

BENEŠ

**Statesman or charlatan?
The plans and the reality
1908-1948**

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INTRODUCTION

The concepts and ideas of Edouard Benes.

For Hungary, state and nation, among those non-Hungarians who exerted the greatest influence on its history of the 20th century, Edouard Benes ranks among the most influential of the Central European politicians. The important stages of his career often intersected the path of Hungary's history.

During and immediately after the First World War, he was intimately engaged in the formation of the new Central European order, the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the dismemberment of historic Hungary. The leading figures of the age, the framers of the Versailles Peace Treaty, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson, meet and consult him. In fact, several of his requirements and suggestions are incorporated. Between the two wars, as „permanent Czechoslovak Foreign Minister” – a position he held without break between 1918 and 1935 -, then as President, he was one of the highest profile politicians internationally and in the League of Nations. He was present at every important diplomatic event of his age. He negotiated with such political leaders as Briand, Barthou, Streseman, Stalin and Litvinov, as well as being the major mover behind the Little Entente and the strongest opponent to Hungary's revisionist hopes.

Before the Second World War – after the collapse of Czechoslovakia – he was again forced into exile but Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill continued to consider him as a partner, enabling him to return to Prague victorious, in 1945. President of Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948, he orchestrated the expulsion of the German and Hungarian minorities, all the while struggling against the attempts of the Communist takeovers. In this last endeavor he fails, spending the last year of his life essentially under house arrest in his country home.

I have devoted the past 17 years to the study of the career of Benes, beginning with a 1988 undergraduate paper. During that time, I have written various studies on the topic, while reading thousands of pages by and of him. When I chose the political career of Benes as my historian's thesis, I was clear that the required length of the thesis could in no way do justice to a Benes biography. I think my reasoning is verified by being unaware of the existence of any biographical work that does justice to his multi-faceted career. I, too, shall refrain from the attempt.

Yet, I took it as a professional challenge to shed light on the role of Benes, attempting to create such a framework which makes it possible. As a starting point, I set as my goal: Disclose the role Benes played in 20th century Hungarian history.

During my research, I realized that if I strive to answer merely that question, it will lead to a pronounced one-sided, Hungarian-centric result. But as the short sketch unequivocally shows, Benes is one of those politicians whose actions influenced, to a large degree, the fate of all of Central Europe. We can state that Benes had a role – perhaps not outstanding, but certainly important – in the two events that left their stamp

on Central Europe, Versailles and Yalta. His actions have greatly influenced the histories of other Central European nations and states: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Sudeten Germans, Russyns, etc. Hence, I expanded my original goal and restated it as: What was the resultant outcome on Central European history of all the plans formulated by Edouard Benes during his long political career?

To state it more pointedly: Is Edouard Benes a positive figure in Central European history – a great man and statesman, as the majority of Czech historians tend to depict him – or a negative figure whose mistakes, Machiavellianism and unrelenting cynicism brought severe suffering to several Central European nations, not only Hungarians but Germans, Slovaks, Poles and, indeed, to Czechs?

After framing the above initial question, a methodological question arises, to wit: How can a political career, so long, full and wide ranging, be adequately grasped, explained and illustrated?

The logical answer would seem to be a chronological ordering. But in making use of that, I have not been able to address the problems that arise from the wide divergence, or the next problem, which is the identification of reliable source material on which to base a reliable portrait of Benes.

In the midst of my musing, it was Benes himself who came to my rescue, as I surveyed the several thousand pages of Benes-written material on my bookshelves. I suddenly realized that Benes was one of those politicians who, for various reasons – partly propaganda, partly the nature of politics – revealed his thoughts to his political partners or the public. During his long political career, he published his plans, thoughts and opinions in countless articles, speeches, letters, memoranda and books.

Based on all these, and with an interest to solving the methodological problems, I decided to base this book on the following framework: During his career, Benes worked out four concepts, or frameworks, for the organization of Central Europe, three of which he tried to implement. Thus, I shall try to present his career alongside these notions. They are:

Concept 1: “If Austria did not exist, it would be necessary to invent her.”* This Monarchy-friendly position was published in 1908 in Dijon as part of his doctoral thesis, “Le probleme autrichien et la question tchégué”, and essentially represented his views until 1914.

Concept 2: “Smash Austria-Hungary.” This view was arrived at during his first émigré period, published in Paris in 1916. Essentially, this was the guiding principle of all his refugee political activities, moreover, it was the course of Czechoslovak foreign affairs, headed by him, from Versailles to Munich.

Concept 3: “Poland and Czechoslovakia ... resolved: after the conclusion of this war, some manner of closer political and economic alliance will be created.” He published this view in January 1942 in the American Foreign Affairs magazine, in an article titled “The organization of postwar Europe.” This determined his course of action during the first part of his second exile (1938 – 1943).

* The quote is from Palacky.

Concept 4: “We feel it important that Russia acquire decisive influence in Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe.” This concept was born sometime during 1943 and essentially defined the last five years (1943-1948) of his political direction.

My dissertation will try to elaborate these four stated concepts of the long political career of Benes. I will begin by elaborating out the stated concept, then show the steps Benes took to in his struggle to bring it to fruition. It is my hope that, by fleshing out this framework, we shall be closer to answering the question, whether Benes was a great man and a great statesman.

PART I: BENEŠ AND THE BIRTH OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1914 – 1918

1.1 THE FIRST CONCEPT or, what preceded 1914 A SUBJECT OF THE MONARCHY

The major highlights in the life of Benes before 1914

Edouard Benes¹ was born in Kožlany, Moravia, on May 28, 1884, where he completed his elementary schooling, going to Prague for his high school years. After graduation, he enrolls in 1904 in the Karolus (Charles) University's School of Philosophy – intending to obtain a degree as a high school teacher – taking courses in philosophy, Latin and German. After the second semester, he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris and to this end he traveled to France in the fall of 1905. Of this decision, he writes: “I went abroad with the intention to devote myself to philology and prepare myself for a career as a university lecturer in this subject.”² At the Sorbonne, he studied philosophy and sociology, as well as political science at the Paris Academy of Social Sciences.³ In 1906, he spent a few months in London, followed by a year in Berlin. In 1907, he is back in France, reading law in Dijon.

In his memoirs, he paints a picture of a diligent student: “I studied sixteen, eighteen hours a day, devouring any material I could lay my hands on, so that I could absorb all the faster the modern thoughts, as well as to acquire a well rounded education, to lay the solid technical foundation for my philosophical studies.”⁴ On the other hand, Magda Ádám posits that Benes did not study sociology and that, in fact, he decidedly neglected his university studies but, on returning to Prague, he was careful to have his French semesters accredited, although they were never accredited anywhere else.⁵ Close to a century after the French student activities of Benes, it is difficult to come to a definitive answer in this question. Quite probably, we shall never know exactly what he studied and which examinations he took. One thing is certain, – and in this we side with Magda Ádám's view – that he spent most of his time raising the monies necessary for his everyday needs, sending newspaper articles home (published in the *Rovnost* and *Právo Lidu*) and writing for various French magazines on the problems of the Monarchy and the Czechs.⁶

¹ For a general summary of the biographies of Edouard Beneš, see Note 1 in the bibliography.

² Edouard Beneš: *A nemzetek forradalma I-III* [The revolution of nations]. Bratislava, 1936, vol. I, p. 11.

³ Josef Hanzal: *Edvard Beneš. Arcképek kettős tükörben* [Edouard Beneš. Portraits in a dual mirror]. Nap Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 1997, p. 18.

⁴ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 20.

⁵ Ádám, Magda: *Edvard Beneš. Arcképek kettős tükörben* [Edouard Beneš. Portraits in a dual mirror]. Nap Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 1997, p. 92.

⁶ Zbyeněk Zeman – Antonín Klima: *The life of Edvard Benes*. Oxford, 1997, pp. 10-11.

As well, he made tentative forays into active politics, regularly meeting with the émigrés of the 1905 Russian revolution. Of this, he confesses: “In 1906 and 1907, I spent time in the company of the revolutionaries, I was a member of their associations, visited their free universities, regularly corresponded with revolutionary students, professors and newspaper reporters. I began to study Russia diligently, its classical and revolutionary literature.”⁷ Also, he establishes a relationship with the French Left, socialists and the syndicalist movement.

In 1907, he went to the University of Dijon to study law – in this all his biographers agree – where, a year later, he obtains a degree, although we may have some reservations with this doctorate degree. Magda Ádám points out that foreign student of the Dijon university were able to obtain a law degree, without taking the courses, by defending high quality dissertations. Benes also obtained his law degree in such manner. This circumstance is tangential to our topic; of much more importance is the content of the dissertation. In his work, “The Austrian problem and the Czech question”, Benes deals with the question of federalization of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. We consider the chain of ideas expressed in this doctoral dissertation as his, so called, first concept.

After defending his dissertation, he returns to Prague,⁸ where his law studies were not accepted, his degree not accredited, in fact, he failed to complete the necessary examinations for his middle school teaching position. Hence, he could only find employment in the commerce academy – teaching French and economics – as a part-time teacher. In 1910, at the age of 26, he marries Hana Vlčková, whom he met in Paris. His studies were considerably aided by a 1911 one-year grant from the Ministry of Education in Vienna, allowing him to travel to France and England.⁹ On his return, he could make an attempt at obtaining a valid degree, spending 1912 at the Karolus University’s sociology faculty. His dissertation was titled “Party-mindedness.” In his essay, he explores the roles and functions of political parties in a modern society. After successfully completing the term, he obtains a diploma from the university’s philology faculty.

In the years before the beginning of the first world war, he publishes numerous studies in the *Náše doba*, *the Česka mysl* and the *Česká revue*, writing on timely societal, social and ethnic questions.¹⁰ These studies were well written, well documented and well crafted – with little original content. The summary style, with well written conclusions, articles can be found in his writings, titled “The Nationality Question” and “Social democracy in England.”¹¹ The magazine *Právó Lidu*, at the time, declared itself as a social democratic publication and he, while submitting smaller political articles, hoped to become its chief editor. As well, he also takes a

⁷ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 20.

⁸ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 19-21; Ádám: *Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 93-94; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 11-15.

⁹ Ibid (Zeman-Klima), p. 13.

¹⁰ Boris Jakovenkó: *Bibliografie Edvarda Beneše*. Praha, 1936, pp. 3-4, 7-21.

¹¹ Ádám: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 94; Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 20; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 12-13.

tentative part in the political life of Czechoslovakia. He makes an acquaintance with the ideas of T.G. Masaryk and slowly succumbs to his influence – although no personal relationship develops – and thus, by degrees, distances himself from the social democratic beliefs.

The first concept of Benes

Benes' dissertation appeared in book form in 1908 in Paris.¹² As we noted above, this can be considered as his first concept, or theory. The 312 page book, after a short "Introduction", is broken into eight chapters, followed by a bibliography.

In the introduction,¹³ Benes defines the topic of his dissertation, according to which he undertakes to expose the 'Austrian problem'. He stresses that he does not wish to deal with Hungary because, in his opinion, since the Compromise between Austria and Hungary, public opinion in both Austria and Czechoslovakia deems Hungary to be a more or less foreign state and that Hungary's influence on the present day internal conflict within Austria is, at best, minimal. On top of it all, Hungary's position was always unique within the Empire, and thus, the struggles of the Austrian half of the Empire proceeded independently. It was only in the period between 1848 and 1867 that the Austrian, Hungarian and Czech problems became closely intertwined. Here we must note that, in spite of this statement of topic focus and restriction, Hungary and Hungarians regularly appear on the pages of the dissertation. Benes takes the viewpoint that the so called 'Austrian question' is, in actuality, the 'Czech question' and interprets it as the Czech's struggles when he comments on the 'Germans against the dynasty.' He writes: "The struggles between the Czechs and the Germans have, for the past half century, paralyzed all political development in Austria and is a direct cause that parliamentary government could not genuinely occur there. As a result, a series of disastrous consequences took place, both for the entire state and the two combatant nations. Today, the situation has become untenable for all concerned. We must make serious attempts, both on the hypothetical and practical levels, to put an end to this eternal question."¹⁴

The eight chapters of the dissertation can be divided into two groups. The larger first portion, made up of chapters one to seven, is used by Benes to show the historical precedents of the 'Czech question', introducing the histories of the Czechs and the Habsburgs, or rather the relationship of the Czechs and the Germans of the Czech lands, from 1526 to the 20th century. This, we can view as the historical introduction to the first concept. The second part, chapter eight by itself, is devoted to laying out his suggestion to the 'Czech question'.

It must be pointed out that Benes, in his dissertation, makes extremely inconsistent use of the names of the member states of the Empire. From a legal perspective, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was born in May of 1867, the symbolic date of birth is taken as June 8, 1867, when Francis Joseph

¹² Edvard Beneš: *Le problème autrichien et la question tchèque*. Paris, 1908.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 1-5 in the original.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

was crowned as King of Hungary. Subsequently, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is made up of two component parts: the Hungary of King Saint Stephen (Kingdom of Hungary) and the Austrian Empire (commonly called Austria, occasionally referred to as Transleithania). When Benes refers to the Austrian portion of the Monarchy, he most often uses the expression 'Austria' but occasionally he uses the same term to refer to the whole of the Monarchy. On occasion, to compound the error, in some instances Benes calls the pre-1867 state as the Monarchy.

It is time to become familiar with the train-of-thought of the first concept. The period from 1526 to 1906 is divided by Benes into 3 separate eras.¹⁵

The first period starts with the ascension of the Habsburgs to the Czech and Hungarian thrones and ends with the death, in 1740, of Charles III. In this period, the Habsburg Empire is a confederation of feudal and independent states.

The next period opens with Maria Theresa coming to the throne and lasts until 1848. This is the age of centralized absolutism, giving rise to the modern bureaucratic state and the Habsburgs instituted a policy of unification to strengthen it.

The last period begins with the revolution of 1848, through the constitutional centralism, to end with the emergence of Dualism.

In chapters one and two, Benes reviews the history of the first period, from 1526 to 1740.¹⁶ He paints the following picture of the newly created Habsburg empire along the Danube¹⁷: "The three parts of the Austrian monarchy were completely separate, merely united by the person of the ruler. In the perpetual Austrian provinces, the Habsburgs exercised absolute power, governing functions being the exclusive realm of the ruler. The case of Hungary is completely different, as the legitimate ruler must obey the laws passed by Diet. The powers of the Czech rulers were only curbed by the law enacted in 1500 by Vladislaus."¹⁸ In practical terms, Beneš interprets the just-born Habsburg Empire as a confederation. In his reasoning, he omits that Ferdinand I was striving to reduce both the Czech and the Hungarians to the level of the perpetual Austrian provinces. To this end, he did all he could to break both countries but his endeavors were only partly successful. In Hungary, he could not break the opposition of the

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 6-24, 25-43.

¹⁷ The history of the 1526 union of the Austrian, Hungarian and Czech crowns has been thoroughly documented. The gist of it is that a pact was made in 1515 between Maximilian I (Holy Roman Emperor between 1493 and 1519) and Vladislaus (king of the Czechs and of Hungary between 1490 and 1516) under the terms of which, in case of no direct male heir in one dynasty, succession would fall to the other dynasty. On the death, with no heir, of the Jagellonian Louis II in 1526 – who was simultaneously king of both the Czechs and Hungarians – under the terms of the 1515 agreement, the Czech and Hungarian crowns fell to the House of Habsburg, Ferdinand I. Thus, from the perpetual Austrian provinces, with the addition of Bohemia and Hungary, was born the Habsburg Empire.

¹⁸ Beneš: *Le problème ...* op. cit., p. 26.

Estates. Among the Czech, he succeeded in trimming the rights of the autonomous cities – thus taking the first step towards absolutism – but he could not completely subjugate the Czech nobility, or contain their rights. In fact, he was forced to grant new privileges. On summary, Ferdinand's attempts to centralize legislative and administrative functions closed unsuccessfully. His heirs were not pleased with this situation and strove in the early 17th century to widen their power and completely hold in their hands the legislative and administrative prerogative.

The final portion of chapter two,¹⁹ Benes devotes to the results of the battle of White Mountain. In 1618, the Czech Estates rose against Habsburg rule. The ruler's forces (Ferdinand II, 1619-1637) defeated the forces of the uprising on November 8, 1620 at White Mountain, close to Prague. Benes makes no mention at all of these events. He merely notes that Ferdinand II executed 27 nobles as the leaders of the uprising and confiscated their properties. The remaining 112 families of the high nobility became vassals of the ruler. The deposed noble families were replaced by foreign nobility who faithfully and without reservation served the Habsburgs. The results of these events can still be felt today – writes Benes – since the descendants of the new aristocracy hold sway in the Diet and the Catholic Church has successfully re-Catholicized the Czech people.

Ferdinand II completely broke the resistance of the Czech Estates after the Battle of White Mountain and shattered the constitution. He introduced absolutism, which was the first step of centralization. The Catholic Church obediently served the dynastic plans of the Habsburgs. Ferdinand wished to avoid new opposition by the Czech Estates, thus, in 1627, he had the constitution amended. This step was explained by trumped up excuses by the Viennese politicians. This was the theory of 'lost rights', meaning that the Czechs lost their rights when they turned against their chosen ruler. The king, thus, had legitimate right to punish them. In reality, the new constitution of 1627 was nothing less than a coup: illegal and unconstitutional – said Benes.

In the new constitution, the law of succession was re-defined. Ferdinand II became the sole ruler of the Czechs, not having to share power with the Estates. It also changed the constitution of the Diet, as well. The three estates – nobility, the knights and the cities – were enlarged by a fourth, the Church, which assumed the position of the First Estate. All were expected to return to the Catholic faith, or leave the country. The German language assumed equality with the Czech language. This equality became altered by the 18th century when the German language assumed primacy. After the introduction of the new constitution, the Czech chancellery embodied the legislative and administrative independence and unity of Saint Wenceslaus's Crown; the chancellery announced the new laws and regulations. The Czechs began the road to absolutism – said Benes.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 34-43.

In the third chapter of his dissertation, Benes deals with the history of what he calls the second era.²⁰ According to Benes, Charles III – between 1711 and 1740, Holy Roman Emperor as Charles IV, simultaneously on the Czech and Hungarian thrones as Charles III – tried to centralize his empire in the interest of dynastic concerns. Parallel to his centralizing efforts, and in concert with them, Charles III managed to have the *Pragmatica Sanctio* enacted on April 19, 1713. This contained three major principles: (1) the permanent Habsburg provinces can not be divided, (2) the investiture is based on the law of primogeniture, and (3) lacking a male heir, the crown descends on the female branch (first along Charles III's daughter, then Joseph I's and Leopold I's). In practical terms, the rules of inheritance were extended to the Habsburg daughters. The Czech estates ratified the *Pragmatica Sanctio* in 1720. The Habsburgs, thus, took another step towards centralization and the unity of the empire. Charles III was able to get the other Great Powers to accept the *Pragmatica Sanctio*, the guarantee of his dynastic plans, ensuring the throne to his heir, Maria Theresa.

After his death, the Prussian ruler, Frederic II, attempted to gain control of Austria's richest province, Silesia, igniting and winning the war of the Austrian succession. After such precedents, the new ruler on the throne, Maria Theresa, blamed the war's losses on the diverse composition of her empire, deciding to adopt the Prussian method, which is to say, increased centralization. The Czech estates expressed mild opposition to Maria Theresa's aspirations. The reason was White Mountain, that is, the defeat of the Czech nation, the reorganization of the nobility and the creation of common institutions. Hungary's situation differed from the Czech's. The Magyar estates were strong and could afford to ask a steep price for the defense of Austria against the Prussians. Maria Theresa was clear that Hungary's revolt would be more dangerous. The Magyar resistance was much stronger against absolutism. For these reasons, the Magyars gained more importance in this period than the Czechs. Maria Theresa's aim was to give uniform administration and uniform laws to the Czech and Austrian parts of the Empire. In 1749, she merged the Czech and Austrian chancelleries. From this time onwards, the Prague Viceroy was appointed directly by the ruler from among her own bureaucrats. The sole right the Czech Diet retained was the vote to approve the taxes. In Hungary, Maria Theresa allowed the institutions of the estates, while the Czech ones were repressed. Thus, the Habsburg rulers made concessions to the Magyars. This policy of concessions came to its zenith with official Dualism.

It must here be pointed out that this statement in Benes' dissertation is a rather liberal interpretation, as it washes together and fails to differentiate between the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise and the reforms of Maria Theresa of a century before.

Benes continues his chain of thought with the assessment of Joseph II (1780-1790), who made attempts to make Austria into a modern state. His aim was to unify the parts of the empire, through a centralized bureaucracy

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 44-79.

and to get all the ethnic parts speaking one language, German. He attempted to govern by edict and expected immediate results but did not count on national opposition. His secular reforms brought him opposition from the Church, while his social reforms pitted him against the nobility. The Church and the nobility both looked for support against the Joseph-inspired germanization and found it in national sentiment. In an empire seemingly on the way to unification, the seeds of decentralization were beginning to germinate, which blossomed into the later national struggles. Joseph II was faced with very strong resistance and finally rescinded all his edicts on his death bed.

His successor, Leopold II (1790-1792), seemingly took some steps backward – reinstating the power of the Diet – but the centralized institutions remained strong. The estates did not regain their ancient rights, which precluded their hope of returning to the previous constitution.

Under the reign of Leopold II's successors, Francis I (1792-1835) and Ferdinand V (1835-1848), public life was defined by one factor: the bureaucracy, which acquired so much power that it could doom to failure any federalist constitutional reform attempts. The estates were powerless against the ruler. Their objections remained fruitless. There was a vast abyss between the written laws and the reality. This was the situation that faced the Czechs in the spring of 1848.

In his dissertation, Benes titles chapter four as “Austria and the Czech lands during the 1848 revolution.”²¹ He broke the chapter into four parts. In the first part, bearing the title of “The awakening of the Czech people and the result of the revolution on Czech Kingdom”,²² he develops the idea that the national awareness of the Slav people, on a theoretical plane, followed the ideal of the French Revolution – espousing human and civil rights – while on the practical level, the desires for democratic needs that filled the void subsequent to the destruction of feudalism. Of all the theories of national rights, Herder's theory exercised the greatest influence on the Czechs. According to Herder, a nation can only be homogeneous; thusly, a heterogeneous state has no foundation for existence.

In 1848, the struggle between the Czechs and the Germans living on Czech lands reignited – Benes continued his line of reasoning. At the beginning of the revolution, the Czechs and the co-habiting Germans stood shoulder to shoulder in common defiance against absolutism. Shortly, though, clashes of interests appeared. The National Assembly, gathered in Frankfurt on May 18, 1848 had, as its prime goal to unite all German-populated territories from the Baltic to the Adriatic. The Czech Germans supported the plan, meaning they cast their vote on the principles of national rights. On the opposing side, the Czech were fighting for a Czech homeland and not for the independence of any ethnic component. They wanted personal rights and universal freedom for all, regardless of national affiliation. Benes stated that, in this conflict, the Czechs held the moral high ground as opposed to the Czech Germans, as the national principle could not be applied since the Czech and Germans were settled in a greatly

²¹ Ibid, pp. 80-162.

²² Ibid, sub-chapter I, pp. 80-119.

commingled manner. The application of the national principle proposed by the Germans would have meant the end of the Czech state. For this reason, the Czechs saw Frankfurt as the greatest danger to their own national survival. To avoid the German peril, the Czech leaders began to support Austria – even though it was strongly anti-Slav – and thus was born the program of historical rights of the Czechs. Its basic tenet was the creation of a federal union with Austria and Hungary. This program could not come into existence because, after the failure of the revolutions, the Habsburgs reinstated absolute rule.

In the second sub-chapter, Benes factually acquaints us with the events of 1848.²³ He states: In the spring of 1848, the ruler was forced to make concessions but this did not satisfy his peoples. The Czechs wrote a petition to the king (and sent it to Vienna on March 11, 1848 – auth.) in which they demanded the complete equality of the Germans and Czechs in legislative and administrative matters in the territories of the Czech Crown: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. (hereafter, referred to simply as Bohemia – *ed.*) The ruler, again, conceded. He issued the Czech Charter on April 8, 1848 in which he decreed the equality of the Czech and German languages, as well as segregating the Czech legislative and executive powers from that of the Empire. He stated that the National Assembly can independently manage its own internal affairs. Only one thing was not granted in the Czech Charter, the unification of the three component parts of the Czech crown, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. The tactics of the Emperor led to the Moravian estates to also write a petition to the Viennese Court. In it, they demanded their independence from the Czechs and stated their opposition to the legislative unification. The National Assembly drafted a new Constitution on June 7, 1848, which it presented to the Diet. The Prague uprising broke out five days after the Diet met. At this point, the Emperor decided on armed intervention. He dissolved the National Assembly and adjourned the Diet.

In the third sub-chapter, Benes acquaints the Czechs' continued struggle for federation.²⁴ He expounds that the Pillersdorf²⁵ Constitution, published in April of 1848 – which ensured certain freedoms and rights for the Empire's population, although retained strong centralization – was rejected by the empire's nationalities. The Emperor, seeing the discontentment, called for a Constitutional Assembly in Vienna, with the task of drafting a definitive constitution for Austria. Due to the uprisings of the Viennese students and workers, the Emperor relocated the Assembly to Kremsier (on May 21, 1848 – auth.) where work was begun on drafting a constitution. In Kremsier, the Czechs wanted to achieve independence, although still within the Empire. One of their prominent leaders – Karel Havlíček – phrased it as: "... only within Austria can we retain our

²³ Ibid, sub-chapter II, pp. 120-129.

²⁴ Ibid, sub-chapter III, pp. 130-151.

²⁵ Franz Freiherr von Pillersdorf was Interior Minister in the Ficquelmont Government that took office in April 1848. He drafted a constitution on the Belgian model.

independence.”²⁶ František Palacky – the defining personage of the Czech delegates to Kremsier – thought that the total independence demanded by the Magyars was extremely risky,²⁷ and so worked out a draft himself. According to his proposal, a central parliament must be created, which would look after common undertakings but the individual National Assemblies could intervene in the legislative work of the central parliament. The representatives to the central parliament would be delegated by the National Assemblies.

According to Benes, Palacky’s plans were not entirely perfect but should have still been implemented after the Hungarian Revolution was put down. However, these plans only remained on paper.

The fourth sub-chapter Benes gave the title “Struggle for the constitution.”²⁸ In this part, he again returns to the problem faced by the Kremsier Assembly. He relates that Palacky’s constitutional proposals failed but the Assembly eventually worked out a new draft constitution. This proposed to transform Austria into a constitutional and parliamentary monarchy. The ruler would only have the power of veto. It envisioned Austria divided into 14 provinces, every one of which would wield equal rights. This constitutional draft was acceptable to both Czech federalists and German liberals, hence it seemed certain to be accepted. However, reactionary forces conspired and, on April 7, 1849, with the help of the army, broke up the Assembly. Here, it must be noted that Benes errs a whole month with regard to this event, or perhaps merely mis-typed, as the Emperor dissolved the Kremsier parliament on March 7, 1849.

In continuing with his narrative, Benes relates that the new Emperor, Francis Joseph, announced a new constitution (historians refer to it as the Octroi Constitution or the Olmütz Constitution – *auth.*). With it, Czech federalist dreams died and centralization again won. The Czechs, along with the Magyars and the other provinces, became indelibly bound to the Monarchy. In 1851, absolutism was again openly reinstated.

Benes devotes the fifth chapter of his dissertation to the period from the Olmütz Constitution to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise.²⁹ His line of reasoning is as follows: The dissolution of the Kremsier Assembly dashed all Czech hopes. During the decade of absolutism, the Czechs suffered the most, being completely subjugated. At the same time, Vienna carried on skirmishes with Prussia; the question was: under whose leadership would German unity be realized, Austria or Prussia? The running confrontation between Austria and Prussia had consequences for the Slav nations of the Empire, too. In order that German unity may be realized under Austrian direction, Francis Joseph had to continue a centralist and absolutist policy, and attempt to Germanize his empire.

²⁶ Karel Havlíček-Borovský (1821-1856) publicist and politician, a leading figure of Czech national liberalism.

²⁷ Frantisek Palacky (1798-1876), historian, archivist of the Sternberg family. First appears in political life in 1830, as one of the founders of the *Matice česká*. One of the most important Czech personage of the Kremsier Assembly.

²⁸ Beneš: *Le problème ...* op. cit., sub-chapter IV, pp. 151-162.

²⁹ *Ibid*, chapter V, pp. 163-208.

Germans filled the leading positions in the Habsburg Empire, thus they, too, had to be resisted. As part of this struggle, Palacky again published his federalist plan in his 1866 book, *Austrian state theory*. On September 2, 1870, at Sedan, the Prussians handed an overwhelming defeat to the forces of France, thereby putting an end to the question. German unity was realized under Prussian leadership, not Austrian.

The official document published in October of 1860 (treated in more detail later in Part I, chapter IV – *ed.*) gave a degree of satisfaction to the Czechs, wrote Benes. In his opinion, the document elucidated two important principles: the necessity of unity for the Monarchy and the independence of the provinces. The major characteristic of the document was that it attempted to impose a new constitution over the whole Empire. It created two Reichsrats (parliamentary houses-*ed.*): the ‘narrow Reichsrat’ for the non-Magyar affairs (meaning the Austrian half of the Empire – *auth.*) and a plenary Reichsrat, whose sphere extended over the whole of the Empire. At the sessions of the plenary Reichsrat, the various provinces were not equally represented, rather representation took into consideration population, taxes paid, etc. The document left untouched the existing Magyar constitution but introduced the new one in the other provinces. Hungary was afforded separate treatment, a situation that precluded the concept of federalism. Furthermore, the rights of the provincial estates were completely confined, until little more was left for them to do than vote (really only approve) the annual taxes. To consider this federalism is preposterous. The only winners of the changes wrought by this document were the Imperial Court and the Magyars.

According to Benes, the legislation was a blend of centralism, federalism and dualism, but mostly centralism and dualism. In this assessment, we disagree with Benes and side with József Galántai, who posits that the document merely set out the broad parameters of a constitutional order, which could have been expanded in either centralist or federalist directions.³⁰

Benes is even more critical of the decree published in February of 1861 (also treated in more detail later - *ed.*), stating that it distinctly enraged the Czechs. On this point, we must state our agreement with him as the decree indeed propelled the Empire on the road towards centralization. Benes presumes that the February decree is the work of Schmerling³¹ and the German centralists. The diktat created a bicameral parliament. In selecting representatives, the interests of the Germans were deemed paramount. Article 13 clearly serves the interests of absolutism, when it defines the roles and responsibilities of parliament whereby the ‘smaller Reichsrat’ holds overriding powers above the provincial assemblies. We find the same in the composition of the Council of State, as it was always filled by men loyal to the Emperor. The decree was born in

³⁰ Galántai, József: *A Habsburg Monarchia alkonya* [Twilight of the Habsburg Empire]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1985, p. 25.

³¹ Anton Ritter von Schmerling (1805-1893) politician, Austrian Minister of Justice 1849-1851, Minister of State and Minister of the Interior 1860-1865. The decree was published on February 26, 1861.

the spirit of dualism, said Benes. The powers of the Transleithanian national assemblies were more circumscribed than Hungary's. While Hungary possessed its own constitution and a National Assembly wielding wide powers, the 'inner' Austrian provinces carried the yoke of unbridled centralism. Thus, the Czechs decided to oppose the decree and attempted to stand up for their rights in parliament. The Court's attempts at centralization ran into sharp opposition in Hungary, too, but Vienna was unable to overcome Magyar resistance. This, then, leads to the Emperor coming to a compromise with the Magyars, setting the stage for the necessary creation of Dualism. The fiercest opponents of Magyar aspirations were the Czechs, who wanted a federal system – wrote Benes, finishing his line of reasoning.

Chapter VI of the dissertation is devoted by Benes to detailed examination of the Austro-Hungarian compromise and the constitution of 1867.³² In his estimation, the February decree never fulfilled its intent. There was great opposition in Hungary after its publication, while, in the Austrian half, the provinces refused to send representatives to the Reichsrat, leading to the fall of Schmerling. His successor, Belcredi, promised some concessions but decided to convene a special sitting of the parliament.³³ At this time, a struggle erupts between the centralists and the federalists. The Court, fearful that the proposal will not gain acceptance, recalled Belcredi and, in his place as Prime Minister, appointed Beust.³⁴ Beust recalled the 'narrow Reichsrat', which showed greater loyalty. Two means of expressing their displeasure lay open to the Czechs: go to the Reichsrat and attempt to fight for their rights or simply protest by boycotting the proceedings. The Czechs, following the Magyar example, chose the latter. Thus, the constitution of 1867 was drafted without the Czechs. To quote the words of Rieger: "about us, without us", meaning, about the Czechs but without the Czechs.³⁵

Hence, the new constitution that was thus born set the state on the road towards constitutionality, on the one hand but, at the same time, strengthened the dual centralism, as well. The Germans and Magyars divided the Empire between themselves along the Leitha River, in Trans- and Cisleithania. In drawing his thoughts to a conclusion, Benes stated that modern Austria was an amalgam of cautious federalism and dynastic centralism, the state becoming the flawed creation of the Habsburgs. Austria could not be a perfectly absolutist state, not having all the preconditions; the component territories are fundamentally different, their

³² Beneš: *Le problème ...* op. cit., chapter VI, pp. 202-232.

³³ Count Richard von Belcredi (1832-1902), politician, Austrian Prime Minister 1865-67, as well as Minister of the Interior and Minister of State Security (police forces).

³⁴ Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust (1809-1886) politician, Prime Minister from February 1867, the first Foreign Minister, from November, 1867, of the combined Austro-Hungarian Empire.

³⁵ František Ladislav Rieger (1818-1905), newspaper man, economist, Czech politician, Palacky's son-in-law. The author of the 1868 Czech declaration of statehood.

historical traditions seemingly incompatible. The different nationalities had never wanted the creation of a unified Austria, always opposing every move towards centralism. The dynasty could never realize this intent, merely able to maintain the façade of a seemingly united Empire.

The seventh chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the appraisal of the 1867 constitution.³⁶ In it, he argues that the constitution's basis rests on federalist ideas but, at the same time, also strengthens centralist principles. This dichotomy arises from the fact that the document was not a homogeneous work, arising from one single principle, but was born from two competing doctrines: federalism in the legislative area and centralism in the executive. The Reichsrat and the provincial Diets were envisioned to be the legislative bodies, while the executive powers were to be centralized. The provincial Diets' did not possess individual executive branches. They could enact laws but had to turn to a central authority to have them carried out. The executive branch, in turn, is not responsible to the Diets. This segregation of functions makes the Diets ineffectual. The creation of the executive branch, based on federalist principles of the legislative branches, would seem to be the next logical step. Without it, the creation of a National Assembly is merely a apparent concession, hamstrung by the centralized executive power; what the constitution gave with the one hand, it took away with the other. This gave rise to "the struggles of the non-German peoples of Austria" - Beneš continued his reasoning. Austria's true role should have been to satisfy the desires of the various nationalities but the successive Austrian governments did not work towards this end, in fact, they worked to ensure the primacy of one nationality in the state, the Germans. They had favored positions reserved in the legislature, the administration and every public place of work through the simple expedient of declaring German as the official language. Until 1906, they controlled the army and the bureaucracy. Schmerling's election rules ensured a majority in the Reichsrat for the 9 million Germans of Cisleithania against 15 million Slavs.

It was against this situation that the Slavs, living in the Austrian portion of the Empire, took up the fight. While the struggle between the Czechs and the Germans is the basis of every ethnic struggle, at the same time, it also encapsulates the gist of the Austrian problem: if the Czech-German conflict would be solved, then every ethnic conflict within Austria would be solved. For the Germans, the continued centralist form of state was their only guarantee for the retention of their privileges and position. They felt that Austria could not exist if it were not German, or at least in German hands. That is why they take steps to frustrate Czech plans to return to the position of the old Czech state, i.e., the federalization of the Monarchy. In German minds, the state is more important than the nation. The differences on this point alone, between the Germans and the Slavs, incited intractable dissent. This clash is primarily a linguistic one. In 1627, the parity of the Czech and German languages in the Czech lands was

³⁶ Beneš: *Le problème ...* op. cit., chapter VII, pp. 233-278. Beneš divided this chapter into three parts: the first part (unnumbered) runs from 233 to 251, the subsequent two parts are identified as II and III.

announced but the bureaucracy of the monarchy, created by Maria Theresa and Joseph II, needed an official language. This, of necessity, became German. At the same time, the stirring ethnic awareness of the Slavs was apparent in their embrace of their national languages and historical cultures. The centralists wanted to make German as the state language, as the most important instrument in the creation of a unified Monarchy. The Czechs took up the battle for the equality of their language because, in their view, linguistic equality meant national equality. Within their country, they wanted to use their own language in public administration, the government, etc. Closely bound to this is the problem of education. For a long time, the Czech language was banished from the schools, forcing the Czechs to press for new schools, which successive governments refused to sanction. The government refused to permit the building of new Czech middle schools, refused the establishment of a single university in Moravia. According to Benes, the question of the schools and the language of public administration were the two topics where Czechs and Germans clashed violently. This claim Benes supports with numerous statistics.³⁷ As an example, he illustrates the situation of higher education with the following statistics: “ 9 million Austrian Germans have 5 universities, while 6 million Czechs (and 2 million Slovaks) have only 1, in Prague; 4.2 million Poles have 2 universities, while 3.4 million Ruthenians have none, 1.2 million Slovenes have none, 700,000 Italians have none and 230,000 Romanians have none.”³⁸

After marshalling more statistical evidence, Benes continues his line of reasoning. He cites, verbatim, article 19 of the constitution, according to which: “all the nations of the Monarch are equal before the law and every nation has an inalienable right to, and protection of, its national language and culture – the state concedes to the legal equality of languages used in a country in the schools, administration and public life - ... In those countries populated by several nations, the educational institutions should be organized such that every national group is to receive educational facilities in its own language, without being forced to learn another nation’s language.”³⁹

Next, Benes takes several pages to list examples showing that, although article 19 guaranteed linguistic equality, in reality, the Czechs are forced to use German in their homeland in the courts, in public administration, in education and every important site of officialdom.

After discussing the linguistic problem, Benes depicts the behavior of the Czech political elite after 1867.⁴⁰ He begins his reasoning with a question: “After the acceptance of the constitution and compromise of 1867, what could be the conduct of the Czechs?”⁴¹ He proceeds to answer the question thus: the constitution was written without, and against, the Czechs, it was of a centralist character with only ostensible concessions to

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 242-244.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 243.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 245.

⁴⁰ Ibid, part II, pp. 251-266.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 251.

federalist principles; the structure is illogical and is full of anti-Slav dictates. In the midst of such a political landscape, the Czechs could not waver for long, they had to develop a new political program. This undertaking was accepted by the Czech nobility. The Czech nobility were envious at seeing the advantages that the Magyar nobility derived from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. In the interest of obtaining the same role for themselves, the Czech nobles thought to employ the same method as their Magyar counterparts. Thus, the Czech nobility became avid supporters of Czech historical rights, transforming from the most compliant German courtiers into the most uncompromising, radical Czechs. In this manner, they became the leaders of the Czech national movement for 20 years, after 1867. The Czech nobles emulated the Magyars in demanding the same rights and privileges as those granted to Hungary. To counter Dualism, they proposed a three way power sharing, based on the Czechs historical rights. Benes evaluated this tripartite plans as follows: this program can be censured on several points, although admirable as a patriotic 'daydream,' it does not address neither the realities of the time nor the situation. The Czech political elite can not create a Czech state, one third of whose population – here Benes hints at the Germans – has decided to oppose it strenuously and will never accept its legality.

In order to shed light on the ethnic background, let us interrupt the examination of the dissertation. According to the first official census of 1880,⁴² in the Austrian Empire of 21,750,000 people, there were 5,100,000 Czechs, living in the 'three provinces of the Czech crown': Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. However, these three provinces were not only populated by Czechs. According to the statistics, the population breakdown by province is as follows: Bohemia: 63% Czech & 37% German; Moravia: 70% Czech & 30% German; Silesia: 23% Czech, 49% German & 28% Polish. To summarize the census figures for these three crown provinces, in 1880, they had a total population of 8 million, of which 62% were of Czech extraction, 35% German and 2% Polish, meaning that the provinces were the mutual homelands of both the Czechs and Germans. To make matters worse, the Germans lived in one contiguous block.

To return to the dissertation, we can state that, when Benes criticized the tripartite proposal of the Czech nobility, he was basing it on the previously cited ethnic situation. We must also cast back to the portion of the document dealing with 1848, where he reasons that the nationality principle supported by the Bohemian Germans would have inevitably led to the breakup of the historical Czech territory. Benes continued: the whole Czech nation, under the leadership of the nobility, demanded a position such as Hungary's, and worked out a plan for an upcoming Austrian-Czech agreement. This 'right-to-a-state program' became unassailable dogma. As a result, the quarrels between the Bohemian Germans and the Czechs became more fanatical. In support of their program, from 1867, the Czechs practiced passive resistance, declining to take part in the Reichsrat. In April, 1870, count Potocki formed a new government in Vienna and made

⁴² Galántai: *A Habsburg* ... op. cit., pp. 205-206.

an offer of serious negotiation to the Czech leaders⁴³ but only if they cease their passive policy and return to Parliament. The Czechs rejected the offer and Potocki's attempt failed. His successor, Hohenwart, also attempted to reach a compromise with the Czechs in February of 1871, so a new round of discussions were begun.⁴⁴ These resulted in the Emperor signing a document, on September, 1871, in which he formally recognized Bohemia's rights and obliged himself to respect them. The final terms of the document awaited the Prague parliament.

On October 10, 1871, the Prague Parliament passed the 'Fundamental Article.' This draft constitution consisted of 18 articles. These articles were meant to govern the position of the Czech Kingdom, its relationship with Hungary and the other countries of Cisleithania. In these founding articles, the Czechs accepted the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, accepted the joint rule of the monarchic government, the combined foreign affairs office of the various parts of the Monarchy, accepted the various delegations created on the basis of the Austro-Hungarian agreement, and demanding 15 seats for the Prague Diet. The articles further decreed the unity of Bohemia and Austria in the areas of customs and commercial matters, indirect taxes, transportation, railways, mail and telegraphs, military and finance affair, and the national debt. In order to be able to pass laws in these areas, a common legislative body must be created, in which all the provincial Diets would be represented. In all other areas, the Prague Diet will have unrestricted right of action. Hence, the Czechs would have regained control over primarily education, justice and internal administration. The executive power in Cisleithania would be exercised by such bodies which would be overseen by appointed national governors with ministerial rank. The executive body of Austria would not have the right to interfere in Bohemian matters. The application of a law, even those enacted by the common legislative body and pertaining to mutual affairs, can only be with the ratification of the applicable Czech Minister whose mandate it is to ratify the laws of the Prague Diet. Finally, a Senate is to be created, its hereditary members appointed by the Emperor, from lists recommended by the Diet. This Senate would have the role of Privy Council, reviewing and ratifying state agreements with foreign countries.

After acknowledging the terms of the draft constitution, Benes sharply criticizes it, arguing that the plan is much more federalist than tripartite. After his critique, Benes appraised the subsequent events: the plan was opposed by both the Germans and the Magyars. The centralist Germans began a campaign against Czech-Austrian compromise-supporting Hohenwart government. The Magyars, on their side, kept repeating that they will have no part with a Slavified Austria and will do anything to prevent this transformation. These led to the failure of the proposal. The Emperor – at the beginning willing to make concessions to

⁴³ Count Alfred Potocki (1817-1889), Austrian politician, supporter of the Czech aspirations, Minister-President of Austria 1870-1871.

⁴⁴ Count Karl Sigmund von Hohenwart (1824-1899), Austrian politician, Minister-President of Austria from February to October, 1871. Supporter of a tripartite monarchical structure.

the Czechs –, unable to resist the combined opposition, rejected the proposal; the Hohenwart government fell in October of 1871. The Emperor, in a ruling, declared that the sole body of constitutional reform is the central Reichsrat and requested the Czechs to appoint representatives from the Prague Diet to the Vienna Parliament. In a note, the Czechs openly refused taking part in the Reichsrat and decided to continue their abstention. The Auersperg government – in office from 1871 to 1879 – took strong steps against every Czech endeavor.

Minister-President Taaffe,⁴⁵ whose government was sworn in on August 14, 1879, was more conciliatory towards the Czechs, who decided to capitulate. The Czech representatives returned to parliament on September 23, 1879, bringing to a close the era of passive resistance. At this point, Benes again heaps sharp criticism on the right-to-a-state program: “The right to a state is an honorable dream, a very justified hope but merely a hope. It is clear from the events that this program lacks common sense. ... This policy was condemned to unavoidable failure. We have already alluded how absurd is the thought of founding a state over the protest and opposition of one third of the population. The Bohemian Germans would not accept a minority role, no matter how solemn the guarantees offered to them by the Czechs to allay their fears of oppression and loss of rights.”⁴⁶

Benes continued his thinking with: the concessions made by the Taaffe government to the Czechs, in return which they returned to the Vienna Parliament, were inadequate. It consisted of Pražak – the Moravian Czech leader – being appointed as Minister of Justice, a positive passage in the throne speech (extolling the enthusiasm of the Czech representatives), a few vague promises on the equality of rights of nationalities, the April 19, 1880 decree (which announced the linguistic equality of the nationalities) and the permission to open a Czech university in Prague. In spite of these concessions, the Czech were not satisfied. They received much but were far from their ultimate goal. The ‘old Czech’ politician supported the Taaffe government in return for the concessions but ran into confrontation with the ‘young Czechs’ who were not satisfied by the political hand-outs of the Taaffe government. Taaffe was unlikely to have been sanctioned to make serious concession to the Czechs, as the Crown was never willing to go past certain boundaries with regard to making compromises with the Czechs, lest it imperil the unity of the Empire. The Prague National Assembly of 1889 gave the mandate to the ‘young Czechs’ – half of the ‘old Czech’ representatives were not reelected.

To digress again from the dissertation, we must note that the Czech political landscape, in the second half of the 19th century, and especially so in the final decade, developed into a highly segmented party structure. The more important parties were: Old Czech Nationalist Party, Liberal Young Czech Party, Czech-Slav Social Democratic Workers Party, Czech-

⁴⁵ Viscount Eduard Taaffe (1833-1895), Austrian politician of Irish descent, twice Minister-President, in 1868-1870 and 1879-1893.

⁴⁶ Beneš: *Le problème* ... op. cit., p. 272.

Moravian Farmers Party (later the Czech-Slav Agrarian Party), Czech National Socialist Party, Czech People's Party, Czech Progressive Party.⁴⁷

Returning to Benes' argument: On top of the internal strife among the Czechs, the clashes between the Czechs and the Germans in Bohemia became more severe. The Germans already lost their majority position in the Prague Diet in 1883. Every attempt at coming to an agreement was futile due to the disproportionately sizeable German demands. In 1886, the Germans refused to sit in the session of the Prague Diet after it rejected their motion to have Bohemia divided into Czech and German territories. In January of 1890, Taaffe opened new negotiations with the Czechs to try and arrange an agreement between the Czechs and their Germans. The Old Czechs tried to show some nominal success, after their disastrous losses in the election, and accepted Taaffe's invitation to the negotiating table. The outcome of these negotiations, which created an internal crisis among the Czech political elite, is referred to as the 'Agreement' – observes Benes. In it, the sides stated their agreement on the following points:

1. The makeup of the ministry for public education in Bohemia. The council must be split into two: Czech and German. Thus, both nations can decide on the issues that impact their schools. The united council can make decisions affecting every school in Bohemia on matters of common interest.
2. The division of the country's agricultural ministry. This council, also, was split into two, Czech and German; also to sit as one to render decisions over matters of common interest. Otherwise, both factions to operate independently. The judicial and administrative ridings were re-drawn, as far as possible, to contain only Czech or German settlements.
3. Schools for the Czech and German minorities. Minority schools were to be provided and maintained, at state expense, where the settlement had 80 school-age children of minority nationality, whose father has lived in the community for 3 years and expressed a need for education in his mother tongue.
4. The creation of a chamber of commerce for the eastern portion of Bohemia.
5. Revision to the rules of election to the chamber of commerce.
6. Separation of the Prague Court of Appeal. The appeals court was again split into two, Czech and German, with 26 advisers who were fluent in both languages and a further 15 who were merely unilingual in German.
7. The rules for the appointment of judges.
8. The question of the languages. The 1880 decree of Taaffe to be reviewed.

⁴⁷ Urban, Otto: *A nagykorúvá érés gyötrelmei. Társadalom és politika a 19. század és a 20. század fordulóján* [The anguish of growing up. Society and politics in the 19th and the turn of the 20th century]. In: *Csehország a Habsburg-monarchiában 1618-1918* [Bohemia in the Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1918]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1989, pp. 132-155.

9. The question of language use in common administrative affairs. This item was deferred for decision to the next session of the Diet.
10. The founding of two national Curiae. Instead of a Curia for the towns and rural villages, two were to be created: Czech and German. Either Curia had the power of veto over questions of the Bohemian constitution, the electoral rules, language use in common administration and educational matters where linguistic segregation was not possible.
11. The reform of the electoral process. The government must present its planned electoral reform before the Diet's next session.

The agreement between the Old Czech and Taaffe brought discontent and displeasure among the Czech public, while the Germans were very content with it – states Benes – as the integrity of the Czech kingdom was breached with the recognition of an inviolable German territory. The Czechs had no rights in the German zone, while the Germans enjoyed equality in the Czech zones. Put another way, the Old Czechs abandoned the Czech minority in the German regions, while ensuring the rights of the Germans. The Young Czechs – who were not invited to the negotiations – deemed the ‘Agreement’ unacceptable and took position against it, citing the indivisibility of the entire country. This garnered the Young Czechs the support of the electorate, leading to their 1891 win in Parliament over the Old Czechs, where they stopped the ratification of the ‘Agreement.’ This also led to the fall of the Taaffe government.

In the closing portion of the chapter, Benes covers the period between 1891 and 1906, the Badeni⁴⁸ and Gautsch⁴⁹ governments, and the Czech-German skirmishes. He closes the chapter with these words: “Every attempt at a mediated a settlement between the two peoples was a failure. All Austria suffered under this regimen; the situation was near impossible to bear. A solution had to be found at any price. After long hesitation, and opposition by the conservatives, the Court ... decided to employ the last possible means at its disposal: in 1907, it granted universal suffrage to all the peoples of Austria.”⁵⁰

After sketching the history of the ‘Czech question’ through seven chapters, Benes gave the next chapter the title “Solution to the Austrian problem”, serving notice that he intends to present what he considers the correct solution.⁵¹ In introducing his rationale, he criticized the strategy of both the Old and Young Czechs. In his opinion, the Old Czechs’ right-to-a-state program was built on historical rights and considered all of Bohemia as indivisible. In 1890, they embarked on the path of compromise by

⁴⁸ Count Felix Kasimir von Badeni (1846-1909), Polish aristocrat, Austrian Minister-President between 1895 and 1897.

⁴⁹ Baron Paul Gautsch von Frankenthurn (1851-1918), Austrian politician, Minister-President between 1897-1898, as well as 1905-1906, and again in 1911.

⁵⁰ Beneš: *Le problème* ... op. cit., p. 278.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 278-307. Beneš broke this chapter (VIII) into two parts, labelling them as ‘I’ and ‘Conclusions’.

giving up this principle and agreeing to administrative and territorial separation of the Czechs and Germans. Even though this is an acceptable idea – states Benes – since the institution of areas with homogeneous populations could lead to self-rule by the nationalities, to more privileges and, to a large extent, the reduction of the central government in their affairs. The Young Czechs exploited the dissatisfaction of the Czech people with the ‘Agreement’, wrapped themselves in the mantle of historical rights, and displaced the Old Czechs in the elections. The Young Czechs thought Bohemia’s historical rights as *sacrosanct* and, for them, it was the ultimate Czech political aim. But while they alluded to Czech historical rights, in reality, they tended towards a federalist direction – Benes states. They concluded that the Czech question can only be solved if they strive toward the solution to the entire Austrian question. Meaning that they must strive for such a redrafted constitution – one that could be adopted for the whole of Austria – which rests on one single principle. But, a reform of such magnitude could only be of a federalist nature – says Benes. The Young Czechs – according to Benes – held themselves to be nationalistic radicals after 1890 but in reality were federalists. Their federalism was ill-defined, uncertain whether to anchor it on historical rights or natural rights, i.e., whether to transform Austria into a federation of provinces or a federation of nations. This is demonstrated by the draft constitution written by the Young Czechs in 1903, which contained strong federalist elements.

In this question, Benes takes a strong stance on the side that Czech politics must be based on natural rights. He feels that demanding historical rights is dangerous, as this principle can be cited against the Czechs, too. Next, he surveys the views of the other Czech parties regarding the solution of the ‘Czech question.’⁵² Thus, he introduces the policies of the Czech National Socialist Party (radicals), the Agrarian Party, the Czech-Slav Socialist Workers Party (social-democrats) and the Czech People’s Party (Masaryk’s party, also called the ‘Realists.’⁵³) The radicals definitely base their policies on historical rights, extracting some high-sounding mottoes from the historical programs of the past to use to incite the populace into an ‘all-or-nothing’ political direction. For the agrarians, class interests override all, their national policies closely following that of the Young Czechs. According to the social-democrats, the struggle between the nationalities was merely the outcome of capitalism; that the nationalism question is, in the final analysis, a social problem since the struggles

⁵² For more on the various parties, see Otto Urban (footnote 47) and Jiří Kořalka: *A világpolitika színpadán. Egy „állam nélküli nemzet” a világpolitika színpadán* [On the stage of world politics. A “stateless nation” on the stage of world politics]. In: *Csehország a Habsburg-monarchiában 1618-1918* [Czechs in the Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1918]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1989, pp. 156-197.

⁵³ Masaryk founded the Czech People’s Party in 1900 (later the Progressive Czech Party), which secured two mandates in the 1907 elections. For Masaryk’s pre-WWI activities Roman Szporluk: *The political thought of Thomas Masaryk*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1981, pp. 55-79.

against feudalism in Austria took a decidedly national coloring. The Realists – led by Masaryk – definitely held themselves to be believers in natural rights. Their political program stems from it. They discard the possibility of reinstating the old Czech state, as well as rejecting the ambiguity of the Young Czechs, which, theoretically, is based on historical rights but in reality makes use of natural and nation's rights. The Realists are definitely disciples of federalism. Their solution to the “Austrian problem” and the “Czech question” is decentralization, promoted by constitutional reform strengthening federalist and autonomist traits. The crux of the reform is the creation of national territories, the separation of administrative and judicial jurisdictions along ethnic lines. The Realists are not afraid of dismembering the Czech Kingdom, seeing the solution in the creation of ethnically homogeneous zones. We can't help but note that, while listing the various party platforms, Benes hold the Masaryk-Realist program as pre-eminent.

Next, Benes again poses the question: “How would it be possible to reorganize Austria in such a manner as every nation could be self-governing? Based on the principle of territory or personal choice?”⁵⁴ His answer was convoluted. In the first part, he argues the advantages of the personal rights as opposed to territoriality. He contends that the division of territory based on ethnicity is impossible. In Bohemia, there are German-populated areas that contain large Czech minorities, and these would be difficult to define on this basis. Here Czechs and Germans live in the same cantons, same communities, occasionally ‘in the same house.’ The only solution, therefore, - states Benes – is the reliance on the individual principle (otherwise personal principle). The country would be divided into individual ethnic units and every citizen would have the right to be registered into the region of their choice. Those belonging to the same nationality, not necessarily in the same region but anywhere in the country, would form one national unit one body, one ‘pseudo-legal person.’ It would be the responsibility of this national unit, this *corpus*, to provide for all the needs of its members: schools, theaters, libraries, museums, institutions, education, etc, in the required amount. It should ensure that the applicable laws are applied to its members, hence, it possesses its own administration and judiciary, collects taxes from its members – in all, truly behave as a state.

At this point, Benes introduces a twist into his reasoning, setting the territorial principle beside the personal principle. (It must be noted here that in the remainder of the dissertation, Benes never again mentions the personal principle, leaving us in the dark how he intends to reconcile the personal principle with the territorial principle – *auth.*) Benes states that the country should be carved up into regions. These administrative regions, as far as possible, should be populated by members of the same nation. (We must point out that here Benes contradicts himself, since only a few pages previously, he stated that the Czechs and Germans could not be separated – *auth.*) Each national and administrative level (villages, towns and regions) would elect a special council exclusively dedicated to its

⁵⁴ Beneš: *Le problème ...* op. cit., p. 289.

national schools, educational facilities, museums, theaters, libraries, etc. Financial questions at the three levels would be resolved by the councils, chosen by universal suffrage, whose make-up would reflect the proportion of the minority. Thus, the framework proposed for Austria and Bohemia – since this proposal would have to be applied to the whole of Austria – must be envisioned as follows: every village, every town, every region where members of two nationalities live, there would exist three institutions, three councils, etc. In Bohemia, for example, in every administrative sub-unit, there would be a Czech national council, a German national council and a council of mixed composition looking after common political and economic matters. The National Council would consist of the representatives of the local councils, which would send a responsible Minister to the central government.

In an earlier part of the dissertation, the importance of schools and the question of language use was a particularly important topic of the Czech-German conflict. So, it is not surprising that, in his solution, Benes specifically addresses these topics. Regarding schools, he states that the state would have no stake with regard to the founding of schools. In this matter, every nation would be the independent and absolute overseer of its public education. Elementary and middle schools would be the responsibility of the villages and towns and their councils, while regional schools would be established and maintained by the regional council. The lower schools would be supervised by the national councils, the advanced institutions falling under the National Assembly. In ethnically mixed districts, every school falls under the supervision of the council of the appropriate nationality.

Benes proposes the following solution to the linguistic use problem: in districts with homogeneous population, the language of public administration is the language of the majority. In mixed districts, each nationality would conduct its business in its own language, similar to the manner in which it supervises its schools. Only those matters would be conducted bilingually – in Czech and German in Bohemia – without bias toward either nationality, which are common in the mixed districts.

In continuing, Benes stresses that the basis for the fundamental re-organization of the state apparatus would be regional autonomy. This, however, requires a degree of democratization, the introduction of a democratic electoral process. Today – writes Benes – the bourgeoisie of the various Austrian nations would not permit, under any circumstances, the extension of the franchise to the proletariat, because every democratic process would aid the oppressed nations and hinder the oppressors. In the fight for democracy is part and parcel of the of the struggles of the nationalities in Austria. Benes then goes on to say that the central constitution must be annulled. Austria must convert itself into a federation of nationalities. In this conversion, particular attention must be paid to the national bodies, districts, areas and settlements, that is, in re-drawing the boundaries of the old regions and historical provinces, every effort should be made to create national units with homogeneous populations. The units thus derived must be equipped with its own administration and a legislative body – democratically chosen by universal suffrage. The right of universal

suffrage must be the basis of every election. Administrative autonomy – similar to the British local councils – must be unhindered. The communities, areas and districts must have the right to organize into national institutions by ethnicity. National Assemblies must be organized – with sovereignty. The central parliament would only retain jurisdiction over the most necessary common affairs, such as military matters, railway transportation, postal and telegraphic services, and the police. To these may be added the national judicial institutions, which would mediate complaints between the nationalities. All these would be applied equally in all parts of the Monarchy. In resolving conflicts in the mixed regions, the model of Belgium, or even more likely Switzerland, could serve as an excellent model for Austria. All these would not eliminate conflicts between the nationalities – says Benes – but they would become localized to a few mixed regions and should become less aggressive.

In the concluding portion of his reasoning, Benes reviews the federalist plan of Aurel C. Popovici,⁵⁵ which he considers inadequate for eliminating conflicts among the nationalities. He especially criticizes Popovici's proposal that, in the newly re-organized monarchy, each nationality absorbs any minority living on its territory. (We need to note here that Popovici only excludes the Germans where they are in a minority position, since he wished to endow them with minority rights.) After his critique of Popovici, Benes once more articulates one of his plan's cornerstones, the principle of territoriality: "Historical traditions must cede their place to national territories ... Czechs must shed their dreams of a state based on historic rights."⁵⁶

Benes gave the title of "Conclusions" to the final part of chapter VIII,⁵⁷ in which he covers the electoral reforms of 1907 (this introduced universal suffrage, for all Austrian male citizens over 24, in electing Reichsrat representatives). He takes special note of the number of representatives of the various nationalities in the 516 seat Reichsrat: Germans 233, Czechs 108, Poles 82, Ruthenians 33, Slovenes 24, Italians 19, Serbs and Croats 13 and Romanians 5.⁵⁸ (We must point out that Benes made a calculation error because, if we add it all up, the total comes to 517. – *auth.*)

Benes takes pains to point out the shortcomings of the election reforms, i.e., the disproportionality among the nationalities. He expresses that the Germans again received preferential treatment at the expense of the Czechs, the Poles over the Ruthenians, and the Italians over the Serbs and Croats. In proportion, one representative represents 40,400 Italians, 41,100 Germans, 46,200 Romanians, 52,000 Slovenes, 54,000 Poles, 54,700 Serbs and Croats, 57,300 Czechs and 103,000 Ruthenians.⁵⁹ He concludes that

⁵⁵ Aurel Popovici: *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Gross-Österreich*. Politische Studien zur der nationalen Fragen und Staatsrechtlichten Kriesen in Österreich-Ungarn. Leipzig, Elischer 1906.

⁵⁶ Beneš: *Le problème* ... op. cit., p. 302.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 303-308.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 305.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

“although we are very far from equality and genuine universal suffrage, the Slavs have finally achieved majority over the Germans in Austria.”⁶⁰

If we look at the numbers, Benes is indeed right, since the Slav total comes to 260, with a further 19 Italians and 5 Romanians. In reality, the Germans allied the Poles to their side and ensured their majority (233 + 82 = 315).⁶¹

Benes also explores the effects of the 1907 elections on Bohemia, remarking that “universal suffrage had deep consequences especially on the Czech state. Almost one half of the Czech electorate voted for the socialists.”⁶² With this statement of Benes, another problem of interpretation arises, since the Czech were able to send 108 representatives and those seats were captured by the various parties as shown below:

Party name	Seats
Agrarian Party	28
Coalition of Young Czechs (National Liberal Party) and Old Czechs (National Party)	26
Czech-Slav Socialist Worker’s Party (Social Democrats)	24
Clerical parties	17
Coalition of Czech National Socialist Party and State’s Right	2
Progressive Czech Party (aka Progressives)	2
Czech People’s Party (Masaryk’s party, or the Realists)	2
Independents	2
Total	108

Table 1: Final results of the 1907 elections in Bohemia, assembled by the author.⁶³

As can be seen clearly, no party alone won 87 seats! On this point, we can categorically state that Benes propagandized aggressively, as the Socialists (more precisely the Social Democrats) did actually get 87 seats in the 1907 elections but NOT in Bohemia, rather in Austria – officially, the Austrian Empire. Of the 516 Reichrats seats, they garnered 87 – 49 of them held by Germans – thus, not of the 108 Bohemian seats. Hence, the Social Democrats did not capture ‘more than half’ of the mandates in either the Empire or in Bohemia.⁶⁴

Returning to his line of reasoning, Benes closes his dissertation with the following: “We have spoken often of the dissolution of Austria. I do not believe any of it. The historic and economic ties that bind the Austrian nationalities, one to the other, are too strong to permit this dissolution. Universal suffrage and democratization in Austria, especially in Bohemia, will lay the groundwork for the easing of tensions between the nationalities; the union of various classes of the various nationalities,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Erich Zöllner: *Ausztia története* [History of Austria]. Osiris Kiadó, 2000, pp. 330-311.

⁶² Beneš: *Le problème* ... op. cit., p. 306.

⁶³ The table was assembled on the basis of data in the cited works of Kofalka and Zöllner.

⁶⁴ Zöllner: *Ausztia* ... op. cit., p. 330.

uniting out of a common economic interest will, of necessity, exert a pressure to solve the Austrian and ethnic question. Certainly, the national struggles will not cease overnight. They will continue to play an important role in Austria for a long time to come but will cease to be like those of the previous half century. Universal suffrage prepared the groundwork for the conclusion of this difficult situation, whose termination ... will lead to the solution of the problem.”⁶⁵

In assessing the first plan of Benes, it can be said that it was completely loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a restatement of the Palacky Austro-Slav course that ‘if it (the Habsburg’s state – *auth.*) did not exist then, in the interest of Europe and all humanity, we should create it.” He did not wish to dissolve the Monarchy but felt a serious reorganization as a necessity. The crux of his suggested solution: federative reorganization with its attendant decentralization.

It is worth comparing his first plan with the plans of the Czech political parties of the day. By the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the Czech national political structure had become deeply segmented, with a number of directions and parties competing for the voters.⁶⁶ Of the eight parties standing for election in 1907, only the Czech National Socialist Party – led by Václav Klobučák – took a sharply anti-Habsburg direction. This position was only exceeded by two of the leading politicians of the State’s Right Progressive Party, founded in 1908, - poet Viktor Dyk and journalist Egon Bondy – when they openly demanded, before 1914, the creation of an independent Czech state outside the framework of the Monarchy.⁶⁷ The other Czech parties all unanimously took a stand on striving for national independence within the Monarchy. These parties all stressed that the Czechs form an independent nation but the realization of complete independence – the creation of an independent Czech state – is frustrated by foreign political circumstances, not the least among them the geographic location occupied by the Czechs, the sensitive central Europe between encroaching Germany and tsarist Russia. For this reason – they said – they accept the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a more or less acceptable state form, although far from ideal. One of the leaders of the Young Czechs – Karel Kramář – put it thus: “Only politically immature rookies in Bohemia can entertain the idea that an independent Czech state can come into being in the middle of Europe amid the territorial and economic expansion of Germany.”⁶⁸

In line with their platform, these parties strove for a singular type of Czech-Austrian compromise, to accomplish Czech independence within the Monarchy. We must point out that Benes, at several places in his dissertation, flogs these parties’ programs with harsh criticism. He stated that the rejuvenation of the historical Czech Kingdom, a part of both the Old and New Czech parties, was an impossibility as you can not create a state against the wishes of one third of the population (the Bohemian

⁶⁵ Beneš: *Le problème* ... op. cit., p. 308.

⁶⁶ Urban: *A nagykorúvá* ... op. cit., pp. 147-154.

⁶⁷ Kořalka: *A világpolitika* ... op. cit., p. 161.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 177.

Germans). It was for this that he stressed that the only solution for the coexistence of the Czechs and Germans in the Czech provinces was decentralization and autonomy, that is, within the affected boundaries, the Germans – and the Czechs, also – must be given autonomy.

We can state that in his first proposal, Benes asks for less for the Czechs – and grants more to the Germans – than the right-to-a-state program. That program proposed the union of the three provinces of the Czech Kingdom – Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia – with the Germans becoming a minority within the reconstituted, enlarged whole. Against this, Benes would have liberated the Germans living within the Czech territories from the control of the Czech state. In his plan, Czechs and Germans, living within the boundaries of the historical Bohemian provinces, lead independent lives, within the boundaries of their autonomy.

István Borsody, in his biography, mentions that in the 1930's – almost 30 years later – the Sudeten Germans dusted off this almost-forgotten book of Benes and began 'to cite very unpleasant passages from it,' demanding autonomy from the Czechoslovak state on that basis.⁶⁹ The peril that the young researcher's book represented, was handled by President Benes by allegedly buying up every copy of the book available in Europe.⁷⁰

Relinquishing the first concept

There are no signs in the pre-1914 activities of Benes that would have pointed to a political career. In this period, he was more the young, unknown scientist than a serious politician. At the outbreak of WWI, he is 30 years old with the beginnings of typical intellectual future consisting of university studies at home and abroad, bursaries, work towards a diploma, various studies and some political interest. Benes led the life of an average intellectual, returning every day to a pleasantly furnished middle class home in an outer suburb of Prague, to a loving wife. The War fundamentally changed his peaceful existence, transforming the studious young man into a 'conspirator,' an émigré and, finally, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak state.

At the outbreak of World War One, neither the Reichsrat, nor the Czech Territorial Assembly were in session, hence, the Czech political parties were 'saved' from the obligation of having to make an official declaration in these official forums regarding the war. The war's outbreak caught almost all the Czech politicians off-guard, most of whom would take a wait-and-see attitude, preferring not to take a stand until they received an indication of the outcome. To this end, the parties and their leaders made statements of loyalty to the Monarchy.⁷¹ Of course, there were qualitative differences between the parties' declarations of loyalty. The staunchest supporters of the Monarchy were the Czech Catholics who stated their "unwavering loyalty and support for the Empire and towards

⁶⁹ Borsody, István: *Benes*. Budapest, 1943, p. 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Zbyenek Zeman: *The Break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy 1914-1918*. Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 43.

his Majesty, the Emperor.”⁷² Of the leading politicians, it was only Karel Kramář who questioned continued loyalty to the Monarchy – although couched in diplomatic terms – when he wrote an article Russophile article in the *Narodní Listy* on August 4, 1914, the day the German armies attacked Belgium. Kramář accepted German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg’s view that the war is one between the Germans and the Slavs but cautioned that the future of the Czech nation depends on who wins the war.⁷³

Kramář’s Russophile leanings are clearly evident when, in May of 1914 – well before any indications of war – he formulates a Slav confederation plan, based on the spirit of the old pan-Slav principles.⁷⁴ The ‘Slav Empire’ of Kramář was to consist of the Russian Empire, the lands and territories of the Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Serb and Montenegrin crowns. On Kramář’s map, the Czech crown lands, beside Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, also included the Slovak settled lands of northern Hungary, from Bratislava to Visegrád, all the way to Carpatho-Ukraine of northeastern Hungary, aka Ruthenia. Ruthenia, merged with Eastern Galicia and Northern Bukovina, was to become a direct part of the Russian Empire. In the South, the Kingdom of Serbia was to receive control of all territories, with the exception of Montenegro, all the way to Trieste and Carinthia. The amalgamation ‘possibly’ even extended over southwestern and western Hungary, “in light of the remnants of Croat populations which extend far North along the flow of the central Danube, where Serbia would abut the Czech territory.” Hence, the Austria Empire would shrink to the German populated provinces; Hungary would be reduced to “the half-Jewish Budapest and its German environs and the strictly Magyar populated regions of the Great Plains”, with a population of approximately 5-6 million. Temporarily, Hungary’s status would be independent but, over time and in response to circumstances, would become a dependent, vassal state to the Slav Empire, along with Romania and Greece.

To return to the events of August 1914, we must note that on the question of the loyalty of the Czech politicians, the political elite received a clear sign of what happens when they stray from the path of loyalty. On September 4, Václav Klofáč (member of the Vienna Parliament and a leader of the National Socialist Party), as mentioned earlier, one of the most extremist opponents of the Monarchy before 1914, was arrested on charges of treason. While Czech politicians issued protestations of loyalty towards the Monarchy, Tomáš G. Masaryk had, in secret, begun his anti-Monarchy activities.⁷⁵ As a first step, he passed news and requests to his London friend, Wickham Steed (foreign editor of the London Times), through Emanuel Voska, an American citizen of Czech descent, who

⁷² Ibid, p. 44.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 43; Kořalka: *A világpolitika ...* op. cit., p. 181.

⁷⁴ Jan Galanduer: *Vznik Československé republiky, 1918: programy, projekty, perspektivy*. Praha, 1988, pp. 243-250; Gulyás, László – Tóth, István: *Kramář Közép-Európa terve* [Kramář’s plan for Central Europe]. *Régió* 2004, issue 4.

⁷⁵ For a general summary of the biographies of T.G. Masaryk, see Note 2 in the bibliography.

happened to be in Prague, on his way to London.⁷⁶ Steed received Masaryk's message on August 2, which he immediately forwarded to the Russian Embassy in London. In the message, Masaryk asks the Russian high command not to term any Czech deserters from the Monarchy armies as enemies. Beckendorf – Russia's ambassador in London – replied with the suggestion that deserting Czech soldiers sing "Hej Slované" to signal their nationality.⁷⁷

Between September 12 and 26, 1914, Masaryk traveled to Holland (his first trip) – using as an excuse the need to accompany his American sister-in-law – and posted letters from Rotterdam to Ernest Denis (professor at the Sorbonne, avowed French friend of Slav affairs), to Wickham Steed and Seton-Watson, asking for a personal meeting.⁷⁸ These took place in October (during his second Trip to Holland, October 14-29, 1914). Masaryk informed Seton-Watson that, with the exception of the aristocracy and the clergy, the entire Czech nation was hoping for its independence. The sequence of events should be – said Masaryk – that, first, the historical Czech provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia should be 'restored,' then, append to them the Slovak populated areas of Hungary. It would be "wiser not head the new state with the Russian crown prince, rather a western prince, preferably Danish or Belgian." The Czech state thus constituted would be bound in the North by an autonomous Poland, in the East by the Russian Empire, expanded by Ruthenia and eastern Galicia.⁷⁹

Let us examine what happened to Benes in the meantime, how he reacted to the outbreak of the war. Let us cite from his war time memoirs: "... the war, whose outbreak was caused primarily by Austria-Hungary in 1914, surprised me as a political world event, although not personally because I was prepared for it politically, philosophically and ethically. Thus, I construed the dilemma of the Habsburg empire as: the end will be either the lost war or the social upheaval, socio-political revolution after the war ... When the fateful time arrived, I began – applying my consistent scientific methods and philosophy to the events – my revolutionary activities, calm and courageous, totally dedicated, never hesitant."⁸⁰

At the outbreak of the war, Benes simply abandoned his first concept. Why he changed his views as chronicled in his 1908 Dijon dissertation, he

⁷⁶ Emanuel Voska also filled an important role in the organization of the Czechoslovak emigration. He tried to organize the activities of the Czechoslovak emigration, primarily in the USA, according to Masaryk's instructions. Voska's important role is reflected by the inclusion of numerous letters written to him by Masaryk into a publication by Frank Hadler: *Weg von Österreich! Das Weltkrieg von Masaryk und Benes im Spiegel ihrer Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus des Jahren 1914-1918*. Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1995.

⁷⁷ T.G. Masaryk: *A világforradalom 1914-1918* [The world revolution 1914-1918]. Európa Kiadó, Budapest, 1990, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Romsics, Ignác: *A trianoni békeszerződés* [The peace treaty of Trianon]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, p. 44.

⁸⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 25.

noted: "... the changes in the situation at home (Bohemia – *auth.*) in the years between 1909 and 1914 gave me more and more disappointments. The internal political battles within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the struggles for universal suffrage, the Bosnian political crisis of 1908, the absolutist rule in Bohemia and Croatia all served to convince me that we are living in the midst of significant political crises, which will lead to significant changes, either peacefully or through deep trauma."⁸¹

It must be noted that the previous two quotations were written by Benes after the First World War, essentially knowing the outcomes, and must be treated carefully as source material. If we examine the actions Benes took, then we can affirm that during August, he regularly traveled into Prague, tried to gather information until, in the beginning of September, he decides to join 'Čas' – this was Masaryk's newspaper – as a volunteer contributor.⁸² The two future founders of the Czechoslovak state barely knew each other at this point. Masaryk remembers in his memoirs: "Until the war, I barely met him (i.e., Benes – *auth.*) personally, but I did follow with attention the articles he wrote from Paris. I heard about him, mostly from that blessed editor of the Čas, Krystynek, finding in him my own realism and the effects of French positivism and Marxism."⁸³

In September, before the regular month-end editorial meeting, Benes sought out Masaryk and told him that "in my opinion, we can not idly observe the war, we must do something: he is restless, he would like to be active."⁸⁴ With this 'confession,' Benes turned to the most likely person as, by this time, Masaryk had begun his anti-Monarchy activities. After their conversation, at Masaryk's request, Benes joined the activities of one of the opposition groups, organizing the 'Mafia.'⁸⁵

Benes remembers the birth of the Mafia in his memoirs: "We held several meetings at the apartment of dr. Boucel. Initially, general informative meetings, which naturally had an anti-Austrian nature, but lacked specifically revolutionary and conspiratorial plans. In time, we debated more and more on the probable outcome of the war, our political aims and tasks."⁸⁶ During this period – in practical terms, the fall of 1914 – Benes was busy traveling to Vienna and Germany. The purpose of the Vienna trips was to transport to Prague the documents purloined by an important Mafia member, Kovanda, the valet of Austrian Interior Minister Heinold. The objective of the German trips was to pick up parcels from Seton-Watson at the central Post Office in Dresden, containing the British newspapers *Morning Post* and the *Times*.⁸⁷ During the fall and early winter of 1914, Masaryk was almost continually abroad, essentially promoting

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 17-18.

⁸² Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 16-21.

⁸³ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 36.

⁸⁴ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ...* op. cit., pp. 36-37.

⁸⁵ Roman Szporluk: *The political thought of Thomas G. Masaryk*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1981, pp. 126-130; Jiri Kovtun: *Masarykov triumf. Příběh konce války*. Toronto, 1987, pp. 68-69.

⁸⁶ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 30.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 30-31.

Benes to the second-in-charge of the organization. Hence, it is not surprising that Masaryk, when about to leave Prague for Italy on December 1914, at their last meeting names him as the leader of the Bohemian organization and with maintaining their line of communication.⁸⁸ According to the original plan, Masaryk was to return to Prague in February of 1915.

Masaryk arrived in Rome on December 22, 1914. Practically every European country had diplomatic contact with Italy, since the Italians declared their neutrality at the outbreak of hostilities, allowing these representatives to continue working unhindered. Masaryk traveled to Rome obtain news about the war and make diplomatic contacts, for which Rome was the ideal terrain. His intuition bore fruit and he was able to carry out discussions with numerous south-Slav and a few Polish émigré politicians; through a Russian journalist, he forwarded a memorandum to the Russian Foreign Minister, as well as having several meetings with the British ambassador to Rome, James Rennell Rodd.⁸⁹

After Masaryk's departure, Benes continued the organizing activities at home, faithfully traveling to Dresden and Vienna, worked on the editorial staff of the *Čas* and maintained contact with the other members of the anti-Monarch group. At the end of January, 1915, he comes into possession of the information (again forwarded to the conspirators from Interior Minister Hainhold's valet, Kovanda) that the Monarchy's ambassador to Rome, baron Macchio, knows that Masaryk met two outstanding political figures of the south-Slav émigrés, Supilo and Trumbič. Hence, it was most probable that he would be arrested on his return by the Austrian police.⁹⁰ To avoid it, Benes traveled to Zurich at the beginning of February, 1915 – Masaryk having moved in the meantime from Italy to Switzerland – to meet with Masaryk. On the basis of information he received from Benes, Masaryk decides not to return to Prague but to continue the organizing abroad, as an émigré. At the same time, Benes' appointed task is to lead and coordinate the clandestine organizational activities, as well as maintain the contact between the homeland organization and the foreign activists (at this point, only Masaryk).⁹¹

Benes returned to Prague in the middle of February, 1915. To maintain his cover, he continued his previous academic routine, continuing to teach at the commercial academy and hold seminars at the university. In reality, he was feverishly organizing the anti-Monarchy group called the 'Mafia.'⁹² In turn, he makes contact with all the significant politicians of

⁸⁸ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 19.

⁸⁹ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ...* op. cit., pp. 45-58; Kovtun: *Masarykov triumf ...* op. cit., pp. 68-69.

⁹⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 38.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Jan Hajšmann: *Mafie v rozmachu. Vzpomínky na odboj doma*. Praha, 1933; Jan Hajšmann: *Česká Mafie*. Praha, 1934; František Soukup: *28 říjen 1918. Předpoklady a vyvoj našeho odboje domácího v československé revoluci za státní samostatnost*. vol. I-II. Praha, 1928.

the country: Josef Scheiner (president of Sokol), Přemysl Šámal, Karel Kramář, Alois Rašín (one of the leaders of the Czech National Socialist Party), Alois Hajn (a politician in the State's Right Progressive Party). Benes tried to persuade Bohumír Šmeral, leader of the Czech-Slav Social Democratic Party, to join in the organizing but Šmeral elucidated to Benes that Masaryk's risky politics can easily bring catastrophe on the nation. In his view, the Entente made no guarantees in return for any potential anti-Austrian programs of the Czechs; the Social Democratic Party's position of manifestation of loyalty to the Monarchy was, in his opinion, the correct one.⁹³ The first 'official' meeting of the Mafia occurred in early March, 1915 at the home of dr. Šámal. Besides the host, Alois Hajn, Karel Kramář, Alois Rašín, František Soukup (Social Democratic politician), Josef Scheiner and Benes were present.⁹⁴ There were regular meeting from March until July, 1915. Benes writes: "We met every time there was important news from within the country, or from abroad, or if professor Masaryk requested something."⁹⁵ Masaryk regularly sent messengers from Switzerland to Prague and one time, taking advantage of Easter school break, Benes traveled to Switzerland to co-ordinate necessary measures with Masaryk. It was Masaryk's intention to take a public stand against the Monarchy but he felt it necessary to have support in the homeland. The Mafia did not have written rules. The oath of secrecy rested on a handshake and the word of honor of the member. Its network extended all over the Monarchy; its members infiltrated the offices of the Minister of the Interior, other ministries, factories and offices. Their activities consisted of organizing strikes, burning down mills, setting off bombs in factories, riots, disappearances, documents disappearing and leaks of information.⁹⁶

During their Easter meeting, Masaryk handed Benes the text of the statement with which he intended to begin his anti-Monarchy activities abroad.⁹⁷ He asked Benes to have the Mafia discuss the text and, through a courier, signify their agreement or make suggestions for potential changes. On his return, Benes convened a meeting of the Mafia where the statement was read and accepted in principle, with the proviso that Masaryk only make his public declaration on the express request of the Prague politicians. The Mafia members were of the opinion that the appropriate moment must be chosen based on events at home.⁹⁸ On May 17, 1915, Benes received a parcel in a double sided suitcase containing 20 copies of a French-language Czech émigré newspaper, *Nation Tchèque*, and some valuable information. He called a meeting of the Mafia for May 20 where

⁹³ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 45-46.

⁹⁴ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 45.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ Gyönyör, József: *Határok születtek. A csehszlovák állam megalakulása és első törvénye* [Birth of borders. The formation of Czechoslovakia and its first statute]. Madách Kiadó, Pozsony, 1992, p. 13.

⁹⁷ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, pp. 57-58.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 61.

he distributed the fresh newspapers.⁹⁹ The meeting was disturbed by some unpleasant news: the authorities conducted a search at the home of one of the members, Scheiner. On hearing this, the meeting was immediately adjourned. Two Mafia members, Scheiner and Kramař, were arrested on their return to their homes.¹⁰⁰

Benes thought that the Austrian authorities had discovered the organization but it soon became apparent that the Austrian interior and security organs had, as yet, no knowledge of the Mafia, or Scheiner and Kramař's membership. The two arrests were unconnected to the Mafia's activities. The Austrian authorities slowly became conscious that some sort of organization existed in the background. New arrests were made on July 12, 1915, this time Rařin, who was sent to Vienna. Benes assessed the current situation in his memoirs: "... it was high time to hit the road."¹⁰¹

This he accomplished in a roundabout way. With the aid of a former school friend, he crossed the German-Austrian border at the town of Asch on September 1, 1915, took the train to Munich and, by steamer across Lake Boden /Bodensee/, stepping on Swiss soil in the night of September 2 to 3.¹⁰²

Thus began the first period of Benes' émigré existence, which would end four years later, with his return on September 24, 1919, as the Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic.

1.2 THE ÉMIGRÉ ACTIVITIES OF BENEŠ PHASE ONE (September, 1915 – March, 1916)

During the first three and a half years of his first émigré episode, Benes performed a series of very wide ranging activities. There are two possible ways in which to record these activities. The first possibility is to document them chronologically. This order carries the danger that, while we cling to a given time-line, parts of the narrative that are closely related thematically may be relegated to distant portions of the work. The second possibility, then, is to treat his activities by thematic groupings. This ordering, however, carries the possibility – nay, probability – of destroying the chronology of the actions. In order to try to avoid the inherent problems in either choice, we have opted for a combination of both methods; while adhering to the principle of chronological order, we will try to discuss thematically connected portions in the same sections.

Benes met Masaryk in Geneva at 9:00PM on September 3, 1915, who wanted to send him back to Prague to organize the continued lines of communications between the Mafia and the Swiss center for Czech émigrés, before going abroad permanently. Benes managed to dissuade Masaryk from this intent, after listing the impending perils awaiting him in

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰⁰ František Soukup: *Revoluce práce*. vol. I-II. Praha, 1938, pp. 153-155, 167-184, 457-462, 467.

¹⁰¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 69.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 70.

Prague (immediate arrest).¹⁰³ Shortly after, the division of labor of the émigré centre was agreed, accordingly: Masaryk moves to London,¹⁰⁴ Benes opens offices in Paris, while Lev Sychrava continues in Switzerland. Lev Sychrava, as a young Prague lawyer, was a sympathizer of the Masaryk Progressive Party – although not a member – and was the first Czech to emigrate after the outbreak of the war. On his own decision, he left Prague on September 24, 1914 and settled in Bern. After Masaryk moved his office from Italy to Switzerland (January 1915), he draws the young lawyer into expatriate movement, who then takes over the media (press) affairs of the émigré organization.¹⁰⁵

The leadership of the émigré organization needed to solve three important problems in the fall of 1915.¹⁰⁶ Firstly, it needed to make itself known and, making use of the already existing contacts (Seton-Watson, W. Steed, E. Denis), find new ones into the upper political regions, the decision making circles of the Allies. Secondly, the émigré society had to be organized, creating the infrastructure necessary for continued political action. Lastly, a political program of the émigré organization needed to be created.

Let us now examine how Benes addressed these three challenges.

Paths to the higher circles of politics

On September 16, 1915, both Masaryk and Benes traveled to Paris. Masaryk stayed for two weeks, introducing Benes to his friends and acquaintances, then departed for London.¹⁰⁷ Left on his own, Benes began to organize the Czechoslovak émigré centre in Paris. The early circumstances were modest. Benes settled into cheap student lodgings on Rue Leopold Robert. It is indicative of the start-up problems that the somewhat prosperous lecturer of the Prague University is once again living in circumstances similar to his Sorbonne days.¹⁰⁸ Benes begins his Parisian activities by attempting to create and build a network of contacts. He ran into difficulties gaining access to the official political circles, where decisions are made. Benes was a refugee, and as such was treated as an ‘escaped Austrian subject,’ and that unpleasant label carried a lot of implications. He notes in his memoirs that the British interned him several times – when he traveled to England to meet with Masaryk – as a subject of nation at war with England. It was only thanks to his influential friends that he was able to secure his freedom after a short arrest. Naturally, as an escaped Austrian subject, he could not have official contact with the leading members of the Entente. He was forced to try and make contact through ‘back doors’ to create a Czechoslovak lobby. Benes writes of his

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 72.

¹⁰⁴ Kovtun: *Masarykov triumf* ... op. cit., pp. 68-105

¹⁰⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of* ... op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁰⁶ Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Kovtun: *Masarykov triumf* ... op. cit.; R.W. Seton-Watson: *Masaryk in England*. Cambridge, 1943; Harry Hanak: *Great-Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War*. London-New York-Toronto, 1962, pp. 100-135.

¹⁰⁸ Borsody: *Benes* ... op. cit., p. 48.

attempts: “I knew a few people from my previous two stays in Paris, in 1905 and 1911, but either they forgot me or they disappeared... I was faced with two choices. First, the circle of Sorbonne professors, whom I knew vaguely from before... The second option led to the Socialists...”¹⁰⁹ Although in his memoirs Benes only mentions these two options, a careful read of his memoirs and other documents, in fact, suggest four options or back doors.

The first is the circle of professors, with whom Benes had contact in his student days. The list is impressive: E. Denis, A. Meillet, E. Durkheim, C. Bougle, plus Masaryk’s intellectual friends. These professors, to some degree, verified for the Allies decision makers that the Czech question and movement is real, serious and will need a political solution. To get an idea of the help these acquaintances could offer the Czech movement, Benes himself noted that: “These intellectual associates all had either influential political friends, or were themselves active publicists, or could introduce us into influential political circles.”¹¹⁰

The contact of academics, as the route to political circles, is clearly seen in the case of his ex-professor in Dijon, Louis Eisemann. Professor Eisemann, as an expert in the Austro-Hungarian field, was assigned a post in the information section of the French War Ministry, at the outbreak of the war. As part of his work, he often had need of someone who knew the circumstances in more detail. In practice, the relationship between Benes and Eisemann was such that Benes delivered information and clarifications for Eisemann’s official ministerial needs. Eisemann, in his turn, returned the favor by introducing Benes to important officials in the ministry.

The other avenue, as noted in the quote above, was that these academic friends were themselves active publicists. We could show numerous examples, but will only note the case of the most substantial personality of them, Ernest Denis, professor of Slavic studies at the Sorbonne. Denis, who spent a lot of time in Bohemia in his younger years, already noted in his pre-WWI writings (*Fin de l’indépendance Bohême*. 1890; *La Bohême depuis la montagne blanche*. 1903) that the Czechs have the role of becoming the greatest barrier in Central Europe to the wave of Pan Germanism. In 1906, he creates the *Association Franco-Slave*, with its own newspaper, the *Revue Slave*. His role during the war was appraised by Kálmán Rácz in the following manner: “He had a substantial part in that French public opinion was filled with anti-German sentiment, finding proof for it in the confusion of the Slav problem.”¹¹¹ During the war, he writes a book, *La questione d’Autriche Les Slovaques*, in which he takes the stand: “Only one possible solution remains, the creation of a series of independent states in place of the Dual Monarchy, starting with the Serb-Croat Kingdom and the Czechoslovak state, which would extend to the left bank of the river (he means the Danube – *auth.*)”¹¹² Apart from his

¹⁰⁹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 81.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Rácz, Kálmán: *A pánszlávizmus története* [The history of pan-Slavism]. Budapest, no date.

¹¹² This book of Denis was published in Paris in 1917.

writings, he provided Benes with other assistance. When the Czechoslovak Committee wanted to address a proclamation to the public – that of November 14, 1915 – Denis suggests changes in the wording to make it more palatable for the French. Too much history, too dry – he said. Benes accepted the critique and asked Denis to rewrite the proclamation. It also afforded important aid that Denis organized a group to study Slav topics, the circle holding a series of debates from 1917 onwards.

It was thanks to academic friends like Denis that the Czech refugees conquered the universities; Masaryk secured a professorship at King's College. His introductory lecture was attended by the Belgian and Greek ambassadors, several members of the Lower House of Parliament, and Prime Minister Asquith sent a letter, addressing the attendees.¹¹³

The second 'back door' was represented by the Socialist contacts Benes had made earlier. As already noted, Benes studied in France between 1905 and 1907,¹¹⁴ during which time he sympathized with, and made contacts among, the French Socialists. On his return to Prague, he maintained the links.¹¹⁵ These contacts he reactivated on his return to Paris. Benes gained access to the Ministry of Munitions through contacts cultivated through the French Socialist, Albert Thomas;¹¹⁶ one of the French Socialist leaders of the Parisian Rovnost Association, Paul Louis, introduced him to an official in the Foreign Ministry.¹¹⁷

The key to the third 'back door' was the person of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, a Slovak. Benes met Štefánik at the Paris home of the painter Strimpl on December 13, 1915, who volunteered his co-operation in the anti-Monarch struggle. This was of such momentous import that Benes did not care to make the decision on his own. On December 22, he went to London to consult with Masaryk. Masaryk had certain reservations regarding Štefánik's volunteering, finally deciding that Benes can involve him in the émigrés' work. Later, this turned out to be an inspired decision. Štefánik's contacts were invaluable to the nascent Czechoslovak émigré organization. Štefánik finished his studies in astronomy in 1904 at the University of Prague. Not finding any employment at home, he went to Paris where he worked as an astronomer in the Paris observatory. He was a member of various French expeditions to Mont Blanc, Spain, Oxford, Turkestan, Algiers, South America and Tahiti. He enjoyed a good reputation in French scientific circles, as well as having *entrée* into the larger and more influential political salons.¹¹⁸ He volunteered for the French army at the outbreak of the war, taking part in 1915 battles of Aisne and Yvres. As a flying officer, he was posted to Serbia, crashed his plane in Albania and returned to France via warship. On top of it all "... he was naturalized before the war and, as a French citizen, he had access to

¹¹³ Kořalka: *A világpolitika ...* op. cit., p. 186.

¹¹⁴ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁵ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹¹⁸ Dušan Kovač: *Szlovákia története* [History of Slovakia]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1993, p. 159.

everywhere not accessible to foreigners.”¹¹⁹ The extent and effectiveness of his contacts can be demonstrated by the fact that, when Masaryk stayed in Paris in 1916, it was Štefanik who arranged his meeting with Prime Minister Briand. Štefanik was one of those effective back doors through which Benes gained access to the French political elite.

The possibility of a fourth ‘back door’ is raised by Ferenc Fejtő in his book *Requiem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért*. According to Fejtő, both Masaryk and Benes were Freemasons, making use of the French lodges and support of the Freemason politicians to persuade the Entente leaders to their own ends.¹²⁰ In Fejtő’s view, the Masons played a leading role in changing the world war into an ideological war, with the aim of converting Europe to a republicanism; the kind of republican Europe with countries clustered around the League of Nations, after the Hydra heads of clericalism and military monarchism have been decapitated. Masaryk and Benes quickly convinced their freemason friends that, if they dismember the Vatican and its pillar of support, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, they will contribute to that shining holy mission, which Providence entrusted to the people of the revolution, and prepare for the glorious future.¹²¹ Convinced, the Freemasons “made their extensive organization available for propaganda purposes to the émigré communities of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, etc.”¹²² In later events, too, the Masons aided the Masaryk-Benes and other anti-Monarchy groups. To demonstrate, the Freemason Congress for the Allied and Neutral Countries, held in Paris between June 28 and 30, 1917, accepted as one of its resolutions the complete catalog of the Italian, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav demands. These demands, aimed at the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, were sent to the allied and neutral governments.¹²³ Benes, in his memoirs admits – although a little sheepishly – his Freemason connections, writing: “... for propaganda reasons, I maintained contact with the Freemasons too, as well as the League of Human and Civil Rights...”¹²⁴ Let us note here that the League of Human and Civil Rights was one of the most influential Freemason-directed association.

We must point out that a common trait of each avenue was that they were based on personal connections, already made or new. Friends and sympathizers opened doors for Masaryk and Benes to the most important universities, public administration offices, influential salons, and occasionally even to the person of ministers. As he wrote: “The friends I made voluntarily and enthusiastically assisted in spreading their influence over the widest possible area.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ...* op. cit., p. 115.

¹²⁰ Fejtő, Ferenc: *Requiem egy hajdan volt birodalomért. Ausztria-Magyarország szétrombolása* [Requiem for a vanished empire. The demolition of Austria-Hungary]. Minerva-Atlantisz, Budapest, 1990, p. 338.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 322-323.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 323.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 323.

¹²⁴ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 129.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 84.

Creating the organizational infrastructure

Other émigré groups, beside the Masaryk-Benes group, volunteered for anti-Monarchy actions.¹²⁶ The openly anti-Monarchy movement of Czechs living abroad had already begun in the summer of 1914, in the first weeks of the war, organized among the Czech immigrants mainly in the USA, Russia, France and England. This strata were not political refugees, having left their homeland for social or economic reasons, for various periods of time, or permanently. Similar to the Czech expatriates, an anti-Monarchy trend also developed among the Slovak émigrés after the outbreak of the war, which intertwined on several points with that of the Czechs.

After the outbreak of hostilities, the Czechs and Slovaks living in the Russian Empire were the most active.¹²⁷ The Slovak newspaper of Warsaw, *Echo Slowianskie*, heralds a 'Czechoslovak' liberation in its August 17, 1914 issue. In August, a delegation of Czechs living in Russia hands a memorandum to Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov. On August 20, 1914, tsar Nicholas II greets a delegation of Czechs living in Moscow, who offer him the Czech crown. On September 17, the Tsar meets with another deputation – the representatives of the Czech colonies in Russia – who present him with yet another memorandum, this one dealing with the borders of the future Czech state. On a practical note, the idea cropped up in the early days of the war among the Czechs – and Slovaks – living in Russia to form a Czechoslovak unit within the Russian army.

The Czechs living in America formed in Chicago the Bohemian National Alliance on September 2, 1914, which published its declaration encompassing the dreams and aspirations of the expatriates of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia for the 'Czechoslovak nation'.¹²⁸ The American Slovaks formed the Slovak League even before the war. In the beginning, its leaders, Ivan Daxner and Albert Mamatey, only demanded Slovak autonomy. At the 'Czechoslovak Congress', held in Paris on December 28, 1914, they declared: "We demand self-rule for Slovakia, not as a separate independent state, but envision a separate political administrative unit, without regard to which larger state the diplomats will assign Slovakia, as one of its constituent parts."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Deák, József: *A cseh–szlovák egység diplomácia története* [The diplomatic account of the Czech-Slovak union]. Budapest, 1943, pp. 39-48; Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 14-24; Victor S. Mamatey: *The Establishment of the Republic*. In: Victor S. Mamatey - Radomír Luza (ed.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 10-16; Betty Miller Untenberger: *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, pp. 1-15.

¹²⁷ Ibid (Deák), pp. 38-39; Ibid (Mamatey), p. 11; Jevgenij F. Firsov: *Boj za orientáciu českého a slovenského národnooslobodziovacehio hnutia v Rusku v rokoch 1915-1917*. Historický Časopis, 1995, issue 1, pp. 47-68.

¹²⁸ Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., p. 17; Szvicsényi, Zoltán: *Hogyan veszett el a Felvidék?* [How was Northern Hungary lost?] Franklin Társulat, Budapest, 1921, pp. 44-48.

¹²⁹ Ibid (Gyönyör), p. 17.

Several months later – on March 14, 1915 – the Slovak League modified its objective and decided, at conference in Pittsburg, that they wished to achieve autonomy within a future Czechoslovak state.¹³⁰ The Slovak League and the Bohemian National Alliance reached an agreement in Chicago, on April 4, to fight united for the creation of a Czechoslovak state. The leaders of the two groups signed the ‘Cleveland Agreement’ on October 25, in which they affirmed their call for the creation of a country, made up of Bohemia, Moravia, Czech Silesia and Slovakia.¹³¹

The Czechs of London created a group called the ‘London Czech Committee and Legion for British Service’ at a meeting in Hyde Park on October 3, 1914, making its existence known to the public in a manifesto. In March of 1915, they issued another manifesto in which they protested against the Austrian military sending the sons of the Czech people to commit fratricide against other Slavs. In July of 1915, the Bohemian National Alliance opened an office in London. These assemblages were supported by Robert William Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed – the old friends of Masaryk.

The Czechs of France created the ‘Volunteer Committee of the Parisian Czech Colony’ on August 9, 1914. The strength of their numbers is shown by their publishing two newspapers, *Journal Franco – Tcheque Nazdov /La Boheme Libre/* in French and *L’Independence Tchèque* in French and Czech.¹³² The Czechs and Slovaks living in neutral Switzerland created their ‘Center for Swiss-Czech Associations’ on January 3, 1915.¹³³

The organizations noted above signifies that a large number of Czechs and Slovaks living in the diaspora took it on themselves to take up the call to arms against the Monarchy. However, these outposts were divided, into parties and factions, and each had its own unique characteristic, depending on the country in which it was to be found. The tendency towards a common cause was shown when, already on December 13, 1914, the ‘Foreign Czechoslovak Committee’ was formed with the goal of uniting the various Czech and Slovak factions fighting for the formation of a Czechoslovak country. It is interesting to note that Masaryk took no part, as he had a differing point of view on numerous questions.¹³⁴ At the beginning of 1915, Masaryk set himself the goal to unite and keep informed every émigré group and colony. To this end, in March, he sent them all a program in which he defined their tasks.¹³⁵ Masaryk, then, was striving to have every group accept his leading role. It was from this resolve that the Czechoslovak Committee was born in Paris in the fall of

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 159. The Slovak language text of the Cleveland Agreement in Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 17.-18. Re Masaryk’s Cleveland negotiations, see Kovtun: *Masarykov triumph ...* op. cit., pp. 202-204.

¹³² Deák J.: *A cseh-szlovák ...* op. cit., p. 40.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 41.

¹³⁴ Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., p. 18; Untenberger: *The United States ...* op. cit. pp. 7-10.

¹³⁵ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ...* op. cit., p. 90.

1915, which elected Masaryk as President. From this point on, it is indisputable that Masaryk is the head of the Czechoslovak resistance abroad.¹³⁶

The Czechoslovak Committee officially announced to the public its existence and declaration of war on the Habsburg Empire on November 14, 1915 with the simultaneous publication of a proclamation in Switzerland, France, Russia and the USA.¹³⁷ The original text of the proclamation was Masaryk's handiwork, which he altered on the suggestion of Denis, as being too historical, too dry.¹³⁸ In the proclamation, the Czechoslovak Committee demands the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state.

A week after the publication of the proclamation, on November 21, Benes traveled to London to synchronize with Masaryk the future development of the émigré movement, especially the areas of action of the various organizations.¹³⁹ On January 15, 1916, Benes writes to his brother, Vojta, active in America, that "we are standing at a crossroad, when direct political and diplomatic work can begin."¹⁴⁰

The turnaround began with Masaryk's trip to Paris at the end of February, 1916. He arrived in Paris on January 28¹⁴¹ and met with Prime Minister Briand on February 3, thanks to the mediation of Štefanik, as mentioned.¹⁴² During the meeting, Masaryk laid out for Briand the position of the émigrés, which consisted of "the condition for the re-organization of Europe and the genuine weakening of Germany – that is, the assurance of France's security, also – is the division of Austria, necessarily into natural and historically accepted parts."¹⁴³ It is important to note that there was an official communiqué of their meeting, as well as an interview in the *Matin*, thanks to editor Sauwerein, in which Masaryk could address the French public and make the content of his meeting with Briand known. During his stay in Paris, Masaryk met with numerous politicians, as well as holding a seminar on the Slavs and Pan Slavism at the Sorbonne on February 22, 1915.¹⁴⁴

To return to the question of tasks of the various groups, we can ascertain that, although the Czechoslovak Committee more or less united

¹³⁶ Mamatey: *The Establishment* ... op. cit., pp. 12-16.

¹³⁷ Deák J.: *A cseh-szlovák* ... op. cit., p. 44.

¹³⁸ Masaryk wrote to Benes in a letter dated September 27, 1915, in which he notes that he is still working on the text, listening to the advice of friends, and editing it, Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit., p. 97.

¹³⁹ Personal meetings were rare between the two leaders of the émigré movement, instead relying on an exchange of letters to co-ordinate their actions. Benes' letter of January 14 is indicative, in which he describes, at length, the situation of the French émigrés, in preparation for Masaryk's Paris visit at the end of the month, i.e., what he can expect to find in Paris on his arrival (Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit., pp. 162-164).

¹⁴⁰ Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit., pp. 167-169.

¹⁴¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek* ... op. cit., vol I, p. 91.

¹⁴² Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁴³ Masaryk: *A világforradalom* ... op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 110.

the far flung colonies, as an effective tool, it did not meet the needs of the Masaryk-Benes group. In Masaryk's view, the Committee was more of a 'parliament-in-exile,' while they would have preferred a 'government-in-exile.'¹⁴⁵ Benes clearly knew that "As in everything, and primarily in politics, and especially in revolutionary actions, methods and organization will, in the end, decide success."¹⁴⁶ On top of it, Masaryk and Benes saw the politicians of the colonies as political amateurs who "frequented the beer halls of Paris, and other cities, dividing up among themselves the positions of the future kingdom, starting with the kingship, down to lesser posts."¹⁴⁷ Hence, both of them strove to force the colonies into the background, and unite the political, and future military, control in their own hands and create "one, unified, closely knit movement." According to their view: "the colonies must accept activities at the local club or organization level, with support and internal organizational tasks."¹⁴⁸

The relegation to a secondary role of the Czechoslovak Committee and the colonies was accomplished during Masaryk's Paris stay (February and March, 1916). On this topic, Masaryk consulted Benes, Štefanik, dr. Sychrava and representative Josef Dürich, who came from Switzerland for this meeting. The result of the discussions was that "instead of the unresponsive Czechoslovak Committee, too dependent on the prevailing situation in the colonies, we will create a new nucleus, located in Paris."¹⁴⁹ Thus, the Czechoslovak National Council was born in March, 1916 – called the Conseil National des Pays Tchéques by Benes in official French correspondence – with Masaryk as President, Dürich and Štefanik as Vice-Presidents and Benes as Secretary General.

From the previously detailed actions, we can deduce that numerous Czech and Slovak groups, large and small, set as their goal and aspiration the realization of an independent Czech or Czechoslovak state. But Masaryk and Benes subsume these groups and, with the creation of the Czechoslovak National Council, ensure for themselves the leadership positions. Subsequently (between 1916 to 1918), Benes, as the secretary general, formed the state apparatus of the yet-to-be-created Czechoslovak state.

To ensure the permanence and continuity of the National Council, a central secretariat is created in Paris. This Paris center became the driving force of the movement as at was a clearinghouse of information, disseminated instructions, created diplomatic contacts toward the Entente, and attempted to influence the Entente's public opinion with propaganda. Essentially, it functioned as a government-in-exile, which fulfilled the roles of various ministries: of external affairs, propaganda and war. Benes paid particular attention to the composition of this Paris center, even taking care to give it a representative aspect. Over time, the secretariat expanded to include offices opened in the Entente countries. A typical example of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁴⁶ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, p. 87.

¹⁴⁷ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ... op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, p. 88.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 99.

this is the Czech Press Bureau opened in London at the end of 1916.¹⁵⁰ This news outlet was split into two in May 1918: a consular and a propaganda department. When the provisional Czechoslovak government was established, on October 14, 1918, the consulate became an embassy.¹⁵¹

Benes and the propaganda war

Newly arrived from the Monarchy, Benes quickly discovers that western politicians, whatever course of action they may take, ascribe it to public opinion. He recognizes the crucial importance of influencing public opinion and, thus, the importance of the press, “the press, which can create not only an emotional mood but also political convictions and their realistic manifestations, guiding political actions.”¹⁵² Benes built his public opinion influencing strategy on this principle. His idea is clear and he depends on the public opinion exerting pressure on politicians and ministers. His first attempts at influencing public opinion were difficult. He recounted the early results as: “In those days, I was content if, 2-3 times a week, I succeeded in placing a short article of a few lines about our affairs with one or another paper. Initially, we had many difficulties to overcome but in time they placed greater confidence in us, we garnered more influence, until, they would publish occasional articles and studies.”¹⁵³

One factor in the successful propaganda campaign is determined by István Bibó, when he writes that the hopelessly drawn out war has produced “... the need for a press, a propaganda organ, in the interest of maintaining war-time morale, which portrays the enemy peoples as monsters.”¹⁵⁴

Ferenc Fejtő starts his reasoning from another starting point, which is that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was ruined by a wide spread and general hatred of Austria in England and France spearheaded by the Freemasons. Hence, their support for anti-Monarchy émigré movements. In spite of the different starting point, Fejtő comes to a conclusion similar to Bibó when he says that the First World War began as a traditional war but continued as an ideological war. When the war assumed an ideological character, the need arose to portray the enemy as Satan; the struggle had to be couched in terms of the battle between Good and Evil.¹⁵⁵ These favorable circumstances were, in large measure, behind the wartime propaganda successes engineered by Benes.

Wartime propaganda is one of the weapons in the arsenal of warfare, with its own set of weapons. On the following pages, we must seek answers to two questions: What were the weapons available to Benes? With what strategy did Benes use these weapons?

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 104.

¹⁵² Gesztesi, Ernő: *A magyarság a világsajtóban* [Hungarians in the world press]. Budapest, no date.

¹⁵³ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 120.

¹⁵⁴ *Bibó István válogatott tanulmányok* 4. kötet 1935-1979 [István Bibó selected studies, vol. 4 1935-1979]. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, p. 324.

