

Hungarian Attempts at the Annexation of Slovakia in 1938¹ (Part II)

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After the Munich pact

The Munich conference took place with the participation of the representatives of England, France, Germany and Italy on 29–30 September 1938. The Hungarian diplomacy tried to make a last effort to have an influence on the Slovak leaders, and therefore Kánya sent the following message to them through the Hungarian consul in Bratislava on 29 September 1938: "They should not ask for autonomy any more but demand the realisation of self-determination with all their power, and we shall support them in it. If they do not take our advice, they could blame only themselves."² The confidence of the Hungarian leadership was shaken by the fact that the Slovaks showed more and more willingness to turn towards the Germans instead of the Hungarians.

As a consequence of the Munich talks, the western powers approved the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany. Czechoslovakia did not undertake the military defence of the country; without the help of the great powers, it could not seriously think of resisting the German army, and therefore they had to sign the agreement. Ceding the Sudetenland had a catastrophic effect in economic and strategic terms. The Munich Pact sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia. Also Slovakia lost a few settlements: Petržalka,³ a suburb of Bratislava, and Devín⁴ (an area of 43 square kilometres with a population of 15,566)⁵ were annexed by Germany. Fear spread in Bratislava in the wake of these events. People were uncertain about the future of the city; they were afraid that also they could get to Germany.⁶ Their fear proved ill-grounded but it was a warning to the Hungarian government that the Germans might bring claims for Hungarian territories as well in the future.

The Munich Pact mentioned the Polish and Hungarian demands only in its supplement. The two countries had to initiate bilateral talks with the Czechoslovak government, and if

1 It is a novelty in my work that author used hitherto unknown Slovak and Czech sources, which provided a new approach to the events.

2 DIMK, II, 681 (doc. no. 424).

3 In Hungarian known as Pozsonyligetfalú.

4 In Hungarian known as Dévény.

5 Ferdinand ĎURČANSKÝ, Biela kniha. I., Trenčín 1991, 55.

6 Attila SIMON, A várakozás hetei. A szlovákiai magyarok az első bécsi döntés előtt, in: Limes, 20, 2007, 2, 13.

they did not bring success, the case would be brought before the great powers again. It can be read in a memoir⁷ that the head of the cabinet office of the Foreign Minister, István Csáky had travelled to Munich in secret. He wanted to meet with the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano di Cortellazzo, but he could not get to the place where he was staying. Finally he spoke with him in the conference building and asked him that Italy, as a friend of Hungary, should at least support the mentioning of the Hungarian territorial claims in the closing communiqué.⁸ Thanks to the mediation of Ciano, this came true. Hitler did not have an interest in forcing the realisation of the Hungarian claims as he could be made to give concessions to the western powers in return.

After signing the Munich Pact, the creation of an independent Slovak state seemed to be realistic and close. The main supporter of the idea was Germany. For Hitler, the destabilisation of the Czechoslovak domestic affairs could provide a pretext for his real goal: the total destruction of Czechoslovakia.⁹ The Slovak political elite shared the opinion that although the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic on 14 November 1918 saved the Slovaks from Magyar assimilation and protected them from Magyar irredentism, the Slovaks immediately had to face Czech centralisation. Therefore these politicians came to support the idea of independent Slovakia.

The Hungarian government delivered a memorandum to Czechoslovakia on 1 October 1938, in which they urged the beginning of bilateral talks.¹⁰ The Poles did the same and they got a territory of 221 square kilometres from Czechoslovakia on 2 October 1938.¹¹ On 5 October, President Edvard Beneš resigned and went to exile.

At his talks with János Esterházy on 4 October 1938, Tiso mentioned that the Hungarian government attempted to get the Slovak People's Party to form a union with Hungary.¹² Tiso needed to get information, so he sent messengers to political leaders in the neighbouring countries. He wanted to see the possibilities for his country, and therefore he sent Ján Farkaš as his personal envoy first to Warsaw and from there to Budapest.¹³ The purpose of his trip, among other things, was to see how the two governments would respond to the declaration of independence of Slovakia.¹⁴

7 ÚJPÉTERY, 69–70.

8 Ibidem.

9 Germany had already completed its plans for the acquisition of Czechoslovakia as a vassal state or a protectorate by that time. For this, they needed the "Slovak card" in: 1938–1939. See: František LUKEŠ, *Podivný mír*, Praha 1968, 145.

10 On the diplomatic antecedents of the Vienna Award see: Gergely SALLAI, *Az első bécsi döntés*, Budapest 2002, 55–104.

11 Ladislav DEÁK, *Hra o Slovensko. Slovensko v politike Maďarska a Poľska v rokoch 1933–1939*, Bratislava 1991, 201, 212.

12 ČARNOGURSKÝ, 6 október 1938, 105.

