Danubian scheme of France was essentially aimed at reconciling and consolidating Central Europe as reshaped in Versailles so that it would safeguard French interests in the German and the Soviet questions, i.e. for neutralizing German aspirations for Anschluss (with Austria) and the Bolshevik menace. Last but not least, this alliance was also to prevent Great Britain and Italy from realizing their ambitions in the Danube Basin.

The documents found in the archives of Paris and Rome throw light on the rivalry of the Allied powers in the Danube Basin, on the struggle which started immediately after the peace negotiations: to obtain economic and political influence in the partitioned area. As soon as the war was over, the differences between the Allied powers came to the surface²; deepening more and more at the beginning of the twenties, they began to undermine thoroughly the "Entente Cordiale", one of the foundations of the "Europe of Versailles". The two main actors in European policy, Great Britain and France, had different opinions on a number of important European problems. Here we shall limit ourselves to the dissensions connected with our theme. They held, for instance, radically different opinions on the question of security. It was easy to understand that France wished to insure itself first and foremost against renewed German aggression. Induced by the loss of the traditional Russian alliance and by the futility of the guarantees promised by Great Britain and the United States, it tried to set up a collective security system based on paragraphs 10 and 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. However, such measures could not provide sufficient security, since Great Britain tried to reduce to a minimum its relevant obligations. Thus, the development of an eastern alliance was of increasing importance for France. This, however, proved to be anything but an easy task, even in the case of Poland

²"I must tell you - said Clemenceau to his British colleague and opponent - that the day after the armistice I have found in your person an enemy of France." "Never mind - replied Lloyd George - since this has always been our traditional policy." G. Clemenceau: *Grandeur et misère d'une victoire*. Paris, 1930, p. 90.

and Czechoslovakia, although the foreign policy of these countries was in line with French intentions.

The weakest aspect of the eastern system of alliance envisaged by France was the unwillingness of Great Britain to guarantee the eastern frontiers of Germany and its persistence in this initial view. Thus, while the question of security was for France a political issue of vital importance, equivalent to the guarantees against Germany, it played for Great Britain only a secondary role behind the more emphatically promoted economic questions.

The difference between the French and the British view was also reflected in the policy of the two states in regard to the Danube Basin: Great Britain was economically interested in the area, France politically; while the former regarded political consolidation as condition *sine qua non* for the planned economic reconstruction, the latter considered, on the contrary, economic recovery as a precondition for securing the peace of Versailles.

Of course, all this does not mean that Great Britain remained inactive in the settlement of political questions concerning the area. As shown by the documents, British diplomacy actually viewed such questions with utmost interest and played an important, occasionally even a decisive role in their solution. Such issues were, for example, the coming to power of Horthy, the setting aside of the archdukes Joseph and Friedrich, the frustration of the French plan for a Danubian confederation, the failure of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations or the establishment of the Little Entente in the form conceived by Beneš and not by Take Ionescu. Another example was the prevention of the attempted Habsburg restoration. Paradoxical though it was, Great Britain presented itself in this period as the main protector of the Versailles peace treaty, engaging itself in the observance of a treaty it explicitly opposed at the peace conference and the revision of which it was to consider as unavoidable and necessary. We shall come back to these questions later in detail.

What induced Great Britain to highlight the political questions in an area it was allegedly not interested in? Its motives were primarily economic. After World War One, Great Britain aspired to regain its position and, as far as possible, to occupy that of Germany as well. Like the Quai d'Orsay, the Foreign Office thus made substantial efforts to appease the Danubian states and to restore the area's economic unity.³ From the second half of 1919 on, the representatives of British diplomacy were thus most active in order to accomplish this plan. Their activity intensified still more after Millerand came to power, since the new Danubian policy of France was also directed against the economic ambitions of Great Britain.

British economic policy had an explicitly political function as well. On the one hand, Britain wished to weaken the position of France in the Danube Basin –

³ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 46. f. 122. Report of the French ambassador in Belgrade to Millerand, January 12, 1920; DBFP. First Series, vol. XII. doc. 120. Report of the British ambassador in Belgrade to Curzon, March 2, 1920.

and so in Europe – on the other hand, it expected to prevent a probable German expansion in the Balkans and the Near East by the economic possession of the area.

The potential and real support of the British Danubian policy was Italy. As soon as the war was over, the Italian government aspired to a foothold in the Danube Basin. Its attention was concentrated mainly on winning the sympathies of Austria, Hungary and Romania, on reconciling the three states and uniting them in a single economic block. As a matter of fact, Italy had also its own federal ideas. Accordingly, it concluded commercial agreements with Austria and Hungary, without having renewed diplomatic relations or waited for the signing of a peace treaty. This step produced considerable discontent both in Paris and London,⁴ since it was evident that Italy – by outmatching the two great powers – wanted to obtain the economic advantages of the former. For anti-French motives and in spite of its differences with Britain, the Italian government often supported British conceptions. In general, it played a sort of balancing function between the two states, but in the matters in dispute it usually backed Britain. The representatives of France in Budapest and Vienna regularly informed the Quai d'Orsay about the collaboration between the British and Italian High Commissioners, underlining its anti-French nature.⁵ It was but natural that French government circles ceased to be passive spectators of British and Italian activities in Central Europe. They regarded the area as belonging to the French sphere of interest and were unwilling to give up this conviction.

Millerand started out from the belief that the former French policy relying only on the victorious successor states was insufficient to secure Central Europe for France. This policy actually opposed to France countries of utmost economic geographic and strategic importance – i.e. Austria and Hungary –, facilitating thereby the influence of Great Britain and Italy and, in the long run, driving both countries into the arms of Germany, an outlook that was particularly alarming for the leaders of French diplomacy.

Why did Hungary become the central link in the French Danubian Policy? Why did Millerand and Maurice Paléologue wish to unite the Danube states around Budapest, i.e., why did they choose precisely the country with which relations had been the most hostile so far?

The motives were manifold. Having played a leading role in past, Vienna or Budapest seemed to be the proper choice as centre of the prospective Danubian economic block. Geographic, economic and communication aspects were all in favour of such a solution. It was therefore not by chance that the British and

⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. Hongrie (henceforward: H.), vol. 56. ff. 19–22. Report of the French ambassador in Budapest to Leygues, November 30, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 14–18. Report of the French ambassador in Rome November 26, 1920.

⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 63–66. Report of Fouchet to Millerand, April 9, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 54–55. Note of the French Foreign Ministry about the policy of Britain and Italy, March 30, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 204–205. Note of the French Foreign Ministry, June 9, 1920.

Italian economic and federal conceptions also started out from this, nor was it incidental that both the British and Italians – but especially the former – decided in favour of Hungary, as the French did.

What was Budapest's advantage over Vienna?

First of all, the situation in Austria was uncertain, almost anarchical, a left-wing government was ruling, unable to master the situation and a further swing to the left was expected; at the same time, a conservative, counter-revolutionary regime came to power in Hungary, which seemed to be capable of "consolidating" domestic politics. And this was of utmost importance for western capital investment, since Britain, Italy and France were aimed equally at realizing their projects with the help of private enterprise which definitely refused to take a risk.⁶ An additional advantage over Austria was Hungary's geographical situation.⁷

Another reason, why Hungary was chosen, was the fact that it was a safe foothold for the proposed assistance to Poland (a factor of utmost importance for Millerand, the chief organizer of the third anti-Soviet intervention).⁸ Moreover, Budapest received the French ideas with more understanding than Vienna and was also ready to make more economic sacrifices. For Hungary this was the only way out of its catastrophic economic situation, while Austria, although having contacted France at the beginning of 1920, still regarded the "Anschluss" as a real chance to remedy its economic difficulties.

Last but not least, Millerand and Paléologue wanted to appease Hungary, the most apprehensive country of the Danube Basin, unwilling to recognize the changes that had occurred, and refusing or delaying the signing of the peace treaty. Of course, this attitude was not accidental since Hungary was expected to accept the hardest peace conditions. The refusal to sign the peace treaty was justified by the Hungarian government not only because of the territorial losses but also because of the country's non-viability within the imposed frontiers. This opposition had to be overcome by means of promised economic and political support.⁹ It was evident anyway that the economic and political consolidation of the Danube Basin would be inconceivable without Hungary.

Who took the initiative in the Franco-Hungarian negotiations? What did the negotiators talk about, and what issues were settled?

In February 1920, soon after Millerand came to power, a change took place in the contacts between France and Hungary. The new leaders of the Quai d'Orsay

⁶ In the case of all the three great powers it can be seen that the private enterprises supported by the government took possession of the economic positions of the Danubian states.

⁷ Cf. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 4–9. Note of the French Foreign Ministry "The Hungarian Question and the French Interests".

⁸ Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Yugoslavia proclaimed their neutrality in the Polish-Soviet war. Rumania, though making no statement of neutrality, was nevertheless unwilling to send its army to the Polish front, but preferred to use it for protecting the Hungarian frontier.

⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 197.

recognized Hungary's importance for their Central European projects,¹⁰ and in Hungary a line of foreign policy gained the upper hand, which expected the country's prosperity from the French orientation. Of course, this change was not unrelated to the former policy. Much earlier, before and during the peace negotiations, the Francophile group was already in touch with French circles preparing themselves for taking over power. Behind the postponement of the departure of the Hungarian peace delegation¹¹ and the total refusal of the peace conditions was the wish to wait for the elections in January 1920. When the French elections were actually followed by the changes expected and it became evident that the hopes would be fulfilled, there was a readiness in Budapest to adopt an unequivocal French orientation.¹² Hungarian politicians were all the more inclined to this change, since they had noticed with disappointment that in Great Britain the Foreign Office view had gained the upper hand, which disapproved from the very beginning of the pro-Hungarian policy of Lloyd George and the House of Lords, and wished to safeguard the interests of the victorious successor states.

As a result of these changes in British and French policy, more and more Hungarian politicians adopted the Francophile line. The main representatives of this trend were Pál Teleki Imre Csáky and Károly Halmos. Due to their activity, the pro-British Regent Horthy finally accepted their ideas – though rather slowly – and supported the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement. So too, though somewhat later, did Albert Apponyi, hitherto known for his anti-French attitude. This line was considerably strengthened, when Pál Teleki became Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 1920. Subsequently, discussions between the two states began at government level also. At Hungary's initiative talks ran concurrently in Paris and Budapest.

The first document concerning these problems was dated January 3, 1920, i.e. before the accession of Millerand to power. Entitled "The Hungarian question and French interests", this diplomatic note was designed for the internal use of the Quai d'Orsay. It shows the duplicity characteristic of the Danubian policy of France and bears the marks of search and hesitation. As is proved by its content and its date, Paris had already discussed, before Millerand came to power, how Danubian unity could be restored under French leadership. How far was it possible to go, without coming into conflict with the war-time allies and with the pre-

¹⁰ In this respect a note of the French Foreign Ministry includes the following lines: "La Hongrie est donc amenée de chercher un soutien à l'extérieur. La chose est si évidente que la Grande-Bretagne, la France et l'Italie s'efforcent ou se sont efforcées depuis quelques mois de prendre dans ce pays une influence dominante. Il ne faut pas oublier l'Allemagne déchue, mais qui continue à veiller dans l'ombre et s'entend déjà secrètement avec l'Italie. La puissance qui dominera la Hongrie possèdera la clef de voute de l'Europe Centrale." AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 140–149. Note of Fouchet, December 11, 1920.

¹¹ The Hungarian government sent the peace delegation to Paris after repeated warnings only.

¹² Until then, Hungary had no definite line of foreign policy. It tried its luck with several countries: Britain, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Romania, but Britain held the first place.

vailing *status quo*? In other words: the necessity of modifying the policy towards Hungary was recognized in Paris before Millerand. This document outlined the changes which would take place later, when Millerand and Paléologue came to power. The unknown author examines Hungary's situation, its past and future in the context of European economic and political conditions, pointing out the country's importance for the balance and the recovery of the area. He emphasizes that the suggested economic co-operation between Prague, Belgrade and Vienna must include Hungary as well, enumerating all that is to be done for the country's economic reconstruction. The most suitable constitutional form would be a republican government, he continues, and accentuates the necessity of fighting against British competition. "The commercial and banking organization existing in Budapest is too big for present-day Hungary, but of adequate dimensions for a new Danubian-Balkan-Europe. We have only to penetrate therein, and we can do it without any difficulty, if we want to."¹³

Another document referring to Hungary is dated two months later, March 6, and bears the signature of Millerand.¹⁴ Like the previous one, it is also marked by duplicity, characteristic of the Danubian policy of the French Premier, particularly in the initial period. It contains the instructions which Millerand addressed to M.-A.-J. Doulcet recently appointed to the post of High Commissioner in Budapest. The leaders of French diplomacy made a point of sending an experienced diplomat to Budapest, for – unlike Great Britain and Italy – France had no High Commissioner in Hungary. At the beginning of March 1920, Millerand appointed to the vacant post Doulcet, who had had a long diplomatic career. According to Millerand's instructions, Doulcet had the following tasks: to do his best to have the peace conditions accepted by Hungary, to co-operate with the local representatives of the Allied Powers, without giving up the interests and rights of France, to support the interests of the neighbouring countries, provided this did not endanger French policy concerning Hungary. Rightful and reasonable claims should not be rejected. Any activity against French interests: i.e. Poland's representative in Budapest should be hindered. To establish contacts with French diplomats in the neighbouring countries; to promote co-operation between Hungary and the neighbouring states; to intensify Franco-Hungarian cultural relations. The last part of the document points out the intention of France to improve its relations with Hungary, and to restore the unity of the successor states. As for the future constitutional form of Hungary, Millerand believed that the best guarantee against the return of aggressive nationalism would be a democratic Hungary. But if the Hungarians decided to maintain the Monarchy, it would be acknowledged, since France did not wish to interfere with

¹³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 4–9. Note of the French Foreign Ministry "The Hungarian Question and French Interests." January 5, 1920.

¹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 14–17. Millerand's communication to Doulcet. March 6, 1920.

the internal affairs of the country. However, France disapproved of a Habsburg restoration, in order to safeguard peace in Central Europe.¹⁵

But the departure of Doulcet to Hungary did not take place. Since March 1920, his post had been occupied by Christian Fouchet. Why did Millerand abandon his initial plan? We might find an answer in the fact that Doulcet belonged to the Berthelot group which disagreed with the opinions of the new political leaders of the Quai d'Orsay. Our supposition may be confirmed by the fact that Doulcet was still sent to Hungary, but more than a year later, in November 1921, when Millerand's foreign policy had already completely failed, while Fouchet, whose activities had provoked repeated protests from the neighbouring states, was recalled.¹⁶

The first Franco-Hungarian discussion took place on the initiative of Hungary on March 17, 1920. Károly Halmos, who had solid French contacts, called on Paléologue on behalf of his government and submitted to him the following proposal; France should change its policy concerning Hungary; it should support the envisaged Franco-Hungarian co-operation, promote the negotiations between Hungary and the neighbouring states, and the settlement of economic and political questions.¹⁷ Paléologue received the Hungarian initiative with much understanding, since the proposals perfectly fitted his plans concerning the Danube Basin. After having discussed the Hungarian paper with Millerand, he contacted the other members of the Hungarian peace delegation who had remained in Paris: Imre Csáky, Pál Teleki and Boldizsár Láng. Apponyi, the president of the delegation, had refused to sign the peace conditions and returned home, but several members stayed in Paris. At these first exploratory talks the Hungarian side outlined the economic and political situation of Hungary, its plan for economic reconstruction to be realized with external help, mentioning the similar interest shown by Great Britain and Italy as well as the resolution of its government to give preference to France in the solution of the question. On his part, the French Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs outlined the plan for a unified Danubian bloc as well as the role Hungary was supposed to play therein. He outlined the economic conceptions of the French government, according to which French companies would help Hungary in its economic reconstruction. On the French side the beneficiary of the economic agreement to be concluded with the participation of the French government would be the Schneider-Creusot Company. At the first talks in Paris the question of territorial revision also came up. Though

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The Budapest representatives of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania were most dissatisfied with Fouchet's activity. Archiv ministerstva zahraničných věcí. Politické zprávy (Archives of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry. Political reports) (henceforward: AMZV. PZ.) Budapešť, report of Lejhanec to Beneš, November 5, 1921.

¹⁷ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 78-79. Aide mémoire about the talks between Paléologue and Halmos, April 13, 1920.

emphasizing that this would be the most difficult problem,¹⁸ Paléologue was ready to negotiate about the re-annexation of border regions with pure Hungarian population.¹⁹

The Hungarian delegation returned to Budapest in order to inform its government about the results of the first discussion and to ask for further instructions. The delegates were received by Horthy who agreed with the plan concerning Franco-Hungarian co-operation.²⁰ He invited members of the government and of the peace delegation staying in Budapest to a conference; they discussed the general situation, the possibility of the new orientation and the economic and political plan of the French government. The members of the conference decided to accept the French proposals and to suspend economic negotiations with Britain; the Hungarian delegation due to conclude an agreement in London covering navigation on the Danube, was recalled at the last minute.²¹ They urged the beginning of Franco-Hungarian economic negotiations including the construction of a commercial port in Budapest;²² they decided to stop anti-French campaigns in the press and to introduce censorship for this purpose; finally it was decided to form a new cabinet in order to realize the great projects.²³

However, the switch-over to the new foreign policy proved to be anything but easy. Both the political circles and the public opinion were characterized by a strong anti-French attitude. The abominable peace treaty was attributed to France, an attitude deliberately incited by the High Commissioners of Great Britain and Italy, T. Hohler and V. Cerrutti.

Fouchet, the French High Commissioner in Budapest, reported to the Quai d'Orsay in detail on the Francophobia existing in the country, on the role played therein by his British and Italian colleagues and on their efforts to bring Hungary under British and Italian influence.²⁴ As chargé d'affaires Fouchet was already very busy improving Franco-Hungarian relations.²⁵ According to the instructions of the Quai d'Orsay, he tried to prepare the conditions for the agreement to be concluded.²⁶ He desired to soothe the anti-French attitude that manifested itself more and more overtly in government circles, in the press and in public opinion

¹⁸ PDH I. doc. 236.

¹⁹ This was the meaning of the acceptance of the Halmos memorandum of April 23 as the basis for negotiations.

²⁰ AD. Europe. 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 61-62. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 5, 1920; *ibid.* Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 9, 1920.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 67-71. Fouchet's report to Millerand, April 28, 1920.

²⁶ Known for his pro-Hungarian sympathies, Fouchet considered the agreement with Hungary as important even at the price of serious concessions.

alike.²⁷ He established close contacts with the Hungarian aristocracy, first of all with Archduke Joseph, whom he very much wanted to put on the Hungarian throne²⁸, as well as with Albert Apponyi, president of the peace delegation, whom he had to win over to the French plans and persuade to sign the peace treaty. He was on good terms with important politicians, including Horthy himself. In the first week of April he had two meetings with the Regent.²⁹ He had talks with Prime Minister Simonyi-Semadam, Foreign Minister Pál Teleki and Kálmán Kánya, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs. The politicians who had so far maintained an attitude of reserve, all of a sudden became friendly and attentive. All of them expressed their agreement with Hungary's French orientation.³⁰ Of course, the question of territorial revision was also discussed; Apponyi demanded a radical revision,³¹ the Prime Minister advocated a plebiscite in the northern areas in order to establish a common frontier between Poland and Hungary (he regarded this as a common Franco-Hungarian interest), expecting from the referendum the re-annexation of Ruthenia and Eastern Slovakia.³²

Simonyi-Semadam proposed that Millerand take this claim into consideration, because "if France wishes to obtain the enormous economic advantages presenting themselves in Hungary" – so wrote Fouchet in his report – "it has to grant these political concessions which are not too significant at all. A gesture from France could be very useful at this moment."³³ In those days Fouchet sent several reports to the Quai d'Orsay, covering the efforts of the Hungarian government towards the new political orientation; their positive results as well as the fact that the anti-French press campaigns had been entirely stopped: articles and other publications had to be submitted to the press chief before being published. The reports also gave an account of a pro-French article by István Bethlen, published in the *Pester Lloyd*, where the author plainly took the side of Franco-Hun-

²⁷ At the end of April he reported with satisfaction to Millerand about the decreasing Franco-phobia. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. ff. 101–106. Reports of Fouchet to Millerand, April 23, 1920.

²⁸ Against the official French standpoint Fouchet supported the manifold activities of Archduke Joseph aimed at obtaining the Hungarian throne. The latter tried to take precedence of his cousin Charles IV with French assistance, and thus to occupy the throne as soon as possible. He actually had several talks in this matter with French circles. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 90–97. Fouchet's report to Millerand, November 6, 1920.

²⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 101–106. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 23, 1920; *ibid.* Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 10, 1920.

³⁰ In spring 1920, Apponyi had good chances to become prime minister. His nomination was supported by the British and, at first, by the French as well. But when the French government became aware of his close contacts with Hohler, it decided in favour of Teleki.

³¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 67–71. Fouchet's report to Millerand, April 28, 1920.

³² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 72–73. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 10, 1920.

³³ *Ibid.*

garian rapprochement.³⁴ Fouchet also reported on the serious preparations for the formation of a Francophile government; the new government would not include the supporters of the British orientation, first of all Frigyes Korányi, Minister of Finance, who had already committed himself by promises and agreements to a pro-British policy. The government would be headed by Apponyi or Teleki, with Csáky as Foreign Minister. According to Fouchet, the two latter were sincere representatives of the new political line and therefore the most suitable for France, but not Apponyi. Though he also showed himself to be a supporter of French orientation, his attitude – according to Fouchet's private information – was not sincere. Millerand was warned by the French representative, that Apponyi, a Germanophile to the core, was in fact a double-dealer shifting between the British and the French. In reality, however, he much preferred the former. He had quite unrealistic plans about revision and was full of hatred towards the neighbouring states. In short, suggested Fouchet, he was not a suitable person for realizing the French plans for the Danube Basin. Apponyi as Prime Minister would have been all the less desirable since the neighbouring countries would not put up with this solution; their representatives in Budapest had already protested against any combination of this kind.³⁵

In the following weeks Fouchet regarded as his main task to support the formation of a Francophile government, because – to cite his own words – “the realization of the great decisions will depend on this”.³⁶

Meanwhile, considerable progress had been achieved in Paris as well in the second round of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations. On April 2, Halmos returned to the French capital with maps, plans, proposals and a personal message from Horthy. On the following day he called on Paléologue and forwarded the Regent's message to the French government. Accordingly, Horthy accepted and supported Hungary's Francophile policy; he was ready to uphold the proposed political programme by throwing his full authority on the scale and to engage all his force in favour of this policy; finally, he hoped that it would be possible within a short time to set up a unified army of 500,000 brave and loyal men within the scope of the Franco-Hungarian agreement.³⁷ Halmos added, that Horthy regarded the formation of a Francophile government as his essential task. Apponyi had been candidated as Prime Minister; he accepted it on condition that France

³⁴ The article appeared on April 20, 1920 and caused much surprise. However, a press discussion was prevented by the government.

³⁵ AMZV. PZ. Budapest 424. Report of Lejhanec; to Beneš, February 15, 1920; ASMAE. 1741. Sforza's cable to the Italian minister in Bucharest, February 17, 1920.

³⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 72–73. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, April 10, 1920. The cabinet formed in June agreed with French conceptions. Pál Teleki became prime minister and Imre Csáky foreign minister.

³⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 178–179. Aide mémoire about the talks between Paléologue and Halmos, April 13, 1920.

trusted him. Halmos also raised the question of territorial revision, but not in conformity with the instructions he received in Budapest: instead of asking for the correction of frontiers, he solicited the support of France for the problem to be settled by the parties concerned.³⁸ Finally he handed over the proposals of the Hungarian government concerning economic co-operation.³⁹

Paléologue accepted Horthy's message and the economic programme sympathetically, and raised no objection to Apponyi's candidature. He mentioned that he would be glad to see Teleki as Foreign Minister.⁴⁰

At Paléologue's request, Halmos had a talk on April 15 with Count Saint-Sauveur, Manager of the Schneider-Creusot Company, and discussed with him the economic programme. They reached agreement in principle on every question.⁴¹

On April 16 Halmos was received by Paléologue. In an amicable atmosphere they discussed in detail the proposed economic agreement and fixed the date of its signing at the end of April. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs promised that presentation of the definitive peace conditions would be postponed.⁴²

During his one week's stay in Paris, Halmos had achieved considerable results. Essentially he reached an agreement with Schneider-Creusot, managed to surmount political differences and to secure French support for a certain readjustment of the frontiers. As the time arrived for the signing of the preliminary agreement, Halmos asked that the authorized persons be sent to Paris.⁴³ However, the signing planned for the end of April did not take place, the Franco-Hungarian negotiations came to a standstill. The French played for time. Under the pretext of "pressure of business", Millerand did not receive Bethlen and Csáky who had arrived in Paris, while Paléologue kept delaying the resumption of talks, saying that quite a lot of questions had still to be clarified.

What was the reason for this sudden change of French attitude? Why was Millerand so very busy all at once? What clouded the clear-sightedness of Paléologue? The main reason was the Hungarian government's memorandum of April 23. In return for the French orientation, the economic concessions and an agreement or just a *modus vivendi* with the neighbouring states, this memorandum and the enclosed map suggested the re-annexation of the following areas: Pozsony and its environs including Csallóköz Island and the Small Hungar-

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ PDH. I. doc. 218. p. 230. Halmos reported thereof as follows: "Conversation with Paléologue took place in a cordial and encouraging tone. I outlined the political and economic situation. He seemed satisfied and stated that we could count on the good-will of the French." On April 17, Halmos again had a meeting with Paléologue Cf.: PDH. I. doc. 236. pp. 243-244.

⁴¹ PDH. I. doc. 224. p. 234.

⁴² PDH. I. doc. 227. p. 238.

⁴³ PDH. I. doc. 239. p. 249; doc. 238.

ian Plain, Eastern Slovakia, Ruthenia, those parts of the counties of Nógrád and Hont that were indispensable for the strategic defence of Budapest, the northern part of Batschka as far as the Francis-Joseph Channel, the contested "corner" of Batschka and the German-inhabited part of Banat. In addition, territorial autonomy for the Hungarians and Saxons of Transylvania and the right of the populations of Western Hungary and Banat to a plebiscite that would decide, whether they would belong to Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia or Romania. Finally, modification of the military decisions of the peace conditions was required.⁴⁴

The memorandum demonstrates quite clearly that the Hungarian government was unable to make a reasonable compromise even as late as the spring of 1920; that Hungary's foreign policy continued to be determined by the unrealistic ambitions of Apponyi. Its unreasonableness was actually pointed out in the mémoires of Lloyd George: if the Hungarian delegation – instead of totally rejecting the territorial *faits accomplis* – had concentrated its efforts on specified frontier problems, as several other delegations did, it could have achieved far better results; such as some correction of frontiers.⁴⁵

The claims as specified in the memorandum of April 23 were simply unacceptable to the French government.

Another reason for the standstill in the Hungarian policy of the Quai d'Orsay was the vacillation of Schneider-Creusot (though the question of cause and effect is debatable). The head of the company, Count Saint-Sauveur who had come to an agreement in principle with Halmos, began to hesitate by the end of April and to ponder deeply the chances of the Hungarian conceptions.⁴⁶ There was certainly a correlation between this new attitude and the above mentioned memorandum of the Hungarian government, notably the effect it produced on the Quai d'Orsay. So the circle was closed – the Franco-Hungarian negotiations came to a deadlock. The French government refused to accept the memorandum even as a basis for negotiations.

Without Budapest's approval, Halmos – who disagreed with the contents of the memorandum – handed on April 23 a further note to Paléologue, restating the results of the negotiations as well as the territorial claims: thus, the re-annexation of closed areas inhabited by Hungarians, and a plebiscite for Ruthenia. Paléologue accepted this memorandum as a basis for negotiations.⁴⁷ Later on, however, the Hungarian government tried repeatedly to complete the Halmos memorandum. This was attempted, for instance, by Bethlen and Csáky, who arrived in Paris on April 28 in order to terminate the negotiations on the basis of

⁴⁴ PDH. I. doc. 242, 242/a. pp. 250–254.

⁴⁵ Lloyd George: *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. II, p. 172.

⁴⁶ Saint-Sauveur convoked a conference on April 28 for the renewed elucidation of already settled questions. PDH. I. doc. 225. p. 225.

⁴⁷ PDH. I. doc. 255/b, doc. 259.

the memorandum of April 23 and to sign the agreement.⁴⁸ But their efforts were unsuccessful. Their recent memorandum supposed to correct and complete that of Halmos was accepted by Paléologue by way of information only.

The negotiations were resumed on May 4. In the morning the members of the Hungarian delegation had a talk with the head of Schneider-Creusot, with whom they agreed on the lease of the Hungarian railways, and discussed, in the afternoon, the political part of the agreement with Paléologue, who informed them in confidence about the latest note of the French government, i.e. the reply to the memorandum of Halmos. Accordingly, France was ready to support Hungary in abolishing the economic or ethnical injustice of the peace treaty and in concluding a treaty that would contribute to the agreement between Hungary and its neighbours. Provided that the basic structure of the peace treaty would not be affected thereby. During the negotiations, Paléologue repeatedly emphasized the firm resolution of France to rely upon Hungary in its Eastern European policy. France, he said, had wavered for a while between Austria and Hungary, but finally decided upon mature consideration in favour of Hungary. Accordingly, it wished to strengthen Hungary both economically and politically as far as possible. In return, the Hungarian government should commit itself to a Francophile policy and reach an agreement with the neighbouring states. The latter was to be of primary importance in the subsequent negotiations, in fact, it became their decisive momentum. Paléologue explained the conviction of the French government that the peace of Central Europe could not be stabilized unless the nations concerned reached mutual agreement on reasonable and justified frontier re-adjustments. According to their instructions from Budapest, Bethlen and Csáky tried to make clear the ways and means by which the French government was supposed to support the Hungarian claims. How could it compel the neighbouring states to accept the Hungarian demands? Paléologue, however, tended to avoid any direct answer and limited himself to allusions on certain economic instruments that could be used for this purpose.⁴⁹ As a matter of fact, he knew quite well that there were no such instruments available, and was himself not at all sure of the results of economic pressure. At the end of the talks, he told Bethlen and Csáky that the definitive peace conditions would be handed on the following day to Iván Praznovszky, Hungary's representative in Paris. In the enclosed letter of transmittal ("lettre d'envoi") reference is made to the possibility of peaceful revision.⁵⁰ He made the letter appear to the merit of the French government, since it was Premier Millerand who signed it on behalf of the Council of Ambassadors. For this reason the document was ascribed to Millerand by the Hungarian government, other contemporaries and historiographers as well. This,

⁴⁸ When Bethlen and Csáky came to Paris, they tried to stop the activity of Halmos which, in their view, was not concordant with their objectives aimed at a radical revision. They disagreed with the memorandum of April 23.

⁴⁹ PDH. I. doc. 259.

⁵⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 112-113. Millerand, letter d'envoi, June 6, 1920.

however, is not supported by our investigations. On the contrary: they seem to prove that the letter, in contrast to Paléologue's statement and to public belief, was not Millerand's work, for the French were initially opposed at the Council of Ambassadors to the British, American and Italian proposal on this subject.⁵¹

It might be asked, why did the French government oppose the Entente proposal which essentially also included Millerand's intentions. Probably because they feared that their allies who were already advocating milder conditions at the peace negotiations, would try to realize their aspirations in this way, i.e. by changing the peace treaty to its very foundations. But Millerand and his followers disagreed with any substantial change in the peace conditions, particularly if it happened with the help of Britain and Italy. They were ready to accept certain modifications, but only on condition that these were carried out by themselves –

⁵¹ Millerand rejected British protests against Franco-Hungarian negotiations by stating that he was negotiating with the Hungarians in the spirit of the *lettre d'envoi*. This letter, which made possible a peaceful revision, had been imposed on France by Britain and Italy. He consented to this concession under their pressure. In a cable to the French ambassador in London Millerand reacted to the British note of protest as follows: "Nous ne nous engageons pas à corriger les injustices ethniques et économiques, comme vous paraissez le comprendre, mais à prêter nos bons offices aux tentatives d'accord à l'aimable entre la Hongrie et ses voisins, qui auraient pour but de corriger ces injustices dans les conditions indiquées par la lettre d'envoi à laquelle vous pouvez utilement vous reporter. Nous sommes donc strictement dans les limites de ce dernier document, limites qui ont été tracées à la demande même des Anglais et des Italiens, car ce sont eux qui ont insisté pour faire mention dans la lettre d'envoi la possibilité de la correction des injustices signalées par les commissions de délimitation. Nous avons même plutôt restreint la partie de cette concession, puisque nous pensons de nouveau comme condition de notre appui éventuel qu'il s'agit d'aboutir à un résultat satisfaisant pour les 2 parties." AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 61. Millerand's cable to the French ambassador in London, June 26, 1920. There are also some additional data testifying that the real author of the *lettre d'envoi* was not Millerand but Lloyd George and Curzon, supported by the Italians – for instance, the French note of September 21, 1920 to Britain, emphasizing that the French policy concerning Hungary "... est strictement conforme aux termes mêmes de la Lettre d'Envoi du Traité de Trianon et qui, Votre Excellence ne l'ignore pas, avaient été rédigées à la demande de la Délégation Britannique." *DBFP*. First Series. Vol. XII. doc. 244. pp. 286–289. An aide mémoire of the French government is of similar contents: AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 245. Aide mémoire of the French Foreign Ministry, December 25, 1920. Finally, the material of the London conference of March 8, 1920 also confirms this conclusion. At the conference the Allies discussed the Hungarian reply to the peace conditions. After a sharp debate between Berthelot and Curzon, the representatives of France and Britain, respectively, whereby the former refused any modifications of the peace conditions, Lord Curzon presented the following suggestion: "Would it not be possible to provide that if the commissions (for delimitation) found after due inquiry on the spot that in certain areas injustice had been done and modifications were required, they should be at liberty to report their conclusions to the League of Nations? It might further be provided that if the League of Nations were then asked by either party to do so, it could undertake to use its good offices to rectify the frontier amicably at the places where modification was considered desirable." (This became actually the contents of Millerand's *lettre d'envoi*.) After a long debate, whereby the British desisted from rediscussing the Hungarian peace conditions – any such discussion being decidedly opposed by the French –, Cambon and Berthelot finally accepted the proposal: "The conference approved Lord Curzon's suggestion" *DBFP*. First Series. Vol. VII. doc. 54. p. 449.

we can see that they asked rather considerable compensations in return. The French standpoint was additionally complicated by the fact that the French representatives at the Conference of Ambassadors – Jules Laroche and Berthelot who were also opposed to Millerand's Hungarian policy at the Quai d'Orsay – disapproved strongly of any correction of the peace treaty at the expense of the victorious successor states. In the discussion about the letter, however, they met with no success. After the Allies agreed that the peace conditions could not be revised, Millerand approved the wording of the letter.⁵²

This document was aimed at the correction of minor, local, flagrant injustices and at inducing the Hungarian government to sign the peace treaty by promising a peaceful revision.⁵³ In this way Millerand wished to break the resistance of the Hungarians and to bring the Peace Treaty of Trianon to a successful conclusion. This was to promote the consolidation of the Danube Basin, a most important and urgent matter, particularly in view of the Polish-Soviet war. None of the great powers had in mind any substantial territorial modification – France not yet, Britain and Italy – particularly the former – not any more. All of them knew only too well that the victorious successor states would never consent to the re-annexation of territories they *de facto* possessed. Unwilling to force them with violence, the Allies were unable to persuade them without. Even the evacuation of areas that were adjudicated to Hungary by the peace treaty could not be achieved.⁵⁴

At the time, of course, every great power was already aware of the fact that the peace treaty was flawed and that this would have grave political and economic consequences, but it existed anyway and its inviolability was guarded by three – with Austria included: four – resolute states ready for anything. Its substantial modification would thus have led to a very grave conflict which they wished to avoid at any price. On May 6, 1920, Millerand handed to Praznovszky, Secretary General of the Hungarian peace delegation, the text of the definitive peace conditions. The claims of the Hungarian government were disregarded in every respect.⁵⁵ The original conditions remained unchanged, with the only difference that the "lettre d'envoi" now alluded to the possibility of a peaceful revision.⁵⁶

The peace conditions caused great disappointment in Hungarian government circles. The Foreign Minister, Pál Teleki, called at once on Fouchet and in-

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ The representatives of the Allied Powers were talking openly about this with one another.

⁵⁴ Yugoslavia and Romania kept occupied even some areas which were awarded to Hungary by the Trianon Peace Treaty. The Belgrade government managed to make an agreement according to which the area should be evacuated only after the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty.

⁵⁵ The peace conditions remained unchanged: "Against our arguments, the prior treaty obligations of the Allied Powers are repeatedly invoked and eventual concessions are mentioned only as possibilities", reported Praznovszky on May 6. *PDH*. I. doc. 264.

⁵⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 112–113, Millerand lettre d'envoi May 6, 1920.

formed him of the cabinet meeting and the bewilderment prevailing in the cabinet. The French high commissioner emphasized the importance of Millerand's "lettre d'envoi" and the Franco-Hungarian negotiations as well as the perspectives resulting thereof. According to the instructions of the Quai d'Orsay, he suggested Hungary to accept the peace conditions.⁵⁷

The reasoning of Paris proved to be right. The promises concerning a peaceful revision and economic support had the desired effect: the Hungarian government decided to accept the peace conditions. More than that: in response to the demands of the French government it tried to restrain the press campaigns and demonstrations against the dictated peace.⁵⁸

Apponyi, the president of the Hungarian peace delegation, disagreed with the government's decision. He distrusted the promises which were kept in general terms, whereas the peace conditions were concrete; the request concerning the plebiscite was rejected. So he again refused to sign the peace treaty and submitted his resignation to Horthy. The Regent designated Teleki, the Foreign Minister, to sign the treaty.⁵⁹ This, however, was against the intentions of Millerand, who would have preferred not to weaken the position of the pro-French Teleki with such an unpopular task, he being designated for the post of Prime Minister. So the task was finally assigned to the Labour Minister, Ágoston Benárd, who signed the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920.⁶⁰

After the peace conditions had been handed over and accepted, the Franco-Hungarian negotiations were re-animated. It was important for the Hungarian government to have its concrete territorial claims accepted by the French as soon as possible. But since the memorandum of Halmos which had served so far as a basis for negotiations recorded these claims incompletely and did not point out the inseparable unity of the economic and political questions, Teleki instructed Csáky to present urgently another memorandum to Paléologue on the basis of the original instructions.⁶¹ This happened on May 12. However, Paléologue ac-

⁵⁷ "Vous devez ne rien négliger pour (faire) accepter ces conditions et à lui (leur?) assurer l'exécution," reads Millerand's instruction to the French High Commissioner in Budapest. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 14-17. March 6, 1920.

⁵⁸ Although Teleki informed Praznovszky on May 7 that favourable comments on the lettre d'envoi in the Hungarian press seem unrealizable (PDH. I. doc. 268), the pertinent measures of the Hungarian government were successful. Fouchet reported thereof with satisfaction to Millerand. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 59. f. 128. Fouchet's report to Millerand, May 23, 1920.

⁵⁹ Teleki informed Fouchet about it, telling him that this would be the end of his political career. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. f. 202. Fouchet's report to Millerand May 23, 1920.

⁶⁰ This Treaty of Trianon was signed on June 4, 1920 by Ágoston Benárd, Minister of Labour and Public Welfare, and by Alfréd Drasche-Lázár, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.

⁶¹ PDH. I. doc. 266. pp. 291-292, 296-297; doc. 276. pp. 299-301.

cepted this note only by way of information and continued to regard the Halmos note as the basis for negotiations.⁶²

The Hungarian government now endeavoured to synchronize the economic and political negotiations and to subordinate the former to the latter. In other words, it was unwilling to make any further advance in the economic questions as long as the political questions were unresolved. By that time, the first phase of the economic negotiations had ended: on May 4 an overall agreement was reached with Schneider-Creusot and laid down in a general convention.⁶³ The next step would have been the letter concerning the option, but the government was ready to deliver it only in return for concrete political concessions.

In this situation Paléologue asked Halmos – whom he considered to be the most sincere and dedicated partisan of Franco-Hungarian rapprochement – to go to Budapest in order to find out what effect a verbal French declaration would produce in Hungary and to inform Fouchet if such a declaration would be necessary.

Accordingly, Halmos went to Budapest on May 13. On the same day Paléologue instructed Fouchet to read the annexed declaration to the Regent, if Halmos asked him to do so.⁶⁴

In Budapest, Halmos at once informed Teleki about Paléologue's ideas⁶⁵ and called upon Fouchet on May 16, asking him to present the declaration.⁶⁶ On the following day Fouchet paid a visit to Teleki and presented him the written text of the declaration. The Hungarian Foreign Minister was satisfied and emphasized that the declaration rendered a valuable service to the Francophile policy he had adopted in the interests of his nation.⁶⁷

On May 18, at 5 p.m., the Regent received Fouchet, the representative of France, with all solemnity, in the presence of Foreign Minister Pál Teleki, Prime Minister Simonyi-Semadam, Minister of Finance Korányi, Minister of Agriculture Rubinek, as well as Apponyi, Andrassy, Bethlen, Csáky and Halmos. For reasons of domestic policy, Horthy and Teleki insisted on the presence of all these politicians, many of whom accepted the French orientation with consider-

⁶² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 122–124. Memorandum of Halmos to Paléologue, May 12, 1920. After Paléologue had informed Csáky on May 11 that he is not going to take notice of further claims (*PDH.* I. doc. 283.), this memorandum laid down the Hungarian demands in generalities only.

⁶³ *PDH.* I. doc. 259. Cf.: AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 95–100. Letter of Halmos to Paléologue, April 23, 1920.

⁶⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 123. Paléologue's cable to Fouchet, May 13, 1920.

⁶⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 138–142. Fouchet's report to Millerand, May 23, 1920.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* As Fouchet reported: "Le Comte Teleki m'a témoigné sa très vive satisfaction pour la politique francophile qu'il a cru devoir adopter au profit de son pays et qui était trop bien servie par le texte que j'étais autorisé à lui communiquer verbalement, pour que son impression put être différente."

able reserve or were, in fact, opposed to it. Summarizing the main principles of French policy towards Hungary, the declaration represented considerable progress in the Franco-Hungarian negotiations going on since March. It was the first official gesture by France, recognizing implicitly the territorial claims of Hungary and promising support for their enforcement. The declaration emphasized that peace and prosperity in Central Europe could not be achieved but with the co-operation of the countries involved. France was therefore ready to support any effort promoting it, including negotiations between Hungary and its neighbours: Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia; a revision of the unjust peace conditions; a completion or revision of the rights secured in the peace treaty for the national minorities. After having read the declaration, Fouchet emphasized that France was interested in creating a strong Hungary and was therefore prepared to support it in both economic and financial respects. The declaration was received with utter satisfaction by all those present, Horthy appreciated its importance with cordial phrases.⁶⁸ Let us note, however, that the text as read by Fouchet and that of the declaration sent by Paléologue to the latter were not identical. Stylistic variances actually covered substantial differences. Who changed the text? Was it Fouchet, or the Hungarian side who put it into writing? We are restricted to hypotheses.⁶⁹

Anyway, the declaration made itself felt. Horthy told Fouchet that he assented to the conclusion of the economic agreement and asked him to contact the Hungarian ministers involved who had already received their instructions, in order to settle the details.⁷⁰

On May 29, the Hungarian government sent two letters to Count Saint-Sauveur, manager of Schneider-Creusot. It offered the operation of the Hun-

⁶⁸ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 59. ff. 203-212. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 10, 1920; *ibid.* vol. 58. ff. 239-241. Millerand's cable to Fouchet June 12, 1920. *Ibid.* Paléologue's cable to Fouchet, June 12, 1920. *Ibid.* Paléologue's cable to Fouchet, May 13, 1920. PDH. I. doc. 292. pp. 310-311.

⁶⁹ The hypothesis is this: Fouchet - who usually adjusted the instructions received to the conceptions of the Hungarian government - changed the text of Paléologue's declaration. According to the text he communicated verbally (and which was published by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry in 1939), the French government promised its support in the following terms: "Fidèle observateur du Traité de paix qui porte sa signature, le Gouvernement français s'inspire des termes de la lettre d'envoi à offrir ses bons offices pour arriver à une réparation d'une injustice ethnique ou économique des conditions de paix, ainsi que pour faire disparaître toute cause d'hostilités, compléter et réviser dans ce but les droits des minorités et pour arriver à des accords satisfaisants pour les parties intéressées" (PDH. I. doc. 292. pp. 310-311). In this text, however, the following essential phrase is missing, which can be found in Paléologue's instruction: "... sans porter atteinte à la structure générale du traité de paix (qui) aurait pour but de corriger une injustice ethnique ou économique..." AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 128-129. Paléologue's cable to Fouchet, May 13, 1920. There are also some other - insignificant - stylistic differences between the two declarations. The declaration remitted in writing on June 22 was subject to further modifications, carried out by Paléologue himself. We shall revert to them later.

⁷⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 59. ff. 18-20. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 19, 1920.

garian Railways and the factories in Budapest and Diósgyőr (with detailed specifications of the condition of these factories and of the length of the railways). In the second letter it offered an option for setting up a commercial fluvial port in Budapest.⁷¹ Saint-Sauveur accepted both offers and was ready to sign the relevant agreements. However, the intervention of the French Government forced him to change his mind.⁷² By now, the Quai d'Orsay was already not satisfied with the above-mentioned economic concessions: in return for the Franco-Hungarian agreement it demanded a further concession – an option on the Hungarian Credit Bank. Only in this case was it ready to make political concessions, i.e. for remitting the verbal declaration in writing in order that it could be published.⁷³ Paléologue repeated several times that the option on the Credit Bank was a condition *sine qua non* of the written declaration as claimed by the Hungarians.⁷⁴

Several weeks of diplomatic discussions followed. The Hungarian government was unwilling or rather unable to fulfil the further demand of Paléologue, who, on the other side, insisted on his position. In June the disagreements seemed to have deadlocked the Franco-Hungarian negotiations. But what was actually the matter? Why was it so important for France to obtain an option on the Hungarian Credit Bank, and why was the Hungarian Government unable to comply with this claim?

As shown by the above, the acquisition of Hungary's economic assets was an object of competition between the Allied Forces, mainly between Britain and France. In the spring of 1920, it seemed that France had managed to overtake Britain in spite of its better positions. In fact, the options on the railways, the most important factories and the fluvial port were granted to the French – and not to Britain in spite of its efforts.⁷⁵ In order to control Hungary's economic life it was important to obtain the Credit Bank option or at least to prevent Britain from getting it. Actually, 230 Hungarian enterprises were controlled by this bank. In the Franco-British competition the balance was in favour of the latter in the

⁷¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 233–237. Letter of the Hungarian government to the Company Schneider-Creusot, June 1, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 208–211. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 10, 1920.

⁷² PDH. I. doc. 323. pp. 335–356.

⁷³ PDH. I. doc. 323. pp. 335–336; doc. 325, 337, 341, 348.

⁷⁴ PDH. I. doc. 350. pp. 354–355. Csáky reported thereupon as follows: "Paléologue emphasized again today that the affair of the Credit Bank is a *sine qua non* for the delivery of the note. He explained to me that he considers this transaction important not so much for the banking aspect but rather because he hopes to exert an influence on Hungary's neighbours through the interest of the Credit Bank in the detached territories." *Ibid.* June 15. Paléologue insisted once more: participation of French capital in the Credit Bank is a *conditio sine qua non* of the agreement because the French believe that this would be one of the most powerful weapons in their hands to exert pressure on Hungary's neighbours." PDH. I. doc. 358. pp. 362–363.

⁷⁵ A keen competition began between the Hungarian enterprises supported by the British and the French government, respectively, for obtaining the economic key positions of Hungary. Cf.: AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 204–205. Note of the French Foreign Ministry, June 9, 1920.

spring of 1920. Even at the request of the government, the chairman of the Credit Bank, Baron Adolf Ullmann, was unwilling to stop the negotiations with the British capitalists and continued to prefer his British partners. On April 12, 1920, in the middle of the Franco-Hungarian economic negotiations, György and Adolf Ullmann travelled to London at the invitation of Lord Furness.⁷⁶ This caused some trouble in the Quai d'Orsay which was not lessened by the note from Halmos, stating that the Ullmanns had been instructed to make only dilatory declarations and not to enter into any obligation, not even a moral one.⁷⁷ Paléologue knew very well that the Ullmanns did not pay much attention to the demands of the government – Teleki himself told this to Fouchet.⁷⁸ So French diplomacy increased its pressure on the Hungarian government in the Credit Bank affair. As Paléologue explained to Csáky, the French insisted on receiving the option in the interests of the Hungarians, because they could then put pressure on the neighbouring states through the financial interests of the Credit Bank in the detached territories.⁷⁹ Fouchet himself had talks with Ullmann and tried to obtain his consent.⁸⁰ At last, Ullmann yielded to the many-sided pressure. On June 12, after having received the written guarantee from the Prime Minister as well as from Bethlen and Apponyi that the option was in the interests of the government and not of the Credit Bank, he agreed to the transaction and went personally to Paris to settle it.⁸¹

However, the Hungarian government kept delaying the granting of the option, considering the French written declaration as inadequate satisfaction for the eco-

⁷⁶ Lord Furness was chairman of the British syndicate wishing to penetrate into Hungary's economic life.

⁷⁷ "Ces Messieurs (Baron Adolf and György Ullmann – M.Á.) ont reçu l'instruction de ne faire que des déclarations dilatoires et de ne prendre aucun engagement même moral" reads the memorandum of Halmos. He proposed to Paléologue to take measures so that the Ullmanns should stop in Paris on their way home. This actually happened. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 76. Memorandum of Halmos to Paléologue, April 13, 1920.

⁷⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 208. Fouchet's report to Millerand, June 10, 1920.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 210. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 1920. Ullmann explained that public opinion is against the lease of the Railways and considers it as anti-national. And since the options on the Railways and the Credit Bank are linked, the animosity is directed against the Credit Bank as well.

⁸¹ "C'est grâce à une forte pression du Gouvernement hongrois que la direction de la Credit bank, qui a attaché une grande importance au maintien de ses rapports établis depuis longtemps avec d'autres banques (?) étrangères, donna son consentement à la remise de l'option" – wrote Teleki to Csáky. PDH. I. doc. 361. pp. 366–368. Teleki to Fouchet: "Le Gouvernement hongrois a enfin réussi à vaincre la résistance du baron Ullmann." PDH. I. doc. 366. pp. 370–371. "He conditioned his approval on a written guarantee to this effect. This was given in the form of a letter to him from the Prime Minister stating that the granting of the Credit Bank option is in the interest of the Hungarian Government and not of the Bank. Count Apponyi, Count Bethlen and Popovics have made similar statements in another letter written to Ullmann." PDH. I. doc. 361. pp. 366–368.

conomic sacrifices: "... the declaration (i.e. that the French would support the negotiations with the neighbours – M.Á.), however valuable in principle, cannot be regarded as a sufficient recompensation for the option" – stated Teleki in his instructions to the delegation leaving for Paris.⁸² He instructed Csáky and Bethlen to inform the French government thereof, saying that the ratification of the option by Parliament and the protection of the French orientation against the opposition would be possible only if the government could present political concessions equivalent to the economic sacrifices.⁸³ On June 9, Teleki delivered to a memorandum of similar content to Fouchet, on June 13 Bethlen – instructed by Horthy – presented another one to Paléologue.⁸⁴ Millerand and Paléologue accepted the Hungarian notes as matters of information only.⁸⁵ Paléologue emphasized his good will, but said, he was unable to make any definite promise until Hungary cleared up differences with its neighbours. Referring to his inquiries in Prague, Belgrade, Bucharest and Vienna, he considered them as rather satisfactory.⁸⁶ He again outlined his plan for the economic and political unification of the Danubian states, with Budapest as the centre.⁸⁷ Finally, he stated that France had no intention of restoring the Empire of St. Stephen, but only to help South-Eastern Europe in its troubles.⁸⁸

In his talks with Csáky, Montiële – Paléologue's Chef de Cabinet – outlined the difficult situation of his government, due to its Hungarian policy. It could not force its allies to abrogate a peace treaty the signing of which it had demanded just a few days before. He added, however, that the time would come when the Hungarians could tear this treaty to pieces and rely on the wholehearted support of France.⁸⁹

Millerand presented a note to the Conference of Ambassadors, suggesting the correction of unjust decisions concerning Hungary, with the help of frontier commissions and direct negotiations between the countries involved.⁹⁰

⁸² PDH. I. doc. 301. pp. 318–319.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 21. Horthy's letter to Teleki, June 9, 1920. PDH. I. doc. 351. p. 355.

⁸⁵ "Paléologue mentioned today Regent's letter to Your Excellency and remarked that this official document referred, among other things, to the memorandum which Count Bethlen gave him some time ago and which he accepted as *titre privé* and only as matter of information." PDH. I. doc. 351. p. 355.

⁸⁶ PDH. I. doc. 349. pp. 353–354.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Csáky reported thereof as follows: "... he (Montiële – M.Á.) said we might rest assured that we could tear this treaty to pieces whenever we felt sufficiently strong to do so and that when that time came, we could rely on the wholehearted support of France." PDH. I. doc. 368. pp. 371–372.

⁹⁰ PDH. I. doc. 374. p. 375.

In their confidential instructions of July 22, 1920 to the frontier commissions, the Conference of Ambassadors ignored the above suggestion of Millerand; on the contrary, their activities were strictly limited. Their main task should be to fix the frontiers as stipulated by the peace treaty and resulting from plebiscites.⁹¹

The complementary instructions dealing with the Hungarian frontiers emphasized that the frontiers should be drawn on the territory indicated by the peace treaty; no modifications were possible which would question the basic line fixed by the peace treaty.⁹² While in the past Britain, Italy and the United States had advocated the correction of the unjust decisions of the peace conference and by overcoming French resistance managed to have this possibility be formulated in the "lettre d'envoi", the situation now reversed. They rejected Millerand's proposal which was originally their own conception. What was the reason for this change? It was, first of all, the change in French foreign policy, including considerably exaggerated information about the secret Franco-Hungarian negotiations. They wanted, in fact, to prevent and not to promote the economic and political intentions of France in regard to Hungary. When it became clear in mid-June that the French government was unwilling to discuss any concrete territorial revision at the cost of Hungary's neighbours and was making, instead, general promises, the Hungarian government tried to obtain the support of France for the realization of its plans concerning Western Hungary, for the reorganization of the army and for securing the rights of the Hungarians living in the detached areas, before delivering the option. This demand was presented by Teleki to Fouchet and by Csáky to Paléologue.⁹³

The French government was ready to discuss these questions with the Hungarians, but only at a later date, fearing with good reason that the end of the Franco-Hungarian talks would be delayed thereby, involving the risk of complete failure. The allies of France, first of all Britain, began energetic diplomatic activity in order to prevent the agreement. They protested in notes against negotiations opposed to the peace treaty. (We shall return to this later.) As a consequence, the Hungarian government became unsteady. According to Fouchet, Teleki looked a different man. Within days, he became hesitant and cautious.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "Les Commissions de délimitation ont pour mission de fixer sur le terrain: (a) D'abord les frontières décrites dans les Traités de paix; (b) Ultérieurement les frontières qui seront fixées après l'exécution des divers plébiscites prescrits par les dits Traités." Archives de la Société des Nations. Genève. *Instructions relatives aux Commissions de délimitation*, 19902/19584. - I have received this document from the French historiographer H. Bagdan, to whom I offer my thanks.

⁹² "En principe, la frontière devra être tracée sur le terrain telle qu'elle est définie dans le Traité de paix. En aucun cas, les modifications de frontière envisagées plus loin ne devront être de nature à remettre en question les bases mêmes de la ligne décrite dans le Traité." *Ibid.*

⁹³ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 59. ff. 5-9. Fouchet's report to Millerand, June 17, 1920; *PDH*. I. doc. 361. pp. 365-368; doc. 324. pp. 336-337.

⁹⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. Fouchet's report to Millerand, June 1920.

A quick conclusion to the negotiations was urged by the French domestic politics. Millerand's policy on Hungary was attacked in the Assembly and the Senate as well. His opponents demanded information about the Franco-Hungarian negotiations.⁹⁵

Time was pressing and so Paléologue was ready to align himself with the Hungarian views in regard to the agreement.⁹⁶ The documents were exchanged on June 21: Csáky, Bethlen, Halmos and Kállay delivered to Schneider-Creusot the option approved by the Hungarian government,⁹⁷ while Paléologue handed over to the Hungarian delegation the declaration,⁹⁸ the original of which was presented in Budapest by Fouchet to Teleki.⁹⁹ On this occasion, Paléologue informed the Hungarian delegation confidentially before its departure that he had already started political moves in the neighbouring states.¹⁰⁰

The agreement between the Hungarian government and Schneider-Creusot covered essentially the following projects: the operation of the State Railways; the construction of a commercial and industrial port in Budapest, a hydroelectric power-plant, the fluvial port in Csepel and a Danube-Tisza channel; regulation of the Danube; and the delivery of a considerable block of Credit Bank shares to the French.¹⁰¹ It was agreed furthermore that as soon as the options were ratified by the Hungarian Parliament, the French government would grant Hungary a loan of 260 million Francs, regard the declaration as valid and provide for its realization.

Delivered in writing, the French declaration was essentially identical to that sent to Fouchet by Paléologue on May 13, and is consequently different from the

⁹⁵ After describing the attacks directed against Millerand, Csáky pointed out that it depended on the Hungarian question whether the government will survive or not. *PDH*. I. doc. 309. pp. 323–324; *ibid.* doc. 578. pp. 576–577.

⁹⁶ A lengthy discussion began about the question of who has to sign the declaration (referring to the constitution, Horthy refused), whether it should be published and where, and to whom it should be sent. *PDH*. I. doc. 331. p. 340; doc. 344. p. 350; doc. 357; 346. doc. 324. pp. 336–337.

⁹⁷ *PDH*. I. doc. 384. p. 384; doc. 286. p. 385.

⁹⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 31–32. Note of Paléologue to the Hungarian delegation, June 21, 1920; *PDH*. I. doc. 384. p. 384.

⁹⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 37. Millerand's cable to Fouchet, June 22, 1920; *PDH*. I. doc. 386. p. 385; doc. 393. pp. 381–382. When presenting the declaration, Paléologue emphasized its importance: "... cette déclaration tient grand compte des considérations politiques et économiques dont vous êtes faits les interprètes auprès de moi: elle atteste que le Gouvernement français est vivement désireux de voir l'Europe Centrale renaître à l'ordre, au travail et à la prospérité." AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 31. Letter of Paléologue to Csáky and Halmos, June 21, 1920.

¹⁰⁰ *PDH*. I. doc. 378. p. 378.

¹⁰¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 35. Paléologue's circular telegram to the French ambassadors, June 22, 1920. It was envisaged that the Schneider-Rotschild combination should have a share of 250 million crowns. *Ibid.* ff. 40–43. Aide mémoire of the Commercial Department of the French Foreign Ministry to Paléologue, June 22, 1920.

text verbally imparted to Horthy on May 18. We have already referred to the nature and the reasons for this difference which was significant in two passages. (1) The written declaration included a new paragraph according to which the declaration became effective only when the Hungarian Parliament had ratified the economic concessions.¹⁰² By means of this amendment, the French government wished to secure for itself the possibility of withdrawal in case the parliamentary opposition upset the agreement. Paris knew very well that the approval of the options by Parliament was rather improbable.¹⁰³ (2) On the other hand, a most important passage was left out of the declaration, which emphasized that the "moral" and economic injustices had to be corrected without affecting the basic structure of the peace treaty.¹⁰⁴

On June 22, 1920, Paléologue instructed the chiefs of the French foreign representations to inform the respective governments about the Franco-Hungarian agreement. The instructions referred only to the economic matters without mentioning that they depended on the annexed declaration nor the fact that the

¹⁰² *PDH. I. doc. 378. p. 378.*

¹⁰³ The Hungarian government was dissatisfied with this decision of Paléologue.

¹⁰⁴ Not knowing that this sentence was already missing in the declaration presented verbally on May 18 (as already mentioned, Fouchet did not read it to Horthy), Paléologue told Csáky on June 20, i.e. two days before the agreement was signed, that the present declaration included a modification in favour of the Hungarians, as compared to the prior one: the above sentence is left out. This means – he went on – that the French wish to revise the basic structure of the peace treaty in favour of Hungary. *PDH. I. doc. 378. p. 378.* He did not mention another modification – the insertion of a half sentence – which, to a certain degree compensated the omitted sentence. For, the new declaration emphasized that the revision can take place only under the conditions indicated by the lettre d'envoi – "dans les conditions indiquées par ladite lettre d'envoi". *PDH. I. doc. 393. pp. 391–392.* Another substantial difference between the two declarations is: while the first declaration promises support for remedying ethnical and economic injustice, the second – written one – states only that the French government is disposed to support negotiations between Hungary and its neighbours, aimed at eliminating any cause of hostility. As the declaration of June 22 reads: "... est disposé à prêter ses bons offices à toute tentative d'accord à l'aimables entre la Hongrie et ses voisins en vue de faire disparaître toute cause d'hostilité entre les parties intéressées qui recevraient une satisfaction commune." *AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 37.* Paléologue's circular telegram, June 22, 1920. *PDH. I. doc. 393. pp. 391–392.* In addition to these essential modifications, there were also some insignificant and rather stylistic changes. There are actually several draft declarations to be found in the Quai d'Orsay; one of them was sent by Millerand to Fouchet on June 16. *AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 40.* Cable of Millerand to Fouchet on June 16, 1920. But this was not the definitive text. At a closer examination of the draft declarations it can be seen that the use of the one or the other term had been carefully considered; there might have been a meditation whether to insert the word "un" or "quelque", "corriger" or "réviser", "compléter-réviser" or just "compléter" in the final text. It can also be seen that in every case it was the milder and less promising term that was used in the final, written declaration presented to the Hungarian government. Thus, the relevant part reads as follows "Ces tentatives auraient pour but, dans les conditions indiquées par ladite lettre d'envoi, soit de corriger quelque injustice, économique ou ethnique, soit de compléter des stipulations de minorités." *PDH. I. doc. 393. pp. 391–392.*

commission engaged in drawing the Hungarian frontiers had also been informed of the agreement.

In his note Paléologue explained in detail the reasons inducing the French government to achieve a rapprochement with Hungary. He referred among other things to the interdependence of the Central European states necessitating their co-operation, and to the fact that the very existence of the isolated and economically ruined small countries was endangered – a situation that might have grave consequences. Hungary might look for protection against its neighbours and thus imperil the overall peace. This is why France deemed it necessary to consolidate Hungary's economic position and to reconcile it with the other successor states. He emphasized that the promised economic and political assistance was a decisive factor inducing Budapest to sign the peace treaty.

The way Paléologue interprets the declaration is quite remarkable: it is aimed at promoting the co-operation of the states established on the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and to normalize relations between the neighbours.¹⁰⁵ In the strictly confidential part of the note Paléologue refers to a most important aspect of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations: "We had to act promptly, because our allies wanted to acquire the assets for themselves and to frustrate our plans."¹⁰⁶ At the beginning, British opposition induced the French government not to withdraw but, on the contrary, to prompt action: it wanted to acquire the options as quickly as possible and thus to oppose the British claims to the options – from a more favourable position.¹⁰⁷

Before putting the question more concretely, we have to mention the French view in regard to the newer Hungarian claims. As already mentioned, Paléologue kept delaying their discussion. When the documents were exchanged, Csáky again asked the French government to support Hungary: (1) in the revision of the military clauses of the Trianon Peace Treaty; (2) in keeping the Western Hungarian areas; (3) in safeguarding the interests of the Hungarian minority; (4) in establishing the residence of the Danube Commission and the Commission of Reparations in Budapest; (5) in the immediate re-annexation of the areas awarded to Hungary by the Trianon Peace Treaty, but still occupied by Yugoslavia and Romania. Paléologue received the Hungarian suggestions with understanding, but promised a definitive answer only after they had been examined; so he asked that they be put in writing. This was done on May 23.¹⁰⁸

On the following day Paléologue sent a message with his Chef de Cabinet, Montièle, to the Hungarian delegation: at first reading he did not find anything in the memorandum that could not be accepted in principle by the French govern-

¹⁰⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 37. Paléologue's circular telegram, June 22, 1920.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 205–206. Note of the French Foreign Ministry, June 9, 1920.

¹⁰⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 44–45. Memorandum of Csáky and Halmos to Paléologue, June 23, 1920; *PDH*. I. doc. 405. pp. 404–408.

ment. However, it would disclose only later the form in which it would support the demands, after the memorandum had been thoroughly examined by the competent officials.¹⁰⁹ Why was it that Paléologue deemed it necessary – in fact, possible – to draw into the discussion of these questions the experts of the Quai d'Orsay (first of all Laroche), who had so far been practically excluded from the Franco-Hungarian negotiations? The answer is quite simple. Until then, the negotiations had been aimed at a territorial revision at the cost of the victorious successor states, and this was disapproved, in fact, most definitely opposed, by many high officials of the Quai d'Orsay, e.g. Peretti de la Rocca, Cambon, Berthelot, Laroche. The recent Hungarian memorandum, however, related – among many other items – to the correction of the frontiers of a defeated state, Austria, in favour of Hungary. And this was generally approved by French politicians: if there was any country at the expense of which the Hungarians could be appeased, it could only be Austria, the other loser of the war. This project was realizable from the moral viewpoint, it is less difficult to take a decision against a loser and, if necessary, to assert it by force, than against allies whose opposition might be feared. Another reason was a factor of utmost importance for the French: they wished to weaken Austria which was aspiring to Anschluss and drifting to the left.

Laroche, whom Paléologue invited to take part in the discussion of the new Hungarian memorandum, informed Csáky on June 24 of the French view. As shown by the above and by Millerand's telegram to Fouchet, the French government had a number of objections to the contents of the paper, in spite of Paléologue's message.¹¹⁰ So for instance, any modification of the military clauses was considered untimely, because Germany would regard it as a precedent. This question could be officially raised only after the complete disarmament of Germany and with the preliminary approval of Great Britain.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Laroche declared unacceptable the Hungarian proposal concerning Western Hungary.¹¹² The reason: France could not make a public declaration aimed at the

¹⁰⁹ *PDH*. I. doc. 405. pp. 404–408.

¹¹⁰ *AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 63–65.* Millerand's cable to Fouchet, June 26, 1920. *Ibid.* ff. 50–152. Aide mémoire of Laroche about his talks with Csáky and Halmos, June 24, 1920. According to Laroche, Paléologue approved his comments on the memorandum. *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ The Hungarian government asked France to promote a revision of the military clauses of the Trianon Peace Treaty, permitting to establish – instead of the mercenary army as prescribed – a military force on the conscription basis because in the case of Hungary the former was unsuitable for maintaining public security and order, and thus the economic reconstruction of the country would have been impossible. *PDH*. I. doc. 405/a. p. 408; *AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 44–45.* Memorandum of Csáky and Halmos to Paléologue, June 23, 1920.

¹¹² It was suggested that the French government should support Hungary in the maintenance of the Western Hungarian areas. Thereby it could stabilize its Francophile political orientation and prevent Austria – which, sooner or later, would join Germany – from increasing its territory. *Ibid.* – Csáky explained to Paléologue the idea of the Hungarian government: in reply to an interpellation, Teleki would announce in the Parliament that Hungary has no intention to withdraw its troops

radical modification of the peace treaty and thus could not take the part of Hungary as suggested. On the other hand, it rejected and opposed any proposal – from wherever it came – that would try to force Hungary to evacuate the said areas. As unacceptable were the Hungarian claims concerning the Hungarian minorities and the Yugoslav evacuation.¹¹³ So, from the entire memorandum the French government only accepted the demand concerning the establishment of the two commissions and promised its concrete support in this question. In Budapest the French refusal of all major claims caused grave disappointment, especially the rejection of the first item concerning the army. This question nevertheless remained on the agenda, in fact, it soon came to the forefront of Hungarian policy. All this coincided with the Soviet-Polish war, with the victorious campaign of the Red Army and the European crisis resulting thereof. Dreading the expansion of Bolshevism, the Hungarian government considered as their main task defence against this immediate danger. In summer 1920, the military question – i.e. the formation and rearmament of the Hungarian army – so much engaged the attention of Hungary that it intensified diplomatic activities aimed at the formation of a Hungarian-Polish-Romanian block. As a matter of fact, much more than this was at stake: the opportunity offered by the prevailing situation – the panic overcoming the governments and military leaders of every country – could be used for enforcing a revision of the military and territorial clauses of the Trianon Peace Treaty. The opportunity was all the better, since hardly any Central European states were willing to fight against the Bolshevik danger or to assist Poland in its struggle. Austria was the first to declare its neutrality. Its example was soon followed by Czechoslovakia. In these critical days both states endeavoured to improve their relation with Soviet Russia. They established contacts with Moscow, Beneš sent to Chicherin a secret message assuring him of Czechoslovakia's neutrality. Masaryk told the French and British ambassadors in Prague that Czechoslovakia would remain neutral, it would deliver no arms to Poland nor would it grant passage to any one through its territory.¹¹⁴ Yugoslavia which disposed of the strongest army also declared its neutrality. Romania made no formal declaration of neutrality, but was nevertheless unwilling to send its

from the western areas, and Millerand would take notice thereof in a declaration. *PDH*. I. doc. 361. pp. 365–368.

¹¹³ The demand concerning the minorities was that the French government should instruct the military missions in the neighbouring states to represent the interests of the Hungarians living there. *AD. Europe* 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 44–45. Memorandum of Csáky and Halmos to Paléologue, June 23, 1920.

¹¹⁴ The neutrality of Czechoslovakia was also due to its conflicts with Poland. Since the Hungarian government repeatedly emphasized that the army must protect Hungary on the Carpathians, Masaryk declared; "If the Red Army would try to find a passage to Hungary through our country, the Czechoslovak government would deny its consent and resist to the Russians to the best of its capacities." Cf. Tibor Hajdu: Károlyi Mihály Prágában (Mihály Károlyi in Prague). *Valóság*, 1972/9, pp. 50–52.

army to the Polish front.¹¹⁵ Millerand was surprised by the attitude of his allies. He blamed the French diplomats and the chiefs of the military missions in these countries for not having informed him in time, nor having prevented the situation.¹¹⁶

In this situation Hungary was considerably upgraded, since the Hungarian government willingly offered military assistance to Poland and proved thereby – according to the French press – that the country had “clever statesmen”.¹¹⁷ Budapest wished to make immediate use of the favourable opportunity to realize one of its main aims: the reorganization of the army.

So Teleki returned on July 14 to the military question included in the memorandum of June 23 and rejected at that time by the French. He instructed Praznovszky to call Paléologue's attention to the considerable change in the European situation during the past three weeks “in consequence of the unexpected victories of the Bolsheviks”.¹¹⁸ Europe is in danger. Hungary wishes to go to war against this danger in the Carpathians and thus fulfil its historical mission of protecting Europe against danger from the East. With a view to this situation the Allied Powers should make it possible to set up seven infantry and one cavalry division as well as their arming, especially with heavy guns.¹¹⁹ In the next weeks, Teleki (who became Prime Minister on July 19, but held for a while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well) continued these activities. On July 26 he met the French and Italian High Commissioners and the British Deputy Commissioner.¹²⁰ On the same day he had also another talk with Fouchet. The topic was always the

¹¹⁵ Chicherin sent a message to the Romanian government saying that the Soviet Union had no offensive aims and strove for the establishment of normal relations. This made it possible for Romania to concentrate its army on the protection of Transylvania. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 47.

¹¹⁶ The French were taken aback by Czechoslovakia's neutrality. Pellé was severely criticized in Paris. The general, who maintained close contacts with Masaryk and Beneš, tried to explain, in fact, to justify the policy of Czechoslovakia in his reports. He agreed with the Central European aims of Beneš (i.e. with the creation of the Little Entente). He was of the opinion that “the Czechoslovak projects were synchronic with the policy of France. Pellé disagreed with the Danubian confederation as envisaged by Paléologue. If we examine the general's correspondence and Millerand's instructions sent to Prague, the conflicts with the prime minister become obvious.” AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 65. f. 88. Pellé's hand-written private letter of 18 pages, July 20, 1920. *Ibid.* vol. 65. f. 86; *ibid.* f. 86. Pellé's letter to Berthelot, September 14, 1920; *op. cit.* vol. 57. ff. 27–28. Millerand's cable to the French ambassador in Prague, August 20, 1920.

¹¹⁷ AMZV. PZ. Paříž 220. Report of Osuský, Czechoslovak minister in Paris, July 2, 1920.

¹¹⁸ “During the three weeks which have elapsed since the suggestion was made, the European situation has changed materially in consequence of the unexpected victories of the Bolsheviks.” PDH. I. doc. 451. pp. 456–457.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* In this instruction Teleki mentions only the protection of the Carpathians, but not the expedition of the Hungarian army to the Polish front.

¹²⁰ Hohler, Great Britain's high commissioner, went on a long leave. This had political reasons we shall come back to.

same: to set up and arm the Hungarian army and to send it to the Carpathians.¹²¹ The order of mobilization was ready, it was intended to call up men of 18 to 24 years.¹²² A war psychosis was prevailed in the country, intensified by Teleki's inaugural address on July 20.¹²³

Meanwhile the Hungarian government appealed to Great Britain and Italy as well, but expected real help mainly from France.

Is it true that France had modified its earlier attitude and has concluded a military agreement with Hungary?¹²⁴ Paléologue received Teleki's message with "explicit sympathy".¹²⁵ Due to the great importance of the question, however, he promised a definite answer only after having discussed the matter with Mille-
rand,¹²⁶ who in principle agreed with the project, but could not ignore the opinion of French military circles when deciding. In these quarters either the whole idea was rejected *a priori*, or utmost cautiousness was suggested. Pierre-Antoine Lefèvre-Pontalis, Minister of Defence, and Generals Mittelhauser and Pellé represented the first view, Marshall Foch and General Gamelin the second.¹²⁷

In their reply to be given to the Hungarian government, the leaders of French diplomacy had also to reckon with the standpoint of their allies, first of all, of Great Britain. Lloyd George, who disagreed in many respects with the interventionist policy of his French colleague, opposed the project of rearming the Hungarians and of sending them to the front, because – he said – this would inevitably lead to a war between Hungary and its neighbours. Unwilling to jeopardize his impending meeting with Lloyd George and the envisaged Franco-British agreement, Millerand decided neither to accept nor to reject the Hungarian proposal. This duplicity can be observed in Paléologue's circular telegram of July 27: "The heads of the French diplomatic missions are informed therein of the Hungarian suggestion and of the fact that France disagrees with the project because it is evident that the Hungarian government made it with the ulterior motive of profiting therefrom ("Il est évident que le Gouvernement hongrois l'a faite avec l'arrière-pensée d'en tirer part").¹²⁸ Nevertheless, there may arise a sit-

¹²¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 47. ff. 78–79. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, July 26, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 81–84. Fouchet's report to Millerand, July 26, 1920.

¹²² AMZV. PZ. Budapešt, report of Lejhanec, 1920.

¹²³ In his speech Teleki referred to the negotiations with France, to the necessity of urgent negotiations and decisions in order to regain Hungary's integrity, and to prepare for the war that was going on right then. *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ In diplomatic circles and in the world press it was widely held that France had concluded also a military agreement with Hungary.

¹²⁵ PDH. I. doc. 461. pp. 471–472.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 47. ff. 88–90. Pellé's cable to Marshal Foch, July 27, 1920. Cable of General Gamelin, July 31, 1920; PDH. I. doc. 587. pp. 578–579.

¹²⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 47. ff. 271–272. Paléologue's circular telegram, July 27, 1920.

uation – the telegram goes on –, where we have to concentrate all forces on assisting Poland. In such a case, of course, we would think first of all of our allies, but it is not impossible that we shall avail ourselves of the Hungarian offer as well against a danger menacing the whole of Central Europe. So my Ministry has decided”, concludes Paléologue, “that it would not be suitable to discourage Praznovszky.”¹²⁹ On July 29, Paléologue told Praznovszky that Millerand did not oppose the project in principle, but believed that the time had not yet come to do anything in this matter.¹³⁰

Without an unambiguous refusal from France, Horthy and his government continued to keep the question alive. They were waiting for the proper time, and in the meanwhile tried to reach an agreement with Poland, irrespective of the Entente. Especially at the beginning, the proposals of Budapest were received in Warsaw with some restraint.¹³¹ But the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement caused a change in the Polish-Hungarian relations. The Polish government was now ready to start negotiations with Hungary, all the more, since the French government expressively asked it to do so. So did Millerand himself, who had deemed it necessary when he came to power to prevent Polish-Hungarian co-operation.¹³² The change was connected with the so-called minimum confederation plan, i.e. with the conception of the Hungarian-Polish-Romanian bloc. Paléologue regarded it as a diplomatic task of high priority to promote the economic and political co-operation of these three states. To that end he was ready to advocate the re-annexation of Ruthenia to Hungary. At his initiative and as a result of his personal invention, the Polish Foreign Minister Patek had two conversations with Halmos on May 3, 1920 and later met Bethlen and Csáky as well.¹³³ Halmos wrote an aide mémoire to Paléologue, which was actually a draft-agreement. This included the following promises from the Hungarian side: (1) Hungary will extend the French economic assistance to Poland; (2) it offers assistance in the plebiscite to be held in the district of Ratibor; (3) it agrees to the establishment of a common frontier; (4) it will conclude a military agreement with Poland, according to which it will make available its military forces for the struggle

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *PDH.* I. doc. 501. pp. 503–504.

¹³¹ *PDH.* I. doc. 85; doc. 88. pp. 115–116.

¹³² In his instruction of March 6, 1920 to the Budapest high commissioner, Millerand still followed this line. *AD. Europe* 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 14–17.

¹³³ The Halmos–Patek meeting was arranged by Paléologue. *AD. Europe* 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 116–117. Aide mémoire about the talks of Halmos. *Ibid.* *PDH.* I. doc. 225. pp. 268–272. “Paléologue expressed his willingness to inform confidentially the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs who is at present in Paris about the matter and to establish contact between him and Dr. Halmos.” *PDH.* I. doc. 255. pp. 268–272; doc. 260. p. 284; doc. 267. p. 292; doc. 276. pp. 299–301; doc. 281. p. 303. Patek was Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and not Polish Ambassador in Paris. Cf. Mária Ormos: *Francia-magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban* (Franco-Hungarian negotiations in 1920). *Századok*, 1975/5–6.

against Bolshevism, first of all against Soviet Russia. In return Poland: (1) supports Hungary in its negotiations with France; (2) promotes Hungary's agreement with Romania in territorial, economic and minority questions; (3) asks to participate in the Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations; (4) supports the rearmament of Hungary.¹³⁴ The discussions and the draft-agreement were from Paléologue¹³⁵ so the latter was part of the French political conception, i.e. of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations.

Before leaving Paris, Patek let Halmos know that after careful consideration he was ready to start the negotiations on the suggested basis. This actually took place in the following weeks. However, Poland continued to keep a certain distance. This can be explained mainly by Hungary's confused domestic policy, by the country's extremely difficult international position, the opposition of Britain and the mistrust of Romania. All this made the Poles cautious. It was very typical of the situation that Marshal Piłsudski only replied on July 10 to a letter Horthy had written to him on June 6.¹³⁶ Piłsudski agreed with the Regent's suggestion and accepted his offer of co-operation. A concrete agreement was now reached by the two governments about transport of arms and ammunition. Efforts were made to secure a transit corridor, but they failed in spite of French support.¹³⁷ Czechoslovakia and Romania turned down the demands made to them. Though considering both transit possibilities, Budapest preferred the latter. Here too, we can clearly see the Hungarian intention at the back of the project: the re-annexation of Ruthenia. Keeping in view the pro-Romanian policy of France and Poland, however, a territorial revision at Romania's cost was hardly possible. The two countries certainly did not want to discourage a prospective member of the envisaged tripartite alliance, but rather to win it. Romania had to be detached from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia; its adherence to the Little Entente as suggested by Beneš as well as its being much influenced by Italy had to be prevented. French diplomacy therefore used much energy in effecting a reconciliation between Hungary and Romania. Paléologue made a special effort; his various activities since spring 1920 had been directed at this. The Hungarian-Romanian agreement held a central position in his talks with the Hungarians. In Budapest the idea of the tripartite bloc was endorsed, and stated repeatedly verbally and in

¹³⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. ff. 116-117.

¹³⁵ PDH. I. doc. 282. pp. 303-304.

¹³⁶ PDH. I. doc. 321. pp. 332-333; doc. 440. pp. 446-447. About the Polish-Hungarian negotiations cf. Endre Kovács: *Magyar-lengyel kapcsolatok a két világháború között* (Polish-Hungarian relations between the two world wars). Budapest, 1971.

¹³⁷ Count Zamoyski, Polish ambassador in Paris, confidentially informed Praznovszky that the French were ready to fulfil the Hungarian demand (concerning the corridor), but made their decision dependent on the consent of the Romanian and Czechoslovak government. However, Prague and Bucharest refused. "Paléologue remarked to Zamoyski that Romania and Czechoslovakia would in time realize that they had made a mistake, but he fears it will be too late." PDH. I. doc. 536. p. 542.

writing. Paléologue kept the Romanians informed about these discussions. At the very beginning of the negotiations, on March 22, he asked Halmos to prepare a draft for the Hungarian-Romanian agreement. Approved by the Hungarian government, this memorandum laid down the Hungarian claims concerning the territorial, economic and minority questions.¹³⁸ On the following day Paléologue disclosed the contents of this paper to Prince Ghica, minister of Romania in Paris, who – according to Paléologue – considered the Hungarian proposal interesting and promised to report it to his government.¹³⁹ We do not know the Romanian answer and know only indirectly that Bucharest did not regard the Hungarian memorandum even as a basis for negotiations. The Romanian government recognized no possibility of territorial revision or of any modification of the peace treaty, especially at the expense of its own country. Take Ionescu announced to the French government that he decidedly rejected any attempt to change the frontiers. In 1927, Paléologue wrote that he had constantly informed the Romanian minister in Paris about the Franco-Hungarian negotiations, and that the Romanian government had never any objection to their content.¹⁴⁰ What he did not write, however, was the fact that his informations covered only the economic aspects of the negotiations – and these were indeed not opposed by the Romanian government. Daeschner, French Minister in Bucharest, presented the Franco-Hungarian agreement of June 22, 1920 as a purely economic matter to Take Ionescu, who was glad to learn this¹⁴¹ and emphasized once more that he wished to establish good relations with Hungary; if, however, Hungary's policy menaced any one of its neighbours, he would change his mind.¹⁴²

Thus, as soon as the Romanian government saw that the Franco-Hungarian agreement affected not only economic question, it immediately protested against it most vigorously.¹⁴³

The situation was similar with regard to Yugoslavia. Here too, the information about the Franco-Hungarian negotiations was received at first with much understanding. In Belgrade it was believed that the French policy in Hungary would frustrate the endeavours of Italy and Britain in that region, notably their plans for a Danubian confederation; at the same time, Hungary under French influence would represent less danger to the *status quo* than if it belonged to the Italian or British spheres of interest.¹⁴⁴ This is what French diplomats emphasized in

¹³⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 47–50. Note of Halmos, March 22, 1920.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. ff. 76–77. Aide mémoire of Paléologue, October 2, 1927.

¹⁴¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 95–96. Daeschner's cable to Millerand, July 3, 1920.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 103–104. Daeschner's cable to Millerand, July 4, 1920.

¹⁴⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 126–127. Aide mémoire about the talks with Beneš, May 13, 1920.