¹⁵⁵ Fejtő: *Rekviem ...* op. cit., pp. 281-333.

First, let us examine the arsenal of Benes' propaganda war. An expert in propaganda warfare¹⁵⁶ grouped the channels of mass influence as: 1) agitation, 2) the press, 3) radio, 4) films, and 5) theater.¹⁵⁷ Benes' émigré propaganda used the first two means, making use of the airwaves during his exile during the Second World War.

Agitation is one of the oldest forms of propaganda, making use of the impact of the live human voice. We can safely say that Benes exploited every opportunity for agitation throughout the war. He gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne on the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He appeared at every gathering, every meeting, where the question of the war and the peace was on the agenda. He noted several such meeting in his memoirs. He attended the series of debates organized by Denis during 1917 and 1918 for the studying of the Slav question.¹⁵⁸ He attended the French Senate's Foreign Affairs committee seminars on Austria-Hungary; in fact, several times, he was the lecturer.¹⁵⁹ He attended the bi-weekly public sociological seminars of the 'Société de Sociologie', given by professor Worms.¹⁶⁰ He was a regular attendee at the weekly debates of the 'Comité National d'Etudes', a French intellectual group. Here, also, he lectured several times.¹⁶¹ He sought out the meetings of the Freemasons¹⁶² and the League of Human and Civil Rights.¹⁶³ He also viewed the various political salons, to which he gained access via Štefanik, as opportunities for agitation.¹⁶⁴

In his newspaper propaganda campaign, Benes employed two distinct tactics. On the one hand, he tried to make extensive use of the newspapers of the Entente countries and, on the other hand, he started his own newspapers. The Entente newspapers had huge public impact. One of the noted French political papers, the *Matin*, had a circulation of 1.9 million – a suitably large forum for influencing public opinion. We must see it as a conscious step on Benes' part that, from the very first step of his exile, he strove to establish contact with the foreign affairs reporters of the French press, make a personal acquaintance with the editors, and place as many articles as possible. He wanted to serve notice that the Czech were here, that they have wishes and demands, and that they must be noticed and heard. We can only assume that the editors and reporters took kindly to the services and information served up by the émigrés. Let us not forget that these exiles came from central Europe, knew the local circumstances and were able to deliver to the newspapers valuable materials, information and news.

Supplying the Entente with news items – from the exiles' perspective – was initially accomplished on a small scale. It was not unusual for Benes

¹⁵⁶ Nádor, László: *Propagandaháború* [Propaganda warfare]. Budapest, 1936.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 127.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

himself to visit the editorial offices personally, to deliver his news. With the growth of the movement, changes were implemented in this, too. In each of the offices of the National Council, Benes set up press offices. We have already mentioned the Czech Press Bureau in London, and similar offices were opened in Switzerland and Holland in 1916. when he visited Italy in January of 1917, he opened a press office in Rome, Ufficio di Boemia, which was renamed in October to 'Consiglio Nazionale dei Paesi Cecoslovacchi'.¹⁶⁵ In America, the 'Slav Press Bureau' was opened, which sent its news feed to about 500 American dailies. These press offices carried on a wide range of activities. As an example, Masaryk wrote the following about the London press office: "We rented a store in the liveliest part of London (Piccadilly Circus) and furnished the window as if it was a bookstore, maps of our country and Central Europe, posted the latest news about us and our enemies, refutations of untrue news items, notices and such."¹⁶⁶

The Czech exiles received considerable help in their public opinion influencing work from sympathetic publicists. In London, Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed, while in Paris Ernest Denis, worked out multi-faceted arguments for the support of the Czechoslovak exiles. As well, being more intimate with the internal workings of England and France, they could offer more effective reasons than Masaryk and Benes.¹⁶⁷ Benes remembers in his memoirs: "Our faithful friends and co-workers, Henry Wickham Steed, Madame Rose and R. Seton-Watson, did a great service in London for our cause. They gathered a number of friends and assistants around themselves. During the whole course of the war, Steed and his friends – Steed, as foreign editor of the Times filled an important post and had entry into very influential circles – met for tea at his place where they consulted, debated, made plans encouraged and informed each other... The same can be said of Seton-Watson – Scotus Viator – who, on top of the work he did on behalf of the Slovaks before the war, surpassed it with the tremendous work in our cause during the war. In October of 1916, with agreement from Masaryk and Steed, he began to publish a paper, The New Europe, which supported our program and the freedom programs of other oppressed Central European nations."¹⁶⁸

Beside making use of the newspaper space offered by Entente publications, the émigrés did their utmost to publish their own papers, too. We have already mentioned previously that the French outpost debuted two papers in the fall of 1914, *Na Zdar* and *L'Independence Tcheque*. When Masaryk relegated the colonies to the background, these papers ceased publication. In their place, Benes began two new papers. The 'Nation Tcheque' was started on May 1, 1915 and, for four years, appeared in Paris on a bi-monthly basis. Its mission was to inform the world-at-large of Czechoslovak aspirations, ideas, and to garner their sympathies. From

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 105.

¹⁶⁶ Masaryk: *A világforradalom ... op. cit.*, p. 111

¹⁶⁷ Szarka, László: *Egy XX. századi államalapító emlékiratai* [The memoirs of a 20th century state founder]. In: Masaryk: *A világforradalom ... op. cit.*, p. 439.

¹⁶⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, pp. 131-132.

1917, it was edited by Benes himself. The first edition of the other paper, *Českoslovenká Samostatnos*, appeared in August of 1915 in Geneva, edited by Lev Sychrava (also bi-monthly). The strongly biased Nádor characterized the two papers as: “Both papers contributed greatly to the creation of an independent Czech state because, working in concert with the leaders of the other nationalities, in co-operation, they spread the most improbable calumny about the Monarchy.”¹⁶⁹ Due to the organizing activities of Benes, the Czechoslovak émigré press gained another paper in 1916, *Le Monde Slave*. To publish three papers, a printer was needed. This too, Benes organized. Henceforth, all three papers were printed in the Paris émigré printing shop. The print shop also enabled Benes to publish books. His speeches and lectures were printed in separate pamphlets and sent to the universities, libraries, legislators and countless other political notables. Two typical examples: Masaryk’s lecture at King’s College on “The problem of small nations in the European crisis” and the lecture series given by Benes at the Sorbonne were published in book form with the title “Détruisez l’Autriche-Hongrie.”

Let us now examine the strategy Benes employs in using these weapons. According to Borsody, Benes’ propaganda was built on two fundamental principles:¹⁷⁰ 1) Don’t be afraid to sling mud, some of it will stick. 2) We can only communicate if we adapt ourselves to the abilities of those with whom we are trying to communicate.

Let us examine Borsody’s suppositions. If we look at his first ‘principle’ closely, and tone down the rhetoric, we can interpret it to mean that Benes used every possible forum to present a negative picture of the Monarchy for the benefit of the Entente leaders and public opinion. In that context, then we must agree that Borsody is right. The Benes-led propaganda campaign made imaginative use of every step the Habsburg Empire, positive and negative. The Czechoslovak exiles swung into immediate propaganda action “as soon as we were able to arouse the public’s interest, through any unusual event, towards the Austro-Hungary question or our cause”,¹⁷¹ wrote Benes.

If we look at negative events, then we can say that Benes made skillful use of the persecutions back home, the political court cases. “The persecution of our politicians, journalists, Kľofác, Dusek, Mackar, Dyk, Dreiss and others, especially the proceedings against Kramař and Rasin, and their sentencing, amnesty and return home – all these became a weapon in our hands, a weapon that caused many wounds in our enemies.”¹⁷² Another event involved Benes personally. When he escaped to the West, the Austrian authorities put his wife on trial and convicted her. The details of the examination and trial “we were able to use as valuable propaganda material”,¹⁷³ said Benes. The Austrian government provided invaluable assistance to the exiles by arresting Kramař and Rasin, creating

¹⁶⁹ Nádor: *Propagandaháború* op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁷⁰ Borsody: *Benes ...* op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁷¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 142.

¹⁷² Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 37.

¹⁷³ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 77.

Czech martyrs for their cause.¹⁷⁴ In *Détruisez*, Benes devoted a sub-chapter, Terror in Czech Lands, to depicting the suffering of the Czech nation.¹⁷⁵

To demonstrate the tone, let us quote several typical sentences: “At present, there is not a day in Bohemia when a certain number of death sentences, or long jail terms, are not announced. The leaders of the nation have either been jailed or exiled, those deemed to be dangerous, publicists, intellectuals, have all been variously persecuted.”¹⁷⁶ Of Slovakia, he wrote: “The country has become desolate, hundreds have been killed ... industry and Slovak publications banned. Today, the country is truly dead and the Hungarian government of Tisza is shamelessly triumphant over these ruins.”¹⁷⁷

The Benes propaganda machinery began a press campaign every time the Monarchy suffered a military reversal, such as when Brusilov broke through the front in July and August of 1916. In this event, Benes made use of positive events, not only the Monarchy’s negative ones. When Vienna announced an amnesty, and political prisoners were free to go, Benes lost a valuable source of agitation. With great flexibility, he turned this, too, to the exiles’ advantage: “The amnesty was presented to the public of the Entente countries as a sign of the breaking apart of the Monarchy and reasoned that, with it, the Monarchy’s position became all the more difficult.”¹⁷⁸

Benes’ agility can be demonstrated by another example – how to turn defeat into a weapon. Italian public morale was very low after the defeat suffered at Caporetto, hence the press “was more than happy to publish anything that described confusion within the Habsburg Empire and any revolutionary aspirations against it. The government ... was elated at our press and propaganda campaign, which hurt Austria-Hungary and helped stoke the public’s support of the war.”¹⁷⁹

Borsody’s second ‘principle’ will not be examined in detail in this chapter, as a separate chapter (chapter 3: Beneš’ second concept) is devoted to the set of reasons and logic that Masaryk and Benes developed for the émigrés. Here, we merely touch upon the most important characteristics of this proposition. Accordingly, Benes – and Masaryk, as well – marshaled the reasons for the necessity of the destruction of the Monarchy, and the creation of Czechoslovakia, in such a manner that the Entente powers will feel that the steps to be taken meets their interests. In other words, they tried to speak the language of the Entente. The crux of their reasoning: the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy can no longer fulfill the balancing role in European power politics it once had in the 19th century,

¹⁷⁴ Kovács, Endre: *Tomás Garrigue Masaryk*. In: Kovács Endre (ed.) *Történelmi arcképek* [Historical portraits]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1976, p. 564.

¹⁷⁵ Beneš: *Détruisez l’Autriche-Hongrie* [Demolish Austria-Hungary]. Paris, 1916, pp. 49-54.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹⁷⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, p. 294.

¹⁷⁹ Borsody: *Benes ... op. cit.*, p. 46.

since it has become a complete vassal of Germany. Thus, it must be ended, broken up and the subsequent vacuum will be filled by the nation states. This is in the Entente's interest or, as he wrote it in *Détruisez l' Autriche-Hongrie*: "Finally, understand your own interests!"

Let us close this chapter's train of thought with some lines from Borsody, who assesses Benes' art of propaganda: "Opinions are divided on the significance of Benes' political career but, as a practitioner of modern propaganda, he is without peer ... Benes is one of the most talented propagandists of our age. All the highlights of modern propaganda – especially its nuances – can be found on him, as if a textbook example."¹⁸⁰

Hungary and the 'Czechoslovak' émigrés

It is a reasonable question to ask, What did the Magyar government know about the Slovak and 'Czechoslovak' movements emerging in exile and what did it attempt to do to counteract them? As illustrated in the previous chapter, from America to Russia, numerous independent Slovak and Czech, also 'Czechoslovak', organizations of various size emerged. In light of that, our question needs to be divided into two: 1) What did the Magyar government know of the Slovak émigré movements? 2) What did it know of the activities of the Masaryk-Benes group?

Let us first examine what the war time Magyar Prime Ministers could know about these groups. After research in the 'Archives of the Prime Minister, 1867-1944', the first document which points in this direction is a letter, dated December 21, 1914, in which PM István Tisza enquires after the activities of the Slovak émigrés. This is a document, in which Tisza asks the Foreign Minister of the Monarchy to make use of the Washington embassy's sources and collect information regarding the political activities of Slovaks living in America.¹⁸¹ The Foreign Minister complied with Tisza's request – in fact, over complied – as, beginning in March of 1915, the consulates and embassies of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy still operating in neutral countries, collected regular reports of the activities of Czech and Slovak émigrés. The reports were forwarded by the Imperial and Royal Foreign Ministry in Vienna to Budapest. Thus, regular reports came in from the Cleveland and Pittsburg consulates. In Europe, the consulate in Bern (Switzerland) was an especially important source of information as, due to its geographic location, it could keep under observation the émigré activities in France and Italy.¹⁸²

The first consular report regarding Slovaks organizing abroad was received by the Magyar Prime Minister from Vienna on March 17, 1915.¹⁸³ This contained information compiled by the Monarchy's Cleveland office. Most important among them is the December 9, 1914 copy of the Slovak

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ OL Miniszterelnökség levéltára 1867-1944 ME 1041. Csomag/1915 XXIV. Tétel [National Archives, Prime Minister's Office 1867-1944, PMO parcel 1041/ 1915 item XXXIV]

¹⁸² OL Miniszterelnökség levéltára 1867-1944 ME 1112. csomag/1917. XII. res iratok között. [PMO parcel 1112 / 1917 item XII]

¹⁸³ PMO parcel 1041 / 1915 item XXIV.

newspaper *Hlas*, which contained the excerpted text of the ‘Agreement’ of the American Slovak League.

The May 15, 1915 report compiled by the Pittsburg consulate contains the entire agreement, all 14 pages.¹⁸⁴ The memorandum, after describing at length the sufferings of the Slovak nation under Magyar rule, stated that: “We demand, for the Slovak nation, complete national autonomy and self government in political, cultural and economic matters.” The document was signed by the five leaders of the Slovak League, numerous émigré Slovak politicians, 49 Catholic and 35 Protestant churchmen. We can gather an inkling of the meaning of ‘national autonomy’ from the following comparison: “The Irish have achieved their Home Rule from the powerful and imperialistic Great Britain, the rights of the Magyars are ensured, the Croatians have their autonomy ...”

It must be noted that the demand does not yet transcend the traditional Slovak territorial demand, i.e., the territorial segregation within Hungary. The report also mentions that in the spring of 1915, the Czech exiles – calling themselves the Czech Press Committee – held a ‘grand’ (open) meeting in New York during which one of the Slovak speakers laid out three possibilities for the Slovak nation: total independence; territorial autonomy within Hungary; and the creation of a country, united with the Czechs.

The speaker thought the last option as most feasible. Immediately after reading the Cleveland report, István Tisza ordered the press department at the Central Post Office (actually, a department of the Interior Ministry – *auth.*) to confiscate every Slovak newspaper coming from America. A few months later, on October 11, 1915, the newspaper *Hlas* was banned – or rather its dissemination through the mails – in Hungary.

Tisza directed his Interior Minister, in March of 1915, to create a register of those dealing with Slovak movements abroad. The Minister, in his response of May 21, acknowledges that “orders for the compendium of personal and material data by the ministry have been given, so that, at the given time, it may be ready for any future need.”¹⁸⁵ Subsequently, the more important *Hlas* articles, regularly sent by the Cleveland consulate, were translated and forwarded to Tisza. Thus, what *Hlas* deemed important to report about the Slovak, or Czechoslovak, movement was known shortly by Tisza. In examining the first half of 1915, apart from the reports already mentioned, Tisza received reports on various events in among the Slovak and Czech émigrés. From a *Hlas* article he is informed that, in the spring of 1915, Slovaks living in Russia created the Slav-Russian Association, which took up communication with the American Slovak League.¹⁸⁶ From a Cleveland report he is informed that on April 18, 1915, a meeting of Slavs – Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, and Serbs – was organized by the Slovak League in Cleveland, and that on May 24, again in Cleveland, the Czechs held a meeting, where the speaker was František Kopecký, a Czech

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ It contains translations of the following *Hlas* issues: 1915 May 19, June 2, June 23, June 30 and July 7.

¹⁸⁶ PMO parcel 1041 / 1915 item XXIV.

from London.¹⁸⁷ Besides the summaries of the meetings, Tisza also received translations of the relevant newspaper clippings from the Cleveland papers, *Cleveland Leader*, *American*, *Svet* and *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.¹⁸⁸ While the Cleveland and Pittsburg reports provide news of the American Slovak movements, the Bern consulate, and the Lausanne consular office informed Tisza, and his successors, of the émigré activities in France and Italy.¹⁸⁹

The reports from the Monarchy's Swiss consulates, Geneva and Bern, brought Masaryk and Benes to the attention of Tisza. The translations of the important articles in two newspapers published by the Masaryk-Benes group were regularly forwarded to Tisza. In our archival research, we came across a comprehensive report – dated April 2, 1916, by Imre Vodicska, an Interior Ministry official – prepared for Tisza, detailing the Czech and Yugoslav émigré press activities.¹⁹⁰ Apart from the consular report and news clippings, Tisza received important information from abroad, and their contacts at home, from the combined Army Headquarters (AHQ). The AHQ sent a very detailed report (dated October 18, 1915) to the Prime Minister's office, titled "The Northern Hungarian Slovaks, their aspirations and movements."¹⁹¹ The AHQ also forwarded to the PMO a summary report (dated October 24, 1915) it received from the Vienna police prefecture covering "anti-Monarchy Czech political movements and organizations abroad."¹⁹² We have no intention to list and review all the reports arriving from various sources in the PMO or the Interior Ministry, which carried news about Slovak, Czech, or Czechoslovak émigré activities. On the basis of the samples documented, we can state that István Tisza, and his successors, had an accurate picture of Slovak and Czech activities in America, Russia and western Europe, and their ties in Northern Hungary.

The reports painted a picture for Tisza that Slovak and Czech émigrés, living in various Entente countries, became mobilized after the outbreak of the war and that the Masaryk-Benes group has taken a leadership position. It is a legitimate question to ask, What countermeasures did the Hungarian government take to lessen the impact of the influence of the Czechoslovak émigrés? What steps did it take against the rising tide Czechoslovak national consciousness?

Our research has disclosed that Tisza, and his successors, took two steps in regard to the Czechoslovak émigrés. On the one hand, they tried to

¹⁸⁷ PMO 1916 item XII.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Bern consulate reports: PMO parcel 1112 / 1917 item XII.

¹⁹⁰ Kemény, G. Gábor: *Iratok a nemzetiségi kérdés történetéhez a dualizmus korában 1867-1918*. 7. kötet [Documents to the history of the nationality question in the age of the Dualism 1867-1918. vol. 7]. Budapest, 1999, pp. 569-570. These source documents have been published by Kemény since 1952 and have now reached 7 volumes. Future references will cite them as Kemény: *Iratok* ...vol. x, p. x.

¹⁹¹ PMO 1916 item XII.

¹⁹² Ibid.

keep its activities under close observation. This is best demonstrated by the creation of The Hague observation center. During 1915, it was relatively simple to keep the Czechoslovak émigrés under observation through the Swiss consulates as, at this time, Masaryk resided in Geneva. The task became more difficult in the spring of 1916, when Masaryk moved to London, Benes to Paris and the Swiss activities were entrusted to Sychrava. To solve this problem, the Foreign Ministry of the Monarchy decided to maintain its current Swiss office to follow the Sychrava group,¹⁹³ while another office was opened in neutral Holland, The Hague, to keep an eye on the London activities of Masaryk.¹⁹⁴ These steps were closely followed by Tisza and he concurred.¹⁹⁵

Parallel to observation activities, Tisza tried to isolate the Slovaks at home from the émigrés. This best shown in his response to the above noted October 18 AHQ report in which he reasons "...due to our sad experiences with the Czechs, we intend to sever all contacts from Bohemia and Moravia to Northern Hungary, to eliminate the danger of this source of infection on our patriotic Slovak people."¹⁹⁶

Tisza was aware of the secret activities of the Czech Mafia from Viennese police reports, which is why he stressed the severing of Czech contacts. Parallel to this, he actively took steps to sever the contacts that lead abroad, one of which was the prohibition of the dissemination of the émigré newspaper *Českoslovenká Samostatnos*.¹⁹⁷ On June 16, 1916, the Interior Ministry published a bulletin for all militia Home Guard commanders regarding a Czech-Slovak anti-state proclamation from Russia: "Since it is probable that returning soldiers will bring with themselves several copies of this proclamation, I order the police authorities to search for them, confiscate the copies found, and punish the disseminators."¹⁹⁸

The Magyar government did everything in its power, including the police, to prevent the entry of any émigré printed material – newspaper, book, pamphlet – from entering Hungary. An edict of the period stated it as: "The dissemination of printed material to be most tightly controlled, or rather, prevented."¹⁹⁹ In fact, the Hungarian authorities made attempts to have actions such as these extended over the Austrian half of the Empire, succeeding in banning the newspaper *Českoslovenká Samostatnos* there. They also took steps against verbal propaganda, the severity of which can be demonstrated in the case of a Moravian citizen, Vincent Luza, whom

¹⁹³ One of the police reports by police counselor Chum, dated January 5, 1917, in PMO parcel 1112 / 1917 item XII.

¹⁹⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson: *Masaryk in England*. Cambridge, 1943.

¹⁹⁵ The documents of the creation of The Hague observation center are given by Kemény: *Iratok ... op. cit.*, vol. 7, pp. 532-543.

¹⁹⁶ Kemény, G. Gábor: *A magyar nemzetiségi kérdés története* [The history of the Hungarian nationality question]. Budapest, 1946, p. 217.

¹⁹⁷ Kemény: *Iratok ... op. cit.*, vol. 7, p. 567.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 657-658.

¹⁹⁹ National Archives parcel K-40 / 1918 item VII. Letter from the Lord-Lieutenant of Trencsén county.

the courts expelled from Hungary for 16 years. Said action was taken because “he voiced sentiments as ‘If only the Russians would come, and the Slav populated parts come under Russian control, it is the only good way’ contains the implication that the Slovaks are oppressed by the Magyars and would prosper under the Russians, and is apt to kindle anti-Magyar sentiment.”²⁰⁰

The Magyar political leaders soon had to protest at the highest levels. On May 30, 1917, the Czech representatives in the Reichsrat, during their right-to-a-state protest demanded the internal alteration of the Monarchy to a federative union, in such manner that the lands of the Czech Crown, with the addition of Slovakia, to form united state.²⁰¹ Naturally, Magyar politicians offered heated rebuttal in Vienna to the attack on the principle of Dualism.

The inescapable conclusion is that these methods were not suitable to ward off, within the Monarchy, the germination of aspirations of a Czechoslovak state.

PHASE TWO (March, 1916 – December, 1917)

The first diplomatic success

In the second phase of his exile, beginning in the spring of 1916, Benes concentrated his efforts in three directions. His days were divided among propagating the program that was created during the first phase, or continued propaganda efforts, followed by political / diplomatic efforts against the Monarchy and in favor of creating a Czechoslovak state.²⁰² Thirdly, his time was consumed with the creation of an independent Czechoslovak army.

In December of 1916, events occurred that had a potentially disastrous implications for the Czechs émigrés. On December 12 – six days after the Germans occupied Bucharest – the Central Powers made a peace offer to the Entente Powers. In it, the Central Powers expressed their “demonstrated invincibility” and “the total situation leads to reasonable expectations of continued successes.” In spite of this, they “do not wish to annihilate their enemies” and thus “the four Allied Powers suggest the beginning of peace talks without delay.” There were no concrete peace terms, only the hint that they “will be brought to the negotiating table.”²⁰³ A few days later, on December 20, President Wilson sent a note to the warring sides in which he asked the combatants to state their war aims.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Zeman: *The Break-up* ... op. cit., p. 126.

²⁰² On May 4, 1916, Benes writes a 7 page report to the Czechoslovak National Assembly on his organizing and propaganda efforts to date (Hadler: *Weg von* ... op. cit., pp. 251-257).

²⁰³ The text of the peace offer was printed in the newspaper *Népszava* on December 13, 1916.

²⁰⁴ Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States. Washington, 1916, Supplement, pp. 97-99.

Parallel to this event, secret peace feelers, through diplomatic back-channels, were sent out between the two sides.

Benes was informed of these peace feelers. In fact, a Russian diplomat urged Benes to state the Czech demands within the Habsburg Empire in a memorandum as Russia may be able to wring some concessions, favorable to Czechoslovakia in the post-war re-apportioning of the Monarchy, out of the Monarchy during the peace negotiations.²⁰⁵

The Paris secretariat led by Benes did not, at this time, carry enough weight. As Benes recorded it: “We could not take part directly in diplomatic negotiations of this type or magnitude. Up to now, we did not have enough influence on the deciding issues, nor did we have direct access to the parties, either. Thus, only indirect channels remained open to us.”²⁰⁶ The indirect path alluded to by Benes was public agitation. Benes mobilized every friend – politicians, publicists, journalists – with the intention to exert pressure, through public opinion, on the Entente negotiators. He also tried to ensure that Czechoslovakia would be mentioned in the treaty notes between the two sides, that Czechoslovakian interests would not be forgotten.

The Entente Powers were conferring since the middle of December on the response to the December 12 note of the Central Powers, as well as the Wilson note. Finally, on December 30, the Entente note offering peace negotiations was rejected as a wartime tactical maneuver. Although the response sent to the Central Powers mentions “small, oppressed nations” – as the Czechoslovaks also defined themselves – the Czechoslovaks are not mentioned by name.²⁰⁷ Thereafter, Benes increased his efforts to have the Czechoslovaks included in the Entente response sent to Wilson. On December 27, Benes meets with Kammarel, an official in the political department of the French Foreign Ministry.²⁰⁸ During the discussion, Benes argues that resistance within Austria-Hungary would be significantly increased if the Allies mentioned Czech and Slovak national demands in Wilson’s reply; that by mentioning Czech and Slovak demands, the Allies could wound the Monarchy in a vulnerable place. Kammarel responded that the Entente had several reasons not to enter into details of the Monarchy’s internal political situation regarding its minorities. Also, in his view, the Entente armies were too far from the Monarchy’s territories, making talk of the dismantling of the Habsburg Empire merely empty words. Any mention of the dismantling of the Monarchy, though, would bring on the renewal of hostilities – to the bitter end. Furthermore, such a statement would also exclude the possibility of a more favorable solution (separate peace with the Monarchy) later. Two days after their meeting, on December 29, Benes summarized his arguments in a memorandum, which he forwarded to the French Foreign Ministry. In his final argument, Benes wrote: “... today the Czechs are that

²⁰⁵ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, pp. 207-208.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 210.

²⁰⁷ H.W.V. Temperley: *A history of the peace conference of Paris*. Vols I-VI. London, 1920 – 1924, vol. 1, pp. 172-173.

²⁰⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol I, pp. 220-222.

element of the Monarchy, which causes the most difficulties for Austria-Hungary and, were the response to Wilson acknowledge our goals and political plans, resistance would increase and lead to the total disorganization of Austria.”²⁰⁹

Beside the dialogue with the Foreign Ministry, Benes made use of other diplomatic channels. With the assistance of a historian professor, Moysset, he gained admittance to the president of the French Foreign Committee, Leygues. Benes thought – and time proved him right – that these steps would bear fruit, writing in a letter to Masaryk, dated December 30, that “shortly we will witness a tremendous diplomatic success.”²¹⁰

Benes, never one to miss an opportunity, looked up journalists sympathetic to his cause. He arranged to have an article about the Czechoslovaks appear on January 3, 1917, in *Le Temps* by André Tardieu (the paper’s senior journalist). On the same day, the *Matin* ran an article, due to the intervention of chief editor Sauerwein, which emphasized the need to support the resistance of the Austro-Hungarian nationalities, especially the Czechs and Slovaks.²¹¹ While these were being publicized, Benes wrote an ‘first-hand, direct-from-Austria report’ for the *Journal des Débats*, based on information received from the Prague Mafia. Chief editor Galvain ran the ‘first-hand’ article, and dealt with the article in his editorial, demanding a clear statement from the Entente regarding Austria-Hungary and on behalf of the oppressed nationalities.²¹²

Benes was able to arrange to have three substantial French papers print several articles, within a few days, dealing with the Czechoslovaks.²¹³ We must deduce that again he used the news media brilliantly to exert pressure. On January 4, he is again in talks with Kammerer, who tells Benes that the Ministry has decided, on principle, to do something on behalf of the Czechoslovaks but are currently searching for the right mode. The crux of the problem is that, as soon as the Czechs and Slovaks are mentioned by name, the South Slavs must also be mentioned. But the South Slavs are currently in a dispute with one of the Entente countries, Italy, and the Italians did everything in their power so that the response would not mention the South Slavs. In the end, the final text of the response was written by Berthelot – head of the political department of the French Foreign Ministry – who took Benes’ request into consideration.²¹⁴ Thus was born the line in the response which states, with regard to the Monarchy, that the Entente considers it a goal “to free the Italians, Slavs, Romanian and Czechoslovaks from under foreign oppression.”²¹⁵

When the text of the response was made public on January 12, 1917, the Czechoslovak émigrés could celebrate their first major success.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 222.

²¹⁰ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., p. 383.

²¹¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 224.

²¹² Ibid, p. 225.

²¹³ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., pp. 408-414.

²¹⁴ P.S. Wandycz: *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919-1925*. Minneapolis, 1962, p. 10.

²¹⁵ PRFRUS, 1917. Supplement I. pp. 6-9.

Masaryk deemed a personal meeting a necessity, sending a telegram to Benes on January 25, asking him to travel to London to co-ordinate actions as the outcome of the response and future tasks.²¹⁶ It was at this meeting that the decision was made for Masaryk to travel to Russia.²¹⁷

Unarguably, the appearance of the word 'Czechoslovak' in the diplomatic note was a great success for the Masaryk-Benes group. Masaryk remarked to Benes in a letter: "... the revolution is perfect."²¹⁸ (Under revolution, Masaryk meant the émigré activities led by him – *auth.*) The note does not mention autonomy, nor an internal re-organization of the Monarchy but speaks, in the strongest terms, of the freeing of oppressed nations. We must point out that this is not the death sentence of the Monarchy but, if all the minorities mentioned had received the independence they demanded, the Monarchy would have been reduced to an unviable remnant. Benes remarked on the note: "Our objective (an independent Czechoslovak state – *auth.*) now took a place among the military aims of the Allies; the official communication, on its own merit and formally, raised it to an international problem, no longer an internal problem of the Habsburg Empire, to be solved by internal means."²¹⁹

Beneš' activities as military organizer

Benes returned from London to Paris on February 13, 1917 and, until August of the same year, he was busy with the preparations for a Czechoslovak army, to be stationed in France. Benes, fighting for diplomatic acceptance of the Czechoslovak émigrés, placed a great deal of importance on the creation of an independent Czechoslovak military. Steps in this direction were already begun in August of 1916.²²⁰

The opening factors were very modest. According to his estimates, at the end of the summer of 1916, there were approximately 4,000 Czechoslovak prisoners of war in France.²²¹ They had a roundabout journey before arriving on French soil. The Czech soldiers, fighting for the Monarchy, fell into Serbian hands on the Balkan front. With the collapse of Serbia, they were part of the Serbian retreat to Albania, still as prisoners. From the Albanian coast on the Adriatic, the Italians transported them to the island of Asinara until, through the intercession of the Serb government and the Czechoslovak National Council, they were sent to France. Benes counted heavily on these soldiers as he began to organize an army in France. He truly needed all his exceptional organizational and propaganda skills, as he ran into countless difficulties. Let's first examine the subjective difficulties. Imagine these 'Czechoslovak' soldiers, armed and on the Serbian front, falling into captivity and the Entente treats them as combatant 'Austrians'. In the camps, they are decimated by typhoid and dysentery, and suffer a great deal. Then, Benes appears and says: I am

²¹⁶ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 253.

²¹⁷ Kovtun: *Masarykuv triumph ...* op. cit., pp. 152-194.

²¹⁸ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., p. 392.

²¹⁹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 227.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 176.

²²¹ *Ibid*, p. 177.

Czechoslovakian, one of the builders of the future country of Czechoslovakia, you are also Czechoslovakians, come and let us fight together for Czechoslovakia. "The Entente is aiding us in our fight, which is why we must join them. Moreover, we must once more go to the front and take up a new battle ..."²²² Following the subjective difficulties faced by Benes just listed, and adding the objective ones as well, we will note that the prisoners brought from Asinara were dispersed in various camps all over France.

Yet, overcome he did.²²³ With the assistance of professor Eisemann, he first identified the locations of the camps and the number of Czechs and Slovaks in them. Still with Eisemann's help, he gains possession of these soldiers' mail. Reading them, he garnered valuable and representative data about the mood of the prisoners, their problems and hopes. At the same time, he achieved with the French Foreign Ministry to have the 'Czechoslovak' soldiers segregated from the rest of the prisoners, and a promise that the French will treat these prisoners with better care. He went from office to office (War Ministry, Foreign Ministry, Army headquarters, Prisoner of war Administration) until he obtained permission to be able to propagandize among these segregated prisoners.

Between August and December of 1916, Benes made significant advances towards setting up a Czechoslovak army on French soil, having thus ensured a source of manpower for the fledgling unit. During 1917, Benes' military activities were concentrated on four areas: One, to organize the prisoners in the French camps as soon as possible; two, extend the activities of organizing the army to Italy; three, begin an intensive volunteer action in America; and four, have transferred as many prisoners as possible from Russia to France.

On June 20, 1917, on behalf of the National Council, he opened political and military meetings with the French Foreign and War Ministries.²²⁴ Benes thoroughly prepared himself on military matters. Of this, he wrote: "I bought a lot of military books and manuals, which I quickly perused, especially organizational matters, modern military service, the achievements of the current war and all manner of current specialist matters."²²⁵ The French Foreign Ministry established a special department for the 'organization of national armed forces'. The department under General Vidalon was occupied with setting up the Czechoslovak and Polish armed forces. It was with this department that Benes met to discuss the technical aspects of military organization, discussing the political aspects with the Foreign Ministry. On the first day of discussions with General Vidalon, June 20, 1917, Benes sought clarification for the following questions:²²⁶

²²² Ibid, p. 180.

²²³ Ibid, pp. 181-185.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 333.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 344.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 345.

- What is the relationship of this Czechoslovak national army to the French government, to the French armed forces, and to the Czechoslovak National Council?
- The question of the defining national symbols for the unit, e.g.- flags, uniform, emblems, flashes, medals.
- The drafting of Czechoslovak soldiers.
- The selection and promotion of officers.
- The use of Czech as the service language and military reporting.
- The finances of the armed force.
- Under what circumstances will the French high command make use of the Czechoslovak unit at the front?
- What is to become of those who do not volunteer for active service but instead opt for support activities? What to do about the wounded and crippled, and those discharged from the unit?

Of these questions, the hardest was the first one, the rest flowing, more or less logically, from it. Let's take each question in turn, the arguments used and results achieved. With regard to the first point, he stated his position as: "The national army is established by a decree of the President of the French Republic as an autonomous unit within the French army, under the political direction of the Czechoslovak National Council, the highest representative body of the Czechoslovak nation."²²⁷

The French officials wanted to apply the same solutions as in use with the already existing Polish army: a French general at the head of a body of French and Polish officers, who acted as mediators between the Polish émigrés and the French government. Benes did not accept this organizational structure, instead wanting that the Czechoslovak unit act under the direction of the National Council. He prevailed at the meetings. The Czechoslovak unit could march under a 'Czechoslovak' flag and display its own national emblems on their uniforms. The drafting of soldiers was referred to the purview of the National Council, officers were to be nominated and promoted by the National Council, with the subsequent approval of the French government. The service language was to be Czech but important documents were to be bi-lingual – French and Czech. However, the French were adamant that the unit be under the leadership of a French General, one approved by the National Council. On the matter of finances, it was agreed to have the soldiers of the Czechoslovak army paid the same way as the soldiers of the French army. It was further agreed that all expenditures connected with the Czechoslovak army would be kept on a separate account to enable indemnification after the war from the Czechoslovak state.

The circumstances under which the French high command could use the unit was important to Benes because, after the difficulties in organizing and raising the unit, he was afraid that it would be thrown into a Verdun type of battle, and possibly annihilated in short order. Benes did his utmost to ensure that at least a portion of the Czechoslovak army would remain intact, "to stand in their formations during the peace negotiations." His aim

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 347.

was clear: He wished to increase the political weight of the Czechoslovaks during the peace talks with the existence of a substantial, armed military force. Unfortunately, Benes makes no statement in his memoirs regarding the outcome of this question with his discussions with General Vidalon. Prisoners unfit for military service were agreed, by a separate agreement between the National Council and the Ministry of Munitions, to work in the munitions industries. However, the National Council retained the identical consular powers over them as other allied governments retained over their own nationals.

As can be deduced from the preceding, Benes had a lot of success with the French War Ministry but had serious difficulties with the Foreign Ministry. He remarks in his memoirs as: "The soldiers primarily kept the military and military-technical issues in the forefront, making more and more political concession over time. The discussions with the Foreign Ministry were far more difficult, as De Margerie and Laroche weighed the international legal and political ramification of each paragraph."²²⁸ It was Benes' intent somehow to have included in the text of the agreement the expression 'Czechoslovak state' or 'Czechoslovak government'. An example is the topic of finances for the army, in which he asked that start-up expenses associated with the creation of the unit be kept on a separate account, so that the Czechoslovak state can repay it after the war. For the French soldiers discussing the financial details, it was immaterial whether the text said Czechoslovak nation or Czechoslovak state. Not so the diplomats of the Foreign Ministry, who "tried to avoid all such expressions (e.g.- Czechoslovak state or Czechoslovakia – *auth.*) which would seem to bind the French government into a guarantee at the peace talks."²²⁹ The officials at the Foreign Ministry openly told Benes that they are not willing to use the expression 'Czechoslovak state' in the wording of the agreement.²³⁰ Benes had to negotiate long and hard with the Foreign Ministry to finally arrive at any agreement, at all. This is clearly shown by the fact that the discussions with the military were concluded on August 4, 1917, while the 'Declaration of the creation of a Czechoslovak army in France' was only finalized on December 16.²³¹

Besides his tussle with the Foreign Ministry, Benes devoted part of his energy to expand to Italy his military organizing activities.²³² In January of 1917, he traveled to Italy and held meetings with several Italian politicians – De Martino, De Morcier – as part of his military organizing drive.²³³ As a result of these meetings, beginning in the spring of 1917, the Italian military command began to collect the Czechs and Slovaks taken prisoner from the Monarchy into the Santa Maria Capua Veter camp. By May, the camp held over 1,000 prisoners, among whom Benes' people began their propaganda.

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 350.

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 351.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, pp. 157-160.

²³² Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 28.

²³³ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., pp. 418-425.

Benes had his second visit to Italy prepared by the head of the Italian military mission in Paris, Prince Brancaccio. Brancaccio was sympathetic towards the Czech cause, allowing Benes to pull off another sleight-of-hand. In his words: "I arranged things so that the suggestion for our second trip should not come from us. On August 22, 1917, Brancaccio came to me at the National Council offices at 18 rue Bonaparte and told me Sonnino's wish (baron Sidney Sonnino, Italian Foreign Minister at the time), to travel to Italy, where some of our military aspirations may be realized."²³⁴

Naturally, Benes accepted the invitation and left for Rome on August 25. His first meeting was on September 2, when he met General Garruccio, head of Military Intelligence Service, and with baron Sonnino on the 6th. As an outcome of his meeting, Benes would have liked to come to an agreement on three points.²³⁵ One was for the Italian government to acknowledge the National Council as the political and military leading organ of the émigré movement, and that any future questions regarding matters pertaining to Czechoslovaks be taken up with the National Council. Secondly, for the Italian government to reclassify the Czechs and Slovaks as friendly nations and release Czech and Slovak nationals interned in Italy. Lastly, for the Italian government to permit the Czechoslovak prisoners to enlist in the Czechoslovak army and that they be allowed to be shipped to France. Sonnino gave evasive answers to two, saying that the Italian government will officially recognize the National Council and will formally communicate with it. On the question about the interned prisoners, he referred Benes to the Interior Minister (Orlando – *auth.*). On the last point, he stated his own position about the prisoners, stating that there can be no discussion about their being sent to France.

Ultimately, Benes had to face a very difficult reality regarding the organizing a Czechoslovak army. The fact was that there were few Czech and Slovak prisoners on French-held territory. It was without meaning that Benes received permission to raise a Czechoslovak army in France if there was only a meager number from which to enlist. Italy, on the other hand, had a common frontier with the Monarchy and, of necessity, had a large number of Czech and Slovak prisoners. That is why Benes attempted to gather the Czech and Slovak prisoners in Italy and have them shipped to France, filling out the ranks of his Czechoslovak army. But Sonnino's rebuff put a stop to his plan. Benes then proposed secondary proposal, asking Sonnino permission for the creation in Italy of the Czechoslovak army. Sonnino did not reject this proposal but deflected the question to the Italian Ministry of War and Exterior Ministry for clarification of the details. Benes met five times with De Martino, a high ranking official in the Exterior Ministry, regarding the Czechoslovak wishes. At the same time, he also held meeting with the War Ministry.²³⁶ Benes met with Under-Secretary General Montari and his staff, meeting Minister of War, General Giordano, twice, at the outset and conclusion of negotiations.²³⁷

²³⁴ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol I, p. 360.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 361-363.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 373-380.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 374-375.

The talks with the Italian soldiers clarified for Benes that he is unable to change the position taken by Sonnino – that not one Czechoslovak soldier will be allowed to cross the French border to become part of the Czechoslovak army -, therefore he set more modest targets for himself. He next tried to achieve that the Italian military command concentrate the Czechoslovak prisoners into a separate camp and that he, Benes, be permitted free access to this prisoner-of-war camp. The Italians lost no time in satisfying the last part of his request. Over a few days at the end of September, he visited a string of camps where Czechoslovak prisoners were held. Finally, he asked the Italians to grant the Italian Czechoslovaks the same permissions and entitlements as the French did on their side.

On this point, we must again draw attention to a sly Benes move. While true that Benes was in negotiations with the French and had an agreement-in-principle for the creation of an army, however, this document was signed and made public on December 16, 1917. His negotiations with the Italians took place over September and October of the same year. Benes was attempting to wring concessions from the Italians, based on French concessions which he had not as yet officially received.

Returning from his visit the prisoner-of-war camps, he received General Giordano's reply on October 4, 1917. The Minister of War makes clear that the Ministry will open official communications with the National Council. The Ministry will also grant freedom to the Czechoslovak prisoners and will organize semi-military units from them. They will not be eligible to fight on the front lines but will do military activities behind the front. As Czechoslovak soldiers, they will receive a unique emblem on their uniform but, legally, they will continue to be under the same regulations governing prisoners. The Giordano response represented a mixed success for Benes, outright failure on two points. On one, the Italians did not wish to create a Czechoslovak army, only semi-military units; the Czechoslovak prisoners gained their freedom on paper but, legally and in reality, they remained prisoners.

Finally, we must also mention some other facets of Benes' Italian trip. Apart from the official meetings, Benes had discussions with a number of other politicians: on September 9, he met with exiled Serbian Prime Minister Pasic, on September 22 with Italian Minister without Portfolio Bissolatti.²³⁸ At the end of September, a reception was given in honor of Benes, as Secretary General of the National Council, where influential Italian anti-Monarchy sympathizers were present, journalists and members of the Italian-Czechoslovak League. Minister Commandini was also present at the gathering. Beside the negotiations and social functions, Benes spent some of his time on organizational matters. He reorganized the Rome press office into a branch of the Paris National Council office. He appointed F. Havlíček to run the office and left on October 10 to return to Paris.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 376.

While Benes was attempting to raise an army in France and Italy, a significant Czechoslovak armed force came into being in Russia, the Czechoslovak Legion.²³⁹

As we can gather from the previous pages, the Czech and Slovak organizations in the Entente and neutral countries began vigorous activities with the outbreak of the war. Most of these activities consisted of the publication of various memoranda, and the publication of newspapers. The same can be said of the émigrés living in Russia, with the significant exception that the idea, of creating an independent military unit within the Russian army, arose in the first days of the war.²⁴⁰ A suggestion to this effect was presented to General Beljajev in the Russian Ministry of War in early August. The plan was approved by the Russian leaders, and the organizing of the Druzina, under Lt.Col. Lotocki, a Russian officer, was begun in Kiev. On October 11, 1914, the Druzina, 800 strong, swore allegiance to a flag donated by the Czech association of Moscow. The tasks assigned to the unit were spying, reconnaissance, fomenting unrest in the enemy trenches, interrogation of captured soldiers and spreading propaganda among the Slavs – not front line fighting.²⁴¹ On January 13, 1916, the Druzina was reorganized into the Czechoslovak Rifle Battalion, and on May 13, when its number grew to 1,600, into a brigade.²⁴²

Alongside with the organization of the military unit, plans were being made for the political activism of the Russian Czechs and Slovaks, as well. Three sufficiently populous centers emerged: Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Kiev but serious differences arose among them. The differences were particularly sharp between Kiev and Saint Petersburg.²⁴³ In early June, 1916, Josef Dürich, vice-president of the Parisian Czechoslovak National Council, arrived in Russia, having been sent by Masaryk. He was charged with two missions: end the rivalry between some of the local groups, and speed up the organization of the Czechoslovak army. Dürich's mission was of strategic importance; the organization of a Czechoslovak army was among the most important goals of the National Council. For its

²³⁹ One of the first mentions of the 'Czechoslovak Legion' is by Rátz, Kálmán: *A pánszlávizmus története* [The history of pan-Slavism]. Atheneum Kiadó, Budapest, no date (in reality in the 1930's – *auth.*), pp. 337-373. He later expanded this chapter with the addition of new documents into Rátz, Kálmán: *Az oroszországi csehszlovák légió története* [The history of the Russian Czechoslovak Legion]. Budapest, no date (again in the '30s – *auth.*). A relatively recent work is by Majoros, István: *A csehszlovák légió, Párizs és az orosz polgárháború* [The Czechoslovak Legion, Paris and the Russian civil war]. In: *Múltunk*. 1990/ issue 4, pp. 81-94. Among foreign language publications, three are worth mentioning: J.F.N. Bradley: *La Légion tchécoslovaque en Russie 1914-1920*. Paris, 1965; J.F. Firsov: *Boj za orientáciu českého a slovenského národnooslobodziovacehio hnutia v Rusku v rokoch 1915-1917*. *Historický Časopis*, 1995, issue 1, pp. 47-68; Betty Miller Untenberger: *The United States ...* op. cit.

²⁴⁰ Ibid (Firsov), pp. 47-50; Ibid (Bradley), p. 29.

²⁴¹ Majoros: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 83.

²⁴² Bradley: *La Légion ...* op. cit., pp. 37-39.

²⁴³ Rátz: *A pánszlávizmus ...* op. cit., pp. 337-338.

realization, Russia offered the best chance, having the most Czech and Slovak prisoners in its camps. However, Dürich failed on both counts. The Czar agreed to the release of the Slav prisoners on June 27, 1916 but then rescinded it in August. As for the disagreements between various factions, instead of ending it, he became embroiled in the clashes, falling under the influence of an anti-Masaryk group allied to the Czar.²⁴⁴

Masaryk, sensing a problem, sent Štefanik to Russia, who was able to solve the dual problems, ending the internal disagreements, culminating in the signing of the Kiev Agreement, on August 29, 1916, in which the Czechoslovak organizations in Russia accepted the leadership position of the National Council.²⁴⁵ He also achieved at the court to reverse the Czar's decision and to let his original agreement stand. In fact, on October 20, permission was again granted for the organization of a Czechoslovak unit within the Russian army, composed of prisoners-of-war. The unity among the exiles was, however, short lived. Dürich organized his own council – the Czechoslovak National Council of Russia – anti-Masaryk in intent but recognized by the czarist government. In the end Štefanik, with the consent of Masaryk and Benes, expelled Dürich from the Czechoslovak National Council.

In spite of the internal fighting, the size of the Czechoslovak brigade kept growing. After the Russian revolution of February, 1917, the environment improved for the organizing of the Czechoslovak army.²⁴⁶ Kerenski permitted the enlistment of prisoners into the independent Czechoslovak unit; the Czechoslovak Legion was born. By this time, it was of significant strength, having swelled to 70,000.²⁴⁷ The organizing effort received a great impetus when Masaryk arrived in Petrograd on May 16, 1917 and personally looked after matters pertaining to the organizing of the Legion.²⁴⁸

Attempts at a separate peace

The Entente Powers' January response to President Wilson's query clearly stated as one of the war's aims the "freeing from foreign oppression the Italian, Slav, Romanian and Czechoslovak minorities. Affirmed in this way, it boded not well for the continued existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. French and British politicians obviously felt that the Monarchy could be safely terminated. The Monarchy was merely seen as an ally of Germany and it never occurred to them to consider it as a potential future ally against Germany. In their view, a more plausible route to achieve it was the extension of Russian influence, increased French power and the creation of a strong South Slav country. There seemed to be no obstacle to having the vacuum created by the disappearance of the Monarchy be filled

²⁴⁴ Kovtun: *Masarykuv triumph* ... op. cit., pp. 70-72; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 28; Untenberger: *The United States* ... op. cit., pp. 14-15.

²⁴⁵ Zeman: *The Break-up* ... op. cit., p. 91.

²⁴⁶ Bradley: *La Légion* ... op. cit., pp. 54-55; Majoros: *A csehszlovák* ... op. cit., pp. 83-84.

²⁴⁷ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 161.

²⁴⁸ Untenberger: *The United States* ... op. cit., pp. 69-82.

by Russian and French allies.²⁴⁹ This conjectural framework was immensely favorable to the plans of the Masaryk-Benes émigrés, since it made possible the creation of a Czechoslovak country, as the Entente Powers no longer felt it important to maintain the existence of the Monarchy. This January situation, favoring the exiles, changed diametrically in a few weeks. In February of 1917, the Russian revolution deposed the Czar, the Monarchy made feelers for a separate peace and America entered the war. The combined impact of these three events resulted in a new, complex environment, influencing plans for Central Europe. The value of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy went up temporarily in the eyes of the French and British politicians as a possible anti-German ally. Subsequent events – the collapse of the Kerenski attempt /July 1917/, the Bolsheviks assuming power /November 1917/, the collapse of the Romanian front /December 1917/ - all reinforced this view.

In England, parliamentarian Noel Buxton tried to sway Prime Minister David Lloyd George to his Monarchy-friendly views. Buxton voiced his opinion that the demand for independence among the Slav and Latin peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is far from unanimous and that the existence of small, nation states will not present a deterrent against German expansionism. In his view, the Monarchy needs to be re-organized on a federative basis, which would ensure the right of the ethnic minorities living within its boundaries, while preserving regional stability.²⁵⁰

On February 12, 1917, Sir Eric Drummond – private secretary to Foreign Minister Balfour – prepared a background briefing paper for the planned upcoming March secret British-Austrian meeting. The meeting actually took place in April. The paper set out, as the main goal, the reorganization of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy along anti-German lines. In Drummond's proposal, Dualism would be replaced by four-way sharing of the power structure with an anti-German Bohemia (but not Czechoslovakia) and Yugoslavia, enjoying equal rights with Austria and Hungary.²⁵¹

Before another important secret British-Austrian negotiations in December of 1917 (the Smuts – Mensdorff meeting), it was again Drummond who was chosen to prepare the background document. His paper of December 12 repeated the main points of his February document, writing "... the re-organized and liberalized Austrian Empire ... could be a strong and effective barrier against the overwhelming German influence in central Europe ... Count Károlyi, during a recent Swiss conversation, suggested a plan for the Austrian Empire, consisting of five sovereign states: Austria proper, the Austrian and Russian portions of Poland,

²⁴⁹ Ormos, Mária: *Padovától Trianonig 1918-1920* [From Padua to Trianon 1918-1920] Kossuth Kiadó, 1984, p. 18.

²⁵⁰ Hanak: *Great-Britain and ...* op. cit., p. 147.

²⁵¹ Arday, Lajos: *Térkép csata után. Magyarország a brit külpolitikában 1918-1919* [Map after the battle. Hungary in British foreign policy 1918-1919]. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1990, pp. 13-16.

Hungary, Bohemia, and a Yugoslav state, including Serbia. These states would comprise a federation under the Habsburg dynasty.”²⁵²

There is no mention at all of any dissection. Quite the opposite, the Monarchy would have emerged from the war enlarged and with increased influence, had it listened to Britain and were it willing to sign a separate peace. According to Lajos Arday, for Prime Minister Lloyd George, a separate peace with Austria-Hungary was more than a fond hope or one of the possible routes to victory, it was the basis of his governing foreign policy up to March of 1918.²⁵³

Among the French politicians – similar to their British colleagues – far reaching plans were entertained in 1917 regarding the mission of the Monarchy, partly as a counterweight against Germany, and partly as buttress against the new eastern peril, the spread of Bolshevism.²⁵⁴ The retention of the unity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, recognized anew as being in the French interest, rested on the assumption that the Monarchy may form part of the French post-war policy of German containment.²⁵⁵

Due to these reasons, several attempts at brokering a separate peace agreement were noted during 1917-1918, both from British and French sources.²⁵⁶ Between March and May of 1917, Charles IV (the new Emperor) carried on secret negotiations with the French, through the mediation of Sixtus Bourbon, Prince of Parma, a Belgian officer and Charles’s brother-in-law. The Emperor and his Foreign Minister, count Ottokar Czernin, wanted a negotiated peace with France and England, at the expense of Russia and Serbia.²⁵⁷

The negotiations between count Abel Armand (an agent of the French Deuxième Bureau) and count Nikolaus Reverta (Charles IV’s envoy) took

²⁵² Ibid, pp. 16-19.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Pastor, Peter: *Franciaország hadicéljai Ausztria Magyarországgal szemben* [French war aims against Austria-Hungary]. In: *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. században* [Hungary and the Big Powers in the 20th century]. Teleki László Alapítvány, Budapest, 1995; D. Stevenson: *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919*. Calderon Press, Oxford, 1962.

²⁵⁵ Ibid (Stevenson), p. 59.

²⁵⁶ Sándor, Iván: *Tanulmányok a világháború diplomáciájából* [Studies in the diplomacy of the World War]. Pécs, 1938; Galántai, József: *Az első világháború* [The First World War]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1980, pp. 405-418.

²⁵⁷ Fejtő devotes two chapters in his book to the negotiations with Sixtus (Fejtő: *Rekviem ...* op. cit., pp. 173-192, 198-210). The most recent treatment is the 2004, issue 10 of the *Rubicon*, devoted entirely to Karl IV; Hajdú, Tibor: *Károly a békecsászár* [Karl, the peace Emperor]. In: *História*, 2004, issue 10, pp. 17-18; Szarka, László: *A cseh és a szlovák történetírás* [Czech and Slovak historiography]. In: *História*, 2004, issue 10, pp. 21-22, shows in detail how current Czech and Slovak historians (Roman Holec, Marian Hronský, Jiří Kovtun, Jan Rychlík, Otto Urban, their works cited at the back) evaluate the peace efforts of Karl IV.

place in August of 1917.²⁵⁸ The meetings between General Jan Smuts (Lloyd George's proxy) and count Mensdorff (Charles IV's representative, previously the Monarchy's ambassador to London) were held in December of the same year.²⁵⁹

Benes, in his memoirs, remarked on this period as: "The year 1917 was, in reality, a year of crisis and vacillation. They (England and France – *auth.*) dithered whether to talk with Vienna or not, whether to fundamentally eliminate the Habsburg Empire or to come to some agreement with it, whether to commit to the fatal step – from which there is no turning back – or to take a cautious waiting position, hoping for a better moment for a compromise."²⁶⁰

Benes, through his French and British friends, was informed about the secret negotiations and attempted to take countermeasures. In the spring of 1917, he wrote a short essay, arguing against the federalization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This pamphlet he arranged to be sent to the British and French politicians and published it on December 1, 1917 in the *Nation Tchèque*.²⁶¹ The attempts at negotiating a separate peace presented a real threat to the Masaryk-Benes émigré plans. In the case of a separate peace, Bohemia would have to settle for 'merely' autonomy in a re-organized Monarchy. On top of it, the plans of the Entente politicians – see Drummond's two memoranda – only covered the Czechs, leaving the Slovaks within Hungary's boundaries, frustrating any plan for a Czechoslovakia. The Entente-Austrian separate peace pact remained as merely a possibility in 1917. By March of 1918, it completely disappeared from the realm of the possible.

PHASE THREE (1918)

The recognition of the Czechoslovak émigrés by the Entente powers

While the peace talks were progressing, Benes continued his efforts, little by little, to create the foundations of a Czechoslovak state. His labors in the spring of 1918 were focused in two directions: the continued work on organizing the army in France – and also in Italy -, and the struggle to gain diplomatic recognition.²⁶²

With regard to the organization of the nascent Czechoslovak army, it was now headquartered in Cognac, its numbers growing from several sources, with 1,100 arriving from Russia in November of 1917.²⁶³ Benes succeed in having a 300-man contingent of Czechoslovak descent

²⁵⁸ Wilfried Fests: *Peace or partition. The Habsburg Monarchy and British Policy.* George Prior, London, 1978, pp. 134-135; Sándor: *Tanulmányok ...* op. cit., pp. 43-72.

²⁵⁹ Ibid (Fests), pp. 190-177; Ibid (Sándor), pp. 73-90. old; Arday: *Térkép ...* op. cit., pp. 16-24.

²⁶⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 9.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 28-29.

²⁶³ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 161.

transferred to Cognac from the French Foreign Legion.²⁶⁴ Benes, having asserted his political power over the French émigré colonies, announced a compulsory draft among the members of the colonies, in the name of the National Council.

In January of 1918, Benes created a separate military department within the Paris offices of the National Council for the Czechoslovak army's general staff. General Maurice Janin was appointed as its commander-in-chief.²⁶⁵ The organization of the army on French soil proceeded at a quick pace throughout 1918, reaching a strength of some 10,000 by the summer. Benes writes: "... so that, with our presence on the Western Front, our political goals have been met. This was the basis that we needed so that, by the summer of 1918, the National Council could call on its political credibility to achieve the diplomatic successes it did."²⁶⁶

If we examine Benes' political activities in the first half of 1918, we can honestly say that he made significant success in his activities towards the organizing of a congress in Rome for oppressed nations. The idea for the congress sprang from Masaryk's 1915 lecture at King's College, where he presented Central Europe as a zone of oppressed small nations. Masaryk's notion was given reality by Benes, when he began to organize the congress.²⁶⁷ For a long time, the differences between the Italians and the Yugoslavs prevented the congress from taking place. However, after the two parties met in London on March 7, 1918 (Torre, Italian and Trumbič, Yugoslav representatives) and agreed on key points, every obstacle was removed from holding the Rome congress.

Benes arrived in Rome on April 8, 1918 and the following day Senator Ruffini officially opened the congress. All the important enemies of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were present, of the Austrian-hating Italians senators Ruffini, Albertini and Della Torre, journalists Amandola, Borghese and Mussolini, a 20-strong 'Yugoslav' delegation, led by Trumbič and Mesterovič, a five-person delegation of Poles (led by Skirmut, the future Foreign Minister), five Romanians under Mironescu, and seven Czechoslovak delegates, including Benes, Štefanik, and Osuský. Also in attendance were the Monarchy's sworn enemies of long standing: Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed from England, and Ernest Denis from France.²⁶⁸ On the second day of the congress, four committees were formed. A propaganda committee, whose activities were concentrated on the front, primarily the Italian front. The committee for the prisoners-of-war and the interned from Austro-Hungarian minority nations, working mainly to recruit them for the army. A committee to prepare for the next

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 170.

²⁶⁵ Maurice Janin: *Ma mission en Sibérie 1918-1920*. Payot, Paris, 1933.

²⁶⁶ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 171.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 180–184.

²⁶⁸ Fejtő: *Rekviem ...* op. cit., p. 255; Wandycz, Piotr S.: *A szabadság ára. Kelet-Közép Európa története a középkortól máig* [The price of freedom. The history of East-Central Europe from the Middle Ages to today.]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2004, p. 180.

congress, to be held in the fall of 1918 in Paris. And finally, a committee compose the final wording of the decisions of the other three committees.

The committees met *in camera*, and issued no communiqués. The ceremonial closing session of the congress was held on April 11. This session ratified an 'Italian-Yugoslav Declaration' and a 'Declaration regarding the freedom of nationalities of Austria-Hungary'.²⁶⁹ In it, they stated that the nations oppressed by the Monarchy no longer wish to live within the boundaries of the Monarchy but desire to create independent nations. After the two mutual declarations, the representatives of the nations present made individual statements. Benes spoke on behalf of the Czechoslovaks. His statement had two messages. In part, he said, the struggle is not only against Vienna but also Budapest, too – because union with the Slovaks was important for the Czechs –, and also that the Habsburg Empire was essentially finished, shortly to be dissolved.²⁷⁰

The congress was a great success but the ceremonial act did not bring closer co-operation between the nationalities that were present. In practical terms, the congress took a stand in the spirit of Mazzini – *Austriam esse delendam* /Austria must be erased/ - the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy must be broken up. After the congress, the organizers and participants exerted constant pressure on the Entente governments to include the dismemberment of the Monarchy among their war goals.

On his return from Rome, Benes was received by the new French Premier, Georges Clemenceau, elected on November 15, 1917, although the reception was more etiquette than substantive.²⁷¹ Still, Benes shortly had another opportunity to confer with Clemenceau. Count Czernin – Foreign Minister of the Monarchy – boasting about the success of the Austrian-German alliance in a speech to the city council of Vienna, on April 2, 1918, referred to an offer by Clemenceau to the Monarchy of negotiations. (Probably referring to the secret negotiations in February between Revertera and Armand – *auth.*) Two days later, the news reached Clemenceau who became irate, screaming, "Czernin lied."²⁷² As we know, this was, in fact true, because the secret French-Austrian negotiations were initiated by Vienna. To revenge the affront, Clemenceau made public the four page letter, written by Emperor Charles IV himself and handed to Sixtus on March 24, 1917. Although addressed to Sixtus, the letter was meant for French President Poincaré. In the letter, the Emperor stressed that the Monarchy wished to retain its territorial integrity, admitted the legality of French demands regarding Alsace-Lorraine and closed with: "Now that I have stated my views, I ask that, after consultations with England and France, you state yours, so that we can prepare a groundwork of common understanding and agreement, with which negotiations can begin for the satisfaction of all, followed by mutual agreements."²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 240.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁷² Fejtő: *Rekviem ...* op. cit., p. 257.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 405-407.

Czernin declared the letter publicized by Clemenceau as a forgery. The Czernin-Clemenceau affair made any further French-Austrian contact impossible. Benes tried to make the most of this Czernin-Clemenceau abyss, writing in his memoirs: "I wanted to exploit the psychological moment when Clemenceau was in such violent disagreement with Vienna."²⁷⁴

Clemenceau received Benes on April 20, 1918, during which Benes requested that Clemenceau make an official declaration in which France recognizes the independence of the Czechoslovak nation, as well as recognizing the National Council as the national government.²⁷⁵ Benes recalled Clemenceau's reply as: "Clemenceau immediately agreed, in principle, but stated that it needs to be thoroughly discussed and the thing must be prepared with the official bodies. He was still under the influence of his polemic with Czernin and repeated that, as far as he was concerned, the Czechoslovak question is a closed affair, politically he recognizes the National Council as a government organization and is willing to accede to their requests ..."²⁷⁶

A month later, Clemenceau again met with Benes, when he reinforced his previous commitment. Emboldened, Benes extended the scope of his diplomatic activities to England.²⁷⁷ In the original internal division of spheres, England was Masaryk's area, who traveled to Russia in the spring of 1917, arriving in St. Petersburg on May 16. After nearly a year of activities in Russia, Masaryk relocated to America in April of 1918, traveling through Siberia. Thus, Benes was forced to assume the diplomatic activities in Britain, too. Between May 7 and 19, 1918, Benes had a series of meetings with Foreign Minister Balfour and Minister of Blockade, Lord Robert Cecil.²⁷⁸ The first meeting with Balfour was on May 10, where Benes was introduced by that old friend of the Czechoslovak cause, H.W. Steed. Employing deceptive tactics, Benes asked that England do at least as much for the Czechoslovak interests as the other Entente countries.²⁷⁹ In other words, Benes wanted to secure the same concessions from the British government as he was able to wring from the French. Benes presented the request to Lord Cecil, who happened to be Balfour's deputy in the Foreign Ministry.

Immediately after the meeting, and the following day, Benes forwarded two memoranda to Balfour. In one, he paints a picture of the Czechoslovak émigrés legal position in France and Italy; in the other, the legal standing of the Czechoslovak army in France.²⁸⁰ Balfour replied that he will give a response in a few days, after studying the documents. Benes makes no remarks on Balfour's response in his memoirs but, according to

²⁷⁴ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 260.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 30-31.

²⁷⁸ Hanak: *Great-Britain and ...* op. cit., p. 263.

²⁷⁹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 335.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

British historian Harry Hanak, Balfour at this point deflected Benes' request.²⁸¹

On May 20, Benes returned to Paris. The next day finds him in a meeting with the French Foreign Ministry regarding the transport of the Czechoslovak army in Russia to France.²⁸² The day after, as already chronicled, he was again meeting with Clemenceau. Benes exerted a great deal of energy to extract official standing and recognition for his cause from both the French and English governments – wheedling first one prime minister, then the other. On May 28, he submits an official request to the French Foreign Ministry. He informed the French that the 21. Infantry Battalion of the Czechoslovak army is about to be posted to the front lines and: “The National Council would be extremely pleased if the French government would find a way, as part of the flag consecration ceremony of a Czechoslovak unit about to move up to the front, to express its feeling concerning Czechoslovakia in a political statement. The National Council feels that the present moment is appropriate, in both Bohemia and Austria-Hungary, the military situation, as well as the Czechoslovak army's position in the Entente countries, for a clear and unambiguous statement in regard to the situation.”²⁸³

After a month of diplomatic to and fro, on June 29, 1918 – and one day before the 21. battalion's flag ceremony – Foreign Minister Pichon, on behalf of the French government, sent a reply to Benes, which stated the following position: “Mr. General Secretary, when the 21. battalion – the first such unit of the independent Czechoslovak army of France – receives its flag and leaves its camp to take position in a sector of the front alongside its French comrades, the government of the Republic deems it just and essential, in recognition for their ardent activities for the cause of the allies, to declare their right to national independence and to publicly and officially recognize the Czechoslovak National Council as the supreme representative of the national interest, the foundation of the future Czechoslovak government.”²⁸⁴

Ergo, the French government officially recognized the Czechoslovak National Council as the *de facto* Czechoslovak government and the Czechoslovak military as an allied army. After the French recognition, Benes again resorted to his usual method, which consisted of obtaining the same concession from the other Entente powers what has been granted by another, claiming the first as a precedent. Borsody judges this method as: “It was mainly through French assistance that the Czechoslovak cause was advanced by degrees. Benes' successes in Paris led the way; London, Washington and Rome were always a step or two behind.”²⁸⁵ Accordingly, Benes in England and Masaryk in America began intensive diplomatic

²⁸¹ Hanak: *Great-Britain and ...* op. cit., p. 263.

²⁸² Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, p. 340.

²⁸³ Ibid, p. 344.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Borsody: *Benes ...* op. cit., p. 42.

activities.²⁸⁶ As a result, The British government²⁸⁷ officially recognized the Czechoslovak National Council as a *de facto* government on August 9, 1918, followed by the United States on September 3.²⁸⁸

The recognition of the National Council by the Entente powers as, for all intents and purposes, the Czechoslovak government unequivocally spelled the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, meaning its definite dismemberment. It must be clearly understood that a unified Poland can be reconstituted, the most extreme and contradictory demands of the Italians, Yugoslavs and Romanians met, yet a strong German-Magyar-Czech core remains. The creation of Czechoslovakia demolished this core. We are in complete agreement with Arday's observation that the death sentence for the Monarchy was not passed in the secret agreements of London and Bucharest, rather, it came about between June and September of 1918 with the recognition of official status for the National Council.²⁸⁹ Benes and Masaryk achieved a tremendous diplomatic *coup*. We can honestly say that, at the outbreak of the war, their émigré situation was in the worst position and had scant prospects for their aspirations. Poland has been an international issue for centuries; the Poles have been trying to reclaim their country, with western help, since Napoleon.²⁹⁰ The Yugoslav's cause – the restructuring of the Balkans – was also an international issue, especially since the war originated in Serbia. With the entry of Romania, the cause of the Transylvanian Romanians also took its place on the diplomatic world stage. Only the Czechs (and also the Slovaks) lacked this type of background, since they did not have a 'mother country'. In spite of it all, several months before the conclusion of hostilities, the Entente powers recognized the Masaryk-Benes émigré groups as a *de facto* government, and thus the Czechoslovak problem became an issue to be solved through international diplomacy. From any point of view, this amounted to an enormous success.

We do not wish to belittle the role of Masaryk and Benes – the attention paid to everyday details of diplomacy, propaganda and organizing an army – but, it must be noted that, the success of the Czechoslovak émigré cause was immeasurably aided by international conditions

²⁸⁶ Masaryk: *A világhorradalom ...* op. cit., pp. 235-244; Kovtun: *Masarykuv triumph ...* op. cit., pp. 52-67, 133-147; Unterberger: *The United States ...* op. cit., pp. 283-289. Re Masaryk's American activities, in English, see Jíří Kovtun: *Tomás G. Masaryk 1850-1937*. A Selective list of reading materials in English. Library of Congress, Washington, 1981.

²⁸⁷ Kenneth J. Calder: *Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918*. Cambridge University Press, London-New York-Melbourne, 1976, pp. 191-194, 204-204; Hanak: *Great-Britain and ...* op. cit., pp. 263-264; Arday: *Térkép ...* op. cit., pp. 44-71.

²⁸⁸ Taraszovics, Sándor: *Amerikai béke-előkészületek az I. világháború alatt és tervek az új Magyarországról* [American peace preparations during WWI and plans for a new Hungary]. In: *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. században* [Hungary and the Great Powers in the 20th century]. Teleki László Alapítvány, Budapest, 1995.

²⁸⁹ Arday: *Térkép ...* op. cit., p. 69.

²⁹⁰ Calder: *Origins of the ...* op. cit., pp. 145-175.

favorable to their cause. Both in France²⁹¹ and England,²⁹² when war aims were considered in foreign policy – and especially the future of the Monarchy – two fundamental directions appeared. On the one hand, there was a distinctly anti-Monarchy lobby, which opted for the dismemberment of the Monarchy as the only course. There was also a distinctly pro-Monarchy group, which reasoned for the necessity of retaining the Monarchy. During the war, these two camps, both in France and England, waged a sharp struggle. As we saw in the previous chapter, between February of 1917 and March of 1918, the pro-Monarchy group was in ascendancy, leading to several attempts at a separate peace. These peace feelers ended in March of 1918 when the anti-Monarchy faction became pre-eminent. Ignác Romsics believes that this change is attributable to the combined effect of several factors.²⁹³ We are thinking here mainly of the infamous Czernin-Clemenceau affair, which scuttled the Austrian-French negotiations, or the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March, 1918, which clearly showed the Entente that Russia could not be trusted for the remainder of the war. In fact, it allowed Germany to begin the creation of the *Neue Ordnung* /New Order/ on the territories stretching from the Baltic to the Dnieper. On May 5, 1918, the Monarchy signed a pact with Germany in Spa, giving extremely close military, political and economic co-operation to Germany.

It is our position that the key to the success achieved by Masaryk and Benes lay in their developing an idea, in conjunction with the French and British anti-Monarchy groups, and implanting and reinforcing this idea into the heads of the Entente decision makers that, even if Russia drops out of the war, a Central European order and security zone can be created – but the Monarchy must be destroyed, to be replaced by nation states.

1.3 THE SECOND CONCEPT THE PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS

In the introduction, we presented our hypothesis that Benes worked out four models during his long political career. In this chapter, we intend to present his second concept. We must immediately state clearly that this idea can not be assigned as being authored purely by Benes, as it contains several elements devised by Masaryk, both during the war and even before. Thus, in the first part of the chapter, we will deal with Masaryk's wartime

²⁹¹ Fejtő: *Rekviem* ... op. cit., pp. 222-239; M.F. Boemeke - G.D. Feldman - E. Glaser: *The Treaty of Versailles*. German Historical Institute, Cambridge University Press, 1998, and two studies of the latter: (1) David Stevenson: *French War Aims and Peace Planning*, pp. 87-110 (This is not to be confused with a similar titled work by the same author: David Stevenson: *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919*. Calderon Press, Oxford, 1962) and (2) Georges-Henri Soutu: *The French Peacemakers and Their Home Front*. pp. 167-189.

²⁹² Fest: *Peace or Partition* ... op. cit., pp. 77-116; Hanak: *Great-Britain and ...* op. cit., pp. 135-203; Erik Goldstein: *Great Britain: The Home Front*. In: Boemeke-Feldman-Glaser: *The Treaty* ... op. cit., pp. 147-166.

²⁹³ Romsics: *A trianoni* ... op. cit., pp. 65-66.

and pre-war activities in this regard, while fully intending to remain with our main topic, Benes. Masaryk carried on extensive activities before 1914 – scientific publications in the fields of philosophy, education, psychology and sociology – so that, after briefly sketching the high points of his career, we can return to a closer examination of those aspects of his life germane to our topic. We shall quickly cover his political career before 1914,²⁹⁴ and touch on the evolution of his views regarding the relationship between the Czech nation and the Monarchy.²⁹⁵

Precedents of the second concept

Masaryk was born in 1850 in Brno, went to college in Vienna, where he also continued his university studies, obtaining a doctorate in 1876. For a short time, he studied in Leipzig. In 1878, at the age of 28, he is a lecturer at the University of Vienna, teaching at the University of Prague, beginning in 1883. If we examine his political career, it becomes apparent that he joins into Czech political life after returning to Prague in 1878, at the age of 33. This was the period of contest between the Old Czechs and the Young Czechs.²⁹⁶ Since he is dissatisfied with the conservative politics of the Old Czechs but not in total agreement with the Young Czechs, either, he gathers a few similar-thinking politicians around himself (Jozef Kaizl, Karel Kramář) and creates his own gathering, the Realists. To disseminate their views, they take over a newspaper, the *Cas*. It is interesting, and a true picture of the era, that they dabble in both the Old and Young Czech groups. In the 1891 parliamentary elections, several of Masaryk's group are elected (Masaryk, Kramář, Kaizl). Masaryk, the inexperienced, beginner politician soon finds himself in a moral dilemma in the daily political skirmishes of a representative (he does not agree with the opposition but refuses to come out openly on the side of the government), he resigns his seat in 1893. His resignation was not the end of his political activities; the time gained from not having parliamentary duties, he spent on writing studies. In 1894, he wrote "The Czech Question",²⁹⁷ in 1895, "Our Current Crisis." In both, he tried to give a philosophical foundation to Czech politics.

During these years, Masaryk tried to create the framework for a national program, in which he tries to synthesize the traditional with the modern. In 1900, Masaryk and his circle establish a new party, the Czech People's Party (later renamed to Czech Liberal Party). The primary purpose of the party, they felt, was to accomplish Czech-Austrian-German

²⁹⁴ For a general summary of the biographies of T.G. Masaryk, see Note 2 in the bibliography.

²⁹⁵ Roman Szporluk: *The political thought of Thomas G. Masaryk*. New York, 1981; Stanley B. Winters (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937)* Volume I. Thinker and Politician. London, 1990; Robert B. Pynset (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937)* Volume II. Thinker and Critic. London, 1989; Harry Hanak (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937)* Volume III. Statesman and Cultural Force. London, 1990.

²⁹⁶ Urban: *A nagykorúvá ...* op. cit.

²⁹⁷ Váradi, Aladár (ed.): *A magyar Masaryk*. vol II. Bratislava, 1935.

cooperation. In 1907, he is again elected to the Viennese Reichsrat, where he becomes known for his criticism of the Monarchy's Balkan policies. He also devotes considerable time to foreign policy activities.²⁹⁸ In 1909, he speaks out in the Reichsrat against the regicide case in Zagreb, later going on several deputations to Belgrade. He played an active role in the case of the Serb-Croat coalition politicians, against Austrian historian Heinrich Friedjung. Between November of 1910 and January of 1911, he carried on a pointed discourse with Aerenthal, the Monarchy's Foreign Minister. During the Balkan War of 1912-1913, he tried to mediate between the Serbs and the Monarchy, carrying Nikola Pasić's letter – the Serb Prime Minister – from Belgrade to Vienna.

We would draw attention to two important appraisal comments with regard to his previous activities. Kořalka judges Masaryk's pre-1914 activities as: "... more and more often he is seen as the solitary man of Czech politics, whose expressions and actions are permeated by a moralizing tendency ... his person and work, up to 1914, better known among the Germans, and even more so among the South Slavs."²⁹⁹ László Szarka gives the following striking appraisal: "It is but a slight exaggeration to say that his name was better known among those following Austro-Hungarian foreign policy, than in the circles following Czech internal developments."³⁰⁰

Masaryk was also interested in the relation between the Czech nation and the Monarchy, beside an active role in politics, as a scientist.³⁰¹ He considered his two studies, *The Czech Question* and *Our Current Crisis*, as seminal. In both, he deems it decisive in the relationship of a state and nation, that the state satisfy the nation's needs. In *The Czech Question*, he aligns to the reasoning of Palacky's 1865 work – The Concept of the Austrian State – accepting and agreeing with the Austrian program of Czech political law. It is during his second period as a representative, starting in 1907, that he begins to re-evaluate his previous position of the '90's on the relationship of the state (especially the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) and the nation (especially the Czechs).³⁰² During this reassessment, he comes to the following conclusion regarding the antagonism between the state and the nations (observable in practice with the Germans, Magyars and Russians): in the end, it weakens the state itself, as it impedes the development of the nations.

In 1911, when the delegation for common matters was meeting in Budapest, Masaryk held a lecture for Slovak intellectuals on the problems of the small nations, and the Slovaks'.³⁰³ In his presentation, he laid out the

²⁹⁸ Kořalka: *A világpolitika* ... op. cit., pp. 167-169.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 161.

³⁰⁰ Szarka: *Egy XX. századi* ... op. cit., pp. 429-465.

³⁰¹ Szporluk: *The political thought* ... op. cit., pp. 101-125, chapter titled 'Nation and state'.

³⁰² Szarka: *Egy XX. századi* ... op. cit., p. 436.

³⁰³ Masaryk's Budapest lecture was reported by Milan Hodža on March 3, 1911, in the paper *Náša zástava*. Much later, it was published in book form. Milan Hodža: *Clánky, reci, studie*. Praha, 1930, vol II, pp. 199-206.

following line of thought: after achieving personal and civil rights, 19th c. development set as a target the acquisition of national rights. The nation is a natural unit (this idea Masaryk took from Herder – *auth.*), therefore affiliation to it is necessarily stronger than attachment to an artificial institution – and a state is a highly artificial institution. Since a nation is the only organic institution, any development should align to its needs. Since Europe does not have any truly nation states, we should strive towards the ideal of pure and natural national ethos.

If we strip the philosophy from the above lecture and try to grasp the politics, Masaryk stated the confrontation between the state and its nations. If we superimpose the political message onto the concrete situation, Masaryk contrasts the interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Czech nation. He has come to a diametrically opposing view he has stated several times in the 1890's, refuting the Austro-Slav political law. As a consequence, it led directly to August, 1914 when, after some wavering, Masaryk began active anti-Monarchy organizing.

The émigré movement he conjured up needed a clear and understandable program. Actually, two: a fundamental statement, in which the émigré society defines itself and its position, and then, a practical program built on that foundation. Masaryk's thoughts, composed before the war, became the fundamental statement (mission statement in today's terms – *ed.*). This was an easy task as Masaryk had, already back in 1911, contrasted the concepts of state and nation.

During his stay in Geneva, from January to September of 1915, Masaryk adapted his earlier ideas to the war circumstances, expanding them with a program for small states with his lecture at King's College ("The problem of small nations in the European crisis").³⁰⁴ Masaryk's British friends accomplish to have Prime Minister Asquith accept the patronage of the lecture, which he did not attend personally, claiming illness but sent a letter addressing the attendees.³⁰⁵ In the introduction to his lecture, Masaryk stated: "We Slavs sharply differentiate state and nation."³⁰⁶ Consistent with this statement, he went on to examine the relationship of state and nation in Europe. He said: In 1915, there are 25 states, inhabited by 62 nations, i.e., Europe has twice as many nations as states. On top of that, of the 28, only seven are inhabited by members of one nation and these are the really small nations (Andorra, Denmark, San Marino, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Holland, Portugal). The medium and large states are inhabited by several nations, the majority nation being the ruler – he said, continuing – "yet we have an example where the minority wants to rule – the Germans in Austria and the Magyars in Hungary beside them."³⁰⁷ He draws attention to the distinctive difference in the two part of Europe "... while there are 18 states in the West, only 8 in the East, and

³⁰⁴ T.G. Masaryk: *The problem of small nations in the European crisis*. London, 1915.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13.

two of them belong partly to the West and partly to the East.”³⁰⁸ He makes a claim that the territory bounded by Constantinople, Salonika, Trieste, Gdansk to St. Petersburg is the zone of the small nations, currently ruled by Germany, the Monarchy, Turkey and czarist Russia. To make things worse, Serbs and Croats live in four states and seven administrative regions, Poles in three states, and Czechs and Slovaks in two states. From this, it can be deduced that in this zone, the chief political motivators are the nationality and language issues. The small nations constantly struggle for their freedom and independence. The current war broke out here, in this tinderbox, which will spread unrest and turbulence to the rest of Europe. This belt needs to be politically reorganized. Continuing with his argument, Masaryk groups the nations of Europe into four groups, based on their population:

86 – 45 million	Russians, Germans, British
40 – 20 million	French, Italians, Spaniards
Under 20 million	Poles, Romanians, Serb-Croats, Czechs, Swedes, Portuguese
Fragment or sporadic	Other

Physical size and strength can not be the basis of law – he said – “... 70 is undeniably more than 10, but does that give the 70 the right to take away the livelihood of the 10? Do they have the right to resort to force?” – posing the question.³⁰⁹ He went at length using historical examples to develop his thesis, according to which the small nations have a right and opportunity for independent cultural growth and statehood.³¹⁰ As his concluding argument, he said: “As there is no superman, so the large nations do not have superior rights. No large nation has the right, to treat its smaller neighbors as a toy of its imperialistic appetite or unbounded thirst for power.”³¹¹

In his concluding portion, Masaryk expand on his small nations program. His reasoning, as he expounds it, is: England entered the war to protect the small Belgium and Serbia. The true pan-German aim of Germany is the creation of a Berlin-Bagdad axis, a building block of which is the Monarchy. The Poles, Serbs, Croats and Czechs are natural enemies of Germany. “Freeing and supporting these small nations is the only appropriate anti-Prussian blow. A free Poland, Bohemia and Serb-Croatia would be the buffer nations, whose creation would ease and ensure the creation of other small nations, such as Hungary, Greater Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. If this terrible war has any meaning, we can only find it in the liberation of the small nations.”³¹²

According to Kofalka, this lecture is important because it was the first time that Masaryk presented his ideal, comprehensive program for the

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

³¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 19-30.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 30.

³¹² Ibid, pp. 31-32.

Czech resistance abroad.³¹³ It was also an important milestone, in our view, because it offered a program for the Entente – the liberation of the small nation as a war aim – the creation of small nation states. All the while, Masaryk linked the Czech question to the larger Middle European restructuring question, running from the Baltic to the Aegean. He considered the creation of a free Poland, Serb-Croatia and, certainly, a Czech state as an important measure in stemming the eastern spread of Germany. The Masaryk-Benes exiles needed to garner the support and cooperation of the Entente powers. To gain this support, he employed a suite of broad based reasons during the war (and, of course, during the peace talks).³¹⁴ In his lecture, Masaryk laid out, and defined, the reasons and reasoning used by the Czechoslovak émigrés in the coming year to convince the Entente of their cause. Several months later – in the spring of 1916 – Benes held a series of lectures at the Sorbonne, with the assistance of Denis, on the topic of the Slav question and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.³¹⁵ Benes used this opportunity to further refine the ideas put forward by Masaryk, to expand them and make them usable in the propaganda and diplomatic efforts.

Conceptually, the question may arise as to, How big a portion of the rationale created for the Czechoslovak émigrés was Masaryk's? How much Benes'? It is impossible to clearly delineate their input, as Borsody puts it clearly in his book: "The two founders of the Czechoslovak state, Masaryk and Benes, were thousands of kilometers apart at the decisive moments. They hardly communicated. They worked separately and independently, yet in total harmony."³¹⁶ About the only thing of which we can be certain: Benes collected his lecture material and published it in pamphlet form, in French (*Détruisez L' Autriche-Hongrie. La Martyre des Tcehegoslovaques a travers histoire*).³¹⁷ For the reasons above, the ideas presented in his pamphlet are to be considered Benes' second concept. We must also note that Benes expanded Masaryk's King's College lecture with two new goals. Through a review of Czech history, he professes to prove that the Germans, Habsburgs and Magyars have always represented an anti-democratic absolutism. In practical terms, Benes is trying to prop up Masaryk's interpretation of the causes of the war, i.e., the war consists of two camps: the Entente, fighting for democratic principles, and the absolutist Central Powers, whose political and current social structure he has a completely opposing philosophical view. As well, he is trying to substantiate that the pre-war cultural and historical development of the Czechoslovaks, their psychological and philosophical concepts, their intellectual and social structure, make them members of western European camp.

³¹³ Kořalka: *A világpolitika ...* op. cit., p. 186.

³¹⁴ Szarka: *Egy XX. századi ...* op. cit., pp. 429-465.

³¹⁵ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., p. 277.

³¹⁶ Borsody: *Benes ...* op. cit., p. 44.

³¹⁷ Beneš: *Détruisez l'Autriche ...* op. cit.

The rationale for the second concept

Similar to his doctoral dissertation of 1908, Benes prefaces '*Détruisez...*' with a long historical introduction. At the very beginning of his reasoning, Benes states that the sole activity of the Czech nation to date has been the search for happiness, justice and humanity. The Czech nation has never wanted anything but to live in freedom. In this, it ran into three obstacles: Germans, Habsburgs and Magyars. This adversarial trinity has never lowered its weapon, constantly threatening the Czechoslovaks. In fact, Benes defined the crux of Czech history as the continuous fight against these three enemies, writing: "In our entire history, there is not one period which was not full of conflicts against one or another of our three enemies."³¹⁸

He employs an interesting strategy in his historical argument, the gist of which is that the interests of the Czechoslovak émigrés are the same as the interests and aims of the Entente. He describes the enemies of the Czechs in the following manner: "It is important to establish, that these enemies are deemed to be, today, the most dangerous enemies of mankind."³¹⁹ In one brilliant sentence, he coupled his Czech historical reasoning with the enemy image of the Entente. What follows of Czech history is not so much a litany of historical injustice suffered by the Czechs but significant information added to the portrait of the Entente's enemies. What he writes and says describes not the Czechs enemies, rather it is meant to castigate the enemies of all mankind, meaning, of course, the Entente's enemies.

Let us then follow the history with this enemy triumvirate, the battles that took place, and what conclusions Benes wrung from them. The Germans are portrayed as the ancient enemies of the Czechs.³²⁰ When the Czechs conquered Bohemia – at the end of the 6th or early 7th century, according to him – they already had to fight off Germanic attacks. The national kings – St. Wenceslaus, Boleslav, Břetislav, Soběslav, Přemysl, Ottokar – had to constantly wage war against the Germans. Benes sums up this period as: "... Bohemia's history until the 14th century can be summarized as war against the Germans."³²¹ While the South Slavs waged war against the Turks, for the Czechs the same role was taken by the Austrians and the Germans. He paints the Czech-German antipathy as an antagonism which completely saturated the Czech psyche. According to him, the Hussite Wars were Czech-German conflicts. Then he makes the statement that, following the Hussite Wars, there was a short period of peace when, under the reign of Georg Podjebrad, the anti-German struggle broke out again. In his own words: "The traces of this battle can be found everywhere. In our oldest historical documents and literature, legends, customs and family memories. Our whole civilization is permeated with this conflict."³²²

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid, p. 9.

The clear message in this anti-German logic was for the benefit of the Entente: 'Here we are, we Czechs have been fighting against the Germans for centuries, does there exist a better ally?'

Benes ends his anti-German historical review with the 15th century: This must be seen attributed to the turn of historical events as – except for a short Jagellonian reign – Czech history is indisputably intertwined with the Habsburgs after 1526. This left him with a problem. To leave off the anti-German battle in the early 15th century until the outbreak of the First World War presented him with a break of four centuries. Since he intended to present a picture for the Entente of continuous Czech struggles, he needed to fill this 400-year void. To accomplish this, at the end of his historical analysis, he made the statement that the Czech fight against the Germans continued after the 15th century but that it had to be more circumspect, more clandestine. In support, Benes cites the example of the religious conflicts within Bohemia. The Bohemian Germans were Catholics, the Czechs remained Hussites. This religious difference has thus been presented in the light of national characteristic, opening a new front in the Czech-German hostilities. He uses the ploy of mixing into the anti-Habsburg reasoning, anti-German historical events (on the assumption the listeners can't tell the difference – *ed.*). We will separate the two distinct threads, treating the German differences in a later chapter.

He analyzes the relationship between the Czech nation and the House of Habsburg in great detail. The long period, from 1526 to date, that Bohemia spent within the Habsburg Empire, Benes devotes two sub-chapters of *Détruisez*. The first covers 1526 to the end of the reign of Joseph II, while the second treats the national struggles of the re-nascent nation.³²³

The sub-title he gives – The destruction of Czechs in Bohemia and Hungary – clearly telegraphs the negative slant he intends to give the relationship between the Czechs and Habsburgs. Beside the wordy title, the introductory sentence sets the basic tone when he begins with 1526 (when Ferdinand I of the House of Habsburg ascends to both the thrones of Hungary and Bohemia – *auth.*): "... the gloomiest date in the whole history of the Czechs."³²⁴ He characterizes the entire Habsburg-era as a period of unceasing conflict between the Czech nation and the Habsburg ruler, fed by two factors. One was the religious difference, since the Reformation following Luther's tenets "found fertile soil in Bohemia." In practice, a large portion of the people became Protestants, while the Czech kings were the staunchly Catholic Habsburgs, who decided to convert the Czechs. The other was the Habsburgs' ambition, from the very beginning, to "rob the Czechs of all political independence."³²⁵

Benes separates the Czech struggles with the Habsburgs into smaller segments. The first part runs from 1526 to the defeat at White Mountain in 1620. In Hungarian history writing, the Habsburg Empire was born in 1526 when the thrones of Hungary and Bohemia were appended to the perpetual

³²³ Ibid, pp. 11-13.

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

Austrian provinces. Benes sees this empire as a personal union, saying that the Monarchy was created from three states (Austria, Hungary and Bohemia) with the only link between them being the person of the ruler. His opinion of this period is that the Austrian provinces were under Habsburg rule for a long time, therefore, the Habsburgs had unrestricted powers over them. The situation in Bohemia, on the other hand, was that the nobility and the free cities enjoyed important privileges *vis a vis* the king's power; the powers of the Magyar kings were also limited since the Middle Ages. (Benes next examines Hungary's position and struggles within the Empire, which will be dealt with in a later chapter – *auth.*) The objective of the Habsburg rulers was to reduce the constitutions of both Bohemia and Hungary to the level of the one governing the Austrian provinces. Thus, two opposing forces clashed: the Habsburgs' desire to unify the three parts of their empire, Ferdinand I and his heirs wanted to centralize state power, while Bohemia and Hungary wanted increased independence and reduced royal powers. The 16th century was, thus, a period of conflict between the monarch and the estates. The religious intolerance of the dynasty brought about the Czech revolt of 1619. This was the beginning of the Thirty Year War. The Czechs were defeated in 1620 at White Mountain and had to face harsh retribution.

This, according to Benes, is the beginning of the second period of the Czech-Habsburg relationship. The Habsburgs used their victory to transform all the Bohemian social and national apparatus. They confiscated two-thirds of all feudal estates and civic properties. The old Czech nobility was almost entirely disbanded – those who were not executed or had their lands confiscated – and their place taken by “all manner of carpetbaggers from every country in Europe.”³²⁶ In this manner, the Habsburgs created a new aristocracy which “dutifully served the Habsburgs, since they received the country as war spoils for their obedience.”³²⁷ At the same time, the Habsburgs helped the triumph of Catholicism. The German language was made equal with the Czech. Ferdinand II tried to disguise these measures in a pseudo-legal manner, giving them the title, New Constitution. In Benes' eyes, the modifications made to the constitution were illegitimate, akin to a *coup d'etat*.

It was Maria Theresa and Joseph II who robbed the Czechs of the last vestiges of their independence. They believed that centralization would strengthen their empire, striving to create a uniform and homogeneous state apparatus on their territories. Maria Theresa's ambitions and Joseph II's 'brutal reform measures' led to an awakening of Czech national feelings, especially since the ideals of the French Revolution penetrated the Habsburg Monarchy, too. Of this, Benes writes: “The doctrines of the Encyclopaedists, Voltaire, Rousseau and Herder quickly became popular, leading to the emergence of Czech patriots who did not lose their faith in the future of the people but hoped to resuscitate a nation dead for a century.”³²⁸

³²⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

³²⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

³²⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

Benes treats the re-emergence of nationalism in a separate sub-chapter. Reading his line of reasoning, we must bow deeply before Benes' propaganda skills. While painting the dismal picture of the 19th century relationship between the Czechs and the Monarchy – further demolishing any residual positive image of the Monarchy³²⁹ – the other two enemies, the Magyars and the Germans, also received their fair share. It was especially important for Benes to establish the ancient enmity with the Germans, since the main antagonist of England and France was Germany. In sketching the background of the birth of Czech nationalism, Benes was, at the same time, destroying the image of both Germany and the Habsburgs.³³⁰

After the downfall of Napoleon, the ideal based on the rights of nations remained, the idea of homogeneous nation states making headway in the whole region, providing a foundation for the Slav renaissance within the Monarchy, as well as for the German patriots. Unfortunately, the Germans – states Benes – had grandiose ideas, dreaming of a Greater Germany, from the Baltic to the Adriatic, consisting of all the territories inhabited by Germans. Naturally, it meant that territories such as Bohemia, Hungary, Silesia, Venice and Lombardy would also be included, whose historical background and traditions were completely antithetical to Germany. For the Czech, German aspirations, which gained strength at the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly, it would have signaled the end, of their rights and their nation. “If these plans succeeded, the Czechs and South Slavs would have been sacrificed for Germany”, said Benes.³³¹ The Czechoslovaks were threatened by a dual peril: if the German union becomes a reality, then Hungary also gains its freedom, putting the Czechs into an even smaller minority in Greater Germany, and the Slovaks into the same position within Hungary. Hence, Czech politics logically became anti-German, anti-Magyar and pro-Monarchy, “... in spite that the Habsburg's Austria showed no consideration towards it, never considered their demands and carry on its anti-Slav policies for centuries.”³³²

The Czech political program can best be summed up with Palacky's famous saying: If Austria did not exist, it would be necessary to invent her.

The line of reasoning Benes constructed craftily skirted and averted such questions as might be raised by skeptical Entente politicians, or that the propaganda of the Monarchy might pose. The question might have been presented as: “If we accept your allegation, Mr. Benes, that the four centuries of Habsburg rule are the darkest chapter of Czech history, how do you explain the statement made by Mr. Palacky, one of you own outstanding intellectuals, when he takes a stand on the necessity of Austria?” It was so important for Benes to explain and repudiate Palacky's

³²⁹ Jeszenszky, Géza: *Az elveszett presztízs* [Lost prestige]. Budapest, 1986. Jeszenszky analyzes in detail the changes that the Monarchy's, and within it Hungary's, image undergoes in England from 1848-49 to the end of WW1.

³³⁰ Beneš: *Détriusez l'Autriche ...* op. cit., pp. 25-35.

³³¹ *Ibid*, p. 28.

³³² *Ibid*.

famous saying that he spent an entire section in his book on it.³³³ Since we thought that his explanation of the quoted saying is closely linked to the questions we posed for this work, we will take a short detour from Benes' anti-Habsburg historical analysis and examine how Benes refutes it.

Benes make the statement that "If Palacky were alive today, he would be among the Czech revolutionaries."³³⁴ Why Palacky took a stand with the Habsburgs in 1848, Benes explains that, having analyzed the political situation of the region, Palacky erroneously predicted the political trends. Among other things, he "did not suspect the development of Yugoslav politics, nor the transformation of the Austrian Germans into pan-Germans."³³⁵

In Benes' interpretation of the international events of the second half of the 19th century, Bismarck intentionally did not strip Austria of its German territories as part of his Pan-German plan. Bismarck planned that Austria, strained by its internal situation, will be forced to turn to Prussia as an ally, hence, Bismarck encouraged Austrian ambitions towards the Balkans and consigned territory there. The result was that "all of a sudden, the Viennese court came to the realization that it must accept Prussian hegemony. Austria became the leading edge of 'Drang nach Osten', its government preparing and unleashing the current catastrophe."³³⁶ Benes again reasons brilliantly for, while revising Palacky's motives, he again proves to the Entente that the Czechs and Germans are natural enemies, since it was the intrigues of Bismarck that led to the internal transformation of Austria. The other reason that Benes attributes to Palacky's pro-Austrian stand – and here again takes Palacky's side, saying that this is the stronger reason – was that in 1848 Czech nationalism was in its infancy. They took to the political stage without preparations, traditions and experienced leaders. After this short detour, let us return to finish Benes' anti-Habsburg thesis.

In 1848, the Habsburgs did not side with the Slavs, did not accept the federative plan for Austria. The Habsburgs were anxious to be a part of the formation of the new Germany, but an Austria, where the Slav elements had an overwhelming majority – as it would have been in a federated state – could not assume a leading position among the German states. Thus, the Monarchy took a position against the Slav movement and, after 1848, took as its main objective, the creation of a Germanic union under its own leadership. The main thrust of the Constitution of 1861 was an effort to reduce the Slav political influence within the Monarchy to minimal. The defeat suffered at the hands of the Prussians (Sadova, 1866 – *auth.*) did not deter this hope, merely set them to await an opportunity for revenge. But the Empire had changed, it grew weaker and Franz Joseph had to make concessions. In 1867, he struck a compromise with the Magyars. That the Empire transformed into a dualist monarchy only meant that now the Slavs were now dominated by Habsburgs *and* Magyars. The Czechs now began

³³³ Ibid, pp. 35-37.

³³⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 36.

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 34.

another fight against Vienna, which was almost successful. In 1871, when Franz Joseph ceremoniously swore to accede to their demands, “it seemed as if a new era had begun in Austrian politics.”³³⁷ The enemies of the Slavs, the Germans and the Magyars, took position against this policy. Berlin interceded and the Magyars declared that they could never tolerate Czech autonomy as it would imperil their sovereignty over the Slovaks. The Czech-Austrian compromise was scuttled. Given this turn of events, the Czechs tried a different tactic, said Benes, instead of open revolt, they turned to increasing their economic growth and political influence. Benes remarked on the new tactic: “Slowly, they (the Czechs – *auth.*) assumed the more important posts in the government, were successful in obtaining new linguistic and school rights, strengthen their autonomy, as well as improving public education.”³³⁸ All the while, naturally, they continued to oppose ceaselessly any German and Magyar objectives.

Benes closed his anti-Habsburg historical discourse with the outbreak of the war and the statement that ‘internal conditions made Austria’s participation in this conflict inevitable’. It is instructional to look back at the first chapter of our dissertation to find that in writing *Détruisez* in 1916, he made significant use of his 1908 doctoral dissertation. The historical interpretation presented in *Détruisez* is substantially same as the 1908 work. At the same time, we must take note of the new element in *Détruisez*, which is the presence of strong anti-Magyar invective. This was born of one of the important elements of his second concept, which was that a strong stand must be taken against the Hungarians, too, not just the Monarchy. The fundamental reason for this was his goal of creating Czechoslovakia from the historical Czech territories (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) and Northern Hungary (Slovensko, as called by the émigrés). Here his vision for the Czechoslovak state clashed with King Saint Stephen’s vision of the state. The Slovak question, thus, held an important role in the political activities of the exiles. The question was made more difficult by the fact that in western European government circles, very little was known about the Slovaks. To partly remedy this, Benes crafts a definition of Czechoslovaks for western consumption in *Détruisez* as: “Czechoslovaks, or more simply Czechs, are made up of two elements: 7 million Czechs live in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia and 3 million Slavs live in the northern part of Hungary... These two branches belong to the same nation and the same civilization.”³³⁹ There appeared to be only one impediment to the unification of the two branches: the Czechs were oppressed by the Austrians, while the Slovaks were oppressed by the Magyars.

It is the conflict between the Czechoslovak image of the state and Saint Stephen’s that Benes devotes a separate chapter to the Hungarians, even though the chapter is mainly concerned with Hungarian events after 1867. The anti-Hungarian harangue based on pre-1867 Hungarian history he embeds in the other chapters. Before we proceed to the image he painted of Dualist Hungary, let us reconstruct from the earlier fragments

³³⁷ Ibid, p. 32.

³³⁸ Ibid, p. 33.

³³⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

the Hungary that preceded 1867. For this portion, we will make use of the chronology of Hungarian history. From the perspective of the Czechoslovaks, Benes defined the Magyars their place in history when he stated that the Czechs have had three great enemies in the course of their history: Germans, Habsburgs and Magyars, and the "... Czechoslovak nation has suffered for 1200 years from the brutality of these nations."³⁴⁰

The beginning of Hungarian history, the original 9th century conquest, he appraises from the Czech point of view.³⁴¹ At the beginning of the 9th century, both Czechs and Slovaks were subjects of the same crown, making up the Great Moravian Principality. The Magyars appear in 907 (in reality, 895, but this way he can claim an advantage of a century – *ed.*) and, as a result of their invasion, "the northern Slavs were separated from their Yugoslav brethren"³⁴² and by 1025 had conquered the whole of Slovakia, retaining it to this day. In spite of all this, the Slovaks retained their Czech and Slav characteristics, which can be attributed, according to Benes, to the Magyars lacking sufficient material and intellectual means to assimilate them.

Next, Benes writes how, from the end of the 13th century, the Czech and Magyar territories began to collaborate, as they both faced a common, external enemy, the Turkish Empire. In 1526, through royal deaths and convoluted succession treaties, the Habsburgs are invited to assume the Czech and Hungarian thrones. For the Slovaks, this meant that they became a part of the same state as the Czechs, making economic, political and intellectual contacts significantly easier between the two branches of the Czechoslovak nation. The Habsburg aspirations after 1526 are typified by Benes as the beginning of an effort to negate the feudal privileges of Bohemia and Hungary. The Czechs lost, while the Magyars managed to retain a semblance of their independence. Benes ascribes this to the fact that a large portion of Hungary was occupied by the Turks but an independent Transylvania had a national ruler. The existence of this national ruler put serious constraints on Ferdinand I's actions, (although the Turkish occupation lasted 150 years – *ed.*) who was forced to observe the constitutional laws. It is to this that Hungary can attribute its almost complete reclamation of its independence.³⁴³

At this point in history, Benes leaves the events of Hungarian history, not to return until 1848,³⁴⁴ when he remarks that the Magyars represented a political force that was in agreement with pan-German plans. If Cisleithania (Austria proper – *ed.*) gains entry into the Germanic union, it would mean a cutting of previous ties between Austria and Hungary, meaning independence for Hungary. For the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak nation, the result would be an oppressed minority without rights in Hungary. It logically follows, said Benes, that Czech politics has a pointed anti-Hungarian slant in 1848.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 49-50.

³⁴² Ibid, p. 38.

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 14.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 27-28.

Benes mentions that the Magyar struggle of 1848 is known in England and France as a revolution for freedom, but in reality it was the uprising of the noble caste, the Hungarian small and middle nobility, who rose against Vienna to be rid of bureaucratic absolutism and to grasp all power in Hungary. The end result of the 'freedom fight' of the Hungarian noble caste, if won, would have meant even more oppression for the non-Magyars.

The Compromise of 1867 Benes assesses as "...the last and unavoidable phase of historical events that have persisted for a long time."³⁴⁵ Next, Benes devotes a complete chapter to Dualist Hungary, which he titled 'The legend of the Czechoslovaks and Magyars, which must be demolished'. The title was consciously deliberate, referring to the relationship as legend. He calls any extant sympathy towards the Hungarians³⁴⁶ – stemming from the 1848 revolt – the result of a baseless myth. In his view, the West shows sympathy for a people – in this case the Magyars – who were willing and able to rise up in 1848 against their oppressors, the Habsburgs, and unfurl the flag of freedom and revolution. The tireless energy, with which it carried out its political program, awoke respect in the West. The legend took on a life of its own because, continued Benes, the Magyar politicians continued to sustain it. Since they emancipated themselves from Vienna, power came into their hands. They controlled the power and the purse, financing the press, books, newspapers and the stage. (Benes here conveniently ignores any facts that do not fit his thesis: after the brutally defeating the uprising, with Russian help, Vienna executed the democratically elected Prime Minister, along with most of the army's general staff, everyone connected with the revolt was 'investigated', jailed and/or their property confiscated, many fled into exile, strict censorship of the media imposed, etc. – *ed.*) They extended their propaganda scope, which portrayed the Hungarian people as one of the greatest gifts to civilization. As well, the wealthy Magyar aristocracy made contacts with every country, putting itself into favorable light in every government. Through these means, it was easy to gain the sympathy of England and France.

There is not a shred of truth in the myth nourished by the Magyars – stated Benes – since they have not been oppressed for a long time; on the contrary, they have been transformed into oppressors. The Magyar people have become "the executioners of the Slovaks, the Serbo-Croats and Romanians",³⁴⁷ to add a little later: "there has never been a more ruthless, worse oppressor than the Magyar." In practical terms, the two quotations form one of the foundations of his anti-Magyar attack. Benes goes on to provide numerous examples of the oppressive policies of the Magyars, painting with great pathos how the Slovaks were "tormented under their yoke." They wanted to Hungarianize the Slovaks using any and all means, no matter how brutal. They tried effectively to terminate Slovak education, with the result that Slovak-language education in lower, middle and higher

³⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

³⁴⁶ Jeszenszky: *Az elveszett ...* op. cit., chapters I and II.

³⁴⁷ Beneš: *Détriusez l'Autriche ...* op. cit., p. 41.

grades fell to a minimum. They suspended the freedom of the press, “there is not one Slovak journalist.” That robbed the Slovaks of their political rights; three million Slovaks have three representatives in the Budapest Parliament; who openly stands up for the Slovak cause, quickly finds himself in jail.

The third point of his thesis is the question of war responsibility. Benes asserts that “they (meaning the Magyars – *auth.*) are completely responsible for the actual outbreak of the war.”³⁴⁸ In support of his declaration, he makes use of the following reasoning: the efforts of the South Slav people in the creation of Yugoslavia first of all threatened Hungary. The Magyars ruled over four million Serbo-Croats, while Austria held sway over a further million. Therefore, the Monarchy’s Balkan policy was, primarily, the Magyar policy. The customs war begun in 1907, which the Monarchy waged against Serbia, was for the benefit of Hungary’s agrarian interests, even costing Austrian industry. The Magyars’ problem is that there are only 8 million Magyars in Hungary, putting them into a minority when compared to the Slovaks, even if we do not count the Romanians. The political and economic development of these people threatens the Magyars. If, for example, if the demand of these people is granted – universal suffrage – then the Magyars are completely stripped of their preferred rights. Thus, the Hungarians thought that there is one solution to their problems, a victorious war. After this, concludes Benes, “... we should not be surprised at their present role, they are in third position as the despicable criminals responsible for this war.”