13 The letter of Ján Farkaš to Alexander Mach, Archiv Ministerstva vnitra, Praha (The Archives of the Ministry of the Interior, Prague; hereinafter referred only as AMV), box 3, doc. no. H-542/7. Some parts of the letter is published in: Jan RYCHLÍK, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, Bratislava 1997, 330–332. The credibility of the document becomes doubtful because Jan Farkaš wrote the letter to the head of propaganda in the Slovak People's Party, later Minister of the Interior, Alexander Mach in 1968, 30 years after the event. Farkaš tells that he met with Tiso on his way back and he talked to him about his negotiations.

14 Eva IRMANOVÁ, *Maďarsko a Versailleský mírový systém*, Ústí nad Labem 2002, 293.

During his negotiations in Poland, Farkaš saw that the Poles would support only the interests of the Hungarians in the question of Slovakia.¹⁵ He flew to Budapest with Polish help on 4 October 1938. He was received by the constant deputy of the Foreign Minister, Gábor Apor, and accommodated in Hotel Gellért. Farkaš said to Apor that he would like to be received by Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya the following day as he was to send a report of his talks to Jozef Tiso by the morning of 6 October. Farkaš also asked for help to get to Vienna after his talks with the Foreign Minister as he had neither passport nor visa in order to keep his travel in secret. On 4 October, Farkaš dined with Apor and State Secretary Tibor Pataky, who led the minority department in the Foreign Ministry. The two Hungarian officials tried to find out the purpose of Farkaš' trip and the Slovak plans for the future. He would not tell them anything; he only wanted to speak to the Foreign Minister. The meeting took place in the morning hours on 5 October with the participation of Kánya, Pál Teleki, János Esterházy and the Hungarian ambassador to Berlin, Döme Sztójay. Farkaš presented his credentials that he had received from Tiso. Kánya only asked him "What have you brought for us?" Farkaš told him that in the case of the collapse of Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks would take their fate in their hands.¹⁶ The participants started to laugh at this, and then they asked what grand decisions he had in mind. Farkaš explained to them that should Czechoslovakia fall apart, the Slovaks wanted to become independent and they asked the neighbouring countries to be understanding. Pataky replied to these words by drawing Farkaš' attention to the thousand years' coexistence of Slovaks and Hungarians and to the advantages of the state of St Stephen. He also referred to the negotiations of Milan Hodža in 1918, when the Hungarian government made its offer to the Slovaks. Pataky pointed out that the territory from Nitra¹⁷ to Komárno,¹⁸ the Žitný ostrov,¹⁹ Levice²⁰ and Košice²¹ and its vicinity were all Hungarian-populated areas. What is more, Bratislava had a large Hungarian population and there are many more scattered all over Slovakia. Therefore, Pataky thought, it would be advantageous for the Slovaks as well to return under the protective wings of the crown of St Stephen. If that could come true, a strong state would be created along the Danube, which could count on the support of the western powers and could weaken the German pressure, which, in his views, posed a threat on the region. Pataky told Farkaš that the Hungarians would grant the widest autonomy to the areas with purely Slovak population or Slovak majority. Bratislava would enjoy specific legal status with regards to its German and Hungarian majority.

Farkaš explained to Pataky that he was familiar with the autonomy proposal created by the government of Mihály Károlyi in 1918 but he thought that the situation had changed since.

15 The visit of Ján Farkaš in Poland and Budapest is confirmed in Hoensch, 113.

16 The letter of Ján Farkaš to Alexander Mach. AMV, box 3, doc. no. H-542/7. The exact words of the text are these: "Your Excellency, I have brought nothing, but I would like to take home the benevolent understanding of the Hungarian government to the historic decisions of my Slovak nation in the case of the collapse of Czechoslovakia."

17 In Hungarian known as Nyitra.

18 In Hungarian known as Révkomárom.

19 In Hungarian known as Csallóköz.

20 In Hungarian known as Léva.

21 In Hungarian known as Kassa.

He stressed that even the views of the Hungarians in Slovakia had changed because they had got used to democracy in Czechoslovakia. He considered the renewal of historical Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy a "mirage dream".²² Pál Teleki also got involved in the talks; he acknowledged, in connection with Košice, that although the vicinity of the city has a Slovak majority, the city itself was regarded as a 'kuruc city', where Prince Ferenc Rákóczi was buried, and therefore it had a symbolic prestige for the Hungarians to get it back. Farkaš responded that they would be willing to carry Rákóczi's remains, with all pomp, to Mukačevo²³ or even to Sátoraljaújhely.²⁴ He maliciously remarked that they would undertake moving the remains despite the well-known historical fact that Rákóczi's soldiers were mostly Slovaks and Ruthenians.