Prague, Bucharest and Belgrade, with the result that these governments at first accepted with understanding the French plans for co-operation with Hungary for the sake of Central Europe's prosperity. In his negotiations in Paris, Beneš approved this plan¹⁴⁵; when in early July the French government proposed to the governments in Prague, Bucharest and Belgrade to start direct negotiations with Hungary, all of them gave a positive reply. As Montièle, Chef de Cabinet to Paléologue, told Praznovszky, Beneš and Vesnić were enthusiastic about the project.¹⁴⁶ Though without enthusiasm, Take Ionescu also accepted the French proposal, adding, however, that he hoped, France would not take part in the negotiations as an ally of Hungary.¹⁴⁷ Beneš was the first to propose to the Hungarian government to begin negotiations: on June 6, Lejhanec, representative of Czechoslovakia in Budapest, presented on behalf of his government this proposal to Teleki, who welcomed the initiative in principle; before giving a definite answer, however, he wanted to know the views of Prague about the boycott.¹⁴⁸

Almost at the same time Yugoslavia and Romania equally expressed their readiness to start negotiations. On behalf of his government, Stircea, Romania's representative in Budapest, offered the Hungarian government the establishment of diplomatic relations, unlike Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, even before the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty. Bucharest asked French support for this project,¹⁴⁹ and Paléologue approved it. He was of the opinion – and let it be known in Budapest on several occasions – that Hungary must reach first an agreement with Romania, because it had to begin the negotiations with Bucharest. He warned the Hungarian government not to raise at the beginning the territorial and political questions, because – as reported by Praznovszky – “untimely insistence on these claims would most probably drive Romania off the course favourable for us, which it had obviously assumed under French pressure, and would force it entirely into the arms of the Czechs and Serbs, whereby the circle around us would be closed”. In this situation, the report goes on, it is the primary task of Hungarian foreign policy to break this encirclement – and this

¹⁴⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 126–127. Notes on talks with Beneš, July 4, 1920.

¹⁴⁶ “Montièle informed me today that both Vesnić and Beneš were enthusiastic about the idea of direct negotiations with Hungary under French auspices.” *PDH*. I. doc. 418. p. 420.

¹⁴⁷ *PDH*. I. doc. 455. pp. 458–459. “... the Rumanians were also pleased with the suggestion of French mediation though their attitude was more reserved than that of the others. The Rumanians emphasized their hope that France will not take part in the negotiations as an ally of Hungary”, disclosed Montièle to Praznovszky.

¹⁴⁸ Lejhanec informed Beneš: his impression is that the Hungarian government will negotiate only if any kind of boycott will be stopped. AMZV. PZ. Cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, July 6, 1920.

¹⁴⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Vol. 50. ff. 97–98. Praznovszky's memorandum to the French Foreign Minister, August 4, 1920. *Ibid.* f. 109. Saint-Aulaire's report to Millerand, August 12, 1920. *Ibid.* f. 118. Paléologue's circular telegram, August 17, 1920.

can be done by means of an agreement with the Romanians.¹⁵⁰ The problems in the East induced Romania to accept Paléologue's advice concerning an agreement with the Hungarians. King Ferdinand and General Averescu were decidedly for a rapprochement with Hungary, while Take Ionescu kept manoeuvring, trying to reconcile what was irreconcilable: his negotiations with Beneš about the Little Entente and the rapprochement with Hungary. Ignoring the desire of his Czechoslovak colleague to first establish the Little Entente and only afterwards negotiate with Budapest. In July he started direct discussions with Hungary about the normalization of relations between the two countries.¹⁵¹ Paléologue again warned the Hungarians against concrete negotiations with their neighbours. He wanted to wait till the options were ratified, (the extraordinary national assembly was convened for August 7) for he feared not without reason that the negotiations would fail, being deadlocked by the territorial question. This would have certainly had a negative effect on the ratification of the options. Praznovszky was right when he reported to his government that he had the impression, "the French would like to have some delay. Montiële (Paléologue's Chef de Cabinet) warned me against pressing the matter too much. In his opinion time is working in their favour"¹⁵² Subsequent events confirmed the misgivings of Paris: the negotiations ended in failure in all three areas, since the antagonisms were irreconcilable.

While the neighbouring states were unwilling to discuss other than juridical, economic and civic problems, the Hungarian government's main topic was the rectification of frontiers: referring to the "lettre d'envoi", it claimed territorial concessions. This was most decidedly rejected by the parties concerned. They did not recognize Millerand's covering letter which was in their view not part of the peace treaty and had consequently not been signed by them.¹⁵³ Neither now nor

¹⁵⁰ Országos Levéltár, Külügyminisztérium (Hungarian National Archives, Foreign Ministry) (henceforward: OL. Küm.) K. 74. – Paris, 1920. Incoming coded cables, Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, August 23, 1920.

¹⁵¹ ASMAE. 6670. Martin's cable to Sforza, July 14, 1920. OL. Küm. K. 74, 1920. Incoming coded cables. Cable of Márffy-Mantuano to Csáky about his talks with Take Ionescu, September 30, 1920. ASMAE. 938. 1853. Martin's cable to Sforza, August 18, 1920; ASMAE. 6670. Martin's cable to Sforza, August 22, 1920. *PDH*. I. doc. 489. p. 491. This document mentions erroneously that the Hungarian-Romanian negotiations applied to the frontier as well. AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 35. f. 204; Aide mémoire, December 13, 1920.

¹⁵² "I have the impression that the French would like to have some delay. Montiële (Paléologue's Chef de Cabinet – M.Á.) warned me against pressing the matter too much. In his opinion time is working in our favour," cabled Praznovszky. *PDH*. I. doc. 955. pp. 458–459.

¹⁵³ The new documents put the Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations also in another light, by modifying the standpoint according to which Masaryk and Beneš were ready for territorial concessions. As a matter of fact, both statesmen, especially the former one, made numerous statements of this kind. At the time discussed, for instance, Masaryk imparted to Foreign Minister Sforza that Czechoslovakia was ready to revise the frontiers in favour of Hungary. As Sforza's cable reads: "Masaryk ebbe a dire repetutamente a Mago che Ceco-Slovachia avrebbe fatto spontaneamente sen-

later did they show any readiness to discuss the territorial problem. The idea that some sacrifice might be made for good relations, for the consolidation of peace in Central Europe, occurred to nobody except Masaryk.

Paléologue was not surprised – from the very beginning he was rather sceptical in this matter. He knew very well that his entire plan for a Danubian confederation depended on an agreement between Hungary and its neighbours, this being the basic condition of the whole conception. He also had no doubt that without such an agreement there would be neither an option, Franco-Hungarian co-operation, nor a Danubian confederation. He hoped that the conditions for negotiations might eventually be improved by economic pressure on the neighbouring states and therefore tried to delay the negotiations he had initiated. Due to events in the following July, however, the conditions for negotiations changed for the worse instead of improving. Let us briefly examine these events.

Heading a French delegation, Count Saint-Sauveur arrived in Budapest on June 22. He was received with ostentative courtesy, Horthy even entertained him at his country residence in Gödöllő. He had talks with Apponyi and with members of the government. In a detailed report on his experiences, he analysed the political and economic situation of Hungary. Within its new frontiers and without economic agreements with its neighbours, he wrote, Hungary was incapable of living.¹⁵⁴ He regarded the economic situation in every successor state as alarming, since none of them was able to meet its own needs, and advocated the formation of a unified economic system or a federation including all the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans. In regard to economics, these states would constitute a rounded whole that should not be disrupted.¹⁵⁵ It is therefore not possible, he continued, to make in an economic respect a Hungarian, a Czechoslovak or an Austrian policy; what is needed, is a unified Central European policy that takes account of the different interests and co-ordinates them by means of appropriate agreements.¹⁵⁶

sibili rettifiche frontiere Slovacchia favore Ungheria per dimostrare spirite conciliativo ed equitativo." ASMAE. 1741. Sforza's cable to the Italian ambassador in Prague, February 18, 1920. Even in later years Masaryk made several similar declarations. It is a fact, however, that the question of revision was raised concretely, too, and was energetically turned down by Beneš, as documented by the following notices on the talks of Beneš with Hungarian statesmen: "Beneš odpověděl že lettre d'envoi není součástíkou mírové smlouvy není námi podepsaná nenávazuje nás." AMZV. PZ. Aide mémoire of Beneš, March 21, 1921. "Teleki a Gratz v důvěrném jednání s Benešem žádali zase ustupky území. Po odmítnutí naznačili, že nemají zájem na dalším jednání." AMZV. PZ. Praha 83. Aide mémoire of the Bruck negotiations of Beneš, March 21, 1921.

¹⁵⁴ "... la situation est très grave. La Hongrie dans ses nouvelles frontières et sans accords économiques avec ses voisins ne peut pas vivre". AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 55. ff. 169–177. Report of Count Saint-Sauveur, August 4, 1920.

¹⁵⁵ "Ces pays de l'Europe Centrale et des Balkans forment dans le nouvel état des choses un ensemble, un tout complet au point de vue économique qui ne peut être disloqué." *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ "Il n'est donc pas possible de faire au point de vue économique une politique hongroise, tchéco-slovaque ou autrichienne, il est nécessaire de faire une politique Europe Centrale avec une

The experiences and suggestions of Saint-Sauveur confirmed the information Millerand had obtained so far and were in conformity with the confederative conception of the Premier.

During his sojourn in Budapest, Count Saint-Sauveur gathered informations, had conversations and made suggestions, but he did not conclude any agreement. After his departure, however, news spread about a secret agreement he was said to have signed in Gödöllő. The text was purchased by Austrian Chancellor Renner for 10,000 Crowns from an official of the Hungarian Ministry of Finance.¹⁵⁷ Renner conveyed the allegedly secret agreement to Beneš, who forwarded it at once to Paris, together with a note of protest. The document of eleven pages – said to have been signed at Horthy's residence in Gödöllő on the night of 19 to 20 – specifies in all details the areas Hungary was to recover. In fact, the so-called agreement was aimed at bringing about a radical change in the Trianon and Saint-Germain Peace Treaties.¹⁵⁸

The document may be either a counterfeit or one of the innumerable Hungarian schemes drawn up in those times. Under the pretext of this alleged agreement, Beneš and Renner launched violent attacks against Franco-Hungarian rapprochement, supported therein by Germany, Yugoslavia, Romania, Britain and Italy – and partly even by the United States –, who all gave credence to the propaganda and blamed the French government.¹⁵⁹ By the time, the

direction unique d'ensemble qui tiennent compte des différents intérêts et les associe entre eux par des accords appropriés" wrote Count Saint-Sauveur. *Ibid.* AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 178. Report of the French ambassador in Prague to Millerand, August 9, 1920.

¹⁵⁷ The document bears also the signature of Saint-Sauveur. The count arrived in Budapest on July 24, while the document was allegedly signed on the night from July 19 to 20.

¹⁵⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 181–192. The French-Hungarian secret agreement. The documents published by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry do not include this agreement. If it had existed, the Hungarian government would have published it in 1939. Today we have already a steadily growing scope of knowledge about the real story of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations, about their background and their aim, such as the limits of how far the leaders of French diplomacy were ready to go in the question of revision – in addition to promises and encouragements – and under what conditions; the fact that France had not concluded a military or political agreement with Hungary, but gave only a declaration of political nature, including implicitly the possibility of a territorial revision, Millerand essentially relied upon the given status quo and had only minor frontier corrections in mind. On the other hand, Paléologue went further in the revision of the peace treaties and considered more important frontier corrections as permissible. Though verbally only, he repeatedly explained this to the members of the Hungarian delegation, so on June 20, 1920 to Csáky, when he told why he had left out of the written declaration the phrase defending the basic structure of the peace treaty: "Paléologue intimated that the omission of this phrase signifies the willingness of the French Government to overlook in our favour, if necessary, the general structure of the treaty," reported Csáky. *PDH*. I. doc. 378. p. 378. Another proof thereof: Paléologue actually accepted the Halmos-memorandum of April 23 as a basis for negotiations. After Paléologue's downfall his pertinent endeavours were openly discussed in French Parliament. Cf. Intervention of Paul Boncour: *Chambre des députés*, 1re séance du mardi, 7 juin 1921.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. f. 180. Report of the French ambassador in Prague, August 9, 1920. *Ibid.* f. 193. Report of the French ambassador in Prague, August 11, 1920. *Ibid.* f. 196.

uproar about the Franco-Hungarian agreement was culminating both in diplomatic circles and in the press. The efforts of the two states to establish genuine contacts lost their former intensity. Both France and Hungary – especially the latter – were reflecting upon the possibility of retreat.

No doubt: factors of domestic policy, the increasing attacks of the opposition demanding cautiousness from both parties, can hardly be overlooked in an analysis of the matter. However, the question was nevertheless chiefly decided by external factors: the international balance of forces. First of all, the policy of Great Britain should be mentioned. The Foreign Office opposed from the very beginning the Danubian plans of Millerand and attacked his policy concerning Hungary. In the first week of May – when the Franco-Hungarian negotiations were just beginning – the British High Commissioner in Budapest, Hohler, was instructed by his government to start a counter-action. Establishing close contacts with Horthy, he tried to turn the Regent against France. He warned Horthy that Hungary could hardly expect any substantial assistance from France, since the country was itself in a precarious financial and economic situation, relying on the help of the United States and Great Britain.¹⁶⁰ On May 27, he presented to Horthy a *démarche* protesting against the Franco-Hungarian economic projects and offering at the same time the intensification of Anglo-Hungarian economic relations.¹⁶¹ On June 4, Britain sent a note – actually a *démarche* – to the Hungarian government, protesting against the leasing of the Hungarian Railways, this being contradictory to the article on reparations of the Trianon Peace Treaty. The *chargé d'affaires* added that his government had protested in Paris as well: at the same time, the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Derby, presented Millerand a letter from Lord Curzon protesting against the Franco-Hungarian co-operation.¹⁶² After the energetic intervention of Great Britain, Teleki began to hesitate. He nevertheless approved the signing of the agreement of June 22, because Paléologue considered the Budapest protest of the British as insignificant, while simply denying the protest lodged with Paris. He did so both in his talk

Cable of Lefèvre-Pontalis, French ambassador in Vienna, August 13, 1920. *Ibid.* ff. 208–209. Cable of Charles Roux to Millerand, August 30, 1920. *Ibid.* f. 200 Fouchet's cable to Millerand, August 18, 1920. *Ibid.* vol. 58. ff. 175–176, 189. Cable of Marcilly, representative of France in Berlin, to Millerand, June 4 and June 6, 1920.

¹⁶⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 154–162. Fouchet's report to Millerand, May 12, 1920.

¹⁶¹ “La situation est très émouvante depuis le commencement de la semaine à cause des *démarches* et paraît-il de l'arrogance de mon collègue anglais, qui a porté avant-hier matin au Régent des offres de Londres.” AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 146. Fouchet's report to Millerand, May 27, 1920.

¹⁶² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 198. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 8, 1920. *PDH.* I. doc. 315. p. 328. According to this paragraph, the peace treaty seizes the country's national wealth as security for the reparations. The French government knew very well that the envisaged option is actually opposed to the decisions of the peace treaty concerning the reparations, as proved by an aide *mémoire* to be found in the French Foreign Ministry, which includes the standpoint of a legal expert. *Ibid.* ff. 204–205. Aide *mémoire*, June 9, 1920.

with Halmos (who asked for information about the British intervention, as instructed by Teleki) and in his telegram to Fouchet.¹⁶³ And when Paléologue confidentially told Halmos that there existed Anglo-French agreement on the Hungarian question, Teleki's confidence was completely restored, all the more, since he learned from Fouchet that Paléologue had discussed the question with Lord Derby and the matter was settled.¹⁶⁴ In his report of June 10, Csáky returned to the question, particularizing his pertinent impressions and information. Accordingly, there existed an Anglo-French agreement stating that Hungary belonged to the French orbit.¹⁶⁵ Hohler's action was merely aimed at frightening the French and securing certain advantages to the British before ceding Hungary to France.¹⁶⁶

On the same day (June 9), when Paléologue informed Fouchet that "the British government has so far made no communication to the French government about options",¹⁶⁷ he wrote an aide mémoire that the day before Lord Derby had officially presented the French government his objections to the options, and that Millerand had given him an evasive reply saying that he knew nothing about such an affair.¹⁶⁸ By means of these tactics the leaders of French diplomacy achieved their aim: in spite of Hohler's intervention the Hungarian government signed the options.

In the Foreign Office the news about the options having been signed came like a bomb-shell. Subsequently, the British intensified their pressure on the Hungarian and the French governments. They wished to prevent at any price the ratification of the options. On June 26 the British chargé d'affaires, Johnson (Hohler had been sent on leave for six months, because the signing of the options was put down to his account) called upon Teleki and requested an answer to the British note of June 4. Teleki replied that the question had been discussed by Paléologue with Lord Derby and the matter was settled. Johnson considered this statement untrue because, he said, his government knew nothing about Paléologue's statement.¹⁶⁹ Two days later, on June 30, Johnson presented Teleki a letter from Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, who protested against the options

¹⁶³ PDH. I. doc. 327. p. 338.

¹⁶⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. f. 204. Aide mémoire about the visit of Halmos, June 9, 1920. PDH. I. doc. 342. p. 349.

¹⁶⁵ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. Paléologue's cable to Fouchet.

¹⁶⁶ PDH. I. doc. 342. p. 349. doc. 409. pp. 415-416.

¹⁶⁷ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. f. 202. Paléologue's cable to Fouchet, June 9, 1920.

¹⁶⁸ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. f. 203. Paléologue's aide mémoire, June 9, 1920. "Il y a un jour que Lord Derby avait de son côté notifié au gouvernement français son opposition. Millerand lui avait répondu qu'il ignorait cette affaire" (the affair in question was about the options). *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 59. ff. 82-83. Fouchet's cable to Millerand, June 30, 1920. PDH. I. doc. 409. p. 415.

as contradictory to the peace treaty.¹⁷⁰ Within two days Sir Hugh Lewick, the British member of the Reparations Commission, wrote a letter to Fouchet, asking for information about the Franco-Hungarian economic and political agreement. He emphasized that the whole transaction was inconsistent with the peace treaty. At the same time, London intensified its economic pressure on the Hungarian government. On June 25 (three days after the options had been signed), Colonel Stead – formerly chief of staff to Admiral Troubridge – gave a reception at the Hotel Ritz, Budapest on the first anniversary of the foundation of the bank. Several high-ranking personalities of Hungarian economic and political life were present, including the Prime Minister. In his toast, Stead stood up for Britain's economic interests in Hungary, emphasizing that Hungary was now a free country and that Britain was interested in its prosperity. He advocated the closest possible financial contacts between London and Budapest. Due to the Danube, he said, Hungary had become Britain's neighbour, and Britain was ready to help it in maintaining its economic independence. Owing to its lucky geographical situation, Hungary was the axis of Eastern Europe, and must play an important role in the area. British friendship might be helpful therein. In his reply, the Prime Minister appreciated Britain's good-will and expressed his hope that it would hold in the future too.¹⁷¹

So, the signing of the options only resulted in the intensification of Anglo-French rivalry for Hungary. At that time the French were still unwilling to withdraw. On the contrary, they intensified their diplomatic activities in order to make the options final, and not to bargain with Great Britain until this was achieved. The Hungarian options were supposed to be a trump card for the proposed conference between Millerand and Lloyd George, the agenda of which was to include among others the Hungarian question. In the French Foreign Ministry there is a note referring to this intention, saying that the option is important for opposing other British claims.¹⁷² It was not until late July and early August – after the Anglo-French meeting – that the French began to draw back. Out of consideration for the British, the Hungarian request that a Hungarian delegation should be received in Paris by Millerand and Foch, was declined.¹⁷³ All this only increased the distance the Hungarian government was moving from France and strengthened the process which had started in Hungary towards the end of June, after the second British intervention. It became clear to the Hungarian government that Britain did not intend to give up Hungary, surrendering it to the French sphere of interest as suggested by Paléologue. Although the French gov-

¹⁷⁰ PDH. I. doc. 409. pp. 415–416.

¹⁷¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. Letter of Sir Lewick to Fouchet, July 2, 1920. Fouchet reported in details about the party, warning the government that the whole thing was aimed against Franco-Hungarian economic rapprochement. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 68–71. Fouchet's report to Millerand, June 26, 1920.

¹⁷² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. f. 205. Note of the French Foreign Ministry, June 8, 1920.

¹⁷³ PDH. I. doc. 550. p. 555; doc. 559. pp. 561–562.

ernment continued to affirm that it had reached an agreement with London on the Hungarian question and had not received any protest from the British,¹⁷⁴ these statements were received with scepticism in Budapest. Slowly but surely, Hungary became estranged from France – and this process seemed to be irreversible.

As a matter of fact, Italy also played a role in Franco-Hungarian alienation. From the very beginning Rome tried persistently to frustrate the French projects with Hungary. As has been mentioned, the Italian government advocated a tripartite coalition consisting of Austria, Hungary and Romania, also with Hungary as the axis of the federation. It was therefore quite understandable that it disapproved of the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement and wanted to prevent France from taking hold of Hungary. Since it became evident that the Italian government in itself was unable to do so, it joined the action of Great Britain. (The position was thus the same as at the peace conference: Anglo-Italian co-operation against France). At several occasions Fouchet called the attention of the Quai d'Orsay to the anti-French stance of his British and Italian colleagues.¹⁷⁵ All the time the Italian High Commissioner, Cerrutti, followed with utmost attention the Franco-Hungarian negotiations and reported in detail to Foreign Minister Sforza.¹⁷⁶ The latter tried to turn Hungarian political circles against the French, painting a picture in the darkest colours about the grave consequences of Hungary's Francophile policy. They were wrong, he emphasized, if they believed they would be able to improve their relations with the Allied Powers by means of concessions to the French.¹⁷⁷ Italian diplomats started extensive activities against the French links with Hungary, pointing out that France could not support Hungary politically, being not interested in a great and strong Hungary.¹⁷⁸ This, they said, is only in Italy's interest. True, France had become estranged for the moment from Czechoslovakia, but this was only a temporary situation and it would be wrong to think that the French had left Czechoslovakia out of their political calculations.¹⁷⁹ They called the attention of the Hungarian government to the fact that no country could be on friendly terms with France and Germany at the same time. If Hungary reckoned on French support, it would be faced with a hostile Germany.¹⁸⁰ After the options were signed, Italy – like Britain – also protested

¹⁷⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 59. ff. 99–101. Fouchet's report to Millerand, July 3, 1920. PDH. I. doc. 409. pp. 415–416.

¹⁷⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 54–55. Aide mémoire, June 20, 1920. Fouchet's report to Millerand, 1920.

¹⁷⁶ ASMAE. 1741. Cerrutti's cable to Sforza, June 7, 1920; *ibid.* 8058. Cerrutti's cable to Sforza, June 25, 1920.

¹⁷⁷ PDH. I. doc. 581. p. 578; doc. 617. pp. 605–606.

¹⁷⁸ PDH. I. doc. 369. p. 372; ASMAE. 1741. Cerrutti's cable to Sforza, June 16, 1920.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ PDH. I. doc. 433. p. 437.

more strongly against the Franco-Hungarian agreement which extremely jeopardized its economic and political interests.

On June 28, Cerrutti lodged a protest on behalf of his government against Franco-Hungarian rapprochement, and repeated his intervention on July 3. The Franco-Hungarian co-operation, he said, made a bad impression both in Britain and in Italy. He reminded the Deputy Foreign Minister Kánya that Prime Minister Huszár and Foreign Minister Count Somssich had told him personally in February that Hungary intended to base its policy on Italy, since the two countries had to protect themselves jointly against Pan-Slavic expansion. Besides this initiative, however, nothing had been done on the Hungarian side that would have really promoted a rapprochement between Budapest and Rome. In his reply Kánya said that the recently begun Franco-Hungarian negotiations had considerably exceeded Hungarian expectations. In his opinion, the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement could by no means disturb the friendly relations with other Allied Powers. "If France now follows the example of Italy and Britain – he said – and gives proof of a somewhat more friendly attitude towards us, this cannot be a sufficient reason for Italy and Britain to turn their backs on Hungary." He shifted the responsibility for the standstill in Italo-Hungarian relations on the Italian government, because its policy with Romania, by ignoring the Hungarian interest, prevented the Hungarian government from realizing its original project. Cerrutti, on the other hand, pointed out the importance of Romania for the proposed Central-European bloc; Hungary must therefore normalize its relations with Romania, even at the price of accepting, in the meantime, the Romanian conditions, i.e. recognizing the *status quo*. Of course, he added, this did not mean that the prevailing situation could not be modified later on. In fact, he believed that the autonomy of Transylvania could be realized immediately.¹⁸¹

We have seen that the French "advice" in regard to Romania did not prevent the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement. There was thus something else at issue: Italy's chances of realizing a revision of the peace treaty were insignificant, and Budapest wished to give preference to a power able to procure (for certain concessions) some compensation of a different kind. At the same time, France was believed to be such a power. In this study, the attitude of the United States to the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement will not be discussed, since it was rather indifferent.¹⁸²

The policy of Britain and Italy had an effect not only on Hungary, but on its neighbours as well. The former was induced to withdraw, the latter were encouraged to attack. The attack was led by Beneš, who wanted to make the most of the situation and to realize his long-standing plan for the Little Entente.

¹⁸¹ PDH. I. doc. 415. pp. 421–423; ASMAE. 6670. Martin's cable to Sforza, July 14, 1920.

¹⁸² The diplomats of the United States observed the events and reported on them. They did not protest officially against the Franco-Hungarian combination. The American press, however, believing the rumour about the secret agreement, attacked the French government which, in turn, protested against the invectives.

Conclusion of the Czechoslovak – Yugoslav Agreement

As it appeared from the preceding chapter, former suggestions of Beneš had been turned down by Yugoslavia and Romania. There was no change in this attitude until the summer of 1920. The Franco-Hungarian secret agreement, however, now pushed the three states towards one another, functioning almost as a catalyst in the development of their relationship. Beneš recognized at once the chance offered by the prevailing atmosphere: Yugoslavia and Romania were panic-stricken, knowing only too well that Hungary's revisionist claims supported by France represent a potential danger and that the message of Beneš – "Hungary is not our enemy any more, but our rival"¹⁸³ – corresponded to the real situation. From the end of July on, there was a lively contact between Belgrade, Bucharest and Prague. The Yugoslav government, military circles and Prince Alexander himself urged the conclusion of the agreement on the Little Entente, which they had repeatedly rejected so far. Momčilo Ninčić hurried to Prague, where he discussed the question of the alliance and invited his Czechoslovak colleague to Belgrade in order to sign the agreement. Beneš wanted to conclude a similar agreement with Romania simultaneously with the signing of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav accord and therefore to combine his trip to Belgrade with a visit to Bucharest. He did not wish to give the adversary enough time to set the hesitating Romanian government against his project. He deemed the timing so important that he postponed his trip to Belgrade, originally scheduled for the beginning of August, by a week.¹⁸⁴

Taking place at the most critical phase of the Polish-Soviet war, the diplomatic action of Beneš was criticized by the right-wing European press in general and by the French papers in particular. Paléologue vehemently attacked Osuský, Czech minister in Paris, warning him that his government had taken the wrong course. He disagreed with the proposed alliance, because there was no reason for its existence. In his opinion the attitude of Czechoslovakia to the Polish-Soviet war was false. Like other countries holding a similar attitude, it would realize this, but then it would be too late.¹⁸⁵ In Paris the independent action of the small

¹⁸³ AMZV. PZ. Beneš's cable to the Czechoslovak ambassador in Belgrade, July 30, 1920.

¹⁸⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 65. f. 12. Pellé's report to the 2nd department of the French general staff August 6, 1920. It was the firm intention of Beneš to conclude simultaneously the agreements with Yugoslavia and Romania, respectively.

¹⁸⁵ AMZV. PZ. Paříž, Osuský's cable to Beneš July 30, 1920. In his report Osuský, Czechoslovak minister in Paris, gave account of Paléologue's outbursts. The latter warned him: his government commits itself to a dangerous course. AMZV. PZ. Paříž, August 20, 1920. Osuský's report to Beneš. In the Prague archives we can find several reports of the Czechoslovak minister in Paris, which reflect the French standpoint concerning the Little Entente being formed. Cf. AMZV PZ. Paříž, 1920. Osuský's reports to Beneš September 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 1920. Due to the documents found in the Prague archives, In 1965 I had already the possibility to raise, in my monography, the idea that the Little Entente was not created by France. The following lines in a book of Beneš (published in 1924) are also indicative thereof: "This policy (of organizing the Little Entente – M.Á.) was criticized and de-

Danubian states caused some uneasiness. Although the background, the limits and the aim of these activities was not yet known for certain, they were obviously directed against the Eastern policy of France and were – even if but indirectly – linked with the Polish-Soviet war; last but not least, the action enjoyed the support of the British Foreign Office.¹⁸⁶

The French diplomats accredited in the Central and South-Eastern European states were instructed to gather all information concerning the journey of Beneš to Belgrade and Bucharest.¹⁸⁷ It was not by chance either that General Franchet d'Esperey arrived in Belgrade when Beneš was there. However, Yugoslavia could not be prevented any more from joining the Little Entente. On August 14, 1920 the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement was signed in Belgrade, forming the core of the Little Entente. Effective for two years, the agreement was aimed at maintaining the order created by the Trianon Peace Treaty "If Hungary starts an unprovoked attack against one of the high contracting parties, the other party is obliged to defend the attacked party, as specified in Article Two of the present Contract" – reads Article One.¹⁸⁸ Under Article Two, the parties are bound to reach a special agreement on the measures to be taken for the fulfilment of the accord. The top secret military agreement specified the co-operation of the two states against Hungary in the case of a defensive or an offensive war.¹⁸⁹ Although the agreement was presented as a defensive instrument, the military convention signed later applied to an offensive war as well: "If one of the contracting states attacks Hungary without the preliminary approval of the other contracting party, the latter is obliged to maintain its neutrality towards its ally, and to keep not less than two mobilized divisions along the Hungarian frontier."¹⁹⁰

From Belgrade Beneš travelled straight to Bucharest. When he arrived, Marshal Joffre was already there. International public opinion observed with keen interest the Romanian events. Who would be the winner – Beneš or Joffre? It was the latter – Romania did not join the Little Entente. The suggestion of Beneš that they should conclude an agreement against Hungary was received by

preciated, its significance was distorted. At first it displeased in the West. We calmly pursued our way and were justified by the events." E. Beneš: *Problémy nové Evropy a zahraniční politika Československa* (Problems of the new Europe and Czechoslovak foreign policy). Praha, 1924, p. 138.

¹⁸⁶ The Quai d'Orsay had much information concerning the latter.

¹⁸⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 55. ff. 242–243. Cable of Pozzi, French chargé d'affaires in Prague, to Millerand, July 31, 1920; *ibid.* vol. 45. ff. 1–2. Couget's cable to Millerand, August 9, 1920. AD. Europe 1918–40. vol. 47. f. 13. Fontenay's report to Millerand July 27, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 30–31. Fontenay's report to Millerand, August 9, 1920; *ibid.* T. vol. 65. ff. 20–23. Fontenay's report to Millerand, August 15, 1920; AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 34. f. 118. Daeschner's cable to Millerand, August 19, 1920; *ibid.* f. 85. Cable of Billy, French ambassador in Athens, to Millerand.

¹⁸⁸ *Diplomatické dokumenty MD.* doc. 25. p. 25; Dénes Halmosy: *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918–1945* (International agreements 1918–1945). Budapest, 1966, pp. 153–154.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *O československé zahraniční politice*, p. 81.

Take Ionescu with the utmost caution. All he was ready to accept was a verbal agreement, according to which Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania would offer each other military assistance in the case of a Hungarian attack, while in case of a Romanian-Soviet war Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia would prevent Hungary and Bulgaria, respectively, from attacking Romania in the rear.¹⁹¹ The French stand against the Little Entente could not be ignored in Bucharest, and this was all the easier, since the Romanian politicians in general and Brătianu's party in particular disapproved of the adherence of Romania to a bloc with Slavic preponderance. The main ambition of Romanian foreign policy was to obtain by means of suitable conventions the approbation of the arbitrary annexation of Bessarabia. In this diplomatic action its main supporter was France. Paléologue received these Romanian intentions with understanding, asking in return for the formation of a Romanian-Hungarian-Polish bloc.¹⁹² However, a Hungarian-Romanian alliance faced considerable opposition in Romania, including Take Ionescu himself. The Romanian foreign minister preferred a "wait-and-see" policy, without engaging himself on either side and keeping the door open in every direction. He did not formally reject the proposal of Beneš to form the Little Entente, but asked for a condition – the participation of Poland and Greece – which was unacceptable to Czechoslovakia. So he managed to delay the decision. Romania actually continued the vacillating, two-faced policy begun during the war. A typical example: at the same time as a verbal agreement was reached with Beneš in Bucharest, delegates were sent to Budapest in order to explore the possibilities of a Hungarian-Romanian rapprochement and of forming the tripartite bloc as suggested by Paléologue.¹⁹³

Millerand and Paléologue took concrete measures to prevent any further development of the Little Entente. Paléologue disclosed to Beneš and Pašić that the French government disapproved of the alliance and would use its influence in Bucharest to prevent Romania from joining the bloc.¹⁹⁴ The position of the French government is exactly represented by Millerand's circular telegram of August 24, addressed to 11 legations. The Premier refers to the negotiations aimed at creating the alliance that would include Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and eventually Poland and Greece, as well as to the – already signed – Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement and continues as follows: "Such policy may involve the grave inconvenience of isolating the Hungarian government, which will be inevitably tempted to go over to the side of Germany in order to find support there. With a view to preventing conflicts, our constant concern consists, on the contrary, of trying to find the elements of rapprochement between the differ-

¹⁹¹ *Diplomatické dokumenty MD.* doc. 34. p. 79; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 65. f. 32. Report of the French Ambassador in Bucharest to Millerand, August 22, 1920; *ibid.* T. vol. 65. f. 32.

¹⁹² Paléologue displayed a considerable diplomatic activity in order to have the Great Powers recognize in an agreement that Bessarabia belonged to Romania.

¹⁹³ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 50. Praznovszky's letter to Millerand, August 26, 1920.

¹⁹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 65. Note of the French Foreign Ministry, without date.

ent states of Central Europe. It was mainly to permit a more efficient realization of this aim that I promoted the economic rapprochement between French and Hungarian enterprises. The development of French influence on Budapest seemed to be suitable for serving the cause of peace, since it granted to all our allies in Central Europe certain guarantees against the revival of an aggressive policy in Hungary. Under the conditions the adherence of Poland and Greece to the envisaged combination would risk the division of Central Europe into two camps and thus to increase the chances of a conflict. We are therefore not at all interested that the government to which you are accredited should join a bloc of this sort. You are requested to call the attention of the (respective) government in the most discrete form possible to the grave consequences of such policy, which involves the danger of solidifying Hungarian and German interests and would make it more difficult to establish normal relations between the states resulting from the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire."¹⁹⁵ This paper of considerable documentary value thus represents the official stand of France in regard to the Little Entente coming into being; it proves that Paris did more than not promoting the formation of the alliance, but disapproved of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement and tried to prevent other states from joining it. Since France was unable to prevent the conclusion of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement and to induce Romania to refuse point-blank the proposal of Beneš (a verbal agreement was actually reached!), it tried to temper the anti-Hungarian aim of the bloc; first, by asking the members of the Little Entente not to over-stress the anti-Hungarian character of the bloc, and later – after the downfall of Paléologue – by advocating the adherence of Poland to the alliance.¹⁹⁶

How can we explain an almost collective error of historiography which tends to impute the creation of the Little Entente to the initiative of French foreign policy, notably to its Danubian ideas, an opinion prevailing for the most part in public opinion as well? How was it possible to maintain this view for over half a century?

First of all, it is due to the fact that the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the documentary material of which is certainly decisive for obtaining an authentic insight into the matter, have been inaccessible to researchers until recently. Another implication is that the French policy opposing the Little Entente was a shortlived one and hardly lasted a year; though determining French foreign policy in the period in question, the representatives of this trend handled the Danubian project and the related negotiations with utmost care, having to take into account a strong internal and external opposition. Moreover, a misleading factor was that, apart from the short period mentioned above, France granted the Little Entente political support and regarded this alliance formed against its will as one of the main pillars of its Eastern policy.

¹⁹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 47. f. 72. Millerand's circular telegram, August 24, 1920.

¹⁹⁶ AMZV. PZ. Paříž, August 20, 1920.

France Takes Sides with the Alliance Formed against its Will

After the conclusion of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement, the French opposition intensified its campaign against the foreign policy of Millerand-Paléologue.¹⁹⁷ It was realized in Paris that the organization of the new order in Central Europe was started not only without, but even against France and that the Little Entente had an explicit anti-French character. It was not unimportant either that the situation was used by London and Rome to further weaken the French position. The most ardent opponent of the French Danubian plans was Italy, which increased its influence in all the victorious successor states. In spite of their conflicts with Britain, the Italians held the same view on several questions: to counter-balance the Danubian ambitions of France. The Italian government aspired to a balancing function, but usually backed Great Britain. In fact, London and Rome supported everything aimed against the Millerand-Paléologue line. In that period the Foreign Office was actually the main supporter of Beneš. Though continuing to consider the restoration of the Central European unity as a question of vital importance, Britain now also embraced the plans of Beneš concerning the Little Entente which practically meant the region's division into two parts, but counteracted at the same time the Danubian ambitions of France.¹⁹⁸ Through its representatives in the Danubian states, British diplomacy effectively supported the establishment of the Little Entente, regarded by the Foreign Office as justifiable and necessary. A report by Phipp refers to this attitude by emphasizing that the Little Entente "will be of defensive character, it will safeguard peace and enjoy the full support of His Majesty's government"... "At the same time, the Little Entente will provide security against the intrigues of the French and the Italian governments."¹⁹⁹

Initially, Italy was definitely against the Little Entente, because the alliance – though not aimed directly against it – was against its interests since it signified the creation of a bloc with Slavic preponderance and thus strengthened the positions of Yugoslavia, one of Italy's main adversaries. In the situation resulting from the Franco-Hungarian negotiations, however, this seemed to be the lesser evil. And though the Italian press criticized the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement,²⁰⁰ the Italian government was taking concrete measures for improving its relations with the states opposed to France – to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – and to force the latter to make concessions. Laying aside the disagreements over Fiume and Dalmatia, it concluded with Yugoslavia the so-called Rapallo

¹⁹⁷ In his cable of September 24, 1920, Praznovszky already informed his government that the main reason of the attacks launched against Paléologue was his pro-Hungarian policy resulting in the establishment of an anti-French Little Entente. *PDH*. I. doc. 666. p. 643.

¹⁹⁸ Ozer Carmi: *La Grande Bretagne et la Petite Entente*. Genève, 1972, pp. 28 – 30.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ At first, the Italian press sharply attacked the action of Beneš. Somewhat later its style became more moderate.

convention which stipulated not only the protection of the Trianon and Saint-Germain Peace Treaties, but also a concerted action against any restoration of the Habsburgs.²⁰¹ With the agreement between Sforza and Beneš, the latter obligation also became part of the Czechoslovak-Italian treaty.²⁰² The government in Belgrade had to pay a high price for Paléologue's policy of Franco-Hungarian rapprochement: it yielded to Italy regions inhabited by a Yugoslav majority, while Fiume was declared a "free city".

The French opposition press blamed the policy of the Quai d'Orsay for the situation,²⁰³ and even Millerand decided to reconsider his plans concerning Hungary. All his promises remained unrealizable. Paléologue who had wholeheartedly sided with the Danubian project and thus with Hungary, was abandoned by his Premier and had to resign.²⁰⁴ His political career came to an end and he utterly disappeared from the political scene.

Thus, by autumn 1920 the Danubian policy of France had taken a radical turn. The leadership of the Quai d'Orsay was taken by Berthelot, a personal friend of Beneš. The new Secretary General belonged to a group of French nationalists unwilling to abandon an iota of the existing Central European *status quo*. In his view, any concession towards yesterday's enemy was dangerous. He approved the political line of Beneš, i.e. the establishment of the Little Entente, with the difference that Poland must also be drawn into the bloc. On October 2, 28 hours after having taken office, he informed the Polish government that France had changed its former standpoint, now sympathized with the Little Entente, and would gladly welcome the adherence of Poland to this bloc.²⁰⁵ In September 1920, Take Ionescu conferred with Beneš and Masaryk about the adherence of Romania and Poland to the Little Entente. In a letter to the representative of Czechoslovakia in Budapest, Beneš wrote that the adherence of Romania to the Little Entente is more than probable; Poland is also ready to become an ally, but only to safeguard the peace of Versailles. The Czechoslovak government – Beneš went on – cannot assume responsibility for the peace treaty of Riga – Yugoslavia approves this, Romania does not.²⁰⁶ In Warsaw the idea was approved in principle. A similar message was sent to Bucharest, but in spite of the changes in French foreign policy, Romania did not join the Little Entente and pursued its "wait-and-see" policy. While maintaining and even strengthening (after the

²⁰¹ R. Machray: *The Little Entente*. London, 1929, pp. 136–138.

²⁰² *Diplomatické dokumenty MD*. doc. 41. p. 93.

²⁰³ Berthelot, an old opponent of Paléologue, used all means to weaken the positions of the latter.

²⁰⁴ Millerand, who remained head of the government, did not fully abandon his former conceptions and maintained contacts with Paléologue even after his downfall.

²⁰⁵ *PDH*. I. doc. 725. p. 696.

²⁰⁶ *AMZV*. PZ. Letter of Beneš to the representative of Czechoslovakia in Budapest, September 30, 1920.

French turn) its contacts with the Little Entente and not rejecting the idea of its adherence,²⁰⁷ it conferred also with Hungary and Poland, though the establishment of the tripartite bloc had been outdated by autumn 1920. It was anyway unwilling to reach an agreement on a bilateral basis, with Hungary not at all, and with Poland not before the end of the negotiations with Soviet Russia. The main objective continued to be the approbation of the annexation of Bessarabia. In 1920 Take Ionescu went to Paris, London and Rome in order to ask for financial assistance as well as for diplomatic support in obtaining official recognition of Bessarabia's annexation. He persuaded the Great Powers to sign the so-called Paris Protocol sanctioning this annexation. However, the document was not ratified, because the Allies wished to secure for themselves the possibility of putting pressure on Romania by means of the Bessarabian question.²⁰⁸ In the three capitals Ionescu received most contradictory advice. His partners agreed only on one question: all of them expected him to join their conception in return for the financial support he was asking for. France urged an agreement between Romania and Poland (Hungary was not included any more) and Romania's adherence to the Little Entente with Poland as members. Great Britain's stand was just the opposite: it insisted on the normalization of the Romanian-Soviet relationship (the above mentioned negotiations in London were actually initiated by the British); it disapproved the Polish-Romanian agreement aimed against Soviet Russia and particularly Poland's participation in the Little Entente, because this alliance would be strained by Piłsudski's "irresponsible" policy.²⁰⁹ The Foreign Office advocated the tripartite Little Entente as suggested by Beneš and advised Take Ionescu to join it. Italy presented a third proposal: trying to restrain Romania from joining the Little Entente, it suggested a rapprochement with Hungary.

Returning from his round trip, the Romanian Foreign Minister tried to reconcile Czechoslovakia with Poland. For this purpose he visited Prague and Warsaw at the end of October and in early November, respectively, but Beneš was unwilling to make any compromise. Finally, Poland desisted from joining the Little Entente and hoped only to reach a bilateral agreement with Romania, before the negotiations in Riga came to an end. The Romanian government rejected this proposal, since in the prevailing situation it preferred not to engage itself on either side. As a matter of fact, it was only in 1921 (when the Soviet-Romanian negotiations were deadlocked and the differences between the two states again became more acute) that it made up its mind to sign the agreement with Poland for the safety of the Eastern frontiers.²¹⁰ However, Take Ionescu stood fast by his

²⁰⁷ Though advocating the Little Entente, Take Ionescu, having become foreign minister, could not disregard the standpoint of the forces opposed to it. By that time he had already abandoned the idea concerning Greece and insisted only on the participation of Poland.

²⁰⁸ AD. Europe 1918-40. R. vol. 35. Cambon's aide mémoire to Millerand, November 18, 1920.

²⁰⁹ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 28-30.

²¹⁰ Dénes Halmosy: *op. cit.* pp. 168-169.

maximum plan and to prevent his country from joining the Little Entente. He changed his stand only when the Hungarian danger became acute as a result of the first return attempt of ex-king Charles.

By autumn 1920, France had in effect abandoned its claims on Hungary which it actually did not need any more as soon as the Polish-Soviet war was over – an alliance with Hungary would only have been useful in this connection. Horthy turned out to be a reliable ally against the Soviets, but absolutely unreliable in regard to Germany: while negotiating with Paléologue, he maintained close contacts with representatives of German revanchism. Paléologue had confidential information about the conversations which the German colonel Bauer had on behalf of General Ludendorff with the Hungarian Regent. So if his earlier plans were realized, Hungary – strengthened by French capital and rearmed by the French – might turn at any moment against France on the side of the Germans.

Franco-Hungarian Relations after Paléologue's Downfall

The change in French Danubian policy did not mean an immediate break with Hungary and the abandonment of economic and political connections. After Paléologue's fall Paris tried to pretend that the relationship between the two countries had not changed. Several personalities, including the new Premier Leygues himself, assured Halmos there being no change whatsoever in French foreign policy.²¹¹ Colonel Láng, Horthy's Chef de Cabinet, was assured by General Weygand that "Paléologue's dismissal does not affect French foreign policy which continues to be pro-Hungarian".²¹² A similar declaration was made by Peretti de la Rocca, head of the Political Department in the French Foreign Ministry, who, after Paléologue was set aside, "carried on the most amicable line in regard to Hungary".²¹³ Cambon, Chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors, also promised to support the Hungarian affair, although – he said – this will not be easy, because "the French are continuously attacked for their pro-Hungarian sympathies".²¹⁴ Of course, the Hungarian government also assured Paris of carrying on its pro-French policy.²¹⁵

However, the key-figure of the new political line, Berthelot, kept silent. At first, he did not even interfere with the management of affairs concerning Hungary, controlling them only from the background. Under the pretext of pressure of business he nevertheless refused to receive the Hungarian delegates Praznovszky and Halmos, intimating thereby that he was keeping a distance from

²¹¹ PDH. I. doc. 755. pp. 718–719. Praznovszky's report to Csáky, October 27, 1920.

²¹² PDH. I. doc. 757. pp. 725–726. Report of Colonel Láng to Csáky, September 28, 1920.

²¹³ PDH. I. doc. 763. p. 732. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, September 27, 1920.

²¹⁴ OL. Küm. 408. K. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, October 29, 1920.

²¹⁵ PDH. I. doc. 674. pp. 648–649. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, September 27, 1920.

the political ideas of his predecessor. There was thus no question of continuity, hopefully expected in Budapest in the early days.²¹⁶ In fact, it became more and more evident that the personal change within the Quai d'Orsay certainly meant a change in the pro-Hungarian policy of France, and that the mutual declarations were without any foundation. As a matter of fact, the policy of supporting the Little Entente, as advocated by Berthelot, necessarily meant an estrangement from Hungary. In the given situation, however, when the Peace Treaty of Trianon was not yet ratified by Hungary and the options were not yet operative, it was not reasonable to admit it: the French, to wit, were unwilling to throw away the economic results already achieved. So they began to insist on the realization of the economic programme, without doing anything in the political line. French financial and industrial circles ventured upon Hungarian enterprises: the Union Industrielle Européenne joined, for instance the Hungarian General Credit Bank, another syndicate obtained the option for the exploitation of the Hungarian State Railways and for constructing the Budapest fluvial port. On the other hand, the time limit of the effectiveness of the options was dependent on the realization of the programme as scheduled in the declaration of June 24, 1920.²¹⁷ That is, of the political programme discussed at a high level even after the downfall of Paléologue. As if nothing had changed, the Hungarian government continued the negotiations hoping that "in the interval between the signing and the ratification of the peace treaty the French will do something in the interest of Hungary".²¹⁸ So Halmos and Colonel Láng returned to Paris for further negotiations about these political concessions. At least in a few questions they wished to obtain a definite decision before the ratification. The French pursued dilatory tactics trying to induce the Hungarian government by means of promises to ratify the peace treaty. "Everything depends on ratification", Paris kept on asserting, whereas Budapest tried to change the order of succession: "The fulfilment of the Hungarian claims would considerably facilitate the ratification of the peace treaty."²¹⁹

Halmos and Láng knew very well that it would be a grave mistake to leave Paris without any tangible result, because this would jeopardize not only the pro-French policy but also the co-operation with French capital. The negotiations between the two countries would be broken off – and this would come just at the right moment for Berthelot, who would hold the Hungarian government responsible for the failure.

Thus, Praznovszky and Láng were considerably active in Paris. Although Berthelot tried to raise difficulties, Halmos was received by Premier Leygues,

²¹⁶ PDH. I. doc. 738. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, October 23, 1920.

²¹⁷ PDH. I. doc. 755. Praznovszky's report to Csáky, October 27, 1920.

²¹⁸ In Budapest the question was put the other way round: first the concessions, which were said to facilitate the ratification.

²¹⁹ PDH. I. doc. 636. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, September 21, 1920.

Láng by General Weygand and by Colonel Georgess; they also had talks with Peretti de la Rocca, Laroche and Cambon. Halmos informed the new Premier about Hungary's pro-French policy and the further consolidation of the French orientation. (In truth, it was much rather disappointment that was consolidated, since Paris had failed, until then, to fulfil any of Hungary's political claims. Nevertheless, this policy was carried on, since it was sincerely hoped in Budapest to obtain in the foreseeable future some political concessions; not only Teleki, but Csáky, the new Foreign Minister, were wholehearted partisans of the French orientation.) Halmos handed over two memoranda. One of these documents summed up the reasons, conditions and aims of Franco-Hungarian rapprochement, indicating the concurrence of the mutual interests of the two states. France recognized the economic and political importance of Hungary, while the Hungarian government had taken note of the advantages resulting from the French orientation. In Hungary's view France is the country that can guarantee its political independence and economic reconstruction.

The other memorandum specified the reasons which induced the French financial and industrial groups to show an interest in Hungary's economic life and to obtain control over Hungarian economic and financial resources.²²⁰

What the Hungarian government asked in return for French orientation and the economic concessions above, continued to include, first of all, a revision of the frontiers and the correction of ethnical and economic injustices. Unlike their earlier attitude, however, the Hungarians now wished to realize all this within the limits of the Trianon Peace Treaty, in the spirit of the *lettre d'envoi*. After the peace treaty was signed, the territorial claims were considerably moderated. By means of direct negotiations with its neighbours, Hungary asked for the correction of flagrant economic and ethnical injustices, a modification of the peace treaty's military clauses and an amendment of the contracts protecting the minorities. In these weeks the two latter issues were mainly emphasized. The Hungarian government expected to be able with French support to raise its military strength limited by the peace treaty to 35,000 men and to organize a conscript in-

²²⁰ In the first memorandum it was emphasized that Hungary, due to its geographical situation, was the gate to the Balkans; the economic life of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy would be based still for a long time entirely on Hungary (the detached areas being non-viable without the Hungarian Lowlands); their river system consisted – without exception – of the tributaries of either the Danube or of the Tisza; the centre and basis of the communication and railway network would always be in Budapest; and that the most part of the industrial equipment of the former Monarchy was centred around Budapest and its environs.

According to the memorandum, the control of the economic and financial forces was to be realized as follows: with the help of the railway network (which secures the control over the entire territory of the former Hungary), the shortest communication between Western and Eastern Europe could be established. The control of the Hungarian railways would secure, in an absolute sense, the exclusive communication of Germany towards the Balkan states and Asia Minor; control of the Danube shipping. (Wishing to secure it for themselves, the British had bought up the shares of the Danube Shipping Company.) PDH. I. doc. 755a/b. Memorandum of Halmos.

stead of a volunteer army, because "Hungary's economic situation does not make it possible to maintain a volunteer army".²²¹

This question was discussed by Colonel Láng with General Weygand. The Hungarian scheme envisaged a reorganization of the army according to the French system and its rearmament with French weapons; Hungary would grant France an exclusive guarantee of political co-operation. The General replied that since the military questions had grave political consequences, neither he nor Marshal Foch could give a definite answer until the question had been discussed with the political leaders. The latter – Leygues, Cambon, Laroche, Peretti de la Rocca – were inclined to grant the rightful Hungarian claim, but only after the ratification of the peace treaty. They promised Hungary's rearmament, although they knew that this was sharply opposed by the French military command and even more so by Great Britain and Italy. "It is the intention of France to rearm Hungary" – declared Peretti de la Rocca, because this is also in its own interest. He suggested that Colonel Láng should remain in Paris for an undefined time, so that he could discuss the matter with the military command as well. But General Weygand avoided further talks with Láng. When, at last, he received the Hungarian delegate, he plainly turned down the Hungarian claim – owing to the influence of Berthelot, said Peretti de la Rocca.²²²

Finally, the Conference of Ambassadors put an end to the indecision by adopting on October 20 a resolution based upon a British proposal: the strength of the Hungarian army would be limited to 35,000 men – as stipulated by the peace conference. The army would consist of voluntarily enlisted soldiers, as in the case of any other defeated country. Any deviation – the resolution went on – was inadmissible. The Conference has no reason to authorize Hungary to set up a temporary army.²²³ The French politicians who had endeavoured to maintain relations with Hungary, explained at length to Praznovszky all their efforts towards having the Hungarian standpoint accepted, but "they were always prevented by the British and the Italians. They still hoped, however, that something might be achieved through the Disarmament Control Commission."²²⁴ "But the first thing to do was to ratify the peace treaty", they kept repeating.

In the following weeks – October and the first half of November – diplomatic activities were concentrated on the ratification of the peace treaty. On September 20, 1920 Laroche urged ratification on behalf of the Conference of Ambassadors, or else the Allies would take drastic measures.²²⁵ On September 23 the question was again discussed by the Conference; it was agreed that the delay pre-

²²¹ PDH. I. doc. 805. p. 771. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, November 16, 1920.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ PDH. I. doc. 630. Note of the Allied Powers to the Hungarian government, November 1920.

²²⁴ PDH. I. doc. 636. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, October 27, 1920.

²²⁵ PDH. I. doc. 636. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, September 21, 1920.

vented the creation of genuine peace in Central Europe. The Hungarian government was again urged to take the necessary measures without any further delay.²²⁶ In his reply Csáky emphasized that the Hungarian government envisaged the ratification of the peace treaty and that the draft bill was ready, but the matter would be considerably facilitated if Hungary were allowed to complete its army by means of conscription, to set up a separate commission for reparations (the peace treaty stipulated a common Austro-Hungarian commission), and if the Conference would provide for the evacuation of Pécs and the Baranya region (by the Yugoslavs).

However, in spite of the energetic protests, the Hungarian government did not put the items on the agenda for the following reasons: (1) public opinion must be gradually prepared for the acceptance of the grave peace conditions; (2) nothing has been done so far towards the solution of the unsettled questions.²²⁷

Finally, the Allied Powers had had enough of the dilatory tactics of the Hungarian government. On October 18, the Conference of Ambassadors sent a note to Budapest demanding that the Hungarian government have the peace treaty ratified as soon as possible. At first, the time-limit was fixed at November 1 and somewhat later at November 15. Any further delay was said to be inadmissible. Should the ratification not be carried out by November 15, Hungary would be excluded for a long time from the work of the international commissions.²²⁸

The result of the note was a substantial reduction in claims by the government. It only asked the Allies to have the neighbouring states change their policy towards the Hungarian minority and make preparations, so that the frontier commissions might start their activity in the spirit of the *lettre d'envoi* as soon as possible.²²⁹ The last part of the Hungarian note suggested that Hungary would welcome it if the commissions were headed by a Frenchman. On October 29 the Conference of Ambassadors was informed that the Bill for the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty had been submitted to the Parliament, but its passage would be considerably facilitated by the fulfilment of the two claims mentioned above.²³⁰

In the short time before the session (Parliament had been convened for November 15), Hungarian diplomats worked intensely in order to explain to the Allies that ratification would be a difficult matter, its accomplishment would be much easier if the government could produce a result on the question of the minorities at least. Praznovszky had several talks with Peretti de la Rocca and with

²²⁶ PDH. I. doc. 676. p. 651. Csáky's cable to Praznovszky, September 29, 1920.

²²⁷ PDH. I. doc. 763. p. 732. Csáky's cable to Praznovszky, September 29, 1920.

²²⁸ PDH. I. doc. 746. p. 712. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to the Hungarian government, October 25, 1920.

²²⁹ PDH. I. doc. 726. p. 696. Csáky's cable to Praznovszky, November 8, 1920.

²³⁰ PDH. I. doc. 777. pp. 746–747. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to Praznovszky, November 5, 1920.

Cambon,²³¹ Chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors, from whom he asked urgent intervention in Bucharest, Belgrade and Prague, to protest against the persecution of the Hungarian minorities.²³² The Conference decided at last not to wait for ratification, but to take steps to safeguard the interests of the minorities and to protest against the violation of the relevant clauses of the peace treaty. At the same time, it was emphasized that the intervention would be much more effective if the peace treaty were ratified, since the Conference had no right to take firm measures enforcing compliance with a peace treaty that had not yet been approved by the Hungarian Parliament.²³³ The Hungarian government was asked for specific details of the complaints, which were promptly sent by Csáky.

The governments of the neighbouring states had indeed violated the convention of December 9, 1919 protecting the rights of minorities; in the period at issue the situation of the Hungarians became extremely strained. Public servants, teachers, professors, doctors unwilling to swear an oath of allegiance – and losing in consequence their job – left the new states in large numbers, without asserting the right to option, i.e. to assume the citizenship of the country involved. Hungary, on the other hand, was not prepared for accommodating such huge masses. The homecoming people were living in camps and waggons under distressing conditions. With reference to paragraph 61 of the peace treaty (on the rights of minorities), the Hungarian government requested the anti-Hungarian measures be stopped and the refugees be repatriated. The Allies tried to achieve the same result through their diplomatic representatives in Bucharest, Belgrade and Prague, suggesting direct negotiations with the Hungarian government.²³⁴

Their intervention was not very successful. The Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav governments held the Hungarians responsible for the grave situation by displaying an attitude which encouraged emigration.²³⁵ They nevertheless declared their readiness to start negotiations with Hungary on the normalization of relations, on the repatriation of the emigrants, and to establish normal diplomatic relations by raising their respective representatives in Budapest to the rank of a minister – but all this only after the ratification of the peace treaty.

²³¹ All the time, Peretti de la Rocca received the Hungarian demands with understanding, Cambon with reserves.

²³² *PDH*. I. doc. 767. p. 36. Praznovsky's report to Csáky, November 1, 1920; *PDH*. I. doc. 785. pp. 752–753. Praznovsky's report to Csáky, November 8, 1920. *PDH*. I. doc. 754. p. 717. Csáky's cable.

²³³ *PDH*. I. doc. 727. p. 697. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy.

²³⁴ *PDH*. I. doc. 699. pp. 674–675. Aide mémoire of Kánya to Hungary's representative in Prague; doc. 727. p. 699. Tahy's cable to Csáky, October 18, 1920. According to the report of July 1, 1924 issued by the Office of Refugees, 350,000 persons fled to Hungary from the neighbouring countries. 35,283 of them were state employees, 160,371 family members. Cf. Ottó Szabolcs: *Tisztviselők az első világháború után* (Civil servants after World War One). *História*, 1982/1, p. 32.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

On November 15, 1920 – the last day of the deadline – Hungary ratified the Trianon Peace Treaty, although none of its claims or conditions had been met. Certainly, Hungary had received numerous promises – mainly from the French government – that this would take place in the future.

In the Franco-Hungarian relations, however, the signs of alienation became more and more visible, in spite of many declarations. The opposition to Hungary was certainly not unanimous, but French policy was marked by an obvious duplicity – and the partisans of closer contacts lessened considerably. Peretti de la Rocca was perhaps the only high-ranking politician who consistently kept to his pro-Hungarian policy.

Cambon, who at first advocated the continuation of this policy and promised to support the Hungarian cause, now – to the utmost bewilderment of Praznovszky – changed his opinion about the “*lettre d’envoi*” (which bore his own signature) and did not regard it as an organic part of the peace treaty.²³⁶ This message caused – with good reason – grave anxiety in Budapest, since it was Cambon’s turn to preside at the Conference of Ambassadors, at a period when the frontier commissions were to be established and which, according to the promises made that far, had to function in the spirit of the *lettre d’envoi*. In his talks with Praznovszky, Cambon inquired about the promises Paléologue had made to Hungary.²³⁷ Generally speaking, he continued to emphasize the importance of Hungary and its need for support. Berthelot himself expressed similar views.

After a delay of six weeks, Berthelot was at last ready to receive Halmos on November 7, 1920. He told him that he did not oppose Paléologue’s policy, though he disagreed with it in many details. First of all, he did not like the way his predecessor had wanted to realize this policy. In reality, however, the difference was much more than formal: Berthelot treated Hungary as a defeated country and would not hear of any territorial modifications. Co-operation with the neighbours – he said – was most important indeed, but not at the price of territorial concessions.²³⁸ Berthelot agreed with the arguments of Halmos about the evacuation of Pécs, the grievances of the Hungarian minority and the arrangement of Western Hungary.²³⁹ But he refused to discuss a territorial revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty and asked for the implementation of the treaty and for acknowledgement of the prevailing situation.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ PDH. I. doc. 767. pp. 735 – 736. Praznovszky’s report to Csáky, November 1, 1920.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ “Berthelot’s remarks concerning the territorial question were unfavorable.” The recollection about the talks reads as follows in the aide mémoire: PDH. I. doc. 783. p. 751. Praznovszky’s cable to Csáky, November 7, 1920.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ The second talk with Berthelot took place in mid-November. PDH. I. doc. 871. pp. 824 – 825. Praznovszky’s cable to Csáky, November 16, 1920.

In opposition to the political line represented by Berthelot, there also existed another one, the partisans of which advocated the stabilization of the French position in Hungary. This group continued to strive for the modification of the frontiers. One of its principal representatives was Fouchet, High Commissioner of France in Budapest, who presented on November 7 – on the same day Halmos was negotiating with Berthelot – the following suggestion to the French government: (1) in accordance with the *lettre d'envoi*, Ruthenia should be re-annexed to Hungary, thus producing a common Hungarian-Polish frontier. "It is inadmissible to discredit with such a long silence this highly important document" (i.e. the *lettre d'envoi*), he added reproachfully. (2) An economic conference should be urgently convened under French leadership, in order to have the economic co-operation discussed by the Central European states. This was for Hungary a question of vital importance.²⁴¹

Several other French politicians shared this favourable opinion – according to Paléologue even Millerand himself, who meanwhile had become President of the Republic. In a summary of his impressions Halmos emphasized that many French politicians were of the opinion that the Hungarian frontiers were not definitive as long as they were not established according to the *lettre d'envoi*. These politicians induced the French Parliament to make a declaration to this effect when the peace treaty was discussed.²⁴²

The encouragement and promises had three main purposes: (1) to promote the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty by the Hungarian Parliament; (2) to win Hungary for the economic conference that was to advance the co-operation of the Central European states; (3) to achieve French economic plans with regard to Hungary and to counterbalance the hesitation of the Hungarian government in this matter.

The French official policy tried also to put pressure on the syndicates which had begun to be somewhat careful in the prevailing situation, when French policy towards Hungary became vague. Schneider-Creusot and the Banque de l'Union Parisienne were about to request an extension of time for the start of practical work. This work, they argued, would necessitate a considerable injection of capital that was then not available.²⁴³ The French government disapproved of this intention because it would facilitate a withdrawal of the Teleki government from the whole transaction. (As a matter of fact, the Hungarian Prime Minister was blamed by significant circles for "selling out" the country gratuitously to the French; especially, the lease of the State Railways was disapproved.) Furthermore, it would help the British to take the Hungarian Railways by lease, as they

²⁴¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. f. 103. Fouchet's report to Leygues, November 7, 1920.

²⁴² PDH. I. doc. 871. pp. 824–825. Praznovszky's cable to Csáky, December 15, 1920.

²⁴³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 160–163. Letter of Saint-Sauveur, chairman of the Schneider Co. to Leygues, December 15, 1920; *ibid.* f. 158. Aide mémoire about the French policy in Hungary, December 14, 1920.

actually endeavoured.²⁴⁴ The British government did not only attack the proposed Franco-Hungarian transaction, but induced – at the same time – a British syndicate to submit an offer to the Hungarian government for the lease of the railways.²⁴⁵

Disregarding the view of the French government, Schneider-Creusot informed Teleki on November 9, 1920 of its intentions but the Hungarian government rejected the time extension of six months requested by the French, because of the country's difficult economic situation.²⁴⁶

The option on the railways, which kept Hungarian and European public opinion in excitement for almost six months, ceased to exist on November 10: after the refusal of the time extension they had requested, the French cancelled it without informing the Hungarian government.

By the end of 1920, the alienation of the two countries had become an evidence for all, and could no longer be disguised by declarations. Nothing was realized of the envisaged co-operation. The promises proved to be unrealizable, the efforts made by Halmos and Láng in autumn 1920 in Paris remained unfulfilled. Henceforth the Hungarian government received any further promises with scepticism. However, the Francophile group did not abandon its original plan and continued to strive for the French orientation of Hungary.

At the beginning of 1921, this group believed that the time was ripe for further action, hoping for results from the change of government expected in January. These hopes were also entertained by Paléologue who had maintained relations with Praznovszky even after his downfall. On January 5, 1921 he had a long conversation with Hungary's representative in Paris and told him that President Millerand still approved wholeheartedly the Eastern policy he – Paléologue – had initiated.²⁴⁷ He asked Praznovszky to inform Teleki without delay that the present government would probably fall within a fortnight and that Berthelot would also be turned out of office.

In January 1920, the Leygues government fell. The new Premier, Aristide Briand, indeed pursued a more adaptable policy on many international questions, but was all the more inflexible in regard to Hungary and followed the policy of Berthelot who – despite Paléologue's prediction – maintained the post of Secretary General for Foreign Affairs. One of Briand's main objectives was to halt the process of rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Italy, on the one hand, and between Italy and Czechoslovakia, on the other, to which – although in a

²⁴⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 107–109. Fouchet's report to Leygues, November 15, 1920.

²⁴⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 137–138. Report of Robien, French chargé d'affaires in Budapest, December 9, 1920.

²⁴⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 60. ff. 160–164. Csáky's letter to the Schneider Co., November 2, 1920.

²⁴⁷ PDH. II. doc. 15. pp. 18–19. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, January 6, 1921.

looser form – Romania was also attached. This was one of the reasons why he rejected Hungary's renewed attempts at rapprochement.

In his letter of February 18, 1921 he instructed Fouchet not to respond to requests for French support for frontier corrections²⁴⁸ and for the restoration of the Habsburgs. He should strengthen the conviction in public opinion that the peace treaties based upon the realization of national aspirations must be implemented. It is not excluded, Briand goes on, that the opposing parties – taking their mutual interests into account – will some day reach an agreement, but first Hungary must obtain the confidence of its neighbours. He asked the High Commissioner not to leave any doubt as to the readiness of France to fulfil every obligation incumbent upon it from the peace treaty. Of course, France would welcome a settlement of the frontier problems by Hungary and its neighbours, but first of all it should have consideration for its allies. France thus expected due respect for peace.²⁴⁹ In short, Briand turned a deaf ear to Hungary's renewed attempts at rapprochement. At the beginning of January 1921 – as has been mentioned – it was contemplated in Budapest to resume the deadlocked Franco-Hungarian negotiations. Due to the catastrophic economic situation of the country, the primary aid would have been to obtain a loan. Other motives for this project was the process of disintegration within the governing party as well as Paléologue's message to Teleki, according to which the President of the Republic continued to advocate rapprochement between the two countries.

However, in spite of a thorough study of relevant documents we are unable to find the slightest indication of the above. On the contrary: during the period at issue Millerand tried to explain, to justify and to defend his earlier policy on Hungary, which – he pointed out – was necessary under the prevailing circumstances (this necessity was actually questioned by Berthelot and his adherents). An *aide mémoire* dated December 14, 1920, was drawn up in the French Foreign Ministry ("Politique française en Hongrie") – presumably for those who disapproved of the policy on Hungary. The unknown author summed up the Franco-Hungarian negotiations and pointed out that they were mainly of an economic character. The intention of France was to appease Hungary by preventing it from seeking political support against its neighbours and thereby jeopardize the peace. The country's economic reconstruction was supposed to facilitate the acceptance of the peace treaty. As proved by the events, all this was right. In its political declarations France certainly offered its support for promoting the normalization of relations between Hungary and its neighbours within the frontiers fixed in the *lettre d'envoi*. But all this was in perfect accordance with the peace treaty and did not mean intervention in Hungary's internal affairs. On the question of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, France acted according to the resolution of the Allies of February 1920. According to the same guiding principles it also approved the

²⁴⁸ Fouchet offered the Hungarian government the re-annexation of Ruthenia to Hungary and wished, by all means, to set Archduke Joseph on the Hungarian throne.

²⁴⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 34. f. 195. Briand's letter to Fouchet, February 18, 1921.

"Little Entente". Another document written under the same title on April 20, 1921 denies still more explicitly the political character of Franco-Hungarian rapprochement. The Hungarian government is said to have believed for reasons of domestic politics that France was ready to support it against its own allies on the question of frontier corrections. In reality, however, France only promised its assistance in economic rehabilitation, a plan to be realized at the time only in case of Austria, with the approval of its allies.²⁵⁰

In these documents there is no trace of an intention by either the President or the government of France to continue the earlier policy towards Hungary.²⁵¹ This seems rather to have been wishful thinking in Budapest.

On January 3, 1921, Lóránt Hegedűs, the new Minister of Finance, started conversations in Budapest with the French chargé d'affaires, Louis de Robien, requesting financial support from the French government. He explained his project to create extensive economic co-operation with the Central European states, first of all with Romania (being about to go to Bucharest for this purpose). In order to realize the project, the frontiers needed to be opened and a single currency introduced, based upon the French Franc. De Robien encouraged the Hungarian minister. He promised that his government, wishing to facilitate the establishment of normal relations between the successor states, would support the ideas of Budapest,²⁵² the rehabilitation of Hungary in accordance with the peace treaties. In return, he said, France wanted to obtain economic advantages in Hungary; he hoped that Hegedűs, just like his predecessor, would support the French enterprises.²⁵³

So, even after Paléologue's downfall, the French government continued to encourage the economic endeavours of French syndicates, and was ready to conclude a commercial agreement with Hungary.²⁵⁴ But it opposed any attempt at political co-operation between the two countries and thus rejected the rapprochement sought for by Budapest. On February 8, 1921, shortly after Briand's accession to power, Halmos – who had played an important role in the Franco-Hungarian negotiations under Paléologue – again turned to the Quai d'Orsay and presented a proposal on the co-operation of the two countries. He acted on behalf of a group consisting allegedly of Hungary's most distinguished politicians. They intended to form a new governing party instead of the disintegrated old one; the new party would strive for close economic and political co-operation

²⁵⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 60. f. 228. "Politique française en Hongrie", an aide mémoire of the French Foreign Ministry, April 20, 1921.

²⁵¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 34. ff. 158–159. The aide mémoire "Politique française en Hongrie", December 14, 1920.

²⁵² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 36. f. 172 Report of Louis de Robien, chargé d'affaires, to Leygues, January 3, 1921.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* The conclusion of the commercial agreement was suggested by the Hungarian government.

with France. In return, it was hoped that the French government would assist in the country's economic and financial rehabilitation, in the negotiations and reconciliation with the neighbouring states, in the correction of economic and ethnical injustices, according to the "lettre d'envoi"; that it will provide for the implementation of the Trianon Peace Treaty by the neighbouring states and for the conclusion of complementary agreements providing for the protection of Hungarian minorities.

Relying upon the available documents, it is difficult to find out whether the action of Halmos was backed by Teleki or not. Presumably it was. But Halmos presented the proposal – unlike the earlier ones – not on behalf of the government, but in the name of a group, that is, of the new government party.²⁵⁵ Less than two weeks later, on February 28, 1921, he handed over another note of similar content to the French Foreign Ministry.²⁵⁶

Briand took notice of the proposal and promised to think it over. However, the initiative had no sequel: Briand informed Fouchet that (1) he was unwilling to negotiate with non-official persons (such as he considered Halmos to be); (2) he did not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of Hungary.²⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, it is hard to believe that these reasons would have kept him from accepting the suggested co-operation, since at the same time he was secretly supporting attempts at a Habsburg restoration. That is, he did negotiate with persons, who were not official representatives of Hungary, and he did support an action that certainly meant interference in Hungarian internal affairs. In all probability, the Halmos proposal was neglected for quite another reason: for the sake of the Eastern allies of France. Hungary's neighbours were observing with suspicion the French policy towards Hungary. There were rumours circulating about the resumption of negotiations. In spring 1921, Romania was most inquisitive about the secret Franco-Hungarian agreement concluded in summer 1920. In the Romanian Parliament the Liberal Party questioned the Foreign Minister and asked for an official denial of the rumours. Take Ionescu was compelled to do so, both in Parliament and in the press. In order to check the attacks of his opponents, he asked for French support, which he actually received from Briand.²⁵⁸

The new Hungarian offer was thus turned down by the French government mainly out of regard for its allies. However, the French had already attained their objective with their policy of summer 1920. The representative of France in Budapest reported with satisfaction that the Hungarian government had decided 8 months before to respect the Peace Treaty of Trianon. Teleki and Csáky were the most consistent partisans of this line, but even Apponyi, known as a fierce

²⁵⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 34. f. 200. Fouchet's report to Briand, March 8, 1921; *ibid.* f. 195. Briand's aide mémoire to Fouchet, February 8, 1921.

²⁵⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 34. f. 195. Briand's letter to Fouchet, February 8, 1921.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 60. f. 213. Daeschner's report to Briand, April 14, 1921; *ibid.* f. 224. Briand's circular telegram, April 14, 1921; f. 225. Briand's cable to Fouchet, April 16, 1921.

opponent of the peace treaty, very soon adapted himself to the prevailing situation. He was followed by Halmos, who also abandoned his cherished plan for Franco-Hungarian economic and political co-operation. And when the Teleki government resigned on April 13, 1921 – after the first unsuccessful return attempt of ex-king Charles – the project had practically no chance of success. Together with Teleki, Foreign Minister Gratz also gave up his post and, although the new Prime Minister Bethlen and the Foreign Minister Miklós Bánffy emphasized that their foreign policy would remain unchanged, the attempts at Franco-Hungarian rapprochement – except for a few insignificant occasions – were definitely broken off.²⁹⁹

On the night of March 26, 1921 – during the Easter holidays – Charles Habsburg arrived incognito from Switzerland in Sopronbathony (Western Hungary), in order to occupy the throne of Hungary. The Peace Treaties of Trianon and Saint Germain did not concern the fate of the Habsburg dynasty and did not compel the Habsburgs to abandon the throne. Charles was compelled by the socio-political changes in Austria to leave the country. (He actually departed on March 24, 1919, almost six months after the proclamation of the republic.) On leaving, he signed a proclamation, emphasizing that his withdrawal did not mean his definite abdication and that he wished to open the possibility of the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty. However, under the Austrian laws of April 1, 1919, the Habsburg dynasty was deprived of its power and any of its members wishing to abdicate its claim to the throne were to be banished from the country.

The situation was different in Hungary. When leaving Vienna, Charles declared in a letter that he abdicated his royal power in Hungary and conveyed the right to decide the fate of the Monarchy to the Hungarian nation. According to Hungarian law, however, his abdication was not legally valid because it was neither countersigned by the Prime Minister, nor approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Unlike Austria, Hungary restored the monarchy at a constitutional form, after the Soviet Republic had been overthrown. The Regency was only regarded as a provisional institution. Furthermore, Charles had a much larger political base in Hungary than in Austria, where his adherents represented no substantial force and were unable to form an independent political party. So we can understand much better, why the ex-Empereur and -King, whose main ambition was the reoccupation of the Austrian throne, tried his fortune in Hungary and wanted to reach Vienna through Budapest.

²⁹⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. 60. f. 213. Fouchet's cable to Briand, April 15, 1921. ff. 200–205. Fouchet's report to Briand, March 8, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 158–159 "Politique française en Hongrie", December 14, 1920; *ibid.* ff. 191–192. Aide mémoire of Halmos, February 8, 1921; *ibid.* H. 34. ff. 195–196. Briand's instructions to Fouchet, February 8, 1921.

Attempts at a Habsburg Restoration in Hungary and the Little Entente

The First Return Attempt. Adherence of Romania to the Little Entente

On the night of March 26, 1921 – during the Easter holidays – Charles Habsburg arrived incognito from Switzerland in Szombathely (Western Hungary), in order to occupy the throne of Hungary. The Peace Treaties of Trianon and Saint Germain did not concern the fate of the Habsburg dynasty and did not oblige the Habsburgs to abandon the throne. Charles was compelled by the socio-political changes in Austria to leave the country. (He actually departed on March 24, 1919, almost six months after the proclamation of the republic.) On leaving, he signed a proclamation, emphasizing that his withdrawal did not mean his definite abdication and that he wished to uphold the possibility of the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty.¹ However, under the Austrian laws of April 3, 1919, the Habsburg dynasty was deprived of its power and any of its members unwilling to abdicate its claim to the throne were to be banished from the country.

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¹ The proclamation was not published for fear of a general uproar. The National Assembly would have been compelled to dethrone the Habsburgs by law. So the proclamation was sent only to the European Great Powers and to the Pope.

² The social basis of the Habsburgs was on the territories detached from Austria.

The Hungarian pro-Habsburg circles were of the opinion, that Charles was prevented from ruling only under the pressure of circumstances and not by the will of the nation. Members of aristocracy and clergy, senior army officers and numerous politicians – within and outside the government – were loyal to the king. In accordance with papal instructions, the Hungarian bishops made active propaganda through the organizations they controlled as well as from the pulpit in favour of the Habsburg restoration. Prince-primate Cardinal Csernoch solemnly declared at a conference of October 1920, that he supported, in fact, he was willing to prepare for the return of the king, which, however, was not opportune at the time.³

Regent Horthy, Prime Minister Teleki and Foreign Minister Gratz – i.e. the leading politicians of the country – were legitimists and made no secret of their views. Horthy was in continual touch with the ex-king, to whom he sent information and made professions of allegiance. He declared that he wished to secure the throne for Charles, whom he continued to regard as the ruler; all he asked was to be free to fix the date of return. In a speech in Szeged on October 20, 1920, Teleki expressed himself in favour of the monarchy;⁴ and Gratz also asserted his loyalty to the Habsburgs and continued to do so even after becoming Foreign Minister in January 1921.⁵

In diplomatic reports, in the contemporary press and in some historical works we can read that these declarations considerably influenced Charles in his decision. No doubt: he certainly relied upon the backing of his Hungarian supporters from the very beginning, this being an essential condition of successful action. But our investigations lead us to the conclusion that Charles decided to achieve his plan as soon as possible, because he noticed some hesitation on the part of the three leading politicians: all of them emphasized more and more the untimeliness of restoration.

The occupation of the Hungarian throne was subject to the condition that Charles renounced his right to any other throne unless authorized by the Hungarian legislative assembly: he had to accept the repeal of the obligations devolving upon Hungary by virtue of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. This opinion was expressed in a pre-election speech by István Bethlen in Hódmezővásárhely on September 19, 1920. This proviso was supposed to reassure the neighbouring states and Italy: if one day the Habsburgs returned to Hungary, this would not mean the restoration of the Habsburg Empire, which these states feared. The ex-king was ready to accept the conditions. In a letter to Horthy of November 8 he approved the intention of Hungary to abrogate the resolutions of the *Pragmatica*

³ It caused dissatisfaction among the Carlists that Cardinal Csernoch vigorously emphasized the untimeliness of the return of Charles.

⁴ The representatives of the Allied Powers in Hungary protested against the expressions concerning the Habsburgs.

⁵ This was specially emphasized in the reports of the diplomats accredited in Budapest.

Sanctio concerning the common and indivisible possession of the Hungarian and the other hereditary provinces and to repeal the Act of 1867/XII.⁶

Horthy did not publish the letter, considering it dangerous for both domestic and foreign politics. The main supporters of his rule were in any case the partisans of the free election of a king rallied around Gömbös and the other opponents of Habsburg restoration. In regard to foreign policy, Yugoslav-Italian and Czechoslovak-Italian rapprochement would have been promoted on an anti-Habsburg basis, while the envisaged Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations would have become impossible. The non-publication of the royal letter caused grave disappointment to Charles and his supporters, and undermined their confidence in Horthy. But they also had some doubt about Teleki. After having resigned and been entrusted with the formation of a new cabinet, the Prime Minister included in his new programme on December 2, 1920 – i.e. the day after his resignation – the resolution of the parliamentary government bloc on the *Pragmatica Sanctio*, according to which the nation reserved itself the right to freely elect its king.⁷ The mistrust of Charles was further increased by news about the conference in Bruck, where the Habsburg question was discussed and where Teleki and Gratz promised Beneš not to aim at a Habsburg restoration which they considered untimely; they also promised to take measures against any attempt at restoration.⁸

The hesitation of the leading Hungarian politicians, their vacillating attitude and their readiness to procrastinate over restoration induced the promoters of Charles's attempt to return to act quickly. Another reason for urgency was the anti-Habsburg front about to be established in Central Europe and initiated by the convention of Rapallo, i.e. an alliance between Italy and Yugoslavia aimed at safeguarding the peace treaties and preventing the restoration of the Habsburgs. Somewhat later Czechoslovakia and Austria also joined the alliance, and tried to extend the obligations of it to Romania and Poland.⁹ A decision was also urged by the Conference of Ambassadors: they insisted on the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty. For reasons of both domestic and foreign policy, this had precedence anyway.¹⁰

So the decision to attempt the return of the king immediately was not taken because of an allegedly favourable situation in domestic and foreign policy – as can be read in several places –, but on the contrary: because the situation be-

⁶ K. Freiherr von Werkmann: *Der Tote von Madeira*. München, 1923, pp. 126–127.

⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. f. (illegible). Fouchet's report to Leygues, January 1, 1921.

⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. ff. 174–175. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 19, 1921.

⁹ The Italo-Yugoslav, Italo-Czechoslovak, Czechoslovak-Austrian, Czechoslovak-Polish agreements concluded in 1921, as well as the Czechoslovak-Romanian and Yugoslav-Romanian agreements concluded after the king's first return attempt obliged the contracting parties to actions against the Habsburgs.

¹⁰ After the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty, the disarmament of Hungary should have been carried out. Furthermore, the former K.u.K. (imperial and royal) officers, who had been discharged, were dissatisfied, being jobless. The Carlists wanted to turn this to their advantage.

came more and more unfavourable. Horthy and his supporters were vacillating, their practical policy was contradicted by their declarations. On the other hand, Italy was most successful in shaping the anti-Habsburg front which it expected to stabilize its Danubian position. However, this development was disliked both by the Carlists and the French, by the latter, mainly because Italy could now rally the victorious Danubian states – potential allies of France – with the help of the Habsburg question, as it had done in the past as a result of Paléologue's abortive policy. In France, where the restoration of the Habsburg Empire was regarded by many as a national interest,¹¹ more and more influential politicians became active supporters of the ex-king. One of them was Premier Briand who, as a supporter of the Danubian confederation, wished to set up, through the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty, a centre that would co-ordinate the different peoples of the region. His slogan was: "unie pour vivre". There existed numerous pro-Habsburg circles, the most important one headed by Franchet d'Esperey. These maintained close contacts with Prince Sixtus of Parma, brother-in-law of the ex-king, and with Briand himself, whose role will be discussed later. Here is another significant fact contributing to a better understanding of the precedents: on March 19, 1921, i.e. a week before the return attempt of the king, the Prince of Parma had a meeting with several French generals and politicians (including some members of the government). They discussed the eventual return of Charles. In spite of several objections, the conference gave the "general" impression that France sympathized with the plan and encouraged it – according to the report of Praznovsky.¹²

Thus, Charles was fed with hopes by the French – actually the only external force he could trust in. He also attached hopes to King Ferdinand of Romania, who – he said – was obliged to him, because he has saved his throne from the German Emperor. As a matter of fact, Charles maintained relations with the Romanian royal family, especially with Queen Mary, who even paid him a visit in Pragnis in 1920. The Queen was ready to support the restoration of Charles, if he would give up his claims related to Romania. According to the sources, she also paved the way for Charles in France.¹³ At the time of the return attempt, however, the attitude of Romania was marked by outright duplicity: the government, the opposition headed by Brătianu and the Romanian minister in Budapest, represented a definite anti-Habsburg standpoint – in contrast with the King.

The Carlists were fully aware of the risk. But they followed an ancient rule of strategy: in a doubtful situation the bolder decision is the better one. Thus, hoping to create a *fait accompli* which their opponents would be compelled to ac-

¹¹ Due to his anti-German attitude during the war, the ex-Emperor and -King enjoyed some sympathies in France. The French premier and many other French politicians advocated the Danubian confederation. With the help of the restoration of the Habsburgs they wished to set up a centre suitable to co-ordinate the different peoples and able to block the German expansion.