After the long historical introduction, Benes tries to prove that the Czechoslovak nation’s pre-war value system, intellectual development and social structure made it a element of western Europe. He strives to attribute to his people characteristics and values which would make them appear as natural allies to the Entente. In part, he describes the Czechoslovaks as: “... having the will and the energy, we were able to contribute to human civilization and create an invaluable addition.”³⁴⁹

Next Benes talks of an intellectual revolution that started with Jan Hus and lasted until the end of the 19th century, pointing to people such as Hus, Comenius, Dobrovsky, Safárik, Kollár and Palacky. “We had marvelous writers, outstanding scientists who made us proud, whom we could justifiably compare with those of any nation.”³⁵⁰ He especially tried to draw a similarity between the national characteristics of the Czechs and the French – not to forget that he was primarily trying to gain the amity of the French – reasoning that Hus was the originator of modern individualistic thinking, which culminated in the French philosophical movement and the French Revolution. The French Revolution then re-echoed back to the Czechs, who found those elements in the revolution which re-invigorated them with new life, saving them from certain death. The Czech spirit, which is deeply idealistic and humanitarian, found its brother and supporter in the French spirit, that lover of the most noble

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 42.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 55.

ideals, in the struggle for a better future for humanity.”³⁵¹ These lines clearly illustrate the message to the West: Czechoslovakia belongs in the western European camp.

Benes then spends two chapters of *Détruisez* to recount the contributions of the Czechs and Slovaks during the course of the war. In one chapter, titled *The Czech nation and the behavior of the Czech soldiers*,³⁵² he argues that, since there was not enough time for armed opposition, the Czechs resorted to passive resistance. The newspapers published anti-Austrian articles, the people refused to buy war bonds, the government refused to turn over food stocks, all contributing to the economic and financial bankruptcy of the Monarchy; the Czech soldiers refused to fight for the Monarchy, “successfully disorganizing and demoralizing the Austro-Hungarian army with their behavior.”³⁵³ To support his allegation, Benes listed the events when the Czech soldiers in the Monarchy’s armies refused to obey orders, revolted or deserted to the Entente side. (“The 35. army was transported from Pilsen to the Galician front. A half an hour later, they were in the Russian trenches.”³⁵⁴)

In the last two chapters of *Détruisez*, chapter 8 ‘The suffering of the past and hopes for the future’ and chapter 9 ‘Appeal to the Entente powers’, Benes sums up his final conclusion for his whole dissertation: “Smash Austria-Hungary.” He puts forward the following solution:³⁵⁵ since Austria-Hungary aids the expansionism and pan-Germanism of Germany, there is but one solution to defeat Germany. Austria-Hungary must be dismembered to be replaced by new and independent states, one of which would be Czechoslovakia, formed from Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. This Czechoslovak state, together with Russia, would form a barricade against Germany. In the East, Transylvania must be given to Romania, in the South, Yugoslavia created from Serbia and the other Serb, Croat and Slovene populated territories. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia must be connected by a corridor running between Austria and Hungary. The principle of nationalities will thus be utilized, concluded Benes.

Benes reasons from the French political point of view, why his suggestion for re-drawing Central Europe is advantageous. If Austria-Hungary is dissolved, it can no longer by a support for Germany; Germany would be reduced to its own resources and “would be incapable of anything” alone. Also, separating the Hungarians from Austria also prevents them renewing their former policies. He also promises further advantages for the French , writing: “It will be to Slav’s advantage to support each other, from the Baltic to the Adriatic, because the Germans are a common threat. France and Italy, also menaced by the Germans would, of necessity, be their allies.”

Benes outlined a plan in *Détruisez* for the re-organization of Central Europe that took into consideration the long-term political objectives of

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 57.

³⁵² Ibid, pp. 45-49.

³⁵³ Ibid, p. 46.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 44-46.

France. Every historian agrees that the chief military objective of the French was the defeat of Germany and leaving it in a weakened post-war state.³⁵⁶ At most, the French intended to reform the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with perhaps minor territorial revisions to satisfy her allies. It is most illuminating that in the third year of the war, France seriously considered a separate peace with the Monarchy as a possibility.³⁵⁷ With this line of reasoning, Benes allied the apprehensive Czechoslovak exiles and their program – the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia – into an uncomfortable alliance with the French, in such a way that both sides’ objectives and war aims seemed in tune. He found a clever solution, offering the key to a French victory over Germany, while ensuring the satisfaction of Czechoslovak needs. This was: the most direct method of gaining French victory was the ending of the Monarchy, which also necessitated the re-organization of Central Europe. And that is why we consider *Detruisez* as one of the most important conceptual and practical building blocks for the creation of Czechoslovakia, and Benes’ second concept

Further elements of the second concept (1917–1918)

The second model, or rather the rationale supporting it, was polished and expanded in 1917, when he published his English-language book, *New Europe*,³⁵⁸ and can be considered as the clone of *Detruisez*,³⁵⁹ repeating again his stated aims and objectives. Due to its size, we can’t review the book’s discussion in detail, merely note the final conclusion it offers the Entente: “Europe and America can choose between a degenerate dynasty of the freedom of nine nations.”³⁶⁰

In 1917, apart from the publication of the *New Europe*, a more practical argument emerged to strengthen the Masary-Benes string of arguments, the Czechoslovak Legion. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the conditions for the organization of the Czechoslovak army improved. Kerenski granted permission so that prisoners of war could join the independent army unit and the Legion was born.³⁶¹ Benes and Masaryk wanted to transfer the Legion to the Western Front, with maximum support

³⁵⁶ J. Néré: *The foreign policy of France from 1914 to 1945*. London and Boston, 1975, pp. 3-9; David Stevenson: *French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919*. Calderon Press, Oxford, 1962.

³⁵⁷ Pastor, Péter: *Franciaország hadicéljai* [French war aims]. In: *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. században*. Budapest, 1995, pp. 39-40; Fejtő: *Rekviem ...* op. cit., pp. 172-250.

³⁵⁸ Masaryk’s “*New Europe*” was published immediately after the war, yet it still had great importance, serving as the conceptual and practical blueprint for the creation of Czechoslovakia. We used the 1923 Hungarian-language version published in Kosice in 1923.

³⁵⁹ Kővágó, László: *T.G. Masaryk Európa újjászervezési tervéről* [T.G. Masaryk’s plan for reorganizing Europe]. In: *Tanulmányok Kelet-Európa történetéből*. Budapest, 1972.

³⁶⁰ Masaryk: *Az új Európa. A szláv álláspont* [The new Europe. The Slav point of view]. Kassa, 1923, p. 66.

³⁶¹ Discussed in greater detail in a previous chapter.

of the French for their intention, Clemenceau stating: "... I want to see every one of their soldiers in France."³⁶² The French politicians and the military expected more from their appearance than mere military aid, they counted on the appearance of the Legion on the Western Front to start an uprising in Prague.³⁶³ On the other hand, the British wanted to keep the Legion in Russia, assigning them a role in the to-be-opened norther front – Murmansk, Archangel – later to be reassigned to secure India, and finally, as a Trojan horse in the eventual anti-Soviet intervention.³⁶⁴

In February of 1918, Masaryk came to an agreement with the Bolsheviks, allowing the Legion to leave for France through Siberia.³⁶⁵ On May 14, the soldiers of the Legion attacked a train in the station of Chelyabinsk, carrying Hungarian and German prisoners. The local Bolshevik forces came to the rescue of the prisoners and a pitched battle ensued. This incident was the beginning of the fighting between the Bolsheviks and the Legion, as the Bolshevik government ordered the disarming of the Legion. In their tur, the Legion took control of the Trans-Siberian railroad from Samara to Irkutsk.³⁶⁶ According to British historian Taylor, the soldiers of the Legion became heroes in the eyes of the Entente, the personification of an exalted democratic principle – as well as the forward units of an anti-Bolshevik intervention.³⁶⁷

Benes immediately realized that the Siberian troops could be useful for the recognition of the political and territorial aspirations of the exiles – this was the period, may to August, when Benes was negotiating with both Paris and London regarding the recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council – quickly including anti-Bolshevik arguments into his reasoning.

On July 27, 1918, he addressed a memorandum to Balfour, in which he argued that the prestige of the National Council, would be greatly enhanced by the Russian intervention, especially if generals Janin and Štefanik were posted there.³⁶⁸ In the early days of August, Benes makes a commitment to Balfour to leave the Legion in Siberia, in spite of pressure from the French, arguing that the recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as a government would greatly increase the unit's fighting spirit.³⁶⁹

In 1918-1919, the Bolshevik threat became an important cornerstone of the Benes-Masaryk arguments, or more precisely, that the Czechoslovak army and government will be a reliable ally of the Entente in case this peril materializes. Benes and Masary often returned to this line of argument, most often to support other aspirations, especially territorial.

³⁶² Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., p. 59.

³⁶³ D. Perman: *The shaping of the Czechoslovak State*. Leyden, 1962, pp. 35-36.

³⁶⁴ Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., p. 60.

³⁶⁵ Masaryk: *A világháború története* ... op. cit., pp. 222-223.

³⁶⁶ Rátz: *Az oroszországi* ... op. cit., pp. 112-115; Untenberger: *The United States* ... op. cit., pp. 170-172.

³⁶⁷ A.J.P. Taylor: *Az első világháború története* [The history of the First World War]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1988, p. 172.

³⁶⁸ Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., pp. 64-65.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

1.4 COUP, THE CREATION OF SLOVENSKO

In Hungarian history books, the series of events that led to the creation of Slovensko from the Northern Hungary, and its attachment to Czechoslovakia, is variously referred to as the unthinkable, a turn of government, a coup. Before we examine more closely the 1918-1920 events that led to this juncture, we need to take a brief look at the background of this event. To facilitate this, we will try to shed light on two questions: How did relations develop between Hungary and the Slovaks before 1914? Primarily, we shall try to determine what was the basis of the later Hungarian-Slovak border. Secondly, how did the relationship change between 1914 and 1918?

SLOVAK – MAGYAR RELATIONSHIP TO 1914

There can be barely any discussion of Magyar-Slovak friction up to the end of the 18th century. The ruling Slovak feudal class were firmly part of the *natio Hungarica*, enjoying the same privileges, holding the same values, formed by the same traditions. Ethnicity aside, they professed themselves to be Hungarians.³⁷⁰ (Not Magyars but Hungarians – *ed.*) the Slovak nobility were integrated into the Hungarian feudal ruling class, for a long time, there did not exist a strata or group that sought territorial separation based on ethnic affiliation. Until the 19th century, we can find no example of Slovak expressed wish for territorial segregation – put another way, Slovaks did not possess the privilege of national territory. This peaceful coexistence was drastically changed in the early 19th century when nationalism appeared in Central and Eastern Europe. Domonkos Kosáry assigns the growth of nationalism in this area into two major phases: the cultural and political phases.³⁷¹

During the cultural phase, the phrase “a nation lives in its tongue“ became a slogan among all the nations, putting the emphasis of each society on the development and spread of its national language. The champions of this phase of this phase were the linguists, poets and writers. The linguists toiled to modernize, or create, a national language, while the creators of literature discovered the glories of their heritage and tried to spur an anaemic present with the shining deeds of past heroes.

In the second phase, the true politicians appear who strive to fashion for their nation a unique, independent political identity, to have that

³⁷⁰ Ács, Zoltán: *Nemzetiségek a történelmi Magyarországon* [Nationalities within historical Hungary]. Kossuth Kiadó, 1986, pp. 90-94, 148-151; Ács, Zoltán (ed.): *Együtt élő népek a Kárpát-medencében* [Nations sharing the Carpathian basin]. Auktor Kiadó, Budapest, 1994, pp. 99-116; Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 32-73; Jozef Lettrich: *The history of Slovakia*. Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1955, pp. 11-42, and its Slovak-language version, Jozef Lettrich: *Dejiny novodobého Slovenska*. Bratislava, 1993.

³⁷¹ Kosáry, Domokos: *Nemzeti fejlődés és ellentétek a 19. századi Magyarországon* [National development and conflicts in 19th c. Hungary]. In: *Gólyavári esték. Előadások a magyar történelemből*. RTV-Minerva, Budapest, 1984, pp. 308-320.

identity recognized and to have freedom of action within a territory or area. The national politicians were not satisfied with emphasis on linguistic and cultural uniqueness; they wished to confirm this distinctiveness at the territorial level. Cartographers make their appearance, who created maps of the 'Great Country', such as Great-Romania, Greater Serbia, etc.

Kosáry's two phases are applicable to Slovak nationalism, too. Due to the time span and volume of the material dealing with the cultural phase, we will not deal with it here.³⁷² Since the Slovaks had no territorial privileges stretching back to the Middle Ages – unlike the Croats and the Transylvanian Saxons – they entered the second phase of nationalism in 1848.³⁷³ The first time a political program is drafted that mentions territorial demands is the national assembly in Liptószentmiklós /Liptovský Mikuláš /, on May 11, 1848. The 'Demands of the Slovak Nation' consisted of 14 points.³⁷⁴ We feel that the demands can be grouped into two major and one smaller group:

National demands:

1. The recognition of equality of every nationality in Hungary.
2. The creation of a Diet – National Assembly of Hungarian nations – where every nationality represented by representatives of their choosing.
3. Apart from the Diet, each nationality shall have its own national assembly. To enable this, the Slovak-Magyar ethnic boundary should be determined.
4. The recallability of national assembly representatives.
5. The use of the Slovak language in public administration in the Slovak counties and communities.
6. The establishment of Slovak national schools, from elementary school to university.
7. The Slovak language to be taught in the Magyar counties of Northern Hungary, as Magyar is to be taught in the Slovak counties.
8. The Slovaks to be able to use their red and white national flag.

Democratic demands:

9. Universal and equivalent suffrage.
10. Freedom of press, of association and of speech.

³⁷² Bonkáló, Sándor: *A szlávok. A szláv népek és szláv kérdés ismertetése* [The Slavs. Introduction to the Slav people and the Slav question]. Athenaeum Kiadó, pp. 110-123; Pechany, Adolf: *A magyarországi tótok* [The Slovaks of Hungary]. Budapest, 1913. For this chapter, we made use of the reprint version from Felsőmagyarország Kiadó, Miskolc, 2000, pp. 41-60; Rátz, Kálmán: *A pánszlávizmus története* [The history of pan-Slavism]. Budapest, no date, pp. 45-65, 108-126, 201-234; Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, pp. 85-99.

³⁷³ Ibid (Kovač), pp. 100-107; Ibid (Pechany), pp. 49-50; Ibid (Rátz), 57-58, 121-125; Steier, Lajos: *A tót nemzetiségi kérdés 1848-49-ben.* vol. I-II. [The Slovak nationality question in 1848-49]. Budapest, 1937, pp. 1-59.

³⁷⁴ The complete text of the petition was published, in Slovak, in *Dejiny Slovenska* [Slovakia's history] vol. II. Bratislava, 1968, pp. 31-32, in Hungarian by Steier above, pp. 75-78.

11. An end to obligatory labor to landowners, settlement of land ownership and agrarian questions.
 12. Pardon for political prisoners, namely Jan Kral and Jan Rotarides.
- Other demands:
13. Rights for the Poles of Galicia.
 14. The Slovaks “express their hope that the Ministry (meaning Budapest – *auth.*) will accede to their demands shortly.”

For comparison, the group we called ‘democratic demands’ covered the same ground as the Magyar demands of March 15 and the subsequent April laws. The Slovak-Magyar conflict was actually triggered by the Magyar ‘national demands’. Gábor G. Kemény is of the opinion that the points regarding the representatives (2 and 4), the language use item (5), and the two regarding Slovak-language education (6 and 7) could have been solved through negotiation. It was point 1 (the recognition of the Slovak nation), and even more so point 3 (the drawing of ethnographic boundaries and the creation of an ethnic enclave), which were demands that seemed unattainable, given the Magyar national ethos of the day.³⁷⁵

Kossuth defined the nation as: “Nationality is equivalent to the state: only history can create it. Ethnicity is a natural quality, a social interest, which can ask for consideration among the other mutual interests in the state but not supersede the state in importance, nor opposed to the interests of the state.”³⁷⁶ In his interpretation, Hungary was made up of only one nation, the Hungarian nation-state – in its political context. To demand recognition for the Slovak nation was, in Kossuth’s eyes, treason; to delineate a separate ethnographic area was equivalent to activity leading to the demolition of Hungary. Subsequently, no meaningful discussions took place between Magyar and Slovak leaders. In fact, Lajos Batthyány, in his capacity as newly elected Prime Minister of Hungary, instructed the Northern Hungarian counties to take stern steps against Slovak nationalistic agitators. Kossuth stated at public meetings that he will jail anyone drafting demands similar to those from Turócszentmárton /Turčiansky Svätý Martin or, more recently, Martin/.³⁷⁷

The Slovak leaders – Ludovít Štúr, Miloslav Hurban and Miloslav Hodža – left the country for Bohemia and attended the Slav Congress on June 2, 1848.³⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that they did not completely sever ties with Hungary. When suggestions arose in the Czechoslovak section, from the Czechs, that areas populated by the Czechs and Slovaks should unite, it was rejected by the Slovaks.³⁷⁹ Hurban remarked: “If the Magyars

³⁷⁵ Kemény: *A magyar nemzetiségi ...* op. cit., p. 3.

³⁷⁶ *Kossuth Lajos válogatott munkái* [Selected works of Lajos Kossuth]. Remekírók Képes Könyvtára, Budapest, 1901-1908, p. 59.

³⁷⁷ Borsody, István: *Magyar-szlovák kiegyezés* [Magyar-Slovak compromise]. In: Borsody, István: *Európai évek* [European years]. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 1991, p. 201.

³⁷⁸ Z. Tobolka - V. Zacek (eds.): *Slovansky sjezd v Praze*. Praha, 1952; V. Zacek (ed.): *Slovansky sjezd v Praze 1848*. Praha, 1958.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid* (Zacek), pp. 254-256, 295-302, 303-304, 315-319.

give us our due, we can't draw swords against them. But if they do not give it to us then, of course, there will be fighting."³⁸⁰ In the end, it was Hurban's second sentence that came to pass. On September 19, 1848, the Slovak National Council, established three days earlier in Vienna with Stur, Hurban and Hodza, among others, refused obedience to the Hungarian government and appealed to the Slovak people for a general uprising.³⁸¹ We will not cover the details of the Slovak-Hungarian armed clashes due to space restrictions but for one event, seminal from the perspective of this dissertation, focusing on an attempt at territorial secession by the Slovaks.³⁸²

In 1849, when it became evident that the Hungarian uprising was doomed to failure, the Slovaks made another attempt in Vienna.³⁸³ The petition given by the Slovak delegation to Emperor Franz Joseph in Olmutz on March 20, 1849, contained the following five points:³⁸⁴

1. Recognition of the Slovaks as a nation.
2. The creation of an independent Slovak territory – called Zem Slovenska – within the Habsburg Empire.³⁸⁵
3. The 'Slovakia' thus constituted to have its own national assembly.
4. 'Slovakia' to have its own government administration, responsible only to Vienna.
5. The official language of 'Slovakia' to be Slovak.

The Emperor gave a noncommittal answer – he was still at war with the Hungarians – but hinted at possible concessions to the Slovaks.³⁸⁶ After putting down the Hungarian revolt, the Emperor simply ignored the petition. It was cynically remarked after the 1848-49 revolution that: "The nationalities received as reward, what the Magyars received as punishment." The tough situation of the pro-Monarchy Slovak politicians is indicative: Hurban and Hodža are, for a period, detained by the police, while Štúr temporarily withdraws from politics, due to a nervous

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 296.

³⁸¹ Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, p. 115.

³⁸² Steier: *A tót nemzetiségi ... op. cit.*, pp. 187-569; Spira, György: *A nemzetiségi kérdés a nyegyvennyolcas forradalom Magyarországon* [The nationality question in the 1848 revolutionary Hungary]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1980; Gabriel, Viktor (pen name of Ladislav Szalay): *1848-49 legendája a szlovák történetírásban* [The legend of 1848-49 in Slovak historiography]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1999; Daniel Rapant: *Slovenské povstanie roku 1848-49* [The Slovak uprising 1848-49] vol I-IV. Turciánsky Svätý Martin, 1937.

³⁸³ Ibid (Steier), pp. 471-482; Steier, Lajos: *A tót kérdés fejlődése* [The development of the Slovak question]. Budapest, 1912, pp. 37-38.

³⁸⁴ Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁸⁵ Gabriel Viktor (alias Ladislav Szalay) points out that, in the original petition, the demand was for a Slovak Duchy. This demand was modified by the delegation on learning the contents of the Olmutz constitution and substituted the request for Slovak territory instead of a Duchy.

³⁸⁶ Gabriel: *1848-49 legendája ... op. cit.*, pp. 120-123.

breakdown.³⁸⁷ The Slovaks only received some minor concessions regarding language rights from the Viennese court; the Emperor permitted the use of Slovak in official matters in the Slovak counties, and its introduction in public education.³⁸⁸ Some Slovak public figures, who remained loyal to the Monarchy throughout the uprising, were appointed to public patronage positions, as judges, school superintendents, public and church administrative positions.³⁸⁹ Thus, nothing materialized of the Slovak's political agenda. During the 1850's, Slovak nationalism was faced with three possible alternatives:³⁹⁰ One, a Magyar-Slovak compromise, championed by Samuel Vozar; two, a Czech-Slovak agreement, championed by Jan Kollar; and three, the combined Slav solution – pan-Slavism within the Empire – championed by Štúr.

Due to the policies of Viennese court, no alternative proved viable. The government victory was quickly exploited for centralization, the introduction of the era of absolutism, ascribed to the Interior Minister, Alexander Bach. Austrian absolutism was introduced as a temporary measure in 1849, and then made permanent in 1854 with the administrative territorial reallocations established by Bach.³⁹¹ Theoretically, an opportunity presented itself for the establishment of Slovak autonomy, but this did not happen. The type of decentralization, which would have taken into consideration Slovak wishes, was not the intention of Vienna. In reality, Vienna re-apportioned the territory of historical Hungary into five crown provinces (see map 1 in Addenda): Kingdom of Hungary, plus the Kingdom of Croat-Slavonia, Fiume and the Littoral, the military border zone, Serbian Voivodina and Banate of Temesvár, and the Principality of Transylvania. The Kingdom of Hungary proper was further subdivided into five administrative regions: Pest-Buda, Pozsony, Sopron, Kassa and Nagyvárád.

We interpret the political aim of the Bach partition of Hungary to be the creation of isolated territories, with little in common. The appointment of the five regional capitals (Pest-Buda, Pozsony, Sopron, Kassa and Nagyvárád) took into consideration that the regions around them, as much as possible, have a majority of Germans, or at least non-Magyars. The Court was led by the political hypothesis that, if there is no close relationship between the newly created parts (as there was not in Austria between the provinces), in time, they will become as integral parts of the Empire as the Austrian provinces.³⁹² The main objective was to relegate the Magyar element into the background, its partial amalgamation.

³⁸⁷ Kemény: *A magyar nemzetiségi ...* op. cit., p. 38.

³⁸⁸ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 119.

³⁸⁹ Szarka, László: *A szlovákok története* [The history of the Slovaks]. Bereményi Kiadó, Budapest, 1993, pp. 106-107; Steier: *A tót nemzetiségi ...* op. cit., pp. 613-617.

³⁹⁰ Ibid (Szarka), p. 109.

³⁹¹ Somogyi, Éva: *Abszolutizmus és kiegyezés 1849-1868* [Absolutism and compromise 1849-1868]. Budapest, 1981, pp. 55-66.

³⁹² Ibid, p. 56.

Two of the regions – Pozsony and Kassa – enclosed the Northern Hungarian portion populated by the Slovaks, making it suitable to grant local autonomy. This would have been possible if the southern border of these two regions ran along the Slovak-Magyar ethnic demarcation line. Instead, it cut deeply into the ethnic Magyar quarter. Two instances: Pozsony region was assigned Nógrád county (19 on the map – *auth.*) and Kassa region's southern border ran along the northern border of Szabolcs county (40 on the map – *auth.*) all the way to the Tisza River in the East. On top of it all, the two regions, with a Slovak majority, had Austrian public administration, as did the other three. We can clearly see that the newly created Pozsony and Kassa administrative regions were a far cry from what the Slovak demands stated (ethnic boundaries, own national assembly, etc.). This allocation was short lived as Emperor Franz Joseph relieved Interior Minister Bach on August 22, 1859, his decrees rescinded and the *status quo* restored, i.e., a return to the historical county system. For a decade, then, Vienna tried to solve the nationality problem through administrative means. A change in this area was produced by the law of October 20, 1860³⁹³ and a decree published on February 26, 1861.³⁹⁴

Subsequent to the October law, the activities of the nationalities, including the Slovaks, restarted.³⁹⁵ Hurban drafted a memorandum, which asked for, on top of the linguistic and educational demands, the segregation of Slovakia's states rights from Hungary, a reiteration of the 1848-49 demands. Similarly, the Emperor again only showed an inclination toward the acceptance of the language demand. In an Imperial Edict, published in July of 1860, he authorized the use of the Slovak language, alongside German and Hungarian, in 23 Hungarian counties. Before the date the law was to take effect, the Emperor yielded to Hungarian pressure and severely curtailed his own edict.³⁹⁶

As a reaction to the February decree, the Slovak movement climaxed in the assembly of Turócszentmárton where, on June 6-7, 1861, all the leading figures of the Slovaks met to debate and hammer out the Slovak's political program.³⁹⁷ The final document was titled "The Slovak National Memorandum"³⁹⁸ and consisted of the following eight points:

1. The recognition of the Slovak nation and the creation of a Northern Hungarian Slovak national region, wherein Slovak is the official language of administration and education.
2. The Slovak counties accept that any correspondence and contact with the Hungarian authorities will be in Hungarian.

³⁹³ For the text, see Edmund Bernatzik: *Die Österreichischen Verfassungsgesetze mit Erläuterungen*. Wien, 1911; Galántai: *A Habsburg ...* op. cit., pp. 20-26.

³⁹⁴ Ibid (Bernatzik), pp. 254-256. old; Ibid (Galántai), pp. 27-32.

³⁹⁵ Steier: *A tót kérdés ...* op. cit., pp. 38-45.

³⁹⁶ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 123-124.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, pp. 124-125; Steier: *A tót kérdés ...* op. cit., pp. 42-43; Martin Greco: *Martinska deklarácia*. Bratislava, 1939; Frantisek Bokes: *Vyvin predstáv o slovenskom uzemi v 19. storoci*. Vydala Matica Slovenska, 1945.

³⁹⁸ Kemény: *A magyar nemzetiségi ...* op. cit., pp. 65-67.

3. The repeal of laws enacted between 1791 and 1848, giving the Hungarian language primacy.
4. Laws passed by the Hungarian Parliament to be translated into Slovak, also.
5. Establish a law school in one of the Slovak towns of Northern Hungary and a chair of Slovak Language and Literature in the University of Pest.
6. Freedom for the Slovaks to establish literary and other social associations.
7. Isolated Slovak communities, whether surrounded by Magyar or other nationalities, to be able to use their own language.
8. The Slovaks to have proportional representation on the Supreme Court.

These latest demands are almost identical to those tabled in 1848, missing only the demand for an independent national assembly. From the perspective of our dissertation, point one is the most important as it states the demand for a separate territorial unit. The writers of the memorandum – the text was by Ivan Daxner and Jan Francisci – used the term ‘Northern Hungarian Slovak national region’. (Region in Slovak is ‘okolie’ /environs/ and so historical writing often refers to an *okolie* demand on the part of Slovaks.) The authors of the memorandum defined the territory covered by *okolie* relatively accurately, which, in their view, consisted of two parts.³⁹⁹

On the one hand, it was ‘the most homogeneous Slav counties’ (in this context, Slav should mean Slovak – *auth.*), that is to say, Trencsén, Árva, Turóc, Zólyom, Liptó, Szepes and Sáros counties. On the other hand, it also extended to the ‘Slav’ populated areas of Pozsony, Nyitra, Bars, Hont, Nógrád, Gömör, Torna, Abaúj and Zemplén counties (see map 2). Theoretically, the southern border of the *okolie* was to be the Slovak-Magyar linguistic boundary.⁴⁰⁰

The Hungarian government firmly rejected the memorandum. Slovak historians almost always mention that the Slovak delegation presenting the memorandum to Kálmán Tisza – the vice-president of the sitting parliament of the day – was humiliated by him. While accepting the memorandum, he kept his pipe in his mouth and did not deem it important to send out a visitor from his office while he received the delegation.⁴⁰¹ After being rejected by the Hungarians – making use of the growing conflict between Vienna and Budapest, which the Emperor solved by dissolving the Hungarian Parliament on August 1861 – the Slovaks presented the memorandum to the Emperor in the fall of 1861, who similarly rejected it.⁴⁰²

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 began the Dualist era that was to last until the end of World War One. The events of the Slovak

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁰ Bokes: *Vyvin predstav ...* op. cit., pp. 37-45.

⁴⁰¹ Greco: *Martinska ...* op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁰² Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 125-126.

nationalism must be put into this perspective,⁴⁰³ examined within the confines of this new construct.

The relationship between the Hungarian state and Slovak nationalism during the decades of Dualism were fundamentally defined by the nationalities law of 1868 (number XLIV), which defined the ‘indivisible and unified Hungarian nation’, meaning the primacy of the concept of a Hungarian political unit. Ferenc Deák wrote about the nationalities debate as: “... Hungary consist of one political body, the unified, indivisible Hungarian nation, every citizen of said country, of whatever nationality, is an equal member.”⁴⁰⁴

This definition by Deák became the basis of the politico-legal fiction of the ‘Hungarian political nation’, which became a sacred and unassailable dogma during the Dualism,⁴⁰⁵ overriding political parties. There were some Magyar politicians who further ‘refined’ the concept of ‘political nation’, speaking of a ‘Hungarian nation state’. Béla Grünwald, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Zólyom county – deemed it a fictive statement that the country is multi-national, going as far as viewing the 1868 law as an unacceptable result. As a result, he urged immediate and energetic action for the elimination (read forcible Hungarianization – *auth.*) of the temporarily sheltered ‘non-Magyar elements’.⁴⁰⁶

A vision of a nation state was conjured before the eyes of the Hungarian political elite of the Dualist state. When the Magyars attained positions with the Compromise of 1867 – becoming a co-ruling nation of the Monarchy – it was not willing to share the hard won concessions with the other nationalities who were adversaries in 1848-49. According to István Borsody, the outstanding Hungarian politicians – Ferenc Deák, József Eötvös, and Kálmán Tisza – saw only two solutions to the existential problem of the nation (the nationality issue). The first option, a compromise with the Habsburgs against the nationalities (see the suggestions of Lajos Mocsáry), or turn against the Habsburgs. The third option, compromise with the Habsburgs *and* the nationalities – in practice, a sort of federalism – they did not even consider.⁴⁰⁷ In 1867, option one was realized. László Szarka, following Borsody’s reasoning, considers the granting of regional autonomy for the nationalities as the best guarantee for

⁴⁰³ Gulyás, László: *A szlovák nacionalizmus területi követelései és a történelmi Magyarország 1848-1914* [Territorial demands of Slovak nationalism and historical Hungary 1848-1914]. Konferenciakötet, Pécs, 2002, pp. 260-266.

⁴⁰⁴ Kemény: *Iratok ...* op. cit., vol 1, p. 130.

⁴⁰⁵ Hanák, Péter: *A dualizmus válságának problémái a XIX. század végén* [The problems of the crisis of Dualism]. In: *Magyarország a Monarchiában* [Hungary in the Monarchy]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1975.

⁴⁰⁶ Grünwald, Béla: *A felvidék. Politikai tanulmány* [Norther Hungary. A political study]. Budapest, 1878; Grünwald, Béla: *Közigazgatásunk és a nemzetiség* [Our public administration and nationality]. Budapest, 1874. A Hungary of 30 million could only emerge through oppressing other nationalities and minorities. The best criticism of this assimilative policy is given by Lubomír Lipták: *Slovensko v 20. storiči*. Kalligram, Bratislava, 1998. This book was first published in 1968, and banned in 1969.

⁴⁰⁷ Borsody, István: *Magyar-szlovák ...* op. cit., p. 201.

the rejuvenation of historical Hungary. The issue arose in the minority policies of the government of the day in a totally different context, as the need to gain and retain exclusive and absolute control over the country.⁴⁰⁸

It logically follows that, after 1867, the *okolie* demanded by the Slovaks was an impossibility. Ensuring the autonomy of Slovak populated areas – and the Serbs and Romanians also presented similar demands – meant the internal division of Hungary according to ethnicity for the country's ruling class. Hence, the ruling class refused to acknowledge the existence of separate nationalities – with the exception of the Croats – and rejected ethnic autonomies, merely conceding limited local language use. The representatives of the nationalities were excluded from the judicial and government processes, while pressing ahead with linguistic and cultural Magyarization.⁴⁰⁹

Again, due to its extent, we do not wish to delve in detail into the Northern Hungarian policies of the Dualist Hungarian government,⁴¹⁰ merely to note that the Slovak national movement was put in a disadvantageous position after the Austro-Hungarian compromise. They could expect no resolution for their demands from the Hungarian government or national assembly. In Szarka's view, the Hungarian government approached the situation only from negative aspects: police supervision of the Slovak nationalist movement, court procedures, legal actions, threats of incarceration and general repression.⁴¹¹

In addition, the Slovak movement was in a doubly difficult position when compared to the Serb and Romanian movements. The Slovaks had no external base or patron for support, such as a mother country outside the Monarchy; nor could they hide behind the bastion of Church autonomy, like the Serbs and Romanians. These contributed to the relative weakness of the Slovak national movement during the decades of Dualism,⁴¹² so that we can only recount one outstanding Slovak action during those years. At the congress of the minorities held in Budapest on August 10, 1895, they hammered out a 21 point program, together with the Romanians and the Serbs, which was meant to be the mutual foundation and program for all the nationalities of Hungary.⁴¹³ The program recognized the territorial integrity of historical Hungary but pointed out that, since the country is multi-cultural, they can not accept that one nation – the Magyar – retains exclusive hold on the attributes of statehood. "Only the combined nations of Hungary, as a whole, have the right to assume the identity of the state" – they said. They stressed that the 'non-Magyar people', using legal means and honoring the integrity of the country, are fighting for their ethnic rights; they do not accept the 'Hungarian state vision' because it is contrary

⁴⁰⁸ Szarka: *A kisebbségi kérdés ...* op. cit., p. 118.

⁴⁰⁹ Hanák: *A dualizmus ...* op. cit.

⁴¹⁰ Szarka, László: *Szlovák nemzeti fejlődés – Magyar nemzetiségi politika 1867-1918* [Slovak national development – Hungarian national policies 1867-1918]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1995.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁴¹² Bokes: *Vyvin predstav ...* op. cit., pp. 52-69.

⁴¹³ Kemény: *Iratok ...* op. cit., vol 1, pp. 379-381.

to the ethnic reality of Hungary and national historical development. They demanded the internal re-organization of the country. They recommended replacing the central administration with county level autonomy for the constituent nationalities. They also demanded that the county boundaries be aligned with linguistic boundaries and that the county's non-Magyar majority language be used in public administration and judicial proceedings. The program went on to demand the introduction of universal suffrage, a more equitable re-drawing of voting districts, self-government of religious and educational institutions by the autonomous boards, government funding for cultural institutions and the appointment of a Minister without portfolio.

The Hungarian government of Dezső Bánffy, the Prime Minister of the day,⁴¹⁴ refused to even talk with the representatives of the congress, even starting police proceedings against them.

The unsuccessful attempts toward a Magyar-Slovak compromise strengthened the thought of Czech-Slovak solidarity among the Slovak thinking class.⁴¹⁵ At the time of an ethnographic exhibition in Prague in 1895, a group of Slovak-friendly Czechs galvanized and, in 1896, formed the Czech-Slav Union (Jednota), which became the chief organizer of Czech-Slovak co-operation and Czech aid to the Slovaks. Jednota was active in organizing in finding boarding in Bohemia and Moravia for Slovak university and middle school students, sent books to Slovakia, etc. From 1908, Jednota organized annual Czech-Slovak gatherings in Luhacovice, which became known as the Czech-Slovak parliament.⁴¹⁶ The passivity of the Slovak movement did not mean that Slovak nationalism gave up its territorial aims; on the contrary, the organizing of an ethnic Slovak region gained converts in ever widening circles.⁴¹⁷ The announcement, or rather demand, of this need did not rise to the previous levels, when Slovak national gatherings sent their memoranda to the Hungarian Parliament or the Emperor. The Slovak activist groups consisted of a few hundred, perhaps a few thousand, of the intellectual elite, who devoted their energies in two basic directions.⁴¹⁸

Making use of the existing articles of the nationalities laws, they took part in the 1901, 1905, 1906 and 1910 parliamentary elections and, if elected, their speeches in parliament made their displeasure of, and opposition to, the Hungarian state known. Their other activity consisted of putting to paper their ideas about Slovensko, its extent. They drew maps, until government security services swooped down on them (for a typical

⁴¹⁴ Bánffy, Dezső: *Magyar nemzetiségi politika* [Hungarian nationality policies]. Budapest, 1903.

⁴¹⁵ Borsody: *Benes ... op. cit.*, p. 213; Szviezsényi: *Hogyan veszett ... op. cit.*, pp. 26-34.

⁴¹⁶ Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, pp. 142-143; *Ibid* (Szviezsényi), pp. 34-41.

⁴¹⁷ Bokes: *Vyvin predstáv ... op. cit.*, pp. 52-69.

⁴¹⁸ Szarka: *A szlovákok ... op. cit.*, pp. 123-127; Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ... op. cit.*, pp. 131-175; Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, pp. 143-154; Mamatey: *The Establishment ... op. cit.*, pp. 5-11.

product, the Triasmappa, see map 3).⁴¹⁹ This map was drawn by Heinrich Hanau in 1910, at the commission of a Slovak group and under their instructions, published in Vienna by Freytag and Berndt Cartographic Institute. On the map, Hanau draws the Magyar-Slovak ethnographic boundary, thus marking the southern boundary of Slovensko. Compared to the subsequent boundary drawn by the Trianon Treaty, this map was judicious. There is no mention of an ethnic boundary along the Danube – as Benes argued at the Peace Conference in 1919 – Pozsony /Bratislava/ and area is noted as Magyar on the Hanau map. Naturally, this restraint did not influence the Hungarian government. Postal forwarding and dissemination was prohibited on Hungarian territories due to its insult to the national image and sovereignty.

To this point, we have paid particular attention to the question of territorial segregation as demanded by the Slovak nationalists. To close our examination of the topic, we shall try to give a different picture of the situation of Slovak nationalism on the eve of WWI. This snapshot is based on a secret 23 page government memorandum, *Review of the Hungarian Slovak Nationality Question*, generated in November of 1913 for internal use.⁴²⁰

The report notes in the first portion that signs of pan-Slav agitation are surfacing in every Slovak settlement, although of various levels, those in Trencsén and Zólyom counties being low, while Pozsony, Nyitra and Turócz counties seeming the strongest. The answer to this is that the wealthiest Slovaks, who are most likely to be the political leaders, live in Pozsony and Nyitra counties. These counties are most likely to be in business and political contact with Moravia. Turócz county has high levels of political activity as it is the location of Turóczszentmárton, which is one of the largest of the Slovak cultural centers, says the report. It goes on to say that, while the Slovak nationalist movement's stated goal is the implementation of Law XLIV of 1868, the leadership is actually working towards another goal, the union of Czechs and Slovaks. As proof, it cites three documents. One is articles appearing in *Národné Noviny* on June 18 and 23 of 1898, which reported on the Prague visit of Slovak politician Matúš Dula. While there, Dula took part in the Palacky tribute, where a toast was given by the representative of the Russian Empire, general Komorov, in which he said "... we can not do other than express our fondest wish that Palacky's ideals be realized: the union of all Slav

⁴¹⁹ The travels of this map are typical of the unsettled conditions of Central Europe. The Romanian troops occupying Budapest in 1919 took it and other documents from the Interior Ministry. As part of a treaty, it was turned over to Czechoslovakia in 1968. The map used by me was found by Tóth István, a co-worker of the Museum of Szeged, while on a research trip to Bratislava.

⁴²⁰ The document was found in the Református Egyetemes Konvent Levéltárában (REKL) [Archive of the Universal Reformed Convent], REKL Tisza István iratai 44/b fond 12 doboz/10/a tétel [REKL Documents of István Tisza, file 44/b, box 12, item 10/a].

countries under the crown of Saint Wenceslaus! I raise my glass to the crown of Saint Wenceslaus.”⁴²¹

The report cites a second document, the statement of meeting of the Moravian and Hungarian ‘student youth’, held on August 13-14, 1911, in Hodonin, Moravia. This announces that “... the Slovak youth meets here to get to know each other, become friends and make an addition to Czech-Slovak unity. The Moravian Slovak youths are aware that the Moravian Slovaks belong to the Czech family of Slovaks and as part of it, they are related to the other Czech nations ... Without a free and cultured Slovak nation, there will not be a free and cultured Czech nation.”⁴²²

Thirdly, the report makes reference to a 1908 comment made by Milan Hodža at a Slovak conference, at which he urged the youth to do more for the national cause, to “disseminate books and journals, go among the people.”⁴²³

The report’s author cites these three documents as proof that, while the Slovak politicians are seemingly working towards the implementation of the 1868 law, in reality their goals can only be reached by the disruption of Hungarian statehood. It sums up the documents: “There is not a word of the implementation of law XLIV, nor of the further development of Hungarian Slovak cultural and economic interests within the precincts of the Hungarian state ... there are words about the union of the Hungarian Slovaks with the other Slavs under the crown of Saint Wenceslaus. Finally, according to Hodža, the young should not be afraid to undertake the execution of such actions, which may even lead to the possibility of prison.”⁴²⁴

The second part of the report acquaints in detail the directions within the Slovak nationalist movement. It expounds that the ‘Turócszentmárton Party’ – this is the Slovak National Party⁴²⁵ – set as its slogan: “Czech-Slovak unity.” The party leaders interpret the slogan, for the public at large, as making use of Czech cultural and economic strengths for the cultural and economic growth of the Hungarian Slovaks.” The report specifically points out that the party leaders never miss an opportunity to tell the public that their efforts in this direction are to be realized within the confines of Hungary but “... the best evidence of how sincere these statements are, Matúš Dula is a pillar of this party, who, but a decade ago, envisioned Czech-Slovak unity under the crown of Saint Wenceslaus.”⁴²⁶

The report identifies two directions within the Turócszentmárton Party. There is a conservative faction, ascribed to Svetozar Hurban Vajanskyý, who “from the beginning was apprehensive about the future of Slovak national existence with Czech help, instead seeing Russian assistance more expedient than Czech, and thus has grown cool towards

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Szarka: *A szlovákok ...* op. cit., pp. 126-127; Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., pp. 139-161; Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 135.

⁴²⁶ REKL, ... op. cit.

the idea of Czech-Slovak unity.”⁴²⁷ Milan Hodža,⁴²⁸ and his circle, represent the other faction. They accept Czech assistance but also take steps to unite the other nationalities within Hungary, as well as trying to gain Vienna’s support.

It is advisable to step back from the report for a moment and sum up this portion – as it has become somewhat blurred in the report – but there were three factions within the Slovak National Party. The Party’s liberal faction, which worked towards co-operation with the Czechs – towards a union; the Russophile faction, led by Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, who counted on Russian assistance; and thirdly, those with Milan Hodža, who pinned their hopes on a federated Monarchy under Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand, when he became emperor.

To return to the report, it makes it clear that the noted factions have not driven a wedge into party unity. On the other hand, the religious distribution of the Slovak movement, the Catholic vs. Lutheran elements, have led, by 1913, to the creation of an independent Slovak Catholic party, the Slovak People’s Party.⁴²⁹ The new party is led by Andrej Hlinka, parish priest of Rose Hill, Ferdinand Juriga, parliamentary representative, Florian Tomanek, assistant rector of Pozsony and Dr. Gyula (Julius) Makovecz, bishop of Vágújhely. According to the report, the party has a dual agenda: while stressing their intent to work for the Slovaks among lawful limits – that they recognize the Hungary of King Saint Stephen – in reality, they are the acolytes of Czech-Slovak unity and, hence, enemies of the Hungarian state.

Aside from the two parties, the report notes an important intellectual and political gathering, the *Prudy* group, whose members held annual general assemblies of ‘Slovak youths’. The report tersely calls the *Prudy* group as ‘a group created and led by the leaders of the pan-Slav movement’.

The third part of the report recounts the Trans-Leithainian (towards Austria – *ed.*) contacts of the Hungarian Slovaks. It reasons that the attention of the Czechs is turned toward the Slovaks on two grounds. They [the Czechs – *auth.*] possess developed industries and are looking for dependable markets for their products. As well, their political struggles with the Austrian Germans has not been very successful and they are casting about for allies. “The political and economical interests having met, they [again, the Czechs – *auth.*] got to work and, dazzling the money hungry leaders of the Slovaks, assumed the role of selfless patron of the Slovaks with promises of economic advantages, all under the interpretable

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Sebestyén, József: *Hodza Milán útja* [The path of Hodza Milan]. Bratislava, 1938, pp. 41-72; Szarka, László: *A 20. századi szlovák politika alternatívái: Andrej Hlinka és Milán Hodza. Párhuzamos politikai portrék a XX. századi Kelet-Közép-Európából* [The alternatives in 20th century Slovak politics: Hlinka and Hodza]. Edited by László Szarka and Katalin Szokollay. Budapest, 1994, pp. 63-66.

⁴²⁹ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., pp. 166-171; Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 150-151; Rátz: *A pánszlávizmus ...* op. cit., p. 276.

slogan of Czech and Slovak unity”, said the report.⁴³⁰ The activities of Jednota was deemed extremely dangerous, from the perspective of the Hungarian government.

The report’s author felt it important and urgent that steps be taken against the thought of Czech and Slovak unity, the best means of which was the stressing of Slovak national independence. As the report phrased it: “The most effective remedy against Czech and Slovak unity, or the Czechization of the Slovaks, we feel, is the awakening of a sense of Slovak ethnic distinctiveness.”⁴³¹ In the interest of such a goal, it suggests the creation of a Slovak party, whose slogan would be Slovak national independence. The existence of a Slovak party, which rejected Czech and Slovak unity, posed a lesser danger to Hungary than a party with the idea of the unity, since this new party would stress national independence within Hungary’s boundaries. Two other things would have to be done by the government parallel to the creation of this party. One, restrict the economic influence of the Czechs in Northern Hungary, and two, propagate the idea of Slovak national independence – suggested the report.

To draw attention to the importance of propaganda, the report recapitulates, as part of the closing of this section, the propaganda activities carried out in the interest of the idea of Czech and Slovak unity. It recounts the annual 3-4 day get-together in Turócszentmárton and Luhacovice. The most important goal of these meetings is that they foster a sense of unity between the two nations. As a bonus, about 300-400 Hungarian Slovaks show up for the Luhacovice meeting who, by their professions (teachers, priests) are eminently suitable for propaganda work. The report also draws attention to the fact that there is constant influx of Czech culture among the Slovaks. They mostly consist of bursaries and grants for Slovak students for study in Bohemian and Moravian schools and the dissemination of Czech books in Northern Hungary.

The fourth part of the report carried the title: ‘The economic and financial institutions in the service of nationalism, their position, and actions necessary to counteract them’. The report indicates that there are nine robust financial institutions that lend support to the economic life of the Slovaks.⁴³² The most sound is the Tatra Bank (in Turócszentmárton), followed by the People’s Bank in Rose Hill, then goes on to suggest that “Since these financial institutions have the widest business contacts among the Slovaks, a possible bank crisis at these two institutions would create a general economic crisis in the North and Northeast regions.”⁴³³

The report feels that both the Tatra Bank and the People’s Bank engage more in political and not business activities, in part offering secret support for various Slovak institutions, funding anti-Hungarian propaganda, and in part by founding and maintaining industries to strengthen the Slovak economy. The report makes concrete suggestions for the closing of these two institutions. As a suggestion, it offers the winning

⁴³⁰ REKL ... op. cit.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., pp. 135-140.

⁴³³ REKL ... op. cit.

over of the dismissed president of the Tatra Bank, Ivan Daxner, - who was let go for financial abuses – “who could precisely disclose, as one who was a knowledgeable insider and a party to the bank’s secret activities, partly out of a sense of injured self-esteem, partly out of revenge.”⁴³⁴ Steps could also be taken through a criminal investigation by an audit of the bank’s books and, after the expected positive results, – meaning the identification of serious shortfalls, or perhaps criminal activity such as false accounting – the bank could be closed or taken over by a Hungarian institution. Thirdly, if these banks are taken over, their executives and boards – and those of the companies owned and controlled by them – should have Slovak politicians and Czech officials ousted, to be replaced by Magyars. The author also has suggestion for the restriction of the other smaller financial institutions – those operating with smaller capitalization – “To prevent the multiplication of smaller financial institutions, it should be stated (meaning, by law – *auth.*) that the minimum capitalization must be 500,000 Koronas.”⁴³⁵

If any financial institution is able to meet these criteria, then regular audits of their books and records should be undertaken. This would have an important secondary effect. “The appearance of the state auditors would have an important consequence in that the ethnic bank would have to introduce Hungarian-language bookkeeping and record keeping, thus having to employ Hungarian-speaking and writing employees.”⁴³⁶ Against those Slovak financial institutions still open, the Hungarian government should support the Magyar financial institutions of Northern Hungary, which would result in “... the Magyar institutions being able to pay one half a per cent more on deposits and offer loans at one half a per cent below the competing institutions (meaning the Slovak banks – *auth.*), essentially solving the problem.”⁴³⁷

The reports fifth part carried the title ‘Cultural tasks to be done’. It starts from the position that the economic activities for Czech and Slovak unity are closely allied with activities in the cultural and educational spheres. In 1913, there were 20 Slovak students in Czech or Moravian universities, 100 in colleges and 150 in agricultural studies. “As soon as they acquire enough experience, they will return home and take over the running of co-operatives, agricultural and industrial concerns because the creation of Czech industries will only become perfected if the teachable material is educated and becomes suitable to be practical leaders” – reads the report.⁴³⁸

The report notes problems with education, too, in Northern Hungary. While the teachers in the publicly funded schools are reliable, the teachers in the parochial schools do not instill loyalty to the Hungarian state but to the Czech-Slovak ideal. By middle school, the already noted paper, *Prudy*, and the summer camps organized during school breaks present opportunities for attacks on the Hungarian state and the proliferation of

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

Czech-Slovak unity. The problems of the seminaries provides a good example, as the younger priests all actively join the Slovak nationalist movement.

After the previous sketch of the environment, it then went on to lay out steps needed in the area of culture and education. The report states that the most important task is the ‘impeding of Czech cultural actions’, the prevention of the spread of the Czech-Slovak ideal. It makes several suggestions: The prevention of those Slovaks, who were educated in Czech schools, from finding employment; the establishment of Hungarian agricultural and trade schools in the Slovak areas, the closing of the parochial schools. If this is not possible, parochial school teachers must be put under stricter supervision. A review of middle and high school teachers, so that only those remain who espouse the ideal of Hungarian statehood. Slovak propaganda during school breaks must be prevented; secret nationalistic groups must be persecuted; anti-government newspapers, journals must be eliminated. Beside the prohibitive and proactive measures just listed, the authors made the following suggestion: “It should be considered whether, without endangering the ideals of the Hungarian state, the teaching of the Slovak language and its literature may not be considered, as an optional subject.”⁴³⁹

The report’s sixth part bore the title ‘The Press’. By way of introduction, it states that the most important instrument of the Slovak nationalist movement is the press. It then goes on to list, and assess in detail, each of the 35 Northern Hungarian Slovak newspapers – circulation, editor, political stance – which appear regularly. It then goes on to review, in similar detail, the émigré press, the overwhelming majority of it from the USA. It offers the solution of buying out these hostile, but widely read, papers – with suitable secrecy of the new owner – so that the readership can be slowly and imperceptibly be converted to loyalty to the Hungarian government. At the same time, it counsels the Hungarian politicians against establishing a national – meaning Northern Hungary-wide – Slovak daily paper, offering two reasons for it. Such a newspaper initiative, coming from the Hungarians, would be rejected by the Slovak nationalists as openly Hungarian propaganda. More importantly, the people do not speak the Slovak literary language; the existence of regional accents would prevent the readability of the paper. It recommends that these purchased, co-opted papers, both inside Hungary and abroad, work toward awakening the nascent Slovak sense of self-image, as a countermeasure of the idea of Czech-Slovak unity.

The report’s seventh part had ‘The Associations’ as its title. In the introduction to this section, it states that state police surveillance should be at the highest level. The associations are then parsed, as were the newspapers: name, leaders, location, main activities, divided into two: those within Hungary and those in America.

It is surprising how well informed the authors of the report were of associations active in America, detailing the activities of eight. They draw special attention to “They are made dangerous by their especially favorable

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

financial situation, the large number of members, the protection of American laws, which do not exist for Hungarian interests ...⁴⁴⁰

Within the country, they deem 18 associations as worthy of mention. For their handling, the following were proposed: 1. The disbanding of any association operating without approved by-laws. They point to the *Prudy* association, already mentioned, which has been operating for five years and acts as an ordinary association (has a board of directors, publishes a newspaper), yet does so without a government sanctioned by-laws. 2. The exclusive character of the associations must be terminated. The authors mean exclusive in the terms that only members with anti-Hungarian ideals were members. This situation, they suggested, could be remedied by the organized enrollment of Hungarian sympathizer members, who would make the right moves, say the right words at meetings, ceremonies, etc.

In the final summation section, the report suggest to Hungarian leaders that, in view of the extensive activities of the Slovak movement, – and the other similar nationalistic movements – a central body should be established, a central investigative bureau, responsible to the Interior Minister to gather all necessary information, co-ordinate the detective activities and take charge of the police actions.

The eight, and last, section is a two page addenda, which lists the Slovak politicians directing the ‘pan-Slav agitation’. The list of those living abroad consists of 12 names, mainly living in America and Russia, while those living in Hungary is comprised of 33 names.

We can justly suppose that the report contents made István Tisza pensive. At least, we can deduce as much because, in April of 1914, Tisza convened in Budapest a ‘Slovak Conference’ to try and solve the Slovak question - Lord-Lieutenants of the Norther Hungarian counties attending. The plan they debated and accepted, the Ghillányi-Szlavinszky Plan, was pre-empted by the outbreak of the war.⁴⁴¹ We must stress that Tisza’s policies of the 1910’s regarding the nationalities differs from that of his predecessors, – policies Tisza called ‘politics of treading on toes’ – and, from certain perspective, seems to revise his own earlier views.

The emerging policy was that Magyar supremacy could not be maintained merely through accelerated Magyarization but entertained possibilities for compromises.⁴⁴² In this attitude of new policies, he began negotiations at the end of 1912 with the Transylvanian Romanian politicians. For our needs, let us remark that he referred several times to these negotiations, saying that, if the outcome is successful, he wished to extend it to the other nationalities.⁴⁴³ Parallel to the Romanian negotiations, only limited talks were held with the Slovaks, the outcome of which was that Tisza offered assurances regarding educational reforms in the mother

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., pp. 178-179.

⁴⁴² Tőkéczi, László: *Tisza István*. Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest, 2000, pp. 107-130; Vermes, Gábor: *Tisza István*. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 1994, pp. 220-233.

⁴⁴³ REKL ... op. cit.; Kemény: *Iratok ...* op. cit., vol 6, pp. 137-139; Albrecht, Ferenc: *Forrástanulmányok gróf Tisza István román nemzetiségi politikájához* [Source studies to the nationalities policies of count István Tisza]. Lugos, 1933.

tongue and other language use concessions. In return, he expected the Slovak politicians to give up their other political demands.⁴⁴⁴

SLOVAK – MAGYAR RELATIONSHIP 1914-1918

One side of the coin: The Hungarian government and the Slovaks

In the first months of the war, the Hungarian government applied different methods of handling to the different nationalities.⁴⁴⁵ Towards the Serbs and Ukrainians, both the government and the military adopted a policy of open and pre-emptive terror.⁴⁴⁶ The approach towards the Croats and Slovaks was different, the ‘kid gloves’ treatment, as there was an expectation for the Croat and Slovak battalions, as reliable troops.⁴⁴⁷

This kid gloves treatment of the Slovaks is demonstrated by a confidential letter written by the Lord-Lieutenant of Nyitra county, on June 28, 1914, to the county bureaucrats: “It is imperative that they (the Slovaks – *auth.*) do not sense any undue hostile feelings from either the Hungarian populace or officials, nor should they see fear or indecision, either. Where necessary, we must show strength, decisive and firm decision making, demonstrate that the laws are unquestionably supreme, that complaining against lawful actions is futile ... As I have often repeated in my speeches and memos, it is our firm duty to maintain a sympathetic contact with the people, especially the Slovak people, which should be the duty not only of the official bodies but also the eminent task of the whole of Magyar society, as well. We must strive to win the confidence of the Slovak people consigned to our care and make them understand and accept that the moment is here when they can earn the amity of the Hungarians, their trust, well meaning interest and support, to form the basis of mutual good relations.”⁴⁴⁸

In light of the content of the letter, it is interesting to reexamine István Tisza’s relationship with Matúš Dula, the president of the Slovak National Party. On August 25, 1914, Dula wrote a letter to Tisza, which he handed to Tisza in the presence of parliamentary representative Sándor Erdélyi, who arranged the meeting. In the introduction of the letter, Dula wrote: “In these heavy days, during which our country’s able bodied Slovak men enthusiastically hurried to the standards to defend of our country at the call of our King, His Excellency ... after such a sign of the loyalty of our Slovak people, some examples of ethnic intolerance and pecuniary jealousy have arisen, which it is my duty to make known to your Excellency, that you may issue instructions that these grievances may be examined and remedied and, in the future, prevented.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁴ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., pp. 178-179.

⁴⁴⁵ Galántai, József: *Magyarország az első világháborúban* [Hungary in the First World War]. Budapest, 2001, p. 136.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 136-139.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 140.

⁴⁴⁸ Kemény: *Iratok ...* op. cit., vol 7, pp. 15-17.

⁴⁴⁹ REKL file 44/a, box 14, item 31.

After that introduction, he presents several grievances. Part of it consists of a detailed list of Slovak lawyers, bank officers and officials – with name and circumstance, date and place – who have been arrested by Hungarian authorities for various lengths of time, their homes or places of business were searched, or have been ejected from their homes.

Secondarily, Dule complains that, since these steps were taken in front of the public eye, they are damaging from two perspectives. They are conducive to induce despair among the Slovak national citizens, as well as being opportune to foment hatred against the Slovaks. He asked Tisza that, insofar as he deems the continued scrutiny of the financial institutions necessary, the Hungarian authorities carry it out with more tact. Dula then draws Tisza's attention to two articles that appeared on August 16 in the *Nagyszombat és Vidéke* /Nagyszombat and Environs/ newspaper, pointing out that both were suitable to wreck the peace between the nationalities. In closing, he remarks that the local Slovaks have only one newspaper, the *Slovenský Denník*, against whose content "no complaint can be found since the beginning of the war, and was not found, in spite of the strict censorship. And yet, His Excellency, the Interior Minister, has ordered the closing of the paper on August 18, by decree 2692, citing content harmful to the public opinion and the military conduct of the war."⁴⁵⁰ Dula asked Tisza to permit the renewed publication of the newspaper, as Slovak politicians use the paper to maintain contact with the Slovak masses, to sustain their enthusiasm and loyalty towards the common homeland. He closes with the following thought: "... when we are ready to risk our lives and wealth for a better future, shoulder to shoulder with citizens of other nationalities, the least we can ask for is that, until proven otherwise, the loyalty of our intentions and actions not be doubted, rather make it possible that we can do everything towards our clearly recognized interests, and for the benefit of our country. I place my trust in Your Excellency's unbiased and wise decision ..."⁴⁵¹

Tisza reflected on the letter and the gist of the words exchanged, and then took tangible steps, as reflected in three letters, all dated the following day, August 26. The first letter went to Sándor Erdélyi,⁴⁵² explaining that the three grievances of arrests and home searches listed by Dula happened immediately after the outbreak of the war and were initiated and carried out by the county authorities, on their own initiative. Since the Hungarian government re-directed them (meaning, reined them in – *auth.*), no new arrests have been carried out. With regard to the two newspaper articles, he stated his own view: "I, too, think the articles of the *Nagyszombat és Vidéke* objectionable, and will have care that similar articles, useful only to whip up the peaceful and good relations between the citizens of the country, will not be accepted in future."⁴⁵³ In the case of the closed newspaper, he replied: "Regarding the matter of the *Slovenský Denník*, I have asked for clarification, and only on receipt of that will I take a

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Kemény: *Iratok* ...op. cit., vol 7, p. 80.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

considered position.”⁴⁵⁴ Of interest is that the letter addressed to Sándor Erdélyi is, in reality, the reply to Dula through a third party – he asked Erdélyi to make its contents known to Dula. We find an explanation to this roundabout reply in a later letter, on November 2, 1914, to Artúr Wieland, Lord-Lieutenant of Szepes county. We quote Tisza: “I do not wish to respond to Dula (probably talking about another Dula letter – *auth.*), as I do not wish to build his reputation in front of his followers, and gather credit for himself.”⁴⁵⁵

Although it may seem to be excessive wariness not to communicate directly, it must be pointed out that the problems brought to his attention were adequately addresses, and promptly. The second letter, to the government commissioners of Northern Hungary, requested their assistance to moderate the chauvinistic tone of the Magyar newspapers.⁴⁵⁶ The third letter requests information from Interior Minister János Sándor regarding the prohibition of the *Slovenský Denník*. The Minister replied to Tisza on September 3, with “... while all the national newspapers write in a patriotic spirit, the Slovensky Dennik, printed in Budapest, published in its August 2 issue several articles that expressed sympathy – although veiled – towards Serbia. In one of the articles, in praising Czech-Slovak ideals, it recommended the book of Scotus Viator.”⁴⁵⁷ The Minister appended a review of the August 2 issue of the paper, done on August 4 by an official of the Press Department of the Interior Ministry.⁴⁵⁸ This failed to completely convince Tisza, who wrote to his Minister on September 10 as: “Amidst the current situation, when the vast majority of the Slovaks are behaving loyally, and with the extraordinary powers at our command with which we can immediately retaliate every misstep of a paper, I am not certain it is proper to make use of this extraordinary power without proper cause. I then ask you, whether you would gracefully consider, if you could consider it proper to permit said newspaper to resume publishing.”⁴⁵⁹ The result was that the Minister rescinded his previous decision and the paper resumed publication. The treatment of the written complaint by Dula sheds light on Tisza’s ‘kid gloves’ treatment of the Slovaks after the outbreak of the war, aiming at good relations. At the same time, in our view, the Slovak politicians were not true partners in creating a good relationship. From the Slovak side, apart from the attempt made by Dula, there was merely one ‘isolated’ initiative (the action of Ludovít Bazovský, a lawyer from Losonc).

During 1915, Tisza’s ‘kid gloves’ policies slowly shifted to the ‘mailed fist’, as shown by his February intervention with his Minister of Justice because he thinks the actions taken against the Slovak provocateurs

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 85.

⁴⁵⁶ *Gróf Tisza István Összes Munkái*. 4. Sorozat II-VI. Levelek. [The collected works of count István Tisza] Budapest, 1924-1927, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁷ REKL file 44, box 7, item 21.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

as being too lenient.⁴⁶⁰ We know of no concrete reason for his change of heart towards the Slovaks, we can but surmise that the reports of the activities of the exiles played some part. Beginning in 1915, Tisza's Slovak policies is characterized by police / agent actions and the exploitation of internal Slovak corruption and conflicts.⁴⁶¹ The Hungarian government tried to reconnoiter the weak points of the Slovak movement through increased police surveillance and detective work. The Hungarian Royal Border Post in Turócszentmárton kept the politicians of the Slovak National Party under continuous observation, sending 'potentially incriminating data for possible use' to Lajos Kürthy, crown commissioner for Northern Hungary, who then forwarded it to Tisza. The reports conspicuously dealt with any personal or political disagreements of the politicians, and their financial matters.⁴⁶²

An equally favored method was making use of corruption, or the use of financial information as a potential corruption weapon against the Slovak politicians. These actions were specifically under the supervision of the Interior Ministry, as witnessed by two letters. The first is a report of June 29, 1915, by Endre Manajló, detective with the border guard forces, in which he informs his superior that "Dr. János Mudrony, lawyer, resident of Turócszentmárton is willing to identify all the Slovak pan-Slav and Russian Russophile aid accounts, with several hundred thousand in them, if he receives a guarantee that when the Tatra Bank of Turócszentmárton declares bankruptcy, he will be named as trustee of the bankruptcy."⁴⁶³ The Under-Secretary of the Interior instructed commissioner Kürthy on July 1 to keep him continually informed of the Mudrony affair.⁴⁶⁴ Our research in the documents failed to disclose the outcome of the Mudrony affair, whether he received asked for compensation, although one report did disclose that Jan Mudroň repeatedly offered to establish a moderate Slovak party, one that would support the Hungarian government.⁴⁶⁵

The birth of a moderate Slovak party would have been welcome news to Tisza, to strengthen his Northern Hungarian policies. In the end, a party was not established, due, more than likely, to lack of adequate numbers that Jan Mudroň could muster among the Slovaks for his plan. At least that is what must be concluded, as Mudroň's later Hungarophile expressions, especially in the fall of 1918, remained without any visible signs of Slovak support. Lacking a moderate Slovak party, Tisza built his policies on creating and making use of internal differences among the Slovaks, scoring at least one significant victory. With the co-operation of the border police, they were able to co-opt an important member of the Turócszentmárton Slovak group, the strongly Russophile Svetozár Hurban Vajansky. The captain of the police detachment, at a confidential meeting, let Vajansky know that he knew about those donations Vajansky was receiving through

⁴⁶⁰ Galántai: *Magyarország az ...* op. cit., p. 141.

⁴⁶¹ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., p. 183.

⁴⁶² REKL file 44/a, box 4, item 16.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

secret channels from Russia.⁴⁶⁶ After that, it was easy to pressure Vajansky to distance the Slovak movement from the Czech-Slovak unity movement, which he did in an article in the *Narodne noviny* on June 17, 1915. In the article Vajansky argued that “After a long while, I learned that in the ‘Czechoslovan’ of Kiev they publicized on September 28, 1914 a resolution about some ‘Czech-Slav committee’ so that, in the case of a successful outcome of the war, the Slovak populated counties can be annexed to the Czech Kingdom, the Slovaks presented to the Czechs. It would not be worth reacting to such an absurd nonsense because there exists no Slovak who would sell his own kin, lowering himself to a piece of merchandise, and there is no Slovak, who – forsaking the ancient principles of his ancestors, who, on countless occasions expressed their loyalty to their homeland, before country and king – would wish to tread on unlawful and unpatriotic paths.”⁴⁶⁷

Vajansky’s statement was a great success for Tisza’s Slovak policies, since a respected Slovak politician took a position against the idea of Czechoslovakism. Vajansky’s distancing did not become the typical phenomenon, in fact, the majority of Slovak politicians gradually sided with the Czechoslovak solution, taking a stand beside the solution that consisted of a break from Hungary (Milan Hodža, Vavro Šrobár, Matúš Dula, Ferdinand Juriga, Emil Stodola, Andrej Hlinka).

The government of István Tisza fell on June 15, 1917. The following two – of Móric /Maurus/ Esterházy (June 15, 1917 – August 23, 1917) and Sándor Wekerle (August 23, 1917 – October 31, 1918) – did not have a sharply differing policy regarding the Slovaks. To demonstrate the unchanging Northern Hungary direction, we offer two documents. Prime Minister Wekerle instructed the Northern Hungarian Lord-Lieutenants in a letter dated December 30, 1917 that “... the unreliable intelligent Slovaks should be watched with extra alertness” and the results to be reported to the Interior Minister.⁴⁶⁸ The Minister, in a January 16, 1918 letter instructs the Lord-Lieutenants that the Kiev ‘Czechoslovak’ published a resolution in 1917 and they should take all steps to prevent its circulation.⁴⁶⁹ Thus, the two governments stayed with the tried and true methods, police surveillance, prohibition and censorship.

The other side of the coin: The Slovaks and Hungary

In the previous sub-section of this chapter, we looked at the relationship between the Hungarian government and the Slovak nation during the war years. Here, we will now take a look at the other side of the coin, the relationship of the Slovaks to the Hungarian government and the Monarchy.

Dušan Kovač writes the following in his book, exploring the Slovak reaction to the outbreak of the war: “The outbreak of the war initiated a wave of chauvinism and pseudo-patriotism in Hungary. The Slovak

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ OL Miniszterelnökség ... op. cit., 1172. 1918. XII.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

populace and the drafted Slovak soldiers were only rarely caught up in the cheering crowds... The war against Slav Serbia and Russia could not have been popular among the Slovaks... From the beginning, the Slovak politicians calculated that this war will decide the fate of the world and, with it, that of the Slovaks.”⁴⁷⁰

It is our position that the above statement of Kovač, especially the last sentence, is completely false, made after the fact in knowledge of subsequent events. At the outbreak of the war, the Slovak newspapers lined up beside the Monarchy in their reporting; Milán Hodža’s paper, *Slovenský týždenník*, urged its readers to patriotism. The People’s Party paper, *Slovenské ľudové noviny*, went to the extent of counseling the Slovaks to obedience, and urged them to join the fight for the dynasty and the Monarchy.⁴⁷¹ We must be rather careful with these articles, as they were born in the already instituted censorship era, and we know the fate of the *Slovenský Deník*, of what happens when a newspaper strays from the approved, orthodox direction.⁴⁷² With that in mind, a longer quote from the same source:

“Our Slovak people ... without any reticence, enthusiastically sent off the uncounted thousands of service eligible young men to serve under the flag, and donated the best from its estates to the military war chest for the immediate needs of the camps, even that which is necessary for the tilling of the soil. We do not doubt for a minute that our young men will retain the trust of our most gracious ruler, no matter how tough an enemy they may face on the field of battle ... it deeply imbues us Slovaks, the conviction that for small nations, such as we and the rest living in the monarchy, the best form of statehood that serves us best is the form of our own and the Monarchy. Who would want to separate what God has joined? ... It is important for us that our country and Monarchy retain its unity, not to suffer any losses from the upcoming war and to emerge from it victorious.”

In closing, the party announce that, for the duration of the war, it is suspending its party activities. This self-imposed passivity lasted until the spring, early summer, of 1918, describing the general Slovak political landscape. Under this loyal and passive *façade*, serious battles took place as to the different directions to take or between individual politicians. The leading politicians, and the various sized groups around them, had differing ideas of the future of Slovak politics; occasionally, diametrically opposing views could be found within the same party.

The position of the Slovak movement was made more difficult by the fact that there was not a town in Northern Hungary that could serve as a natural center, hence, the more important politicians and groups carried on their activities in wide geographic dispersal.⁴⁷³ The Slovak National Party,

⁴⁷⁰ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 155.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, p. 156. It is odd that a mere page earlier, Kovač writes about lack of Slovak enthusiasm for the war (see previous footnote) and then goes on to show examples of support.

⁴⁷² Kemény: *Iratok* ...op. cit., vol 7, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁷³ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., pp. 163-165; Galántai: *A Habsburg* ... op. cit., pp. 323-324; Gyönyör: *Határok* ... op. cit., pp. 37-38; Rác: *A pánszlávizmus* ...

espousing passivity, was active in Turócszentmárton. The party itself was not united. Its president, Matúš Dula, maintained secret contacts with the Czechoslovak union movement in Prague, the Mafia, while one of the most notable members, Svetozar Hurban Vajansky, rejected the idea of the Czech-Slovak solution.

Andrej Hlinka and the People's Party was active around Rose Hill, and were almost totally passive during the war.⁴⁷⁴ Based on our research, we think he was a supporter of Slovak autonomy, until 1918, within the Hungarian state. In the fall of 1918, he becomes a spokesman for autonomy within a Czechoslovak state.⁴⁷⁵

Vavro Šrobar also set up his headquarters in Rose Hill. He favored the 'Russian solution'. On a 1916 map created by him, the Slovak populated sections of Northern Hungary were shown as a province of Russia.⁴⁷⁶ Later, Šrobar develops contacts to the Prague Mafia and, as a result, slowly changes allegiance to the idea of a Czechoslovak national union.

Emil Stodola and his newspaper, *Slovenský týždenník*, are active in Budapest. Ferdinand Juriga, the sole Slovak representative in the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, reaffirming his loyalty to the state until October 17, 1918, when he publicly demands autonomy for the Slovaks.

The Social Democrats, led by Emanuel Lehotský, published a newspaper, *Robotnícke noviny*, in Pozsony /Bratislava/.

Kornel Stodola and his circle (Ivan Derer, Jan Cablko, Milan Hodža) worked primarily in Vienna. They had contacts with the Prague Mafia, becoming, over time, staunch supporters of the Czechoslovak solution.⁴⁷⁷

Ludovít Bazovsky and his group carried out their activities from Losonc /today Lučenec /. They represented the 'Hungarian solution, i.e., a Slovak autonomous territory within Hungary.

From this short summary, it becomes clear that, as the war dragged on, the 'Hungarian solution' lost ground to the 'Czechoslovak solution'. All during the war, there was only one initiative from the Slovak side, which favored the Hungarian solution. In 1915, Bazovsky, a lawyer in Losonc – although quite isolated from the other Slovak political parties but probably had the tacit approval of the Turócszentmárton group – wrote a memorandum, which he forwarded to Tisza. In it, he asked for linguistic, cultural and administrative rights and privileges for the 'Slovak region'.⁴⁷⁸ In effect, it was a summary of the pre-war Slovak cultural and linguistic demands, with some administrative rights added. Tisza received him on several occasions and according to whom Tisza offered him the position of

op. cit., pp. 325-334; Szarka: *A szlovákok ...* op. cit., pp. 148-150; Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., pp. 183-189; Szvicsényi: *Hogyan veszett ...* op. cit., pp. 68-73; Mamatey: *The Establishment ...* op. cit., pp. 9-10, 30-33; Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 40-43.

⁴⁷⁴ Szarka: *A 20. századi ...* op. cit., pp. 60-63.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 61; Rácz: *A pánszlávizmus ...* op. cit., p. 276.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid (Rácz), p. 326.

⁴⁷⁷ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 156.

⁴⁷⁸ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., p. 183.

Nationalities Minister.⁴⁷⁹ The Prime Minister, however, was not willing to offer more than what was already in the nationalities law, hence, this attempt was also doomed to failure.⁴⁸⁰

The much more modest initiative begun from the Hungarian side also died without bearing fruit. Tisza strove to have the Slovak politicians make a grandiose statement of loyalty in support of the government. The statement of loyalty prepared for August 20, 1916, then 1917, (August 20 is Saint Stephen's Day, a national holiday – *ed.*) – after resistance from the Rose Hill group (Vavro Šrobar) – was declined by the leaders of the Slovak National Party, even though the son of the founder, Jan Mudroň, was willing.⁴⁸¹

On May 17, 1917, a group of Prague writers, led by Alois Jirasek, published a manifesto. In it, Šrobar and Stodola's Vienna group achieved that the request for the unification of the Czech and Slovak territories be included.⁴⁸² Because of its importance, we quote it *verbatim*: "Resting at this historic moment on the self-determination of nations and the natural right of unfettered development, which, in our case, are reinforced by undeniable historical rights recognized by the state, standing at the forefront of our nation, we shall strive for the unification of all the branches of the Czech-Slovak nation, within the democratic Czech state, including the Slovak nation, inhabiting a contiguous territory with the Czech historical homeland."⁴⁸³

József /Joseph/ Gyönyör, in his book, points out that not a single writer signed the manifesto.⁴⁸⁴ This is an uncontestable fact but, in spite of it, it is a clear tendency that, as the war years rolled on, the Slovak political elite gradually distanced itself from any solution within Hungarian borders and tended, more and more, to see its political future within the framework of a 'to-be-created' Czechoslovakia. By the fall of 1918, any solution that was envisioned a Slovak future within Hungarian boundaries was only supported by a few second-string Slovak politicians (Jan Mudroň, Ludovít Bazovský) and Hungarian-leaning Slovak intellectuals (Adolf Pechány, Károly /Karl/ Csecsofka, István /Stephen/ Margin, Károly Bulissa, Győző /Victor/ Dvortsák).⁴⁸⁵

These internal proceedings were reinforced after 1914 by a fundamental change, the emigration of Masaryk and Benes from the Monarchy and the organization by them of the 'Czechoslovak' exiles with the avowed aim of destroying the Monarchy and creating a strong Czechoslovakia. The émigré groups were able gradually to influence the decision makers of the Entente to their views through brilliant propaganda and clever diplomacy. It meant that the territorial aspects of the Slovak question (determining the Hungarian-Slovak boundary) seemingly rose

⁴⁷⁹ Szviezsényi: *Hogyan veszett ...* op. cit., p. 69.

⁴⁸⁰ Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., p. 183.

⁴⁸¹ Szarka: *A szlovákok ...* op. cit., p. 150.

⁴⁸² Zeman: *The Break-up ...* op. cit., pp. 122-124.

⁴⁸³ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁸⁴ Gyönyör: *Határok születtek ...* op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁸⁵ Lipták: *Slovensko ...* op. cit.; Szarka: *Szlovák nemzeti ...* op. cit., p. 198.

from being an internal concern of the Monarch and, through Benes, became a global political matter. If the Slovak populated territory was annexed to the newly created Czechoslovakia, it is no longer about the ethnographic boundary between Magyars and Slovaks, not the redrawing of administrative boundaries, but the borders of a sovereign state.

In the spring of 1918, the Slovak politicians could have been considering the following four potential scenarios, and we must stress *potential*:

- (1) The creation of an independent country. This was merely a theoretical alternative because, in reality, none of the Slovak political groups dared to espouse it. Even the hard line Hlinka group only proposed it 10 years later, in 1928.
- (2) Autonomy within the bounds of a federated Monarchy. This could only happen if the Monarchy survives but the Slovak areas 'depart' from historic Hungary and 'unite' with the Czech provinces to create an independent unit. This option was no longer viable after October of 1918, with the beginning of the dissolution of the Monarchy.
- (3) Autonomy within the boundaries of Hungary. Supporters of this option were in the minority among the Slovak political elite.
- (4) Autonomy within the boundaries of a yet-to-be-created Czechoslovakia. Supporters for this option gradually came to represent the majority.

As history and the preceding portions have illustrated, the fourth option seemed to have begun its progress in the fall and winter of 1918 towards realization. In the end, though, it was a fifth scenario – written by Masaryk and Benes – that was executed, namely that Northern Hungary was annexed to a centralized Czechoslovakia. Finally, we must conclude that the fact that no official Magyar-Slovak boundary settlement existed before 1918 had tragic consequences at the Versailles Peace Conference. The Czechoslovak delegation, taking advantage of this lack, the undefined state of the Slovak-settled territory, presented territorial demands that brazenly laid claim to substantial swaths of lands populated entirely by ethnic Magyars.

1.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SECOND CONCEPT PRELIMINARIES TO SLOVENSKO

The Czechs and the Monarchy

As is apparent from the first chapter, during the first years of the war, the Czech parties and politicians (apart from the few who took part in organizing the Mafia) took a 'wait and see' attitude – see how the war progresses – and continued to pay lip service of their loyalty to the Monarchy. By the middle of the war, the Czech parties felt it necessary to form an alliance to protect their political interests. After prolonged dialogue, the nine Czech representatives to the Reichsrat formed the Czech Coalition on November 19, 1916 and, at the same time, the National Committee. They elected the Agrarian Party's Frantisek Stanek as

president of the Coalition, and the Social Democrat Vlastimil Tusař as its Secretary. The president of the 18 member Committee was the doyen of the National Party, the 80-year old dr. Karel Mattus, the secretary was from the Agrarian Party, Antonin Švehla.⁴⁸⁶

On the day of inauguration, the Coalition and the Committee issued a joint proclamation, titled *Českému národu*, in which they voiced the principles of retaining the Monarchy's integrity and the equality of every nationality. The loyalty of the Czechs, and the tone of the proclamation, is clear in the proclamation's third paragraph: "In the certain conviction ... that we act in the interest of both the glorious dynasty and the historical role of the Empire, which lies in, more than anything, the union of our kingdoms and countries, and the preservation of its indivisibility, along with the equality of every nationality ..."⁴⁸⁷

The Czech Coalition expressed its loyalty to the Monarchy several more times after November 19. While Woodrow Wilson requested a statement from the Entente combatants on January 10, 1917, for a clear statement of their war aims, among which, incidentally, they included "the liberation of the Italians, Slavs, Romanians and Czechoslovaks", the presidium of the Czech Coalition passed a statement of loyalty in Vienna on January 23. In it, they note with dejection that parliament is not in session and thus the elected representatives of the Czech nation are unable to express "the loyalty of the Czech nation towards the Austrian Empire", going on that they wish to reassure the Emperor that they will remain loyal to him and his heirs.⁴⁸⁸ A few days later, on January 31, the presidium made yet another statement of loyalty, this time in a letter to count Ottokar Czernin, Foreign Minister of the Empire, in which they emphatically state "... the Czech nation, today and in the future, as in the past, can only see its future and prospects of development under the rule of the House of Habsburg ..."⁴⁸⁹

The declarations of November 19 and January 23 put the Masaryk-Benes exiles into a delicate situation. Benes records it as: "The repeated statements of the two national bodies had no value for our movement and reinforced our concerns. Although the statement reiterates the old national program and state rights demands but it clearly states that they seek its creation within the confines of the Habsburg Empire ... Since the Czech Coalition and the National Committee contain every party, the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, Agrarians, Young Czechs and Catholics, except the Realists and the Liberals, in reality they have excluded us."⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁶ Deák J.: *A cseh-szlovák ...* op. cit., pp. 124-142; Siklós, András: *A Habsburg-birodalom felbomlása 1918* [The unraveling of the Habsburg Empire 1918]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, pp. 131-133; Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 24-29; Zeman: *The Break-up ...* op. cit., pp. 120-127, 168-176; Mamatey: *The Establishment ...* op. cit., pp. 11-12, 22-23, 31.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid (Gyönyör), p. 25.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, pp. 38-39.

In this time period, Benes used two methods to keep the behavior of those 'at home' under control. If he was able, he kept quiet about news from home that was unfavorable to the émigrés. If not, he resorted to explanations, rationalizing the behavior of those still under the Monarchy as being under tremendous pressure, or reiterating that their time has not yet come for open action against the Monarchy. All the while, Benes never ceased his behind the scenes work to win the support of the locals to the program of the émigrés. In April of 1917, he wrote a long letter to Šamal – one of the most respected local politicians – in which he sums up in seven points what the exiles abroad expect from Bohemian politicians. The letter perfectly illuminates the situation of the times, so we quote it in its entirety:

“... we definitely expect the following from you:

You can not vote for the war, the budget or the draft, in general, no part of paragraph 14: furthermore, do not vote for anything, which would serve the war effort.

Demand the liberation of the arrested representatives, their freedom to speak, an end to the treason cases, and freedom of the press. With this tactic, you can prevent parliament from being convened.

Demand that a few of you be allowed to meet with us and professor Masaryk on neutral territory to discuss the general political situation. Especially if professor Masaryk were granted amnesty and would again have the right to appear in Parliament.

Under no circumstance must you repudiate our actions or of the National Council movement.

You must make firm demands for historical state rights, without excluding the possibility of the union of Slovensko, nor take a stand beside the retention of Austria.

It is imperative that not all of our representatives attend parliament. At least the radical Czechs and Moravians should stay away. It would be impossible to explain out here why they are all there in the House of Representatives and there is no evidence of obstruction, noise or bitter fighting.

Finally, you must always bring up the problems of the Bohemian state. I mean this in the sense that the December constitution does not exist for us. Hence, it is imperative for you not to attend the Emperor's swearing in, nor take the loyalty oath. We ask you not to appear in parliament at these sorts of events, we will make sure that these actions receive the proper attention abroad.

On no account must that mistake be repeated, which we committed in 1648, no one must defend the existence of Austria. Remember that there is a revolution in Russia and Russia will transform into a republic. Lastly, we urge you to sway our soldiers: if the Slav battalions distinguish themselves on the Italian front, it will be interpreted as a sign of Austria's viability. And that would be to the detriment of our cause. Do everything you can in this matter.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol II, pp. 47-48.

Of Benes' 7-point radical wish list, very little was realized as the Bohemians were far more cautious in their politics. When it was announced that the Reichsrat for the Empire will again be convened after a long hiatus – it finally met on May 30, 1917 – Benes and the exiles received help from an unexpected source. On May 17, 222 Czech writers addressed a manifesto to the “Czech delegation to the Reichsrat” in which they asked the representatives to “be the spokesmen of our nation” and take up the cause of Czech rights and demands with conviction and altruism.⁴⁹²

Gyönyör points out that a Czech national program – for which they demanded principled action – was not worked out in any detail.⁴⁹³

At the opening session of the Reichsrat on May 30, the Czech Coalition tabled a demand for the “re-organization of the Habsburg-Lotharingian Empire into an alliance of free and equal nation states” and urged “the unification of all the branches of the Czechoslovak nation into one democratic Czech state, including the nation’s Slovak branch, who live in contiguous proximity with the historical Czech homeland.”⁴⁹⁴

In this action of demanding the rights of a state, we must stress two defining moments. This was the first appearance in an official forum, the Reichsrat, of the demand for annexation of the Slovak-populated territories. Also, that the demanded transformation was envisioned within the boundaries of the Monarchy. The parliamentary demand of May was clarified and amended by January 6, 1917 – the Feast of the Epiphany – hence, usually referred to as the declaration of the Epiphany. The Czechs demanded, on the basis of national self determination, the autonomy of the Czech and Slovak territories – within the Monarchy.⁴⁹⁵ Benes remarked on it as: “We, abroad, treated the Epiphany declaration as the first radical demonstration inside Bohemia, which expressed complete solidarity with us.”⁴⁹⁶

During the spring and summer of 1918, Czech politicians became more and more radical, as shown by these three events. At a general assembly held on April 13, Czech writer Anton Jirasek read out the ‘National Oath’ in which the Czech parties expressed their objection to a speech made by Foreign Minister Czernin, in which he made disparaging statements against the Czechs and Masaryk. On May 18, at the 50th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the National Theater, an impressive political demonstration was organized.⁴⁹⁷ And finally, on July 13, the Czechoslovak National Council was established, which declared itself the highest umbrella organization of the nation. Of the 40 members, 30 were delegated by the parties, in proportion to the mandates obtained in

⁴⁹² Kořalka: *A világpolitika* ... op. cit., p. 190; Mamatey: *The Establishment* ... op. cit., p. 22.

⁴⁹³ Gyönyör: *Határok* ... op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁹⁴ Kořalka: *A világpolitika* ... op. cit., p. 191; Zeman: *The Break-up* ... op. cit., pp. 123-127.

⁴⁹⁵ Gyönyör: *Határok* ... op. cit., pp. 32-35.

⁴⁹⁶ Beneš: *A nemzetek* ... op. cit., vol II, p. 296.

⁴⁹⁷ Gyönyör: *Határok* ... op. cit., pp. 35-36.

the 1911 elections to the Reichsrat; the remaining 10 were representatives of *Sokol*, the sciences, literature and public life. At the founding meeting, the committee accepted the 'Proclamation', which declared that "the right of self-government can not be disputed in an independent Czechoslovak state."⁴⁹⁸

As these events were unfolding, the Slovaks were becoming activists. At a May 1 meeting, a declaration was announced, thanks to Vavro Šrobar, of the intention of uniting in a common state with the Czechs. The second paragraph of the declaration stated: "We request the immediate recognition of the right of self determination of every nation as an essential and natural state, not only outside the boundaries of the Monarchy but for the people of the Austro-Hungary, specifically the Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak people."⁴⁹⁹

This is the first appearance of the expression 'Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak people'. This was of the utmost importance because the Czech papers printed it on May 3 and 4, then smuggled by the Mafia to Benes, who forwarded it to the Entente news media through his reliable sources. The émigrés were thus able to demonstrate to the Entente, that a Czechoslovak nation exists and that the 'Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak people' supports his idea of the creation of a Czechoslovakia. This was all the more important because the Austro-Hungarian propaganda was doing its utmost to describe the activities of Masaryk and Benes as the actions of a group of opportunist, with no support in⁵⁰⁰ Bohemia or the Slovak populated areas.

It can be clearly seen that the behavior of the Bohemian politicians during the first three years of the war created extreme difficulties for the Masaryk-Benes émigré group, primarily their multiple protestations of loyalty to the House of Habsburg. On that topic, he wrote: "... up until the May 1917 writers' manifesto, the Bohemian politicians gave us a lot of headaches ... Not infrequently did our allies (the Entente – *auth.*) ask the question, at the behavior of our parties (the Czech parties – *auth.*), whether we are not the representatives of an extreme faction – and not the articulators of the real aspirations and goals of the entire nation, – whether at the crucial moment the nation will be with us and whether we have the right to speak on behalf of the whole nation in the allied countries."⁵⁰¹

In May of 1917, a new direction was beginning to take form among the Czech politicians – although statements of loyalty to the Habsburgs continued – in that they began to attack Dualism more and more openly, becoming more vehement in urging an internal federative re-organization. The new element making its appearance is that the talk has passed the autonomy of Bohemia and Moravia within the Empire and the idea of a Czech-Slovak union slowly takes hold, within the parameters of uniting the lands of the Czech crown with the Slovak populated territory into one

⁴⁹⁸ Mamatey: *The Establishment* ... op. cit., p. 22.

⁴⁹⁹ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 166; Marian Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon 1918-1920*. Bratislava, 1998, pp. 43-52.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 166.

⁵⁰¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek* ... op. cit., vol II, p. 40.

country. After May 1, 1918, they receive Slovak support for the idea. After May of 1917, Benes could probably follow the events at home with growing cheer, as the statements of loyalty became rarer as events unfolded, and the position taken at home began to mirror more and more the program of the exiles. Of course, this was not accidental, as the Bohemians kept in close contact with the émigrés through the Mafia. In our opinion, the Bohemian political direction began to change toward the Benes course when America entered the war and the Entente powers recognized the National Council. The Czech political parties were assured that the Czech question was no longer looked upon as an internal question of the Monarchy but an international issue, which formed an integral part of the Entente's was objectives.⁵⁰²

September to November – the birth of Czechoslovakia

As we saw at the end of the chapter dealing with the diplomatic efforts of Benes, the French government was first to recognize officially the Czechoslovak National Council as a *de facto* government on June 29, 1918, followed by the British government on August 9, and finally the USA on September 3. Subsequent to them, Benes was in negotiations with the French Foreign Ministry during the first week of September, resulting in the “agreement between the French Republic and the Czechoslovak National Council regarding the position of the Czechoslovak nation in France” on September 10.⁵⁰³

The agreement reiterates France's recognition of the National Council as the *de facto* government but two new elements were included in the wording, according to Benes' wishes. One new development was in article 2, in which France “undertakes to continue to provide aid to the Czechoslovak nation to regain its freedom, to the restoration of the Czechoslovak state and its creation within its historic boundaries.”⁵⁰⁴ Another was in article 4, which stated that “The French Republic acknowledges the right of the Czechoslovak nation to represent itself at all Allied conferences at which questions will be discussed regarding the interests of Czechoslovakia.”⁵⁰⁵

The two quotations clearly show that Benes was attempting, along with gaining official recognition, to project an impression of the territorial make-up of the yet-to-be Czechoslovakia, as well as ensuring their presence at the forums where the important decisions will be made.

In September, Benes began to work on the creation of the provisional government, initially targeted for November 8 – the anniversary of the battle of White Mountain, so tragic an outcome for the Czechs – but, due to the speed of events, it occurred sooner. Benes synchronized the plans regarding the composition of the government with Masaryk, who was in America at the time, in a telegram (receiving Masaryk's instruction on September 26), while he informed those Prague in a long letter, dated

⁵⁰² Deák J.: *A cseh-szlovák egység ...* op. cit., pp. 125-126.

⁵⁰³ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, pp. 71-72.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

September 11.⁵⁰⁶ The Prague politicians debated the contents of the letter on September 29 and concurred with the formation of the government. In the meantime, military and diplomatic events were taking a direction favorable to the Masaryk-Benes program. On September 14, István Burián, Foreign Minister of the Monarchy, sent a diplomatic note to the belligerent nations, asking for "... representatives be sent to a neutral foreign country for the purpose of confidential and non-binding discussion of the principles of peace negotiations."⁵⁰⁷ Balfour, for England, rejected the feelers on September 16, Clemenceau in the name of France on the following day, and Robert Lansing, Secretary of State of America, took the same position.⁵⁰⁸ On September 25, Bulgaria sued for peace, signing an armistice with the Entente in Salonika on September 29. The road North to the Austro-Hungarian border became unopposed along the Entente's Balkan front.⁵⁰⁹ On October 5, the German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish governments sent a diplomatic note to President Wilson with a request for peace negotiations. The note offered an armistice, to be followed immediately by peace discussions, based on the principles of Wilson's Points.⁵¹⁰ Lansing replied to Germany on October 8, on behalf of America, in which he stated that, while Central Power forces were occupying territories of America's allies, America could not open negotiations.⁵¹¹ It must be noted that America had not yet responded to the Monarchy. That took place on October 18. Secretary Lansing suggested to Wilson that Germany and the Monarchy be treated differently. "The German population can be convinced that, if they accept a democratic form of government, they can avoid an invasion of foreign troops and complete collapse. Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, must cede it place to new nations"- he said.⁵¹²

Benes watched the unfolding events with increased concern and trepidation, writing: "We were in uncertainty, not knowing the reason for Wilson's sharp reply to the German government, while no mention of his intention with Austria-Hungary. We, and our friends, were beginning to worry. Many in the Paris circle did not expect that Wilson would treat the Habsburgs harsher than the Hohenzollerns."⁵¹³

During these days, Benes was concerned that Wilson – or more precisely, the Entente – would have mercy on the Monarchy. In a letter to Masaryk, dated October 10, 1918, Benes counsels that the formation of the Czechoslovak government should be announced immediately, ministers named and ambassadors dispatched to the Entente countries (Benes made

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 73-77.

⁵⁰⁷ Rubint, Dezső: *Az összeomlás* [The collapse]. Budapest, 1922, pp. 302-305.

⁵⁰⁸ Galántai, József: *Az első világháború* [The first world war]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1980, p. 471.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 473-474.

⁵¹⁰ Rubint: *Az összeomlás* ... op. cit. p. 306.

⁵¹¹ Galántai, József: *Az első* ... op. cit., p. 479.

⁵¹² Jean-Baptiste Duroselle: *From Wilson to Roosevelt, Foreign Policy of the United States, 1913-1945*. New York and Evaston, 1968, p. 68.

⁵¹³ Beneš: *A nemzetek* ... op. cit., vol III, p. 106.

recommendations for the ministerial and ambassadorial posts, which Masaryk accepted in whole).⁵¹⁴ After Masaryk's blessing of Benes' recommendations, Benes sent notes to the Entente governments at 6PM on October 14, announcing the formation, with the approval of the President of the Czechoslovak National Council, Masaryk, of the Provisional Czechoslovak government, in Paris. The President, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance positions were held by Masaryk, those of Minister of Internal and External Affairs by Benes, Štefanik became Minister of War. On the same day, Benes, as Foreign Minister of one day, appointed the ambassadors of the provisional government (more precisely its agents) to the Entente capitals: Štefan Osuský to London, Lev Sychrava to Paris, Lev Borsky to Rome, Karel Pergler to Washington, and Bohdan Pavlu to Russia.⁵¹⁵

Benes reported the action in a telegram to Masaryk, who, on October 18 made public in Washington the 'Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence'.⁵¹⁶

Emperor Charles IV made an attempt to save the Monarchy when, in an Imperial edict of October 16, he declared the Monarchy to be a federative state. According to the manifesto, every 'tribe' forms an independent state unit of lands settled by them. The national councils of the various nations will take part in the creation of the federative state.⁵¹⁷ The manifesto was too little, too late; the Entente powers were uninfluenced, while the nationalities rejected the mixed proposal as unacceptable. In these circumstances, the *fait accompli* policies of Benes bore fruit. France recognized the Czechoslovak Provisional Government on October 15, Britain and Italy on October 23. While these were proceeding, America's reply to the Monarchy was drafted on October 18, in which Lansing stated that the Wilsonian 14 Points could not form the basis of peace negotiations with the Monarchy: "The President feels it his duty to inform the Austro-Hungarian government that he can not consider this government's suggestion because, since his letter of January 8, certain momentous events have taken place, which, of necessity, altered the capability and responsibility of the United States government."⁵¹⁸

In his memoirs, Benes remarked on this note as "Wilson delivered the *coup de grace* to the Habsburg Monarchy", and he was absolutely right. Wilson was willing to negotiate with the German government – if they forego the influence of the Kaiser and the military, and become a parliamentary system – treating it as the representative of the people, while

⁵¹⁴ Hadler: *Weg von ...* op. cit., pp. 533-534.

⁵¹⁵ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 110.

⁵¹⁶ George J. Kovtun: *Masaryk and America. Testimony of relationship.* Washington, 1988.

⁵¹⁷ Romsics, Ignác (ed.): *Magyar történeti szöveggyűjtemény 1914-1999* [Collected Hungarian historical manuscripts]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2000, vol I, pp. 58-59.

⁵¹⁸ Rubint: *Az összeomlás ...* op. cit. p. 308.

refusing talks with the Monarchy's central government. Wilson, it seems, made Lansing's point of view completely his own.⁵¹⁹

Under the external disasters, the internal cohesion of the Monarchy fell apart.⁵²⁰ On October 5-6, the 'Slovene, Croat and Serb National Council' was formed in Zagreb, which drafted and accepted a temporary constitution two weeks later, and created an executive committee that acted as a government body. On October 11, the Polish representatives of the Reichsrat announced that Galicia is deemed to be a province under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Polish National Council of Krakow. There was a general strike in Prague on October 14, resulting in the power within Bohemia being assumed by the Prague National Council. On October 16, the Hungarian government and Parliament announced that its relationship with Vienna is strictly on the basis of a monarchic personal union. In effect, Benes' program of "Demolish Austria-Hungary" essentially became the reality during the month of October.

On October 17, Benes sent a message to Prague, through Switzerland, asking that a delegation of politicians travel to Geneva, as soon as possible, to harmonize the future actions with the Parisian Czechoslovak government.⁵²¹ František Stanek and Vlastimil Tusař – Czech representatives in the Reichsrat – requested passports for 20 people from the Vienna Foreign Ministry. The Ministry, although it knew of the real reason for the trip, issued the passports within two weeks. The delegation of the Czechoslovak National Council (Karel Kramař, Václav Klofač, František Staněk, Antonín Kalina, Gustav Habram, Přemysl Samal, Jaroslav Preiss, and Karel Svoboda) left Vienna for Switzerland on October 25, with the knowledge and permission of the Austrian authorities, by train.⁵²² The delegation met with Benes between October 28 and 30 in the Beau Rivage Hotel.⁵²³ Three documents remain of their meetings: minutes of the meetings, a letter and a proclamation of the Czechoslovak state's program.⁵²⁴

The minutes record that the delegation heard Benes' detailed report of the work of the émigrés, the historical development of the independent

⁵¹⁹ Taraszovics, Sándor: *Amerikai béke-előkészületek az I. világháború alatt és tervek az új Magyarországról* [American peace preparations during the First World War and plans for a new Hungary]. In: *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. században*. Teleki László Alapítvány, Budapest, 1995.

⁵²⁰ Zeman: *The Break-up of ...* op. cit., pp. 217-246; Siklós: *A Habsburg-birodalom ...* op. cit., pp. 126-139; Zöllner: *Ausztria ...* op. cit., pp. 370-376; Palotás, Emil: *Kelet-Európa története a 20. század első felében* [History of Eastern Europe in the first half of the 20th century]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2003, pp. 138-218; Piotr S. Wandycz: *A szabadság ára. Kelet-Közép Európa története a középkortól máig* [The price of freedom. History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to today]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2004, pp. 182-186. old.

⁵²¹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 124.

⁵²² Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., p. 50.

⁵²³ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 54-55; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 34-35; Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, pp. 126-140.

⁵²⁴ Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 53-55.

Czechoslovak state and the standpoint of the Entente powers on the Czechoslovak affair. Of the meetings, Benes wrote: "I presented the position that the allies had at different times with regard to the Austro-Hungarian problem, that today they are essentially in agreement in the final goals... I reviewed in detail the state of our movement, our political and military organization, the inner state and problems of the emigration, I recounted the Dürich affair, sketched the circumstances of the army, the situation of our Siberian units, and the progress being made towards our political and legal recognition. I informed them of our methods, our propaganda efforts, showed them our communiqués, the books, maps and journals, the official documents of the National Council and the provisional government, the diplomatic notes and the text of the responses... I covered the prior French, British and American acts of recognition, explaining their importance, the agreements signed with France and Britain, and the documents recognizing the established country and government."⁵²⁵

Afterwards, it is not surprising that the delegation approved the work of the National Council and its transformation into the provisional government. In the next phase of the dialogue, they came to an agreement of the territorial demands for the Czechoslovak state and the outlines of its foreign policy.⁵²⁶ During the dialogue, they agreed that Czechoslovakia must receive, beside the historical provinces, Austrian Silesia, the Sudetenland, Slovakia, with some correction to their existing borders to the benefit of the new state. They also maintained a need for the Czechoslovak – Yugoslav corridor. With regards to foreign policy, they laid down some important premises. For one, they agreed that, for the moment, Czechoslovakia will not enter into a confederation with any states that constitute the newly re-organized Central Europe. For another, they stated their opposition to the continued existence of the Habsburg Monarchy, in any form or variation. Finally, they agreed not to support Poland's claims to Russian territories. This position had long term effects on Czechoslovakia's foreign policy toward Poland and Russia.

We must agree with Mária Olmos, who posits that the principles of the Geneva conference, in essence, laid out the vision for a Czechoslovak led Central Europe. In this plan, Czechoslovakia relied on Yugoslavia for support, in European matters on the Entente, mainly France.⁵²⁷ The information recorded in the minutes was made public through a proclamation. In it, they declared that the Czechoslovak nation wants to live in a free and independent state within its historical boundaries and "once and for all wishes to sever all ties with Vienna and Budapest."⁵²⁸ They went on to categorically state that "there is not, and never shall be, any tie between the nation and the Habsburg dynasty."⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 129.

⁵²⁶ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 56-57.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 53-54.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

Beside the foreign policy questions, an important topic of the meeting was the provisional internal politics.⁵³⁰ Agreement was reached that the new country will be a republic – Kramář's plan for a kingdom swiftly swept off the agenda – with Masaryk as president. There was quick agreement regarding the new government to consist of 14 ministries, Karel Kramář to hold the post of Prime Minister. Two ministers of the provisional government in Paris retained their previous portfolios (Benes as Foreign Minister and Štefanik as Minister of Defense), while the other 12 posts went to Prague politicians. The closing act of the Geneva meeting was the composition of a letter addressed to Benes, as Foreign Minister, in which the delegation expressed its thanks for his tireless work and ensured him of their continued confidence.⁵³¹ The Kramář government was assembled in Prague on November 14.

While the Geneva meetings were under way, there was a huge public demonstration in Prague on October 28, following which all power was assumed by the National Council, which announced on the same evening – 10PM to be exact – the passing of the so called 'First Act', announcing the official creation of Czechoslovakia.

At the end of October, Benes could look on two tremendous achievements: the creation of independent Czechoslovakia and his assumption of the post of Foreign Minister.

November to January – political *fait accompli*

Due to the Geneva conference, Benes only arrived in Paris on November 1, 1918.⁵³² This time, however, he missed an important event. The Entente diplomats finalized on October 31 the text of the armistice with the Monarchy, and there was no mention of Czechoslovakia. This is realistic, as a truce can only apply to sections of a front, and only existing fronts, at that. More than likely, Benes was aware of this, however, he saw the danger in that the Czechoslovak government might not be invited to the conference discussing the armistice terms. He wrote: "This I thought to be a serious thing; in effect, our national interests may have suffered an injury in the wording of the armistice terms, in form, in regard to our legal position. I was especially worried that our allies will interpret our absence at later conferences as a precedent."⁵³³ He swung into immediate action, visiting Berthelot in the French Foreign Ministry on the morning of the 2nd and asked for permission for the representatives of Czechoslovakia to be present at the truce conferences with the Central Powers. On November 3, he wrote a letter to Clemenceau saying that "the question of the upcoming armistice with Austria-Hungary is particularly important for us, as there are still many questions for both sides awaiting answers, which would be advantageous – both in the interest of the allies and our country – for us to present our case. Thus, I think, our presence at the discussions – in light of

⁵³⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol III, pp. 133-140.

⁵³¹ Gyönyör: *Határok ... op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁵³² Beneš: *A nemzetek ... op. cit.*, vol III, pp. 180.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

the mutual interests – is desirable, even after the signing of the armistice.”⁵³⁴

The French acknowledged his request and he was able to take part, as Czechoslovakia’s representative, at the November 2 and 4 meetings of the Supreme Military Council, where the details of the armistice text with the Germans was debated.⁵³⁵ At the November 2 meeting, he made known the Czechoslovak demands formulated in Geneva. On November 6, he presented these demands in writing to the French government.⁵³⁶ The first point of the note was his wish to have the prisoners-of-war held in France and Italy transported home immediately and permission for the Czech army to occupy Slovakia, which was being threatened by Bolshevism. The southern boundary of Slovakia he defined as the Pozsony-Komárom-Esztergom-Vác-Rimaszombat-Kassa-Csap-Máramarossziget line.

In his next letter to Clemenceau, on November 7, Benes amended this with the assurance of access to a sea for Czechoslovakia.⁵³⁷

Beginning in November of 1918, one of the chief problems for Benes is the Slovak question. In the November 6 issue of the London *Times*, Benes made the statement that the Czechs must occupy Slovakia. This he justified with the threat of Bolshevism in Hungary, which could easily spread toward the West, endangering the Entente countries, as well. “In this, *fait accompli* will decide” – wrote Benes.⁵³⁸ In the meantime, the Hungarian government changed its tactics, due to a change in circumstances, from threats and coercion to a policy of concessions. In a move to appease the Slovaks and solidify its position within Hungary, the government decided to grant the request for convening the Slovak National Party’s political assembly. Hence, the Slovak representatives were allowed to meet on October 30 in Turócszentmárton. The assembled represented the Slovak National Party, the Slovak People’s Party and the Slovak Social Democratic Party – 200 in all, although only 103 signed the attendance roll – in the council chamber of the Tatra Bank.⁵³⁹ According to some of their professions, there were 15 lawyers, 4 priests or clergymen, 13 industrialists or businessmen, 13 office workers, 7 farmers, 7 college students, 5 bank directors, 5 manual workers, 4 doctors, 3 self employed, 3 architects and 3

⁵³⁴ *Francia diplomáciai iratok a Kárpát-medence történetéről 1918-1919* [French diplomatic documents of the history of the Carpathian basin 1918-1919]. Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999, p. 3.

⁵³⁵ Beneš sent a report to Prague to the Czechoslovak National Council, recounting his discussion in the early days of November in Paris. Jindřich Dejmek and Frantisek Kolař (eds.): *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918-1920*. Svazek I, Praha, 2001, vol A/2/1, doc 4, pp. 56-58.

⁵³⁶ *Francia diplomáciai ...* op. cit., pp. 5-9.

⁵³⁷ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., p. 57.

⁵³⁸ Boros, Ferenc: *Magyar-csehszlovák kapcsolatok 1918-1921-ben* [Hungarian-Czechoslovak relationships in 1918-1921]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1970, p. 42.