Sztójay mentioned that, as far as he knew the plans of the German diplomacy with Slovakia, they did not get along with the ideas of Farkaš and the Slovak leaders. Farkaš replied that, in his view, the Germans were not especially interested in strengthening Hungary. A nearly two-hour debate followed, then Kánya closed the meeting by declaring that the Slovaks could expect the help of the Hungarian government but he did not determine the form and the circumstances. Nevertheless, he warned Farkaš that all the steps and decisions of the Hungarians must originate from the notion of the thousand-year Hungarian history and they would keep themselves to it.²⁵ Kánya let him know, in a diplomatic way, that they expect a part or the whole of Slovakia to reunite with Hungary. This meant for Farkaš that the Hungarian leadership regarded Slovakia as the northern part of St Stephen's Hungary, and that they did not support the ideas of Slovak independence. Farkaš also mentioned in his report that János Esterházy had not said a word during the talks. He knew it from Esterházy, though, that the latter would travel to Žilina the following day, that is, 6 October, and therefore he asked him to take a letter for Jozef Tiso. Farkaš wrote to Tiso: the Poles like us only because of the Hungarians and because they want some Slovak settlements along the border. The Hungarians want to see us under the protection of St Stephen's crown, and therefore "long live the independent Slovakia".²⁶ Farkaš closed his letter by saying that he would report to Tiso by person when he returned from Vienna.²⁷ Farkaš' meetings could be regarded as attempts to collect information, as well as to let the Poles and the Hungarians know about the Slovak attempts for independence.

The Slovak parties, organised by the Slovak People's Party,²⁸ declared the autonomy of Slovakia in Žilina on 5–6 October 1938, which was sanctioned by the Prague government. On 9 October, a separate government was formed in the Carpathian region within the Czecho-Slovak state. On 6 October, the so-called Žilina agreement was drafted, which guaranteed the autonomy of Slovakia. This was considered the conclusion of the twenty-

22 The letter of Ján Farkaš to Alexander Mach. AMV, box 3, doc. no. H-542/7.

23 In Hungarian known as Munkács. Today Мукачеве.

24 Farkaš mentioned Sátoraljaújhely because he thought, mistakenly, that Ferenc Rákóczi was born there.

25 The letter of Ján Farkaš to Alexander Mach. AMV, box 3, doc. no. H-542/7.

26 Ibidem.

27 No sources have been found so far about the talks of Farkaš later in Vienna.

28 After the death of Andrej Hlinka on 16 August 1938, Jozef Tiso became his successor and the President of the Slovak People's Party.

-year struggle for the acknowledgement of the Pittsburgh agreement of 1918.²⁹ The five-member Slovak regional government was part of the central government. The name of the state was changed as well to Czecho-Slovak Republic. Only foreign, defence and financial affairs remained common affairs with Prague.

This was the time when the Germans had worked out their plans with Slovakia. The head of the political department of the German Foreign Ministry, Ernst Woermann outlined the possibilities for Slovakia in a report for Hitler on 7 October 1938.³⁰ According to this report, there were four theoretical options for Slovakia: 1. independent Slovakia, 2. autonomous Slovakia in a Czechoslovak federation, 3. autonomous Slovakia annexed by Hungary, 4. autonomous Slovakia annexed by Poland. Woermann emphasised in connection with the first option that it would be very favourable for Germany because it would be economically dependent on them while remaining a weak state. He also mentioned it as an advantage that Slovakia could serve as a basis for their advance to the east.

He also found the second solution acceptable because Czechoslovakia would be under German influence; the advantage of it would lie in the fact, according to the report, that, in the long run, it would leave the way open to the first solution. The third solution would be important for Hungary but it is not in the interest of Germany and also the Slovaks would reject it. The unification of Slovakia and Poland was, in his view, not a serious idea.³¹

Hitler changed his views about the settlement of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak question after Munich. He decided to support the Žilina resolutions and he did not want Bratislava.³² Hitler had realised by that time if Slovakia became independent and later got under German influence.

Tiso's policy became increasingly determined; he was trying to get allies for the idea of Slovakian independence. The Slovak leaders now held talks also with Hitler, who offered apparently more favourable conditions than the Hungarians or the Czechs. Tiso, as President of the Slovak autonomous government formed on 6 October, got into contact with the leader of the Slovakian German Party, Franz Karmasin as early as 7 October, with the mediation of Alexander Mach, a member of the radical and pro-German wing of the Slovak People's Party. Tiso thought that he could effectively withstand the Hungarian revision attempts with German help, and therefore, in return for building connections with the German Empire, he promised autonomy to the German population in Slovakia. He also offered them the option to freely join the National Socialist movement.