¹² PDH. II. doc. 320. p. 231. Praznovsky's report to Gratz, April 6, 1921.

¹³ *Ibid.*

knowledge, they decided in favour of action. As already mentioned, Charles and his retinue arrived in Szombathely on the night of March 26. They took up residence in the palace of Bishop Mikes. The palace was full of guests, who were attending Easter services. Later, everybody claimed that this was mere coincidence. The "incidental" swarm of guests included among others József Vass, Minister of Public Education. The ex-king conferred with the persons present. He explained that he expected energetic protests from the successor states, but did not expect a reaction from the Entente. He said not to fear Romania, because the King of that country was personally obliged to him. Yugoslavia was preoccupied with the problem of the Croats, whose secession he took for granted. Czechoslovakia was on bad terms with France because of its attitude during the Polish-Soviet war. As far as domestic policy was concerned, the ex-monarch went on, he had influential followers among those who favoured the free election of a king; the army would obey the orders of Horthy, whom he trusted without reserve. He added that he could not disclose all available information, but he saw no obstacle to the success of the action.¹⁴ Minister Vass at once offered his services, while Charles assured him that he would keep his ministry in the new cabinet Charles would appoint. Vass now telephoned Prime Minister Teleki, who happened to be near-by – of course, equally "by chance" – at the country-seat of Count Antal Sigray in Iváncz. He asked the Prime Minister to come at once to Szombathely, where new deliberations began, with Teleki now present. Teleki did not share the optimism of Charles and said, the time was not ripe for his return. He advised the king to return to Switzerland. But when Charles told him that the plan was supported by the French Premier Briand, Teleki wavered in his resolution and promised to mediate between the king and Horthy. There now began a discussion about the next step: should Charles remain in Szombathely under the protection of the troops commanded by Colonel Lehár, and summon the Regent to hand over power, or would it be better if he went to Budapest for personal negotiations with Horthy? Lehár suggested the first option, Teleki the second one. Finally it was decided that Charles should go to Budapest, but Teleki and Vass should precede him in order to prepare Horthy for the meeting. It was decided, however, that the Prime Minister should not telephone Horthy.¹⁵ So Teleki and Vass started for Budapest, but their car broke down on the way, and they were thus

¹⁴ Gusztáv Gratz, then foreign minister, quoted in his book the contentions of Charles IV about Briand. "A short time ago" – said the ex-king – "Briand invited his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Parma. It was Briand, who asked him to come, and not the prince to be received. Through Prince Sixtus, Briand sent a message to the king suggesting him to return. France and England – there being a consent between the two countries in this question – will be formally compelled to protest, but that would be all. The Little Entente will make a row but that must not be taken too seriously; this message of Briand induced the king to attempt the return. During his stay in Szombathely he also received encouraging messages from Briand." G. Gratz: *A világháború utáni kor története* (The history of the post-world war age). Budapest, 1939, vol. II, pp. 52–53. We shall see that Briand was going to refute all this.

¹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. ff. 67–78. Fouchet's report to Briand, April 4, 1921.

unable to arrive sooner than the ex-king. This "chance event" would lead later on to justifiable conjectures. The two politicians were certainly aware of the fact that their mission was by no means innocent: should Charles fail to regain his throne, they, as active participants in the attempt, would have to carry a grave responsibility.

Charles and his attendants arrived at noon on March 27 at the royal palace in Budapest, where Horthy now had his residence. The Regent was taken aback by the unexpected appearance of the ex-king. Their conversation took place privately, and so the details are unknown. It is a fact, however, that it was a long discussion. Charles promised Horthy titles, rank and high offices, and claimed power in return.¹⁶ Horthy categorically rejected the idea of enthronement, outlined the difficulties that would result in domestic and foreign policy, and requested that Charles leave the country without delay. At the same time he assured Charles of his unswerving loyalty: as soon as the situation was convenient, he would himself request the king's return. It is not easy to determine, whether he really meant what he said. It is much more probable that Horthy's opposition to the ex-king was motivated not only by national interest, but by personal ambition, aimed at maintaining himself in power as regent. Finally, Charles yielded to pressure and consented to leave the country. In spite of his promises, however, he spent one more week in Szombathely, thereby causing a crisis in both domestic and foreign policy.

As a matter of fact, the attempt at restoration led to grave international complications, and strained the situation in Central Europe, which was hardly consolidated. The Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations in Bruck, which were of utmost importance for the peace of the region, were broken off. The "incidental" meeting of Prime Minister Teleki and Minister Vass with the ex-king in Szombathely caused alarm in the capitals of the neighbouring states, where the return attempt was seen as the joint action of Charles and the Hungarian government. The scare was all the more intense since the government regarded the problem of the Habsburg dynasty as a matter of Hungarian domestic policy. This is what Horthy, Teleki and Gratz replied to the protests of the diplomats accredited to Budapest, and this was also the main content of the circular telegram sent by Gratz to the Hungarian foreign representations.¹⁷

¹⁶ According to Pál Prónay, Horthy immediately received him and Gyula Ostenburg after Charles has left, and said: "I can assure you that these were the hardest moments in my life! You cannot imagine what I had to suffer when I had to persuade His Majesty, our crowned king, whose regent I am, and to entreat him on my knees to leave his own country as soon as possible, for his staying could become fatal not only for him, but for the whole nation and for all of us..." Although the king alluded to the silent consent of Paris, he did not cede the power, for if he had done so, the Czechs, Serbs, and Romanians would be here tomorrow. *Prónay's diary*. II, pp. 414-420.

¹⁷ *PDH*. II. doc. 267. p. 289. Cable of Kánya to Tahy, March 30, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 271. p. 292. Tahy's cable to Gratz, March 30, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 328. p. 335. Circular telegram of Gratz to the Hungarian foreign representations, April 8, 1921.

As far as the alleged "complicity" of the Hungarian government is concerned, thorough investigation and collation of sources have led us to the conclusion that the government or its members – although supporters of the Habsburgs – did not take part in the organization of the action, because they regarded it as untimely. It would have aggravated Hungary's political situation both at home and abroad, and, eventually plunge the country into disaster. In a note of February 2, 1920, the Conference of Ambassadors had already warned the Hungarian government that the restoration of the Habsburgs would not be tolerated. It still needs to be explained, however, why the ministers were staying in Szombathely at the time of the king's attempted return. Was it really a coincidence, or, after having obtained knowledge of the impending action, did Teleki and Vass hurry to Szombathely in order to dissuade the ex-king from his project? In any case, Teleki actually tried to do it. Diplomats accredited to Budapest reported to their governments that neither Horthy, nor the members of the government knew anything about the preparations for the return of the king and were perfectly surprised by the events.¹⁸

The Hungarian government – although rejecting any foreign intervention under the pretext that the affair was, from the juridical point of view, an internal affair – resolutely opposed the attempt of Charles, because it was well aware of the European situation, as shown by the circular telegram of Foreign Minister Gratz.¹⁹

Gratz thus immediately got in touch with the Swiss government and requested that Charles be re-admitted, because: "...peace in Central Europe will be in grave danger, if the king's return cannot be realized at once".²⁰

Why was Habsburg restoration so important for the Hungarian legitimists, and so dangerous for the neighbouring states?

As already mentioned, the abdication of Charles was not legally valid in Hungary.²¹ Consequently, since the king had not signed the Treaty of Trianon, his royal and hereditary rights to the territories belonging to Hungary in 1914, were still in force. However, these areas now belonged to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. In the case of the latter there was an additional problem: Croatia. In Croatia, though formally not part of Hungary, loyalty to the Habsburgs had a solid base furnished by Roman Catholicism, and so it was feared that op-

¹⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. ff. 65–78. Fouchet's report to Briand, April 4, 1921.

¹⁹ PDH. II. doc. 328. p. 335. Cable of Gratz to the Hungarian foreign representations, April 8, 1921.

²⁰ PDH. II. doc. 286. pp. 304–305. Cable of Gratz to Parcher, April 1, 1921. – Finally, the Allied Council decided that Charles IV might return to Switzerland. Further, that he may settle down for three months, if (1) he retires from political activity; (2) announces his envisaged departure not later than 3 days in advance. *Ibid.* doc. 425. p. 448. Parcher's cable, May 19, 1921.

²¹ Charles refuted later that he had resigned the Hungarian throne. He made a similar statement in Szombathely as well. PDH. II. doc. 363. p. 377. Report of Somssich, Hungarian minister in the Vatican, April 21, 1921.

position to Belgrade would be intensified, including eventually demands for secession.²² The government in Prague had similar, though far lesser concerns about Slovakia,²³ and in general, the successor states were convinced that Charles regarded the occupation of the Hungarian throne as only the first step to the restoration of the Habsburg Empire.

The struggle over the return of the Habsburgs which, in those days, worried the governments of the European states, was essentially not aimed at the re-establishment or the prevention of a given social order, but resulted from the question of whether the successor states would be able to replace the Empire, i.e. to create a balance of power between East and West. Everybody was of the opinion that the integration of the fragmented Danube Basin had to be promoted. But as soon as the framework and the centre of the envisaged confederation were at issue, conflicts arose. Beneš and Berthelot wished to limit the confederation to the victorious successor states, with Prague as its centre, whereas Paléologue and Millerand wanted Budapest as the centre. Briand also advocated a confederation including every Danubian state, but while Millerand and his supporters wished to achieve their aims without the Habsburgs, Briand considered the dethroned dynasty as the most suitable co-ordinating factor. Together with his followers, he thus supported the Habsburg restoration.²⁴ Their opponents, notably Lloyd George and Curzon, were against it, because they feared that this might involve Central Europe in a war.

The successor states were not opposed to the Habsburg restoration on the grounds of its constitutional form: they had no objection to a monarchy as such. This, after all, was the form of government in both Yugoslavia and Romania.²⁵ King Ferdinand of Romania would not even have opposed the return of Charles Habsburg, if the latter were willing to ensure the sovereignty of an enlarged Romania. Nevertheless, they were afraid of the integration of the Danube Basin, especially if it were to take place under the leadership of a Habsburg. They thus rejected the restoration for the very reason that induced the western circles to welcome it. They had no objection to the free election of a king, and backed both the Hungarian and foreign supporters of this line, although they represented a

²² In Belgrade the Habsburg restoration was much more feared than the Hungarian revisionistic ambitions. This fear persisted all the time.

²³ Tusar, former prime minister of Czechoslovakia, emphasized in a talk with Szapáry: "Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are afraid of the Habsburgs and particularly of Charles, because he has many adherents in Croatia and Slovakia. But if Hungary would elect another king, Czechoslovakia would be ready for significant sacrifices." *PDH*. II. doc. 42. pp. 41–51. Szapáry's report about his conversations with Czechoslovak politicians, January 1921.

²⁴ This does not mean that in France, like in other western countries, there were no circles and groups supporting or opposing the attempt of the ex-king on account of the monarchic constitutional form.

²⁵ The official policy of Czechoslovakia gave preference to the republican government, as repeatedly imparted by Masaryk and Beneš to the Hungarian politicians.

considerable force beside the legitimists. They started from the principle that the disintegration of the Monarchy had automatically resulted in the nullity of the *Pragmatica Sanctio* and consequently in Hungary's re-assertion of its right to freely elect its king.

There were many aspirants to the Hungarian throne, including members of the British, French, Italian, Romanian and Belgian royal families. The Habsburgs themselves put forward four candidates: Charles (who alleged never to have abdicated at all), the Archduke Joseph Francis, as well as the Archduke Albert (Albrecht), all of them were competing with one another, especially the first two. Both hoped to obtain French support. Meanwhile in Paris it was the ex-emperor Charles, who enjoyed more sympathy; Fouchet, French High Commissioner in Budapest, did his best to win the French public opinion for his candidate, Joseph. This is clearly demonstrated by his reports.²⁶ The Archduke Joseph Francis expected assistance from Italy; in order to improve his chances, he wanted to marry the eldest daughter of the King of Italy. Having regard to France, however, his father, the Archduke Joseph was ready to give up this plan. In a letter to Joseph, Charles reproached him for his attitude after having promised not to assent to the marriage without his approval. The fourth Habsburg candidate, the Archduke Albrecht, was also hopeful of Italian support. But Italy had plans of its own, wishing to place an Italian prince on the Hungarian throne. The new Italian High Commissioner in Budapest, Prince Carraciolo di Castagneta, made every effort in this matter. His action was prepared by General Ernesto Mombelli, head of the Italian military mission.²⁷

No doubt, this plan would have been most advantageous for Italy, since it would have secured Italo-Hungarian friendship. On the other hand, Yugoslavia sited between the two countries, would have been in a difficult position. Fouchet reported to his government with anxiety on the Italian efforts, regarding them as dangerous for France.²⁸

The plan for a British, Italian or Belgian prince was unrealistic – in Britain neither the King, nor Prime Minister Lloyd George would hear of it.²⁹ Among the supporters of the free election of a king, the name of Horthy was also cir-

²⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 56. f. (illegible). Fouchet's report to Leygues, October 25, 1920; H. vol. 33. ff. 73–74. Fouchet's report to Briand, March 1, 1921; H. vol. 33. f. 72. Fouchet's cable to Briand, February 17, 1921. The supporters thereof hoped that the Conference of Ambassadors was going to modify its note of February 2, 1920. At the beginning of January, Charles let his cousin know that he would return to Hungary before long. The Archduke Joseph held it important to inform Hohler thereof, who – like the Foreign Office – represented an anti-Habsburg standpoint. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. f. 38. Cable of the French ambassador in Berlin to Briand, January 7, 1921.

²⁷ Österreichisches Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (henceforward: HHStA.). Berichte aus Bukarest 1921–1922. 709. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest.

²⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 56. f. 28. Fouchet's report to Millerand, October 25, 1920.

²⁹ Both of them held these conceptions as unrealistic.

culated, and on the face of it the successor states, especially Yugoslavia and Romania, would have readily accepted his candidature.

Of all the plans it was the Romanian union that was considered the most seriously. This idea was first raised in 1919 by the anti-Bolshevik government of Szeged and was not abandoned in subsequent years. Its main representatives were István Bethlen and Miklós Bánffy. After the failure of the king's first return attempt, Bethlen became Prime Minister, with Bánffy as Foreign Minister. Together with other supporters of the plan they wished in this way to save their Transylvanian domains; in addition, the plan was supposed to prevent Romania from joining the Little Entente, i.e. from closing the ring around Hungary.

We only have indirect evidence of the steps taken by the new Prime Minister after his succession to power, nor could we find out, when and to whom he actually presented his proposal. However, the fact is that the Romanian court as well as government circles were seriously dealing in autumn 1921 with the Bethlen project, which had two variants. According to the first (which was preferred by the Hungarian Prime Minister), Romania, Transylvania and Hungary would constitute a tripartite confederation, while the second envisaged the union of Romania and Hungary under the rule of King Ferdinand. The king and especially his wife, Queen Mary, received the plan with sympathy. All that concerned them was the choice between Budapest and Bucharest as the royal residence.

However, the Romanian government and opposition led by Brătianu opposed most energetically both plans, which were supported neither by Britain nor by France and produced considerable alarm in Prague and Belgrade alike. In an interview with Czechoslovak journalists, Take Ionescu was obliged to explain the standpoint of the Romanian government. He emphasized that the Romanian people and particularly the Romanians in Transylvania opposed the plan. Even if the Romanian government were ready to discuss it, neither France, Britain nor even Italy would ever accept it. It was a matter of common knowledge, he added, that the Hungarian throne could not be occupied without the consent of these states. In his opinion it was impossible for Hungary and Romania to live under the rule of the same king; even in Hungary the Hungarians would not accept for long a common ruler, since they had only accepted a king from Vienna as a punishment. Now, when Romania's national unity had become a reality, he concluded, these fantastic and short-term ideas were definitely rejected.³⁰ On November 8, 1921, Ionescu sent a telegram to Stircea, the Romanian Minister in Budapest, informing him that "a personal union between Romania and Hungary is rejected".³¹

³⁰ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť, report of Lejhanec to Beneš, November 10, 1921.

³¹ Take Ionescu disclosed to Stircea, Romanian minister in Budapest, that the plans about a personal union were out of question: "L'union personnelle entre la Roumanie et la Hongrie est exclue", reads the cable of Take Ionescu to Stircea. "Just for your conduct: You may pursue only a Little Entente policy". *Ibid.* Stircea presented the cable to Lejhanec. AMZV. PZ. Budapešť, report of Lejhanec to Beneš, November 10, 1921.

Of course, the Romanian government considered the plan to seat Prince Nicholas of Romania on the Hungarian throne as still more absurd. "You cannot force two brothers to live as enemies of one another", was the argument of Take Ionescu.³²

Finally, the royal court accepted the standpoint of the government and the political parties, and complied with the resolution of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 2, 1920: it did not support Charles and rejected the proposal of a personal union as well as a union under Prince Nicholas. At last, the only one of the many plans that reached the stage of realization was that of Charles, which eventually represented the gravest danger to the successor states. Evidently, they all protested at once, though in a different form, against the ex-king's stay in Hungary.

The main actor in the protest action was Beneš, who started intensive diplomatic activity in the capitals of the western powers. He knew that significant circles sympathized with Charles and that strong pressure was therefore needed to induce the Conference of Ambassadors to take energetic measures against Hungary. He also knew that his protest would have real authority only if backed by the other successor states. His plan for integrated action with the participation of every small state could only be partly realized. Only Yugoslavia supported him without reserve since the king's return attempt had caused at least as much fright in Belgrade as in Prague. In spite of repeated requests, however, Romania disagreed with the radical proposal. As already mentioned its readiness to co-operate with the Little Entente left much to be desired. This applied still more to Poland.³³

On March 29, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia jointly demanded the removal of Charles³⁴ as well as the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty which had not been included in the Treaty of Trianon. They accused the Hungarian government of having participated in the conspiracy. They lodged a protest with Horthy and declared that their government would regard a Habsburg restoration as a *casus belli*. On the same day Lejhanec, the representative of Czechoslovakia in Budapest, called on the Foreign Ministry and declared on behalf of his government that Czechoslovakia would have to take appropriate measures together with its friends, if the Hungarians produced a *fait accompli* and did not conform to the obligations assumed at Bruck.³⁵ He did not specify, what concrete measures were

³² *Ibid.*

³³ During the first return attempt, Estance Sapienta, Polish foreign minister, did only as much as to tell the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Warsaw that Poland disapproves of the restoration.

³⁴ Attempted returns of Charles IV. doc. 12. pp. 87-89; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 90, 93, 94 h, n.d. Cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, March 30, 1921; PDH. II. doc. 344. pp. 354-356.

³⁵ In Bruck, Teleki and Gratz undertook to act against attempts of a Habsburg restoration. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 79. Couget's cable to Briand, April 4, 1921.

meant; Beneš informed only Berthelot, who took notice of the plans of the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister.³⁶

In the absence of Gratz, Kálmán Kánya received the representative of Czechoslovakia and told him that since the Hungarian government regarded the return of Charles as exclusively a matter of domestic policy, he was not in a position to discuss it officially. Tahy, Hungary's representative in Prague, refused for the same reason to forward the protest of Beneš to Budapest.³⁷ On March 30, when Lejhanec again called on Kánya, the latter declared once more that the question being a matter of domestic policy, it could not be discussed with foreign diplomats. As a private person, he added, he could say that the Hungarian government was of the opinion that the question of enthronement did not belong to the political questions of the day, and that the Hungarian government had taken the necessary steps so that Charles could return to Switzerland without any delay.³⁸

On March 31, Beneš, while dealing with the ex-king's stay in Hungary, declared that he had agreed with Yugoslavia and Italy on joint action and that he had informed London and Paris about his decision concerning intervention.³⁹ He also described the critical situation caused in Hungary by the action of Charles. Czechoslovakia intended to co-operate with Hungary, as proved by the recently begun Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations. Due to the king's return attempt, however, relations between Hungary and the successor states became tense again. Although the Hungarian government assumes that it is a matter of domestic policy, said Beneš, "it never was and never shall be". On April 1, in a speech before the Senate, he expressed himself in similar terms. On March 31, Lejhanec again pressed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to expel Charles. He pointed out the political weight of the return attempt and the fact that it compromised the negotiations in Bruck and prejudiced relations between the two countries.⁴⁰ The answer was again the same: the question of the monarchy was a matter of domestic policy. On the same day Beneš instructed his representative in Budapest to tell Gratz in confidence: should the National Assembly decide in

³⁶ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 33. f. 151. Couget's cable to Briand, March 30, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapest 90, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, March 30, 1921; PDH. II. doc. 265. p. 288. Cable of Kánya to Teleki staying in Szombathely, March 30, 1921; return attempts of Charles, 12. doc.; cable of Kánya to Tahy, March 30, 1921; AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 33. ff. 171-172. Berthelot's circular telegram, March 31, 1921.

³⁷ *Ibid.* PDH. II. doc. 271. p. 292. Tahy's cable to Gratz, March 30, 1921.; return attempts of Charles, 13. doc.

³⁸ PDH. II. doc. 344. pp. 354-356. Circular telegram of Kánya, April 11, 1921.

³⁹ PDH. II. doc. 299. pp. 313-314. Tahy's cable to Gratz, April 2, 1921; AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 117. Couget's cable to Briand, April 6, 1921.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

favour of Charles or any other Habsburg, even if only conditionally, the Little Entente and Italy would resort to the most energetic measures without delay.⁴¹

Gratz being absent, Lejhanec passed Beneš's message on April 2 to Khuen-Héderváry, who expressed his astonishment at the inflexible standpoint of the Czechoslovak government, despite the resolution passed on April 1 in the Hungarian National Assembly.⁴² As a matter of fact, everything had been done to ensure that the ex-king could return to Switzerland.

Of course, Beneš knew very well that "there was no serious danger any more", and that the whole affair would be rapidly concluded. He nevertheless wished to continue diplomatic pressure, because, as emphasized in his circular telegram to the foreign representations, "every state has to exploit as far as possible the action of Charles against Hungary". He wished to make use of these circumstances to consolidate the situation in domestic policy to achieve national unity, and to mobilize the nation for struggle with the catchword of "Hungarian danger". "... we shall use it to strengthen the army" – he cabled to Take Ionescu – "because we are sure that an intervention will take place. In this case we shall move against Budapest and Szombathely."⁴³ Now we can better understand why he decided on April 1, in spite of – or because of – the decision of the Hungarian National Assembly to send an ultimatum to the Hungarian government demanding (1) the definite settlement of the Habsburg question, (2) guarantees for the observance of the decision, (3) the immediate surrender of Western Hungary to Austria. Nevertheless, the ultimatum was not forwarded to Budapest, because Great Britain and France protested against it, and even Italy, Yugoslavia and Romania disapproved of the idea, although the latter two had closely co-operated. They feared, not without good reason, that the Hungarian government would reject the extensive political claims, and this would bring them into a difficult situation. But Beneš did not give up his project. Two days later he took diplomatic steps concerning the ultimatum. He considered the presentation of the ultimatum as important, not so much for the present but rather for the future – to prevent a repetition. He wanted to demonstrate that the Habsburg question was not a matter of home affairs and that he was determined to prevent the restoration. However, he had to hurry, because the crisis appeared to draw to its end: Switzerland was ready to re-admit Charles,⁴⁴ while the Austrian government agreed after lengthy delays to let the ex-emperor travel through Austria.⁴⁵ So on April 3 he instructed

⁴¹ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť, cable of Beneš to Lejhanec, April 1, 1921.

⁴² AMZV. PZ. Budapešť, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, April 3, 1921. The National Assembly decided for the removal of Charles.

⁴³ AMZV. PZ. 5124, circular telegram of Beneš to the Czechoslovak foreign representations, April 3, 1921.

⁴⁴ On the repeated request of the Allied Powers, Switzerland re-admitted the ex-king for three months, under certain conditions.

⁴⁵ Initially, the Austrian government flatly rejected the demand of the Allied Powers. Later it admitted under certain conditions that the ex-emperor may return to Switzerland across Austrian

the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest to "present a joint ultimatum together with the Yugoslav representative, as soon as the latter has received his instructions on the subject. We demand the immediate expulsion of Charles Habsburg from Hungary. If Charles is still in Hungary on Thursday, April 7, at 6 p.m., we shall at once take the measures we have jointly decided upon."⁴⁶ (We can see that the three items specified in the first note were left out this time.) He also instructed Lejhanec to inform the representatives of Romania and Italy in Budapest of this step and, if they should receive similar instructions from their governments, to present the note together with them.⁴⁷ However, both Italy and Romania objected to the delivery of the note even in this changed form. Yugoslavia nevertheless agreed, but came up with suggestions which made clear that it was playing for time. It actually proposed extending the time-limit by three days, so the deadline would be the 10th rather than the 7th of April. It was hoped in Belgrade that by that time Charles would have left the country anyway. Beneš agreed to the extension of the time-limit, but rejected the Yugoslav request to inform the French and the British governments of the proposed steps and to ask for their support,⁴⁸ because "they would rather hinder our plan. It would be better, if the Little Entente achieves it by itself".⁴⁹

Britain and France were indeed opposed to the ultimatum. Hohler and Fouchet did their best to keep Lejhanec from carrying out the instructions of Beneš.⁵⁰ Considering the Italian and Romanian opposition, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister wanted at least to obtain the backing of Yugoslavia. So, at first, he wished that his Budapest representative should only present the ultimatum together with the Yugoslav representative; he should align himself with the latter,

territory, fixing the vehicle, the route and the point of time of the passage through Austria. The vehicle of the ex-emperor had to be escorted by the Austrian police. For Austria's relation to the Habsburg restoration see Lajos Kerekes: *A Habsburg-restaurációs kísérletek és az osztrák-magyar viszony 1921-ben* (Attempts at a Habsburg restoration and the Austro-Hungarian relationship in 1921). *Századok*, (110), 1976/1, pp. 3-50.

⁴⁶ AMZV. PZ. Budapest 103, cable of Beneš to Lejhanec, April 3, 1921; *Diplomatické dokumenty MD*. doc. 47. p. 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 133, 135, cable of Beneš to the Czechoslovak minister in Belgrade, April 3, 1921.

⁴⁹ The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry published the documents concerning the Habsburg restoration, but this document was not included. *Diplomatické dokumenty týkající se pokusů o znovunastolení Habsburků na trůn maďarský* (Diplomatic documents relating to the Habsburg attempt to return to the Hungarian throne). Praha, 1922 (henceforward: *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*). Cf. V. Olivová: *Československá zahraniční politika a pokus o reštauraci Habsburků v roce 1921* (Czechoslovak foreign policy and the Habsburg return attempt in 1921). *Československý časopis historický*, 1959/4, p. 683.

⁵⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 43. Fouchet's cable to Briand, April 3, 1921.

i.e. with the instructions to be received from Belgrade.⁵¹ The Yugoslav government, however, was in no hurry to send such instructions.

Of course, Beneš knew well that Charles and his retinue were ready to leave for Switzerland, and thus the presentation of the ultimatum was no longer a risk. But moral capital could still be made out of it. The Yugoslav and Romanian representatives had not obtained their instructions by the morning of April 5, under the pretext that the steps already taken were sufficient and, besides, the wishes of the Budapest representatives of the Great Powers could not be ignored.⁵² He ordered Lejhanec to present the ultimatum alone. However, Hohler dissuaded Lejhanec from doing so.⁵³ Meanwhile, the whole affair had become uninteresting: on April 5 at noon, Charles left Hungary. But Beneš was still not satisfied. He instructed his representative in Budapest to acquaint Gratz with the text of the ultimatum and to tell him that although Charles had departed, Gratz should take the resolution of the Czechoslovak government as evidence. If possible, the Yugoslav and Romanian representatives should join the action. If not, he was to act alone.⁵⁴ According to the report of Lejhanec, the Yugoslav and Romanian representatives "had no authentic instructions and were unwilling to join me; therefore I presented the ultimatum on the evening of Wednesday [April 5], that is, the ultimatum we had intended to present".⁵⁵

At last, at noon on April 6, approval for the joint presentation of the ultimatum arrived from Belgrade and Bucharest. To be sure, it came somewhat late: Charles crossed the Swiss frontier on April 6 at half past three.⁵⁶

As demonstrated by the events described above, Yugoslavia's co-operation with Czechoslovakia was the closest in those critical days. In Belgrade the restoration of the Habsburgs was regarded from the very beginning as most dangerous for the sovereignty of the country, even more dangerous than Hungarian revisionism. This is why Yugoslavia opposed it as energetically as Czechoslovakia. According to the terms of the Little Entente, the two countries took mili-

⁵¹ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 106, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, April 3, 1921; V. Olivová: *op. cit.* p. 670.

⁵² *Ibid.*: AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 133, 135, cable of Beneš to the Czechoslovak minister in Belgrade, April 3, 1921.

⁵³ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 43. Fouchet's cable to Briand, April 3, 1921.

⁵⁴ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 107, cable of Beneš to Lejhanec, April 5, 1921.

⁵⁵ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 113, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, April 5, 1921. The sources are contradictory about the presentation of the ultimatum. In the source material published by the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, the dates are not correct. Accordingly, the representatives of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are said to have presented the ultimatum in the evening of April 5, 1921, while the representative of Romania adhered at noon of April 6, whereas the ultimatum was actually presented in the evening of April 5 by the Czechoslovak representative only. So the published document conceals the fact that the Yugoslav and the Romanian governments instructed their Budapest representatives to align themselves with the Great Powers.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

tary measures and even considered the occupation of Hungary. An order for partial mobilization was issued and armoured troops were concentrated on the Yugoslav-Hungarian and Czechoslovak-Hungarian frontiers. In a protest presented on March 28 to Horthy, they declared that Habsburg restoration would be considered a *casus belli*.⁵⁷ The initial readiness of Yugoslavia to present a joint ultimatum to the Hungarian government, however, was shaken by the resolute intervention of Britain and France; as mentioned above, this step was approved by Belgrade only after the danger was over and Charles had left the country.

All the time, both members of the Little Entente were in touch with Italy and reconciled their plans with Rome. Not only did the Italian government not object to the planned military action, but it was ready to join – in name at least. The three states co-operated with one another on the basis of the Rapallo convention signed in November 1920 by Italy and Yugoslavia, obliging the contracting parties to observe the Saint-Germain and Trianon Peace Treaties. “With mutual understanding every political instrument will be used that is suitable to prevent the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty to the Austrian or Hungarian throne”, – reads article 1 of the treaty. After the well-known exchange of letters between Beneš and Sforza, the agreement was binding on Czechoslovakia as well. Italy encouraged the successor states and their representatives in Budapest without actually joining their action – including the presentation of the ultimatum. Out of regard for its allies, it simply could not do that.

Romania kept a distance from the radical plans and measures of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It also disapproved of the presentation of the ultimatum – according to Take Ionescu; a rude and dangerous step. Of course, it equally protested against the ex-king's remaining in Hungary.

At his own request, Stircea, Romanian Minister in Budapest, was received by Horthy, whom he told in a most courteous but resolute manner that in accordance with the resolution of the Allied Powers his government had to consider the return of Charles as against the interests of Romania. The following day – March 30 – Take Ionescu sent the following message through András Hory, Hungary's representative in Bucharest: “The Allied Powers have protested against the return of the ex-king. Romania joins this démarche.” He advised that Hungary should abstain from any step that would compromise the relations between the two countries.⁵⁸ This was all Romania addressed to Hungary in protest; compared with the protests of other countries, it was certainly mild, both in form and in substance.

Under strong pressure from Italy, Romania was later ready to recall its ministers from Budapest at the same time as the Italian, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav representatives were due to leave Budapest, thus breaking diplomatic relations

⁵⁷ IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., doc. 12. pp. 87–89. AMZV PZ. Budapest 90, 93, 94.

⁵⁸ PDH. II. doc. 273. pp. 294–295. Hory's report to Gratz, March 30, 1921.

with Hungary.⁵⁹ On the question of military intervention, however, it continued to manoeuvre all the time. In principle Romania considered its participation as conceivable, but in practice it tried not to assume any obligation. This ambiguous attitude was partly due to the fact that the events were seen differently by the king, the government and the opposition. Ferdinand and his wife were actually indebted to Charles for his attitude during the war, and if Charles had renounced his claims against Romania, they would have welcomed him on the Hungarian throne. On the other side, both the government and Brătianu's party strictly objected to the restoration even under the conditions mentioned above, and considered it as a great threat to the country. Finally, this line proved to be decisive. Another reason was the fear that Romania would be involved in a war, while its forces were still pinned down by its eastern neighbour, and there remained problems on the Yugoslav, and Bulgarian frontiers as well. Last but not least, the government was induced to caution by the news that Charles enjoyed French support, as well as by the energetic reaction of the Conference of Ambassadors against the military preparations and planned intervention by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Romania thus asserted that a considerable part of the army had already been demobilized, while almost all the rest was stationed on the frontier with Soviet Russia. At the repeated request of the Italian government and given reports that Italy would also participate in military action, it nevertheless began to concentrate troops along the Hungarian frontier, and to consider a partial mobilization as well as keep the Transylvanian corps.⁶⁰ But at the same time Take Ionescu mobilized the French and British representatives, who requested that the Romanian government maintain its neutrality, that Romania would do nothing without the consent of Britain and France.⁶¹ Once more, Romania thus pursued a wait-and-see policy, leaving to the turn of events whether it would take part in military intervention or not.

What was the standpoint of the western powers in regard to the crisis? In this question we have to differentiate between the official view as represented by the Conference of Ambassadors and an unofficial real view, taken behind the scenes, in private discussion or in the statements of influential legitimist groups. The Conference of Ambassadors was guided by the note of February 1920,⁶² accord-

⁵⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 50. Report of the French ambassador in Budapest to Briand, April 4, 1921; *ibid.* f. 56. Report of the French ambassador in Bucharest to Briand, April 4, 1921.

⁶⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. f. 83. Cable of the French ambassador in Bucharest to Briand, April 5, 1921.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 34. Cable of the French ambassador in Bucharest to Briand, April 4, 1921; *PDH.* II. doc. 276. pp. 297-298. Kánya's cable to the Hungarian representative in London, March 31, 1921.

⁶² In their protest they literally cited the note of February 1920, according to which: "...they would neither recognize nor tolerate the restoration of members of the Habsburg family". *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., doc. 18. p. 103.

ing to which it put pressure on Horthy and the Hungarian government to remove the ex-king from Hungary. At the same time, it endeavoured to restrain Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia from any action that might result in the outbreak of war, in further bloodshed.⁶³

The Conference was not unanimous on the Habsburg question. Decisions were preceded by long and vehement discussions. The French supported, officially and in public, the anti-Habsburg resolutions of the Conference, but in the background they encouraged the ex-emperor to return.

In Great Britain the House of Lords and aristocracy in general were in favour of Habsburg restoration. They criticized the British government and the successor states for interfering in Hungary's internal affairs. British government circles were against the Habsburgs. Unlike France, they saw no danger in the Anschluss for Great Britain's security, whereas the Habsburg restoration – according to Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon – would destroy any prospect of co-operation between the Danubian states. The view of the Foreign Office played an important role in the adoption of the resolution by the Conference of Ambassadors and in deflecting criticism of the resolution. The Foreign Office also contributed to resolving the crisis resulting from the king's return attempt, and – last but not least – to restraining the Little Entente.⁶⁴ In this question it had to assert its view not only against France, but against Italy as well. Hohler, British High Commissioner in Budapest, was actually a central figure in the struggle against the attempted return of Charles. As the doyen of the High Commissioners, he organized and harmonized their actions and did his best to prevent the representatives of the neighbouring states from aggravating the situation by their actions and thus setting Central Europe aflame.⁶⁵ As a matter of fact, the opposition of the Little Entente to the western powers was growing. According to the Entente, Paris had encouraged Charles in his attempt, while London impeded radical action against the return attempt by its conciliatory attitude towards Hungary. However, Hohler was anything but lenient towards Charles and Hungary. He protested vigorously against the presence of the ex-king in Budapest and in Szombathely, thereby urging the Hungarian government on more firmness. As a matter of fact, he tried to put pressure not only on the Hungarian government, but also on the representatives of the Little Entente in Budapest. From Horthy, Teleki and Gratz he demanded energetic measures to remove Charles, form

⁶³ This agreement does not apply to Italy. During the king's first return attempt the Italian government supported the diplomatic action of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as well as their military conceptions, and did not oppose their envisaged action; in fact, it was ready to join it.

⁶⁴ The above note was set up upon British initiative. The British delegate played a decisive role in the fact that the note was again presented to the Hungarian government at the time of the first return attempt. *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., doc. 18. p. 103.

⁶⁵ Hohler's steps caused an uproar among the representatives of the neighbouring states, who repeatedly reported thereof, emphasizing Hohler's anti-Little-Entente attitude.

Lejhanec and Milojević moderation, calmness and the abandonment of war threats. He played an important part in the fact that the ultimatum was finally not presented. Meanwhile he persuaded Curzon to induce Switzerland by all diplomatic means to re-admit Charles, and Austria to grant him a transit permit.⁶⁶

During the whole crisis Italy was the ally of the Little Entente and Britain. Italy agreed with Britain that the return of Charles Habsburg to the Hungarian throne would produce a dangerous situation, especially if carried out with French support. However, while the Foreign Office demanded the exclusion of every Habsburg from the Hungarian throne, the Italian government – although having signed the February note and in fact agreeing to it officially – supported, behind the scenes, the candidature of the Archduke Albert who, it was intended, should marry the daughter of the King of Italy. There was also a substantial difference between the policy of the two governments in their attitude to the Little Entente. London disapproved of the threats and did its best to restrain the Little Entente from precipitant action. Italy, on the contrary, encouraged it and officially backed its diplomatic actions.

Italy was actually interested in preventing the Habsburg restoration more than any other great powers, because the restoration of the Monarchy would have jeopardized its ambitions in the Danube Basin and the Balkans, especially if supported by France. The first news about the return attempt precisely indicated such a support: Cerrutti, Italian ambassador in Budapest, reported to Foreign Minister Sforza that Charles was backed by the French. Sforza at once instructed Bonin Longare, Italian ambassador in Paris, to ask the Quai d'Orsay for information. Laroche declared the news to be false and authorized Bonin Longare to cable his government: "...the French are opposed to the Habsburg restoration".⁶⁷ In spite of the *démenti*, the Italian press was full of anti-French articles.⁶⁸ The French government protested against these attacks. In his report to the Senate, Sforza finally admitted that French diplomacy was taking measures to resolve the crisis.⁶⁹ The Italian government displayed intense activity, above all in Budapest. Without waiting for instructions from his government, Cerrutti took steps at once, i.e. on March 28. He agreed that Hohler should present Horthy with a *dé-marche* on behalf of the Budapest representatives of the Allied Powers, including himself.

In the afternoon of the same day he personally called upon Horthy and protested against the return of the ex-king. "The prevention of a Habsburg restoration is a cardinal question of Italian foreign policy" – he declared. Horthy

⁶⁶ At the beginning Austria was decidedly against this.

⁶⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. f. 164. Aide mémoire of Laroche, March 30, 1921.

⁶⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. ff. 195–199. Cable of the French ambassador in Rome to Briand, April 1, 1921.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

replied that the return of the king was an internal affair and concerned only Hungary; thus, he was not in a position to discuss it with foreign diplomats.⁷⁰

Unlike his colleagues, Cerrutti also closely co-operated with the Budapest representatives of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. According to instructions received from their governments, the first two informed the Italian High Commissioner about everything, trying to obtain his approval for their plans. The Romanian minister, Stircea, did the same, although without being authorized by his government; he acted on his own.⁷¹ The four diplomats tried to co-ordinate their action. They decided to leave Budapest at the same time, to break off diplomatic relations with Hungary and to blockade the country. The Italian government promised the successor states every assistance, including military support. By means of this promise, Romania was supposed to be induced to a more unambiguous and resolute attitude and to join the military action envisaged by the Little Entente.⁷² Of course, it is rather improbable that Italy would have actually taken part in military intervention, since it even disapproved of the ultimatum suggested by Prague and Belgrade, although Beneš and Pašić attached great importance to it. Rome regarded this step as too dangerous.

Having arrived in Hungary, Charles Habsburg referred to the support of France. He asserted that the French Premier had approved his plan. Certainly, the Great Powers would protest, but this would not alter the situation: "they would acquiesce to a *fait accompli*" – this was allegedly Briand's last message. In the days following the return attempt, the French assistance was commented on in the press all over Europe. The matter was handled with priority in diplomatic circles as well. Briand's name was particularly often mentioned.⁷³ The participation of French monarchists in the preparation of the return attempt is unquestionable, but not that of Briand. In fact, historiography presents much uncertainty in this question. All we can venture at the present state of knowledge is to piece facts together in Briand's support.

The French Premier made no secret about his sympathy with the Habsburg restoration, regarding it as being in the national interest of France. In his view the Habsburg dynasty could be a focus for the different small nations. The only way was to set up a Danubian confederation, which would help prevent German expansion to the East – the Anschluss – and would neutralize the Bolshevik menace. Thus, his intention was the same as that of Millerand and Paléologue. Briand's main supporter was Jean-Louis Barthou.

⁷⁰ PDH. II. doc. 259. pp. 284 – 285. Kánya's cable to the Hungarian minister in Rome, March 29, 1921.

⁷¹ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt, report of Lejhanec to Beneš, April 2, 1921.

⁷² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. f. 56. Cable of the French ambassador in Bucharest to Briand, April 4, 1921.

⁷³ In their reports, the diplomats transmitted – almost without exception – information concerning Briand's role.

The attitude of the French government in the hours and days after the king's return attempt was remarkable.⁷⁴ It simply did not react up to the events. The telegram of its diplomatic representatives in Central and South-Eastern Europe asking for instructions following news reports suggesting that Briand had not objected to the return of Charles were left unanswered.⁷⁵ Especially in the case of Hungary, this attitude may have had serious consequences: without any instructions from Paris, High Commissioner Fouchet was most irresolute. On March 28, when Charles arrived in Budapest, he agreed that the British High Commissioner Hohler should declare to Horthy on behalf of Italy and France also that "the Allies will not tolerate the return of Charles".⁷⁶ Horthy at once invited Fouchet to appear and told him that the king had mentioned the support of Briand – so what was the truth? Fouchet gave an evasive answer relying upon the instructions of February 18, 1921: the French government was loyal to the declaration of the Allied Powers of February 2, 1920. In other words: he confirmed Hohler's action. At Horthy's request he put down his reply in writing and sent the note to the Foreign Ministry, which forwarded it immediately to Szombathely, to the ex-king. However, Fouchet declined to travel to Szombathely and to tell all this personally to Charles.⁷⁷ The king referred even after receiving the note to French support – allegedly he received even in Szombathely a message encouraging him to hold out.⁷⁸ Fouchet immediately cabled Briand informing him about his talks with Horthy and about the king's declaration according to which Briand had approved his plan.⁷⁹

Although the news about the French support were published in the French press, the *démenti* of the Quai d'Orsay which would have been issued at once in any similar case, was omitted this time. That is, it was published after a delay of one or two days, but neither its form nor its content resolved all doubt.⁸⁰ It is also remarkable that the press digests sent by Havas to Budapest were tendentious, throwing a favourable light on both Hungary and the restoration.⁸¹

⁷⁴ The French politicians and diplomats remained silent. If they had to answer questions, they usually referred to the note of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 20, 1920 and to their loyalty to this document.

⁷⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. ff. 135–139. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 29, 1921; *ibid.* f. 155. Cable of the French ambassador in Vienna to Briand, March 30, 1921.

⁷⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 34. ff. 65–78. Fouchet's report to Briand, April 4, 1921.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. f. 167. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 31, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 135–139. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 29, 1921.

⁸⁰ PDH. II. doc. 320. pp. 327–331. Praznovszky's report to Gratz, April 6, 1921; Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 33–34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Cf. Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* p. 41.

Only on March 30 did Briand begin to deny that the French government – and he himself – had played any role in the king's return attempt. This was mainly due to the intervention of Poincaré. On March 30 Poincaré reproached the Premier for his attitude in the Habsburg affair, and told him that he, as President of the Republic, had explicitly promised Italy that France did not support the restoration.⁸² As a consequence, Briand was forced to undertake diplomatic steps contrary to his own feelings about Habsburg restoration. In a circular telegram sent to 17 French legations the same day, he cited the declarations of Charles about French support – as reported by Fouchet – and refuted them all. "The news propagated by the emperor and his adherents in order to make it believe that restoration is approved by the Allies, especially by France, are without any foundation".⁸³ In the evening he received the journalists and denied once more the allegation that the French government supported the return attempt.⁸⁴

Some hesitation could be observed nevertheless. So, for instance, the Quai d'Orsay left Fouchet's cable of March 28 for two days without any answer. As already mentioned, the High Commissioner acted independently when – being left without any instructions – he protested on the basis of Briand's earlier letter (of February 18).

As a matter of fact, French opposition to the restoration was only clear after April 1, when it became evident that Charles would not succeed, Horthy being unwilling to withdraw. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were threatening with war, Britain and Italy protested energetically. In fact, it was feared that the Italian government would offer the Little Entente military assistance as well, and Central Europe would become a battlefield once more. This had to be prevented at all price. In reply to the telegram of March 28, Briand cabled to Fouchet on April 1, emphasizing that he had never consented to the return of Charles and that every statement by the emperor was without foundation. This statement was to be announced to the Hungarian government.⁸⁵

On the same day – April 1 – the French government informed the Conference of Ambassadors of the king's return attempt. Accordingly, the government was informed only on March 30 by a telegram from Fouchet that in his talks with Horthy, the ex-emperor had alluded to the support of the Allied Powers, above all to that of France. The note to the Conference of Ambassadors described the measures taken by the High Commissioner (Fouchet) and his colleagues in order to avert the danger, and indicated also the growing tension in the neighbouring

⁸² Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* p. 41.

⁸³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. ff. 160–162. Briand's circular telegram, March 30, 1921. As the cable reads: "Le Gouvernement français s'opposerait formellement à une restauration de Habsbourg et rappelle à ce sujet sa déclaration du février 1920." This formulation does not imply a stiff opposition to the return attempt.

⁸⁴ PDH. II. 320. doc.

⁸⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. f. 203. Briand's cable to Fouchet, April 1, 1921.

states.⁸⁶ The inexactitude of the information as regards the date and the content of Fouchet's telegram was not accidental. The first telegram of the High Commissioner reporting that Charles had claimed Briand's support, was actually dated March 29 and not March 30.⁸⁷ At the same time the French government proposed to send a note to the Hungarian government. We shall see that it was actually dispatched. The theory of Briand's participation is also confirmed by his declaration before the Senate. The French Premier consistently avoided dealing with the question *in merito*. He merely referred to the loyalty of France towards its allies as well as to the interests of Italy, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, which, he said, were so strong that if Charles had remained in Hungary, Central Europe would have been again flooded with blood. But he did not even mention that the prevention of the Habsburg restoration in Hungary was in the interests of France as well.⁸⁸

Subsequently, diplomatic activity at the Quai d'Orsay was intensified. General Secretary Berthelot came to the fore who – though a main supporter of the Little Entente – did not join at once the action of Beneš and Pašić. The reason for his reticence was probably the fact that he also did not consider the Habsburg restoration as a danger to French interests. He opposed it, because he respected the position of France's eastern allies. His attitude was marked initially by this duplicity. He hesitated, but kept silent, because Briand did the same. He preferred not to be opposed to his Premier and Foreign Minister. Only after Briand started speaking (against the restoration) did he go into action – at once. In a circular telegram sent on March 31 to London, Rome and the successor states, he emphasized the necessity of co-ordinated action by the Budapest representatives, who had to demand energetically the immediate removal of Charles. They also had to warn the Hungarian government that otherwise it would have to bear the full responsibility for attacks aimed against the Trianon Peace Treaty.⁸⁹ This was the first severe response on the part of the Great Powers. As the most influential, Berthelot tried in every way to take a resolute, severe attitude against Hungary.⁹⁰ Unlike London, he did nothing to restrain the aggressive steps of the successor states – on the contrary: he explicitly encouraged them.

At the time Praznovszky repeatedly asked the Quai d'Orsay for support against the threats of the neighbouring states, demanding that the French stop the attacks of the Little Entente. But the Secretary General rejected his demand. In fact, an editorial in *Le Temps*, published with Berthelot's approval, hoped that the neighbouring states would not moderate their attitude.⁹¹

⁸⁶ PDH. II. doc. 293. pp. 308 – 309. Fouchet's note to Teleki, April 2, 1921.

⁸⁷ AD. Europe 1918 – 40. H. vol. 33. ff. 135 – 139. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 29, 1921.

⁸⁸ PDH. II. doc. 320. pp. 327 – 331. Praznovszky's report to Gratz, April 6, 1921.

⁸⁹ AD. Europe 1918 – 40. H. vol. 33. ff. 171 – 172. Berthelot's circular telegram, March 31, 1921.

⁹⁰ PDH. II. doc. 320. pp. 127 – 131. Praznovszky's report to Gratz, April 6, 1921.

⁹¹ PDH. II. doc. 331. pp. 320 – 327. Praznovszky's report to Gratz, April 6, 1921.

France strongly opposed the attempted return of Charles Habsburg in those days and co-operated closely with the Allied Powers. After the vigorous protest of the Conference of Ambassadors and the Little Entente, Charles was forced to leave even Szombathely. The role of the threatening attitude of the Little Entente in the decision of the Conference is difficult to point out. As a matter of fact, Charles was unable to produce a *fait accompli* – a precondition of his recognition – because of the Little Entente's intervention.

Romania Joins the Alliance

The first attempt at restoration and its failure contributed to the worsening of Hungary's international position, and to the consolidation and definite establishment of the Little Entente. Shortly after the departure of the ex-king, on April 23, 1921, Take Ionescu signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia and somewhat later with Yugoslavia similar to the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav convention, with the only difference that the latter obliged the contracting parties to safeguard not only the Peace Treaty of Trianon but that of Neuilly as well.⁹² Thus the Little Entente consisted of three bilateral political and military conventions, recognized on August 30, 1921 by the League of Nations. A co-ordinating commission of the alliance did not exist; this function was fulfilled until 1933 by the annual conference of the foreign ministers of the three states.

While joining the Little Entente, Take Ionescu did not abandon his own project of drawing Poland into the alliance. This plan was still supported by France. Besides signing the Polish-French and Czechoslovak-French conventions, one of the main purposes of the visit of Marshal Foch to Prague and Warsaw was to reconcile the two states. Skirmunt, the new head of Polish diplomacy, pursued a more flexible policy than his predecessor. Although the August resolution of the Conference of Ambassadors – which decided upon the division of Tešin-Silesia – did not satisfy the Polish government, the new Foreign Minister, fully aware of realities, was ready to come to an agreement with Czechoslovakia and to adhere to the Little Entente. In summer the representatives of the two states had conversations in Warsaw and Mariánské Lázně. By November, Beneš and Skirmunt had already signed the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement, guaranteeing the new frontier and agreeing to maintain neutrality. According to the secret agreement, the Czechoslovak government pledged itself to support Poland on the question of Eastern Galicia and not to join an alliance contesting the Riga frontiers, while Poland did not recognize the return of the Habsburgs to Hungary or Austria.⁹³ At the time of the king's second return attempt, Poland accordingly supported the Little Entente's diplomatic action against the return of the ex-king. Poland's

⁹² *Diplomatické dokumenty MD*. doc. 54. p. 119; doc. 65. p. 141; doc. 72. p. 157; Dénes Halmosy: *op. cit.* pp. 153–158.

⁹³ Dénes Halmosy: *op. cit.* p. 176.

rapprochement with the Little Entente (henceforth it was represented at the conferences of the latter by an observer) caused great dissatisfaction in Hungary, since the country's major adversary was strengthened thereby. The events that were to take place half a year later promoted the further consolidation of the Little Entente that was by now complete.

The Little Entente and the Burgenland Dispute

Due to the Burgenland dispute and the king's second return attempt, the "Hungarian danger" re-appeared, but this time not only for the Little Entente but for Austria as well. At the same time, these events continued to strengthen the position of the Little Entente; Austria moved closer to it, especially to Czechoslovakia, as demonstrated by the so-called Lany convention signed by the two countries. Thus the encirclement of Hungary was complete.

Later, it will be attempted to answer the following questions: what in fact was the Burgenland dispute? Why did the interests of the different powers conflict? Why did the disagreements between the Great Powers and the Little Entente deepen? In how far did the Burgenland issue promote the king's second return attempt? Relying mainly upon research in French and Italian archives, the author will try to reconstruct the international connexions and the background of the events.⁹⁴

Burgenland is an area to the east of Vienna, with 330,000 inhabitants, along the Austro-Hungarian border. It had belonged to Hungary since the 10th century. The majority of the population was German, while the Hungarian minority lived mostly around Sopron. After World War One, Burgenland asked the Károlyi government for autonomy and actually received it.

On June 2, 1919, the Austrian government, protesting against the peace terms, demanded a plebiscite for Burgenland. Its arguments were of an ethnic, strategic and economic nature: the territory was close to Vienna, its agricultural produce was significant, the majority of the population was German-speaking. Its strategic importance lay in its being a barrier between the northern and southern Slavs. Beneš was opposed to the claim, since he wanted to divide the area between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in order to establish a corridor between the two countries.⁹⁵ At its session of July 2, 1919, the Supreme Council (with Italy miss-

⁹⁴ In the archives of the Italian and the French foreign ministries – especially in the former – there is a vast material concerning the question. About the Burgenland crisis see R. Mosca: *L'Italia e la questione dell'Ungheria occidentale*. Roma, 1972; Katalin Soós: *Burgenland az európai politikában 1918–1921* (Burgenland in European politics, 1918–1921). Budapest, 1971; V. Jelinek: *The Hungarian Factor in Italian Foreign Policy 1918–1927*. (A dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at New York University, 1977.)

⁹⁵ Already at the end of the war Masaryk explained the importance thereof (T.G. Masaryk: *Nová Evropa...*). At the peace conference the representatives of both states claimed the area.

ing) disregarded the objection of Czechoslovakia and assigned the whole territory to Austria.⁹⁶

The reasons for this decision are clear: Austria had to become viable, or else it would choose the Anschluss.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Hungary was ruled at that time by a Soviet Republic which had to be weakened. Autonomy for the territory within Hungary, as suggested by Károlyi, would only have been advocated by Italy, which was absent.

Shortly after the peace treaty was signed, the Hungarian government asked the Allies to allow Hungarian troops to remain in Burgenland until the plebiscite had taken place. But Austria rejected further discussion on this matter, since it had already been settled in its favour.

The opposition of the Hungarian government induced the Austrians to conclude an agreement with Czechoslovakia, thus securing the implementation of the Saint-Germain peace treaty, with special regard to Burgenland.⁹⁸ After this agreement was signed, Hungary also received the peace terms, according to which Burgenland belonged to Austria. In this situation Hungary tried to solve the question on its own account. However, it was on rather bad terms with the government of Chancellor Renner, partly because of general differences and partly because Renner had not abandoned his plan to occupy Western Hungary (this would have been his only success in foreign policy). So the Hungarian government preferred to leave Renner aside and to get in touch with the parliamentary opposition. Secret negotiations were started with the leaders of the Christian Socialist Party, who promised that in the event of their victory at the polls they would be "ready to negotiate on an amicable settlement". In return they asked that (1) the agreement should be kept secret, (2) the Hungarian government should support their electoral campaign by all available means, and (3) in the event of their victory it should supply Vienna with food.⁹⁹

At the same time the Hungarian government tried to obtain support from the Great Powers. At first, it applied to Italy, suggesting an agreement against the Slav danger. In Budapest it was quite clear that in spite of its rapprochement with the Little Entente, Italy was more than a little afraid of the co-operation between and strengthening of the two Slav countries – at least as much as of the growing French influence in the Danube Basin. Nevertheless, Italy was most reserved in regard to the Hungarian proposal, which would have dragged Austria towards Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and worsened its relations with Romania. Last but not least, Hungary was in those times on friendly terms with France – to the utmost displeasure of Rome. However, Hungarian diplomacy tried to convince

⁹⁶ Cf. works cited above by R. Mosca, K. Soós, and V. Jelinek.

⁹⁷ R. Mosca: *op. cit.* pp. 7–9.

⁹⁸ Dénes Halmosy: *op. cit.* p. 178.

⁹⁹ PDH. II. doc. 776. pp. 745–746 Report of Gratz to Teleki, November 5, 1920; OL. Küm. resp. pol. 1922–20–3608.

the Italians that "the improvement of Austro-Hungarian relations is also in the interest of Italy".¹⁰⁰

After repeated Hungarian requests Sforza promised to discuss the matter with Renner,¹⁰¹ and so he did. When Renner came to Rome, he advised the chancellor to improve relations with Hungary and cautioned him against a rapprochement with Czechoslovakia only.¹⁰²

However, in their talks with Renner, the Italian politicians did not espouse the Hungarian cause. In fact, they feared that a revision of the peace treaty could create a precedent, and eventually Austria would claim territories from Italy by way of recompensation.¹⁰³ So, in the months following the visit of Renner, nothing happened on the Burgenland issue, while the Peace Treaty of Trianon signed on June 4, 1920, stabilized Austrian control over the area.

In autumn 1920, when – after the signing of the peace treaty – the question of Burgenland again came to the fore in international diplomacy, the Hungarian government tried to obtain the support of France.

As already mentioned, Millerand and Paléologue were ready to support the Hungarian plans concerning Burgenland, when it became clear that a revision of the peace treaty at the expense of the successor states was out of the question. Although the Franco-Hungarian negotiations were postponed and even stopped after the withdrawal of Paléologue, co-operation between the two countries continued to exist over the Burgenland affair. Berthelot himself, who was in general opposed to Paléologue's Danubian policy, took the side of Hungary. He would have been pleased if – as a result of negotiations with Austria – the territory or a part of it could remain in the possession of Hungary. His attitude was not motivated by any kind of truthfulness, still less by sympathy, but simply by the reasoning that this would be best for the interests of France. Most French politicians were of the same opinion, and the Hungarian government did its best to confirm them in their belief. Praznovszky, Hungary's representative in Paris, expressed hope that France would support the Hungarian claim to Burgenland, because it was France's interest to counterbalance Pan-Germanism by creating a strong Hungary.¹⁰⁴

So the Hungarian government kept the Quai d'Orsay informed about its plans for Western Hungary. It disclosed the secret negotiations with the Austrian opposition, its intention to promote the fall of Renner and the taking of power by the Christian Socialist Party, the leaders of which were ready to discuss an amicable settlement of the question. Officials of the French Foreign Ministry agreed

¹⁰⁰ PDH. II. doc. 207. p. 215.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² PDH. II. doc. 221. Sforza denied the anti-Czechoslovak statements. At that time Italian diplomacy successfully turned to account the conflicts between the successor states and France.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ PDH. II. doc. 640. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, September 11, 1920.

with the Hungarian action aimed at overthrowing Renner and told Praznovszky that they were also active along the same line. However, they did not share the optimistic opinion of the Hungarian government as far as the Christian Socialist Party was concerned, because "according to their information, it is just the other way round: the Christian Socialist Party aspires even more than Renner to the annexation of Burgenland".¹⁰⁵ As we shall see, they were right.

While the Hungarian government tried to find a remedy in Paris, it was this time Renner who applied to Rome. He explained at length to Pietro Tomasi Della Torretta, Italian minister in Vienna, the efforts of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to induce Austria to join the Little Entente. Prague and Belgrade, he added, had promised Austria military assistance in asserting its claim to Burgenland. He also declared that – although sharing some opinions of Beneš in regard to Hungary, for instance on the question of Habsburg restoration and the implementation of the peace treaty –, he rejected the proposal to join the Little Entente, because he observed with caution the Pan-Slavic orientation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which might be against the interests of Austria. Renner assured the Italian diplomat that for these reasons he rejected the proposals of Prague and Belgrade. "However, if Hungary does not change its attitude towards Austria", he added threateningly, "Austria will be forced to adhere to the Little Entente, and Hungary will lose a neutral and friendly Austria".¹⁰⁶ So the Little Entente was for Renner an important tool of obtaining the support of Italy for the annexation of Burgenland. His demands were as follows: (1) Hungary guarantees to depose the Habsburgs from the throne; (2) it gives up the idea of acquiring Burgenland; (3) the plebiscite will take place only after Hungary has evacuated the area and Austria occupied it. Renner did not exclude the possibility of a certain correction of the frontiers in favour of Hungary.¹⁰⁷

Torretta urged the Italian Foreign Ministry to consider Renner's proposal. "The Austro-Hungarian rapprochement will prevent Austria's adherence to the Little Entente and makes it easier for Italy to establish good terms with both states – he emphasized. – An agreement between Austria and Hungary would undermine the plan of Czechoslovakia to create a Pan-Slav bloc on the Italian frontier."¹⁰⁸ This was precisely what Rome wished to prevent. Thus Sforza instructed Cerrutti to transmit Austria's proposal to the Hungarian government, underlining its advantages.¹⁰⁹

However, Hungary received the Austrian offer with reserve, because – as Teleki declared – the item related to the Habsburg restoration meant interfer-

¹⁰⁵ PDH. I. doc. 635. p. 618. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, September 6, 1920.

¹⁰⁶ Archivio Centrale dello Stato (henceforward: ACS) 258–594. Torretta's cable to Sforza, September 4, 1920.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 253. Cerrutti's cable to Sforza, September 13, 1920.

ence in Hungary's internal affairs. The postponement of the plebiscite was also rejected.¹¹⁰

Cerrutti reported to his government that Teleki wanted to drag out the negotiations until the Austrian elections (October-November 1920), hoping the Christian Socialist Party would come to power. He was right – the Hungarians actually did hope for concessions from a new government. However, they would have been ready to arrive at an agreement with Renner, too.¹¹¹ When the election campaign began, Renner broke off contact. The tension between the two countries increased more and more. Renner accused the Hungarian government of intervening in the election campaign through the Hungarian mission in Vienna, in order to improve the chances of the Christian Socialists. The Hungarian government repudiated the charge and informed Italy about the events, suggesting a postponement of negotiations on the settlement of the Burgenland question until after the Austrian elections.¹¹²

But the leaders of the victorious Christian Socialist Party, once in power, seemed to have forgotten what they had promised to the Hungarians. In the Burgenland question their attitude was more inflexible than that of their social democrat predecessors. Certainly, Michael Mayr, the new chancellor, soon started talks with the Hungarian mission in Vienna,¹¹³ pressing himself for talks,¹¹⁴ since his government was actually facing an extremely difficult economic situation. The food supplies promised by the Hungarian government were of vital importance for him. But as soon as it became evident that the negotiations were aimed (on the Hungarian side) at keeping the whole of Western Hungary under Hungarian control, Mayr's readiness to negotiate diminished visibly. He would have been willing to discuss everything – economic co-operation, settlement of pre-war debts, etc. –, except the cession of Western Hungary or substantial frontier corrections. He did not regard the "lettre d'envoi" (cited by the Hungarian government) as an integral part of the peace treaty.¹¹⁵ Instead, he quoted the standpoint of the Conference of Ambassadors as disclosed by Cambon: "The frontiers fixed by the peace treaty must remain unchanged. The negotiations suggested by the Allies can bear relation only to absolutely necessary, minor modifications of the frontiers."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 254. Cerrutti's cable to Sforza, September 13, 1920.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² ASMAE. 1741–1213. Sforza's cable to Cerrutti, October 11, 1920.

¹¹³ PDH. I. doc. 821. p. 782. Report of the Hungarian *chargé d'affaires* in Vienna to Csáky, November 2, 1920; *ibid.* doc. 890. p. 838. Cable of Gratz to Teleki, December 30, 1920.

¹¹⁴ PDH. I. 457. Cable of Gratz to Csáky, November 14, 1920. Csáky emphasized that it would be useful to start friendly negotiations before the peace treaty is ratified.

¹¹⁵ PDH. II. doc. 380. pp. 387–388. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, May 5, 1921.

¹¹⁶ PDH. II. doc. 188. pp. 202–203. Cable of Masirevich to Gratz, March 5, 1921.

Cambon also informed the chancellor that the Conference of Ambassadors did not intend to return to the "lettre d'envoi", which would only delay the execution of the peace treaty.¹¹⁷ Csáky, head of Hungarian diplomacy, thereupon applied to the French government requesting that France (a) should put pressure on the Austrian chancellor to start the negotiations as soon as possible, and (b) it should mediate between the two countries.¹¹⁸ After the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty, however, Paris did not show much inclination towards the promised co-operation, in fact, it was absolutely unwilling to openly take sides with Hungary. By now, every step of the French was being keenly observed not only by the Little Entente, but by Austria as well. At the same time, the new Austrian government was more and more unwilling to fulfil its promises.

The rigid and uncompromising attitude of the new chancellor caused great disappointment in Budapest. It was taken especially amiss that he began to urge the cession of Burgenland by way of the Conference of Ambassadors.¹¹⁹ Mayr actually induced the Allied Powers to summon the Hungarian government in their note of December 23, 1920 to evacuate without delay the territory assigned to Austria.¹²⁰ Surprised by this unexpected action, the Hungarian government at once protested against it in Paris and Vienna, expressing its disapproval to Mayr for turning, with his policy, the Austro-Hungarian relations in an undesirable direction.¹²¹ The chancellor excused himself: he had not demanded the immediate cession of the area, but merely the assertion of Austrian rights; he was surprised himself by the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors.¹²² The whole truth, however, was disclosed to the Italian minister in Vienna, i.e. that the chancellor was forced by parliamentary pressure to demand the fulfilment of the peace treaties, especially in regard to Burgenland.¹²³

In reply, the Hungarian government began to apply sanctions by suspending the flour supplies destined for Vienna. Csáky's telegram to Praznovszky: "... further flour supplies will encounter difficulties, unless the Christian Socialist Party gives a positive reply".¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ PDH. II. doc. 63. pp. 676–679. Praznovszky's cable to Gratz.

¹¹⁸ PDH. I. doc. 834. p. 785. Csáky's aide mémoire about his talks with Fouchet, November 30, 1920.

¹¹⁹ PDH. I. doc. 887. p. 836. Teleki's cable to Gratz, December 29, 1920; *ibid.* doc. 889. p. 837. Cable of Gratz to Teleki, December 30, 1920.

¹²⁰ The Allied Powers summoned Hungary on December 23, 1920 to evacuate the area.

¹²¹ PDH. I. doc. 889. p. 837. Cable of Gratz to Teleki, December 30, 1920.

¹²² PDH. II. doc. 1. pp. 1–2. Cable of Gratz to Teleki, January 2, 1921; doc. 3. pp. 7–9. Teleki's cable to Praznovszky, January 3, 1921.

¹²³ ASMAE. 1743. 890. Torretta's cable to Sforza, October 31, 1920. Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 116–167.

¹²⁴ PDH. I. doc. 784. Csáky's cable to Praznovszky, November 8, 1920.

But Hungary's chances of keeping Burgenland turned from bad to worse. The government tried to find a way out of the hopeless situation. It lodged a protest with the Conference of Ambassadors against the decision, demanding the postponement of the cession of Western Hungary, because it wanted to start direct negotiations with Austria, and asked for support in this matter. "Anyway, the decision is contrary to the spirit of the peace. According to the 'lettre d'envoi', there is no doubt that the present Hungarian frontier is not definitive" – declared Praznovszky to Cambon, chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors.¹²⁵ After having read the Hungarian note, Cambon declared that the peace treaty had to be implemented. The Hungarians are mistaken if they regard the "lettre d'envoi" as part of the peace treaty. Rightful claims, he said, are only based on the peace treaty signed by the Allied Powers, whereas the "lettre d'envoi" was signed only by Millerand, demonstrating thereby the good-will of the Allied Powers towards Hungary. It is an error to think that the "lettre d'envoi" could grant the right to change the peace treaty. It might be discussed, he went on, whether the peace treaty is good or bad, but it must be executed anyway.¹²⁶ The Hungarian government is also mistaken if it thinks that the whole territory would remain in Hungarian possession, if the Allied Powers would consent to the negotiations, for even according to the "lettre d'envoi", only minor frontier corrections are possible.¹²⁷

All this was already very different from what Cambon had earlier told Hungary's representative in Paris, when the Hungarian government was persuaded to sign and ratify the Trianon Peace Treaty.

However, the inflexibility of Cambon on the question of Western Hungary was not characteristic of the politicians of the Quai d'Orsay who actually came into conflict with him. So the Teleki government wanted to rely upon them and instructed Praznovszky to get in touch with them. Halmos, who had good connexions in France, was once more sent to Paris. With the help of Paléologue, Halmos met Millerand, President of the Republic, with whom he discussed in detail the attitude of the Hungarian government in the Burgenland question, i.e. that the Hungarian government was unwilling to fulfil any demand concerning Western Hungary. If it was constrained, it would resist – without knowing as yet, how to do it. He also disclosed to Millerand the Hungarian reply to the Conference of Ambassadors. Millerand suggested a few corrections.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ PDH. II. doc. 44. pp. 52–54. Praznovszky's note to the Conference of Ambassadors January 13, 1921.

¹²⁶ PDH. II. doc. 244. pp. 272–273. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, March 22, 1921.

¹²⁷ PDH. II. doc. 189. pp. 203–204. Praznovszky's cable to Gratz, March 5, 1921.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Before presenting the note to the Conference of Ambassadors, Praznovszky paid due regard to these suggestions.

The President, reported Halmos, "fully approves our standpoint and will take the necessary steps ... he promised his support".¹²⁹

Meanwhile Praznovszky had talks with Berthelot, Peretti de la Rocca and Massigli. According to Teleki's instructions, he emphasized that the decision on Western Hungary was against the interests of Hungary and would make any French orientation quite impossible. He also pointed out the duplicity of French policy in the Burgenland affair: the same French officials – his negotiating partners – who had encouraged the Hungarian government to resist, now pressed the government to evacuate the area.¹³⁰

But the officials of the Quai d'Orsay – Peretti de la Rocca and Massigli – saw no contradiction in their attitude. The Hungarians, they said, had misunderstood the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors. Austria actually had title to the area, and the note dealt only with the legal aspects of the question, without excluding an agreement between Austria and Hungary before the territory was handed over. Austria wanted only to ensure its rights. Once this was achieved, it could negotiate at a later date.¹³¹

Indeed, the note of the Conference of Ambassadors did not exclude negotiations, but wished to carry them out with the mediation of one of the Allied Powers. The parties involved accepted this formula, however, the choice of the mediator gave rise to serious difficulties. Austria insisted on Italy, Hungary objected from the start. "In our opinion" – declared Gratz, the new head of Hungarian diplomacy – "Italy cannot be taken into consideration as mediator because of its attachment to the Little Entente... Austria thinks of Italy's mediation, and this we cannot accept."¹³² Hungary asked France to act as mediator, but this was rejected by Austria and Italy.¹³³ Mayr categorically refused this plan, whereas the standpoint of the Italian government was this: "...if Hungary insists on the mediation by France, Italy will propose to return the whole Burgenland affair to the Conference of Ambassadors".¹³⁴

This would have been disadvantageous for Hungary, because Great Britain was also taking the side of Italy, and supported Austria. So the Hungarian government applied to Italy and demanded the help of Sforza in order to reach an agreement. Sforza agreed to act as secret mediator, although Italian-Hungarian

¹²⁹ PDH. II. doc. 16. p. 19. Teleki's cable to Praznovszky, January 7, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 43. p. 52. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, January 13, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 368. pp. 381–383. Praznovszky's cable to Bánffy, April 22, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 33. p. 35. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, January 11, 1921.

¹³⁰ PDH. II. doc. 48. pp. 56–57. Praznovszky's cable to Teleki, January 15, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 16. p. 19. Teleki's cable to Praznovszky, January 7, 1921.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* Praznovszky's reply: "Needless to attach a town or an area to Austria, which would again become Hungarian within a week."

¹³² PDH. II. 95. 100–101. Cable of Gratz to Praznovszky, February 5, 1921.

¹³³ Praznovszky appeared several times in the Quai d'Orsay, demanding the mediation of the French government.

¹³⁴ ACS. PC. 260–96. Torretta's cable to Sforza, February 8, 1921.

relations were rather frosty at that time. Italy harboured resentment against Hungary for its French orientation, while Hungary was angry with Italy for the Rapallo agreement with Yugoslavia, the news of which actually caused a real shock in Budapest: it was feared that the agreement would diminish Hungary's potential value to Italy.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, Sforza was ready to mediate, because even after the settlement of the Adria question he was anxious about the Slav corridor and Austria's eventual adherence to the Little Entente. On the other hand, he did not want to jeopardize good relations with the successor states. So he warned the Hungarian government in advance: "... we cannot lend our name to any time-wasting, ambiguous and uncertain tactics which, in case the negotiations were broken off, would make us appear as being involved in intrigues, thus increasing our difficulties with the successor states."¹³⁶

In the following three months Italy tried to make the contending parties sit at the conference table, but without much success. The difficulties were mainly from the Hungarian side. As soon as he received the Austrian proposal, Teleki presented his counter-proposals which practically deadlocked the conversations: he asked for territorial revision before Hungary would evacuate the area, because Mayr had promised earlier – orally – that Austria would consent to any reasonable frontier correction. Sforza rejected the counter-proposals, considering them as entirely dissatisfactory and "unworthy" of being presented to the Austrian government.

Meanwhile Sforza continued to urge on the talks, fearing that the successor states – Austria included – would take military action and occupy Burgenland in accordance with the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav and Czechoslovak-Austrian agreements. Italy was gripped by fear of a Slav corridor – it could not have looked on unmoved, while Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia took control of the area, whereas its interference would have definitely worsened its hardly improved relations with them. This had to be avoided at all cost. Referring to this danger, Italy managed to persuade the Conference of Ambassadors to request the Austrian and Hungarian governments (in its note of February 4, 1921) to start negotiations on the basis of the frontiers as fixed by the peace treaty. So Austria finally accepted Sforza's proposal. The conversations began in February 1921 in Vienna, at the initiative and with the approval of the Conference of Ambassadors, but without a mediator.¹³⁷ On the Hungarian side the negotiations were conducted by the new

¹³⁵ ASMAE. 1744. 2199. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Sforza, December 3, 1920; ASMAE 1744. 2197. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Sforza, December 3, 1920; ACS. PC. 258–1541. Sforza's cable to Torretta, December 30, 1920; *ibid.* 260. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Sforza, February 1, 1921. Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 116–167.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ PDH. II. doc. 272. p. 293. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to the Hungarian government; February 4, 1921; ASMAE. 1743–1106. Carraciolo di Castagneta to Sforza, February 6, 1921. ACS. PC. 260–139. Vinci's cable to Sforza, March 29, 1921; Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 110–167.

Foreign Minister, Gusztáv Gratz, but went very slowly indeed – the differences of opinion were so marked that there was no hope of an agreement.

The talks were interrupted by the king's first return attempt, increasing the tension between the two countries. The situation became especially dangerous for Italy, because the return attempt offered Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia an additional argument for the joint occupation of Western Hungary. According to the confidential information of the Italian government, both states actually had detailed military plans for such action.¹³⁸

Sforza tried to find a way out in two directions. On the one hand, he attempted to put pressure on the Hungarian government, reminding it to respect the decisions on Burgenland and not to give an excuse to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to occupy the area.¹³⁹ On the other hand, he reminded Yugoslavia that any action against Hungary would be incompatible with the Rapallo agreement, which declared that the two states would co-ordinate their policy in regard to Hungary. In the summer of 1921, Yugoslavia's attitude in the Burgenland affair moderated. This was due not only to the Italian warning, but also to the question of the Baranya region: the Conference of Ambassadors demanded more and more vigorously the evacuation of the area and its return to Hungary.¹⁴⁰

After the failure of the king's first return attempt, the governments of Austria and Hungary resumed the interrupted negotiations. Their representatives met on May 25, 1921 in Vienna. But Chancellor Mayr persisted in his former standpoint: he was ready to negotiate about Western Hungary, but only on the basis of the peace treaty, without mentioning the "lettre d'envoi", or taking economic and ethnical principles into consideration. What was new, was his readiness to accept a third state as mediator: according to reliable information, he believed that this would be advantageous for Austria. But the talks again ended without any result.¹⁴¹ Shortly afterwards Mayr resigned and Schober was appointed chancellor. Budapest was pleased with these events, since Schober had more wish for an amicable solution than his predecessor. He promised not to insist at the Conference of Ambassadors on the evacuation of the territory, but was unwilling to comply with the Hungarian request for him to intervene personally with the Al-

¹³⁸ ASMAE. 1743–31682. Sforza's circular telegram to the Italian embassies in Paris and London, and to the missions in Prague, Vienna, Belgrade, and Budapest. May 21, 1921.

¹³⁹ ASMAE. 1744–731. Sforza's cable to the missions in Belgrade, Budapest and Bucharest, May 28, 1921.

¹⁴⁰ The demands of the Conference of Ambassadors were disregarded by the Belgrade government.

¹⁴¹ PDH. II. doc. 409. Bánffy's cable to Masirevich, May 14, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 385. p. 402. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, May 25, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 449, pp. 500–501. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, May 25, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 451. pp. 502–503. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, May 25, 1921. The Chancellor emphasized that, irrespective of the negotiations, the Hungarian government has to cede Western Hungary immediately after the ratification of the peace treaty. PDH. II. doc. 454. p. 562. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, May 26, 1921.

lies in order to delay the handing over of the area, because – he said – this would cause a cabinet crisis.¹⁴² Through the French minister in Vienna, Lefèvre-Pontalis, French diplomacy also tried to advance an agreement.¹⁴³ But in spite of the benevolent support of the French government, the Conference of Ambassadors refused to postpone the original date of evacuation, while the Austrian mission in Paris – despite the promises of Schober – continued to urge the evacuation.¹⁴⁴

It was the declared intention of the Hungarian government, not to hand over the whole of Burgenland. It wanted to have a plebiscite, the idea of which originally came from the French. So it again asked France for help in changing the unjust decision. But Peretti de la Rocca, who had so far displayed the utmost good-will as far as Hungary was concerned, now declared that the Hungarians were certainly right in principle and he personally never would have made such a peace treaty; but since it represented the common will of the Allies, the peace treaty had to be implemented and could not be changed.¹⁴⁵

Urged by the Austrian and the Italian governments, the Conference of Ambassadors instructed the allied generals in Hungary to intervene with the Hungarian government in the evacuation of the area.¹⁴⁶ In spite of the decision, there was still vacillation at the conference. Although the Italian representative Garbasso demanded most energetic steps to be taken against Hungary, this did not happen. In June 1921, the Italian ambassador in Vienna, Torretta became foreign minister – his line was harder than that of Sforza in regard to Hungary, especially at the beginning. He was opposed to any kind of concession, or else, he said, Austria would try to find protection in an “unnatural alliance”, while Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia would have a pretext for occupying Burgenland.¹⁴⁷ The Italian minister in Budapest was instructed to follow the same line, even if his British and French colleagues were of another opinion. “It is all the same for us, whether this territory is Austrian or Hungarian. For us it is the most important to be able to secure the strict execution of the treaties.”¹⁴⁸ He was actually ready to further the Austro-Hungarian negotiations, but only after the implementation of the peace treaties.

¹⁴² PDH. II. doc. 548. p. 577. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, January 27, 1921.

¹⁴³ PDH. II. doc. 534. pp. 567–568. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, June 27, 1921.

¹⁴⁴ PDH. II. doc. 24. pp. 630–631. Bánffy's cable to the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Vienna, July 23, 1921; doc. 625. p. 631. Bánffy's cable to Praznovsky, July 23, 1921.

¹⁴⁵ PDH. II. doc. 481. p. 527. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy, June 8, 1921. AMZV. PZ. 151, report of the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest to Beneš, May 10, 1921.

¹⁴⁶ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 250; PDH. II. doc. 590. p. 603. Note of the Allied Powers to the Hungarian government, July 16, 1921.

¹⁴⁷ ASMAE. 1743–464. Garbasso's cable to Torretta, August 31, 1921; *ibid.* 1263. Torretta's cable to Garbasso, September 2, 1921.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Garbasso received similar instructions. "Italy will not adhere to an alliance asking Austria and Yugoslavia in advance for concessions to Hungary." He demanded economic sanctions, if Hungary refused to evacuate Burgenland.¹⁴⁹

At the beginning of August 1921, it was already evident that Schober had broken his promise. Like his predecessors, he also insisted on the cession of the territory. Although negotiating with Hungary's representatives, he was anything but eager to reach an agreement, and so the talks made little, if any, progress. So Bánffy instructed Masirevich on August 3, there being obviously no chance for an agreement, to tell the Austrian government categorically: Hungary claims compensation for damage to the state property of Western Hungary, as stipulated by the peace treaty. In the event of a refusal, the negotiations would be broken off.¹⁵⁰ France – and to a certain extent even Britain – would have welcomed it if a part of the area had remained Hungarian as a result of direct negotiations, but given the attitude of the Italian and Austrian governments, they were compelled to insist on the implementation of article 71 of the Trianon Peace Treaty. Originally, the territory should have been handed over on August 17. The postponement demanded by the Hungarian government was granted by the Conference of Ambassadors, the new time-limit was fixed at August 27, with the evacuation to begin on August 26.¹⁵¹ On the same day (August 8), Yugoslavia was to evacuate the city of Pécs and the Baranya region.¹⁵² The two questions were linked up in order to make Hungary interested in the cession of Burgenland. However, the Yugoslav government did not fully comply with the decision and kept a small part of the Baranya region occupied, saying that this would serve as an inducement to Hungary to hand over the other area. The Yugoslav military commander even refused to sign the protocol of evacuation.¹⁵³ Referring to this, Hungary equally refused the full evacuation of Burgenland. In a note to the Allied Powers, Bethlen emphasized the readiness of the Hungarian government to comply with article 71, if the other part of the peace treaty favourable to Hungary was also implemented, i.e. if the territories occupied by the Yugoslavs were completely evacuated and handed over.¹⁵⁴ The following weeks were marked by seri-

¹⁴⁹ ASMAE. 1742–1350. Torretta's circular telegram, September 10, 1921; ASMAE. 1743–472. Garbasso's cable to Torretta, September 8, 1921; *ibid.* 520. Note of the British embassy to the Italian government, September 8, 1921; Cf. the works cited above by V. Jelinek and K. Soós.

¹⁵⁰ PDH. II. doc. 668. pp. 677–678. Bánffy's cable to Masirevich, August 3, 1921.

¹⁵¹ PDH. II. doc. 648. pp. 649–650. Cambon's note to Praznovszky, July 26, 1921; doc. 659. p. 664. Bánffy's cable to Praznovszky.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* doc. 742. p. 757. Bánffy's cable to Villányi, August 20, 1921. The date of evacuation was not indicated, only that of the transfer.

¹⁵³ PDH. II. doc. 779. pp. 783–784. Bethlen's note to the representatives of the Allied Powers in Budapest, August 28, 1921.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

ous tension. The Conference of Ambassadors pressed the Hungarian government in several notes to hand over Western Hungary.¹⁵⁵

The League of Nations also reproved Hungary's decision, regarding it as non-fulfilment of international obligations. Parcher, Hungary's representative in Berne, was anxious that the affair might be detrimental to the country's admission to the League of Nations.¹⁵⁶

Let us now see the attitude of the Little Entente during the Burgenland crisis. Though with different intensity, all its members were striving for the consistent execution of the decision concerning Western Hungary. As in the past, their foreign policy was again led by a single central idea: Hungary had to be forced to fulfil the peace conditions, i.e. to hand over the territory unconditionally to Austria.¹⁵⁷ Their menacing attitude further increased the tension. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were considering in earnest the idea of military intervention.¹⁵⁸ After an initial reservedness, Romania also approved the project and offered Austria its military assistance against Hungary.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, it opposed the establishment of a corridor, because – like Italy – it disapproved of the unification of the two Slav states, which would have strengthened the Slav element within the bloc: which it had feared from the very beginning. It consented to the plan of a joint “preventive occupation” of Western Hungary, but insisted that the territory should be handed over to Austria. At the same time Averescu assured Bánffy that his country would remain neutral in an eventual military conflict over Burgenland and would not join the action of its allies within the Little Entente. He also agreed not to oppose certain frontier corrections in favour of Hungary. The Romanian government hoped that, as compensation, Budapest would accept the Hungarian-Romanian frontier line and would not demand its modification by the frontier commission.¹⁶⁰

The Austrian government categorically refused to accept the armed assistance of the Little Entente because, as its spokesman declared, “it trusted in an amicable solution”. As a matter of fact, it feared not without good reason that it would be more difficult to induce the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav units to leave the area than the Hungarian troops. But it was ready to avail itself of diplomatic assistance, especially that of Beneš, who had great prestige in the West.