⁵³⁹ Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit., pp. 43-53; Gyönyör: *Határok ...* op. cit., pp. 93-100.

teachers.⁵⁴⁰ The assembly was unaware that Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in Prague on the evening of the 28th.⁵⁴¹ The delegates elected the Slovak National Council and accepted the Declaration, in which they declared:

“... in the name of the Czech-Slovak nation living within the boundaries of Hungary, only we are entitled to make official statements or act on their behalf. The Hungarian government is not entitled as, for generations it knew no task more important than to oppress everything that is Slovak, did not establish nor grant permission to our nation for a single school, did not permit that Slovaks should get into public administration or offices, with its feudal system and policies it economically ruined and exploited our people ... In the name of the Slovaks of Slovakia, only the Slovak National Council is entitled to make declarations.

The National Council of Czechs and Slovaks living in Hungary declares:

The Slovak nation is a part of the unified Czechoslovak nation, both linguistically and from a cultural-historical perspective. In every cultural battle, which the Czech nation has fought and for which it became known in the whole world, the Slovak branch has also taken part.

For this Czech-Slovak nation, we also demand the unrestricted right of self-determination based on complete independence. We demand an immediate armistice, one based on universal Christian principles, so that peace can be established, a peace with international legal assurances that will prevent future wars and continued armaments.

We are convinced that our ambitious and talented Slovak people, who have risen to such a peak of culture in spite of the incredible oppression, will not be shut out of the blessing of the peace and the brotherhood of nations but will have an opportunity to develop according to its character and contribute, according to its capability, to the universal progress of mankind.”⁵⁴²

The declaration originally consisted of four, not three, points. The fourth point read: “We await the solution of the Slovak question from the peace conference, which will determine the fate of our nation. Therefore, we demand that the Hungarian branch of the Czech-Slovak nation be also represented at the upcoming peace congress.” On the evening of October 30, when some of the representatives were already on the way home, Milan Hodža arrived in Turócszentmárton, announcing the news: Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in Prague.⁵⁴³ On hearing it, a smaller group sat down and corrected the text of the declaration in two places. Firstly, they omitted

⁵⁴⁰ The names, occupations and the name of their settlement are given in Szviezsényi: *Hogyan veszett ...* op. cit., pp. 75-76.

⁵⁴¹ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 171.

⁵⁴² *Magyar Történeti Szöveggyűjtemény 1914-1999* [Collected Hungarian historical documents 1914-1999]. vol I, p. 66.

⁵⁴³ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 172.

point four, and second, they appended a sentence to point two, reading: “On the basis of this principle, we agree with the newly manifest international legal situation which President Wilson drafted on October 18, 1918 and was accepted by the Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary on October 27, 1918.”

According to Dušan Kovač, both amendments were based on logical decisions.⁵⁴⁴ Through the Declaration, the Slovaks voted for an independent Czechoslovakia, opening communication with Prague following the Turócszentmárton conference, then forming a provisional government under Vavro Šrobár on November 5. This is usually referred to as the Szakolca government, from the place of its formation.⁵⁴⁵ Among the first acts of this short lived government was the invitation of Czech forces into Slovakia. With the formation of the Kramář government on November 14, the Szakolca government ceased and Šrobár became a member of the Prague government as Minister in charge of Slovakia’s administration. He was vested by Prague with absolute powers with “maintaining order, consolidation of conditions and ensuring an orderly government.”⁵⁴⁶

The first Czech military units wasted no time, entering Northern Hungary on November 2 (a Lt. Ripka occupied the village of Malacka with 130 men). On November 8, under former Austrian general Stik, further Czech interventionist units were dispatched to Northern Hungary.⁵⁴⁷ These units were easily repulsed by the Hungarian units stationed in Northern Hungary, so that Szakolca Slovak government’s control extended only over a minute area. Mihály Károlyi, Hungary’s Prime Minister since October 31, sent a diplomatic note on November 11 to Prague, strongly objecting to the incursion, and presence, of Czech troops in Northern Hungary. The letter was answered on November 14 by Kramář, pointing out to the Hungarian government that the Entente powers have recognized Czechoslovakia and in the event of being attacked, the Entente’s assistance will be sought. Kramář also objected to the Hungarian government’s interference into the domestic matters of Slovakia, asking the Hungarian government to issue orders not to offer resistance to Czechoslovak forces in Slovakia.⁵⁴⁸

While these political and military events were going on, Prime Minister Károlyi was taking steps attempting to preserve Hungary’s territorial integrity. On November 13, he signed a military letter of understanding in Belgrade with the commander of the French Balkan forces, General Franchet d’Esperey. The pact ensured a southern line of

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ For the members of the provisional government, see Szviezsényi: *Hogyan veszett ...* op. cit., p. 85.

⁵⁴⁶ Vavro Šrobár: *Osvobozené Slovensko. Pameti z rokov 1918-1920*. Praha, 1928.

⁵⁴⁷ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 42; Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit., pp. 97-99; Marian Hronský: *Priebeh vojenského obsadzovania Slovenska ceskoslovenskym vojsom od novembra 1918 do januara 1919*. HC 32, 1984, p. 734.

⁵⁴⁸ Jindřich Dejmeš – Frantisek Kolař (eds.): *Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918-1920*. Svazek I. Praha, 2001, pp. 66-67.

demarcation, running along the Drava River to the Maros-Tisza confluence and on East to Beszterce /Bystrica/. He was even more successful in the case of Northern Hungary as the pact made no mention of any line of demarcation. In fact, point 17 of the pact stated that, with the exception of Croatia and Slavonia, the Hungarian territories are, for the time being, to remain under Hungarian administration.⁵⁴⁹

For signing the Belgrade pact, Károlyi is still the subject of heated debate from politicians and historians on the grounds that: why did he have to sign this pact when the armistice signed in Padua was binding for all the active fronts of the Monarchy, including the Balkan.⁵⁵⁰ In assessing the problems with the Belgrade pact, we feel Mária Ormos's interpretation is correct in that Károlyi's action was governed by the principle of trying to stabilize the country's borders, obtaining a guarantee of the Great Powers for this *status quo* and avoiding occupation of the rim areas (Northern Hungary, Transylvania and Southern Hungary) by the 'smaller powers' (Romanians, Czechs, Serbs). All the while, he would negotiate, and reach agreements, with the nations who wanted to secede. Through these means, having gained time, he hoped to take part in the peace conference with consolidated circumstances that would result in the least loss of territory to Hungary.⁵⁵¹

In early November, it seemed as if Károlyi's logic was correct: at the time, there was no Czech army in 'Czechoslovakia,' the Romanians have not yet re-entered the war and the Serbs had not crossed the Monarchy's border. These conditions point favorably to Hungarian government efforts to fix a *status quo* while in a relatively advantageous position. Károlyi was justified in thinking that, having signed the Belgrade pact, he had, in fact, obtained assurances from the belligerent powers for the situation described therein. According to that interpretation, the Károlyi-government continued to try and maintain its control over Northern Hungary, its military forces expelling the Czech troops during the month of November. In this situation, the idea arose among the Slovak political leaders to negotiate with the Hungarian government. At the November 16-17 sitting of the Slovak National Council, a heated debate broke out over negotiating with Hungary, several leading politicians (Ivanka, Derer, Markovič, Hodža) supporting the idea.⁵⁵²

While the Slovak politicians put out feelers toward Budapest, the Belgrade pact and the military successes in Northern Hungary instilled panic in Prague. Kramař, in his November 15 letter to Benes, assesses the

⁵⁴⁹ Ormos: *Padovától ... op. cit.*, pp. 59-74.

⁵⁵⁰ Gosztonyi, Péter: *Károlyi Mihály mai szemmel* [Mihály Károlyi, as seen today]. In: *Politikusok, katonák, események. Adalékok Magyarország és a kelet-európai népek legújabb történelméhez*. Herp Nyomda, Munich, no date.

⁵⁵¹ Ormos: *Padovától ... op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁵² Šrobar notes in his memoirs that, during these days, the politicians debated whether Slovakia should, after all, come to an agreement with Hungary and its own autonomy. Šrobar: *Osvobozené ... op. cit.*, pp. 252-253.

situation as grave, saying: "... we have no forces to defend Slovakia."⁵⁵³ Károlyi again raises objections with the Prague government on November 17 against the occupation of Northern Hungary, citing the pact of November 13. Kramář's reply of November 19 states that the recognition of the Czechoslovak Republic pre-dates the pact and its non-negotiable part is the Slovak-populated area. Hence, the Hungarian government cannot sign a treaty which has jurisdiction over Czechoslovakia, or its parts. The peace conference will have no further work but to decide on minor border revisions, the affiliation of Slovensko having been already decided.⁵⁵⁴

At the same time as sending a note to Budapest, the Prague government issued an informational communiqué for the benefit of the Slovak National Council. In it, it draws attention to the actions abroad of the Hungarian government where it is doing everything in its power to prove its intention to come to an agreement with the Slovaks and that it is able to create a *modus vivendi* within its current boundaries. It drew attention to this 'dangerous' Hungarian tactic and categorically directs the Slovak National Council to avoid any economic, political or diplomatic talks with the Magyars, as they will try to make use of it in foreign arenas. It then goes on to say that the Czechoslovak army will, on the basis of Entente agreement, occupy Slovakia. The communiqué asserts that the Czechoslovak army, part of the 'allied' forces, has a legal right for the occupation. It considers the Magyar irredentist activities, and the attendant 'pressure,' as temporary and which can only inflict minor damage. The Czechoslovak government considers it an important and fundamental task to gather data on the past 'deeds' of the Magyars, to be able to prove oppression against the nation at the peace conference. In this task, it asks for the unreserved help of the Slovak National Council. It also asks that the Slovak National Council extend its sphere of authority over Szepes, Sáros, Zemplén, Abaúj and Ungvár counties, as well.⁵⁵⁵

Kramář wrote another letter to Benes on November 24, asking for straightforward action from him. He wrote, "It is high time that we take the administration of the whole country into our hands, without delay ... Britain, France, America and Italy have recognized the Czechoslovak state, therefore, the Slovak territories no longer belong to the Magyars."⁵⁵⁶

Benes recalls these November days, so dangerous for Czechoslovakia "I was bombarded by Kramář's letters, telegrams, couriers. The Prime Minister informed me of these military and political events and urged my immediate intervention. Paris became the center of the fight for Slovensko. From the middle of November, my days were filled with arguments,

⁵⁵³ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 44; Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 217.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid (Boros), p. 43.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

⁵⁵⁶ Frank Hadler: *A prágai kormány fait accompli politikája a Szlovákiáért folytatott küzdelemben 1918 végén* [The *fait accompli* politics of the Prague government in the struggle for Slovakia at the end of 1918]. In: *Szabadelvű Unió*, 1990, Winter, pp. 21-24.

intercessions, explanations and meetings at the offices of the military and political heavyweights. Most importantly, I discussed the matter with Berthelot, the leading Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry... then with Pichon, the Foreign Minister and Marshall Foch... I made appearances at the British and the Americans...”⁵⁵⁷

The first tangible step of Benes was to launch an attack against the Belgrade military pact.⁵⁵⁸ Benes argued at his rounds of meetings that Hungary, as a newly created state, does not possess internationally accepted legal status. Insofar as Entente military circles are in contact with the organs of the Hungarian government, it can only be for the purpose of maintaining public order and local administration and can not transcend a limited, local agreement. No political or legal precedent can be construed from these formal contacts. Based on his memoir entries, between November 20 and 27, he drew a line on a propaganda map up to which, in his opinion, the Czechoslovak army should advance. He wrote: “The line I drew followed the Carpathians, the Morva River, the Danube, all the way to the mouth of the Ipoly /Ipeľ/ River, up the Ipoly to the area of Rimaszombat /Rimavská Sobota/, from here in a straight line to the confluence of the Bereg and Ung /Uh/ Rivers, following this river up into the Carpathians. The territory behind this line I wish for us...”⁵⁵⁹

On November 25, Benes wrote a letter to the French Foreign Ministry, in which he expounded that Czechoslovak troops occupied Northern Hungary because the Allies recognized Czechoslovakia as an allied state and it is an impossibility that a truce (the Belgrade pact) by a French general (hinting at Franchet d’Esperey) endows an enemy state (meaning Hungary) with rights, on the territory of an allied country (i.e., Czechoslovakia).⁵⁶⁰

Foreign Minister Pichon replied on the 27th, saying “Considering that count Károlyi has drawn an entirely faulty conclusion from this truce, which was nothing more than an existing, but not legally binding, agreement with the local authorities and which in no way alters the terms of the November 3 armistice. I am fortunate to be able to tell You that the Minister of War has sent a telegram to the high command of the Allied eastern front, with precise instructions. In confidence, I can tell you that the instructions order the Hungarian units to immediately withdraw from the territory they have wrongly occupied...”⁵⁶¹

Through this Paris feat of Benes, the French Foreign Ministry let Franchet d’Esperey know, in no uncertain terms, that he acted improperly, as he had no authority to recognize, and treat with, the new Hungarian state and its government, which was, at that time, acting merely as local authority. In his update to the French ambassador, Minister Pichon stated: “Czechoslovakia has the right to occupy the Slovak territory, as

⁵⁵⁷ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 218.

⁵⁵⁸ Zeman-Klíma: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 34-38; Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 71-96.

⁵⁵⁹ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 219.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 220.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 221.

Czechoslovakia has been recognized as an allied country.”⁵⁶² Pichon expounded at length that, in Paris’ view, the Belgrade pact was nothing more than an honest mistake by a general, which the malicious Mihály Károlyi chose to interpret as *de facto* recognition of the Hungarian government. Károlyi cleverly wanted to confer on the pact the status of an armistice and, on that basis, dispatched troops to Slovakia, wanted to establish diplomatic relationship with Germany and named an ambassador to Switzerland. Interpreting the situation from this perspective, Paris decided to repudiate the Belgrade pact, sentencing Károlyi’s notion of creating a *status quo* to failure. In due course, Franchet d’Esperey sent a letter on December 3 to Károlyi, *via* Lt.Col. Ferdinand Vix, in which he instructed the Hungarian government to immediately withdraw its forces “from Slovak territories.”⁵⁶³

The December 3 note caused new problems, as it did not precisely specify what was to be meant as ‘Slovak territory.’ This impasse was broken with the aid of Milan Hodža, who happened to be in Budapest. He had traveled to Budapest on November 25 to begin negotiations with the Hungarian government.⁵⁶⁴ In fact, at Hodža’s request, the executive committee of the Slovak National Council traveled to Budapest. Thus, Hodža began his negotiations in the presence of six leading Slovak politicians.⁵⁶⁵ Hodža’s initial negotiating mandate only covered the winding up of Hungarian public administration in Northern Hungary and affairs concerning the withdrawal of Hungarian armed forces but Oszkár Jászi – as Minister of Nationalities – made an offer of autonomy to Hodža and the group. According to the Jászi plan, the ‘Slovak Imperia’ was to include five entire and 10 partial counties under Slovak authority. The five unquestionably Slovak counties were Árva /Orava/ (75.0% Slovak), Liptó /Liptov/ (89.9%), Trencsén /Trenčín/ (91.7%) and Zolyóm /Zvolen/ (84.8%). Most of three counties (Nyitra /Nitriansky/ (excepting one district and Érsekújvár /Nové Zámky/), Sáros /Šariš/ (without one district), Szepes /Spisske/ (without Gölnichánya /Gelnica/ and one district)), with minor exceptions, were also to be ceded. Seven partial counties were also put on offer: three districts of Pozsony county (but the city of Pozsony itself would have remained in Hungarian hands), three districts from Bars /Tekovske/ county, two from Hont, two from Nógrád /Novohradske/, four from Gömör-Kishont /Gemer a Malohont/, four from Zemplén /Zemplin/

⁵⁶² Pichon’s letter was addressed to the French ambassadors in London, Bern, Brussels, Rome and Washington. (*Francia diplomáciai ...* op. cit., pp. 23-24.)

⁵⁶³ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁶⁴ Fogarassy, László: *Hodza Milán és a Károlyi-kormány* [Milan Hodža and the Károlyi government]. *Palócföld*, 1990, issue 5, pp. 72-87; Šrobár: *Osvobozené ...* op. cit., pp. 317-323; Jászi Oszkár *a szlovákokkal való megegyezés lehetőségeiről* [Oszkár Jászi on the possibilities of compromise with the Slovaks]. In: *Duna-völgyi barátságok és viták. Jászi Oszkár közép-európai dossziéja*. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1991, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁶⁵ Hodža sent a report to the Foreign Ministry in Prague, reporting on his negotiation with Károlyi and Jászi. (Dejmek-Kolař (eds.): *Československo ...* op. cit., pp. 85-87.)

and one from Ung /Užská/ to be annexed. Under this plan, Hungary would have retained the counties of Abaúj-Torna /Abaúj/ (78% Magyar, 18.7% Slovak) Kassa /Košice/ (75.4% Magyar, 14.8% Slovak) (see map 4). In this independent Slovak 'Empire,' the Slovak National Council would exercise almost sole authority; in common matters, the two appropriate bodies would decide together.⁵⁶⁶

The intervention of the Czechoslovak government brought these tempting talks to an abrupt halt. On November 30, they instructed Hodža to immediately suspend the talks and, in a statement published the next day, stated that "He (Hodža – *auth.*) never had authorization to conduct political or military discussions with the government of Hungary."⁵⁶⁷ In spite of his government's repudiation of his role, Hodža remained in Budapest. The French note of December 3rd again put him in a bind. He turned to Col. Vix on the 4th and pointed out that, unless the boundary to which Hungarian forces must withdraw is defined, problems will be encountered. Two days later, Hodža addressed a letter to Benes in Paris, asking him to take steps in the matter of determining Slovakia's borders. Benes recounts this letter in his memoirs: "In his letter, Hodža urged the immediate occupation of Pozsony and a strip South of the Danube, the railroads, along with Galánta, Érsekújvár and Komárom, all along the Danube to the Ipoly, then the Ipoly region with Balassagyarmat, Losonc /Lučenec/, Salgótarján, Rimaszombat /Rimavská Sobota/, Nagyrőce /Revúca/, Kassa /Košice/ and from there due South in a straight line towards Csap /Čop/ and Ungvár /Užhorod/."⁵⁶⁸

But Hodža did not wait for an answer from Benes, instead coming to an agreement on a line of demarcation with the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Béla Bartha. The Bartha-Hodža line lay North of the upper Danube to the Ipoly and Kassa, from where it turned North to the Dukla Pass in the Carpathians. The line accurately followed the Hungarian-Slovak language boundary. This new agreement again brought out great anxiety in Prague, Prime Minister Kramář instructing Benes to take immediate steps, which immediately ran into difficulties.⁵⁶⁹ The French Foreign Ministry and the High Command both looked with suspicion at the Czechoslovaks for carrying on territorial negotiations with the Hungarians, to which they had no right, said the French. As allies, they can only make such decisions in concert. Benes immediately alerted the Prague government to repudiate, in some manner, the Bartha-Hodža agreement. Kramář obliged immediately. On December 10, he rose in the National Assembly and spoke to the extent that there exists no agreement between Czechoslovakia and Hungary regarding the occupation of Slovensko, that the Czechoslovak government has not authorized anyone to conduct talks on this topic, Milan Hodža only empowered to liquidate certain administrative function.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Pándi, Lajos: *Köztes-Európa 1763-1993. Térképgyűjtemény* [Middle Europe 1763-1993. Collection of maps]. Budapest, 1995, pp. 364-365, map 164.

⁵⁶⁷ Hadler: *A prágai ...* op. cit., p. 22.

⁵⁶⁸ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 226.

⁵⁶⁹ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., p. 109.

⁵⁷⁰ Hadler: *A prágai ...* op. cit., p. 23.

Benes, in the meantime, through dedicated hard work, achieved that the French Foreign Ministry defined a new demarcation line.⁵⁷¹ After consulting with Benes, the Foreign Ministry announced its decision on December 19. Col. Vix, as the Entente's representative in Budapest, received the details of the new line on December 23, along with instructions to make it known to Károlyi. According to the new revision, the line followed the Danube and the Ipoly rivers, South of Losonc, through Rimaszombat, South of Kassa to the Ung River, following that to the old border. This new line ran well to the South of the Bartha-Hodža line, where, according to the 1910 Hungarian census, the annexed population was 58% Slovak, while the 1919 Czechoslovak census showed 63%. Those of Magyar mother tongue made up 29% in 1910 and 27% in 1919; Germans were shown as 5% and 7%, and Rusyns as 4% and 4%.

The Hungarian government acknowledged the note presented by Vix and began to pull out its troops from Northern Hungary. Czechoslovak units, at the same time, began their second occupation of Slovakia.⁵⁷² The Hungarian government, in the hopes of a more favorable settlement at the upcoming peace conference, did not resort to the possibility of organized armed resistance. A few local politicians made attempts at arranging a popular uprising.⁵⁷³ The local resistance South of Pozsony (in Hung.: Csallóköz – *ed.*) organized by György /George/ Szmrecsányi and Gyula /Julius/ Steiner quickly collapsed. It was also the fate of the short lived Eastern Slovak Republic, proclaimed in Kassa on December 11. The leaders of this action - Győző /Victor/ Dvortsák and Lajos /Louis/ Liptay – receiving covert assistance from the Hungarian government, escaped at the news of the approaching Czech and Slovak forces. Kassa was occupied by Czechoslovak forces, with no opposition, on December 30, by which time two-thirds of the annexed territory was under their control. Pozsony was occupied on January 1, 1919. The Ministry led by Šrobár, moved its seat from Zsolna to Pozsony, which became the capital of Slovakia, having been officially rechristened to Bratislava. The Czechoslovak army finished its military takeover of Northern Hungary on January 20, 1919. During the same period⁵⁷⁴, French general Hennocque, commanding Czechoslovak troops, pushed into sub-Carpathia, reaching Ungvár on January 12.

It must certainly be noted that, in the fall of 1918, Benes made successful use of the *fait accompli* tactic, both diplomatically and militarily in the battle for Northern Hungary. At the close of the year, he was able to point to concrete accomplishments: firstly, French politicians drew a demarcation line that vastly favored Czechoslovakia and secondly, the

⁵⁷¹ Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 93-94.

⁵⁷² Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit., pp. 126-148.

⁵⁷³ Szviezsényi: *Hogyan veszett ...* op. cit., pp. 88-89.

⁵⁷⁴ Fedinec, Csilla: *A kárpátaljai magyarság történeti kronológiája 1918-1944* [The historical chronology of the sub-Carpathian Hungarians 1918-1944]. Lilium Art, Galánta-Dunaszerdahely, 2002, pp. 43-53; Gulyás, László: *Hogyan veszett el a Kárpátalja? Trianoni határaink története II* [How sub-Carpathia was lost. The history of our Trianon borders]. In: *KAPU* 1992, September issue, pp. 54-60.

Czechoslovak army was able effectively to take control of all the territory behind this line. The peace conference convened for January 'merely' had to give its approval to this set situation. Temperley assessed the situation as: "... the most important task facing the Czechoslovak delegation was to protect what they had already acquired."⁵⁷⁵

THE GLITTERING CHAMBERS OF VERSAILLES

The Peace Conference and the Czechoslovaks

The ceremonial opening of the peace conference took place on January 18, 1919.⁵⁷⁶ The attendees were unclear whether the conference in Paris was the meeting where the victors gathered to harmonize their aims and points of view, to be followed by a congress with the inclusion of the losers and the neutrals, or whether this was, in fact, the peace conference, whose decisions were final and irrevocable. The Paris conference began as the former and slowly transformed into the latter during the conference itself. The representatives of the vanquished countries were not permitted to take part in the proceedings of the conference, only appearing to be handed the decision affecting their fate. If we look at the decision-making mechanism, we will see a number of debates and discussion groups being organized – the thinking being that afterwards a plenary session will make the final decision – but the major decisions were effectively made by the leaders of the four Great Powers.⁵⁷⁷

The highest body of the conference was the 'Council of Ten,' composed of the heads of government of the five victorious states (America, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan) and their foreign ministers. After three months of activity, the body was felt to be too unwieldy and, at President Wilson's suggestion, was reduced to the 'Council of Four': President Wilson of America, Prime Minister Lloyd George for Britain, Premier Clemenceau for France and Prime Minister Orlando for Italy. For examining the numerous complex questions, and make proposals, 58 separate commissions were created, as suggested by Balfour on January 16.⁵⁷⁸

There were several committees set up to study the border and territorial questions, operating under the umbrella 'Committee IX' (president: André Tardieu, France, members: marquis Salvago Raggi, Italy,

⁵⁷⁵ Temperley: *A history of ...* op. cit., vol IV, pp. 267.

⁵⁷⁶ M.F. Boemeke - G.D. Feldman - E. Glaser: *The Treaty of Versailles*. German Historical Institute, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Margaret MacMillan: *The Peace Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to end of War*. London, 2001; Eva Irmanova : *Maďarsko a versailleský mírový systém*. Albis International, Ústí nad Labem, 2002; Hronský: *Priebeh vojenského ...* op. cit.; Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit.; Hronský: *A második demarkációs ...* op. cit.

⁵⁷⁷ F.S. Marston: *The Peace Conference of 1919. Organization and Procedure*. London, 1944; Lord Hankey: *The Supreme Control at the Paris Peace Conference 1919*. London, 1963; Arday: *Térkép csata ...* op. cit., pp. 146-149.old; Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 135-155.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid (Hankey), pp. 21-32.

dr. S. E. Mezes, America, and Sir E. Crowe, England). In regards to territorial decisions, the determining factor was not the losing, non-represented 'guilty party' but started from the interests of those present. The problem of Austria-Hungary was approached from the perspective of the perceived needs of the Czechoslovaks, Poles, Romanians and Yugoslavs.

Hungary's territorial question was not addressed by any one of the 'expert committees', except as the topic fell into the purview of the Czechoslovak committee, the Romanian committee and the Yugoslav committee.⁵⁷⁹ Czechoslovakia, as an Allied and Associated Government member, had the right to present its demands to the peace conference. Benes had begun preparations for this in the fall of 1918, writing: "Professor Masaryk occasionally reminded me in his letters during 1918 to prepare for the peace conference. With the utmost speed, more or less improvising without references and literature, I composed most of our peace memoranda, where I stated all our peace requirements. Thus, it happened that some factual errors occurred in them, for which I was later accused of introducing intentional, calculated misinformation."⁵⁸⁰

This protestation of Benes regarding his improvising should be treated with caution, since we know that both Benes and the Czechoslovak delegation thoroughly prepared themselves for the peace conference. We base our view on the communiqué sent by the Prague government to the Slovak National Assembly in the fall of 1918, as already mentioned earlier, asking it to assemble data on previous Magyar 'deeds' *to be used as evidence at the peace talks* of Magyar oppression.⁵⁸¹ The data collection, for which they solicited the National Assembly's help, was to encompass where and how Magyarization was carried on, with what events surrounding it; collection of Church and government statistics, flyers and materials, which will demonstrate the "brutal Magyarization policies."

While preparing for the peace conference, Benes was faced with two serious problems during this time.⁵⁸² Early in 1919, a Benes-Štefanik conflict developed, springing from the fact that Benes obviously wanted to align Czechoslovakia's foreign policy with that of France,⁵⁸³ while Štefanik was a believer of an Italian orientation. Or rather, he repeated that Czechoslovakia's foreign policy should rely on both France and Italy.⁵⁸⁴ Because of this difference, the relationship of the two politicians worsened. Benes warned Masaryk, that Štefanik wanted to crown an Italian prince with the Bohemian crown.⁵⁸⁵ (During our research, we were unable to find

⁵⁷⁹ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., p. 136.

⁵⁸⁰ Beneš: *A nemzetek ...* op. cit., vol III, p. 237.

⁵⁸¹ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 44.

⁵⁸² Strickland: *Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference 1919*. Minneapolis, 1958, PhD thesis; Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 212-228; Zdeněk Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš ve svých dopisech z doby pařížských mírových jednání v roce 1919*. Praha, 1994, vol I-II.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid* (Šolle), pp. 147-149.

⁵⁸⁴ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 36-37.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 37.

any factual source for this information – *auth.*) Benes also launched several coarse personal criticisms against Štefanik, censuring him for maintaining a romantic liaison with an Italian countess, Giulianna Benzoni. In his April 5 letter to Masaryk,⁵⁸⁶ Benes again castigates Štefanik for his relationship with the countess, then makes the statement that Štefanik is a broken man, both physically and mentally, at the end of his vigor. As well, those in charge of French foreign policy no longer have any trust in him, so his career is slowly coming to an end. Masaryk suggested to Benes to come to a truce with Štefanik for the duration of the peace conference. The conflict came to a sudden end on May 4, 1919. Štefanik was on his way from Italy to Czechoslovakia when his plane crashed near Bratislava and he died. (The plane was shot down by Czechoslovak forces – *ed.*)

While the Benes-Štefanik conflict was progressing, a similar situation arose between Benes and Kramař. Kramař was the official head of the Czechoslovak delegation to the peace conference as Prime Minister, although, in reality, Benes, as Foreign Minister, reserved the right to form all important decisions. Plus, Benes, as a result of his three years of diligent work, knew almost all the ‘peacemakers’ in Paris. If they, in turn, wanted to know something, they turned to Benes. This situation became harder and harder for Kramař to bear. After all, ‘he’ was elected to the Reichsrat several times before the war, while Benes became Foreign Minister without previous experience, or even electoral sanction.⁵⁸⁷ This personal rivalry between Benes and Kramař was only the surface layer of a conflict based on more serious differences. Even before the war, Kramař was a committed Russophile politician, who brought that orientation with him to Versailles. He held that Czechoslovakia’s natural ally could only be a restored tsarist Russia. To that end, Czechoslovakia should do its utmost to help overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Benes, on the other hand, was working to create a French-Czechoslovak alliance on which to base Czechoslovakia’s Central European influence. Kramař’s relationship with Benes rapidly deteriorated.

Benes petitioned Masaryk, as Czechoslovak President, in a letter, dated February 2, to recall Kramař to Prague under some excuse.⁵⁸⁸ (Masaryk returned from exile to Prague in December of 1918.) the Benes-Kramař conflict was solved by the June, 1919 local elections held in Czechoslovakia, in which Kramař’s party suffered a defeat and he was forced to resign on July 8. It gave Masaryk an opportunity to recall him from Paris. Benes, on the other hand, did not budge from the peace conference until the December 1918 line of demarcation became the political boundary. In spite of the two conflicts recounted above, Masaryk’s confidence in Benes was unbroken. In fact, in the early part of June, before the elections, Masaryk tried to get Benes to accept the post of

⁵⁸⁶ Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš* ... op. cit., pp. 206-213.

⁵⁸⁷ Hanzal: *Edvard* ... op. cit., pp. 35-36; Perman: *The shaping of* ... op. cit., pp. 126-130.

⁵⁸⁸ Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš* ... op. cit., pp. 177-179.

Prime Minister, on top of his Foreign Minister post.⁵⁸⁹ Benes declined, citing the election results.⁵⁹⁰

Czechoslovak territorial claims and justifications

The Czechoslovak delegation, led by Benes, handed 11 written memoranda to the peace conference, as well as obtaining leave to address the Council of Ten and personally present the Czechoslovak claims.

Written Czechoslovak claims

This sub-paragraph will look at each of those 11 submitted memoranda, with particular attention to content and intent. Of special interest will be memorandum 2, dealing with the territorial demands of Czechoslovakia, and 5, pertaining to Slovakia.

Memorandum I.⁵⁹¹ The note is concerned mainly with the history of the Czechoslovaks, their civilization, battles, mission and significance. It goes on to explain that the spirit of brutality and oppression among the Slavs has never been as prevalent as among the Germans (here he means the Germanics in general – *ed.*); that the Slavs are individualistic, sensual dreamers and idealists, with a token sense of reality. On the other hand, the German(ic)s possess a strong trait of collectivism and, having lived in close proximity with the Roman Latins, left the Slavs behind. The Slavs were harried from the West by the Germans, from the East by Mongols, Avars, Magyars, Tatars and Turks. In spite of it all, during the 14th and 15th centuries, Czechs became leaders of European democratic and religious rejuvenation but then they were trod underfoot by the Habsburgs, who catholicized and centralized their country.

The 19th century brought renewal for the Czechs, the emergence of a strong peasantry, an organized working class, a wealthy and independent middle class, which took on itself the anti-German struggle. The Czech economy was the most developed in Central Europe. Their mission has always been the service of humanity, protecting the intellectual and ethical values from German barbarism, not with weapons but moral means. The idea of solidarity between the Czechs and the Magyar oppressed Slovaks stems from this period. Its geographic situation placed the Czechs at the head of the Slavs, in the forefront of anti-German resistance. At the beginning of a new life after the war, freed from the yoke of the Central Powers, the Czechoslovak people justly ask for some consideration for its great services to Europe.

This line of reasoning is, essentially, a shortened version of the historical rationalization worked out by Masaryk.

Memorandum II⁵⁹² covers Czechoslovak territorial demands, in seven chapters. Chapter 1⁵⁹³ explains that Czechoslovakia should be constituted

⁵⁸⁹ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁹⁰ Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš ...* op. cit., pp. 292-294, 73.

⁵⁹¹ The complete text of the memoranda are published by Raschoffer: *Die Tchechoslowakischen Denkschriften für die Friedenskonferenzen von Paris 1919-1920*. Berlin, 1938. Memorandum 1, pp. 2-33.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 34-42.

from the historical Czech provinces (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) and Slovensko but that the Ruthenian populated areas of Hungary should also be annexed. As well, territorial contact between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia should be ensured by means of a corridor.

Chapter 2⁵⁹⁴ lays out the model for the borders of the Czech provinces as: border modifications must be made in Prussian Silesia (Glatz and Ratibor) and Lower Austria (Gmund and Marchfeld), all to the benefit of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Chapter 3⁵⁹⁵ is concerned with Slovakia. The memorandum stresses the geographic cohesion of this area and especially notes the importance of its southern border: the Danube, the Mátra and Bükk mountains and, further towards the East, the wine-growing country of Tokaj to the Bodrog River. Slovensko is made up of two parts, the eastern part made up of valleys and rivers running to the Tisza River, the western part of similar valleys running to the Danube. After the geographic introduction, the memorandum discusses the ethnic make-up of the population. It mentions that, according to the 1910 census, there were 1,967,970 Slovaks living in Hungary. Then, it immediately confronts this datum, stating that Hungarian statistical figures are notoriously unreliable, as once admitted by a Minister in Parliament. Namely, that many hundreds of thousands of non-Magyars were recorded as Magyars, at instructions from the top, to boost the Magyar numbers. Fabrication and forgery are everyday occurrences where statistics are concerned. It then goes on to opine that, in reality, there are 2,300,000 Slovaks living in Hungary and the 700,000 Slovaks who fled to America will, on hearing of the birth of Czechoslovakia, return shortly. The memorandum declares that certain Magyar-populated lands must also be annexed to Slovensko. The reasoning behind it is that Magyars live widely dispersed in Slovensko because the devious magyarizing method was consciously colonizing the territory. And in any case, the claim for these lands is also justified by the significant numbers of dispersed Slovaks inside Hungary. The Danube is a question of life and death for Czechoslovakia and no concessions can be made in this regard to the Magyars. The Danube is the only possible border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak state has any number of reasons for needing Pozsony /Bratislava/, although its population is mainly German, and some Magyars and the Slovaks represent a minority compared to them. But Pozsony has been a Slovak city for centuries and was seen as the capital of Slovensko (conveniently forgetting to mention that it was the capital of Hungary for four centuries – *ed.*). The line of the Danube must then follow the Mátra and Bükk mountains, even though there is no naturally occurring boundary, this area, too, should be given to Slovensko. Although it is populated by Magyars today, at one time, it was populated by Slovaks who were extirpated by the brutal Magyar oppression. Of course, all Magyars (and other nationalities) who now find themselves in Czechoslovakia will be endowed with a wide range of minority rights.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 44-55.

Chapter 4⁵⁹⁶ addresses the Ruthenians, recapitulating their number and geographic distribution, then turning to discuss the future fate of their land. It opines that their land should be annexed either to Poland, or even the Ukraine, although neither country has expressed a claim. It should certainly not be left with the Magyars, so, perhaps, the best solution would be to attach it to Czechoslovakia as an autonomous province.

Chapter 5⁵⁹⁷ concerns the question of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor. The factual submission is preceded by a historical introduction that goes like this: In Central Europe, the Germans and Magyars together want to rule over all the other nations. The Magyars have always supported the pan-German idea. Up until the 13th century, the Czechs, Moravians, Silesians and Slovensko were adjoining neighbors in Pannonia, as well with the Slavs of Kraina, Styria and Lower Austria. The link between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was broken by the Magyars and Germans in the 14th and 15th century, separating the two nations. Beginning from this period, the Magyar-German alliance contrived to separate the northern and southern Slavs. After this short history lesson, the memorandum presents its recommendation. It states: The Slav population has not disappeared completely among the German and Magyar settlers; 25-30% of the population of western Hungary is of Slav origin. The solution is obvious, Czechoslovakia should be given Moson and Sopron counties, while Yugoslavia should be given Vas and Zala counties. The resultant corridor would separate Germans and Magyars, ending their support of pan-Germanism. The democratized Magyars will align themselves with the two Slav states, contributing to the cause of peace.

Chapter 6⁵⁹⁸ takes up the topic of the international modes of communication. First, it expresses the Czechoslovak's viewpoint regarding river transportation. It reiterates several times that Czechoslovakia is a Danubian country, and thus, naturally has a need for the Danube or, more precisely, its internationalization; Czechoslovakia will be in contact with the Black Sea through the Danube. Similarly, the same applies to the Elba River, which will directly connect Czechoslovakia with Hamburg and the Vistula River, connecting it to Danzig. The memorandum then covers rail transportation and network, making a suggestion for declaring the Bratislava-Trieste, Bratislava-Fiume (today Rijeka – *ed.*) and the Prague-Nurnberg-Strasbourg lines international. The memorandum asserts that Czechoslovakia needs a direct link to France. After all, since the toppling of the Monarchy, Prague is the hub of Central Europe and should be the focal point of economic life-lines from the West.

Chapter 7⁵⁹⁹ is concerned with the situation of the Sorb people of Lausitz, wishing them autonomy and close contacts with Czechoslovakia.

Memorandum III⁶⁰⁰ covers the topic of the Germans of Czechoslovakia. By way of introduction, Benes cites the census numbers

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, pp. 58-66.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 67-77.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 78-83.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 84-109.

from 1910, which showed a total of 3,512,583 Germans residing in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia but that most of them live in Bohemia, those in Moravia living widely dispersed. Then, similar to the chapter dealing with Slovakia in memorandum II, he casts aspersions on the accuracy of statistics published by the Monarchy. In this case, he states that approximately 800,000 to 1 million can be deducted from that number as the Austrians regularly falsified the numbers. This is followed by the economic justification for the claims, where Benes states that a substantial portion of the raw material resources of Czechoslovakia lay in the German populated areas and not having them would bankrupt the country. The country has especially strong need for the large coal deposits. There are strategic reasons for the indivisibility of Czechoslovakia – he goes on to say – losing the highlands that surround the country, populated by the Germans, would leave the country indefensible from Germany. A short historical overview followed (German colonization, the battle of White Mountain, etc.). The memorandum closed with assurances to the reader that the Germans will live in democracy in the future Czechoslovakia (universal, equal and secret voting) and all their minority rights will be guaranteed. Czechoslovakia will be a second Switzerland and German will be the second official language.

Memorandum IV⁶⁰¹ evaluates the question of Teschen, making the statement that possession of this territory is crucial for Czechoslovakia. There is, in reality, no Polish majority there. The statistics only seem to show such a large Polish majority because improper census methods were used. The Silesian population, which represents a transition between the Czechs and the Poles, the Poles count as theirs. On top of it, Czechoslovakia needs the territory for its extensive coal fields, and for the Kassa-Oderberg railway line. Poland can go and find its own compensation from Prussian Silesia.

Memorandum V⁶⁰² treated Slovensko in four chapters. By way of introduction, it states that “The Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak nation has lived, from time immemorial, in the northwest portion of Hungary, where it had settled well before the Magyars. The territory they initially possessed was not limited to today’s Slovakia but consisted of a solid block of the watersheds of the Vág, Nyitra, Garam and Ipoly Rivers to the Danube. But it did not stop there. It spilled over onto the western part of Hungary, old Roman Pannonia, from Lake Fertő South to Lake Balaton. This entire region was occupied by the Slovak branch of the Czech nation.”⁶⁰³ During the 9th century, the Magyars exterminated the Slavs of western Hungary, said the memorandum, but the Slavs hung on North of the Danube. In the Middle Ages, the kings of Hungary favored Germanic colonization in contrast to the Slovaks. The Mongol incursion of 1241, and the later Turkish wars (1526-1718), inflicted great injury to the Slovaks. The subsequent depopulation was followed by vigorous German re-settlement. The Hungarian kings had begun exploiting the rich mineral

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 110-153.

⁶⁰² Ibid, pp. 158-205.

⁶⁰³ Ibid, p. 159.

resources of the Slovak counties – Szepes, Nógrád, Bars, etc. – a process that accelerated during the 13th century when Germans were brought in and granted extensive privileges, to the detriment of the original population. By the 15th century, hardly a settlement existed without German families. The Magyars tolerated the Slovak language until the 18th century, to some extent, but, beginning in the 19th century, the Magyars wanted to make Magyar as the official language instead of Latin. As a result, the Magyar state wanted to force all its citizens to use Magyar in schools, places of work, the military and public life, forcing the Slovak people to exert all its strength to avoid forcible magyarization. The masses of the Magyar people looked down at the members of the other nations, placing overly great reliance on their brutal powers. Their view of the Slovaks is clearly reflected in the common saying of the day: “A tót nem ember (A Slovak is not a human / Der Slowake ist keine Mensch).”⁶⁰⁴ Although the Hungarians assured the other nationalities of equal citizenship right in 1868, on paper, in reality, the state rejected the natural right to ethnicity and language. There is not an equal example of oppression in European history similar to the oppression of the Slovaks by the Magyars, reflected the memorandum on the minority laws of Dualism.

Chapter 2⁶⁰⁵ of this memorandum touches on the forcible magyarization. The memorandum takes several direct quotes from a pamphlet by Béla Grünwald, *Northern Hungary*. “The national awakening of the non-Magyars presents a danger for the Magyar nation. There can only be one Magyar culture in Hungary. It is impossible to convince the Slovaks through peaceable means regarding the state’s Magyar ideal. The only possibility left open is to completely exterminate their culture. If the Magyars want to hold their ground, then their tribes must be enriched through the assimilation of the non-Magyars.”⁶⁰⁶ The memorandum continues its line of reasoning that it is consistent that the Magyars then took action against the Slovak-language schools, in the interest of magyarization. In 1874 and 1875, they closed the three existing Slovak high-schools, confiscating their assets. Those Slovaks seeking higher education were forced to look for it in Magyar schools, since they had none of their own.

At this point the memorandum again quotes a passage from Grünwald’s: “The high-school is like a big machine; hundreds of young Slovaks are put in on one side and finished Magyars come out on the other.”⁶⁰⁷

To illustrate the sad situation of Slovak education, the memorandum presents the following statistics: “In 1916, Slovakia had:

1. Kindergartens: Magyar – 448, Slovak – none; 22,715 Slovak children between the ages of 3 and 5 were forced to attend Magyar kindergarten.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 161.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 162-167.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 163.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

2. Primary schools: Magyar – 4,253, Slovak – 365; and they were Slovak in name only since the directive of Educational Minister Wlassics in 1912, ordering that, of the weekly 26 hours, 17-24 be conducted in Magyar.
3. Commercial and trade schools: Magyar – 138, Slovak – none; 7,407 Slovak students were forced to attend Magyar schools.
4. Middle and high schools: Magyar – 112, Slovak – none; 3,181 Slovaks students had to attend Magyar schools.
5. Training institutions: Magyar – 27, Slovak – none.
6. Colleges and art schools: Magyar – 46, Slovak – none.
7. Higher level girls' schools: Magyar – 8, Slovak – none.
8. Universities, technical colleges, law schools, advanced theological institutions and technical institutions: all Magyar.”⁶⁰⁸

After this statistical presentation, the memorandum continues its train of thought, the Magyars did not overlook the Slovak Church as a means of magyarization. In Csernova (Černova), in Liptó county, the Slovak Catholics built a church and demanded that a Slovak priest come and consecrate it. The bishop, on the other hand, ordered a Magyar priest to do the ceremony. Naturally, the members of the congregation did not allow the Magyar priest to enter the church. Hungarian authorities dispatched the gendarmes to the aid of the Magyar priests, resulting in the death of 15 from the congregation and many seriously wounded; others were jailed for anti-government activities (resisting arrest).

The Hungarian politicians used every means possible to shrink the number of Slovak people, the memorandum said. As an example: “The authorities conducted organized manhunts for Slovak children, sending them to the Magyar lands, to the great Hungarian Plains. These hunts lasted from 1874 to 1900; Slovak children were torn from their parents and sent far away.”⁶⁰⁹

They went so far as to create a magyarizing association, FEMKA, which, with the help of the authorities, took over the deportation of Slovak children, with particular attention to 12-15 year old girls, many of whom ended up in bordellos. The world was devastated when it learned of the facts. In 1889, Alexander Poptoff of Saint Petersburg wrote a French-language book on this topic, titled *Slavery in the heart of Europe*.

After recounting the sufferings of the Slovaks (the memorandum uses the term martyr hood – *auth.*), the memorandum goes into a lengthy treatment of the oppressive economic measures of the Hungarian government. It states that the government attempted to impede the growth of material wealth of the Slovaks, resulting in the emigration of 739,565 Slovaks to America.

Chapter 3⁶¹⁰ turns to the Hungarian census, more specifically with Hungarian statistics. It makes a case that the authorities consciously falsified the Slovak numbers, e.g.- 20 thousand Slovaks in Pest county

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 165.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 167.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 168-175.

recorded as Magyar. In another case, it reasons that: “In Szabolcs county, in a completely Magyar environment, is an ancient Slovak colony, the town of Nyíregyháza. The population of this town (38,198 inhabitants) spoke the Slovak tongue and heard the sermons in their churches in Slovak. The 1880 census recognized the majority of the inhabitants as Slovaks; the 1910 census only recorded 1,117 Slovaks but, over the same period, the number of Slovak-speaking Magyars grew to 18,719. Obviously, it was not in the interest of Magyars to learn Slovak in a mostly Magyar county, far more so for the Slovaks enumerated as Magyars.”⁶¹¹

The memorandum then accuses the Hungarians of recording in their statistics more than half a million Slovaks as Magyars. It then makes the sweeping statement that “... and many other things entitle us to reject the Hungarian statistics out of hand, especially the figures of the last census, which are the most inaccurate.”⁶¹² The hidden intent of this statement can be clearly detected, i.e., if the Hungarians want to use the ethnic, census figures at the peace conference, they must be deemed as having no credibility.

Chapter 4⁶¹³ describes the boundaries of Slovakia, giving a village by village description: the left (North) bank of the Danube to Vác, across the Cserhát and Bükk Mountains, along the line of Miskolc-Tokaj-Sárospatak-Sátoraljaújhely.

Memorandum VI⁶¹⁴ turns in detail to the Ruthenian situation, reiterating the portion of memorandum II that pertains here. It repeats the three possible solutions (annexation to Poland, Ukraine or Czechoslovakia) of which it recommends the Czechoslovak option as the most proper. As in the memorandum discussing the state of Slovakia, this memorandum also paints a picture of Magyar oppressive measures, again making a statement that many Ruthenians were forced into self-exile in America. It stresses the strategic importance of the territory as, if it belonged to Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia would gain a land bridge towards Romania.

The remaining memoranda deal with lesser topics, such as memorandum VII,⁶¹⁵ which takes up the fate of the Sorbs around Lausitz, demanding their freedom from German rule. Memorandum VIII⁶¹⁶ treats Ratibor, demanding its annexation to Czechoslovakia. Similarly, memorandum IX⁶¹⁷ is concerning the future of Glatz, again demanding its annexation to Czechoslovakia. Memorandum X⁶¹⁸ has the topic of adjustments of the Czech-Austrian and the Prussian-Silesian borders and arguing its necessity. Memorandum XI⁶¹⁹ lays a claim of reparations and

⁶¹¹ Ibid, p. 169.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid, pp. 176-205.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 206-223.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 224-255.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 256-265.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 266-275.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 276-297.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 298-310.

war damages for all that the Czechoslovaks have suffered throughout the war.

It is clear from the content of the memoranda that their aim was to convince the Allied Powers of the advantages for their side of the creation of a strong Czechoslovakia in Central Europe. Toward this end, a broad based line of arguments was developed, covering the whole spectrum from historical philosophy to pragmatic, economic reasoning. What must be stressed is that the series of memoranda calls into question the results of the Austrian and Hungarian census figures, accusing the statisticians, and the politicians, of the Monarchy with fraud and forgery. At the same time, the writers of the memoranda treated statistical data in a highly creative manner – when dealing with Slovak numbers. An equally important element was the appeal to the emotional (young Slovak girls dragged off to bordellos) and the vivid images used to illustrate the ‘brutal magyarization’ process. All through the documents, the authors maintained a profound silence over the right of self-determination of other minorities.

Marian Hronský's study⁶²⁰ points out that the Slovak politicians assisting in the creation of the memoranda – who gathered the necessary materials in Turócszentmárton – originally thought that it was sufficient to present the ethnic argument to determine the borders of Slovakia. In December of 1918, they received instructions from Prague to include also the economic, transportation and strategic aspects in their arguments, too.

The words of István Borsody perfectly express the crux of the memoranda: “... He was perfectly prepared (Benes, that is – *auth.*). No question could come up for which he did not have a memorandum in his briefcase. The memoranda all proved that for Europe, the world, humanity, peace and justice, only one possible solution exists, that which is acceptable to the Czechs.”⁶²¹

Verbal presentation of Czechoslovak claims

The peace conference decided that, over and above the written submission of claims, the smaller allies will be given an opportunity to state their case verbally, and at the highest level. Thus, it came to be that Benes presented Czechoslovakia's claims in front of the Supreme Council on February 5. His presentation certainly taxed the time and patience of the Council as he spoke for three and a half hours about his country's situation

⁶²⁰ Marian Hronský: *A második demarkációs vonal, valamint az 1919. június 12-ei szlovák-magyar végleges határ a cseh-szlovák javaslatok és követelések tükrében* [The second line of demarcation, and the final Slovak-Hungarian border of June 12, 1919, in light of the proposals and demands]. In: „... ahol a határ elválaszt” *Trianon és következményei a Kárpát-medencében* [“... where the border divides” Trianon and its consequences in the Carpathian Basin]. Balassagyarmat-Várpalota, 2002, pp. 190-198..

⁶²¹ Borsody: *Benes ...* op. cit. p. 71.

and territorial demands,⁶²² although, to be fair, he was interrupted several times with questions.

In his introduction, he reminded his listeners that the Czechoslovak nation "... has never hesitated to stand up for the interests of the Allies or of democracy. It was not territorial acquisition that took it into battle but those self-same ideals that drove the young men of the Allies. They rose against a dynasty from the Middle Ages, which was upheld by bureaucracy, militarism, the Roman Catholic Church and, to a degree, by big business. The whole nation merely wished to take its fate into its own hands. ... The nation, which, after 300 years of servitude and vicissitudes, which had almost led to its extermination, felt that it must be prudent, reasonable and just to its neighbors; and that it must avoid provoking jealousy and renewed struggles, which might again plunge it into similar danger."⁶²³

We think that, in full knowledge of the written Czechoslovak claims, we can apply critical criteria in evaluating these sentences. After this pious opening, he gets down to the business of territorial claims. In the case of the historical provinces (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), he used historical reasoning, arguing that these three areas already formed a state in the 6th century, under a Czech dynasty. Since 1526, Habsburgs have sat on the throne and, although *de jure* they have always recognized the existence of Czech institutions, they immediately began a strong tendency of centralization. The Czech people rose three times, not only against mere germanization but also against the privileges of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church. Benes went on to argue that the people woke up from their torpor, caused by the loss of the battle of White Mountain, by the effects of the French Revolution, becoming the leading nation of Central Europe. As Benes said, "... our nation was so diligently industrious that, by the beginning of the 20th century, it grew into the most advanced society of Central Europe, intellectually and politically."⁶²⁴

Next, he stated that Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia form a unit, a whole, both geographically and ethnographically. He mentions that 2.4 million Germans live in this area, adding immediately that the figure is derived from the 1910 Austrian census, which was falsified by the Austrian authorities. At this point, Lloyd George interrupted to ask what the earlier statistical figures showed.⁶²⁵ Benes, in his reply, said that the 1900 figures are similar to the 1910 but that it, too, can be explained by the same process of falsification. President Wilson interjected, asking how many Czechs live in this territory; Benes replied: four and a half million.⁶²⁶

Benes moved on to the economic reasons of his argument, saying that Bohemia was the most industrially advanced part of the Monarchy,

⁶²² The complete speech is given in *Paper relating to the relations of United States 1919 the Paris Peace Conference*. Volume I-XII. Washington, 1942-1947, vol III, pp. 876-887.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 877.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 878.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 879.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*

responsible for 90% of sugar production, 70% of textiles, 55% of iron smelting and 60% of alcohol production. These though, he added, are mainly concentrated in the mixed German-population border zones. Since the mainly agrarian interior can not subsist without the industrialized border areas, the integrity of the current division must be maintained, i.e., the German populated areas must be annexed to Czechoslovakia. Here, Lloyd George again interrupts, asking what is the reason that industry is concentrated in these fringe areas.⁶²⁷ Benes replies that the reason is that the large coal mines are to be found in the border areas. Next, a short – about 10 minute – discussion breaks out between Lloyd George, Balfour, Benes and Kramař on the ethnic and economic situation of the border areas and their interconnections. During the discussion, Benes showed his incomparable pragmatism and debating ability, reasoning that the Germans of Bohemia wish to stay with Czechoslovakia because they are clear that, if annexed to Germany, they will not be able to compete with German industry and will soon go bankrupt.

The talk then turned to the Teschen question, Benes stating that he lays a claim to the area based on ethnographic and economic reasons.⁶²⁸ He again accuses the Austrian statisticians of falsifying the nationality figures for Teschen – for political reasons and, of course, to the detriment of the Czechs – when, in reality far more Czechs live here than the statistics show. In fact, the reality is that the Poles are in the minority. On this item, Lansing asked why President Masaryk made a statement that Teschen was not yet ready for a plebiscite.⁶²⁹ Benes replied that he was not aware of a proposed plebiscite but if there was going to be one, he is sure it will be a win for the Czechs. Benes went on with his economic argument, which spoke for annexing Teschen to Czechoslovakia. In fact, he repeated the two arguments of memorandum IV: the Teschen coal fields – geologically contiguous – without which Czechoslovak industry could not function; the railway line through the area, connecting Bohemia with northern Slovakia.

Benes next returned to the border question of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia and stated his request to have Ratibor and Glatz annexed to Czechoslovakia⁶³⁰ and moved on to the Slovak question.⁶³¹ He reasoned that Slovakia once formed a part of a Czechoslovak state but it was overrun by the Magyars in the 10th century. These conquerors tried to assimilate the natives – without success. The population is still, to this day, friendly to the Czechs and wish to join the new country. As to the border question, he argues that Slovakia should be bound in the North by the Carpathians and in the South by the Danube. The border from where the Danube turns South to the Tisza River is partly natural, partly man made. This section will, unarguably, separate many Magyars, for which problem the conference will have to find a solution. Lloyd George broke in and expressed his opinion that there can be no question of the legality

⁶²⁷ Ibid, p. 880.

⁶²⁸ Ibid, pp. 881-882.

⁶²⁹ Ibid, p. 882.

⁶³⁰ Ibid, p. 883.

⁶³¹ Ibid, pp. 883-886.

regarding the Slovakian claims, suggesting that Benes restrict his comments to the debatable points.⁶³²

In response, Benes firmly stated his claim to the Danube as the boundary. "Slovakia is a Danubian country" – he said. As proof, he again turned to history, reiterating that, before the Magyars appeared, the Slovaks ruled all of Pannonia. The Magyars drove them up into the mountains; only when they cleansed the South bank of the Danube of Slovaks did they come into contact with the Germans. They were unable to exterminate the Slovaks living North of the Danube. They remained on their lands, although, becoming more or less Magyars. Benes also tried to bolster the Danube border claim with economic arguments: "Czechoslovakia does not have and sea coast. It is surrounded on three sides by Germans and Magyars on the fourth. Being an industrial nation, it must have an outlet to the sea. It can only be assured by an internationalized Danube, as the economic lifeline of the country. This is a geographic necessity, which the new country can not do without."⁶³³

On this topic, Lloyd George asked what is the proportion of Slovaks in the Danube zone.⁶³⁴ Benes replied that with the annexing of the territory, about 350,000 Magyars would be transferred to Czechoslovakia. He quickly stressed that there had been forcible magyarization in this area. Also, there are a good number of small Slovak settlements on the other bank, not to mention that about 150,000 Slovaks live around Budapest. As recompense, they would be left under Hungarian authority – he said.⁶³⁵ Then Sonnino asked what the proportion of Slovaks vs. Magyars is.⁶³⁶ (In practical terms, he repeated the question asked by Lloyd George but left unanswered by Benes.) Benes replied that the regions, in which the surveys were carried out run in a North-South direction, thus showing a strong Magyar majority. "In his personal opinion, the area has a 60% Slovak majority but it would be very difficult to respond with accurate data since the region has never been an independent census district"⁶³⁷ – he said.

President Wilson then asked if there were available statistics for the towns and if it is true that the Slovaks are in contact with the Danube only at Pozsony. Benes replied that the Slovaks reach the Danube North of Budapest but had to admit that "the majority of the people living by the river are Magyars."⁶³⁸

Following that, there was a discussion between Lloyd George, Benes and Kramař regarding the navigability of Slovak rivers and the connection to the Danube via rail. During their talks, Benes reiterated that the border claims he is presenting are precisely predicated on the constraints of the rail network. It is due to the North-South alignment of the mountain ranges that makes East-West communication difficult, making it extremely

⁶³² Ibid, p. 883.

⁶³³ Ibid, p. 884.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, p. 885.

necessary to obtain the only railway line that makes a lateral connection. Benes admitted that defining the border in such a manner would result in a sizable number of Magyars being transferred to Czechoslovakia but he immediately asserted that the Hungarian statistics are even more unreliable than the Austrian. This is the first appearance of the Benes argument, which was cited even during the 1945-46 Slovak-Hungarian population exchange, i.e., in total, 650,000 Magyars would find themselves in Czechoslovakia, while 450,000 Slovaks would remain in Hungary.⁶³⁹

Next, Benes makes use of the brutal Magyar oppression card, already well known from the memoranda, saying: “The Slovaks were especially saddled by oppression, Kossuth himself saying that the Slovaks can not get the right to vote. The Magyars openly said that they do not regard Slovaks as people. In Slovakia, of the 2,300 civil servants, a mere 17 were Slovaks; of 1,700 judges, only 1; of 2,500 tax collectors, no more than 10! As a result, the Slovak population emigrated to America. Others left their homes and migrated to other parts of Hungary in hope of making a living, as shown by the 90,000 living around Budapest and 80,000 around Debrecen.”⁶⁴⁰

In the next part of his presentation, Benes raises the question of sub-Carpathia (Ruthenia). “In close proximity to the Slovaks, East of them, there is a territory populated by Ruthenians. These Ruthenians spring from the same tribe as the East Galicians, from whom they are separated by the Carpathians. They live in closeness with the Slovaks, amid similar social and economic circumstances – what’s more, a transitional language has sprung up between the two languages. The Rusyns do not want to remain under Hungarian authority and they have offered to enter into a close federal relationship, as an independent state, with Czechoslovakia ... It would be unjust to abandon them to the whims of the Magyars and, though they do not appear among Czechoslovakia’s claims, he (meaning Benes – *auth.*) has undertaken to present their case in front of the conference.”⁶⁴¹

In his closing remarks, Benes brought up the matter of the corridor, asking the conference to create a land connection between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, to the detriment of Austria and Hungary, thus assuring a possible Czechoslovak outlet to the Adriatic.

In parsing the text of his presentation, we can clearly see that, in his speech, Benes has reiterated the main claims of the 11 memoranda. An incredibly wide array of arguments were presented to bolster Czechoslovak claims, not only the historical, strategic and economic from his memoranda but also geological (the Teschen coal fields) and linguistic (the common dialect of the Rusyns and Slovaks). His presentation must be regarded as ingeniously inventive, even coming up with an argument to explain why Germans want to stay in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, we must note that Lloyd George, Sonnino and Wilson posed several uncomfortable questions – especially the ethnic makeup of the territories to be annexed, in

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, p. 886.

our view – meaning that the members of the Supreme Council took some of the assertions in his presentation with critical skepticism.

At the end of the presentation, the Supreme Council decided to send a committee (the Czechoslovak Committee) to assess the Czechoslovak claims.⁶⁴²

Beneš and the determination of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border Prior standpoint of the Allied Powers

A decisive factor in determining the future borders was the pre-conference stand that the major Allies (America, England, France and Italy) took regarding the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border.

At the suggestion of Lloyd George, the British Foreign Office created a special group in the spring of 1917 to gather the necessary information for the peace conference and to prepare the officials to be sent out into the field, the British Empire Delegation.⁶⁴³ Dr. G.W. Prothero of the Foreign Office was responsible for collecting the historical, economic and statistical material. His task was to have the Ministry official create a small reference library, which would give detailed answers to all the questions members of the delegation might ask. This reference library, the *Peace Handbooks*, ran to 163 volumes, seven volumes of which covered the Austro-Hungarian Empire, compiled by Seton-Watson, as subject matter expert, and his cohorts. The seven volumes – actually booklets of 20-80 pages – bore the following titles:⁶⁴⁴ History and foreign policy of Austria-Hungary; Bohemia and Moravia; Slovakia; Austrian-Silesia; Bukovina; Transylvania and the Banate; and Hungarian Ruthenia.

It must be pointed out that the portion of volume one, regarding the foreign policies of Austria and the Monarchy, bears the unmistakable imprint of Wickham Steed, while the primary source of the parts dealing with Hungary and Slovakia is Seton-Watson's book, *Racial Problems in Hungary*, published in London in 1908 under the alias of Scotus Viator.⁶⁴⁵

Of interest in the account of the Slovak-Hungarian border is volume three. The unknown author states that “throughout history, there has never been a Slovak country,” going on to define the non-existent country as “The Hungarian counties, which contained a greater or lesser number of Slovaks have, of late, for simplicity's sake, been called Slovakia.”⁶⁴⁶

It is legitimate to ask what is really meant by the term ‘for simplicity's sake.’ Merely that, from the author's perspective, the 17 counties of historical Hungary (Árva, Trencsén, Turóc, Liptó, Zólyom, Szepes, Sáros, Pozsony, Nyitra, Bars, Esztergom, Hont, Nógrád, Gömör, Abaúj-Torna, Zemplén and Ung), with an area of 57,000 square kilometers

⁶⁴² Ibid, p. 887.

⁶⁴³ Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., pp. 128-133.

⁶⁴⁴ The seven booklets were published in book form by the Foreign Office in 1920. We made use of those in the preparation of this work.

⁶⁴⁵ Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., p. 129. Arday points out that the portion of volume one, sub-titled “Forcible Hungarianization”, is a verbatim lift from Seton-Watson's work, *Racial problems* (London, 1907).

⁶⁴⁶ *Peace Handbooks*, volume 3, p. 16.

and a population of 3.5 million, were deemed to be a country, Slovakia; the southern border of 10 of those counties essentially becoming a state boundary. At another point in the booklet, the author writes of the Slovak-Magyar linguistic boundary as existing “East of Pozsony, North of Vác and South of Kassa.”⁶⁴⁷

The author then goes on to discuss, in that context, in the geographic chapter, the mountains of Slovakia which include the Pilis, Mátra and Bükk, among its rivers the Danube and the Tisza, deeming the cities of Esztergom and Vác as Slovakia’s, as well as the winegrowing areas of Tokaj. In the closing pages of the booklet give solid opinions for determining the future boundary: The public administrative districts along the left bank of the Danube are completely Slovak, those on the right bank of the Tisza are mostly so ... The two most important cities, Pozsony and Kassa have, to date, been governed by Germans, Jews and Magyars and it is certain that the loss of either of these, especially Pozsony, which is the only port on the Danube and the southwestern gate of the region, would paralyze the economy of Slovakia.”⁶⁴⁸

Reading the above lines, the question arises: How can the non-existent economy of a non-existent country (Slovakia) afford or not afford to lose Pozsony?

Knowing the discussion of the peace conference committees (where railway lines took on an elevated importance), volume three’s section of railways is especially crucial. The author notes the importance of North-South railway lines (Kassa-Miskolc, Zólyom-Salgótarján-Hatvan, Zólyom-Losonc and Zsolna-Galánta) and states: “Although certain parts of the mentioned railway lines do not fall within Slovakia’s borders, all of them are crucial for Slovakia’s economy.”⁶⁴⁹

If we had any doubts, the Peace Handbooks series had immense impact on the determining of borders. The British politicians and officials who made decisions regarding Hungarian borders, in the name of the British Empire Delegation, did not have any personal knowledge of local conditions. For them, these publications represented a starting point in the creation of border recommendations and in deciding arguments that arose. It is also obvious from the content of the Handbooks that the biased British supporters of the Czechoslovak émigrés – primarily Steed and Seton-Watson – were able to have their views incorporated into the ‘expert material’ of the reference work.⁶⁵⁰

Beside the Foreign Office, the British Ministry of War was also at work on the future Slovak-Hungarian border. In their proposal of October 24, 1918, the border ran along the line of Duna-Vác-Miskolc-Ungvár,⁶⁵¹ giving Salgótarján, Sárospatak and Sátoraljaújhely to Czechoslovakia.

Similarly to the British, the United States was also preparing for the peace conference while still at war. In September of 1917, a research

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 23-24, 47.

⁶⁵⁰ Arday: *Térkép csata* ... op. cit., p. 131.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 123-124.

group, The Inquiry, was created to prepare for the conference. It was headed by a confidante of President Wilson, Colonel E.M. House.⁶⁵² One hundred and fifty researchers worked in the Inquiry, writing 2,000 reports, documents and drawing 1,500 maps. The head of the Austro-Hungarian section, Charles Seymour, was a 32 year old university lecturer, who earlier studied the ethnic problems of the Monarchy. Seymour was, for along time, the proponent of the federative restructuring of the Monarchy, working on a federative plan as late as April of 1918.⁶⁵³ President Wilson opted to accept Lansing's 'liquidation' plan, as opposed to Seymour's federation.

The Inquiry presented a proposal to Wilson on January 21, 1919, regarding the Czechoslovak-Hungarian, Romanian-Hungarian and Yugoslav-Hungarian borders. As part of this proposal, Pozsony and its surroundings, with Komárom would remain Hungarian. East of Komárom, the border proposal was what became known as the Trianon borders. South of Kassa to Ungvár, a moderately wide swath would remain Hungarian, with Ungvár becoming a Hungarian border city. The southwest border of Ruthenia would have run from Ungvár, South of the Avas Mountains to Bikszád, from there along the foot of the mountains.⁶⁵⁴ The experts of the Inquiry essentially proposed a border based on ethnic reality, although the actuality of the border determination was also influenced by economic factors. A crucial factor in their proposal was that the Rusyns could not stay with Hungary but, at the same time, they should not be given to the Ukraine, either. Therefore, they have to be annexed to Czechoslovakia.

In France, we find no equivalent to the 'Peace Handbook' or preparations similar to the Inquiry. The French, for a long time, had no prepared plan where the southern borders of Czechoslovakia should run. The first document dealing with the Czechoslovak border issue was prepared for the Foreign Ministry on November 20, 1918.⁶⁵⁵ The unknown expert wrote: "Slovakia is nothing more than a myth: the Slovak tribes of northern Hungary have never constituted a country; they are not of a homogeneous type, varying from village to village."⁶⁵⁶ Accordingly, the expert drew the Slovak-Magyar ethnic boundary – from east to West – as following the line of the Ung River, from North of Sátoraljaújhely curving to Rozsnyó and Rimaszombat, reaching the Ipoly River at Losonc, following it to the North, arcing to below Nyitra and sloping down to Pozsony (but not touching the city itself). The author of the study avers: "Only behind this line can we talk of Slovak territory. In fact, the truly Slovak populated territory we can restrict to the line of the Garam River, in the lands to the East they are always in a minority. The mountainous uplands of Liptó, Zólyom, Trencsén are truly Slovaks lands... Nowhere

⁶⁵² L.E. Gelfand: *The Inquiry. American Preparation for Peace 1917-1919*. New Haven-London, 1963.

⁶⁵³ Charles Seymour: *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*. Arranged as a narrative by Ch. Seymour. vol I-II. Boston and New York, 1926-1928.

⁶⁵⁴ Gelfand: *The Inquiry* ... op. cit., pp. 202-206.

⁶⁵⁵ Ormos: *Padovától* ... op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

does the ethnographic line drawn by us touch the Danube, which has remained until today a German and Magyar river. It also does not include Pozsony either, although Slovaks work in its factories and its markets the surrounding Slovak farmers but, where for every 42 Germans and 40 Magyars, there are only 12 Slovaks. Pozsony is not Slovakia's capital; if there is one, it is Turócszentmárton.⁶⁵⁷

It is interesting to note that the line proposed in the study more or less agrees with the December 6 draft of the Bartha-Hodža line. As noted earlier, Benes marked the line almost at the same time as the Ministry study, (between November 20 and 27) which, in his opinion, Czechoslovak forces should occupy. The Benes demands and the French proposal were quite a distance apart (no pun intended). While the French proposed a realistic Slovak-Hungarian border, the line drawn by Benes cut deeply into Hungarian populated areas. When looked at in this light, the demarcation line drawn by the French Foreign Ministry on December 19, 1918 was a compromise between the Bartha-Hodža and Benes lines. We feel that it was a result of the dedicated work of Benes in Paris.

Although Italy was a member of the 'Big Four', our research has failed to turn up any information, which would lead us to believe that Italy made preparations for the peace conference. According to a researcher of the topic, L. Nagy Zsuzsa, Rome did not have a unified plan regarding the arrangement of Central Europe.⁶⁵⁸ In fact, personality changes influenced consistent foreign policy; the views of Prime Ministers Orlando and Nitti differed on several key points.⁶⁵⁹ If we examine the drawing of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border from an Italian point of view, we can state that the Italians were not concerned in the topic and, as a result, represented the ethnic principle. They would have left both Pozsony and a portion of the Lesser Plains, the Žitný Ostrov, to Hungary. One of their delegates, Salvago Raggi, was even amenable to leaving sub-Carpathia as part of Hungary.⁶⁶⁰

Beneš and the committee wars

The Czechoslovak Committee first met on February 27, 1919. It was composed of the following people:

President: Jules Cambon, France
Vice-president: Salvago Raggi, Italy
Members: Charles Seymour, USA
Allen Dulles, USA
Sir Joseph Cook, Britain

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ L. Nagy, Zsuzsa: *Itália és Magyarország a párizsi békekonferencia idején* [Italy and Hungary during the Paris Peace Conference]. In: Romsics, Ignác (ed.): *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20 században* [Hungary and the Great Powers in the 20th century]. Teleki László Alapítvány, Budapest, 1995, pp. 83-84; L. Nagy, Zsuzsa: *Az olasz érdekek és Magyarország* [Italian interests and Hungary]. *Történelmi Szemle*, 1965, issue 2-3.

⁶⁵⁹ René Albrecht-Carrié: *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*. New York, 1938.

⁶⁶⁰ L. Nagy: *Itália és ...* op. cit., p. 85.

Sir Eyre Crowe, Britain
Harold Nicolson, Britain
General Henri Le Rond, France

The meeting of the 27th was only an introductory meeting, accomplishing nothing concrete. Benes, however, was not idle on this day either, having lunch with one of the British members, Nicolson, who fixed it in his diary as: "Lunch with Benes and Kramař, afterwards discussed the Czech borders. Benes has a whole slew of map sketches, which they intend for the use of the youngsters and the Council of Ten."⁶⁶¹

The second meeting of the committee took place on the following day.⁶⁶² There were two Hungarian-related items on the agenda: the Slovak border and the Rusyn / sub-Carpathian question. An argument developed among the delegates on the Slovak-Hungarian border issue. The British, American and Italian members wanted to leave the Csallóköz (Csallóköz, defined as North of the main tributary of the Danube and a side branch, once named Csalló, extending from Pozsony to Komárom – *ed.*) as part of Hungary. It was General Le Rond of France who insisted that, according to the French, the area must be given to Czechoslovakia. There was another disagreement over the city of Komárom; the British wanted to give it to Czechoslovakia, while the Italians wished to draw the border North of it. Due to the differing opinions, the committee decided to leave the definition to another subcommittee of experts.

The second agenda item was decided relatively quickly. The Italian, Raggi, suggested that the Rusyn populated territory – sub-Carpathia – should remain with Hungary to provide a common point of contact for Poles, Romanians and Hungarians. British delegate Crowe commented that it was exactly a Magyar wedge that was to be avoided. After a short debate, the committee accepted the American suggestion of an autonomous state, composed of the Hungarian Rusyns, under a Czechoslovak protectorate.⁶⁶³ In effect, one of Benes' wishes came true; sub-Carpathia became part of Czechoslovakia.

Nicolson wrote the following in his diary regarding the March 3 meeting of the committee: "We started with Pozsony and came to an agreement (meaning they awarded it to Czechoslovakia – *auth.*). Then came the Csallóköz. The French wanted to give it to the Czechs. The USA to the Hungarians. I abstained from expressing my opinion, saying that it depends if German-Hungary (Burgenland – *auth.*) goes to Austria."⁶⁶⁴ The difference of opinion again arises over the fate of the Csallóköz.⁶⁶⁵ After Le Rond's comment, the committee decided to delay its decision and began to address the northeastern border. We again cite Nicolson: "Then, we examined the border from Komárom to Ung. Devilish business. The

⁶⁶¹ Harold Nicolson: *Peacemaking 1919*. London, 1933 and New York, 1939, p. 272; Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 121-155, 213-227; Strickland: *Czechoslovakia at the ...* op. cit.

⁶⁶² *Francia diplomáciai ...* op. cit., pp. 154-158.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 154-157.

⁶⁶⁴ Nicolson: *Peacemaking ...* op. cit. p. 273.

⁶⁶⁵ *Francia diplomáciai ...* op. cit., pp. 165-170.

Yankees want to go to the North, along the ethnic boundary, cutting every railway line. We want to go in the South, keeping the Kassa-Komárom lateral line of communication, even if it will mean placing 80,000 Magyars under Czech rule. Finally, a compromise. The Yankees give regarding the Ipoly and we regarding Miskolc. As for the rest, we decided to wait and hear Benes.”⁶⁶⁶

The following day, March 4, the committee listened to Benes who gave “swift and loquacious” (as exemplified by Nicolson on Benes’ performance – *auth.*) answers to the countless questions of the committee and, naturally enough, demanded the Csallóköz and the Losonc-Miskolc railway line. A sample from the minutes of the meeting:⁶⁶⁷ “General Le Rond (France) asks Benes if, in his opinion, all this (the Magyars of the Csallóköz – *auth.*) will not result in political problems. Benes replied that these are farming, peaceful people. He wishes to stress the importance of Csallóköz to the economic future of the Czechoslovak state. All the economic hopes of Czechoslovakia are invested in Pozsony as it is the only spot they have a river port. This great river port is indispensable for the economic growth of the country... If the Csallóköz is given to the Hungarians, it will strangle Pozsony.”⁶⁶⁸

The following days brought sharp arguments within the committee on its March 5, 7 and 8 meetings⁶⁶⁹ mostly devoted to the fate of the Csallóköz and the various railway lines.⁶⁷⁰ Also, in the March 8 meeting, the Czechoslovak proposal for a corridor to Yugoslavia, through Burgenland, was debated (see map 5). This claim was unanimously rejected by the committee. In the end, the committee decided on March 8 to give the Csallóköz to Czechoslovakia. Since the main points of the debate were settled by the delegates, the committee accepted the subcommittee’s report, the final boundary. In a typical fashion, Nicolson recorded it in his diary: “March 12. If it were not for Kosica and the Csallóköz, I would feel rather happy about our border. Both places will have a place in ⁶⁷¹my heart.”

Hronský’s analysis shows that the committee members were more swayed with the economic, geographic and strategic arguments than with the ethnic principle, while deciding on the line of the border.⁶⁷²

The Czechoslovak Committee presented its recommendation regarding the proposed border to the central Territorial Committee, which

⁶⁶⁶ Nicolson: *Peacemaking ...* op. cit., pp. 273-280.

⁶⁶⁷ *Francia diplomáciai ...* op. cit., pp. 165-170.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 171-172.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid*, March 6, pp. 172-176, March 7, pp. 177-182, March 8, pp. 184-186.

⁶⁷⁰ Palotás, Zoltán: *A trianoni határok* [The Trianon borders]. Interedition, Budapest, 1990, pp. 37-57; Majdán, János: *A vasútak szerepe a határ kialakulásában* [The role of the railways in the shaping of the border]. In: „...ahol a határ elválaszt” *Trianon és következményei a Kárpát-medencében* [“... where the border divides” Trianon and its consequences in the Carpathian Basin]. Balassagyarmat-Várpalota, 2002.

⁶⁷¹ Nicolson: *Peacemaking ...* op. cit., p. 283.

⁶⁷² Hronský: *A második demarkációs ...* op. cit. p. 195.

approved it on March 24 and presented it to the Council of Four for its final decision. That decision was greatly delayed by the March 21 government overthrow in Budapest by Béla Kun and his Bolshevik revolutionaries.⁶⁷³ In spite of that, and with knowledge of later events, we can state that the final Slovak-Hungarian border was agreed upon on March 12, 1919.

Benes had daily information on the activities of the Czechoslovak Committee and, as he was not satisfied with the lines drawn by them, he tried to have the decisions influenced with the assistance of the French High Command. Czechoslovak Minister of Defense Klofač wrote a memorandum on March 9 suggesting the Slovak-Hungarian border be drawn further South, citing the bad transportation circumstances close to the border and the importance of communication between Prague and the eastern portion of Czechoslovakia – saying that the Vix note of December 24, 1918 gives no assurance of it.⁶⁷⁴ Benes managed to forward the memorandum to Marshal Foch, through General Le Rond, on March 15. Foch forwarded the note to the Foreign Minister, and the High Command also deliberated on it. The High Command created a detailed note on March 18, stating: the Czechoslovak government requested a change to the demarcation line for “purely economic” reasons, citing as justification that otherwise they can not assure the food supply of Slovakia.⁶⁷⁵

It seems plausible on the content of the High Command note that Marshal Foch, analogous to the Romanian-Hungarian solution, tried to nudge the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border by means of a new line of demarcation, past what the committee had decided. The new line would have run along the Danube to Vác, encompassing the Bükk Mountain, the coal fields of Salgótarján and the Losonc-Miskolc railway line. Ultimately, this was the aim of the Benes-Foch action.⁶⁷⁶ Benes wrote a letter on March 21 to the French Minister of War and asked for Czechoslovakia to be given the Ipoly River valley and the Losonc-Miskolc railway line. Foch then addressed a letter to the French President of the Czechoslovak Committee, Cambon, describing and supporting the Czechoslovak claim. The committee decided to ignore the Foch request.⁶⁷⁷

Beneš and the Hungarian Soviet Republic

The March 21, 1919 overthrow of the Budapest government by Béla Kun presented a new opportunity for Benes to oppose the committee’s decision. The proclamation of the Republic of Soviets handed a prime opening for the Czechoslovak politicians to “grab new Hungarian-populated areas under the guise of fighting Bolshevism.”⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷³ Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit., pp. 215-216.

⁶⁷⁴ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 69.

⁶⁷⁵ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., p. 200; Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko ...* op. cit., pp. 160-161.

⁶⁷⁶ Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., p. 215.

⁶⁷⁷ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 200-201.

⁶⁷⁸ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 70.

Following March 21, Benes again swung into action to wrest a more favorable boundary that that drawn by the committee. Kramař and Benes sent a new letter on March 26 to Clemenceau and Pichon.⁶⁷⁹ The letter opened with: "The Bolshevik revolution in Hungary has placed our country in an extremely difficult position. In Berlin, Saxony and Bavaria, the Spartacist movement (extreme Left-wing faction that later became the Communists – *ed.*) is making greater and greater inroads. The effects of the Budapest revolution can be felt strongly in Vienna. At the moment, we can't predict what will happen in Poland. There is no doubt that our situation is terribly grave as the growing Bolshevik movement of Germany, Austria, Hungary - and possibly Poland – can engulf us at any minute. We are becoming an oasis in the desert... That is the reason we turn to you, asking you (meaning Clemenceau – *auth.*) as president of the Peace Conference and the Supreme Council, to grant a few of our requests."⁶⁸⁰

After that introduction, Benes continued to say that Czechoslovakia still does not have a final boundary (knowing full well that it has been finalized on March 12, since he was scheming to change it with the aid of Foch – *auth.*) and the current line of demarcation is disadvantageous. He goes on to say that the Czechoslovak delegation has forwarded a map to Marshal Foch of a proposed new demarcation line (although Benes probably knew that the committee has already rejected Foch's proposal – *auth.*). Czechoslovakia can only resist Bolshevism – stressed the letter – if it can occupy the new proposed line, as well as Ruthenia. (Here we must note that the Czechoslovak Committee has awarded Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia on February 28 but that the upper echelons of the conference have not yet made a final decision.) It also asked for arms and ammunition for the fight against Bolshevism.

Besides the diplomatic channels, Benes made use of his tried and true weapon, the press. An article by Benes appears in the *Times* on March 27, demanding action to stop the inexorable spread of Bolshevism. The extortion of Károlyi and his countrymen must be stopped – wrote Benes – "because there is a danger of Germany following Hungary's example." Then he gets to his real point, saying that Bolshevik Hungary must be isolated. Borders must be immediately marked, as the committee has finished its work, and the respective governments notified without delay. A connection must be created between Czechoslovakia and Romania to completely cut off Hungary from the Ukraine and Russia.⁶⁸¹

While Benes was simultaneously working two channels to lobby for Czechoslovak interests – diplomacy and the media – the Peace Conference was deeply divided by the coming to power in Budapest of the Kun faction. As a result, two striking position can be observed at the conference.

On the one side, Lloyd George, following the events in Budapest and assessing the impact of Bolshevism on territorial claims came to the

⁶⁷⁹ *Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit.*, pp. 222-224.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶⁸¹ Arday: *Térkép csata ... op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.

conclusion in his 'Fontainebleau memorandum' that German and Hungarian Bolshevism was sparked by unjust territorial reallocations. "There will never be peace in southeast Europe if the newly created small nations will all have a significant Hungarian population. As the guiding principle of the peace, I would take, as far as humanly possible, that the various nations receive their own country and that this ethnic principle override every strategic, economic or transportation solution, which are usually solvable through other means."⁶⁸²

On the other side was the stand taken by the hardliners. The best illustration is a comment made by a delegate, Leeper, on March 24 about the Hungarian Republic: "A textbook example of the most disgraceful extortion, worthy of the past and present leaders of Hungary. The situation is extremely grave and justifies the repeated requests of the Romanian and Czechoslovak governments for military aid."⁶⁸³

At the meeting of the Council of Four on March 29 – discussing the Hungarian situation – Lloyd George brought it up that they should comply with Béla Kun's request and send an Allied mission to Hungary. Clemenceau, one of the hardliners, tabled the question for another day on the grounds that the foreign ministers should be consulted.⁶⁸⁴ After long arguments, Lloyd George's suggestion won the day and a delegation was sent to Budapest, headed by General Jan Smuts.⁶⁸⁵

The first week of April, the Smuts mission was occupied with the Hungarian-Romanian demarcation line,⁶⁸⁶ thus, of scant interest to us here. His negotiating meetings of April 4 and 5 proved unfruitful, General Smuts traveled to Prague, at Lloyd George's instruction, and met with President Masaryk on April 7.⁶⁸⁷ Lloyd George recounts the episode in his diaries: "The claims presented by Benes concerned me to such an extent that I asked General Smuts ... to go to Prague, examine the validity of these proposals and report back. The local inquiries raised serious doubts in him regarding the wisdom and sincerity of pushing the border of their country all the way to the Danube, with no regard to the ethnic composition of the population. At his (meaning Smuts – *auth.*) meeting with Masaryk, he openly expressed his doubts and disapproval. He pointed out inadvisability of absorbing into Czechoslovakia the mainly or purely Magyar population north of the Danube ... from Pozsony to Komárom. According to his report to us, Masaryk agreed and said that he would much rather drop the

⁶⁸² Ibid, pp. 189-192.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, p. 188.

⁶⁸⁴ Litván, György (ed.): *Trianon felé* [Toward Trianon]. MTA, Történelemtudományi Intézete, Budapest, 1998, pp. 19-21.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 21-26.

⁶⁸⁶ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 227-237; Arday: *Térkép csata ...* op. cit., pp. 197-210; Francis Deák: *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*. Howard Fertig, New York, 1972, pp. 65, 431-433; Karsai, Elek: *Iratok a Smuts-misszió történetéhez* [Documents of the history of the Smuts mission]. Levéltári Közlemények, year XXXVIII, 1967, pp. 238-242. old; Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit., pp. 274-275.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid (Deák), pp. 431-433.

claims to all Magyar territory and move the Czechoslovak border further North, leaving all the ethnic Magyar territories to Hungary, on condition that, in exchange, Czechoslovakia gets a narrow strip of land South of the Danube at Pozsony.”⁶⁸⁸

Masaryk made the request for this strip of territory so that, being in possession of both banks, Czechoslovakia could build its river port and docks. The Smuts-Masaryk meeting gave the British delegation an opportunity to have the Peace Conference reopen the question of the Csallóköz. Smuts’ report was discussed at the Council of Foreign Ministers on May 3. The Frenchman Laroche argued that, according to Benes, there is a misunderstanding, as Masaryk’s remarks on the Csallóköz was not presented as his own position but as something that certain people hold – but not his personal view.⁶⁸⁹ Due to the argument, the Council of Foreign Ministers referred the question of the Csallóköz back to the Czechoslovak Committee. At the committee meeting of May 5,⁶⁹⁰ Nicolson attempted to reverse the Csallóköz back to Hungary but the committee, as a whole, rejected that. The Csallóköz remained with Czechoslovakia; the committee also rejected Masaryk’s request for a beach head on the South side of the Danube. How it exactly came about is revealed in Nicolson’s diary: “... was asked what Kramář wants exactly, and can we satisfy him, as time is short. We rejected the Pozsony request (the beach head – *auth.*) but gave him a small piece of the Ipoly to keep him quiet.”⁶⁹¹

In the meantime, Benes completely repudiated President Masaryk, as shown in the minutes of the meeting of May 5: “Laroche added ... saw Benes to clarify if the Czechoslovak government really wants to acquire territory across from Pozsony in trade for the Csallóköz. Benes rambled in his reply that it is possible there are some who support this idea but it is not the position of the Czechoslovak government, which wants to retain the Csallóköz. In any case, Kramář is the Prime Minister and Benes is the Foreign Minister, while President Masaryk has no real hand in running the government.”⁶⁹²

Masaryk, it must be noted, thought of his role in the above in a different light. The day after Smuts’ Prague visit, in a letter to Benes dated April 8, he wrote: “ If the Allies invite me (to the Peace Conference – *auth.*) as an expert on eastern Europe ... If they have a sense of responsibility, I could become a member of the Council of Four.”⁶⁹³ A startling comment that Masaryk, in a totally unrealistic fashion, hoped to join the Big Four.

To return to the mainstream of the events unfolding, we can see that, while the question of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border bounced among

⁶⁸⁸ David Lloyd George: *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, vol. I-II. London, 1938, p. 941.

⁶⁸⁹ Ormos: *Padovától ... op. cit.*, p. 202; Deák F.: *Hungary at ... op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁹⁰ *Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit.*, pp. 283-286.

⁶⁹¹ Nicolson: *Peacemaking ... op. cit.*, p. 360.

⁶⁹² *Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁶⁹³ Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš ... op. cit.* pp. 218-220.

the various committees of the Peace Conference, the politicians back home once again wished to make use of the *fait accompli* policy, drafting a resolution on March 20 that, if necessary, the new line of demarcation claimed by them should be occupied by armed force.⁶⁹⁴ However, since Paris did not give its accord, the start of the military action was shelved. In the first half of April, the French commander of the Czechoslovak forces, general Pellé, once again contemplated mounting an attack – an intervention against the Hungarian Soviet Republic – to occupy sub-Carpathia, as well as the new line of demarcation claimed by the Czechoslovak politicians. The attack was put off as Clemenceau did not officially ask the Czechoslovaks to take such an action against Hungary.⁶⁹⁵

Clemenceau was clear that, if the Czechoslovak army carries out an intervention in Hungary, the Czechoslovak politicians will present a new bill for payment, more than likely a demand for a new line of demarcation. However, since the Romanians launched an attack, without any Allied approval, on April 16, the Czechoslovak government decided to launch its own attack, also without French approval. On April 27, when the Romanians marched into Csap, Czechoslovak forces began moving against Hungary.⁶⁹⁶ Minister of War Klofač ordered the Czechoslovak forces to take the Verőce-Mátra-Mályi-Gesztely-Tallya-Sárospatak, including the coalfields around Salgótarján, Miskolc and the Tokaj region. Initially, the action was successful, the forces of general Hennoque took sub-Carpathia, while the 6th Division under Italian general Rossi took Sátoraljaújhely and Miskolc on May 1. The following day, Czechoslovak and Romanian forces linked up a little way South of Csap. This brought to an end the successes of the Czechoslovak forces. They met with stiff resistance around Salgótarján.⁶⁹⁷

The Czechoslovak action elicited a deafening silence from Paris; general Pellé, in spite of asking for orders, received neither confirmation nor disapproval.

The action around Salgótarján reached a critical phase and, on May 10, the Hungarian forces took the initiative and went on the attack (referred to as the northern campaign of the Red Army), pushing the Czechoslovak forces behind the line of demarcation. By June 16, the Red Army occupied a wide swath of Northern Hungary (Radvány, Érsekújvár, Surány, Verebély, Aranyosmarót, Benedek, Újbánya, Zólyom, Rozsnyó, Korompa, Kisszeben, Bártfa, Nagymihály, Csap to the Tisza River). On June 16, 1919, the Slovak Soviet Republic was proclaimed at Eperjes /Prešov /.

⁶⁹⁴ Hronský: *A második demarkációs ...* op. cit. pp. 197-198.

⁶⁹⁵ Ormos: *Padovától ...* op. cit., pp. 220-221.

⁶⁹⁶ Breít, József: *A magyarországi 1918-19 évi forradalmi mozgalmak és a vörös háború története* [The 1918-19 revolutionary movements of Hungary and the history of the Red war]. Budapest, 1929; Vaclav Kral: *A csehszlovák burzsoázia intervenciós háborúja a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság ellen* [The interventionist war of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie against the Hungarian Soviet Republic]. Bratislava, 1956.

⁶⁹⁷ Kral: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 96.

The successes of the Hungarian forces elicited responses from the Peace Conference. Clemenceau tabled the Hungarian question before the Supreme Council, suggesting that the conference send a message to Budapest,⁶⁹⁸ to promise that if hostilities cease, the Hungarian government will be invited to the conference and have a peace treaty signed, otherwise, armed intervention by the Allies was a possibility. The Supreme Council unanimously accepted the proposal. General Alby immediately composed the text of the message, which omitted the part about inviting a Hungarian delegation.⁶⁹⁹ After the telegram was sent, Clemenceau began military preparations for an invasion of Hungary on the assumption that the Hungarian government will reject the proposal. But the Hungarian government accepted the terms of the offer on June 9, replying: “The government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in the interest of avoiding needless bloodshed, hereby announces its willingness immediately to cease hostilities against all the countries so that the Allies may have the means to enforce its orders with the Czech-Slovak Republic, and the Yugo-Slav and Romanian Kingdoms and enforce the terms of the November 13 military accord and come to an agreement regarding terms pertaining,” the government is willing to take part in any discussion pertaining to a peaceful solution.⁷⁰⁰

The reply by Béla Kun erased the legal underpinnings of a concentrated military attack. The Supreme Council was again in session on the day the Hungarian telegram arrived (June 9). This meeting was a distasteful day of the conference for the small nations.⁷⁰¹ Lloyd George addressed the Romanians with sharp words for ignoring the terms of the armistice and launching an attack, now deep in Hungarian territory. Next, Italian general Cavarelo unmasked the Czechoslovaks, announcing that in Slovakia, it was the Czechoslovaks who attacked, not the Hungarians. He presented Minister Klofač’s orders regarding the action. In the remainder of the argument, Lloyd George expressed his suspicion that the anti-Bolshevik steps taken by Hungary’s neighbors were, perhaps not exclusively, or not even primarily about putting an end to the regime, but as a means to acquire new territory. The antipathy against the small allied states – Czechoslovakia and Romania – can best be illustrated by a short quote from the official minutes:

“Lloyd George: Shouldn’t we talk about this with Bratianu, and Kramař or Benes?

Wilson: I don’t like to play with ammunition stores – it can result in an explosion.

Clemenceau: We can invite them for this afternoon, if you feel it is important.

⁶⁹⁸ *Paper relating to the relations ... op. cit.*, vol VI, pp. 240-251, 246-247.

⁶⁹⁹ *Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit.*, pp. 297-298.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.

⁷⁰¹ *Paper relating to the relations ... op. cit.*, vol VI, pp. 254-258.

Lloyd George: These people (meaning Benes and Bratianu – *auth.*) come to us for help after getting themselves into trouble. They are only small time thieves who wait for any opportunity to steal some more territory.”⁷⁰²

For the following day’s meeting, the representatives of the small nation were invited, leading to the presence of Benes, Kramař and Bratianu.⁷⁰³ During the meeting, both the American President and the British Prime Minister sharply interrogated Bratianu and Benes about their actions to date regarding Hungary. Benes defended himself by saying that the Czech attack had been sanctioned by Marshal Foch.⁷⁰⁴ When the Czech and Romanian politicians left, Clemenceau suggested that a mission be dispatched to Budapest, which would determine those lines to which the Hungarian, Romanian and Czechoslovak forces must withdraw. President Wilson made a counterproposal: instead of a mission, why not finalize the already determined boundaries and have all the participants withdraw to those lines. It must be noted that the Council of Ten had unanimously accepted the proposal concerning Hungary’s borders a month before, on May 12, meaning that Wilson’s suggestion was pointless. Clemenceau accepted Wilson’s proposal and had the Supreme Council issue instructions for the Foreign Ministers Council to announce on June 11 to the representatives of the two countries (Czechoslovakia and Romania) regarding the border, because the Supreme Council does not feel it necessary to define a new demarcation line; instead, to cease Hungarian-Czechoslovak and Hungarian-Romanian hostilities along the finalized borders. The Foreign Ministers Council did so on that day.⁷⁰⁵

Kramař and Benes accepted the border ruling but immediately asked for an adjustment at two points. They asked that Czechoslovakia be given the Csata-Kalonda-Losonc railway line and a base across from Pozsony, South of the Danube. The Foreign Ministers Council immediately consulted with the Supreme Council, then rejected both requests. The first on the ground that the Danube formed a natural boundary; the second on the grounds that to do so would transfer a significant number of Magyar residents from Hungary. The Foreign Ministers Council counterproposed to the Supreme Council to effect a revision in the Ipoly region, so that the railway hub there will become part of Czechoslovakia.⁷⁰⁶

The Supreme Council accepted the suggestion on June 12 regarding the revised Czechoslovak-Hungarian border. The Supreme Council called on the Czechoslovak government to suspend hostilities and have its armed forces observe the June 11 boundary.⁷⁰⁷ While this was all going on, the government of Béla Kun accepted the Allies’ terms and made it known to

⁷⁰² Ibid, p. 258.

⁷⁰³ Ibid, pp. 281-289, 320-325.

⁷⁰⁴ This statement of Benes echoes a letter written by Masaryk on April 7, 1919, according to which Foch determined the line of demarcation. Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš ... op. cit.*, pp. 214-217.

⁷⁰⁵ *Paper relating to the relations ... op. cit.*, vol IV, pp. 803-814.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 821-826.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, vol VI, pp. 411-412.

the conference by a telegram on June 16.⁷⁰⁸ Two things should have followed: the Romanian troops withdraw to the Hungarian-Romanian border designated by the Peace Conference and the Hungarians likewise withdraw from Northern Hungary to the designated Czechoslovak-Hungarian border. However, the Supreme Council sent a new telegram on June 21 to the Czechoslovak and Hungarian governments, which stated that the Romanian government will be asked to vacate their current positions when the Hungarian withdrawal in the northern zone has been completed.⁷⁰⁹

General Pellé now opened contact with the Hungarians, Vilmos Böhm. Böhm responded to Pellé that he will begin the withdrawal from Northern Hungary if he is given a guarantee that the Romanian troops will also withdraw. The conference also assigned American general Bliss to organize the whole Czechoslovak-Romanian-Hungarian question, claims and counterclaims.⁷¹⁰ Bliss solved the Czechoslovak-Hungarian matter simply, he suggested discussions with Benes.⁷¹¹

On June 26, Béla Kun again posed the question to the Peace Conference, what is the guarantee that the Romanian troops will actually be withdrawn?⁷¹² The conference failed to answer Kun, leading to a view to emerge in Budapest: if Hungary executes the conference's decision – withdrawing its troops from Northern Hungary behind the assigned borders – Hungary becomes a recognized partner in the peace process and, if the Romanians fail to carry out their directive, justifiable firm steps can be taken against them.⁷¹³ On June 29, Béla Kun notified Paris that the Hungarian government has issued the orders for the withdrawal and does so on the understanding that the conference president's word is the guarantee for compliance with the second part, the Romanian withdrawal. The Hungarian army began to fall back on June 30 to the line designated by Paris. The army began to disintegrate after the withdrawal from Northern Hungary, many officers tendered their resignations (eg- Aurél Stromfeld), while a number of the officer corps took a sympathetic stance toward the National Army, being organized in Szeged by Miklós Horthy.

The withdrawal from Northern Hungary was completed by July 4, the border positions being assumed by the Czechoslovak army on July 6. The first ever Slovak-Hungarian border of history began to function.

In spite of the withdrawal of the Hungarian army from Northern Hungary, the Romanians made no moves whatever to withdraw. In fact, French government circles made two simultaneous attempts to overthrow the Hungarian Soviet Republic: providing help for the counter-revolutionary groups – such as Gyula Károlyi's group in Szeged – as well as beginning to organize an inter-allied military expeditionary force. The Supreme Council hear a situation report – the Hoover Report – on July 5,

⁷⁰⁸ *Francia diplomáciai ... op. cit.*, pp. 305-306.

⁷⁰⁹ Ormos: *Padovától ... op. cit.*, p. 307.

⁷¹⁰ *Paper relating to the relations ... op. cit.*, vol VI, p. 513.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 550, 552-556.

⁷¹² *Ibid*, pp. 706-707.

⁷¹³ Ormos: *Padovától ... op. cit.*, p. 309.

1919, on conditions in Hungary. The gist of the report was that, with regards to Hungarian Bolshevism, “there is no more room for delay, must intervene, Budapest must be occupied.” An argument ensued after the report and the delegates decided to ask the military to prepare a plan, within 48 hours, for the intercession.⁷¹⁴ The proposed plan for the military action was discussed by the Council on July 9 but a question quickly arose: who will supply the necessary military contingent for the effort?⁷¹⁵ The decision was made to invite leaders of the Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav delegates to their July 11 meeting.

At this meeting, it was not Benes but Kramař who spoke for the Czechoslovaks, saying that an anti-Hungarian action would come at the worst possible time for his country.⁷¹⁶ A few days later, on July 15, President Masaryk notified the commander of the expeditionary force, Marshal Foch, that Prague was ready to provide men for the intervention.⁷¹⁷ We can safely infer that Prime Minister Kramař – who, in the meantime, resigned – did not represent Masaryk’s or Benes’ views. As foreign minister, Benes offered Marshal Foch six infantry and two mounted divisions, a total of 100,000 men.

The meeting to discuss the intervention was scheduled on July 17, and Benes was invited, and immediately raised objection to holding discussions with the Hungarians. “If the Allies begin to talk with the Hungarians, they must count on the suspicion of the Romanians, the Czechoslovaks and the Yugoslavs.”⁷¹⁸ The delegates were unable to come to a consensus at their meeting of the following day due to differences of opinion, hence, the beginning of the action was delayed.⁷¹⁹

While the conference was occupied with preparations of an intervention in Hungary, the Hungarian army opened an offensive against the Romanian army on July 20, in an effort to occupy the lands designated by Paris as Hungarian territory. The Hungarian attack came as a good excuse for Prague to begin a Czechoslovak attack. There were almost daily telegrams from Prague to Benes in Paris, urging him to press for the beginning of the incursion.⁷²⁰ Vlastimil Tusař, the new Czechoslovak Prime Minister, mentioned to Benes in his letter of July 29, that if the Romanians occupy Budapest, they will capture all the plunder.⁷²¹

Benes himself dedicated a lot of his attention to the question, writing to Marshal Foch on July 29: “The Czechoslovak army is ready to start its offensive against the Hungarians. It can start immediately, not waiting for the decision of the conference. I only have reservations against the general policy of the conference ...”⁷²² Elsewhere in his letter, Benes points out

⁷¹⁴ *Paper relating to the relations ...* op. cit., vol VII, pp. 220-228.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 59-61.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 103-108.

⁷¹⁷ Kral: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., pp. 268-269.

⁷¹⁸ *Paper relating to the relations ...* op. cit., vol VII, pp. 178-179.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 198-200.

⁷²⁰ Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 90.

⁷²¹ *Ibid*.

⁷²² *Ibid*, p. 91.

that the Allies are still in discussions with the Hungarian Social Democrats and, if that should lead to the overthrow of the proletarian regime, only then can the Romanians and Czechoslovaks come into consideration. In his opinion, the Romanians dare not attack Budapest alone, if only because of the Peace Conference. But if the Romanians do march on Budapest, then he has no objections if the Czechoslovak army does the same, too. For the moment, it is best to wait, as a premature intervention will adversely influence Czechoslovakia's position at the conference.

All the while, Minister of War Klofač was doing his utmost to prepare for the invasion.⁷²³ Events in Hungary were also dramatic. On July 31, the Revolutionary Governing Council resigned, to be replaced on August 1 by the officially formed Union government; on August 3, Romanian troops entered Budapest. In this chaotic time, the Czechoslovak quickly occupied the coalfields of Salgótarján, with the intention of occupying western Hungary and other areas. Their advance was reluctantly halted by resistance from the Allied and the Romanian army commands. In fact, they had to withdraw from Salgótarján, too.

Thus ended the final Czechoslovak attempt by Benes and his fellow politicians to alter the border as drawn by the Peace Conference. In typical fashion, Benes, citing the loyalty of Czechoslovakia, asked Clemenceau that, when the spoils are to be distributed, Czechoslovakia should get its share of the war booty which the Romanians got through their occupation of Budapest.⁷²⁴

⁷²³ Ibid, pp. 91-92.

⁷²⁴ Kral: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., p. 279.

PART II: DEFENCE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE 1920 – 1938

2.1 DEFENSE OF THE SECOND CONCEPT PRIME MINISTERIAL INTERLUDE

As we have seen in the previous part, the interim National Assembly met in Prague on November 14, 1918, on whose agenda were the first acts of sovereignty. The assemblage made certain decisions regarding the form and make-up of the government and, in that vein, elected the republic's first president, T.G. Masaryk, and went on to constitute the first government, under the prime ministership of Karel Kramář. The Kramář government consisted of 17 members; Benes, still in Paris, was named to the foreign affairs portfolio, a post he retained until 1935 when he was elected to the presidency. Czechoslovakia had 17 governments in the 20 years between 1918 and 1938 but only one 'permanent' Foreign Minister in most of that time - Benes. In fact, he did not quit foreign affairs with his election as President, naming foreign ministers to the post who carried out his plans.

Between 1918 and 1935, foreign affairs were the sole focus of Benes' political activities.⁷²⁵ His involvement in the domestic affairs of the country was merely a secondary activity. This, in spite of the total trust Masaryk placed in Benes and had significant plans for him in domestic matters, too. This is illustrated in the first half of June 1919 when – while Benes was still in Paris fighting resolutely for the Czechoslovak borders – Masaryk attempted to convince Benes to accept the prime ministership, on top of his Foreign Affairs post. Benes declined, citing the results of the local elections.⁷²⁶

Benes waged an extremely active foreign policy in 1920-21. These actions were greatly valued by the politicians at home, who saw in him as the one politician to solve the increasing number of internal problems, too.⁷²⁷ The 'petka', the council of the five largest political parties – formed as liaison between the bureaucracy and parliament – nominated him for the prime ministership, which Benes accepted. Thus, on September 26, 1921, Benes is sworn in as Prime Minister, naturally retaining the external affairs portfolio, as well.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 59-85.

⁷²⁶ Šolle: *Masaryk a Beneš ve ...* op. cit., pp. 292-295.

⁷²⁷ Joseph Rothschild: *East Central Europe between Two World Wars*. History of East Central Europe, volume IX. University of Washington Press, Seattle-London, 1974, pp. 73-135; Victor Mamatey: *The development of Czechoslovak Democracy*. In: Mamatey-Luza (eds.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 47-58; Nosz, Gyula: *Csehszlovákia története* [The history of Czechoslovakia]. Budapest, 1932; Antinín Klimek: *Boj o Hrad 1918-1926*. vol I-II. Paneropa, Praha, 1996.

⁷²⁸ Ibid (Mamatey), p. 109.

In a bitter twist of fate, Benes, elected to solve internal problems, is almost immediately beset with serious external problems (the attempts by Emperor Charles IV to regain his throne, the topic of the next chapter), while the beginner prime minister was also expected to address a number of internal problems, too.⁷²⁹

One of the chief problems was the matter of Slovak autonomy. Beginning in the summer of 1921, Slovak politicians – Hlinka, Juriga, Tomanek – wage an increasingly intensive campaign demanding Slovak autonomy.⁷³⁰ In towns large and small, populous public demonstrations are organized. The one held in Zsolna in June of 1921 presented concrete demands:⁷³¹

- Remove Anton Štefanek from the Ministry of Education,
- Review the qualification of the Czech administrators and teachers in Slovensko,
- Return the middle and high schools expropriated from the Catholic Church,
- A rejection of the education of the youth in the spirit of Jan Hus,
- The Czech press must stop its attacks on Slovak literature and attempts toward autonomy,
- Review of the results of the agricultural reforms, and
- The Slovak People's Party will fight for autonomy.

In the middle of October, Ferdinand Juriga summed up the military demands in the following way:

- The Czech army to withdraw from Slovensko,
- Slovak units now in Bohemia to be posted back to Slovakia,
- Slovak officers to be placed in charge of Slovak units, and
- The language of command to be Slovak with Slovak units.

Parallel to these events, Vojtech Tuka drafts the first plan for Slovak autonomy. These are the active events when Benes assumes the prime ministership. While assembling his government, he takes steps to disarm the Slovaks.⁷³² He floats trial balloons about the possibility of naming Andrej Hlinka as bishop of Olmutz, or perhaps as head of the soon-to-be-established Slovakian archdiocese. He also raised the possibility of returning a few Catholic schools to the Church. These attempts remained unsuccessful. On October 21, Hlinka and followers announce that the Slovak People's Party will split from the united Czech and Slovak People's Party⁷³³ and take up opposition on the autonomy issue. The Benes coalition still managed to retain the reins of government.

⁷²⁹ Ibid, pp. 109-110; Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ... op. cit.*, pp. 80-93.

⁷³⁰ Kovač: *Szlovákia ... op. cit.*, pp. 179-187.

⁷³¹ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ... op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁷³² Valerian Bistricky: *Edouard Beneš a Slovensko (1918-1938). Historický Časopis*, 1995, issue 2, pp. 246-262.

⁷³³ Rothschild: *East Central ... op. cit.*, pp. 25-35.