From early October 1938, the Hungarians in Slovakia were on tenterhooks.³³ It became clear for the Hungarian leaders that the system of Versailles had collapsed with the Munich

29 The Pittsburgh agreement: the leaders of Slovak and Czech organisations in the USA signed a common agreement with the President of the Czechoslovak National Council, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in Pittsburgh on 30 May 1918. The signatories of the so-called Pittsburgh Declaration laid it down that they agreed with the programme and state conception of the Czechoslovak National Council about the establishment of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks. The agreement said that this state would be a republic, which would grant Slovakia extended autonomy and the use of the Slovak language. The Czechs did not keep the agreement later, or they interpreted it in a different way than the Slovaks.

30 ADAP, D, Vol. IV, doc. no. 45–47.

31 Ibidem.

32 ADAP, D, Vol. IV, 46, doc. no. 47–48.

33 About the events in Slovakia see: SIMON, A várakozás hetei, 5–20.

Pact. It was obvious that Czechoslovakia could not expect any help from the great powers. The Hungarian government sent a five-point petition about the conditions of creating friendly relations to Prague on 3 October 1938. Their demands were as follows: "1. The Hungarian political prisoners must be released immediately. 2. Hungarian soldiers must be dismissed and sent home immediately. 3. Local militia should be set up under mixed-nationality leadership for the protection of life and property."³⁴ Furthermore, they demanded the immediate ceding of two or three towns along the border, to symbolise ceding territories. They also wanted to initiate bilateral talks in Komárno. The talks were strongly hindered, on the part of the Czecho-Slovak side, by the chaos that developed in the wake of the evacuation of the territories to be ceded to Germany or annexed by Poland. The Prague government gave way to the demands of the newly autonomous Slovakia, and decided to let the new Slovak government continue the talks with Hungary.

The Czecho-Slovak-Hungarian negotiations began in Komárno³⁵ on 9 October 1938. The Hungarian delegation arrived on board the *Zsófia*, where they were also accommodated, while the Czecho-Slovak delegation was staying in a local hotel. The two parties were led by Kálmán Kánya, Pál Teleki and Jozef Tiso, Prime Minister of the autonomous Slovak government respectively.

The Hungarian government first wanted to put pressure on Tiso through the Vatican. The Hungarian ambassador to the Vatican, György Barcza suggested that his government should present the following points to the representative of the Vatican, who, in turn could then put pressure on Tiso: "The new Czechoslovakia, it seems, will get under strong German influence. Therefore it would be in the interest of the Vatican that Hungary, that is, the Hungarian dioceses, where the Church enjoys high esteem and its interests are guaranteed, annexed as large territory as possible. The opposite can be expected in the new Czechoslovakia, with its widespread German and atheist ideologies."³⁶ The Vatican listened to the Hungarian proposal but remained neutral in the question.

At the negotiations in Komárno, Hungary wanted to get back the territories with Hungarian majority: 14,153 square kilometres with 1,091,000 inhabitants, out of which 849,000 (78%) were Hungarians. To support their claims, they presented statistics and maps about the nationalities in Slovakia from 1880 (the first registration of nationalities) to the census of 1930. The Slovak delegation first offered autonomy but it was promptly rejected by the Hungarians. The Slovaks, however, did not accept the data of the 1910 census. Tiso argued that he knew it from personal experience that in the Austro-Hungarian era, many Slovaks, who were temporarily staying away from their nation, reported themselves as Hungarians, and therefore the 1910 statistics did not show the real ethnic situation. Besides, the Slovaks argued with economic and strategic reasons. They pointed out that "an industrial area was under construction in the Nitra region and it required access to the Danube".³⁷ In Tiso's view, the Slovak-Hungarian question must be examined in the context of a wide Central European reconstruction, and they had to find an alternative for the reorganisation which

34 DIMK, II, 707 (doc. no. 449).

35 About the antecedents of the Komárno talks see: SALLAI, 57–81.

36 DIMK, II, 735 (doc. no. 482).

37 Notes about the Czechoslovak-Hungarian talks in Komárno. 10 October 1938. AMZV, VI/4, box 61, 1938.

perfectly ensured the economic and cultural coexistence of the nations in question. He explained in connection with the nationality question: "The Slovaks themselves know it the best what it means when a nation cannot live as a nation. Therefore the Slovak government will not make the mistake to deprive the Hungarian souls of their nationality. The Hungarian delegation must be convinced that there is no one in the Czechoslovak delegation who would want to make a new Trianon. If we look at the question from this higher aspect, there is no doubt that an arrangement that does not consider the vital economic interests of both parties equally cannot last long. The events of the recent past have shown it very well."³⁸ Despite the high-sounding and promising words the principle of the Slovak strategy was to give back as little as possible from the debated territory. They also wanted to prolong the decision and hoped for the help of the Germans.³⁹

In the afternoon of 11 October 1938, some of the experts of the Hungarian delegation invited the Slovak delegation to the bar of Central Hotel. The Hungarian experts said that an agreement would be very favourable for common defence against the strong German advance. The Hungarian military experts argued that Slovakia could benefit very well from a union with Hungary. They also threatened the Slovaks that, if the negotiations should bring no success, the Hungarian army could occupy their country. The Hungarian delegation suggested with this step that the Hungarian government enjoyed the support of Germany.⁴⁰