¹⁵⁵ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 345, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, September 8, 1921; *ibid.* 342. September 7.

¹⁵⁶ PDH. II. doc. 805. p. 811. Parcher's cable to Bánffy, August 31, 1921.

¹⁵⁷ HHStA. Berichte aus Belgrad 1078. Hoffinger's report to the foreign minister, October 3, 1921; Berichte aus Belgrad 5121. Hoffinger's report to the foreign minister, October 4, 1921; PDH. II. doc. 467. p. 517. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, July 1921.

¹⁵⁸ PDH. II. doc. 381. pp. 398–399. Praznovszky's cable to Bánffy, May 2, 1921.

¹⁵⁹ ASMAE, 1743–535. Biancheri's cable to Torretta, September 6, 1921.

¹⁶⁰ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. PDH. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 904. p. 92. Rubido-Zichy's cable to Bánffy, September 17, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 988. pp. 165–166. Rubido-Zichy's cable to Bánffy, September 28, 1921.

For different reasons, active interference by the Little Entente in the Burgenland events was disapproved of and opposed by all the Allied Powers.¹⁶¹ This was favourable to the Hungarian government, which repeatedly requested their help: they should protect Hungary against the military threats of the Little Entente and prevent Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia from realizing their aims. France was asked to guarantee that Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia would not occupy Western Hungary.¹⁶²

The Allies assured the Hungarian government that there was no question of it, since it would have been inconsistent with the peace treaty, but they were not at all sure, whether events would work out actually this way.¹⁶³ Their anxiety was not dispelled by the attitude of Beneš, who refused to contemplate a common corridor with Yugoslavia.¹⁶⁴ It was obvious that Beneš tried to profit from the Burgenland crisis in several ways. On the one hand, he wished to realize his long-term aim, the corridor. On the other hand, he wished to bring Austria nearer to the Little Entente or even to achieve its adherence to the bloc, the idea of which had been previously rejected by Austria.¹⁶⁵ Last but not least, he wanted to induce Hungary (which was in a difficult situation indeed), to be more compliant towards Czechoslovakia, and to resume the talks broken off because of the king's return attempt from a more advantageous position. We shall see later that this plan succeeded.

In September 1921, however, a considerable turn-around took place in the Burgenland policy of Beneš: he expressed his readiness to mediate between Austria and Hungary. Until then he had always advocated the unconditional and complete implementation of the peace treaty, without paying attention to British and American advice, suggesting that he win over Hungary by means of offering some help in its difficult situation. He certainly was aware of the fact – as were the Allies – that in the event of an Anschluss, Western Hungary would increase the strength of Germany, but for the moment the weakening of Hungary was more important for him than the containment of Germany.¹⁶⁶ Although his opinion remained unchanged for a long time, he preferred to profit from the opportunity offered by the prevailing international constellation. So in the second half of September, the Czechoslovak foreign minister was ready to mediate between Austria and Hungary, in order to reach an amicable settlement of the Burgenland question. The sources are contradictory as far as the origin of this mediation

¹⁶¹ There was, however, a common consideration as well. All of them were afraid that the intervention of the Little Entente would aggravate the tension.

¹⁶² *PDH*. II. doc. 473. p. 520. Praznovszky's cable to Bánffy, June 4, 1921.

¹⁶³ *PDH*. II. doc. 381. p. 398. Praznovszky's cable to Bánffy, May 2, 1921.

¹⁶⁴ *PDH*. II. doc. 467. p. 517. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, June 2, 1921.

¹⁶⁵ *PDH*. II. doc. 703. pp. 716–718. Report of Masirevich to Bánffy, August 12, 1921; HHSStA. Berichte aus Belgrad 7131. Report of Hoffinger to the foreign minister, December 11, 1921.

¹⁶⁶ *AMZV*. PZ. Budapešt 151, report of Lejhanec to Beneš. May 10, 1921.

is concerned. Who was the initiator? Was it the Hungarian or the Czechoslovak government? According to Bánffy, Beneš sent him a message through Szapáry, expressing his readiness to mediate between Austria and Hungary, and he – Bánffy – accepted the offer.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, Beneš declared (and later put it down in writing) that he was invited to act as a mediator by Szapáry, with whom he had just had talks about the relations between their two countries.¹⁶⁸ Since this unexpected turn caused much embarrassment and even resentment mainly in Rome and Vienna, but also in Bucharest and Belgrade, both parties insisted upon their own version as far as the origin of the mediation was concerned.¹⁶⁹ Who was actually right? We cannot but rely upon hypotheses, for the plan promised to be advantageous for both parties, covering definite political aims.

The Hungarian government received reliable information about the readiness of Beneš to mediate and to support the Hungarian claims on Eastern Burgenland, and was sure that Beneš as a mediator would not urge the cession of the area – as he had that far –, anyway not during the negotiations. In fact, the Hungarians hoped he would use his influence in the West (and this is in our opinion the main reason) to induce the Allies to extend the time-limit for the evacuation. Bethlen's expectations proved to be right. To the great bewilderment of his allies, the head of Czechoslovak diplomacy requested that the Conference of Ambassadors extend the time-limit.¹⁷⁰ It was also obvious to the Hungarian government that this step would provoke differences between Czechoslovakia and Italy as well as between Czechoslovakia and its allies within the Little Entente.¹⁷¹

All this seems to confirm the hypothesis that the Hungarian government was the initiator. Furthermore, the Hungarian government did not refute the note of Beneš to the Allied Powers, Austria and his partners in the Little Entente, where he described the events concerning the Hungarian invitation.¹⁷²

When Masirevich, Hungarian minister in Vienna, informed Bánffy thereof, the Hungarian foreign minister replied that "the initiative came from him", but

¹⁶⁷ Ol. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 938. p. 122. Bánffy's cable to Masirevich, September 23, 1921.

¹⁶⁸ Ol. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 957. p. 136. Cable of Masirevich to Bánffy, September 21, 1921.

¹⁶⁹ Ol. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 991. p. 167. Cable of Matuska to Bánffy, September 28, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 949. p. 130. Bánffy's cable to Masirevich, September 28, 1921.

¹⁷⁰ Ol. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 991. p. 167. Cable of Matuska to Bánffy, September 28, 1921.

¹⁷¹ In connection with the Rapallo convention there was a slight rapprochement to be observed between Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

¹⁷² Ol. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 981. p. 167. Cable of Matuska to Bánffy, September 28, 1921.

added: "...however, I suggest that you do not underline this controversy".¹⁷³ So the Hungarian government did not refute explicitly the statement of Beneš, either because he was actually right, or perhaps because it did not want to provoke difficulties with the Czechoslovak foreign minister, whose assistance it certainly needed.

The turn-round in the standpoint of Beneš was partly due to the fact that in mid-September he received confidential information concerning the readiness of the Conference of Ambassadors to let Hungary keep Sopron and its surroundings, despite the protests that were bound to come from Austria or the Little Entente. In this situation he preferred to compromise and to appear as Hungary's supporter, by accepting the Hungarian offer. On September 22 he met Schober in Hainburg and told him that he was ready to mediate between Austria and Hungary on the following terms: (1) Hungary was to evacuate the area within four days; (2) the territory had to be handed over first to the Allied Powers and only afterwards to Austria; (3) eight days after the territory was handed over, Sopron and its surroundings would be returned to Hungary; (4) Czechoslovakia would guarantee to both states the implementation of the agreement. Like the Hungarian government, Schober accepted the conditions as well as the mediation of Beneš. Both parties promised a definite and written answer at a later date.¹⁷⁴ The Hungarian government expressed its gratitude to Beneš for his intervention.

In Rome the news caused an uproar, since almost at the same time the Hungarian government had also invited Italy to act as mediator. When Bánffy saw that France was opposed to the Hungarian action (demanding jointly with its allies the immediate implementation of the decision on Burgenland) and that Italy – partly because of Hungary's Francophile policy – was backing Austria, he sent a letter to Torretta demanding his intervention, shortly after the message to Beneš.¹⁷⁵ In Rome it was quite clear that the double invitation was not by chance. The Italian government immediately moved against the intervention of Beneš. Torretta asked the Czechoslovak foreign minister not to interfere as long as there was any hope that the Conference of Ambassadors would accept Italy's proposal.¹⁷⁶ Beneš tried to explain himself, without knowing that the Hungarian government had also invited the Italian government to mediate.¹⁷⁷ However, he had no intention of withdrawing.

¹⁷³ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 949. p. 30. Bánffy's cable to Masirevich, September 24, 1921.

¹⁷⁴ AMZV. PZ. 385, circular telegram of Beneš to every Czechoslovak mission, September 29, 1921.

¹⁷⁵ ASMAE. 1744–1546. Torretta's cable to the Italian embassy in London, September 26, 1921.

¹⁷⁶ ASMAE. 1744–1466. Torretta's cable to Carraciolo di Castagneta, September 26, 1921.

¹⁷⁷ ASMAE. 1743–1784. Chiaramonte's cable to Torretta, October 6, 1921.

Torretta also protested against the mediatory role of Czechoslovakia to Vienna. He asked Schober to keep a distance from the "intrigues" of the Little Entente; Austria did not need to be involved in dangerous combinations which would endanger the support of Italy. Beneš wanted to make Vienna dependent on Prague, he warned, and suggested that Schober should not accept Beneš's invitation to Bratislava.¹⁷⁸

Shortly afterwards, the Italian foreign minister appeared unexpectedly in Vienna, where he conferred for days with Schober about the Burgenland affair and the intentions of the Little Entente in regard to Austria. A secret agreement was concluded; Austria committed itself, not to join any confederation or political and economic union aimed at the unification of the successor states, while, in return, Italy would support Austria "against intrigues and efforts aimed at the restoration of the Monarchy, or at detaching certain territories from Austria".¹⁷⁹

The conditions of the negotiations mediated by Italy read as follows: (1) The Hungarian government to completely evacuate Burgenland; (2) a mixed administrative commission to be established in Sopron; (3) Sopron to be occupied by the Allied Powers; (4) the Hungarian government to demobilize; (5) a plebiscite to be held in Sopron and its surroundings; (6) the zone covered by the plebiscite to be delimited; (7) both parties to submit themselves to the result of the plebiscite; (8) Hungary to compensate for the costs resulting from the delay of the evacuation; (9) still pending war expenditures to be settled by means of arbitration.¹⁸⁰

Torretta tried to make Hungary accept the above terms by means of the following tactics: on the one hand, he urged an economic blockade against Hungary, while on the other, he put pressure on the Hungarian government to accept the Austrian proposal. Hungarian acceptance of the Austrian proposal would entail economic blockade. The scheme proved to be successful: since the Hungarian government feared economic sanctions more than anything else, it accepted the Austrian proposal as a basis for negotiations, and also accepted Italian mediation.¹⁸¹ The head of Italian diplomacy expressed his hope that the government would promote the settlement of the crisis, and offered in return the town of Sopron.¹⁸² According to certain sources, Torretta assured Hungary in writing that the town would be returned eight days after the withdrawal of the Hungarian

¹⁷⁸ ASMAE. 1743–1301. Torretta's cable to Biancheri, September 7, 1921.

¹⁷⁹ ACS. PC. 224–294. Torretta's notice to the Italian mission in Vienna, January 30, 1922; V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 110–167; Katalin Soós: *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁰ ASMAE. 1743. 1404. Torretta's circular telegram, September 20, 1921; 1744. 1466. Torretta to Carraciolo di Castagneta, September 26, 1921.

¹⁸¹ ASMAE. 1744. 1496. Torretta's cable to Carraciolo di Castagneta, September 30, 1921.

¹⁸² R. Mosca: *op. cit.* p. 33.

troops.¹⁸³ In Rome it was believed with good reason that, the majority of the population being Hungarian, the result of the plebiscite would be favourable to Hungary.¹⁸⁴ Two days before the Venice Convention was signed, Bethlen, Bánffy and Torretta concluded a secret agreement on Western Hungary. If no direct agreement was reached in Venice, Torretta committed himself in a declaration to support the pertinent Hungarian territorial claims through the frontier commission, the Italian member of which being instructed accordingly. The agreement would be presented to Horthy in an official form.¹⁸⁵ After these preliminaries the so-called Venice Convention was signed on October 15, 1921 by Bethlen, Bánffy and Schober.¹⁸⁶ The document specified the measures to be taken for the preparation of the plebiscite: the Hungarian government should disband the armed groups; the international commission of generals stationed in Sopron would carry out the administrative and legal functions during the Hungarian evacuation; eight days after the commission announces the normalization of the situation, the plebiscite would be held in Sopron and its surroundings; the "winner" would receive the area eight days after their voting.¹⁸⁷

The members of the Little Entente were displeased with the convention. They blamed the Allied Powers for having coupled the settlement of Burgenland with the Baranya affair (they actually sent several severe warnings to Yugoslavia), for having excluded Czechoslovakia from the negotiations and entrusted Italy, Yugoslavia's main opponent, with the mediation. They regarded the Venice Convention as a grave mistake, creating a precedent for a possible revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty. All this increased the tension between the Western Allies and the Little Entente. In this strained situation, hardly a week after the Venice Convention was signed, the second return attempt of ex-king Charles took place.

The Role of the King's Second Return Attempt in the Consolidation of the Little Entente

Six months after the first abortive attempt, on October 21, 1921, Charles reappeared in Hungary in an attempt to occupy the throne.

¹⁸³ ASMAE. 1743. Torretta's cable to the embassies in London, Paris, and Budapest, October 3, 1921.

¹⁸⁴ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63-474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1056. pp. 224-225. Secret agreement between Bethlen and Torretta about Western Hungary, October 13, 1921.

¹⁸⁵ ASMAE. 1743. 8289. Torretta to the Italian Foreign Ministry, October 13; OL. Küm. pol. K. 63-474. Collection of diplomatic documents. *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1055. pp. 219-225. October 13, 1921.

¹⁸⁶ In details cf. R. Mosca: *op. cit.*; K. Soós: *op. cit.*; V. Jelinek: *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Personally, and through their connections, the Hungarian Carlists continued to encourage the ex-king to act. At home, they intensified the organizational work throughout the whole country: men in their confidence were present both in state offices and in the army, the senior officers of which (mainly those who had belonged to the former K.u.K. [Imperial and Royal] army) could be successfully persuaded by referring to their old oath of allegiance to Charles, which was said to be still valid. In Horthy's immediate entourage the chief of the military cabinet, Boldizsár Láng, was chosen to bring the Regent to compliance in due time. Horthy continued to profess allegiance to the ex-king. In his letter of September 4, for instance, he declared that he would not maintain his present position and could hardly await to transfer power. This was exactly the style of his earlier letters but now he added that the international situation was not appropriate for a restoration.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, however, he took precautionary measures: in order to counterbalance the activity of the Carlists, he started a vigorous propaganda campaign against the return of the Habsburgs. In public administration and in the army he tried to replace pro-Habsburg legitimists with his own followers, and gave orders that the Ostenburg detachment stationed in Western Hungary should return to Budapest on October 23 and be incorporated in the regular army. It was most important for the Carlists to carry out their plans before their military supporters were removed from Burgenland. They were also pressed by the fact that the Allied Powers were demanding the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty. At the request of the Hungarian government, the time-limit was repeatedly extended, but was finally set at November 15. The government wanted to prevent the ratification of the peace treaty at all costs, because this would have meant a considerable demobilization of the Hungarian army, leaving only 35,000 men. Finally, they had to hurry because, although following the first return attempt, Charles had been granted a residence permit by the Swiss authorities, it was only valid for three months. The conspirators feared that Charles would be removed to a remote area, thus making it difficult to carry out their plans.

The Allied Powers and the Hungarian government did their best to obtain a residence permit for Charles in another country. But since every country refused to admit the ex-king, Hungarian foreign minister Bánffy applied on July 12 to the Swiss Federal Council, asking it to allow Charles to stay in Switzerland after August. "Central Europe's peace and quiet depends on the decision of the federal council", he cabled.¹⁸⁹ The members of the Little Entente protested most strongly against this. They demanded that Charles be expelled from Switzerland and

¹⁸⁸ Gordon Brook-Shepherd: *Um Krone und Reich. Die Tragödie des letzten Habsburgerkaisers*. Wien, 1968, p. 337.

¹⁸⁹ *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., Magyar Kir. Minisztérium, vol. I, Annex 40.

transferred to a remote place.¹⁹⁰ Finally, after repeated requests from the Allied Powers, the Swiss prolonged the residence permit until October.¹⁹¹

The Little Entente demanded the removal of Charles. It had information that the Carlists were preparing more action. From June on, the intention of Charles to return received increasing publicity in the international press,¹⁹² and this news spread in diplomatic circles as well. Since the information came from reliable sources, the members of the Little Entente took precautionary measures. On July 23, Beneš instructed the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest to "act in concert with his Romanian and Yugoslav colleagues in case Charles returned".¹⁹³ Take Ionescu gave similar instructions to the Romanian minister: if Charles returned, he should take the most energetic steps in concert with the ministers of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Italy. "Should their protest prove unsuccessful, he should leave Budapest together with his staff within 24 hours."¹⁹⁴ The Yugoslav government did the same; in Belgrade a confidential order of partial mobilization was issued.

Budapest was considerably alarmed by the threat to the country from its neighbours. So the Hungarian government – besides doing its best to procure residence for the ex-king abroad (so that he should not be "obliged" to return to Hungary, because he had nowhere to go) – prepared to resist.¹⁹⁵ At the same time the admission of Hungary to the League of Nations was put on the agenda. The reasons for this were both economic and political, partly to do with a possible second return attempt, and partly to do with the reaction of the neighbours to such an event. Admission to the League of Nations meant that the independence and integrity of every member state was solemnly guaranteed by the full authority of the League. Thus, if Hungary was admitted, it could not be attacked – in principle – if the king returned (this was namely not prohibited by the Trianon Peace Treaty), because any such action would be diametrically opposed to the Covenant of the League of Nations.

We shall return later to the complications over Hungary's admission – here and now we would just say that the Little Entente and Italy resolutely opposed it. Their reasons: Hungary's attitude in the Burgenland affair, and its chaotic domestic conditions. The real aim of Hungary's request, they said, was to achieve

¹⁹⁰ *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., vol. I, p. 30.

¹⁹¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. Report of the French minister in Switzerland. October 15, 1921.

¹⁹² AMZV. PZ. Stockholm 261, report of the Czechoslovak minister in Stockholm, June 23, 1921; PDH. II. doc. 532. Report of the Hungarian representative in Berlin to Bánffy, June 25, 1921.

¹⁹³ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 273, instructions of Beneš to Lejhanec, July 1921.

¹⁹⁴ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 270, report of Lejhanec, Czechoslovak representative in Budapest to Beneš, July 23, 1921.

¹⁹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 65. Report of Clément-Simon, French minister in Belgrade, to Briand, October 6, 1921.

the Habsburg restoration under the protection of the membership in the League of Nations, thus preventing the interference of foreign powers. So they demanded as a prerequisite the dethronement of the Habsburgs by Hungary. Albert Apponyi, delegate of the Hungarian government in Geneva, vigorously protested against this demand. In a statement given to representatives of the world press he emphasized that neither the Trianon Peace Treaty nor the Covenant of the League of Nations included such an obligation which thus could not be imposed as a prerequisite. He referred to the country's sovereignty which did not allow any foreign interference in home affairs, and repeated that no extra obligations not included in the peace treaty could be imposed on Hungary.¹⁹⁶ Thus, Apponyi did not explicitly refute the accusations of the Little Entente, but merely tried to prove Hungary's right to make its own decision on the question of the monarchy. By doing so, he actually encouraged the Carlists.

Meanwhile, preparations for the return of Charles were going on in Hartenstein. A leading figure in this was Aladár Borovizény, chef de cabinet in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, who had asked to be sent on leave after the king's first return attempt and had stayed in the entourage of Charles – with the knowledge and approval of the Hungarian government. By the beginning of October everything had been ready, only the day had to be fixed. The return had to take place before October 22, because the Ostenburg detachment (which was supposed to be the basis of the action in the initial phase at least) was due to return to Budapest on October 23, on Horthy's orders. The return attempt was worked out in every detail. Everything was founded on surprise and had to be carried out within a single day. There were to be no negotiations with the Regent and the government and Buda Castle was to be immediately captured. The replacement of military commanders was organized in advance.

On October 21, 1921 – that is, half a year after the first return attempt and a fortnight after the signing of the Venice convention – the ex-king's aeroplane landed at Dénesfa; Charles immediately went to the near-by city of Sopron, where he formed a new government and set off for the capital with the troops stationed in the area, who had immediately taken his side.

Although the preparations had been given much publicity during the past months, the news still caused general consternation.¹⁹⁷

The Hungarian government learned of the king's return attempt at daybreak on October 23. At 9 o'clock the Council of Ministers met in conference, with military commanders attending. Bethlen informed the participants of the events and of the measures that would be taken at once: (a) the representatives of the Great Powers would be informed of the events and of the government's stand,

¹⁹⁶ Karl Freiherr von Werkmann: *Der Tote von Madeira*. München, 1923, pp. 225 – 226.

¹⁹⁷ Both the politicians and public opinion were misinformed by the démentis of Charles. On October 18, the ex-king invited Walter, head of the Swiss political police, and asked for some supplementary measures for the sake of his personal security. He declared at the same time that he had no intention to leave Switzerland and that all rumours in this respect were unfounded.

according to which "by virtue of the law of 1920. King Charles should not assume the exercise of his royal rights and must again leave the country"; (b) an official statement of similar content should be issued to the Hungarian and the foreign press; (c) in concert with the Minister of Defence a strong order should be issued to every local headquarters, emphasizing that Charles IV should not exercise rights as king and commander-in-chief, the troops should not swear an oath of allegiance to him, nor should they obey his orders.¹⁹⁸

Foreign Minister Bánffy, who also attended the morning session of the cabinet, intended to carry out his part in the decisions in the afternoon. However, at noon the representatives of the Allied Powers presented him with a letter of protest (formulated a short time before at Hohler). In Fouchet's report the events are described as follows: "On October 22, the news came about another return attempt by Charles... Vinci brought the telegram sent by the Commission of Generals (residing in Sopron - M.A.). We went together to the British minister, who did not yet know anything about the event. According to the instructions received earlier in the Habsburg question, we wrote a joint letter, referring to our note of April 2 presented during the first putsch, to the Hungarian government... We formulated our letter in the most emphatic style. At noon all three of us presented the letter to Bánffy. Then ... we went to Horthy."¹⁹⁹

Thus, the High Commissioners lodged the protest with Bánffy, before the latter had carried out the cabinet decision obliging him to inform the allied powers. Consequently, the Hungarian Foreign Minister could not have "ordered" the diplomatic protest of October 22, as alleged in Hungarian historiography.²⁰⁰

As a matter of fact, after having received the letter of protest, Bánffy informed the allied representatives asking them to send delegates and officers to Győr to negotiate with the ex-king in order to dissuade him from his plan and to force him to leave the country. However, the High Commissioners turned down the request, saying that "it is the business of the Hungarian government to set aside Charles".²⁰¹

Now, the three diplomats called upon Horthy. The Regent emphasized that his opinion about the restoration was unchanged and that he would do his best to prevent it, by sending all his troops against Charles. However, he did not disguise

¹⁹⁸ Elek Karsai: *Számjeltáviratok valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek* (Cipher telegrams to all Royal Hungarian Legations). Budapest, 1969.

¹⁹⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 66-76. Fouchet's report to Briand, October 28, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 77-78. Note of the Allied Powers to Hungary, October 22, 1921; *Documents diplomatiques relatifs au détronement des Habsburg*. Budapest, n.d., pp. 4-5, 12-13.

²⁰⁰ E. Karsai: *op. cit.* pp. 234-238.

²⁰¹ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 66-76. Fouchet's report to Briand, October 28, 1921. AMZV. PZ. Budapest 440, cable of Čermak, secretary of the Czechoslovak mission, to Beneš, October 22, 1921; *ibid.* 476. Cable of Čermak to Beneš, October 23, 1921.

his reservations, saying that "the Hungarian soldier does not like to fight against another Hungarian soldier".²⁰²

Finally, Hohler, Vinci and Fouchet went to Bethlen. Fouchet describes in his report the visible mental torment of the Prime Minister when he had to turn against his own King.²⁰³

Almost at the same time, the representatives of the Little Entente (informed probably by Vinci) also called on Bánffy, Horthy and Bethlen and lodged a joint protest against the presence of Charles in Hungary. As spokesman for all three of them, the Yugoslav representative Milojević qualified the events as a "casus belli". The Hungarian Foreign Minister declared that his government had that morning taken the decision to accept battle against Charles, who was advancing towards Budapest.²⁰⁴

Čermak, the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest reported to Beneš that the attitude of the Hungarian government was vacillating; in his opinion, no firm steps by the Allied Powers could be expected, and any loss of time would have incalculable consequences.²⁰⁵ The same day Beneš instructed the representative "to act in any event in concert with the other members of the Little Entente and with Italy. He [i.e. Čermak] should maintain contact with the French and British representatives as well. Even if the other missions should decide to leave Budapest, he should leave only if the Yugoslav and Romanian representatives did so". Beneš added that preparations were being made for all eventualities. The standpoint was the same as for the first return attempt.²⁰⁶ The Czechoslovak attitude was as follows: (1) any action would be carried out together with the Little Entente; (2) Czechoslovakia was prepared to resort to the most radical means, and to take immediate military measures; (3) the presence of Charles in Hungary was a "casus belli"; (4) even if he did not stay, strong diplomatic or eventually military pressure would be put on Hungary in order to bring about a definite solution of the Habsburg and Burgenland questions; (5) if the Allied Powers did not join Czechoslovakia, it would advance alone with the Little Entente, even against the wishes of the Allied Powers.²⁰⁷

The next day, October 23, the Czechoslovak government informed its allies in the Little Entente of its intentions and its claims. According to the conventions of

²⁰² AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 66-76. Fouchet's report to Briand, October 28, 1921.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*, doc. 32. p. 81.

²⁰⁵ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 451, cable of Čermak to Beneš, October 22, 1921.

²⁰⁶ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 439, cable of Beneš to Čermak.

²⁰⁷ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 448, cable of Beneš to Čermak, October 22, 1921; cf. *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*, doc. 32. p. 81. The cable published by the Czechoslovak foreign ministry was re-written in stylistic regard. The claims were reduced to two items. The demand concerning Burgenland was omitted, and so was the intention of Czechoslovakia to take immediate military measures and to act against the will of the Entente.

the Little Entente, a "basis foederis" existed and thus, four divisions were mobilized as a temporary measure.²⁰⁸ Preparations were made for military intervention. If Charles won, the Czechoslovak army would immediately march into Hungary. If Horthy took a strong stand against the ex-king, the Czechoslovak government would present an ultimatum to the Hungarian government within 24 to 48 hours with the following conditions: (1) All members of the Habsburg dynasty to be deprived of their right to the throne; (2) The disarming of Hungary with the participation of the Little Entente; (3) Implementation of the peace treaty, irrespective of the Venice negotiations; (4) Reimbursement of the costs of mobilization.²⁰⁹

The Yugoslav government accepted the proposal of Beneš, although it did not quite agree with the clause concerning Burgenland. In this respect it rather shared the view of Romania, according to which the abrogation of the Venice convention could not be demanded.²¹⁰ An agreement was reached about mobilization and military co-operation. On the following day, October 24, Czechoslovakia called up 5 divisions, Yugoslavia 3 (completing its 1st and 4th army),²¹¹ and began to concentrate the units along the Hungarian frontier. It was decided that if Horthy lost the battle against Charles, both armies would cross the frontier.²¹²

Romania had major reservations about the proposals of Beneš and, as had happened at the time of the first return attempt, did not join the action by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The Romanian government was of the opinion that any action was subject to the agreement of the Great Powers and that the Venice convention should not be involved. As already mentioned, the Yugoslav government was of the same opinion in the latter question.

The contrasting opinions caused tension within the alliance and prevented the realization of the Beneš plan. The French minister in Belgrade warned Briand that it would be difficult to stop the Little Entente if it decided intervention was necessary; however, any independent military action by the countries would be

²⁰⁸ Not four, but five age groups were called up, together with the specialists of every age group. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 36. f. 205. Report of the head of the French military mission in Prague to Fouchet, (n.d.).

²⁰⁹ AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 487, cable of Beneš to the Czechoslovak mission in Belgrade. The above suggestions sent to Belgrade are not included in the collection of sources published by the Czechoslovak foreign ministry. Only the cables sent to Paris and London can be found therein, with substantial modifications of contents and style. *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*. doc. 37. pp. 91-92.

²¹⁰ We shall see that this item was timely not included in the note.

²¹¹ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 36. ff. 230-233. Cable of the French minister in Belgrade to Briand, October 25, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 38. Cable of the French minister in Belgrade to Briand, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 36. ff. 192-193. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 24, 1921.

²¹² *Ibid.*

prevented by the conflicts within the alliance.²¹³ The French diplomat was right. Take Ionescu, although also advocating a settlement of the Habsburg question, thought that the ultimatum suggested by Beneš was untimely and recommended to his allies that they be careful. Before carrying out their plan, he suggested, they should offer Horthy military assistance against Charles, and they should not act without knowing the standpoint of the Great Powers. Of course, he also considered the situation extremely grave. He explained to the French minister that a renewed occupation of Hungary had to be contemplated; at the cabinet meeting of October 24, the mobilization of six divisions had been ordered; should the Hungarian government fail to keep its promise concerning Charles, these troops would advance directly against Budapest; they would also march into Burgenland, if Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia did so. Nevertheless, the Romanian Foreign Minister continued to restrain his colleagues from any hasty action.²¹⁴

At the same time, Austrian troops were also moved to the Hungarian frontier. Although the Austrian government declared its neutrality in regard to the return attempt of Charles, it took precautionary measures. The Wehrmacht was brought up to strength and the League of Nations was asked to send military units to Austria. The Allied Powers were requested to arrange the transfer of Western Hungary, the disarming of Hungary and the banishing of Hungarians who had taken part in the plot.²¹⁵ In regard to a possible ultimatum by the Little Entente, the government emphasized Austria's neutrality, its loyalty to the Venice convention and its readiness to fulfil all its conditions.²¹⁶ However, it offered political support to the Little Entente.

Due to the concentration of troops, the situation became critical. Thus, the Conference of Ambassadors sent a strong note to the Hungarian government on October 24, demanding: (1) the dethronement of Charles and his expulsion from Hungary; (2) the ex-king had to leave Hungary in a way decided by the Allies;

²¹³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 20–23. Report of Clément-Simon to Briand, October 25, 1921.

²¹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 234–236. Daeschner's cable to Briand, October 25, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 237–238. Daeschner's cable to Briand, October 25, 1921. The decision was not carried out by the Romanian government, since Charles had been arrested meanwhile. The Romanian minister of defence and the chief of staff told General Pétain that no order of mobilization had been issued; the mobilization decree was ready and waited only for the King's signature. But in any case, it would be only a partial mobilization. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 85–86. Cable of General Pétain to Marshal Foch, October 27, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Bukarešt 334, cable of the Czechoslovak minister in Bucharest to Beneš, October 24, 1921; *ibid.* 336. Cable of the French minister in Bucharest to Beneš, October 25, 1921.

²¹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 12–13. Cable of Lefèvre-Pontalis to Briand, October 28, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Viděn 155, cable of the Czechoslovak minister in Vienna to Beneš, October 28, 1921.

²¹⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 57–58. Cable of Lefèvre-Pontalis to Briand, October 28, 1921.

(3) if the Hungarian government did not meet these demands, the responsibility for the intervention of the neighbouring states would fall on Hungary.²¹⁷

The same day the three member-states of the Little Entente sent a note to Briand, describing in generalities the threat to the peace in Central Europe. They considered the return attempt to be a consequence of the Burgenland events. They asked the Allied Powers to take urgent measures to safeguard the peace.²¹⁸ The note did not include the items suggested by Beneš, presumably because the different interests could not be reconciled.

Before analysing the standpoint of the Great Powers, let us deal briefly with the efforts of the Hungarian government, its military struggle against Charles and its diplomatic activity aimed at preventing the intervention of the Little Entente.

The decisions of the cabinet meeting and the general order of the Regent – both published on October 22 – made it clear that Hungary was determined to fight. Due to the political situation abroad and at home, disadvantageous for the restoration – but only for this reason –, the return of Charles had to be postponed. Horthy emphasized in his general order that "... power cannot be transferred to His Majesty Charles IV but by the elected Regent of the country. But under the present circumstances this would cause the final perdition of our fatherland".²¹⁹

The Hungarian government certainly acted in the spirit of the declarations of the Conference of Ambassadors and in accordance with its promises to the neighbouring states. It did its best to organize resistance and to force the ex-king to leave the country. Thus, it "behaved correctly", as was stated repeatedly by the Allied Powers and the Conference of Ambassadors.

We shall not dwell upon the military events which are well known: after minor skirmishes the so-called national army of Horthy defeated the royal troops,²²⁰ and Charles was arrested on October 24, some 60 kilometres from Budapest. Bánffy, who was in close contact with the Budapest representatives of the Allied Powers and the Little Entente, informed them at once.²²¹

However, the affair was far from being closed – the major diplomatic complications were still ahead. As already mentioned, Beneš had formulated – and sent to his allies of the Little Entente – a note setting out the Czechoslovak stand-

²¹⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 213. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to the Hungarian government, October 24, 1921. The note disregards in effect the claims of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for these concerned only the dethronement of Charles. Cf. ASMAE, 1744–1729. Torretta to Carraciolo di Castagneta October 24, 1921.

²¹⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 216. Note of the Little Entente to Briand, October 24, 1921.

²¹⁹ Karsai: *op. cit.* p. 233.

²²⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 197. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 24, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapest 494, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, October 26, 1921.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

point. This document – unlike the note of October 22, dealt only with the consequences of Charles's presence in Hungary – and contained the claims Hungary was supposed to meet even if the ex-king were expelled, and all this within 24 to 48 hours.

As a matter of fact, on October 23 it was already evident that Horthy was unwilling to transfer power to Charles, in fact, he put up successful resistance and dealt with the return attempt within a short time. It was feared that the Allied Powers would regard the matter as closed and Hungary would come off strengthened, winning the sympathies of the Western allies for its "correct" action.

This actually happened: the king's return attempt was defeated on October 24, and on October 25 Briand cabled the French diplomatic missions in Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest that "the loyalty and resoluteness of the Hungarian government, its respect for the Great Powers and for peace must be acknowledged". He also instructed the representatives to notify the Little Entente governments as well as the British and Italian governments. He added that it was the wish of the Allied Powers that no measures be taken against Hungary without their knowledge.²²²

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia actually continued mobilization even after the defeat of the return attempt. The Czechoslovak forces were increased to 500,000 men, most of them being stationed along the borderline river Ipoly.²²³ So the crisis was not ended by the arrest of Charles, because – as Beneš explained to the French minister Couget – there was no guarantee for the future; Charles and his son must be forced to abdicate; all Habsburgs must be divested of their right to the throne by means of a declaration; Charles should be extradited to the Czechoslovak authorities, who would intern him until the Great Powers could decide on his future. He also demanded the implementation of the peace treaty in regard to the disarmament and the Burgenland questions, the participation of the Little Entente in the military commission, and the reimbursement of the mobilization costs.²²⁴

Of course, Beneš knew very well that a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav war against Hungary would be absolutely opposed by the Western powers, and thus regarded such action as the last resort. Concurrently with war preparations, he therefore started diplomatic negotiations mainly aimed at winning France to his plans. On October 27, he sent a letter to Briand and Berthelot, stating that the situation in Central Europe was critical; in four days he would decide whether Czechoslovakia would go to war; his allies in the Little Entente supported him.

"I do not want war, but if the Allies do not offer a guarantee and do not support our claims against Hungary, I shall not be in a position to restrain public

²²² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 245. Briand's circular telegram, October 25, 1921.

²²³ *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* (Return attempts of Charles IV), Budapest, n.d., doc. 63. p. 218.

²²⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. f. 5. Couget to Briand, October 26, 1921.

opinion... Public opinion wants war"²²⁵ he wrote. Beneš, who was at that time Prime Minister as well, indicated that it was of vital importance for Czechoslovakia to achieve the dethronement of the Habsburgs, the implementation of the Trianon Peace Treaty, Hungary's disarmament, the participation of the Little Entente in the military commission and the reimbursement of the mobilization costs. He requested the French government to support him in these questions. If he received a positive answer by November 1, he would be ready to postpone military action and to start negotiations with Hungary.

Beneš referred to the pressure of public opinion and to the agreement of his allies in the Little Entente. In reality, however, it was not public opinion putting pressure on the government, but just the other way round; Czechoslovak propaganda tried to generate a war psychosis. Just as during the first return attempt, Beneš tried to use the crisis to promote national unity and consolidate the political situation at home. By creating a war-like atmosphere, he certainly accomplished a great deal, particularly in foreign policy. Menaced by Czechoslovak and Yugoslav bayonets, the Horthy régime certainly acted more resolutely and swiftly, and there is no doubt that this forced the Allied Powers (and through them Hungary, too) to carry out the dethronement of the Habsburgs. However, within the Little Entente, good relations only really existed with Yugoslavia and even here there were difficulties (e.g. differences of opinion in regard to the Venice convention), while agreement with Romania was utterly non-existent. To be able to refer in his letter to Briand and Berthelot to the harmony in and the support of the Little Entente, Beneš had to leave out the points disapproved of by Belgrade and Bucharest. Indeed, the letter did not include the claim concerning Burgenland, the presentation of the ultimatum, nor the intention of the Little Entente to act even against the wishes of the Entente.

The two items deemed as important earlier, were actually not included in the instructions, which Beneš sent to the Czechoslovak representatives on October 26; he nevertheless continued to insist on the claims supported by Belgrade, irrespective of Bucharest's standpoint. He emphasized that Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were ready to send an ultimatum to the Hungarian government on November 1, demanding the dethronement of the Habsburgs. "The answer can only be yes or no. If it is yes, we shall sign a protocol, and negotiations will be started about the details; if it is no, military action will be taken... Proceed care-

²²⁵ "Je ne veux pas la guerre, mais si cette fois-ci les Alliés ne nous donnent pas une assurance solennelle et s'ils ne voulaient pas nous appuyer auprès les Magyars pour exécuter nos demandes, je ne serai pas en état de pouvoir arrêter l'opinion publique chez nous. Je veux à tout prix arriver à l'accord entre la Petite et la Grande Entente et agir d'accord avec elle. Mais ces quatre points sont pour nous vitaux... Notre opinion publique veut la guerre." Beneš asked Berthelot to take measures before Briand's visit to America. Berthelot's reply: "... it would be difficult to explain to the public the first point, since the Hungarian government has accepted and fulfilled the claims of the conference". AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 61-63. Letter of Beneš to Berthelot, October 17, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 109-111. Briand's circular telegram, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 101-102. Cambon's letter to Briand, October 29.

fully with the Great Entente [Allied Powers]; do not irritate them, but let them know that they cannot reject our demands. I suggest: do not ask for their consent in anything, and do not make any concessions."²²⁶

Wishing to obtain not only the diplomatic, but also the military assistance of the French government, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister addressed a surprising request to the French Premier, asking him to agree that the intervention be carried out under the command of French officers stationed in Czechoslovakia.²²⁷ Briand refused, without excluding the possibility of a situation leading to war between Czechoslovakia and Hungary; in such a case, Czechoslovakia might reckon with the assistance of the French officers stationed in the country.²²⁸ Even Secretary General Berthelot, the great supporter of Beneš, was sceptical in regard to the political claims of the latter. He explained to Osuský, Czechoslovak minister in Paris, that it would be difficult to support the demand for dethronement, since the Hungarian government had accepted and fulfilled the demands of the Conference. He also had doubts about the other items.²²⁹

Thus, the attitude of Horthy and his government during the king's second return attempt, the energetic action against Charles and the readiness to submit in every respect to the Conference of Ambassadors, made the best impression on the Allies.²³⁰ After the arrest of Charles, until October 29 the Allies' only demand was the dethronement of the king; this was accepted by Bethlen although he kept insisting, as he had from the beginning, that the question of the monarchy as a constitutional form was the country's internal affair. On the one hand, the Hungarian government was most careful not to antagonize the Allies, since it expected from them protection against the threats of its neighbours. On the other, it did not want to offer Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia a pretext for military intervention. Thus, it offered most resolute resistance to the army of Charles without relying upon the military "assistance" of its neighbours. After the defeat of the return attempt, those responsible were arrested at once and the troops ordered back to their barracks, thus demonstrating the government's peaceful intentions and its standpoint against the king's return. But since all these measures

²²⁶ These quotations were not included in *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*, published by the Czechoslovak foreign ministry. I regarded their accentuation as necessary because – as will be shown – the Beneš ultimatum was going to create considerable diplomatic complications.

²²⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. Briand's cable to Couget, November 3, 1921.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* Fouchet warned repeatedly his government not to let French officers participate in an attack against Hungary at the head or on the side of the Czechoslovak army because, as he put it, (1) "it is not necessary to jeopardize without any special reason the influence of France on Hungary"; (2) "the Conference of Ambassadors is against it anyway". AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 8, 1921.

²²⁹ AMZV. PZ. Paříž 516, Osuský's letter to Beneš, October 28, 1921.

²³⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 196–197. Fouchet's aide mémoire to Briand, October 24, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 38. ff. 14–25. Aide mémoire about the conversation Praznovszky–Laroche, October 26, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 26–29. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 27, 1921.

did not remove the animosity of the neighbouring states, the Hungarian government asked the Allies for protection against the threat of the Little Entente. From October 24 on, it repeatedly called their attention to the situation, requesting their intercession.²³¹

The representatives of the Allied Powers intervened with the governments of the Little Entente. The demand of Beneš concerning the Habsburg dynasty was rejected.²³² The Conference once more warned the governments to abstain from any action against Hungary that would be incompatible with the standpoint of the Allied Powers. The attitude of the Hungarian government gave no excuse for military intervention, and the Hungarians hoped that the military preparations would be stopped.²³³ This question, which, otherwise, had absorbed the attention of the Allied Powers to a considerable extent until then, now came to the centre of their policy. It became clear that the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav mobilization had no longer anything to do with the conduct of the Hungarian government, nor with the king's return attempt, in fact, the countries of the Little Entente wished to aggravate the crisis instead of solving it. The reasons also became evident: in this way the Allied Powers – afraid of the possible outbreak of war – were supposed by them to accept their demands and to make Hungary accept them. In addition, they wanted to overthrow the pro-Habsburg Prime Minister Bethlen and to bring the anti-Habsburg Smallholders' Party to power.²³⁴ Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia continued the mobilizing even after the Hungarian government had accepted the note from the Conference of Ambassadors demanding the dethronement of every Habsburg.

However, the pressure from the Allies was so strong, that Beneš wavered in his resolution, as shown by a telegram to Belgrade: "... under the circumstances I would not like to make war... We must be prepared for everything, and show the Allies that we are ready to do anything, but if possible, war must be avoided..." To the outside world, however, the sabre-rattling continued – there is no trace of any vacillation in the note sent by the Little Entente to Paris, London and Rome,²³⁵ on October 28, repeating the earlier demands and laying special stress upon the dethronement of the Habsburgs. The same day, the Little Entente's representatives in Budapest presented a collective note to the Hungarian gov-

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 105–108. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to the Czechoslovak, the Yugoslav, and the Romanian government, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 30–33. Couget's cable to Briand, October 27, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 516, 523, aide mémoire of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. f. 8. Report of Charles Roux to Briand, October 26, 1921.

²³⁵ AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 530, cable of Beneš to the Czechoslovak minister in Belgrade, October 26, 1921; *ibid.* PZ. Budapešť 533. Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, October 29, 1921. Bulletin of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* 329. Osuský's cable to Beneš, October 29, 1921. V. Olivová: *op. cit.* p. 696.

ernment, demanding the immediate dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty, or else they would take measures which would have serious consequences for the Hungarian government.²³⁶ This note was not an ultimatum – but certainly its precursor.

Bánffy at once applied to the representatives of the Allies for assistance. The High Commissioners, who had already deplored the menacing attitude of the Little Entente, now advised their respective governments to intervene at once to safeguard peace. Fouchet, the French High Commissioner, considered that the dethronement of every Habsburg carried the risk that the supporters of the Archduke Joseph in Parliament would turn against the Little Entente, and this would cause public disturbance in the country, whereas the dethronement of Charles alone could be carried out without any trouble.²³⁷ Thus, Fouchet had clearly not abandoned his plan of setting the Archduke Joseph on the Hungarian throne.

All three Great Powers observed with unease the war preparations of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and their apparent intention to intervene against Hungary. Moreover, the attitude of Italy and France to the second attempt at restoration differed from their approach to the first return attempt. Although the international press – especially the German, but also the Austrian, the Italian and even the British newspapers – continued to write about the role played by the French government in the return attempt,²³⁸ our research sets the question in another light. As a matter of fact, the second attempt of Charles was unequivocally opposed by Briand from the very beginning: he was satisfied with the energetic measures taken by the Hungarian government, reproached the Swiss government for its negligence in making possible the return of the ex-king²³⁹ and tried everything to persuade Spain to admit Charles and his family. However, Briand's anger was only directed at Charles IV, with whom he was most displeased. Charles had put Briand in a difficult situation by openly claiming that Briand supported him. Charles's ill-prepared action was doomed to failure. By this action, however, he deprived himself of the chance of returning to the Hungarian throne

²³⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 87–88. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 28, 1921.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 45–46. Report of the French consul-general in Stuttgart to Briand, October 27, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 34–35. Cable of Lefèvre-Pontalis to Briand, October 26, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 36. ff. 246–248; Report of the French minister in Berlin to Briand October 25, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 241–242. Cable of Montèle to Briand, October 25, 1921; *ibid.* H. 38. ff. 43–44. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 27, 1921. *Le Temps* published a long démenti of the insinuation of the *Manchester Guardian*.

²³⁹ Briand and – upon his instruction – Cambon supported the British proposal that was discussed at the session of the Conference of Ambassadors on October 24. Accordingly, a note should have been presented to the Swiss government, reminding it of its negligence in regard to King Charles. Italy rejected the proposal. Finally it was agreed that the attention of the Swiss government will be directed in a friendly tone to the neglects. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 244. Briand's circular telegram, October 25, 1921.

and made it difficult to set any other member of the Habsburg dynasty on the throne – a scheme that would have been welcomed by Briand. Even during the second return attempt, when the main demand of the Little Entente was to depose every Habsburg, the Premier asked the Hungarian government to dethrone Charles alone. Only after the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors taken on October 29, calling for the dethronement of every Habsburg, was he compelled to accept the common standpoint. “German propaganda” – cabled Briand – “is trying to sow discord among the Central European allies, by spreading the rumour that France supported the second putsch of Charles. This must be refuted at all costs by the allied governments and in the press. Not only did the French government not support Charles, but it took the initiative in dethroning him... For the sake of peace the French government is opposed to the return of any Habsburg.”²⁴⁰ Of course, this did not mean that certain French circles did not participate in the preparation of the second return attempt. Presumably they did, but by now Briand stayed aloof from them.

Compared with the situation during the first return attempt, Italian policy took an opposite turn. This was due to the changes in foreign policy, which came with the new Foreign Minister Torretta. Torretta, the former ambassador in Vienna, replaced Sforza shortly after the first return attempt. Though emphasizing that Italy's foreign policy would remain unchanged, he still modified the line of his predecessor on several questions, including, in regard to the Little Entente, especially towards Czechoslovakia. Torretta disapproved of the consolidation of the alliance after the first return attempt, the adherence of Romania to a political bloc which was dominated by Slavs, with Prague as its centre. There were also the efforts of Beneš to strengthen the position of Czechoslovakia by joining up with Austria, and he was also looking for contacts with Hungary. Therefore Torretta prevented Beneš from mediating the Burgenland question (although the latter had been invited to do so by the Hungarian government), and successfully persuaded the Conference of Ambassadors to entrust Italy with the task.²⁴¹ During the second return attempt he again opposed the ambitions of Beneš. Whereas at Easter there was close co-operation between Italy and the Little Entente (regular contact between their representatives in Budapest), and Italy supported every initiative of the latter, i.e. the presentation of an ultimatum, readiness to join the military intervention, it now refused any kind of co-operation, in fact, the Italian Foreign Minister most energetically opposed the claims of Beneš: the Burgenland plan (that would have destroyed his great personal achievement, the

²⁴⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. f. 61. Briand's circular telegram, October 28, 1921. The last statement is untrue: he actually assumed this standpoint only after an energetic pressure from Great Britain and the Little Entente in early November; until then, he did not claim the dethronement of every Habsburg, but supported the ambitions of the Archduke Joseph.

²⁴¹ Torretta's argument: Czechoslovakia cannot function as an arbitrator, having similar problems in Upper Silesia. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 56. ff. 28–33. Couget's report to Briand, November 20, 1921.

Venice Convention), the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav mobilization²⁴² and the proposed intervention. He also opposed the plan for Little Entente participation in the control of Hungarian rearmament and the reimbursement of the mobilization costs by Hungary. There was only one thing he approved: Charles had to be forced to leave Hungary and had to be dethroned by law. To this end, he put strong pressure on the Hungarian government.²⁴³ Unlike Sforza, however, he did not demand the dethronement of every Habsburg, as stipulated by the Rapallo Convention and the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors. He certainly handled the question most carefully, and the Italian press discussed the affair of Charles quite separately from that of the other Habsburgs. In fact, it was rumoured in diplomatic quarters that Torretta was ready to invite a Habsburg archduke to the Hungarian throne, for instance the Archduke Joseph or his son, and had even had some talks in this matter with Bethlen and Bánffy during the negotiations in Venice.²⁴⁴ Torretta's standpoint on this question caused some tension between Italy and the Allies. Especially in London, the encouragement of the Hungarian government was taken amiss.

As at the time of the first return attempt, the Foreign Office took the most energetic steps in order to solve the crisis. Its action was again of decisive importance. Along with its protests to Budapest,²⁴⁵ it put pressure on the Little Entente, especially on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: Clerk threatened to break diplomatic relations with Prague, Jung did the same in Belgrade. Both demanded an immediate stop to military preparations.²⁴⁶ At the Conference of Ambassadors the British representative pressed hard for measures aimed at solving the crisis, vetoing every proposal based on the excessive demands of the Little Entente and those of the French. As a matter of fact, Briand sent the demands of Czechoslovakia to the Conference of Ambassadors, instructing the French representative to "turn the full attention of the Conference on the démarche of Beneš". He him-

²⁴² AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 53-55. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 28, 1921; ASMAE 1743-1690. Torretta's cable to the Italian embassy in Paris and London, October 27, 1921; *ibid.* 1737. Torretta's cable to the Italian mission in Prague.

²⁴³ It was rumoured in diplomatic circles that Italy knew about the second attempt of Charles. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. f. 1. Daeschner's cable to Briand October 26, 1921. The French ambassador in London reported that according to well-informed circles Italy had encouraged Charles for the second return attempt, since Rome was supporting everything that might serve as a pretext for an intervention in the Danube Basin. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 36. ff. 241-242. Montiéle's report to Briand, October 25, 1921.

²⁴⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 9-11. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 26, 1921.

²⁴⁵ The representative of the British government, as initiator, played in those days a decisive role in Budapest.

²⁴⁶ Britain put pressure on Austria as well, claiming the preservation of its neutrality. Its minister in Vienna had several talks with the Chancellor, who promised that Austria would not adhere to an eventual ultimatum of the Little Entente and would remain loyal to the Venice agreement. AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 38. ff. 57-58. Cable of Lefèvre-Pontalis to Briand, October 28, 1921.

self shared the sentiments of the Czechoslovak government about the need to safeguard peace in Central Europe.²⁴⁷ Of course, in his diplomatic formulation he did not specify which measures he would approve of or not, for keeping the peace. For this reason, Briand did not reply at once to Beneš's letter. Beneš repeatedly threatened with intervention. On October 28, Beneš told the French ambassador Couget that mobilization would be completed by November 1, but he wanted to know in advance the views of the Great Powers in regard to his four demands.²⁴⁸

Beneš's letter was discussed by the Conference of Ambassadors on October 29. Laroche supported all Beneš's demands, stating that they accorded with the views of the two other members of the Little Entente. He added that, according to his information, the situation was tense in these three states, and therefore France deemed it necessary to support the Czechoslovak demands – all the more, since they were compatible with the Peace Treaty of Trianon. Of course, his government did not oppose the Venice Convention, but thought that its implementation should be postponed to a later, more peaceful time. The participation of the Little Entente would be useful, he said, because these countries were the most interested and the best informed in this matter. It had to be understood that they wished to avoid unnecessary expense. The question was interpreted in a different way by Cambon, chairman of the Conference, who stood nearer to the British and Italian position than to that of his own government. The British delegate Hardinge, rejected all the demands of the Little Entente, saying that his government believed that the successor states wanted to use the return attempt to realize their own individual interests, and that this had to be prevented. The Italian delegate Bonin Longare agreed with him. It was impossible to accept the demands of Beneš, he said, especially the one concerning the Venice Convention, this being no business of the Little Entente. The Convention had been concluded with the mediation of the Allied Powers and approved by the Conference of Ambassadors. He also categorically rejected the other items. Together with the British representative, he expressed the opinion that the Little Entente, by profiting from the events in Hungary, wanted to put pressure on the Great Powers in order to achieve their aims. This would be dangerous for the peace in Central Europe.

In a long discussion, Laroche reminded the British and the Italian delegates of the decisions taken by the Conference of Ambassadors in February 1920, and April 1921, directed against the Habsburgs; Beneš was merely asking for confirmation. He emphasized that peace was endangered in Central Europe. Finally, Hardinge and Bonin Longare accepted the French proposal: the Hungarian government should be requested to dethrone every Habsburg. However, they ab-

²⁴⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 114–115. Letter of the French foreign ministry to Osuský, October 29, 1921.

²⁴⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 49–51. Couget's cable to Briand, October 28, 1921.

solutely rejected all the other demands.²⁴⁹ The Conference decided as follows: a note would be sent to the ambassadors accredited to the states of the Little Entente, who would be instructed to present a *démarche* to the respective governments, in reply to the letter of Beneš, the text of which would be transmitted to the representatives in Budapest. The latter would present a note to the Hungarian government, demanding the dethronement of every Habsburg. The Conference also formulated a reply to Beneš: except for the first item, all demands were rejected; as far as the participation of the Little Entente in the arms control process was concerned, it was promised that the control commission would rely on the knowledge of the Little Entente. In regard to the captive ex-king, the British delegate explained the position of his government. Charles' deportation would be the duty of the British fleet; it would be desirable not to let him pass through Budapest, but to transport him from Tihany directly to another port; he had to leave Hungary as soon as possible and not be transported through Hungarian territory. Under the pretext that the level of the Danube in Budapest was too low for the British ship, Charles was taken to Baja in Southern Hungary; Madeira was chosen as his new (and final) home.²⁵⁰

The Quai d'Orsay informed Osuský at once about the discussion and the decision of the Conference. The next day, Cambon cabled to Beneš that the Conference would demand that *today* (*italics mine* – M.Á.) the Hungarian government dethrone every Habsburg, but that the fulfilment of the other demands was not possible.²⁵¹

Beneš replied in a long letter to the *démarche* of the Conference of October 30. He expressed his thanks for the acceptance of the most important demand; that Hungary was obliged to dethrone all the Habsburgs. He referred to the unstable situation in Central Europe, adding that the states of the Little Entente were of the opinion that the Trianon Peace Treaty was not being implemented as resolutely and consistently as those of Versailles and Saint-Germain. The Czechoslovak government regarded the disarmament of Hungary as a matter of utmost importance, this being the main obstacle to the implementation of the peace treaty. The Little Entente, he added, knew exactly, what was happening in Hungary, including the political methods of the Hungarian authorities, and could therefore usefully co-operate with the Allies in the fulfilment of the difficult task of disarmament. It remained only to make clear the form of this co-operation. The rejection of the fourth demand (reimbursement of the mobilization costs),

²⁴⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 101–102. Cambon's letter to Briand, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 109–111. Briand's circular telegram, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* f. 105. Briand's circular telegram, October 29, 1921.

²⁵⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. ff. 115–118. Aide mémoire about the session of the Conference of Ambassadors of October 29; *ibid.* ff. 103–104. Peretti de la Rocca's circular telegram, October 29, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 104–108. Peretti de la Rocca's circular telegram, October 29 1921; *ibid.* 99. Peretti de la Rocca's circular telegram, October 29, 1921.

²⁵¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 38. f. 100. Cambon's cable to Beneš, October 29, 1921.

however, was regarded by Beneš as unfair, since Czechoslovakia had been forced by the attitude of Hungary to mobilize its army, the first protests of the Budapest representatives to Horthy on October 22 having been unsuccessful: the Regent had refused to take adequate measures against Charles. Only after repeated requests and the threat of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav mobilization did the Hungarian government resign itself to the necessary action. The Czechoslovak government remained convinced, concluded Beneš, that without their intervention the Hungarian government would not have given proof of the attitude that was now being seen as "correct". As a matter of fact, there may be some truth in this conclusion: the fear of military intervention certainly induced the Hungarian government to take resolute measures without delay. But the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister misinformed the Conference of Ambassadors by declaring that the first intervention on October 22 had been unsuccessful and Horthy had refused to take any steps against Charles. Just the opposite was true.

As already described, the Conference of Ambassadors informed Beneš orally of its decisions on October 29 and on October 30 in writing. A demand addressed *the same day* to the Hungarian government called on it to *depose the Habsburg dynasty* without delay. In reality, however, this happened only the following day, and not by chance, for it was hoped that the decision would reassure the Little Entente. On the other hand, Bethlen – without having received new instructions – acted according to the Conference note of October 28, proclaiming the dethronement of Charles and delivering him to the commander of the British fleet. For this was what the Hungarian government had been asked to do.²⁵² The Conference members had precise information about the preparatory measures taken by the Hungarian Prime Minister: he tried to persuade Charles (already in custody) to abdicate willingly, and when the ex-king refused, he wished to have the abdication proclaimed by Parliament. So the Hungarian government was still preparing the dethronement of Charles on October 30, although the dethronement of the whole Habsburg dynasty had already been decided in Paris: the day before, on October 29. Bethlen presumably knew about it, but he also knew that the Great Powers, especially Italy and France, would regard as undesirable the exclusion of every Habsburg from the throne, as was said point-blank by Torretta during the negotiations in Venice.

The French mission in Budapest led by Fouchet, gave Bethlen every assistance in carrying out his plan. The French High Commissioner – together with the Archduke Joseph – helped prepare a Bill that would make it possible to set the Archduke on the throne. On October 30 he reported to Briand that everything was ready for the abdication of Charles. Should the king refuse to abdicate, the Parliament would proclaim it. "However, it seems wiser to postpone the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty to a later date, since it would needlessly

²⁵² AMZV. PZ. Paříž 334, letter of Beneš to Osuský, October 30, 1921. According to Beneš, the Horthy regime was at first vacillating in the question of fighting against Charles. Initially Bethlen refused to deliver Charles to the British. Cf. V. Olivová: *op. cit.* pp. 694–695.

complicate the situation." In fact, Fouchet repeatedly misinformed Briand by stating that the exclusion of every Habsburg would cause public disturbance in Hungary.²⁵³

Wishing to make an end to this manoeuvring behind the scenes, Beneš summoned the Hungarian representative Tahy at 8 o'clock in the evening on October 29, and asked him to send the following demands to Budapest: (1) The Hungarian government must declare that it will exclude every Habsburg and abolish the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. This declaration is to be ratified by the National Assembly. (2) Every clause of the Trianon Peace Treaty must be implemented. (3) The mobilization costs must be reimbursed. (4) It must accept the full disarmament plan by midnight of November 1. If Hungary rejects these claims or leaves them unanswered, the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav armies will cross the frontier on November 2 and begin the occupation of Hungary.²⁵⁴ Tahy forwarded the ultimatum on October 30, early in the morning to Budapest: Bethlen immediately called a cabinet meeting, where the following decision was taken: (1) For lack of an adequate army and ammunition, no real resistance was possible. (2) Hungary would immediately appeal to the Allied Powers.

The same day, Bethlen invited the representatives of the Allied Powers and – in the presence of the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defence – described the critical situation of Hungary given the threat of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav intervention. He declared that the Hungarian army would not resist. The three High Commissioners advised Bethlen not to take any military measures and to trust Hungary's fate to the Allied Powers. The Little Entente would not dare attack a country loyal to the Allies, they said. Bethlen accepted their proposal, on the understanding that the Allied Powers would guarantee the independence of Hungary.²⁵⁵

The same day Bethlen instructed Tahy to tell Beneš: at the request of the Conference of Ambassadors, the Hungarian government has submitted itself to the Conference on the question of the dethronement of Charles. (This was true, since the Conference decision of October 27 applied only to Charles, whereas the new decision of October 29 had not yet been received in Budapest.) Beneš again threatened with war, saying that the abdication of Charles was not sufficient to

²⁵³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 125–128. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 30, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 140–143. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 30, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 309, Feistmantel's cable to Masaryk and Beneš, October 30, 1921.

²⁵⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 125–128. Fouchet's cable to Briand October 30, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 37. ff. 232–234. Tahy's aide mémoire, October 31, 1921 OL. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents. PDH. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1192. pp. 352–353. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, October 30, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 1194. p. 355. 1. Bánffy's cable to Kolossa, Hungarian minister in Belgrade, October 30, 1921.

²⁵⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 61–62. Cable of the Budapest representatives of the Allied Powers to the Conference of Ambassadors, October 31, 1921. The next day Bethlen again conferred with the three high commissioners; *ibid.* ff. 163–167. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 31, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 7–18. Fouchet's report to Briand, November 1, 1921.

settle the crisis. He repeated his statement of the day before, to which he had nothing to add, refusing to accept any responsibility for the crisis. Mobilization would be started and would be completed on October 31. If there was no reply by November 1, they would cross the frontier on November 2.²⁵⁶

The Budapest representatives of the Allied Powers immediately reported to the Conference of Ambassadors and their governments the Beneš ultimatum and their talks with Bethlen. They urged diplomatic and, if necessary, military intervention to protect Hungary, since Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia wanted to occupy the country under different pretexts. Following their advice, the Hungarian government decided to place the fate of Hungary in the hands of the Allies. Fouchet actually advised his government to consider military action if the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav troops crossed the frontier; because the peace in Central Europe would be endangered. He warned Briand not to let French officers stationed in Czechoslovakia participate in action against Hungary. As already mentioned, this is what Beneš – alarmed by the initial military success of Charles – had demanded from the French Premier.²⁵⁷

The Allied Powers – and this time, Italy included – were profoundly indignant at this latest action of Beneš. After the ultimatum had been presented to Budapest, the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav ministers in Rome called on Torretta (the Romanian minister did not join them, because he was allegedly staying in Porto Rosa); the conversation revealed a substantial difference between the standpoint of Torretta and that of the others.²⁵⁸ According to the Italian Foreign Minister, the *casus belli* no longer existed, since Charles had been arrested. Prague and Belgrade insisted that Charles be formally dethroned.²⁵⁹ In principle,

²⁵⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 232–234. Tahy's aide mémoire, October 31, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 36. ff. 7–18. Fouchet's report to Briand, November 1, 1921; *PDH.* III. doc. 1197. pp. 358–360. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, October 30, 1921.

²⁵⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 129–131. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 30, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 61–62. Cable of the representatives of the Allied Powers in Budapest to the Conference of Ambassadors, October 31, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 7–18. Fouchet's report to Briand, November 1, 1921.

²⁵⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 179–180. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 31, 1921. Although in his message, sent on October 31 through his ambassador in Prague to Beneš, Torretta agreed with the claims of the latter, including the reimbursement of the mobilization costs, he disagreed with the aggressive plans of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as well as with the ultimatum. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. f. 5. Couget's cable to Briand, November 1, 1921; *ASMAE.* 1743–1690. Torretta's cable to the Italian embassy in Paris and London, October 27, 1921; *ibid.* 1737. Torretta's cable to the Italian mission in Prague, October 31, 1921.

²⁵⁹ The difference was also due to the fact that, while Italy was satisfied with the dethronement of Charles, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia insisted on that of every Habsburg. Nevertheless, the Italian ministers in Prague, Belgrade, and Bucharest did not unequivocally support the action of their British and French colleagues aimed at appeasing the Little Entente. AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 158–160. Daeschner's cable to Briand, October 31, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 1–3. Cable of Delens, French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade, to Briand, November 1, 1921; *ibid.* f. 5. Couget's cable to Briand, November 1, 1921; *ibid.* f. 4. Couget's cable to Briand, November 1, 1921. Prague and Belgrade continued to do their best in order to win Romania for their projects.

Torretta did not advocate the exclusion of every Habsburg. This question, he said, had to be settled by discussion. According to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, it had to be settled immediately by force.²⁶⁰

Although Great Britain and France shared the standpoint of Italy, it became evident after the Beneš ultimatum that the affair had to be settled at once in order to safeguard peace in Central Europe, Prague and Belgrade being capable of anything. Any further delay could have had grave consequences. Thus, on October 31, the Allied Powers informed the Hungarian government of the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors made on October 29, concerning the Habsburgs... "In order to remove the difficulties existing between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian government must proclaim without delay the dethronement of king Charles and the *entire Habsburg dynasty*" (italics mine - M.Á.).²⁶¹ On October 31 at 8 p.m., Bánffy informed the Great Powers that the government (1) accepted unreservedly the resolution of the Conference of Ambassadors and committed itself to effect it without delay. (2) A written declaration would be ratified by the National Assembly the next week. (3) Hungary placed itself in the hands of the Great Powers. (4) Hungary expected the Great Powers to prevent a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav invasion. (5) Should Czechoslovak and Yugoslav forces nevertheless occupy any Hungarian territory, the Great Powers would guarantee their quick withdrawal.²⁶²

As well as putting the pressure on the Hungarian government, the Allied Powers took energetic steps towards the governments of the Little Entente, informing them of the contents of the latest note sent to the Hungarian government.

Beneš finally yielded to pressure from home and abroad. In fact, Masaryk tried from the very beginning to restrain his foreign minister, warning him strongly against acting without the agreement of the Great Powers. In his opinion the claims of Beneš were exaggerated, except the first item. He actually assured the western diplomats that Czechoslovakia would only act in harmony with the Great Powers.²⁶³ However, the ultimatum of Beneš testified to anything but this line. Beneš preferred to deny the facts, when he became aware of the indignation of the Allies, who were prepared to guarantee the independence of Hungary. He claimed to have sent no ultimatum to the Hungarian government, but to have merely handed over to Tàhy a list of four demands and asked for a reply by November 2. Tàhy must have misunderstood him and thus wrongly informed his government. The word "ultimatum" was never used - either in Prague or Bu-

²⁶⁰ *A trónfosztással kapcsolatos külpolitikai anyag ismertetése* (The material concerning the dethronement). A Magyar Királyi Külügyminisztérium, n.d.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* 23-25; AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 36. ff. 163-167. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 31, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 36. ff. 7-18. Fouchet's report to Briand November 1, 1921.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 36. ff. 134-138. Couget's cable to Briand, November 3, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 91-92. Aide mémoire of Osuský to Peretti de la Rocca, November 3, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 105-106. Briand's circular telegram, November 4, 1921.

dapest. According to Beneš, Tahy was forced to admit that his reports cabled to Budapest were not in accordance with the truth.²⁶⁴ The Allied Powers "accepted" the statements of Beneš, who received considerable assistance from the French minister in Prague.²⁶⁵

There is actually no documentary evidence that Tahy admitted misinforming his government – what we know is based on the statements of Beneš. Historiography – including Hungarian²⁶⁶ – accepted these statements, i.e. Tahy told a lie and there was no ultimatum at all. It is plausible that, immediately before the parliamentary debate on the dethronement bill, Tahy invented a story about an ultimatum and Hungary's imminent occupation in order to promote the passage of the bill.²⁶⁷ This, however, we cannot accept. Although having no documentary evidence of Tahy's admission, we do have much indirect proof of the existence of the ultimatum. Furthermore, it is hardly credible that an accredited diplomat would dare to invent such a thing and expect to escape the consequences. In fact, far from being called to account, Tahy was appointed ambassador in Ankara soon afterwards. So was the ultimatum contrived by the Hungarian government, as suggested by the above. Certainly not. In our opinion, Beneš really sent an ultimatum to Budapest, irrespective of whether the term "ultimatum" was used or not. (Beneš argued that the word was not used.) But the question depends not on phraseology, but on the fact that Beneš fixed a time-limit for the acceptance of his demands, and threatened with war if they were rejected.

We shall now enumerate some facts supporting our contention that the ultimatum existed. From the very beginning of the crisis, Beneš toyed with the idea of sending an ultimatum, and actually presented one after the first return attempt.²⁶⁸ In the last days of October, that is, after the second return attempt, he again considered this possibility. He was afraid that the ex-king – already detained – would be dethroned by the Hungarian government and delivered to the Allied Powers (all this was actually under way), and thus the crisis would be

²⁶⁴ *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*. doc. 25. p. 52.

²⁶⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 80–81. Couget's cable to Briand, November 3, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 91–92. Aide mémoire of Osuský to Peretti de la Rocca, November 3, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 105–106. Briand's circular telegram, November 4, 1921.

²⁶⁶ Karsai: *op. cit.* pp. 233–238.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Because of the deliberate temporization of Lejhanec, representative of Czechoslovakia in Budapest – due to Hohler's intervention –, the ultimatum was presented only after the ex-king had left Hungary. For the documents about the second ultimatum cf.: PDH. OL. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents; PDH. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1197. pp. 358–360. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, October 30, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 1219. pp. 384–385. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, October 31, 1921. When Beneš disclosed to Rome that in case he would not receive a satisfactory answer, he would attack Hungary on November 2, Torretta sharply disapproved, saying that the Allied Powers would turn against Czechoslovakia. He promised to find a solution. ASMAE. 1743–1737. Torretta's cable to the Italian mission in Prague, October 31, 1921.

solved without the fulfilment of his claims. Beneš wanted to use the crisis to achieve the exclusion of all Habsburgs and the complete disarmament of Hungary. This ultimatum was drafted by Beneš and the Belgrade government. They put pressure – both together and separately – on the Romanian government in order to obtain its support. The pressure became so strong that Take Ionescu applied to the French government for help. His allies within the Little Entente vigorously demanded his agreement to an ultimatum, which resembled that presented by Vienna to Serbia in 1913.²⁶⁹

Thus, the ultimatum did exist, ready to be dispatched. The question is, whether it was actually forwarded to Budapest or not. In our opinion it was – and more than once! First, on the evening of October 29; this was when Beneš – as he stated later – was allegedly misunderstood by Tahy. What the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister did not say, was that the next day, on October 30, he again asked Tahy to appear and told him that he had not yet received any answer to the proposal he had sent the day before. The transportation of troops to the front, he added, would begin on October 30 and would be completed on October 31. If there was no answer by November 1, they would cross the frontier on November 2. Tahy immediately informed his government as well as the British, French and Italian ambassadors in Prague of the ultimatum.²⁷⁰ In a conversation with Tahy on November 1, Beneš explained that the ultimatum of October 30 – i.e. the new ultimatum – had nothing to do with their talks of October 29. A further fact: on news of the ultimatum Fouchet at once called on Feistmantel, the Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires in Budapest, and criticized the action of the Czech government, saying it was not justified given the correct attitude of the Hungarian government. The reply of the Czechoslovak diplomat: “*but they will never reconcile themselves to the given frontiers*” (italics mine – M.Á.). Thus, he did not deny the existence of the ultimatum.²⁷¹

With a view to the above, it is most probable that the ultimatum did exist and was not “ordered” by Bethlen.²⁷² Anyway, the calculations of Beneš proved correct: the Allied Powers stopped playing for time, and urged the Hungarian government to dethrone the entire Habsburg dynasty.

In addition to the military threat from the Little Entente and the diplomatic pressure of the Allied Powers, domestic considerations also prompted the Hungarian government to act. The new upper class of Horthy's regime – its main

²⁶⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 158–160. Daeschner's cable to Briand, October 30, 1921.

²⁷⁰ See Note 268.

²⁷¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 192–199. Fouchet's report to Briand October 31, 1921. We have no data on Feistmantel's presentation of any ultimatum, only on his statement of October 28: his government demands the immediate settlement of the Habsburg question; the omission thereof would be a *casus belli*. OL. Küm. pol. K. 63–474. Collection of diplomatic documents; PDH. unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1192. pp. 352–353. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, November 1, 1921.

²⁷² Bethlen's steps in domestic and foreign policy do not prove this.

support consisting of the military circles of the gentry – was afraid of losing its influence and opposed the return of the ex-king; it was backed by the Smallholders' Party which advocated the free election of a king. The combined effect of these external and internal factors forced the government to make a decision.

The Bill submitted to the National Assembly on November 3 dethroned Charles and repealed the *Pragmatica Sanctio*.²⁷³

Despite the note of October 31 presented by the Conference of Ambassadors, the Bill did not explicitly exclude every Habsburg from the throne, but was limited to the dethronement of Charles and the repeal of the *Pragmatica Sanctio*. As a matter of fact, the phrase "free election of a king" suggested that some other member of the Habsburg dynasty might be elected king. The Little Entente immediately protested against this. On the day the Bill was submitted to the National Assembly – after the first vote, at 6.30 p.m. on November 3 – Beneš instructed the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest to lodge a protest with Bánffy, if possible, together with the other representatives of the Little Entente. The representative of Yugoslavia agreed at once, but the Romanian minister Stircea did not, saying that he had not been authorized by his government to do so. His instructions from Bucharest were actually to protest. So Feistmantel, the Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires, and Milojević, head of the Yugoslav mission, called upon Bánffy in the evening of the same day, demanding an amendment to the Bill, so as to exclude any Habsburg from election.²⁷⁴ Bánffy reiterated that, in his opinion, the demand of the Conference of Ambassadors was limited to the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty and this had been done by his government. Anyway, it was already too late, he said, since the Bill had passed its first reading and thus the wording could not be changed.²⁷⁵

Immediately afterwards, Feistmantel called on Hohler, informed him of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav view as well as Bánffy's reply, and told him that the troops would not be demobilized due to the inadequacy of the dethronement bill. At Hohler's initiative, the High Commissioners of the Allied Powers met in conference. The outcome of these deliberations is not clear. However, it seems that most of them were of the opinion that the new demands made by Beneš were too late, since the bill had already been carried. But on the following day they received instructions from their governments to inform the Hungarian government that the Bill was insufficient, its text did not make it possible to obtain the demo-

²⁷³ *Országgyűlési Napló* (Records of the National Assembly) XII (November 1921) pp. 101–162. For the law see: *Corpus Juris Hungarici XLVII* (1921).

²⁷⁴ *A trónfosztással kapcsolatos külpolitikai anyag ismertetése* (The material concerning the dethronement). A Magyar Királyi Külügyminisztérium, n.d.

²⁷⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 120–121. Fouchet's cable to Briand, October 15, 1921. According to Fouchet, the complementary law was artificial and might have caused the downfall of the Bethlen government. Cf. AMZV. PZ. Budapest 577, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, November 4, 1921.

bilization of the Little Entente forces so they would have to do their best to meet the demands of Beneš.²⁷⁶

Only afterwards did Romania begin to support the claims presented by its allies. Take Ionescu instructed his Budapest representative to support the other representatives of the Little Entente in every respect and to tell the Hungarian government that the text of the dethronization bill was insufficient, since it did not exclude every Habsburg.²⁷⁷

Romania's position strengthened against Hungary after the second return attempt, approaching the line of Prague and Belgrade, but without being identical with it. This was due to the fact that the view of Take Ionescu gained the upper hand.

All the time the Romanian Foreign Minister found himself in a most difficult situation, being exposed to pressure from two sides. The King maintained an attitude of reserve, insisting that nothing should be done without the approval of the Allied Powers. He opposed military intervention and blamed Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia for acting inconsiderately. In 1919 he had certainly approved enthusiastically military intervention in Hungary, ignoring the protest of the Allies, but now he attached the utmost importance to the opinion of the Entente. He may have drawn a lesson from the 1919 intervention which had strained Romania's relations with the Allied Powers and had had a negative effect on its western contacts. But it is unquestionable that one of the main factors was the sympathy of King Ferdinand for Charles IV, already mentioned in connection with the first return attempt. According to rumours circulating in diplomatic circles, the Romanian royal family had promised Charles support for his second return attempt as well – a letter referring to this was read out in the Hungarian Parliament during a debate on the Habsburg question. Of course, the Romanian government refuted these "insinuations".²⁷⁸

On the other hand, the officer corps, the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff, were impatient over the passivity of the Romanian army and insisted upon the invasion of Hungary. A plan for the occupation of Hungarian territories was prepared. As explained to the French military attaché Pétain, the aim was to keep the Hungarian government under permanent pressure and so to

²⁷⁶ *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*. doc. 67. p. 155; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 104–105. Note of the Conference of Ambassadors to the Budapest representative of the Allied Powers, November 4, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 577, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, November 4, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 116–117. Fouchet's aide mémoire for the Conference of Ambassadors, November 5, 1921.

²⁷⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 118–119. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; *ibid.* f. 122. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 114–115. Daeschner's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 610, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, November 5, 1921.

²⁷⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. f. 21. Doucet's cable to Briand, December 13, 1921; *ibid.* f. 230. Doucet's cable to Briand, December 19, 1921.

prevent a similar event from happening again.²⁷⁹ The occupation was due to begin on October 26. But meanwhile Charles was taken into custody. Of course, the King would have probably refused to sign the decree of mobilization.

Take Ionescu represented the standpoint of the King, even against the military circles and the allies within the Little Entente. That is, any action was dependent on the approval of the Allied Powers. In his opinion the military intervention was inconceivable unless the worst happened, i.e., if Horthy was unable or unwilling to fight against the royal units. But as soon as the return attempt was frustrated, Romanian troops should be evacuated at once. He believed that the tactics of 1919 – the long occupation of Hungary – had been a mistake: he would not have stayed longer than three days at most, he said. He managed to have his views accepted by the government, which was anyway not inclined to war on account of the grave economic situation and problems with the Soviet Union. Ionescu was also in a delicate situation with regard to his allies, whose actions he considered unnecessary. At the same time, he did not want to antagonize them. Manoeuvring with remarkable resourcefulness, he tried to moderate them, and supported them on certain questions even against the view of the Conference of Ambassadors. So, for instance, he backed their claim for the reimbursement of the mobilization costs. He also seconded some of their diplomatic action, but usually only after this had been approved by the Allies. However, in the event of war with Hungary he would have probably joined a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav invasion. In the first place, Ionescu would have been obliged to honour the military provisions of Little Entente Treaty that had just recently been signed; on the other hand, the military would have forced him to do so. Of course, this was not unknown to the Allied Powers either: in addition to diplomatic pressure on Prague and Belgrade, they also urged the Romanian government on moderation.²⁸⁰

Thus, in spite of the detention of Charles, his deportation from Hungary²⁸¹ and the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty, there was a lingering danger of war in Central Europe. Although denying having sent an ultimatum to Budapest, Beneš openly proclaimed that he would take military action if the Dethronement Bill did not make every Habsburg ineligible for the throne.

Finally, the Allies complied with this request, too. On November 5, their Budapest representatives demanded from the Hungarian government in a note that the resolution of the National Assembly should declare: every Habsburg is deprived of the right to the Hungarian throne. Hohler assured the Hungarian gov-

²⁷⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Report of General Pétain to the minister of defence, October 31, 1921.

²⁸⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 158–160. Daeschner's cable to Briand, October 31, 1921, "The French minister gives account of the pressure he puts on the Romanian government, together with his British colleague. However, he has doubts about the attitude of the Italian minister."

²⁸¹ For a detailed report thereof see: AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 36. ff. 19–22. Fouchet's report to Briand, November 1, 1921.

ernment that there would be no further claims.²⁸² On the same day, Bánffy sent a message to the Conference of Ambassadors, expressing the readiness of his government to meet the demand.²⁸³

Accordingly, the Hungarian government obliged itself in the Dethronement Bill, or to put it exactly: in an additional paragraph thereof, to comply with the resolutions of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 4, 1920 and April 3, 1921, concerning the dethronement of the Habsburgs. Given the election of a king, it would not act without the agreement of the powers represented at the Conference.²⁸⁴ Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania were now satisfied.²⁸⁵

The action of the Little Entente was thus crowned with success. Beneš and Pašić offered their thanks to Take Ionescu for his resolute stand after the return attempt, and all three thanked the Allied Powers for their assistance in a quick settlement.²⁸⁶

The Conference of Ambassadors now pressed Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to demobilize.²⁸⁷ However, they refused to do so, although both of them had promised immediate demobilization if Hungary declared the dethronement of the Habsburgs. Beneš said that the decree of demobilization was ready, but could not be carried out for technical reasons; at the same time, he informed his representative in Budapest that "only two age-groups would be demobilized, the two others will be kept in arms for all eventualities".²⁸⁸ What "eventualities" could Beneš have had in mind? Why did he refuse complete demobilization, although all his aims concerning the Habsburg question had been achieved? Most probably the army was supposed to reinforce some other claims. This time, Yugoslavia took the initiative. On November 7, the government in Belgrade sent a note to the Conference of Ambassadors, asking them to fix a time-limit for the disarming of the Hungarian army (with the participation of the Little Entente), and to have

²⁸² *Diplomatické dokumenty Habsburků*. doc. 70. p. 161.

²⁸³ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. f. 157. Bánffy's note to the Budapest representatives of the Allied Powers, November 5, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 587, Feistmantel's report to Beneš, November 5, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. f. 129. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; *ibid.* H. vol. 37. ff. 170–174. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade to Briand, November 13, 1921.

²⁸⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 118–129. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 610, Feistmantel's report to Beneš, November 5, 1921; *Országgyűlési Napló* (November 5, 1921), p. 577.

²⁸⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. f. 122. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 6, 1921; *ibid.* f. 140. Daeschner's cable to Briand, November 6, 1921; *ibid.* f. 126. Couget's cable to Briand, November 5, 1921; *ibid.* Briand's circular telegram, November 18, 1921.

²⁸⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 202–203. Daeschner's report to Briand, November 25, 1921.

²⁸⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 112–113. Cable of Delfus to Briand, November 5, 1921; *ibid.* f. 164. Couget's cable to Briand, November 11, 1921.

²⁸⁸ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 599, cable of Beneš to Feistmantel, November (illegible) 1921.

the mobilization costs reimbursed by Hungary. The same day it demanded that the Hungarian government begin the discharge of its army under Art. 102 of the Trianon Treaty and to guarantee that this would be accomplished within three months.²⁸⁹

In this question, the three states of the Little Entente again acted in concert, though Romania was again more careful: without formally joining the diplomatic action of Prague and Belgrade, it merely supported the action and gave its approval.²⁹⁰

Beneš would have preferred preliminary consultations with Paris, and had some reservations in regard to the Yugoslav action; he nevertheless supported the proposal of Belgrade and instructed his representative in Budapest to act jointly with the Yugoslav representative ("if the Yugoslav government insists upon sending a note to Budapest, I agree to it in spite of reservations").²⁹¹ The joint action took place on November 7, when Feistmantel and Milojević called upon the British High Commissioner Hohler and informed him of the contents of the note. According to the report of the Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires to Beneš, "Hohler turned red when he learned of our claims and repeated several times: *Alors vous voulez la guerre*".²⁹²

In spite of the protests of Hohler, the representatives of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia presented the note to Bánffy.²⁹³

The Allied Powers reacted most strongly. Threatening to break off diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, they insisted upon immediate demobilization. The pressure was so strong that Czechoslovakia started on November 10 and Yugoslavia on November 13 to discharge the age-groups called up at the end of October. They did not hurry. Demobilization was finally completed towards the end of November.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. ff. 143–144. Fouchet's cable to Briand, November 8, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 147–148. Note of the Yugoslav embassy in Paris to the Conference of Ambassadors, November 8, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 599, aide mémoire of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry, 1921.

²⁹⁰ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 577, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, November 4, 1921.

²⁹¹ AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 599, cable of Beneš to Feistmantel, November 8, 1921.

²⁹² AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 602, November 8, 1921. Feistmantel again points out that Hohler and Fouchet are pursuing an anti-Little-Entente policy and have given much evidence thereof. So, for instance, although having been repeatedly informed that the Little Entente insists upon the dethronement of every Habsburg, they asked the Hungarian government only to set Charles aside. Both of them, he writes, are counteracting our interests. He thinks it important that the British and the French governments should recall Hohler and Fouchet, who are completely under the influence of the Hungarian government; AMZV. PZ. Budapešť 608, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, November 9, 1921.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 37. f. 187. Cable of Delens to Briand, November 17, 1921; *ibid.* f. 201. Couget's cable to Briand, November 25, 1921.