Benes was also having troubles with the German minority. They started to demand their right of self-determination, turning to the League of Nations with a memorandum. There were bloody clashes between the local Germans and the Czech troops sent from the capital from the Sudetenland to the area around Eger.

In spite of all these internal difficulties, in 1921-22 Benes concentrated on foreign matters: two attempted royal coups in 1921 and the conference in Genoa in 1922 takes up most of his time. During this time, it is effectively the 'petka' who runs the country; often Benes only spends a few days in Prague between two foreign trips.

By the end of 1922, the governing coalition parties – who elected him to the prime ministership expecting his boundless capacity for work to solve the burning internal problems – have had enough of a Benes almost exclusively engaged with foreign policies. The five-party coalition that formed his government created a new coalition with the Agrarian Party on October 6, inviting party leader Antonin Švehla to become Prime Minister (a post he held for five years). Benes retained the Foreign Ministry post.⁷³⁴

BENEŠ' FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 20's

The Benes-guided foreign policy initiatives had two main goals: the maintenance of the fledgling Czechoslovak state and the retention of the borders hard-won in Versailles.⁷³⁵ In working towards these goals, Benes exerted intensive activities in three areas through the Twenties to increase Czechoslovakia's security. Firstly, he created the Little Entente; secondly, he concluded a number of bilateral agreements; and lastly, he played an active role on the stage of world politics.

Creating the Little Entente

The Hungarian government signed the treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920. In spite of that, there were spirited French-Hungarian discussions underway around three topics: one, economic questions; two, military questions (about creating an anti-Soviet block of Hungary, Poland and Romania); and three, territorial questions. The chief characteristic of these discussions was that the Hungarians hoped to wring political concessions – more to the point, territorial concessions – for making economic concessions to the French, to absolutely no avail.⁷³⁶ In spite of the fact that, in the meantime, Hungary's military value went up in French estimates as Red Army units were, by August of 1920, approaching Warsaw in the

⁷³⁴ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 92-93.

⁷³⁵ P.S. Wandycz: *Foreign policy of Edvard Beneš 1918-1938*. In: Viktor S. Mamatey – Radomir Luza (eds.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973; Felix John Vondracek: *The foreign policy of Czechoslovakia 1918-1935*. New York, 1937. (It must be noted that the Vondracek book is extremely biased in a positive way towards Benes - auth.)

⁷³⁶ Ádám, Magda: *A kisantant és Európa 1920-1929* [The Little Entente and Europe 1920-1929]. Budapest, 1989, pp. 39-75.

Russian-Polish war. The French government wanted to create an anti-Soviet block of Poland, Hungary and Romania to halt the Red advance. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Pál Teleki, who assumed the post on July 19, 1920, was a willing partner. Five days before taking the post, he signaled the French that Hungary is willing to take part in the anti-Bolshevik fight and, to this end, is willing to raise seven infantry and one mounted divisions.⁷³⁷

The French neither accepted nor rejected the offer, deferring the response. They hoped – and events bore them out – that the Poles could reverse the tide of events. Thus, they informed the Hungarians that, although France does not hypothetically oppose their proposal, the time has not yet come to take concrete steps.⁷³⁸ At the same time, Hungary was conducting talks with Poland, as well – with French approval.⁷³⁹ These meetings had actually begun on May 3, 1920. Regent Horthy, in a letter dated June 6, offered Hungarian military assistance to Pilsudski, resulting in a bilateral agreement covering the shipment of arms and ammunition.⁷⁴⁰ In lieu of this help, Teleki was hoping to have Ruthenia repatriated, and there were some hopes for the return of Northern Hungary, as well.⁷⁴¹

Benes viewed the French-Hungarian talks with suspicion, although the French tried to allay the fears of Benes and their other Central European allies. French diplomats stressed in Prague, Bucharest and Belgrade that, in the interest of Central European prosperity, cooperation with Hungary is necessary. It is interesting to note that while the French only informed their Romanian allies of the economic portions of their talks, keeping silent on political aspects, it must also be assumed that they made use of the same tactic with the Czechoslovaks.⁷⁴²

In spite of his suspicions, Benes suggested opening talks with the Hungarian government, through Czechoslovakia's representative in Budapest, Lejhanec, on June 6. Shortly after, on June 22, count Saint-Sauveur arrived in Budapest, leading a French delegation. He had meetings with Apponyi and members of the Hungarian government, and was Horthy's guest at Gödöllő.⁷⁴³ After his departure, a rumor made the rounds that a secret agreement was signed in Gödöllő. The text of the agreement was bought by Austrian chancellor Renner from a Hungarian civil servant for 10,000 Korona and sent to Benes, who immediately forwarded it to

⁷³⁷ Francis Deák – Dezső Újváry (ed.): *Papers and Documents to the Foreign Relations of Hungary*. vol I. 1919-1920. Budapest, 1939. vol II. January-August 1921. Budapest, 1946. vol III. July-December 1921. Never published in book form; to be found in the National Archives. (In future, cited as PDH.) This quote found in PDH vol I, document 451, pp. 456-457.

⁷³⁸ PDH vol I, doc. 501, pp. 503-504.

⁷³⁹ Kovács, Endre: *Lengyel-magyar kapcsolatok a két világháború között* [Polish-Hungarian relations between the wars]. Budapest, 1971; Galántai, József: *A trianoni békekötés* [The treaty of Trianon]. Budapest, 1990, pp. 165-169.

⁷⁴⁰ PDH vol I, doc. 321, pp. 332-333; doc. 440, pp. 446-447.

⁷⁴¹ Galántai: *A trianoni* ... op. cit., pp. 177-179.

⁷⁴² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa* ... op. cit., p. 67.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 70.

Paris, accompanied by a note of protest.⁷⁴⁴ The 11 page document defines in detail those territories to be returned to Hungary.

The document is either a forgery, or one of the countless Hungarian proposals of the time in circulation. Benes did not concern himself with the document's authenticity, rather, he made sharp sorties against the Hungarian-French approach, while also making clever use of the French-Hungarian talks on behalf of his foreign policy initiatives. He knew that both Romania and Yugoslavia had fears that Hungary's revisionist dreams may yet come true with French support. At his initiative, bilateral talks were begun in July between Belgrade and Prague, and diplomatic activity picked up in Bucharest.⁷⁴⁵

The Yugoslav government began to urge the signing of the Little Entente agreement, rejected several times previously. Yugoslav Foreign Minister Ninčić traveled to Prague and invited Benes to Belgrade for the signing of the agreement.⁷⁴⁶ Benes wanted a simultaneous agreement with both Yugoslavia and Romania, extending his Belgrade trip with a side trip to Bucharest. On August 14, 1920, Benes signed the Yugoslav-Czechoslovak agreement in Belgrade.⁷⁴⁷ The first paragraph of the agreement states that, in case either signatory is faced with an unprovoked attack by Hungary, the other party is bound to come to the aid of the attacked party – clearly signifying that the agreement was made solely against any Hungarian revisionist intentions.

Benes went directly to Bucharest from Belgrade, arriving on August 17.⁷⁴⁸ The French – who, at this time did not encourage the creation of the Little Entente, in fact, were decidedly opposed – sent marshal Joffre to Bucharest to dissuade the Romanians from joining the Little Entente. Joffre was successful in his mission; Take Ionescu, Romania's Foreign Minister, was extremely cool towards Benes' suggestion of signing an anti-Hungarian alliance. Benes was able to garner only a verbal agreement to the effect that Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania will render military assistance to each other in the event of an attack by Hungary and, in the event of a Soviet-Romanian war, Czechoslovakia will restrain Hungary and Bulgaria from attacking Romania from the rear.⁷⁴⁹ Romania – as all through the war – was, however, playing a two sided game. While making a verbal agreement with Benes, Ionescu sent delegates to Budapest to enquire about the possibilities for the creation of the French-suggested Hungarian-Romanian-Polish block.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

⁷⁴⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 69.

⁷⁴⁶ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 76.

⁷⁴⁷ Halmosy, Dénes: *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918-1945* [International agreements 1918-1945]. Budapest, 1966, pp. 153-155.

⁷⁴⁸ Horváth, Jenő: *A trianoni békeszerződés megalkotása és a revízió útja* [The making of the peace treaty of Trianon and the trail of revision]. Budapest, 1939, p. 205.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 205; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 69; Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 77.

The French took strong steps against the Little Entente organizing activities of Benes. Maurice Paléologue – directing French foreign policy in his role as Secretary of the Foreign Ministry – informs Benes and Pasič that “the French government does not approve of the alliance and will use its influence in Bucharest to prevent Romania from joining the block.”⁷⁵⁰ Prime Minister Millerand phrased it thusly in his August 14 circular to the French ambassadors of Europe: “... It is not in our interest, then, that the government where you are accredited join a group with such an orientation (meaning the Little Entente – *auth.*) I, therefore, ask that, using the most discreet manner in your judgment, bring to the government’s attention the serious consequences of such policies, which contain the dangers of uniting Magyar and German interests, and endanger the natural development of relations between Central European states.”⁷⁵¹

The letter clearly shows that, in this period, Benes comes into sharp opposition with France over the creation of the Little Entente. Also, in contrast with earlier statements by historians, Paris in the ‘20s (mostly the Millerand-Paléologue duo) were strongly opposed to the formation of the Little Entente. In spite of it, Benes resolutely fought for the establishment of the block. His efforts were encouraged by the Parisian Czechoslovak ambassador’s, Stefan Osuský’s, reports in which he recounts that the French opposition is set against the pro-Hungarian Millerand-Paléologue direction.

This report of Osuský agrees with the one sent by the Hungarian ambassador to France – Iván Praznovsky - on September 24, in which he recounts that one of the major reasons for the attacks on Paléologue is his pro-Hungarian stand, which, according to the opposition, resulted in the creation of the Little Entente contrary to French interests.⁷⁵²

In the fall of 1920, a sharp change of direction took place in French foreign affairs. Yielding to opposition pressure, Millerand was forced to part with Paléologue, his Secretary of the Foreign Ministry. Millerand himself was on the way out – albeit upwards – moving from Prime Minister to President of the Republic. Paléologue’s post was assumed by Philippe Berthelot, long time friend of Benes, who shelved any plans regarding Hungary, distanced himself from the pro-Hungarian direction and unequivocally backed the emerging Little Entente. On the contrary, he had plans to include Poland.⁷⁵³ This, however, was impossible due to the Czechoslovak-Polish antagonism. The change in French direction had no influence of Romanian behavior, which continued in its “We’ll see” attitude. At this time, the chief interest of Romanian foreign policy was the retention, and official recognition of annexation, of its occupation of Bessarabia on January 18, 1918. In this matter, Foreign Minister Ionescu made a tour of Paris, London and Rome in the fall of 1920. As part of his circuit, he visited Prague and Warsaw in an attempt to make peace between Czechoslovakia and Poland. However, Ionescu made no commitments

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid (Ádám), p. 78.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² PDH vol I, doc. 666, p. 643.

⁷⁵³ PDH vol I, doc. 725, p. 696.

anywhere, Romania continuing not to join the Little Entente but following the evasive policy of non-committal.⁷⁵⁴

Events in Hungary, the series of 'Hungarian royal coup,' soon created a favorable environment for Benes and the creation of the Little Entente.

During the night of March 26, 1921, Charles IV – having left Austria on March 24, 1919 and settling in Pragnis, Switzerland – arrived in Szombathely, western Hungary, to take his place on the Hungarian throne.⁷⁵⁵ Charles and his retinue arrived at mid-day in the palace of Buda. Regent (and governor) Horthy held a private hour-ninety minute meeting with the king. Citing domestic and foreign policy interests, he did not cede power to the king, in fact, asking him to immediately leave the country.⁷⁵⁶ Charles retreated, starting to return to Szombathely in the afternoon of March 27, arriving at the episcopal palace during the early morning hours of the 28th due to car trouble. There – probably at the urging of his retinue – he becomes adamant and again orders Horthy to step down and to cede power.

The foreign legations only learned of Charles's Budapest visit on March 28. On the same evening, the chief representative of Britain, Hohler, paid an unofficial visit to Horthy in the name of the British, French and Italian governments. Horthy disclosed that Charles is leaving the country

⁷⁵⁴ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 81.

⁷⁵⁵ Both the Czechoslovak and Hungarian Foreign Ministries published a booklet about the return attempts of Karl. The Hungarian is actually two pamphlets: *IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei* [The return attempts of Karl IV]. Budapest, undated, and *A trónfosztással kapcsolatos külpolitikai anyagismertetése* [Foreign political material relating to the dethronement]. Budapest, undated.

The Czechoslovak Ministry also published documents relating to the attempted Habsburg restoration, see: *Diplomatické dokumenty tykající se pokusů o znovunastolení Habsburku na trůn mad'arský 1919-1922*. Praha, 1922.

Apart from the Foreign Ministry publications, the PDH also discloses several documents relating to the royal coup.

In the past 15 years, two monographs have appeared about the coup attempts of Karl IV: Zsiga, Tibor: *Horthy ellen a királyért* [Against Horthy for the king]. Budapest 1989, and Ormos, Mária: *Soha amíg élek. Az utolsó koronás Habsburg puccskísérletei* [Never while I am alive. The coup attempts of the last crowned Habsburg]. Pécs, 1990.

Apart from these treatises, almost every important participant, but Karl, has written a memoir: Boroviczény, Aladár: *A király és kormányzója* [The king and his regent]. Európa Kiadó, Budapest, 1993; Gratz, Gusztáv: *Magyarország a két háború között* [Hungary between the two wars]. Osiris, 2001; Horthy, Miklós: *Emlékirataim* [My memoirs]. Budapest, 1990; *Kozma-iratok. Adatgyűjtemény 1920-1924 "A király hazatérése"* [Kozma documents. Collected data 1920-1924. "The return of the king"]. Országos Levéltár (National Archives), Anton Lehár: *Erinnerungen. Gegenrevolution und Restaurations-versuche in Ungarn 1918- 1921*. Hrsg.: Peter Broucek.. Munich, 1973; Prónay, Pál: *A határban a halál kaszál...* Fejezetek Prónay Pál feljegyzéseiből [Death is reaping in the fields...] Kossuth, Budapest, 1963.

⁷⁵⁶ Three memoirs recount: Ibid (Horthy), pp. 149-152; Ibid (Prónay), pp. 414-420; Ibid (*Kozma ...*).

shortly.⁷⁵⁷ The Budapest representatives of the Little Entente – at this time only Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – went to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry on March 29 and gave voice to their veto regarding the person of Charles and the possible restoration of the House of Habsburg.⁷⁵⁸

Jenő Horváth points out that Benes counted on the possible return of Karl.⁷⁵⁹ In his speech of September 1, 1920 in parliament, he spoke of the specter of the restoration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, while in his January 1, 1921 speech, he declared the possible return of the king as a *casus belli*.⁷⁶⁰

The return of Charles presented a real danger to Benes' foreign policy.⁷⁶¹ In his view, Charles embodied the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and his successful return could well be the first step of the restoration of the Monarchy. The second step, Austria's joining (with Hungary) and thus reconstituting the Monarchy would possibly have represented a strong appeal for the German and Magyar minorities of the newly constituted Czechoslovakia, likewise for the Croat and Slovene minorities of Yugoslavia.

We must ask the question: Was there any basis for this scenario? The answer is: Legally, yes. Charles, on stepping down from the throne, declared in writing that he renounces his claim to the crown of Hungary, empowering the nation with the right to decide. This resignation was, however, without warrant as it would have to have been acknowledged by the prime minister and ratified by both houses of parliament. These steps were not taken. Since the king did not sign the peace treaty of Trianon, his rights of succession and rule remained valid over the territories that formed pre-1914 Hungary. In light of this, it is then understandable that, when Charles returned, Benes decided to activate immediately the Little Entente and, as a first step, raise a protest with the Hungarian government in concert with the Yugoslav ambassador.

To return to the events in progress, Charles remained in Szombathely and continued to create an international incident by insisting that he had French Prime Minister Briand's support in his restoration efforts.⁷⁶² The French denied this claim of Charles's at the April 1 Conference of Ambassadors. In effect, the conference reiterated its February 1920 decision that "... we will not recognize the restoration of the Habsburg family, nor will we accept it."⁷⁶³ In the following days, the entire international diplomatic corps was forced to deal with Charles until, finally, he left the country on April 5 and traveled to Switzerland.

We can reasonably assume that Benes, the polished politician, was already clear around March 29 that neither Horthy nor the Hungarian

⁷⁵⁷ Ormos: *Soha amíg* ... op. cit., p. 62.

⁷⁵⁸ PDH vol II, doc. 344, pp. 354-356; *IV. Károly visszatérési* ... op. cit., doc 12, pp. 87-89.

⁷⁵⁹ Horvát: *A trianoni* ... op. cit., p. 207.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 208.

⁷⁶¹ Wandycz: *Foreign policy*... op. cit., p. 222.

⁷⁶² Ormos: *Soha amíg* ... op. cit., pp. 62-65.

⁷⁶³ *IV Károly visszatérési* ... op. cit., doc. 18, p. 103.

government would support Charles's return attempt but that he grasped the event as another opportunity to further weaken Hungary. In his telegram to the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps, he put it as: "Every country should make the most against Hungary of Charles's escapade."⁷⁶⁴ What gives substance to his action is that he tried to draw Yugoslavia and Romania into his anti-Hungarian steps. On March 30, Benes notified the French ambassador in Prague that he wished to place Hungary under an embargo, to be followed by a military demonstration and, finally – if necessary – to resort to more serious methods.⁷⁶⁵ Next, he prepared a draft for an ultimatum, according to which, if Charles did not leave Hungary by 6 PM on April 6, the three countries (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania) will decree a blockade, to be followed 48 hours later by military action.⁷⁶⁶

The Yugoslav government concurred with Benes and his view, and so the two countries began to mobilize their forces. Romania again took a 'wait and see' attitude and did not join Benes. In any case, it would have been difficult for Romania to withdraw forces from the Soviet-Romanian border – where incidents were daily events – and also because the Romanian royal family, Ferdinand and Maria, supported Charles Habsburg. On April 1, Benes drafted another ultimatum in which he demanded a permanent solution to the Habsburg question, assurances for the decision and the annexation of western Hungary to Austria.⁷⁶⁷ This ultimatum was, after protest from Britain, France and Italy, not forwarded to Budapest. In fact, even Romania disagreed with it. Yet, two days later on April 3, Benes instructed the Czechoslovak ambassador in Budapest to "Tender jointly with the Yugoslav ambassador – as soon as he receives instructions to do so – a note of ultimatum..."⁷⁶⁸

As can be clearly observed, since the Great Powers did not support Benes, he at least tried to present a common Prague-Belgrade front in the matter of the ultimatum. But Belgrade was in no hurry to wire instructions to its Budapest embassy – waiting because of the British and French veto – hoping that, in the meantime, Charles would leave the country. The Yugoslav delaying tactic worked as Charles left for Switzerland around mid-day on April 5. Not wishing to lose an opportunity, Benes still instructed his representative in Budapest to "Appraise Gratz (the Hungarian Foreign Minister – *auth.*) after the fact of the text of the ultimatum. Inform him that, although Charles had left, we wish to inform him of the decision of the Czechoslovak government..."⁷⁶⁹

The matter of the presentation of the ultimatum is still an open issue today. According to Magda Ádám, Lejhanec handed over the ultimatum in the evening hours of April 5, while Mária Ormos feels that it was never

⁷⁶⁴ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 103.

⁷⁶⁵ Ormos: *Soha amíg ...* op. cit., p. 75.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ The text of this ultimatum can not be found in either the Hungarian or the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry pamphlets. Our sole source is Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 103.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 103-104.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

presented.⁷⁷⁰ Whatever the case, we can safely say that Benes was clear that Charles's returning attempt never presented a serious threat, yet he still exerted huge diplomatic pressure on Hungary. He clearly demonstrated that the Habsburg question was not an internal matter – no matter what the Hungarian politicians stated – and the Czechoslovak diplomacy will do everything to maintain the Central European *status quo*.

In the months following the first royal *coup* attempt, Benes exerted an intensive anti-Hungarian diplomatic campaign. On the one hand, he was apprehensive that the *coup* might be repeated. To this end, he lobbied the Allies to have Charles relocated from the relatively close Switzerland to the more distant Spain. This suggestion of his found support among the Great Powers and the process to have him relocated to Spain was undertaken. On this particular issue, even the Hungarian government happened to agree with Benes, since Horthy and his retinue were more than happy to see Charles as far from Hungary as possible.

On the other hand, Benes also made plans to surround Hungary with strong allies in the event of another *coup*. One of the outstanding results of his attempts in this direction was the April 23, 1921 signing with Czechoslovakia, by Romanian Foreign Minister Ionescu, of the treaty corresponding to the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav treaty, followed by a Romanian-Yugoslav treaty on April 7.⁷⁷¹ Thus, the Little Entente was born out of three bilateral agreements. An allied coordinating committee did not, at this point, exist, that function was filled until 1933 by an annual conference of the foreign ministers. The first such conference was held in Prague on August 3, 1921.⁷⁷²

While these events were taking place, Benes took steps to arrange the Czechoslovak-Polish and Czechoslovak-Austrian relations (treated in more detail in the next chapter). All that needs to be noted here is that Benes' overture towards Austria was greatly assisted by the worsened relations between Austria and Hungary due, in large part, by the Supreme Council's July 2, 1919, decision to award Burgenland (Hung: Örség) to Austria.⁷⁷³ The Hungarian government petitioned the Allies, after signing the Peace Treaty, to be allowed to station Hungarian forces in Burgenland until the plebiscite. The Austrian government took a strong position against the request. The Hungarian side kept delaying the vacation order for the territory, hoping to retain Sopron and its surroundings. On December 23, 1920, the Allies sent a note to Hungary to immediately withdraw its forces from territories adjudicated to Austria.⁷⁷⁴ Hungary, at this time, undertook vigorous diplomatic efforts to try and retain Burgenland,⁷⁷⁵ calling on Italian mediation attempting to come to an agreement with Austria. As

⁷⁷⁰ Ormos: *Soha amíg* ... op. cit., p. 75.

⁷⁷¹ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi* ... op. cit., pp. 155-157.

⁷⁷² Vondracek: *The foreign policy* ... op. cit., pp. 162-173; Horváth: *A trianoni* ... op. cit., p. 211.

⁷⁷³ Soós, Katalin: *Burgenland az európai politikában* [Burgenland in European politics]. Budapest, 1971.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 120.

⁷⁷⁵ PDH vol I, doc. 889, pp. 836-837; PDH vol II, doc. 1, pp. 1-2.

well, direct Austrian-Hungarian negotiations were begun on February 4, 1921, which was ended by the royal *coup* attempt of March. The negotiations were reopened on May 25, again in Vienna, again without success. Seeing the unsuccessful negotiations, the Council of Ambassadors named August 27, 1921 as the date of the Burgenland handover. It was the same date that Yugoslavia was ordered to withdraw from Baranya and Pécs (the Council trying to engage Hungary in a meaningful way in the withdrawal from Burgenland). Since Yugoslav troops did not vacate the entire province of Baranya, the Hungarian government refused the complete withdrawal from Burgenland. The eastern portion of the area was occupied in August of 1921 by 20-30,000 irregular Hungarian forces, later proclaiming the independent republic of Lajtabánság under the command of Pál Prónay, with its capital in the mostly Magyar populated Felsőőr (Oberwart).⁷⁷⁶ (This short-lived republic, independent of both Austria and Hungary, existed from October 4 to November 5 – *ed.*)

Benes reaped double profit from the extended Burgenland crisis. He drafted a joint plan of action between Prague and Belgrade in case a repeat of the royal *coup*.⁷⁷⁷ As part of it, he resurrected the idea of a Yugoslav-Czechoslovak corridor, already discarded at the peace conference. He was making preparations to occupy the corridor jointly with Yugoslavia, however, the Great Powers again disposed of this notion. On a different tack, he attempted to draw Austria closer to the Little Entente, seeming to appear in the guise of a friend of Austria. In every international forum, he argued that Hungary must be forced to comply, immediately and fully, with the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, meaning the handing over of Burgenland.

According to Miklós Bánffy – Hungarian Foreign Minister – in September of 1921 Benes offered to mediate in the Burgenland situation.⁷⁷⁸ In his memoirs, Benes states that it was Bánffy who asked him to act as intermediary. It is almost impossible to verify the claims now but it is a fact that Benes tried to mediate between the two parties.⁷⁷⁹ Benes was a consummate tactician, seeming to accept the role of mediator after learning through confidential sources that the Ambassadors' Conference was ready to leave Sopron and its surrounding area with Hungary. Benes reasoned that, if the Allies were to give Sopron to Hungary anyway, he can appear to take the credit for it through his mediation efforts. To this end, he met with Austrian chancellor Schober on September 22, 1921 in Hainburg, who accepted his offer of mediation. The Hungarian government, not trusting completely the offer of assistance, in the meantime asked the Italian government to take the role. Italian Foreign Minister Toretta also went to Vienna, where he managed to sideline Benes by having the Ambassador's Conference appoint Italy as the mediator.

⁷⁷⁶ Zsiga: *Horthy ellen* ... op. cit., pp. 129-149.

⁷⁷⁷ Ormos: *Soha amíg* ... op. cit., p. 90.

⁷⁷⁸ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa* ... op. cit., p. 124.

⁷⁷⁹ Vondracek: *The foreign policy* ... op. cit., p. 182.

The Austrian-Hungarian agreement was finally signed in Venice on October 13, 1921.⁷⁸⁰ Under the terms of the agreement, the area was to be vacated by Hungary (the 4,000 km² Burgenland, with a population of 292,600, became Austria's ninth province); Sopron and the surrounding four villages were to decide their own future through a plebiscite. This was held on December 14-16. (There were 26,900 eligible voters with a turnout rate of 87.7% and 500 spoiled ballots.) The result was that 65.1% of the votes cast chose to stay with Hungary.⁷⁸¹

To return to the saga of the clashes between Benes and the Hungarian government's foreign policy efforts, the tale took another twist in the fall of 1921 when king Charles's plane landed at Dénesfa on October 21, 1921, setting off the second royal *coup* attempt. This time, Charles immediately went to Sopron, where he constituted a new government and took to the road toward Budapest with his forces – the western Hungarian irregular troops, who switched sides.⁷⁸²

The Hungarian government learned of the events in the early morning hours of October 22. The Cabinet met at 9 AM, issuing the following decision: "King Charles can not assume his regal rights as stated in law I of 1920 and must again leave the country. b) a proclamation to this effect must be published in the local, as well as foreign, papers..."⁷⁸³ Then, the diplomatic machinery swung into action and the senior representatives of the Allies met with Horthy,⁷⁸⁴ while those of the Little Entente visited Bánffy, Bethlen and Horthy to protest against Charles's presence in Hungary. The Yugoslav representative went so far as to say, speaking for the three countries, that he felt the events represented *casus belli*.⁷⁸⁵ The Hungarian foreign minister, in response, stated that the government has decided to accept the battle with Charles IV.

The train, with king Charles IV, his rebel government and military unit left Sopron, touched Győr and Komárom, and was steaming towards Budapest.⁷⁸⁶ The train reached Budapest on October 23, or rather Budaörs in the outskirts, where the forces loyal to the king fought a battle against the government forces. The royalists lost. The king and queen, who fled to Tata, were captured, the leaders responsible for the events were arrested, and the military units were disarmed. The royal couple was transported to Tihany on October 25. Effectively, the second royal *coup* was over in the morning of the 24th.

⁷⁸⁰ Soós: *Burgenland ...* op. cit., pp. 150-151.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² Zsiga: *Horthy ellen ...* op. cit., pp. 149-158; Ormos: *Soha amíg ...* op. cit., pp. 94-157.

⁷⁸³ Karsai, Elek: *Számjel-távirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek* [Coded telegram to all royal Hungarian embassies]. Budapest, 1969, pp. 233.

⁷⁸⁴ Ormos: *Soha amíg ...* op. cit., pp. 111-113; Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 130-131.

⁷⁸⁵ *Diplomatické dokumenty týkající...* doc.32, p.81.

⁷⁸⁶ Zsiga: *Horthy ellen ...* op. cit., pp. 149-158; Gratz: *Magyarország a két ...* op. cit., pp. 105-124; Boroviczény: *A király és ...* op. cit., pp. 219-273.

Benes activated the response he used in response to the first *coup*. On October 23, Czechoslovakia began to mobilize, calling up four divisions, as well as apprising the Little Entente allies of their plans: If Charles wins, the Czechoslovak army will immediately cross the border into Hungary; if Horthy meets Charles and manages to retain his position, the Czechoslovak government will present a 24-48 hour ultimatum. The terms were:

1. All the Habsburgs are to be stripped from the succession to the throne.
2. The disarmament of Hungary, with Little Entente participation.
3. The execution of the peace terms, independent of the Venice agreement.
4. Repayment of the mobilization costs.⁷⁸⁷

The following days were filled with diplomatic exchanges, which can be summarized as: the Hungarian government maintained the correct attitude toward the Allies, respecting the anti-Habsburg decision of the Ambassador's Conference, doing everything in its power to force Charles to leave the country. The Great Powers, respecting this attitude, strove to rein in Benes, who was preparing for a military intervention with the aid of Yugoslavia. They pointed out to Benes that the actions of the Hungarian government did not justify military action. Romania – although, by this time, a member of the Little Entente – was reluctant to support Benes' harsh policy, disagreeing with both the sending of the ultimatum and the mobilization. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia continued to forge ahead with their military preparations.

It should by now be amply clear that Benes did not wish for a solution but, rather, a worsening of the situation to be used to inflict further punishment on Hungary. The Ambassador's Conference tabled Benes' letter on October 29 – as he forwarded a written copy of his October 23 position to the French⁷⁸⁸ – and, after a long debate, made the decision to ask the Hungarian government to implement point one. The remaining three points were all rejected, as the Council did not accept Benes' view. The Hungarian President, Bethlen, was, at the time, preparing the document to de-throne, not the House of Habsburg but only Charles IV, as requested in an earlier message (October 28) by the Council.

At 8PM on October 29, Benes summoned László Tahy, Hungary's representative in Prague and informed him that, if Hungary does not announce the deposition of the House of Habsburg, the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav armies will cross the border.⁷⁸⁹ Bethlen replied on the following day that the Hungarian government was preparing for the deposition of Charles IV, as instructed by the Ambassador's Conference resolution of the 28th. At the same time, Bethlen, on the advice of the Allied representatives in Budapest, placed Hungary under the protection of the Great Powers.⁷⁹⁰ Benes again summoned Tahy on October 30 and stated that the deposition of Charles IV is not adequate and the whole of the

⁷⁸⁷ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., p. 184.

⁷⁸⁸ *Diplomatické dokumenty tykající...* doc. 37, pp. 91-92.

⁷⁸⁹ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 141.

⁷⁹⁰ Ormos: *Soha amíg ...* op. cit., pp. 134-146.

Habsburgs must be included, again threatening armed intervention to begin on November 2.⁷⁹¹

Benes' harsh ultimatum clearly stated for the Allies that the deposition of the House of Habsburg must be addressed at this time. The Conference's October 29 decision was sent to Budapest, which included not only Charles IV but the whole ruling house. Benes scored a huge diplomatic victory with his sword rattling, not only threatening the government of Hungary but influencing the Allies to take steps favorable to Czechoslovak interests.

At 8PM on October 31, Foreign Minister Bánffy notified the Allies that his government accepted the resolution without reservation, albeit the November 3 meeting of the Hungarian parliament only voted for the deposition of Charles IV and rescinded the *Pragmatica Sanctio*.⁷⁹² The free election of a king to the throne of Hungary still maintained the possibility of elevating one of the Habsburg family members to the throne.⁷⁹³ While these events were unfolding, Charles was escorted to Baja in the morning of October 31 to begin his voyage to Madeira aboard the British ship, HMS *Glowworm*.⁷⁹⁴

On the day of the parliamentary vote, Benes instructed his Budapest representative to object to the wording of the law.⁷⁹⁵ Bánffy replied that his government has obeyed the Ambassador's Council decision, having deposed the House of Habsburg. Benes, however, succeeded in persuading the Allies to send a new note asking the Hungarian government to amend the law to the effect that every Habsburg is banned from seeking the throne.⁷⁹⁶ The government again complied with the Allied demand, amending the paragraph in question.

Benes accomplished another diplomatic success, yet he wished to wring still more out of the situation. On November 7, the representatives of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia presented a note demanding that the Hungarian government begin, according to the terms of the peace agreement, the disarmament of its military and payment of the mobilization costs because, until these have been done, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia refuse to demobilize their mobilized units. This was too much even for the Allies. On the threat of suspending diplomatic relations, the Allies demanded the immediate demobilization of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.⁷⁹⁷ Diplomatic pressure was so great that Czechoslovakia

⁷⁹¹ PDH vol III, doc. 1197, pp. 358-360.

⁷⁹² *Országgyűlési Napló* 1920-1922 XII. kötet. 1921. November 3. [Parliamentary Diary, 1920-1922, vol XII, Nov. 3, 1921], pp. 101-162.

⁷⁹³ For Law XLVII of 1921 re "the cessation of the ruling privileges of Karl IV and the right of succession of the Habsburgs" see *Magyar történelmi szöveggyűjtemény* 1914-1999, vol I [Collected Hungarian historical texts], p. 165.

⁷⁹⁴ Ormos: *Soha amíg ...* op. cit. p. 146.

⁷⁹⁵ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit. p. 146.

⁷⁹⁶ *Diplomatické dokumenty tykající...* doc. 70, p. 161.

⁷⁹⁷ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit. p. 150.

began to demobilize its forces on November 10th, Yugoslavia on the 13th, which was not completed until the end of the month.

In the end, although unable to win every one of his objectives, Benes won on the most important points. The House of Habsburg, so dangerous for Czechoslovakia, was deposed never to sit on the throne of Hungary; Benes emerged from this series of events with an enhanced international reputation, undeniably the politician who must be consulted on Central European issues.

Jenő /Eugene/ Horváth assessed the aftermath of the second unsuccessful royal *coup* as: "The political experiment, which tried to reestablish Central Europe's unstable order with the reestablishment of the Dual Monarchy, was replaced by the experiment of Masaryk and Benes, under which the order of the new Central Europe will be created by the Little Entente, under Czech guidance."⁷⁹⁸ His observation is echoed by a study in the January 1923 issue of the influential American foreign policy publication, *Foreign Affairs*, titled *The Little Entente*,⁷⁹⁹ which stated that the Little Entente, created on the ruins of the Dual Monarchy, was capable of safely reorganizing the region. The author: Edouard Benes.

The creation of bilateral agreements

The core of the diplomatic activities of Benes during the '20s was the safeguarding of the terms of the Versailles peace treaty. One method was the creation of bilateral agreements designed to increase the security of Czechoslovakia.

The annexation of the Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia seriously strained relations between Czechoslovakia and Austria but the Burgenland solution and the two *coup* attempts by Charles IV gradually oriented Austria toward Czechoslovakia. The tentative feelers were begun in February of 1921 when, on the first of the month, Benes, on his way to Rome, travels from Linz to Innsbruck in the company of Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Mayr.⁸⁰⁰

The first coup attempt of Charles IV (March 26-April 5, 1921) was unanimously rejected by all the parties represented in the Austrian parliament, if at different levels of conviction.⁸⁰¹ The Social Democrats demanded that the Austrian government inform the Allies, and the newly created countries, that a restoration of the Habsburgs in Hungary is a step that threatens Austria's peace and security; the Christian-Socialists merely said that they continue to support the federalist state; the Greater Germany supporters sharply criticized Charles, who was 'smuggled across Austria in a treacherous manner.'

The situation presented an opportunity for Benes to meet in Hallstatt on August 9 with Hainisch (the new Austrian president) and Schober (the

⁷⁹⁸ Horváth: *A trianoni ...* op. cit., p. 216.

⁷⁹⁹ Edouard Beneš: *The Little Entente. Foreign Affairs*, 1923, January, pp. 66-72.

⁸⁰⁰ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 85.

⁸⁰¹ Kerekes, Lajos: *Ausztia hatvan éve 1918-1978* [Sixty years of Austria]. Budapest, 1984, pp. 74-75.

new chancellor). The result of the meeting was summarized in four points:⁸⁰²

1. The Czechoslovak government supports Austria's attempts to raise loans.
2. The Czechoslovak government supports Austria regarding Burgenland.
3. The Czechoslovak government ensures the same trade concessions to Austria, as towards Romania and Yugoslavia.
4. Austria takes the same position as Czechoslovakia with regard to the restoration of the Habsburgs.

As noted before, Benes met in Hainburg on September 22, 1921, with Chancellor Schober, who accepted his offer to mediate in the Burgenland affair. Although the Italian foreign minister sidelined Benes on this issue, there was a visible improvement in Czechoslovak-Austrian relations.

After the second coup attempt, Benes and Schober signed the Lany agreement (the Czechoslovak presidential palace was in Lany), a document of nine paragraphs:

Para. 1 – Austria binds itself to observe the terms of the treaty, in its entirety, signed in Saint-Germain en Laye and takes a position to have the Hungarians similarly observe the terms of the Treaty of Trianon to its full extent;

Para. 2 – They shall extend political and diplomatic assistance to their neighbors and each other;

Para. 3 – In case of an attack on either party by a third party, the other shall remain neutral;

Para. 4 – The two countries guarantee not to tolerate on their territory any military or political organizations, which threatens the other party's territorial integrity or security;

Para. 5 – Czechoslovakia informs Austria of Little Entente agreements;

Para. 6 – Contentious issue will be resolved through negotiations; or

Para. 7 – Unresolved issues will be brought to the International Court, or to an *ad hoc* court of arbitration;

Para. 8 – Both parties bind themselves not to negotiate treaties with any other state that contravenes with this treaty;

Para. 9 – The treaty is to be in effect for five years.⁸⁰³

The treaty demonstrates Benes' success against Austria on three broad fronts. In the first place, Czechoslovakia gained another ally who guarantees the terms of the Versailles accord or, more to the point, the immutability of the Trianon treaty. In the second place, Austria acknowledged the borders, naturally giving up any claims to the Sudetenland, stating confirmation of the Czechoslovak-Austrian territorial decisions. Finally, in paragraph 4, Austria undertook not to tolerate or

⁸⁰² Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 85.

⁸⁰³ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 178-180.

support on its territory any revisionist movements targeting the Sudetenland.

However, the real loser of the agreement was Hungary. Romania and Yugoslavia greeted the agreement with great glee, since Benes now managed to completely surround and isolate Hungary. The sole advantage to Austria from the agreement was that, after the signing, Czechoslovakia granted a loan of 500 million Czech Kroner (\$16 million US) to allow Austria to address some of its most dire shortfalls of coal and sugar.

Chancellor Schober was a personal loser after the agreement. Shortly after the signing, the Austrian Greater Germany Party withdrew from the governing alliance – they held the Czechs to be the grave-diggers of the Monarchy – and a short time later, with the Social Democrats, brought down Schober and his government.⁸⁰⁴ On May 31, 1922, a new government was elected under the leadership of a Christian-Socialist rector, dr. Ignaz Seipel. However, his administration also did not repudiate the very unpopular agreement.

Poland's relationship was in sharp disagreement with Czechoslovakia over territorial questions. Benes composed his territorial demand regarding the northern border of Slovakia on November 3, 1918. The border he described ran on the line of Polska Ostrva – Bohumin (Oderberg) – Tesin (Teschen).⁸⁰⁵ Of the 2,100 km² Teschen's population of 426,700, 54.8% were Polish, 25.7% Czech and 18.0% German.⁸⁰⁶ The area was not a part of Northern Hungary during the Monarchy but constituted a part of Silesia. Benes laid claim to this area with its Polish majority on the basis of strategic importance (railway lines, a mountain pass and coal fields). In his usual *fait accompli* style, Czechoslovak forces entered Teschen in January of 1919. Naturally enough, the Poles were loath to take it lying down and armed fighting broke out.⁸⁰⁷

The Peace Conference posted a plebiscite to be held on October 27, 1919, which did not take place. The Conference rejects this solution (Spa, July 11, 1920) and decides (Ambassador's Conference, July 28, 1920) to partition Teschen into an eastern Polish and western Czechoslovak parts. The Poles are forced to accept the July decision as they are locked in a life-and-death battle with Soviet Russia, having become embroiled in it in April of 1920 over disagreements over their eastern border. Initially, fate favored them – they occupied Kiev on May 6, 1920 – but then the Red Army went on the offensive, retaking Kiev on June 12 and Minsk on July 11. The Poles sued for peace on July 22 but the Soviets kept up their attack. On August 1, they captured Brest, then Bialystock, where, under Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Polish counter-government was formed. By the middle of August, the Red Army had pushed forward to the Vistula River. The destruction of the state of Poland was a real possibility, as well as the subsequent creation of a Soviet Poland. For these reasons, the Poles

⁸⁰⁴ Zöllner: *Ausztria* ... op. cit., p. 378.

⁸⁰⁵ Ormos: *Padovától* ... op. cit., p. 57.

⁸⁰⁶ Pándi: *Köztes* ... op. cit., pp. 292-293 (map 129), 362-363 (map 163); 366-367 (map 165).

⁸⁰⁷ Perman: *The shaping of* ... op. cit., pp. 213-227.

viewed the 'annexation' of Teschen as base extortion and a taking advantage of their tough situation. This factor played a significant role in the stormy Czechoslovak-Polish relation between the two wars.

The cool Czechoslovakia-Poland relationship, already strained over Teschen, was further exacerbated by Czechoslovakia's refusal to take a supporting position, while the Poles were in the fight of their lives against the Red Army. Masaryk and Benes even refused the July 22, 1920, request of the Allies to offer assistance to Poland.⁸⁰⁸ Masaryk informed the French and British ambassadors in Prague that Czechoslovakia will not even ship arms to Poland and will not permit anyone to transit across its territory.⁸⁰⁹ In fact, Benes opened a channel to Moscow and, in a secret message, assured the Soviet foreign commissar of Czechoslovakia's neutrality.

The Polish forces managed to inflict a decisive victory at the Battle of Warsaw, August 14-22, followed by other successes. A truce was signed on October 12 in Riga, followed by a peace pact, signed in Riga in March of 1921. The turn of events in the war took the offer of Hungarian assistance and Czechoslovak neutrality off the international agenda but the Czechoslovak behavior left a blot on their relations. This was the background of Romanian Foreign Minister Ionescu's unsuccessful peacemaking effort when visiting Prague and Warsaw in October and November of 1920.

Benes took steps to normalize Polish-Czechoslovak relations only a year later. Meetings were begun between Benes and Polish Foreign Minister Skirmunt in the summer of 1921 in Warsaw and Marienska Lazne, leading to agreements in the fall.⁸¹⁰ With relations thus normalized between Poland and Czechoslovakia, Poland exhibited an increasingly sympathetic stance toward the Little Entente. During the second royal coup attempt in Hungary, Poland was in support of the Little Entente's diplomatic sanctions against Charles IV. Relations overall still remained tense. Benes was capable of going to ridiculous lengths to achieve his aims, carrying on litigation into 1924 for a mountain village of 300 people, Javorina. (In the end, it was awarded to Czechoslovakia.⁸¹¹)

The two countries observed each other warily. Both considered their diplomatic relations with France to be extremely important. When France wanted to sign a political and military agreement with Czechoslovakia in 1924 (covered in greater detail in the next chapter), the Paris representative of the Polish government voiced concerns that the agreement might be contrary to Polish interests. This was not a far fetched worry, as Poland could easily find itself embroiled in a war against Germany on the behalf of Czechoslovakia thanks to the system of French alliances.⁸¹² Benes expressed his worry while preparing the Czechoslovak-French treaty that,

⁸⁰⁸ Vondracek: *The foreign policy* ... op. cit., p. 135.

⁸⁰⁹ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa* ... op. cit., p. 63.

⁸¹⁰ Igor Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler. The diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s*. Oxford University Press, 1996., p. 12.

⁸¹¹ Rothschild: *East Central* ... op. cit., p. 20. old; Pándi: *Köztes* ... op. cit., pp. 366-367 (map 165).

⁸¹² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa* ... op. cit., p. 167.

due to an existing French-Polish treaty, Czechoslovakia, as an ally of France, might drift into a Polish-Russian conflict.

The German-Czechoslovak relationship was tranquil, meaning free of conflict, in spite of the Sudeten question. Following the war, Germany lost its position as a great power, in fact, for a time, a view gained prominence among the German politicians that attempts at world domination must be renounced. Germany broke with its monarchy in November of 1919 and began to organize itself along democratic lines. Although peaceful and peaceable intentions were in the forefront of German politics, it must be noted that revisionist demands were already present under the surface.⁸¹³ Looking at the relation of Germany and Czechoslovakia, we can state that, for the frequently changing Weimar governments, the fate of the Sudeten Germans, never a part of the Prussian Empire, was of no interest. Germany did not wish to cause a stir over the historical borders of Bohemia and Moravia.

On the other side, certain economic conditions nudged the Sudeten German minority towards an accommodation with the Czechoslovak state. The Sudeten German economic elite thought through and weighed the disadvantages if it had to compete with German industry without the protection of Czech tariffs. Not to mention that Czechoslovakia, as one of the victors, was not burdened by reparation payments.⁸¹⁴ The Sudeten Germans decided to make temporary use of the economic opportunities offered by Czechoslovakia.⁸¹⁵ This does not mean that they would not fight long and hard for their minority rights and privileges within Czechoslovakia.

A significant contributory factor to the good relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia was that Czechoslovakia developed close economic ties with Germany during the early '20s.⁸¹⁶ In 1920, Germany was in second place as far as Czechoslovak exports were concerned, after Austria. By 1925, Germany ranked first with 28.3%, while Austria slid to second place with 17.3% of Czechoslovak exports.⁸¹⁷ Germany, thus, became Czechoslovakia's largest trading partner. As a contributing factor, Germany accepted the Bohemian and Moravian borders, while Hungary made attempts to revise Slovakia's southern boundary and to regain Ruthenia. These factors all resulted in Benes holding Hungary as Czechoslovakia's greatest enemy in the '20s and not Germany.

⁸¹³ Zsigmond, László: *A német imperializmus és militarizmus újjáéledésének gazdasági és nemzetközi tényezői 1918-1923* [The economic and international factors of the re-emergence of German imperialism and militarism 1918-1923]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1961.

⁸¹⁴ Zora P. Pryor: *Czechoslovak economic development in the interwar period*. In: Mamatey – Luza (eds.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973.

⁸¹⁵ Rotschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., pp. 14-15.

⁸¹⁶ Pryor: *Czechoslovak economic ...* op. cit., pp. 198-202.

⁸¹⁷ Ormos, Mária: *Franciaország és a keleti biztonság 1931-1936* [France and security in the East 1931-1936]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1969, p. 33.

Although Czechoslovakia had much to thank France both during the war and the subsequent peace conference – perhaps Czechoslovakia might not have been realized without French assistance – Benes was not an easy ally of France in the '20s.⁸¹⁸ To achieve his aims for Czechoslovakia, Benes even opposed the French (e.g.- the creation of the Little Entente over French opposition). Hence, when France made an attempt from 1921 to create an eastern security zone through alliances, the Benes directed Czechoslovak foreign policy was a difficult partner.

The chief aim of French foreign policy in the early '20s was the isolation of Germany. To this end, a system of alliances in Eastern and Southeastern Europe was entertained. The first link in this system was the 1921 French-Polish political agreement of February 19, 1921.⁸¹⁹ The agreement provided protection for the *status quo* of France and Poland against Germany. Bismarck's saying that "a Polish army would always be worth a French corps on the Vistula,"⁸²⁰ was now aptly demonstrated.

Poland was merely the first link. To isolate Germany, France also needed Czechoslovakia. But, during the '20s, Benes viewed Hungary as its greatest enemy, not Germany. So, when Marshal Foch went to Prague in 1921 to obtain a French-Czechoslovak military treaty, Benes sidestepped the issue.⁸²¹ The French government raises the issue two years later, the foreign ministry sending a draft proposal to Prague in July of 1923. Thus began a period of long back and forth negotiations. At the end of 1923, Benes makes three trips to Paris (October, November and December) to discuss things personally, accompanied by Masaryk in November.⁸²²

Benes was trying to achieve that the agreement also cover Hungary. The French politicians attempted to convince Benes that his request was unreasonable. "It is difficult to visualize a circumstance where Hungary would attack France and any clause pertaining must begin from the reciprocity of the same."⁸²³ It was, however, difficult to derail Benes – as the French foreign ministry notes revealed – who argued that, with a possible *Anschluss*, Hungary will have a common border with Germany.⁸²⁴ The French attempted to convince Benes that it was in the interest of Czechoslovakia to concentrate its strength on Germany because if, in a war where the Germans and Hungarians act together, even if Czechoslovakia eats the Hungarians, it can not escape occupation by Germany. If, however, Czechoslovakia beats Germany in concert with France, it will be relatively easy to restore the pre-war situation with regard to Hungary. Finally, the French-Czechoslovak agreement was signed on January 25, 1924.

⁸¹⁸ P.S. Wandycz: *France and her Eastern Allies 1919-1925*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1962.

⁸¹⁹ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 159-160.

⁸²⁰ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 161.

⁸²¹ Wandycz: *France and her ...* op. cit., p. 293.

⁸²² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 163-165; Wandycz: *France and her ...* op. cit., pp. 292-312.

⁸²³ Ádám: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 125.

⁸²⁴ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 164-165.

The stubborn negotiation of Benes again bore fruit. The agreement did not specify the military cooperation of the two parties, did not contain military clauses, even though the French originally wanted to include a separate paragraph of it in the text of the agreement. The final agreement was merely a treaty of friendship and alliance, whose first paragraph stated: "The government of the French Republic and the government of the Czechoslovak republic oblige themselves to act in a similar manner in all such international questions that might threaten their security or disturbs the peace created by signed peace agreements."⁸²⁵ These were seen as restoration attempts by the House of Habsburg (paragraph 5), the House of Hohenzollern (paragraph 6), as well as an *Anschluss* (paragraph 3).

Since Benes rejected signing a military pact, the French chose the expedient of attaching the two Foreign Ministers' letter to the agreement. The day after the signing, Poincaré wrote a letter to Benes, which Benes answered on January 31. The Poincaré and Benes letters set down, in matching language, the responsibilities of the heads of the respective military. In it, they maintain, in fact, strengthen their cooperation, whose goal is the creation of a unified plan of action to overcoming the aggression of a common enemy – aimed at either of them.⁸²⁶

It is interesting to note that, when the Czechoslovak-German crisis began to heat up in 1937, the French came to the conclusion that the text of the two letters is not identical. Benes' letter means automatic action for both signing parties, even in the event if they are not simultaneous victims. Poincaré's letter, on the other hand, restricts military action only if both parties become victims of German aggression. The French government tried to limit its military obligations towards Czechoslovakia and blame it on a typing error, stating that it holds Poincaré's letter as valid and binding. Two historians examined the letters in detail but both Wandycz and Ádám came to the conclusion that the text of the two letters is indistinguishable, with no deviation between them.⁸²⁷ It is a strange quirk of fate that the French tried to repudiate in 1937 the military pact they themselves wrung out of Benes in 1924-25.

On the international stage, or "Est pour Benes"

The title for this chapter is a saying, 'This is one for Benes,' expressing the observation that Benes was present at every major international conference between the two wars. In the same period, he put forth a great deal of activity in the League of Nations against peaceful revision.⁸²⁸ One of his biographers describes his activities in this direction: "He is alert, watching the speakers and those adding commentary (among them István Bethlen), he argues and corrects. He remains calm in an argument, even if attacked. He wishes always to seem objective; careful of the impression he makes. His lectures are not spellbinding, rather, boring

⁸²⁵ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 204-206.

⁸²⁶ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 167-168.

⁸²⁷ P.S. Wandycz: *L'alliance franco-tchécoslovaque de 1924: Un échange de lettres Poincaré-Benes. Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, No 3-4, 1984.

⁸²⁸ Compton Mackenzie: *Dr. Benes*. London, 1946, p. 130.

and colorless. His speeches are groups of facts and points, rather pedantic in style. Sentences meant to demonstrate his loyalty to the League of Nations and lauding the order imposed in Versailles are never omitted.”⁸²⁹

In his effort to protect the fledgling Czechoslovakia, Benes tried to influence international processes. At conferences, or in their preparations, he appears countless times as an intermediary between important European politicians. His activities in this line were demonstrated at the first post-war conference in Genoa in April of 1922.⁸³⁰ In Benes’ model, the two main factors in European stability were France and Britain, and their cordial relationship. But the relationship was less than rosy in the early ’20s as the two countries differed more and more on foreign policy. Before the conference, Benes plays the role of the European statesman, the go-between traveling to Paris, London and Rome in February, 1922. During his meetings, he had to face up to the fact that British Prime Minister Lloyd George suggested the recognition of Soviet Russia and supported the reduction of German reparation payments. While the French, on their side, (Briand in early 1922 but Poincaré by the time of the conference) opposed the recognition of Soviet Russia and stood by the ruthless collection of the agreed German reparations. In this environment, Benes had little chance to conciliate between these extreme positions.

The conference, begun on April 10, was the first post-war international gathering where, alongside the victors, the losers – Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria – were represented. The Soviet Union sent a delegation. Beside the 28 European countries, representatives also arrived from the British colonies and Japan. At the conference, Benes supported the French position, in opposition to the British view of recognizing Soviet Russia.⁸³¹

An unexpected event occurred during the Genoa conference. On April 16, German Foreign Minister Rathenau and Soviet Foreign Commissar Chicherin signed a German-Soviet agreement that came to be known as the Rapallo Agreement. The terms of the agreement mutually cancelled all pre-war debts and renounced war claims. The German government renounced claims of compensation for all nationalized German property in Russia, provided Russia did not pay similar compensation to any other country. The two countries agreed to resume mutual diplomatic and consular contacts.⁸³² Rapallo represented an emergence from isolation for both countries. The bilateral cooperation was followed in 1925 with a commercial treaty and, in 1925, a treaty of friendship and neutrality. The German army was thus free to use unsupervised facilities in Russia to develop and test weapons (tanks, planes) forbidden to it under the Versailles treaty.⁸³³

⁸²⁹ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 131; Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 106-113, 195-197, 205-210, 271-278.

⁸³⁰ Wandycz: *Foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 224-225.

⁸³¹ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 227-229.

⁸³² Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 200-201.

⁸³³ Herczeg, Ferenc: *A szarajevói merénylettől a potsdami konferenciáig* [From the assassination in Sarajevo to the Potsdam conference]. Budapest, 1999, p. 178.

Rapallo was a stern warning for Benes, showing as it did that the victors could not keep countries in economic and political isolation at their whim; they have opportunities to break out. Benes followed the selfsame policy of isolation towards Hungary, closing the ring with the Lany treaty with Austria in 1921. It is not known if Benes was informed but Miklós Bánffy, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, twice visited the Soviet foreign commissar and made agreements regarding the resumption of diplomatic and commercial contacts.

After the Rapallo Treaty was made public, the Czechoslovak delegation immediately closed behind the French position and signed the note of protest sent to Germany. Benes, ever the foreign diplomat, in the meanwhile opened discussions with Chicherin regarding the possibility of economic cooperation.

During the 1920s, the League of Nations was the arena where Benes and the politicians of his greatest perceived enemy, Hungary, met and clashed. The League carried importance as an international forum.⁸³⁴ Mutual disarmament, individual arms quotas and issues of minority rights could easily be raised at this forum, a right of which the members of the Hungarian delegations made ample use.⁸³⁵ Naturally enough, these triggered vehement counter-activity from Benes, and explains why Benes was one of the most active members of the League. The first round of clashes came over the admission of Hungary. The Hungarian Foreign Minister Bánffy requested in writing Hungary's admission to the League on May 23, 1921.⁸³⁶ A month later, on June 21, the president of the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Association, Apponyi, arrived in Geneva and reiterated the intention to make use of the membership to try and get satisfaction for the injuries done to the country. It is amply clear from Apponyi's speech that the Hungarian government intended to find refuge in the League against possible military attack by the Little Entente, not unlikely in light of the threats at the time of the first royal *coup* attempt, and support for improving the situation of the Hungarian minorities.⁸³⁷

Benes understood perfectly well how dangerous the Hungarian tactic was to his foreign policy. According to paragraph 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, a member nation falling victim to aggression gains collective protection. Benes made use of the worsening Burgenland

⁸³⁴ *The League of Nations. Organization and Accomplishments.* United Nations, New York and Geneva, 1996; Martin Scheuermann: *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren.* Verlag Herder Institut, Marburg, 2000; Galántai, József: *Trianon és a kisebbségvédelem* [Trianon and the protection of minorities]. Maecenas, Budapest, 1989; Cholnoky, Győző: *Állam és nemzet* [State and nation]. Hatodik Síp Alapítvány, Budapest, 1996. As well, the *Küliügyi Szemle* /Foreign Review/, published since 1921, regularly recounted events at the League of Nations.

⁸³⁵ Zeidler, Miklós: *A reviziós gondolat.* Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2001, pp. 63-65.

⁸³⁶ *Journal Office.* Geneva, 1922, issue 5-6, pp. 512-513.

⁸³⁷ *Küliügyi Szemle* [Foreign Review]. Budapest, 1921, pp. 189-190.

crisis,⁸³⁸ especially with Italian assistance, to sink Hungary's application for membership. His diplomatic actions bore fruit. Under a great deal of pressure, the Bethlen government withdrew its application. However, in spite of his greatest efforts, Hungary was admitted to the League in September of 1922. This was a great diplomatic achievement, since membership in the League brought not only responsibilities but rights.

The second round of clashes with Benes in the League of Nations arrived shortly, in February of 1923, when the Hungarian government tabled a request to defer a portion of the ordered reparations – Hungary was ordered to pay 200 million gold Koronas over 20 years – and an application for a sizable League loan.⁸³⁹ The two major Little Entente politicians, Benes and Titulescu, tried everything to block the Hungarian loan. They met with success when the Reparations Committee voted 5:4 on May 4, 1923 against deferring the Hungarian reparation payments (this would have been the first prerequisite for the loan).⁸⁴⁰ Bethlen opened talks in London on May 7, which resulted in Britain siding with Hungary and exerting strong diplomatic pressure on all three members of the Little Entente.⁸⁴¹

In an attempt to counterbalance Bethlen's visit, Benes traveled to London, where he was informed on July 10 that Czechoslovakia could only count on British political and financial support if, at its next meeting, the Little Entente made a favorable decision regarding the Hungarian loan.⁸⁴² Benes was in a quandary. After all, it was he who worked the hardest for the negative outcome of the loan application in May, only to be told to take a diametrically opposite direction now. Benes backed down and, at the Sinaia conference, accomplished the Little Entente's agreement to the loan. At the 1923 general meeting of the League of Nations, the Little Entente politicians met with Bethlen, although these meetings did not contribute a lot to improved relations between Hungary and her neighbors. In the end, primarily to the pro-Hungarian stance of Britain, in December of 1923, the League voted to advance the loan to Hungary.

Lack of space prevents a full review of the clashes between Benes and the Hungarians in the League; here, a sketch of the typical characteristics must suffice.⁸⁴³ The primary aim of the Hungarians was to continuously keep the question of the Hungarian minorities on the agenda

⁸³⁸ Soós: *Burgenland ...* op. cit.; Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 182-184.

⁸³⁹ Ormos, Mária: *Az 1924. évi államkölcsön megszerzése* [Securing the 1924 government loan]. Akadémiai Kiadó. Budapest. 1964.

⁸⁴⁰ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 220.

⁸⁴¹ Ormos: *Az 1924. ...* op. cit., pp. 47-51.

⁸⁴² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 220.

⁸⁴³ Szarka, László: *Revízió és kisebbségvédelem* [Revision and protection of minorities]. In: *Duna-táji dilemmák* [Dilemmas along the Danube]. Nemzeti kisebbségek-kisebbségi politika a 20. Századi Kelet-Közép-Európában. Ister Kiadó, Budapest, 1998; Szarka, László: *A kisebbségi kérdés a magyar-(cseh)szlovák kapcsolatokban* [The minority issue in Hungarian-(Czech)Slovak relations]. In: *Duna-táji ...* op. cit.

and to refine the procedure of minority complaints. This had two goals: the improvement of the fate of the Hungarian minorities outside the borders and moral, legal and political action against the Little Entente.⁸⁴⁴ Benes tried to form the most positive image of his country under assault by Hungarian charges.⁸⁴⁵ He invited to Czechoslovakia, one after another, the Geneva officials and bureaucrats, taking them around the country personally. Of course, he ensured that his visitors always received favorable information regarding the minority policies of Czechoslovakia.⁸⁴⁶ At Benes' suggestions, the League of Nations met in Prague on June 6, 1922, the meeting at which the representatives of the Hungarian minority of Czechoslovakia were admitted. Benes was not loath to employ stronger means, though. In August of 1922, because of the minority question on the agenda, the Czechoslovak delegation simply boycotted the Vienna interparliamentary session. A month later, to head off impending complaints against the Czechoslovak government, he made a suggestion to have an international examination of the behavior of minorities. In August of 1923, he addressed a note to the League, raising opposition to a wider interpretation of minority rights.

The Magyar – and German – minority posed a number of headaches for the foreign policies of Benes, having to continually respond to Magyar and German 'accusations.'⁸⁴⁷ Even the avidly pro-Czech Seton-Watson visited Czechoslovakia⁸⁴⁸ and toured what was the former Northern Hungary, talking to the Magyars with serious complaints. After his trip, even he raised a voice, albeit timid, on behalf of the Magyar minority in his series of articles.⁸⁴⁹

Beside the minority question, the second field of Hungarian political campaigning in the League was the topic of equality in rearmament, which, naturally, elicited violent reaction from Benes.⁸⁵⁰ The peace treaties following the war only decided the allowed armed strength of the losing countries, although the victors agreed in principle that there must be a global agreement leading to a general disarmament.⁸⁵¹ According to the

⁸⁴⁴ Zeidler: *A reviziós ...* op. cit., p. 65.

⁸⁴⁵ Scheuermann: *Minderheitenschutz ...* op. cit., pp. 51-370.

⁸⁴⁶ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 105.

⁸⁴⁷ Wandycz: *Foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 220-221.

⁸⁴⁸ Seton-Watson maintained his contacts after WWI with his Czech and Slovak politician friends. There was extensive exchange of letters on several topics, published in book form. R.W. Seton-Watson: *His relations with the Czechs and Slovaks*. I-II. volume. Matica Slovenská, 1995.

⁸⁴⁹ R.W. Seton-Watson (ed.): *Slovakia then and now*. London, 1931.

⁸⁵⁰ Benes continued his previous practice of publishing his speeches in pamphlet form while foreign minister. Edouard Beneš: *The diplomacy struggle for European security and the stabilization of peace*. Speech of Edouard Beneš czechoslovak foreign minister in Foreign Comité of Senate. April, 1925. Orbis., Praha, 1925.

⁸⁵¹ B.J.C. McKercher: *The League of Nations and Problem of Collective Security 1919-1939*. In: *The League of Nations*. Organization and Accomplishments. United Nations, New York and Geneva, 1996.

terms of the treaty, Hungary was only permitted to maintain such a modest army which would not have been able to repel any foreign aggression. At the same time, the countries of the Little Entente possessed sizeable and well equipped forces.⁸⁵² Hence, it is not surprising that, at the August-September 1924 meeting of the League, Benes was again a most active member, actively supporting the 'Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes,' aimed at preventing future wars.⁸⁵³

The chief aim of Benes' foreign policy – the safeguarding of Czechoslovak independence – was grounded on the Versailles agreement. The four Great Powers – America, Britain, France and Italy – were charged with ensuring the post-Versailles European order. However, this order was scuttled early on by the growing isolationism of the United States, and Congress' refusal to ratify the treaty. Italy – one of the Big Four, at least on paper – was unable to act as befitting expectations. In the years after the war, it became isolated, opposed to its former allies and the direction of its foreign policy difficult to discern.⁸⁵⁴ With Mussolini coming to power, Italy ceased to be the guardian of the *status quo*, instead switching to a position of revisionism. That left England and France to guarantee European peace. For France, the only guarantee of peace was greater political and military might on the continent to compensate for Germany's greater population and industrial strength. To this end, the French began to construct a system of eastern alliances, the first link being the French-Polish pact of 1921. The British, continuing their centuries old policy, saw their role as maintaining the power equilibrium between France and Germany. As a result, British diplomacy not only did not support but rather contradicted some French steps, which the French claimed were part of the terms of the Versailles treaty but, in actual fact, were meant to increase their continental power.⁸⁵⁵ When Benes began to organize the Little Entente, against French wishes, the French diplomats in Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest did everything in their power to prevent it. The British diplomats in Belgrade and Bucharest, on the other hand, received orders to provide all assistance in its realization. England played a significant role in the birth of the Little Entente. When ties between the Little Entente and France began to solidify, England immediately began to distance itself from the Little Entente.⁸⁵⁶

From the point of view of subsequent events, aside from the British-French conflict, two more factors must be noted. One was that, as a result of the Dawes Plan, European financial and commercial rebuilding began to take place. Secondly, Germany had a foreign minister from 1923 to 1929, Gustav Stresemann, who made the observation of the terms of the Versailles treaty the cornerstone of his foreign policy. By doing so, he hoped to attain amelioration of the terms of the treaty and for Germany to regain its previous position and status as a great power.

⁸⁵² Edouard Beneš: *The diplomacy struggle ...* op. cit., pp. 10-13.

⁸⁵³ Wandycz: *Foreign policy ...* op. cit., p. 224.

⁸⁵⁴ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 185-196.

⁸⁵⁵ Herczeg: *A szarajevói ...* op. cit., p. 173.

⁸⁵⁶ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 183.

These combined factors led to Locarno, where an international conference was meeting from October 5 to 16, 1925.⁸⁵⁷ At the conference, Benes had to face up to the unpleasant fact that, while he was attempting to carry out international politics in the name of Czechoslovakia, in reality, the Great Powers were making all the decisions. The representatives of Germany, Belgium, France, Italy and England discussed and made decisions that came to be known as the Locarno Pact. While the terms were hammered out, Benes and his Polish counterpart, Skrzynski, were forced to pass the time in the waiting room of the conference chamber – literally. “Mr. Benes and Mr. Skrzynski had to sit in the waiting room until we asked them in,” bragged Stresemann in his memoirs.⁸⁵⁸

The most important portion of the Locarno Pact treaties was the Rhine Pact, a series of treaties signed by Germany (by now the Weimar Republic), France and Belgium, offering mutual guarantees to honor the borders defined by the Versailles treaty, not to initiate attacks against each other and to resolve mutual issues through peaceful means. England and Italy, as guaranteeing powers, agreed that, in the case of an attack, they will come to the aid of the attacked party.⁸⁵⁹

It is important to note that the Locarno agreements only guaranteed Germany’s western frontiers (facing France and Belgium). Although the French made attempts to create similar agreements for Germany’s eastern borders, also, Britain refused to guarantee that frontier. It meant that the Locarno treaties did not guarantee Poland’s or Czechoslovakia’s western boundaries. That the Great Powers differentiated between Germany’s eastern and western boundaries, that the western frontier was more inviolable than the eastern, was a defeat of major proportions for Benes and his foreign policies.

Benes was only able to accomplish that Germany sign arbitration treaties with its eastern neighbors, Czechoslovakia and Poland, instead of the guarantees offered by the Rhine Pact.⁸⁶⁰ The signatories undertook the obligation that any disagreements arising between them, which could not be settled through diplomatic means, will be referred to an arbitrator or to the Permanent International Court. It must be noted that these arbitration treaties were not guaranteed by anybody, meaning they carried scant importance, and did not exclude the possibility of revisions.

Locarno had an impact on the Czechoslovak-German and Czechoslovak-Austrian relations.⁸⁶¹ On September 8, 1926, it fell to Benes as rotating president of the League of Nations, to preside over the session at which Germany made its first appearance as a full member. Such are the jokes of Fate. Although Germany continued to try and maintain good relations with Czechoslovakia, it has ceased to treat it as a near-equal.

⁸⁵⁷ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 229-240.

⁸⁵⁸ Eric Sutton (ed.): *Gustav Stresemann: His Diaries, Letters, and Papers*. Mcmillan, New York, 1937, p. 228.

⁸⁵⁹ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 225-240.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 237-238.

⁸⁶¹ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 235.

Austria also, with strong ties to Czechoslovakia since Lany, began to distance itself and begin to draw nearer to Germany.⁸⁶²

A strong determining factor on Czechoslovak-Hungarian relation was the two-pronged direction taken by Hungarian foreign policy in the early 1920s.⁸⁶³ Attempts were made to come to a *modus vivendi* with one or other of the neighboring countries, and through them garner the support of one of the victorious Great Powers (illustrated by the French-Hungarian tentative contacts and the associated Polish-Hungarian-Romanian plan). The other direction being explored was the ongoing possibility of upsetting the *status quo* with German help (as evidenced by the various military officer organizations). In 1923, Bethlen ends this duality of action and begins to follow a policy of conciliation and coexistence, similar to Gustav Stresemann's in Germany (*Erfüllungspolitik*): Hungary gains admittance to the League of Nations and takes out a League loan. These two successes were achieved in spite of the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia, directed by Benes. Yet, Benes' anti-Hungarian policies were successful in isolating Hungary internationally in the early 1920s.

In the second half of the decade, Benes was confronted by two serious threats originating from Hungary: the Italian-Hungarian friendship treaty and the Lord Rothermere action.

Beginning in 1925, Hungarian diplomacy was making attempts to draw closer to Yugoslavia.⁸⁶⁴ The permanent Italian threat made it attractive to the South Slav state to sign a treaty with Hungary and protect its back. Italian diplomats got wind of the attempt and quite simply made a better offer than the advantages offered by the Slavs. Thus, the April 5, 1927 Italian-Hungarian friendship treaty was born which, on its face, was a simple treaty of friendship but containing private correspondence (read: secret) between the heads of state covering agreements of consultation between the two on matters of important political issues. The agreement represented two things for Hungarian diplomacy.⁸⁶⁵ It represented Hungary's breakout from international isolation and the support of a victorious power; secondly, Hungary openly abandoned the policy of integration and openly switched to a policy of revision.

"We did not lose provinces. We were butchered ... we have to say farewell to one third of our people forever... If someone buttons their vest the wrong way, he can only fix his clothing by unbuttoning it and re-buttoning it correctly. It is impossible to build a permanent peace on these borders. On these borders, you can only build a jail, in which we are the

⁸⁶² Zöllner: *Ausztria* ... op. cit., pp. 378-394.

⁸⁶³ Romsics, Ignác: *Magyarország története a 20. században* [Hungarian history in the 20th century]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2000, pp. 233-234.

⁸⁶⁴ Hornyák, Árpád: *Magyar-jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok* [Hungarian-Yugoslav diplomatic relations]. Fórum Kiadó, Újvidék /Novi Sad/, 2004, pp. 181-187.

⁸⁶⁵ Romsics: *Magyarország* ... op. cit., p. 235.

prisoners and the victors the wardens ... we need different borders” – said Bethlen in a 1928 speech.⁸⁶⁶

Almost at the same time that Hungarian foreign policy became activistized, the Rothermere actions also began.⁸⁶⁷ English politician and press baron Lord Rothermere printed an article on June 27, 1927 in the *Daily Mail*, titled Hungary’s Place in the Sun, which raised a stir.⁸⁶⁸ The theme of the article was that the unfair Treaty of Trianon is outdated and the Little Entente is rapidly losing its effectiveness. Hence, it is in the interest of the newly formed countries to return the Magyar-populated border territories. If this is not done, a war will be inevitable. The ‘sacrifice’ asked of the Little Entente countries – the surrender of these areas – is not all that great. Through this revision, approximately two million Magyars would be returned to Hungary. Hungary deserves this help as it is an old friend and ally of Britain. The accompanying map, however, erroneously indicated the territories to be returned by Yugoslavia, indicating a significant portion of Croatia instead of the Voivodina.⁸⁶⁹

Lord Rothermere’s article kept the countries concerned in anxiety for over half a year. The Hungarian press received the article warmly, the *Magyarság*, *Pesti Hírlap* and *Budapesti Hírlap* unleashing a torrent of articles lauding Rothermere’s article on their readers.⁸⁷⁰ The press of France and the Little Entente countries, on the other hand, immediately condemned the attempts at revisions. Benes accused Rothermere of driving a wedge between Hungary and the Little Entente, in the process endangering European peace. Rothermere replied in two derisive letters to Benes in which he criticized the injustice of the Central European situation and cataloged the administrative and legal measures inflicted upon the Magyar minorities in their new countries.⁸⁷¹

Benes was forced on the defensive, to refute the charges of oppression toward the Magyar minority in Czechoslovakia, which gave another opportunity for Rothermere to reply, garnering the question a great deal of publicity. A series of articles in the *Daily Mail* called into question the mere existence of the Czechoslovak Republic. Benes then began a wide

⁸⁶⁶ *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai* 2. kötet [Speeches and articles of count István Bethlen]. Genius, Budapest, 1933, p. 185.

⁸⁶⁷ Two radically differing Hungarian-language books have been written of Rothermere and his actions: Vásárhelyi, Miklós: *A lord és a korona* [The lord and the crown]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1977; Bencsik, Gábor: *Lord Rothermere és a magyar revízió* [Lord Rothermere and Hungarian revision]. Magyar Mercurius, Budapest, 2002. The main character also wrote his memoirs: Viscount Rothermere: *My campaign for Hungary*. London, 1939. As well, S.J. Taylor: *The great outsiders, Nortcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail*. London, 1998.

⁸⁶⁸ The article was reprinted in Hungarian in *Rubicon*, 1997/1, pp. 35-37.

⁸⁶⁹ Bencsik: *Lord Rothermere* ... op. cit., p. 50.

⁸⁷⁰ Zeidler: *Zeidler: A revíziós* ... op. cit., pp. 99-100.

⁸⁷¹ The letters were published in the daily newspaper *Est* [Evening] on July 20 and 27, 1927.

and vicious propaganda campaign, trying to smear Rothermere – and Hungary, too – as upsetting the peace. Benes was in a hard position. The British Foreign Office was silent for a long time, leading some to conclude that Rothermere was, in reality, leaking the official British position. Finally, the British government, under French pressure, was forced to announce that it held the Trianon treaty as inviolable and that it had no hand in Rothermere's actions.⁸⁷² The affair calmed as suddenly as it arose – although Rothermere continued his support of Hungary – but it did warn Benes that forces entertaining revisions of the terms of the Versailles treaty were now free to act in the open.

This flurry of activity – Locarno and Hungarian activism, the Italian-Hungarian friendship treaty, and the Rothermere affair – forced Benes to take new foreign diplomacy steps to ensure Czechoslovakia's safety.⁸⁷³ He was able somewhat to counteract Locarno, getting the French to sign a new agreement with the 'abandoned' Czechoslovakia and Poland. The treaty terms stressed that the signing parties would continue to observe the treaties signed under the auspices of the League of Nations and, if any were attacked by Germany, they would render assistance as laid down in paragraph 16 of the League charter.⁸⁷⁴

Also, Benes tried to reorganize the Little Entente as the guarantor of Central European peace.⁸⁷⁵ Having assurance of French support, he presented his plan for the reorganization of the Little Entente at a Belgrade conference in 1929, where several important decisions were accepted.⁸⁷⁶ They agreed that the ending of the bilateral agreements, made at different times and for different periods of time, will be synchronized and renewed for a period of five years. The alliance, based upon bilateral agreements, was now put on a trilateral basis. A decision was made for closer military cooperation. In this matter, the heads of the military were to meet annually to make anti-Hungarian defensive and preventive war plans. A unified position was created regarding the minority question: attempts aimed at expanding the obligations towards the minorities were to be firmly rejected by all. A wide-ranging program of solutions to the problems appearing in their economic cooperation was worked out. Benes expected this package of decisions to put the Little Entente on firmer footing, making it more able to handle the arising problems, especially to counter the increasingly active foreign diplomacy of Hungary.

A small chink in the concept, agreement attempts with Hungary

As is amply clear from the preceding chapter, an important element of Benes' second concept was the placing of Hungary into a position of subservience to Czechoslovak politics. He tried to force this on Hungary through the 1920s at every international forum, using every means. It was

⁸⁷² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 249.

⁸⁷³ Wandycz: *France and her ...* op. cit., pp. 225-226.

⁸⁷⁴ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 234.

⁸⁷⁵ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 288-296.

⁸⁷⁶ Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 268.

the main thread of the foreign policy conducted by Benes. Beside this main direction, occasionally, the possibility of conciliation with Hungary arose.

The Teleki government made attempts to approach Czechoslovakia in early 1921.⁸⁷⁷ The background motivation was more economic than political. The need to reestablish the previous economic ties was becoming strongly apparent in all the newly created countries, regardless of the political situation.⁸⁷⁸ Benes – already hard at work in creating the Little Entente – accepted the Hungarian feelers, leading to Czechoslovak-Hungarian talks in Bruck on March 14. The Hungarian delegation was led by Prime Minister Teleki and Foreign Minister Gusztáv Gratz,⁸⁷⁹ while the Czechoslovak delegation was headed by Benes. The conference resulted in a strange situation on both sides. From the Hungarian side, we see a Czechoslovakia, to which the Hungarian government is making an overture, engaged in secret negotiations aimed primarily at a military attack against Hungary. On the Czechoslovak side, we see a Benes negotiating with Hungary, while feverishly working on creating the Little Entente to encircle Hungary.

The Hungarian side wished to place territorial revision at the center of the negotiation, asking for the return of Magyar-populated border areas in return for economic cooperation. The two Hungarians leading the talks placed their hopes in the unofficial Prague statement that it may be possible to discuss returning certain territories. At the conference, Benes tried to press territorial questions into the background, instead creating four committees to resolve the problems (financial, economic, legal and transportation).⁸⁸⁰ The discussions of the expert panels, so difficult to organize, came to an abrupt halt at the news of the attempted return of King Charles IV.

The second round of Hungarian-Czechoslovak talks happened in June and July of 1921 in Budapest and Marienbad.⁸⁸¹ The two sides were unable to come to a single long-term commercial or economic agreement, merely closing a short-term agreement on a barter trade deal of Czech coal and

⁸⁷⁷ Mészáros, Károly: *Horthy és Teleki 1919-1921 Kormánypolitika és Trianon* [Horthy and Teleki 1919-1921. Government policy and Trianon]. Nesztor Kiadó, Budapest, 1996.

⁸⁷⁸ Marta Romportlová: *A kereskedelmi politika helye a két világháború közötti csehszlovák-magyar kapcsolatokban* [The role of economic policies in Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations between the wars]. In: Szarka, László (ed.): *Békétlen évtizedek. 1918-1938.* [Turbulent decades. 1918-1938]. Budapest, 1988; Vadkerty, Katalin: *A Csehszlovák Köztársaság gazdaság története* [The economic history of the Czechoslovak Republic]. In: *Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyarság történetéből* [Chapters from the history of the Magyars of Czechoslovakia]. Pozsony, 1993.

⁸⁷⁹ Gratz: *Magyarország a két ...* op. cit., pp. 42-47; Boros: *Magyar-csehszlovák ...* op. cit., pp. 284-285; Juhász, Gyula: *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919-1945* [Hungarian foreign policy 1919-1945]. Budapest, 1988, pp. 77-78; Ablonczy, Balázs: *Teleki Pál* [Paul Teleki]. Budapest, 2000, p. 66.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid* (Boros).

⁸⁸¹ Romsics, Ignác: *Bethlen István. Politikai életrajz* [István Bethlen, a political biography]. Budapest, 1991, pp. 127-128.

Hungarian flour. The two sides took an equally differing stand on the question of the borders. Miklós Bánffy, who succeeded Gratz as Foreign Minister, wanted to draw the new boundary essentially along the line of the ethnic population divide, somewhat south of the line determined later, in 1938. Benes, on the other hand, was only willing to talk about the possibility of returning several small pieces of territory around Komárom and Losonc. After Bethlen listened to Bánffy's report of Benes' offer, he decided that, in light of such an insignificant concession, it would be a mistake if Hungary signed a bilateral agreement in which it voluntarily renounced the claims for other territories now under Czechoslovak control. The conference thus came to an end, influenced also by the worsening Burgenland situation.

It is almost certain that Benes was willing to talk about the return of small pieces of Magyar-populated areas merely as a tactical move. His offer was not serious. This was, after all, the Benes who fought long and hard at the Peace Conference for the border definition and it seems inconceivable that he would have altered his position in such a short time to entertain modification. Benes made his offer of border revision knowing – rightly – that it would be refused. He was certain that the Hungarian government was not interested in piece meal revision but total revision, so he could afford to make himself be seen as being amenable to border realignment. The Hungarian government, interested in a comprehensive revision, lacked the tactical flexibility which would have made it accept Benes' offer. We feel that Benes was not interested in returning a square yard of territory but, through his clever tactic and the rigid intransigence of the Hungarians, allowed him to increase Czechoslovakia's moral stature in the eyes of the other European states. After the unproductive negotiations, he could clearly state that: We tried, we made an offer, we were open to territorial concession, we wanted an agreement but the Hungarians wanted too much. The lack of accord is their fault.

Benes overestimated the Hungarian possibilities of the 1920s, seeing in Hungary the greatest potential threat to Czechoslovakian territorial integrity. He paid unwavering attention and action to confining Hungary and prevent any alteration whatever. With such a starting point, there was but a slight chance for a Czechoslovak-Hungarian political agreement. On top of it all, Bethlen, prime minister of Hungary between 1921 and 1931 and Benes' chief negotiating partner, had serious reservations toward Benes and Czechoslovakia. This well traveled politician consciously avoided Czechoslovakia. Indicative was his reservation that, in regard to the League loan affair of 1923 when the possibility of a Bethlen-Benes meeting arose, he stipulated that he will not set foot on Czechoslovak soil.⁸⁸²

For tactical reasons, Benes – and sometimes President Masaryk, too – occasionally raised the possibility of a Czechoslovak-Hungarian agreement. As illustration, let us examine two examples. In 1923, Masaryk made an offer of returning certain Magyar-populated areas in return for

⁸⁸² Romsics: *Bethlen István ... op. cit.*, p. 216.

economic considerations.⁸⁸³ After a supper at the 1930 Hague conference, Benes sat down beside Bethlen and raised the possibility of a Czechoslovak-Hungarian, or a Little Entente-Hungarian, political rapprochement.⁸⁸⁴ We strongly feel that these seeming attempts by Benes and Masaryk were governed by tactical considerations in an attempt to demonstrate their willingness to international public opinion and diplomacy to come to an agreement.

Aside from the political field, in the economic sphere there were serious attempts at coming to a Czechoslovak-Hungarian agreement. Marta Romportlová's study divides Czechoslovak-Hungarian economic relations into six phases:⁸⁸⁵

1918-1920: The phase from the creation of the new states to their final political consolidation.

1921-1923: The final period of post-war crisis to the beginning of the normalization of Hungarian economic conditions. The beginning of comprehensive economic negotiations and economic-political relations.

1924-1927: The crystallization of the two economies and the time of the taking of shape of political relations. The years of preparations for bilateral trade agreements.

1927-1930: The era of the first valid bilateral economic agreements.

1930-1936: The era of the customs war, or trying to escape from it.

1937-1938: The era of the second true bilateral economic agreements.

Economic ties were most harmonious between the two countries in the fourth phase, as defined above by Romportlová, with the signing on May 31, 1927, of a comprehensive trade agreement. The world economic crisis, which made itself felt on the falling price of agricultural products, urged the agrarians within the Czechoslovak governing circles – the Agrarian Party was a member of the ruling government coalition – to take protective steps in the interest of their prices. Under pressure from the Agrarian Party, parliament enacted the Bread Baking Law intended to offer protection for the agricultural products of the homeland.⁸⁸⁶ The country then significantly raised the tariffs on grain, flour and animal imports. These measures were indisputably aimed at Hungarian exports.⁸⁸⁷

On November 7, 1920, a new regulation specified that everyone was mandated to use at least 75% of Czechoslovak grown wheat in the baking of bread. After that, it was a logical step that the Hungarian-Czechoslovak trade agreement that came to an end on December 15, which was the cornerstone of Hungarian wheat exports, was not renewed. Nor was an

⁸⁸³ Ormos, Mária: *Franciaország és keleti biztonság 1931-1936* [France and eastern security 1931-1936]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1969, p. 21.

⁸⁸⁴ *A magyar ellenforradalmi rendszer külpolitikája*. IV. kötet 1927-1931 [The foreign policy of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary system. vol IV 1927-1931]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1967, pp. 365-366.

⁸⁸⁵ Romportlová: *A kereskedelmi politika ...* op. cit., pp. 29-30.

⁸⁸⁶ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 140.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid.

agreement reached at the Prague trade talks already begun. There was a state of trade war between the two countries.

The two countries only signed a new trade agreement in 1936.⁸⁸⁸ The Czechoslovak side practiced protectionism for its agricultural products, while the Hungarians extended state protection for their industrial output. It was thus logical, and unavoidable, that a trade war ensued.

2.2 BENEŠ' FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EARLY 30's DECLINING INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

World economic crisis and its effects on Beneš' foreign policy

The October 24, 1929 New York stock market crash began the world wide economic crisis. The crisis affected the Danube basin particularly deeply. In 1919-1920, the economic and political unit that the Monarch represented became seven small countries, all jealously guarding their economic and political independence. These countries managed to achieve a measure of stability by the mid-20s, organizing their economies around huge foreign loans of short and long term. The economic crisis had a very powerful fiscal aspect – the fiscal equilibrium was disrupted and the international credit system collapsed – putting the newly created countries in a tight economic position. The foreign banks – themselves in trouble – began to recall their loans made in Eastern Europe. From an economic perspective, these years seemed to validate those who thought it a mistake to break up the market equilibrium of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.⁸⁸⁹

The economic crisis also had an impact on international relations. Lack of space prevents us from discussing here each proposal and the reaction to it. Instead, we will sketch the more important plans proposed to solve the economic problems, from which – as appropriate to our topic – we will discuss their effect on Beneš' plan of integration. The proposed plans, in chronological order, for the solution to the economic crisis were:⁸⁹⁰

Aristide Briand puts forward a pan-European memorandum (May 1, 1930), in which he proposes the organization of a 'United States of Europe'. In its original concept, the idea was to unite the countries of Europe, excluding the Soviet Union, in a customs union. The plan was rejected by the majority of European politicians; hence, no definitive steps were taken.

In an effort to counterbalance France, Germany made a proposal in the late 1930s for preferential treatment. It made an offer to all the Danubian countries – with the exception of Czechoslovakia – that each undertake to accept an agreed amount of agricultural products at a specified price. The proposal found favor with the agricultural countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and Germany began bilateral talks with them.

The third significant proposal was for a German-Austrian customs union (March 19, 1931). The intent of the plan was to erase the customs

⁸⁸⁸ Romportlová: *A kereskedelmi politika ...* op. cit., p. 38.

⁸⁸⁹ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 27.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 43-80.

barrier between Germany and Austria, as well as to harmonize external tariffs. This was to have been the 'cold Anschluss.'⁸⁹¹ The emergence of this alternative created a large international difficulty. In response to international pressure organized by the France and, for once, supported by the England, Johann Schober (Austrian Vice-Chancellor) and Julius Curtius (German Foreign Minister) were forced to announce the cancellation of the customs union plan.

Italy put forward the Brocchi Plan (April 1931). The Italians, like the French, wanted to remove German influence, proposed an Italian-Austrian-Hungarian economic cooperation. Inginio Brocchi, Italy's Foreign Minister, envisioned the union to be based on bilateral preferential export subsidies.

The British Foreign Office proposed (January 17, 1932) that the six Danubian countries – Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria – for a customs union. Essentially, the British plan was for a (sort of) economic reconstitution of the Monarchy.⁸⁹² Berlin and Rome immediately rejected the plan, while Paris, initially in support, also decided to reject it. Berlin deemed this customs union as being contrary to German interests; Italy saw it as endangering the Italian-Austrian-Hungarian plan; Paris worried about an emerging area of British influence, creating imbalance.

André Tardieu's plan (March 2, 1932) proposed that Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia create a system of preferential tariffs. This plan was supported enthusiastically by Benes but failed due to German and Italian resistance.⁸⁹³ The plan revealed that France made an attempt to organize a Danubian-basin economic union – under French influence. The French government felt that the regional crisis was primarily an agricultural crisis, hence, the best solution was the creation of a term of reference for the agricultural countries.⁸⁹⁴

The number of plans put forward clearly shows that the Great Powers (France, England, Italy and a gradually recovering Germany) recognized that the one which can secure decisive influence over central and south-eastern Europe is the one which can cooperate in effecting a solution to the economic crisis.

If we examine the proposed plans from the point of view of the Benes led Czechoslovak foreign policy, it is obvious that – with the exception of the French plan – they all posed serious hazards to Czechoslovakia. The Brocchi plan meant that Austria will become distanced from the Lany agreement and for a strong Central European block with Italy and Hungary.⁸⁹⁵ The German-Austrian plan raised the specter of Anschluss and

⁸⁹¹ Herceg: *A szarajevói merénylettől ...* op. cit., p. 192.

⁸⁹² Diószegi, László: *A nagyhatalmak és a Duna-medence az 1930-as években* [The Great Powers and the Danubian basin in the 1930s]. In: *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20 században* [Hungary and the Great Powers in the 20th century]. Teleki László Alapítvány, Budapest, 1995, pp. 100-101.

⁸⁹³ Ibid, pp. 101-106.

⁸⁹⁴ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 52.

⁸⁹⁵ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 318-326.

the emergence of German economic and political power in the Danubian valley.⁸⁹⁶ The German plan for preferential treatment seriously endangered the existence of the Little Entente. Benes rightly felt that, in response to the economic advantages offered by Germany to Yugoslavia and Romania, – especially the absorption of their grain surpluses by the German market – they will value it more than the Little Entente and become more amenable toward German plans. To Benes, German ambitions, in the long term, raised the fear of a German influenced Danubian-basin.⁸⁹⁷

Czechoslovakia found itself in grave trouble as a result of the international economic situation, as the carefully erected system of allies and security was seriously compromised. Austria tended more and more toward the position that “For Austria, there is no solution without Germany,” which would break the circle woven around Hungary by Benes. The circle was also showing other weak points: Romania and Yugoslavia were conducting trade negotiations with Germany,⁸⁹⁸ raising the real possibility of the disintegration of the Little Entente. Benes could only continue to rely on his earlier supporter, France, for all practical purposes a French-Czechoslovak affiliation. It is then not surprising that when the German-Austrian plan surfaced, Czechoslovakia joined France in vocal objection in Vienna on the very first day. The seriousness of the French-Czechoslovak situation is indicated in that, in the interest of breaking off trade talks with Germany, Yugoslavia was granted a loan of 8 million pound sterling by the French, and Romania 10 million. As was, Benes had to make full use of his diplomatic skills to convince Romania and Yugoslavia to commit to the French-Czechoslovak policy at the Little Entente conference in Bucharest in May.⁸⁹⁹

The united French-Czechoslovak direction finally deflected the peril as Romania and Yugoslavia suspended their talks with Germany after the Little Entente conference, dealing a defeat to the German government in 1931. It had to relinquish its plans for the creation of a central and east European economic block. This German setback was only temporary, as it attained successes in this direction in subsequent years.

The German-Austrian customs union raised fears mainly in France and Czechoslovakia,⁹⁰⁰ but its sinking by the French created an excellent

⁸⁹⁶ John R. Lampe – Marvin J. Jackson: *Balkan economic history, 1505-1950*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 179-194.

⁸⁹⁷ The foreign policy views of Benes in the early 1930s is well summarized in Edouard Beneš: *The problem of Central-Europe. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia*. Speech delivered March 21, 1934, before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament and Senate. In: *The Montevideo Conference*. New York, 1934, pp. 159-172.

⁸⁹⁸ Hans-Paul Höpfner: *Deutsche Südosteuropapolitik in der Weimarer Republik*. Frankfurt-Bern, 1983, pp. 94-95; Ránki, György: *A Duna-völgyi kis országok a nemzetközi gazdaság és politika rendszerében* [The small danubian states within the international economic and political system]. In: Ránki, György (ed.): *A Harmadik Birodalom árnyékában* [In the shadow of the Third Reich]. Budapest, 1988.

⁸⁹⁹ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 312-326.

⁹⁰⁰ Beneš: *The problem of ...* op. cit., pp. 160-164.

opportunity for Benes to go on the offensive and propose a plan for a customs union that excluded Germany from the Danubian basin. Benes first introduced the idea of an Austria-Czechoslovakia-Hungary economic cooperation block in June of 1931, then repeated it at the League's September assembly to Apponyi.⁹⁰¹ Accordingly, Czechoslovakia was willing to cooperate economically with Hungary, without any political recompense. This economic rapprochement may lead to acquaintance, understanding and possibly eventual sympathy between the two countries. The other problems must be left to the future to solve.

Benes put out feelers towards the Austrian, saying in the presence of Marek, the Austrian ambassador in Prague, that there is no other way out of the economic chaos than a rapprochement among the three countries. He would like, he said, if Austria took the first step and come forward with some concrete proposal.⁹⁰² Not getting any response through diplomatic channels, Benes makes public during October his intention for closer economic ties between Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary. In his speech to the Czechoslovak parliament on October 20, 1931, Benes stated that the Central European crisis can not be solved without Hungary, that Czechoslovakia has an interest in Hungary's well being. To this end, the Czechoslovak government is ready to offer a helping hand so that it can escape from the crisis.⁹⁰³ Benes made a similar statement at a press conference a few days later.

The circumstances became easier for Benes to take the initiative because the Bethlen government fell on August 31, to be replaced by one led by Gyula Károlyi, under whose leadership the French orientation again surfaced.⁹⁰⁴ To arouse the attention of the Hungarian government, Benes dropped hints at the possibility of territorial concessions. These hints, regarding the possible handover of Kassa and its surrounding area, were forwarded to the Hungarian government by the intermediation of Austria.⁹⁰⁵ Hungary received the Benes plan with suspicion, although, in the interest of marketing its agricultural surplus, it aroused the interest of Foreign Minister Lajos Walkó who was not opposed to it.

Austria declined the Czechoslovak proposal. After the frustration of the German-Austrian customs union plan, Austria worked at maintaining the future possibility of cooperation with Germany. The Austrian politicians explained to Benes that they did not wish to take part in a plan in which Benes wished to close the gates of the Danube valley (meaning to Germany).⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰¹ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 91.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* [Prague Hungarian Gazette] 1931, October 21.

⁹⁰⁴ Márkus, László: *A Károlyi Gyula kormány bel- és külpolitikája* [The internal and foreign policy of the Károlyi government]. Budapest, 1968.

⁹⁰⁵ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 91.

⁹⁰⁶ Zöllner: *Ausztria ...* op. cit., pp. 381-386; Kerekes: *Ausztria hatvan ...* op. cit., pp. 148-163. old; Kerekes, Lajos: *Ausztria története, 1918-1955* [Austria's history, 1918-1955]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1966, pp. 61-70.

The German government took a harsh stand against Benes' proposal, saying that the planned cooperation was not in the interest of either Austria or Hungary, and that Germany can not be excluded from the economic recovery of the area. Italy's main activity related to the plan was to keep both Austria and Hungary out of it, as the plan jeopardized its own Central European ambitions.

In the end, Hungarian suspicions, Austrian indifference, Italian and German opposition and dubious French support sank the plan in short order. In our opinion, the plan had a great deal of economic reality – the Vienna-Prague-Budapest triangle represented the most advanced areas of the Monarchy – but lacked all political reality. The anti-Hungarian policy of Benes over a decade and a half, the diplomatic cooperation of Hungary and Italy, and the increasingly marked German presence in the region all refuted any possible reality to Czechoslovak-Hungarian-Austrian cooperation.

Benes based the security of Czechoslovakia entirely on the post-war system of peace treaties following Versailles. One important pillar of this system was a weakened and confined Germany but Germany made measurable strides in returning to the international stage beginning at the end of the 20s and early 30s. Beginning in the 30s, Czechoslovakia had to face up to German economic aspirations in the Danube basin, a Germany that was able to force Benes and his foreign policy into retreat.

Nothing illustrates better the shift of Benes' foreign policy onto the defensive than the question of disarmament. During the 20s, Benes carried out active work within the League of Nations on the question of disarmament.⁹⁰⁷ The peace treaties after the conclusion of the war limited the armies of the losing nation, while the victors merely had a vague idea that global disarmament would eventually have to be addressed. Hungary was permitted an armed force only suitable to maintain internal security, while the Little Entente countries maintained sizable forces. It allowed the victors to maintain a military threat over the losers. There were preliminary disarmament conferences in Geneva, where Benes was an active participant.⁹⁰⁸ In spite of it, in 1932 Benes was forced to acknowledge a defeat in this area, too. The disarmament conference that began on February 2, 1932, despite six years of preparatory work, disclosed that the delegates were unable to agree. France proposed an 'international army' and demanded guarantees for its security in an effort to maintain its military superiority over Germany. England argued on the side of German equality to rearm, in an effort to return to a European equilibrium. The British were leery of a large French military – without a counterbalance – and did not support the French proposal. The United States – still owed significant amounts of war loans by the French – took the position that the indebted French should not arm further but instead should disarm and repay their debts. Germany stressed its right to rearm, which was supported by Italy. Since Germany's right was not recognized, it left the conference.

⁹⁰⁷ McKercher: *The League of ...* op. cit.; Edouard Beneš: *The diplomacy struggle ...* op. cit., pp. 10-13.

⁹⁰⁸ Horvát: *A trianoni ...* op. cit., pp. 263-308.

The first session of the conference ended on July 23 without being able to show any results.⁹⁰⁹ The closing protocol text was collected by Benes, its only advantage was the marked avoidance of every contentious issue.⁹¹⁰

At the end of the same year, on December 11, the Geneva conference of the five Great Powers – England, France, America, Italy and Germany – decided to recognize Germany's equal right to rearm, the Five-Power Agreement. Afterwards, Germany again sat at the disarmament conference. Czechoslovak foreign policy found itself in a difficult situation, since one of the important links in the post-Versailles security system was removed by the agreement.

On January 30, 1933, General Hindenburg named Hitler to the post of chancellor of Germany. Hitler began to make Germany a military power in Europe again and, based on this military strength, create the Third Reich. This meant more than revision of the terms of the Versailles treaty, Hitler aimed at the economic and political domination of all of Central and Eastern Europe.⁹¹¹ The accomplishment of the Anschluss and the solution for the Danzig corridor were not ends in themselves, merely springboards on the way to dominating the entire region. Hitler's program fundamentally brought into question the mere existence of Czechoslovakia. He received significant diplomatic help when Mussolini proposed a Four-Power Pact in March of 1933, that England, France, Germany and Italy should collaborate on all important European questions, including armament and peaceful revision.⁹¹²

Mussolini's proposal erupted in a long diplomatic wrangling. England was of the opinion that everything should be given to Germany that was legitimately demanded, so that it would not demand anything over and above that. This was essentially the beginning of the appeasement program of Britain.⁹¹³ France again brought up its security concerns and voiced the opinion that the disarmament conference and the League of Nation could not be left out of the agreement. Some German-Italian disagreements also surfaced. The entire European diplomatic machinery worked full time between March and July 7, 1933, when the agreement was signed; Poland and the Little Entente countries doing all they could to prevent it.

Benes felt the perils in the Four-Power Pact and desperately fought during these months to prevent its signing. When the British Foreign Minister tried to convince Benes of the well-meaning and beneficial aspects of the Pact, Benes replied angrily that the Pact represented a breach of the League's current policy and, in raising the issue of revisions, a break with the peace agreements, as well.⁹¹⁴ We feel that, in that discussion with

⁹⁰⁹ Ormos, Mária – Majoros, István: *Európa a nemzetközi küzdőtéren* [Europe on the international battleground]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, pp. 343-345.

⁹¹⁰ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 159.

⁹¹¹ Herczegh: *A szarajevói ...* op. cit., p. 203; Ormos, Mária: *Hitler*. Budapest, 1994, p. 286.

⁹¹² Horváth: *A trianoni ...* op. cit., p. 277.

⁹¹³ Martin Gilbert – Richard Gott: *The Appeasers*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1963, pp. 3-24.

⁹¹⁴ Ormos-Majoros: *Európa a ...* op. cit., p. 200.

his British colleague, Benes assessed the situation correctly, that the Pact powers wished to assign internationally significant political and economic issues to a directorate, in opposition to the then-current League policy. This was dangerous for Benes – as shown previously – because his foreign policy relied heavily on diplomatic initiatives carried out in the League of Nations in the interest of Czechoslovak security.

It was also an acute threat to his foreign policy initiatives that the word ‘revision’ became acceptable. Mussolini’s first – March – proposal laid out in paragraph II that: “... the peace treaties within the framework of the League of Nations, as during the time of the 1918 Peace Conference drafted and proposed by the British and the Americans, are open to revision.”⁹¹⁵ Mussolini was the first who dared to use the term ‘peaceful revision’ in an official document. In his April 25 speech in the Czechoslovak parliament, Benes tore apart the proposed pact.⁹¹⁶ He argued that the aim of the pact was to confer complete political equality on Germany and Italy and ensure their special Central European interests, the creation of a new equilibrium through the reduction in the military strength of the victors and the increase of those of the vanquished, the undermining of the power of the Little Entente and Poland through revision and, finally, the appeasement of Italy’s colonial demands.

Benes certainly saw clearly and understood perfectly the gist of the pact, with the exception of the last point. In the second part of his speech, Benes established that the Little Entente tries to prevent, in opposition to the pact’s aims, the small states becoming the playthings of the larger powers and that he wants to foster understanding in Central Europe, so that no smaller country will again ask a larger for help against its enemy. Again, we must comment on his diplomatic prescience, since he perfectly described, in 1933, the script of the First Vienna Arbitral Award. Benes specifically made mention of the question of revision, too. He stated that no country can dispose of the territory of another country (after he got what he wanted – *ed.*). he went on to say the Little Entente insists on its borders, which could not be altered anywhere with the required constitutional majority. In any case, revisions could only be entertained on the basis of paragraph 19 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, i.e., by unanimous vote of the council.

In spite of Benes’ actions and warning, the four Great powers, including France, signed the pact. However, the signing governments did not ratify the pact due to Germany’s withdrawal from the League (October 19, 1933) and final departure from the disarmament conference, citing as the reason that, in the proposed disarmament terms, it could not see assurance of the opportunity for the equality of German rearmament. The diplomatic clashes around the pact revealed to Benes – and to every Central European ally of France – that the French government was not the sort of ally on whom one can count in every circumstance. This was the time when the saying made the rounds in Paris: “Not a single Frenchman wants to die for Danzig.”

⁹¹⁵ Horváth: *A trianoni ...* op. cit., p. 277.

⁹¹⁶ *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* [Prague Hungarian Gazette] 1933, April 26.

Beneš' Hungarian and Polish policies

Beneš' foreign policy was influenced not only by events on the international stage but by events closer to home. This sub-chapter will examine his Polish- and Hungarian-related activities.

Similar to Czechoslovakia, Poland was deeply disappointed in the behavior of its French ally. They felt that France had abandoned Poland by signing the Four-Power Pact and in its behavior at the disarmament conference. This opened new possibilities for Hitler to maneuver. German-Polish animosity went back for centuries and the Versailles treaty only made it worse. The conflict had its base in the large number of Germans annexed to Poland and the matter of the Danzig/Gdansk corridor. The city was founded by Poles but, over time, became German populated. Out of the city's 366,700 population, 95% was German.⁹¹⁷ In spite of that, the German treaty of Versailles deemed Danzig to be a 'free city' under the auspices of the League of Nations. German access to the city was through a single road and a single railway line through Polish territory, hence, the term 'corridor.'⁹¹⁸

Shortly after coming to power, Hitler received the Polish ambassador to Germany, Wysocki, and raised the problem that 'the peacemakers of Versailles sowed the seeds of discord between the two countries.' Germany wants peace, the Chancellor said, and he has no intention of annexing any Polish territory.⁹¹⁹ Józef Lipski, Poland's new ambassador to Berlin, continued the discussion with Hitler, who now said that he does not wish to wage war over Danzig. A round of secret negotiations began, which ended with Marshal Józef Piłsudski and his Foreign Minister Józef Beck accepting Hitler's offer.⁹²⁰ The agreement signed on January 26, 1934, was a ten-year mutual non-aggression pact.⁹²¹ In it, the two governments agree to forego the use of force and sets as its goal that problems will be solved 'through fair and equitable discourse for both sides.'

The German-Polish pact inflicted several serious blows to the foreign policy interests of Czechoslovakia. Even though the pact declares that its terms do not affect either government's other international commitments, essentially, it represented a loosening of alliance ties between France and Poland. This was, then, the first significant chink in the system of French alliances, which was one of the mainstays of Czechoslovak security. The bilateral German-Polish agreement was an attack on the League concept of multilateral security, the other mainstay of Czechoslovak security. On top of it all, the dreadful vision of a possible Hungarian-Polish rapprochement arose before Beneš – after all, both Hungary and Poland had territorial demands against the Czechoslovak state. Beneš was finally made to see

⁹¹⁷ Pándi: *Köztes ...* op. cit., p. 284.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 285.

⁹¹⁹ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 272.

⁹²⁰ Piotr Wandycz: *Polish diplomacy 1914-1945. Aims and Achievements.* The School of Slavonic and East European Studies. Orbis Books, London, 1988.

⁹²¹ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 328-330.

that his attempts to include Poland in the Little Entente – something he was forcing since the early 20s – was a complete failure. Czechoslovak-Polish relations worsened even further when the Polish government publicized the problems of the Czechoslovak minorities in the international media in the spring of 1934. Poland was not willing to change its anti-Czechoslovak stance even at the request of French Foreign Minister Barthou at his visit to Warsaw in April of 1934.⁹²² In fact, at a 1935 meeting in Geneva, Beck contended to his Hungarian counterpart, Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya, that he sees a lot of validity in a Rome-Budapest-Warsaw cooperative union.⁹²³ For Czechoslovakia, this view was life threatening. Shortly after, the idea of a common Polish-Hungarian border makes its appearance in Polish diplomatic thinking.

If we examine Hungarian foreign policy in the first half of the 1930s, it is apparent that the primary ally of Hungary was Italy, although Bethlen's November 1930 trip to Berlin signaled the restart of German-Hungarian contacts. After the short-lived Károlyi government⁹²⁴ – August 24, 1931 to October 1, 1932 – Hungary, under the prime ministership of Gyula Gömbös, returned to the previous Italian orientation, and to the continuing strengthening of ties with Germany.⁹²⁵ The shift to the right in Austria also led to improvement of ties with Austria.

Benes had no illusions for the reason behind the Italian-Hungarian-Austrian cooperation. The Hirtenberg arms shipment scandal erupted two months before the Rome signing of the agreement in January of 1933. A Viennese Social Democratic newspaper broke the story that arms arrived from Italy at the Hirtenberg munitions factory in Austria for repairs. They were then to be shipped to Hungary.⁹²⁶ Benes made use of the Hirtenberg affair as anti-Hungarian propaganda and mounted an international press campaign against the Italian-Hungarian-Austrian cooperation agreement. Benes trumpeted to the world that the Hungarian government, while saying that their revisionist intentions are peaceful – and wishing to take part in the League as an equal member, probably only thinking of equality of rearmament – unwilling to wait for permission to proceed, is already engaged in secretly acquiring arms.⁹²⁷ Benes intended to table the Hirtenberg affair in the League of Nations but the other two Little Entente partners did not agree, and France and England decidedly opposed it (on the grounds that it might derail the ongoing disarmament talks). In the end, there were no consequences for any of the countries involved in the affair.

In fact, the rapprochement between the three countries continued. At Mussolini's proposal, the representatives of Italy, Austria and Hungary

⁹²² Wandycz: *Polish ...* op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁹²³ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 302.

⁹²⁴ Márkus: *A Károlyi ...* op. cit..