On 11 October 1938, the deputy Premier of the autonomous Slovak government, Ďurčanský, a member of the Czecho-Slovak delegation left the negotiations to fly to Berlin, where he talked about the question of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border with Hitler and Hermann Göring. He returned on 13 October.⁴¹ Ďurčanský declared in Berlin that the Slovaks never wanted a union with Hungary; they wanted complete independence and to keep Bratislava as capital city. It was their intention to build close political, military and economic connections with Germany. Ďurčanský drew Göring's attention to the dangers of a possible referendum. He said that the Jews would vote for the union with the Hungarians. After their talk, Göring thought that they had to give more support to the Slovak independence movement, because the Czech state, without Slovakia, would be more defenceless against Germany. He determined Slovakia as the starting point of attacks against eastern territories and as an appropriate place for the construction of air bases.⁴² As the Hungarian diplomacy knew, Ďurčanský got access to the German leaders with the help of Franz Karmasin and the Nazis in Vienna.⁴³

In the meantime, the Hungarian-Slovak negotiations continued on 12 October.⁴⁴ On this

38 DIMK, II, 749 (doc. no. 488).

39 Balázs ABLONCZY, Teleki Pál, Budapest 2005, 377.

40 SALLAI, 92.

41 On 12 October 1938, Ďurčanský and Alexander Manch met with Herman Göring. ADAP, D, IV, 68. doc. no. 76.

42 Ibidem.

43 Valerián BYSTRICKÝ, Nacistické Nemecko a vznik Slovenského štátu, in: Vojenská História, 5, 2001, 2, 51.

44 As an anecdote says that on one day of the talks Kánya showed Tiso a sheet turned down with only one signature visible: Tiso József. On Kánya's request, Tiso acknowledged that it was his signature. Then Kánya showed him the whole document, the statistics of the 1910 census, which showed that Tiso, then, declared himself Hungarian. No source has been found to confirm this incident. Emil NIEDERHAUSER, Nemzet és kisebbség, Budapest 2001, 322–323.

day, Tiso offered the Žitný ostrov to the Hungarians on condition that a Czecho-Slovak free port is established in Komárom (Komárno). This offer would have meant a territory of 1,800 square kilometres with 121 thousand inhabitants, out of which 117 thousand were Hungarians. The Hungarian delegation rejected this because it would include only 11% of the Hungarian-populated land. When he saw the rejection of the Hungarians, Tiso pointed out that the Little Danube was a fixed border and he offered an exchange of population: "[...] would it not be possible to carry out a mutual relocation of the Slovaks in Hungary and the Hungarians north of the Csallóköz?"⁴⁵ Pál Teleki rejected the population exchange because it could not have been carried out without asking the people involved and it could have taken a long time. Tiso answered that the Slovak people could by no means come to terms with the solution that their 400 thousand brothers and sisters would be ceded to Hungary. One member of the Slovak delegation added that "the Slovaks would rather choose war than letting 400 thousand Slovaks go to Hungary".⁴⁶ Finally the Slovaks offered a territory of 5,405 square kilometres with a population of 349 thousand, including 342 thousand Hungarian on 13 October 1938. Teleki characterised the Czecho-Slovak offer as "moderated" Trianon, which is based on strategic and transportation aspect, and which would have left territories in Slovakia where the Hungarian population reached 90%. What is more, the Slovak offer left out several Hungarian-populated towns. "So that no new railways will need to be built in a few areas, closed ethnic units must not be broken up.", said Teleki. "Towns must not be kept back arbitrarily and, in order to keep the market area, large Hungarian blocks must not be left on Slovak territory."⁴⁷ Teleki thought that the Czecho-Slovak proposal⁴⁸ had been made along twenty-year old lines, and he found them entirely unacceptable. On the other hand, Teleki saw the Hungarian territorial claims unambiguous; those claims were based on purely ethnic principles and did not regard the transportation and strategic interests of the Slovak party.

In Ďurčanský's view, the underlying principle of the Slovak proposal was equality by saying that the same number of Hungarians should remain in Slovakia as the number of Slovaks in Hungary. This is the only feasible principle, said Ďurčanský, for marking an ethnic boundary is impossible due to the mixed population.⁴⁹ Teleki warned Ďurčanský in his response: "here we are dealing with drawing borders in a righteous manner in order to establish friendship between the two nations rather than mutually keeping hostages of the other."⁵⁰ Teleki also made it clear that according to the Hungarian proposal at least 40–60% of the border line could be drawn simply and without problems as the territories in question were ethnically homogeneous. In those territories, ethnic borders were the same in the censuses of 1880, 1910 and 1930. Teleki regarded it as the ill-will of the Czecho-Slovak delegation that they did not accept the Hungarian proposal even for these unquestionable areas.