The question of Charles IV again came up, when the British proposal was discussed. The ex-king should receive 500,000 gold francs from the states, in the interests of which he had abdicated, i.e. from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland. Of course, all of them refused.²⁹⁵

Shortly afterwards, in April 1922, Charles died in Madeira, and the question was pushed into the background. However, the issue of Habsburg restoration was not entirely dropped, particularly not in Austria, where support for the Habsburgs increased, especially in the thirties. The monarchists were actually a "minor evil" compared with the attempts at Anschluss. This was reflected in the standpoint of Beneš as well. But for the time being, Yugoslavia continued to regard Habsburg restoration as the main danger.

Although the Little Entente could not enforce its will in every respect, it had achieved its main objective: the Habsburg dynasty was dethroned, no Habsburg could become king of Hungary, and it had consolidated its political position at home and abroad. The expectations of the Carlists were not fulfilled: the Croatian and Slovak separatist movements did not gain strength and turn against Belgrade and Prague. (Active measures were taken against their propaganda.) Mobilization went on undisturbed in both countries, even among the Hungarian minority.

On the other hand, relations between the Little Entente and the Allied Powers, especially with Great Britain and Italy, became strained. During the first return attempt, the Little Entente's main supporter was Italy, during the second, France. Its cause was particularly taken up by Laroche, while Fouchet, the French representative in Budapest, was opposed to the French change of policy on the Habsburg question and was relieved of his post immediately after the return attempt.

Beneš, who had played a leading role during the crisis, grew in authority. The events contributed to the consolidation of Czechoslovak leadership in Central Europe and to a further increase of its weight within the Little Entente.

The Ring Is Closed

Due to Charles's return attempts and the Burgenland crisis, Austria came closer to the Little Entente, and particularly to Czechoslovakia. In December 1921, after long discussions, the two states signed the convention of Lány which also concerned the protection of the Trianon Peace Treaty. It was emphasized that the contracting parties were relying upon the Peace Treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon; regarding their neighbours they offered each other political and diplomatic support. In the case of aggression, they would remain neutral; they

²⁹⁵ AMZV. PZ. 599, November 25, 1921. AD. Europe 1918-40. Daeschner's cable to Briand, November 26, 1921; Take Ionescu was ready to his share of the king's maintenance, but adhered later to the other successor states.

would promote war material supply; they would take measures against organizations jeopardizing the unity of the other state; they would fight against the restoration of former conditions. Finally, Austria recognized the contracts of the Little Entente: under an economic agreement, Czechoslovakia granted Austria a credit of 500 million Czech crowns.²⁹⁶

The resolute opposition of Vienna to Charles Habsburg's attempts to take the throne in Hungary as well as its antagonism towards Hungary over the Burgenland affair brought about an adequate atmosphere for the development of economic and political contacts. As a result, Yugoslavia and Romania were ready to follow the example of Czechoslovakia and improve their relations with Austria. The members of the Little Entente did not regard Austria as an enemy state, in fact, they even considered inviting Austria to join the Little Entente. For a long time this question caused considerable anxiety both in Rome and in Budapest. With the help of Austria, Hungary could have been entirely blockaded. At the time this could have been a real possibility, since the Burgenland incident had turned Hungary utterly against Austria. Hungary thus lost its only way out to the outside world. With the agreement of Lány between Czechoslovakia and Austria – heartily welcomed by Romania and Yugoslavia – Beneš managed to close the blockade around Hungary, to isolate the country and thus to reduce the refractory southern neighbour to obedience. "The ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty, the establishment of the Little Entente, the unsuccessful attempts of Charles have convinced the Hungarians that they have to submit to our political line"²⁹⁷ – concluded Beneš with satisfaction.

It became clear that the members of the Little Entente – Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania – united with one another to enforce the Peace Treaties of Trianon and Neuilly and to prevent a Habsburg restoration.

Every member of the Little Entente took care not to assume obligations in any question it was not directly interested in; as a result, there remained for all members unsolved problems as important as the Hungarian one: for Romania the Soviet, for Yugoslavia the Italian and for Czechoslovakia the German question. Each of them tried to obtain separate guarantees: Czechoslovakia in Paris, Romania in Warsaw and in the second half of the thirties in Berlin. Yugoslavia was in a most difficult position: to balance Italy it had to find a *modus vivendi* with Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, and from the beginning and particularly in the second half of the thirties with Germany as well. It tried to subordinate the Little Entente to its Balkan policy and to use the alliance rather as a back stop, its attention being mainly engaged by the Balkan problem. Romania, on the contrary, tried to subordinate the Balkan question to its Central European policy. A change only took place in the mid-thirties, when it tried to replace the disinte-

²⁹⁶ V. Olivová: K historii československo-rakouské smlouvy, r. 1921 (On the history of the Czechoslovakian – Austrian agreement). *Československý časopis historický*, 1961/2.

²⁹⁷ AMZV. PZ. Budapest 234, aide mémoire of Beneš, September 21; E. Beneš: *Problémy nové Evropy...* pp. 205, 298.

grating Little Entente with the Balkan Entente established meanwhile, and to concentrate its policy on the Balkans. This was also the time of its rapprochement with the Axis Powers.

From the very beginning, the situation outlined above was to the advantage of the centrifugal forces within the Little Entente, it weakened the alliance and was one of the reasons for the eventual disintegration of the bloc. The other, equally important influence were the economic problems of the Little Entente. We shall now examine some of the factors which played an important role in its dissolution.

Without an Economic Basis

After the establishment of the Little Entente its members began to consolidate the conditions created by the peace treaties, and the co-ordination of their economic relations. "Reconstruction, Consolidation, Pacification" – this was the motto of the Little Entente. As Beneš declared in 1922,²⁹⁸ "the Little Entente was established not only to safeguard the peace treaties, securing their execution and protecting the area against political and social shocks, but also to lay down definitely the political, economical and social bases of Central Europe's new order." This meant already a much wider programme than originally envisaged by the alliance of the three states. Even with the support of the Western Powers this far-reaching programme in both domestic and foreign policy could not be realized, since all three states were confronted with grave political and economic problems. Standing on different economic and political levels and inhabited by various ethnic groups, the recently occupied territories would indeed not easily be forged into a homogeneous alliance.

The Republic of Czechoslovakia resulted from the union of Bohemia, Slovakia and Ruthenia. Size: 140,000 sq.km, population: 13,743,460.

Czechoslovakia's economic and domestic political situation was in many respects different from that of its allies in the Little Entente. On the one hand, it was an entirely new state created on the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, so it had to set up a completely new economic structure. On the other hand, its position was incomparably better than that of either Romania or Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact, it "inherited" the most valuable parts of the Monarchy: most of the Empire's industry was in the so-called Sudetenland and thus Czechoslovakia received 52.3 per cent of the Monarchy's industry; about half of its wheat-crop was produced by the areas attached to Czechoslovakia.

The monetary question was also rather simple. In the whole territory – whether it had earlier belonged to Austria or to Hungary – the currency was the

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 87, 287.

Ethnic composition of the population of Czechoslovakia

	Number	Percentage
Czech, Slovak	8,760,957	64.4
German	3,123,448	22.9
Hungarian	747,096	5.5
Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Russian	461,849	3.4
Jewish	180,855	1.3
Other, unknown	469,255	2.2
Total	13,743,460	100.0 ²⁹⁹

Crown. Czechoslovakia was the first to carry out a monetary reform aimed at loosening the Imperial economic unity. It became evident that the Czechoslovak politicians envisaged a nationalistic economic policy, and were opposed to confederation as earlier proposed. Though the Czech Crown was only stabilized in 1923, the economic situation outlined above provided Czechoslovakia with a more advantageous international economic and political position as well. The development of the transport and communication network, however, was a great trouble to the country. The Bohemian and Moravian areas were connected with Vienna, Slovakia and Ruthenia with Budapest, but the communication between them and Prague was non-existent.

The differences in cultural level between the country's regions also caused some difficulties. The western (Bohemian) part of the Republic – about half of its territory – was comparable to the western advanced, industrial states as far as economic and social structure and stage of cultural development were concerned. The eastern part, a predominantly agrarian area, i.e. Slovakia and – still more – Ruthenia, was marked by the characteristics of Eastern Europe. 34.9 per cent of the country's population was engaged in industry, 34.6 per cent in agriculture. While the intellectual life of the Bohemian areas was at a high stage of

²⁹⁹ Cf. Kelet-Európa népei 1880–1930. Adatsorok (Peoples of Eastern Europe. 1830–1930. Data series). *Historia*, 1981/4–5. Compiled by János Pótó. These data sheets were set up according to the census of 1921. Data on the Hungarians show a considerable decrease as compared to those of the census taken in 1910, and this for several reasons: (1) The census of 1910 did not represent the real situation either, since an opposite trend occurred, acting in the sense of a decreasing proportion of the national minorities (considerable non-Hungarian social strata declared themselves Hungarians). (2) In 1910, Yiddish was officially recognized as a Germanic language, so 53,942 Jews declared themselves Germans, and 30,680 Hungarians. (3) After the areas were attached to Czechoslovakia, many Hungarian office-holders emigrated to Hungary (according to Czechoslovak official data: 56,000, according to Hungarian authorities: 106,000).

development, strongly influenced by liberalism since the second half of the 19th century, Slovakia and especially Ruthenia were most backward in this respect too. As a whole, the democratic republic of Czechoslovakia was one of the most progressive states in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The economic and political development of Romania and Yugoslavia presented many identical traits – both countries had similar problems to overcome. Both of them substantially increased in size, compared to their pre-war territory. The new areas were detached from Austria and Hungary, from Soviet Russia and Bulgaria, respectively, all of them being constituent parts of the economic and financial systems of the countries they had originally belonged to. But this system was considerably different from the economic structure of pre-war Serbia and Romania. In both cases, the economic and financial system of the pre-war kingdom had to be extended to a much larger territory. Great Romania included Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania and Southern Dobrudja, a total area of 295,000 sq.km (the pre-war territory of Romania was 137,903 sq. km). Its population: 16,023,355.

Ethnic composition of the population of Great Romania

	Number	Percentage
Romanian	11,545,311	79.9
Hungarian	1,463,573	9.1
German	713,564	4.5
Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Russian	674,777	4.2
Gipsy	133,026	0.8
Jewish	778,094	4.9
Bulgarian	351,328	2.2
Turkish, Tartar	222,375	1.4
Polish	35,033	0.2
Other, unknown	48,704	0.3
Serbian	52,570	0.3
Czech	5,000	0.0
Total	16,023,355	100.0 ³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* There is a difference in the final result of the data sheet; however, the summary I have published is the exact one. The data of the Romanian census of 1920 covered only the territory of Transylvania. These data sheets have been calculated by the author according to census data of different dates. As compared to the data of 1910, there is also a significant decrease to be observed, for similar reasons as in Czechoslovakia (cf. Note 299).

Romania was an agrarian state, with 72.6 per cent of its population being engaged in agriculture and only one per cent in industry. After the war, its agrarian production considerably increased by the annexion of Bessarabia and the Banat district. By taking possession of Transylvania and Bukovina, Romania obtained areas rich in timber and mineral resources, and a considerable industrial base. (More than half of its industrial base and more than 80 per cent of its heavy industry was sited in Transylvania.) All this contributed substantially to the fundamental difference between Romania's pre-war and post-war economic structure. Its exports no longer consisted only of agricultural produce, although Bessarabia and the Banat district considerably increased its agricultural resources as well.³⁰¹

The Romanian budget was also in a bad condition. In the years following the war, the expenses of the government were much higher than the revenue. A balanced budget was only achieved in 1922–1923.

Romania had to extend its economy on a considerably increased territory; Bucharest became the economic and financial centre of a state doubled in size.

Communication problems were a major obstacle to the development of the Romanian economy, in regard to both the railway network and to shipping. Pre-war Romania was linked with Bucharest and the Danubian ports: the Transylvanian railways ran towards Budapest and Vienna, as well as to the Adriatic sea-ports, the Bessarabian line towards Kiev and Odessa. The newly acquired areas were connected neither with Bucharest nor with one another.

A major concern was the creation of a common currency. In the areas detached from Austria and Hungary the Austro-Hungarian Crown was circulating, in Bessarabia as many as four different Roubles and in pre-war Romania the Lei. The establishment of a common currency was achieved only gradually by 1920–21.

There was also a considerable difference in cultural level between the different areas, for instance, between Transylvania and Bessarabia on the one hand, and Bessarabia or the former and Bukovina, on the other. From the end of the twenties, efforts to replace the constitutional monarchy by royal dictatorship became more and more manifest.

The situation of Yugoslavia was similar to that of Romania. Its small pre-war territory had been considerably increased. Several problems were still more complicated. Yugoslavia included Serbia, Montenegro, Herzegovina, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia, on a total area of 247,000 sq.km (pre-war size of Serbia: 87,300 sq.km). Number of population: 12,017,323.

The dominance of agriculture was still more pronounced than in Romania: 76.6 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture, 11 per cent in industry. Industry was sited mainly on the areas detached from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The creation of a common currency was also a difficult task, since four different currencies were circulating at the same time: in Serbia the Dinar,

³⁰¹ This was connected with the fact that non-agrarian areas had also to be supplied at that time, and so the cereals assigned earlier to export had to be used on the domestic market.

in the areas detached from Austria and Hungary the Crown, in Montenegro the Perper and in the area detached from Bulgaria the Leva.

Ethnic composition of the population of Yugoslavia

	Number	Percentage
Serbian, Croatian	8,946,884	74.4
Slovenian	1,024,761	8.5
Other Slavs	174,466	1.5
Hungarian	472,409	3.9
German	513,472	4.1
Romanian	229,398	1.9
Albanian	441,740	3.7
Italian	12,825	0.1
Other, unknown	201,368	1.7
Total	12,017,323	100.0 ³⁰²

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Dinar and the Perper were withdrawn from circulation to be replaced with the Crown, while in the region occupied by Bulgarian troops the Leva became the currency. So, as a temporary solution, the country was divided into two parts, the Dinar being used to the south-east of the Sava and Drava, and the Crown to the north-west. This situation lasted until 1919, when the Dinar became the only legal currency, considerably inflated meanwhile. The inflation was halted in 1925 only.

The development of a unified railway network was also a highly difficult task, accomplished very slowly. Yugoslavia actually "inherited" five railway systems (with four different gauges). Each railway system ran towards another centre. There was no communication between Belgrade and the occupied territories. This important task was not completed by the end of the twenties. The only train service between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had been the Constantinople line.

The system of land tenure varied considerably: in Serbia there were no large estates, the land – mostly divided into small plots – belonged to the peasantry. In the areas detached from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, large estates predominated. In Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina the Turkish feudal system still

³⁰² Cf. the data compiled by J. Pótló: *op. cit. História*, 1981/3–4. The remarks in Note 299 apply to Yugoslavia as well.

existed, just as in Macedonia and other territories annexed by Serbia after the Balkan War.

Furthermore, Yugoslavia was confronted with six different taxation systems, the standardization of which remained unrealizable. The budget was in deficit until 1923.

There was still another reason why the situation was more complicated in Yugoslavia than in Romania. The pre-war kingdom remained the predominant element of Great Romania. In Yugoslavia, the Serbs were striving for a unified and centralized state (pre-war Serb nationalism became still stronger after the war), while the Croats and Slovenes claimed territorial autonomy. With the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the question was whether to form a confederation or a unified state. The Serbs aimed at the latter, but were forced by Croatian politicians to make some concessions to decentralization.

On June 28, 1921 a constitution was adopted, according to which Yugoslavia became a tripartite kingdom under Serb law. Nevertheless, the centralist thinking that existed both at the royal court and within the government, continued to produce internal tensions. The royal dictatorship introduced in the twenties consolidated the autocracy of the king. Centralist trends gained the upper hand: thus was it that the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian kingdom became Yugoslavia.

Thus, all three members of the Little Entente began to function under most difficult conditions, especially Yugoslavia and Romania. They were confronted with huge tasks: repairing the devastation of war (especially grave in Yugoslavia and Romania); solving the capital shortage; establishing a standard system of land distribution and ownership; achieving a balanced budget (in deficit everywhere after the war); organizing foreign trade; development and reorganization of the railway network; introduction and/or stabilization of a single national currency; eliminating the differences between the individual peoples of the country and creating conditions for their harmonious co-existence. Some of these aims were attained sooner or later, others never.

With great efforts the war damage was repaired, communications reorganized and the national currencies stabilized. The problem of land distribution remained for the most part unsolved. In Romania, for instance, half the peasants had no land of their own; the agrarian reform caused temporary difficulties in domestic and foreign policy alike, since the landowners of the annexed territories were greatly affected. Credits and finance remained a grave problem, financial stabilization being largely dependent on the international financial situation. The amortization of credits obtained from western countries caused much trouble – Czechoslovakia was actually the only state that did not ask for a moratorium. The question of the nationalities remained unsolved and was to the advantage of the centralists. In principle, the nationalities had equal rights, but not in practice – not even in countries such as Czechoslovakia and the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian kingdom, where the union of co-equal kindred nations was at issue. In both cases, there was a “ruling” nation, the Czech and the Serb, respectively. This was reflected in the economic, political and cultural development of the state in-

volved. The equality of rights was purely nominal – and so much more in the case of national minorities. The rights of minorities were clearly secured by the treaties of 1919, but there were no sanctions against any violations of those rights. Besides aggravating the internal and external difficulties of the new states, the unsolved national problem became one of the main sources of irredentism. Thus, political nationalism in the Danube Basin was, in a certain sense, still more pronounced after the war, instead of being eliminated as expected.

The new states were unable to organize economic co-operation with one another, sticking tenaciously to the new frontiers, irrespective of economics, i.e. of the fact that the borders crossed economically coherent areas. The political frontiers became economic boundaries, and every state began to function within them, as though it were a separate economic unit. Every state of the Danube Basin – winners and losers alike – had to bear the grave consequences. There is scarcely any other part of the world, where nature has produced such a close correlation between the neighbouring countries as in the Danube Basin, and where the chances of co-operation were as thoughtlessly neglected. Regional union, co-operation, were regarded as incompatible with national sovereignty. None of the states recognized that it was in their best interests to form a Danubian economic bloc – in fact, that there was no other course for them. The choice for the future was: union or nationalism. The members of the Little Entente preferred the latter.

They actually had the choice of three possibilities: (1) establishment of a unified area; (2) developing closer economic relations with each other and other states, on the basis of mutual advantages; (3) maintaining the economic autarchy of the independent economic units. The third way was preferred. Fearing that close economic co-operation with other states would endanger their national sovereignty, the states tried to restrict contact with each other.

It was not the question of whether foreign capital was needed or not, since in all three states – and especially in Romania and Yugoslavia – the capital shortage was so evident that there could be no discussion about it. The disagreements centred on the amount, the terms and the time-scale and schedule of foreign loans.³⁰³ Those who regarded the whole problem as a political question, advocated the reduction of foreign capital investment to a minimum. The slogan “rather slowly, but with our own strength”, prevailed in Romania, and to a lesser extent, it asserted itself in the two other states as well.

We shall see that all of them recognized, towards the end of the twenties, that they had chosen the wrong path by opposing closer international economic co-operation and pursuing an isolationist policy even towards one another.

In spite of their political and military alliance, the three states were actually unable to co-operate in economics. As a result of the economic structure out-

³⁰³ “Our policy does not exclude the participation of foreign capital in our economy, because we know that our country, rich in natural resources, is unable to exploit them by its own means. At the same time, the influx of foreign capital cannot be indifferent for us”, declared foreign minister Duca. *L'economist Roumain* (June 1, 1927).

lined above, the Little Entente had no economic basis. This was one of its weakest points. It became evident that the future of the bloc would mainly depend on the success (or the failure) of the following aims: co-ordination of the economies of the three states, division of labour between a highly developed industrial-agrarian state and two underdeveloped agrarian states, and the achievement of a wide co-operation.

As has been seen, the disintegration of the economic structure of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had created a most difficult situation for the member states of the Little Entente. Czechoslovakia, inheritor of more than half the Empire's industrial potential, was deprived of its former markets. Due to its privileged position within the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia nevertheless enjoyed many advantages.³⁰⁴ Its economic structure hindered the development of commercial relations with its allies in the Little Entente. Being an industrial-agrarian state, it wished to export its industrial products to Yugoslavia and Romania, the two comparatively underdeveloped countries, without having to import their agricultural products. It was actually the agrarian protectionism practised by the Czechoslovak government under pressure from the Agrarian Party, which was the main obstacle to foreign trade within the Little Entente. Since Czechoslovakia's allies had much trouble selling their agricultural products, they tried to import industrial articles from countries offering them a market for their products, namely from Great Britain and Germany. At the same time, they started industrialization with all their might. For the most part, Yugoslav industry was new: 40 per cent of its industrial potential existed before the war, 60 per cent was set up in the years after the armistice.³⁰⁵

Until the end of the twenties, it was typical that all three states wanted to produce and sell everything. Industry and agriculture were disproportionately expanded, resulting in considerable pauperization, especially in the economically rather backward countries: Yugoslavia and Romania.

A major industrialization programme also took place in Romania with the main aim of promoting domestic industry, and this in spite of the difficulties resulting from capital shortage. Certainly, foreign shareholders were accepted, but the majority of shares had to belong to Romanians. It was typical of Romanian industrialization that it was supported by government action. The influx of foreign capital and the import of industrial articles were impeded by legislation. In fact, Romania continued to pursue its pre-war protectionistic policy. Of all the Danubian states it had the highest protective tariff, enforced even against its allies in the Little Entente.³⁰⁶ As a result of this mutual pro-

³⁰⁴ While emphasizing the military importance of the bloc, it exported arms to both countries – a huge business for Škoda.

³⁰⁵ Statement submitted to the International Economic Conference by the Serb-Croat-Slovene members.

³⁰⁶ In 1921, it abrogated the former agreements and conventions, and consistently refused till 1927 any negotiations aimed at the conclusion of customs agreements.

tectionism, commercial relations between the three states remained quite insignificant even after the establishment of the Little Entente. In 1923, 4.3 per cent of Czechoslovak exports went to Yugoslavia and 3.2 to Romania, whereas Germany and Austria took over more than 50 per cent. Yugoslavia's share of Czechoslovak imports was only 2.7 per cent, from Romania not even that much. 2.5 per cent of Romanian exports went to Yugoslavia, and only 0.3 per cent of Yugoslav exports to Romania. The commercial relationship between the three countries did not substantially improve in the following years either: in 1924, for instance, 3.8 per cent of Czechoslovakia's total trade went to Yugoslavia, and 3.85 per cent to Romania. The unsuccessful economic policy of Czechoslovakia resulted not only in a downward trend in mutual trade within the Little Entente, but also in a declining share in world trade, since the states were unable to overcome competition from highly developed West-European industrial articles. The plan of the Little Entente to occupy the position of the Monarchy in the world market remained a vain hope. Thus, the economic structure and policy of the Little Entente – the excessive economic nationalism its members practised even against each other – did by far not consolidate the alliance, but on the contrary, hastened its disintegration. Beneš wished to stop this process, and towards the end of the twenties, considered the question of whether to set up an economic Little Entente. We shall see, however, that this plan ended in failure.

The financial situation of all three states was catastrophic. Despite this, they wanted to realize at the beginning their autarchic nationalism conceptions. However, there was an obvious contradiction between their aims and reality, since the achievement of autarchy would have required huge investment they simply did not have, their own resources being insufficient. So all of them were forced to ask for loans. By the early thirties, the credits received by Romania amounted to 372.8 million dollars, those of Yugoslavia to 173.9 and those of Czechoslovakia to 114.2.³⁰⁷

It was not easy to raise the money. First of all, the Western powers had their own financial troubles as well, while, on the other hand, the granting of credits was usually subject to political conditions.

The tension resulting from the different constitutional forms of the member states could not be surmounted either. Czechoslovakia was a democratic republic, where Masaryk and Beneš developed the traditions of Czech liberalism in a spirit of democracy. In Romania and Yugoslavia the monarchies were right-wing regimes, where the absolutistic ambitions of the kings were realized towards the end of the twenties by the establishment of royal dictatorships.

Another common task of the member states was – according to Beneš – to safeguard the achievements of 1918, to protect Central and South-Eastern Europe from social and political shocks, i.e. to prevent the expansion of revolution

³⁰⁷ Much more money would have been needed, but inspite of their efforts they were unable to procure more. Cf. Iván Berend T. – György Ránki: *Közép-Kelet-Európa gazdasági fejlődése a 19–20. században* (Economic development of East-Central Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries). Budapest, 1969.

and to stabilize the capitalist system. Though not laid down in the treaties, these tasks represented an important field of co-operation. In this respect the Little Entente certainly fulfilled its aims, but without being able to lay the new political and economic bases of Central Europe. It contributed to a temporary consolidation of the Danube Basin and to the restoration of a relative calmness, which, however, could not be long-lasting.

The political and military bloc set up in 1920-21 produced a double effect. On the one hand, it brought the small victorious states nearer to each other by reducing - though not eliminating - their mutual antagonisms; on the other hand, it intensified the hostility between victors and vanquished. Under a surface of apparent calmness, the antagonisms kept boiling and broke out with immense force as soon as the power relations were changed.

The choice between a "Danube confederation or Little Entente" was essentially settled by the creation of the Little Entente. The trend represented by Beneš prevailed over Paléologue's plans. The planned confederation, though not without hope of success, failed, because significant local and international factors promoted the establishment of the Entente. In the struggle between the two conceptions, the victory went to the plan which sought to secure the future of the Danube Basin by the consistent observance of the peace treaties, with the help of a political and military alliance of the states involved.

The European Great Powers in the First Half of the Twenties

France

As described in the preceding chapters, France was opposed to the establishment of the Little Entente, because it hindered the creation of the envisaged Danubian confederation. In autumn 1920, however, Philippe Berthelot, the new Secretary General at the Quai d'Orsay, put an end to this political line and, according to Clemenceau's ideas, began an orientation towards the alliance which had meanwhile been established. The tensions between the two parties were certainly eased thereby, but not fully resolved, since Aristide Briand, who came to office in 1921, continued to advocate the establishment of a Danubian confederation and therefore secretly supported the restoration of the Habsburgs. A substantial improvement in relations between France and the Little Entente only began after Briand's departure in 1922, but these contacts were far from being unclouded, as is emphasized in the literature. In its Danubian policy – including its relations with the Little Entente – France suffered several setbacks (even in the twenties), and could realize many of its aims only with the utmost difficulty – or not at all. The reasons were primarily of a geographic and economic nature (the relations between France and the Little Entente having no economic basis), at the same time facilitating the efforts of Britain, Italy and – in the thirties – Germany, opponents of the French Danubian policy. The members of the Little Entente manoeuvred between the Great Powers, and this influenced considerably their standpoint in regard to the agreements offered by France. We shall see that all three states tried to avoid signing these agreements, and France needed many years of diplomatic effort to achieve concrete results.

In the first half of the twenties, the differences between the European great powers became more and more acute. The Franco-British negotiations of 1921–22 made it clear that Great Britain was unwilling to engage itself in securing the status quo in Eastern Europe. This objectively increased the importance of the Little Entente. From 1921 on, France made an effort to set up an eastern alliance system, but could realize its plan only in connection with Poland. The agreement concluded in 1921, which was to safeguard the interests of France and Poland against Germany, was the foundation stone of the French eastern alliance. Bismarck's famous phrase: "an independent Poland is for Germany equivalent to the presence of the French army on the Vistula" – was given real meaning in this situation. For some time a similar agreement with Czechoslo-

vakia that was of equal strategic importance, could not be concluded. But a still more difficult task was the conclusion of a Franco-Romanian and a Franco-Yugoslav agreement. This was only achieved in the second half of the twenties.

Our knowledge of French eastern policy has been considerably modified by documents to be found in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry. We actually obtain an inside view of the long diplomatic struggle which took place between France and the states of the Little Entente in the course of concluding the agreements.

From the very beginning of the twenties, the political and military leaders of France made a point of linking the ambitions of their country's foreign policy to all three states of the Little Entente. Their intention was to conclude, first with Czechoslovakia and later with Romania and Yugoslavia, political and military agreements. As Foch wrote to Mittelhauser: "... after an agreement concluded without delay between France and Czechoslovakia, the states of the Little Entente will be invited to adhere" ("un accord établi sans retard entre la France et Tchécoslovaquie, les Etats de la Petite Entente seraient ultérieurement invités à adhérer").¹ These agreements were of the utmost importance for the eastern policy of France, while Czechoslovakia – due to its geographical situation – was the main link in this policy. This was actually one of the main reasons for the special attention and support enjoyed by Masaryk and Beneš in Paris at the end of the war and during the peace conference.

But while Masaryk and Beneš tried to make the best use of French fear of Germany when drawing the Czechoslovak frontiers, they were most cautious on the question of concluding a political and military agreement as desired by France and delayed it for several years. Marshal Foch, who had already visited Prague in 1921 to discuss the details of the agreement, realized very quickly that the ideas of the Czechs were not quite the same as his own. In fact, Beneš was surprised by the offer of Foch, because – as he said – he did not yet consider the situation ripe for such a step.² The reserved attitude of both Masaryk and Beneš had economic and political origins. As a matter of fact, in the early twenties Czechoslovakia maintained close economic relations with the Weimar Republic, which became its main commercial partner. In addition, political relations were also satisfactory. Aimed against Germany, the political and military agreement offered by the French would have jeopardized all this, furnishing at the same time a reasonable pretext for Germany to join the enemies of Czechoslovakia. (Hungary counted from the very beginning as a potential ally of Germany.) Furthermore, Masaryk and his followers feared the reaction of the political left, principally of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, which had close contacts with Germany; finally, they were not indifferent to the presumably negative reaction of the international social democratic movement and of the democratic forces in general.

¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 28–30. Letter of Foch to Mittelhauser (n.d.).

² *Ibid.*

Besides domestic reasons, the attitude of Great Britain also represented a considerable restraint. The Czechoslovak statesmen wished to avoid a situation where they would have to choose between France and Britain, all the more, since they were economically dependent on the latter. As already mentioned, Czechoslovakia needed loans, and these were mostly available in Britain. But they did not wish to antagonise Britain for political reasons either, because – contrary to public belief – London's voice was decisive in the settlement of political questions in Central and South-Eastern Europe (e.g. on the question of Franco-Hungarian rapprochement, of the two return attempts of ex-King Charles, or of the Austrian and Hungarian reconstruction loans).

The Czechoslovak government was furthermore unwilling to spoil its good relations with Italy, for at the time it was co-operating with Italy on several important questions – first of all, on the Habsburg question. So the Czechs were afraid not without reason that a Franco-Czechoslovak agreement would put an end to this.

In addition, they had reservations about the agreement, because it involved the risk of a military conflict with the Soviet Union in support of Poland, which was part of the French security system. Certainly, Beneš advocated the weakening of Soviet power (this is why he opposed Lloyd George in the recognition of the Soviet Union), but he wished to avoid fighting against the Russian people.

At the same time, this very "risky" French agreement could offer no guarantee at all against Hungary. The guarantees were supposed to be aimed exclusively against Germany, "where nobody menaced the frontiers", since the German Government acknowledged the historical frontiers of Bohemia and furthermore had no intention of crossing them in support of the German population living there. Hungary, on the other hand, it was believed, wished to re-annex the Ruthenia and Slovakia. The aim of having the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier guaranteed, may have played a role in the negative Czechoslovak attitude to the French schedule of agreement which disregarded the problem of Czechoslovakia's relations with Hungary. Of course, Prague considerably overstated the threat from Hungary, since after the establishment of the Little Entente the Czechoslovak-Hungarian frontier was assured by a block of more than 42 million against a Hungary of less than 10 million inhabitants. Furthermore, after the ratification of the Trianon Treaty, Bethlen tried to obtain a so-called "little revision" of the frontiers, with reference to Millerand's letter. In truth, Prague wanted to delay the conclusion of the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement as long as possible, under the pretext of the Hungarian question, being sure that France would never guarantee the Czechoslovak-Hungarian frontier. Thus, Beneš profiting of his country's key position, wished to ensure that the envisaged agreement should cover not only the German-French and the German-Czechoslovak, but the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier as well.

French political and military circles tried to convince the Czechoslovak government of the undesirability and impracticability of its demand, for "it is difficult to imagine a situation where Hungary would attack France", whereas the

clause in question has to rely upon reciprocity.³ As documented by an aide mémoire sent to the Quai d'Orsay, however, the Czechoslovak government did not at all exclude the possibility of a Franco-Hungarian war: "In the event of an Anschluss, Hungary will have a common frontier with Germany. The two defeated countries will wage a common war against the Europe of Versailles."⁴

Both parties thus maintained their positions. After Foch returned from Prague, the plan for the agreement fell into the background, to be taken up only two years later, in 1923. Again, the initiator was the French government. But the events which had taken place meanwhile had created a more suitable atmosphere for the realization of the plan. Obviously the Ruhr crisis had a strong effect on the Czechoslovak government. There was estrangement in Anglo-Czechoslovak relations, too. Prague blamed the British government for having engaged itself with Germany and Hungary (supporting in the Ruhr conflict the German standpoint, and on the question of the reconstruction loan the Hungarian one), but refusing at the same time to grant Czechoslovakia the financial support it had requested in order to realize its political aims.

In this situation the French government deemed it opportune to return to its former offer. As a matter of fact, there are several schedules to the agreement to be found in the Quai d'Orsay, permitting us to reconstruct the diplomatic struggle, and to observe the whole process leading finally to the conclusion of the agreement, as a result of mutual compromise. Both parties reduced their original conditions, especially France. The fundamental difference was this: while the Czechoslovak government desired an exclusively political agreement concerning generalities and without time limits, which would include the question of Hungary, the French government wanted to have a more specific agreement including concrete military co-operation, which would apply only indirectly to Hungary. If possible, Hungary should not even be mentioned by name. Nevertheless, the French schedule of summer 1923 still includes a special article on Hungary.

As set out in item 3 of the schedule, France agreed to assist Czechoslovakia in the event of unprovoked aggression by Hungary against Czechoslovakia and to harmonize their positions. ("Dans le cas d'une agression non provoquée de la Hongrie contre la Tchécoslovaquie la France s'engage à prêter assistance à la Tchécoslovaquie et à se concerter avec elle à cet effet.")⁵ The kind of assistance was not specified, it presumably meant the transport of arms and war material and the sending of advisors; this was in accordance with the original plan of the French. The second item concerning Germany was formulated more clearly: the parties agreed to mutual assistance ("prêter mutuellement assistance") and emphasized the common defence of their territories ("la défense de leur terri-

³ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 41. f. 75. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry (n. d.).

⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 41. ff. 73-76. Comments to the draft of the Franco-Czechoslovak friendship pact (n. d.).

⁵ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 41. f. 60. The Franco-Czechoslovak draft agreement (n. d.).

toire").⁶ Paragraph 4 of the schedule outlines an agreement by the military experts – general staffs – of the countries on the execution of items 2 and 3, i.e. on concrete co-operation against Germany and Hungary.

The planned agreement and its extension to Hungary had many opponents in Paris, especially on the military side. Marshal Foch criticized it most vigorously. The agreement, he said, applied to Germany, and only in an indirect way to Hungary (the interpretation of paragraph 2 refers to it), which should not be mentioned by name. In the event of a Czechoslovak-Hungarian war, France could only assist Czechoslovakia with arms, war material and advisors. Compared with Germany (of 60 million inhabitants), Hungary (6 millions) was no serious enemy, Foch wrote to Poincaré, and was thus only a secondary target. It was in the interests of Czechoslovakia to concentrate its forces against Germany, because even if it defeated the Hungarians in the event of a German-Hungarian war against Czechoslovakia, Germany would win and Czechoslovakia could not escape from German occupation. But if Germany was defeated, it would be easy for Czechoslovakia to re-establish the former state of affairs in regard to Hungary. The main enemy of Czechoslovakia – like that of France, Poland and Belgium as well – was Germany against which it had to concentrate its forces, entrusting precautionary measures against Hungary to its allies within the Little Entente, i.e. to Yugoslavia and Romania. For France it would be more advantageous if the agreement left Hungary unmentioned, (*expressis verbis*), because this would mean its indirect adherence to the Little Entente.⁷ Foch's view was accepted by Poincaré, too.

In June the Quai d'Orsay sent the draft to Prague, but waited in vain for the comments of the Czechoslovak government. Under the pretext that the draft had to be basically re-worked, Beneš was in no hurry to reply. In October he went with Masaryk to Paris, where the question was discussed in detail with Millerand and Poincaré. All of them wished to conclude an agreement which would be the most serviceable for the security of the two countries. "Czechoslovakia wishes to remain with France for better and worse", said Masaryk in the Palais Elysée in a speech which caused great sensation at the time.⁸ Although these words, repeatedly quoted by the press conveyed quite a lot, it was still unknown, what kind of agreement was actually envisaged. As a matter of fact, not even the contracting parties knew it, because their ideas were contradictory even on the basic questions: against whom should the agreement be aimed? How was their sovereignty to be safeguarded? Would there also be a military agreement? The most substantial differences were on the latter, for in this matter the Czechoslovak side seemed to be unyielding. Although the positions had moved considerably closer to one another, since the Czechoslovak government had abandoned its original

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 28–30. Letter of Foch to Mittelhauser (n. d.).

⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 41–42. Aide mémoire about the visit of Beneš to Peretti de la Rocca, October 18, 1923.

demand concerning Hungary, a full identity of views was still far from being achieved. Referring to the situation of Germany and to Czechoslovak public opinion, Beneš considered the conclusion of military conventions as untimely.⁹ On the other hand, he promised to reply to the French offer of the previous June after his return and, after consultations with Masaryk, to send a draft agreement to Paris, which could be discussed in December when he would be in Paris. There are some indications that Beneš tried to persuade Masaryk to accept the military obligations. The latter strongly vacillated, being against military alliances in general, and well known for his pacifism. Beneš even boasted in the Quai d'Orsay that the above cited declaration was made by Masaryk in the Palais Elysée under his influence.¹⁰ It was anyway representative of President Masaryk's hesitation that shortly afterwards, at a royal dinner in his honour in London, when he was asked, whether it was true that Czechoslovakia has signed a military convention with France, he replied: "telle convention n'était pas signée et ne le serait jamais".¹¹ (Such a convention was not signed and would never be signed.)

On November 28, 1923, Beneš told Couget, the French minister in Prague, that he was working on the new draft agreement, which would be not as laconic as the previous one, it will be of a more friendly style and include a review of Franco-Czechoslovak relations. In other words: instead of the concrete, precise formulation of the French, he suggested an ineffectual wording of commonplaces.¹²

In November 1923, the Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia was again negotiating in Paris, where he presented orally and in writing his comments on the French draft of June. The difference between the two texts was fundamental. The most significant difference was on the question of the military alliance: the new text did not even include an allusion to military co-operation, whereas the French draft devoted a special article to the matter. Hungary was not mentioned by name – a concession to the French (however, Beneš emphasized verbally the necessity of precautionary measures against Hungary). In agreement with the French, the measures to be taken in the event of an Anschluss were more strongly stressed. The article dealing with the Habsburg question was perfectly new. The French draft only included a clause about the Hohenzollern dynasty: the contracting parties were obliged to co-operate in order to prevent a restoration. According to the Czechoslovak draft, the contracting parties would act in accordance with the decisions of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 1, 1920 and April 1, 1921, as well as with the policy of the Hungarian government as determined in its declaration of November 10, 1921. In case of need – at the request of one of the parties – joint action would be taken. The difference between

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. f. 60. Report of Saint-Aulaire to Poincaré, November 21, 1923; letter of Poincaré to Foch, November 27, 1923.

¹² AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 64–65. Couget's report to Poincaré, November 28, 1923.

the agreements covering the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs was still significant: in the latter only consultation. There was also another difference: the French version only included a general statement that the present agreement was not contrary to earlier agreements by the contracting parties, while the Czechoslovak text mentioned these agreements by name (necessary first of all on account of Italy).

The final text that was to be signed was drawn up in December 1923, when Beneš was staying in Paris. French government circles made considerable concessions to the wishes of Masaryk and Beneš – most significantly: the clauses concerning the co-operation of the general staffs was left out (the agreement became a political convention), a special paragraph dealt with the Habsburg question, the point concerning Italy, Austria, Yugoslavia and Romania was included.¹³

During the preliminary discussion the position of Poland was a great problem for both parties. As already mentioned, Czechoslovakia was reluctant to get involved in a war against the Soviet Union on behalf of Poland, bound by treaty to France. The negotiations were followed with great interest in Warsaw too, and although the envisaged agreement would have been advantageous for Poland's security as well, it was not welcomed at all, for Poland was anything but pleased about the possibility of getting involved in a war against Germany in support of Czechoslovakia. Warsaw was also worried by the arming of Czechoslovakia by France, since these arms could, at any time, be turned against Poland, while the frontier dispute (which had already led to a seven-day war between the two countries) was still far from being settled.

Szembek, Polish chargé d'affaires in Paris, appeared several times at the Quai d'Orsay, asking for information about the agreement.¹⁴ According to the Franco-Polish agreement, the French government was obliged to consult Poland on the draft agreement, to ask its opinion and to take its objections into consideration. Respecting the rules of the game, Poincaré thus informed the Polish government about the preparations, about the contents of the draft and the course of the negotiations; he added reassuringly that the treaty would not be at variance with the agreement concluded with Poland, in fact, it would complement the Franco-Polish agreement: no military agreement would be signed, this being unnecessary because of the French military mission in Prague and the co-operation of the general staffs.¹⁵ So the situation, whereby Poland could find itself in a state of war

¹³ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. f. 66. The Franco-Czechoslovak draft agreement, December 13, 1923; *ibid.*, ff. 78–81. Aide mémoire of Laroche; *ibid.* f. 65; aide mémoire about the talk Beneš–Peretti de la Rocca, December 13, 1923; *ibid.* f. 70. Comments to the Franco-Czechoslovak draft agreement, December 13, 1923.

¹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 95–96. Aide mémoire about the visit of Szembek, Polish minister in Paris, to Peretti de la Rocca, February 13, 1924. The Polish diplomat was mainly interested in the question whether France was going to conclude a military agreement also with Czechoslovakia. Peretti de la Rocca reassured him that this was out of question.

¹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 95–96. Poincaré's letter to the French minister in Warsaw, December 28, 1923; *ibid.* ff. 95–96. Aide mémoire about Szembek's visit to Peretti de la Rocca,

with Germany on account of Czechoslovakia, could not occur. However, the statements made by Poincaré did not reassure the government in Warsaw, since it had confidential information about the preparation of a military agreement.

Signed on January 25, 1924, the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement did not actually mention military co-operation between the two states, nor did it include any military clauses; it was merely a friendship treaty and alliance obliging the two parties "to act in concert in any international question that could menace their security or the order established by the peace treaties signed by both of them".¹⁶ Attempts at the restoration of the Hohenzollern and Habsburg dynasties as well as the Anschluss were regarded as such.

This time Beneš refused to sign the military agreement suggested by the French. "Since Prague proved to be unyielding in regard to the military convention, the only way out for us was to attach to the text of alliance the interpretative letter of the two foreign ministers concerning the co-operation of the two general staffs", wrote Laroche in an aide mémoire.¹⁷

The following letters were sent on January 26, the day after the agreement was signed, Poincaré addressed a letter to Beneš, who replied to it on January 31. The responsibilities of the chiefs of staff were identically formulated by both Poincaré and Beneš. Accordingly, the general staffs of the two countries would maintain and strengthen co-operation aimed at developing a concerted plan in order to resist aggression by a common enemy against one of the two countries. The respective paragraphs read literally as follows: "Il est entendu que par application de l'article 2 du Traité d'alliance en date d'hier (in the letter of Beneš: 'en date du 25 janvier' – M.Á.) les États-Major généraux de deux pays continueront de maintenir et de resserrer d'une manière constante leur entente dans le même esprit et pour la même fin, tant en ce qui concerne l'établissement de plans concertés pour parer à une agression dirigée contre l'un des deux pays par un ennemi commun, qu'en ce qui touche l'étude des moyens respectifs d'assistance envisagés plus haut."¹⁸ In both letters, the texts are fully identical. On

December 28, 1923; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. f. 45. Aide mémoire about Szembek's visit to Peretti de la Rocca, February 13, 1924.

¹⁶ Dénes Halmosy: *op. cit.* pp. 204–206.

¹⁷ Jules Laroche: *Au Quai d'Orsay avec Briand et Poincaré: 1913–1926*. Paris, 1957, p. 185.

¹⁸ The vast material about the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement does not include the letter of Beneš and that of Poincaré. There is a short notice indicating that the letters have been taken out in 1936 by M. Bargeton. However, the copies of the letters can be found: AD. *Collection des Papiers d'Agents – Papiers Millerand*. vol. 56. ff. 157–160, and: *Archives du Service historique de l'armée de Terre à Vincennes* – 7 N. 3105, carton 12, dossier 1. The letters were published by P. Wandycz: *L'alliance franco-tchécoslovaque de 1924: Un échange de lettres Poincaré–Beneš. Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 1984/3–4. In his paper Wandycz also published two highly important statements. In its note of February 9, 1937 the Troisième Bureau of the French General Staff called the attention of the Quai d'Orsay to the difference between the two letters. The text of Beneš is said to mean an automatic action for both contracting parties even if they do not fall victim to a direct aggression, whereas Poincaré limits the action to the case when both states fall victim to a German aggres-

February 16, 1937, the Quai d'Orsay lays down that Poincaré's text is binding, while the term in the letter of Beneš is a typist's error. Wandycz is right when he rejects the allusion to the typist's error, since in Poincaré's letter of February 14, 1924 to Marshal Foch we also find the above-cited text. And it can also be found in the copies at the Quai d'Orsay and in the archives of Vincennes. The author also asks with good reason: where is Poincaré's letter cited as instance by the French General Staff in 1937? Is it not rather a deliberate effort of the General Staff in order to limit the obligations of France towards Czechoslovakia? No doubt: the exact specification of these obligations require still further research work.

The contracting parties agreed not to enclose these letters in the text of the agreement to be sent to the League of Nations and to acquaint both Parliaments with the main point of the agreement; these reports were drafted and harmonized in advance.

News of the agreement created an international stir. The world's press wrote for weeks about a secret military convention, denouncing the imperialist ambitions of France and its drive for hegemony in Europe. The attacks were led by Germany which regarded the agreement as aimed against itself and at the encirclement of the country. The views of Tusar (former Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, who maintained close contact with the German social democrats, but was on bad terms with Beneš), and who emphasized the untruth of these beliefs, were simply ignored.¹⁹ The *Berliner Tageblatt* even published the text of a secret military convention which, it alleged, had already been signed in October 1918.²⁰ This was categorically denied by the French government: it stated that in 1918 no military convention had been signed, only negotiations were started about the establishment of a French military mission in Prague, the chief of which was supposed to fulfil the function of the Czechoslovak chief of staff.²¹

An equal uproar was caused in Italian government circles. The press fiercely attacked France; "which continuously aspires to European hegemony, as is proved by the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement". The newspaper headlines reported an anti-Italian clause of the secret Franco-Czechoslovak agreement, Paris and Prague having agreed to act in concert against Italian efforts to acquire Mediterranean hegemony. In spite of French protests the press campaign was not stopped. Mussolini had no intention of intervening, since he himself believed that the agreement seriously endangered Italy's interests in Central and South

sion. A comparison of this part of the two letters makes it clear, however, that the texts are literally identical, without any difference. The following sentence may be found in both letters: "Une agression dirigée contre l'un des deux pays par un ennemi commun."

¹⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 42. f. 81. Margerie's report to Poincaré, March 20, 1923; *ibid.* Couget's report to Poincaré, March 3, 1923.

²⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 42. f. 86. Selections from the foreign press, March 17, 1924.

²¹ *Ibid.* ff. 137-138. Margerie's report to Poincaré, January 4, 1924.

Eastern Europe. He was afraid that the agreement would not only make Czechoslovakia enter the service of France, but also the allies of the Little Entente; and this would have even worse consequences for Italy.²²

The British press was more moderate, reporting on the secret military convention only with reference to the German and Italian articles. Nevertheless, Britain was obviously afraid that France, the strongest power on the continent, would gain in strength and become its serious rival. Public opinion was decidedly against military alliances, blaming them for the outbreak of World War One, because – as a British newspaper put it – “a military agreement between two states against another country can never be a work of peace”.

French and Czechoslovak diplomacy paid utmost attention to reconciliation with Britain, wishing to prove the untruth of the allegations, but succeeded only in part. The Foreign Office knew about a coded telegram sent from Prague and informing the Quai d'Orsay on January 13 of the arrival of General Sirový in Paris.²³ It was obvious that the deputy chief of staff of Czechoslovakia had come to Paris to discuss military questions, and so it was not easy for Beneš to explain in London that there would be no change in the co-operation of the general staffs. Finally, Curzon seemingly gave credit to the information received. As a matter of fact, Beneš notified him of what was most important: Czechoslovakia was not going to support the conclusion of the Franco-Romanian and the Franco-Yugoslav agreements. This information was very significant for the British government because – like the Italian – it was afraid of the logical consequence of the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement, i.e. that a similar one would be concluded with Romania and Yugoslavia.²⁴

The Austrian government also joined the Italian, German and British attacks. The press reported on a secret military convention which was to prepare the occupation of Austria by France and Czechoslovakia. The attacks were especially sharp during the visit of the German chancellor and foreign minister to Vienna. These reports – in reality: pure invention – were to the advantage of the Anschluss movement.²⁵

In Parliament and the press as well as through their foreign representations both the French and the Czechoslovak governments denied the existence of any military convention and refuted the reports. In Parliament Beneš referred only to

²² *Ibid.*, ff. 159–162. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Rome to Poincaré, January 9, 1923; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. f. 96. Selections from the foreign press, March 19, 1924.

²³ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 183–184. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the talks with Osuský, January 24, 1924; *ibid.* ff. 164–165. Saint-Aulaire's report to Poincaré, January 16, 1924; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. ff. 27–28. Poincaré's telegram, January 30, 1924.

²⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 41. ff. 159–161. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Rome to Poincaré, January 9, 1924.

²⁵ *Ibid.* ff. 159–161. Aide mémoire of the French minister in Vienna about the Austrian press campaign, March 19, 1924.

the agreement of the two general staffs in 1918 and considered their co-operation as satisfactory.²⁶

Nevertheless, it might still be asked, whether the diplomatic and press campaign had any foundation, i.e. whether a military convention was concluded or not. According to our present knowledge the answer must be no, for no paper of documentary value has been found so far that would prove the existence of such a convention. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, the Nazis searched the Prague archives in vain. They found no trace of any such convention, whereas they did find evidence of other secret agreements. The military convention was not concluded, because Masaryk and Beneš opposed it, although the French government had insisted upon it since 1921. As already mentioned, Foch left Prague in 1921 empty-handed. It was not opposition to military conventions in general – although Masaryk was opposed to any such agreements –, for there were actually three military agreements concluded against Hungary which Prague never tried to keep secret. In the present case, however, the proposed convention was aimed not at Horthy's Hungary but against Weimar Republic which did not contest the rightfulness of its frontiers with Czechoslovakia, and enjoyed much sympathy in left-wing circles both at home and abroad. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of international relations, a Franco-Czechoslovak agreement was also considered differently from a military convention between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia or Romania. So the main point was not, *against* whom, but *with* whom the agreement was to be concluded. An alliance with France, particularly a military one, could be expected to be supposed by all the European Great Powers. This could not be disregarded by Masaryk and Beneš, so they preferred not to conclude a military convention. It was unnecessary anyway, since close military co-operation already existed between the two states. As already mentioned, there was a military mission consisting of 300 French officers who worked as advisors in Czechoslovakia; even the chief of the staff was a French officer, General Mittelhauser. So the above declaration made by Masaryk in London was in accordance with the real situation – anyway as far as the first part of his statement was concerned.

The exaggerated and long-lasting diplomatic uproar created by Italy and Britain over the agreement was not so much against the agreement as such, but aimed rather at preventing a similar agreement with Romania and Yugoslavia. There is no doubt that both powers played a role in the rejection of the French proposal by Belgrade and Bucharest; to the great surprise of Paris, not even Beneš supported the idea of such agreements any more. The opposition to the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement was actually so strong that Beneš, who – according to his agreement with the Quai d'Orsay – wanted to draw his allies of the Little Entente into the alliance system, now considered this untimely. He gave as a reason at the end of January 1923 that Romania would be primarily

²⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. ff. 90–91. Report of Couget, French minister in Prague, to Poincaré, January 20, 1924.

concerned with the "Russian" question, while an agreement with Yugoslavia would offend Italian sensitivities.²⁷

Yugoslavia and Romania Do Not Follow the Czechoslovak Example

After the conclusion of the agreement with Czechoslovakia, the French government wished to conclude similar agreements with Romania and Yugoslavia. The question was to be discussed by the Belgrade conference of the Little Entente. The agreement was welcomed by public opinion in both Romania and Yugoslavia, and eulogized in the press. However, the two governments maintained an attitude of reserve. On the one hand, they were rather angry with the parties for not having informed them in advance of the contents of the agreement, on the other hand, they were showing due regard for Italy and Great Britain. Furthermore, Romania was afraid that through the agreement France would move closer to the Soviet Union. (From the very beginning, Czechoslovak policy towards Soviet Russia had been more liberal.)²⁸ So the Belgrade conference raised great expectations.

The cautiousness of the participants became clear from the first day. The Franco-Czechoslovak agreement was touched upon, but it was removed from the agenda without genuine discussion. As a matter of fact, the agreement would have meant no significant advantage for Yugoslavia or Romania either politically or economically. Both expected something else from it, wishing to assert their own real or imagined interests which, mainly for geographical reasons, were very different. On the other hand, Poincaré's plan disregarded the specific foreign affairs problems of the two states. Since neither of them was directly interested in the German question, they would only have met their obligations under the treaty if France, in return, had offered guarantees against the Soviet Union and Italy, respectively. This however was unacceptable to Paris. The attitude of the two countries was also influenced by the fact that Beneš himself did not wish to see further agreements concluded.

The cautiousness of Yugoslavia and Romania was increased still more by the international uproar over the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement. The reaction of Britain and Italy was crucial, because it was perfectly clear that the criticism of Czechoslovakia was a warning, with the real aim of restraining them from concluding a similar pact. However, Britain and Italy only used indirect methods to make their views clear: the former refusing a request for loans and by the strict

²⁷ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 41. ff. 156-157. Couget's report to Poincaré, January 26, 1924.

²⁸ *Ibid.* ff. 125-126. Report of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, January 3, 1924; *ibid.* f. 124. Report of Clément-Simon, French minister in Belgrade, to Poincaré, January 3, 1924.

observance of amortization terms²⁹ (the policy which had proved so effective in the case of the Hungarian loan), while the latter used political and economic pressure.

Poincaré had already prepared the extension of the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement in line with the discussions of the two parties. Time was pressing, for the French had much information indicating that Mussolini intended to frustrate their project and to establish strong ties with the two countries. Thus, French diplomacy was faced with a double task: to upset Italy's calculations by outstripping the Italians, and to win over the Yugoslav and Romanian governments. It was clear that the real battle would be fought for Yugoslavia. Since opinions on the Yugoslav-Italian and Yugoslav-French agreement published so far have simply repeated commonplaces and have not always corresponded to the truth, we shall now try to reconstruct in detail the course of the negotiations. Documents found in French and Italian archives as well as in the bequest of Prince Regent Paul kept in the United States, put the events in another light and permit us to add some significant nuances to the general aspect. The latter especially demonstrate the efforts made by King Alexander as well as by Ninčić and Pašić to arrive at an agreement with Italy. Even relations with France were subordinated to this aim, and this was the main reason why they avoided the French attempts at rapprochement.

Since the summer of 1923, negotiations had been going on between Yugoslavia and Italy concerning the settlement of the Fiume question which, according to Mussolini, had not been resolved satisfactorily by Sforza, Mussolini wished to assert Italian interests at any price, be it by force or otherwise.³⁰ He also wanted to avail himself of French influence in Belgrade. On September 12, 1923, Contarini, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, had talks with Charles Roux, the French chargé d'affaires in Rome. In order to awaken French interest, he suggested the idea of a trilateral (Italian-Yugoslav-French) agreement.³¹ Two days later the secretary general asked Poincaré through Barrère, French ambassador in Rome, to use his influence on Belgrade to help settle the Fiume question. The same day Charles Roux informed the Quai d'Orsay that Mussolini was trying to conclude a military agreement with Yugoslavia. On September 15, Millerand told Laroche, deputy chief of the political department, by telephone that, according to his confidential information, the Italian government was trying to exclude France from the Fiume settlement (the Italian proposal suggesting a tripartite agreement being only a tactical play). In the opinion of the President, direct intervention in the negotiations was not possible. France could not pretend to be disinterested, since

²⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 183-187. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the talks with Osuský, Czechoslovak minister in Paris, January 24, 1924.

³⁰ In September 1923, Mussolini considered resolving the Fiume question by force.

³¹ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 52. f. 2bis. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about negotiations with Yugoslavia. (n. d.).

Yugoslavia could not be left out of consideration.³² The same day he instructed the French ambassador in Rome to pay close attention to the negotiations, to listen to the Italian proposals, but not to interfere. "Direct intervention in such delicate negotiations – he cabled – involves the risk that we shall be made responsible for the resulting arrangement."³³ This instruction was confirmed by a telegram to Rome on September 18.

The Quai d'Orsay was only informed by the Yugoslav government of the Italian draft and conditions of agreement on November 24, 1923 in a confidential memorandum presented by Miroslav Spalajković, the Yugoslav minister in Paris. Before replying to Mussolini, the Belgrade government wished to know the French position. The Italian proposal concerning the settlement of Fiume consisted of three points: (1) a general agreement concerned with the implementation of the peace treaty; (2) the maintenance of neutrality, if another party should be subject to unprovoked aggression; (3) the purchase of the area (if one of the parties was to buy it, the other would be entitled to compensation).

Laroche made the following comments on the conditions: (1) The principle of concluding a general agreement concerning the implementation of the peace treaty must be rejected, because "this would permit Italy to alienate Yugoslavia from France and the Little Entente. A prior agreement between France and the Little Entente is absolutely necessary". (2) The item on neutrality could remain, if based on the stipulations of the Franco-Italian convention of 1902. (3) In concert with the Yugoslavs, proposal on the purchase of the area was rejected.

On November 26, Peretti de la Rocca discussed the matter with Spalajković, presenting him with the above comments. The Yugoslav minister declared that Yugoslavia was unwilling to pay for the settlement of its relations with Italy – the question of Fiume included – by undertaking general obligations.³⁴ Since Poincaré invariably took the view that any Italo-Yugoslav agreement had to be preceded by a Franco-Yugoslav convention, Spalajković repeated that Yugoslavia had always sided with France and so a formal agreement was unnecessary. However, the Quai d'Orsay insisted on its original position, i.e. on a prior Franco-Yugoslav or a simultaneous trilateral agreement. On November 28, 1923, Peretti de la Rocca sent a letter to Spalajković, where he again raised the idea of a Franco-Yugoslav agreement. But in Peretti de la Rocca's note of December 8 about his talk with King Alexander of Yugoslavia, we read the following sentence: "Le Roi n'a pas parlé de confirmer par écrit l'alliance franco-serbe". (The King did not speak about the written confirmation of the Franco-Serb alliance.)³⁵ In fact, the King made some statements concerning the Italo-Yugoslav agreement, which caused uneasiness in Paris. When it became clear that Mussolini was encouraging

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis–4.

³⁵ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis–5.

Yugoslavia to arbitrarily occupy Saloniki (thereby attaching it to Italy), French diplomacy did its best to restrain Belgrade from this risky adventure. Any information was forwarded at once to the British government which was most interested in the matter.³⁶

On December 18, Contarini had talks with the French ambassador Barrère on the question of Tangier and Tunis. He expressed his misgivings about future relations between Italy and France and alluded to the possibility of an understanding between the two countries in connection with the Italo-Yugoslav agreement.³⁷ This was a further initiative in favour of the trilateral agreement he had suggested previously. In his next talk with Barrère on December 24, he again returned to the question, emphasizing that France should take part in the negotiations either directly or indirectly.³⁸

On December 27, Poincaré instructed Barrère to be cautious with the proposals of Contarini. Although the plan deserved much attention, "there can be no question of a similar agreement as long as the Fiume affair remains unsettled".³⁹ In his reply Barrère should only say that "the initiative was received with sympathy, and without assuming a definite standpoint, we shall study the possibility of an eventual agreement aimed at consolidating the contacts between the three states. However, the question of Fiume must be settled directly by the two interested parties between themselves".⁴⁰

In his reply of December 28, Barrère emphasized: he was also of the opinion that the envisaged agreement could not be concluded before a settlement of the Fiume question. And since it was important that the Yugoslav government should not refuse the settlement, he suggested putting pressure on Belgrade.⁴¹ On January 5 he recommended to Poincaré that Belgrade's opinion of the trilateral pact should also be sought, while immediate negotiations should begin with Italy. Given imminent changes in the British cabinet, any further delay would be unwise. He also pointed out that the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement – though not yet signed, but, as generally known, due to be signed in the near future – was giving rise to suspicion in Rome. "Time is not working for us", he added, France and Yugoslavia must take the opportunity, for if they are late, they lose their advantage.⁴²

In January 1924, the Italian proposal concerning the trilateral agreement was accepted in Paris. Poincaré informed the French minister in Belgrade of this on

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis – 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis – 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

January 8, and also gave the reasons for acceptance. "The trilateral agreement is not the best form of mutual security, but it facilitates the conclusion of an agreement between France and Yugoslavia, which will complement the agreement with Czechoslovakia." Poincaré expressed the hope that the Yugoslav government, knowing that France was ready after the trilateral agreement to make a bilateral agreement, would strive to achieve a settlement of the Fiume question.⁴³

On January 9, Barrère asked for an immediate reply to the question: Was the Belgrade government ready for the trilateral agreement? "Italian public opinion is worried about a possible Franco-Yugoslav and Franco-Romanian pact, since these agreements, together with the Franco-Czechoslovak pact, would result in the engagement of Italian forces." He warned his government against signing a pact with Yugoslavia before the conclusion of the trilateral agreement.⁴⁴

On January 10, the French minister in Belgrade, Clément-Simon, reported that he had discussed the trilateral agreement with Pašić. Ninčić, the King and Spalajković. "Pas d'objection de principe" (no objection in principle), he wrote. At the same time, Pašić told the French minister that Britain's reaction had to be known before the question could be decided, for the Francophile policy of the Little Entente was not approved of in London, as had been made known shortly before in connection with a request for a loan.⁴⁵

On January 12, 1924, Barrère informed the Quai d'Orsay that the Italian government was now opposed to the "pacte à trois". Contarini stated that his government deemed it unworthy of great powers that France should reach an agreement with Italy "through Yugoslavia". In addition, it was afraid of the British reaction. He thus suggested a bilateral Franco-Italian agreement. Barrère reminded him that the whole conception had been set out by Italy; without denying this, Contarini said that they hoped to arrange the Fiume matter in this way. Barrère had the impression that the position of Contarini remained unchanged, but encountered the opposition of Mussolini.⁴⁶ This was confirmed in a later cable; accordingly, Mussolini at first agreed in principle to the plan, but when the French wanted to have a convention on Tunis as well, he began to hesitate.⁴⁷

But the real shock for the French government came on January 16, 1924, when Clément-Simon reported from Belgrade that the text of the Italo-Yugoslav agreement was as good as ready and would be signed at the end of the month. Poincaré instructed Barrère to verify at once whether it had already been

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis-9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis-10.

signed.⁴⁸ Barrère replied that according to press reports, Mussolini and Pašić would meet at the end of the month in order to sign the agreement.⁴⁹

It was obvious that if Yugoslavia signed the agreement, the Italian government, whose position in regard to the "pacte à trois" had visibly changed, would no longer be interested in such a trilateral agreement. In this situation the French government had only one aim: the Italo-Yugoslav agreement should include no term making it difficult or impossible to sign a Franco-Yugoslav pact. On January 18, Poincaré cabled Belgrade asking for precise information about the agreement, indicating French worries and emphasizing the importance of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement.⁵⁰ The French tried to save what they could. They even considered sending a letter to Belgrade on the day the agreement was due to be signed, emphasizing the friendly relations between the two countries and referring to the Franco-Yugoslav agreement which was in preparation. They also contemplated asking Mussolini to officially inform the French government of the Italo-Yugoslav agreement. But finally both schemes were abandoned as unrealistic.

On January 22, 1924, Spalajković appeared at the Quai d'Orsay and handed to Peretti de la Rocca the text of the Italo-Yugoslav agreement. He referred to some differences between Pašić and Ninčić on the question, and tried to reassure Peretti: the agreement was only a pact of friendship and not of alliance, it concerned only the Balkans and was aimed at ousting Italy from the peninsula. The agreement, he said, would be signed on January 26 or 27. He also declared that the Italian minister in Belgrade had never mentioned the trilateral agreement to him, and in his opinion Italy had suggested it only for tactical reasons, wishing to put pressure on Yugoslavia. Finally, he referred to the fact that the King was also hesitating on the question of the "pacte à trois", because of the British attitude to it but that during his stay in Paris he would be ready to sign anything that was prepared.⁵¹ However, as was shown by the following weeks and months, this was anything but true: the King was unwilling to sign any kind of treaty with France.

Although it was already evident to Paris that the Yugoslav government was paying the utmost attention to the sensibilities of Mussolini and therefore rejecting every French proposal French diplomats began to push strongly for a Franco-Yugoslav agreement. Pašić and Ninčić, who were staying in Rome, were invited to travel from Italy directly to Paris, but the Prime Minister refused on the pretext that he had to return urgently to Belgrade on account of parliamentary affairs. The French government had to resign itself to this, but asked Pašić to visit the French capital after a short stay at home, in order to discuss and eventually sign the agreement. The Prime Minister did not refuse, but kept post-

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

poning his journey to Paris because of pressure of business and illness. The proposed visit of the King of Yugoslavia was also postponed. Unable by now to prevent the Italo-Yugoslav agreement, Poincaré made a last attempt to make the bilateral treaty a trilateral one. As a result, the Yugoslav minister in Rome, Antonović, met Mussolini one day before the agreement was due to be signed (on January 26), and had a talk with him about a possible trilateral Italian-French-Yugoslav treaty. Mussolini flatly refused the plan, because it would "cause discontent in public opinion" and nullify the Italo-Yugoslav agreement. He emphasized once more that he wanted to conclude a treaty with the French, but not a trilateral one.⁵² The French government, pretending to ignore Mussolini's refusal, appealed to Contarini the same day, asking him to prepare a draft of a trilateral treaty. The Italian Secretary General refused with the same arguments as Mussolini. In a letter to the Quai d'Orsay, Barrère recapitulated what he called "the comedy of the trilateral pact".⁵³

On January 27, 1924, Pašić and Ninčić had a long talk with the French ambassador in Rome. Referring to his political obligations at home, the Yugoslav Premier again refused to travel directly to Paris from Rome, but agreed to begin his French trip sooner, in ten days. Barrère again familiarized them with Contarini's draft of the "pacte à trois".

On January 27, 1924, the Italo-Yugoslav friendship treaty was signed in Rome, together with an agreement concerning the settlement of the Fiume question; accordingly, the harbour of Fiume was annexed to Italy. An attached protocol emphasized that the treaty was not aimed against Yugoslavia's agreement with Czechoslovakia and Romania.⁵⁴ So Mussolini managed to establish still closer links with Yugoslavia and to consolidate his position in the Balkans. It was a grievous defeat for French diplomacy. Poincaré now concentrated all his efforts on concluding, as soon as possible, an agreement with Yugoslavia and Romania along the lines of the Czechoslovak-French agreement and frustrating Mussolini's plans concerning Romania and Czechoslovakia. However, Poincaré was only able to achieve a small part of his plan. He prevented an Italo-Romanian agreement, but in this matter Mussolini himself was also helpful by recognizing the Soviet Union.

In Paris the Italo-Romanian negotiations were viewed for a long time with such concern, and as they seemed to be making some progress, intervention was decided upon. It was obvious that the struggle for influence in Romania would be won by the country which was prepared to grant a loan and ratify the Bessarabia convention the soonest. The French government promised both. The Brătianu cabinet was faced with a grave dilemma. Its hesitation was brought to a sudden end by the unexpected action of Mussolini in January 1924, when he recognized

⁵² *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 15.

⁵⁴ For the Italo-Yugoslav agreement cf. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (hereafter: *DDI*), Series VII, 1922-1935, Rome, Vol. II, 1955, doc. 382.

the Soviet Union. In Bucharest the news came like a bomb-shell. The negotiations were broken off. King Ferdinand and Foreign Minister Duca made arrangements for a visit to Paris, the date of which was set at April 1924. It was universally believed that a Franco-Romanian agreement would be negotiated and signed on this occasion. We shall see, however, that this was not to be the case.

Simultaneously, the French government continued its endeavours with Yugoslavia, regarding as its main task in spring 1924 to conclude an agreement with that country and to prevent Czechoslovakia from adhering to the Italo-Yugoslav pact, all the more since it had information that this was being considered.

On January 29, 1924, that is, two days after the Italo-Yugoslav agreement had been signed, Peretti had talks with the Yugoslav minister in Paris⁵⁵ and urged the earliest possible conclusion of the treaty. He asked the minister to prepare a draft before the arrival of Pašić in Paris. He emphasized that there would be no special military convention this time, but he attached great importance to the close and regular co-operation of the chiefs of staff. Spalajković was ready to prepare the draft, without mentioning it in the report intended for Ninčić.⁵⁶ The French proposal was drafted a day later by Laroche along the lines of the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement, with the only difference that, in addition to providing for military co-operation "it was important to provide for precautionary measures, so that Yugoslavia would not get involved in a military conflict with Bulgaria through ill-considered policy and Italian encouragement". Laroche also composed a letter which was to be an annex to the agreement. The draft agreement was also approved by Poincaré, with the reservation that the undertaking of obligations should not encourage Yugoslavia to attack Bulgaria.⁵⁷

The same day the French Premier cabled Barrère, instructing him, "not to initiate any more negotiations (with the Italians). On the contrary: it is time to start talks with Yugoslavia. These will take place during the visit of Pašić to Paris". As already noted, the Yugoslav Prime Minister had promised more than once to visit Paris. On January 30, he sent a message that he would arrive in the French capital on about February 10.⁵⁸

In the meantime, the Yugoslav Government tried to ascertain what kind of military support they could count on if they entered into conflict with Bulgaria. The Yugoslav Military Attaché was making enquiries about this from General Desticker. In his next note Laroche advises caution, as the Franco-Yugoslav military agreement could encourage the Yugoslavs to attack Bulgaria.⁵⁹ The French

⁵⁵ Regent Paul Nachlass in Bakmetieff Archives Butler Library Columbia University (henceforward: Regent Paul Nachlass). Box 110. "Report file. Alliance with France". 1924-27; AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 2bis-17.

⁵⁶ Regent Paul Nachlass. Report of Spalajković to Ninčić, January 1924.

⁵⁷ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 2bis-17. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about negotiations with Yugoslavia.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

military leadership also became increasingly critical of the agreement which was urged by Poincaré. While in the case of Czechoslovakia the same circles were ready to go to the most extreme lengths – they even demanded a secret military pact –, in the case of Yugoslavia they were opposed to an agreement on military co-operation.

On January 31, 1924, Marshal Foch disclosed to the Quai d'Orsay that he "disapproved in principle of the agreement with Yugoslavia, because it is not justifiable for security reasons, unlike the agreement concluded with the Czechs. It seems to be an effort at hegemony". "The Marshal was most anxious about the anti-Bulgarian attitude of the Yugoslavs", noted Laroche, and added: "the latter comment is just, the former not. For us, the agreements should counterbalance the mutual security system envisaged by Yugoslavia."⁶⁰

The position of the French military circles (finally accepted by the political leadership as well) would have brought Yugoslavia very few advantages but increased risk. It actually increased Belgrade's reservations against the agreement, which had existed from the very beginning.

On February 1, 1924, Ninčić instructed Spalajković, not to proceed further with the draft agreement. As soon as the parliamentary situation permitted, the Prime Minister would travel to Paris and negotiate the question personally.⁶¹ Scheduled for February 10, Pašić's journey was adjourned *sine die*. On February 17, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister sent another telegram to Spalajković with the following instruction: "... if the French initiate discussions about the alliance, please do not make any promise at all. We wish to wait for the effect of the Franco-Romanian agreement. This will show, whether the moment is propitious for a similar agreement to be concluded by Yugoslavia".⁶² (At the time – February 1924 – it was believed that a Franco-Romanian agreement would be signed in April, when King Ferdinand was due to come to Paris.)

This was not without foundation. In Paris preparations for the signing of an agreement began. Since it was evident that the question of Bessarabia would play a decisive role in the matter, the French Parliament ratified the so-called Bessarabia convention (concluded in 1920) a short time before the arrival of King Ferdinand. In a speech delivered on the occasion, Poincaré spoke warmly of Romania and of the relations between the two countries.⁶³

Antonescu, the Romanian minister in Paris, called on Peretti the same day (March 14), expressed his thanks for the warm words of the Premier and said that the ratification of the convention would permit the resumption of negotiations. In his opinion, these could take place during the royal visit. Finally he asked: What would be Italy's opinion of an eventual Franco-Romanian agree-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Regent Paul Nachlass. Coded cable of Ninčić to Spalajković, February 1, 1924.

⁶² *Ibid.* Coded cable of Ninčić to Spalajković, February 17, 1924.

⁶³ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 65. ff. 190–194. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the Franco-Romanian negotiations, March 29, 1927.

ment? Peretti misinformed Antonescu, because he replied that negotiations were going on with the Italians on this question, the inference being that Mussolini would not mind, if France concluded agreements with the other states of the Little Entente, similar to that signed with Czechoslovakia. (This he said in spite of possessing information attesting to the contrary.) Only in connection with Britain did he hint at a certain lack of comprehension in regard to the plans.⁶⁴ Peretti and Antonescu agreed to draw up the draft agreement before the King arrived in Paris. However, there were irreconcilable differences of substance. The French government wanted to prepare a draft similar to the agreements that had been signed with Czechoslovakia and was due to be signed with Yugoslavia.

On March 28, Antonescu appeared at the Quai d'Orsay and told Peretti that Foreign Minister Duca had insisted in a telegram that Bessarabia be *explicitly* mentioned in the draft.⁶⁵ Peretti presented the French draft, which the Romanian minister declared at once to be unsatisfactory, Bessarabia not being mentioned therein. Peretti tried to explain that the draft – just like the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav agreements – was limited to general considerations, but Antonescu asked that the Romanian-Polish or the Franco-Polish agreement should be taken as a basis, because the existing French draft merely repeated the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Romanian diplomat was actually right, and the French knew it very well. This comes to light in a memorandum from Poincaré to the Quai d'Orsay: "I share the opinion of Antonescu, I had similar impressions which I imparted to the political department: the agreement does not add anything to the convention of the League of Nations. Nevertheless" – the Premier goes on – "it is impossible for us to assume more obligations, especially in regard to Bessarabia."⁶⁶

So it was not surprising that the negotiations made no progress during the visit of King Ferdinand to France. After the King had left, Duca remained in Paris and had long discussions with Peretti, but the differences of opinion remained. Finally, Duca declared that he could understand why Bessarabia and the guarantee of the Romanian-Soviet frontiers could not be mentioned in the agreement, therefore he suggested a secret military agreement on the model of the Franco-Polish pact. He asked Peretti to place at his disposal the text of the Franco-Polish pact, so that he could study it. Peretti refused, saying that the agreement was secret, but he added that it only contained the agreement between the general staffs. However, the Romanian foreign minister remained unyielding.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ On this occasion, Antonescu declared that the guarantee of the Romanian-Soviet frontiers was the most important question for Romania. "Romania is strong enough to defeat Bulgaria or Hungary in a war. The situation is different with Russia." AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 65. f. 191.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

On April 17, Poincaré modified his previous standpoint; the Quai d'Orsay informed Duca of this by letter. According to the new French proposal, first a Franco-Romanian agreement should be concluded which would serve the common interest, and this could be followed by an agreement between the general staffs ("qui pourrait être suivi d'un accord militaire entre les Etats-Majeurs"). The military agreement would be attached to article 2 of the draft agreement, where the co-operation needed for the mutual security of the two countries was set out. In the letter Duca was reminded of the difference between the positions of Poland and Romania in regard to France which had to be reflected in the military agreements. France and Poland being neighbours of Germany, their agreement could not be the model for that to be concluded with Romania. Permanent contact had to be established between the general staffs, in order to consider the circumstances where war material might have to be delivered, but the dispatch of fighting forces was out of question.⁶⁸

On April 18, Antonescu asked on behalf of Brătianu for preliminary information from the French government on three matters: what advantages would accrue to Romania from the proposed agreement, if it were to become involved in a military conflict with the Soviet Union? What did the Franco-Polish military agreement contain? What could be expected as compensation for Anglo-Romanian alienation, a presumed consequence of a Franco-Romanian agreement?⁶⁹

After consulting Poincaré, Peretti replied that an agreement could be concluded only along the lines of the pact with Poland. He refused to disclose the contents of the Franco-Polish military agreement, because – as he put it – it changed daily. There was no answer to the third question which obviously concerned the granting of a loan. (However, there is no reference to it on record.) Finally, Peretti told Antonescu that it was not at all urgent for France to conclude an agreement. Romania on the other hand, had to be interested in an agreement because of its worries about the Soviet Union.

On April 27, Peretti had a further talk with Duca. He again insisted on his previous standpoint and repeated that France could not sign an agreement declaring that it would go to war under any circumstances whatsoever, this being in fact forbidden by the Covenant of the League of Nations. The agreements concluded with Poland and Czechoslovakia did not commit the contracting parties to more than consultations and to agreed positions in the event of a threat. So France could not guarantee a Romanian occupation of Bessarabia, just as it would not think of asking Romania to guarantee Brittany. According to the record, these arguments made an impression on Duca, who declared finally that if they could come to terms on a political agreement, an agreement covering the co-operation of the general staffs could also be discussed, and a Romanian military mission would come to Paris for this purpose. Thus the Romanian foreign minister accepted that the political agreement should include no military clauses.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, the negotiations came to a standstill, and Britain played an important role in this. Concurrently with the French negotiations, Duca also had discussions with MacDonald, asking him to conclude an alliance with Romania at the same time as France, or even without France. He also revealed some confidential information about the French position. The British Prime Minister rejected the proposed alliance, but took care that certain news should become known. At the beginning of May, Reuters News Agency published a communiqué disclosing the real position of Romania towards the French alliance. It was evident that the information came from the Foreign Office. In a letter Peretti lodged a protest letter to Antonescu. The King of Romania, who had left Paris empty-handed, had talks with several British politicians shortly afterwards. Bucharest's hesitation towards France increased still more. This had an effect on the Franco-Yugoslav negotiations as well. The talks made even less progress, although during this period an agreement with Yugoslavia was considered as important in Paris.

In February 1924, France sent a new ambassador to Belgrade, Clément-Simon, being regarded as unsatisfactory. Billy, his successor, had long discussions with Spalajković on February 18, before leaving for Belgrade. The Yugoslav diplomat explained that the Franco-Yugoslav agreement would have to wait until the Skupscina had ratified the Italo-Yugoslav agreement, which had been delayed by Pašić's illness. He emphasized that French public opinion had to be prepared for the official visit of King Alexander to Paris, and this would provide an excellent opportunity to negotiate an agreement between the two countries, which could eventually be extended to a trilateral pact.⁷⁰

On the margin of the note made of the Billy-Spalajković talk, Poincaré wrote: "It is better to protract the talks about the agreement, until the question of Macedonia is settled."⁷¹

The French Premier – whose intransigent foreign policy was strongly criticized both at home and abroad – began to display some cautiousness in relation to Yugoslavia. All the more, since in the given situation he could not have concluded a treaty with that country, unless he had been prepared to make some guarantees to the Yugoslavs against Bulgaria and Italy. But this was out of question. Thus, from spring 1924, the French no longer pressed Belgrade to conclude an agreement. They also became more careful in regard to any treaty with Romania.

The Franco-Yugoslav and Franco-Romanian talks made it clear that the positions of the parties were very different. Each country wished to ensure its own security. In addition, no country wanted to damage its relations with the power important for it, and each wanted to keep out of the political problems of the others – the members of the Little Entente from the Franco-German, France

⁷⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 2bis–18. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the negotiations with Yugoslavia.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

from the Italo-Yugoslav and Romanian-Russian problems. In the latter case Romania's allies within the Little Entente were also most careful.⁷²

During the Franco-Romanian negotiations, Pašić had disclosed to Paris that he was not delighted at the prospect of a Franco-Romanian-Yugoslav agreement, being afraid of getting involved in a Romanian-Soviet war over Bessarabia.⁷³ When news came from Paris that the Franco-Romanian agreement would not come about, the Yugoslav Prime Minister informed the Quai d'Orsay that for that very reason the Franco-Yugoslav pact could not be concluded either.⁷⁴

The diplomatic wrangling went on. Billy reported on May 8 that the Yugoslav government was claiming not to have received the French draft agreement.⁷⁵ Of course, this was not true, for Peretti had handed the text to Spalajković a long time before, in January.⁷⁶ A copy of the "lost" draft was sent to Belgrade on May 21. Shortly afterwards, Billy informed his government that King Alexander's visit to France had had to be postponed for various reasons.

As already mentioned, from April 1924, the French government no longer insisted on a Franco-Yugoslav-Romanian agreement, but it launched a diplomatic offensive against the impending Italo-Czechoslovak pact, wanting to prevent at all cost the adherence of Prague to the Italo-Yugoslav agreement.

It actually had precise information about the talks in progress between Italy and Czechoslovakia and about the fact that Beneš, who regarded the envisaged Franco-Yugoslav agreement as untimely, welcomed the Italo-Yugoslav treaty and was ready to accede to it. On April 16, 1924, just before Beneš went to Rome, Poincaré cabled the French representatives in Prague and Belgrade, instructing them to begin talks with Beneš as soon as possible, as well as with Ninčić, King Alexander and Pašić, about the proposed Italo-Czechoslovak agreement.

"... French public opinion will be indignant if it learns that Czechoslovakia has come to terms with Italy before France and Italy, but particularly France and Yugoslavia have had the opportunity to conclude agreements. We have so far abstained from putting pressure on our friends in Belgrade, but if an agreement should be concluded between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Italy, everybody in France will regard it as an attempt to oust us from the Central and South-Eastern European affairs. The result would be a grouping around Italy that would counterbalance the influence of France. It is not in the interests of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia that Italy's influence should grow at the expense of France. It is well known in Belgrade as well as in Prague that France is the only great power the states of the Little Entente can rely upon. It is thus in the interests of both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia to avoid the distrust of French public opinion in

⁷² *Ibid.* d. 2bis - 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 18; *ibid.* Billy's cable to Poincaré, April 16, 1924.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis - 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

regard to the trilateral Italo-Yugoslav-Czechoslovak pact as envisaged by Beneš. This cannot be achieved unless a Franco-Yugoslav agreement is concluded either prior to the trilateral agreement or concurrently with it. Beneš must understand the importance of this and try to influence Belgrade accordingly.”⁷⁷

The same day Laroche sent for Osuský, the Czechoslovak minister in Paris, and warned him that the adherence of Czechoslovakia to the Italo-Yugoslav pact would be likely to have serious consequences.⁷⁸ Two days later, on April 18, Peretti told Spalajković: “We shall put no more pressure either on Yugoslavia or Romania. But if Czechoslovakia should adhere to the Italo-Yugoslav agreement, the question will be raised in Paris, as to whether the Little Entente is under the influence of Italy.”⁷⁹

Despite the determined intervention of Poincaré’s government, however, Czechoslovakia followed the example of Yugoslavia: at the end of April 1924, Beneš went to Rome and signed the Italo-Czechoslovak friendship treaty, committing the signatories to the defence of the status quo and the prevention of a Habsburg restoration.⁸⁰ The Czechoslovak foreign minister did not take the advice of Paris: he neither restrained Yugoslavia from an agreement with Italy, nor did he himself refuse Mussolini’s offer of an Italo-Czechoslovak treaty.