⁹²⁵ Pritz Pál: *Magyarország külpolitikája Gömbös Gyula miniszterelnöksége idején 1932-1936* [Hungary's foreign policy under Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, 1932-1936]. Budapest, 1982.

⁹²⁶ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., p. 135.

⁹²⁷ Nándori, Pál: *A hirtenbergi fegyverszállítás* [The Hirtenberg arms shipment]. Hadtörténelmi Közlemények, 1968, pp. 636-655.

signed a memorandum (the Rome Memorandum, March 17, 1934), which placed into the realm of the possible close political cooperation, beyond the increased trade relations.⁹²⁸ A clause in the memorandum made it possible to accept other countries in the *bloc*. While Hungary expected Germany to join, Italy expected the Little Entente. This made it possible for Benes to swing into action, which he did, voicing the need for improved relations between Italy and the Little Entente. The affair shows Benes' political acuity and wisdom, immediately recognizing the internal contradictions in the Rome Memorandum – the differences in the positions of Italy and Hungary – and taking instant action to try and make use of Italy against Hungary.

Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations showed no great improvements under the Gömbös government.⁹²⁹ Two facts especially prevented a thaw. In his 95 point program, Gömbös promised increased protection for minorities. The existence and fate of the Magyar minority in Czechoslovakia greatly influenced Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations. Also, Gömbös was the first European head of state who paid a visit to the recently elevated Hitler. During their two day talks on June 17-18, 1933, Gömbös raised four topics: Hungarian-German trade relations, the question the Anschluss, Hungarian territorial revisions and the situation of the German minority in Hungary.

According to Ladislav Deák, both sides agreed that, in the post-war Eastern European order, Czechoslovakia represented the weakest link. The country is to be weakened from within, isolated internationally, and finally, terminated.⁹³⁰ Hitler clearly stated, we must note, that he was only willing to support Hungarian revisionist plans against Czechoslovakia but not against Romania and Yugoslavia.⁹³¹

As an experienced politician, Benes knew that the worsening situation in international relations represented a threat to Czechoslovakia. The question must arise: What did Benes do for Czechoslovakia in this ever more perilous situation? In response to the situation, Benes took steps on several fronts. In spite of the heated revisionist campaign waged by Gömbös against Czechoslovakia, Benes made an offer to Hungary in the second half of 1933. The substance of the offer was that Czechoslovakia was willing to offer trade preferences to Hungary, similar to its Little Entente partners, if, in return, Hungary accepts an economic and political 'truce.' Benes was referring to the revisionist campaign of the Hungarian government and its anti-Czechoslovak propaganda. In his response to the offer, Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya phrased the Hungarian position thusly: "Hungary is only willing to negotiate with Prague if no political

⁹²⁸ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 339-342.

⁹²⁹ Gergely, Jenő: *Gömbös Gyula*. Elektra Kiadóház, Budapest, 1999, pp. 120-126.

⁹³⁰ Ladislav Deák: *Csehszlovák-magyar kapcsolatok a fasizmus közép-európai előretörésének éveiben (1933-1938)* [Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations during the central European emergence of Fascism (1933-1938)]. In: Szarka, László (ed.): *Békétlen évtizedek. 1918-1938*. [Turbulent decades. 1918-1938]. Budapest, 1988.

⁹³¹ Gergely: *Gömbös ...* op. cit., p. 123.

preconditions are set before an agreement, such as political truce, which would signify that Hungary gave up its national aspirations. There is no government that would accept this.”⁹³² Since Hungary did not accept the principle of a ‘political truce,’ only willing to talk about bilateral trade, Benes’ initiative did not succeed.

On February 22, 1933, Vojtech Mastny, Czechoslovak ambassador in Berlin, assured the German government that the Little Entente was not directed against Germany and that “Czechoslovakia attaches particular importance to be on good terms with Germany.”⁹³³ Yet, when Hitler approached the Polish and Czechoslovak governments in November of 1933 on the subject of bilateral treaties, Benes – as opposed to Poland – rejects Hitler’s offer.⁹³⁴ Of course, it is questionable whether the German offer to Prague was sincere, or merely a tactical ploy.

Benes attempted to reorganize the Little Entente yet again – as he did at the Belgrade conference in 1929 – or, rather, to strengthen it. The foreign ministers of the Little Entente decided at their December 18, 1932 meeting in Belgrade – at Benes’ suggestion – to create a Permanent Council and a Permanent Secretariat.⁹³⁵ The first meeting of the council, in Geneva on February 14-15, 1933, laid down a ‘plain and permanent foundation’ to the activities of the Permanent Council (members are the foreign ministers, meet three times annually, the meeting to rotate among the three capitals, one meeting each year to be held in Geneva). The first meeting created an Economic Council (to coordinate the economic interests of the three countries) and renewed the existing agreements among the three countries for an indeterminate period.⁹³⁶

Benes correctly surmised that German economic encroachment along the Danube valley represented a great threat to the fundamental existence of the Little Entente. The structural reorganization and the creation of the Economic Council failed to stop the decay within the Little Entente. In the spring of 1934, Yugoslavia signed a successful trade agreement with Germany, followed a year later (March 1935) by a similar agreement between Romania and Germany. Germany thus had access to Romanian grain and raw materials, to add to its sources from Hungary and Yugoslavia.

In the two bilateral agreements, to ensure increased industrial exports, Germany contracted to accept both countries’ agricultural surplus at a price above world markets. The surplus grain problem of the Danube basin was thus solved by 1935 with Germany accepting delivery from the three agricultural countries of Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia.

⁹³² Deák L.: *Csehszlovák-magyar ...* op. cit., p. 80.

⁹³³ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 180.

⁹³⁴ Herczegh: *A szarajevói ...* op. cit., p. 209.

⁹³⁵ Ádám, Magda: *A kisantant 1920-1938* [The Little Entente 1920-1938]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1981, pp. 169-170. This is not to be confused with her similarly titled book *A kisantant és Európa 1920-1929* published in 1989.

⁹³⁶ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 364-368; Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 309-312.

The German agreements with Yugoslavia and Romania were signed in spite of the steps taken by Benes to protect the Little Entente from German economic encroachment. As German economic influence grew in Central Europe,⁹³⁷ so did the Little Entente continue to break up. Germany won the economic battle in this region and, starting from that position, began to draw the Danube valley under its political control. The economic dependence of these countries shortly began to exhibit itself on the political plane, as well. A segment of Romanian politicians began to voice the opinion that it is in Romania's interest to build good relations with Germany, based on the large economic impact of Germany on Romania. A sharp duality split Romanian politics: Foreign Minister Titulescu tried to carry on with the French-Romanian orientation, while the groups around the King pushed the German-Romanian course.

FEELERS TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION

As detailed in the previous section, Benes had to face up to the fact that fundamental shifts took place in the 30s in the system of relations that defined European politics as compared to the 20s. Germany grew substantially stronger, both politically and economically German desires could not be ignored. England began its appeasement policy, showing herself ready to accede to a number of German demands. France stood alone to face Germany, even more so since the weakening of its eastern alliances by the German-Polish pact. Italy was making more marked attempts to acquire influence in the Danube zone, finding a partner in Hungary. Similar significant changes took place among Czechoslovakia's neighbors and allies. German economic influence made inroads in Romania and Yugoslavia leading to some political groups to warm to the idea of friendship with Germany. Poland loosened its alliance relationship with France and concluded an agreement with Germany. Hungary, after a short detour, returns to the Italian and German orientation.

These changes undeniably foreshadow the twilight of the post-Versailles Europe, and indicate dangers for the Czechoslovak future. Benes, however, was able to revitalize his foreign policy direction. He discovers that the Soviet Union has gradually returned to the international stage, so much so that at the 1933 economic conference in London 'a race was on for the favors of Mr. Litvinov, out of favor until now.' To improve Czechoslovakia's international position, Benes makes energetic moves towards the Soviet Union.

The shaping of Czechoslovak-Russian relations, 1919-1935

It is extremely difficult to pin down the exact date of the beginning of Czechoslovak-Soviet dealings. The Czechoslovak Legion in Siberia was in military contact with the Bolsheviks before the existence of either Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.⁹³⁸ The first official diplomatic contact

⁹³⁷ Ránki, György: *A Harmadik Birodalom árnyékában* [In the shadow of the Third Reich]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1988, p. 123.

⁹³⁸ Untenberger: *The United States*, ... op. cit., pp. 133-159.

was suggested by the Soviets. Commissar for foreign affairs Chicherin sent his first official note to Prague on February 25, 1920, in which he expressed his hope that Czechoslovakia will not take part in the anti-Bolshevik campaign of the Allies. Chicherin went on to make an offer of establishing diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovaks.⁹³⁹

Benes replied almost six weeks later, on April 10, expressing a wish to establish diplomatic contacts, and specifically asked Moscow's help in the matter of repatriating Czechoslovak citizens stranded in Soviet Russia.⁹⁴⁰ At the end of April, Chicherin signaled that Soviet Russia was ready to open diplomatic contacts with Prague. The cover employed for the diplomatic connection was humanitarian matters; the Hillerson Red Cross Mission arrived in Prague on July 8. It was, in effect, a Soviet diplomatic, trade and intelligence mission, masquerading as a Red Cross delegation, under S.I. Hillerson.

The members of the Hillerson mission gathered intelligence, prepared sabotage operations, conducted secret arms deals and engaged in murky financial maneuvers. Chicherin also tasked Hillerson with two further important missions: Ensure Czechoslovak neutrality in the Soviet-Polish war and get Czechoslovakia to officially recognize the Bolshevik regime.

Hillerson successfully carried out the first task. While Poland was in a fight for its very existence against the Red Army, Czechoslovakia remained neutral. Masaryk and Benes refused an Allied request (July 22, 1920) for providing assistance to Poland.⁹⁴¹ Masaryk went as far as to inform the French and British ambassadors that Czechoslovakia will not ship arms and ammunition to Poland, nor will it permit transit across its territory.⁹⁴²

Hillerson met several times with Benes and the other Czechoslovak leaders regarding the matter of official recognition. They, however, were perfectly informed by the newly organized Czechoslovak secret service of the Hillerson mission's other activities. It is probable that this played a role in their January 1921 decision not to establish diplomatic ties with Soviet Russia at this time. Benes notified Moscow that Prague considers Hillerson *persona non grata*. The Soviets – unusual in diplomatic circles – ignored Benes' statement and Hillerson was only replaced by a diplomat named Jurinov in August of 1923.

Czechoslovak diplomats traveled to Moscow in March of 1921 to carry on talks regarding Czechoslovak-Soviet diplomatic ties. An agreement was signed on June 5, 1922 to the extent that the Soviet mission in Prague represents the Soviet Union and *vice versa*. This was not full diplomatic representation as the two countries did not officially recognize each other. Rather, diplomatic relations were maintained through the two missions.

⁹³⁹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 7.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁴¹ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., p. 135.

⁹⁴² Ádám: *A kisantant és Európa ...* op. cit., p. 63.

The internal situation in Czechoslovakia had great impact on Benes' policies towards Soviet Russia.⁹⁴³ Karel Kramář, first prime minister of Czechoslovakia in 1918-19 and party leader of the ruling coalition member National Democratic Party, took a hard anti-Bolshevik stand in the early 20s. Another leader of a strong party, Vaclav Klofač of the National Socialist Party, made a statement in September of 1922 to the effect that 'he would never shake hands with a Bolshevik.' Benes also had to take note of other, equally anti-Bolshevik, Czech and Slovak forces.⁹⁴⁴ The changeable nature of the relations between the two countries is well demonstrated by the actions at the Genoa conference: In response to the German-Soviet agreement of Rapallo, the Czechoslovak delegation immediately joined the French initiated reply and signed the note of protest sent to Germany. At the same time, Benes began secret talks with Chicherin on possible economic cooperation.

Throughout the 20s, the Soviets periodically revisit the question of recognition but Benes deflects it every time. The only concession he is willing to extend is for a certain number of the Soviet mission in Prague to enjoy diplomatic status, as do some members of the Czechoslovak mission in Moscow. Beginning in 1924, six Soviet diplomats enjoyed diplomatic status in Prague. Prague also continued to be a bastion of White Russian émigrés, where, according to some sources, 20,000 Russians émigrés were living in the 20s. They organized numerous political associations which enjoyed the support of Czechoslovak politicians (one was openly supported by Masaryk, another by the mayor of Prague).⁹⁴⁵

1924 was a year of success for Soviet diplomacy; Germany, England, France, China and Mexico recognized the Soviet Union. Soviet diplomats put Benes under an extraordinary amount of pressure for *de jure* recognition but without any success. Chicherin put the question to Benes asking why Czechoslovakia hesitates in recognizing the Soviet Union when a number of countries have already done so. His reply is not recorded. However, we know that both Masaryk and Benes hoped throughout the 20s that the Bolshevik regime was but a short interlude in Russian history and the new masters of the Kremlin will emerge from among the Prague refugees.⁹⁴⁶

By the end of 1924, leading Soviet diplomats realized that they can not expect recognition from Czechoslovakia and so decided to reduce diplomatic contact to the minimum, linked with a hard-line confrontational policy. In practical terms, the relationship between the two countries was frosty from 1925 to 1933. The Soviet secret services, the GPU and GRU, significantly increase their activities in Prague.⁹⁴⁷ The primary targets for the Soviet agents were the Russian émigrés. They tried to infiltrate, then create unrest, in their associations. The Czechoslovak secret service followed the Soviet activities and, where possible, thwarted them. One

⁹⁴³ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 7.

⁹⁴⁴ Mamatey: *The development of ...* op. cit.

⁹⁴⁵ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., pp. 25-35; Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit.

⁹⁴⁶ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 16.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 19-21.

important Soviet agent, Pietrovski, was arrested and jailed for five years. On their side, the Soviets exerted great pressure on the Moscow mission. Two events to illustrate it:⁹⁴⁸ In 1925, unknown burglars broke into the Czechoslovak mission. When the head of the mission, Girska, recognized some items stolen from the mission at the market the following day, Soviet authorities prevented their repurchase (under the guise of a thorough and long inspection of identity papers, the thieves packed up and fled). At another instance, police escorted three diplomats – with diplomatic status – from an identity checkpoint to a nearby police station. These unusual events in diplomatic circles adequately illustrate the frosty nature of relations. The Prague activities of the Soviet agents and the atrocities against the Moscow mission overshadowed the relationship.

Benes was convinced that the Bolshevik regime could be handled through trade concessions, hence trade relations were well developed, in spite of the political tension. During the Great Crash, a number of countries vied for access to the huge Russian market for their products. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the opposite was the case. Czechoslovak exports to the Soviet Union reached a peak in 1931, when radical reduction was begun to be felt, reaching a low point in 1934.⁹⁴⁹ The reason for it was that Moscow was actively restraining Czechoslovak imports. The reason was made clear in April of 1934 when a Soviet diplomat stated that the Soviet Union can only entertain normal trade relations with Czechoslovakia if recognition takes place.⁹⁵⁰ Moscow, then, wanted to make use of the international economic crisis to reintroduce the question of recognition, pending since 1924, through trade pressure.

Moscow recalled the head of the mission from Prague in July of 1933. The unfortunate man, and his Czech wife, soon found themselves in a Siberian labor camp. The replacement, Alexandrovski, was one of the most outstanding members of the Soviet diplomatic corps. His mission was to secure recognition as soon as possible. Alexandrovski expounded in the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, in January of 1934, that Moscow would be pleased to end the frosty state of affairs between the two countries and normalize trade also but, in return Moscow expects Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente to recognize the Soviet state in short order. The change in Czechoslovak foreign policy was illustrated by the Czechoslovak diplomat who was meeting with Alexandrovski did not reject the request, merely asking for a little patience.

French political aspirations contributed greatly to the thaw in Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. From the early 30s, France was looking for ties of cooperation, possibly alliances, with the Soviet Union. After Hitler's coming to power, the leader of the French governing party, Herriot, made a non-official visit to Moscow in August of 1933, followed in September by the official visit of the Minister for Aeronautical Affairs, Pierre Cot. At the end of 1933, Minister Paul Boncour developed a diplomatic plan, which assigned a role to the Soviet Union. Stalin, in the meanwhile, began the

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 35.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

review of the German-friendly policies, setting off the great diplomatic competition between the western enemies of the Soviet Union and Germany, France and England.⁹⁵¹ From Stalin's perspective, the importance of the competition was: the imperialist threat to the Soviet Union could only be averted if a wedge could be driven into the block of the capitalist countries, or put another way, always make overtures to the country that is the least dangerous for the Soviet Union. From the perspective of the western powers, the importance of the contest was: Hitler must be focused towards the East, at a confrontation with the Soviet Union. If this is unsuccessful, then an anti-German alliance must be made with the Soviet Union. In February of 1934, Louis Barthou was named foreign minister, who continued the Soviet-friendly policies of his predecessors. Although the German-Polish agreement shook the French eastern policy to its foundations, Barthou's first eastern visit on April 22 was to Warsaw, where he received a cool reception. The Poles did not even want to hear of the anti-German French-Polish-Soviet alliance suggested by the French.⁹⁵²

In contrast to Warsaw, Barthou found a warm reception in Prague. Benes was clear in that German expansion posed a threat primarily for Czechoslovakia. As a result, Benes and Barthou quickly arrived at common ground that, in the interest of security of Central and Eastern Europe, they should cleave to a policy of cordiality toward the Soviet Union. They agreed to unite their countries and do everything possible to obtain membership in the League of Nations for the Soviets. In the sign of harmonizing French and Czechoslovak foreign policy – France at this time was making overtures to Italy – Benes agreed to try and bring into line the Italian and Czechoslovak positions, ultimately leading to the Little Entente joining the three allies of the Rome agreement.⁹⁵³

The Benes-Barthou talks demonstrate the solidity of the French-Czechoslovak alliance. Benes agreed with, and supported, the French effort of creating an anti-German system of alliances by making the Danubian countries stronger and, ultimately, including the Soviet Union. Only after this did Barthou raise the so-called Eastern Locarno plan in Geneva on May 13. The plan consisted of immediate mutual assistance by the eastern pact countries (Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland and the three Baltic states) in case any of them were attacked. At the same meeting, Barthou also proposed the League membership of the Soviet Union. At its very announcement, the Barthou plan was already still born – the real reason was a demonstration toward the Soviet Union – since it was obvious that Germany and Poland will not join the pact and without them, there was no pact.

The German government declined joining the eastern pact in a note to the French Foreign Ministry dated September 5, 1934 and Poland on September 27. The only governments indicating their willingness to join

⁹⁵¹ Deutscher Issac: *Sztálin. Politikai életrajz* [Stalin. A political biography]. Budapest, 1990, pp. 402-448. old.

⁹⁵² Wandycz: *Polish diplomacy ...* op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁹⁵³ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 295.

were Czechoslovakia and the three Baltic countries. As could be expected, the proposal was a failure but it opened the door for the real aim Barthou was contemplating: creating a French-Soviet pact. The Soviet Union was accepted into the League of Nations on September 18, 1934. The French-Soviet rapprochement could not be stopped – although it slowed it down significantly – by the assassination attempt against the king of Yugoslavia on October 9, 1934,⁹⁵⁴ which claimed Barthou. Finally, the French-Soviet mutual assistance pact was signed in Paris on May 2, 1935.

There are at least three reasons why Benes reluctantly agreed to the recognition of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, he saw that Czechoslovak exports to Russia were impossible without it. Secondly, he agreed with French foreign policies in this direction. Lastly, he came to realize that his position of the 20s, whereby the Bolshevik regime was a short term phenomenon, was incorrect. He had to face up to the fact that the Soviet Union not only still existed in the 30s but was taking an increasingly energetic role on the international stage.

Due to the previously mentioned reasons, Benes began to work at top speed in 1934 on the task of normalizing Czechoslovak-Soviet relations. Barthou suggests the eastern Locarno plan in Geneva on May 13 – and the usual diplomatic back and forth begins – Benes, who was in Geneva at the time calls Prague on June 6 and asks authorization for recognition of the Soviet Union. He claimed that the eastern Locarno pact can not be concluded unless Czechoslovakia issues a *de jure* recognition of the Soviet state.⁹⁵⁵ He receives the requested authorization. On June 9, Benes and Litvinov sign a document of mutual recognition. As could be expected, Karel Kramář, his internal political opponent, immediately attacked Benes, writing in the most popular Czechoslovak paper that "... the nation will have to pay the price of Bolshevik recognition."⁹⁵⁶ Benes makes no reply, instead – but probably with his knowledge and approval – the official gazette of the Foreign Ministry of the Czechoslovak Republic makes public its official position. Accordingly: The peril arising from the advance of the Third Reich ended the German-Soviet cooperation, continuous since Rapallo, and the Soviet Union suddenly finds itself among the countries under threat by Germany. The Soviet Union, threatened in the East by Japan and in the West by Germany, began to orient itself toward France and strove to come to agreements with its neighbors, that is, the Soviet Union has become a supporter of the existing *status quo*. This status was recognized, *de jure*, by Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia needs to have its security guaranteed by France and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, a guardian of the *status quo* will be a reliable partner of both Prague and Paris.⁹⁵⁷

It is our view that the article correctly identified the shift that the scourge of the Versailles system, the Soviet Union, became its protector.

⁹⁵⁴ Ormos Mária: *Merénylet Marseilleben* [Assassination attempt in Marseilles]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1968.

⁹⁵⁵ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 37.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Deutscher points out that in the early 20s, Lenin referred to the League as a 'den of thieves', created only to forcibly maintain the Versailles order of peace. Stalin, in turn, declared that "... if anyone wants to join the League of Nations, he has to choose between the hammer and the anvil. However, we do not want to become the hammer for weak nations, nor the anvil for the stronger ones."⁹⁵⁸ In spite of these statements, beginning with its 1934 entry, the Soviet Union became the greatest champion of collective security within the framework of the League of Nations.

Benes thought that the Paris-Moscow cooperation provided adequate restraint against Germany, ensuring Czechoslovakian existence and security, hence, his recognition of the Soviet state and support for its League membership. The situation is amply illustrated by Litvinov's first speech in the League of Nations (September 18, 1934) in which he thanks France, and Benes personally, for their aid in attaining membership.⁹⁵⁹

After *de jure* recognition, Czechoslovak-Soviet relations warmed up significantly. In July of 1934, Moscow appointed Alexandrovski, the earlier head of the Prague mission, as its ambassador to Czechoslovakia, while Prague appointed Bohdan Pavlůt – former anti-Bolshevik combatant of the Czechoslovak Legion in 1919 – as its ambassador to Moscow.⁹⁶⁰ The military commands of the two countries also opened communications, Frantisek Dastich arrived in October in Moscow as the Czechoslovakian military attaché. He made the rounds, getting to know the Soviet high command. At one of these meeting, on January 29, 1935, Marshall Yegorov suggested that their two countries should sign a military agreement. Dastich passed on the proposal to Prague with his opinion that it should be done.⁹⁶¹ The change in attitude of the Soviet Union was shown by a warm article in *Izvestia* (December, 1934), extolling the peacemaking policies of the Czechoslovak politicians and the efforts Prague made to secure League membership for the Soviet Union.⁹⁶² An indication of the improved relationship was a bilateral trade agreement signed in March of 1935. All traces of the diplomatic ice-age disappeared, the two countries and their military behaving as if they had never faced each other in Siberia, the diplomats magnanimously forgetting previous atrocities. Benes and Litvinov signed an agreement in December of 1934.

French-Soviet talks took place in the spring of 1935. These took on some urgency when Hitler announced on March 6 that the term of the Versailles treaty banning a standing army was no longer binding and that Germany was returning to a general draft. Within that framework, Germany will begin to create and equip 36 divisions. The wavering French signed the French-Soviet mutual assistance pact on May 2, which detailed that, if either country was subject to an unprovoked attack, the other would render assistance.⁹⁶³

⁹⁵⁸ Deutscher: *Sztálin*. ... op. cit., p. 406.

⁹⁵⁹ Vondracek: *The foreign policy* ... op. cit., p. 389.

⁹⁶⁰ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between* ... op. cit., p. 35.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁹⁶² *Ibid*.

⁹⁶³ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi* ... op. cit., pp. 360-363.

Benes worked his experts at full speed on the text of the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement. To top it off, the internal situation again interfered with external policies. The Czechoslovak parliamentary elections were drawing near and Masaryk, wishing to withdraw from public life due to his health, named Benes as his successor but was far from certain whether the new parliament would accept him. Hence, Benes had a burning need for a spectacular foreign success.⁹⁶⁴ It was in this atmosphere that they signed the Czechoslovak-Soviet mutual assistance pact on May 16, 1935. Article 2 of the agreement stipulated that: "In the event that, as laid down in article 15, item 7 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the Czechoslovak Republic were to be attacked unprovoked by any European nation, in spite of their peaceable intentions, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the Czechoslovak Republic will, without fail, offer mutual aid and support."⁹⁶⁵

Item two of the addenda attached to the agreement limited the effects of the article to a period of time, (specified in item 4), as well as stipulating that the terms of the agreement only take effect if the attacked party of the two signatories receive French aid.⁹⁶⁶

In our view, the addendum meant two things. Primarily, the bilateral agreement now became three-sided. Secondly, the functioning of the French-Soviet agreement depended on France. (This circumstance becomes fatal to Czechoslovakia in 1938.) Benes tallied the signing of the pact as a great success and felt successful in increasing Czechoslovakia's future security by isolating Germany. As well – Benes reasoned – the agreement excludes the possibility that France abandons its Czechoslovak ally at British pressure.

In Jenő Horváth's view, the importance of the French-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet agreements lay in an altered European situation around Germany, where the French and Russians were linked through Prague. This resulted in a French-Russian coalition very similar to that of 1892, with the vast difference of including the League of Nations in the picture.⁹⁶⁷

One interesting aspect of the value of the agreement is noteworthy. At the time of the signing, there was no common Soviet-Czechoslovak border, meaning that the pact had no real value until some manner of right of transit could be secured for the Red Army. Poland – due to tense Polish-Czechoslovak relations and its anti-Soviet stand – firmly rejected it. The other possible country, Romania, had some political forces that could entertain the prospect of permitting the Red Army to cross its territory but

⁹⁶⁴ Mamatey: *The development of Czechoslovak ...* op. cit.; Zeman-Klima: *The life of Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 116-117; Angyal, Béla: *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből* [Advocacy and self-organization. Chapters from the history of Hungarian party politics in Czechoslovakia]. Lilium Art, Galánta-Dunaszerdahely, 2002, pp. 199-202.

⁹⁶⁵ Halmsy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., p. 365.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁷ Horváth: *A trianoni béke ...* op. cit., pp. 317-318.

they were in the minority facing pro-German and anti-Soviet groups. Thus, it was highly doubtful how a possible act of Soviet assistance was to be delivered.

Germany officially protested the French-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet pacts, painting them as breaking the terms of the Locarno Pact. Hitler interpreted the situation such that the terms of Locarno guaranteed the western boundaries of Germany, while leaving the eastern ones unguaranteed. The French-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet agreements removed the ambiguity of the situation.⁹⁶⁸

2.3 THE FAILURE OF THE SECOND CONCEPT BENEŠ' FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MID-30s

A short lull: Milan Hodža in foreign affairs

On May 24, 1934, the 80-year old Masaryk was again – for the fourth time – elected by the Czechoslovak parliament by a vote of 327 out of 418. However, it soon became apparent that, due to his rapidly declining health, he would not be able to serve out his full term.⁹⁶⁹ On November 5, 1935, as his final official act, Masaryk named Milan Hodža as Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia⁹⁷⁰ - the first Slovak to attain this post – and resigned shortly afterwards. In his farewell speech on December 14, Masaryk spoke, among other things, of the succession question: "... I would like to tell you that I recommend Dr. Benes as my successor; I have worked with him at home and abroad and I know him. I have every faith that all will be well and, God willing, I will be a witness for a while to see how You manage affairs."⁹⁷¹

The parliamentary president, Malypetr, announced December 18 as the date of the presidential election but, before Masaryk's wish became fact, unexpected difficulties arose. Benes' opponents, initiated by the Konrad Henlein led Sudeten German Party, nominated Dr. Bohumil Nemeč for the post.⁹⁷² This led to frantic deal-making behind the scenes.

⁹⁶⁸ Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., p. 376.

⁹⁶⁹ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., p. 65.

⁹⁷⁰ Sebestyén, Zoltán: *Hodža Milán útja* [Milan Hodža's road]. Bratislava, 1938. This is a propaganda work, written specifically to enable the rapprochement between Hodža and the activist Hungarian politics. Borsody, István: *Milan Hodža, a közép-európai federalista politikus* [Milan Hodža, the Central European federalist politician]. In: Borsody, István: *Amerikai évek* [The American years]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2000. Szarka, László: *Turóctól Chicagóig . Milan Hodža közép-európai útja* [From Turiec to Chicago]. *Európai utas*, 2002/10 issue. Slovak historians held a Hodža conference on September 14-16, 1992, whose collected material was published as: *Milan Hodža štátnik a politik* [Milan Hodža, statesman and politician]. Assembled by: Mathé Svätoslav. Bratislava, 1992.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid (Sebestyén), pp. 135-136.

⁹⁷² Mamatey: *The development of ...* op. cit., p. 155; Zeman-Klíma: *The life of Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 116-1117.

Benes lined up the support of the Agrarian Party, the socialist parties and the Czech Catholics, as well as the minority Magyar representatives.⁹⁷³

The decisive negotiations took place during the night of December 17. Benes met with Tiso (already an influential politician of the Slovak People's Party) during the night and promised wide-ranging autonomy if elected. According to a previous agreement with the Sudeten German Party, the Slovak People's Party representatives were supposed to vote for Nemeč but Tiso, believing Benes' promise, convinced his party's representatives to vote for Benes.⁹⁷⁴

In the end, the parliamentarians cast 440 votes out of a possible 450, of which Benes received 340, 76 were left blank, while Nemeč – who, in the meantime, withdrew from the nomination – received 24. Again, it is a strange twist of Fate that the most important figure of Slovak nationalism, Tiso, played a key role in electing Benes, a tenacious proponent of Czechoslovakism, to the post of President.

On becoming President, Benes had to step down from his Foreign Minister post, leaving it to Milan Hodža, who now held the dual posts of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Hodža taking over Foreign Affairs was an important moment, as Benes was the 'permanent foreign minister' of Czechoslovakia since its founding in 1918.

Hungarian foreign policy analysts of the time immediately alerted attention to the fact that Hodža's policy direction diverged sharply on four points from Benes: 1. While Benes cultivated France among the Great Powers as an ally, Hodža leaned toward England. 2. Hodža had extremely good relations with Poland, as opposed to Benes, and was able to achieve a change in the tense Czechoslovak-Polish relationship. 3. Hodža is anti-Soviet and was not in favor of Benes' Soviet-Czechoslovak rapprochement. 4. Hodža was a believer in coming to terms with the neighboring countries, not only Poland but also Austria and Hungary.⁹⁷⁵

In Hodža's plans, three of the four elements made their appearance. The first – vague – mention of the Hodža Plan received a mention during the January 16-17 visit to Prague by Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg. Schuschnigg's visit to Prague was initiated by Austria.⁹⁷⁶ The explanation for this can be found in that Austria had previously sought the support of Italy instead of Germany but, beginning in the mid-30s, there was a change of direction in Italian foreign policy. Mussolini began to draw nearer to Germany, beginning talks with Austria's greatest enemy.

⁹⁷³ Angyal: *Érdekvédelem és ...* op. cit., pp. 199-202.

⁹⁷⁴ G. Kovács, László: *Jozef Tiso*. In: *Arcképek kettős tükörben* [Portraits in a dual mirror]. Nap Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 1997, p. 29; Valerian Bistrický: *Eduard Beneš a Slovensko (1918-1938)*. *Historický Časopis*, 1995, issue 2, pp. 246-262.

⁹⁷⁵ Szvatkó, Pál: *Hodža Milán a csehszlovák politika élén* [Milan Hodža as leader of Czechoslovak politics]. *Magyar Szemle*, 1936, volume XXV, issue 4, pp. 349-358.

⁹⁷⁶ Kerekes: *Ausztria története ...* op. cit., pp. 61-114; Kerekes: *Ausztria hatvan ...* op. cit., pp. 84-230; Erich Zöllner: *Ausztria ...* op. cit., pp. 381-394; Ormos, Mária: *Mussolini*. Kossuth Kiadó, 1987, pp. 282-293.

It is, then, understandable that Austria cast about for a new ally and Schuschnigg's visit to Prague should be seen as an exploratory move. The chancellor tried to ascertain what the advantages were if Austria were to opt for the Little Entente instead of the Rome Pact. The Schuschnigg-Hodža-Beneš talks revolved around two topics.⁹⁷⁷ Firstly, Schuschnigg wished to accomplish results in greater commercial ties between Austria and Czechoslovakia and, secondly, Hodža and Beneš strove to have the Czechoslovak-Austrian peace and arbitration agreement, coming to an end on May 31, 1936, replaced by a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance. No concrete agreements were reached on either topic. Beside the official talks, the Austrian Chancellor gave an address in Prague in which he took a position against the autocratic trend emerging in Central Europe.⁹⁷⁸ "Is it not a peculiar and trying situation – said the Chancellor – if Austria, surrounded by agricultural countries, must import Argentinean wheat?" The chancellor reasoned that the neighboring small countries must develop closer ties with each other. The chancellor went on to say that he considers the commercial agreements between the Little Entente countries, as well as the Italian-Austrian-Hungarian agreement of Rome as closer ties and regional cooperation. The precondition for the economic growth of the region is the economic cooperation of the neighboring Danubian countries. This should be the focus, leaving political considerations aside. Schuschnigg opined that preferential tariffs were the best means to achieve this end.

Hodža tried to make the most of the chancellor's speech in favor of his own foreign policy, saying that the economic rapprochement suggested by Schuschnigg should be the centerpiece of every Central European action program. What Schuschnigg proposed as an end became a means in Hodža's interpretation. This 'action program' can be taken as the first hazy mention of the Hodža Plan. The essence of the 'action plan' can be reconstructed from the January 24 report of Wettstein, Hungarian ambassador to Prague.⁹⁷⁹ Wettstein made an introductory visit to Hodža (to present his credentials) during which the Prime Minister spoke at length about the economic problems of Central Europe. As Wettstein reported it: "... informed me that he will take concrete steps the next time to bring about an old idea and suggest the creation of a common grain cooperative for the Danubian countries, whose task would be to arrange the marketing of the grain surpluses and centrally address the compensation questions that will arise. The most suitable site for the center was Vienna, partly for

⁹⁷⁷ Diplomáciai Iratok Magyarország Külpolitikájához (hereafter DIMK) [Diplomatic documents of Hungary's foreign policy], vol I, pp. 77-81, "Prágai magyar követ 1936. január 18-i jelentése a külügyminiszternek [January 18, 1936 report of the Hungarian ambassador to Prague to the Foreign Minister]."

⁹⁷⁸ Gratz, Gusztáv: *Közép-Európa problémája* [Central Europe's problem]. *Külföldi Szemle* [Foreign Review], 1936, pp. 114-118.

⁹⁷⁹ Külügyminisztérium Levéltár [Archives of the Foreign Ministry]. K 63. Politikai Osztály [Political Department] 57. csomó [bundle].

its central location and partly because there is great interest from the Austrian side for the plan.”⁹⁸⁰

After the diplomatic discussions held behind closed doors, Hodža revealed to the public and the press (in the last week of January) the plan that bears his name.⁹⁸¹ The plan offered the following 7 point program for the six Danubian countries (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria):

- A gradual reduction of tariffs, until their complete elimination;
- Raising the quotas;
- Extension and easing of credit and payment;
- Coordination of agricultural production;
- Harmonization and simplification of transportation, postal and telegraph issues;
- Simplification of means of payment; and
- The creation of an agricultural center for the coordination of economic interests and the marketing of grain surpluses.

As becomes evident, the Hodža Plan aimed at the economic cooperation among the newly formed countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the addition of Bulgaria. After the February publication of the plan, three important tasks faced Hodža: 1. Ensure the support of the Great Powers. 2. Obtain the consent of the Little Entente partners. 3. Involve Austria and Hungary in the execution of the plan.

In the first round, Hodža wanted to secure the support of France and England.⁹⁸² The first opportunity for the Hodža Plan arose in early February when numerous national representatives met in London for the funeral of King George V, presenting a diplomatic opportunity to discuss the plan.⁹⁸³ British diplomats expressed neutrality regarding the plan for the future of the Danubian valley and the Hodža Plan. Sir Robert Vansittart, Under-Secretary and Hungarian specialist of the Foreign Office, summed up Britain’s position as being happy at the rapprochement of the Central European countries, especially if it results in lessening the political tension and reduces the tariffs. The Danube region does not represent significant possibilities for British capital and there are no future plans for investments. Hence, the British government feels no responsibility for solving the regional problems. The Hodža Plan can expect nothing more from the British government that benign awareness.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁸¹ We were unable to find any trace of the Hodža Plan in our archival research. We cite as our source Borsody: *Milan Hodža ...* op. cit., p. 312.

⁹⁸² Ádám, Magda: *Tervek a dunai államok együttműködésére* [Plans for the cooperation of the Danubian countries]. In: Szarka, László (ed.): *Békétlen évtizedek 1918-1938* [Turbulent decades 1918-1938]. Budapest, 1988, pp. 19-23; Sallai, Gergely: *Az első bécsi döntés* [The first Vienna arbitral award]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2002, pp. 19-20.

⁹⁸³ Kerekes: *Ausztria története ...* op. cit., pp. 130-131.

⁹⁸⁴ DIMK vol. I, pp. 111-112.

The talks begun in London continued in Paris, prompting Hodža to go there on February 12, 1936. During the course of the talks, he stated that first an economic agreement should be established among the Danubian countries. This agreement would initially cover the three countries of the Little Entente and Austria – and Hungary may also join. The economic *bloc* would restore the economies of the Danubian countries, said Hodža, and the resultant economic prosperity would ease the existing potential frictions. He also stated that he could not entertain any territorial revision.⁹⁸⁵ The French diplomats viewed the plan with sympathy but added that, other than well wishes, they could offer no further support.⁹⁸⁶

There is an interesting addendum to the French reaction that we came across in our archival research.⁹⁸⁷ On April 4, 1936, Rosty-Forgách, a counselor at the Hungarian embassy in Prague, reports to the Foreign Ministry that, Louis Monicault, counselor at the French embassy in Prague, was musing at a diplomatic reception of April 2 that, in his opinion, Czechoslovakia should orient itself, both politically and economically, toward the Rome Pact countries. France is clear that the price of this political truce is only possible through territorial concession by Czechoslovakia to Hungary. After giving his opinion, Monicault invited Rosty-Forgách to his office and asked him to mark on a map the minimum territory for which Hungary would be willing to come to an agreement with Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian counselor turned aside the request by saying that the French diplomats responsible should take their question to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.

After his London and Paris disappointment, Hodža paid a visit to Belgrade on February 23-24. During his consultation with the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Stojadinović, Hodža stressed two elements of his plan.⁹⁸⁸ One was the economic need for the Danubian countries to create a grain cartel, located in Vienna, the other was the political necessity for the same group to sign a non-aggression – possibly also a mutual assistance – pact. The published protocol after the meeting asserted that the two sides agreed that all the affected countries would draw benefit from a closer economic cooperation and that these attempts should be encouraged. Furthermore, they consider it important to come to an agreement on organize collective security. The text of the protocol would lead us to assume that Hodža met with a measure of success in Belgrade but, in reality, it was yet another failure, since he was unable to come away with a signed agreement. In fact, the situation was even worse for Hodža, as Belgrade let the Hungarian government know – extremely perturbed due to the Hodža talks – that “... while Stojadinović was at the head of Yugoslavia, his (Hodža’s) ideas had little chance of being realized. Yugoslavia rejects, in the most resolute manner, any agreement that

⁹⁸⁵ Gratz: *Közép-Europa* ... op. cit., pp. 114-118.

⁹⁸⁶ Ádám: *Tervek a dunai* ... op. cit., p. 20.

⁹⁸⁷ Borsody: *Milan Hodža* ... op. cit., pp. 312-313.

⁹⁸⁸ Külügyminisztérium Levéltár. K 63. Politikai Osztály 58. csomó.

excludes Germany and Italy, or which Germany may feel as being directed against Germany, no matter how indirectly.”⁹⁸⁹

There were serious economic reasons behind Stojadinović’s negative attitude. The German and Yugoslav economies were increasingly becoming intertwined during the 30s.⁹⁹⁰ Indicative is the fact that German imports into Yugoslavia in 1935 grew from 15% to 19%, while in the case of Czechoslovakia it fell from 13% to 11%. In Yugoslavian foreign trade, Germany ranked first, placing only fourth in Czechoslovakia. Yugoslavia took the position that, in future, it would try to import from countries to which it could also export. As but one example: Yugoslavia made a trade agreement with Germany for its textile needs, formerly supplied by Czechoslovakia. This was a severe blow to the Czechoslovak textile industry. After the Hodža Plan became public, Germany signaled Yugoslavia that it would make no economic concessions to countries that carried on a foreign policy hostile to it, meaning that either they accept certain German political conditions or the German market will be closed to their products.⁹⁹¹

The other Little Entente partner, Romania, expressed its interest in the Hodža plan in early February. The Foreign Minister, Titulescu, actively supported Hodža’s ambitions in London (at the diplomatic opportunity occasioned by the king’s funeral) and, later, in Paris. Berlin warned the Romanian government that if it takes part in making the Hodža plan a reality, Berlin would review its economic relationship with Romania. At this, Romania had second thoughts and assured Berlin on February 24 that the Romanian government has no intention of signing any Danubian valley agreement that is without German participation.⁹⁹²

As we have already shown earlier in our work, the early 30s already spawned several integration plans similar to Hodža’s – the Briand pan-European memorandum, etc. – but they were all sunk by Germany or Italy. Hodža, learning from the past, did not want to completely exclude Italy and Germany from the economic cooperation aiming, instead, at a compromise.

Germany, however, was signaling its strong opposition to a customs union or preferential trade agreement among the Danubian countries by exerting pressure on Romania and Yugoslavia. The answer is simply a fear for its own trading positions. Italy, at this time, was primarily concerned with the Abyssinian war but indicated its opposition to the Hodža plan.

Hodža already took steps in February to counteract the negative stance of Germany and Italy, as shown by two archival references. The Czechoslovak ambassador in Budapest, Kobr, asserted on February 17 to the Hungarian foreign ministry that the Hodža plan was not aimed against Germany but that successful economic talks can only be achieved with Germany if the Danubian countries first come to an agreement among

⁹⁸⁹ Ádám: *A kisantant ...* op. cit., pp. 192-193.

⁹⁹⁰ Lampe–Jackson: *Balkan economic ...* op. cit.

⁹⁹¹ R. Erbe: *Die nationalsozialistische Wirtschaftspolitik 1933-1938*. In: *Lichte der modernen Theorie*. Zürich, 1958.

⁹⁹² Ádám: *A kisantant ...* op. cit., p. 193.

themselves. Then, they can present a unified stand to Germany.⁹⁹³ On February 19, Hodža reassured the Italian ambassador to Prague, De Facendi, that he wants to solve the Central European problems with the assistance of Italy.⁹⁹⁴

Thus far, it is obvious that the Hodža plan, introduced at the end of January, was an almost certain failure by the end of February. It was now only Hodža who still had hopes for the plan, illustrated by his telegram to the ambassadors of the Czechoslovak Republic, in which he painted the following optimistic reception of his plan: “In Paris, I gained consent for the negotiations of the Central European customs and economic talks... The indications about London’s position are, so far, favorable. Titulescu accepted the proposal, as did Stojadinović in Belgrade.”⁹⁹⁵

The reality and the picture painted by Hodža differ by quite a lot, having been rejected by the Great Powers, as well as the Little Entente partners. Finally, at the end of this train of thought, let us examine what the two most affected countries, Austria and Hungary, thought of the plan. The opinion of the Hungarian government is reflected by Foreign Minister Kánya’s remarks to John. F. Montgomery, the American ambassador to Budapest: “... we know from confidential sources that Hodža’s proposals are not serious, only serving the purpose of putting himself into the limelight, as he feels he has to step into Benes’ shoes. Hodža is risking nothing by floating such proposals because he knows they have no chance of becoming reality and that Hungary can be ultimately blamed.”⁹⁹⁶

Essentially, the movers behind Hungarian foreign policy were certain that the Hodža plan was a trial balloon that was soon to run out of hot air. Accordingly, Hungarian rhetoric concerning the plan had three aspects: One, that Hungary is ready to consider any concrete economic proposal. Two, Hungary feels that the reorganization of the Danube basin is not feasible without Italy. And three, on a political level, Hungary had demands with regard to the Little Entente and these can not be separated from the economic questions.⁹⁹⁷

Kálmán Kánya expressed this Hungarian position in several statements and diplomatic discussions. To cite but one example: In March of 1936, he expounds to the British ambassador to Hungary that he can envision closer economic ties but “... I don’t feel that closing the political gap among the Danubian countries is possible. You can’t demand of a country, that has lost close to three-quarters of its territory through a peace treaty, to draw a veil over the past and honestly cooperate with certain of its neighbors.”⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹³ Külügyminisztérium Levéltár. K 63. Politikai Osztály 57. csomó.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁵ Jindřich Dejmek (ed.): *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1936. A/18/1* Svazek I. Praha, 2003, 69. Dokumentum, pp. 170-171.

⁹⁹⁶ *John F. Montgomery bizalmas politika beszélgetései 1934-1941* [Confidential political conversations of John F. Montgomery]. Budapest, 2003, p. 105.

⁹⁹⁷ Pritz: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., pp. 241-253.

⁹⁹⁸ Auer, Pál: *Fél évszázad* [A half-century]. Occidental Press, Washington, pp. 160-161.

Kánya informed Milan Kobr, Czechoslovak ambassador to Budapest, on February 17 of Hungary's position. He stated that the good intentions were always present in Hungary's leaders to improve the situation of the peoples of the Danubian valley. It is not Budapest but Prague who is responsible for the bad blood between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. It was Czechoslovakia that terminated the trade agreement in 1929, forcing Hungary to find other markets (Germany and Italy). After all that, Hungary now can only conduct negotiations that take into consideration the interests of Germany and Italy. As well, ended Kánya, the relationship between the Little Entente states and Hungary is so bad that political cooperation "can not be envisioned for a long time."⁹⁹⁹

The Hodža Plan found favor only in Austria, threatened as it was by the Anschluss. This immediately activated Hungarian foreign diplomacy. When the Austrian ambassador to Hungary made a visit to Foreign Minister Kánya on February 10, he received stern censure for the Prague meetings, saying that it will result in drifting closer to the Little Entente.¹⁰⁰⁰ The tense Austrian-Hungarian relationship became tenser when Hodža returned Schuschnigg's January visit to Prague, traveling to Vienna on March 8, 1936. according to the official statement, the talks were mainly concerned with mutual trade agreements, and discussion was also tabled on enhancing an agreement coming up for renewal with a mutual friendship clause, as well as beginning discussions about a cultural agreement. Aside from this, the statement also said, "topics were tabled regarding the organization of the Danubian valley as well as the economic cooperation between the countries of the Little Entente and the Rome Pact."¹⁰⁰¹

This particular wording actually hid the fact that Austria was not willing to entertain the Hodža plan, even balking at the first stage of signing a mutual assistance agreement with Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente. Perhaps Schuschnigg's cautious behavior stemmed from the fact that the Hodža meeting took place one day after Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland. Although Austria tried to make overtures to Czechoslovakia and the Little Entente, the growing German threat kept it committed to the Rome Pact. The Schuschnigg-Hodža talks closed with the principle that Czechoslovakia will mediate between Austria and Yugoslavia, while Austria will be the intermediary between Czechoslovakia and Italy, and Czechoslovakia and Hungary. This convoluted *modus operandi* trumpeted that the Schuschnigg-Hodža talks in Vienna ended with no tangible results. The Hungarian ambassador in Prague reported gleefully on March 16 that "Marek (Austrian ambassador to Prague – *auth.*) awaited the returning Czechoslovak prime minister at the train station on his return from Vienna. Mr. Hodža was in a bad mood... To the station master, who paid his respects, he hinted that he will not put upon the gentlemen for a longish time, from which one can conclude that his foreign travels are at an end for the time being."¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁹ Külügyminisztérium Levéltár. K 63. Politikai Osztály 57. csomó.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Tilkovszky, Lóránt: *Ausztria és Magyarország a vészterhes Európában* [Austria and Hungary in a Europe laden with danger]. Budapest, 2002, p. 137.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Külpolitikai Szemle*, 1936, p. 295.

¹⁰⁰² Külügyminisztérium Levéltár. K 63. Politikai Osztály 57. csomó.

When Schuschnigg traveled to Budapest a few days later, March 13-14, Kánya sharply criticized any Austrian attempt to move away from the tripartite Rome Pact, rejecting the idea of moving closer to the Little Entente. He argued that the Hodža plan was unworkable and that Hungary would not support it under any circumstance.¹⁰⁰³ Kánya managed to secure an agreement in Budapest that the Austrians would not take part in any anti-German block, but rather that Austria would try to stabilize its relations with Germany.

It was with that in the background that the representatives of the three Rome Pact countries (Italy, Austria and Hungary) met, again in Rome, on March 21-23, 1936. During their conference, they renewed the decisions of the 1934 agreement and accepted addenda II and III to the original document.¹⁰⁰⁴ With respect to the future of the Hodža plan, it was addendum II that held the greatest impact, as it stated that the three countries "... would not enter into any important political discussions with third party governments regarding the Danubian question without ... previous notification of the other two governments." The memorandum also stated that to increase trade, only bilateral agreements may be made with the countries of the Little Entente.

Ambassador Milos Kobr interpreted the situation correctly in his report to Prague when he assessed the importance of addendum II: "Political talks with third-party countries about possible cooperation has become significantly more difficult on the basis of the second amendment. This is clearly a concession to the Hungarian position, which is attempting to make it impossible to come to an agreement with third-parties, until they accept the Hungarian terms. In absolute terms, it means the end of the Austrian experiment ..."¹⁰⁰⁵

In practical terms, addendum II killed the Hodža Plan. Austria, the sole country who saw any possibility in the plan and conducted serious negotiations with Czechoslovakia, returned to the orientation of the Rome Pact. Two months after its announcement, not one country supported it.

What's more, Hodža had to face a setback within Czechoslovakia. Since December of 1935, he held the dual posts of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Benes, the 'permanent foreign minister' since the beginning did not bear the situation well but, as president of the republic, he had to cede the post. Faced with this situation, he seemingly supported Hodža, as in on of his speeches where he gave voice to the importance of England as a diplomatic partner of Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁰⁶ In February of 1936, Lajos Rudnay, Hungarian ambassador to Vienna, appraised the relationship of Benes and Hodža as: "Benes will leave his inexperienced adversary, Hodža, on the international stage ... making attempts with his plan until he forgets the realities and the overreaching Hodža will trip, in

¹⁰⁰³ Tilkovszky: *Ausztria és ...* op. cit., p. 139.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., pp. 158-159; Pritz: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., pp. 249-251.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Dejmek: *Československá zahraničí ...* op. cit., pp. 282-283.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Szvatkó: *Hodža Milán ...* op. cit., p. 358.

which case Czechoslovakia's rudder will doubtless come to Benes' hand."¹⁰⁰⁷

Rudnay turned out to be extremely prescient. Benes allowed Hodža to overextend himself and, when it became clear that the plan was doomed to failure, he struck. At the end of February, Benes relieved Hodža from his foreign minister post, naming one of his own men, Dr. Krofta,¹⁰⁰⁸ as his replacement. Benes thus regained control of foreign policymaking.¹⁰⁰⁹

In Hitler's shadow

Independent of the person of the foreign minister, Hitler cast an ever increasing shadow on Czechoslovak foreign policy during the 30s. Shortly after coming to power, Hitler declared: "The German people want to live at peace with the world", merely striving to secure the same rights accorded to other countries.¹⁰¹⁰ On another occasion, he reassured those concerned with the Versailles treaties and the *status quo* that: "No new European war would create a situation that would replace today's unsatisfactory condition."¹⁰¹¹ While Hitler carried out a verbal peace campaign, in reality waging a crude, adventurer-style foreign policy, reaping success after success between 1934 and 1938. These were:¹⁰¹² the signing of the Four-Power Pact (July 7, 1933), successes with regard to disarmament (see the McDonald disarmament plan), creation of the German-Polish agreement (January 26, 1934), the announcement of a general military draft system (March 6, 1934), the plebiscite of the Saar lands (January 13, 1935), the reoccupation of the Rhineland (March 7, 1936), the Anschluss (March 12, 1938). These events all contributed to the gradual restriction of the field of action of Czechoslovak foreign policy, especially the final two. They will be examined in more detail on the following pages.

Articles 42 and 43 of the peace treaty with Germany declared that: "Germany is forbidden to maintain or construct any fortifications either on the left bank of the Rhine or on the right bank to the west of a line drawn 50 kilometres to the East of the Rhine (Article 42). In the area defined above the maintenance and the assembly of armed forces, either permanently or temporarily, and military maneuvers of any kind, as well as the upkeep of all permanent works for mobilization, are in the same way forbidden (Article 43). It was also forbidden to maintain or garrison armed forces, either permanently or on a temporary basis, in the zone specified in Article 42, as well as being forbidden to hold any manner of military exercises or maintain material stockpiles that would aid mobilization."¹⁰¹³ The aim of the cited articles was to protect Belgium and France from a

¹⁰⁰⁷ DIMK, pp. 123-124.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Jindřich Dejmek (ed.): *Korespondence Kamila Krofta s Edvardem Benešem*. Část I. 1920-1927. Praha., 1994. Část II. 1927-1938. Praha, 1998.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., pp. 79-126.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ormos: *Hitler*. op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid.

¹⁰¹² Herczegh: *A szarajevői ...* op. cit., pp. 203-279; Ormos-Majoros: *Európa a ...* op. cit., pp. 344-393; Ormos: *Franciaország és ...* op. cit., pp. 145-330.

¹⁰¹³ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 51-77.

surprise German attack, or to provide easy access to the zone for Belgian and French forces. Germany later ensured the continued demilitarization of the zone by signing the 1925 Locarno Pact.

The French-Soviet pact of 1935 – ratified by the French parliament on February 27, 1936 – was interpreted by Hitler as France's withdrawal from the Locarno Pact. This view he communicated to the French ambassador on March 2, 1936.¹⁰¹⁴ French diplomatic circles next awaited Hitler to announce officially his withdrawal from the Locarno Pact. No one foresaw that Hitler would take immediate action and march into the Rhineland zone, which is what he did beginning at dawn on March 7.¹⁰¹⁵ German soldiers were marching on the bridge in Cologne when Hitler announced in the Reichstag that he is repudiating the Locarno agreement and Germany is ending the demilitarized zone. In the closing part of his speech, he attacked the French-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet agreements. Regarding the French-Soviet treaty, he stated that it allows into Europe the 'great disease' of the East, Bolshevism.¹⁰¹⁶

On receiving the news from the Rhine, France opted not to mobilize its troops and send them into the German-occupied territory. It merely decided to seek London's and the League's help in solving the problem.¹⁰¹⁷ In our view, France committed a serious error in so doing, instead of making an immediate military response. Historians unanimously agree that this was the last opportunity to stop Hitler.¹⁰¹⁸

Prague, similar to the other European governments, received the German memorandum regarding the re-taking of the Rhineland in the morning of March 7. Foreign Minister Krofta immediately consulted with President Benes – clearly showing that it was Benes who continued to direct foreign affairs – and conveyed to the French embassy the message that Czechoslovakia was ready to support a French course of action.¹⁰¹⁹ The next day, the Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, Štefan Osuský, elaborated to Flandin, Principal Secretary of the French Foreign Office, what that actually meant, that Czechoslovakia was willing to mobilize and join the anti-German economic sanctions. Osuský gave voice to his worry that, if Germany mans its western frontiers, France will be unable to deliver to its allies its guaranteed obligations. Osuský's worries were well founded, as later events were to bear out. Germany was able to build the Siegfried Line, which effectively cut France from her central European ally, Czechoslovakia. Flandin conveyed to Osuský that France's moves will depend on what action will be taken by England and the League of

¹⁰¹⁴ Document Diplomatiques Francais (DDF) 1932-1939, 2. Série 1936-1939, 349. doc., pp. 458-460.

¹⁰¹⁵ Geneviève Tabouis: *Elsodort diplomácia* [Dumbfounded diplomacy]. Budapest, 1967, p. 226; Ádám, Magda: *Az elszalasztott lehetőség* [The lost opportunity]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1988, pp. 42-43.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ormos: *Hitler ... op. cit.*, p. 261.

¹⁰¹⁷ Tabouis: *Elsodort ... op. cit.*, pp. 227.-229.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ... op. cit.*, pp. 44-51.

¹⁰¹⁹ DDF 307. doc., p. 419; 373. doc., pp. 485-486.

Nations. Then he added, "It would be good, perhaps, if the Little Entente and the Balkan entente held a conference and stated their positions."¹⁰²⁰

Benes obliged immediately; the Little Entente representatives meeting in Geneva on March 11. Here, Benes had to face up to the fact that German economic involvement in the economies of Romania and Yugoslavia made itself felt in the foreign policies of those countries. Benes must confront the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Milan Stodajovič, who does his utmost to oppose the imposition of sanctions against Germany, in light of the common Yugoslav-German economic interests. Stodajovič sinks the publication of a mutual communiqué, as suggested by Benes, which would have condemned the German action. Even Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu, usually a reliable supporter of Benes and France's policies, would not agree to the idea of the communiqué. Titulescu's behavior can be explained by the fact that, in Romania, as in Yugoslavia, a pro-German political elite came into ascendancy, who sharply criticized Titulescu's pro-French foreign policy.

While it became clear that the Little Entente countries were immobile due to differing interests, England, too, declined to take serious – read military – action and confront Germany over the Rhineland. London suggested looking for a diplomatic solution. The British position was well illustrated in Anthony Eden's memoirs – the then Foreign Minister – when he wrote: "There was not one man in a thousand in the country at that time prepared to make a real effort in concert with France to prevent the German re-occupation of the Rhineland. Many went even further and held it inconceivable that Germany be forbidden to do what its wants on its own territory almost twenty years after the war."¹⁰²¹

What followed was the usual League of Nations procedure – at England's request in London and not Geneva – of politicians consulting and being self-important. Eventually, a memorandum was written, in which the League formally condemned Germany, but the fact remained that Germany occupied the Rhineland and Hitler was able to accomplish it without serious consequences, in spite of the close cooperation of France and Czechoslovakia to get the League to impose collective economic sanctions. Benes took a hard line beside imposing sanctions, in spite of knowing what difficulties it would impose on the Czechoslovak economy. Benes argued with his French colleagues that if the French will be firm and resolute, England will have no choice but to follow suit. Economic sanctions will only be effective if applied collectively by all of Europe.¹⁰²²

In the end, sanctions were not invoked against Germany since they would have been detrimental to the economies of a number of countries. The French-Czechoslovak course of action suffered a complete defeat on all fronts. What did it mean for Czechoslovakia? In effect, it further restricted the options available in dealing with Germany, wiping out any possibility of a successful military confrontation. The now re-militarized

¹⁰²⁰ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁰²¹ Avon, Earl of: *Facing the Dictators: the memoirs of Anthony Eden*. London, Cassel, 1962, pp. 114-115.

¹⁰²² DDF 476. doc., pp. 624-626.

zone – while in existence – was the guarantee that Germany would be unable to attack either Czechoslovakia or Poland because, if it did, France could advance unopposed to the West bank of the Rhine and threaten the Ruhr valley, and live up to its obligations in the two bilateral agreements. Hitler, in possession of the West bank territory, could now easily prevent France from providing rapid and effective assistance to Czechoslovakia, if he were to attack it. The French would have to wage a difficult battle with the German army of the Rhine, growing stronger by the day, and then there was the matter of the Siegfried Line, quickly constructed by the Germans. The occupation of the Rhineland meant that, for Czechoslovakia, the practical – meaning military – value of the French alliance dropped in value substantially.

The (re)occupation of the Rhineland and its subsequent diplomatic events – the Little Entente conference in Geneva, the League conference in London – awakened Benes to the fact that France had weakened some more and that the protection of Czechoslovakia's borders by the Allies was becoming figurative. The position of Czechoslovakia, indeed of the Central European countries, was best stated by Purič, Yugoslavia's ambassador to Paris: "When France and England do nothing in their own defense over the Rhine zone, it would be foolhardy to hope that they would do anything for the security of Central Europe."¹⁰²³ This recognition forced Benes to review his past policies with regard to Germany, Hungary and Poland.¹⁰²⁴ Afterwards, Benes begins to distance himself from the French and their common anti-German direction, suspending his offensive foreign policies so sharply critical of Germany. He made an attempt to accommodate his neighbors, beginning to seek agreement instead of confrontation.¹⁰²⁵ Benes propounds to a French attaché in Prague that "... hopes that it will be more beneficial for Hitler if he increases his influence in Czechoslovakia, than if he subjugates it."¹⁰²⁶

Benes' appeasement policy found a match in German intentions. After the Rhine action, Germany wanted to solidify the image that it has no new demands, no intentions of attacking. To achieve it, it began a diplomatic offensive both in the West and the East. To France and Belgium, it offered a 25-year non-aggression treaty, guaranteed by England and Italy. To the eastern neighbors, it offered treaties – only on a bilateral basis.¹⁰²⁷ Hitler's offer of a non-aggression treaty was warmly received in Prague. Benes then attempted to create a Germany-Little Entente treaty, starting from the observation that Yugoslavia was already following a German-friendly course and Romania was warming to the Reich. Hence, Czechoslovakia had no other choice. The question was discussed by the Little Entente and a position taken that steps should be taken in the interest of creating a Little Entente-Germany block. The intent was that the Little Entente makes a unified agreement with Germany, or the three countries

¹⁰²³ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁰²⁴ Ádám: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 144. old.

¹⁰²⁵ Wandycz: *Foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 231-232.

¹⁰²⁶ DDF 424. doc., pp. 548-549.

¹⁰²⁷ DIMK, vol II, doc. 6, pp. 102-103.

sign individual bilateral agreements.¹⁰²⁸ Benes hoped that, since Hitler conducted friendly foreign policy toward Romania and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia could establish friendly relations under the umbrella of the Little Entente. He was in for a rude awakening. Hitler categorically rejected an agreement with the Little Entente, envisioning any agreements only on a bilateral basis.

After Hitler's rebuff, German-Czechoslovak talks proceeded on a bilateral plane.¹⁰²⁹ The German government continued talks with Prague but Hitler informed the German embassy that, for their information, he does not make the offer he made to Czechoslovak seriously. He does not consider the country as a viable unit and is convinced that its breakup will happen within a predictably short time. The Hungarian government, concerned about the seeming German-Czechoslovak rapprochement, was informed through several diplomatic channels that the negotiations were insignificant. Reich Foreign Minister Bülow informed the Hungarian ambassador in Berlin that the non-aggression treaty offered to Czechoslovakia was a tactic; the offer is tied to terms that will be unacceptable to Czechoslovakia.¹⁰³⁰ At the same time, Bibra, secretary of the Prague German embassy, informed the Hungarian ambassador that, based on a private conversation with Hitler, the Führer does not view Czechoslovakia as a realistic country and is certain of its dissolution in the foreseeable future.¹⁰³¹

By the end of 1936, certainly by early 1937, Benes must have realized that Hitler had no intention of making an alliance with the Little Entente, or with Czechoslovakia on a bilateral basis. The Czechoslovak-German non-aggression treaty was taken off the foreign policy agenda. Benes tried to make an opening toward Poland but Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, rejected the rapprochement attempts. Warsaw could not forgive Benes for his behavior in the Teschen question.¹⁰³² The Beck direction felt it important to establish a common Polish-Hungarian border, envisioned through the return to Hungary of sub-Carpathia, currently a part of Czechoslovakia. In April of 1936, Polish diplomats at a Budapest meeting of the Polish-Hungarian negotiations informed the Hungarian government that Poland entertained no claims on Ruthenia and supported Hungary's claims in this matter.¹⁰³³

Due to the preceding circumstances, it was important for Benes to normalize his relationship with his other main enemy, Hungary. In this, he wished to make use of the Little Entente, convincing his allies, Romania

¹⁰²⁸ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., pp. 77-78.

¹⁰²⁹ Gerhard L. Weinberg: *Secret Hitler-Beneš negotiations in 1936-1937. Journal of Central European Affairs*, XIX, 1960, pp. 350-375.

¹⁰³⁰ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁰³¹ DIMK, vol II, doc. 20, pp. 127-128.

¹⁰³² Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 228-257; Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 418-420; Wandycz: *Polish diplomacy ...* op. cit., pp. 24-32.

¹⁰³³ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., pp. 94-95; Kovács: *Lengyel-magyar ...* op. cit.

and Yugoslavia, to open talks with Hungary. Negotiations between Hungary and the Little Entente began in January of 1937 when the three ambassadors individually (but close to each other: the Czechoslovak Milos Kobr on January 19, Romanian ambassador Raoul Bossy on January 23, and Yugoslav ambassador Alexandr Vukcevic also on January 23) visited Foreign Minister Kánya and suggested a settling of relations between the Little Entente and Hungary.¹⁰³⁴ With minor differences, all three offers suggested that, in exchange for acceptance of military equality, the Hungarian government should sign a non-aggression treaty with the Little Entente countries. Kánya stiffly rejected the Czechoslovak offer with the comment that military equality can not be the basis of negotiations. He did not accept the Romanian offer, either, but noted the necessity for closer cooperation between the two countries. Brisk secret talks began with Yugoslavia,¹⁰³⁵ which were only ended when Yugoslavia and Italy signed an agreement on March 25 mutually recognizing their borders. The Yugoslavs were carrying parallel secret talks with the Italians, while negotiating with the Hungarians. The Yugoslav-Italian agreement signed by Stojadinovič surprised not only Hungary but presented a *fait accompli* to his Little Entente allies, too. It was another shining example of the gradual breakup of the Little Entente, whose 1933 bylaws forbade member countries from making such agreements without the knowledge and approval of the other two.¹⁰³⁶ What's more, after Yugoslavia, Rome suggested talks with Romania, also. This series of events raised the specter of the breakup of the Little Entente in Benes' mind.

The Little Entente conference met in Belgrade in early April of 1937. The Czechoslovak delegation concentrated all its efforts to prevent the alliance from breaking up. They were successful in obtaining agreement that, if the member countries sign an agreement with Hungary, they are bound to consult with each other beforehand.¹⁰³⁷ This resolution clearly illuminates Benes' fear that Yugoslavia comes to a secret agreement with Hungary. For Benes, the Belgrade conference was seen as a success, since his allies bound themselves to coming to any agreement with Hungary only together and at the same time. Benes was not satisfied with merely having the previous principle stated. For him, it was extremely urgent to also conclude an agreement with Hungary (due to the increased tensions of the Sudeten German problem, he wanted to be sure of Czechoslovakia's southern border). Hence, he had it tabled again at the Little Entente's Geneva conference in May of 1937.¹⁰³⁸ The delegates decided to renew negotiations with Hungary.¹⁰³⁹

¹⁰³⁴ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., pp. 166-167.

¹⁰³⁵ DIMK, vol II, doc 53, pp. 183-190; Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., pp.102-105.

¹⁰³⁶ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 309-312.

¹⁰³⁷ Ádám: *Az elszalasztott ...* op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁰³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 115.

¹⁰³⁹ DIMK, vol II, doc 80, pp. 227-228.

The two-sided negotiations began at the Little Entente's Sinaia conference in August.¹⁰⁴⁰ However, while the official Little Entente-Hungary talks were proceeding, the Hungarian representative, ambassador to Bucharest László Bárdossy, also met individually with the foreign ministers.¹⁰⁴¹ The Hungarian government did not wish to make an agreement with the Little Entente, which is why the minority issue was raised as a priority. It was seen as the most likely question to break the united front of the three countries. The Hungarian tactic worked perfectly. At the second round of talks in Geneva on September 20, it became known that Romania was taking such an intractable position on the minority question as to be the roadblock to a possible agreement. On September 23, the Czechoslovak foreign minister, Krofta, confirmed the situation but offered that, if there is no change of attitude, Prague is ready to come to an agreement with Hungary on a bilateral basis.¹⁰⁴² What a wry twist of fate for both sides. The Hungarian side wanted to break the unity of the Little Entente and came to individual agreements with Romania and Yugoslavia. Hungarian diplomacy was successful but the country making an offer is the one with which Hungary does not wish to sign an agreement. On the other side, Benes fought specifically for a unified, single agreement between the Little Entente and Hungary but, due to Romania's intransigence, he was forced to relent and make an offer of a bilateral agreement to Hungary. The talks were, of course, broken off, not to be restarted until after the Anschluss (March 12, 1938).

In the view of Ladislav Deák, of the Little Entente countries, Czechoslovakia had the most pressing need to come to an agreement with Hungary – and it did all it could. Benes was hoping that a non-aggression treaty with Hungary would reduce the threat from the South, providing some measure of security.¹⁰⁴³

The Sudeten Germans and Czechoslovakia

The Sudeten Germans had an important role in Hitler's anti-Czechoslovak plans. Before discussing the events of the 30s, let us examine the relationship between the Czechoslovak state and the Sudeten German minority. On October 29, 1918, one day after the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia declared the Deutschböhmen – the Sudeten region – as provinces of Austria. Provisional governments were installed in the two prospective Austrian provinces in Liberec (Reichenberg) and Opava (Troppau). They asked for recognition several times from President Wilson and were hoping for the possibility of a plebiscite.¹⁰⁴⁴ Units of the Czechoslovak army occupied these areas by December of 1918.¹⁰⁴⁵ In his speech of December 22, 1918, President Masaryk spoke of the German-populated territory as

¹⁰⁴⁰ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., p. 169.

¹⁰⁴¹ DIMK, vol II, doc 83, pp. 232-237.

¹⁰⁴² Ibid, doc 92, pp. 250-252.

¹⁰⁴³ Deák L.: *Csehszlovák-magyar kapcsolatok ...* op. cit..

¹⁰⁴⁴ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Mamatey: *The Establishment ...* op. cit., pp. 27-30.

being a part of Czechoslovakia and called upon the Germans to accept this unalterable fact and help in creating the new state.

The Peace Conference accepted Benes' arguments regarding the historical boundaries of Bohemia, forcing the Germans to accept the evolved situation.¹⁰⁴⁶ Certain economic circumstances propelled the Sudeten German minority towards accommodation with the Czechoslovak state. The Sudeten economic elite weighed the disadvantages of becoming a part of Germany and having to compete in the large German market against German industry without the protection of Czechoslovak tariffs. Also, Czechoslovakia, on the winning side, was not burdened by reparation payments like Germany.¹⁰⁴⁷ The Sudeten Germans decided, for the time being, to take advantage of the economic opportunities offered by the Czechoslovak state, although it did not mean that they would not fight stubbornly for their minority rights and privileges within Czechoslovakia. To accomplish this, they assembled into the Deutscher Verband (German Union). This political group broke apart by 1922 into the German Nationalist Party and the German National Socialist Party. The two party alliance – Kampfgemeinschaft (Resistance Alliance) – rejected any kind of cooperation with the Czechoslovak government. Another important party was the German Social Democratic Party, which belonged to the activist camp beginning in the mid-20s. The 'activists', comprising several parties and ideologies (Liberal Democrats, Christian-Socialists and Agrarian Alliance), under the name Arbeitsgemeinschaft (Work Alliance), were willing to collaborate with the government. The German Communists joined the Czechoslovak United Communist Party.

The first solid result of activism came on October 12, 1926 when the Christian-Socialists and the Agrarian Alliance were successful in the 1925 elections, each receiving a ministerial portfolio in the third Švehla cabinet. The Agrarian Alliance named its president, the Moravian born Franz Spina, professor of Slavic philology at the Prague University, as Public Works Minister. The German Christian-Socialists sent Robert Mayr-Harting, Viennese born law professor, to fill the post of Minister of Justice.¹⁰⁴⁸ The inclusion of two German politician into the cabinet and the entry of the two German parties into the governing coalition had great presentation value for both sides. The Czechoslovak politicians could point to it as demonstration that the 'Switzerland of the East' promised at the peace conference was already working. A Czech commentator was rejoiced with the high-flying rhetoric that the Sudeten Germans finally "became real German-speaking Czechoslovaks."¹⁰⁴⁹ Now that they were part of the government, the German-minority politicians, in the meanwhile, could demonstrate that their ethnic group is loyal to the country. Dr. Spina gave birth to a slogan for the German supporters of activism: "Let there be no government without Germans." The Resistance Alliance naturally strenuously opposed this effort, holding the activist politicians as traitors.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Perman: *The shaping of ...* op. cit., pp. 156-182.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Pryor: *Czechoslovak economic ...* op. cit., pp. 188-216.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., p. 50.

Professor Bruno Kafka tried to mediate between the activists and the Resistance Alliance, suggesting that the Sudeten Germans adopt the actions of the Czechs in the turn-of-the-century Austro-Hungarian Empire. That strategy rested on a few Czech parties being officially government supporters, several in opposition, but they cooperated when a Czech issue came before the Reichsrat. The idea held great danger for the functioning of the Czechoslovak parliament but the Resistance Alliance rejected Kafka's plan.

The first benefit of the Germans' loyalty was reaped by the state founder Masaryk. In the presidential election of May of 1927, 432 votes were cast out of an eligible 450. The Communist Sturc received 54 votes and the representatives of Kramář's and Hlinka's parties cast 104 blank ballots.¹⁰⁵⁰ Thus, Masaryk barely received the 274 votes necessary for his reelection. Without the two German parties in the government coalition and the German Social Democrats, Masaryk would have failed. Later statistics showed that three quarters of the German representatives and senators voted for Masaryk (as a reminder, not one in 1920). Afterwards, the parties of the Sudeten German minority were active in several Czechoslovak governments,¹⁰⁵¹ but the emerging cooperation was overshadowed by the global economic crisis, which affected the Sudeten German area more than the rest of Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁵²

There was a simple explanation for this. The Sudeten German industries produced for the export market, primarily to Germany, while the Czech industries supplied the home markets. Thus, the trade restrictions introduced to curb the economic crisis, such as the self-sufficiency attempt of Germany, had greater impact on the Sudeten industries. This, then, led to two serious political consequences. The crisis disrupted the economic basis of activism. In the local elections of 1931, the two extremist parties, the Communists and the Nazis, made significant gains. As well, the activist attitude began to lose favor. In 1932, the DAWG group, led by the previously mentioned Bruno Kafka, stepped out of the Czechoslovak-German coalition.

During the early to mid-30s, the Sudeten German problem became more polarized. In October of 1933, the Czechoslovak parliament banned the activities of the German National Socialist Party (Nazis) and the German National Party (nationalists).¹⁰⁵³ It was at this point that Konrad Henlein mounted the political stage and created the Sudeten German Patriotic Front. The new party quickly absorbed the German National Party, the German National Socialist Party, and even the liberals.¹⁰⁵⁴ Only

¹⁰⁵⁰ Nosz: *Csehszlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁰⁵¹ Mamatey: *The development of ...* op. cit., pp. 135-141, 145-148; Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., pp. 47-54, 181-187.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid (Mamatey), pp. 142-145; Pryor: *Czechoslovak economic ...* op. cit., pp. 202-215; Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 191-192.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid (Kovač), p. 193.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ronald M. Smelser: *The Sudeten Problem 1933-1938*, in Folkestone (ed.): *Volkstumpolitik and the Formulation of Nazi Foreign policy*, 1975; Zeman-

the German Christian-Socialist Party (Dr. Spina) and the Agrarian Alliance avoided absorption. The Sudeten German Social Democrats and the Communists have already joined their appropriate Czechoslovak counterparts earlier. Before the elections, the Czech parties – except the Agrarian party – and the German activists petitioned President Masaryk to ban the Sudeten German Patriotic Front. Masaryk was unwilling, merely asking Henlein to change the title from Front to Party. Henlein acceded and the party was renamed Sudeten German Party. In the end, only three Sudeten German parties contested the 1935 elections, with the following results:

	House of Representatives			Senate		
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%	Seats
Sudeten German Party	1,249,530	15.2	44	1,092,255	15.0	23
German Christian-Socialist Party	162,782	2.0	6	155,234	2.1	3
Agrarian Party	141,399	1.7	5	129,862	1.8	0

The final result of the 1935 Czechoslovak elections. Source: the author's own research.¹⁰⁵⁵

The table clearly shows the erosion of support for the two parties representing the activist direction, while the Sudeten German Party makes significant headway. If we add up all the votes cast for a German party, then 2/3 went to the Sudeten German Party. Thus, it is not surprising that, on the day following the election, Henlein announced that, as of that moment, they are the sole spokesmen for the Sudeten Germans and the activist German parties do not represent the real interests of the Germans. With 15 per cent of votes garnered, it was impossible to think of banning the party. The activists again joined the coalition led by Malypetr but were unable to counterbalance to continued growth of the Sudeten German Party. For the future of Czechoslovakia, it turned out to be a decisive moment that the Henlein-movement quickly looked for – and found – a contact with Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁵⁶

The first documentable financial assistance to Henlein from Germany came in September of 1934. After the election success of May, 1935, it was followed with increasing regularity and larger amount payments.¹⁰⁵⁷ According to a different source, beginning in 1935, the German Foreign Ministry financed party operations through a monthly payment of 15 thousand Deutschmarks.¹⁰⁵⁸ Naturally enough, along with the money, shortly political instructions also arrived. Hitler was using the Sudeten Germans in his anti-Czechoslovak plans. In 1938, Hitler stated as a demand for Henlein that: “The Sudeten German Party must make demands

Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 118-119; Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., pp. 407-411.

¹⁰⁵⁵ The table was created based on data in Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Vondracek: *The foreign policy ...* op. cit., p. 409.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁰⁵⁸ William L. Shirer: *A Harmadik Birodalom felemelkedése és bukása* [The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich]. Teleteacher, Budapest, 1996, p. 221.

of the Czech government it can not accept.”¹⁰⁵⁹ Henlein himself summed up Hitler’s views: “We must always demand as much as can never be satisfied.”¹⁰⁶⁰

THE COLLAPSE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The immediate precedents to Munich

Before we turn to Munich and the events that immediately preceded it, we must take a look at the strategic situation which bound the fates of Czechoslovakia, Germany and Hungary together. We must examine the intentions and plans of the three countries and how they crossed and complemented each other.

From 1918, the exclusive diplomatic goal of Benes was the assurance of Czechoslovakia’s continued existence and security. His steps in this quest have been examined in detail.

The goal of Hungarian foreign policy was territorial revision, the alteration or repudiation of the Paris peace arrangement. One of the cornerstones of Hungarian revision was the reclamation of Northern Hungary and Ruthenia. Germany followed an appeasement policy under Stresemann between 1923 and 1929. The change of individuals beginning at the end of 1929 and early 1930 – Heinrich Brüning replacing Hermann Müller at the head of the government, Julius Curtius, then baron Neurath, replacing Stresemann as Foreign Minister, and von Bülow taking over as Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs from Schubert – signaled the beginning of a change in political direction. After the change in the cast of characters, German foreign policy took a revisionist and anti-French bearing.¹⁰⁶¹ To this end, making use of the world economic crisis, Germany unleashed an economic offensive in Central and Southeastern Europe. We have already noted in several places that Germany gradually made the bilateral trade agreements into a means of exerting political pressure. The first sign of a German-Hungarian rapprochement was the invitation of István Bethlen to Berlin in November of 1930. Some harmonization of the foreign policies of the two countries took place. Julius Curtius stated that “... the goals of German foreign policy are proceeding in parallel to Hungarian foreign policy in the most important question, such as the questions of revision and disarmament.”¹⁰⁶² It became apparent at this stage that German and Hungarian political interests in Central and Southeastern Europe were not identical. Both countries sought revisions, especially those drawn in Versailles, but had differing viewpoints in the redrawing of borders. Hitler’s coming to power made no alteration in this, in fact, he presented German interests in a more aggressive way than his Weimar predecessors.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶¹ Romsics, Ignác: *Magyarország helye a német Délkelet-Európa politikában 1919-1944* [Hungary’s place in German Southeastern European politics 1919-1944]. In: *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében* [Our place and fate in the Danube basin]. Budapest, 1996.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid, p. 198.

While a strong trend of German-Hungarian approach, even cooperation, could be noticed beginning in the early 30s, their differing foreign policy interests occasionally significantly overshadowed their relationship. There were regular diplomatic arguments.¹⁰⁶³ A number of German-Hungarian friction points can be cited. Poland was one of the long term targets of German revision, while Hungary entertained the thought of a common Polish-Hungarian border, of Polish-Hungarian cooperation. The fate of Austria, the question of Anschluss also presented opportunities for disagreement between Hungary and Germany. Germany had increasingly strong economic interests in Yugoslavia and Romania, while Hungary's relationship with them was based on territorial claims. At Hitler's meetings with Hungarian politicians (Gömbös in 1933 and 1935, Horthy in 1936 and Darányi in 1937), he stressed that the Hungarians should concentrate all their efforts on Czechoslovakia and urged coming to an agreement with Romania and Yugoslavia. Hitler's position was that German-Hungarian interests in the region were only identical with regard to Czechoslovakia. In the interest of recovering Northern Hungary and Ruthenia, in 1937 Hungarian diplomacy accepted Hitler's argument. At Foreign Minister Kánya's November meeting, a conceptual agreement was arrived at regarding the action against Czechoslovakia. This consisted of synchronized German and Hungarian military plans in an attack on Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁶⁴ The German-Hungarian vise was slowly closing around Czechoslovakia. In this atmosphere, Benes' attempts (German-Little Entente, Little Entente-Hungary and Czechoslovak-Hungary) were without hope. Hitler wanted to wipe Czechoslovakia off the map; Hungary could hope for vastly larger Czechoslovak territory from the German alliance than Benes would have been willing ever to return.

On November 4, 1937, Hitler made a speech, attended by diplomats and the army high command, in which he laid the preparatory groundwork of the Austrian and Czechoslovak 'matter'.¹⁰⁶⁵ He reasoned that the future of Germany depended on territory, hence, it must be acquired; the first steps are the acquisition of Austria and Czechoslovakia. He added that, in his opinion, the British and French governments will accept these without demur.¹⁰⁶⁶ Hitler's calculations regarding the behavior of Britain and France were supported by Lord Halifax's visit in November of 1937 (Neville Chamberlain formed a government on May 18, 1937 and Halifax was the Prime Minister's confidante, later appointed as Foreign Minister). Halifax indicated to Hitler that England is ready to examine the matter of Danzig, Austria and the Sudetenland.¹⁰⁶⁷ Hitler came to the conclusion, based on Britain's appeasement policy, that the western powers will also

¹⁰⁶³ There are ample documents that bear this out, see the document collection in "The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary 1930-1944"

¹⁰⁶⁴ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája* ... op. cit., pp. 171-172.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ormos: *Hitler* ... op. cit., pp. 298-299.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Haraszti, Éva: *Békéltető. A brit külpolitika a 1930-as években* [The appeasers. British foreign policy in the 30s]. Budapest, 1981; Gilbert-Gott: *The Appeasers* ... op. cit.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Ibid* (Gilbert-Gott), pp. 73-75.

concur. On March 12, 1938, Hitler set the Wehrmacht units into motion against Austria. The Austrian forces offered no resistance and no one else took a stand for the quietly surrendered country,¹⁰⁶⁸ nobody objected. Even the League of Nations was silent. Hitler's calculation was, once again, correct; the western powers calmly accepted the reality of the Anschluss.¹⁰⁶⁹

Encouraged by the success of the Anschluss, Hitler immediately turned his attention to solving the Sudeten German problem. On March 28, 1938, Konrad Henlein traveled to Berlin for instructions, where he met with Hitler, Ribbentrop and Hess. At the meeting, Hitler stated his firm intention to solve the Czechoslovak question in the near future. He instructed General Keitel on April 21 to prepare a military strategy against Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁷⁰

In order to pull off the Anschluss successfully, Hitler was clear that Czechoslovakia was the only country that could initiate a military response against the Wehrmacht marching into Austria. He paid particular attention to the Czechoslovak politicians. The night preceding the attack, Marshall Hermann Goering paid a visit to Czechoslovak ambassador Mastny and assured him that it was a 'family affair' and further, that Germany does not wish to attack Czechoslovakia. At the same time, Germany expects Prague not to mobilize its forces in this situation. Also, he went on to suggest that both the Czechoslovak and German armies refrain from posting units within 15 km. of the Austrian-Czechoslovak border. Mastny immediately informed Prague of his discussion with Goering.¹⁰⁷¹ During the following week, several German politicians, including Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, assured Mastny that Germany had no aggressive intentions regarding Czechoslovakia. The German ambassador in Prague stated that Hitler intended to honor Czechoslovakia's sovereignty.¹⁰⁷² Of course, these assurances did not reassure Benes and his diplomats. Their worry was heightened by the complete breakdown in relation between the government and the Sudeten Germans.¹⁰⁷³

Beginning in 1937, the number of 'incidents' increased in the Sudetenland. To make matters worse, Prague lost its activist allies, too. On March 16, 1938, Henlein announced that membership in the Sudeten German Party was closed to new members after March 31. This began an avalanche, as Germans flocked to join the party. On March 22, the

¹⁰⁶⁸ Zöllner: *Ausztria ...* op. cit., pp. 392-394.

¹⁰⁶⁹ English reaction: DIMK, vol I, doc 447, pp. 689-698.

French reaction: DIMK, vol I, doc 452, pp. 704-706.

League of Nations reaction: DIMK, vol I, doc 451, pp. 702-704.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ormos: *Hitler ...* op. cit., p. 300.

¹⁰⁷¹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁰⁷² *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁷³ Matolay, Géza: *Az első viharfelhők Prága felett* [The first storm clouds above Prague]. In: Mayer, Judit (ed.): *Edvard Benes elnöki dekrétumai, avagy a magyarok jogfosztása* [The presidential decrees of Edvard Benes, or the disenfranchisement of the Magyars]. Bratislava, 1996; Zeman-Klíma: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 129-153.

Agrarian Alliance announced their withdrawal from the government coalition, followed by the German Christian-Socialist Party on March 24. Both parties dissolved and merged into Henlein's party.¹⁰⁷⁴ Only the German Social-Democrats and the Communists distanced themselves from Henlein's party. As an aside, we must take note that, in the local elections held during May and June, the Sudeten German Party captured 91.4% of the German votes.¹⁰⁷⁵

The Sudeten German Party held a congress on April 24, 1938 in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) where an 8-point program was adopted. It demanded the following:¹⁰⁷⁶

1. Total equality of rights restored between the German and Czech peoples.
2. The recognition of the Sudeten ethnic group as a pseudo-legal person.
3. The recognition and definition of the German-settled territory.
4. The creation of German local government on the territory of German settlement to govern all aspects of life.
5. Legal protection for those citizens who live outside the area populated by their ethnic group.
6. Elimination of illegalities that have struck the Sudeten Germans since 1918 and restitution made for any damages caused by those illegalities.
7. Recognition and establishment of the principle of 'German public servants in German areas'.
8. Complete freedom of association with the German people and freedom to profess a German world-view.

It is obvious from the eight points that the Sudeten Germans demanded legal equality and restitution but the Czechoslovak government rejected the program. Hitler, in the meantime, sent Henlein to London to try and sway the British toward the German view regarding the Sudeten Germans.¹⁰⁷⁷ Henlein arrived in London on May 12 and was expounding at a tea party organized the following day by Harold Nicolson that the first step of a solution was for the Sudeten German Party and the government to come to an agreement and set aside an autonomous German territory. This local government would exclude common subjects, such as the military, foreign policy and finance. If the first solution is impossible, then the second solution must be an international committee and plebiscite to decide in the Sudeten question.¹⁰⁷⁸ Henlein also stated that he personally does not wish the Sudetenland to be annexed to Germany but there are many in his party who do. In closing his dissertation, Henlein elaborated that, if neither of the suggested courses are adopted, then there is nothing more than occupation by Germany, which is analogous to a declaration of

¹⁰⁷⁴ Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Charles Wojtasek: *From Trianon to the first Vienna Arbitral Award*. Montreal, 1981.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Shirer: *The Rise and ...* op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Haraszti: *Békéltetők. A brit ...* op. cit., p. 127.

war. The politicians present reasoned that, for England, both solutions are acceptable.¹⁰⁷⁹ Henlein's mission in London – and the British politicians' reactions – was an important episode on the road to Munich. It showed Hitler that, in the Sudeten German question, he could count on Britain to yield.

Such were the events leading up to the May crisis. Let us then examine the events of the day. In the morning of May 20, Benes was giving a long interview, essentially most of his morning, to a reporter from *Life* magazine, and then had another appointment at 12:30 with a French reporter.¹⁰⁸⁰ While Benes was devoting himself to his favorite activity – propaganda – feverish activity was going on in Czechoslovak military intelligence. On May 18, an agent, code named D-14 (Willy Lange) sent a message reporting large scale troop movements by the Wehrmacht. On the same day, another agent reported similar news, that German forces were being concentrated in Saxony. At dawn and in the morning hours of May 20, more reports arrived in Prague about German troop concentrations. The analysts found similarities to the troop movements before the Germans overran Austria. They came to the conclusion that Czechoslovakia was facing imminent German attack. Accepting the analysts' conclusions, General Ludvik Krejčí, head of intelligence gathering, and Minister of Defense Machnik asked for an immediate meeting with Benes at 13:15. At the meeting, they informed Benes that large scale German troop movements and concentrations can be observed near the Czechoslovak-Austrian border, that the Germans were probably preparing for some hostile act. At 16:30, Benes gathered the military experts and leaders of the political parties. After some debate, the consensus was that military countermeasures must be taken – the Czechoslovak army must be mobilized. Minister Machnik ordered the mobilization, calling up 199 thousand reservists, swelling the Czechoslovak army to 383 thousand men. The mobilized army manned the prepared border fortifications. The following day, Benes made a speech in the town of Tabor, a town important to Czechs since Hussite times. In the speech, he stated that: Czechoslovakia is not Austria, and will not be wiped off the map without a fight. “We stand ready for the struggle” – he said.¹⁰⁸¹

The Germans reacted furiously at the news of the Czechoslovak mobilization. Hitler accused Prague of attempting to influence the local elections, posted for May 22, by marching into the Sudeten region. The German ambassador in Prague, Ernst Eisenlohr, protested to Foreign Minister Krofta and denied, in fact, called it preposterous, that the German army carried out troop concentrations near the border. In Berlin, German diplomats, led by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, made similar statements to ambassador Mastny.¹⁰⁸² It must be noted here that, for once, German diplomats told the truth. There were no troop movements around May 18-

¹⁰⁷⁹ Harold Nicolson: *Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*. London, 1967, pp. 163-164.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., pp. 144 –145. The day in question has been reconstructed by Lukes, almost hour by hour.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ibid, p. 145.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid.

20. As we now know, Plan Green (Fall Grün) – the plan of Czechoslovakia’s attack – was not yet ready. Immediately, the question arises: What happened? Igor Lukes made extensive archival research after the Velvet Revolution – including the remaining materials of the Czechoslovak military intelligence services – and presented several explanations.¹⁰⁸³

His first explanation points to human error: the Czechoslovak agents active in Germany were inexperienced and provided inaccurate information to the Prague analysts, leading to the mobilization.

His second explanation lays the fault with the analysis. The officers of the analysis section assembled the data incorrectly. When they looked at them, they thought they detected troop movements similar to those that preceded the Anschluss.

His third explanation is put down to disinformation. According to Lukes, the Czechoslovakians also quickly came to realize they were faced with misinformation. A high ranking intelligence officer, Colonel Havel, reviewed the agents’ reports on May 21 and concluded that the information was not credible. He based his conclusion on the fact that the reports covered military movements over an area much greater than a network, under one agent, could cover.

We can not decide, after 70 years, which explanation is true. However, it is certain that Czechoslovak intelligence re-checked the original statements and found that German troops were in their normal, peace-time billets and no sign of any strategic troop concentrations. They informed Benes on May 25 of their error. Lukes feels that, if we accept the third of the possibilities, then we must pose the question: Who benefited by ‘fooling’ Czechoslovak intelligence?¹⁰⁸⁴ According to Lukes, Paris and London are obviously innocent in the matter as their interests demanded an easing of tensions, not heightening them. Not a single trace has come to light that implicates Berlin, either. Having eliminated the obvious, Lukes suspects the hand of the Kremlin behind the disinformation. Moscow was afraid that the western democracies will isolate the Soviet Union and convince Hitler into waging a war against the East. In a preventive move, the Soviets would have liked to spark a war between Hitler and the western democracies. Soviet agents organized the misinformation campaign, passing the false information to the Czechoslovak agents that Hitler’s attack was imminent. According to the Soviet scenario, the events should have unfolded in the following manner: Czechoslovakia orders mobilization at receiving the information (it happened); Hitler flies into a rage and orders an attack on Czechoslovakia (Hitler did become enraged but did not order an immediate attack); finally, France and England drift into the conflict. In the meantime, the Soviet Union sits, waits and watches until the right moment to join in on the appropriate side.

It must be stressed that Lukes’ conclusions pointing to the Soviet Union were arrived at only through the means of logic. Archival evidence does not support any of it. It is, however, a fact that Benes ordered

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid, pp. 148-153.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 154-157.

mobilization, which was executed in exemplary fashion, demonstrating that Czechoslovakia was ready for combat with the Wehrmacht. Why Benes ordered the mobilization remains an open question.

We suspect that there might be two answers (which are not, in our opinion, mutually exclusive). On the one hand, Benes had to order the mobilization call since, in the afternoon of May 20, he could not have known that he was faced with a 'situation', or not. Also, contributing to the decision was the Czechoslovak army's strategy of occupying the fortifications along the frontier, forcing the Wehrmacht into a lengthy siege.

The second possibility is raised by Taylor, who reasons that Benes might have been interested in raising the level of tension.¹⁰⁸⁵ He had hopes that the French and British would be confronted by the crisis and must take Czechoslovakia's side. It would force Hitler to back down and the humiliation meted out would not only thwart his attempts at European domination but possibly end in the collapse of the German Nazi regime. If we accept Taylor's hypothesis, then Benes was doubly wrong in his reasoning: once, on the inner stability of the Nazi regime, and twice, regarding the attitudes of England and France.

Hitler's plans were embarrassingly affected by the Czechoslovak mobilization, having lost the initiative for a short period of time. His scenario for Czechoslovakia was similar to Austria, i.e., apply strong pressure (mainly through Henlein), quick military action and, in a few short days, the world will have forgotten this country, too. Then Benes goes and mobilizes and, in the Tabor speech, sends the message that they are ready to fight. After hesitating for a few days, Hitler assembled the Reich's political and military leaders and made public his plan against Czechoslovakia, the Green Plan. The date of the attack was October 1.¹⁰⁸⁶ To distract attention, instructions went out to Henlein to begin negotiations with the Czechoslovak government over resolving the 'Sudeten question' but that he was not to agree to any compromise. Following the well known tactic, he was instructed to keep demanding more and more.

While this was going on, a vast diplomatic game unfolded between the affected countries. England saw the victory of the appeasement policy of Chamberlain and Halifax.¹⁰⁸⁷ The centerpiece of it was that England would not accept any responsibility which carried a risk of war. Instead, the Foreign Office urged the Czechoslovak government to come to an agreement with the Sudeten Germans. Furthermore, it tried to influence the French also to pressure the Czechoslovak government in the direction of an agreement. It is palpably clear that England was worried that, if France rushed to the aid of an attacked Czechoslovakia, Britain would also be drawn into the war, which would then lead to general hostilities. In the interest of avoiding it, they urge the appeasement of Hitler's demands.

¹⁰⁸⁵ A.J.P. Taylor: *A második világháború okai* [The causes behind the Second World War]. Scolar Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, p. 188.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Keith Eubank: *Munich*. In: Viktor S. Mamatey – Radomir Luza (ed.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Haraszti: *Békéltetők. A brit ...* op. cit., p. 130.

The French government was also wavering, mainly due to military considerations. On March 15, the French parliamentary National Security Committee met regarding the assistance to be provided to Czechoslovakia. On this occasion, General Gamelin took the position that France could tie down some German troops but could not break through the Siegfried Line. Anything more effective would involve France attacking through Belgium.¹⁰⁸⁸ Two months later, on May 17, French Foreign Minister Bonnet met with Osuský, the Czechoslovak ambassador and reported that the French high command turned to Belgium with the request of transit for French troops if assistance was to be rendered to Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁸⁹ The Belgian Prime Minister immediately rejected the proposal. Hence, Bonnet suggested to Osuský that the Czechoslovak government do its utmost in the way of concessions in the Sudeten German question. On May 22, in the midst of the mobilization, the British and French forward separate notes to Prague to dispose of the Sudeten question as soon as possible.¹⁰⁹⁰ Shortly afterward, at the end of May, the prime ministers and foreign ministers of England and France met at French request. At the meeting, the French wanted to wrest a promise out of the British that they would support France if it comes to war but the British balked. On July 27, there was a friendly exchange of letters between Chamberlain and Daladier but England continued to shun any responsibility.

What did Benes do in the meantime? After the Anschluss, Benes was lecturing a co-worker, reasoning that: "Regimes like Hitler's, based on force and built on the basest human instincts, must collapse after their first miscalculation. It is a sociological rule."¹⁰⁹¹ On July 18, Benes held a five and a half hour meeting with ambassador Mastny, back from Berlin on a visit, during which he reviewed Czechoslovakia's international situation.¹⁰⁹² Mastny submitted that, in his opinion, Hitler's intentions are clear: The occupation of Czechoslovakia. He drew Benes' attention that England feels that, if Hitler receives a free hand in Central Europe, then he will not be a problem in the West. France is so weak internally that she will be unable to take military action against Germany. Benes rejected the pessimistic opinion, feeling that France will deliver on its treaty promises made to Czechoslovakia. The conclusion of the Mastny-Benes dialogue is that, at this time, Benes still had an unshaken belief in his French ally and that the attack on Czechoslovakia will be the mistake that will lead to Hitler's fall.

While London opted to take a position on the side of appeasement, Paris wavered and Prague hoped, Berlin began to send a message, composed of three important ideas, through diplomatic channels to Paris and London.¹⁰⁹³ On the one hand, if the Czechs had the right of self-determination through the war, then the Sudeten Germans also have the

¹⁰⁸⁸ Taylor: *A második világháború ...* op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Haraszti: *Békéltetők. A brit ...* op. cit., pp. 125-126.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 127.

¹⁰⁹¹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 126.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid.

right to self-determination. On the other hand, Hitler is patient and his intent is focused on a peaceful resolution to the Sudeten question but Benes is showing no signs of coming to an agreement. Benes' chief aim is to gain time to build up the Czechoslovak military even more. Lastly, Benes is unwilling to come to an agreement because he thinks he can hide behind England and France. Hitler is running out of patience and if London and Paris would like a peaceful resolution, then they should force Prague into an agreement. The above message from Berlin found receptive ears in the West, mainly London, after which Chamberlain and Daladier both counseled Benes to yield to Henlein. After these events, Chamberlain announced in Parliament on July 26, 1938, that Lord Runciman is going to Prague to mediate between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechoslovak government.¹⁰⁹⁴ Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovak ambassador to London, reported the same day to his Foreign Ministry about Runciman and his mission. "This is Chamberlain's idea; the Foreign Office disagrees and has strong reservations. Runciman is smart, hard headed, a principled Christian, abstinent and wealthy. He is a true admirer of the Founding President (as T.G. Masaryk was called—*ed.*) and had a good relationship with him. I don't like his trip ..."¹⁰⁹⁵

Walter Runciman was sent out from London to wring concessions out of Benes, or return with evidence of Czech inflexibility. If he achieved results in the first instance, then the Sudeten German problem was solved; if in the second, then Benes loses his credibility and England can safely repudiate Czechoslovakia without suffering any dishonor.¹⁰⁹⁶ Runciman arrived in Prague on August 3 and was given a reception in his honor the same evening. The British ambassador, Newton, had invited the leaders of the Sudeten Germans, Dr. Kundt and Dr. Sebekowsky, to Prague and introduced them to Runciman at the reception.¹⁰⁹⁷ Newton took this step on the conviction that there were ethical reasons for the Sudeten demands and that the Czechoslovak government was doing nothing to resolve the problem.¹⁰⁹⁸ To counteract Newton's move, Benes paraded the following day the only Sudeten German politician of substance, Wenzel Jaksch, who supported the Czechoslovak government.

The members of the Runciman delegation criss-crossed the Sudetenland, to gather information and familiarity. It was a bad omen when one member of the delegation, Geoffrey Peto, on returning to Prague from one such trip remarked in front of a German diplomat that he now

¹⁰⁹⁴ Karen Paler: *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938*. PhD thesis, The Queen' University of Belfast, 1989; Paul Vysny: *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938: Prelude to Munich*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003; Eubank: *Munich ...* op. cit., pp. 245-248; Gilbert-Gott: *The Appeasers ...* op. cit., pp. 129-131; Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., pp. 183-190; Wojtasek: *From Trianon to ...* op. cit., pp. 109-124.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Jindřich Dejmek (ed.): *Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938. A/20/2 Svazek I*. Praha, 2001, doc. 429, p. 66.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Taylor: *A második világháború ...* op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 183.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Taylor: *A második világháború ...* op. cit., p. 194.

understands why Germans don't like Jews.¹⁰⁹⁹ It also did not add to the objectivity of the delegation that, during their trips around the Sudeten area, they usually enjoyed the hospitality of prosperous Germans with substantial land holdings.¹¹⁰⁰ Runciman, in the meantime, held several lengthy discussions with Benes and the Sudeten representatives. "I am very tired of all the dinners", he wrote to Halifax. While Benes met with Runciman almost on a daily basis, the leader of the Sudeten Germans, Henlein, stayed away from the delegation, only meeting Runciman two weeks after his arrival in Prague, on August 18. During their meeting, Henlein reasoned that, in his opinion, there exists a peaceful solution but what Prague is presently offering is 'worthless'. After the meeting, Runciman summed up his opinion of Henlein as "a totally honest man", whose demands are well founded.¹¹⁰¹ Newspaperman William Shirer, in Prague to cover the Runciman mission, summed up the situation: "Runciman is traveling back and forth between the Sudeten area and Prague making friendlier and friendlier gestures toward the Sudeten Germans, while demanding ever more strongly that Prague satisfy their wishes."¹¹⁰²

In London, Jan Masary was, in the meanwhile, trying to come to an agreement with an official of the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittert, regarding possible concession to be made to the Sudeten Germans.¹¹⁰³

On August 24, Runciman, once more to define the relationship between Prague and the Sudeten Germans, proposed the so-called 'Third Plan.'¹¹⁰⁴ In it, it is proposed to create – as far as possible – ethnically homogeneous cantons in the Sudetenland. The plan calls for four cantons, or which three would be completely German. The Sudeten German leaders are embarrassed by the proposal as their directive from Berlin was to prevent an agreement. They rejected the proposal on the grounds that the Sudeten Germans would be apportioned into different cantons. Benes met with the two Sudeten delegates, Kundt and Sebekowsky, on August 30 and indicated his willingness to settle on the basis of the Karlsbad eight points. Benes requested a yes or no answer from the two politicians in three days. Henlein traveled to Berlin on September 1 – evidently for more instructions – returning with Hitler's showy answer to Runciman: "I do not want war." Kundt and Sebekowsky returned to Benes on September 2 and, although Benes asked for a yes or no answer, they brought a long memorandum but not a clear cut reply. Benes interpreted it as a negative response. After the two delegates left, Runciman sternly warned Benes not to have any illusions about England declaring a war on Czechoslovakia's behalf.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 184.

¹¹⁰⁰ Mosley, Leonard: *Az elfecsérelt idő* [Squandered time]. Budapest, 1975, p. 51.

¹¹⁰¹ Eubank: *Munich ...* op. cit., p. 246.

¹¹⁰² Shirer: *The Rise and ...* op. cit., p. 232.

¹¹⁰³ Dejmek: *Československá ...* op. cit., doc. 500, p. 176.

¹¹⁰⁴ Lukes calls the August 24 plan as the 'Third Plan' (page 185). However, there is no mention of a 'First' or 'Second Plan' in his, or any other, work.

Benes again invited Kundt and Sebekowsky to his residence on September 4. As the talks opened, the two Germans were surprised to find something amiss. Benes, always energetically defending his position, was lethargic and wooden. He opened the meeting by taking out a blank sheet of paper and asked the two delegates to write down their wishes, saying: "I assure you ahead of time that I will fulfill them."¹¹⁰⁵ The Germans were, at once, astounded and mad, expecting a great argument. Instead, Benes seemed conciliatory. They were at a loss for words. When the silence became unbearable, Benes lifted his pen, saying: "Fine. If you don't want to write it down, I shall. Please dictate what I should write." The two delegates began to dictate with Benes writing it all down. At the end, they all signed the list and departed.¹¹⁰⁶

This sheet of paper became the basis of the Fourth – and final – Plan proposed by the Runciman mission. Effectively, by signing, Benes accepted in total the Sudeten German's 8-point Karlsbad program. In essence, Benes reaped a diplomatic victory over both the Sudeten German delegates and Runciman. That he acceded to all the demands proved his ability to compromise, making Runciman's mission superfluous. Runciman was forced to agree that there is no further need to mediate, Benes gave in to the Sudeten Germans on all counts. Benes was victorious over Runciman. It is our suspicion that Benes agreed to all the Sudeten demands because he was sure that they will be rejected. As in the 20s, at the League of Nations sessions, Benes was playing to an external – international – audience. The message was clear: If you please, I want to come to an agreement with them, I am willing to go a long way, but nothing is ever enough for them.

The Sudeten Germans were in shock at Benes' move. "My God, they gave us everything we asked", commented Karl Hermann Frank, the second man in the Sudeten German Party, on the event. Quickly, they hastened to Berlin to consult with Hitler where they received new orders. 'Incidents' must be provoked in the Sudeten region and then break off the negotiations. This was the scenario that came to be. On September 7, a clash occurred in Moravska Ostrava in which a Czechoslovak policeman shot and killed a Sudeten German. The very same day, the Sudeten Germans informed Prague that "The leaders of the Sudeten Germans conclude that state official and Czech settlers have killed and wounded a number of Sudeten Germans. In this situation, the leadership of the Sudeten German Party feels itself unable to continue negotiations with the government, free and unpressured, about the reasons and future of the Sudeten Germans..."¹¹⁰⁷

Runciman's mission thus lost its *raison d'etre* and embarked on September 15 to return to London. In his report written a week after his return, he blamed radical Sudeten German groups for the breaking-off of

¹¹⁰⁵ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 187.

¹¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the usually very precise Lukes does not record what was committed to paper. Hence, we can only surmise that Benes made a written promise to fulfill all the Sudete German demands.

¹¹⁰⁷ Matolay: *Az első viharfelhők ...* op. cit., p. 44.

negotiations, writing: "... Messrs. Heinlein and Frank are solely responsible for the situation, and their supporters at home and abroad, who urged them to take these unconstitutional steps."¹¹⁰⁸ In spite of that, he deemed the Sudeten German demands as justified. To quote Runciman again: "Czechoslovak behavior in the Sudeten German populated areas over the past twenty years ... bears the mark of tactlessness, little understanding, intolerance and discrimination... Local grievances can be added to these serious irritants. The Czech civil servants and police posted to the mostly, or exclusively, German-populated areas were unable to speak German... Czech colonists were able to acquire land in the heart of German territory... I believe that these complaints are legitimate."¹¹⁰⁹ On the other side, he gives the following detailed assessment of the Czechoslovak government: "Having come to the end of my mission, I do not feel that the Czechoslovak government is ready to remedy the situation adequately."¹¹¹⁰

In the concluding portion of his report, he surmises that: "A simple plebiscite would be a mere formality, since the overwhelming majority of the population would vote for annexation to Germany. Therefore, I think that any further delay would only lead to the stirring up of sentiments."¹¹¹¹ Finally, he states his conclusion that the Sudeten German region must be annexed to Germany, "quickly and without delay."