45 DIMK, II, 762 (doc. no. 491).

46 The remark was made by Jozef Zvrškovec, a member of the Slovak delegation. See DIMK, II, 763 (doc. no. 491).

47 DIMK, II, 766 (doc. no. 492).

48 The counterproposal of the Czecho-Slovak delegation see: DIMK, II, 770 (doc. no. 492/b).

49 The proposal of Ďurčanský was not based on the principle of equality at all, for the Hungarian and the Slovak delegations accepted different census statistics for the minorities.

50 DIMK, II, 767 (doc. no. 492).

Đurčanský replied that they chose this solution as they must keep to the principle of equal attitude. There was an impassable gorge between the two viewpoints. Although Kálmán Kánya did not believe in the success of the negotiations, he did not want to terminate them because he wanted to see how far the Slovaks would go. He thought "[...] the counterproposal that we received this morning is so different from our conception that there is such a huge gap between the viewpoints of the two delegations regarding the resettlement which cannot be hoped to be overcome at these negotiations".⁵¹ Finally the Hungarian delegation, urged by Prime Minister Béla Imrédy, broke off the talks. Kánya explained in his final speech on 13 October: the negotiations had to be ceased because the disputes had become too long and the different views had not got closer to each other. He added that they could have made some modifications in their own demands but they were not prepared for such neglect of the ethnic principle by the other side and offer so little. Then Kánya made a little bow towards Tiso and, without saying goodbye to the other members of the Slovak delegation, left the room. All the Hungarian delegates followed him.

The Czecho-Slovak delegation was not very surprised by the Hungarian declaration. They were released and they trusted the help of the Germans. Their optimism was fuelled by the experience of Đurčanský in Germany.⁵² The Slovak side was hoping at the Komárno talks to reach a compromise which did not violate the territorial integrity of Slovakia, and shows thereby the power of the Slovak movement for political sovereignty. The talks did not meet the expectations however. The three Czecho-Slovak proposals showed that Tiso and his fellow politicians did not consider the real political situation.

The failure of the Komárno talks can be attributed to three causes. Firstly, the two sides used different 'official' statistics. The Hungarians used the data of 1910 while the Czecho-Slovak party worked with the figures of 1930. Secondly, the Czecho-Slovaks presented strategic and economic reasons whereas the Hungarians spoke about ethnic composition. Thirdly, both delegations counted on the help of Germany, and therefore neither was inclined to compromise.

Kánya and the whole Hungarian delegation opposed military solution, so the termination of the Komárno talks gave the opportunity to the Imrédy government to send the case back to the four-power conference for decision.⁵³

51 Ibidem, 771 (doc. no. 493).

52 The letter of the German foreign secretary Ernst Weizsäcker to the German embassies in Europe on 10 October already contained the following principles: "1. They expect friendly relationship with Prague. 2. They support the Hungarian claims for the neighbouring Hungarian territories; the details of the problem are to be settled between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. 3. In the Slovak question, they support the Žilina resolutions, that is, Slovak autonomy. 4. They are cautious about the Carpathian region; they do not support a Polish-Hungarian border but they do not issue anti-Hungarian slogans. 5. The fate of Pozsony (Bratislava) must be decided on the principle of self-determination, which would probably be favourable for Slovakia." ADAP, D, IV, 50, doc. no. 50.

53 Kánya thought at the government session: "We must not leave the four-power base." This was confirmed by the argument that Hungary would not get enough support due to the different views on the Carpathian region in Germany and Hungary. See: MNL-OL, K 27 (Minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvek; The minutes of the Council of Ministers), 13 October 1938, 10. fol. In our opinion, Kánya did not regard the Komárno talks as a fiasco, for the Hungarian foreign policy got closer to the realisation of its two-decade endeavour: the revision of the Trianon Treaty with wide international agreement. This is proven by the fact that Kánya threatened to break off the negotiations, being afraid that the Slovaks could get the support of the Germans in the meantime, and later he was the strongest to urge that the four-power conference should be called together. See: DIMK, II, 760, 771 (doc. no. 491 and 493).