Thus Poincaré’s diplomacy suffered an ignominious defeat. France’s relations with Britain and Italy became more and more strained and ties with the states of the Little Entente – especially with Yugoslavia – loosened as well. This, together with his unsuccessful policy on the Ruhr question, provoked sharp criticism from almost every French party; as a result, the elections in May 1924 resulted in Poincaré’s defeat, and Millerand also resigned. A left-wing bloc of radicals and radical socialists came to power, with Edouard Herriot as Premier. The latter was a representative of pacifism; under his influence considerable changes took place in French foreign policy. Poincaré’s aggressive policy aimed at European hegemony and at the establishment of military alliances was replaced by a policy of reconciliation. The new French Premier regarded it as important to repair the worsened relations with Britain. His aspirations were similar to those of MacDonald’s Labour government which had taken office a little earlier. During this period, co-operation between the two governments became very close. Herriot firmly opposed the system of eastern alliances and suspended further development. Thus, the Franco-Yugoslav and Franco-Romanian agreements were removed from the agenda for a number of years.

⁷⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. ff. 105–107. Poincaré’s circular telegram, April 16, 1924.

⁷⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 2bis–18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 2bis–19.

⁸⁰ The Italo-Czechoslovak negotiations started much earlier, already in the summer of 1923. ASMAE. 1743. 937–1870. Note of the Italian foreign ministry to Bordaro, Italian minister in Prague, August 23, 1923; cf. E. Beneš: *Problémy nové Evropy...* p. 264.

Great Britain

In the previous chapters we merely hinted at Great Britain's policy concerning the Little Entente; now we are going to treat the matter in some detail. As indicated by the sources, the Little Entente was established with Great Britain's agreement, out of anti-French considerations. Britain supported the ambitions of Beneš which were opposed by Millerand. At the time the alliance was formed, a political line prevailed in the Foreign Office which was opposed to the pro-Hungarian policy of Lloyd George and pressed for increased support of the victorious successor states. British diplomats in Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest were instructed to promote the realization of the Beneš plan, i.e. the creation of the intended alliance.⁸¹ A note from Philips refers to this: "... the Little Entente will be of a defensive character, it will safeguard peace and enjoy the full support of His Majesty's government"⁸² However, the plan advocated by Take Ionescu and aimed at the inclusion of Poland and Greece in the alliance, was opposed by the Foreign Office.⁸³

Thus, British diplomacy played a role in the establishment of the alliance, the members of which, however, had no political agreements with Great Britain. As a matter of fact, London took care not to undertake any obligations in the region. When relations between France and the Little Entente became closer, Great Britain withdrew more and more from the bloc, letting it pass into the French sphere of interest. However, Britain did not abandon its economic position, in fact, it endeavoured to expand its important commercial relations. It concluded commercial agreements with every member state, leading to considerable results within a short time, especially in the case of Yugoslavia and Romania. In both countries it managed to occupy, to a significant extent, the economic position formerly held by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Germany, thus entering into competition with Czechoslovak industry. Economically, all three countries of the Little Entente were very dependent on Britain, since the loans which were for them of vital importance, came mainly from Britain. The British government tried to draw as much profit as possible from the situation, putting considerable pressure on the member states to accept its political ideas. Much can be read about the alleged indifference of Great Britain to the region, but this is true only in so far as it was unwilling to undertake any obligations there; as proved by our investigations, the British government actually intervened constantly and most strongly in political matters, playing a decisive role in their settlement. This was done mainly for economic reasons: to protect British economic interests and to promote the economic and political consolidation of Central and

⁸¹ In their reports, the British diplomats in Prague, Bucharest, and Belgrade considered as justified Czechoslovakia's, Romania's and Yugoslavia's fear of Hungary, i.e. the establishment of the Little Entente. Cf. Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 32-33.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

South-Eastern Europe. Britain urged the overall economic reconstruction of every state within the region and supported Hungary's request for a loan from the League of Nations, despite the opposition of the Little Entente. In connection with this, Britain opposed the attempts at Habsburg restoration as well as the policy aimed at isolating Hungary. In fact, Britain advocated Hungary's admission to the League of Nations, opposing at international level the excesses of the Little Entente which were supported by France. Later Britain pressed for revision of the peace treaties.

So, although allowing the region to fall under French influence, Great Britain took good care to ensure that this did not result in too great a reinforcement of the French hegemony in Europe. Thus it kept a constant watch on the actions of the French government in the Danube Basin, countered them and managed in most cases to form a common position with Italy. As already mentioned, Britain and Italy joined forces to prevent the Franco-Hungarian agreement, the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty in Hungary and, apart from a short period, also co-operated in the reconstruction of Austria and Hungary. In the case of the Franco-Little Entente agreements, they took the same position. Britain also played a role in the fact that France had to content itself with the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement and that the expansion of the alliance system was not realized until the second half of the twenties. In an article "France and the Little Entente", Lloyd George emphasized that French efforts to create military alliances in Central and South-Eastern Europe would imperil European peace, since they would change the region into a military camp. "What advantages does France expect from this policy?" – he asked – "For in the case of war between France and Germany, they would be unable to lend it a real aid."⁸⁴

The difference between Great Britain and France, marked especially after the Ruhr crisis, also affected Britain's relations with the Little Entente. London's call for the recognition of the Soviet Union strained the situation still more. From the end of 1923, the Tory cabinet was pressing for recognition of the Soviet Union, both by Britain and by the states of the Little Entente. In Curzon's opinion the international situation, the economic crisis and shrinking European markets required economic and political co-operation with the Soviet Union. However, he was confronted with considerable opposition at home and abroad; at first, all the members of the Little Entente were against him. Even Beneš, who took a most liberal line on the question, had a long discussion with the British Foreign Secretary.⁸⁵ Finally the Cabinet dropped the plan. Only after the defeat of the Tories in January 1924, when the Labour Party came to power, did Great Britain recognize the Soviet Union. MacDonald, the new Prime Minister, also urged the

⁸⁴ V.P. [Potemkin] Patyomkin: *A diplomácia története* (The history of diplomacy). Budapest, 1950, p. 288.

⁸⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 42. f. 105. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the visit of Beneš, December 1923; *ibid.* vol. 41. f. 65. Aide mémoire about the Beneš–Peretti discussions, December 13, 1923.

normalization of relations between the Little Entente and the Soviet Union, but he was unsuccessful. On this question the member states aligned themselves rather with Poincaré, who rejected the British proposal. Only later, during the Herriot cabinet, which actually recognized the Soviet Union, did they change their attitude to some extent. Although at that time Beneš agreed with the British – and by now French – position, he retreated because of the resistance of the right-wing opposition and his allies. (For further details see the chapter: The Soviet Union.)

Though unwilling to guarantee Germany's eastern frontiers, Great Britain vigorously supported the establishment of a Central and South-Eastern European Locarno. For this reason it put pressure on all three members of the Little Entente,⁸⁶ and increased its diplomatic activity in the defeated small states – Hungary, Austria and Bulgaria as well. (See the following chapter.)

Italy

The relationship between Italy and the Little Entente has already been dealt with in detail. Therefore, we will now just briefly summarize its development.

For a long time the relationship was unclear. It is indeed hard to find an unambiguous line in Italy's foreign policy at this time. In the years after the war it became isolated and antagonistic towards its allies. It felt cheated and disadvantaged by the post-war settlement and pursued an uncertain policy of sabre-rattling. So it approached the Little Entente, and then it withdrew. In one respect, however, it was quite consistent: in an attempt to weaken potential adversaries in the Balkans, Italy followed from the very beginning an anti-French and anti-Slav foreign policy. This determined its relations with two members of the alliance, i.e. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Since Romania shared Italy's concerns about the Slav danger, the two states could co-operate very closely. From the very beginning, the Italian government opposed a Slav dominated alliance in the Danube Basin, since this would have hindered its Balkan plans and reinforced the position of Yugoslavia. In general, in favour of bilateral contacts, Italy concentrated its attention on the improvement of Hungarian-Romanian relations. "The main line of our policy is to prevent by any means an agreement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. All our efforts must be concentrated on the establishment of a Hungarian-Romanian alliance"⁸⁷ – wrote Tittoni, Italian foreign minister, in August 1919. His successor, Scialoja, followed a similar line: "Instead of an alliance between Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia being under the influence of France, the Italian government prefers an alliance consisting of Hungary, Roma-

⁸⁶ In the archives of the French and Italian foreign ministries, there are numerous documents about this. The question will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

⁸⁷ ASMAE. 1738. 1150. Tittoni's cable to Borghese, August 12, 1919; *ibid.* 1152. Tittoni's cable to General Mombelli, August 12, 1919.

nia and eventually Poland, which would follow our line" – he wrote.⁸⁸ In 1920, when Sforza became foreign minister, Italy intervened – together with Great Britain – against the Franco-Hungarian rapprochement and the two return attempts of ex-King Charles. As a consequence, Italy was able to sign, in the same year, the Rapallo convention with Yugoslavia, certain parts of which also applied to Czechoslovakia. Up until 1925, Italy did not support the revision of the Peace Treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon and opposed vigorously any attempts at the Anschluss. It also disapproved of Hungarian revisionism, initially opposed the admission of Hungary to the League of Nations, the granting of a League of Nations loan to Hungary, and a moratorium on reparations. All this provided the opportunity to pursue an apparently amicable policy towards the Little Entente. Although Hungary continued to be regarded as a potential ally, Italy was careful and circumspect in its relations with Hungary.

Mussolini's seizure of power caused considerable change in the development of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Although the direction of Italian expansion was already clear before Mussolini's putsch, there now occurred a radical change in the means of achieving its aims. Italy, which had earlier posed as a guarantor of the status quo, appeared from the mid-twenties as a supporter, indeed, as the champion of revisionism.

Of course, the change did not occur suddenly. At first, Mussolini collaborated with the Little Entente and maintained an anti-Hungarian policy. The international events of 1923 offered Italy a good opportunity to maintain its apparently friendly policy towards the Little Entente. Anglo-French dissension resulting from the Ruhr crisis isolated France and also brought to the surface important differences within the Little Entente – a fine opportunity for Mussolini to prevent, together with Britain, the realization of the Franco-Yugoslav and Franco-Romanian agreements which were also against Italian interests, and thus to place further obstacles in the way of French ambitions in Central and South-Eastern Europe.⁸⁹ Profiting from the isolation of France after the Ruhr crisis, in 1924 he concluded an agreement with Yugoslavia and shortly afterwards with Czechoslovakia. Except for the first half of 1924, the closest contact continued to be maintained with Romania, although this was the only member state of the Little Entente, with which Mussolini did not succeed in concluding a pact in the first half of the twenties. In its policy towards the Soviet Union, Italy was unwilling to follow Bucharest; needing Soviet good-will in its Balkan plans, it refused for economic and political reasons to ratify the convention – including the Bessarabia question – a point upon which the Romanian government was insisting. In fact, Italy recognized the Soviet Union in January 1924, and this over-

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; ACS. 458–4. Scialoja's cable to Cerrutti, December 28, 1919; *PDH*. I. 65. doc.

⁸⁹ ASMAE. 1738–937–1870. Cable of the Italian foreign minister to the Italian minister in Prague, August 23, 1923; *ibid.* 1509–6720. Aloisi to Mussolini, April 15, 1924; *ibid.* 6721. Aloisi's report to Mussolini, May 17, 1924; *ibid.* 1508–6704. Aloisi's cable to Mussolini, May 21, 1924; *ibid.* 938–1888. Aloisi's cable to Mussolini, January 5, 1924.

shadowed for a while relations between Italy and Romania. Despite the agreements with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the disputes between them became more and more frequent. The agreements concluded in January and April 1924, were not renewed by Mussolini. His policy towards Hungary changed accordingly. By 1925, Mussolini had overcome his domestic opposition, while Hungary's economic and financial situation had consolidated somewhat. There were a number of indications of the readiness of the two countries to co-operate. In a confidential note Mussolini advocated an overall revision of the peace treaties, including the Treaty of Trianon.

The Soviet Union

On the Soviet question the states of the Little Entente did not take common line, there being great differences between them from the very beginning. Their relations with Soviet Russia (and later with the Soviet Union) were influenced not only by their fear of Bolshevism, but also by other political, economic and geographic factors, which were very different in the three states. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were not immediate neighbours of the Soviet Union, and thus had no territorial problems, nor did the Bolshevik danger manifest itself on their frontiers. Both states were Slav and, although they hated the Soviet regime and were all for weakening and subverting it, they were unwilling to participate in military action against the Russian people.⁹⁰ Thus, they refused to agree to anything which would have amounted to, or could have led to, military confrontation, for instance joining a third intervention or to the Romanian proposal for a treaty that would guarantee the Soviet-Romanian frontiers. They were also most careful in regard to draft agreements connected directly or indirectly with Poland. Of course, the governments in Prague and Belgrade did their best to avoid any military conflict contrary to their direct interests, but their caution was certainly also motivated by an unwillingness to get involved in a war with the Soviet Union on the side of Poland. A substantial difference between the two states, which obviously influenced their standpoints on the Soviet question as well, was that Czechoslovakia was a liberal democratic state, whereas Yugoslavia and Romania were right-wing monarchies. Industrialized as it was, Czechoslovakia was more interested in the development of commercial relations with the Soviet Union than were the two others. This was the main reason why Romania was unable to realize one of the main ambitions of its foreign policy: a Little Entente that would also guarantee the Romanian-Soviet frontiers. In fact, Romania's allies within the Little Entente refused even to recognize the annexion of Bessarabia.

⁹⁰ This aspect certainly played a role in the rapprochement and co-operation of the two countries. However, it was not this that really counted; the collective protection of their common interests was the decisive factor. Whenever and wherever the interests did not coincide, the two states turned against one another in spite of Slav fraternity.

Thus, the Little Entente was not directly aimed against the Soviet Union as alleged in historical works published in the East-Bloc countries in the fifties. The standpoint of the alliance on the Soviet question varied. It was different at the beginning, when France was still against the bloc and British influence asserted itself, from what it was later when French influence became dominant, and also from what it became in the thirties, when France itself began to move closer to the Soviet Union. In the first phase, all three states – Romania too – were – paradoxical as it may sound – a support for the young Soviet Russia, since they did not join the third intervention. In fact, they refused to let Hungarian troops pass through their territory (Hungary participated voluntarily), being afraid the troops might remain there. Under British influence the three states received the initial Soviet advances with some sympathy. The Romanian Prime Minister Vaida-Voevod, thought that Soviet Russia, being in a difficult position, would be ready for concessions in the Bessarabian question, started talks with Chicherin in London in March 1920.⁹¹ Following the intervention of France, however, the negotiations were broken off. Vaida-Voevod, who allegedly started the talks without consulting the King, was dismissed and replaced by General Averescu, who merely suspended the talks without definitely breaking them off. But when it became clear that the Soviet government was unwilling to accept the arbitrary annexation of Bessarabia by Romania, Bucharest turned completely against Moscow. An agreement with Poland, suggested earlier by Warsaw, was concluded in 1921, committing the two states to the mutual protection of their eastern frontiers. Thereafter the Soviet-Romanian relationship was rather hostile.

During this period the Yugoslav government also vacillated in its attitude towards Soviet Russia. In August 1920 – at the same time as the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement was signed in Belgrade – the Yugoslav foreign ministry sent Irić, a former member of the Serbian embassy in Russia, to Paris in order to find out whether the Soviet government regarded a rapprochement with Yugoslavia as desirable. Chicherin welcomed the initiative and emphasized that Soviet Russia wished to establish friendly relations with Yugoslavia.⁹² But this was finally prevented by certain forces, first of all by the royal court. Yugoslavia became one of the centres of White Russian emigration. Normalization of relations was out of question for many years. Together with Romania, the Belgrade government did its best to restrain Czechoslovakia from establishing relations with the Soviet Union, a plan which its ally – unlike itself – did not give up.

Beneš announced for the first time in January 1920 his intention of approaching Soviet Russia. He started a correspondence with Chicherin in the summer of 1920, they negotiated in London about the establishment of commercial relations between the two countries.⁹³ However, Beneš envisaged the de-

⁹¹ A. Yazkova: *Malaya Antanta v evropeiskoy politike* (The Little Entente in European policy). Moscow, 1974, pp. 110–111.

⁹² In detail cf. *op. cit.* pp. 114–115.

⁹³ *Op. cit.* pp. 115–119.

velopment of Czechoslovak-Soviet contacts with the exclusion of political questions and without diplomatic relations. Vigorously attacked not only by the governing coalition, but also by his partners in the Little Entente, he was finally compelled to withdraw.

The fact that the Little Entente was not explicitly against the Soviet Union and was actually never aimed against it, did not mean that the three states did not pursue an anti-Soviet policy and that the bloc had no anti-Soviet function. The latter became obvious by the geographical position and the international role of the alliance: in accordance with French conceptions, it played the role of a buffer between the East and West.

This function of the bloc was overstated by the Bratislava conference of the Central and South-Eastern Communist Parties. The conference advocated the abolition of the anti-Soviet "reactionary" alliance and the creation of a revolutionary federation, which would unite the Central and South-Eastern peoples.⁹⁴

During the Rapallo conference (1922) and afterwards, the Little Entente was again in a dilemma. In the weeks before the conference the representatives of the member states had several meetings in order to inform themselves and to co-ordinate their opinions. For this purpose Beneš went to London and Paris, where he had talks with Lloyd George and Poincaré.⁹⁵ During his discussions he noticed the profound differences that existed between the British and the French standpoints on the questions to be discussed at the conference. Lloyd George suggested the recognition of Soviet Russia, Poincaré was definitely against it. The former envisaged a reduction in German reparations, the latter an increase. The British Prime Minister wished to restrict the activity of the Little Entente at the conference, in fact, he would have welcomed its absence, together with that of Poland, whereas the French Premier wished it just the other way: both Poland and the Little Entente should take part in the work of every commission.⁹⁶

At the beginning of the conference, the members of the Little Entente supported the French line and opposed the British proposal to recognize Soviet Russia. The Soviet-German agreement – the outstanding event of the conference – only reinforced their inflexibility. After the agreement had been concluded – signifying considerable economic and political recovery for Soviet Russia and Germany, both isolated so far – the Little Entente states immediately joined the action initiated by France and signed the protest note addressed to Germany. However, they rejected the proposal of French Foreign Minister Barthou to leave the conference room with the French delegates.⁹⁷ The Little Entente states were

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 190–191.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 221.

⁹⁶ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* p. 77.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* A. Yazkova: *op. cit.* p. 223.

unwilling to provoke an open clash with Great Britain; in addition, they were afraid that Bethlen might possibly come to terms with Soviet Russia.

The Hungarian Prime Minister tried to make them believe that he was ready to follow the example of Germany. He gladly welcomed the Rapallo convention and gave voice to his pleasure in the press.⁹⁸ It is hard to say, how much was genuine pleasure and how much simply tactics. But the Rapallo convention certainly made the Western powers and the states of the Little Entente more conciliatory in regard to Soviet Russia as well as to Germany and Hungary. Rapallo was a warning that they could not simply keep states in political and economic isolation as they liked, because there existed the possibility that the "victims" would break out.

Thus, Czechoslovakia wanted to normalize its relations with Soviet Russia and showed more understanding in regard to Hungary's efforts at rapprochement. At first, this plan was supported by Yugoslavia. In Rapallo, Beneš and Ninčić started talks with Chicherin about the possibility of economic co-operation.⁹⁹ The Romanian minister did not follow their example, but very soon Yugoslavia also opposed the ideas of Beneš, who was also sharply criticized by his political adversaries at home. The attacks both at home and abroad were so violent that Beneš was forced to abandon the political part of his plan, i.e. the establishment of diplomatic relations, and to content himself with developing commercial relations. In 1922, commercial agencies were set up in both Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia.¹⁰⁰

In 1924, normalization of the relations between the Little Entente and the Soviet Union was again put on the agenda. By this time most of the capitalist states had realized that the policy of isolation they had pursued against Soviet Russia had failed to bring about the result they had expected. On the contrary: it had started a German-Soviet rapprochement, a process that was against their interests. They also became conscious of the fact that Europe's economic reconstruction required access to the vast Russian areas which were rich in raw materials. Germany alone could not be allowed to exploit them. Several countries decided on *de jure* recognition of the Soviet Union: on January 7, 1924, Great Britain did so, a week later Italy, and at the end of January, Austria. France continued its policy of not recognizing the Soviet Union, making recognition dependent on certain conditions.¹⁰¹

In 1924, when the question of recognizing the Soviet Union entered a new phase, the Little Entente again considered establishing diplomatic relations with that power. Two factors were decisive therein. First, the Western Powers recognized the Soviet Union in turn and Great Britain expected the members of the

⁹⁸ He did it presumably for tactical reasons.

⁹⁹ A. Yazkova: *op. cit.* pp. 225–226.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ France continued to refuse to recognize the Soviet Union. This standpoint was changed only after the downfall of Poincaré and the accession to power of Herriot.

Little Entente to also do so. On the other hand, Hungary was following the same line and the Little Entente feared that Hungary would pre-empt them like Germany had done.

At the Belgrade conference of the Little Entente (January 1924), the question was thus put on the agenda. It appeared that the differences within the bloc had increased instead of lessened.¹⁰² The embassy of tsarist Russia was still functioning in Belgrade, and Yugoslavia was unwilling to change its policy towards the numerous white Russian émigrés. Political circles insisting on the establishment of contacts with the Soviet Union, especially strong within the Croatian opposition, were thus subdued.

Romania maintained its negative attitude. Thus, the Belgrade conference failed to reconcile the differences. Therefore, at Beneš's proposal, an agreement was reached that permitted every member state to decide independently on the question. Beneš considered it necessary that now – given that Great Britain and Italy were already negotiating with the Soviet Union – the members of the Little Entente should also establish contacts with Moscow and to try to persuade France to do the same.

In spring 1924, the states of the Little Entente began talking separately with the Soviet representatives. After long hesitation, even Romania began talks, not least because of Hungary's negotiations with Soviet representatives about the development of economic contacts and the establishment of diplomatic relations.¹⁰³ However, the Romanian-Soviet talks soon reached deadlock. In return for the establishment of official relations, Romania asked the Soviet Union to recognize their common frontier. The Soviet Union refused and suggested a plebiscite in the areas involved, but fearing an unfavourable outcome, Bucharest refused to agree.¹⁰⁴

On the Bessarabian question the Romanian government enjoyed the full support of France. As already mentioned, the French government had ratified the convention on Bessarabia on March 11, 1924. Then it put pressure on the other members of the Little Entente in order to make them change their positions on the Bessarabian question and to support the Romanian request, but both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia refused. The former wished to normalize its relations to the Soviet Union, the latter wanted to avoid any step which the Soviet Union could regard as hostile. In a way, Belgrade was actually pleased with the uncertainty of the Romanian-Soviet frontier, which thus engaged the attention of Bucharest. During this time the relationship between Yugoslavia and Romania became increasingly strained. Ceded to Yugoslavia by virtue of the bilateral Romanian-Yugoslav agreements, the villages in the Banat region were practically

¹⁰² AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 29, report of the Czechoslovak minister in Belgrade, January 25, 1924.

¹⁰³ HHStA. Berichte aus Bukarest. 13 774. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, July 2, 1924.

¹⁰⁴ A. Yazkova: *op. cit.* pp. 274–275.

denuded of all valuables, which were not returned in spite of repeated requests. Mutual attacks in the press became more and more frequent, and the animosity between the two countries increased considerably.¹⁰⁵ Czechoslovakia backed Yugoslavia – co-operation between Prague and Belgrade was on the increase during this period. The two foreign ministers, Beneš and Ninčić, negotiated in Bled without, in fact, against Romania. The Romanian foreign minister, Ion Duca, protested. He refused to take part in the Prague conference of the Little Entente, where the Soviet question was again to be discussed. The European press was writing about a crisis in the Little Entente – with some justification.¹⁰⁶

Considerable changes occurred meanwhile in France. After the electoral success of the left-wing bloc and the withdrawal of Poincaré and Millerand, the new cabinet headed by Herriot produced a certain détente in European politics. In contrast to its predecessors, the new cabinet insisted upon the recognition of the Soviet Union. Franco-Soviet diplomatic relations were actually established in October 1924. The changed line of French policy also acted upon the Little Entente. Paris stayed aloof from the anti-Soviet policy of the Romanian government. The conclusion of a Franco-Romanian agreement – concerning which even Poincaré had been rather careful in the last period of office – was removed from the agenda for a long time.

In this way, Beneš's position on the Soviet question was reinforced within the Little Entente. The Belgrade government began to show more understanding of his standpoint. In Belgrade, the tsarist Russian embassy was closed, and military aid to General Wrangel stopped. Belgrade took an unequivocal stand against Romania over Bessarabia. It was therefore all the more surprising that in July 1924, at the Prague conference of the Little Entente (finally joined by Duca at the urging of his colleagues), Ninčić took the side of the Romanian foreign minister.¹⁰⁷ Beneš was left isolated.

Shortly after the conference, the Pašić cabinet was forced by the opposition to resign. The foreign policy of the new coalition-government moved towards that of Czechoslovakia in regard to the Soviet question and shared the conception of Beneš. The Croatian leader visited Moscow. Nevertheless, no concrete progress could be achieved. The position of the new government was most unstable; further changes in international politics aggravated its insecurity and hastened its downfall.

¹⁰⁵ AMZV. PZ. Bělehrad 107, report of the Czechoslovak minister in Belgrade. April 20, 1924. The Romanian-Yugoslav conflicts caused a grave crisis within the Little Entente. Cf. HHStA. Berichte aus Bukarest. 13057. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, May 12, 1924.

¹⁰⁶ It was due to the long and assiduous action of Beneš that Duca finally appeared at the Prague conference of the Little Entente.

¹⁰⁷ In spite of the Romanian-Yugoslav differences, close co-operation was achieved between Duca and Ninčić at the Prague conference. With united forces they rejected Beneš's conception of the Soviet question.

The ruling Labour Party was defeated in the British elections of October 29, 1924. The sharply anti-Soviet foreign policy of the new Tory cabinet led by Baldwin (rejecting an agreement with the Soviet Union), encouraged right-wing circles in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia; they vehemently attacked the policy of Beneš and Marinković, who sought to recognize the Soviet Union. Beneš, who had hoped to follow the example of Paris immediately after the establishment of Franco-Soviet contacts, but whose political position at home was considerably weakened by the events, was again forced to abandon his plan, this time for almost a decade. The members of the Little Entente eventually established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

Thus, the ambivalent diplomacy surrounding the recognition of the Soviet Union, came to an end, and the same applied to Hungarian-Soviet and Little Entente-Soviet relations.

The new Tory cabinet also opposed the Geneva conventions approved by MacDonald, which were supposed to be in the interests of collective security. The British were unwilling to take up the cause of Central Europe and were most decidedly against guaranteeing the eastern frontiers of Germany. In the British view the strategic border for the defence of British interests was the Rhine.

At the intervention of the Belgian government, the plan presented by the French – and already at an advanced stage – was turned down. Instead, the Locarno Conference assembled in October 1925.

Chapter 5

The Little Entente and the Other Successor States

Hungary

On the following pages we shall treat in detail Hungarian contacts with the Little Entente, with reference to its connections with its other neighbours: Poland and Austria.

The creation of the Little Entente produced uneasiness in general, among the neighbouring states, and particularly in Hungary, since the alliance was primarily aimed against it.

Relations between the Little Entente and Hungary were always strained, but especially in the year following the establishment of the alliance, when there were practically no contacts between the three member states and Hungary. As was shown in the previous chapter, there was a certain rapprochement immediately after the war between Hungary and its neighbours. Our investigations do not support the contention that the Hungarian government refused any co-operation with the neighbouring states, rejecting initiatives aimed at the normalization of relations. The truth was just the contrary: the initiatives always came from Hungary.¹ The reasons were both economic and political. Territorially mutilated and deprived of its seaports, Hungary was politically isolated and economically not viable. Its neighbours would have liked to keep it in this position and were ready to form an alliance for this purpose. This was the very thing the Hungarian government wanted to prevent and tried therefore to reach an understanding, first with Yugoslavia, then with Romania and finally with Czechoslovakia. The development of this policy was also dependent on the ambitions of the different great powers in Central and South-Eastern Europe, since each used the states in its own interests to achieve a rapprochement with Hungary. To this end, they put strong pressure on the Hungarian government and on the neighbouring countries as well, which pretended to be ready to normalize their relations with Hungary, but were not sincere. (This was especially true in case of Romania.) All three states received the Hungarian proposals with some understanding, and each was ready to negotiate with the Hungarian government, if possible, before the others. Each kept a jealous eye on the Hungarian policy of the others, for it was obvious that Hungary, after having reached an agreement with one of them, could then

¹ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 47. f. 38. Report of Doulcet, French minister in Budapest, to Poincaré, September 22, 1922.

negotiate with the others from a safer position, having escaped its isolation. On the other hand, all of them were interested in economic co-operation, since the new frontiers crossed economically interdependent areas, detaching plants and factories from their sources of raw material and energy, and vice versa. All the Danube states, victors and vanquished alike, felt the burden of this situation. For political reasons, however, they were less than active in seeking to change it.

Shortly after the war there was a certain rapprochement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. (This rapprochement suited Britain and France, but not Italy.) Mihály Károlyi, Béla Kun, Peidl, Friedrich and Huszár were the first to attempt to normalize relations between the two countries. Hungarian-Yugoslav differences were relatively minor. Comparatively small areas were occupied by Yugoslavia, the annexation of areas had been accepted by the Hungarian government and it did not seek to recover other territories. The situation of the Hungarian minority, not numerous anyway, was somewhat better than that of the Hungarian population in the two other successor states. Although Hungary and Serbia had been foes during the World War One, the historical significance of the common struggle against the Ottoman Empire and the heroism of the Serbs were generally recognized in Hungary. Furthermore, the Yugoslav government was essentially satisfied with the Belgrade armistice and had not taken part in the occupation and pillage of Hungary in 1919,² while Yugoslav-Romanian and Italo-Yugoslav differences during this period also helped rapprochement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. So for all these reasons it is clear, why the choice fell on Yugoslavia. With its help Hungary hoped to prevent the formation of the Little Entente, or, if an alliance was formed, promote its disintegration.

During the armistice talks, as well as in the following months, Mihály Károlyi made efforts to improve relations between the two countries. This line was also followed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic during its life-and-death struggle against Czechoslovakia and Romania, and immediately after its fall by the governments of Peidl, Friedrich and Huszár. Their proposals were aimed at intensifying economic co-operation and at developing commercial contacts; they wished to improve communications between the two countries and to secure a seaport on the Adriatic; the settlement of legal matters was also promised. In political circles advocating the free election of a king, even the idea of a personal union with Yugoslavia came up.

In Belgrade the attempts at rapprochement were received with some reserve. Without explicitly rejecting the proposals, the government tried to delay their realization and to confine them to strictly necessary economic questions. Pašić and his supporters had a great antipathy towards Hungary because of its participation in the World War. They were also well aware that the rapprochement was primarily aimed at strengthening Hungary's position against Czechoslovakia and Romania, at preventing Yugoslavia's adherence to an anti-Hungarian bloc and at

² Only minor areas were occupied. Later, in 1921, the Yugoslav government did the same at the evacuation of Pécs and its environs.

obtaining the support of Italy. Their negative attitude was also due to the fact that they were sceptical about the stability of the above-named Hungarian governments which they regarded as shortlived, and they were unwilling to negotiate with provisional governments. Last but not least, they were disturbed that at the same time as seeking a rapprochement with Yugoslavia, Hungary was strengthening its relations with Italy, Yugoslavia's main adversary. In fact, Hungarian-Yugoslav relations were always determined by the Italian question.

Although Italy emerged victorious from the World War, its position was different from that of the other allied powers. It feared that it would obtain less than had been promised, and that with the creation of Czechoslovakia and the reinforcement of Yugoslavia, Slav dominance in the Balkans and in Central Europe would be strengthened; this was, from the very beginning, a solid basis for co-operation with Hungary, worried as it was about the harsh peace terms. The first steps were taken by Mihály Károlyi, who hoped to obtain the support of Italy in his attempt to save his country from the consequences of total defeat. From December 1918, diplomatic soundings by both sides were followed by negotiations between representatives of the two governments. The semi-official talks continued in January and February 1919. Károlyi informed the Italian government that if Italy protected Hungary against the territorial ambitions of its neighbours – i.e. if Italy opposed the Czech, Romanian and Yugoslav claims on Slovakia, Transylvania and the Banat, respectively –, he would be ready to adopt an Italian orientation and support the Italian standpoint in regard to Fiume. "Hungary would prefer, if Fiume were to belong to Italy rather than to Yugoslavia" – reported Biancheri.³ Károlyi assured the Italian government that a plebiscite would be held in the disputed territories, "so that the peoples might decide about their fate", and that Hungary would become a federal state. In the course of the negotiations, the idea of a union with Romania was also raised. The government of Vittorio Orlando was of the opinion that it was in the interests of Italy to reach an agreement with Hungary, because this would (1) prevent France from gaining too much influence in the country, (2) counterbalance Slav preponderance in the Danube Basin and the Balkans, (3) strengthen the Italian position in the Adriatic and (4) prevent a Hungaro-Yugoslav alliance supported by France. Italian military circles regarded Hungary as a potential ally against France and Yugoslavia, which could strengthen Italy's position vis-à-vis Yugoslavia.⁴

During the Soviet Republic, Italo-Hungarian contacts became even closer. Béla Kun was even more in need of outside support than Károlyi, since all the

³ ASMAE. 1738. Biancheri's aide mémoire, March 3, 1919. Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.*

⁴ In the Italian archives there are many papers to be found about the inquiries of the representatives of Mihály Károlyi. ASMAE. 1738. Badoglio's report to the foreign minister. Grazioli's instructions concerning Italian policy towards Hungary, February 17, 1919; *ibid.* Biancheri's cable to Nitti, March 13, 1919; *ibid.* Camillo Rossi to Sonnino, February 5, 1919; *ibid.* Biancheri to Sonnino, February 7, 1919; cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 1–36.

victorious powers had a hostile attitude to the new régime. But Italy, although just as hostile as the others (it also recalled its representatives from Budapest), was regarded as a possible supporter because of its differences with the western powers.

After its allies had rejected its claims concerning Dalmatia and Fiume, the Italian government set itself overtly against them on the question of relations with the Soviet Republic. In the second half of April, Italy sent a military mission to Budapest headed by Colonel Romanelli. The head of the mission maintained close contact with Béla Kun and advised his government to put aside the political questions and to co-operate with Hungary in the commercial and financial field. Kun asked repeatedly for food and arms, and was ready to pay in gold.

Negotiations were held in Budapest and Vienna. The Italian proposals included the handing over of Hungarian enterprises on Italian territory; Kun agreed, asking for arms and food in return. The promised supplies were sent, but – according to the press – in Bruck (on the Austro-Hungarian frontier) the authorities discovered not only food supplies, but 20 waggon loads of arms as well. In a virulent press campaign, Italy was blamed for having violated the blockade. France availed itself of the opportunity to discredit Italy in the successor states. Subsequently, on June 13, Sonnino instructed his representatives to immediately break off negotiations with the Kun government. A further instruction ordered that the blockade should under no circumstances be violated.⁵

For a while the Italo-Hungarian talks came to a standstill. A change only occurred after the defeat of Sonnino in July, when the new government of Nitti, wishing to acquire the Hungarian enterprises, resumed the talks with Hungary. This turn was probably also due to Béla Kun's letter to the Italian prime minister, where he referred to the common interests of the two countries and suggested the establishment of closer contacts, emphasizing that the difference in the political systems should not be an obstacle. Béla Kun also asked for Italian support for changing the peace terms, as well as the delivery of food, clothes and arms. In return he promised to abstain from communist propaganda, to recognize Italy's claim to Fiume, to support its claims in regard to other nations, to give military assistance if Italy should become involved in a war with Yugoslavia as well as agreeing to hand over Hungarian enterprises on Italian and Yugoslav territory.⁶

The political consequences of such an agreement would damage Yugoslavia, reported Segré to Rome. He was negotiating in Vienna with the representative of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, István Kodor, commissar of food. He had for a long time urged the conclusion of an agreement, he added, because the Yugoslavs were doing their best to come to terms with Hungary; promising the

⁵ ASMAE. 1738–4695. Note of the High Command, June 13, 1919; *ibid.* Borghese's note to the Italian delegate to the peace conference, June 1, 1919; *ibid.* Borghese to Sonnino, June 4, 1919.

⁶ ACS. PC. 19–29. Letter of Béla Kun to the Italian prime minister (n. d.). Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 36–82.

development of commercial relations in return for a military convention aimed against Italy, a plan supported by the French.⁷

Nitti was afraid that an agreement with Hungary would be incompatible with the Allied blockade. Meanwhile the Soviet Republic was overthrown.

It should be noted that, while having official and semi-official discussions with Béla Kun and his representatives, the Italians also maintained contact with the anti-Bolshevik government in Szeged and with the so-called Vienna group, thus securing Italian interests, should the Soviet Republic fall.⁸ (The Szeged government enjoyed the confidence of the French as well.) Borghese negotiated several times with Bethlen, who promised to follow an Italian orientation and to reach an agreement with Romania if he should come to power. For this purpose he asked for military assistance, in order to overthrow the Soviet Republic as well as for political and diplomatic support for a Hungarian-Romanian agreement. The Italian government refused the first request but accepted the second and mediated between Szeged and Bucharest.⁹

Bethlen proposed to Borghese the conclusion of a secret convention, whereby Hungary would commit itself to conform its foreign policy to Italy; in return, the Italian government would support Hungary at the peace conference, supply it with arms and promote the Hungarian-Romanian agreement. A military convention would lay down the co-operation of the two countries against Yugoslavia. Bethlen requested that this part of the convention (concerning Yugoslavia) be kept top secret until the peace treaty had been signed.¹⁰ But since neither Bethlen nor his supporters came to power, their conception of foreign policy was not realized, and so Hungary's rapprochement with Italy and, as a consequence, with Romania remained in the background. All the more, since the Romanian government was rather reluctant to conclude an agreement with Hungary.

Policy toward Italy as conducted by Mihály Károlyi and Béla Kun gave rise to anxiety in Belgrade for fear that Budapest would conform to Italy in the Yugoslav question. Thus, Hungary's rapprochement with Yugoslavia was received with reservation, while its failure was welcome. On the other hand, they also feared that the Szeged government would come to power. Namely, they received certain confidential information on Bethlen's acceptance of the Italian conception concerning a virtually anti-Yugoslav Hungarian-Romanian bloc.

After the downfall of the Soviet Republic in Hungary, Yugoslav-Hungarian relations entered a new phase. All subsequent Hungarian governments headed by Peidl, Friedrich and Huszár, respectively, continued to regard Yugoslavia as the only neighbour to which Hungary should make advances. They all proposed to Belgrade the normalization of relations, economic co-operation and collabora-

⁷ ACS. PC. 7024, Segré to the commander-in-chief, April 27, 1919; *ibid.* 1404. To Orlando in Paris, May 5, 1919; *ibid.* 3376. Segré to the high command.

⁸ ASMAE. 478 - 1400. Borghese's cable to Tittoni, July 8, 1919.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ ASMAE. 1738 - 1918. Borghese's cable to Tittoni, August 25, 1919.

tion against Romania. The last point corresponded with the ideas of Pašić, who was on bad terms with Brătianu over the Banat. Nevertheless, he maintained an attitude of reserve in regard to the Hungarian proposals, first, because he regarded the governments as temporary, and not worth negotiating with, second, they still maintained contact with Italy, although much less closely than earlier, and – last but not least – he was afraid of a Habsburg restoration. This danger became really acute when Friedrich came to power and the Archduke Joseph, a member of the Hungarian branch of the Habsburgs, became the head of state as *homo regius*. In Belgrade this was regarded as the first step to a Habsburg restoration and produced most vehement protests. In order to prevent it, the Yugoslavs were even ready to collaborate with Italy. As a result of strong international pressure, the Archduke Joseph was forced to resign. But the events overshadowed Yugoslav-Hungarian relations for a long time and turned Yugoslavia towards Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente.

Although Friedrich initiated the resumption of talks after the resignation of the Archduke Joseph, the planned agreement came to nothing. Budapest had to content itself with the development of commercial relations, and to accept that Yugoslavia was unwilling to co-operate politically with Hungary.

In diplomatic circles, first of all in Rome, the Yugoslav-Hungarian rapprochement was observed with concern; Italian diplomats were instructed to prevent an agreement between the two countries, if possible. On August 12, Tittoni emphasized in a cable to Borghese: "... it is the main line of our policy to prevent by all means a Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement. Instead, we should support a Hungarian-Romanian alliance."¹¹

The relationship between Romania and Hungary remained strained even after the armistice. The Romanian government displayed a rather hostile attitude to the Hungarian governments; the Károlyi cabinet, the Soviet Republic and after the fall of the latter against the subsequent governments as well, including the first period of the Horthy era. In the summer of 1920, the two countries were still at war with each other. The frontiers were closed, traffic and mail services were broken off. Unlike Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, Romania did not have a permanent representative in Hungary. At the intervention of Paléologue and Sforza, however, Romania sent a representative to Budapest in September 1920 and was the first to establish diplomatic relations with Hungary. Since this action took place before the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty, it provoked grave disquiet both in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.¹²

¹¹ Similar instructions were sent to General Ernesto Mombelli and to the Italian members of the international military commission, as well as to Italy's representative in Bucharest; ASMAE. 1738–1150. Tittoni's cable to Borghese, August 12, 1919; *ibid.* f. 1152. Tittoni's cable to Mombelli, August 12, 1919; ACS. 1755. Borghese's cable to Tittoni August 26, 1919; *ibid.* 1825. Borghese to Tittoni, August 26, 1919; cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 1–36.

¹² AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 50. f. 118. Circular telegram of the French foreign ministry (n. d.).

The tension between the two countries was mainly due to the fact that no Hungarian government was willing to acknowledge the Romanian claim to Transylvania and wished to keep the area in Hungary's possession. For this reason Romania continued the war against Hungary even after the armistice, occupying and despoiling much of the country. Brătianu especially showed great antipathy towards Hungary. His removal caused a temporary change: his successors, Vaida-Voevod and – even more – Averescu took the Italian view towards Hungarian-Romanian rapprochement; as a consequence, some discussions took place between representatives of the official governments.

Until 1920, Hungarian governments also rejected the idea of collaboration with Romania, with the exception of the Szeged government and the Vienna group, including, importantly, the Bethlen faction. Bethlen regarded as a basis for rapprochement an autonomous Transylvania under Romanian sovereignty, with full rights for the Hungarian minority. For Bucharest this was out of question; so – according to indirect sources – Bethlen even suggested the idea of a personal union.¹³ In order to realize these plans and to develop contacts with the Romanians, Bethlen repeatedly requested and actually obtained the assistance of Italy. From the very beginning, the Italian government promoted a Hungarian-Romanian alliance under Italian influence, but neither now nor later on was it able to achieve this aim. The differences were far too grave. The Romanian attitude made it a priori impossible for any Hungarian government to pursue a policy of friendship with Romania.

In principle the Romanian prime minister agreed with the Italian plan – an anti-Yugoslav Hungarian-Romanian alliance, including eventually Bulgaria as well – but only on condition that Romania's territorial claims would be completely fulfilled. He was unwilling to negotiate unless Bulgaria and Hungary ceded the whole of Dobrudja and Transylvania, respectively. In his opinion, the government in Szeged could not negotiate. Only with an elected, non-Bolshevik government actually in power was he willing to have talks.

In spite of Brătianu's standpoint, talks were started with the mediation of Borghese between representatives of the Szeged government and Romania. The conference took place in Vienna, and was later joined by representatives from Transylvania.

In September 1919, the Brătianu cabinet was ousted. A coalition government was formed by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod who – like his foreign minister, Take Ionescu – was in favour of a French orientation; he also represented a less inimical line towards Hungary, for he adopted Paléologue's conception of a Hungarian-Romanian-Polish bloc. At that time the rapprochement between the two countries was aimed against Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia, for in return for collaboration, the Horthy régime expected the re-establishment of the common

¹³ According to several indirect sources, Bethlen considered the idea of a Hungarian-Romanian personal union. Although we have no primary sources supporting this, we accept it nevertheless as a hypothesis suggested by secondary sources.

Hungarian-Polish frontier, i.e. the re-annexation of Ruthenia. However, these claims made the Romanian government rather cautious; it became more and more unresponsive in regard to the envisaged bloc, and flatly turned down the idea as soon as the Soviet-Polish war was over. Romania regarded the existing frontiers as sacrosanct – except the Romanian-Yugoslav border. In Bucharest it was believed that the division of the Banat gave an unfair advantage for Yugoslavia, and so it fomented anti-French feeling in the region. Italy was expected to help in changing the original decision.

In March 1920, Vaida-Voevod also resigned and was succeeded by General Averescu, known for his pro-Italian sympathies (he actually graduated from the Italian Military Academy). However, at the same time, he did not neglect the pro-French policy. In the Hungarian question this meant no difficulty for him, since both great powers – each for different reasons – suggested an agreement with Hungary. Therefore neither Italy nor France supported Hungary on those questions, which might have provoked opposition in Bucharest and proposed to start the negotiations by setting political questions aside. Italy and France were also at one in their wish to prevent Romania from adhering to the Little Entente. In Rome the adherence of Romania to the Slav bloc as envisaged by Beneš was regarded as contrary to Italian interests and the Beneš-plan aimed at encircling Hungary was rejected, as it was by Millerand and Paléologue. All this played a role in the fact that Romania did not join the alliance in 1920 and showed a certain willingness to start negotiations with Hungary, as well as in the readiness of the Hungarian government in office to adopt the idea of Hungarian-Romanian co-operation.

In February 1920, the Hungarian foreign minister, József Somssich, informed Cerrutti, Italy's representative in Budapest, that his government would again try to reach an understanding with Romania, this being the precondition of the alliance with Italy. However, the Hungarian attempts were unsuccessful, because the Romanians, although emphasizing their readiness to make an agreement, never really wanted one. They thought it would be the best for Romania, if Hungary remained in complete isolation. Under pressure from the great powers, they nevertheless agreed in May 1920, to start talks with Hungary. These took place in Budapest and dealt exclusively with technical questions. On the advice of Italy and France, the Hungarian side did not even mention territorial problems.¹⁴

Meanwhile Italy tried to make use of the loss of prestige France had suffered in the successor states as a consequence of Paléologue's policy. By trying to establish contacts with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, it attempted to prevent the coalition of the three states. In order to achieve success, Italy became more careful in supporting Hungary. While in London and Paris Sforza and Nitti advocated a mitigation of the Hungarian peace terms and definitely objected to the re-annexation of Ruthenia, Torretta already regarded Hungarian revisionist

¹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 33. f. 75. Fouchet's report to Briand, March 1, 1921; ASMAE. 1740–137. Sforza's cable to the Italian missions in Budapest and Bucharest, March 2, 1920.

aspirations with utmost reserve. To Bucharest's relief, he did not urge a Hungarian-Romanian agreement either. When news of the so-called secret Franco-Hungarian agreement became known, the negotiations were in fact broken off. Although at the founding of the alliance it had not joined the Little Entente "against the Hungarian danger", Romania now began closer co-operation with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In 1920, a verbal agreement was reached between the three states concerning co-operation against Hungary and finally in 1921, Romania became a full member of the bloc. As a consequence, there was no question of Hungarian-Romanian rapprochement. Only in 1922 were further attempts at rapprochement made, under different international circumstances and power relations.

Before the creation of the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia had hardly any contact with Hungary. There was some exchange of goods based on a short-term contract, but neither country was really interested in a rapprochement. Czechoslovak help would not have secured Hungary a sea-port – an essential question in the choice of a preferred neighbour –, nor could it have prevented through an alliance with Czechoslovakia the establishment of the Little Entente, since the bloc was masterminded by the Czechoslovak foreign minister Beneš himself. Furthermore, the differences included serious territorial disputes. The struggle of the Károlyi government for integrity and the foreign policy of the Soviet Republic, which had given the appearance of relying upon integrity, had strained the relations between the two countries to an extreme degree. The differences were further increased by the two abortive return attempts of ex-King Charles, since the Prague government was on both occasions ready to take military action against Hungary.

Beneš was decidedly of the opinion that it was absolutely necessary to bring overwhelming pressure to bear on Hungary which was unwilling to resign itself to its lot: there were to be no negotiations until Hungary had signed the peace treaty and was encircled by the alliance. Though co-operation with Hungary would have been of considerable economic importance, the Czechoslovak government tried to sidestep the negotiations suggested by Budapest. Czechoslovak diplomats did not conceal the intention of Beneš to conclude an agreement with Yugoslavia and Romania against Hungary in order to force the country to co-operate.¹⁵

Since the plans of the Hungarian government regarding Yugoslavia and Romania proved a fiasco, the Teleki government tried its chances with Czechoslovakia. In the summer and autumn 1920, there were indications that Czechoslovak statesmen – first of all, President Masaryk – were ready to start negotiations with Hungary. This change of mind can be explained partly by Hungary's readiness to sign the Trianon Peace Treaty after lengthy delays, and partly by the fact that Hungary was more or less encircled as a result of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement. In addition, as a matter of policy, Britain and France were

¹⁵ PDH. II. doc. 539. p. 571. Hedry's cable to Bánffy, June 29, 1921.

both pressing strongly for an agreement with Hungary. In this Britain's role was of special importance, since Czechoslovakia was financially dependent on it. Beneš was just about to go to London to ask for a loan. So it was in his own interest to give a favourable answer to the Hungarian proposals, in fact to act himself as initiator and to overstate considerably the importance of the talks. After the Trianon Treaty had been signed, the Prague government offered to make a goods exchange agreement. In return, Budapest requested the lifting of the embargo on certain goods, the end of the boycott and the discussion of political questions. To complete the picture, it should be noted that the development of relations was mainly in the interests of Czechoslovak big industrial capital and the large Hungarian estates, both having lost some of their domestic political influence, and to the advantage of big capital in Hungary and large estates in Czechoslovakia. These interests opposed any kind of compromise, an attitude which was reflected in the relations between the two countries.

So, in spite of the animosity of the Czechoslovak government, the Teleki government displayed vigorous diplomatic activity at the end of 1920. In December 1920, the situation between the two countries once more became very tense, because on December 22, the Prague government received confidential information that an armed attack was planned against Czechoslovakia on December 23, with the tacit support of the government. At the request of Beneš, the chairman of the international military mission, General Gamelin, at once called on Teleki and demanded that the action be stopped. The Hungarian prime minister admitted that such a plan existed, but as soon as he had known about it (on December 21), he had taken measures to prevent the attack. On December 24, he assured Lejhanec, the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest, that he would do everything to prevent similar actions in the future and intended to maintain a correct relationship with Czechoslovakia; he requested that the Prague government take cognizance of this guarantee.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Beneš and his supporters accused Teleki of having known about the planned military action, which he stopped only after Gamelin's intervention. In this atmosphere of mistrust, Teleki sent Count Szapáry to Prague to discuss, in an unofficial capacity, the possibility of direct negotiations. Szapáry, who had contacts with influential Czech personalities, had earlier met the former prime minister Tusar, who – to his utmost surprise – advocated the revision of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier.¹⁷ But when, at the end of December, Szapáry had official talks with prime minister and foreign minister Beneš, the latter told him that Czechoslovakia was ready to discuss eco-

¹⁶ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 244, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš, December 24, 1920; *ibid.* 242. Cable of Lejhanec to Masaryk and Beneš, December 24, 1920; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. ff. 109–110. Couget's cable to Millerand, December 26, 1920; AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 245, directions of Beneš to Lejhanec, December 27, 1920; *ibid.* 5316. Report of Lejhanec to Beneš, January 1, 1921.

¹⁷ Tusar wanted to know which areas were reclaimed by Hungary. Szapáry's reply: "Die ganze Sprachgrenze von Oesterreich bis zu den Karpaten und die Ruska Krajna." Tusar declared that Pozsony (Bratislava) was out of the question. *PDH.* II. doc. 42. pp. 41–51. Szapáry's report to Bánffy, January (no day given), 1921.

conomic and political questions, but no territorial issues. On January 12, 1921, Szapáry again talked to Beneš, who reiterated his view.¹⁸ However, the Hungarian government wanted to confine the negotiations to the territorial issue. It had received information suggesting that Masaryk was inclined to a correction of the frontiers. The information was correct: there was a considerable difference between the policy of Masaryk and Beneš in regard to Hungary and the Hungarian minority. The President of the Republic attached great importance to an agreement with Hungary, even at the price of certain sacrifices. In this way he wanted to prevent the future concurrence of Hungarian and German interests.

Masaryk was thinking in an international perspective, looking to the future. It was obvious to him that the defeated countries would do all they could in order to mitigate their defeat, and he had no doubt that they would act in concert. So he wanted to establish relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary before Germany regained its former power. Learning from the lessons of history, he was ready for mutual understanding, for co-operation and for the correction of injustice. He did not want to keep a Hungarian population living in isolation and was ready to return to Hungary regions inhabited by Hungarians, for instance, Csalóköz Island, but only if the railway and other communications were not cut off thereby (several areas inhabited by Hungarians were actually annexed by Czechoslovakia on this pretext). Thus he did not reject the proposal of the Hungarian government which would have been ready in this case to make some contribution to the construction of a new communications network. By returning to Hungary, some areas with a Hungarian population, Masaryk hoped to reduce the population of minorities living in Czechoslovakia – in his opinion a grave danger for the republic – and to secure the rectified Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontiers.

There were also differences between Masaryk and Beneš as far as the policy towards the Hungarian minority was concerned. There is evidence that the President tried to obtain information about the situation of the Hungarians and to prevent short-sighted measures, concealing this from Beneš. He became aware that it would depend on them, whether the Hungarian minority would play the role of a bridge or of a wooden horse. The leaders of the Hungarian minority regarded Masaryk's conciliatory attitude as sincere.¹⁹

Although usually rather uninterested in questions of foreign policy, at the beginning of 1921, Masaryk paid considerable attention to Hungarian-Czechoslovak rapprochement. However, his viewpoint hardly revealed itself in the policy of Beneš which was inflexible and uncompromising. His talks with Szapáry in December 1920 and January 1921, went against the spirit of Masaryk's conception. His style was offensive, the talks had no substance. Beneš wanted to limit the talks to economic questions. A slight change took place in spring 1921, when he at last agreed to start negotiations at government level. This change was certainly due to the fact that a new Hungarian foreign minister had come to office:

¹⁸ PDH. II. doc. 31. p. 34. Tahy's report to Bánffy, January 10, 1921.

¹⁹ PDH. II. doc. 378. pp. 391 – 395. Tahy's report to Bánffy, April 29, 1921.

Gusztáv Gratz, who, according to the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest, Lejhanec, "completely adapted himself to the situation created by the Peace Treaty of Trianon; he is best-intentioned towards Czechoslovakia and earnestly wishes the improvement of Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations".²⁰ A similar report was sent to Briand by Fouchet. Lejhanec also informed Beneš that Gratz's ministry would not last long and so the opportunity of discussing the main questions of mutual interest should be taken at once.²¹ His impending visit to Western Europe also induced Beneš to begin the negotiations, since he wished to refer to them when requesting loans, especially in Britain from where he had long been "advised" to reach an agreement with Hungary. Last but not least, the head of Czechoslovak diplomacy was sure that his negotiation with the Hungarians would soften the Romanians and the Poles.²² (He was not wrong.)

In the weeks preceding the negotiations, there were discussions between Szapáry and Beneš about where the talks were to take place. Beneš proposed the castle of Hédervár in Slovakia and then the town of Brünn (Brno), but the Hungarians refused to accept this. Since Beneš was unwilling to come to Hungary – at least not for the first meeting –, they finally agreed upon the Austrian border town of Bruck. Budapest set its hopes on the talks, as is proved by the cable sent by Fouchet on March 15 – i.e. on the day of the negotiations – to Briand. Fouchet reported that Teleki, Gratz and Beneš discussed not only economic, but political questions as well. The latter included the return to Hungary, a zone 80 km long and 10–20 km broad, extending from Nyitra to Ruthenia.

Couget, French minister to Prague, obtained similar information. On March 8, he reported to Beneš that "the Czechs are ready to cede to Hungary a zone of 80 km length along the Danube, reaching as far as Nyitra".²³

The evidence concerning the talks in Bruck is most contradictory. There are differences on essential issues, such as the question of whether Beneš was willing to negotiate in the spirit of the "lettre d'envoi" and to return to Hungary certain areas or not. According to the aide mémoire made by the Hungarian participants – Gratz, Teleki and Szapáry – as well as to the information they gave to diplomats accredited to Budapest, he was, while according to documents found in the Czechoslovak archives, he was not. So, what is the truth?

²⁰ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 78, report of Lejhanec to Beneš, March 14, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 160. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 9, 1921.

²¹ *Ibid.* The choice fell on Gratz; he had close contacts with political circles in Vienna, and he had represented Hungary for a long time in Austria. Good use could be made of this at the negotiations over Burgenland.

²² Aide mémoire of Beneš about the negotiations in Bruck. AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 83, cable of Beneš to Lejhanec, March 18, 1921.

²³ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 170. Fouchet's cable to Briand, March 15, 1921; *ibid.* f. 181. Couget's report to Briand, March 8, 1921; N.A. Washington State Department R. G. 963. Report of Smith, representative of the United States in Budapest to the State Department, March 21, 1921.

The meeting took place on March 14–15. Hungary was represented by the afore-named, Czechoslovakia by Beneš and Jan Masaryk. The former prime minister Tusar, who originally was also to have been present, did not come – much to the regret of the Hungarians. The paper drafted by the Hungarians reads as follows: “In answer to Gratz, as to how the frontier commission would proceed, Beneš replied: ‘in the spirit of the *lettre d’envoi*’”. “For it did not seem impossible – writes Gratz in his book – to reach an agreement that would have returned the territories bordering on Hungary that were given to Czechoslovakia by the peace treaty...”²⁴ Foreign minister Gratz so informed the French high commissioner Fouchet, telling him that he was most satisfied with the talks and that Beneš had emphasized that Czechoslovakia did not intend to keep areas inhabited purely by Hungarians, but that for parliamentary and general political reasons, it was impossible for his government to promise any immediate change in the Trianon Peace Treaty.²⁵ Such statements by Beneš are confirmed by another source, too. Two months later, Szapáry reminded him in a conversation that “he had promised in Bruck to do his best to familiarize Czechoslovakia with the idea of territorial concessions, in other words: to prepare public opinion for this”. Beneš did not deny it.²⁶ Thus the information coming from the Hungarian ministers and from Szapáry indicates without exception that the Hungarians requested a revision of the unjust peace treaty and that Beneš received their arguments with understanding.

The Czechoslovak sources demonstrate just the contrary. In an internal note to the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps in Budapest, the following lines may be read: “The Hungarians wanted to discuss first of all the territorial question and the concessions... Referring to the ‘*lettre d’envoi*’ of Millerand, they declared that they could not return home without having discussed the territorial problems; Beneš replied that the ‘*lettre d’envoi*’ was not part of the peace treaty, had not been signed by the Czechs and so does not commit them to anything...”²⁷ The next day – the note goes on – Teleki and Gratz again claimed territorial concessions in a confidential talk with Beneš. Since Beneš refused, they declared that they were not interested in further negotiations. Beneš warned them that Czechoslovakia had already reached agreements with all their neighbours. Should the Hungarians not come to terms with Czechoslovakia, they would be blockaded. Then the Hungarians gave up their claims and accepted the proposals of Beneš, i.e. that the negotiations would be continued in four commissions and

²⁴ Gusztáv Gratz: *op. cit.* p. 42.

²⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 174. Fouchet’s cable to Briand, March 19, 1921.

²⁶ PDH. II. doc. 767. pp. 774–775. Szapáry’s aide mémoire about his talks with Beneš, August 24, 1921.

²⁷ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt, notice of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry to Lejhanec, March 18, 1921.

that only economic and technical questions,²⁸ as well as the execution of the Trianon Peace Treaty would be discussed.

The two parties thus gave visibly different accounts of the talks in Bruck. Both delegations emphasized what the government circles at home wanted to hear. The Hungarian delegates repeatedly referred to the impossibility of their accepting the injustices of the peace treaty and of dealing exclusively with technical questions of secondary importance, instead of vital political problems, since accepting such conditions would not have been tolerated at home. It is therefore understandable that they left unmentioned the refusal of Beneš and referred vaguely to the possibility of the return of certain areas. Of course, it is also conceivable that Beneš did not exclude such a possibility in their confidential talks, for tactical reasons.

Anyway, the real situation is not disclosed in the documents of either party, but perhaps Beneš was nearer the truth. He actually never recognized the cogency of the "lettre d'envoi", nor was he ever willing to discuss it with the Hungarians. Unlike Masaryk, he opposed the territorial revision, even if he often tried to make the Hungarians believe the contrary. For the time being he only was willing to discuss the implementation of the Trianon Treaty and the development of economic relations. For tactical reasons he certainly referred in his confidential conversations with Gratz and Teleki to the possibility of discussing even the most delicate affairs, i.e. the territorial problems, when a favourable atmosphere existed between the two countries. But in his papers there is no mention of this. On the contrary: he wrote that he flatly refused the Hungarian claims of territorial revision, nor did he recognize the "lettre d'envoi", but told the Hungarians: if the League of Nations suggested a frontier revision in the spirit of the "lettre d'envoi", he would reject it.²⁹

Relying upon our present knowledge and taking the contradictory documents mentioned above into consideration, we offer the following summary of the negotiations. First of all, the agenda was controlled by Beneš. The efforts of Gratz and Teleki to give priority to the political issues over the technical questions were unsuccessful. Beneš considered impossible a discussion of the territorial problem,

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ In the subsequent activities of the frontier commission it occurred (not only with Czechoslovakia but in relation to Romania and Yugoslavia as well) that the representatives of the three states cited Millerand's "lettre d'envoi" when claiming the annexion of villages that had remained in Hungary, but were important for them. In his letter of June 11, 1920, the ambassador of the United States in Paris reported that the Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav members of the peace delegation (Titulescu, Osuský, and Pašić) expressed the hope that Millerand's "lettre d'envoi" would make it possible for them to obtain the areas they had requested in vain at the peace conference. "The Romanian, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak Delegations hope that it will be possible for them, in this way, to arrive at certain local modifications of the frontiers with Hungary which, however, have always been refused to them on the ground that the territorial settlement must be regarded as final." N.A. Washington State Departments 1375. Report of the ambassador of the United States in Paris, June 11, 1920.

and although he admitted that "the given frontiers are not the best", they were not marked out exclusively on the basis of ethnicity, but – as he put it – the historical and economic aspects were also taken into account. Nevertheless, he could not negotiate about their revision, nor could he have made as much as a formal promise in this respect, because he would have been dismissed at once. However, Beneš considered that if, through close economic co-operation the political atmosphere between the two countries improved, the question could be raised in parliament in Prague.³⁰

On the other hand, the Hungarian side made economic co-operation dependent upon the improvement of the political atmosphere, i.e. a certain rectification of the unjust stipulations of the peace treaty – a real vicious circle: progress depended on a change of position by one of the parties. In Bruck the Hungarian delegation changed its stance. The Hungarians accepted Beneš's view that direct negotiations should only be concerned with the technical questions relating to the Trianon Peace Treaty and with the development of economic co-operation. As a matter of fact, the Hungarian government had no choice but to yield. The country was living in complete isolation, having been unable to come to an understanding with any of its neighbours. This included Poland, although there were no differences between the two states – but Warsaw treated Hungary rather cautiously. The Hungarian government hoped that by reaching an agreement with Czechoslovakia, it could improve its international position, win the backing of Beneš in the Burgenland affair and his support for Hungary's admission to the League of Nations. Hungary also needed help in obtaining a western loan. Last but not least, it expected an easing of the country's economic plight.

Teleki and his team wished to establish very close economic relations with Czechoslovakia by offering Beneš a customs union. Beneš gladly welcomed the offer, since for him an agreement with Hungary was also of great importance, for both economic and political reasons. He wanted access to the Hungarian market as well as the agricultural produce needed by his country; he had to make Romania and Poland more tractable, so far having been unable to reach an agreement with them, and to place himself in a better light in the eyes of the western powers, improving thereby his chances of obtaining a loan. He explained to Teleki and Gratz that co-operation with Hungary would be on a basis different from that with Czechoslovakia's other neighbours; these differed from Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the fact that the latter "both belong to the occidental civilisation".

The negotiations in Bruck resulted in the following agreement: (1) Hungary would abstain from revisionist propaganda in Slovakia and abroad; (2) it would take measures against any attempts to restore the Habsburgs (this question was

³⁰ PDH. vol. II. doc. 224. pp. 233–241. Szapáry's aide mémoire about his talks with Beneš, March 1921; *ibid.* doc. 767. pp. 774–775. Szapáry's aide mémoire about his talks with Beneš, August 24, 1921.

removed from the agenda for a long time); (3) those who had fled from Czechoslovakia to Hungary could return and freely assert their rights; (4) an amnesty would be mutually granted to political prisoners; (5) four special committees would be set up, to begin work after the Easter Holidays; the sessions of the legal and the financial committees would be held in Prague, those of the committees for economics and communication in Budapest.³¹

As compared to their significance, the negotiations in Bruck created a rather exaggerated international stir. In London, Paris and Vienna the news were received with satisfaction,³² in Rome, Bucharest and Warsaw with unease. The Romanian government considered the talks most dangerous, since Czechoslovakia had deviated from the policy pursued against Hungary by all of them and aimed at the isolation of the country. Czechoslovakia had accepted a rapprochement with Hungary that had been rejected by Bucharest and had started high level negotiations. Romania had been more afraid of Soviet Russia than of an isolated Hungary, but now its uncertainty increased. It had to relax its inflexible policy, either in favour of Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Fearing the resumption of the talks with Hungary, it reflected upon the conclusion of a Czechoslovak-Romanian agreement often suggested by Beneš. The first return attempt of Charles IV put an end to the hesitation – a few days after the abortive attempt, Romania signed a treaty with Czechoslovakia.

The reaction of Poland was also most revealing. Warsaw had a grudge against the Hungarian government for having “given up the common cause”. Since the end of the war, Poland’s relationship with Czechoslovakia had been definitely hostile, the drawing of the frontier had provoked a life-and-death struggle, whereas Hungary had represented a valuable support by engaging the attention and the force of its adversary in the south. Some co-operation had developed between Budapest and Warsaw, and it was an open secret that both states desired to bring about a common Polish-Hungarian frontier. On the international scene, however, Warsaw displayed some cautiousness. It did not sufficiently espouse the cause of isolated Hungary and this made a rather bad impression on the Budapest government circles, already dissatisfied because of Poland’s pro-Romanian policy. After the negotiations in Bruck it became evident that the position of Prague had been strengthened. Warsaw’s resentment was also expressed

³¹ About the Bruck negotiations cf.: AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 181. Couget’s report to Briand, March 8, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 83, notice of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry to Lejhanec, March 18, 1921; PDH. II. doc. 221. pp. 225–231. Aide mémoire about the negotiations in Bruck, March 14, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 157. p. 177. Szapáry’s aide mémoire about his talks with Beneš, 1921; AMZV. PZ. 86, cable of Lejhanec to Beneš March 22, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 160. Fouchet’s cable to Briand, March 9, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 170. Couget’s report to Briand, March 16, 1921; *ibid.* f. 172. Couget’s cable to Briand, March 17, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 176–179. Couget’s report to Briand, March 17, 1921; *ibid.* f. 185. Fouchet’s cable to Briand, May 31, 1921; *ibid.* f. 172. Report of Maugras to Briand, March 16, 1921.

³² PDH. II. doc. 226. pp. 242–243. Wettstein’s cable to Gratz March 15, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 181. Couget’s cable to Briand, March 15, 1921.

by Csekonics, Hungary's representative in Warsaw, who considered the Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations a false step, a deviation from the line followed up to that time. According to Csekonics and to Polish military circles, Hungary would only break out of its isolation if the "bill was settled" with Czechoslovakia by joint Polish-Hungarian military action to restore the common frontier. In his reply Gratz regarded the view of Csekonics as unacceptable, according to which Hungary's isolation could only be ended by means of military action. There was also another way, he wrote, to remove one of the neighbouring countries from the encirclement surrounding the country. This is what the Hungarian government had to try: to reach agreement with one of the neighbouring countries. If this could be achieved, then the isolation of Hungary could not be contrived. Romania, as the strongest state, would have been the most suitable partner, but tentative Hungarian moves in this direction had been unsuccessful. Military action as suggested by the Poles, Gratz went on, would be impossible anyway, since Hungary would be faced by three or four enemies at the same time. Furthermore, such action would be vigorously opposed by the Allied Powers as well. "Our Polish colleagues are thus mistaken in their judgment of the situation, when encouraging us to take military action in the near future." Finally, Gratz reminded the Hungarian representative that during their last visit to Paris, the Polish statesmen tried to avoid the Hungarian politicians: "... they seemed to be ashamed of being our friends". It made also a bad impression that the Polish representation in Budapest had not been raised to the rank of a legation, although Romania had done so a few weeks before, and Czechoslovakia was about to do so. In Gratz's opinion, Enstance Sapiena, the Polish foreign minister, was more realistic in his judgment than the military when he said: "Hungary and Poland cannot pursue a common policy, for this would produce only intrigues, which would be dangerous for Hungary." He also disbelieved the assertion of the Polish military, according to whom Romania advocated the common frontier. But even if this were true and there was a real chance to realize the common frontier, direct contacts with Czechoslovakia would be no obstacle in this respect. Otherwise, he was convinced that Poland would reach a similar agreement with Czechoslovakia. Should this be the case – in his opinion: not unfavourable for Hungary – there would be new perspectives in Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations as well, and relations with Poland would be more frank and better. "And in this situation – concluded Gratz – Sapiena would be less ashamed of serving common aims with Hungary. Maybe, this way will be more profitable than undertaking a military adventure. Maybe, we shall lose in this case Upper Hungary. It may be, but it is not sure. But it is anyhow inadmissible to imperil a whole country for the sake of a plan, the realization of which shows but little promise."³³

The first return attempt of ex-King Charles took place barely a fortnight after the Bruck conference, during the Easter Holidays. At first, the Czechoslovak

³³ PDH. II. doc. 240. pp. 262–266. Letter of Gratz to Csekonics, March 21, 1921.

government took the view that the Bruck negotiations could not be resumed until the question of the Hungarian throne was settled.³⁴

We have already dealt with the Czechoslovak reaction to the return attempt, but not with its effect on the negotiations. The Czechoslovak government broke off the negotiations, and the sessions of the special committees also did not take place. The two governments accused one another. Beneš was especially vexed by the fact that Teleki and Gratz had explicitly declared in Bruck that the Habsburg question was not to be feared, but a few days later Teleki was nevertheless staying "by chance" near the Austrian border, when the ex-King arrived incognito. In the declarations which followed, the question of kingship was stated as being Hungary's internal affair. In his speech to the Senate, Beneš declared that: "We wanted to co-operate with Hungary and have given concrete proof thereof... In London, where the reparations were discussed, we offered our hand to Hungary. In Bruck we started negotiations which were of economic and financial importance for both countries. As proved by the events of recent days, this was untimely."³⁵

In Budapest, Beneš's speech – and his statements in general at the time – were regarded as interference in Hungary's internal affairs and provoked a protest to Prague. "We are startled at the attitude of Beneš – cabled Gratz to Tahy – for he must have seen that the Hungarian government was pursuing this time the policy outlined by Teleki in Bruck" – i.e. by removing the ex-King.³⁶ The attacks against the two ministers and their subsequent removal was acknowledged in Prague with satisfaction. In mid-May, Beneš sent several messages to Budapest about his readiness to resume negotiations, although his condition thereof – i.e. a complete solution to the Habsburg question – had not yet been fulfilled. The reason why he departed from his original demand was quite obvious: on May 24, he was to begin a tour of Western Europe with the principal aim of obtaining loans as large as possible. This is why he wanted to resume the negotiations with Hungary, suggested and urged by both Paris and London. So at the beginning of May, he proposed to the new Hungarian foreign minister, Count Miklós Bánffy, that the talks be continued: the experts of the four special committees as well as the two foreign ministers should meet in conference not later than May 25, and the diplomatic missions should be raised to the status of legations.³⁷

Bánffy accepted the proposal and was ready to meet Beneš personally. "Beneš was visibly pleased with this message" – cabled Tahy. Technical difficulties in

³⁴ PDH. II. doc. 405. pp. 420–421. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy, May 13, 1921.

³⁵ PDH. II. doc. 157. p. 177. Szapáry's note, March 1921.

³⁶ PDH. II. doc. 316. p. 325. Cable of Gratz to Tahy, April 6, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 299. pp. 313–315. Tahy's cable to Gratz, April 2, 1921.

³⁷ PDH. II. doc. 403. pp. 418–419. Bánffy's cable to Praznovsky, May 16, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 345. pp. 462–463. Bánffy's cable to Praznovsky, May 5, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 183. Fouchet's cable to Briand, May 31, 1921.

regard to the venue were finally overcome after a proposal by Bánffy to meet in Marienbad. The new Hungarian foreign minister was ready to go to Czechoslovakia – a step his predecessor had refused to take.³⁸ At first it was said that Bethlen would also be present, but finally he was not.

So Beneš achieved his purpose. In Paris and London he could now claim that negotiations had been resumed with Hungary. He wanted to give the impression that an agreement with Hungary could be expected. Furthermore, he revealed his plan for a confederation of Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia, but excluding Yugoslavia and Romania. Those Balkan states, he contended, could not be drawn into a bloc aimed at the consolidation of Central Europe.³⁹ However, because of the exclusion of Yugoslavia and Romania, the new Beneš plan was received in Paris with some reservation. But not in London. According to Hohler, the British government had lost all illusions about Yugoslavia and Romania, because both of them had rejected the idea of coming to terms with Hungary. In this situation the readiness of Beneš to reach an agreement and to bring about close co-operation with Hungary made the best possible impression on the British. Hedry, Hungary's representative in London, reported on the Beneš plan in detail, and its reception in London. In his opinion, Hungarian political circles should not adopt a negative attitude to the proposals. They were supported by Great Britain as well. The plan, he went on, was favourable for Hungary, because the leading role within the tripartite confederation suggested by Beneš would obviously fall to the Hungarians and Germans. This bloc of thirty millions would be the strongest bloc in Central Europe, and Hungary would have sufficient power to achieve its political aims.⁴⁰

Of course, Beneš knew this just as well, and so we have no reason to take his federal plan seriously. As a matter of fact, the project was merely aimed at convincing the governments in Paris and London of his interest in Central Europe's prosperity, and at enabling him to obtain the maximum amount in loans. At all times he was sharply opposed to a tripartite confederation, because – as he explained in confidence – this would be very similar to a revival of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. "From time to time, it is regretted on this or the other side that the Monarchy has been abolished. Various difficulties of some national states are being given as pretexts. On this basis there have been innumerable ideas for a Danubian confederation or at least for the revival of the Austro-Hungarian customs union... The reconstruction of any similar formation – even in the economic sphere – would be dangerous for us."⁴¹ However, all this did not

³⁸ PDH. II. doc. 403. pp. 418–419. Bánffy's cable to Tahy, May 13, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 516. p. 548. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, June 19, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 517. p. 549. Bánffy's cable to Tahy, June 20, 1921.

³⁹ PDH. II. doc. 642. pp. 644–645. Hedry's cable to Bánffy, July 25, 1921.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ E. Beneš: *Boj o mír a bezpečnosti štátu* (Struggle for peace and the security of the state). Praha, 1934, p. 239.

prevent him from making the London government believe that the core of the envisaged union would be Hungary.

The Hungarian government followed with attention the visit of Beneš to Paris and London, and since everything seemed to indicate that he was going to overstate the importance of the talks with Hungary, Bánffy instructed Praznovszky (and presumably Hedry as well) on May 22 – three days before the arrival of Beneš – to inform the competent authorities that “although there are certain favourable signs, a Hungarian-Czechoslovak agreement is now out of the question”.⁴²

Whereas London attached great importance to a Czechoslovak-Hungarian agreement and to the envisaged Hungarian-Czechoslovak-Austrian economic co-operation, Paris, although approving of Czechoslovak-Hungarian rapprochement, urged rather a Czechoslovak-Polish agreement. This was important for France because of the envisaged alliance system in Eastern Europe. The possibility and usefulness of a Czechoslovak-Polish-Hungarian rapprochement was certainly also mentioned, but only the conclusion of a Czechoslovak-Polish agreement and of a Franco-Czechoslovak mutual assistance pact was insisted upon.⁴³

Beneš, after returning from his western tour – which was not a complete success, since he received only part of the amount he was asking for –, began to delay the start of the negotiations under various pretexts. The special committees conferring in Prague and Budapest (they also began their talks later than agreed: instead of May 25, only at the beginning of June) came to an understanding only on very few points, while irreconcilable differences appeared on the question of the repatriation of refugees and on the question of agrarian reform. The only agreement of note was reached by the economic committee in Budapest: on July 6, an agreement was signed about the exchange of coal and food. Discussion of all other questions – including a commercial convention – was postponed to August. But this was no mere chance: the conference in Marienbad had made it clear that Beneš was unwilling to conclude such a convention. A rather insignificant result was achieved by the legal committee in the legal representation of pensioners and in criminal cases. In Prague the committee dealing with pre-war debts, broke off its discussions after a short deliberation. Walko, head of the Hungarian delegation, referred to the Czechoslovak position according to which the question of state debts was to be settled by the peace treaty and depended on the decision of the committee for reparations, but did not make any proposal.⁴⁴ The Czechoslovak members of the committee for communication and com-

⁴² PDH. II. doc. 345. pp. 462–463. Bánffy's cable to Praznovszky, May 22, 1921.

⁴³ None of the French demands agreed with the conception of Beneš. However, progress was achieved in the former question, but not in the latter.

⁴⁴ AMZV. PZ. 202, aide mémoire about the session of the committee dealing with public debts, June 20, 1921.

merce, saying that they had to attend the conference of Porto Rosa, left Budapest after a short stay. Time was too short for an agreement to be reached.⁴⁵

The meeting of the foreign ministers took place only on June 23. From the first day it became clear that Bánffy had every right to be sceptical: the standpoints were so contrary that an agreement was out of question. The problems occurring in the activity of the committees was the first item on the agenda. Beneš went back on several questions he had assented to in Bruck. So, for instance, the parties had agreed in Bruck that there would be a wide-ranging amnesty which would apply to all persons opting for Hungarian nationality. Now Beneš declared that there were persons to whom the amnesty could not apply even if they opted for Hungarian nationality. The committee conferring at the same time in Prague, assumed a standpoint contrary to that of Beneš, i.e. it acted in accordance with the Bruck agreement. However, these decisions were revised later.

Beneš refused to negotiate on the question of pre-war debts – and so did the committee – because, he said, a statute had been accepted in this matter. The problem of active and pensioned state employees was another item where no agreement was reached. Beneš also refused to discuss agrarian reform, saying that it belonged to his country's home affairs: the bill had been submitted to the League of Nations, which had approved it. However, he was compelled to admit that since the bill concerned national minorities, it also had international consequences. But even after a long debate, Bánffy was unable to sustain his view that a difference had to be made between those, who chose Czechoslovak citizenship and those who opted for Hungarian citizenship.

A proposal by the Hungarian foreign minister for a commercial agreement was also turned down. Beneš tried to explain to Bánffy and Szapáry, why he could not conclude a long-term commercial agreement: the agreement he wanted to conclude with Hungary should be based, he said, on the most-favoured-nation principle, but in this case, he would have to grant the same favour to the other states as well, and this he was unwilling to do. This was obviously a mere pretext. "I had the impression – wrote Bánffy – that Beneš wanted to avoid discussion of a long-term commercial agreement, because he knew that this would raise the necessity of considering territorial concessions... He wanted us to believe that Czechoslovakia did not need commercial co-operation with Hungary, but this sounded rather unconvincing."⁴⁶ At the end of the negotiations, Beneš raised the question of the activity of irrendentist organizations against Czechoslovakia, but Bánffy refused to discuss the matter, saying, it belonged to Hungary's home affairs.

The failure of the Marienbad talks was clear, since no agreement could be reached on most of the questions. Beneš was more supercilious than in Bruck,

⁴⁵ PDH. II. doc. 480. p. 527. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, June 7, 1921.

⁴⁶ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 233, aide mémoire of the Czechoslovak foreign minister, June 27, 1921; about the negotiations in Marienbad cf.: AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. ff. 181. 226–228. Couget's report to Briand, June 18, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 238–239. Couget's report to Briand, June 22, 1921.

whereas the Hungarian delegation headed by Bánffy was less resolute than that of Teleki and Gratz. Questions of a political nature, such as the problem of the frontiers, were not insisted upon. From all this Beneš drew the following conclusion: "... the ratification of the Trianon Peace Treaty, the establishment of the Little Entente, and King Charles's unsuccessful coup attempt have convinced the Hungarians that they have to submit to our political line".⁴⁷

After returning from Marienbad, both the Hungarian and Czechoslovak foreign ministers emphasized that they were satisfied with the negotiations.⁴⁸ Relying upon Czechoslovak sources, the world press reported that complete agreement had been reached in Marienbad.⁴⁹ From the Czechoslovak side this was welcomed, since it wished to prove to the western powers its constructive role in the Danube Basin. In fact, Czechoslovakia had every reason to be satisfied with Marienbad, since the Hungarian demands became more moderate. The situation was different for the Hungarian government, which had no reason to be satisfied, having been turned down on almost every issue, while Beneš had shown little good-will. The Hungarians had also taken note of a meeting between Beneš, Take Ionescu and Pašić, that had taken place almost at the same time and on the same site as the Hungarian-Czechoslovak talks. Although the negotiations did not this time overstress the anti-Hungarian attitude of the Little Entente, the time and place of the meeting were not chosen by mere chance, and the whole matter was regarded as a plot against Hungary.⁵⁰ In spite of his failure, Bánffy nevertheless put a good face on it and was "most satisfied" with the negotiation.⁵¹ This was necessitated by Hungary's international position, which went from bad to worse on account of the first return attempt of ex-king Charles and Romania's adherence to the Little Entente; the situation was further aggravated by the Burgenland crisis. In this affair Bánffy wanted to avail himself of Beneš with his good western and Austrian contacts, in order to reach a settlement, and thus needed the good-will of the latter. In Hungary it was feared that this situation would drive Hungary into the arms of Beneš. Anyway, the negotiations were certainly marked by the unequal power relationship.

⁴⁷ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 233-234, aide mémoire of Beneš; PDH. II. doc. 528. pp. 559-564. Protocol of the talks between Bánffy and Beneš, June 24, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 516. p. 548. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, June 19, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 517. p. 549. Bánffy's cable to Tahy, June 20, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 537. p. 570. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy, June 28, 1921; *ibid.* 497. doc. 537. Tahy's cable to Bánffy, June 13, 1921.

⁴⁸ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 45. f. 224. Fouchet's cable to Briand, June 27, 1921; *ibid.* f. 224. Couget's cable to Briand, June 27, 1921.

⁴⁹ PDH. II. doc. 536. p. 569. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy, June 28, 1921; *ibid.* doc. 537. p. 570. Praznovsky's cable to Bánffy, June 28, 1921.

⁵⁰ PDH. II. doc. 767. pp. 774-775.

⁵¹ This is what he told Fouchet after his return. AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 45. f. 224. Fouchet's cable to Briand, June 27, 1921.

The Hungarian side was most careful when referring to the necessity for territorial revision. Besides the above-mentioned factors, London also played a role. The British government repeatedly warned the Hungarian government that the time was not right to discuss political questions, because this would lead to complications. So, discussion of frontier problems should not be insisted upon during the economic negotiations. Britain stood for the maintenance of the Treaties of Trianon and Saint-Germain, said Tufton.⁵²

In Marienbad, Beneš and Bánffy agreed to meet again after the conference in Porto Rosa, when – among other things, a commercial convention would be discussed.⁵³ The Porto Rosa conference took place in November 1921, but the two foreign ministers had already talked in September in Brno. Recent investigations permit us to explain this earlier date – and to make more precise our knowledge of the Brno conference. On September 26–28, 1921, Beneš and Bánffy had an extraordinary meeting, where the main issue was the Burgenland question and the mediatory role Beneš was to play therein. Other problems of mutual interest were merely touched upon. An agreement was reached on the question of amnesty, the problem having become acute.⁵⁴

As already mentioned, the Brno talks were of an *extraordinary* nature and had been initiated by Bánffy. This is made clear by a cable from Feistmantel, head of the Czechoslovak representation in Budapest, dated September 24, and a note from Beneš of September 28. According to these, Beneš had talks on September 21 with Szapáry, with whom he had already discussed several times Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations. This time the Burgenland crisis was the question of the day. Szapáry asked Beneš, whether he would be prepared to play an active role in the solution of the crisis. After Beneš answered in the affirmative, Bánffy proposed to come to Czechoslovakia to discuss the matter. Two days later, on September 26, the two foreign ministers were already in Brno, the main issues of their talks were to be Western Hungary and the mediation of Beneš.⁵⁵ However, discussion of the latter, as was described above, did not take place. Nevertheless, Bánffy tried “not to break off the contact established with Beneš in Brno”. After returning from the conference in Venice, he wanted an immediate meeting with

⁵² PDH. II. doc. 540. pp. 571–572. Hedry's report to Bánffy, June 20, 1921.