The Munich conference

The second week of September saw rapid series of events, both inside Czechoslovakia and internationally. On September 12, Hitler, addressing a Party Day rally in Nurnberg, launched a sharp attack on the Czechoslovak government and, by name, Benes. Of the Sudeten Germans, he said: "All I can say to the representatives of the democracies, that this is not all the same to us, and if these tortured creatures do not find rights and help, they will get both from us. The denial of rights for these people must end."¹¹¹² The following day, there was an armed clash in the town of Cheb, West of Karlovy Vary, which claimed several lives. The Czechoslovak government sent in the army against the armed Sudeten Germans.¹¹¹³

Three important events happened on September 15: Runciman left to go home, the Sudeten German Party issued the slogan "We want to return to the Empire", and British Prime Minister Chamberlain visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden.¹¹¹⁴ The Prime Minister informed Hitler that his government was willing to accept German demands over the Sudetenland and will convince the French and Czechoslovak governments to accept it. They came to an agreement that the areas, where Germans are in the majority, will be simply handed over, while mixed populated areas will be decided

¹¹⁰⁸ Wojtasek: *From Trianon to ...* op. cit., pp. 201-204.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹¹² Ormos: *Hitler ...* op. cit., p. 310.

¹¹¹³ Mosley: *Az elfecsérelt ...* op. cit., pp. 23-25.

¹¹¹⁴ Gilbert-Gott: *The Appeasers ...* op. cit., pp. 144-148.

by plebiscite.¹¹¹⁵ Chamberlain returned to London where the French delegation arrived on September 18.

In his study, Brandes claims¹¹¹⁶ that Benes was taking serious steps while these were going on. On September 17, he consults with the French ambassador and offers to cede three purely German populated cantons to Germany (one each in western and northern Czechoslovakia and one in Czech-Silesia). During his research, Brandes was unable to clarify how the French received this offer, only saying that Benes also sent one of his ministers to Paris while the talks progressed.¹¹¹⁷

One thing we can say for certain, Benes and the Czechoslovak diplomats worked feverishly to influence the events. Ambassador Osuský made an attempt to meet with Daladier or at least French Foreign Minister Bonnet before they left for London. He failed to do so. He immediately phoned ambassador Jan Masaryk in London to get him to try and meet with the French before their talks with the British. Ambassador Masaryk also failed.¹¹¹⁸ A dejected Masaryk phoned Benes that the French and British are “deliberating about us but without us.”¹¹¹⁹

During the course of the British-French talks, the French – Daladier and Bonnet - gave ground, and the solution born from the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting was accepted.¹¹²⁰ The two countries then ‘asked’ Czechoslovakia to hand over to Germany those portions of the Sudetenland where the percentage of German population exceeded 50%. In return, an international agreement would guarantee the altered borders.¹¹²¹ At 3:00AM on September 19, the text of the proposal was drafted by Halifax and telegraphed to the French and British embassies in Prague.

The two ambassadors made their way to Benes’ official residence at 2:00PM of the same day and conveyed the document, asking for an immediate answer.¹¹²² According to eyewitnesses, Benes flushed red as he read the proposal, replying that he is the head of a democratic country and, thus, can not give an immediate answer.¹¹²³ During the 45 minute interview, British ambassador Newton exerted a lot of pressure on Benes, reasoning that, if he ceded the Sudetenland to the Germans, he would garner the future support of the British government. If, on the other hand, he rejected the proposal, then he will be left to himself in a war against

¹¹¹⁵ Harsányi, Iván (ed.): *München 1938. Diplomáciai és politikai dokumentumok* [Munich 1938. Diplomatic and political documents]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1988, pp. 57-61.

¹¹¹⁶ Detler Brandes: *A müncheni diktátum egy megkésett cseh alternatívája* [A belated Czech alternative of the Munich decree]. *Történelmi Szemle* [Historical Review] XXXVIII (1996), issue 2-3, pp. 219-228.

¹¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹¹¹⁸ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 219.

¹¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹²⁰ Eubank: *Munich ...* op. cit., p. 248; Gilbert-Gott: *The Appeasers ...* op. cit., pp. 148-151.

¹¹²¹ Haraszti: *Békéltető. A brit ...* op. cit., p. 137.

¹¹²² Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 222.

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*

Germany, which he will lose in a few days. On top of it all, the international community will look at him as one who provoked the war. After the meeting, Benes met with government members and heads of the important political parties to frame an answer. The situation was made even more complicated by the emergence of internal disagreements: The majority of the leaders of the Agrarian Party, whose head, Hodža, happened to be the president of the country, were willing to accept the French-British offer; Benes and his followers took the position of rejecting it.

Benes asked to meet with the Soviet ambassador, Alexandrovsky, on the 19th telling him that, relying on the half-million strong Czechoslovak army, he wishes to reject the proposal. He then asked Alexandrovsky to transmit two questions to the Soviet government.¹¹²⁴ 1. Will the Soviet government offer immediate and effective aid to Czechoslovakia if France fulfills its obligations? 2. What does the Soviet government wish to do if Czechoslovakia becomes embroiled in a military conflict with Germany and France does not fulfill its obligations?

The following day, September 20, Benes continued his talks with members of the government, leaders of the parties and high ranking military officers, while waiting for an answer from the Kremlin. The Kremlin, for the moment, remained silent. Benes, unfortunately, could not do the same. On his instructions, Foreign Minister Krofta summoned the French and British ambassadors at 7:15PM and curtly informed them that the Czechoslovak government rejected their proposal.¹¹²⁵ The astonished ambassadors left Hradcany Castle at 8:00PM. Twenty minutes later, the Soviet reply was received from the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow. The answer to the first question was 'Yes, immediate and effective.' To the second question, they twisted the answer by saying: The Soviet Union would act in accordance with paragraphs 16 and 17 of the League of Nations charter. It is interesting to note the Soviet behavior. The reply came, not through Alexandrovsky but, through the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow and evasive nature of the second answer. It is seemingly a positive reply but in reality a prevarication. In effect, the second response meant that, if war broke out between Czechoslovakia and Germany, Czechoslovakia should turn to the League of Nations and Moscow would offer assistance based on the League's decision.

After the British and French governments received the Czechoslovak reply, Chamberlain contacted Daladier and agreed to issue an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak government. On the evening of September 20, after the arrival of the Soviet reply, Benes went to bed, only to be woken up at 1:00AM of the 21st by the French ambassador who requested a 2:00AM meeting for him and the British ambassador. At the meeting, they informed Benes that their governments could not accept Czechoslovakia's rejection of the proposal. The two Great Powers then presented Czechoslovakia with two options: Either Czechoslovakia accepts the September 19 British-French proposal or the two will abandon Czechoslovakia in the event of a

¹¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 223.

¹¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 225.

German attack. After several hours of debate, the Czechoslovak government gave the following reply to the ultimatum: "... under the given circumstances, with grief, the Czechoslovak government accepts the French and British proposals, with the provision that when the proposals take effect, the interests of the Czechoslovak state be safeguarded ..."¹¹²⁶

Chamberlain again flew to Germany (September 22) with the 'good news' only to be met by Hitler and new demands. The Godesberg memorandum now demanded the handing over of the whole of the Sudeten area – with a deadline of October 1.¹¹²⁷ Hitler also raised the possibility of acceding to Hungarian and Polish demands for revision, as well. In this manner, he wanted to thwart the agreement. His plan almost worked (and will be treated in the next part). Hitler's newest demands sparked vigorous reaction in Czechoslovakia. A new government formed in Prague on September 23, General Jan Syrový taking over from Hodža as prime minister. Naming a general as prime minister, in these tense times, was a message in itself. On September 25, Benes declared the Godesberg memorandum as unacceptable and the Czechoslovak army began to mobilize.

It becomes a legitimate question: What could Benes depend on in these trying times? Both the Czechoslovak-French and Czechoslovak-Soviet agreements were valid. Based on them, Benes pinned his hopes on two things. He had hopes of the Daladier government's imminent downfall and that his replacement, Herriot, will name a government ready to take a firm and decisive stand behind the French-Czechoslovak treaty.¹¹²⁸ In the other direction, he believed that the Kremlin will also hurry to his aid. This line of reasoning was supported by several – seemingly serious – gestures made by the Kremlin toward Czechoslovakia. On September 23, the government of the Soviet Union warned the government of Poland that, if they do not cease troop concentrations along the Czechoslovak-Polish border, they will be forced to repudiate the 1932 Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact.¹¹²⁹ At almost the same time, in Geneva Halifax asked Litvinov that "if Czechoslovakia becomes embroiled in a war with Germany, what steps will the Soviet government make?" Litvinov replied: "if the French hurry to the aid of the Czechs, Russia will also act."¹¹³⁰

French General Gamelin inquired of the Soviets on September 24 what possible assistance they could offer. The reply was that "there are 30 infantry divisions stationed along our western frontier and our armored units are in total readiness."¹¹³¹

British-French consultations took place in London on September 24-25, where General Gamelin reported on concrete military matters. At the same time, the French army began to mobilize, calling up reservists needed to man the Maginot line.

¹¹²⁶ Harsányi: *München ...* op. cit., pp. 63-64.

¹¹²⁷ Ibid, pp. 71-73.

¹¹²⁸ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 230.

¹¹²⁹ Harsányi: *München ...* op. cit., pp. 65-66.

¹¹³⁰ Taylor: *A második világháború ...* op. cit., p. 219.

¹¹³¹ Ibid.

On September 25, Benes again met with ambassador Alexandrovsky. Benes was especially interested in the number and strength of the Soviet parachute units. Shortly afterwards, a Soviet military officer flew from Kiev to Prague to discuss practical questions.¹¹³² Still on the same day, the British government rejected Hitler's demands and notified the French government of their military support in the case of a war.

It seemed that, in these post-Godesberg days, Benes could still salvage a victory from a losing situation. The events were unfolding along Benes' intentions, with Britain and France rejecting the Godesberg memorandum. For a few days, it seemed as if Benes managed to create a strong anti-German coalition in aid of Czechoslovakia. His scenario ran: if Germany attacks Czechoslovakia, then France and the Soviet Union hurry to his aid, forcing England to do so, too, under the circumstances. The events of the following days dashed his illusions.

On September 26, Hitler made a new speech in which he remarked regarding the Sudetenland: "This is the last of my territorial demand in Europe", adding later that "We do not want a single Czech."¹¹³³ With that, Hitler pulled back from the brim of the abyss of war and England became an immediate supporter. A British diplomat, Horace Wilson, was sent by Chamberlain to talk with Hitler. By September 27, a stalemate developed in which none of the Great Powers knew what to do next. Then Dino Grandi, Italian ambassador to London broke the stalemate and signaled to the British that Mussolini would be willing to mediate in the Czechoslovak matter. Mussolini's offer was accepted by both the British and the Germans.¹¹³⁴

Benes had every hope to be able to attend the conference, as illustrated by the telegram circular sent by the Czechoslovak government: "The Czechoslovak government is ready to take part in an international conference at which Germany, Czechoslovakia and other countries will be represented ..."¹¹³⁵ On the afternoon of September 28, the French-British ambassadorial pair paid a visit to Benes where the Brit assured Benes that Chamberlain will represent Britain "according to the best of his ability." It was a veiled hint to Benes that Czechoslovakia will not be allowed to participate in the conference.

The four-nation conference convened in Munich at 2:00PM on September 29 and ended in total victory for Hitler. The memorandum signed in the early hours of September 30 fixed that Germany received the entire Sudetenland – without plebiscite, without regard for the ethnic make-up of any part of it. Addendum 2 of the agreement stated that: "... insofar as the problems of the Polish and Magyar minorities living in Czechoslovakia can not be resolved by the affected government in the next three months, the problem will be addressed at a future conference by the four countries present today."¹¹³⁶

¹¹³² Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 241.

¹¹³³ Ormos: *Hitler ...* op. cit., p. 313.

¹¹³⁴ Eubank: *Munich ...* op. cit., p. 250.

¹¹³⁵ Harsányi: *München ...* op. cit., pp. 81-82.

¹¹³⁶ *Francia sárga könyv* [Yellow book of France]. Párizs, 1939, doc 12, pp. 23-25.

Twenty years of effort by Benes unexpectedly went up in smoke. The neighbors – Germany, Poland and Hungary – could now begin to alter the borders of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler and the Hungarian card

Regent Horthy made an official visit to Germany on August 22, 1938. He was accompanied by the prime minister (Béla Imrédy), the foreign minister (Kálmán Kánya), the minister of defense (Jenő Rátz) and a few of the important Hungarian politicians, such as the army's Chief of Staff Lajos Keresztes-Fischer and the prime minister's private secretary, Elemér Újpeéry.¹¹³⁷ The Hungarian delegation met with the German leaders for five days in Kiel. These German-Hungarian talks were conducted at different times and by variations of different people (Hitler with Horthy, Ribbentrop with Imrédy and Kánya, General Beck with Rátz).¹¹³⁸ During the talks, the Germans made known their suggestion that, if Hungary declared war on Czechoslovakia, then all of Slovakia and Ruthenia may be received in return. In a nutshell, Germany offered Hungary the role of *agent provocateur*. The idea was that Hungary alone acts in the role of the aggressor, sparking an armed conflict that would be the pretext for German military intervention. The Hungarians, although maintaining their revisionist claims against Czechoslovakia, refused to act the part of the *provocateur*. The reason given was that Hungary was not yet ready militarily to attack Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the Hungarians stressed that the refusal was not permanent, leaving the door open for a possible later action. The Germans reacted angrily at the Hungarian tactics, especially so when in possession of the fact that negotiations were ongoing between the Little Entente and Hungary in Bled. The Little Entente recognized Hungary's right to rearm and made promises of some improvements in the situation of the minorities if Hungary, in turn, renounces the use of force.¹¹³⁹ An enraged Hitler railed that "whoever wants to sit at the table must help with the cooking."¹¹⁴⁰

It can be noted that the Hungarian government took the position of cautious patience, waiting to see what England and France might do on Czechoslovakia's behalf. Hungarian diplomacy only swung into action again in the middle of September. Sometime around the 17th, exact date unknown, Horthy wrote a letter to Hitler in which he drew attention for the need to satisfy Hungarian demands.¹¹⁴¹ Horthy's letter was akin to knocking on an open door. Goering summoned the Hungarian ambassador on the evening of September 16 and informed him that Germany feels the necessity that the Hungarian government take more stringent actions in the Czechoslovak question. "... provoke some armed clashes, strikes, refuse to

¹¹³⁷ Újpeéry, Elemér: *Végállomás Lisszabon* [Last stop: Lisbon]. Budapest, 1987, p. 69; Horthy, Miklós: *Emlékirataim* [My memoirs], 212. old.

¹¹³⁸ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ... op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

¹¹³⁹ Ádám: *A kisantant ... op. cit.*, pp. 221-226; *Ibid*, p. 187.

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid* (Juhász), p. 188.

¹¹⁴¹ DIMK vol II, doc 359, pp. 616-627.

answer the call-up notices because only robust incidents will focus the West's attention to Hungarian demands."¹¹⁴²

After the first Chamberlain-Hitler meeting, on September 15, Hungarian government stopped its cautious behavior. Prime Minister Imrédy, accompanied by his foreign secretary, traveled to meet with Hitler on September 20. Hitler requested the Hungarian prime minister that, while he again sits down to talks with Chamberlain – which took place on September 22-23 – Hungary begin a military assault against Czechoslovakia. Then he, Hitler, would break off the talks and intervene on Hungary's side in the war. Afterwards, they could divide Czechoslovakia between themselves. Imrédy could not commit to the armed action, citing the unreadiness of the Hungarian forces and the five-fold Czechoslovak superiority. The only topic of agreement with Hitler was the offer of aid in a robust diplomatic offensive.¹¹⁴³

Ladislav Deák drew the following picture of the August-September behavior of Hungarian diplomacy: The tactics of the Imrédy government varied in direct response to how strongly the western powers took a stand beside Czechoslovakia or the wavering of the Nazi leaders between the military solution and the British-French proposal.¹¹⁴⁴

The diplomatic push promised by Imrédy to Hitler actually began before September 20. On the 18th, the Hungarian ambassador to London, György Barcza, informed Under-Secretary Alexander Cadogan of the Foreign Office that the Hungarian government wishes to secure the same considerations and rights for the Magyar minority of Czechoslovakia as received by the German minority.¹¹⁴⁵ It was a thinly veiled statement that the Hungarian government wants to re-annex the territories inhabited by the Magyar minority back to Hungary. In the following days, the Hungarian government reiterated several times to the British government its claim but the British government always declined to give a definitive answer.¹¹⁴⁶ Lord Halifax's discussion with Barcza on September 20 can be taken as a typical example in which he reasoned that all his attention is tied down with the solution to the Sudeten German problem but, at a more opportune time, British diplomacy will consider the Magyar minority question.¹¹⁴⁷ It must also be noted that Czechoslovak ambassador to Budapest also informed the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry on September 20 of the Hungarian government's demand for equal treatment of the Magyar minority in Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁴⁸

The Hungarian government also began vigorous talks with the Polish government regarding a common stance toward Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁴⁹ The

¹¹⁴² DIMK vol II, doc 361, p. 619.

¹¹⁴³ Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája* ... op. cit., pp. 190-191.

¹¹⁴⁴ Deák L.: *Csehszlovák-magyar* ... op. cit.

¹¹⁴⁵ DIMK vol II, doc 363, pp. 621-622.

¹¹⁴⁶ DIMK vol II, docs 365, 367, 371 and 373.

¹¹⁴⁷ DIMK vol II, doc 370, pp. 691-630.

¹¹⁴⁸ Ladislav Deák: *Viedenská arbitráž 2, November 1938*. Dokumenty I. Matica Slovenská, 2002, p. 33.

¹¹⁴⁹ DIMK vol II, docs 364, 369, 372, 376 and 381.

path of Hungarian-Polish cooperation was immeasurably eased by the state of Czechoslovak-Polish relations, which worsened during 1938. When Benes ordered the mobilization of the Czechoslovak military in May of 1938, Poland sharply criticized the Czechoslovak actions. The Polish Foreign Ministry registered its objections with the Czechoslovak ambassador in Warsaw and also, the Polish ambassador in London informed the British that the Polish intelligence services have no information showing German troop movements.¹¹⁵⁰ In a sign of Hungarian and Polish cooperation, the Hungarian and Polish ambassadors in Prague separately handed notes to the Foreign Ministry on September 22 in which they demanded the same treatment of the Polish and Magyar minorities that Benes promised to the Sudeten Germans.¹¹⁵¹ The Polish foreign minister was blunt in saying to Benes that, if Teschen is handed over, Poland will not take part in an attack on Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁵² In the language of diplomacy, it meant that, if Benes does not accede to Polish demands, then Poland will resort to military means. The seriousness of Polish intentions were telegraphed by troop concentrations along the Teschen border. The harsh Polish attitude bore fruit. On September 26, Benes communicated to the Polish president that Czechoslovakia was willing to negotiate on territorial concessions to Poland. The Polish foreign minister informed the Hungarian ambassador in Warsaw of Benes' letter on the following day and also explained that Warsaw supports Hungary's demands.¹¹⁵³ As a consequence, the Hungarian government sent another sharply worded note to Prague on the 28th demanding the return of the Magyar populated territories, as well as autonomy for Slovakia and Ruthenia.¹¹⁵⁴

The Great Powers, in the meantime, decided to organize an international conference to address the Sudeten German problem. Hungary pinned its hopes, based on the information provided by its Berlin ambassador, Döme Sztójay, on being able to introduce, with Germany's assistance, the Hungarian demands onto the agenda. However, since Hungary did not wish to take the responsibility of beginning the armed conflict, Hitler did not assume the task of representing Hungarian interests in Munich.¹¹⁵⁵ Hungarian diplomacy got wind of this, in spite of Sztójay's assessment to the contrary, and cabinet head István Csáky requested an audience with Mussolini, who was amenable to mediating in Munich, and sketched out the Hungarian demands. Mussolini promised to support Hungary's demands but was unable to completely follow through. The chief reason was Hitler, who did not want the four-power conference to decide in the Hungarian and Polish demands, wanting to do it himself. The disposition of these demands were, thus, relegated to the second

¹¹⁵⁰ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., pp. 146-147.

¹¹⁵¹ Deák: *Viedenská ...* op. cit., pp. 34-35.

¹¹⁵² Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 228.

¹¹⁵³ DIMK vol II, doc 402, pp. 663-664.

¹¹⁵⁴ DIMK vol II, doc 404, p. 666; doc 414, p. 672; doc 424, p. 681; Deák: *Viedenská ...* op. cit., doc 16, p. 41.

¹¹⁵⁵ Sallai: *Az első bécsi ...* op. cit., p. 71.

addendum. The terms fixed were that the Polish and Hungarian questions were to be directly addressed by Polish-Czechoslovak and Polish-Hungarian negotiations within three months. If no decision was forthcoming, then the four powers will arrange a foreign ministerial conference to come to a settlement.

The collapse of Czechoslovakia

Although Czechoslovakia was unable to participate in the four-power dialogue, ambassador Mastny traveled from Berlin to Munich and was able to secure a copy of the agreement in the dawn hours of September 30 – after the German and Italian delegation left the chamber – with which he immediately boarded a plane bound for Prague. The German diplomats in Prague, however, beat him to the punch – Mastny landed about 8:00AM – and presented the text of the agreement in the Castle at 6:15AM, along with the accompanying map.¹¹⁵⁶ Benes was awoken by his secretary. He sat there in his pajamas and, with a flushed face, read the content of the agreement, raising his hands several times while declaiming: “Unbelievable, unbelievable ... How horrible. What French treachery. They have completely abandoned us.”¹¹⁵⁷

After the initial shock, at 9:30AM he met with Soviet ambassador Alexandrovsky, to whom he described that England and France have sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Hitler. In the given situation, the country is faced with two alternatives: start a war against Germany or capitulate. Benes put the question to the ambassador to enquire and let him know, as soon as possible, what is the Kremlin’s point of view. Lukes, having reconstructed the hourly events of September 30, states that Alexandrovsky was in no apparent hurry to forward the question to the Kremlin, sending the telegram around 11:45AM.¹¹⁵⁸ Benes spent the rest of the morning consulting with various politicians, while the government was meeting on the Kolowrat Palace. At 11:45, the government and Benes sat down together in the Castle, where Benes made the statement that Czechoslovakia is capable of waging war against Germany, against the wishes of all the European powers, but that it would end in the loss of independence. Reluctantly, he advised accepting the Munich agreement. After a short debate, the government accepted his proposal. The meeting ended at noon.¹¹⁵⁹ At 12:30PM, Foreign Minister Krofta officially notified the British and French ambassadors; at 1:40PM, Alexandrovsky sent a new telegram to Moscow that “Benes is no longer insistent on an answer to the previous question as the government has decided to accept all the terms of the agreement. The occupation of the Sudeten territory by German troops will begin tomorrow morning.”¹¹⁶⁰

From this point, the saga unfolds in a mysterious way: according to Lukes, Alexandrovsky’s first telegram, sent before noon, was only decoded

¹¹⁵⁶ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 253.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁸ Harsányi: *München ...* op. cit., p. 97.

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 97-101.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 101.

in Moscow after 6:00PM. There is still no answer to this inexplicable fact. Or for the equally strange circumstance that Czechoslovak technicians were unable to establish telegraph or radio contact with Moscow throughout the whole of October 1.¹¹⁶¹ Benes only received a telegram from Fierlinger, the Czechoslovak ambassador in Moscow, at 2:00PM on October 3 – when the situation was ended – that the Soviet Union disagrees with accepting the Munich agreement and would have, in any circumstance,¹¹⁶² hurried to the assistance of Czechoslovakia.

In our view, the Soviet response *pro forma* satisfied the terms of the 1935 agreement. However, it is an open question whether actual military intervention was contemplated without suitable available territory (there was no common Soviet-Czechoslovak border, thus land troops would have to be allowed to pass through Poland or Romania, or be delivered by air) and the complete absence of military preparations. The delay in answering Benes' 9:30AM question sprang from the consideration that Moscow, in reality, did not wish to become embroiled in a war. In his memoirs covering his second period of exile, Benes took the position that he could not accept the Soviet offer of assistance because:¹¹⁶³

1. The whole world would have believed Hitler's propaganda that "Czechoslovakia was the means to the Bolshevization of Central Europe and they would all have turned against us".
2. France and England would have become absolved from the heavy responsibility for its own policies, viz. supporting Germany against us. They could wash their hands of the long term consequences in the aftermath of a German-Soviet war.
3. He wanted to avoid a war limited to Germany, Czechoslovakia and Russia, i.e., a one-front war with Germany.

But let us return to the flow of events: while the Wehrmacht occupied the assigned territories on October 1, Goering was transmitting the German wish to ambassador Mastny that President Benes resigns immediately.¹¹⁶⁴ Benes yielded to the pressure and resigned from his post on October 5, explaining his reasons for leaving in his farewell radio address to the nation. In the speech, he accused the western allies: "The sacrifices, which they forced on us, are immeasurably large and unjust. The nation will never forget this, although it accepts the situation with admirable dignity, calm and faith. This shows the strength of our people, the moral stature of our sons and daughters ... we are a sober nation, and while our fortune did not make us arrogant, let us not lose our heads in misfortune. The heroism of work and self-denial, whose moment has arrived for us, is no means any less dignified than bravery on the field of battle."¹¹⁶⁵ (See map 6, Czechoslovakia, 1938-1939)

¹¹⁶¹ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 256.

¹¹⁶² Ibid.

¹¹⁶³ Eduard Beneš: *Memoirs of dr. Eduard Beneš. From Munich to New War and New Victory*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston., 1959, pp. 42-43.

¹¹⁶⁴ Lukes: *Czechoslovakia between ...* op. cit., p. 256.

¹¹⁶⁵ Benes: *From Munich ...* op. cit., pp. 292-295.

After his resignation, Benes immediately went to his country home in Sezimovo Ústí where, completely exhausted and ill, – having lost his sense of equilibrium, he was unable to walk without support – he spent most of his time bedridden. His nephew, Bohus, who was working in England, offered his small rented house in Putney, one of the suburbs of London. Benes accepted and, accompanied by his wife, left his country on October 22, 1938, beginning his second period of exile.

Czechoslovakia fell apart in a few months following Benes going into self-exile. Poland was not idle. On the day following the Munich agreement, on October 1, it demanded the handing over of Teschen, which Czechoslovakia ceded to Poland on October 2 and 3.¹¹⁶⁶ The Hungarian government was more restrained, merely asking in a note on October 1 for a Czechoslovak-Hungarian conference, as soon as possible.¹¹⁶⁷ On seeing the success of the Polish action, a new diplomatic note on October 3 asked that, before the beginning of the negotiations, Czechoslovakia symbolically hand over 2-3 towns.¹¹⁶⁸ The Czechoslovak government delayed the beginning of talks.¹¹⁶⁹ The Hungarian government dispatched another note on October 7 to the Czechoslovak foreign minister, suggesting the beginning of bilateral talks on October 9 in Komárom.¹¹⁷⁰

While Prague and Budapest dueled with each other in the first week of October, important events were unfolding within Czechoslovakia, too. The Slovak People's Party (SPP) of Andrej Hlinka was meeting in Zilina (Zsolna) on October 5 and 6, where they introduced to the parties the SPP's plan of autonomy, which was accepted. The plan was also accepted by the Czechoslovak government. Thus, Slovakia – officially now called Slovenska krajina, Country of Slovakia – received autonomy, with Josef Tiso coming to the head of the autonomous government.¹¹⁷¹ Ruthenia also proclaimed its autonomy on October 8 – recognized by the Czechoslovak government on October 20 – and Fr. Volosin formed an autonomous government.¹¹⁷² Czechoslovakia became a *de facto* federative state, changing its name to the Czech-Slovak Republic, under President Emil Hácha. As a consequence of all these changes, the October 9 negotiations in Komárom were not Czechoslovak-Hungarian but Slovak-Hungarian. They closed on October 13 without any tangible results.¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁶⁶ Herczegh: *A szarajevói ...* op. cit., p. 253.

¹¹⁶⁷ Deák, L.: *Viedenská ...* op. cit., doc 3, p. 50; doc 24, p. 51.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid, doc 27, pp. 54-55.

¹¹⁶⁹ DIMK vol II, docs 443, 445, 449, 453, 457, 464, 468, 469, 473, 474 (all between October 1 and 7).

¹¹⁷⁰ Deák, L.: *Viedenská ...* op. cit., doc 48, pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁷¹ G. Kovács, László: *Jozef Tiso*, and Ivan Kamenec: *Josef Tiso*, both works in *Arcképek kettős...* op. cit.

¹¹⁷² Botlik, József: *Volosin uralma Kárpátalján* [Volosin's reign in sub-Carpathia]. *Valóság*, 2000/12 issue, pp. 22-42.

¹¹⁷³ Sallai: *Az első bécsi ...* op. cit., pp. 82-103; Juhász: *Magyarország külpolitikája ...* op. cit., pp. 191-193; Rónai, András: *Térképezett történelem* [History in maps]. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1989, pp. 145-164. Of the 5 plenary sessions, see Deák, L.: *Viedenská ...* op. cit., session 1: doc 52, pp. 72-

These events led up to the November 2, 1938 First Vienna Arbitration Award where, under German and Italian arbitration, Hungary was handed back 12,000 sq. km. of what was the former Northern Hungary.¹¹⁷⁴ However, the remaining days of the Czech-Slovak Republic were numbered.¹¹⁷⁵ The relations between Bratislava and Prague were continuously tense after Munich in the Czech-Slovak Republic, mainly for the uncertain areas of responsibility. Within the SPP governing Slovakia, the radical wing gained strength (Ferdinand Durcansky, Vojtech Tuka), which clamored ever louder for the creation of an independent state. Hitler, preparing to dissolve Czech-Slovakia, supported the radical Slovak politicians. Prague reacted harshly to the Slovak attempts at independence and, during the night of October 9-10, declared martial law in Slovakia, dissolved the Tiso government and the military sent in arrested several hundred people. In practice, Prague introduced military dictatorship in Slovakia. Karol Sidor became the new Slovak prime minister.¹¹⁷⁶

The Germans invited Tiso to Berlin – the meeting took place on March 13 – where Hitler convinced Tiso to declare an independent Slovakia. The following day, the 14th, Tiso announced Hitler's suggestion in parliament. The representatives pronounced the birth of the new Slovak state by standing and singing the Slovak anthem. Immediately after, the parliament named a new government, headed by Tiso.¹¹⁷⁷

Parallel to the declaration of Slovak independence, two important events happened: The Wehrmacht entered Bavaria and Moravia, and, with German approval, Hungary occupied Ruthenia. On March 15, 1939, Hitler made an appearance in the Hradcany Castle and announced that Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist. He ordered the creation of a Czech-Moravian Protectorate, naming former foreign minister Neurath at its head. As a final act, he signed a document for the creation, recognition and guarantees to Slovakia.

The *magnum opus* of Masaryk and Benes, Czechoslovakia, lay in ruins. After mere 20 years of existence, Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map of Europe.

76; session 2: doc 57, pp. 82-88; session 3: doc 64, pp. 100-104; session 4: doc 70, pp. 111-118; session 5: doc 78, pp. 121-123.

¹¹⁷⁴ Wojtasek: *From Trianon to ...* op. cit., pp. 151-167; Ibid (Sallai), pp. 143-152.

¹¹⁷⁵ Theodor Prochazka: *The Second Republic*. In: *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*; Jörg K. Hoensch: *The Slovak republic*, both works appeared in Viktor S. Mamatey and Radomir Luza (ed.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973; Kovác: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 201-206; Ivan Kamanec: *Trauma. Az első szlovák köztársaság (1939-1945)* [Trauma. The first Slovak republic 1939-1945] Budapest, no date given.

¹¹⁷⁶ Ibid (Prochazka), pp. 268-269.

¹¹⁷⁷ Hoensch: *The Slovak republic ...* op. cit., pp. 275-276.

PART III: THE SECOND EXILE 1938 - 1945

3.1 THE THIRD CONCEPT THE EARLY YEARS (1939-1941)

The English months (October, 1938 – February, 1939)

Benes left his country, accompanied by his wife, on October 22, 1938, went to England and thus began his second period of exile.¹¹⁷⁸ He holed up in his nephew's small rented house in Putney. Official British circles kept a cold and aloof attitude toward Benes. They let him know that he was now a private person and to behave accordingly.¹¹⁷⁹ Only a few old friends – former comrades-in-arms – visited the failed politician in Putney (Wickham Steed, Seton-Watson, Lord Robert Cecil wrote a letter). His American friends secured a lecturer position for the 1939 spring semester at University of Chicago in the sociology department; during the fall of 1938, he was busy preparing his lectures.¹¹⁸⁰ He was also doing some political activities, taking up contact with Czechoslovak politicians staying in England, e.g.- Jan Masaryk (long time Czechoslovak ambassador to London who quit after Munich) and Colonel Kalla (the London embassy's military attaché).¹¹⁸¹ Part of his time was taken up by maintaining contact with the political circles back home, exchanging spirited correspondence with politicians in Czechoslovakia. He even sent a letter of congratulation on November 30, 1938 to his successor, Emil Hachá, on his election.¹¹⁸²

We can gain an insight based on three documents regarding what Benes was thinking in the fall of 1938, his opinion in early 1939 of the Munich agreement, his personal future and Czechoslovakia's.

The first document is the report of Hubert Ripka – Czech politician who later became a minister in the émigré government – who visited Benes at his London dwelling. During their talks, Benes elucidated that: “His foreign policy was correct; there is no need to change it. Many in the West feel that, with Munich, they preserved the peace but in reality they merely delayed the outbreak of the war, which will certainly break out, if not now, then certainly in 2-3 years.”¹¹⁸³ Hitler will first steamroll Poland and the Polish politicians, especially Beck, will rue their former assistance to Hitler. After Poland, Hitler will attack everybody, first the West, then the Soviet Union and, finally, even America. The western powers will be

¹¹⁷⁸ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 140-164; George F. Kennan: *From Prague after Munich. Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1968.

¹¹⁷⁹ Ádám: *Edvard Benes ...* op. cit., p. 152.

¹¹⁸⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 51.

¹¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹¹⁸³ A Benes book was published in 1942, for which Hubert Ripka wrote a foreword, writing the above cited quotation from 1938. The Ripka foreword was incorporated by Benes in E. Beneš: *Šest let exilu a druhá světová válka. Ráci, projevy a dokumenty z r. 1938-1945*. Praha, 1946, pp. 14-21.

forced by the war to follow the kind of policies that Benes followed for twenty years. At the end of his musing, he voiced his conviction that Czechoslovakia will emerge from the war successfully.

The second document offering an insight is the first so-called Rašín letter. In early November, Benes received a message from a Czech politician, Ladislav Rašín, who recounted the campaign against him in Czechoslovakia since his exile. Benes replied to Rašín later in the month.¹¹⁸⁴ In the portion of the letter dealing with the past, Benes stated that he will never blame anybody for the events of September, instead recording in his memoirs the events and how they happened. Then he goes on to say that, between Chamberlain and Bonnet, the responsibility for Munich lies with Bonnet. Chamberlain wanted to avoid a war but, due to his inexperience and misinterpretation, he took the wrong steps. Bonnet, on the other hand, knowingly prepared the French for a policy of abandoning Central and Eastern Europe or, rather, for France not to live up to its treaty responsibilities. A fear of the Soviet Union played a significant role in these plans. Benes then went on to admit that the Czechoslovak government coalition was not strong enough and that he was unable to resolve the differences between the Agrarian and other parties. He then turns to the foreign policies of the 20s and 30s, legitimately posing the question: “Why did we not come to an agreement with the Germans and the Hungarians, as we did with the Poles and Yugoslavs?”¹¹⁸⁵ His answer is twofold. In his opinion, it is not certain that the German alliance will work out for the Poles and Yugoslavs; we must patiently wait for the end result. Then, he protests that he tried to reach an agreement with the Germans in 1928 and 1937, with the Poles in 1933, that he went to Rome in 1923 and signed an agreement with the Italians that Mussolini refused to extend in 1928. He continued: the only possible means of coming to an agreement with these countries was if Czechoslovakia renounces its French ally, meaning that it would have to make voluntary territorial concessions to Poland and Hungary. Then he wrote his conclusion: “It was the only possible, worthy and honorable policy, the one we were conduct, which was accepted and approved by everybody for years, up until the very last minute.”¹¹⁸⁶ Finally, he return to the question of Munich: “During the month of August and September, it was clear to me that the best solution to the crisis for us, for France, for Europe and Germany, too – not to give in, even at the price of war. This was my policy.”¹¹⁸⁷

We, however, know that Benes did not choose war but accepted the terms of the Munich Pact. Of this he wrote in the letter: “... a few hours later they informed me that the four powers will meet in Munich – it became clear to me that France and England literally decided to sacrifice us and from that moment we were on our own... In these circumstances, we could not enter into war. For us, it would certainly entail more catastrophes and undoubtedly involve greater destruction – war damages

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 22-32.

¹¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

¹¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 27.

¹¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 28.

and the destruction of the country – than delaying the conflict for a more opportune time.”¹¹⁸⁸ In closing the review of past events, he evaluates his own resignation: “In the eyes of Germany and the world, I symbolized the republic and its political direction, I symbolized resistance, I held the battle standard high for the borders, for democracy for the fight against Nazism and the concept of a united European political concept... Munich was a shameful capitulation and betrayal of everything. It was clear to me that the interest of the country and the nation demanded my leaving.”¹¹⁸⁹

After dispatching his thoughts on the past, in the second part of the letter Benes addressed his views on the future. The capitulation of the West before Hitler and Mussolini did not solve anything, he wrote, because one can not come to an agreement with the Axis powers. The future will unfold according to one of three possible scenarios: first, war will break out between the West and the Axis by the spring of 1939, at the latest; two, an 1848-like revolutionary wave will inundate first Germany, then the rest of Europe; and third, an era of “neither war, nor peace”. Benes felt that for Czechoslovakia, scenario three would be the worst as it would lead to gradual demoralization and resignation. If there were to be a war (scenario one), Czechoslovakia must continue a policy of neutrality until the opportune moment and then join the West. He wrote: “In the end, our geographic situation does not make anything else possible. We must await the moment and then enter into the historical battle, swing into cultural and political attack.”¹¹⁹⁰ Benes pinned his hopes on Hitler attacking Poland but leaving the rump Czechoslovakia its independence. The closing portion of the letter contains an important insight: “Naturally, we will never forgive anybody for this treachery, we will never give up the rights and territories taken from us.”¹¹⁹¹

The third important document was born in the second half of January of 1939. A counselor of the Czechoslovak embassy in London, Karel Lisicky, turned to Benes with some matter pertaining to the embassy building. Benes grasped the opportunity to hand him a message to some Czech political figures, in effect the whole Prague government.¹¹⁹² In opening, Benes remarked that he holds his stay in England as a personal matter by a private citizen. At the moment, he is doing some scientific work, he wrote, preparing for the Chicago series of lectures, and at other American universities. He will return from America in July to conduct more scientific activities, writing “... will remain (meaning Benes-*auth.*) in the realm of the theoretical and will stay away, as far as possible, from actual events.”¹¹⁹³ His intention is to stay in contact with personal friends, answering through letters everyone who writes to him but has no intention of actively taking part in internal politics. He rejects public appearances, interviews, articles, lectures and has no intention of publishing anything

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 30.

¹¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 31.

¹¹⁹² Ibid, pp. 33-36.

¹¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 25.

soon regarding Munich or Czechoslovakia. It is curious to note that regarding the last activity – publication regarding Munich – he wrote Rašín the exact opposite. On the contrary, we can ascertain that he wrote the first part of the letter merely for tactical reasons because, in the second part of the letter, he analyzes in detail the international situation and writes about the tactics that Czechoslovak politicians should follow. He reasons that either in 1939 but by 1940 at the latest, armed conflict will break out between the West and the Axis powers, as the clash is unavoidable. The site of the first conflict he indicated as the Mediterranean region. America will once again become involved and it will be the deciding factor for the West. At the outbreak of the war, Czechoslovakia must be unified, without party divisions and blocks, and above all remain neutral. Later, he continued: “The circumstances – how the war broke out, how the war progressed – should determine the subsequent steps. Every action abroad should be precisely coordinated with the needs of the state and the nation at home...”¹¹⁹⁴

Optimism shines forth from the closing part of the letter: “He (Beneseauth.) deems that whatever will happen, in the end, our nation and people will emerge, from the serious situation of today and the coming chaos, stronger and with the major injustices righted, even if they must suffer through an occupation, an unwanted war or a period of great social upheaval...”¹¹⁹⁵

It seems obvious that at the end of 1938 and early 1939, Benes was certain that his earlier foreign policy was correct, in spite of the Munich agreement. He saw Munich not as the end of Czechoslovakia but as the prelude leading to Hitler’s downfall. He was certain that the war, which will break out shortly, will bring the rebirth of Czechoslovakia, if only the right strategy is followed. We can state with some certainty that his manifestation, especially the Lisicky letter, is not the writing of a scientist preparing for some peaceful professorial work but a politician consciously preparing for serious work abroad.

The American months (February to June, 1939)

Benes and his wife departed Portsmouth for America on February 22, 1939 on board the *George Washington*. A pleasant surprise awaited him on his arrival in New York. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia held a reception in his honor at City Hall.¹¹⁹⁶ Afterwards, he began his series of lectures in Chicago, whose theme was: The development of democracy from the end of the 18th century to our times. According to his Czech biographer, full halls greeted him. His popularity is attested by 7,000 students voted him as the most outstanding university personality of the year.¹¹⁹⁷ Beside Chicago, he received invitations from several universities for a lecture, usually on the topic of dictatorship or war and peace. He always declined to speak of the Munich accord. In reality, we can view the Chicago series, and the

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

¹¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 36.

¹¹⁹⁶ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 61.

¹¹⁹⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 147.

other lectures, as a well organized propaganda tour on behalf of a Czechoslovakia suffering on behalf of peace and democracy. Naturally, he kept a profound silence about his policies towards the Sudeten Germans, the Magyars and the 'state founding' Slovaks.

On March 15, 1939, the First Czechoslovak Republic ceased to exist, Hitler occupied Hradcany Castle, Josef Tiso declared an independent Slovakia and Hungary marched into Ruthenia. Benes, on receiving the news in Chicago, immediately swung into a three-pronged action: diplomatic, propaganda and program design. On the day following the termination of Czechoslovakia, March 16, he sends telegrams, as the former president of Czechoslovakia to world leaders, among them Roosevelt, Chamberlain, Daladier and Litvinov, as well as to the League of Nations.¹¹⁹⁸ In his telegram, Benes remarked on the situation: "And now, one of the Great Power signatories of the Munich Pact partitions our territory, occupies it with his army ... and ... creates a 'Protectorate' under the threat of force and military threats. Standing in front of the conscience of the world, and history, I am forced to declare that the Czechs and Slovaks will never accept the intolerable humiliation of the loss of their sacred rights and will not cease to fight until all the rights of their beloved country has been reclaimed! I ask Your government to reject the recognition of this infamy and draw the conclusions today which the situation of Europe and the world urgently demand."¹¹⁹⁹

Of the addressed politicians, Litvinov was first to reply. On March 18, he forwarded the contents of a note in which the Soviet Union registered its displeasure at the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia.¹²⁰⁰ Chamberlain sent a short, noncommittal telegram on March 20, while Daladier did not reply.¹²⁰¹ Roosevelt replied by telegram on March 27, writing: "I have followed these events with great attention. Although it is clear to the government of the United States that Bohemia and Moravia are occupied by German military forces and are now in reality under German administration, it has not recognized the situation as lawful. I need not add how deeply I share with the Czechoslovak nation the grave situation in which they temporarily find themselves."¹²⁰²

The first meeting of the League of Nations subsequent to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was on March 23. Benes again seized the opportunity to take diplomatic action. On May 13, he sent a letter to J. Avelon, Secretary-General of the League of Nation and all the European foreign ministers, protesting the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the Hungarian occupation of Ruthenia.¹²⁰³ It bears special notice that both the March 16 and May 13 communiqués were signed by Benes as 'Past President of the Czechoslovak Republic'. Through it he wanted to signify that the Czechoslovak state continued to exist, which he

¹¹⁹⁸ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 65.

¹¹⁹⁹ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 433-434.

¹²⁰⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 67.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹²⁰² Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 434.

¹²⁰³ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 72.

elucidated in the May 13 letter. The shaky international legal standing of Benes, and the émigré group gathering around him, is well illustrated by the League's refusal to table his note of May 13 for discussion, saying that it came not from official sources – the Czechoslovak or some other government – but presented by a private person.

In the meantime, Benes began to organize the émigrés. There were significant numbers of Czechs and Slovaks living in New York, Cleveland and Pittsburg whose associations – Czech National Alliance, Slovak National Alliance and Czech Catholic Society – met in Chicago on April 18-20, at Benes' suggestion, and formed the American-Czechoslovak National Committee, to coordinate the collective tasks.¹²⁰⁴ One outstanding achievement of his American diplomatic activity was a meeting with President Roosevelt, arranged by a fellow World War One 'warrior', Hamilton Fish Armstrong, a respected editor of the publication *Foreign Affairs*.¹²⁰⁵ (Benes and Roosevelt already knew each other. In 1919, Roosevelt was the secretary of the Naval Committee and Benes, as the newly minted foreign secretary, had to arrange with him the naval transportation home of the Czechoslovak Legion from Siberia.) The meeting took place on May 28.¹²⁰⁶ It lasted three and a half hours, during which Benes outlined his views with regard to Munich and the two politicians reviewed the situation in Europe, paying special attention to questions pertaining to the Soviet Union. Benes would have liked firm answers from Roosevelt to three questions: 1. Does the United States government feel a second declaration of independence of Czechoslovakia conceivable? 2. Is the United States government willing to denounce the German occupation of Czechoslovakia? 3. If war were to break out, can the Czechoslovak émigrés count on official recognition – meaning as a government – from the United States?

According to his memoirs – written after 1945, so they must be treated with some skepticism – Roosevelt immediately gave positive answers to the first two. As to the third, he replied that official recognition depended on the circumstances and the situation of the war at the time. However, he assured Benes that the Czechoslovak émigrés could count on US political support similar to that during the first world war.¹²⁰⁷ The meeting was a great success as a leader of one of the Great Powers assured Benes of his support. Beside Roosevelt, Benes met two other influential politicians before returning to London. On June 29, he met with Cordell Hull (Secretary of State between 1933 and 1944) and with Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State, on the following day.

As already shown in the part dealing with the first émigré period of Benes, he was an excellent propagandist. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he exerts strong propaganda activities during his second exile, also, making good use of his university lecture tours to create propaganda for Czechoslovakia. The end of Czechoslovakia as a country gave him new

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 74.

¹²⁰⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 147-148.

¹²⁰⁶ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., pp. 75-82.

¹²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 81.

impetus in this direction. A mere three days after the liquidation of the country – on March 19 – he voiced his strenuous objections in a radio speech from the University of Chicago.¹²⁰⁸ Benes understood and used effectively the tools of propaganda available, in this case the most modern and up-to-date method, the radio. In his radio address, he painted Czechoslovakia as the poster country for democracy, tolerance, and moral and political development. It is of some interest to examine the speech closer and get a sense of his new line of reasoning. Of Czechoslovakia he said: “And during the past twenty years, the Czechoslovaks continually and with diligence built their blooming republic, bringing its social structure into admirable balance, creating progressive legislation, advanced national economy and orderly finances. The country’s budgets were always balanced, foreign loans were always paid on time, foreign trade was significantly improved and there was genuine political and religious tolerance within the country. Although minorities lived within the country – this problem besets almost every European country, Czechoslovakia is in no different position in this regard – the most unbiased statesmen, historians, scientists, economists and sociologists generally agree that, in this respect, we have created a very liberal public administrative system and that we follow the most tolerant policy among all the new countries of Europe in matters of the minorities. Czechoslovakia was known in Europe as the refuge of the sons of free nations and the most ardent supporter of the League of Nations. There was no religious or other persecution there, not of the Jews or of any other race. This was, in fact, one of the most enlightened, most developed and most progressive of democracies to the East of the Rhine.”¹²⁰⁹ This small freedom-loving and democratic nation, continued Benes, was crushed exactly for those reasons by the dictatorial Germany. In accepting the terms of the Munich agreement of March of 1938, Czechoslovakia sacrificed itself for peace but, in spite of this admirable sacrifice, five months later Nazi Germany still subjugated the truncated country. Benes closed his speech by saying: “I solemnly state that Czechoslovak independence has not been legally eradicated. It continues to survive, live and exist. I declare most emphatically that those who committed this crime against the Czechoslovak people and the entire world are guilty before God and humanity and will be punished most severely! ... In this moment, I give to every justice minded man and woman of the world the motto of my beloved people: Truth Wins.”¹²¹⁰

The third most pressing activity of Benes was the creation of a program, setting goals for the members of the exile. On June 8, 1939, a reunion was organized in Chicago for the former members of the Czechoslovak Legion living in the United States where Benes presented the program of his second exile.¹²¹¹ In the introductory portion of his speech, he reviewed the events that led up to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. True to his habit formed during the First World War –

¹²⁰⁸ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 39-46.

¹²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 46.

¹²¹¹ Ibid, pp. 46-60.

implanting Czechoslovak events into the European, or even world, events – it again surfaced in his rationale that Czechoslovakia’s problems are Europe’s problems. According to his reasoning, a lasting peace was not possible to be maintained after Versailles because starting in 1930, and especially after 1932, Germany, Italy and Japan decided to liquidate the Versailles arrangement. The major European political powers – France and England – did not understand the direction of events, arguing among themselves about minor issues. Hence, they could not unite and safeguard the Versailles arrangement. For their fatal mistake, they will have to pay the price. For a long time, Czechoslovakia was trying through superhuman effort to create a unified defense but the events of September (in almost all his speeches through the war, Benes refers to the Munich decision as the events of September-*auth.*) showed the Czechoslovak politicians that the West did not understand their efforts. Yet, what happened to Czechoslovakia is only a small part of the series of events, whose outstanding elements are: Japan’s attack of China, the occupation of Abyssinia, the Anschluss, the Spanish Civil War, Munich, Prague and Ruthenia. The European democracies did not grasp that it is impossible to bargain between democracy and dictatorship. Thus, this sequence of events will continue against Poland and the other Central and Eastern European countries because Germany wants to realize its plans for the enslaving of Europe. Czechoslovakia was not strong enough to defend its own freedom. But what happened is only temporary “... since the current European events, and those of tomorrow and the day after ... will erupt in a new, vast world struggle in which the freedom of Europe will emerge victorious, democracy will return and we will once again be on the winning side, as we were in the last war.”¹²¹² He then continued his line of reasoning: The Munich Pact does not bind the Czechoslovaks as it has never been constitutionally ratified. In fact, when Germany created the Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate in March, Germany overturned constitutionality. For these reasons, the Czechoslovaks do not recognize any conquest, not the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, not the first Vienna arbitration award, not the re-annexation of Ruthenia, not the Munich agreement as all have been forced upon us arbitrarily and through fraudulent means. This is the legal basis for the announced struggle against the occupation and we shall continue to look upon Czechoslovakia as still extant. Then, he gave the slogan: “Let all free Czechs, Slovaks and Carpatho-Ukrainians unite, and all free Sudeten Germans, too, from all over the world to us at home and prepare for the decisive moment which will, in all certainty, come to pass.”¹²¹³ As soon as circumstances allow, he continued, the Czechoslovak exiles abroad must convene a government. Then he draws attention to the need for national unity, saying: “The nation must be united ... we have no need of left and right wind divisions. Our aim is the defeat of the Nazi system and the freedom of our democratic country.”¹²¹⁴

He again ended his speech with ‘Truth Wins’.

¹²¹² Ibid, p. 52.

¹²¹³ Ibid, p. 54.

¹²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 58.

In our opinion, the results achieved by Benes between February and July – the path of a private person, from exiled politician to university professor – was remarkable for any émigré political person, especially since the impetus was not received until March 15. In barely five months, Benes conducted a diplomatic campaign that culminated with his meeting with the American president. His countless lectures and appearances shaped American public opinion. He brought into existence the uniting organizational structure for Czechs and Slovaks and proposed a program for them to follow. After all these accomplishments, he started his return journey to England on July 12, 1939.¹²¹⁵

Back in England (July, 1939 – July, 1940)

After his return from America, activity accelerated around Benes, as more and more former associates dropped in at Putney. The officialdom of England – the government of Chamberlain – openly expressed its disapproval, the Foreign Office warning Benes a week later to behave more circumspect.¹²¹⁶ On the other hand, around July 20, Wickham Steed notified him that a group of parliamentarians – the anti-Chamberlain group – were organizing a dinner, led by Churchill and Eden, where they would be pleased to receive him. Benes, his wife and Jan Masaryk took part in the event held on July 27, attended by about two score important politicians, the elite of the Chamberlain opponents. There were various speeches during dinner by, among others, Churchill, Eden, Lord Robert Cecil, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Harold Nicolson and Wickham Steed. Their speeches were unequivocally Czechoslovak-friendly.¹²¹⁷

It seems certain that, during the summer of 1939, Benes was forced to conduct his émigré-organizing activities in an ambivalent atmosphere – Chamberlain's England rejected him, while Churchill secretly supported him. The first favorable moment for Benes and the exiles came on September 3, when Chamberlain announced on the radio that Germany attacked Poland on September 1. As a result, England declared war on Germany, shortly followed by France.¹²¹⁸ It thus came to pass what Benes has foretold so often – and waited for eagerly – the Western Powers were embroiled in a war with Germany. The very same day, he sent a telegram to Churchill and Daladier in which he also declared war on behalf of Czechoslovakia. “Our country was attacked and occupied by the Nazi armies and the whole nation groans under inhuman oppression and terror. We, citizens of Czechoslovakia, deem it that our country is in a state of war with the German military forces. We march at the side of Your nation until the final victory and the liberation of our country.”¹²¹⁹

Chamberlain stated in his reply: “The agony of the Czech nation will not be forgotten and we believe that the victory of those ideals, for which

¹²¹⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 155.

¹²¹⁶ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 81.

¹²¹⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 155-56.

¹²¹⁸ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 510.

¹²¹⁹ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 85.

we now take up arms, will grasp the Czech nation from the alien yoke.”¹²²⁰ Daladier, again, sent no reply.

Lacking concrete promises in Chamberlain’s response, Benes continued his struggle for diplomatic recognition of the exile organization. On December 20, 1939, he notified Lord Halifax (who, as Foreign Minister had a significant role in finalizing the Munich Pact-*auth.*) of the creation of the Czechoslovak National Committee – which occurred in Paris on November 17 – and asked for its recognition. Lord Halifax replied the same day: “It is my pleasure to announce to you that His Majesty’s government of Great Britain has noted this announcement and recognized the mandate of the Committee to represent the people of Czechoslovakia... His Majesty’s government has sent instructions to the appropriate bodies to cooperate with the Committee in carrying out the duties in the noted territories and to offer all assistance.”¹²²¹

While working for diplomatic recognition, Benes also strove to organize the exiles. Gathered around him were Jan Masaryk (former ambassador to the Court of Saint James), Hubert Ripka (who left Czechoslovakia after Munich), Jaromír Smutný (a former minister) and Colonel František Moravec (the head of Czechoslovak intelligence).¹²²² Another important active base formed in Paris around Milan Hodža (former prime minister) and Štefan Osuský (former ambassador to France). There were a number of high ranking Czechoslovak officers in Paris, so the group had a strong military flavor.¹²²³ This manifested itself when the Paris group, Osuský, came to an agreement on October 2 with the French government whereby Czechoslovak citizens could temporarily join the French Foreign Legion. According to plans, these Czechoslovak citizens would serve as the basis of an independent Czechoslovak army.¹²²⁴

The Paris émigrés would have like if, shortly after the military agreement, recognition of the Czechoslovak émigrés – more to the point, a Czechoslovak government in exile – was forthcoming.

On hearing the news, Benes immediately went to Paris – October 6 – not wishing to have significant events transpire without him. The reason behind his swift reaction was the significant tensions between the London and Paris émigré groups. The tension was fed from two sources. On the one hand, there were entirely ‘too many generals and not enough soldiers.’ Milan Hodža, Štefan Osuský and Rudolf Bechyně (a Social-Democrat politician) questioned Benes’ right to the leadership, and even his political vision for the future. Bechyně, for one, urged closer ties with the Soviet Union.¹²²⁵ As well, both Hodža and Osuský – as Slovak politicians – wanted to ensure that in the country to be re-born, the Slovaks would

¹²²⁰ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 436-437.

¹²²¹ Ibid, pp. 437-438.

¹²²² Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 81.

¹²²³ Vájlok, Sándor: *A csehszlovák emigráció* [The Czechoslovak emigration]. *Új Élet*, Budapest, 1944.

¹²²⁴ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 73.

¹²²⁵ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 54.

receive greater independence.¹²²⁶ It was amid these tensions that the Czechoslovak National Committee was born on October 17. Its members were Edouard Benes, Sergej Ingr, Štefan Osuský, Edouard Outrata, Hubert Ripka, Juraj Slávik, Jan Šrámek and Rudolf Viest.

In the first official declaration, the Council affirmed that: “We go to war in the spirit of Masaryk and Štefanik, in the name of the national heroes and martyrs. We do not recognize any differences, not party organizations, not class or other distinctions, we are committed to fight for and protect a free and democratic Czechoslovak Republic, a republic which will be just to all the minorities of the state.”¹²²⁷

It was not by accident that the outstanding Slovak political figure of the First World War, Milan Štefanik, was heralded in the proclamation. There was deep tension between the Czech and Slovak members of the exile community.¹²²⁸ An indication lies in the most important Slovak politician of the day, Hodža, not joining the Committee, instead, starting his own Slovak National Council in February of 1940.¹²²⁹

The main focus of Benes’ October trip to Paris was to reconnoiter who is really the leader of the Czechoslovak émigrés, or rather, to assess whether there really is a Czechoslovak émigré group, or separate Czechs and Slovaks. The Benes’ primacy was not certain is uniquely illustrated by Daladier, who signed the agreement with Osuský, refused a personal meeting with him, demonstrating that the French government would rather negotiate with the Czechoslovak exiled politicians in Paris. Benes was forced to return to London without any tangible results. To make matters worse, the French government recognized the National Council, dominated by the Parisian émigrés, on November 17.

In the fall of 1939 and the spring of 1940, the main fault line ran between Benes and Milan Hodža, and Osuský, too. Hodža first traveled to London on July 20, 1939 and discussed at length these questions with Benes who wrote in his memoirs that there was agreement on every major issue. However, these statements must be taken with reservations.¹²³⁰ According to Benes’ view, Czechoslovakia must be reorganized similar to its pre-Munich monolithic form. But the Slovak politicians voted to secure wider autonomy for Slovakia. In cooperation with the Slovak Communist politician living in exile in London, Vladimir Clementis, they worked out a memorandum in which they demanded such far reaching changes to Czechoslovakia’s internal structure as to be equal to federalism.¹²³¹

The rivalry between the London and Paris groups was finally decided by Hitler when he attacked France on April 10, 1940 – ignoring the neutrality of Holland and Belgium – and brought her to her knees in short

¹²²⁶ Vájlok: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., pp. 9-11.

¹²²⁷ Otáhalova-Cervinkova (ed.): *Dokumenty z historie ceskoslovenskej politiky 1939-1943*. I-II. vol. Praha, 1966, pp. 47-48.

¹²²⁸ Ibid, pp. 51-53.

¹²²⁹ Ibid, p. 74-75.

¹²³⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 88.

¹²³¹ Kovác: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 222.

order.¹²³² German troops were marching in the street of Paris on June 15 and Hodža and Osuský lost their main support, the French government. The Czechoslovak National Council escaped to London, where Benes solidified his leadership position. After lengthy internal struggle, the following slate was agreed among the exiled Czechoslovak politicians in London on July 9:¹²³³

President of the Republic:	<u>Edouard Benes</u>
Prime Minister:	<u>Jan Šrámek</u>
Government members:	<u>Stefan Osuský</u> - Minister of State Ladislav Feierabend – Minister of State Jaromír Nečas – Minister of State Jan Masaryk – Foreign Minister <u>Hubert Ripka</u> – Secretary of State <u>Sergei Ingr</u> – Minister of Defense <u>Rudolf Viest</u> – Secretary of Defense <u>Juraj Slávik</u> – Interior Minister František Nemeč – Social and Welfare Minister Jan Becko – Secretary of Social and Welfare <u>Edouard Outrata</u> – Minister of Finance Jan Paulíny – Secretary of Finance, Slovakia

The underlined names were already members of the previous Paris Committee.

Benes, as president of the republic, created a 40-member Czechoslovak state council on July 21, which acted in the role of an émigré parliament.¹²³⁴ Now, it must be noted that following March 15, 1939, the majority of the Czechoslovak embassies and consulates refused to cooperate with Germany and its personnel joined the resistance movement abroad. Hence, in the most influential capitals – Washington, London and, until their German occupation, Paris and Belgrade – the émigrés possessed a solid infrastructure and personnel. The embassy in Moscow was closed in December of 1939, after the Soviet Union recognized an independent Slovakia in September.

To return to the internal strife of the exiles, Benes gradually forced his fiercest opponent, Milan Hodža, out of power and out of the émigré government. All he was able to achieve was a position in the state council, and the post of one of the three vice-presidencies. Slowly, he was sidelined from any real power. Hodža moved to America in the fall of 1940 and tried to create a base of his own out of the Slovak exiles and their offspring to oppose Benes. In his analysis, István Borsody shows that the majority of the Slovak politicians who clustered around Hodža in America were old followers who supported the centrist policies of Prague but defected from Benes during the Second World War.¹²³⁵ A prime example is Štefan Osuský who worked beside Benes in Paris during the First World War,

¹²³² John Lukács: *A párvialdal* [The duel]. Magyar Könyvklub, Budapest, 1993.

¹²³³ Beneš: *Sest let exilu* ... op. cit., pp. 438-439.

¹²³⁴ Beneš: *Memoirs* ... op. cit., pp. 128-129.

¹²³⁵ Borsody: *Milan Hodža* ... op. cit.

enjoyed his maximal confidence between the wars as Czechoslovakia's ambassador to Paris and Minister of State in the exile government formed in London. Yet, in 1942, he breaks with Benes and threw his lot in with the Hodža camp in America.

Hodža struggled with a series of illnesses during his American stay – dying in 1944 – unable to gather any strength for any political activity. One significant achievement, in spite of his condition, was the writing of the synthesis of his ideas regarding the federative concept, *The federation in Central Europe*, published in 1942 in London and New York.¹²³⁶

Benes, on the other hand, won two important battles in the internal struggles of the exiles by July of 1940. He managed to create the framework for the Czechoslovak émigré organizations; the exiles now had a president, a government, a parliament and embassies. While doing it, he managed to solidify his own leadership position – very much in question in the fall of 1939 – until he was seen to be the top civil leader of the émigrés.

Diplomatic victories (July, 1940 – October, 1942)

After overcoming the internal strife and building an organization for the exiles, Benes again attempted to obtain official recognition for the émigré organization. In the spring of 1940, Benes was in continuous talks with the British Foreign Office regarding accreditation. On July 9, he sent a letter to Lord Halifax informing him of the creation of a provisional Czechoslovak government, continuing with "... we are continuing and building our state edifice on the foundation, which His Majesty's government's prudent policy and generous attitude has sheltered, imbued with a vision of truth, international right and respect for the sacred rights of freedom for nationalities and independence.

It is in this spirit that I turn to Your Excellency with the request to ask for recognition for the provisional Czechoslovak government, and I assure You that our country will always be extremely grateful for the help which the people of Great Britain offered for the Czechoslovak people in their momentary subjugation and their present affliction and anguish."¹²³⁷

Lord Halifax replied on the 18th: "It gives me pleasure to convey to You that His Majesty's government is ready to recognize in the United Kingdom, in principle, the provisional Czechoslovak government thus constituted... His Majesty's government has acknowledged that this provisional government wishes to be the provisional representative of the Czech and Slovak people..."¹²³⁸ A few days later, on the 21st, Halifax went even further in another letter, saying "...His Majesty's government is pleased to recognize within the country the provisional government named by the Czechoslovak National Council and will open relations with it. His Majesty's government will gladly talk with the representatives of the

¹²³⁶ Milan Hodža: *Federation in Central Europe. Reflections and Reminiscences*. Jarrold Publishers, London, 1942.

¹²³⁷ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 441-442.

¹²³⁸ Ibid, pp. 442-443.

provisional government about such matters stemming from this recognition which need to be addressed.”¹²³⁹

Lord Halifax’s second letter was a great diplomatic coup for Benes, official British recognition. After securing the recognition, the ministers of the Czechoslovak government began to solidify British-Czechoslovak contacts. Hubert Ripka (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) and General Sergei Ingr (Minister of Defense) began talks with the British War Ministry about organizing a Czechoslovak army. An agreement covering it was signed on October 25 by Jan Masaryk and Lord Halifax.¹²⁴⁰ At the same time, Edouard Outrata (Minister of Finance) came to an agreement with the British Ministry of Finance – the Czechoslovak assets placed on deposit in the Bank of England before 1938 were handed over to Benes – creating a financial base necessary for the functioning of the Czechoslovak government.

In his radio speech on July 24, Benes reflected on British recognition: “We have lived through two hard years. We have fallen to a great depth and suffered serious blows, day after day. Our fall has now stopped and we have begun to rise toward victory.”¹²⁴¹

Benes’ contacts with the Soviet Union were meager at the beginning of his exile. In practice, he was able to communicate with Moscow through two channels. After Munich, several Communist senators emigrated to England (Nosek, Hodinova, Való, Beuer, Kreibich). Benes took up contact with them in July of 1939 and offered to cooperate with them. But, after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (August 23, 1939), these self-exiled Communists broke their contacts with Benes. Then there was the Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, with whom Benes maintained informal contacts, meeting him several times throughout 1939-1941.¹²⁴² Their first meeting took place on August 23, 1939 when, during a quiet lunch at which Benes tried to convince the ambassador of the German danger and the imminent German-Polish war, on the same day, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed in Moscow.¹²⁴³ We can well imagine his state of mind when Benes learned of the event the next day from the British newspapers. On top of it all, on September 16, the Soviet Union recognized Slovakia as an independent country.¹²⁴⁴ as a result, the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow was forced to close, shutting its doors in December, ambassador Fierlinger going first to Paris, then London.¹²⁴⁵

After the declaration of the Soviet-German hostility (June 22, 1941), Maisky indicated to Benes on July 5 that the Soviet Union is ready to renew diplomatic contacts.¹²⁴⁶ Concrete propositions were on the agenda of

¹²³⁹ Ibid, pp. 443-454.

¹²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 443.

¹²⁴¹ Ibid, p. 92.

¹²⁴² Ivan Maisky: *Egy szovjet diplomata visszaemlékezései* [Reflections of a Soviet diplomat]. Gondolat-Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1975, pp. 481-482.

¹²⁴³ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 137.

¹²⁴⁴ Kamanec: *Trauma ...* op. cit., p. 51.

¹²⁴⁵ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 145.

¹²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 156.

their July 8 meeting, the Soviet diplomat informing that they are ready to establish a Czechoslovak army. Benes enquired if Moscow would accept it if Fierlinger was again named as ambassador? After verbal agreement, Maisky sent Benes the draft of the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement on July 16,¹²⁴⁷ which was signed on July 18 at the Soviet embassy in London by Jan Masaryk and Ivan Maisky.¹²⁴⁸ In it, the Soviet Union also recognized the Czechoslovak government in London and agreed to exchange, without delay, ambassadors. Fierlinger again became Czechoslovak ambassador in Moscow, while the Soviet Union delegated Alexander Bogomolov to represent it to the Czechoslovak government. Paragraph 3 of the agreement is important in that it stated that Czechoslovakian national military units would be organized on Soviet territory, whose commander would be appointed by the Czechoslovak government, subject to Soviet approval.

Beginning in 1940, Benes put all his efforts to gaining official American recognition, similar to that of the British and Soviets. To this end, he exerted serious diplomatic efforts in two areas. At his instruction, Vladimir Hurban, former Czechoslovak ambassador to Washington, aided by the American Czechoslovak lobby (an important element was the Friends of Czechoslovakia circle at the University of Chicago), began various activities. Benes himself regularly informed the American ambassador in London, J.G. Winant, of the activities and plans of the Czechoslovak émigrés. On June 4, 1941, Benes wrote a letter to President Roosevelt. In it, he reminded the President of their meeting in 1939 then, citing the diplomatic recognition by the British government, asked for the same by the American government.¹²⁴⁹ The slow, small diplomatic steps eventually bore fruit. On July 29, 1941, the American State Department informed Vladimir Hurban in Washington that official recognition is imminent. The following day, ambassador Winant handed President Roosevelt's letter to Benes¹²⁵⁰ in which the president informs him that "the American government has decided to appoint an ambassador *extraordinaire* and a minister plenipotentiary to the provisional Czechoslovak government in London to maintain closer contacts deemed of interest to the two countries ..."¹²⁵¹ The next day, July 31, Winant also informed Jan Masaryk by letter that the United States wishes to establish official contacts with the provisional London government and that the Czechoslovak embassy in Washington is deemed to be the diplomatic representative of Czechoslovak nation.¹²⁵²

It must be noted that the two letters did not constitute full official recognition of the exile government in London – they merely offered a provisional recognition – but the creation of official contact and permission for an embassy to operate in Washington were important partial successes. After America entered the war (December 7, 1941), ambassador Anthony

¹²⁴⁷ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 455-458.

¹²⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 457-458.

¹²⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 460-463.

¹²⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 464-465.

¹²⁵¹ Ibid.

¹²⁵² Ibid, p. 465.

Biddle officially notified Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk on October 26, 1942, that President Roosevelt had decided to amend the provisional recognition of the Czechoslovak government in London to full and permanent diplomatic recognition. Beside the three countries mentioned, the London government took up official contacts with De Gaulle's 'Fighting France' organization, with the Polish government-in-exile (November 27, 1940), as well as securing official recognition from Norway (October 12, 1940), Belgium (December 13, 1940) and Holland (March 15, 1941). All in all, Benes achieved a string of significant diplomatic successes. For the rebirth of Czechoslovakia, securing complete diplomatic recognition from the Big Three – Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States – by October of 1942 was of tremendous significance.

THE THIRD CONCEPT OF BENEŠ

The theoretical basis for the third concept

Benes struggled through the First World War and the Peace Conference following a well thought-out and carefully constructed concept that he fabricated over the course of 1915 to 1918 of his first exile.¹²⁵³ During his second period of exile, he wished to do the same, to create such a concept that would allow successful diplomacy and lead the émigrés to victory.¹²⁵⁴ The creation of a new model was more difficult than that of WWI. The problems Benes encountered show that, during his second exile, he actually worked out two models. Initially, he created a plan for confederation during 1939-1940 (the 'third concept' in this monograph-*auth.*), which could not be realized as it was vetoed by the Soviet Union. Then, he created a 'nation state' concept (our 'fourth concept'-*auth.*), which he was able to bring into reality with Soviet assistance.

His thoughts regarding a Central Europe after the war – the third concept – were published in the respected American periodical, *Foreign Affairs*, under the title 'The organization of postwar Europe'.¹²⁵⁵ The lengthy article (18 pages) was organized into eight parts. He began the introduction with the thought: The experts have not assembled the balance sheet of the effects of the First World War on human life, customs, moral and financial situations when the Second World War broke out but in every area progress was typical. Today, the dangers of the First World War are negligible to the dangers that presently threaten us. He poses the following questions: "What will European conditions be after the Second World

¹²⁵³ Gulyás, László: "Zúzzátok szét Ausztria Magyarországot" [Crush Austria-Hungary]. *Limes*, 2000, issue 4, pp. 27-35; Gulyás, László: *Egy sikeres emigráció anatómiája. Eduárd Beneš első világháború alatti emigrációjának néhány momentuma* [Anatomy of a successful emigration. A few scenes from the emigration of Eduard Benes during the First World War]. *Aetas*, 1996, issue 2-3, pp. 103-139.

¹²⁵⁴ See Godfrey Lias' foreword in the English edition of Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., pp. i-xi.

¹²⁵⁵ Beneš: *The organization of postwar Europe. Foreign Affairs*, 1942, vol 20, no. 2, pp. 226-243.

War? How much will be left of the harmony and of the culture? How many millions of graves will the victims fill? What kind of accord will the survivors have? Will those millions, who were tortured in concentration camps and jails, be able to return to a normal civilian life? How will families be reunited who were separated by deportation and forcible emigration? How will the countries handle those huge debts which they accumulated during the war?"¹²⁵⁶ He continued: I posed these questions to stress those requirements which are necessary for survival. I simply want to say that the damages caused by the Second World War are so great that generations will be needed to heal them. The most frightful is that not everybody will receive a remedy. Those countries which were flooded by Nazi barbarism and those bravest of people who were executed can not get any treatment. Europe was beheaded under the German yoke. This barbarity is without parallel in history. In closing the first part, he tersely stated his position: "After the war, Germany must be made such that it will not be able to start a third war."¹²⁵⁷

In the second part of his article, Benes continued his view: "I think that today it is still too early to speak of the details of Europe's future."¹²⁵⁸ But we must speak of those principles, which will help avoid a third world war. In this connection, a fundamental question is the security of Central Europe, since this is the area that brought about the 1914 war by the Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs and in 1939 by the Nazis. 'Drang nach Osten' /Drive to the East/ was always a solid fundamental element of German policy. The other substantial component was 'Drang nach Westen'. The Germans did not merely wish to extend their power over Central and Eastern Europe, they strove for hegemony over all of Europe. In fact, it was merely to be their first step toward world domination. All of Europe must be reorganized, not just its especially weak spot, Central Europe. All of Europe's security must be ensured. The security of a reorganized Europe must rest on a continued and general stability. The basis of this stability is the economic and political equilibrium of several large political units. The following seven large territorial units could be created:¹²⁵⁹

Western Europe: This unit would consist of four countries: Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland;

Germany: The 1938 borders should be reinstated and the country must be decentralized. Within this boundary, Prussian dominance over the rest of the country must be broken. In fact, Prussia must be divided into three or four independent units.

Italy: Must be weakened for taking part in the Nazi imperialistic venture; it must be stripped of its African and Mediterranean conquests;

Reorganized Central Europe: Its foundation is a federation of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Austria, Hungary and perhaps Romania may

¹²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 226.

¹²⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 227.

¹²⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 228-229.

join but it depends on circumstances after the war. Naturally, Hungary may not keep those territories received from Nazi Germany.

Balkan block: A confederation of Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania is to be considered, to which Romania perhaps may wish to belong. Turkey must also decide what it wants to do. Bulgaria, on the other hand, must be forced to join.

Soviet Union: This country must exist as part of Europe and cooperate with the other units to be formed. It was a great mistake after the First World War that the Soviet Union was not drawn into the organizing and that it only became a guarantor of the collective security at such a late date (1934). The reason was that the Soviet Union felt that it was being isolated and threatened. If the Soviet Union is again excluded from the European arrangement, then the large political units again lose their balance and the German influence in the East will again be unjustifiably strong. The European parts of the Soviet Union form a part of Europe both geographically as well as politically as do the British Isles. The isolation of the Soviet Union was one of the reasons for the Second World War and, if we repeat this error, perhaps it will lead to a third;

Scandinavia: A larger political union must be created in Northern Europe, with the agreement of England and the Soviet Union;

Southwestern Europe: Spain and Portugal must decide about their own future.

In the third part, he again returns to the German question, stating at the beginning: "I stress again that Germany must return to the borders before Munich",¹²⁶⁰ reiterating his reasoning: all territories Germany acquired by force must be taken away. Might and force can not be rewarded. Else, Germany and its allies might again fall prey to temptation and try the path of force. The Germans, nation and country, are responsible for the most horrible war of world history, the Germans, nation and country, are responsible for Hitler and Himmler, just as the Americans are responsible for Lincoln and Roosevelt, the English for Churchill, the Italians for Mussolini, the Czechoslovaks for Masaryk and the Russians for Lenin and Stalin.

Then Benes returns to the question of European stability. He states that the contribution of the Soviet Union in the new European stability must manifest itself through a mutual agreement between the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation and the Soviet Union. In spite of the numerous unpleasant memories, Poland and the Soviet Union must understand each other. When Germany was preparing for its Eastern war, it could count on the discord between the Soviet Union and Poland. In the future, every tension between Warsaw and Moscow might inspire the Germans to try for a repeat of 'Drang nach Osten'. The East, same as the West, must unite to demonstrate to Germany the impossibility of any attempt at conquest or domination. The Czechoslovaks – who have no historical animosity towards the Russians and have decided to resolve their differences with the Poles – create a union with the Poles and are glad that

¹²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 229.

relations between Poland and the Soviet Union have significantly improved of late. It is the intention of Czechoslovakia to enable the success of the common interests of the Slavic countries.

The fourth part treats the difficulties of the reorganization of Europe. In his view, it will be especially difficult in Western Europe because this area consists of old countries whose borders have barely changed. Too, France must go through significant internal changes because its democracy is decayed and corrupt. It was this that was responsible for putting Bonnet and Daladier into power and the fall of France. Then he continues his line of reasoning: The situation in Central Europe is difficult since these countries were created in 1919. They were unable to solve their numerous linguistic, political and social problems in the 20 years available to them. Plus, the current war and the German conquests created countless new problems. Hence, it is as yet impossible how a Central European confederation will emerge. At the moment, Central Europe is in a state of flux with visible revolutionary tendencies. Benes then states that he does not believe that the current war's aim is to do away with the dynasties, as that could only be brought about by violent means, which would inevitably mean the emergence of new dictators. The situation of the Bulgarian throne is uncertain but, in reality an opposite tendency is emerging; the position of the Norwegian, Holland, Belgian and Yugoslav thrones is secure. (It is interesting to note that, speaking of Central Europe, Benes cites mainly Western European examples-*auth.*) Benes then disposes of the Habsburg question, saying that he does not see the possibility of the return of the House of Habsburg. In 1919, it was not the peace conference that ended Habsburg rule but the people living under it. It was the internal revolt of these people, and the Czechoslovak and Polish Legions, along with the Romanian and Yugoslav armies (Benes ignores the fact that Yugoslavia did not exist during WWI, and should not be able to speak of a Yugoslav army-*auth.*) that provided great help to the Allies in their victory over the Central Powers in 1918. These people distanced themselves from the Monarchy well before the outbreak of the war due to the policies enacted against them by the Austrians or the Magyars. The Peace Conference merely recognized that *fait accompli* which came into being beforehand. Those forces that overthrew the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 are still in existence and are stronger than the forces which are trying to reinstate the Habsburgs. The old order can not return. He then asserts that one critical criteria of the successful reorganization of Central Europe is mutual trust, another that the partners have identical political structures, which will require certain changes in Romania and Hungary. The new institutions of Central Europe will spring from democratization, not the consolidation of the old monarchies. In spite of the previous, the people of Central Europe have the right to decide on their own fate. If the majority decides on the reinstatement of the Habsburgs or some other dynasty – “Something, I repeat, I do not believe – then they are free to do so, although it will prepare not Europe's reorganization but a new collapse.

It is not by accident that Benes specifically mentions the restoration of the Habsburgs in his study. Otto Habsburg came forward, almost at the same time as Benes, with his plan for a Danubian federation on the

territory of the former Monarchy.¹²⁶¹ In this article, Otto Habsburg tried to bring into harmony the nationalistic and dynastic principles. At the head of the federation – without declaring specifically – a member of the House of Habsburg, he himself, would preside. Here it must also be noted that the American peace preparatory committee, the Advisory Committee, whose first meeting was held on February 12, 1942, devoted serious attention to Otto Habsburg's plan.¹²⁶²

In the fifth part of the article, Benes again returns to the question of the Czechoslovak-Poland confederation. He says that, as soon as the Poles and Czechoslovaks have created their confederation, it could serve as an example for the reorganization of Central Europe. He cites Comenius /the 17th c. Czech Protestant bishop/: "Let all proceed free and without violence."¹²⁶³ According to Benes, in accord with the words of Comenius, in the next stage of development, natural links will be formed between the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation and the Balkan block. In closing his argument Benes states, significantly diverging from the spirit of Comenius: "After this war, Germany can not have a chance to again rearm itself and, following Hitler's deadly method, destroy its neighbors one by one."¹²⁶⁴

The sixth portion of his article Benes devotes entirely to the minority question.¹²⁶⁵ As its starting point, he states that the minority question is one of the most important issues of the new European organization. This is especially true for the German minority. He then develops his line of reasoning: While the other large nations – British, French, Russian and Spanish – sent their excess population to other continents, achieving significant transmittal of civilization thereby, the Germans sent their excess population to neighboring countries, countries that often stood at similar cultural levels, in fact, sometimes higher. These Germans became agents of German expansion. As well, these settled Germans often became indigenous by their centuries old inhabitation of a given area.

Czechoslovakia has discharged its responsibility toward its minorities. Naturally, not everything was perfect but, apart from Switzerland, the Czechoslovak state was the most tolerant and well-intentioned toward its minorities. In spite of that, the German and Magyar minorities made attempts to expose the mistakes of Czechoslovakia (Benes

¹²⁶¹ The 'almost at the same time' is literal. The issue of *Foreign Affairs*, in which Benes presented his plan also printed Otto Habsburg's vision. 'Danubian Reconstruction' by Otto of Austria was placed by the editors immediately after Benes' article. *Foreign Affairs* 1942, vol 20, no 2, Benes on pp. 226-243, Habsburg on pp. 243-253.

¹²⁶² Romsics, Ignác: *A State Department és Magyarország, 1942-1947* [The State Department and Hungary, 1942-1947], in Romsics, Ignác: *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében* [Our place and fate in the Danube basin]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 1996, pp. 234-303; Romsics Ignác: *Amerikai béketervek a háború utáni Magyarországról* [American peace plans for post-war Hungary]. Gödöllő, 1992.

¹²⁶³ Beneš: *The organization of ...* op. cit., p. 234.

¹²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 235.

¹²⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 235-239.

here refers to the complaints raised at the League of Nations-*auth.*) and to bring down the country. In this matter, they received financial aid from Germany and Hungary. Ensuring the rights of minorities meant that the Czechoslovak Republic was forced to endure the anti-government activities of German political parties, the newspapers of Henlein and the subversive actions of the German schools. The minority propaganda fomented by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and reactionary Hungary spread all through Europe and created the impression that the minorities of Czechoslovakia suffered unjust oppression. While Hungary and Germany persecuted their minorities, against Czechoslovakia – who was truly democratic – they took a stand as the protectors of minorities. While denying freedoms to their own minorities, they cynically attacked democratic Czechoslovakia, and shouted to the entire world the appearance of the least of problems. When the Czechoslovak state was painted in front of the whole world as an oppressor, the League of Nations did nothing.

Then, Benes states that the pre-war means of minority protection have collapsed and are impossible to renew. Before we can define the rights of minorities, we must define the rights of majorities, since every nation has the right to live freely and peacefully within its borders. If these borders are national(ity) borders, it is best. This is not typical in Central Europe, as every country has minorities. The German minority – sometimes actively, sometimes passively supporting German imperialism – can present a serious international danger. No Central European country wants to be faced again with the danger with which Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania or Poland faced as a result of their German minorities. Border alteration may be the solution so that a given country might lessen the numbers of its minorities. Also, it is necessary to deport the minorities. Hitler removed the German minorities from the Baltic countries and Bessarabia. Perhaps the other countries could adopt this solution, said Benes. Naturally, continued Benes, every country in Central Europe will feel that it has the right to punish members of its minorities who harmed the majority through treason, spying or taking part in terrorism. On the same principle, every country will punish its Quislings. Then he sets out three general principles to observe in solving minority problems:¹²⁶⁶

Even in post-war Europe, it will be impossible to create countries that are, from an ethnic perspective, homogeneous, since certain countries can not exist without such territories populated by an ethnically mixed population. For example, Czechoslovakia could not survive without those areas where they live intermixed with German minorities (the Sudetenland-*auth.*).

After the war, it will be necessary to move a portion of the population. This should be solved with the greatest possible humanity, with international assistance and financial aid.

In future, the protection of minorities should rest on human rights and not on minority rights. A minority should not turn to an international forum as it leads to further problems.

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 238-239.

The entire seventh section of the article was devoted by Benes to economic themes.¹²⁶⁷ He makes the statement that the creation of the seven regional groupings suggested by him will make it easier to handle the post-war economic problems. If the reorganized Central Europe and the Balkan block organize the economy of the Central European region, then it will also be politically stronger, not only economically. The German economic regional expansion was followed by political and military, as well. The reorganized Central Europe – similar to the other blocks of Europe – can not be economically self-sufficient but should be nearly so.

In the closing, eighth, section Benes admits: “Although I can not assure that everything is correct (in the article-*auth.*), that every detail is correct, I am sure that if we do not make use of the stated principles after the current war, in 10 or 15 years Germany will possibly start the Third World War.”¹²⁶⁸

We can conclude that Benes drew three conclusions from the collapse of Czechoslovakia, and of the Versailles order:

1. Germany aimed at complete European hegemony, and thus was responsible for both world wars;
2. The European states, especially the Central European countries are not able to offer resistance to Germany’s attempts at European domination;
3. A minority within any country, when united with the mother country, represents potential danger for that country. This danger is further increased by the minority protection policies of the League of Nations.¹²⁶⁹

Accordingly, the third concept of Benes set three goals:

1. Europe is to be reorganized in such a manner that larger territorial and political units are to be created, seven in number. Central Europe’s reorganization hinges on one of these territorial-political units, the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation. In practical terms, the thought of a Czechoslovak-Poland agreement reappears, similar to the idea that arose in the Masaryk-Benes leadership during WWI. In 1917, Masaryk wrote in his book, *The new Europe*, that without a free Poland there is no free Czechoslovakia and *vice versa*.¹²⁷⁰ But the Teschen question – exacerbated by Benes’ aggressive foreign policy initiatives – created a tense situation between the two countries beginning in 1919 and made progressively worse through the 30s. During his second exile, Benes revives Masaryk’s 1917 idea of the common fate of the two countries, writing to his brother in March of 1940: “The destiny of the Poles is clearly related to our destiny. Without our freedom, they will not be able to exist. But without our

¹²⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 239-240.

¹²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 242.

¹²⁶⁹ Galántai, József: *Trianon és a kisebbségvédelem* [Trianon and minority protection]. Maecenas Kiadó, Budapest, 1989.

¹²⁷⁰ T.G. Masaryk: *Az új Európa. A szláv álláspont* [The new Europe. The Slav point of view]. Kassa 1923.

rebirth, they also will not be able to be reborn.”¹²⁷¹ Benes, then, felt that the Czechoslovak-Poland confederation could be the foundation of Central European stability.

2. Larger political units must be created in Europe and, in the interest of preventing World War Three, Germany must be dismembered.

3. The minority problem must be solved in some manner. One means of significantly reducing the minority figure is the resettlement of the ethnic population back into the mother country. Another is that, for the remaining minority within a country, they can not be the recipients of the rights enshrined by the policies of the League of Nations during the war.

We can thus conclude that, when creating this concept, Benes took not the slightest notice that the Versailles order was inherently unjust, especially the treatment of Germany and the matter of the redrawn borders.

Attempts at implementing the third concept

While working on the theoretical basis of his new concept, Benes was also taking practical steps toward the Poles. During his October 1939 visit from London to Paris, he made time for two meetings with Vladislav Sikorski.¹²⁷² The exile government of Poland, divided and occupied after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was formed in Paris on September 30, 1939. It was constituted from the four largest political parties and headed by General Sikorski.¹²⁷³ During their meetings, Sikorski informed Benes that he wished to part from the anti-Czechoslovak foreign policies attributed to Pilsudski and Beck.¹²⁷⁴ When Sikorski returned the visit in London on November 18, 1939, the possibility of closer cooperation between the two countries was also on the agenda.¹²⁷⁵

On December 2, 1939, Benes met with Edward Raczynski, Polish ambassador in London, at which the matter of a Czechoslovak-Poland confederation was one of the topics of discussion. The Polish ambassador posed two important questions: Will the Czechs and Slovaks enter separately into the confederation? Can any other Central European country enter into the confederation? Benes replied that Czechoslovakia would wish to enter as one country, and second, the entry of Austria, Hungary and

¹²⁷¹ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 234.

¹²⁷² Gosztonyi, Péter: *Vihar Kelet-Európa felett* [Storm over Eastern Europe]. Budapest, 1990, pp. 104-147; Andrzej Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad Lengyelország történetéből 1939-1989* [Half-century from the history of Poland]. 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1997, pp. 70-79; Štefan Korbonski: *The Polish underground state*. East European Quarterly, Boulder-New York, 1978, pp. 14-40.

¹²⁷³ Fejtő, Ferenc: *A népi demokráciák története* [A history of the Peoples' Democracy]. Budapest, 1991, pp. 15-25; Jerzy Topolski: *Lengyelország története* [History of Poland]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest 1989, pp. 345-371; Ibid (Korbonski), pp. 56-110.

¹²⁷⁴ Edward Taborsky: *President Edvard Beneš: Between East and West, 1938-1948*. Hoover Institution Press, 1981, p. 77.

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 78.

Romania can be entertained. He then drew his Polish partner's attention that he had no desire to enter into a confederation with a Poland that has unsettled border issues with Lithuania and the Ukraine.¹²⁷⁶

After Germany overran France, the Polish government-in-exile was forced to relocate to London. This made the course of talks much easier. In October of 1940, Benes had two long meetings with Sikorski, during which he stated four of his principles: 1. There can be no talk of trilateral confederation, meaning that the Czechs and Slovaks can not join separately. 2. The Teschen border question must be solved through peaceful means. 3. The social structure of the two countries must be brought closer to each other. 4. The Polish-Soviet relationship must be sorted out and settled.¹²⁷⁷

After the verbal dialogue, Benes recapitulated his position in a 13 page memorandum on November 1, 1940 *vis-à-vis* the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation.¹²⁷⁸ The first part of the memorandum is devoted to setting out the fundamental principles of the confederation. They are: 1. If a confederation occurs, both countries maintain a significant portion of their individual sovereignty, each retaining a president, government, parliament and army. 2. Economic sovereignty is where sacrifices are to be made, the two countries to harmonize their trade policies. 3. Foreign policy is also to be harmonized. 4. Military equipment and other materiel are to be standardized. 5. A committee is to be created (members are to be the two presidents, the foreign ministers and ministers of finance, trade and transportation from both countries) to determine the mutual foreign, economic and military policies of the confederation.

In the second part, Benes stresses two things. One is that the social structures of the two countries should be more closely aligned (meaning, in Benes' interpretation, that Poland should be more democratic than it was before the war). The other is the importance of creating a good relationship with the Soviet Union.

The third part contains the suggestion for the creation of a committee to coordinate the future tasks, one of which would be the examination of the Teschen issue.

After the events leading up to it, a joint communiqué was born on November 11 in which both governments stated their official intention to end, once and for all, the previous era of arguments and accusations for the common interest. They have resolved to join, after the war, in some manner of closer political and economic union, as sovereign states, to ensure stability and the new order in Central Europe... Both governments have now decided to work closely together to protect their interests and to prepare for the future concord...¹²⁷⁹

In the interest of proceeding toward 'some manner of closer political and economic union', Sikorski responded by letter on December 3 to the questions posed by Benes in his memorandum. In his reply, Sikorski

¹²⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 79.

¹²⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 79-81.

¹²⁷⁹ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ... op. cit.*, pp. 455-456.

essentially accepted all the proposals made, except one, on which he took a fundamentally different stand. Sikorski felt that Moscow will make use of the war to install a Communist régime not only in Warsaw and Prague but also Berlin. Moreover, he suspected that the Soviet Union will not honor Poland's pre-September 1, 1939 borders.¹²⁸⁰ The two politicians again met in person on January 26, 1941 at which Benes tried to convince his collaborator that his fears regarding the Soviet Union are exaggerated and, in any case, the war can not be won without the Soviet Union.¹²⁸¹ In spite of the difference of opinion, Czechoslovak-Polish talks continued through 1941, often raising the Teschen issue, as well as the Soviet-Polish relationship.¹²⁸² Finally, the agreement was signed on January 23, 1942 for the previously negotiated confederation of the two countries. Under Polish General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, the confederation committee was convened.¹²⁸³

In early 1942, it seemed as if Benes' third concept was nearing reality with the signing of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement, all that remained to be done was victory over Germany but the Soviet veto sank the dream. Benes soon had to face up to the fact that the Soviet Union did not support the idea of the proposed Czechoslovak-Polish confederation. One reason was the ever worsening Soviet-Polish relations.¹²⁸⁴ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. The German army launched its attack against Poland on September 1, 1939 and the Soviet Union did likewise on September 17. Thus, approximately 201,000 km² of former Poland became Soviet territory. The main goal of the Sikorski émigré organizations was the restoration of the pre-war border. In an agreement signed on August 25, 1939, England officially recognized the Polish boundaries, which was reaffirmed on July 18, 1940. Then, in June of 1941, the Soviet Union became one of the combatants and a member of the Grand Alliance (England, the United States and the Soviet Union). For England, it was extremely embarrassing that there was tension between its Polish ally and Soviet ally (remember that England went to war because Poland was attacked-*auth.*). With British mediation, talks were begun between the two parties on July 5, 1941.¹²⁸⁵ The negotiations, at which General Sikorski represented Poland and ambassador Maisky represented the Soviet Union, progressed slowly due to the border issue and the Polish citizens imprisoned in the Soviet Union.¹²⁸⁶ The Poles wished to

¹²⁸⁰ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 82.

¹²⁸¹ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., pp. 147-148.

¹²⁸² Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 83-87.

¹²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹²⁸⁴ Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad ...* op. cit., pp. 70-80; Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., pp. 15-26.

¹²⁸⁵ Winston S. Churchill: *A második világháború* [The Second World War]. vol. 1, Európa Kiadó, Budapest, 1989, pp. 544-546; Maisky: *Egy szovjet diplomata ...* op. cit., pp. 482-486.

¹²⁸⁶ Csósz, László (ed.): *A lengyel emigráns kormány és a Szovjetunió kapcsolat felvételének dokumentumai* [Documents relating to the establishment of contact

have the Soviet Union recognize Poland's pre-war borders. On the other side, the Soviets wished to hold themselves to the 1919 Curzon-line as the boundary. Sikorski typified the Soviet proposal as the Red variant of pan-Slavism, taking a stand with the confederation offered by Benes, stressing that for the small nations of Central Europe, the better solution would be the creation of a mutually allied block instead of alliances of friendship with the Soviet Union.¹²⁸⁷

Under strong British pressure, an agreement was reached on July 30, 1941 between the émigré Polish government and the Soviet Union. The two sides agreed that the Soviets will free the Polish prisoners of war from 1939 and make it possible for General Wladyslaw Anders – captured in 1939 and held in the infamous Ljubjanka prison – to raise and command a Polish army on the occupied territory.¹²⁸⁸ The main issue of the agreement – the matter of the boundary – was left open, the Soviet party not willing to declare a return to the 1939 borders, merely stating that the German-Soviet border arrangements are seen as void.

The majority of the Polish officers captured earlier were unable to be found, in spite of repeated requests by the Polish government and several searches. This issue and the matter of the borders continually aggravated Polish-Soviet contacts. The Soviet leaders informed their western allies, during a visit to Moscow in December of 1941 by British Foreign Secretary Eden, that one of the war aims of the Soviet Union is the restoration of the border as defined in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the annexation of certain other territories (in Finland, the Baltics, Eastern Poland /rather western Ukraine and Belarus/ and Bessarabia).¹²⁸⁹ When General Sikorski was in Moscow, having dinner with Stalin on December 4, 1941, Stalin suggested they discuss the border issues. Sikorski immediately replied that: "Poland takes the position that we must return to the pre-war borders." Stalin, shaking his head, replied: "I would like to modify these borders slightly."¹²⁹⁰

Relations became even more strained when the events of Katyn became known.¹²⁹¹ On April 13, 1943, German radio accused the Soviet government that the Polish officers captured in 1939 were murdered. The Germans spoke of 10 or 12 thousand victims. The background to the announcement was that in early April, the Germans found mass graves of many thousands of officers and NCOs in the Katyn forest. According to research by Polish historian Leopold Jerzewski, in the three camps (Kozelsk, Starobilsk and Ostashkov) set up by the Soviets for Polish

between the Polish émigré government and the Soviet Union], in *Documenta Historica*, Szeged, 1995; Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad ...* op. cit., pp. 70-71.

¹²⁸⁷ Ibid (Csősz), p. 5.

¹²⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 19-20.

¹²⁸⁹ Romsics: *Amerikai béketervek ...* op. cit.

¹²⁹⁰ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 18.

¹²⁹¹ Leopold Jerzewski: *Katyn, 1940*. Babits Kiadó, Szekszárd, 1990; J.K. Zawodny: *Death in the Forest. The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1962; Korbonski: *The Polish underground ...* op. cit., pp. 144-150.

prisoners and holding between 14,500 and 14,800, only 449 avoided execution.¹²⁹² The Germans claimed – and today we know as a fact – that the Polish officers were murdered by the Soviets before 1941, before the Wehrmacht captured the area. The Polish government requested on April 17 that the International Red Cross examine the German assertions regarding the massacre. On April 21, the Soviets accused the Polish government of collusion with Hitler against the Allies. The emerging details of Katyn led to cancellation of the Soviet-Polish agreement on April 25, with the Soviet Union breaking off diplomatic contact with the émigré Polish government.

The deterioration and suspension of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union had serious effects on the future prospects of Benes' third concept. Benes received the first hint of trouble in March of 1941 when the Soviets signaled that they had serious reservations regarding the planned Czechoslovak-Polish confederation. Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London made a statement in the presence of Fierlinger – former Czechoslovak ambassador to Moscow until the embassy's closure in 1939, when he moved to London – that: "President Benes can return to Prague but I can't guarantee that Sikorski can ever return to Warsaw."¹²⁹³ In spite of the previous statement, Maisky informed Benes a few days after the signing of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement, on January 23, 1942, that the Soviet Union has no objection to the agreement. However, the Soviet Union is not contemplating on renouncing its territorial claims to the western Ukraine and western Belarus, meaning the pre-war Polish territories.¹²⁹⁴

Shortly after the conclusion of the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement, in July of 1941, Fierlinger again took up his previous post in Moscow and, as instructed by Benes, assured the Soviets – he was dealing with Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Vishinski – that the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation will carry out a Soviet-friendly policy. Benes himself informed ambassador Maisky on August 28 of a similar intent. In early February of 1942, only a few weeks after the signing of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement, Fierlinger sent a report from Moscow, which analyzed that, according to 'certain Soviet circles', the Czechoslovak policy direction that wishes to cooperate with the Poles is based on an unrealistic assessment of the future.¹²⁹⁵ At the same time, Bogomolov – the Soviet ambassador posted to the Czechoslovak government in London – conducted talks with the more important members of the Czechoslovak émigrés in which he expressed his 'personal' doubts about the confederation agreement signed with Poland.¹²⁹⁶ Benes was informed of these 'casual' Soviet comments, so it is not surprising that when he met Molotov at the Soviet embassy on June 9, 1942, the topic was raised. On this occasion, Benes assured Molotov that one of the fundamental tenets of Czechoslovak-Polish cooperation was that Poland establish good relations

¹²⁹² Ibid (Jerzewski), p. 10.

¹²⁹³ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 92.

¹²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 93.

¹²⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 94.

¹²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 95.

with the Soviet Union. In his reply, Molotov assented that, in that case, he has no objection against the agreement.¹²⁹⁷ Barely six weeks later, on July 16, Benes received a shock when his Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, reported that he was informed by Bogomolov that the Soviet Union has serious issues with the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement. To clarify the matter, Benes invited the ambassador to lunch the very same day. During the meal, the ambassador tried to defend himself by saying that ‘certain Soviet circles’ have reservations regarding Poland, not himself. Benes made serious efforts to salvage the Czechoslovak-Poland confederation by improving Soviet-Polish relations. After the suspension of Soviet-Polish diplomatic contact – April, 1943 – in a letter sent to the British government dated July 7, 1943, Molotov states that: “In the matter of the creation of a European federation of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece, with the possible inclusion of Hungary and Austria, the Soviet government is unwilling to commit itself to the creation of such a confederation, and does not deem it fitting that Hungary and Austria take part in it.”¹²⁹⁸

When Foreign Secretary Eden still presented the British plans for a federation at the foreign ministers’ conference in Moscow in October of 1943, the Soviets swept it off the conference table in a most determined manner. The Eastern European plan for federation, reasoned Molotov, reminds the Soviet people of the pre-WWI *cordon sanitaire* aimed at the Soviet Union.¹²⁹⁹

Benes was powerless against the increasingly aggressive Soviet position, distancing himself more and more from Sikorski.¹³⁰⁰ In the late evening hours of July 4, 1943, the plane carrying Sikorski to London crashed into the sea shortly after take-off from the British base on Gibraltar. Sikorski died in the accident. The reasons for the catastrophe (sabotage, human error, etc.) have never been found. He was followed in the post of president by the vice-president, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, who made a few more attempts to save the confederation plan – the final in December of 1943 when he visited Benes and asked to present the proposal to Stalin in his upcoming trip to Moscow.

In reality – as the minutes of the Stalin, Molotov and Benes discussions recorded – Benes had already given up his ideas about a federative union.¹³⁰¹ The plan for the confederation went into the dustbin, although it must be noted that Benes exerted serious diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Czechoslovak-Polish confederation. The two agreements made with Poland were serious steps towards confederation, and hence, the realization of his third concept. When it became clear that the Soviet

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁹⁸ Juhász, Gyula (ed.): *Magyar-brit titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* [Hungarian-British secret negotiations in 1943]. pp.158-159. old.

¹²⁹⁹ Romsics: *Amerikai béketervek ...* op. cit., p. 21.

¹³⁰⁰ Ádám: *A kisantant ...* op. cit., p. 155.

¹³⁰¹ Gulyás, László (ed.): *Az 1943 december Beneš-Sztálin-Molotov megbeszélések dokumentumai* [Documents of the 1943 conference between Beneš, Stalin and Molotov]. *Documenta Historica* XI, Szeged, 1993.

Union, playing the major role in the reorganization of the region, opposed the federation, he was forced to relinquish his third model.

3.2 THE FOURTH CONCEPT THE EVOLUTION OF THE FOURTH CONCEPT

Of all the models Benes constructed, the fourth is the most difficult to detail. His first concept was published in 1908 as a doctoral thesis, the second published in book form in 1916 and the third saw the light of day as an article in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* in 1942. The fourth model, however, was never published in such a comprehensive form. Thus, we must reconstruct it, after the fact, from four sources: 1. Benes' own memoirs from the Second World War.¹³⁰² In these, he recounts in detail his political actions but we must treat with particular skepticism his memoirs committed to paper after the fact – in full knowledge of events and outcomes – referring to such things as the deportation from the Sudetenland. 2. The extant minutes of the Benes-Stalin-Molotov meeting.¹³⁰³ 3. Chapter VIII of the government program of Košice and the Benes decrees, which contains a portion, but not all, of his latest model – the deportation of the minorities. In our view, this source only contains one aspect of the three that make up the complete model. 4. The statements he made during his second exile, especially radio speeches and letters.¹³⁰⁴ Of interest is that, in opposition to his first three constructs, the different elements of this model did not appear at the same time, some surfacing early in his exile, while other facets appear much later. Some aspects, again the deportation of minorities, are brought forward from his third concept. As a unified concept, the various features only came together into a coherent whole during 1944-1945. Taking all these into consideration, we feel that the fourth concept is built on three pillars:

The principle of continuity, meaning that the Munich agreement must be nullified and Czechoslovakia's borders reinstated to their pre-September 29, 1939 status.

The creation of a Czechoslovakian nation state, with the eradication of ethnic minorities.

Cooperation with the Soviet Union in the area of foreign policy.

The first pillar: The principle of continuity

This facet of the fourth concept was the first to appear, although, it can be considered a carry-over from his third concept as it was voiced by Benes in the spring of 1939. In actual fact, this defining pillar consists of three lesser aspects: the principle of continuity of the state, the nullification

¹³⁰² Beneš: *My war memoirs*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1954.

¹³⁰³ Gulyás, László (ed.): *Az 1943 december Beneš-Sztálin-Molotov megbeszélések dokumentumai* [The documents of the December 1943 Benes-Stalin-Molotov conference]. *Documenta Historica* 11. Szeged, 1993.

¹³⁰⁴ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit.

of the Munich Pact and the re-constitution of Czechoslovakia within its former borders.

At the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, March 14, 1939, Benes was a guest professor at the University of Chicago, where he immediately took action at the news. Only five days later, on March 19, he stated in a speech: "... I can solemnly state that Czechoslovakia's independence has not been legally obliterated. It continues to survive, live and exist."¹³⁰⁵ It is worth citing a longer passage from his Chicago speech of June 8, made to the former Siberian Legionnaires, in which he clearly affirms: "As it happens, the Munich Pact does not compel us because, on the one hand, it was never accepted constitutionally, and on the other because dictatorial Nazi Germany contravened constitutionality by the forcible and unilateral creation of the protectorate... We will go to war for the freedom of our old country and for the restoration of the former Czechoslovak Republic. We will not recognize or accept, either legally or politically, any *fait accompli*. We do not admit to any conquest, hence our country continues to exist legally. We do not accept the decision of the Vienna arbitration regarding Slovakia and Ruthenia, which Hungary has independently and forcibly occupied."¹³⁰⁶ To drive his point home, in his correspondence, he began to use the title of Second President of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Benes was able to have this first aspect – continuity – recognized internationally when Britain granted official status to the émigré Czechoslovak government on July 18, 1940, followed by the Soviet Union on July 18, 1941 and the United States, in two phases, on July 30, 1941 and October 26, 1942. However, official recognition, or assured continuity of the state, was a far cry from having the Munich agreement annulled and the original borders reinstated, as shown by Lord Halifax's letter of July 18, 1940 to Benes, in which the British politician reasons: "I would wish that it be clear that by the act of recognition, His Majesty's government does not wish to obligate itself to recognize or support any future border re-alignment in Central Europe."¹³⁰⁷

Benes was forced to continue in his attempts to have the Munich Pact annulled. In September of 1941, on the second anniversary of Munich, he sent a letter to the British Foreign Office in which he presented his arguments why, in his opinion, the Pact is invalid. In his view, the signature of the Czechoslovak government was extracted under duress and, furthermore, the agreement became null and void when Germany occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939.¹³⁰⁸ In his response, Churchill wrote on September 30: "The battle that we are now waging (meaning the British-*auth.*) is not merely our battle. It is also your battle! In reality, it is the battle of all those nations who put freedom ahead of humiliating slavery. This is a battle of the civilized nations for their right to live their lives in the manner of their choosing... We in Great Britain received with pride and gratitude your soldiers and airmen who came to us

¹³⁰⁵ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 39-46.

¹³⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 46-60.

¹³⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 441-443.