Both the Slovaks and the Hungarians started to investigate. On 14 October 1938, the former Hungarian Prime Minister had talks with Hitler.⁵⁴ Darányi mentioned to the Führer that the Komárno talks were broken off as the Czechs and Slovaks were willing to give up only a fragment of the Hungarian-populated territories. He took maps and complained that the Slovaks wanted to keep almost all Hungarian towns and railways. Hitler asked if the Hungarians wanted to fight. Darányi replied that Hungary could not tolerate the Slovak behaviour. Hitler was pessimistic about a military operation because Hungary would remain alone and the outcome of a conference of the great powers is uncertain. He said he had been informed by Hungarian politicians that the Slovaks and the Ruthenians wanted to unite with Hungary, but the situation seemed to have been changed. In Hitler's opinion the main question is not who is right but who has power. Nevertheless, he assured Hungary of his support at a future conference where territorial questions would be discussed. The Führer pointed at the map of Slovakia and asked if Darányi could see any chance for Hungary to occupy a part of Slovakia and to get the rest by a referendum. Darányi answered "he has to ask his government but he thinks that what is Hungarian must be occupied".⁵⁵ Hitler warned the Hungarians against a referendum because he thought its result would be unpredictable. Finally he ordered his Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop to talk with the Czechs and find out their maximum claims and see the minimum territorial claims of the Hungarians compared to this.

On 23 October 1938, Darányi wrote a letter to Ribbentrop about the future of Bratislava, Nitra, Košice, Mukačevo and Užhorod⁵⁶. Darányi insisted that Košice and the two cities in the Carpathian region (Mukačevo, Užhorod) should get under Hungarian control. As for Nitra, Jelšava,⁵⁷ Smolník⁵⁸ and its vicinity, he thought that a referendum would be the best solution.⁵⁹ Ribbentrop supported the Czecho-Slovak viewpoint for Užhorod and Mukačevo but acknowledged the Hungarian claims for Košice.⁶⁰

In the meantime Ribbentrop received Tiso and Ďurčanský on 19 October.⁶¹ They spoke against the Hungarian demands by saying that the 1910 census statistics were false.⁶² They also emphasised the significance of Košice as a transport junction. They rejected the idea of a referendum; Tiso said that the Hungarians would unite with the Communists and the Jews. Ribbentrop assured the Slovaks about his sympathy but he emphasised the necessity for understanding to the justifiable demands of the Hungarians. He promised to save Koši-

54 Prime Minister Imrédy asked the German ambassador in Budapest that Hitler receive Darányi. The visit of the former Hungarian Prime Minister aimed at clearing the problems between Germany and Hungary and fixing the intentions of the two countries. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939, Ernest Llewellyn WOODWARD – Rohan BUTLER – Margaret LAMBERT, Third Series, Vol. IV, London 1953, 57. doc. no. 66.

55 Wilhelmstrasse, 149, doc. no. 304.

56 In Hungarian known as Ungvár.

57 In Hungarian known as Jolsva.

58 In Hungarian known as Szomolnok.

59 Wilhelmstrasse, 152, doc. no. 309–311.

60 *Ibidem*, 153, doc. no. 311.

61 Ladisláv DEÁK, *Viedenská arbitráž*. Vol. I, Martin 2002, 99, doc. no. 159. See also: ADAP, D, Vol. IV, 66, doc. no. 75.

62 ADAP, D, Vol. IV, 72, doc. no. 81.

ce, Mukačevo, Bratislava and Užhorod for the Slovaks.⁶³ On 20 October, the Czecho-Slovak government, with German mediation, delivered its final offer regarding the territories to the Hungarian government, in which they were willing to cede 11,300 square kilometres. The proposal did not mention the Hungarian towns, and therefore it was rejected by the Hungarians.⁶⁴ So the decision in Vienna became necessary due to the debated territories especially the towns along the border. The difference between the claims of the two delegations was not more than a few hundred square kilometres.⁶⁵ If the Hungarians had been contented with this smaller area, the bilateral agreement could have been made. Eventually, on 2 November 1938, in the Belvedere palace in Vienna, the German-Italian committee designated the new Hungarian-Czecho-Slovak border. The First Vienna Award gave Hungary 11,830 square kilometres with over one million inhabitants. It was a success of the Hungarian diplomacy that the territory had to be ceded within five weeks rather than three months. The Vienna decision was based on the ethnic principle without doubt. The Hungarian government, however, hoped getting further territories. This can be seen in the order of the Hungarian Chief of Staff to the occupying troops: "The Hungarian royal defence forces have stopped at the lines designated by the Vienna decision makers but we must trust that the noble enthusiasm and the ambition that have filled every member of our forces in the past weeks will get the option to carry out great deeds."⁶⁶

The Hungarian minority and the mother country felt the Vienna Award a great achievement, and it did not occur to them that they would be called to account for it.⁶⁷ Only János Esterházy felt that the First Vienna Award could have unfavourable consequences. He was discontented with the failure of the Komárno talks as well as the Vienna decision. He blamed the Hungarian government for being rather impatient with the Slovaks at Komárno. He thought that the Vienna Award could have been avoided with patience and tact. He suggested that the Hungarian government should give up 1,000 square kilometres, by which the Hungarians could regain the good-will of the Slovaks and the two nations could get closer to each other. Esterházy suggested the territory between Šurany⁶⁸ and Palárikovo,⁶⁹ which had Slovak majority anyway. However, the Hungarian government rejected this by saying, as someone remembered: "Trianon had deprived Hungary of so large territories that we cannot give up a square centimetre from what we were given back by the Vienna decision."⁷⁰

Tiso said about the Vienna Award: "We have lost everything. Our people, although they cannot be blamed for it, have become victim. The decision has been made without our knowledge, that is, against us. The decision of the German-Italian committee does not follow the ethnic principle. [...] There is nothing to be done but to bow our heads and work.