⁵³ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. f. 224. Couget's cable to Briand, June 27, 1921; *ibid.* f. 228. Fouchet's cable to Briand, June 27, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Praha 5745–181, aide mémoire of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry, June 25, 1921.

⁵⁴ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63. 474. Collection of diplomatic documents; PDH. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1289. p. 439. Tahy's report to Bánffy, November 11, 1921; doc. 1310. p. 453. November 16, 1921. Beneš later demanded the execution thereof, when negotiations between the two countries were completely broken off after the second return attempt of ex-king Charles.

⁵⁵ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63. 474. Collection of diplomatic documents. PDH. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 969. pp. 145–147. Brünn. September 26, 1921; doc. 982/a. pp. 168–169. Note of the Czechoslovak government to the Western powers, September 28, 1921; AMZV. PZ. Budapest 4884–386, Feistmantel's cable to Beneš, September 24, 1921.

the Czechoslovak foreign minister.⁵⁶ On the one hand, he wanted to clear up misunderstandings concerning the mediation, on the other hand, he wished to resume the talks on the normalization of economic and political relations between the two countries. His plan was upset by the second return attempt of ex-King Charles; Beneš wanted to use this event for a show-down with Hungary, and was ready to go to war. "After the aggressive attitude of Beneš – cabled Bánffy on November 12 to Tahy – a rapprochement with Czechoslovakia is out of question."⁵⁷ By now, however, Czechoslovakia did not want it either. For a long time the question was removed from the agenda. The tactics of Beneš worked well, his rapprochement with Hungary did its share: Romania adhered to the Little Entente, Poland signed the pact as desired.

In autumn 1921, Hungary's relations with all its neighbours were extremely strained. None of them insisted any more on the normalization of contacts. In the Hungarian question Czechoslovakia backed its allies, who opposed any rapprochement with Hungary and, far from mitigating Hungary's economic situation, wished to aggravate it still more.

This is proved by the economic conference at Porto Rosa in November 1921. The participating successor states, i.e. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania and Italy, but not Hungary – decided to extend their economic relations, in spite of their political differences. To this end, they took certain measures (though not very important ones), but Hungary was left out. The neighbours availed themselves of every opportunity to raise economic difficulties.⁵⁸

The irresponsible actions of the Carlists thus brought grave consequences to the country: the encirclement grew tighter, and Hungary was deprived of vital economic contacts. Relations between Hungary and the Little Entente were further strained by the activity of the frontier commissions. The concrete demarcation of the frontiers stipulated by the Trianon Peace Treaty lasted for several years. Although having been instructed by the Conference of Ambassadors to act in accordance with the peace treaty, the "lettre d'envoi" and the instructions of June, the commissions usually disregarded the latter two.⁵⁹ Protests by the Hungarian government to the Conference of Ambassadors were of no avail. As a matter of fact, the Great Powers took cognizance of the non-application of the "lettre d'envoi" by their delegates. They presumably gave them instructions on this. Millerand's letter was not taken seriously by anybody, except by the Hungarian, not even by those who had drafted it (this was already obvious during the activities of the frontier commissions). It may be the case that not even the Hun-

⁵⁶ OL. Küm. pol. K. 63. 474. Collection of diplomatic documents; *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 1299. pp. 237–238. Bánffy's cable to Matuska, October 17, 1921.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* doc. 1070. p. 446. Bánffy's cable to Tahy, November 12, 1921.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* doc. 1172. p. 334. Bánffy's cable to Tahy, October 19, 1921.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* doc. 1140. pp. 290–291. Letter of Cambon, Chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors, to Praznovsky, October 25, 1921.

garian government attached much hope to it, although trying to keep up a contrary appearance.

The frontier commissions worked from autumn 1921 to the end of 1923. There were lengthy discussions, often even between Entente representatives, over the fate of a village. In most cases, however, disputes were settled in favour of the states of the Little Entente, in spite of the right of veto held by the commission's Hungarian member. In this situation the Hungarian government was isolated, nobody listened to its complaints. Not even in a case, where a decision in favour of Hungary would have been better.⁶⁰ No modification whatsoever was carried out, not even on the recommendation of the frontier commission and with the assent of the League of Nations, because the states of the Little Entente refused it. The last word was theirs. Just a few examples: along the Hungarian-Yugoslav border there came about a situation referred to in Millerand's "lettre d'envoi". There was a zone 50 km. long and 5 km. broad, with 34 villages, 28 of which with pure Hungarian population, expressing their wish to be annexed to Hungary. The interests of communication also called for a modification of the frontier as suggested by the frontier commission. The Hungarian government was ready to yield another area in exchange. The League of Nations approved the proposal, but was unable to implement its decision, since the Yugoslav government refused to discuss the matter.⁶¹ Another case: the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier commission usually disregarded the demands of the Hungarian delegation, e.g. in the case of Kassa and its environs – , but proposed for economic reasons a modification of the frontier in the district of Salgótarján. The League of Nations approved the proposal on April 23, 1923. The Czechoslovak government protested against the decision at the Conference of Ambassadors, which was unable and, in fact, unwilling to use coercion.⁶² Similarly, not even the slightest modification could be achieved along the Hungarian-Romanian frontier.

In 1923 the Conference of Ambassadors, disregarding the protests of the Hungarian government, made final the decisions of the frontier commissions.

Subsequently, relations between Hungary and the Little Entente were strained by repeated border incidents, provoked from both sides – responsibility was always attributed to the other side. The Hungarian government was blamed for border violations carried out by Hungarian groups or individuals, actually opposed by Bethlen, too. Collective protests were lodged both with Budapest and the western powers against Hungary's alleged "war preparations", demanding an end to military measures, the so-called troop concentrations. Upon the instructions of the Conference of Ambassadors, the military control commission investigated the complaints; according to its reports, accusations of war preparations by

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* doc. 1063. p. 231. Cable of Kánya to Csekonics, October 14, 1921.

⁶¹ N. A. Washington State Department R. G. 6848. Report of the ambassador of the USA in Paris, October 18, 1922.

⁶² Hoover Institution Collection: Stefan Osuský Box 9. Accession No. 74065-8M-36. Osuský's letter to the Conference of Ambassadors, November 17, 1923.

the Hungarian government were unfounded.⁶³ Such efforts were really out of the question, since it was highly improbable that an economically totally exhausted country, disarmed by Trianon (according to the Peace Treaty, Hungary was entitled to keep an army of 35,000 men) and encircled by a block of more than 42 millions, would launch a war against any of its neighbours. Bethlen, well known for his political realism, would obviously not have committed such suicide. By the extreme exaggeration of border violations and incidents provoked by Hungarians, the Little Entente wanted to demonstrate to the Western Powers that there was a risk of war in the Danube Basin, because the Hungarian government was pursuing a policy of revenge. The Romanian government also referred to the Soviet danger menacing the Balkans and the Middle East. Titulescu knew very well that the latter argument carried more weight in London than the former.⁶⁴

By asserting an existing danger of war, the states of the Little Entente wished to achieve three aims: to strengthen their claims to western loans (the war preparations in Budapest and Moscow required an increase in their defensive forces), to hamper Hungary's admission to the League of Nations, and finally, to hinder the economic reconstruction of Hungary and the granting of a western loan.

The Hungarian-Czechoslovak negotiations made clear what Budapest had feared from the very beginning: in the prevailing international situation Hungary would be compelled to make far-reaching compromises. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government advocated the resumption of talks. The country was actually on the verge of economic and financial collapse and Bethlen knew very well that there was only one way to improve the catastrophic economic situation: by obtaining a western loan as well as the reduction or postponement of reparations. For this reason, Hungary had to be admitted to the League of Nations. Bethlen also had no doubt that the way to the west was through the Little Entente, first of all through Prague.

Hungary's Admission to the League of Nations, and the Reconstruction Loan

In 1922, Hungarian diplomacy worked actively in order to secure Hungary's admission to the League of Nations. This was of importance for several reasons: in order to obtain a western loan, Hungary had to demonstrate its readiness to adapt itself to post-war Europe. On the other hand, the Hungarian government

⁶³ AD. Europe 1918-40. H. vol. 58. f. 52. Doucet's report to Poincaré, July 5, 1923.

⁶⁴ Hoover Institution Collection: Titulescu Box 12. Titulescu's letter to Lloyd George, September 29, 1922.

wanted to secure the protection of the League of Nations against the military threat from the Little Entente, and its support for improving the situation of the Hungarian minorities.⁶⁵

News about the admission began to circulate in July 1921. Its necessity was raised first by the royalists, thinking that membership of the League of Nations would protect Hungary from her neighbours. Their plan was to restore the Habsburg monarchy. The Crown Council convened in Hertenstein decided to attempt this with help of League membership. After coming to power, Bethlen also took up the question and made inquiries about Hungary's chances both in Geneva and among the Great Powers. The result was most discouraging. Whereas Britain, France and Italy had supported a similar request from Austria, they rejected that of Hungary, because in their opinion Hungary's whole attitude – the intrigues over Habsburg restoration, the opposition to the peace treaty – was anything but satisfactory.⁶⁶ Italy's opposition was the sharpest of all. Torretta began intensive diplomatic action against Hungary's admission. He informed the Hungarian government that he considered its request premature, and if such a request were placed on the agenda at the next League meeting, he would not support it. He also made efforts to induce Britain and France to adopt an unambiguous negative standpoint. His delegate at the League of Nations, Imperiali di Francavilla, was instructed to convince his British and French counterparts that the best thing would be not to raise the question of Hungary's admission at all.⁶⁷ Although also regarding as untimely the admission of Hungary, Britain and France were more flexible, especially the former. This caused much uneasiness in the capitals of the Little Entente states.

Just as at the time of the Franco-Hungarian negotiations, the Little Entente again moved close to Italy: Beneš at once resumed his contacts with Torretta on the matter. They agreed that Hungary's admission had to be prevented, while the policy of Italy and the Little Entente should be harmonized: they would support the admission of Austria and oppose that of Hungary. Beneš suggested his Italian counterpart that Italy being in the position of a Great Power should take the initiative.⁶⁸ All the time the Italian government and the states of the Little Entente used the Burgenland crisis to delay Hungarian admission. In London, Paris and Geneva they employed all diplomatic means against Hungary. Torretta appealed

⁶⁵ By virtue of para. 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, any member of the League falling victim to aggression was entitled to receive collective protection.

⁶⁶ ASMAE. 1742–1195. Torretta's circular telegram to every Italian ambassador and minister in Europe, August 29, 1921.

⁶⁷ ASMAE. 1742–1237. Torretta's cable to Bordenaro, August 30, 1921; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 55. ff. 24–26. Fouchet's report to Briand, April 30, 1921; *ibid.* ff. 34–35. Report of the French ambassador in Rome to Briand, November 10, 1921.

⁶⁸ ASMAE. 1742–200. Bordenaro's cable to Torretta, August 28, 1921.

personally to the Swiss government asking it to reject the Hungarian application for admission.⁶⁹

Their efforts finally produced the expected result. The Bethlen cabinet deemed it advisable to withdraw the application. It was renewed a year later, under more auspicious international circumstances, towards the end of the Burgenland crisis. By that time, Italy had moved closer to Hungary and withdrawn support from the Little Entente. The Little Entente now came increasingly under French influence. Italy now supported Hungary's application for membership.⁷⁰

The Little Entente was alone. Every Great Power took the side of Hungary. This time, the Entente had to yield to Great Power pressure. But at the second General Assembly of the League of Nations (September 1922), the Little Entente demanded that on the occasion of Hungary's admission the League of Nations should register all the obligations Hungary had assumed in connection with the Habsburg restoration. Bánffy protested, saying that the Little Entente could not demand the registration of obligations, which Hungary had undertaken exclusively in relation to the Great Powers. Thereupon the Little Entente began collective diplomatic action in London, Paris and Geneva; it rejected the standpoint of Bánffy and insisted upon its original demand. However, the Great Powers were unwilling to reopen the discussion about the Habsburg question that had raged between Hungary and the Little Entente, and thus disregarded the demand of the latter. Thereupon the Little Entente supported the decision of the Great Powers, i.e. to allow Hungary to join the League of Nations.

The uproar about League membership was hardly over, when the Little Entente started another and still fiercer struggle, this time against Hungary's application for a loan. It was supported by France and, at the beginning, by Italy as well. Nevertheless, it failed to achieve its aim, because Great Britain, which finally decided the matter, took the side of Hungary. Ostensibly the discussion was about technical and financial questions, but in reality it dealt with grave problems of international life, first of all with the question of security: what was the best way to prevent the outbreak of another war in Europe?

On the issue the two rivals – France and Great Britain – were again opposed to each other. Due to its steadily improving relations with the Little Entente, France assumed a hard and uncompromising stand against Hungary, whereas Great Britain supported Hungary's economic reconstruction, because it persisted in its opinion that peace in Central and South Eastern Europe depended on a solution to the economic questions and on stopping rising inflation. The loan to

⁶⁹ ASMAE. 1742–515. Orsini's cable to Torretta, September 1, 1921; *ibid.* Torretta's circular telegram to the Italian embassies and missions in Europe, September 4, 1921; *ibid.* 1369. Imperialito's cable to Torretta, September 11, 1921.

⁷⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 58. ff. 44–48. Report of Doulcet, French minister in Budapest, to Briand, January 11, 1922; *ibid.* f. 49. Doulcet's report to Briand January 18, 1922; *ibid.* ff. 50–51. Doulcet's report to Briand, May 15, 1922; *ibid.* f. 75. Memorandum of the French foreign ministry about Italo-Hungarian relations, February 5, 1923; *ibid.* f. 77. Doulcet's report to Briand, February 5, 1923.

be granted to Hungary was part of Britain's overall plan, aimed at the reconstruction of Central and South Eastern Europe. So it obviously supported the Hungarian application with all its weight, all the more since the Hungarian government wanted to obtain the loan mainly on the London money-market.

In February 1923 the Hungarian government took up two major western loans: a short-term credit of 40–50 million gold Crowns and a long-term credit of 550–650 million gold Crowns; in April it appealed to the Reparations Committee to release some public revenues blocked as security for the reparations. This was the condition of obtaining the loan and the guarantee for its repayment. István Bethlen and Tibor Kállay then went to London, Paris and Rome and tried personally to persuade the western politicians of the importance of Hungary's reconstruction, of being able to obtain the loan as well as of the need to reduce the reparations.⁷¹

The Little Entente again made efforts to prevent the fulfilment of the Hungarian request. An outstanding figure in this struggle was Titulescu, Romania's ambassador in London and its representative at the League of Nations. This intransigent and gifted politician and financial expert, who was to become known world-wide, was not accidentally appointed to his posts in 1922. To obtain a Romanian loan and the prevention of the Hungarian one, London and Geneva were of utmost importance. So they were also on account of the acrimonious debate about the "optant affair" (see the section about it in Chapter 6). Most valuable documents about these affairs can be found in the Titulescu bequest at the Hoover Institute. The London ambassador and later foreign minister made daily reports about the main events, transcribing the essential parts of incoming and outgoing letters and cables. As shown in these documents, Titulescu was, by the twenties already playing a highly important role in international life, his qualities and his knowledge were acknowledged everywhere, by friends and adversaries alike. He was an out and out anti-Hungarian throughout his career. This trait was already clear when he was minister of finance (1920–1922), still more during his time in London (1922–1927) and especially in his activities as foreign minister (1927–1928, 1932–1936). He was relentless against his adversaries and was not particular about the means he used to achieve his aims. Already by the twenties, Beneš had availed himself of Titulescu's assistance. Later their contact became still closer: Beneš sent Titulescu details of his plans and considered or even accepted his comments. Similar in many respects, the two politicians co-operated closely during the period at issue, on the matter of the Hungarian loan (and still more in the optant affair).

This time their Hungarophobia met with full sympathy in Paris. Like the states of the Little Entente, France was at first definitely against meeting Bethlen's de-

⁷¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 48. ff. 110–112. Doucet's report to Poincaré, June 23, 1923; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 55. ff. 78–81. Report of the French ambassador in Rome to Poincaré, May 18, 1923; Hoover Institution Collection. Titulescu Box 13. Duca's letter to Titulescu, November 30, 1923. Cf. Mária Ormos: *Az 1924. évi magyar államkölcsön megszerzése* (Obtaining the Hungarian state loan in 1924). Budapest, 1962.

mands for two reasons: on the one hand, France wanted to strengthen its system of eastern alliance based essentially on the Little Entente – so it had to win those states for the envisaged Franco-Czechoslovak, Franco-Romanian and Franco-Yugoslav agreements –, on the other hand, it feared that the League of Nations, if it met the Hungarian request, would establish a precedent for the Germans in regard to reparations. France's opposition was thus a logical consequence of its German policy: like the Little Entente, it regarded the Hungarian loan as a political question, while Great Britain thought just the opposite: "The Hungarian question must be handled without political considerations", said Foreign Secretary Curzon.⁷² However, at the beginning even the British government was rather cautious in supporting Hungary: it did not wish to strain its relations with the Little Entente to breaking-point, for this would have facilitated the ambitions of France. With this in mind, Britain tried to put pressure on Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Under such circumstances, the hard line of the opponents to the remission of reparations gained the upper hand – the first round went to them. Italy's standpoint also played a part. For economic reasons, the Italian government at first backed wholeheartedly the Little Entente and France, because Hungary owed a very considerable sum to Italy (according to the peace treaty, 25 per cent of the reparations to be paid by the defeated Central European states were due to Italy; 10 per cent were to be paid by Germany, 15 by Austria and Hungary), which – suffering from a capital shortage – needed money badly. Thus, putting political considerations aside, it joined the hard line. This had also been the case in 1921 when Hungary had requested a moratorium. The Italian attitude was similar in regard to German and Austrian reparations as well, and this brought it closer to France, but opposed it to Britain. When Mussolini came to power, he did not immediately change policy on the question of Hungarian reparations. On December 14, 1922 he rejected the Hungarian demand for a moratorium with the excuse that "Italy cannot give up something that is rightfully hers". He advised Bethlen, who was about to go to Rome, to go instead to Paris, where the Reparations Committee was in session.⁷³

However, the Italo-French concord was short-lived. The occupation of the Ruhr region again set the two countries against one another. Mussolini was ready to give France diplomatic assistance in its discussions with the Germans, but unwilling to recognize as legal the occupation of a territory strengthening French political influence in the Balkans. So he again took sides with Britain and accordingly changed his Hungarian policy. In a letter he informed Bethlen that following his consultations with the British, he was ready to agree to a moratorium of 20 years on the Hungarian reparations as well as to the international loan. In order to discuss the matter, he invited Bethlen to Rome. Thereupon he instructed the Italian delegate on the Reparations Committee to follow the

⁷² Cf. Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 88–110.

⁷³ ASMAE. 1747–2956. Mussolini's cable to Carraciolo di Castagneta, December 17, 1922; *ibid.* 448. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Mussolini, December 14, 1922.

British example and to vote for a moratorium of 20 years on the Hungarian reparations.⁷⁴

The first phase of the negotiations about the loan took place in Paris with Barthou presiding. On May 4, Bethlen gave an account of Hungary's difficult financial situation to the Reparations Committee and presented his request. The main issue was the postponement of the reparations, this being the condition for the loan. The conference divided, with Italy and Britain on one side, France and the Little Entente on the other. After a long debate, the committee accepted the French motion 5 votes to 4, i.e. the moratorium was refused. "It is unfortunate that because of the influential vote of the committee's chairman, the British and Italian motion was rejected" – wrote *The Times*.⁷⁵ No doubt, chairman Barthou played a considerable role in the decision.

So it seemed that France and the Little Entente had won. Acting upon London's advice, however, Bethlen appealed to the Great Powers involved and to the members of the Little Entente, requesting them to reverse the May decision of the Reparations Committee; as for the loan, he applied to the League of Nations. The Council of the League of Nations began discussions in October 1923. The Committee suggested granting the Hungarian loan and the postponement of reparations for many years, the Council did not reject in principle the Hungarian application for a loan, but held as necessary the further payment of the amount fixed by the Reparations Committee. The Anglo-Italian motion emphasized that the Hungarian government fulfilled completely every clause of the peace treaty, except the financial obligations. In London and Rome it was actually feared that if Hungary did not fulfil its obligations resulting from the Trianon Peace Treaty, the Little Entente would follow the example set by France in the Ruhr region and would occupy Hungary. The Entente states would evidently avail themselves of every opportunity to realize their long cherished plan. The representative of the Little Entente brought forward further claims. He asked, that every interested state, i.e. the member states of the Little Entente, should take part in the work of commission preparing Hungary's financial reconstruction, in the negotiations about the loan and in the control of the loan conditions. Owing to Barthou's opposition, however, these demands were not included in the French motion.⁷⁶

The half-year following the Paris session of the Reparations Committee was used by the British government to force the opposing camp to withdraw and to make it accept the British standpoint. Britain was not particular about its methods. British political and financial circles put strong pressure on all three mem-

⁷⁴ ASMAE. 1748. 1546. Mussolini's cable to the Italian mission in Budapest, April 17, 1923; ASMAE. Cabinet. 5339. 61. Mussolini's cable to Torretta, April 18, 1923; ASMAE. H. pacco 1748. 1201. Mussolini's cable to Salvago-Raggi, May 3, 1923.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 88 – 110.

⁷⁶ Hoover Institution Collection. Titulescu Box 13. Aide mémoire of Antić, Yugoslav delegate at the League of Nations, July 1923.

bers of the Little Entente and continued their activities within the League of Nations as well: Titulescu observed with much concern the actions of the British government. Curzon unambiguously took the side of Hungary: in reply to the application by the Hungarian government of June 14 (when Bethlen requested that the May decision be changed), Curzon, speaking in Parliament, demanded modification of the decision. The May decision of the Reparations Committee considerably impeded the reconstruction of Europe, argued the Foreign Secretary, and therefore everything had to be done to meet the Hungarian request. Britain's resolute support for Hungary produced grave discontent in the capitals of the Little Entente. Having been only partially successful with political pressure, the British government attacked the opposition at its weakest point: it now used financial pressure to "win over" Hungary's neighbours. Britain gave them to understand unambiguously, that "neither the Treasury nor the City" would lend them any money if they went on rejecting the reconstruction of Hungary.⁷⁷ Although rather slowly, Czechoslovakia was the first member of the Little Entente to end resistance. This was obviously also due to the fact that Czechoslovakia was financially much less interested in Hungarian reparations than were Yugoslavia and Romania.

Before making a decision, Beneš wanted to consult the French government on the matter. So he went to Paris before going to London, but Poincaré and Barthou kept to their original standpoint, i.e. to the May decision which was approved in principle by Beneš as well. However, his negotiations in London convinced him that he had to yield. Beneš arrived in London on July 10, 1923. The financial circles as well as the Foreign Office continued their tactics, refusing his application for a loan. They told him point blank that he could not expect to receive a loan unless the next conference of the Little Entente (in Sinaia) came to a positive decision in regard to Hungary.⁷⁸ Of course, the Foreign Office continued to take care not to provoke a break, since Czechoslovakia was important not only within the Little Entente, but in the Danube Basin in general. So, to prevent Beneš from leaving empty-handed, the already negotiated British-Czechoslovak commercial agreement was signed during his stay in London.

The efficacy of British policy soon made itself felt. Before returning home, Beneš called upon Torretta, Italian ambassador in London, and told him that Czechoslovakia – unlike in the past – would support Hungary's reconstruction and try to convince its allies in the Little Entente to do the same.⁷⁹ And so he did. However, the decisive role in inducing Yugoslavia and Romania to change their attitude was not his, but Britain's: the Treasury and the Foreign Office refused first the Romanian and then the Yugoslav application for a loan, until both agreed to the "reconstruction of European civilization". Following Czechoslo-

⁷⁷ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 88–110.

⁷⁸ ASMAE. 1748. Aide mémoire about the declaration of Beneš, July 12, 1923; *ibid.* 595. Torretta's cable to Mussolini, July 13, 1923.

⁷⁹ ASMAE. 1748–692. Torretta's cable to Mussolini, July 14, 1923.

vakia, Romania also consented to the Hungarian request, being influenced therein by the "advice" of Rome. However, Italy always took good care not to engage itself too much with Hungary, and therefore Mussolini kept talking about the protection of the status quo as laid down in the peace treaty. He also supported the Little Entente in its intent to have the loan transacted by the Reparations Committee and not by the League of Nations, thereby opposing not only Britain, but also Hungary. In order to receive the loan as soon as possible, Bethlen actually accepted the British standpoint, although he knew that Mussolini was against it.⁸⁰ But the members of the Little Entente also complied on this question with British policy and not with the constantly changing Italian policy.

At the Sinaia conference of the Little Entente, at the end of July 1923, the main item was the decision on the Hungarian loan. During a long discussion of the foreign ministers, Beneš consistently advocated a moderate line. The modification of the May decision proved easier than he had expected. Apart from Beneš's diplomatic skill, the economic sanctions "promised" by Britain also played a decisive role. The conference passed a resolution according to which the Little Entente agreed to the loan for Hungary, but a considerable part had to be used to pay reparations. On this point they kept to their earlier standpoint (of May). The difference, however, was that they now considered that if Hungary received two loans, as requested, and the first one did not exceed 50 millions, then the whole amount should be used exclusively for Hungary's reconstruction. For the term of the first loan, Hungary should be relieved of its financial obligations resulting from the Trianon Peace Treaty. But if it received the 600 millions as well, the amount above 500 millions should be used for the reparations due to the Little Entente. If the first loan amounted to 250 millions, as suggested by the Mixed Committee, 25 per cent should be appropriated for reparations, while the major part of the second loan should be devoted to reparations. The use of the loans would be controlled by a financial organ to be appointed by the Reparations Committee. A separate military commission should be set up with the participation of a member of the Little Entente so that the military clauses of the Trianon Peace Treaty could be carried out in full. As stipulated in May by the Reparations Committee, the loan could not be spent either on the army or on propaganda. The Hungarian application should be discussed by the Great Powers involved and by the Little Entente, without being submitted to the League of Nations.⁸¹ Thus, the standpoint of the Little Entente had visibly changed and be-

⁸⁰ Mussolini informed Bethlen in confidence: he could not side overtly with Hungary, for this would strengthen the position of France in the Little Entente; ASMAE. 1748. Aide mémoire about his talks with Bethlen in May 1923 (n. d.). At that time Italy faced antagonism at the League of Nations because of the incident with Greece; DDI. II. doc. 239. Mussolini's cable to Torretta, September 1, 1923; Torretta's cable to Mussolini, September 1, 1923; *ibid.* doc. 247. Mussolini's cable to Torretta September 1923.

⁸¹ Hoover Institution Collection: Titulescu Box 13. Aide mémoire of Antić, Yugoslav delegate at the League of Nations, November 1924; ASMAE. 1748-2862. Mussolini's circular letter, August 24,

come more flexible, but it still came nearer to the French than to the British view. It wished to handle the loan through the Reparations Committee and a major part would still be devoted to reparations.

The decisions of the Sinaia conference were unacceptable to London, and thus the British government persisted in its earlier tactics against all three states. At the same time, it appealed to the Reparations Committee demanding that it reconsider its May decision, and undertook steps to arrange an immediate meeting between Beneš and Bethlen. But the two politicians could not agree on the venue. Beneš proposed Tapolcsány, where Masaryk was staying, whereas Bethlen preferred Vienna. Since Beneš was willing to negotiate only on Czechoslovak territory and this was rejected by the Hungarian prime minister, it had to be accepted that the two statesmen would only meet in autumn, at the Geneva conference.⁸²

In September 1923 the General Assembly of the League of Nations offered an opportunity to the parties (who, for different reasons, were so far unable or unwilling to meet), to establish direct contact with one another. At the initiative of the British government, the representatives of the Little Entente – Beneš, Titulescu and Ninčić – had talks with Bethlen and Daruváry. "Their discussions – wrote Cadogan – helped to overcome the differences and to develop a standpoint that was already more or less acceptable."⁸³ Ninčić, so far perhaps the most intransigent towards the Hungarian request (e.g. in Sinaia), now engaged himself in support of the British standpoint. The reason was obvious: in autumn, 1923 Yugoslavia also applied to London for loans, but was turned down for political reasons. The British government let Belgrade know that there could not be any talks about loans until it was ready to settle its relations with Hungary and to agree to Hungary's reconstruction. "In regard to the Little Entente, we shall pursue a policy of denying any financial assistance until it changes its standpoint concerning Hungary's financial reconstruction and agrees to the League of Nations realizing its plan", noted Cadogan.⁸⁴

During the negotiations between Beneš, Titulescu, Ninčić and Bethlen and Daruváry, political and economic questions of mutual interest were discussed. Almost by ultimatum, Hungary was pressed to settle its problems with the members of the Little Entente by means of bilateral negotiations not later than December 18, 1923 (the Hungarian loan was due to be handled in December 1923). Beneš, Titulescu and Ninčić emphasized that the talks were aimed at eliminating differences and at developing a relationship based on mutual confidence which

1923; AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 68. ff. 65–66. Poincaré's aide mémoire, 1924; *ibid.* ff. 69–70. Aide mémoire of Beneš, August 1924; *ibid.* ff. 88–89. Cable of the French minister in Belgrade, August 1924; *ibid.* ff. 99–100. Summary of the French foreign ministry about the conference in Sinaia.

⁸² AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 68. ff. 126–127. Couget's cable to Poincaré, August 1923.

⁸³ *Ibid.* ff. 131–132. Aide mémoire of Beneš, August 1923; *ibid.* f. 228. Doulet's report to Poincaré, August 15, 1923.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 88–110.

would prepare the ground for Hungary's financial and economic reconstruction. In Geneva they only came to a verbal agreement with Bethlen and Daruváry.⁸⁵ However, the bilateral talks begun in November were unsuccessful as far as December. Just a few hours before the protocol concerning the loan was due to be signed, some contested matters were settled. Nevertheless, the Little Entente was unable to prevent the League of Nations from rehearing, in December, the Hungarian application for a loan.

Finally, British diplomacy won the day: the Hungarian application was submitted to the League of Nations. Drawn up for the Council of the League of Nations, the report of the Financial Committee reflected the British standpoint: the Hungarian application was qualified as a purely economic and financial problem, with only a single sentence referring to the necessity of a good political relationship between Hungary and its neighbours, this being important for the successful realization of the project. The Committee recommended a loan of 250 million gold Crowns over two and a half years (the Hungarian government requested 400 millions over 4 years). In the report the country's reconstruction was divided into two periods. In the first stage, Hungary was to be relieved from paying reparations, in the second it had to comply with its financial obligations, paying an annual maximum of 10 million gold Crowns. The proposals of the Financial Committee were discussed and unanimously approved by the Council of the League of Nations at its session in December 1923. Shortly afterwards, the conference of the Little Entente meeting in Belgrade passed a resolution according to which Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia consented to the Hungarian loan on the following conditions: Hungary acknowledged the frontiers as fixed by the Trianon Peace Treaty; it guaranteed that no member of the Habsburg dynasty would return to the Hungarian throne, and that it would not use the loan for military purposes.⁸⁶ At the Belgrade conference the members of the Little Entente adopted a common standpoint. In Belgrade they consented to a moratorium on Hungarian reparations, i.e. they ceased demanding that a substantial part of the loan be devoted to reparations. They presented their conditions to the western powers and to the Reparations Committee, which subsequently elaborated its proposals to the League of Nations. For the payment of debts and reparations the committee suggested a delay of 20 years. The efforts of France to reduce the time-limit to 15 years were unsuccessful.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 48. ff. 161-162. Couget's report to Poincaré, September 27, 1923; *ibid.* ff. 198-199. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the talks between Peretti and Korányi, September 1923.

⁸⁶ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 68. ff. 167-168. Reports of Clément-Simon to Poincaré, February 24, 1924; *ibid.* ff. 169-180; *ibid.* ff. 204-206.

⁸⁷ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 68. ff. 211-213. Aide mémoire of Beneš about the Belgrade conference, February 21, 1924; OL. Küm. pol. 16. Report of Matuska, Hungarian minister in Prague, February 21, 1924.

The Reparation Committee drew up two protocols which had to be signed by the parties involved. One of them included the conditions of the Little Entente. Besides the common conditions, the Little Entente states made their final consent dependent on the success of the talks in Bucharest, Prague and Belgrade, as agreed in September with Bethlen.

Hungarian-Romanian, Hungarian-Czechoslovak and Hungarian-Yugoslav Discussions

The talks lasted from November 1923 to March 1924. Unlike earlier conferences, Hungary now had to confer at the same time with the representatives of all three states. It tried first with Yugoslavia, then with Romania and at last with Czechoslovakia, but all three states insisted upon simultaneous negotiations. By doing so, they wanted to bring an end to the Hungarian policy aimed at loosening the bloc. Having no other choice, Hungary thus began to negotiate with all three states, but in truth it only desired an agreement with one of them: Romania. As is shown by the conference documents after Geneva, the Hungarian government pursued the most flexible policy towards Romania, to which it granted the most concessions. Thus Romania came in 1923 to the forefront of Hungarian policy, just as it had in 1920. The important reasons were the same. The fate of Transylvania was still of paramount importance for Bethlen, and so an agreement with Romania was also of great moment.

Romania had formerly been against a rapprochement, but now it was ready to negotiate and to reach an agreement. This change had many reasons, but one of the main factors was again Italy. Under the influence of international events, Mussolini, who had meanwhile come to power, was attaching growing importance to a Hungarian-Romanian agreement. He outlined his pertinent ideas to the Romanian foreign minister Duca, who visited Rome in January 1923. In the last resort he saw the project as balancing the "Slav menace" and told Duca that in the case of an agreement his government could expect Italy's financial support. Shortly after his return from Rome, Duca informed Mussolini of Brătianu's standpoint, according to which the Romanian prime minister shared Mussolini's fears of the Slav menace; he was ready to normalize relations with Hungary, on the one condition that Hungary resigned itself to the loss of Transylvania. Mussolini forwarded Brătianu's message to Bethlen, who came to Rome in May 1923 in order to obtain Italy's support of Hungary's reconstruction.

Mussolini assured Bethlen of his support and demanded in exchange closer economic co-operation and an agreement with Romania. The Hungarian prime minister received the proposal with understanding.⁸⁸ Thereupon started Aloisi in

⁸⁸ ASMAE. 1749-1830. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Mussolini, July 2, 1923; *ibid.* 1891. Aloisi's cable to Mussolini, July 30, 1923; *ibid.* 279. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Contarini,

Bucharest to elaborate the Italian plan in detail; Carraciolo di Castagneta did the same in Budapest. At the end of July the Italian foreign ministry instructed Aloisi to go to Budapest and to harmonize personally measures to promote an agreement between the two countries. It may be assumed that the Italians arranged the secret meeting between Bethlen and ex-premier Averescu. The pro-Italian Romanian general, now in opposition had kept close relations with the Italian government even after his fall, because he hoped to return to power with its help. So he obviously took the advice of Rome in every respect, including on the Hungarian question. Before the meeting he had secret talks with representatives of the Hungarians in Transylvania. Bethlen, on whom he made a good impression, was convinced that "if General Averescu returns to power, the Hungarian-Romanian rapprochement will be realizable".⁸⁹ The secret talks of Bethlen and Averescu were already at an advanced stage – Bethlen actually hoped for a successful conclusion by August 15 –, when a further request came from Rome. Mussolini asked Bethlen to negotiate with the existing government, since there was little likelihood of Averescu again coming to power. These negotiations also had to be kept secret, to prevent Romania's allies within the Little Entente from learning about them.⁹⁰ Bethlen was ready to do this, but without breaking off his talks with the opposition. He wished to secure an agreement with Romania along two lines. The discussions with Averescu were also joined by the leaders of the Hungarians in Transylvania, who reached an agreement with the ex-premier, but it was to be kept secret until he returned to power.⁹¹

Mussolini repeatedly pressed for the earliest possible beginning of official negotiations. As already mentioned, Bethlen was ready to start them, it was only Brătianu's consent that had to be obtained. Aloisi, Italian ambassador in Bucharest, tried to persuade the Romanian government by means of Italian financial support, and since the British loan was also dependent on this, Brătianu put the matter on the agenda. It was discussed at two consecutive cabinet meetings. The cabinet approved the project and also accepted the programme suggested by Bethlen, with the modification that the talks had to take place in Bucharest.⁹²

Besides the British and Italian pressure, however, there were also other factors moving Brătianu – well known for his anti-Hungarian feelings – to incline towards negotiations. The situation seemed propitious to settle the differences between the two countries – or at least some of them – in a way advantageous

August 13, 1923; ASMAE. 1508–6704. Aloisi's cable to Contarini, August 13, 1923; ASMAE. 1508–6704. Aloisi's report to Mussolini, February 17, 1924.

⁸⁹ ASMAE. 1749–240. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Mussolini, July 16, 1923.

⁹⁰ ASMAE. 1749–1830. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Mussolini, July 28, 1923; *ibid.* 1757. Mussolini's cable to Carraciolo di Castagneta, August 18, 1923; ASMAE. 1508–6704. Aloisi's cable to Mussolini, August 5, 1924.

⁹¹ ASMAE. 1749–375. Carraciolo di Castagneta's cable to Mussolini, November 3, 1923. Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* p. 264.

⁹² Aloisi's cable to Contarini, 1924 (date illegible).

for Romania, since Bethlen needed the "good-will" of Romania to obtain the loan. Another reason for Brătianu's growing "understanding" towards Hungary was his fear of the consolidation of Hungarian-Soviet contacts. So the tactics of Bethlen proved good, for there is no doubt that this was precisely one of the aims of his talks with the Soviet Union. As already mentioned, there began a certain rapprochement between Hungary and the Soviet Union after the Rapallo Conference. Talks had been held in Vienna and Berlin.

In the period discussed, Soviet diplomacy began to show sympathy with the peoples who were "victims" of the peace of Versailles as well as towards the Hungarian minorities living under oppression in the states of the Little Entente. Following his discussions with the Soviet chargé d'affaires Levicki, the Hungarian minister in Vienna, Masirevich, was led to the conclusion that the Soviet Union wanted to put pressure on Romania with the help of Hungary. The Hungarian minister, who also had talks with Levicki, came to similar conclusions in regard to Bulgaria.⁹³ The negotiations in Berlin dealt with similar matters in the same spirit. The Hungarian government tried to restrain the Soviet Union from establishing diplomatic relations with the member states of the Little Entente, which had begun to consider this question, for fear of a Hungarian-Soviet agreement. The Czechoslovak minister in Budapest reported to Beneš that officials of the Hungarian foreign ministry were openly talking about Hungary's intention to co-operate with the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy against France and the Little Entente. News of Hungarian-Soviet rapprochement produced uneasiness in Bucharest as well. The latter had good reason to fear that the economic rapprochement of the two states had an anti-Romanian trend and hid political ambitions. Since at the time Romanian-Soviet relations were extremely strained, it was a vital aim of the Romanian government to secure the neutrality of Hungary in the event of a Soviet-Romanian war. As a matter of fact, Romania could expect no military assistance from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, since they had even refused to agree to the declaration on Bessarabia as requested by Bucharest, saying that they preferred to remain neutral on this question.⁹⁴

Thus Brătianu wished to profit from Hungary's difficult situation and from Bethlen's tractability. The Romanian-Hungarian negotiations started in November 1923 in Bucharest and lasted until April 1924. Prime minister Brătianu and foreign minister Duca devoted great attention to them and directed them personally. The representatives of the two countries discussed the most urgent economic, legal and political problems and reached agreement on several questions. As already mentioned, Bethlen was more compliant towards Romania. In ex-

⁹³ In the summer of 1924, the Hungarian-Soviet secret agreement was often discussed in diplomatic circles. On October 24, 1924 the Soviet government denied it. Cf. V. Vinaver: *op. cit.* p. 267. OL. Küm. pol. K. 63. 474. Collection of diplomatic documents; *PDH*. Unpublished 3rd vol. doc. 676, 677, 678, 720; HHStA. Berichte aus Bukarest, 616-617. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, June 25, 1924.

⁹⁴ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 50. ff. 92-93. Billy's report to Poincaré, March 25, 1924.

change for concessions to Romania, he hoped not only for its consent to the loan, but also the indemnification of the land-owners according to Hungarian wishes. So he fulfilled one of the main wishes of the Romanian government by recognizing that Romania had taken part as a belligerent in the attack on the Hungarian Soviet Republic: this meant a substantial difference in regard to reparations and involved negative material consequences for Hungary. Bethlen also decided not to claim reparations from Romania in connection with the intervention and with Hungary's occupation. In January 1924 Bethlen wrote to Titulescu from Paris, informing the latter that Hungary was ready to withdraw her demand for reparations from Romania (in compensation for military operations against Hungary in 1919–1920), if Romania would likewise declare that she had no claims against Hungary for the same operations (including the occupation of the country), and if Romania would support the Hungarian request for a loan.⁹⁵ Only under these conditions was Romania willing to agree to the Hungarian loan, for in addition to the collective decisions of the Sinaia Conference, Romania demanded the renunciation of reparations. Only after this agreement did foreign minister Duca authorize Titulescu to sign the protocol concerning the Hungarian loan.⁹⁶ The Romanian-Hungarian agreement, including 13 conventions, was signed in Bucharest on April 16, 1924.

The conventions concerned not yet settled economic, legal, financial reparation, communications, pensions and postal questions. The most important were the conventions renouncing reparations for the war of 1919–1920 and on the settlement of commercial relations, based on the most-favoured-nation principle and aimed at establishing a commercial *modus vivendi*. On two issues, Brătianu was unyielding: the indemnification of the landowners and the arrangement of exchange visits between the Hungarian and Romanian populations of the frontier zone.⁹⁷

During the Bucharest talks, the tensions between Hungary and Romania were considerably eased. According to Duca, there was a certain political *détente* which – so he hoped – could lead to the establishment of commercial relations that were of utmost importance for both states.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Hoover Institution Collection. Titulescu Box 13. Bethlen's letter to Titulescu, January 25, 1924.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 54. f. 2. Report of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, March 15, 1924; *ibid.* f. 4. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Bucharest to Poincaré, May 8, 1924; *ibid.* f. 3. Report of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, March 29, 1924; HHStA. Berichte aus Bukarest. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, April 4, 1924; *ibid.* April 12; *ibid.* June 24.

⁹⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 54. f. 2. Report of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, March 15, 1924; *ibid.* f. 6. Report of De Garbannel, French chargé d'affaires in Budapest, to Poincaré, June 5, 1924; *ibid.* f. 8. Report of De Garbannel to Briand, September 10, 1924; HHStA. Berichte aus Bukarest 12660. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, April 4, 1924; *ibid.* 13774. Report of the Austrian minister in Bucharest to the foreign minister, June 25, 1924; Hoover Institution Collection. Titulescu.Box 13. Letter of the Hungarian minister in

However, the "détente" was short-lived, for in spite of propitious circumstances, the agreement came to nothing. Among the numerous reasons let us highlight the main one: Italy's policy. When in February 1924, Mussolini recognized the Soviet Union, Italo-Romanian relations changed for the worse. The Romanians cancelled a royal visit to Rome scheduled for spring 1924. The Romanian-Italian talks were broken off and Bucharest was unwilling to resume them unless Italy ratified the Paris convention on Bessarabia. But Mussolini refused to do so, because he did not want to compromise his improving relations with the Soviet Union. Thus the Italian factor which had played an important role in the Hungaro-Romanian negotiations and in the agreement, ceased to act. This was reflected by the attitude of both governments. The Romanian policy towards the national minorities and the Romanian attitude over the optant affair induced Bethlen not to have the already signed Bucharest conventions ratified. Anyway, this was not urgent any more, since the League of Nations loan had already been granted to Hungary.

In autumn 1924, Romania and Hungary again became estranged from one another, and this alienation deteriorated in the second half of the twenties, especially from 1927, into open animosity.

Almost at the same time, talks also began between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The Hungarian government had been requesting since January 1922 the resumption of the negotiations broken off in 1921, although the earlier talks had unequivocally demonstrated that Beneš did not consider the Hungarians as his equals. Nevertheless, more and more Hungarian politicians were insisting both in the press and in Parliament on the normalization of relations. These included Huszár, former prime minister, Walko, minister of commerce and Gratz, former foreign minister. Bethlen himself took the same view. In addition, the "advice" of western powers – Britain and France, and the Czechoslovak-Polish and Czechoslovak-Austrian agreements also played a part. The Czechoslovak-Polish agreement caused much trouble in Hungarian government circles. In Budapest, the Polish action had been taken amiss, because by it Warsaw came to terms with the Prague government, while encouraging Hungary in an anti-Czechoslovak attitude and offering diplomatic, political and military co-operation as well. The Hungarian government was actually surprised by the events, its hopes and illusions vanished.⁹⁹ Csekolics, Hungary's representative in Warsaw, was recalled at once because of false information about Polish policy; he did not return to Warsaw, presumably also because of his Carlist sympathies.

The Austrian-Czechoslovak agreement also made a bad impression on Bethlen, since it strengthened the position of Austria and thus obviously involved consequences for Hungaro-Austrian relations. It should be noted that Hungary

Paris to Titulescu, February 16, 1924. The writer informs Titulescu that, according to a cable he received from Daruváry, the Romanian government entrusted Titulescu with the formulation of the final text of the convention (concerning the reparations in connection with 1919).

⁹⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 46. Doucet's report to Briand, December 21, 1921; *ibid.* f. 114. Doucet's report to Briand, March 27, 1922.

was the only successor state which had not settled its relations with its neighbours by 1922.

A rapprochement between the two states continued to be prevented by frontier incidents, detentions and revisionist propaganda; in January 1923 the situation was especially strained because of alleged Hungarian troop concentrations along the Czechoslovak and Romanian borders. The states of the Little Entente again applied to the Conference of Ambassadors, and on January 12, their ministers in Budapest lodged protests with Bethlen and Daruváry. Two days later, they repeated their protest, joined by the Great Powers.¹⁰⁰ The result of the subsequent investigation was the same as earlier. Again, Bethlen proved to be right; the Czechoslovak and Romanian governments had mistaken the individual actions of Hungarian nationalist groups for troop concentrations. Bethlen continued his struggle for détente. He did his best at the League of Nations, established contacts at international conferences with prominent statesmen and refuted the charges made against Hungary by the Little Entente. At the same time he endeavoured to settle relations with Hungary's neighbours.¹⁰¹ The Hungarian prime minister attached great importance to an agreement with Beneš, well-known for his considerable political influence, and therefore undertook substantial measures to bridle chauvinism and suppress revisionist propaganda.

At first, the replies of Beneš to the proposals of the Hungarian government were rather evasive, under the pretext that Hungary's political system was blocking an agreement between the two countries.¹⁰² Of course, Beneš would have gladly come to terms with Hungary, this being of utmost economic importance for Czechoslovakia, but he still refused the proposals of Bethlen, mainly due to the attitude of Czechoslovak nationalist groups and his allies within the Little Entente. In May 1923 he explained to the French ambassador Couget that he was not opposed to a reconstruction loan for Hungary, but he still objected to it on the ground of supporting Romania and Yugoslavia, because he could not disregard the standpoint of his allies. This all the more, since both states had adopted his standpoint in the Austrian affair, and it was now his turn to adopt theirs, i.e. to oppose the Hungarian request.¹⁰³

As a matter of fact, Beneš was from the very beginning not as vigorously opposed to the plan for Hungarian reconstruction as were Romania and Yugoslavia, but opposed he was. This was not only on account of his allies, as he

¹⁰⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 46. f. 76. Report of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, May 12, 1923.

¹⁰¹ V. Vinaver: *op. cit.* p. 218.

¹⁰² AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 46. f. 80. Doucet's report, December 26, 1921; *ibid.* f. 114. March 27, 1922; *ibid.* vol. 48. ff. 1-2. Report of Doucet, French minister in Budapest, to Poincaré, April 12, 1923. Doucet warns the Quai d'Orsay that the allegation of Beneš, according to which Hungary hinders the agreement between the two countries, is untrue, because Bethlen is doing his best to normalize Hungary's relations with Czechoslovakia.

¹⁰³ AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 48. ff. 75-76. Couget's report to Poincaré, May 14, 1923.

tried to pretend, but also because he wished to profit from Hungary's difficult situation and to obtain certain concession in return for his agreement. This became obvious in his discussions with Bethlen and Daruváry. In his talks with Couget, Beneš overstated his own positive role, because he knew that the French ambassador was fully backing Hungary in the loan question. In many of his reports to be found in the archives of the Quai d'Orsay, Couget points out that it was in the interests of France to support Bethlen's demand, or else Hungary would have been driven into the arms of Britain and Italy.¹⁰⁴ Beneš also repeatedly explained his uneasiness about the growing influence of Britain: "... the loan cannot be realized but upon Britain's intervention. And in this case Britain would probably find the ways and means to establish a sphere of interest in Central Europe it does not possess at present. Thereupon it will have the possibility to interfere in Central European problems – but probably not to the advantage of France and the Little Entente."¹⁰⁵

In the summer of 1923, Bethlen again tried to start talks with Beneš but in vain. As already mentioned, Britain's participation was needed for these talks in September 1923 in Geneva. According to the agreement of the two statesmen, the talks were to continue in November 1923 in Budapest and Prague and deal with economic and political issues. The efforts of the Hungarian government to conclude a commercial agreement were unsuccessful. Only a commercial convention was signed, but its implementation was always postponed. It actually included the most-favoured-nation principle, and this would have hindered to a certain degree the Prague government in its negotiations with France and Italy, let alone with its allies within the Little Entente.

The negotiations about political and legal questions were also unsuccessful. Klebelsberg, minister of culture, went to Prague in order to put in writing the oral agreements reached by Bethlen and Beneš in Geneva. But this did not happen. Despite the preliminary agreement, a sharp dispute arose about archives and Hungarian officials having been moved from Slovakia to Hungary. As far as the first issue was concerned, Prague demanded that the Hungarian government return all the archival material concerning Slovakia, whereas Beneš and Bethlen wanted a compromise: the recent material would be delivered to Czechoslovakia, the earlier material would remain in Hungary, but the Hungarian government would afford every assistance to Czechoslovak citizens who wished to study it. Another dispute began about the second question: Klebelsberg recognized the establishment of Czechoslovakia only since the validity of the Trianon Peace Treaty and not since October 1918, as recognized by all other states. In the background of this dispute were the efforts of the Hungarian government to obtain an indemnification for tens of thousands of Hungarian public servants who had moved from Slovakia. According to the Hungarian opinion, those who left Slo-

¹⁰⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 58. ff. 210–211. Couget's report to Poincaré, December 23, 1923.

¹⁰⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 48. ff. 75–76. Couget's report to Poincaré, May 14, 1923.

vakia after October 28, 1918, did nothing else but move from one part of the country to another. The Czechoslovak government rejected this interpretation, saying that the Hungarian officials did not take service with the new state, nor did they ask to be retired. They settled down in Hungary, where they were employed by the Hungarian state and so the expenses should be met by the latter.

No agreement was signed on these issues. The Czechoslovak government was convinced that the only aim of the Bethlen government was to demonstrate its readiness to settle its relations with Czechoslovakia, this being most important for the negotiations about the reconstruction loan.¹⁰⁶

The Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations concentrated on the question of reparations, all the more, since Yugoslavia claimed – after Italy – the highest reparations. The talks started in a rather tense atmosphere, because after 1919 the worst relations between Hungary and the Little Entente were those with Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁷ However, the Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement in 1923 eased the tension. Budapest wished to balance the Italian policy towards Yugoslavia by settling its relations with its southern neighbour. Bethlen explained to the Austrian chancellor Seipel that he expected major results from the negotiations.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the French government also advised Bethlen to come to terms with Yugoslavia, because it wanted to prevent Italy from taking advantage of the Hungarian-Yugoslav conflict. France addressed similar suggestions to Pašić, who actually heeded this “advice”, wishing to promote an Italo-Yugoslav agreement by means of the Hungarian question. Thus, when in autumn 1923, Belgrade was obliged under British pressure to agree to the Hungarian reconstruction loan and to a moratorium on reparations, it started negotiations with the representatives of Hungary. Belgrade did its best, however, to achieve the least possible effect of the loan on the reparations due to Yugoslavia and made its final assent dependent on Hungary’s readiness to deliver coal from Pécs in unchanged quantity and under agreed terms. The Hungarian government agreed to all these claims, and so the agreement was signed on February 3, 1924. Accordingly, (1) Hungary committed itself to continue the coal deliveries under the agreed conditions until September 12, 1926 (daily 880 tons); (2) the reparations of 9 millions and the interest would be paid in coal as specified above; the deliveries were to begin on September 13, 1926 (this was a concession from Belgrade, the date of delivery having been postponed); (3) Hungary would return the engines from Kragujevac

¹⁰⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 58. ff. 210–211. Couget’s report to Poincaré, December 23, 1923.

¹⁰⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 49. ff. 148–165. Foreign affairs exposé of Ninčić, June 8, 1923; Y. vol. 50. ff. 115–129. Foreign affairs exposé of Ninčić, March 17, 1924.

¹⁰⁸ AMZV. PZ. Budapešt 205, aide mémoire of the Czechoslovak mission in Budapest to Beneš, January 10, 1923. Shortly afterwards, Speidl went to Belgrade, where he presumably mediated between Yugoslavia and Hungary; AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 49. ff. 125–130. Report of Lefèvre-Pontalis to Poincaré, February 26, 1923; *ibid.* f. 131. Report of Clément-Simon to Poincaré, February 27, 1923.

and continue to search for them according to the convention of September 6, 1923; (4) from the middle of 1926 it would return railway equipment. The loan could not be charged with any part of the sum fixed for reimbursement. The agreement was approved by the Reparations Committee.¹⁰⁹ Yugoslavia thus changed its original standpoint and agreed to the Hungarian reparations being paid at a later date. At the same time, conventions governing relations between the two countries were signed, together with an agreement expanding commercial relations.

In spring 1924, all three states of the Little Entente agreed to the moratorium and to the loan, to be liquidated by the League of Nations.¹¹⁰

The protocols were signed on March 14, 1924 in Geneva by Hungary, the Little Entente and the main European Allied Powers. The same day the Council of the League of Nations undertook the implementation of the plan. A struggle of more than a year ended with British and Hungarian success. However, the latter was not unambiguous, not only because the Hungarian government received only half of the amount it had applied for and the conditions governing the appropriation of the loan were equivalent to interference in the country's internal affairs, but also because the Bethlen government had to make political compromises: in Geneva Hungary signed a protocol which included an acknowledgement of the frontiers fixed by the Trianon Peace Treaty. It actually did what it was earlier unwilling to do even in return for territorial concessions. In the prevailing – ruinous – financial situation, Hungary had no choice but to accept the conditions of the Little Entente, all the more, since the British government had approved them. This, as well as the question of the Habsburg dynasty, meant a victory for the Little Entente, since Hungary yielded on two essential questions which were the “raison d’être” of the Little Entente.

Great Britain's active intervention in Danube affairs had a positive impact on the further development of the region, especially on the relations between Hungary and the Little Entente. The fact that the Hungarian government accepted the first of its claims by recognizing the Trianon frontiers (which, though legally valid, had been openly attacked and considered as unjust thus far), was of immense moral importance for the states of the Little Entente. The relationship between the alliance and Hungary was improving.

¹⁰⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 50. f. 129. Foreign affairs exposé of Ninčić, March 17, 1924.

¹¹⁰ All three states of the Little Entente agreed to sign the protocol, the last to do so was Romania. The Bucharest government consented only on March 14, i.e. on the day of the signing. From January 1924 on, the Little Entente had a joint representative on the Council of the League of Nations. The first to be elected was Beneš, so during the session of March 1924 – when the Hungarian question was on the agenda – he represented the Little Entente. However, the protocol was signed by all three member states of the Little Entente; AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 50. f. 6. Notice of an unknown author for Laroche; AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 59. f. 2. Cable of the French minister in Bucharest to Poincaré, March 14, 1924.

Relations between the Little Entente and its Other Neighbours

Besides Hungary, the other neighbouring state that was constantly skirmishing with the Little Entente, was *Bulgaria*. One of the three conventions of the alliance – the Yugoslav-Romanian agreement, was actually aimed against it. But since in the first half of the twenties, this completely isolated country seemed to have resigned itself to its lot, its relationship with the Little Entente was not as inimical as that of Hungary. Among the member states it was Czechoslovakia that had the best economic and political relations with Sofia: there were no territorial problems, nor did the question of national minorities disturb their co-operation. In fact, its Bulgarian policy often set the Prague government against its allies, and there were also conflicts between Yugoslavia and Romania on account of Bulgaria, because during the first half of the twenties the Romanian government supported the anti-Yugoslav policy of Bulgaria. The relationship between Bulgaria and the Little Entente was also strained by the efforts of Bulgaria and Hungary – a country in a similar position – to establish political and economic contacts. In the second half of the twenties, especially such efforts found sympathy in Budapest.

Among the defeated countries, *Austria* was on the best terms with the alliance, first of all with Czechoslovakia. At the beginning the relationship was nevertheless hostile, because Vienna did not accept Beneš's claim to the historic frontiers of Bohemia, and supported the opposition of the German population and its wish to join Austria. But after the Peace Treaty of Saint-Germain had been signed and ratified, Austria resigned itself to the situation. Due to the Burgenland crisis and the two return attempts of ex-Emperor Charles, Austria moved even closer to the Little Entente, particularly to Czechoslovakia. In December 1921, the two states signed the Lany convention aimed at economic co-operation and the protection of the Trianon Peace Treaty. At that time, the two other members of the Little Entente, Yugoslavia and Romania, also moved closer to Austria, for economic and political reasons. Both, but especially Yugoslavia, wished to establish commercial contacts with Austria. Before the World War, Vienna had occupied a central position in the foreign trade of Serbia, and thus Belgrade aspired to re-establish relations. In July 1920, a temporary commercial agreement was signed with Austria and renewed several times. Within a short time, trade between the two countries revived: in 1921 almost half of Yugoslav exports went to Austria. Political aspects also contributed to this rapprochement. The decided objection of Vienna to the attempts of Charles Habsburg to regain the Hungarian throne and its antagonism towards Hungary in the Burgenland affair produced the proper political atmosphere for establishing political and economic contacts, in fact, these reasons induced Romania to follow the example of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The members of the Little Entente thus did not regard Austria as an enemy state, they even considered its participation in the alliance, since

Hungary could have been entirely blockaded with the help of Austria. To put it simply, the Little Entente found a *modus vivendi* with Austria.

In the first half of the twenties, it was in rather good terms with *Poland* as well, which actually took part in its conferences as an observer until 1923, although it was not a member of the bloc. For a long time Warsaw considered joining the alliance. (In order to increase Poland's influence in the Danube Basin and to secure its eastern frontiers). This idea was supported by Romania, but opposed by Czechoslovakia, which had been on bad terms with its eastern neighbour since the end of the war. The territorial disputes between the two countries – leading in 1919 to a seven-day war – were so serious that they could not be settled either by direct negotiations or by conventions, including the convention of September 1921, which was never ratified. An improvement in relations only began in 1924, after the formal settlement of the Teschen affair, or rather in 1925, when three conventions were signed.

Romania had the closest relations with Poland, because their interests were in many respects the same, first of all in regard to the protection of their eastern frontiers: the convention signed in March 1921, committed each state to assist the other in case of an attack on these frontiers.

The third member state, Yugoslavia, did not have close relations with Poland, but was on friendly terms with it.

As demonstrated by the above, no member of the Little Entente was able to normalize its relations with Hungary, while all of them were on good terms with the other defeated successor state, Austria. Their relationship with Poland was different: Romania had the best and closest contacts, Czechoslovakia was on the worst terms with Poland, while the relationship between Yugoslavia and Poland may be regarded as having been friendly.

The Struggle of the Great Powers for Influence in Central and South-Eastern Europe during the Second Half of the Twenties

The Effect of the Treaty of Locarno on Central and South-Eastern Europe

In the domestic policy of the Weimar Republic, the democratic bases of the coalition weakened from the mid-twenties, while conservative forces came to the fore. Of course, this trend made itself felt in foreign policy as well. Berlin began to concentrate its efforts on the development of Germany as a Great Power and wished to achieve this aim by means of an active foreign policy in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The plan was to be realized step by step. German foreign policy took good care not to spoil Germany's relationship with the Soviet Union (which actually produced significant economic and political advantages), while endeavouring to establish lasting good terms with the West. For this purpose the "Russian trump" was also employed, while the West, first of all Great Britain, tried to remove Germany from the Rapallo line by means of concessions. With the active co-operation of Great Britain, the German government produced the so-called Rhine Convention which was to be signed in Locarno and guaranteed the German-French and German-Belgian frontiers as fixed by the peace treaties. The agreement was actually a mutually advantageous Franco-German compromise, with the major defect, however, that the guarantee did not cover Germany's eastern frontiers – this according to the German view was supported by the British. With Czechoslovakia and Poland the German government signed an arbitration agreement that was guaranteed by nobody and did not preclude the possibility of revision. This discrimination between eastern and western frontiers caused grave concern among the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The Locarno Treaty was hailed by European public opinion as the consolidation of the continent, as an event securing peace for a generation. But, as was proved by subsequent events, peace could not be safeguarded separately, in the West only. In December 1925, Gustav Stresemann alluded in his report on the Locarno conference to the fact that the agreement had weakened the position of the Eastern states. Beneš and Poland's foreign minister Skrzyński, who were also invited to the conference, had to wait quite a long time in a room next to the conference-hall before they were admitted to the meeting, recounted Stres-

mann. "This was the situation with states that were exalted for being servants of others, but dropped as soon as it became clear that an understanding with Germany was possible."¹

The Locarno agreement, signed on October 16, 1925, and guaranteed by Britain and Italy, were completed with arbitration conventions. Germany concluded such conventions with most of its neighbours: France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland. But while the first two documents were part of the Locarno Treaty, the latter two were not, and thus were not guaranteed by anybody and had but little importance. (Even the slightest problems could not be resolved in direct bilateral talks.)

In order to appease its eastern allies, France concluded separate agreements with Czechoslovakia and Poland, which were signed on October 16, 1925 in Locarno by Briand as well as by Beneš and Skrzyński respectively. The contracting parties committed themselves to honour agreements concluded under the League of Nations, and to mutual assistance in case of a German attack, according to Art. 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.²

Locarno produced a new situation in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Germany's relationship with Czechoslovakia changed. Although maintaining a friendly neighbourliness, it did not regard Czechoslovakia as its equal. Austria also became more and more alienated from Czechoslovakia and approached Germany (Anschluss-tendencies revived again). Thus, Czechoslovakia obviously moved closer to Poland. The Locarno Treaty made itself felt in the Balkans, too. At first, Italy was not at all pleased with the Franco-German accord, being afraid of the possible extension of German revisionism to the Brenner and preferring anyway that French forces be engaged along the Rhine. We shall see, however, that the Locarno agreements which caused so much anxiety to Mussolini, finally offered him the chance to realize his plan of pursuing a dynamic policy in the Balkans and in the Danube Basin.

The open admission by the Great Powers that the western frontiers could be regarded as inviolable, while the eastern ones could not, caused much anxiety in the small states. However, we cannot find any trace of this in their government declarations, nor in their press, on the contrary: the events were "heartily" welcomed.³ Anyway, the real frame of mind was much better demonstrated by the fact that almost all of them tried to find a "Danube or Balkan Locarno" in order to consolidate their security. There existed two different conceptions for this purpose: according to one, Hungary should follow the example of Germany and conclude with all of its neighbours agreements similar to those of Locarno, while

¹ G. Stresemann: *op. cit.* p. 243.

² AD. Europe 1918-40. T. vol. ff. 116-118. Text of the Franco-Czechoslovak agreement, October 16, 1925.

³ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 229-230. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade to Briand, October 27, 1925.

the other plan envisaged the establishment of a "Balkan Locarno".⁴ These efforts were approved in principle by all the western Great Powers, as was told in Locarno to the Czechoslovak and Polish foreign ministers and suggested later to every Danube state. Shortly after the conference, Chamberlain and Briand delivered a letter to Scialoja in Geneva, urging the establishment of a "Balkan Locarno" and the conclusion of bilateral arbitration conventions.⁵

As a matter of fact, Italy wanted to take advantage of the fact that France was thinking mainly of its own security, but was unmindful of its eastern allies. Rome had already done quite a lot to increase its influence in the Balkans: it had concluded an agreement with Yugoslavia and was on good terms with the Soviet Union. (It had established diplomatic relations, and refused to ratify the convention on Bessarabia.) The next step would have been a "Central European and Balkan Locarno" under Italian influence.

In the second half of December 1925, Mussolini proposed to Ninčić the creation of an alliance including Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Austria. He did not mention Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the former because he was sure that Hungary would not guarantee the existing frontiers, and the latter because of its very close relations with France.⁶ (The Franco-Czechoslovak agreement of 1924 was still vehemently disapproved of in Rome.) Ninčić, however, rejected the Italian proposal, saying that Yugoslavia was unwilling to participate in such an agreement without Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Mussolini soon changed his mind in regard to Hungary, since, in truth, he also wished to include that country in the envisaged alliance and had left it out only for tactical reasons; in regard to Czechoslovakia, his standpoint remained unchanged.

Ninčić also informed the French ambassador in Belgrade about the Italian proposal and assured him that Yugoslavia was unwilling to co-operate with Italy on the question of a "Balkan Locarno".⁷

That this was not quite true, it may be seen in the reports of Alessandro Bodrero, Italian ambassador in Belgrade, to be found in the Italian Foreign Ministry Archives. Accordingly, the Yugoslav government – first of all Ninčić – insisted, (from October 1925 to mid-January 1926) on the conclusion of a pact of guarantee, where Hungary would play the same role as Germany had at Locarno, i.e. abandon its territorial claims against its neighbours. The whole treaty system would be guaranteed by Italy.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 52. ff. 223–224. Aide mémoire of the French foreign minister, October 22, 1925; *ibid.* f. 41. Grenard's cable to Briand, July 16, 1925; *ibid.* f. 63. Besnard's cable to the foreign minister, July 24, 1925; *ibid.* ff. 160–162. Grenard's cable to Briand, August 26, 1925; *ibid.* Grenard to Briand, September 16, 1925; *ibid.* f. 253. Aide mémoire of the French foreign ministry about the conclusion of the arbitral conventions, November 28, 1925.

⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 53. f. (illegible). Grenard's cable to Briand, December 30, 1925.

⁷ *Ibid.*

In October 1925, the Yugoslav foreign minister informed Mussolini through Bodrero that he had communicated the proposal to his counterparts within the Little Entente, and that it had been discussed at the Belgrade conference. All of them had expressed their readiness to agree to a treaty that would be guaranteed by Italy. The only exception was Romania, although this had not been quite clear at the Belgrade conference because of that country's ambiguous attitude. After a while, however, the Romanian foreign minister was more explicit: "Romania is no partisan to a Central European Locarno", he declared.⁸ The reason was said to be Hungary, with which Romania was on rather bad terms at that time, while the arbitration convention suggested by Mussolini, which did not preclude territorial revision, would not have guaranteed Romanian security, nor would have Italy with its growing rapprochement with Hungary. Several similar demands were made at the time from Belgrade to Rome. At the beginning of January 1926, Bodrero told Ninčić confidentially that Mussolini believed "Italy to be the only power able to extend the basic principles of Locarno to the Danube Basin".⁹

For Mussolini now was the time to act. He considered Locarno to be a failure of French eastern policy. Great Britain had agreed to guarantee the Rhine line, but refused to do so for the eastern frontiers. However, the Duce knew very well that Chamberlain would support an agreement under Italian leadership, for the latter had proposed in October 1925 a comprehensive system of security for Central Europe.¹⁰

However, France did not give up the struggle. At the beginning of January it informed Mussolini of its efforts to establish a Balkan Entente and asked for his support and co-operation. Shortly afterwards, Belgrade was also informed about this plan, which suggested the conclusion of a trilateral non-aggression pact. Such a proposal had already been presented by Italy in 1924, but was soon withdrawn. According to Briand, Mussolini was now ready to accept it.¹¹ In Belgrade the French plan was positively received.

The foreign ministers of the Little Entente discussed the different proposals at their conference in Temesvár, where the French conception was preferred. Accordingly, the bloc would include Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, eventually Romania and – if it should wish to adhere – Turkey as well.¹²

But it was not at all Mussolini's intention to have France participate in the settlement of Balkan questions and to conclude a trilateral agreement. He instructed Bodrero that he considered a Balkan Entente as untimely and that the

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ ASMAE. 251. 473. Cable of the secretary of the Italian embassy in Belgrade to Mussolini, October 25, 1925; *ibid.* 6125/1167. Bodrero's cable to Mussolini, December 2, 1925.

¹⁰ P. Pastorelli: *Italia e Albania 1924–1927. Origine diplomatiche del trattato di Tirana del 22 Novembre 1927*. Florence, Biblioteca della Rivista di studi politici internazionali, 1967, pp. 229–233.

¹¹ Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Coded cable of Spalajković to Ninčić, March 9, 1926; *DDI*. IV. doc. 223. Bodrero's report to Mussolini, January 15, 1925.

¹² AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 52. f. 252. Grenard's cable to Ninčić, November 27, 1925.

ambassador should not negotiate about a "pacte à trois". The reason was the participation of France, he said confidentially.¹³ At the same time, Rome informed the Belgrade government that it disapproved not only of a Balkan Locarno with French participation, but the Franco-Yugoslav bilateral agreement as well.¹⁴

Since French diplomacy was continuing its activities in the Balkans, Mussolini strongly insisted on his own conception. Ninčić, who was staying in Rome, was informed of this, and asked to postpone any talks with France about a bilateral or trilateral agreement. Mussolini instructed Italy's representative at the League of Nations to explore the possible reception of his proposals by the Central and South-Eastern European countries.¹⁵

This exploration produced a favourable result, as had the talks with Ninčić in Rome. Mussolini now prepared a detailed plan for a Balkan Entente. He did not rely upon the Locarno pact – his proposals were different both in spirit and substance. While the Locarno Treaty was an agreement between four Great Powers, Mussolini's project envisaged bilateral agreements which would guarantee the existing treaties and prevent any aggression. Mussolini suggested an understanding with all Balkan and Danube states, including Hungary and Bulgaria. The parties involved would discuss all their problems in plenary meetings, while the arbiter would be Italy, i.e. the Great Power guaranteeing the agreements.

Thus Italy wished to keep a firm hand on nine Central European states, giving them advice and arbitrating in their affairs. These ambitions were as great as they were unrealistic. Mussolini's plan was aimed primarily against France, since he wished to prevent at all costs a Franco-Yugoslav agreement which was not entirely off the agenda. In order to avoid any surprise, Mussolini informed Belgrade and Paris on his objections, and told Chamberlain that the French project was contrary to the spirit of Locarno, and, in addition, superfluous, since Yugoslavia was not in any danger. Its disputes with Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece would be settled within the framework of the envisaged agreement. Furthermore, Yugoslavia had committed itself in Rome, not to sign any agreement aimed against Italy. Ninčić assured him that there was no question about this and promised that the conclusion of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement would be postponed.¹⁶

Italian diplomacy was thus faced with the important task of obtaining the approval of leading politicians from the Danube and Balkan states, at that time staying in Geneva. For this purpose Dino Grandi went to Geneva together with Scialoja, in order to obtain this approval. In the course of the talks, it turned out that the leaders of the Danube and Balkan countries shared the view of

¹³ ASMAE 1758, Mussolini's letter to Bodrero (date illegible).

¹⁴ DDI. IV. doc. 230. Memorandum by an unknown author, January 30, 1926.

¹⁵ DDI. IV. doc. 269. Mussolini's cable to Scialoja, March 10, 1926; Scialoja's cable to Mussolini, March 11, 1926.

¹⁶ DDI. IV. doc. 262, 263. Avezzana to Mussolini; DDI. IV. doc. 283; doc. 270. Avezzana to Mussolini, March 19, 1926; Pastorelli: *op. cit.* pp. 259–263.

Mussolini. Only Czechoslovakia raised objections, first, because it itself aspired to the leading role, and secondly, because France had been left out of the project. The British government advised the Hungarian government to consent to the security system. Chamberlain discussed the project several times with Rubido-Zichy, Hungarian minister in London, and sent a message to the Hungarian government asking it to promote the establishment of the security system and try to come to an understanding with its neighbours, this being advantageous for the Hungarian minority.¹⁷ Scarcely four months later, Bethlen actually agreed to the project. In Geneva he explained to Grandi that after stabilization had been achieved at home, Hungary would put an end to its passive policy and support Mussolini's project. Bethlen also asked Grandi's opinion of the proposed Hungarian-Yugoslav commercial negotiations, which, he said, could be a basis for Hungarian-Yugoslav rapprochement. The Hungarian foreign minister offered to go to Rome to discuss the matter, but Mussolini rejected this offer with a rather hollow pretext.¹⁸

Rome advocated almost exclusively the bilateral agreements. Since it was clear that the realization of the project depended mainly on Belgrade, Mussolini wanted to persuade Yugoslavia to conclude bilateral agreements with its neighbours. Of course, a Yugoslav-Hungarian agreement was also important for him, because he knew very well that there could not be a Central European security system without Hungary. His Hungarian policy was also influenced by the possibility of detaching Yugoslavia from the Little Entente with the help of the Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement and thus to isolate it. Last but not least, he hoped to secure for Fiume (acquired by the agreement of 1924) the background that was formerly provided by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for it was feared that the seaport would waste away without such a background.

Our recent investigations thus seem to prove that *the Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations were started at Italy's initiative and enjoyed its support in the initial phase*. These facts should be underlined because they put the Hungarian-Yugoslav talks in a new light, while completing and making more precise this aspect of the Italo-Hungarian agreement.

Hungarian-Yugoslav Negotiations and the Italo-Hungarian Agreement

The Hungarian-Yugoslav rapprochement was an integral part of the post-Locarno situation, i.e. of the attempt to establish a Central European security system. Britain, France and Italy equally urged the establishment of contacts be-

¹⁷ AD, Europe 1918-40. T. vol. 43. ff. 25-28. Cable of Fleuriau to Briand December 4, 1925.

¹⁸ ASMAE 1758.972. Grandi's aide mémoire about his discussions with Bethlen; the paper was sent to the Italian mission in Budapest and Belgrade. March 1926; DDI. IV. doc. 268. Grandi's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927; *ibid.* doc. 279. Scialoja's report to Mussolini, March 10, 1927.

tween the two countries. (The latter because of its intention to submit the "grand construction" to its own influence.) Mussolini, though advocating closer relations with Hungary which was to play an important role in his foreign policy, took good care not to scare away the small states, which were afraid of revisionism, since he also needed their support for the realization of his project.

Bodrero, Italian ambassador in Belgrade, began to mediate between the two countries and, together with the Hungarian minister András Hory, worked hard to produce an agreement.

Long before the attempts to establish a "Central European Locarno", the idea of an agreement between Hungary and Yugoslavia had been cherished by many in Budapest. Economists and public opinion in general sympathized with the southern neighbour, while supporters of the free election of a king advocated the idea of a personal union with Yugoslavia, and would have been glad to place St. Stephen's crown on the head of King Alexander.

The first politician to emphasize the necessity of co-operation between the two countries was Gyula Gömbös. In August 1925 he wrote an article in the periodical *Szózat* under the title "Hungary and the Serbo-Croat Kingdom", "where he broke a lance" on behalf of an agreement between the two countries. The article created a stir both in Hungary and abroad, first of all in Yugoslavia, for the author was actually a leading figure in the right-wing nationalist group called "Waking Hungarians", known for its implacable hatred of the neighbouring states.

The Yugoslav press published the translation of the article with appreciative comments. The government did not react officially, but had an article published in *Novosti* (the official bulletin of the Agrarian Party) on August 27, where it was emphasized that Belgrade understood the interests of Central Europe as well as Hungary's important role therein.¹⁹

As a matter of fact, the reaction was rather muted. We learn more from discussions between the Yugoslav foreign minister Ninčić and the French and Italian ambassadors. Ninčić had told Grenard that he would reply to the Gömbös article in the August 27 issue of *Novosti* (thus the above mentioned article was by him). He added that though "one swallow does not make summer", it awakened attention and prepared public opinion for the cares of the next season ("une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps, elle doit éveiller l'attention et préparer l'esprit aux soins de la saison à venir").²⁰ Hungarian nationalists, he said, wished closer contacts with Yugoslavia, the strongest state of the Little Entente. He saw a possibility for the gradual co-operation of the two countries, but Italy's sensitivities had to be respected; a close alliance with Budapest might provoke the opposition of Italy, if all necessary measures were not taken. The question had therefore to be settled together with Romania and Czechoslovakia. Ninčić was

¹⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 52. f. 179. Grenard's report to Briand, August 29, 1925.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

visibly afraid of Italy. At that time he had every reason to be: – Locarno was still ahead.

Hungarian-Yugoslav rapprochement was also pressed by the Hungarian minister in Belgrade, Horthy, who – probably on behalf of his government – tried to explore the attitude of the Yugoslavs to an agreement. He reported several times that “concessions that would indemnify the country cannot be expected, but the negotiations would nevertheless be useful”.

Bethlen shared this opinion. After his efforts with Romania failed, he turned towards the southern neighbour. His conceptions relied on economic and political aspects alike. As already mentioned, the smallest area inhabited by Hungarians had been attached to Yugoslavia, and though Bethlen was absolutely unwilling to give it up, he was ready to remove the question from the agenda for a while. All this in order to break-up the Little Entente, to obtain for Hungary an exit to the sea and to demonstrate to Mussolini that if he continued to be so cautious and refuse to receive Bethlen, there were other ways open to Hungary.

Bethlen thus reminded Regent Horthy in a letter that “efforts in foreign policy must be undertaken to break-up the Little Entente with the help of the Serbs”.²¹ In March 1926 he discussed the matter in Geneva with Grandi, deputy secretary general of the Italian foreign ministry. Grandi did not disclose the Italian plans concerning Central Europe and gave evasive answers to Bethlen’s questions, but told him that Italy would have no objection to a Yugoslav-Hungarian arbitration convention.²² A few days later, Bethlen had talks with the Yugoslav foreign minister Ninčić, in the presence of foreign minister Lajos Walko, and suggested the possibility of concluding an arbitration convention. Ninčić outlined the plan for a Locarno-type agreement, but Bethlen declined to accept it (for this would have guaranteed the existing Yugoslav-Hungarian frontiers).²³

In summer the Bethlen government thought, the time had come to start official negotiations. In August 1926, at the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the battle of Mohács, Horthy mentioned in his commemoration speech the friendship of the Hungarian and the Serb peoples and emphasized the necessity for a rapprochement between the two countries. Later the Regent said: “Since we wish to break the iron ring encircling us, I have tried to come nearer to the Serbs. Within the Little Entente they belong to those adversaries with whom we can shake hands without blushing. In our difficult situation, in order to win a breathing space, I have tried somehow to find a *modus vivendi*.”²⁴

²¹ *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* (Secret papers of Miklós Horthy). (Ed. by Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs). Budapest, 1963, p. 67.

²² ASMAE. 1758. Grandi’s cable to Mussolini, March 1926.

²³ Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Aide mémoire of Ninčić, March 1926.

²⁴ *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai* (Secret papers of Miklós Horthy). (Ed. by Miklós Szinai and László Szűcs). Budapest, 1963, pp. 157–167.

The speech created great stir. The Yugoslav papers published long passages – some with friendly, others with reserved comment, but all of them underlined that the Little Entente must remain.²⁵

This highly important declaration from the Regent was followed by a long silence: Bethlen, who was reckoning simultaneously with several possibilities so as to be able to make a choice according to the prevailing circumstances, first wanted to know the reaction of Italy and the Little Entente.

In fact, Mussolini's standpoint had changed in the meantime. Thus far, he had regarded a Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement as being aimed against Italy, but he now regarded it as most beneficial to his plans: he wanted to detach Yugoslavia from the Little Entente and include it in the "Central and South-Eastern European Locarno", and, by increasing Hungarian transit trade, to reduce the decay of Fiume. The realization of his plans was thus highly dependent on Yugoslavia: would Belgrade conclude an agreement with France, or adhere to the system of alliance under Italian leadership?

However, the Belgrade government presented a demand that upset the calculations of Italy. It proposed to draw France into the settlement, and failing this, would conclude a separate agreement with it. Not without reason, Rome regarded this as blackmail with the purpose of securing Belgrade concessions in Albania (in spite of numerous agreements, the two countries still kept fighting for the latter). Unlike Yugoslavia, Italy had major economic interests in Albania, which it wanted to use to achieve its political aims. However, it was compelled to abandon these plans for the sake of its relations with Yugoslavia, but it rejected Belgrade's proposal, according to which Albania would belong to the sphere of interest of both.²⁶

The Italo-Yugoslav negotiations in Rome thus made it clear that the interests of the two countries were in general irreconcilable. His failure to settle the Albanian question induced Mussolini to change his "pro-Yugoslav" policy, and he actually gave up the plan to include Yugoslavia in the envisaged security system. This change in foreign policy brought the conflicts between the two countries again into the limelight (politicians and diplomats who had advocated an Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement now resigned from office),²⁷ while Italian diplomacy undertook concrete steps in order to conclude bilateral agreements with Albania, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary and thus to encircle Yugoslavia. We shall see that these efforts were successful.

In this situation the Bethlen government took a "wait-and-see" attitude. For this reason, Horthy's Mohács speech was not followed by serious action. Al-

²⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 66. ff. 190–191. Grenard's report to Briand, September 1, 1926; *ibid.* ff. 192–193. Clinchant's report to Briand, September 6, 1926.

²⁶ Pastorelli: *op. cit.* p. 265.

²⁷ Such as Contarini, who had serious differences with Mussolini, as well as Romano Avezzana, Italian ambassador in Paris, and Torretta, ex-minister of foreign affairs, Italian ambassador in London.

though the Hungarian prime minister disliked the turn-around in Italian policy, he had to decide which of several political lines to choose. He resolved to continue the rapprochement with Yugoslavia; even in the new situation, Mussolini had no objections, he only asked that in negotiations with Belgrade, Hungary should insist on the use of the Port of Fiume.²⁸ At the same time, Bethlen concentrated his attention on an agreement with Italy, for it was obvious that the former would help the latter, and vice versa. Bethlen had wanted for a long time to reach an agreement with Mussolini, and it was no fault of his that his efforts had been unsuccessful so far: the Duce was extremely cautious in regard to any rapprochement attempted by the Hungarian prime minister.

At first, Bethlen offered to conclude an agreement with Yugoslavia in March 1926. The Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Belgrade suggested a non-aggression and arbitration treaty to the Belgrade government. Ninčić received the Hungarian offer with understanding, with the condition that the proposed pact would not be contrary to Yugoslavia's other treaty obligations.²⁹

The Yugoslav government welcomed the initiative from Budapest which meant protection against Italian policy, for it was not unimportant for Belgrade to have a friendly Hungary as neighbour in the event of a conflict with Italy. The fear of an Italo-Hungarian agreement also hastened the renewal of relations.

The non-aggression pact as suggested by the Hungarian government would have meant that Yugoslavia would have had to abrogate those clauses of the military pacts of the Little Entente which committed Yugoslavia to aid Czechoslovakia and Romania in the event of war with Hungary. It was obvious that its allies would have done their best to prevent this. It was also clear that they would have appealed to France and to Yugoslav public opinion as well.

Ninčić at once informed his Czechoslovak and Romanian colleagues about the Hungarian proposal. A long correspondence followed between them. Beneš and Duca opposed the agreement and said that Yugoslavia could only conclude a treaty which respected Yugoslavia's previous treaty obligations and where the latter were explicitly mentioned. The non-aggression pact, they claimed, had to apply to the territory of the entire Little Entente. During this period they closely co-operated with each other. Both countries regarded the Yugoslav-Hungarian talks with mistrust and scepticism. In addition, although they were rather sceptical as to the outcome of these negotiations, presuming that Hungary's policy of rapprochement was only a manoeuvre to promote an Italo-Hungarian agreement, they took concrete steps to secure themselves against any surprise. After separate consultations they decided to call a conference of the Little Entente.³⁰

²⁸ Mussolini did not object to the Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations and asked only that the Hungarian government insist on the use of Fiume and not to accept any other sea-port.

²⁹ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 37. f. 31. Vienne's cable to Briand, April 13, 1927; AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 67. ff. 37-38. Dard's report to Briand, April 24, 1927; *ibid.* f. 31. Vienne's cable to Briand, April 13, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 18-20. Vienne's cable to Briand, March 26, 1927.

³⁰ AD. Europe 1918-40. Y. vol. 67. ff. 36-37. Clinchant's cable to Briand, April 16, 1927.

Their main aim was to win the support of France which actually supported the negotiations. Thus they demanded the intervention of Paris – and succeeded: France advised the Hungarian government to accept the Yugoslav conditions, i.e. to conclude an agreement that would recognize the treaties of the Little Entente. According to the Hungarian foreign minister Walko, however, the conclusion of a general arbitration convention was out of the question, since Hungarian public opinion would not accept it. He endeavoured to conclude a convention that could be the basis of a later revision of frontiers.³¹

Meanwhile, France put pressure on Yugoslavia as well. According to the “advice” of Dard, French ambassador in Belgrade, no more than an arbitration convention could be considered.³²

So the Belgrade government found itself in a rather difficult position. On the one hand, its allies came forward with claims which would *a priori* make any agreement with Budapest impossible, while on the other hand, the normalization of its relations with Hungary was of utmost importance for its own security. Especially with Bethlen about to go to Rome.

Thus, the preliminary talks went on in spite of the alarming news. At the beginning of March, the Yugoslav prime minister Lazar Marković, came to Budapest on an informal visit, the first Yugoslav statesman to visit Hungary since the war. In an interview with the newspaper *Magyarország*, he emphasized that he had come as a private person in order to establish contacts with Hungarian statesmen and to inform himself about the possibilities of co-operation. We could find no written accounts of his Budapest talks, but we know from indirect sources that he had talks not only about the normalization of Hungarian-Yugoslav relations, but also about the establishment of a Central European security system and the eventual creation of a federation. Commenting on Bethlen’s imminent trip to Rome, he said that its principal aim was obviously to obtain an exit to the sea: “We do not want to compete for Fiume. The problem of Fiume cannot be turned against Yugoslavia, just because the Yugoslav railways run that way.”³³

Begun in the spring of 1926, the Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations continued, but with no haste at all. The obstacles were rather considerable. Yugoslavia had to convince its allies within the Little Entente about the importance of an agreement with Hungary, in addition, it was engaged by the Albanian problem too, while Bethlen was in no hurry for tactical reasons. Relying upon past, but now obsolete Italian consent, he continued the talks. Apparently unaware of the change in Italian foreign policy, he wanted to reach an agreement with Yugoslavia just at the time when the differences between Yugoslavia and Italy were

³¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 67. ff. 4–5. Dard’s report to Briand, March 31, 1927.

³² *Ibid.* f. 21. Dard’s report to Briand, March 31, 1927.

³³ *Ibid.* ff. 1–2. Dard’s report to Briand, March 4, 1927; *ibid.* f. 3. Report of the Yugoslav News Agency Avala, March 2, 1927.

at their sharpest. He knew very well that Hungary's value to Italy would thereby considerably increase.³⁴

At the beginning, Mussolini was rather careful and did not oppose the continuation of talks. He merely asked the Hungarian government to insist upon the use of Fiume seaport and not to conclude a definitive agreement as long as the Italo-Yugoslav relationship remained unsettled.³⁵ In reality, however, Mussolini and Grandi were of the opinion that the rapprochement between the two countries had to be prevented at all costs.³⁶

In this situation Mussolini thought, it was important to follow the negotiations with attention and, if possible, to take part. This happened in Geneva in September 1926, when Grandi wanted to meet Hungarian foreign minister Walko, who was negotiating with Ninčić. He explained to Walko that Italy did not oppose the conclusion of a political agreement between Yugoslavia and Hungary, in fact, it wanted to contribute to its success. Walko promised that his government would keep Rome informed about the negotiations.³⁷

At the end of 1926, after the conclusion of the Tirana Treaty, the Italian standpoint became more clear cut. After the treaty was published, news began to circulate in diplomatic circles that the Yugoslav-Hungarian talks, suspended since October, were to be resumed. The timing was intentional on both sides. Ninčić, whose position had considerably weakened (he actually resigned shortly afterwards), wished to demonstrate to public opinion that Yugoslavia was not isolated and could reach an agreement with Hungary, while Bethlen wanted to use the Yugoslav question (and actually did so to obtain more concessions from Italy.³⁸

In February 1927, the Italian ambassador in Belgrade informed Mussolini that the Yugoslav-Hungarian talks had been resumed. This report was confirmed by the Italian ambassador in Budapest.³⁹

Bethlen appeared, as though he were acting with the consent of the Italians, since they had suggested the rapprochement in spring, 1926. But this time Mussolini reacted indignantly. He at once informed Bethlen that he had never suggested a friendship treaty with Yugoslavia and had always reminded him of

³⁴ ASMAE. 1754. Mussolini's cable to Durini, September 1, 1926; ASMAE. 1758. Grandi's aide mémoire about conversations with Hory; the paper was sent to Durini and Bodrero, February 12, 1927; ASMAE. 1754. Durini's cable to Mussolini, September 1, 1926.

³⁵ ASMAE. 1754. Mussolini's cable to Durini, September 24, 1926.

³⁶ DDI. IV. doc. 432 Mussolini's cable to Durini, September 26, 1926.

³⁷ DDI. IV. doc. 439 Mussolini's cable to Durini, September 24, 1926. On this occasion Grandi told Walko that Mussolini was now ready to receive Bethlen.

³⁸ DDI. IV. doc. 521. Bodrero's report to Mussolini; ASMAE. 1754-53673. Report of the Security Service of the Italian Ministry of the Interior to the Foreign Ministry, December 1, 1926.

³⁹ DDI. IV. doc. 23. Bodrero's report to Mussolini, February 19, 1927; ASMAE. 1758-535. Durini's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927.

the unreliability of the Little Entente.⁴⁰ In his reply Bethlen assured Mussolini that the most he wanted to achieve was the conclusion of an arbitration convention.⁴¹ In February 1927, Grandi explained to Hory – now Hungarian minister in Rome – that Italy had abstained so far from interfering in the Hungarian-Yugoslav negotiations, because Bethlen had assured him that only technical questions would be discussed. He denied that the Italian government had consented to the agreement, all the more, since the Bethlen government had informed nobody that a political agreement was also being considered. In Budapest, he said, it was well known that Italy's relationship with Yugoslavia had considerably changed in the last months, so it was rather surprising that the Hungarian government was now referring to Italian consent. This could not be regarded as an alibi, since the consent of March 1926 was obviously out of date. Finally, he reminded the Hungarian minister that a Yugoslav-Hungarian political agreement would have serious consequences for Bethlen's visit to Rome.⁴²

Mussolini then informed Bethlen that he was ready to discuss with him a far-reaching political agreement, but for procedural reasons Hungary should take the first step. Bethlen replied to the Italian ambassador in Budapest that he would decide on the offer after his meeting with Mussolini and that he was ready to go to Rome. The date of his visit was fixed for April 2.⁴³ At the end of February, a Hungarian delegation led by Baron Wimmersberg went to Rome to prepare for Bethlen's visit and to discuss the question of Fiume. The Hungarian government demanded a basis of exclusive use, but the Italians rejected this claim, saying that the seaport was already overcrowded. Said the Baron: "Either you give us an independent basis, or Bethlen will not come to Rome."⁴⁴ The confusion was only increased by the fact that, in spite of Mussolini's repeated urging, the Hungarian prime minister did not send him the draft agreement he had asked for.⁴⁵ Finally, Mussolini appealed personally to Bethlen, explaining to him, why he could not meet Bethlen's demand concerning Fiume.⁴⁶

By now, the Duce had become aware that he would be unable to prevent a Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement unless he unequivocally took the side of Hungary and gave up the cautious attitude demonstrated not only by himself, but by all of his predecessors. The first sign of this perception: he supported at the

⁴⁰ ASMAE. 1760–343. Mussolini's cable to Durini, February 25, 1927; *ibid.* 79. Durini's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927.

⁴¹ ASMAE. 1755–71. Durini's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927; ASMAE. 1760–74. Durini's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927.

⁴² ASMAE. 1758–972. Grandi's aide mémoire about his talks with Hory. The paper was sent to Durini and Bodrero, February 23, 1927.

⁴³ DDI. IV. doc. 25. Durini's report to Mussolini, February 28, 1927.

⁴⁴ ASMAE. 1758. Grandi's memorandum to Mussolini, March 11, 1927.

⁴⁵ DDI. V. doc. 70. Mussolini's letter to Durini, March 14, 1927.

⁴⁶ DDI. V. doc. 56. Mussolini's letter to Durini.

Conference of Ambassadors Hungary's demand that military control over the country be ended, disregarding thereby the protests of the Little Entente and France, and being opposed at first even by Britain. After the control was ended (March 1927), Mussolini at once told Bethlen that this had been due to his, Mussolini's influence.

At the end of March, Bethlen handed over to Durini the expected draft agreement, which contained a secret clause about mutual consultation.⁴⁷ On April 4, he was in Rome where he explained to Mussolini Hungary's situation and difficulties due to its geographical position. Since Hungary lay between 160 million Slavs and 80 million Germans, Bethlen said, he was opposed to the Anschluss. He emphasized that Hungary's attempt to reach an agreement with Yugoslavia was aimed only at breaking-up the anti-Hungarian Little Entente. The choice fell on Yugoslavia, because Hungary had lost the least territory to that country. Bethlen added that – although the situation with Romania was different, the disputed territory being considerably larger – an agreement with Bucharest was not excluded either.⁴⁸

On April 5, 1927, in the Palazzo Chigi, Mussolini and Bethlen signed with all solemnity an agreement of friendship and arbitration, with an annexed protocol concerned with Fiume. The two parties agreed upon the training of Hungarian officers in the Italian military academy and upon the sale of aircraft and weapons.⁴⁹

The friendship treaty was aimed against Yugoslavia. A secret military clause obliged Hungary not to allow the transport of supplies from Czechoslovakia to Yugoslavia in the event of an Italo-Yugoslav conflict. In return, Mussolini committed himself to support Hungarian revisionist claims, but only against Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Since the latter was unacceptable to Bethlen, Czechoslovakia remained the only target. It was also agreed that Italy would deliver to Hungary gratis, the Austro-Hungarian armaments left in Italy. The transport of arms began at once and resulted in the so-called St. Gotthard affair. The Italian ambassador in Budapest suggested thereupon to henceforth transport the arms on the Danube.⁵⁰

The Italo-Hungarian agreement was of great international importance. It strengthened Italy's position in Central Europe and produced a shock within the Little Entente, first of all in Yugoslavia. As was predictable, it caused resentment in Bucharest, and the relationship between the two countries worsened again. This was accelerated by the downfall of the pro-Italian prime minister Averescu and by the formation of the Brătianu government with Titulescu as minister of

⁴⁷ DDI. V. doc. 78. Durini's letter to Mussolini, March 18, 1927.

⁴⁸ DDI. V. doc. 123. Aide mémoire about the talks Bethlen – Mussolini, April 4, 1927.

⁴⁹ ASMAE. 1760. Aide mémoire of the Italian foreign minister, April 6, 1927; ASMAE. 159. Bethlen's letter to Mussolini, July 11, 1927; ASMAE. 195. Mussolini's letter to Bethlen, July 21, 1927.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 132. Durini's cable to Mussolini, January 30, 1928. Cf. V. Jelinek: *op. cit.* pp. 295 – 327.

foreign affairs. Prague was also alarmed, fearing – not without reason – an intensification of Hungarian revisionist policy. Shortly after the agreement, this actually happened. For Bethlen, co-operation with Hungary's neighbours was from the very beginning a necessary evil which he accepted only as long as he had no other alternative. At the end of the twenties (1927-28), the Italo-Hungarian agreement brought him the "friend among the Great Powers" he had been waiting for. He had been waiting, indeed, but not in a passive way: he had done his best towards the above. His policy towards the neighbouring states was not passive either, as is shown by the numerous initiatives mentioned earlier. Hungary's economic and political situation compelled him to adopt such a policy. However he took care to undertake only the absolutely necessary steps. "Already in the first year of his government" – wrote Gusztáv Gratz – "Bethlen has made it clear that his foreign policy will not be aimed at a rapprochement with the neighbouring states."⁵¹

An important result of the Italo-Hungarian agreement was the convention about the use of the seaport at Fiume. However, since the route to the Adriatic crossed Yugoslav territory and thus Yugoslav communications had to be employed, this convention was a worthless sheet of paper without the normalization of relations with Yugoslavia.⁵²

After the Rome agreement, Bethlen thus tried to come to terms with Yugoslavia. Through the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Belgrade, he reassured Ninčić that the agreement was not aimed against Yugoslavia and the negotiations only concerned Fiume. He also emphasized that the Italo-Hungarian agreement did not limit Hungary's freedom of action.⁵³ (To tell the truth, the policy of the signatory states after the agreement was not indicative of equal partners.)

In the summer of 1927, Hungarian politicians again insisted upon a Yugoslav-Hungarian agreement. On May 30, former foreign minister Gratz told the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* that "the Italo-Hungarian agreement about Fiume remains a worthless act unless a convention about the preference of the transit trade is concluded with the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian Kingdom".⁵⁴ In an article in the Yugoslav periodical *Vreme* he expressed his discontent: "nothing has been done" during the year that had passed since Horthy's Mohács speech. Gratz underlined the economic importance of rapprochement. The Hungarian market, he wrote, had always been highly important for Yugoslavia. On the other hand,

⁵¹ Gusztáv Gratz: Bethlen külpolitikája és kisebbségi politikája (Bethlen's foreign policy and his policy towards national minorities). *Magyar Szemle*, 1933/2, p. 304; Mária Ormos: Bethlen koncepciója az olasz-magyar szövetségről, 1927–1931 (Bethlen's conception of the Italo-Hungarian alliance, 1927–1931). *Történelmi Szemle*, 1971/1–2.

⁵² AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 67. f. 30. Besnard's cable to Briand, April 3, 1927.

⁵³ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 67. f. 30. Besnard's cable to Briand, April 3, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 32–35. Vienne's report to Briand, April 13, 1927; *ibid.* f. 8. Dard's report to Briand; *ibid.* ff. 32–35. Vienne's report to Briand, April 1, 1927.

⁵⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 67. ff. 51–54. Recapitulatory report, May 30, 1927.

the transit trade through Yugoslav territory was essential for Hungary. He regarded the Hungarian revisionist movement as the obstacle preventing a rapprochement between the two countries, but he added that "this is not the policy of the Hungarian government". This was confirmed in a declaration by Bethlen, who said that revision was not the question of the day. Finally, he hoped that the two countries would come to terms.⁵⁵

Yugoslav-Hungarian "fraternization" which went on even after the Italo-Hungarian agreement, was brought to an end by the Little Entente. At their conference of May 11-15, 1927, the foreign ministers again discussed the situation. It became clearer than ever that the interests of the three member-states were increasingly diverging. On the Italian question, which involved grave danger for Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania maintained a careful attitude. There were also some differences on the Hungarian question. Whereas it had been previously stated (at the beginning of the month) that Yugoslavia could conclude an agreement with Hungary with the consent of the other two member-states (with the condition that it kept its obligations to the Little Entente), the conference now declared that a Yugoslav-Hungarian bilateral agreement would only be possible if simultaneous and similar agreements were concluded between Hungary and the two other member-states, Romania and Czechoslovakia.⁵⁶

Yugoslavia yielded to the decisions of the Little Entente, having no other choice. Italy's attitude became more and more aggressive, whereas Hungary was ready to negotiate and to conclude an arbitration convention, but only with Yugoslavia; not with its allies. After the Jáchymov conference, France also changed its standpoint and no longer supported a separate agreement.⁵⁷ Moreover, since the Belgrade government had taken up the idea of a Franco-Yugoslav agreement, it was not in a position to ignore the French view.

Marković, who had insisted a short time before on the conclusion of a Yugoslav-Hungarian agreement, now declared his readiness to accept the demand of the allies within the Little Entente, i.e. that the three states should conclude at the same time arbitration conventions with Hungary.⁵⁸

So the Hungarian-Yugoslav talks came to a deadlock after the Jáchymov conference. The efforts of Forster, Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Belgrade, to restart them, were unsuccessful.⁵⁹

This being the case, the Bethlen government could only hope to achieve an economic agreement with its southern neighbour. As a consequence of the agreement with Italy, Hungary was no longer isolated and began an active for-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* ff. 69-70. Dard's report to Briand, September 20, 1927.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* f. 84. Briand's notice to Vienne, January 9, 1928; *ibid.* f. 50. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade to Briand, May 31, 1927.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* f. 84. Briand's notice to Vienne, January 9, 1928.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* f. 47. Dard's cable to Briand, May 11, 1927.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* f. 68. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade to Briand, September 30, 1927.

eign trade policy, looking for new overseas markets. It was clear that the agreement about the use of Fiume would be a "lettre morte" without an agreement with Yugoslavia about preferential transit trade. The Hungarian proposal to begin negotiations was accepted by Marković; the talks began in Belgrade in September 1927, and were exclusively economic in character. The agreement was envisaged as part of an already existing commercial convention, which was to secure Hungarian transit trade through Yugoslavia.⁶⁰

However, these negotiations were also unsuccessful. Incidents which took place towards the end of the year worsened the relationship between the two countries and had a negative effect on the economic talks as well.

Thus, for internal and external reasons, normalization of relations could not be realized. Bethlen blamed the Little Entente for the failure. "Last year" – he said to the French ambassador in Budapest – "I proposed to the Belgrade government that we should conclude an arbitration convention and a political agreement, but Yugoslavia was restrained by its allies who said that it could not conclude a treaty without them."⁶¹

After the agreement with Italy, Bethlen displayed much more courage. He claimed territorial revision and declared in public that no lasting peace could be achieved with the existing frontiers and that Hungary needed new frontiers. The Hungarian Revisionist League began to proclaim the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty and launched extensive international propaganda. Shortly after the conclusion of the Italo-Hungarian agreement, the so-called Rothermere action was started.

The Rothermere Action

On June 21, 1927, Harold Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, published an article in his paper under the title "Hungary's Place in the Sun". It had been a blunder, he wrote, to dismember the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and to mutilate Hungary. The peace in Europe was endangered by the new frontiers and thus the revision of the peace treaty was in the interests of everybody, including the Little Entente. Hungary must get back parts of the detached areas, which would mean the return of 2 million Hungarians. He also indicated by what means the new states could be forced to make these concessions: "If the present unstable and uncertain situation lasts, London and New York should consider whether they should grant the requested loans to the Little Entente".⁶² Demanding the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* ff. 71–72. Dard's report to Briand, October 14, 1927; *ibid.* f. 76. Dard's report to Briand, November 21, 1927; *ibid.* f. 61. Briand's note to Vienne.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* f. 85. Briand's cable to the French missions in Prague, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Warsaw, January 8, 1928.

⁶² Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 124–125.

revision of the peace treaty, the Rothermere action caused much excitement in the Danube states and in France for almost half a year, and deepened Franco-British differences. The great impact of the action was due to the fact that the British government was suspected of being behind it. At the beginning, the Foreign Office actually kept silent, expressed no opinion and simply ignored the event. On the other hand, the British government took a pro-Hungarian stand in two affairs where Hungary was involved and which took place almost at the same time: the lawsuits concerning the counterfeiting of French Francs, and the landed properties issue in Romania.⁶³

The press in the Little Entente states as well as that of France, immediately blamed the revival of revisionist aspirations. It was obvious that the article in the *Daily Mail* had been drafted with Hungarian co-operation, since Rothermere had been in Budapest just a few days before it was published (June 5-10). But the fact that the Bethlen government did not join the action in its initial phase – in fact, it demonstrated some cautiousness – had a moderating influence on the members of the Little Entente. The commotion caused by the article had begun to calm down, when Beneš again brought up the event at a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate. He accused Rothermere of straining the relationship between Hungary and the Little Entente, i.e. of jeopardizing the peace in Europe, in fact, of warmongering.⁶⁴ Beneš's declaration started a course of events which greatly intensified the differences between the opposing parties. Rothermere now addressed to Beneš provocative and ironical open letters which were published in the Budapest newspapers *Az Est* and *Pester Lloyd*, in which he attacked the unjust conditions prevailing in Central Europe and specified the administrative and legal measures afflicting the Hungarian minority in the successor states. "Your Excellency knows as well as I do that the Trianon Peace Treaty was only able to be implemented because the representatives of the Great Powers were entirely uninformed about the complicated national and political conditions of these areas... A million British soldiers did not die to allow injustice to prevail in that part of Europe as the price of their deaths", he wrote in one of these letters.⁶⁵

The letters forced Beneš to defend himself and to refute the accusations concerning the Hungarian minority. But this was most helpful to Rothermere, in gaining still more publicity for his action.

The menacing tone and the self-assurance of the letters confirmed the suspicion that they were not the product of individual ambition, but of a well prepared plan supported by the British government (the Foreign Office remained silent). Paradoxically, both parties thus attributed to the affair far more importance than it really had. As a result of Rothermere's success, Hungarian official circles took heart, though – as already mentioned – they were rather reserved at the begin-

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* p. 127.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 128; *Az Est*, July 20, July 27, 1927.

ning. In an interview with *Az Est*, Bethlen backed the action, saying that "the Hungarian government has never made a secret of the fact that the Trianon Peace Treaty must be revised sooner or later".⁶⁶ The prime minister who, for reasons of political expediency, had in the past suppressed the activity of revisionist extremists, now did not do so. Another letter from Rothermere to Beneš published in *Pester Lloyd* and *Budapesti Hírlap* further encouraged both the Hungarian government and Hungarian public opinion.⁶⁷

Led by Czechoslovakia, the members of the Little Entente started a counter-attack. They launched a press campaign against Hungary, condemning the action "directed by the Hungarian government", as well as the complicity of British officials. They lodged protests with the Foreign Office, demanding explicit disapproval of the action. The British government should confirm the inviolability of the Trianon Peace Treaty, and assure the members of the Little Entente that His Majesty's government has nothing to do with the action, but would do its best to safeguard the integrity of the peace treaties.⁶⁸ Meanwhile the situation in the Danube Basin went from bad to worse, the war psychosis intensified. The British government was now compelled to attach due importance to the events, all the more, since the members of the Little Entente had already considered a commercial boycott against Great Britain, and London's silence was sharply censured in Paris as well. Barclay, the British ambassador in Budapest, repeatedly informed the foreign minister that his government disapproved of Rothermere's campaign and that the Hungarians could not expect London's support. The Hungarian minister in London, who also took part in the affair, was told on Chamberlain's personal instructions, that "if he wants to fish in troubled waters", he could not expect the support of the London government.⁶⁹

Almost at the same time – during the second phase of the Rothermere action – a scandal burst over the so-called Paléologue note, which allegedly proved that in 1920 the French themselves had contemplated a revision of the peace treaty. On July 20, 1927, the *Daily Mail* published a letter from Gordon Ross, a former member of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian frontier commission, who referred to Millerand's note to the Hungarian peace delegation. In the note, Millerand had commented on the injustice of the envisaged treaty. The note itself was published in September. In order to support its authenticity, the French text of the note, dated April 15, 1920, was published in *Magyarság* on September 28, together with a map signed by Paléologue and Baker, the British member of the frontier commission; in the note the modification of the Trianon frontiers and the re-establishment of ethnographical frontiers was suggested.⁷⁰ That is, the very thing

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Pester Lloyd*, August 2, 1927; *Budapesti Hírlap*, August 2, 1927.

⁶⁸ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 133–136.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 136.

⁷⁰ *Magyarság*, September 28, 1927; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. f. 68.

Rothermere had been advocating. The note had allegedly been sent in 1920 to the Hungarian prime minister Simonyi-Semadam. Paléologue declared the document was a fake. Simonyi-Semadam, Apponyi and Halmos, who had taken part in the Franco-Hungarian negotiations at the time, did the same.⁷¹ It was indeed a counterfeit (the British government was actually of the same opinion). It was published for two purposes: on the one hand, to force Bethlen to adopt a more resolute line on the question of revision, and, on the other, to deepen the differences between Great Britain and France.

The parties involved reacted at once to the event, first Bethlen, through the Hungarian News Agency MTI. He revived the memory of what had happened seven years before. He admitted that the Hungarian peace delegation had received a note from Millerand, promising to put right the ethnic and economic "mistakes" made by the drafters of the peace treaty. To prove its goodwill, the Hungarian government had promised the French government some economic concessions during the Franco-Hungarian negotiations, but the latter had not promised a radical change in the peace treaty nor the conclusion of a military pact. Since the French had been unwilling to give any guarantee concerning the revision, the negotiations had been unsuccessful.⁷²

Some days later, Paléologue refuted Bethlen's statement in an open letter and denied that any negotiations had been carried on between Hungary and France concerning revision of the peace treaty. The note he was said to have signed – and about which the Hungarian press was making such a big fuss – was a counterfeit from end to end.⁷³ Bethlen then published through MTI the genuine French declaration, a note dated June 24, 1920, the authenticity of which could not be contested. The document proved without any doubt that secret negotiations had actually taken place between the two parties and that the Quai d'Orsay had promised some modification of the frontiers. The relevant part of the note reads as follows: "These attempts are aimed at correcting some economic and ethnic injustices under the conditions as specified in the 'lettre d'envoi', and at completing the already existing stipulations on the protection of minorities."⁷⁴ The revival of the memory of Franco-Hungarian secret negotia-

⁷¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. f. 70. Record of the French foreign ministry about Paléologue's telephone message, September 30, 1927; *ibid.* f. 71. Vienne's report to Briand, September 30, 1927; *ibid.* f. 72. Vienne's report to Briand, September 30, 1927; *ibid.* f. 62. Rivière's report to Briand, October 3, 1927; *ibid.* f. 74. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 2, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 87–88. Cable of Charles Roux, French minister in Prague, to Briand, October 3, 1927.

⁷² In an article published by the Hungarian news agency Magyar Távirati Iroda (MTI), Bethlen revived the memory of the events in 1920. He declared that no military agreement was concluded, but it was agreed that France would support a certain correction of the frontiers; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. f. 90. Rivière's cable to Briand, October 6, 1927.

⁷³ *Le Temps*, October 14, 1927; AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. f. 105. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 14, 1927.

⁷⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. f. 104. Rivière's cable to Briand, October 14, 1927; *ibid.* vol. 62. f. 105. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 14, 1927; *ibid.* f. 106. Cable of the French

tions was again to the advantage of Rothermere. The campaign became more and more serious and began to be dangerous for the Little Entente. On September 8, 1927, the *Daily Mail* announced that Lloyd George had joined the affair, and it published at the same time an open letter from the former prime minister emphasizing that the peace treaties of 1919-1920 could not be regarded as unchangeable and their modification was possible under the League of Nations by virtue of para. 19 of its Covenant.⁷⁵ The intervention of Lloyd George encouraged the Hungarian revisionist movement and caused unease in the states of the Little Entente. The former prime minister was a politician of high international standing who – after a significant past – was again, it seemed, about to play an important role in British policy. A joint committee of Parliament was set up to study the situation in the Danube Basin. Its members were the Lords Charnwood, Philimore, Newton and Thomson. The pro-Hungarian lobby backed the action of Rothermere, which was supported by several British politicians including Gower, a Member of Parliament. The action was further strengthened by the intervention of an American senator, Barah, who had earlier attacked the whole Versailles system, especially the Treaty of Trianon. In his letters and declarations, published in *Az Est*, Barah stated that he fully shared the opinion of Rothermere; he emphasized that the Trianon Peace Treaty had brought about a dangerous situation in Europe and that world peace depended on a revision of the treaty. Politicians supporting Rothermere's action attacked the states of the Little Entente in statements and articles, demanding a revision of the frontiers in favour of Hungary and threatening the suspension of credits. The *Daily Mail* published a series of articles focussing its attacks on Czechoslovakia. In the articles the very existence of the Czechoslovak Republic was questioned.⁷⁶

However, the hope that the different peoples of Czechoslovakia would turn against Prague was not fulfilled. The articles were vehemently condemned, even by the Slovak autonomists led by Hlinka, who declared his loyalty to the Czechoslovak state. The German minority was indifferent to the Rothermere campaign, which passed almost unnoticed by most of the Hungarian minority also.

The Foreign Office continued its former tactics: it simply ignored the activities of Rothermere. But it took care not to give the action the appearance of official policy. The Foreign Office was therefore opposed to those who wished to debate the revision of the peace treaty in the British House of Lords, fearing that this would publicize the affair, and that Rothermere's action would be seen as the of-

minister in Prague to Briand, October 14, 1927; *ibid.* f. 108. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Budapest to Briand, October 16, 1927; *ibid.* f. 112. Cable of the French chargé d'affaires in Budapest to Briand, October 19, 1927; *ibid.* f. 111. Cable of the French chargé d'affaires in Budapest to Briand, October 19, 1927; *ibid.* f. 119. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Budapest to Briand, October 22, 1917; *ibid.* f. 127. Report of the French minister in Budapest to Briand, December 27, 1927; *ibid.* f. 189. Summary of the 2nd Dept. of the French General Staff (n.d.).

⁷⁵ *Daily Mail*, September 8, 1927.

⁷⁶ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 148 – 151.

ficial policy of the government. This was not desirable, since the situation in Central Europe was worsening from day to day.

The Little Entente again counter-attacked. The documents published in Hungary, the Franco-Hungarian secret agreement, were declared false, and the Franco-Hungarian agreement of 1920 denounced by Beneš as a forgery.⁷⁷ The low-key Foreign Office policy of quiet diplomacy was regarded as insufficient: more radical measures were demanded.

An interview with the British Prime Minister MacDonald in the Czechoslovak newspaper *Práva Lidu*, considerably reassured the Little Entente states. Britain was not interested in Rothermere's action, said MacDonald which was an isolated event and did not express public opinion. British diplomats in the capitals of the Little Entente states were instructed to convince the governments of those countries that Rothermere was not to be taken seriously and therefore his action could not cause any damage. The ambassador in Budapest was instructed to counter the action and not to offer any assistance to supporters of Rothermere coming to Budapest.⁷⁸

The British government decided to take these steps because, on the one hand, the campaign created an inimical atmosphere in the Danube Basin, increased the tension caused by the so-called optant affair and hindered Chamberlain's efforts to settle the matter, and, on the other hand, it had a bad effect on Franco-British relations which had become rather cordial after Locarno. Of course, all this meant not that the Foreign Office regarded as absolutely impossible an eventual partial revision, the correction of some unjust stipulations of the peace treaty, but it was clear that – due to the actual balance of power – this was unrealizable. The victorious successor states stuck tenaciously to every inch of ground and any revision of the frontiers would have led to armed conflict. For all these reasons, British official policy was consistently opposed to Rothermere's efforts.

Although the affair caused considerable excitement among government circles in Hungary, the Little Entente and France, the *furore* gradually died down. Certainly, Rothermere went on supporting the Hungarian revisionists, but neither Bethlen, nor the governments of the Little Entente took him seriously any more. Nevertheless, the co-operation between Italy and Hungary gave notice that the forces pressing for the revision of the Versailles treaty system were on the attack.

The Franco-Yugoslav and the Franco-Romanian Agreement

In the second half of the twenties, Italian foreign policy became even more aggressive and Mussolini's hostile attitude towards the Little Entente more acute.

⁷⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. H. vol. 62. ff. 87–88. Report of Charles Roux to Briand, October 5, 1927; *ibid.* f. 99. Report of the French minister in Warsaw to Briand, October 7, 1927; *ibid.* f. 74. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, October 2, 1927; Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* pp. 134, 138–140.

⁷⁸ Ozer Carmi: *op. cit.* p. 152.

The Italian government began to create the strategic basis it needed for its policy in the Balkans and in Central Europe. It sought – and actually found – assistance in a Foreign Office led by Chamberlain, for weakening or even liquidating the French alliance system. In September 1926, Mussolini and the British Foreign Secretary had a personal meeting in Livorno, where they discussed the European questions concerning the two countries. Although a formal agreement was not concluded, Mussolini could henceforth regard Great Britain as his ally. As a matter of fact, London had substantially contributed to Poincaré's failure to conclude with Yugoslavia and Romania similar agreements to that which existed with Czechoslovakia, and to the fact that the members of the Little Entente were ready to co-operate – and actually co-operated – with Italy. But Mussolini was not yet satisfied: he continued in his efforts to break-up the bloc and to loosen the relationship of its members with France. This time, his primary target was Yugoslavia. Although a formal agreement concerning certain frontier problems had been concluded earlier, the tensions between the two states became more and more acute. During this period, the Belgrade government actually co-operated more closely with Mussolini and its contacts with France certainly loosened, but it still insisted on the Little Entente policy, for it became more and more obvious that one of Mussolini's main objectives was the solution of the Yugoslav problem. Since he had been unable to detach Yugoslavia from the Little Entente and to draw it away from France, he now tried to encircle it. In his Balkan and Central European policy, Mussolini continued to apply the principle of "divide et impera": he launched sharp diplomatic attacks against Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and at the same time tried to win over Romania, Hungary, Albania and Bulgaria. The negotiations took place concurrently.

The gravest danger for Yugoslavia was the so-called Tirana Treaty concluded with Albania in December 1926, whereby Mussolini practically placed the small country under a political protectorate: the treaty obliged the two countries to take joint action against any threat to the political, legal and territorial *status quo* in Albania. This gave Italy the right to send military forces to Albania in case of need and meant that an attack could be made from Albania against Yugoslavia at any time.⁷⁹

Mussolini was also worried by the diplomatic activity of France in the Danube Basin. The Franco-Romanian and Franco-Yugoslav talks, broken off earlier, had been secretly resumed in the spring of 1926, and rumours were already circulating about impending agreements.

Paris continued its diplomatic struggle for Yugoslavia. Most instructive are Briand's instructions to the French ambassador in Belgrade: "The task which falls to you is most delicate indeed. Yugoslavia is not only a source of important information, but also the axis of French policy. Based upon the protection of the peace treaties, our policy actually depends on the attitude of the Central European states, particularly that of Yugoslavia. On account of its geographical posi-

⁷⁹ Pastorelli: *op. cit.* p. 204.

tion and its military strength, the country must at all costs remain our faithful and safe friend.”⁸⁰

However, an agreement between the two countries continued to be complicated by the fact that Yugoslavia was at least as important for Italy as well. Mussolini did his best to extend the Italo-Yugoslav agreement of 1924 by means of a political agreement having regard to the new situation, i.e. securing still more advantages for Italy. (In exchange, he was ready to share Albania with Yugoslavia.) He wished to achieve his aim in two ways: on the one hand (as already mentioned), he took steps to encircle Yugoslavia, while, on the other hand, he tried to prevent Yugoslavia from signing a treaty with France; the treaty which had been planned a long time before. Mussolini had received information that Paris was pressing Belgrade on this matter. The Belgrade government was faced with a difficult dilemma. It was obvious that an agreement with Italy would not last long, Mussolini could not be relied upon. Belgrade could not accept the new Italian conditions, or Italy's proposal that Italy and Yugoslavia should divide Albania between them for this would have had a high price. On the other hand, Yugoslavia decidedly requested to join the Italo-Albanian pact – and this was supported by France as well.⁸¹ It tried to consolidate its negotiating position with Rome by urging a Franco-Yugoslav agreement and the “pacte à trois”, which had already proved in 1924 to be entirely unrealistic. In fact, Mussolini only wanted a bilateral treaty with Yugoslavia, which – together with treaties with Romania and Bulgaria – would have assured him of a leading role in the Balkans. Of course, Belgrade began to urge the conclusion of the treaty, Yugoslavia put itself at Italy's disposal. It “only” asked that France should adhere directly or indirectly.⁸²

The Yugoslav request was wholly supported by Briand, who knew just as well that Italy would never consent. The reports of the Yugoslav and French ambassadors left no doubt.

“Contarini became quite nervous when he received the proposal for a trilateral agreement” – reported one of them.⁸³ Despite this, Rome asked the French to send the draft agreement which Briand sent without delay. It was predictable that the draft agreement would be unacceptable to Mussolini.

Yugoslavia began concurrent negotiations with the French and Italian governments, primarily concerned with bilateral agreements. However, the “pacte à trois” was left on the agenda because both Briand and Ninčić considered it important for tactical reasons. Although rather slowly, the Franco-Yugoslav negotiations broken off in 1924 were resumed in November 1925, at the urging of Belgrade. The talks had the primary aim of putting pressure on Mussolini and

⁸⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 54. f. 138. Briand's instructions to Dard (n.d.).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* ff. 138–144; *ibid.* Y. vol. 70. ff. 7–9. Dard's cable to Briand, January 22, 1926.

⁸² AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 54. f. 138. Briand's instructions to Dard (n. d.); *ibid.* Y. vol. 70. ff. 7–11. Cable of the French minister in Belgrade to Briand, January 22, 1926.

⁸³ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 7–11. Dard's cable to Briand, January 22, 1926.

make him accept the Yugoslav proposals. On January 8, 1926, Ninčić informed the French government that if Mussolini rejected the trilateral agreement, he, Ninčić would be forced to sign the Italo-Yugoslav treaty, but wanted, shortly afterwards, to conclude an agreement with France as well. The French ambassador in Belgrade noted that Rome would do its best to prevent such an agreement. Ninčić also asked for an urgent reply on whether – if Mussolini refused to conclude a trilateral or bilateral agreement – the French government would be ready to sign the Franco-Yugoslav agreement within a short time, if possible by January.⁸⁴

In February 1926, Ninčić went to Rome where he had talks with Mussolini and Contarini. He did not insist on the “pacte à trois” this time either, because he realized that Mussolini disapproved of the plan.⁸⁵ Of course, Paris and Belgrade would have welcomed it, because it would have reduced Mussolini’s resistance to a Franco-Yugoslav agreement: the Belgrade government had a further reason: it did not trust Mussolini’s promises and would have liked to have them guaranteed by France. As Ninčić put it: “... Yugoslavia would need at least three or four years to be in a position to beat off an Italian attack”.⁸⁶

Ninčić’s negotiations in Rome were concentrated on the prolongation and modification of the Italo-Yugoslav agreement of 1924 and on the adherence of Yugoslavia to the Tirana Treaty. The Yugoslav foreign minister quickly understood that Mussolini wanted to conclude an agreement providing Italy with further advantages, although the Duce promised everything if Yugoslavia would abandon France a bilateral agreement with Italy. To settle the questions in dispute and to prevent the Anschluss, Mussolini suggested an arbitration and military agreement. Finally they decided on an arbitration agreement. After Mussolini had unequivocally rejected a trilateral agreement, Ninčić told him that he was negotiating with the French government as well and would considerably reduce the importance of an Italo-Yugoslav agreement.⁸⁷ Ninčić thus began to insist upon the conclusion of the Franco-Yugoslav treaty, but without breaking off talks with the Italians: by doing so, he wanted to put pressure on Paris where there was still considerable hesitation. The French ambassador in Rome also advised his government, not to sign anything with Ninčić before the Geneva meeting. “Mussolini is alarmed – he cabled to Briand – fearing that the agreement with Yugoslavia will be signed in Paris before the Geneva meeting.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 3–4. Dard’s cable to Briand, January 8, 1926.

⁸⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 13–17. Besnard’s cable to Briand, February 25, 1926; *ibid.* ff. 18–19. Dard’s cable to Briand, March 2, 1926; *ibid.* f. 19. Besnard’s cable to Briand, March 2, 1926.

⁸⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 23–27. Aide mémoire about the talks between Ninčić and Berthelot, March 6, 1926.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* f. 18. Dard’s cable to Briand, March 2, 1926.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The Italian government not only informed Paris, but also London that such a step would have grave consequences and Italian public opinion would turn fully against France.⁸⁹ Rome hoped to negotiate and sign an agreement with Ninčić at the Geneva Council meeting (March 1926), anyway before the French. It was therefore logical that the visit of the Yugoslav foreign minister to Paris caused great uneasiness in the Italian capital since it was known that the conclusion of an agreement was on the agenda.

We have only one document – an aide mémoire from Berthelot – concerning the Paris talks of Ninčić, notably about the conversation of March 6. The note states that Ninčić negotiated for three days with Briand and Berthelot about the Franco-Yugoslav agreement and about an eventual Italo-Yugoslav and Italian-Yugoslav-French agreement. Ninčić assured Berthelot that Yugoslavia first wished to conclude an agreement with France – the King had informed him of this in a cable he had received the previous night.⁹⁰ However, Briand dissented saying that he had resigned and was thus not in a position to sign anything, but he promised to sign the agreement in Geneva when they met again at the Council session (everybody, including Briand himself, was sure that he, Briand, would again be asked to form a cabinet). Ninčić asked Berthelot to confirm Briand's promise to sign the agreement, because "if it is postponed at Mussolini's demand, this means that it will be definitely abandoned".⁹¹ Berthelot listened without comment to Ninčić's arguments (intended as threats), and promised to inform Briand, who would give the final answer.⁹²

The Yugoslav government decided to bring the plan for a Franco-Yugoslav agreement to a successful conclusion. On March 5, King Alexander cabled to Ninčić, who was then staying in Paris: "... you must achieve a solid agreement, something definitive".⁹³ When on March 6, Romano Avezana, Italian minister in Paris, told Spalajković, Yugoslav minister in Paris, that his government was ready to come to terms with Yugoslavia even if it concluded an agreement with France, on the understanding that their agreement should have priority, Ninčić received further instructions: "Without urging, try to achieve a trilateral agreement; if this should be impossible, sign with Italy a similar agreement as that to be concluded with France, without the supplement about the co-operation of the general staffs. The question of priority should be discussed with the French government, but priority can go to Italy if it shows good-will. But if it is not true what the Italian ambassador in Paris has said or if the Italians want priority only to win

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 23–27. Aide mémoire about the talks between Ninčić and Berthelot, March 6, 1926.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 21–22. Dard's cable to Briand, March 5, 1926.

time and prevent the Franco-Yugoslav agreement, then immediately sign the treaty with France."⁹⁴

In Geneva, Ninčić discussed the matter with Grandi, deputy secretary general of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with Scialoja, Italy's representative at the League of Nations. On behalf of Mussolini both of them asked Ninčić not to sign an agreement with France during the Council meeting. They told him: they knew that the French were not insisting on the immediate conclusion of the agreement, and emphatically asked him, not to press the matter.⁹⁵ Ninčić at once asked for instructions from his government. Belgrade repeated its earlier instructions, thus leaving open all three alternatives and leaving it to the foreign minister to decide according to the situation.⁹⁶ Ninčić decided on the Franco-Yugoslav agreement because, as he said, he did not trust in the Italian promises. But after a discussion with Chamberlain and Grandi, Briand refused to sign the agreement, although he had promised Ninčić earlier that he would do so. The Yugoslav foreign minister thus found himself in a most awkward position, having no choice, he thought, but to resign. On his way home he stopped in Paris, where he resumed his talks with Berthelot. With his choice, he said, he had put his country – where not everybody was in favour of French orientation – in a difficult and dangerous position. He decided for France, because Briand had assured him that he would sign the agreement in Geneva. Grandi and Scialoja, who considered that the two agreements excluded one another, were told that he, Ninčić, would choose France. Ninčić said that Briand's attitude had created a most difficult situation for both his country and himself. Of course, the gravest consequence was the fact that the negotiations with Italy would have to be resumed, but this time under far more difficult circumstances. The Italian conditions would have to be accepted and the French alliance abandoned – this meant a new orientation in Yugoslav foreign policy. Berthelot promised to inform Briand at once and to bring the prime minister's answer next morning.⁹⁷

The resoluteness of Ninčić proved successful. The next day, on March 19, Briand and Ninčić initiated the agreement, the text of which had changed quite a lot compared with the original Yugoslav draft. "It suits the spirit of the Locarno convention", said Berthelot. It consisted of two parts: a friendship and non-aggression pact and an arbitration convention. The supplement concerned the co-operation of the general staffs.⁹⁸ However, it had nothing like the same importance as the agreement that had been concluded with Czechoslovakia, since it only obliged the two parties to consult on questions of mutual interest and to act

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* ff. 28–29. Dard's cable to Briand, March 9, 1926.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* f. 6. Dard's cable to Briand, March 22, 1926.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* f. 30. Dard's cable to Briand, March 15, 1926.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* f. 33. Aide mémoire about the talks between Ninčić and Berthelot, March 18, 1926.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* f. 80. Berthelot's cable to Dard, April 6, 1926; *ibid.* f. 39. Speech of Ninčić, March 19, 1926.

in concert on the Habsburg question according to the resolutions of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 1920, and November 1921, and to that of the Hungarian government of November 1921.⁹⁹

The initialling was followed by an exchange of letters between Ninčić and Briand. Accordingly, the initialled pact would not be published, but if one of the parties asked within six months for the agreement to be signed, the other one would not refuse.¹⁰⁰ This solution was chosen with regard to Italy and Britain, since the relationship with them could not be strained. During Ninčić's last session of talks in Paris, the Italian ambassador, full of concern, called on Berthelot and asked him about the conclusion of the agreement. Berthelot replied that an agreement had already been reached on every question a few months before, and they were waiting for a suitable time to sign it.¹⁰¹ What he did not say was that his government had decided the same day to initial the agreement. Nevertheless, the Italian and British governments obtained details of the secretly initialled agreement.

The Franco-Romanian talks were also resumed. After some delay an agreement was signed in Paris on June 10, 1926, albeit considerably modified compared with the original draft agreement. Both parties agreed to comply with the League. In the preamble it was emphasized that the agreement respected international obligations as laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations. The first paragraph of the agreement concerned the mutual non-aggression pact, the second the arbitration convention, while paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 specified where the parties would co-operate: (a) if they considered their security or the peace treaties to be threatened; (b) in the event of aggression against one of the parties (the nature of any action would be determined under the Covenant of the League of Nations); (c) in the event of an attempt by any European state to change the status (again, in compliance with the decisions of the League of Nations). A convention and two protocols were annexed to the agreement. The convention concerned the arbitration: one of the protocols referred to the non-aggression obligations of Romania undertaken in 1922 at Geneva with regard to Soviet Russia and based upon the *status quo*, while the other dealt with the consultations of the general staffs in the cases specified by the agreement. This clause did not give France the right to intervene in the national defence of Romania as had been stipulated under the treaty with Czechoslovakia.¹⁰² Discussion of an agreement was resumed only in 1925, when Diamandy – Antonescu's successor – called at

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 41–52. Text of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* f. 62. Speech of Ninčić on the occasion of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement, March 19, 1926; Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Coded cable of Spalajković, Yugoslav minister in Paris, to Ninčić March 9, 1926.

¹⁰¹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. f. 35. Aide mémoire about the talks of Berthelot with the Italian ambassador in Paris, March 19, 1926.

¹⁰² AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 65. f. 75. Memorandum of the French foreign ministry about the Franco-Romanian and the Italo-Romanian agreements, June 10, 1926; *ibid.* September 10, 1926.

the Quai d'Orsay and offered the resumption of talks about a defence and friendship treaty which would oblige the signatories to co-operate if their territorial integrity was threatened. This new proposal already took account of the French standpoint, and yet more than one and a half years elapsed before the agreement was signed. The protocol concerning co-operation between the general staffs remained secret and was never published, nor deposited, along with the agreement itself, at the League of Nations.¹⁰³

In 1924, France had recognized the sovereignty of Romania over Bessarabia, now it actually guaranteed the inviolability of the frontiers. For some considerable time the text of the Franco-Romanian agreement was not published, this at the specific request of the French government, for Paris feared the reaction of the Soviet Union and Italy.

Berthelot informed the French foreign missions of the two agreements and sent them the texts with instructions to keep them "strictly secret until further orders".¹⁰⁴ Although Briand promised to have them published after registration by the League of Nations, he kept postponing publication, despite the insistence of Romania. Antonescu, Romanian minister in Paris, called repeatedly at the Quai d'Orsay, requesting fulfilment of the promise. His government understood very well – he said – why France was unwilling to publish the agreement, but asked for Briand's understanding in return. At the forthcoming conference of the Little Entente the Romanian foreign minister would not be able to conceal the matter.¹⁰⁵ At long last the French government decided, at the beginning of August – at the insistence of Romania amongst others – to publish the agreement. As demanded by the Romanian minister in Paris, Bucharest had been informed 48 hours earlier. On August 13, the Romanian government called a press conference to make known the treaty with all its articles and clauses, except the last one.¹⁰⁶ The event caused considerable international reaction.

French diplomacy took care to explain to the Soviet government that the agreement was not aimed against the Soviet Union and did not guarantee the frontiers of Romania. Most revealing are the discussions between the French ambassador in Moscow, and Chicherin and Litvinov. Asking for utmost discretion, the ambassador told the commissar for foreign affairs and his deputy that there was no reason for concern "because the agreement does not really promise anything to Romania". Although secrecy had been promised,¹⁰⁷ Moscow launched a sharp press campaign against the agreement and sent a protest

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* ff. 162–164. Briand's letter to the French Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff, November 26, 1926.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* f. 18. Berthelot's cable to the French mission in Warsaw, July 4, 1926.

¹⁰⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. ff. 25–40. Clinchant's report to Briand, August 13, 1926.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 65. ff. 73–74. Report of the French minister in Moscow to Briand, September 9, 1926.

note.¹⁰⁸ The treaty was attacked in the German, British and Italian press as well. Articles about a Romanian-Polish-French military bloc provoked, in turn, the protests of Paris.¹⁰⁹

The Italo-Romanian Agreement

Meanwhile, the Italian government was unwilling to regard passively French diplomatic actions in Central and South-Eastern Europe, and to abandon Romania even after the conclusion of the Franco-Romanian agreement. Mussolini harboured resentment against Romania, since there had been substantial improvement in relations between the two countries. Brătianu was defeated as a result of the general election, his successor was General Averescu, well-known for his pro-Italian feelings. However, the new prime minister could not disregard the fact that the Franco-Romanian agreement was ready to be signed, nor the fact, that both the opposition and public opinion supported the latter and not the – anyway not very popular – Italo-Romanian pact; furthermore, he could not ignore the views of his allies within the Little Entente either. Earlier, in 1924, Beneš had thought that the Franco-Romanian and the Franco-Yugoslav agreements were out of time, but now, when Italy was becoming increasingly aggressive, not only against Yugoslavia, but against Czechoslovakia as well, he supported them. As far as the Franco-Romanian agreement was concerned, he only asked that “it should include no term that could provoke the Soviet Union”.¹¹⁰ Averescu’s rise to power provided Mussolini with the opportunity to establish close contacts with Romania, without becoming too opposed to the Soviet Union. The conclusion of an Italo-Romanian agreement was still being hindered by Mussolini’s unwillingness to ratify the convention on Bessarabia; Britain and France had done so. The question had been discussed at length for more than two years and was the reason for the sluggishness of the negotiations which had resumed in February 1926. Averescu’s accession to power was needed to remove the deadlock in the talks, for the new prime minister was ready to conclude an agreement with Italy even before the Bessarabian convention had been initialled. He abandoned the political line represented by Brătianu, whose primary aim was the acknowledgement of Romania within the given frontiers, and the subordination of any international relations to this. Averescu was satisfied with promises, for Mussolini actually promised to have the so-called Bessarabian protocol ratified within a short time.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* ff. 107–109. Berthelot’s circular telegram to the French missions in Europe.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 70–72. Margerie’s cable to Briand, September 6, 1926.

¹¹⁰ AD, Europe 1918–40. T. vol. 45. Memorandum of the French foreign ministry, 1926 (date illegible).

The Italo-Romanian agreement was signed in Rome on September 16, 1926. According to paragraph 1, the two states would co-operate in the maintenance of the international order as laid down in the peace treaties. Paragraph 2 stated that in the event of an international crisis, if the parties agreed that their common interests were, or might be threatened, they would meet to agree on concerted precautionary measures. This formulation implied far more possibilities than paragraph 3 of the Franco-Romanian agreement.¹¹¹ Paragraph 3 is identical with para 4 of the Franco-Romanian agreement, with the significant difference that the former stipulated that the "action" needed for mutual assistance should be executed in the spirit of the Covenant of the League of Nations, within the framework fixed thereby (by virtue of para 16 this could be military assistance as well), whereas the latter committed the signatories to diplomatic and political assistance only. Paragraph 4 dealt with the arbitration convention. The annexed protocol concerned the establishment of a joint commission to study the possibilities of expanding economic relations between the two countries. A further supplement included the exchange of letters between Mussolini and Averescu over Bessarabia; accordingly, the Italian government would ratify the convention of October 28, 1920, when ratification would not adversely affect the overall interests of Italy.¹¹²

The Italo-Romanian agreement concluded for a term of 5 years was formulated far more carefully than the Franco-Romanian pact. It included fewer obligations than the latter, and left Mussolini with several "backdoors" open. Romanian political circles, firstly the opposition, were most dissatisfied with Averescu's "oeuvre". They particularly blamed the Prime Minister for having accepted Mussolini's conditions over Bessarabia. On his return from Rome, Averescu tried to present the agreement as a major achievement, but the indignation only ceased when Mussolini ratified the Bessarabian protocol in March 1927, i.e. when he actually recognized the Romanian-Soviet frontier.¹¹³ Mussolini's policy towards Romania had changed quite considerably. After the conclusion of the agreement, political, economical and military co-operation between the two countries became closer. Italy's Marshal Badoglio visited Bessarabia. In a speech in Kishinev he referred to Italo-Romanian brotherhood in arms during World War One and expressed the hope that in the event of a new war, Italy and Romania would again be in the same camp. The Soviet gov-

¹¹¹ AD. Europe 1918-40. R. vol. 65. f. 75. Text of the Franco-Romanian and the Italo-Romanian agreements.

¹¹² *Ibid.* f. 75; AD. Europe 1918-40. R. vol. 66. ff. 64-67. Text of the Italo-Romanian agreement.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*; AD. Europe 1918-40. R. vol. 66. f. 98. Besnard's report to Briand, October 9, 1926; *ibid.* ff. 80-81. Clinchant's report to Briand, September 23, 1926; *ibid.* f. 87. Briand's cable to the French ambassador in Moscow, September 26, 1926; *ibid.* f. 69. Besnard's cable to Briand, September 17, 1926; *ibid.* f. 85. Besnard's cable to Briand, September 28, 1928; *ibid.* f. 93. Clinchant's cable to Briand, September 21, 1926; *ibid.* ff. 90-91. Clinchant's cable to Briand, September 29, 1926; *ibid.* f. 93. Clinchant's report to Briand, October 9, 1926.

ernment protested against the Italo-Romanian agreement as well as against the Marshal's speech.¹¹⁴

After Badoglio's visit, Italy began to deliver arms and ammunition to Romania.¹¹⁵

Conceptions of a Hungarian-Romanian Personal Union

Averescu's accession to power contributed not only to the conclusion of the Italo-Romanian agreement, but also to the fact that both in Budapest and Bucharest certain circles renewed the idea of normalizing the Romanian-Hungarian relationship. We have already referred to secret negotiations between Averescu – then in opposition – and Bethlen, as well as to those with leaders of the Transylvanian Hungarians and to the agreement, according to which Romanian politicians promised to be tolerant towards the Hungarian minority and to further the normalization of relations between the two countries. All this depended on Averescu's return to power (he expected of course, support in this aim). On becoming prime minister, Averescu did not forget his promise (he was reminded of it by Mussolini and Bethlen as well), but due to his rather unstable position, he was less liberal on the Hungarian question than he had been when he was in opposition. The National Party and the Liberal Party vehemently attacked his policy towards Italy, especially the Italo-Romanian agreement. Averescu, said the opposition, had given up the country's national interests. As it had done several times since the war, the Italian government again urged an agreement with Hungary, suggesting to both parties the normalization of their relations and the conclusion of an arbitration convention. This was anyway in line with Mussolini's Central and South-Eastern European policy at that time. Mussolini appeared after Locarno as an advocate of arbitration conventions. However, neither Brătianu nor Bethlen were enthusiastic about a Hungarian-Romanian arbitral convention – the former for fear of conceding advantage to Hungary, the latter because he saw therein the confirmation of the *status quo*. Averescu was far less opposed to Italian ambitions than his predecessor and regarded the conclusion of an arbitration convention as conceivable. However, he was most careful, because relations between Hungary and Romania were rather strained at that time, due to the so-called "optant" affair. Bethlen, though in general rather unresponsive on the question of an eventual Central and South-Eastern European Locarno, regarded the conclusion of a Hungarian-Romanian arbitration convention as practical,

¹¹⁴ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 66. ff. 116–117. Cable of the French ambassador in Moscow to Briand, December 15, 1926; *ibid.* R. vol. 33. ff. 103–105. Besnard's report to Briand, October 29, 1926; *ibid.* vol. 66. ff. 108–109. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Bucharest to Briand, November 13, 1926; *ibid.* ff. 138–140. Protest note of the Soviet government to Mussolini October 6, 1926; *ibid.* f. 135. Report of the French ambassador in Moscow to Briand, January 28, 1927.

¹¹⁵ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 66. f. 112. Berthelot's cable to Clinchant, November 19, 1926.

hoping to resolve a number of unsettled questions through direct negotiations with the help of Italy as arbiter. But all these ideas came to nothing. Averescu's time in office proved short-lived. A government crisis in spring 1927 led to his dismissal (due also to his Hungarian and Italian policy). Brătianu became prime minister, Titulescu foreign minister. These changes caused a substantial modification in Romanian foreign policy and had a most negative effect on the Hungarian-Romanian relations.

Before describing these changes, let us illustrate the trends towards a Hungarian-Romanian personal union during the government of Averescu.

In summer and autumn 1926, when Averescu favoured the Italian orientation, came to terms with Mussolini and was ready to normalize relations with Hungary as well, some political circles in Hungary revived the idea of a Hungarian-Romanian personal union. Following these events with attention, the French ambassador in Budapest reported in detail to his government: the Hungarians could hardly bear the fact that they had become a small nation, and even their most serious politicians were playing with ideas for a personal union. According to confidential, authentic information – the ambassador wrote – Count Gyula Andrássy, former minister of foreign affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was dreaming about a union with Austria, i.e. the restoration of the dual monarchy under the Archduke Otto. Others would have preferred a personal union with Yugoslavia, still others with Romania. The latter deserved the most attention.¹¹⁶

As already mentioned, some Hungarian politicians, for example Bethlen and Bánffy, had considered this idea in 1919 and 1921, and it was favourably received at the Romanian royal court as well. At the same time, Romanian political circles decidedly rejected such conceptions. Plans of this kind reappeared in summer 1926. The available sources do not prove that politicians such as Bethlen and Bánffy would have really welcomed this solution (the unreality of which they had certainly already realized in 1921). As a matter of fact, the idea of a Hungarian-Romanian personal union reappeared at a time, when relations between Italy and Romania grew closer (in the weeks before the conclusion of the agreement). It cannot be denied that Rome always supported such conceptions. Both diplomatic circles and the Hungarian opposition were far more occupied by the question than earlier, the matter created more sensation than ever. Thus, Briand instructed the French ambassador in Bucharest to report at once any information about it.¹¹⁷ The Hungarian Parliament resounded with discussion on the affair. The immediate reason for these speculations was the fact that Count Bánffy, former foreign minister, returned to Transylvania and applied for Romanian citizenship. Before leaving Hungary, he was received by Regent Horthy, who honoured him with a high decoration. In Bucharest, King Ferdinand gave a reception in his honour (where Bánffy wore the Hungarian decoration). Queen Mary,

¹¹⁶ AD. Europe 1918–40. R. vol. 54. ff. 76–77. Vienne's report to Briand, August 1, 1926.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* f. 94. Briand's letter to the French minister in Bucharest, November 23, 1926.

although ill, was also present and had a long talk with Bánffy. (It was a matter of common knowledge that a Hungarian-Romanian personal union was favoured mainly by the ambitious queen.) However, we were unable to reconstruct the talks between Bánffy and the royal couple, and to find out whether Bánffy's removal to Romania (including his Romanian citizenship) had any political motives and, if so, what was Bethlen's role therein. The French minister in Budapest reported as follows: "It seems probable that Count Bánffy was charged with directing the Hungarian deputies in the Romanian parliament and eventually to prepare the union between Hungary and Romania."¹¹⁸ This supposition is acceptable, its first part may be taken for granted. According to reliable information to the minister, Bánffy sent a report to Budapest: "...to wear the double crown of Hungary and Romania is the ambition of the queen, who has favourably received the idea of a personal union... But the Romanian statesmen have vehemently protested against this plan which, in the opinion, would weaken the monarchy."¹¹⁹ For this reason, Bánffy's report is said to end on a pessimistic note.¹²⁰ The French ambassador in Bucharest also reported the opposition of Romanian political circles who considered the whole matter a moral impossibility. He cites a statement from Take Ionescu who, in 1921, had emphasized the absurdity of the project.¹²¹ Briand now informed French foreign missions in a circular telegram that, according to Yapi, the French ambassador in Bucharest, the Romanian government had categorically rejected the plan: after having achieved national unity, they were unwilling to jeopardize it with such experiments. He approved the comment of the French minister in Budapest: "In this combination of man and horse, Hungary will most certainly be unwilling to play the role of the horse."¹²²

Hungarian political life was also preoccupied with plans and rumours about the personal union. In Parliament, Bethlen was criticized by Nagy, a minister in the Károlyi government (1918), who accused him of using Bánffy as a political instrument. Bethlen rather roughly refuted these statements, but rumours continued to circulate.¹²³

Thus, Bánffy had left Budapest presumably with the consent of and with instructions from Bethlen. It may be supposed that these instructions also concerned the personal union. However, we have no primary sources on this matter, only secondary data which made this hypothesis possible. According to the confidential information, noted above, Bánffy reported after his arrival in Romania that the project had been received favourably by the royal couple, but adversely by the politicians, and so his conclusion was said to have been pessimistic. Re-

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* ff. 76–77. Vienne's report to Briand, August 1, 1926.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* f. 79. Vienne's report to Briand October 4, 1926.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.* ff. 80–81. Clinchant's report to Briand, November 5, 1926.

¹²² *Ibid.* f. 96. Briand's circular telegram to the French missions in Europe, November 25, 1926.

¹²³ *Ibid.* f. 95. Report of the French chargé d'affaires in Budapest to Briand, November 23, 1926.

garded as a fantasy by many, the project was thus finally dropped. After the downfall of Averescu and still more by the appointment of Titulescu as foreign minister, the relationship between the two countries became most inimical. The so-called "optant" affair resulting from the expropriation of Hungarian landed properties in Transylvania had strained relations between the two countries ever since 1923, though at different times to a different degree; now it led to political and diplomatic skirmishes which engaged for many years the attention of the League of Nations.

The Optant Affair

We are not in a position to discuss in detail within the present paper all the international aspects of the so-called optant affair. The vast archival material in our possession will be elaborated in a separate study. At present, we shall limit ourselves to the results of our research in French and Italian archives as well as in the Hoover Institute, elucidating the diplomatic actions of Titulescu, prior to one or other session of the League of Nations in order to obtain the votes needed to settle the affair in favour of Romania. Titulescu's efforts were hampered by the fact that Chamberlain took the side of Hungary, while his attempts to win Chamberlain over failed. Due to the British standpoint, a struggle of several years was needed to prevent the decision of the League Nations in favour of Hungary becoming the "last word". In this struggle, Titulescu was assisted by Briand and, to a certain extent, by Mussolini, though the latter was rather vacillating, since he had to adapt himself to Chamberlain as well. Mussolini's position became more complicated when he reached an agreement with Hungary in 1927-1928. So he started a diplomatic action to have the optant affair settled by direct negotiations between the parties involved and not within the League of Nations. Poland, which was on friendly terms with both countries, acted in the same way. The efforts were successful, not least because in 1928 Titulescu ceased to direct Romanian foreign policy. Negotiations were started between Romania and Hungary, at first in Austria and then in Italy, and ended in a compromise. But relations between the two countries hardly improved, the tension remained and the situation was far from being normalized. A similar development could be observed in the Hungarian-Yugoslav relations: after some attempts, the negotiations proved a failure.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Substantial sources are available in the Quai d'Orsay about the international aspects of the optant affair. AD. Europe 1918-40. R. vols. 45 and 46; in the Archives of the Hoover Institution: Titulescu Collection.

Publication of the Franco-Yugoslav Agreement

Alone against Italian ambitions, Yugoslavia looked for assistance from France. Whilst it had kept delaying the conclusion of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement and the publication of the treaty initialled in March 1926, France now urged that the treaty be signed. As already mentioned, the treaty was supposed to be signed and published, if one of the contracting parties requested it within six months after April 10, 1926. This term was extended by another six months,¹²⁵ because the Quai d'Orsay was unwilling to publish the agreement within the original term. On March 27, 1927, Spalajković reported to his foreign minister: "... the French say that as soon as Yugoslavia settles its dispute with Italy, the agreement will be signed. Or else, this would appear as a demonstration". The French government proposed the term be extended by six months.¹²⁶ This happened on April 4, 1927, according to an exchange of notes between Briand and Spalajković,¹²⁷ dated April 20, 1927.

In a letter of July 28, 1927 to the Yugoslav minister in Paris, prime minister Marinković insisted on the conclusion of the agreement. Yugoslavia's international position went from bad to worse. Attempts to normalize its relations with Hungary and Bulgaria failed. Italy upset its plans. The Italo-Hungarian agreement concluded in April 1927, created a dangerous situation for Yugoslavia; making use of the Macedonian question, Italy hindered the normalization of Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations as well. Contacts with Albania were practically cut off, incidents provoked and directed by Mussolini took place between the two countries.

In the above mentioned letter, Marinković referred to these problems. "Paris must understand – he went on – that the real struggle is not going on between Italy and Yugoslavia, but between Italy and France; Yugoslavia is an advanced bastion of France... In Rome it is believed that the best way to liquidate or to weaken the European system of France is to attack Yugoslavia." He reminded the French government that it had to protect Yugoslavia in its own interests, because if Yugoslavia was forced to capitulate to Italy, the European *status quo* would be upset. An Italo-Yugoslav bloc, with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria joining it, would destroy the Little Entente. In his opinion, such a development would be against the vital interests of Yugoslavia. Any peace and security obtained in this way would be temporary, because the balance of power after a war would be catastrophic. Thus, Rome believed that if Yugoslavia was isolated and faced with a hopeless situation, it could be forced into diplomatic capitulation. So it tried to alienate Yugoslavia from France by means of its friendship policy. Italy had revealed its trumps with the Tirana Treaty. However, not everybody had confidence therein – neither Hungary nor Bulgaria had fully joined the action.

¹²⁵ Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Cable of Spalajković to the foreign ministry, March 28, 1927.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Perhaps Romania was the only one to do so, but did not fulfil Italian expectations either: it was unwilling to provoke tension and to paralyse Yugoslav diplomacy by putting pressure on the country.

After having outlined these gloomy aspects, Marinković appealed to France to deliver Yugoslavia from Italian pressure. The only way, he wrote, was to conclude a defensive pact that would be published in Geneva, for such an alliance would put an end to Italian speculation, based upon the hypothesis that Yugoslavia would remain isolated if it were attacked. These speculations, he added, could plunge both France and Yugoslavia into war. Finally, he instructed the Yugoslav minister to find a way to have the agreement signed at once in Paris.¹²⁸

We have seen that the Yugoslav government had tried in 1924 to avoid an agreement which – after the downfall of Poincaré – even the French did not regard as advisable. In short, neither country was interested in signing the agreement. From spring 1926 on, however, the Belgrade government insisted on the formal conclusion of the agreement, but Paris reacted evasively: initialled in March 1926, the agreement was first prolonged in September 1926 (dated October 10), and for the second time in March 1927 (dated April 20), each time for six months.¹²⁹ As already mentioned, the two parties agreed that if one of them requested the initialled agreement be signed, the other would agree to the request. This was the case in May 1927, when the Belgrade government asked that the treaty be signed.¹³⁰ However, Paris disagreed, because – said Berthelot – this would be an unnecessary demonstration, undesirable for both Yugoslavia and France.¹³¹ The Yugoslav government did not resign itself to the refusal and kept insisting on the conclusion of the pact. Said Ninčić: “Italy wants to alienate Yugoslavia from France. But it would stop any such effort, if we were married in public.”¹³²

On July 25, 1927, Spalajković again called at the Quai d’Orsay and insisted on the conclusion of the agreement. Berthelot again repeated the French standpoint. Briand and Poincaré were certainly of the opinion, he said, that the conclusion of the agreement and its deposition in Geneva would create a most negative impression among European governments, in the “dead season” of diplomacy and would damage the favourable impression governments had of Yugoslavia. By provoking further incidents. Italy would merely discredit itself, its intrigues in Sofia, Athens and Bucharest having turned out to be a failure. Due to Great

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Letter of Marinković to the Yugoslav minister in Paris, July 18, 1927.

¹²⁹ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 70. ff. 101–103. Dard’s report to Briand, March 14, 1928; *ibid.* ff. 104–105. Briand’s cable to the French minister in Belgrade, March 26, 1927; *ibid.* f. 110. Memorandum of Spalajković to Briand, April 4, 1927.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* ff. 115–119. Dard’s cable to Briand, May 18, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 122–123. Cable of the French chargé d’affaires in Belgrade to Briand, May 27, 1927.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* f. 121. Berthelot’s cable to Dard, May 21, 1927.

¹³² *Ibid.* ff. 125–126. Dard’s report to Briand, June 27, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 124–132. Dard’s cable to Briand, June 29, 1927.

Britain, Italy could win only in Albania. Finally, he assured the Yugoslav minister that "France regards Yugoslavia as the main military force in Europe and would protect it, irrespective of whether the agreement had been signed or not".¹³³

The next day, Spalajković had discussions with Briand, who fully agreed with Berthelot, saying that "in the present international situation no military alliance can be concluded in public". Mussolini's position, he said, was very bad indeed. Though further incidents could be expected, they would result in the whole League of Nations turning against Italy. "If France and Yugoslavia signed the treaty immediately – said Briand – Mussolini would be offered the pretext to act. He will say that the agreement is aimed against Italy. The unpublished Franco-Yugoslav agreement is no secret."¹³⁴ However, if Marinković still insisted on publishing it, Briand was ready to announce this at the cabinet meeting of August 6. The French government thus seemed to be unwilling to undertake anything beyond the already initialled and meaningless agreement.

Nevertheless, Belgrade was not convinced by the French arguments. It insisted more and more on the conclusion of an agreement including military questions as well. On July 29, Marinković cabled to the Yugoslav minister that he would leave at once for Paris to discuss the agreement. The matter was in his opinion too serious to be delayed for electoral reasons. He denied absolutely rumours that Yugoslavia had delayed publication of the agreement because of the elections. He was ready to make every effort to conclude the matter before the Geneva session.¹³⁵

But the French government remained inflexible. So Marinković had no other choice but to accept. He therefore agreed to sign the agreement before the end of the second term, i.e. in October.¹³⁶

On August 6, Briand announced to the cabinet the Yugoslav demand and that the agreement would be concluded in October.

Initialled in March 1926, and twice prolonged, the Franco-Yugoslav agreement¹³⁷ was signed by Briand and Marinković in Paris on November 11, 1927. The event – as expected – created a huge international reaction. The Italian government regarded the treaty as being aimed against Italy and started political and diplomatic action against France and Yugoslavia. Mass demonstrations were organized all over the country against the signatories, the press was free to pub-

¹³³ Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Cable of Spalajković, Yugoslav minister in Paris, to Marinković, July 26, 1927.

¹³⁴ Berthelot also referred to this when telling Spalajković that the existence of the initialled agreement was known to the British and the Italians as well. Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Cable of Spalajković to Marinković, July 26, 1927.

¹³⁵ Regent Paul Nachlass... Box 110. Cable of Marinković to Spalajković, July 29, 1927.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* Cable of Spalajković to Marinković, August 2, 1927; *ibid.* Cable of Spalajković to Marinković, August 2, 1927.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* Cable of Spalajković to Marinković, August 6, 1927; *ibid.* Cable of Spalajković to Marinković, August 2, 1927.

lish any slander, and protests were lodged with Paris and Belgrade against the "anti-Italian" pact. Mussolini tried to persuade Stresemann and Chamberlain to criticize the agreement. He informed Stresemann that the treaty was aimed against Germany as well, since the signatories had agreed to prevent the Anschluss. He offered both London and Berlin co-operation against French ambitions.¹³⁸ Though unwilling to receive Marinković after the conclusion of the agreement, Chamberlain assumed a more moderate attitude. This could be seen in the style of the British press as well, which was less aggressive after a while. In spite of the protests of the French government, both the British and – especially – the German press published articles denouncing the French policy in Central and South-Eastern Europe. It was not helpful either that the text of the agreement was sent at once to the states involved, including Hungary. All over Europe – first of all in Italy and Hungary – it was said that the agreement was aimed against Hungary too.¹³⁹

The Franco-Yugoslav agreement had a double effect on the events in Central and South-Eastern Europe. On the one hand, it consolidated the *status quo*, the position of the Little Entente, while on the other hand it promoted the co-operation of the opposing forces, which increasingly engaged themselves in pressing actively for the revision of the post-war settlement.

Reorganization of the Little Entente

In the last years of the twenties, the Little Entente found itself in a most difficult situation. Italy intensified its attacks against two of its members – Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. It did not renew the agreements concluded in 1924, which expired in 1927 and 1928, respectively. At the end of the twenties the co-operation between Hungary and Italy became still stronger. In April 1928, the Hungarian prime minister, Bethlen again went to Rome, where he had long discussions with Italian statesmen. Mussolini explicitly advocated the revision of the peace treaties, especially that of Trianon, and promised Hungary his assistance.

¹³⁸ AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 71. ff. 13–32. Text of the Franco-Yugoslav agreement, November 11, 1927.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* ff. 6–8. Besnard's cable to Briand, November 11, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 42–43. Margerie's cable to Briand, November 12, 1927; *ibid.* f. 44. Fleuriau's cable to Briand, November 12, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 45–47. Besnard's cable to Briand, November 12, 1927; *ibid.* f. 56. Rivière's cable to Briand, November 13, 1927; *ibid.* Fleuriau's cable to Briand, November 12, 1927, and its supplement, an article in *The Times*; *ibid.* f. 87. Gauquie's report to Briand, November 14, 1927; *ibid.* f. 104. Roger's report to Briand, November 16, 1927; *ibid.* f. 105. Cambon's cable to Briand, November 16, 1927. In the given situation Paris deemed it advisable to publish the agreement as soon as possible (according to Berthelot, the failure to do so produced the sharp press attacks). In Belgrade the proposal was approved. So the Franco-Yugoslav agreement was published in November 1927, and ratified in December. AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 77. f. 93. i. Berthelot's cable to i. Dard, November 15, 1927; *ibid.* f. 101. Dard's cable to Briand, November 17, 1927.

It was an open secret that Italy was supplying Hungary with arms, in spite of various diplomatic protests. The consolidation of Italo-Hungarian relations manifested itself in the intensification of Hungarian revisionist propaganda.¹⁴⁰ In his public speeches, Bethlen advocated the revision of frontiers. The Budapest embassies of the member states of the Little Entente lodged protests with the Hungarian government.¹⁴¹ Bethlen and foreign minister Walko rejected these protests, saying that their position had never been concealed. This was welcomed all over Europe, first of all in Britain, by all those who demanded the revision of the Trianon Treaty which they regarded as the most unjust peace treaty of the Versailles system.

At the end of the twenties, a considerable rapprochement could be observed between Poland and Italy as well as between Italy and Hungary. The almost simultaneous visits of the three foreign ministers, Grandi, Zaleski and Walko to Budapest, Warsaw and Rome started much guessing. In diplomatic circles it was said that a Polish-Hungarian-Italian bloc was being planned.¹⁴²

Great Britain continued to support Italy, although a certain alienation could be observed between the two countries, London being at the end of the twenties of a different opinion on several questions. France wished to strengthen its relations with Britain and tried to develop a Franco-Italian *modus vivendi*. It was feared that this would be to the disadvantage of the Little Entente.

Strengthened in its international position, Germany also intensified its foreign policy towards the East. Whereas in the mid-twenties Stresemann had concentrated his efforts on the consolidation of Germany's economic position in the region, he now began to insist on political questions as well. He demanded for the German minorities the rights as set out in the agreement, as well as an extension of the agreement itself. Hungary joined the German action. On April 15, 1929 it presented a memorandum to the secretariat of the League of Nations on behalf of the Hungarian minority.¹⁴³ Although both the Little Entente and Poland vigorously protested against these claims, the secretariat of the League of Nations decided on July 13, 1929 after a long discussion to change the position of the minorities. Neither Germany nor Hungary were satisfied with the new measures, since no sanctions were proposed to secure their realization. There was actually no change in the oppression of the minorities, but the mere fact that the losers of yesterday could voice such claims – a sign of altered power relationships – as well as the readiness of the League of Nations to discuss and to adopt their demands – although not in accordance with the desires of Berlin and Bu-

¹⁴⁰ On January 14, 1929, the Upper House passed a resolution, according to which the Hungarian foreign minister would submit the question of a revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty to the League of Nations.

¹⁴¹ Cf. V. Vinaver: *op. cit.* pp. 387–390.

¹⁴² However, the harmonious co-operation of the three states continued to be hindered by Romania, which neither Italy nor Poland was ready to abandon.

¹⁴³ R. Machray: *op. cit.* pp. 350–352.

dapest – caused considerable unease in every member state of the Little Entente.

Beneš made use of this situation to realize his long-cherished plan of reorganizing the Little Entente. He wished to consolidate the position of the alliance, to restrain Hungarian revisionist ambitions and to counterbalance German and Italian penetration in Central Europe. He was especially alarmed by Stresemann's political activity in Central and South-Eastern Europe. According to information, he received from his ambassadors in Belgrade and Bucharest as well as from the French government, the German chancellor was trying to establish closer co-operation with Yugoslavia and Romania. (So far, German contact with both states had been very loose.) Stresemann achieved the most substantial results with Yugoslavia. The explanation given by the Belgrade government – only the establishment of economic relations was desired – did not reassure either Prague or Paris.¹⁴⁴ Thus, after obtaining the support of Briand, Beneš again put on the agenda his reorganization project, that had already proved a failure in 1928. At the Belgrade conference of the Little Entente in May 1929, he again presented his ideas which were at first received by the allies with reservation; however, after persistent argument, he managed to have them accepted – though not entirely – by his Yugoslav and Romanian colleagues.¹⁴⁵ Thus reforms could be carried out which would demonstrate the closeness of the alliance, and consolidate the bloc. The expiry dates of the basic treaties which had been concluded at different times and for different terms were synchronized and the treaties prolonged for five years. The treaties remained automatically valid after this term, if the parties had not declared their dissolution a year earlier.¹⁴⁶ A common protocol was signed, according to which the alliance which had so far been bilateral would become trilateral.¹⁴⁷ A decision was taken on closer military co-operation between the three states: the general staffs were to meet regularly every year to elaborate military plans for self-defence and a possible preventive

¹⁴⁴ For the Yugoslav-German rapprochement cf. AD. Europe 1918–40. Y. vol. 55. ff. 18–20. Report of the French consul in Zagreb to Briand, April 26, 1927; *ibid.* f. 22. Margerie's report to Briand, April 28, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 26–27. Dard's report to Briand, April 30, 1927; *ibid.* f. 35. Margerie's report to Briand, May 4, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 39–41. Report of Charles Roux to Briand, May 8, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 42–43. Cable of Charles Roux to Briand, May 10, 1927; *ibid.* f. 65. Briand's letter to Charles Roux, May 20, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 151–153. Cable of the French foreign ministry to the French ambassadors in London, Berlin, and Rome, August 19, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 209. Report of Dard, French minister in Belgrade, to Briand, November 17, 1927; *ibid.* ff. 210–226. Dard's report to Briand, November 19, 1927; *ibid.* vol. 70. ff. 111–114. Dard's report to Briand, May 2, 1927. According to the minister, the rapprochement between Germany and Yugoslavia had a political reason, too, i.e. the fact that Yugoslavia did not fear the Anschluss.

¹⁴⁵ E. Campus: *Mica Intelegere* (Little Entente). Bukarest, 1968, p. 89.

¹⁴⁶ M. Vanku: *Mala Antanta 1920–1938* (Little Entente 1920–1938). Beograd, 1969, pp. 349–461; Felix John Vondracek: *The Foreign Policy of Czechoslovakia 1918–1935*. New York, 1937, pp. 295–296.

¹⁴⁷ M. Vanku: *op. cit.* pp. 349–361.

(aggressive) war against Hungary, taking into account every possibility.¹⁴⁸ A common policy on the question of the minorities was also agreed. Accordingly, any claims or decisions aimed at extending the obligations of the Entente towards the minorities would be rejected collectively.¹⁴⁹ A wide-ranging programme was worked out to surmount difficulties in economic co-operation.¹⁵⁰ Finally, the three states concluded a collective security agreement which declared, in the spirit of the Kellogg pact, that disputes between them would be settled by peaceful means.¹⁵¹

With these measures the first period of the Little Entente's history came to an end. At its inception the Little Entente was characterized by separate bilateral agreements; in 1929 the alliance assumed a new organizational form: in addition to the bilateral agreements an integrating "tripartite" agreement was signed.

However, these measures neither consolidated nor unified the Little Entente. The differences within the bloc could not be eliminated, in fact, the political and economic changes of the following years actually increased them. The establishment of a royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia (January 1929), complicated the policy of the alliance still more, aggravating the existing antagonism between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Yugoslav monarchy. The swing to the right in Romania and the stabilization of the squirearchy in the summer of 1930, after the return of King Charles, had the same result. Both the Yugoslav and Romanian governments presented themselves as unswerving supporters of the Little Entente, but the first stormy events of the thirties quickly proved that they were far from being so. Each state represented its real or imagined interests, even against those of the alliance. The economic projects and programmes remained a dead letter, the "economic Little Entente", although much talked of, could not be realized in practice.

After eighteen years of existence, the bloc disintegrated in 1938: when events put to the test the unity and solidarity of its members, which had been emphasized for almost two decades.

¹⁴⁸ For the different military projects of the Little Entente cf. *Die militärischen Vereinbarungen der kleinen Entente. 1929-1937*. (Compiled by Rudolf Kiszling, München, n.d. Separatum.)

¹⁴⁹ In international forums the members of the Little Entente advocated a common standpoint on the minority question.

¹⁵⁰ As shown by the subsequent years, the economic co-operation of the member states of the Little Entente continued to meet with considerable difficulties.

¹⁵¹ Vondracek: *op. cit.* pp. 295-296; M. Vanku: *op. cit.* pp. 349-361.

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List of Abbreviations

ACS. = Archiv Centrale dello State.

AD. = Archives Diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Série Europe 1918–1940.

H. = Hongrie,

R. = Roumanie,

T. = Tchécoslovaquie,

Y. = Yougoslavie.

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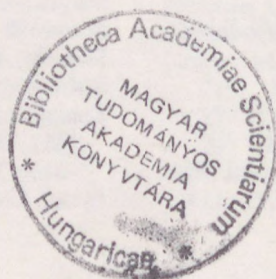
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Witnessing the dissolution of the former Soviet Bloc, one wonders what sort of new blocs might come into being. History has already seen various formations in this territory. How new groups of countries with similar interests will develop is an open question.

In the first half of this century, there existed in Central Europe a political and military bloc called the Little Entente. It was directed against Hungary. Hopefully no such formation will again emerge.

National minority and other political problems, however, make it necessary to learn more about this one-time bloc: the real reasons behind its establishment and the games of high politics.

Magda Ádám, a well-known expert in the history of Central Europe, has found reliable historical sources relating to the Little Entente that have not been published so far. On the basis of these, she has drawn several conclusions which contradict views widely held by both the public and experts of the field. Based on fundamental research into archival sources, some of these conclusions are really surprising.

The reader gets a good picture of Central Europe in the Post-World War I period, and on this basis can better understand the events happening in the area nowadays.



Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest

Magda Ádám • The Little Fintec and Europe (1920–1929)

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