63 Slovenský národný Archív (Bratislava, hereinafter referred only as SNA), Národný súd, Box 43. 6/46-II/I-2.

64 DIMK, II, 829 (doc. no. 563).

65 László SZARKA, *Duna-táji dilemmák*, Budapest 1998, 195.

66 Loránt TILKOVSKY, *Revízió és nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon 1938–1941*, Budapest 1967, 33.

67 Slovak historians condemn the Vienna Award almost unanimously, and they welcome its annulment in 1945 as a self-explanatory administration of justice. Lubomír LIPTÁK, *Slovensko v 20. storočí*, Bratislava 1998, 263–265.

68 In Hungarian known as Surány.

69 In Hungarian known as Tótmegyer.

70 ESTERHÁZY, 95.

But nobody can forbid us [Slovaks] to proclaim before the whole world: the Slovak nation has suffered a tragic loss."⁷¹ Tiso was seriously thinking about abdication those days. Hungary could thank Košice, Mukačevo and Užhorod to the Italian action. Ribbentrop adhered to the Slovaks retaining Bratislava and Nitra to the last minute, which shows that the idea of an independent Slovakia was already there among the objectives of German diplomacy.⁷²

Discontented voices could be heard on both sides as early as the following day. Budapest resented that they got only a part of the Carpathian region but the Slovak politicians found the extension of the Hungarian revision exaggerated. The rivalry continued for the remaining pieces of former Czechoslovakia.

The Hungarian government, as we could see, did all they could to get the whole Slovakia; that was the maximum of the revisionist ideas. The minimum was to get back the areas with Hungarian population; this came true with the First Vienna Award. The decision healed some of the injustices of the Trianon treaty but it deepened the tension between the Hungarian and Slovak political leadership. Also, both governments became puppets of Germany, who cleverly made use of this situation. The hypothesis that the Hungarian leadership gave up attempts to get more territories in Slovakia and focused on retaining the annexed areas seems to apply from the second half of 1939.

The first Viennese arbitration redressed only partly the injustices of the peace treaty, but it resulted that the Hungarian and Slovak leaderships conflicted with each other even more, on the other hand these governments became puppets of Germany which could expertly make use of it in the years of war. At the beginning inhabited by the Polish proved to be the easiest to be won over. The Polish nursed good relations with Slovak politicians, and getting to know of it, the Hungarians wanted to put pressure on the Slovaks also by their aid, in order to make the Slovaks to join the Hungarians, in return of autonomy. Hungarian leadership made every effort all along to cross the rapprochement of the Czech and Slovak nations.

The Slovakian political administration was not interested in cooperation with Hungarians, they trusted the German leadership which promised them own country. The two small nations the Slovaks and the Hungarians were cleverly used against each other by German diplomacy.

Abstract

Hungarian society and the government never approved of the loss of the northern region populated by Hungarians and Slovaks, just as they never accepted the loss of other territories of the former Kingdom of Hungary. They endeavoured to regain those territories during the interbellum years. The annexation of Slovakia was in the focus of Hungarian revisionary thought, cherished by both political and military circles. Hungarian politicians especially resented the loss of Upper Hungary, second only to the loss of Transylvania, because this region had played an essential role in the economy of the Kingdom of Hungary.

71 DEÁK, 34–35.

72 ORMOS, Magyarország, 196.

Hungarian propaganda implied that since Czechoslovakia had no historical traditions as a state, it would be the easiest target to break up in order to regain the lost territories. In their view, Czechoslovakia was an artificial construction which could thank the great powers for its existence, and therefore could be defeated relatively easily in an appropriate moment. After the Anschluss in 1938, the Hungarian diplomacy tried to negotiate a potential incorporation of Slovakia to Hungary based on autonomy with Slovak political representatives. Polish foreign policy representatives acted as mediators in these talks. On the other hand, Josef Tiso and his political mates wanted to achieve that the Polish, German and perhaps the Hungarian leadership support the recognition of the Slovaks as political nation, possibly their autonomy or directly their independence. Also Slovak politicians held secret negotiations with the Hungarians. From the Slovak party, the negotiations with the Hungarians could be regarded simply as tactics, but they rejected it indeed, thus these talks ended without success.

Keywords

History, Hungarian revision, Hungarian-Slovak relations, Slovak autonomy, Hungarian-Polish relations, 1938