¹³⁰⁸ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 199.

over dangerous paths to take part in Great Britain's war with continued success, a war which is being waged for Czechoslovakia."¹³⁰⁹

We can sense how Churchill stressed the British-Czechoslovak common interest and alliance, yet was careful to avoid alluding to borders or any concrete action on the Munich agreement. It gave Benes some faint hope that Robert Bruce Lockhardt, the British diplomat delegated to the Czechoslovak émigré government, in his letter of November 11, 1940, informed Benes that, according to the British position, the Munich agreement has become nullified. The diplomat went on to state that the British government does not wish to bind itself to any one future boundary revision.¹³¹⁰

During 1941-1942, Benes and Jan Masaryk continued to campaign with the British for the annulment of Munich and the reinstatement of the Czechoslovak borders.¹³¹¹ Detlef Brandes came across an interesting document – a document somewhat contrary to what has been said before – in the archives Columbia University in New York, while doing research among the papers of Jaromir Smutný.¹³¹² Brandes found a file from the Foreign Office containing Lockhardt's report of May 22, 1941. Accordingly, during one of their conversations, Benes expressed willingness to cede German-populated border zones in western and northern Czechoslovakia and Silesia to reduce the number of the German minority living inside the country. The big problem, Benes said, was getting the approval of his countrymen. We can assume that his intention to cede territory was merely a tactical move on Benes' part. At the very same time as the date of the report, he is fighting for exactly the opposite – the reinstatement of the pre-Munich border. We can also surmise that the British Foreign Office was extremely guarded in regard to questions about borders, fearing that, if it recognizes Czechoslovakia's claim, other countries will also come forward with similar claims. The entire situation is well illustrated by Foreign Secretary Eden's July 18, 1941 letter to Jan Masaryk, in which he wrote: "... His Majesty's government equates the legal situation of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic and its government with the situation of the other allied heads of state and government currently residing in this country and the Czechoslovak government apparatus will be referred to in the near future as: Czechoslovak Republic, president of the Czechoslovak Republic, government of the Czechoslovak Republic, and embassy of the Czechoslovak Republic. Similarly, His Majesty's government also agrees that, in the future, and agreements signed with your government are made in the name of the Czechoslovak Republic... To avoid any possible

¹³⁰⁹ Beneš: *Sest let exilu* ... op. cit., pp. 443-445. [My humble apologies to W.S.C. and any other foreign language author if my rendition into English is less than accurate. I am translating from a translation. P.Cs.]

¹³¹⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs* ... op. cit., p. 302.

¹³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-203.

¹³¹² Detlef Brandes: *A müncheni diktátum egy megkésett cseh alternatívája* [A belated Czech alternative to the Munich decree]. *Történelmi Szemle* XXXVIII, issue 2-3, 1996, pp. 219-228.

mistakes, I would like to inform you that His Majesty's government maintains the position stated in my predecessor's letter (the July 1940 letter from Lord Halifax-*auth.*) in the matter of territorial questions. This letter does not compel us to recognize or support any future Central European boundary revision."¹³¹³

In contrast to the British stand, the Soviet Union supported Benes' aspirations to the fullest. Benes met Foreign Minister Molotov in London on July 9, 1942 who declared during the meeting that his country recognizes the Czechoslovak Republic with its pre-Munich borders and deems both the Munich agreement and subsequent events as invalid.¹³¹⁴ The real advance on the subject came after the retributions following the assassination of Heydrich. Two Czechoslovak soldiers, Josef Gabcik and Jan Kubis, trained in England and dropped by parachute, on May 27, 1942 killed Heydrich, the governor of the Moravian Protectorate.¹³¹⁵ In retaliation, the SS slaughtered the inhabitants of Lidice, a village 30km. from Prague.¹³¹⁶ According to Magda Adam, Benes had a substantial role in the preparation of the assassination.¹³¹⁷ Her view is supported by a book published in England in 1999, which suggests that Benes and the head of his intelligence organization, a Colonel Moravec, came to the conclusion at the end of 1941 that a high-ranking German official must be killed in occupied Czechoslovakia. A successful assassination would, of course, bring German retaliation to demonstrate the abyss between the victorious Germans and the vanquished Czechs. Hence, Benes ordered the killing of Heydrich, ignoring the cost in Czech lives that the retribution will bring.¹³¹⁸ We must hasten to point out that the author of the book is a reporter and not a historian; his statements are not supported by any documents, at all. It is, however, a fact that, after the Lidice massacre, the pace of talks increased between the British and the Czechoslovaks regarding the nullification of the Munich agreement. During the months of June and July, Benes, Jan Masaryk and Hubert Ripka met several times with Foreign Secretary Eden on this topic. Benes exerted some pressure on Eden by announcing that the Soviet Union will shortly announce that it holds the Munich agreement as null and void.¹³¹⁹ After a protracted diplomatic stand-off, the breakthrough came in a letter from Eden to Jan Masaryk on August 5, in which the Foreign Secretary informed his colleague that "... I wish to announce, on behalf of the United Kingdom, to His Excellency's government that, with regard to Germany's deliberate termination of the terms of the 1938 agreement pertaining to Czechoslovakia, in which His Majesty's government also took part, His Majesty's government relieves itself of any accountability. In the

¹³¹³ Beneš: *Sest let exilu* ... op. cit., pp. 459-460.

¹³¹⁴ Beneš: *Memoirs* ... op. cit., p. 204.

¹³¹⁵ Vojtech Mastný: *The Czechs under Nazi rule*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1969, pp. 183-207.

¹³¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 207-223.

¹³¹⁷ Adam: *Edvard Beneš* ... op. cit., p. 152.

¹³¹⁸ Charles Whiting: *Heydrich, Henchman of Death*. London, 1999.

¹³¹⁹ Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 42.

determination of Czechoslovak borders after the war, the events of 1938 and afterward will not influence our position.”¹³²⁰

The letter was, without a doubt, a great victory for Benes and the Czechoslovak exiles as it brought official nullification of the Munich Pact – from a Great Power which had a role in its creation. It should be noted that the letter makes an oblique reference that nullifying the Munich agreement did not automatically mean the reinstatement of Czechoslovakia’s original boundaries. Reading between the lines, the letter conveyed that the British wished to decide later on the boundary question. Not content with his victory with the British, Benes met on the following day with Maurice Dejean, Foreign Minister of De Gaulle’s Free French government and suggested that France, too, nullify the Munich accord. His suggestion found favorable reception. On September 29, 1942 – the fourth anniversary of Munich – General De Gaulle met with Prime Minister Šramek and Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk and repealed the agreement.¹³²¹ In his radio address of the same day, Benes recounted the event: “... with General De Gaulle’s signature, the policies of the new, free France spoke. This, with our ministers’ signatures, recalls the old, traditional friendship and officially announces that both countries, along with Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States and the other allies, renew European order and freedom, and renews the glory, greatness and stability of Czechoslovakia and France.”¹³²²

It is palpable that Benes had every right for these victorious words. His was a great achievement. After four years of effort, he succeeded in having two of the signatories of the Munich Pact – Britain and France – repudiate the agreement. If we add the support of the Soviet Union and the United States, Benes again succeeded – as in the First World War – in shepherding his émigré government into the victorious camp.

The second pillar: The creation of the Czechoslovak nation state

As is evident from the previous chapters, when Benes spoke of the rebirth of Czechoslovakia, he meant the pre-Munich country – the Brandes file notwithstanding. But restoring the original borders obviously meant the re-creation of all the ethnic problems. Thus, Benes was faced with the problem of how to avoid the surfacing of those problems in the renascent republic. From a logical point of view, the problem can be solved in two fundamental ways. One possible solution is to ensure the loyalty of the ethnic minorities to the state by granting them wide ranging ethnic rights. The other possibility was to make the country more homogeneous through ‘some means’. Between the wars, in Central Europe, this was meant to be achieved through aggressive assimilation. We can not reconstruct how Benes felt towards these two solutions. In his exile period speeches – mainly on the radio – and letters, he oscillated between the harshest threats and democratic promises.

¹³²⁰ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 473-474.

¹³²¹ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 43.

¹³²² Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 176-177.

The first tangible threat can be found in a letter to Rašín in November of 1938, where he wrote: “Naturally, we will never forgive anyone for their treason, for taking away our rights, and we will never give up any territory.”¹³²³ A good example of promises is his radio address of July 24, 1940 – several days after England recognized the émigré government in London – in which he extends a peaceable hand to the minorities, when he said: “I solemnly announce these political and legal fundamental rights, and I stress that they are all valid, for every citizen of our country, for Czechs, for Slovaks, for Germans and Carpatho-Ukrainians (Ruthenians) and the rest at home.”¹³²⁴ A year later, on July 24, 1941 – two days after the declaration of war between Germany and the Soviet Union – he took a very different tone in his speech. About those persons and countries he deemed to be traitors, he said: “We must never forget that Nazi pan-Germanism tried in this war to destroy all the Slav countries and nations, one after another... While parts of nations were mutually turned against each other (meaning the German minorities-*auth.*). And these Quislings, who played a role in Slovakia, these royal assassins in Croatia and perhaps shortly prisoners in the Ukraine, paid and trained by Berlin (alluding to the Vlasov army being organized-*auth.*), will be forever damned in the eyes of their nation, their history will forever condemn them and in no country will they be able to avoid their deserved punishment... I will finish my speech as the others: Perseverance, not retreat – today, more so than ever! The hour of punishment is approaching...”¹³²⁵

Kálmán Janics attributes Benes’ swings between the olive branch and revenge to the changes in the military-political constellation.¹³²⁶ To illustrate these swings in the day-to-day politics of the Czechoslovak exiles, let us review Benes’ course of action toward the Sudeten German émigrés.¹³²⁷ Between 1939 and 1945, a Sudeten German exile group existed in London.¹³²⁸ This group was formed after the after the March 1939 abolition of Czechoslovakia, mainly of those members of the self-suspended Sudeten German Social-Democratic Party (DSAP) who escaped to Poland or to the West (Sweden, Norway and England). In the spring of 1939, their most influential center, led by Ernst Paul, operated in Sweden

¹³²³ Ibid, p. 31.

¹³²⁴ Janics, Kálmán: *A hontalanság évei* [The exile years]. Hunnia Kiadó Kft., 1989, p. 85.

¹³²⁵ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 119-126.

¹³²⁶ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 58.

¹³²⁷ Detlef Brandes: *Grossbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten. Die polische, tschechoslowakische und jugoslawische Exilregierung im Londoner Exil 1939-1943*. Munich, 1988.

¹³²⁸ Kasza, Péter: *Az emigráció küzdelmei* [The struggles of the emigration]. In: Kasza, Péter (ed.): *A szudétanémet kérdés a második világháborúban. Edvard Benes és Wenzel Jaksch levelezése 1939-1943* [The Sudeten German question in the Second World War. Correspondence of Edvard Benes and Wenzel Jaksch 1939-1943]. *Documenta Historica* 45, Szeged, 2000.

but gradually the leadership position migrated to the London group headed by Wenzel Jaksch,¹³²⁹ the former head of the DSAP.

Since Benes directed the Czechoslovak émigrés from London after July of 1939 – after his return from America – the first contact took place as early as August 3.¹³³⁰ Benes and Jaksch met for over four hours. Benes explained to his partner that, based on legal continuity, he wished to organize an émigré Czechoslovak government, as soon as circumstances permit. Jaksch indicated to Benes that, if an émigré Czechoslovak government comes into being, the Sudeten Germans wish to secure representation in it, also that they envision the coexistence of Sudeten Germans and Czechoslovaks in the reborn Czechoslovakia based on the pre-Munich Fourth Plan (see the chapter regarding Runciman's Prague trip-*auth.*). In his reply, Benes indicated that he accepted the Fourth Plan to unmask Henlein and that currently he could only envision coexistence based on the Third Plan. They agreed to continue the dialogue based on mutual loyalty.

Between 1939 and 1942, Benes' chief aim was the nullification of the Munich Pact, recognition of the principle of continuity and the restoration of the original borders of Czechoslovakia. To achieve these goals, Benes needed the support of the Sudeten Germans, too, as the two groups were, as yet, mutually dependent on each other. Benes needed to demonstrate to his most important ally, England, that there will be no ethnic problems in the new Czechoslovakia because the Czechoslovak politicians are, already, coming to an agreement with the democratic forces of the Sudeten Germans, who previously comprised most of the problems. Jaksch was willing to support Benes' policy of revising the Munich agreement but, in return, he wanted guarantees for improving the situation of the German minority after the war.¹³³¹

The Sudeten German exiles clearly stated their position in this regard in the Holmhurst Declaration of March 11, 1940. According to the document: they are willing to form state with the Czech people (meaning that they support the revision of the Munich accord) but, in return, they ask for wide-ranging autonomy within a Czechoslovakia restructured along federative lines.¹³³² Under British pressure, Benes turned to the Sudeten Germans on October 12 with a proposal, offering six representative seats and one vice-presidential seat in the National Council that was formed the previous July. As a solution to the ethnic problem, he suggested the separation of the German and Czechoslovak territories within Czechoslovakia.¹³³³ This turn of events pointed in the direction that most of the Sudeten German aspirations would become reality and that Benes was willing to come to an agreement based on the Holmhurst Declaration. The

¹³²⁹ Friedrich Prinz (ed.): *Wenzel Jaksch-Edvard Beneš briefe und Dokumente aus dem Londoner Exil 1939-1943*. Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, Cologne, 1973.

¹³³⁰ Ibid, pp. 80-82.

¹³³¹ Kasza: *Az emigráció ...* op. cit., pp. 10-14.

¹³³² Prinz: *Wenzel Jaksch-Edvard Beneš ...* op. cit., pp. 83-90.

¹³³³ Kasza: *Az emigráció ...* op. cit., p. 16.

Germans went as far as naming the politicians who were to fill the National Council seats. According to Péter Kasza, an expert on the period, for Benes, the image of looking to create consensus was more important than actually creating consensus.¹³³⁴ This view is well illustrated by Benes letting negotiations run out of steam as soon as he was able – having acquired two powerful backers during 1941 for his continuity principle with the entry of the United States and the Soviet Union into the war. On September 22, 1941, he met with Jaksch and showed him a telegram from Czechoslovakia.¹³³⁵ According to the message, resistance back home would be greatly demoralized if German members were to be accepted into the National Council. Hence, Benes asked Jaksch to delay their date of entry until the psychological situation improved back home.¹³³⁶ The conference of Sudeten Germans on September 28 accepted Benes' request, not having much choice, and delayed taking their seats in the National Council.¹³³⁷ This was a tactical victory for Benes since, from this point forward, he could delay making any agreement with the Sudeten Germans, citing Czech public opinion.

During 1941-1942 there were a number of personal meetings and exchange of letters between Benes and the Sudeten German leaders but the tone veered more and more toward the difference of views between them.¹³³⁸ After the massacre in Lidice (May 1942), the British government unreservedly supported the revision of the Munich agreement, freeing Benes from having to demonstrate his willingness to come to an agreement with the Sudeten Germans. On July 11, 1942, Smutný recorded Benes' pithy observations on the Sudeten German question: "The British and the Sudeten Germans. It is merely a matter of prestige, I will not mention it again, will tell them (meaning the British-*auth.*) that Jaksch and his lot are no longer of interest to me, let them amuse each other."¹³³⁹

Shortly after his cynical comment, even the seeming cooperation with the Sudeten Germans was halted. His last personal meeting with Jaksch was on December 1,¹³⁴⁰ followed by a letter on December 10 (which we refer to as the December memorandum-*auth.*), the closing portion of which summarized the lessons of his negotiations with the Sudeten German leaders:

"9. I conclude that every decision of your party, including those of October of 1942, show one political direction in their entirety, aligned to the quotations above. Their content and spirit is essentially the following:

¹³³⁴ Ibid, p. 18.

¹³³⁵ Wenzel Jaksch: *Europas Weg nach Potsdam*. Stuttgart, 1958, pp. 364-365.

¹³³⁶ Ibid, pp. 364-365. In his memoirs, Jaksch questioned the authenticity of the telegram.

¹³³⁷ Prinz: *Wenzel Jaksch-Edvard Beneš ... op. cit.*, pp. 112-115.

¹³³⁸ Ibid, pp. 104-105, 117-118, 127-128; Kasza: *Az emigráció ... op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, 36-40, 40-41, 42-44.

¹³³⁹ Janics: *A hontalanság ... op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹³⁴⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs ... op. cit.*, p. 221.

We do not accept, and will not defend, the Republic's legal continuity.

Every statement of yours, regarding Czechoslovakia, is of a conditional nature, leaving the field open for other types of government.

It has never been clear, whether your Czechoslovak citizenship was permanent or merely a temporary fact, since you have Czechoslovak passports and the British and other authorities consider you Czechoslovaks.

Your people have never felt, and do not feel today, obligated to discharge a citizen's duties towards the Czechoslovak Republic. And not just when you gained international recognition of your legal standing but even today when different recognition has taken place. (See your decisions regarding military service.)

... but whether you are Czechoslovaks or not, whether you still have reservations regarding to which country you belong, and whether you stand by the country totally and without reservation or not – you still have not stated these unequivocally and clearly. Is this a tactic? Or uncertainty? Or rather decisiveness to keep the door open toward other solution?

10. ... I do not believe that this situation can be maintained for long.”¹³⁴¹

In effect, Benes openly broke with the Sudeten German émigrés on the grounds that they do not accept the legal continuity of the First Republic, and are not loyal to the Czechoslovak state. The Sudeten Germans were placed into an impossible situation, as one of their leaders fixed their position: “If Hitler wins the war, then we Socialist Germans are lost; if the Czechs win, we are also lost.”¹³⁴²

After breaking off negotiations with the Sudeten Germans, the scenario of the banishment of the minorities became an ever stronger thread in Benes' concept. We do not know the exact date when the idea of deportation was born but signs point to its inclusion in early plans: three German émigrés, Walter Kolarz, Johann Wolfgang Brügel and Leopold Goldschmidt, wrote a pamphlet in December of 1939, in France, titled “*Le problem du transfert de population Trois million Sudetes doivent-ils emigrer*”, in which the authors took a position against expulsion plans floating among the Czechoslovak émigré groups in France.¹³⁴³

It was elevated to official policy during May 1941 when Hubert Ripka – Under-Secretary of State for the provisional Czechoslovak government – wrote an article in the émigré newspaper *Czechoslovak*, urging deportation.¹³⁴⁴ This is in agreement with Kálmán Janics' view that, in the spring of 1941, members of the émigré Czechoslovak government in London were openly discussing, or debating among themselves, the

¹³⁴¹ Kasza: *Az emigráció ...* op. cit., pp. 44-58.

¹³⁴² Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 73.

¹³⁴³ The only extant copy of the manuscript can be found in the Seliger Archive of Stuttgart. It was found there by Péter Kasza.

¹³⁴⁴ Kasza: *Az emigráció ...* op. cit., p. 44.

deportation of the Germans.¹³⁴⁵ Naturally, Benes took steps to gain the support of the major Great Powers for his banishment plans (Today, it would be considered as ethnic cleansing, of which The Hague takes a dim view-*ed.*). First, he notified his British partners – during meetings on annulling the Munich accord – of his plans in this regard. On September 21, 1942, Peter Nichols, British ambassador to the provisional government, informed Benes that Great Britain approved the plan to deport the Germans from Czechoslovakia.¹³⁴⁶ After securing England’s assent, Benes began to work on securing the consent of the Soviet Union. He held several meetings with ambassador Bogomolov in the spring of 1943.¹³⁴⁷ On June 5, 1943, the Soviet diplomat informed Under-Secretary Ripka that the Soviet Union is in agreement with the deportation of the Germans. Ripka notified Benes, who was in Washington at the time, on the following day. Benes immediately made the contents of the telegram known to President Roosevelt.¹³⁴⁸

Benes attempted to link consistently the deportation of the German minority with the deportation of the Magyar minority, as well. He aimed to bring both minorities under the same criteria and hence, to be able to apply the same measures.¹³⁴⁹ In the latter part of 1943, Benes began to give voice to the idea that both minorities were collectively guilty in the Munich accord and the destruction of the First Republic.¹³⁵⁰ In November of 1942, Hubert Ripka held a lecture in Oxford in which he expounded that: “... Germany and Hungary used the ethnic minorities as a fifth column, to destroy the country in which these minorities lived ... hence, it is truly a legitimate desire which would force Germany and Hungary to receive their nationals and to look after those whom they used for offensive and military purpose.”¹³⁵¹

Making use of the previous arguments, Benes tried to convince the Allies to sanction the expulsion of the Magyar minority. His talks with Roosevelt (June 1943) bore no fruit on this matter. The American president agreed that, after the war, the numbers of the German minority within Czechoslovakia had to be reduced to a minimum through deportation but he disagreed with the expulsion of the Magyars. From the research of Ignác Romsics we learn that the Territorial Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee, created by Roosevelt – in actual fact, the American committee preparing for the peace talks – found, on the basis of the 1930 Czechoslovak census, 10 districts along the border (6 in western, 3 in central and 1 in eastern Slovakia) with absolute Magyar majorities. On the basis of ethnic correctness and fair play, the sub-committee recommended that these districts should belong to Hungary.¹³⁵² In the proposal worked

¹³⁴⁵ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 65.

¹³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹³⁴⁷ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 222.

¹³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵⁰ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 75.

¹³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹³⁵² Romsics: *Amerikai béketervek ...* op. cit.

out by the American experts, Hungary would have received, at a minimum, 7,000 km² and a population of 484,000 (of which 64% were Magyar). Under the maximum for the proposal, it would have meant 11,000 km² and 854,000 people (59% Magyar).¹³⁵³

When the time came for the meeting between Roosevelt and Benes, the American president was still considering minor Slovak-Hungarian border realignments and this prompted his rejection of Benes' suggestion for the deportation of the Magyars. During the fall, Benes sought to secure British approval for the expatriation of the Magyars. During October of 1943, he reported to Nicolson that, beside the 2 million Germans, – whose deportation the British government has previously approved – he also wished to deport 400,000 Magyars from Czechoslovakia. The British – similarly to the Americans – did not support the expulsion of the Magyar minority.¹³⁵⁴ Benes also raised his demand for the deportation of the Magyars at the December 1943 conference in Moscow. On this matter, Stalin and Molotov assured him of their support. At the end of 1943, the Allies all gave their consent to the deportation of the Germans, while only the Soviet Union was in favor of deportation of the Magyar minority, also.

The Great Powers had no concrete ideas of the mechanics, or the magnitude, of the proposed deportations from Czechoslovakia. In this regard, Benes received unexpected help from an unlikely source, from Winston Churchill, as an outcome of the Polish situation. At the Teheran Conference (November 28 – December 1, 1943) the Allies agreed that the western boundary of the Soviet Union will be the so-called Curzon Line, while the western boundary of Poland will be the line of the Oder and Neisse Rivers. In effect, Poland was shifted toward the West to compensate it for territories lost in the East.¹³⁵⁵ There was a significant German minority within Poland's 1937 borders but the proposed Oder-Neisse Line would have pushed the numbers even higher.¹³⁵⁶ In response, Churchill clearly urged in his letter to Stalin, dated February 20, 1944, that Germans be expelled from all of Poland.¹³⁵⁷ Roosevelt took the same view in a letter to Mikolajczyk, dated November 17, 1944, in which he supported the deportation of the Germans from Poland.¹³⁵⁸

Emboldened by these events, the Czechoslovak émigré government in London and the Polish National Liberation Committee in Lublin – the rival

¹³⁵³ Ibid, pp. 31-32, 90-117 and map 2.

¹³⁵⁴ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 77.

¹³⁵⁵ Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad ...* op. cit., pp. 74-79.

¹³⁵⁶ Joseph Rothschild: *Lengyelország története a két világháború között* [History of Poland between the World Wars]. *Studium Füzetek* 1, Szeged, 1995.

¹³⁵⁷ *A Szovjetunió, az Egyesült Államok és Nagy-Britannia kormányfőinek üzenetváltása 1941-1945* [The communications between the heads of the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain 1941-1945]. Budapest-Uzgorod, 1981, p. 233.

¹³⁵⁸ R. Süle, Andrea: *A közép és kelet-európai német kisebbség kitelepítése a második világháború után* [The deportation of the Central and Eastern European German minority after World War Two]. *Medvetánc* 1988/4 - 1989/1, p. 108.

Polish government created by the Soviet Union – sent a memorandum to the Allies in the fall of 1944 (the Poles on September 27), to secure their official approval for the deportation of their German minority.¹³⁵⁹

Riding on the coat-tails of the Polish effort, the Czechoslovak émigré government sent a memorandum on November 23 to the European Advisory Council in which it summarized its demands against Germany. The memorandum calculated that 2.5 million Germans will be left in Czechoslovakia after the war, of which approximately 1.5 million will have to be deported.¹³⁶⁰ In the memorandum, they again attempted to link the issues of the German and Magyar minorities, reasoning: “The presence of the Magyar minority in the Czechoslovak Republic is no less a dangerous problem than the question of the German minority. The Czechoslovak government reserves the right to take action – as stated in this memorandum – against any member of the Magyar minority who behaved in a hostile manner towards our Republic.”¹³⁶¹

America’s reply to the memorandum on January 31, 1945 made the matter of the deportations contingent on the decision of the Great Powers.¹³⁶² The British government responded on March 8 in a similar vein.¹³⁶³ Benes informed Nicolson in January of 1945 that he wishes to strip the Czechoslovakian Germans of their citizenship by enacting a law, and the creation of an office to handle the deportations. The British Foreign Office warned Benes to refrain from passing such a law and await the decision of the Great Powers in this matter.¹³⁶⁴ While England and America consistently rejected the idea of deportation for the Magyar minority, the Soviet Union consistently supported it since the December 1943 Moscow meeting between Benes and Stalin.

Parallel to a diplomatic solution – the expulsion of the Magyar minority with Allied blessing – the possibility arose during 1944 of preparing for the possibility of a *fait accompli*.¹³⁶⁵ On August 29, 1944, the center of Slovak resistance, the Slovak National Council, touched off the Slovak national revolt.¹³⁶⁶ The military headquarters, headed by Jan Golian, coordinated the plans for the revolution with the plans of the Red Army. The plan consisted of the two eastern Slovakian divisions clearing the road into Slovakia as the Red Army reached the Carpathian passes and opening the way for the Soviets. The plan failed – primarily due to the revolt breaking out at the wrong time – and the fighting concentrated

¹³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 109.

¹³⁶⁰ Karel Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi arca 1945-1948* [The true face of Czechoslovakia 1945-1948]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1993, p. 185; Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 89.

¹³⁶¹ Janics, Kálmán: *A kassai kormányprogram és a magyarság kollektív bűnössége* [The government program of Kosice and the collective crime of the Magyars]. Pannónia Kiadó, Pozsony, no date, p. 8.

¹³⁶² Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 185.

¹³⁶³ Ibid.

¹³⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 186.

¹³⁶⁵ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 656-657.

¹³⁶⁶ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 223-230.

mainly in central Slovakia where the rebels held contiguous territories. In the end, German troops occupied the center of the uprising, Banská Bystrica, on October 27. The military leaders of the revolt, General Rudolf Viest and Jan Golian, were executed, some of the soldiers were taken prisoners, the remainder began guerilla warfare while withdrawing into the mountains.

On October 6, 1944, while the rebels still held substantial territories in Central Slovakia, units of the Red Army – along with the Czechoslovak army organized in the Soviet Union – crossed into Slovakia through the Dukla Pass (in the Carpathians, on the Slovak-Polish border-*ed.*).¹³⁶⁷ The success of the Dukla maneuver would have meant that the Red Army would have advanced from North to South. It would not have taken much effort to ‘convince’ the Magyar population in the front zones to flee.¹³⁶⁸ In the October 6 edition of the paper *For a Free Czechoslovakia*, published in Moscow, a petition was addressed to the soldiers fighting in the Dukla Theater: “The battle now begins for the large-scale cleansing of the Czechoslovak Republic of Germans, Magyars and traitors.”¹³⁶⁹ It must also be noted that, on the orders of Stalin, a similar set piece was employed by the Red Army in Poland. Making use of the moving front, a majority of the German minority – 8 million according to some sources – were expelled from the country. However, making excellent use of the terrain in the Dukla area, the German army held up the Soviet advance. This event, and the crushing of the Slovak national revolt, saved the Czechoslovakian Magyar minority from being pushed out by the advancing front. In 1945, the Red Army advanced from the South, from the direction of Hungary, into Slovakia and thus the Magyars had nowhere to escape.

Benes, never one to miss an opportunity, tried to achieve his objective by diplomatic means, as well. One attempt was the November 23, 1944 memorandum addressed to the Allies (whose reception we covered in the previous pages). On another front, when the Hungarian-Soviet armistice talks began in Moscow (October 1944) with the Faraghó delegation, Benes turned to the Soviets with the request to have included among the terms the deportation of the Magyar population of Czechoslovakia, as well as a population exchange.¹³⁷⁰ The Soviets deflected the request, saying that questions of that nature belong in the realm of the peace talks and not of armistice negotiations.¹³⁷¹ The émigré government of London was not, however, that easily put off. Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs Hubert Ripka instructed Fierlinger by telegram on January 9, 1945 again to urge Moscow for the inclusion of the deportation matter into the armistice

¹³⁶⁷ Ránki, György: *A második világháború története* [History of the Second World War]. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1973, pp. 442-463; Gosztonyi: *Vihar Kelet-Európa ...* op. cit., pp. 225-226.

¹³⁶⁸ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 88.

¹³⁶⁹ Idézi Janics: *A kassai ...* op. cit., p. 8.

¹³⁷⁰ Gosztonyi, Péter: *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian army in the Second World War]. Európa Kiadó, Budapest, 1992, pp. 180-181.

¹³⁷¹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 98.

agreement.¹³⁷² Soviet diplomats were more understanding this time toward the Czechoslovak request. Molotov invited Fierlinger to attend the meeting where the Allies finalized the terms of the armistice to be signed with Hungary. At the January 15 meeting – England represented by Ambassador Balfour and America by Ambassador Harriman – Molotov ‘jokingly’ introduced the Czechoslovak request, in the following manner: “What, then, is to become of those Magyar citizens whom the Czechoslovaks do not like? I feel we should accept the proposal.”¹³⁷³ But Harriman strenuously opposed the proposal, while Balfour was not willing to discuss it, saying these types of questions properly belong at the peace conference. The position of the two western allies did not subsequently change and thus, in spite of support from Molotov, the armistice agreement signed by Hungary on January 20 contained no mention of such demands by Czechoslovakia.¹³⁷⁴

To sum up the preceding, we can say that, for a time, Benes did not take a clear stand regarding policies to be executed toward the minorities. His talks with the exiled Sudeten Germans bears out our view. Half a century later, it is difficult to ascertain definitively whether Benes was truly unable to decide between these two solutions – wide-ranging democracy for the minorities vs. aggressive homogenization – or if he was merely employing tactics. Knowing Benes’ political career, his thought process, tactical trickery and the events of the day, we agree with Péter Kasza’s view that Benes carried out talks with the Sudeten German exiles only under duress and for tactical reasons. As soon as the threat disappeared, he dropped the idea. Benes learned the lesson from Munich that a homogeneous Czechoslovak nation must be created. From the fact that Hitler was able to use the Sudeten Germans as a ‘fifth column’ against Czechoslovakia, he drew the conclusion that the assimilative policies of the inter-war years were a failure and more radical means must be used. This more radical means was the expulsion of national minorities. This drastic move required the sanction of the Great Powers and he made tremendous diplomatic efforts to try and emerge victorious. The results, however, were inconsistent with Washington and London supporting the deportation of the German minority but not of the Magyars. By 1945, Washington and London back-pedaled their earlier stand on deportation, attempting to defer a concrete decision to the peace conference. Only Moscow was an unhesitating supporter of his expulsion plan, not only of the Germans but the Magyars, as well.

The third pillar: Co-operation with the Soviet Union

As related previously, during 1943 the Soviet Union exhibited an increasingly marked resistance to Benes’ plan of a Czechoslovakia-Poland confederation, rejecting it as unacceptable. As a result, Benes relinquished his third concept and in his next – fourth – concept an important element was cordial relations with the Soviet Union. A notable success in this

¹³⁷² Ibid, pp. 98-99.

¹³⁷³ Ibid, p. 99.

¹³⁷⁴ Gosztonyi: *A magyar honvédség ...* op. cit., p. 243.

direction was his trip to Moscow, the dialogues and the Czechoslovak-Soviet signed while there.¹³⁷⁵

Benes arrived in Moscow after a circuitous route. He left England on November 23, 1943, flying to Gibraltar, Libya and on to Egypt, Baghdad and Tehran – where he met the Shah of Iran – finally landing in Baku, from where a train journey of several days finally deposited him in Moscow on December 11.¹³⁷⁶ Benes was met in Baghdad by Fierlinger and Alexander Korneychuk, a high ranking Soviet diplomat in the Foreign Ministry. During the week long Baghdad-Baku-Moscow leg of the trip, the three diplomats were able to discuss several topics: policy toward Germany and Hungary, the prospects of the Czechoslovak-Poland confederation, Moscow's Slav policy. Korneychuk prepared a memorandum for Stalin and Molotov who were thus briefed on Benes' viewpoint. It is not surprising, then, that the day after he arrived, the Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance and mutual assistance treaty was signed on December 12.¹³⁷⁷ The first paragraph of the agreement fixed that, after the war, both parties will follow a policy of mutual assistance and, within this framework, provide all manner of military and other aid to each other. Paragraph 2 stated that neither side will make a separate peace with Germany or its allies. In paragraph 3, the parties agreed that, if, in the post-war period, either of them became involved in hostilities with Germany or any other country, the other party will immediately offer all possible military aid. Paragraph 4 set down that, in the period after peace was restored, both parties will maintain close and friendly cooperation by respecting each other's independence and sovereignty, and acting in a manner not getting involved in the internal affairs of the other. Paragraph 5 mandated that the two parties not enter into any alliance aimed against the other party.

It is obvious from the text of the agreement that Benes meant to ensure the security of the newly reconstituted Czechoslovakia. He must have suspected, or deduced from the unfolding events, that the Red Army will be the one to expel German forces from Central Europe, hence, he must make plans for dealing with a significant Soviet military presence in the region at the end of the war and after. Thus, his foreign policy from 1943 was based, more and more, on an alliance with the Soviet Union. In the view of Magda Ádám, what was behind his (re)orientation was the desire to place Czechoslovak security on several foundations, not placing his sole trust in his western allies, who deserted him in 1938.¹³⁷⁸

We can not readily accept this view since, as we saw in the chapter dealing with Munich, the Soviet Union merely provided verbal support to Czechoslovakia in September of 1938, equally deserting Benes as Britain and France did. Rather, we accept Kaplan's view that the explanation lies in his recognition that, after the war, the Soviet Union will have a decisive role in Central Europe.¹³⁷⁹

¹³⁷⁵ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 187-192.

¹³⁷⁶ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., pp. 259-260.

¹³⁷⁷ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 559-563.

¹³⁷⁸ Ádám: *Edvard Beneš ...* op. cit., p. 156.

¹³⁷⁹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 6-14.

More likely, in our opinion, is that Benes thought that a victorious Soviet Union, militarily strong and geographically close, would have foreign policy interests in Central Europe that coincided with Czechoslovakia's, i.e., the major common enemy being Germany. That the Soviet Union threw out the Munich agreement and recognized Czechoslovakia with its pre-Munich borders, strengthened his conviction. It seems likely that Benes saw in the Soviet presence in Central Europe assurance that Czechoslovakia can finish settling accounts with Germany and Hungary. The wording of paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the agreement is definitely an indication of this conviction. Several historians have pointed out that Benes believed in Stalin, believed that, after the war, the Soviet Union would return to the path of democratization.¹³⁸⁰ Benes allegedly saw as logical signs of internal development the resurgence of Soviet patriotism – previously incompatible with Bolshevism –, the dissolution of the Comintern, some democratization of private life and the rehabilitation of the Pravoslav Church. He generalized these new aspects of Soviet society. In reality, he committed a serious error as these characteristics were not signs of internal growth but, as pointed out by Deutscher, tactical concessions made by Stalin to ensure victory.¹³⁸¹

Benes' conduct towards Stalin was, at once, both cautious and naïve. His caution is reflected in paragraph 4, where he felt it important to define mutual non-involvement in each other's internal affairs; his naiveté showing, by thinking that the paragraph will actually deter the Soviet Union from interfering. A segment of the Czechoslovak politicians warned Benes that the Soviet Union will make use of the war to spread Bolshevism through Central Europe but Benes quashed their contrary opinion.¹³⁸²

It is our view that the trip Benes made to Moscow and the friendship pact signed were events of crucial importance. The short term consequence was that the provisional government of Benes drifted into the Soviet sphere; long term, it meant that Czechoslovakia voluntarily tied its fate to the Soviet Union. To jump a bit forward in time, the Soviet oriented policy of Benes worked well for a while. Soviet foreign diplomacy was invaluable to Benes at various international forums in regard to the deportation of the Germans and Magyars, the restoration of the pre-Munich borders, with the exception of Ruthenia.

The explanation lies in the fact that, until the middle of 1947, Moscow followed differentiated policy towards Central and South-eastern European countries, between victor and vanquished states, and Slav and non-Slav people.¹³⁸³ Hence, in the Soviet view, in the Hungarian-Czechoslovak relation, Czechoslovakia was a victor, an ally and Slav country, while Hungary was vanquished, an enemy and non-Slav country. This view and its consequences can be clearly followed by Molotov's activities at the Paris peace conference in regard to Czechoslovakia and

¹³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 9; *Ádám: Edvard Beneš ... op. cit., p. 156.*

¹³⁸¹ Deutscher: *Sztálin ... op. cit. pp. 471-478.*

¹³⁸² Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ... op. cit., p. 9.*

¹³⁸³ Ibid, p. 13.

Hungary.¹³⁸⁴ Benes' Soviet oriented policy became a failure when, beginning in mid-1947, Moscow begins to reorganize its Central and South-eastern European sphere of influence into a well-organized block of power, in which it no longer differentiated between the countries. In light of this shift, arguments and problems between the satellites were frozen, all border and minority questions were swept under the rug for a long time to come.

Apart from signing the pact, Benes also carried out very important talks with the Soviet leaders regarding political questions affecting the future of Central Europe.¹³⁸⁵ We have written minutes of four such meetings, which we will discuss in greater detail later on.¹³⁸⁶

On December 12, 1943, the Soviets invited Benes to the Bolshoi Theater. The conversation recorded in the minutes took place during intermission.¹³⁸⁷ Representing the Soviet side were Stalin, Kalinin, Molotov, Voroshilov and Korneychuk, against Benes, Smutný and Fierlinger on the other side. We will quote extensively from the minutes as it shows Benes, the politician extraordinaire. Stalin opened by saying:

“Stalin: There is a serious question that I would like your opinion on. We would like to come to an agreement with Poland. Tell me how it is to be done and is it possible? You are in contact with London, and they know them.

Benes: I will answer it as: Our behavior towards Poland is somewhat cool, we have few dealings but maintain contact and know them. The Poles have maintained towards us a peculiar and not too good conduct. I must say, the main obstacle was always our relation with you. Then, a lot of things happened, for example, the Poles held it against us that, when they attacked you (here Benes hints at the April to October 1920 Soviet-Polish war-*auth.*) and were marching toward Kiev, our workers began a general strike and prevented the passage of those trains delivering military

¹³⁸⁴ Fülöp, Mihály: *A befejezetlen béke* [The unfinished peace]. Héttorony Kiadó, Budapest, 1996. end

¹³⁸⁵ András, Károly: *Beneš Moszkvában* [Benes in Moscow]. Part I. *Új Látóhatár*, 1985, June, pp. 137-167; Part II. *Új Látóhatár*, 1985, December, pp. 425-453.

¹³⁸⁶ During all his talks with the Soviet leaders, Benes had his chief of staff, Smutný, present who recorded the conversations. After the Czechoslovakian Communist takeover, Smutný was forced into exile. During his exile years, he worked on his papers but was not finished at his death in 1964. His papers were left to New York City's Columbia University Russian and East European Historical and Cultural Archives. An American historian of Czech descent, Vojtech Mastný, translated into English the mainly Czech-language notes and published them in 1972 in *The American Historical Review* under 'The Beneš-Stalin-Molotov conversation in December 1943'. These minutes were translated into Hungarian by the author of this work and published as *Az 1943. december Beneš-Sztálin-Molotov megbeszélések dokumentumai* [The documents of the December 1943 Benes-Stalin-Molotov conference] in *Documenta Historica*, issue XI, Szeged, 1993.

¹³⁸⁷ *Ibid* (*Documenta Historica*, issue XI), pp. 8-14.

equipment to Poland through our territory. In any case, we have always had territorial disagreements with the Poles throughout our history.

Stalin: This Teschen question... It is a ridiculous thing, yes?

Benes: It is, naturally. But it was always more than that. For twenty years, the Poles follow a policy inspired by France and especially the fatal error of Clemenceau at the peace conference. The idea was that the Poles act as a barrier, as a *cordon sanitaire* between yourselves and Germany. Now, after the collapse of France, the Poles think they can assume France's role.

Stalin: France is in the West, Poland in the East.

Benes: Of course, but they calculate that England will always need a partner in Europe and since they no longer can count on France, they must accept Poland as a partner. They do not believe that France will quickly recover after the war. As well, they do not correctly assess their own – a country of twenty million – opportunities. I am certain and I hope that after the war the Poles will come to their senses and it will be possible to cooperate with them.

Stalin: But only after the third war?

Benes: It will not be, I believe, after this war.

Voroshilov: There will be a new war.

Stalin: Nations can not be changed, they will again begin to prepare for war and after a time a new war will begin.

Benes: The situation in London among the Poles is as follows: They see the Red Army approaching Poland, that you will easily get there, and they have no influence over what will happen. [Stalin smiled and did not say that the Red Army will not penetrate into Poland.] (The comments in square brackets are by Smutnŷ-auth.) Because of it, they are trying very hard to come to an agreement with you, first of all, they would like to reestablish diplomatic contact. [Stalin and Molotov listened attentively but did not react.]”

Next, they discussed various Polish émigré politicians – Witos, Kaczynski, Raczynski, Tarnowski, Sosnkowski, Rackiewitz, Grabski, Zaleski – when Stalin mentioned a name and Benes willingly gave his opinion. The following is a sample:

“Stalin: What is happening with Zaleski? You know him?

Molotov: You must know him, the official foreign minister.

Benes: Yes, I know him well. But he is a man of the past. He is probably active behind the scenes but without significance. He will not return again...”

At the end of their conversation, Benes predicted the following future for the Poles: “I don't see the London government able to solve the basic problems of the new Poland and the question of relations with you. I suspect that the same thing will happen in Poland as in Yugoslavia today. In a certain time, a new government will be formed on Polish territory who will not know what to do with this London government. They may yet come to an agreement with this government. But in the interest of possible

collaboration with Poland, the present feudal and aristocratic caste must be eliminated. [The Russians show agreement.]

We have cited extensively from the minutes – we could have illustrated with a few lines from the Bolshoi theater meeting our conclusion that, in Moscow, Benes simply abandoned his previous partner-to-be in a federation, for the interests of Czechoslovakia – but felt that verbatim quotes illustrate more fully what actually happened in Moscow.

The second meeting took place on December 14, 1943 at 4:00PM, when Molotov, accompanied by Korneychuk, met Benes in his office (the minutes again taken by Smutný).¹³⁸⁸ In his opening, Benes reasoned that he would like to have the foreign policies of the two nations continue to be synchronized and suggested as the meeting's topic a deliberation over the fundamental questions of their mutual foreign policy. During the entire time of this meeting, Benes behaved in a very servile manner, several times making statements of loyalty. Two examples:

“I agree with you, our policies toward Germany we will align to yours, we will issue instructions to our diplomats in the same manner, and the government will also act in this manner.”¹³⁸⁹

“... Prague wants the same thing as Moscow.”¹³⁹⁰

Benes raised the question of the ‘break-up’ of Germany – the post-war division – but Molotov side-stepped the question, answering: “We can not yet discuss in detail how and into how many pieces it must be divided.”¹³⁹¹

The second question he raised concerned post-war reprisals, of which Benes said: “... We are preparing proceedings, such as lists of war criminals. We want to go to great lengths, as you do, too. We read your declaration, we agree. But there is a problem here: We have and will have increasing problems with the Americans and the British with regard to the punishment of war criminals. Our Germans are responsible for Munich, for the German invasion, and everything that came after. They are the first who must be held responsible for the war.”¹³⁹²

Then he returned to his favorite topic – one he already raised in Versailles in 1919-1920 – the question of Hungarian democratization: “... Next is the question of the Hungarians. ... An internal revolution must take place in Hungary in the interest of destroying feudalism. The British and the Americans are beginning to understand this. But they are afraid that the Hungarian revolution will be similar to the one after the previous war, Béla Kun and the others. That is why it is very important to occupy Hungary, I think it important that it be done not only by the British and Americans but

¹³⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 14-27.

¹³⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

¹³⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹³⁹¹ Ibid.

¹³⁹² Ibid.

that you should also take part. I can imagine what would happen if the British were there alone.”¹³⁹³

After this introduction – in which he grandly offered Hungary for occupation by the Soviets – he stated the most important Czechoslovak demands against Hungary, which were: “With regard to Hungary, we want to take control of the borders as before Munich.”¹³⁹⁴ Molotov’s reply reassured Benes when he said: “The Hungarians also need to be punished. In respect to occupation, we have a shorter road to get there than the others but the situation is still unclear and untimely.”¹³⁹⁵

Only after these did Benes raise the question of the deportation of the minorities, stressing British support in the matter: “... The British finally understood that it is impossible to go back to the 1938 situation... Churchill himself said: We will support the expulsion. Eden also categorically stated it in front of me. The British ambassador handed me a personal note in which he stated that they support the deportation of the greatest number of Germans from Czechoslovakia.”¹³⁹⁶ Then he went on to justify the necessity of deportation: “... Since the Czechoslovakian Germans started the war, they should bear the greatest responsibility and punishment.”¹³⁹⁷ Then, Benes names a concrete number: “There are about 2.8 million Germans in our country. If we are fortunate in getting rid of them all, good, if not, then at least 2 million.”¹³⁹⁸ Then they conversed about war reparations and the previous Czechoslovak land reforms. Close to the end, Molotov again raised the Polish topic, which leads us to believe that the matter was of serious interest to the Soviet Leaders. Again, a longer quotation from Benes must be employed to illustrate his policy toward Poland and the dramatic shift of ideas from what we labeled as his third concept.

“Benes: ... First, about the period before you were in the war. We needed recognition from the British but they insisted that they will only recognize us if we come to an agreement with the Poles. They exercised pressure towards a federation, as did the Poles, too. In spite of the pressure, I rejected from the beginning the idea of a federation. During the talks, my fundamental principles and conditions were the following:

There will be no federation of any kind,
at most, there may be a confederation,
this confederation will be *sui generis*.

Molotov: What do you mean by a confederation *sui generis*?

Benes: I did not want it called a confederation because it has a definite meaning in international law and I did not want lawyers coming to

¹³⁹³ Ibid, p. 18.

¹³⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

¹³⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 20.

¹³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 21.

us and telling us that our confederation has to be like this or that. That is why we added that the confederation between us and the Poles is special, unique, *sui generis*, and that its characteristics must be defined by further talks. Then I laid down the following negotiation conditions, of which I informed the Poles, the British and Bogomolov, also:

There will be nothing between us and the Poles if the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union is not cordial, and if we are unable to resolve our boundary differences in a friendly manner, and there will not be any manner of confederation without radical internal Polish changes.

Molotov: What do you mean by this?

Benes: It is evident that there can be no amicable relationship and strong cooperation between two countries with totally different internal structure – feudalism in Poland, developed democracy in our country. We sign no agreements abroad, we just confer, the people back home must discuss. In the end, the Poles tried to make use of the dialogue against us, and you too, that is why I ended the impossible situation. I broke off the negotiations, suspending solutions for all questions...¹³⁹⁹

Benes crowned his betrayal of the Poles by replying to Molotov – who reminded him that the exiles he led still signed two agreements with the Poles (November 11, 1940 and January 21, 1942) – that the 1940 agreement was of little significance and that of 1942 was invalid. His exact words were: “Well, this agreement (referring to the 1942 agreement-*auth.*) is void, we told each other that our work is finished, I told Mikolajczyk that I do not feel bound by this declaration...¹⁴⁰⁰ With that statement, the second round of meetings ended.

On December 16, at 4:00PM, Molotov, accompanied by Korneychuk and Lebedev, again met with Benes, Fierlinger and Smutný.¹⁴⁰¹ The early parts of the meeting were devoted to details of Czechoslovak-Soviet military cooperation. Similar to the meeting devoted to foreign policy, Benes again took a subservient role to the Soviets, sacrificing his country’s interests. His words: “After this war, we must retain close military cooperation with you. It means we must coordinate our plans, our military principles must align to your experience, we must standardize weapons and ammunition, we must cooperate in air defense, in defining air space, and so on.”¹⁴⁰²

Switching to economic matters, he continues: “The situation is the same with economic cooperation... Our economic orientation must be changed. Up to now, 80% was toward the West – this will definitely change. I am thinking of an orientation of 50% West and 50% East.”¹⁴⁰³

¹³⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 27-43.

¹⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁴⁰³ Ibid, p. 30.

Next, Benes raised the question of punishing war criminals and, within it the question of Slovakia (to be treated in more detail in the next chapter, Benes and the Slovak Question-*auth.*). Then, the dialog turned to the various Central European countries, exchanging information in turn on Austria, Romania and Yugoslavia. At this point, Benes informed Molotov that he is in contact with Maniu, who would agree to cede Bessarabia and the Bukovina to the Soviet Union, in return for Romania being given Transylvania.¹⁴⁰⁴

The background to Benes' comment was that, in the summer of 1943, the Romanian government received an offer from Benes for a Little Entente-like cooperation, in return for which the possibility was raised for the reinstatement of the old (meaning pre-August 30, 1940) Romanian-Hungarian border.¹⁴⁰⁵ From the beginning of his first period of exile, from 1915, Benes always tried to carry out politics on an international level, always trying to link Czechoslovakia's interests with other international matters that promised success. This is reflected in his offer regarding Transylvania. In our opinion, Benes was certain that a victorious Soviet Union would not return Bessarabia and the Bukovina to Romania but would probably compensate for it with Transylvania. Hence, he was betting on an almost sure thing but still made a run at weakening one of his chief enemies, Hungary, while seemingly putting Romania in his debt. After his Moscow meetings, Benes informed Maniu by letter that: "Russia holds as their own, the territories of Bessarabia and the northern Bukovina, but feels favorably about the return of Transylvania to Romania." Then added: Stalin is very displeased with Hungary and follows with interest the activities of Maniu.¹⁴⁰⁶

To return to the Benes-Molotov conference, Molotov replied to the suggestion regarding Transylvania: "The Magyars are your common enemy. We make a distinction among those who attacked us, between Hungary and Romania, too. The attitude of the Hungarians was much worse towards us. On the matter of Transylvania, last summer we sent a written memorandum to the British, noting that the question was not resolved equitably from the Romanian perspective."¹⁴⁰⁷

During the course of this meeting, and for the first time in the conference, the question of Ruthenia was raised. In light of later developments (Ruthenia's annexation to the Soviet Union), we quote the dialogue *verbatim*:

"Benes: Regarding the Carpatho-Ukrainians, we have had enough arguments about it. The old question is the rivalry between the Russian and Ukrainian elements. During the Austro-Hungarian period, this argument was deliberately fuelled, the people turned against each other. I think that, in matters of education and language, the situation in Carpatho-Ukraine should be harmonized to that on the other side of the border. The Magyars

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Romsics: *Bethlen István ... op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁷ *Documenta Historica*, issue XI, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

tried to create another Slav, the 'native', but I am against it. In Slav matters, we should plan on integration, not disintegration.

Molotov: Very good."¹⁴⁰⁸

We quoted from the minutes to refute a certain view that Benes was 'selling' Ruthenia during his Moscow conference. The quote bears out that this was certainly not the case at the December 16 meeting. Benes envisioned this territory's future within a reconstituted Czechoslovakia. Molotov's laconic 'Very good' ended the matter.

The topic of discussion next turned to Czechoslovak territory and the matter of the boundaries. While on it, Benes contradicted himself, saying on the one hand that he insist on the restoration of the pre-Munich boundaries, then also admitting that he is willing to cede certain land in the interest of deporting the Germans.¹⁴⁰⁹ Then, he explained that they also wanted to expel the Magyars, or have a population exchange with Hungary for their Slovaks and to reinstate the borders. Molotov was mainly interested in the stand that the western allies took in this matter. Benes replied that the British and the Americans were familiar with the fundamentals of the plan and, in principle, are not opposed. It must be noted that his response only partially covered the truth, as the two western allies did, indeed, give their sanction for the deportation of the Germans but rejected a similar solution for the Magyars. Close to the end of their discussions, Molotov informed Benes about the Polish border situation, saying that, in the East, the Soviets would like the Curzon Line, while in the West, the Oder River was their choice for Poland's borders. Of course, it meant that 3 – 3.5 million Germans would have to be moved out of Poland. Interestingly, the matter of Ruthenia also cropped up here, as they were using maps during the talks. At one point, Benes unrolled a map, on which the Czechoslovak-Soviet border was not marked. Molotov, naturally, noticed it immediately, at which Benes drew out another map on which it was drawn in (as expected, Ruthenia formed a part of Czechoslovakia).¹⁴¹⁰ We may draw the conclusion from this scene – and the previous dialogue – that it probably occurred to Benes at this time that he may have to cede Ruthenia to the Soviets. Hence, when he was talking about the affiliation of Ruthenia, and using the map with the undefined border, he was essentially testing his Soviet partner, trying to coax his intent. But Molotov, being a sly, old hand at the diplomatic game, did not rise to the bait, made no concrete statement regarding Ruthenia's future.

The next meeting took place on December 18, between Stalin and Molotov on one side and Benes and Fierlinger on the other. Alas, no minutes survive of this meeting, merely a short note by Smutný.¹⁴¹¹ According to it, Stalin opened with a statement that the risk exists that the British may make a separate peace with Germany. Benes reassured Stalin the Churchill and Eden were committed allies and would not make a

¹⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁴¹¹ Ibid, pp. 43-44.

separate peace. The territorial questions again came to the fore, of which Smutný tersely recorded: “Benes discussed with Stalin all our territorial issues. Stalin spoke of Glatz and Ratibor. Stalin understood why Benes was willing – under terms – to give the Germans those ‘goodies’ – as Stalin called them – after Benes explained that, with the ‘goodies’, we would be rid of 500,000 Germans.”¹⁴¹²

Smutný also recorded that Stalin used the harshest words with regard to the Magyars. “They are worse than the Germans, who use them as executioners”, he said.¹⁴¹³

Parallel to his talks with Stalin and Molotov, Benes also had talks with the leaders of the émigré Czechoslovak Communists in Moscow, with Gottwald, Kopecky, Slánský and Sverma.¹⁴¹⁴ According to Taborsky, Benes had six long meetings with them.¹⁴¹⁵ Unfortunately, Smutný did not make minutes of these meetings. The various treatises¹⁴¹⁶ are based on two sources. There are the Second World War memoirs of Benes, which are to be taken with strong reservations.¹⁴¹⁷ Then, there are the six minutes of the meetings recorded by Gottwald and associates, plus the extensive correspondence of Gottwald, in which he informs the comrades in London of the Moscow meetings.¹⁴¹⁸

On the basis of the Gottwald minutes, András Károly emphasizes that the Moscow Communists attacked Benes, without pity, during his Moscow stay. They confronted him with all his errors and omissions, real or imagined.¹⁴¹⁹ This statement is closely paralleled in Benes’ memoirs, in which he expounds that the Communists created uncomfortable moments for him during the conference by raising the issue of the acceptance of the Munich agreement.¹⁴²⁰ Gottwald and the Communists were of the opinion that it was wrong for Benes to resign and that he should have accepted, under any circumstances, the war against Hitler.¹⁴²¹ Benes tried to explain to his debating partners his acceptance of the Munich accord by citing the international situation of the moment – the appeasement policy of France and Britain, the malice of Poland and Hungary, – the disloyal behavior of the Agrarian Party and a segment of the Slovaks, and the weakly defended Austrian-Czechoslovak border (defensive fortifications were missing in

¹⁴¹² Ibid, p. 44.

¹⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁴¹⁴ Paul E. Zinner: *Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1948*. Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, New York-London, 1963, pp. 71-183.

¹⁴¹⁵ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁴¹⁶ For the Beneš-Gottwald meetings, see Ibid, pp. 170-175; András: *Beneš Moszkvában ...* op. cit., pp. 446-449; Zeman-Klíma: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 187-190; Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 19-20.

¹⁴¹⁷ Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., pp. 268-275.

¹⁴¹⁸ Milos Klimes et al (eds.): *Cesta ke květnu*. The Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Publishing, Prague, 1965, pp. 25-68.

¹⁴¹⁹ András: *Beneš Moszkvában ...* op. cit. p. 447.

¹⁴²⁰ Beneš: *Memoirs ..* op. cit., pp. 268-269.

¹⁴²¹ Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 82.

this sector-*auth.*). Finally, the two sides agreed to drop this issue, focusing instead on the future.

Benes was then able to inform the Muscovites of the achievements of the exiles in the West (in England and the United States). He gave a detailed account of the western émigrés, beginning with Munich up to 1943. Benes asked the Communists to delegate two persons to the government in London, offering two ministerial posts, but the Communists declined to take any part. They merely agreed to have members of the Czechoslovak Communist exiles in London take part in the National Council (the provisional government).¹⁴²² In Taborsky's view, the Communists did not enter into the London government because they did not want it to return victorious from exile. Instead, they were planning a new government, made up of the London group and representatives of the resistance back home, naturally under Communist dominance.¹⁴²³

They also discussed, in detail, the post-war political make-up of the country. Gottwald urged the creation of the national councils. In the end, they came to firm conclusions on two questions: 1. A National Front will be created, consisting of representatives of the exiles and the resistance at home. 2. Democratic elections will be held six months after the conclusion of the war.

The reintroduction of the party system was also discussed. Benes was extremely wary on this topic in his memoirs, merely noting that the possible banning of the Agrarian Party was mentioned. What really transpired between him and the Communists – what agreements were made – for the future of the party system and democracy was hinted at in his December 21 radio speech from Moscow: “Immediately after the war, our country will freely create its own political system, with a limited number of parties – I personally would like to see three – in a truly democratic people's state, which will represent the whole of the national electorate, excluding from it and its advantages only the Fascists, Nazis and all the traitors of this war.”¹⁴²⁴

One important issue that arose was the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities. The Communists under Gottwald held a milder viewpoint on the deportation of the Magyars, than Benes. The head of the London émigrés wanted to punish every member of the minorities, while the Moscow Communist exiles urged a more differentiated approach to the mass deportation of the minority population, meaning they did not want to expatriate the ‘democratic masses’ of the minorities – meaning the Communist Germans and Magyars.¹⁴²⁵ A more different viewpoint only emerged during the following year when they took a more radical stand on the Magyar question. In his radio message of May 11, 1944, Gottwald now said: “... the moment is near when we can begin to clear our country of the

¹⁴²² Ibid, p. 81; Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁴²³ Ibid (Taborsky).

¹⁴²⁴ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 227.

¹⁴²⁵ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 19; Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 83-84.

traitorous German and Magyar trash.”¹⁴²⁶ We can suspect that the change behind Gottwald’s position was the acceptance by the Soviet government (April 1944) of the plan to expel the Magyar minority.¹⁴²⁷

Finally, we must here make note of the fact that Benes ‘neglected’ to record in his memoirs that the topic of the Slovaks also was covered with the Communists (to be covered in more detail in the next chapter).

The most important conclusion for Benes arising out of the Benes-Gottwald meetings was that, in the re-emerging Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party will be a serious contender. Of this, he received clear indication from Gottwald who stated that the first prime minister of post-war Czechoslovakia must be a Left-winger – as was the case in 1945 when the Social-Democrat Fierlinger received the post – since the elections will bring a significant victory for the Left.¹⁴²⁸ Benes assessed his conferences with the Communist leaders as a success. On a few questions, he must have realized that there were differences of view between the civil and Communist exiles but they agreed on the major questions of post-war politics and thus were able to avoid the antagonistic divisions that characterized the Polish and Yugoslav resistance.¹⁴²⁹

Benes ended his Moscow consultations on December 21, 1943. His return trip to London took him via Baku, Cairo and Algeria. On January 4, he interrupted his travel in Marrakech to meet with Churchill who was recuperating there and update him on the outcome of the Moscow meetings. According to his memoirs, the British prime minister was especially interested in the stand that the Soviets took on the Polish question.¹⁴³⁰ During their talk, the ‘distant’ past cropped up. Churchill recounted in his memoirs that Benes told him that in 1935 Hitler made an offer to him (meaning Benes-*auth.*) that Germany would honor Czechoslovakia’s territorial integrity if Czechoslovakia guarantees to remain neutral in a possible French-German war. Benes, however, hastened to state that, in that eventuality, Czechoslovakia would hurry to the aid of France due to treaty obligations.¹⁴³¹ We feel that with this small anecdote, he wanted to demonstrate to the British PM the loyalty of the Czechoslovaks – and himself personally – after the Moscow conference.

After the Marrakech side trip, Benes arrived back in London on January 6, where he continued his wide ranging diplomatic activities. As in the inter-war period, he again tried to devote himself to ‘world politics’, to mediate between parties.¹⁴³² As an activity in this manner, he met with Mikolajczyk, the head of the émigré Polish government in London, and reported on his Moscow trip.¹⁴³³ He informed the Polish prime minister that the Soviet Union is ready to renew diplomatic contacts with the exile

¹⁴²⁶ Ibid (Janics), p. 85.

¹⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 85.

¹⁴²⁸ Zinner: *Communist Strategy* ... op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁴²⁹ Beneš: *Memoirs* ... op. cit., p. 275.

¹⁴³⁰ Ibid, pp. 265-266.

¹⁴³¹ Churchill: *A második* ... op. cit., pp. 89-90.

¹⁴³² Beneš: *Memoirs* ... op. cit., p. 266.

¹⁴³³ Ibid, pp. 267-268.

Polish government but that there is a cost. They asked that the Poles end their anti-Soviet propaganda – begun after the Katyn incident – and recognize the Curzon Line as the Soviet-Polish boundary-to-be. In his memoirs, Benes records Mikolajczyk as saying that he knows his countrymen and he does not think he could get them to accept the Curzon Line as the new border. Benes cautioned Mikolajczyk that he also talked to Churchill in Marrakech on the topic – Benes acting the international mediator – and the PM felt that the Soviet proposal was the final chance for a Soviet-Polish agreement.

As an aside, Stalin created his own Polish government on July 21, 1944 in Lublin in competition with the London exile government. As a result Mikolajczyk flew to Moscow in the fall of 1944 and attempted to come to an agreement with Stalin. In the end, Mikolajczyk gave in to British (and American) pressure and – abandoned by the majority of his London supporters – signed an agreement in June of 1945 with the Soviets accepting the Curzon Line as the eastern boundary of Poland. His Peasant Party garnered one third of the seats in the new coalition government and National Council.¹⁴³⁴

To return to Benes, his biographer Taborsky observed that the months following December, 1943 were the happiest ones during his second exile. Benes must have come to realize during 1944 that the alliance with the Soviet Union was not a bed of roses but came with serious drawbacks. But, at the end of 1943 and a few months that followed, it looked as if fate smiled on his vision for the reemerging Czechoslovakia – a bridge between East and West.¹⁴³⁵ This illusion was furthered by the agreement signed with the Soviets on May 8, 1944 (“Agreement regarding the relationship between the Czechoslovak executive and the Soviet military headquarters after Soviet forces enter Czechoslovak territory”,¹⁴³⁶). Paragraph 6 laid down that: “As soon as any part of the territory ceases to be a military theater of operation, the Czechoslovak government assumes complete power of public administration and renders wide ranging assistance to the Soviet (Allied) headquarters through civil and military organizations.”¹⁴³⁷

Benes must have been clear in December of 1943 that the Red Army was going to clear eastern Europe of Wehrmacht troops and that there would be a significant Soviet military presence in the region with which to deal. On top of that, Soviet politicians bluntly told Benes – and the British – that they are not willing to entertain any kind of confederative conglomeration in the region. In response, Benes, who wrote an extensive article in *Foreign Affairs* regarding the necessity of a Central European confederation for a future Czechoslovakia, ostentatiously disavowed his earlier stand in Moscow, citing British pressure and Polish intrigue as explanation. The long quotations from the minutes of the meetings clearly illustrate the flexible nature of Benes’ politics, the servile tone he adopts in

¹⁴³⁴ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., pp. 22-23; Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad ...* op. cit., pp. 76-81.

¹⁴³⁵ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁴³⁶ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 483-485.

¹⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 484.

the hopes of achieving his goal, the ease with which he abandons one plan for another. (I think that the words of the minutes of the meetings bring us closer to his style and to a clearer understanding of his methods-*auth.*) In recognizing the future power balance in Central Europe, Benes made an alliance with the Soviet Union the cornerstone of his new – and fourth – concept. In all likelihood, these considerations were behind his pilgrimage to Moscow, his signing the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement. The minutes clearly illustrate that Benes was striving to accomplish three things during the Moscow meetings. One, the reinstatement of the original borders of Czechoslovakia; two, the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities; and three, the creation – and prominent display – of a loyal military, political and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. His meetings with the Communist faction of Czechoslovak exiles in Moscow can be explained by his fear of the development of sharply opposing points of view between the factions as was the case of the Polish and Yugoslav émigrés. He tried to come to an agreement with the Communist to prevent it.

Being aware of the events that occurred between 1944 and 1948, we can state that the conferences and meeting in Moscow prepared the road to his second, and final, downfall in February of 1948.

BENEŠ AND THE SLOVAK QUESTION

In his fourth plan, the deportation of the minorities was the means to creating the Czechoslovak nation state. Beginning in March of 1939, when Czechoslovakia ceased to be, he opined – increasingly so in the second half of his exile – that this event was the result of the ‘treason’ of the minorities living in the country, mainly the Germans but also the Magyars. (Eerily similar to Hitler blaming the Jews for the ills of Germany-*ed.*) Although the two minority groups did, indeed, play a significant role in the destabilization of Czechoslovakia – we need not go into whose fault it was that Czechoslovakia ended up with such sizable minorities – yet the unsolved relationship between Czechs and Slovaks was at least as pressing an issue. Between the two wars, Czech policies did not (wish to?) take note of the emergence and strengthening of Slovak national consciousness and rigidly maintained the ideal of Czechoslovakism, as defined during the first war by Masaryk and Benes, an image of a unified Czechoslovak nation.¹⁴³⁸ The end of the Czechoslovak state became a spring of Slovak nationalism. The decree of the First Slovak Republic gave the mortal blow to Czechoslovakia.¹⁴³⁹

¹⁴³⁸ Gulyás: *Zúzzátok szét* ... op. cit.; Gulyás: *Egy sikeres emigráció* ... op. cit.; Szarka: *Egy XX. századi* ... op. cit., pp. 429-465.

¹⁴³⁹ Hoensch: *The Slovak republic* ... op. cit.; Kamanec: *Trauma*. ... op. cit.; Kovač: *Szlovákia története* ... op. cit., pp. 207-232; Lettrich: *History of* ... op. cit., pp. 123-192; Szarka: *A szlovákok* ... op. cit., pp. 173-187; Vigh, Károly: *A szlovákiai magyarság sorsa* [The fate of the Magyars of Slovakia]. Bereményi Kiadó, Budapest, no date, pp. 101-115.

From the very beginning of his self-imposed exile, Benes posted the aim of the rebirth of Czechoslovakia as his goal but there was no consensus among the émigrés how the reunification of Bohemia and Slovakia was to be accomplished. As we saw earlier, among the western exiles – around ex-prime minister Milan Hodža and former ambassador Štefan Osuský – a Slovak nationalistic group formed, which wanted to ensure greater independence for Slovaks in the new Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁴⁰ In the face of it all, Benes clung rigidly to his view of Czechoslovakism, an idea of a homogeneous country, denying recognition of the fact that Slovaks formed an separate nation and not merely a branch of the Czechoslovaks. Hodža and Osuský were slowly sidelined from the leadership between 1939 and 1941 for endangering his vision. But, the unified view of the western émigrés was thus created.

On March 13, 1943 – two days before the fourth anniversary of the birth of a Slovak state – Benes turned to the Slovaks with an appeal in his customary radio address.¹⁴⁴¹ The appeal rested on the supposition that the Germans suffered a catastrophic defeat on the eastern front and reasoned that the Allies would shortly win the war; that the Czechoslovak Republic still exists, legally and politically – the events of 1938 and 1939 notwithstanding – and will certainly be in the camp of the victors. The émigrés are hard at work reinstating the pre-Munich boundaries of Czechoslovakia; apart from the Axis powers, other countries have not recognized Slovakia (This was a sizable fib on his part because, beside Germany and Hungary, the Soviet Union recognized Slovakia after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, as well as the Vatican, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Spain, Sweden, Romania, Bulgaria, Holland, Belgium, Finland, Yugoslavia /later Croatia/, Manchuria, the Chinese government of Nanking, Vichy France, Costa Rica and Ecuador-auth.);¹⁴⁴² and that Tiso and his associates are guilty for having betrayed Czechoslovakia in 1938-1939. Benes characterized Tiso's role and activities as: "... along with Hitler, this unfortunate priest announced in a traitorous fashion on March 14 and 15, 1939, the creation of the so-called Slovak state, which they fabricated through base treason against the common Czechoslovak homeland, in alliance with Henlein, Hitler and Horthy, then declared war on our Slav brethren, the Poles, aided the persecution and destruction of the Catholic Poland by the Nazi Hitler, later declaring war on the friendly people living in the Soviet Union, and finally on England and America, who, a mere 24 years ago helped the Slovaks to rid themselves of the Magyars and retain their national existence."¹⁴⁴³

He continued his line of reasoning: Slovakia will emerge from the war on the losing side. The defeated Slovak people can only be saved by the Czechoslovak government from the terrible consequences of defeat. That is to say, Slovakia is in great danger as the Hungarians will do

¹⁴⁴⁰ Vájlok: *A csehszlovák ...* op. cit., pp. 9-11, 18-26.

¹⁴⁴¹ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., pp. 196-202.

¹⁴⁴² Kamanec: *Trauma ...* op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁴⁴³ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 198.

anything to keep after the war the territories awarded through the first Vienna arbitral award.

In this portion of his appeal to the Slovaks, Benes makes skillful use of the ‘carrot and stick’ method, threats (the specter of Hungarian revisions) and promises (we are on the winning side and are working for you, too) following one another. Then he appeals to the Slovaks for resistance: “... attack this regime (meaning Tiso’s Slovakia-*auth.*) wherever you can, do everything possible against the Germans and the Hungarians, destroy their war machinery, oppose them at all times everywhere, wherever you can, to revenge all that they have done against us, against all of us and our Allies – Tiso, Tuka and their regime! Only with the Allies can you regain what the current Tisos and Tukas forcibly and unjustly took from you with their allies in Berlin, Rome and Budapest and which is yours by right. Here, we will do everything that we can with the Allies on behalf of Slovakia.”¹⁴⁴⁴

On closing, Benes said a few words about the future: “I say to you completely openly that we must honestly admit between ourselves what we did wrong in the republic and must highlight things in an objective and brotherly manner, and fix everything in the future! ... We will amend the system and institutions of our common republic, and will create through mutual agreement, democratically and familiarly, that new republic that will suffice the needs of everyone in the Czechoslovak nation and as demanded by the new European situation. This will be freely decided by the Czech and Slovak people for themselves.”¹⁴⁴⁵

In these sentences, Benes struck a seemingly self-critical tone yet said nothing tangible about the organization of a new Czechoslovakia or the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks; nothing concrete, merely vague promises about democracy and brotherly cooperation. His caution with regard to Slovakia was not accidental. The ‘Czechoslovak politicians’ of the exile – the National Socialist, the People’s Party and the Social-Democrats – all espoused the theory of Czechoslovakism but there were two sizable opposing camps. There was the opposition at home, more precisely the opposition in Slovakia; then, there were the Communist émigrés in Moscow who stressed the independent aspect of the Slovak nation and who entertained thoughts of a federation. They consistently and doggedly defended their ideas against Benes and his London supporters. The Slovak question came up several time while Benes was in Moscow, conferring with Stalin and Molotov.¹⁴⁴⁶ The Communist would have liked to accomplish that the London government recognized the independent existence of the Slovak nation but Benes, who clung inflexibly to the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation, rejected this wish. The question was deferred for later resolution.

We feel that it was not by accident that the Slovak question arose at the December 16 Benes-Molotov meeting, if by strange fashion:

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 201.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 202.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 172; Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., pp. 82-83.

“Benes: ... The second question is rather sensitive. I would like it if your government exerted some pressure – thus supporting us – and demand the punishment of all those people in Slovakia who are responsible for the war against the Soviet Union. I would like if you, in a kindly manner, urged us to punish severely those who are responsible for pro-war statements, those who cooperated with the Germans, those who made concessions to them.

Molotov /smiles and nods understandingly/: In all fairness, we can not very well put the Slovaks in the same category as the Germans and the Magyars.

Benes: No, we can't. I want to dispose of this question between the two of us. I do not want the Slovak question to become an international matter; it is our domestic matter. But I do not want for someone to grab the internal political opportunity and use it as proof that the Czechs are persecuting the Slovaks. That is why I am asking for your help. What they are doing is completely unacceptable to us, from the perspective of all the Slovaks, too, we must judge them the same as those who worked for the Germans against the Slavs.

Molotov: I understand. What kind of Soviet support do you need against the Slovaks? Who do you want to punish?

Benes: Tuka, Šaňo Mach, Tiso, Gašpar, Medricky, Čatloš – they must be strung up, and the rest, also. It is difficult to catch the guilty among the Slovaks. All of Slovakia is one big clan and they take good care of themselves: one brother in London, one brother in Slovakia. If the Allies lose, the brother in Slovakia will rescue the brother abroad; the other way, the brother abroad helps the one at home. Of course, I exaggerate but I want to demonstrate how difficult it is for us Czechs, and for the Slovaks themselves, to punish war criminals. But it is important to do it, in any case, in the interest of the future and morality.”¹⁴⁴⁷

Shocking words from the émigré President of Czechoslovakia – a seemingly exemplary democrat, a champion of the principles of the League of Nations – asking for help from a foreign power to hang his political enemies, all under the guise of morality. But then, we already saw enough examples in his political career of treachery, cheating, lies and abandoning former allies, yet we look on this episode as the undeniable, absolute lowest point. During the same meeting, Benes once more raised the Slovak question in the following manner:

“Benes: I left the sixth point to the end. I would merely like to inform you of our post-war plans of internal organization. We have already discussed it here with the Communist members of our parliament and were able to come to an agreement (yet another monstrous falsehood since, as we have seen previously, they were unable to agree-*auth.*). First, the problem of decentralization.

Molotov: Slovakia will be autonomous?

¹⁴⁴⁷ *Documenta Historica* vol. XI, pp. 31-32.

Benes: No, I do not want decentralization as an administrative method. I do not want to use the term 'autonomy' because everyone understands it differently, everyone gives a different meaning to this word. I already said this to Hlinka. We are democrats, we must discuss the question after the war and the decentralization will be of such measure as we can agree on. I want to give more to the Slovaks than what they had under their first republic but we must agree on this. /Points out the appropriate administrative units on a map: Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine/ (This last was Smutný's aside-*auth.*) All will have a local parliament. Slovakia will get a new capital because Bratislava is on the border. ...¹⁴⁴⁸

Molotov, it can be noted, did not express comments on Benes' plans. The Stalin-Molotov-Benes conference ended without significant comment by the Soviets on the future organization of Czechoslovakia, whether a centralized, monolithic state or a federation.

Eight months after the talks, in August of 1944, Benes received a absolute indication that the Soviet Union was mulling the Slovak question. This was the second time when the question of a Soviet-Slovakia came up. Here, we must back-track a little in time. The question of Soviet-Slovakia first came up during 1940-1941 – around the time that the Soviet Union annexed those East European territories as detailed in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – as the Slovak Communists were hoping that their country would also be incorporated into the Soviet Union, hence their motto "For a Soviet-Slovakia".¹⁴⁴⁹ However, the Slovak Communists had to give up their goal – on Moscow's orders.¹⁴⁵⁰ The idea of Soviet-Slovakia came up for the second time around August of 1944. On April 8, 1944, the Red Army reached the crest of the Carpathians, the former northern boundary of Czechoslovakia. During the summer, the Minister of War for the Slovak Republic, Ferdinand Čatloš – one of those mentioned by name by Benes to Molotov as one who 'must hang' after the war – began secret talks with the Soviets.¹⁴⁵¹ In secret, Čatloš collaborated with the Slovak Communists and, on August 4, 1944, sent a delegation to Moscow.¹⁴⁵² One member of the delegation was Karol Šmidke, one of the leaders of the Slovak Communists (also a member of the executive of the illegal Slovak National Council). The delegation an offer in Moscow that consisted of two points: 1. Slovakia will withdraw the declaration of war made to the Soviet Union and its allies and, at the same time, declare war on Hungary and sever relations with Germany. The Slovak military will retain its status as the army of independent Slovakia but will, at once, become part of the Red Army. 2. The Slovak Communists will make contact with the Soviet Union and guarantee that the post-war resolution of the Slovak question will be according to the interests of the Soviet Union.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 38.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Kamanec: *Trauma* ... op. cit., pp. 61, 144.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁴⁵¹ Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 176.

¹⁴⁵² Ibid.

The offer Čatloš made was essentially the same as the earlier Soviet-Slovakia dream. The Soviets did not inform Benes of the secret talks. He learned of them after August 17 when Mikulas Ferenc (a member of the delegation) was able to shake off his Soviet minders and met Colonel Heliodor Pika (a member of the military mission in Moscow of the London émigré government). The Soviet's secretiveness worried Benes, who instructed Fierlinger to protest against the secret Slovak-Soviet talks.¹⁴⁵³ The Soviets only replied to Benes on September 5, indicating that the ongoing talks with the Čatloš delegation have come to an end (meaning without any results-*auth.*). Benes could now relax as this meant the last gasp of the Soviet-Slovakia proposition.

Benes always spoke of a unified Czechoslovakia all through his émigré period and urged a return to the governmental structure of the first Czechoslovak Republic. The majority of the Slovak resistance back home did not agree. At the end of 1943 – Christmas to be exact – the civil block and the Communists met in secret in Bratislava and created a common central organization of resistance, the Slovak National Council (SNC), and signed the Christmas Agreement of undertaking, consisting of four points:

- “1. Direct the struggle of the Slovak nation, united and centrally, for the termination of the Nazi German order, being served by usurpers of political power at home, too.
2. At the first possible moment, assume complete political, legislative, military and administrative-executive power in Slovakia and exercise it according to the wishes of the people until such time as the people's freely elected representatives can assume all power.
3. After assuming power, as soon as possible, the Slovak National Council will see to it that the people can freely and without hindrance nominate such representatives to whom the Slovak National Council can cede all power.
4. The activities of the Slovak National Council will be in coordination with the Czechoslovak government and the entirety of the resistance abroad, recognizing and supporting their work internationally and militarily.”¹⁴⁵⁴

In essence, the Christmas Agreement can be filed under ‘successes’ by Benes since the SNC clearly stated in a separate point the cooperation with the émigrés, although it was contrary to Benes’ plans in declaring the principle of equality as: “We wish for the Slovak nation and the Czech nation, as the closest related Slav nations, to address their future fate in Czech-Slovakia, the common country of Slovaks and Czechs, on the basis of equality.”¹⁴⁵⁵ The meaning was clear, that the Slovak nation was a nation just like the Czech and only on this basis would an internal restructuring between Slovaks and Czechs possible. Benes only took a position regarding the Agreement on March 29, 1944, when he lauded it and, in general, agreed with it.¹⁴⁵⁶

¹⁴⁵³ Ibid, p. 177.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Janics: *A hontalanság* ... op. cit., p. 111.

On August 29, 1944, the Slovak national revolt erupted, an SNC declaration on September 1 announced that it had assumed power on Slovakian territory, that it had the sole power to speak on behalf of the people, and declared the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak Republic.¹⁴⁵⁷ In fact, the declaration merely reiterated the content of the Christmas Agreement. It is important to stress that, in the intent of the SNC declaration, the reconstituted Czechoslovakia would have had to be a federative state. Because of that, the SNC recognized the London government of Benes but, at the same time, it wished for Benes to accept – finally – the self-government clause in its program.

Benes devoted his radio address of September 8 to the Slovak revolt, of which three elements are of interest. He described the revolt as an action of the London government, as well as declaring the military units in revolt as part of the Czechoslovak army.¹⁴⁵⁸ It is important to note that, from his point, the birth of the SNC was fundamentally dangerous, since it was an ‘organization’ that did not receive its legitimacy from the London émigré government. To top it off, the SNC demonstrated, through the revolt, that it could marshal actual military might, which is what prompted Benes to declare these units a part of the Czechoslovak army, in an attempt to draw the SNC under the authority of the London government.

Thirdly, for propaganda reasons, Benes described the uprising at length in these terms: “... Slovakia has risen in a decisive, solemn and general national revolt and sided, for all the world to see, with the Czechoslovak Republic, which a majority of its population has never forsaken spiritually! Its soldiers and partisans are now fighting with the Germans and the shameful Slovak Quislings, righting with their blood and resolute battle all that happened in 1938. This will be the most magnificent page of Slovak history, no earlier uprising and no other current battle is comparable in significance or grandeur to this chapter of Slovak and Czech liberation struggles.”¹⁴⁵⁹

While mouthing a propaganda speech meant for public consumption, Benes immediately swung into political action. On September 23, he sent a message to the leaders of the revolution, stating his wish that they accept a plenipotentiary representative of the London government who – as a commissar – would assume the powers of the SNC. The SNC rejected his demand, saying that as the highest organ of the Slovak people, it alone exercises the powers of legislation and government. It was with this background that negotiations began in London between Benes and an SNC delegation (Jan Ursíny, Ladislav Novomesky, Mirko Vesel), during which Benes temporarily backed down and recognized Slovak independence and the authority of the SNC.¹⁴⁶⁰

According to the reasoning of Dušan Kovač, Benes was only trying to gain time, hoping for eventual victory for his plan for a reborn Czechoslovakia. His calculation proved correct; the Slovak revolution

¹⁴⁵⁷ Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 204-227.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Beneš: *Sest let exilu ...* op. cit., p. 238.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 236.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 229.

failed¹⁴⁶¹ and the position of Slovakia within the reorganized country remained an open question, to surface again March of 1945 in Moscow.

EARLY SIGNS OF THE FAILURE OF THE FOURTH CONCEPT

In Moscow again or, the birth of a government platform

After the previous short chapter on the relationship of Benes and the Slovaks, let us return to the events of history. After his December 1943 trip, Benes was pleased with himself. He was certain that the Soviet-Czechoslovak relationship was excellent, that he could achieve his most urgent foreign policy initiatives – the deportation of the minorities and the reinstatement of the pre-Munich borders – with Soviet help, and that the Soviet Union would respect the country's internal affairs. Moreover, he felt that he was successful in creating the correct relationship with the Czechoslovak Communists, too.¹⁴⁶² He was to suffer disappointment in these suppositions even before the war ended. With Stalin backing them, the Czechoslovak Communists were able to push the London government further and further into the background; the Carpatho-Ukraine /Ruthenia/ was acquired by the Soviet Union.

Early in 1945, Fierlinger – by now more of an agent of the Czechoslovak Communists than the London government – relayed to Benes Moscow's wish that the President and his government return to Czechoslovakia through the Soviet Union. According to Hanzal, Benes was not enraptured by the idea because signs were starting to emerge that hinted at the real face of the Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Communists exiles.¹⁴⁶³ There was the report from the head of the government delegation sent to Moscow, František Nemeč, who recounted hostile steps being felt from the Soviet political police and members of the Communist émigrés.¹⁴⁶⁴ Benes' pessimism was fanned by the possibility arising that Slovakia may become a Soviet member republic and the Soviet behavior exhibited in the matter of the Carpatho-Ukraine.

Taborsky, in his book dealing with Benes, writes the following, based on Ladislav Feierbend's (the Minister of Finance of the London government) retelling of the events of March 1945: Benes was, by now, clear on the real state of events and “was extremely skeptic about the outcome of international events... regarded his post-war country without optimism... and was weighing the probability of another world war within twenty years.”¹⁴⁶⁵

Feierbend recommended to Benes on March 9 that “... Mr. President, don't go to Moscow!” suggesting that Benes cite medical problems (Benes actually had been beset with medical problems at the time-*auth.*) and

¹⁴⁶¹ Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 214-227.

¹⁴⁶² András: *Beneš Moszkvában ...* op. cit., pp. 449-450; Beneš: *Memoirs ...* op. cit., p. 275.

¹⁴⁶³ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 60; Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., pp. 87-99.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Ibid (Hanzal).

¹⁴⁶⁵ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 195.

decline the invitation from Moscow.¹⁴⁶⁶ Benes, however, rejected the suggestion and, with the members of the London émigré government, was once again in Moscow on March 17. The façade reminded one of the 1943 occasion: a smiling Molotov on hand to receive him, the obligatory visit to the Bolshoi Theater.

Members of the London civic and Moscow Communist parties, as well as the delegates of the Slovak National Council met from March 22 to 29, to come to an agreement on the issues.¹⁴⁶⁷ During the sessions, they worked out, or more accurately accepted, a government program. In reality, Gottwald and the Communists worked out a proposed program before the meetings and the other representatives – lacking their own prepared program – looked on this as the starting point, merely tinkering with it. Hence, the reality was that the accepted government program was that of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, with ‘minor’ modifications. Its name comes from the place where it was announced, Kosice /Kassa/.¹⁴⁶⁸ The program contained 16 chapters, of which two are important for our purposes: the reconciliation of the relationship between the Czech and Slovak nations and the matter of punishment of the minorities.

One of the key topics was the relationship between the Czech and Slovak nations. In this area, Benes already had a serious tactical handicap even before the beginning of the Moscow consultations. The SNC published a memorandum on March 2, 1945, in which it demanded that the new government recognize the SNC as “the sole representative of the political will of the Slovak nation” which has “the legal right to act in the name of Slovakia and decide in matters pertaining to Slovakia”. It further demanded the endorsement of its position “by the Slovak government and Parliament”. This memorandum formed the negotiating basis for the SNC delegates who left for Moscow on March 7, arriving on the 12th. Benes and the London contingent only arrived on the 17th, giving the Communist and SNC delegates five days to form a common – essentially anti-Benes – platform.

Benes and the London group were not willing to accept the memorandum as the starting point for the forum. They did not realize that the Czechoslovakism represented by them, and the necessarily centralized government it represented, was completely unacceptable to the Slovaks, who wanted a federation. Benes wanted to organize Czechoslovakia on the principle of ‘three provinces’, the Slovaks on ‘two nations’. The rigid position of Benes and his followers – plus the already mentioned five day head start – enabled the SNC delegates and the Communists to arrive at essentially the same position.¹⁴⁶⁹ During the three sided negotiations, the

¹⁴⁶⁶ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 228.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 103; Janics: *A hatalanság ...* op. cit., p. 95; Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., pp. 90-95; Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 229-238.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Borsiné Toldy, Mária – Szokolay, Katalin (eds.): *Harc a hatalomért 1943-1948* [Battle for power 1943-1948]. Budapest, 1979, vol I, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, pp. 82-113.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 223.

SNC delegates tabled their hard demands, which were adamantly refused by Benes and his side, allowing the Communists to present a compromise solution to the deadlock which, in almost every case – and probably not by accident – was closer to the Slovak position than Benes'. Thus, of the original SNC memorandum items, the major ones made it into the government platform (recognition of the independent status of the Slovak nation, the equality of the two nations, the position of the SNC as the representative of the Slovak nation, and the recognition of the chief Slovak governmental bodies). A portion of the temporary economic decisions and the definition of areas of responsibility (competencies) between the central and Slovak bodies were addressed by directing them to a later decision by the representatives of the two nations.¹⁴⁷⁰ In the view of Dušan Kovač, in this question, a compromise was arrived at that had characteristics of both centralization and federalism.¹⁴⁷¹

In opposition to the long and heated debate on the relationship of the two nations (in one instance, Benes' group walked out), an agreement was quickly reached on the question of the German and Magyar minority. Chapter VIII of the government platform did not announce the deportation of the minorities, in contravention to Benes' wish, but stated it as:

“Those terrible experiences received by the Czechs and Slovaks at the hands of the German and Magyar minorities – which minorities mainly became the means of conquest against the Republic ..., force the new Czechoslovakia to take profound and permanent steps ... Those German and Magyar nationals of the Czechoslovak Republic who possessed citizenship before the 1938 Munich Pact and are anti-Fascists, will be reinstated in their Czechoslovak citizenship and their return to the country will be made possible; similarly, those who carried out active fighting before Munich against Henlein and the irredentist Magyar parties in defense of Czechoslovakia, those who suffered persecution after Munich and March 15 from the German and Hungarian political bodies for their resistance or loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic, those jailed or sent to camps, or those who were forced to flee abroad from the German and Hungarian terror and there took part in the anti-Fascist battle for Czechoslovakia.

The citizenship of the other (meaning those who were not anti-Fascists-*auth.*) German and Magyar nationality Czechoslovak citizens is rescinded. These citizens may again apply for Czechoslovak citizenship but, at the same time, the Republic's authorities maintain the right that every application may be judged individually. Those Germans and Magyars, who are cited before a court and sentenced for crimes against the Republic and the Czech and Slovak nations, are stripped of their Czechoslovak citizenship and are banished from the Republic for all time, if not sentenced to death.”¹⁴⁷²

The government platform, then, stated Benes' radical plan – the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities – in a far more

¹⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 221-222.

¹⁴⁷¹ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 232.

¹⁴⁷² Borsiné Toldy–Szokolay: *Harc a hatalomért ...* op. cit., pp. 95-96.

charitable manner. It is true that all the German and Magyar populace were to be stripped of citizenship – except the anti-Fascists, who, in the estimate of Janics, were about 1% - but the option was open for available for them to opt for regaining it. The government program did not openly incorporate the deportation of the minorities, softening Benes' radical position, but was still extremely harsh.

Kálmán Janics, in his work on the Kosice government platform, held that the previously mentioned chapter VIII was drafted with suitably sly tactic, everywhere vague on questions pertaining to the Magyars, leaving the door open for the possibility of harsher methods later, either by force or by diplomacy. One such drastic diplomatic means will be the wresting of the population exchange.¹⁴⁷³ During the course of adopting and accepting the government program, Benes was forced to retreat several times before the Communists. He was forced to adopt the Communist position on two key questions: the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks in the new Czechoslovakia and the extent of punishment meted out to the minorities. The questions legitimately arise: Was Benes right in accepting the Soviet invitation and having gone to Moscow? Would it not have been better for his government to return home straight from London?

It is, however, an undeniable fact that Benes and his government did go to Moscow and, once there, the government program – and indeed the make-up of the government – was born under the strenuous pressure exerted by the Czechoslovak Communists and their Soviet allies. These pressures forced him to change his position, as already noted, on several questions, to 'compromise'. In spite of the preceding events, we agree with his decision to return to Czechoslovakia through Moscow. In all likelihood, if Benes had stayed in London, he would only have been able to return at the end of the war, in May, while the émigré Communists, with the backing of the Red Army, would have had a six week to two month head start in the race for political power. Benes could well have found himself in the situation where the returning Muscovites and the local resistance leaders have already divided the power base. It seems that Benes was forced to choose between two bad choices. In either case, though, we can't but observe that taking any action in March of 1945 was a lost cause, having already been doomed in December of 1943. The most important element of the fourth concept, good relations with the Soviet Union and a belief that the Soviet Union will not interfere in Czechoslovak affairs after the war, led him to sign the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement. His own signature prepared the subsequent downfall of his plan.

The second omen: The loss of sub-Carpathia

Beside the defeat suffered in the creation of the government program, Benes fated to having to accept another loss during 1945, that of sub-Carpathia /variously also Carpatho-Ukraine, Ruthenia/. Czechoslovakia's only post-war border modification was the annexation of sub-Carpathia to the Soviet Union. This was an odd revision in that a victorious country – Czechoslovakia – ceded territory to its own ally. From the very beginning

¹⁴⁷³ Janics: *A kassai ...* op. cit., p. 15.

of his second exile, Benes strived to have the pre-Munich boundaries of Czechoslovakia reinstated, and the Soviets concurred. In all the documents between Moscow and the London government, the Soviets always agreed to the necessity of the pre-Munich borders as an integral part of restoring Czechoslovakia. And in any case, during the war years, sub-Carpathia was part of an enemy Hungary. For a long while, there was no difference of opinion between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia regarding the fate of sub-Carpathia. Karel Kaplan, on the other hand, feels that, as early as 1939, Benes was weighing the possibility of ceding all or part of sub-Carpathia to the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁷⁴ Zseliczky, in his book, agrees with Kaplan's analysis, citing a meeting between Benes and Maisky at the end of 1939, where Benes said: "In the matter of Podkarpatska Rus, you and I will find the solution."¹⁴⁷⁵ Taborsky's book also supports this interpretation recounting a meeting on August 28, 1941 between Benes and Maisky during which they came to the conclusion that sub-Carpathia can not become a part of either Hungary or Poland, hence, must belong to Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁷⁶

The signs seem to indicate that, while Benes wished to reinstate Czechoslovakia with its pre-Munich borders intact, he was willing to give up all or part of sub-Carpathia in lieu of Soviet support. During his discussions with Soviet diplomats (Maisky and Bogomolov), he raised the matter several times.¹⁴⁷⁷ The Soviets, for their part, did not react to his offers. When Benes met Molotov in London in June of 1942, the Soviet Foreign Minister said that the Soviet Union assumes that the reborn Czechoslovakia will have its pre-war boundary.¹⁴⁷⁸ That Benes remained unsure of the future of sub-Carpathia is illustrated by the small 'trick' he employed when meeting Molotov on December 13, 1943. In discussion the Curzon Line, he 'accidentally' produced a map on which the Soviet-Czechoslovak was not defined. Molotov noted it but offered no further comment, no insight on the fate of the territory.¹⁴⁷⁹

We feel that with this 'unmarked' map, Benes was testing the water but Molotov refused the bait. Unfortunately, of the negotiations with Stalin two days later, on December 18, Smutný's terse notes only recorded: "Benes discussed all our territorial questions with Stalin..."¹⁴⁸⁰ We can deduce that the Soviets did not state a claim to sub-Carpathia at this meeting from the statement issued after the meeting: "3. Munich Pact. Confirm that the SU maintains the position, which was previously agreed on by Benes and Molotov in London, according to which the Soviet Union,

¹⁴⁷⁴ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 24-25.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Zseliczky, Béla: *Kárpátalja a cseh és a szovjet politika érdekerében 1920-1945* [Sub-Carpathia in the sphere of Czech and Soviet politics 1920-1945]. Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, p. 64.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 182.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Zseliczky: *Kárpátalja a cseh ...* op. cit., pp. 65-68.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 183.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Documenta Historica* XI, p. 42.

¹⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

not having taken part in the Munich agreement, will always recognize Czechoslovakia's national and territorial integrity."¹⁴⁸¹

The Soviets, thus, once again reiterated their acceptance of the pre-Munich Czechoslovak borders. Thus, it is not surprising that Benes, when reporting on the Moscow trip to the Cabinet on February 3, 1944, stated: "When we were discussing Slovakia and Podkarpatska Rus, the matter came up as merely an internal political issue."¹⁴⁸² The events, however, turned out otherwise.

Remember paragraph 6 of the agreement signed with the Soviet Union on May 8, 1944, cited a few pages previously?¹⁴⁸³ On the basis of that paragraph, Benes instructed František Nemeč, a minister in the London government, to travel as a government representative to Hus on October 27, 1944 and assume control of public administration in the Soviet 'liberated' sub-Carpathia. Nemeč and his staff began organizing the national administrative bodies and restarted Czechoslovak statehood in the settlements under their administration (the Berehovo-Hus-Rahov line).¹⁴⁸⁴ We can imagine Benes' surprise when the radio station in the Red Army occupied Uzghorod spoke of the 'eternal dream' of the 'Ukrainians in trans-Carpathia' to 'live as part of the greater family of Ukrainians.'¹⁴⁸⁵ Almost at the same time, the Red Army began to draft the young Ruthenians and, at about the same time, to deport all Magyar males between 18 and 55 of age.¹⁴⁸⁶

Benes lodged a complaint with Lebedev – the Soviet ambassador to the London émigré government – who professed ignorance but promised to make enquiries in Moscow.¹⁴⁸⁷

Molotov's rude response arrived the following day, composed of: "The minister requests you to cease opposition to the acceptance of the Carpatho-Ukrainian volunteers into the Red Army."¹⁴⁸⁸

Benes explained to Lebedev that the Ruthenians are Czechoslovak citizens and, thus, belong in the Czechoslovak army and their joining a foreign military is tantamount to desertion. Lebedev flew to Moscow on November 15 to gather information personally. They never met again as Lebedev never returned to London (he was later being appointed as ambassador to Warsaw).

¹⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸² *Documenta Historica* XI, pp. 45-49.

¹⁴⁸³ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 262.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 198, 213-215.

¹⁴⁸⁵ For the transmission of radio station with the call sign *Voice of Zakarpatszka Ukrajina*, see Siegfried Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége. Az áldozatok és akik megúszták* [The inheritance of Yalta. The victims and those who escaped]. AB-Független Kiadó, Budapest, 1990.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Botlik József - Dupka, György: *Ez hát a hon... (Tények, adatok, dokumentumok a kárpátaljai magyarság életéből 1918-1991.)* [So this is home ... (Facts, data, documents from the life of the Subcarpathian Hungarians 1918-1991)]. Budapest-Szeged, 1991, pp. 54-58.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 214.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 184.

The pace of events picked up in Ruthenia as the Trans-Carpathian Ukrainian National Council, under the 'protection' of the Red Army, demanded that the province become a part of the Soviet Ukraine. On November 19, the Ruthenian Communists withdrew from the Czechoslovak Communist Party and formed an independent sub-Carpathian Communist Party. On November 26, at the first congress of sub-Carpathia's national councils, a proclamation was accepted whereby the National Council was tasked, as executive body, to oversee the union of sub-Carpathia with the Ukraine.

On December 1, Ivan Turjanica, a pre-war sub-Carpathian functionary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, sent an ultimatum in the name of the National Council to Benes in London, in which he reasoned that, since the population of sub-Carpathia unanimously opted for the Soviet-Ukraine instead of Czechoslovakia, there is no reason for the London government's representative in Hus (the previously mentioned František Nemeč-*auth.*). Hence, he demanded that the delegation leave sub-Carpathia within 72 hours. Nemeč was forced to comply with the demand, leaving for Moscow. From there, he informed Benes by telegram on December 14 of the events. Three days later, the National Council forbade recruitment into the Czechoslovak army and began a recruitment drive for the Red Army.¹⁴⁸⁹ The previous actions were all intended to sever any cooperation with the London government and its president.

A question rightly appears: Who was behind the emerging action to join the Soviet Union? The answer, in our opinion, is clear. The activity for annexation to the Soviet Union was headed by Ivan Turjanica, whose actions were determined by two orders. The first, from Gottwald, to ensure that the territory comes under Czechoslovak public administration. The second – unbeknownst to Gottwald – came from the Soviets, ordering the preparation of the territory for incorporation into the Soviet Union. A recollection sheds some light as to determine which order was tantamount. According to it, a Czechoslovak comrade of Turjanica – Josef Krosnar – reminded him that the directives of the Moscow leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party must be followed. Turjanica replied: "I received other orders, I have nothing to do with the CzCP, and you, Josef, disappear or else I will have you arrested."¹⁴⁹⁰

On the basis of all these, it is fairly obvious that Stalin was behind the events of sub-Carpathia. Interestingly, Benes rejected the notion that Moscow was behind it.¹⁴⁹¹ According to Taborsky's account, Benes, in his usual manner of thinking aloud, assessed the situation in December of 1944 as: "If they wanted sub-Carpathia, they would only have had to say so. I would never have insisted on keeping any territory if it meant making enemies of the Russians... This, I do not understand at all. Why are they grasping at the territory when they could have obtained it through clever

¹⁴⁸⁹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 32-38; Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége ...* op. cit., pp. 120-122; Botlik-Dupka: *Ez hát ...* op. cit., pp. 51-53; Zseliczky: *Kárpátalja a cseh ...* op. cit., pp. 93-127.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Ibid (Kaplan), p. 267.

¹⁴⁹¹ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 186.

negotiating? I can not imagine another explanation than the Ukrainian nationalists are making use of the situation and are going behind Moscow's back. Yes, that is the only logical explanation..."¹⁴⁹²

While Benes made himself believe that the 'good Tsar' did not know anything and merely evil underlings were responsible, Stalin played a dual game. On the one hand, he waited for the sub-Carpathian and Ukrainian 'over eager' activists and 'Ukrainian nationalists' to create a *fait accompli*, to get control of sub-Carpathia. On the other hand, his diplomats nurtured in Benes the image of the 'benevolent Tsar' and the 'innocent Soviet Union'. A high point of this duplicity came on December 15, 1944, when Zorin – Soviet Assistant Foreign Minister – informed Fierlinger that the matter of sub-Carpathia is an internal Czechoslovak matter and the Soviet authorities do not wish to become involved because they wish to observe the terms of the agreements made with the Czechoslovak government.¹⁴⁹³ The message seemed to mean that the Soviets are taking the position of non-intervention, while their agents and soldiers were effectively engaged in transferring control of the territory to the Soviet Union. Benes was in a perfect trap. By deeming the matter an internal Czechoslovak matter, the ball was in Benes' court – saying: it is your problem, solve it – while the London government had not means at hand to effect any change in sub-Carpathia. It is in this context that the ultimatum served to František Nemeč must be understood.

We can assume that Benes understood that the province was lost but he was threatened by a more serious danger than territorial loss, the peril that shortly his entire fourth concept will collapse. The first two pillars of his plan (reinstatement of the pre-Munich borders of Czechoslovakia and a good relationship with the Soviet Union) were in serious jeopardy due to events in sub-Carpathia. It was then that Stalin wrote a letter to Benes on January 23, 1945 that began: "Today I learned from Comrade Gottwald regarding that the Czechoslovak Government is feeling ill at ease about the events of Zakarpatskaja Ukraina, supposing that the Soviet Government wishes to make a unilateral decision in the matter of Zakarpatskaja Ukraina, in spite of the agreement between our countries. (It is worth to note the date. Stalin only took a position two and a half months after the November 7 radio speech of Uzghorod-*auth.*) I must tell you that if you, also, have formed a similar view, then it must be the result of some misunderstanding."¹⁴⁹⁴ Stalin went on to state that the Soviet government can not deny the population of Carpatho-Ukraine to give expression to their will. Then, he continued: "... in Moscow, you seemed amenable to handing over Zakarpatskaja Ukraina to the Soviet Union, at the same time, you may well remember, I did not give my consent."¹⁴⁹⁵

Stalin then went on to try and reassure Benes because he said that he does not wish to annul the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty over sub-Carpathia. However, he also was adamant that, since the Carpatho-Ukrainians raised

¹⁴⁹² Ibid.

¹⁴⁹³ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 188-189.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

the question of affiliation of the territory, the question must be resolved. The means is a bilateral negotiation between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

Benes replied to Stalin on January 28. In the letter, he argued that he always accepted the mutual view agreed upon earlier with Maisky, that sub-Carpathia can not be a part of either Hungary or Poland but must belong to Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁹⁶ The letter took a strongly subservient note, illustrated by the following quote: "... I (meaning Benes-*auth.*) want to assure you in the strongest terms, Mister President (meaning Comrade Stalin-*auth.*), that neither I personally, nor the government of Czechoslovakia, did not suppose for a moment that the Soviet government decided unilaterally in the question of Podkarpatskaja Ukraina, or that it broke the agreement between our countries. I am very familiar with the political principles of the USSR well and know that this is not possible, and I ask you to believe me."¹⁴⁹⁷

After this complete acquiescence, Benes assured Stalin that he does not wish to raise the question with the other Great Powers or as part of their ongoing mutual disagreements. Then he went on to say that resolution of the question would be best, for Czechoslovakia, after the war, writing that: "... a decision can be expected in this question after the return home of the government and consultation with local political forces." Although Benes cites the need for the assent of the Czechoslovak parliament in the matter, we feel that his real intent was to salvage what could be saved, meaning that he would cede sub-Carpathia after the country's pre-Munich borders have been reinstated with Hungary, Poland and Germany, i.e., the Soviets can annex sub-Carpathia but, in return, must offer their support for the pre-Munich borders elsewhere. This is typical Benes strategy, trying to make the most out of even a losing proposition. What is interesting in the letter is what is actually missing from it. Benes did not refer to the passage in which Stalin reminded him of his earlier offer that the transfer of sub-Carpathia to the Soviet Union can be discussed. It is obvious that Benes backed down before Stalin's will and, not wishing to make an international incident or to raise a fuss at the peace conference, he quietly abandoned the territory.

After Benes' retreated, events smoothly followed one another:¹⁴⁹⁸ the government program hammered out in Moscow in March of 1945 stated that the Czechoslovak government wished to resolve the matter by the democratic consultation of the population of sub-Carpathia and the friendly understanding between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. On July 29, a Czechoslovak government delegation led by Prime Minister Zdenek Fierlinger signed the agreement in Moscow that annexed sub-Carpathia to the Soviet Union. On November 22, 1945 (barely a year after 'eternal

¹⁴⁹⁶ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 189-190.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 32-38; Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége ...* op. cit., pp. 120-122; Botlik-Dupka: *Ez hát ...* op. cit., pp. 51-53; Zseliczky: *Kárpátalja a cseh ...* op. cit., pp. 93-127.

dream' of the Uzghorod radio announcement) the Czechoslovak Parliament (in reality, the provisional parliament) ratified the agreement.

“Article 1. Carpatho-Ukraine (according to the Czechoslovak constitution Podkarpatska Rus), which was added to the Czechoslovak Republic as an autonomous territory by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye on September 10, 1919, in accordance with the wish expressed by the population and on the affable agreement between the two signatories, is united with its ancient homeland, Ukraine, and henceforth forms a part of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic.”¹⁴⁹⁹

After the conclusion of the Moscow conference, the now ‘united’ exiles took a train on March 31, 1945 and headed for Czechoslovakia. The members of the London government, at the insistence of the Communists – who did not want the London government returning to Czechoslovakia – tendered their resignations while on *en route*. Czechoslovakia’s future leaders, led by Eduard Benes entered Kosice on April 3.¹⁵⁰⁰

On April 4, through a presidential decree, Benes appointed the new government, whose make-up was already decided during the Moscow conference. Fierlinger became Prime Minister and 8 of the 25 ministers were Communists, including the portfolios for Interior, Agriculture, Education and Welfare. Gottwald and Siroky became deputy prime ministers, Clementis became Deputy Foreign Minister beside Jan Masaryk. The key portfolios went to the Communists, which significantly restricted the field of action for President Benes.¹⁵⁰¹ After making public the government’s program, Benes stayed in Kosice until May 8, and then started for Prague with his retinue. Along the way, they stopped in Banská Bystrica and Bratislava. Finally, they entered Hradcany Castle in Prague on May 12.¹⁵⁰²

¹⁴⁹⁹ Ibid (Botlik-Dupka), pp. 148-150.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁵⁰¹ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁵⁰² Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 212.

PART IV: VICTORY, THEN DEFEAT 1945 - 1948

4.1 THE ATTAINED ELEMENT OF THE FOURTH CONCEPT ETHNIC CLEANSING

As we have seen in Part III, a crucial element of Benes' fourth concept was the creation of a Czechoslovak nation state, attained through the deportation of the minorities. In this chapter, we will examine what Benes managed to accomplish, and how.

The expulsion of the Germans

On his return to Prague, Benes began to take steps toward the realization of the second aim of his concept, the creation of a nation state. Thus began the persecution and deportation of the non-Slav population. On May 9, 1945, he stated: "... the majority part of the Germans and Magyars must leave us. This is our final decision... Our people can not live with the Germans and Magyars in a common country."¹⁵⁰³

The expulsion of the Czechoslovakian Germans was accomplished in two phases.¹⁵⁰⁴ The first – spontaneous – phase lasted from May to August of 1945; the second – organized deportation – phase ran from August of 1945 into the fall of 1946. The general expulsion of Germans began in the

¹⁵⁰³ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Literature regarding the deportation of the Germans began to multiply after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It was aided by the creation of the German-Czech Historian Committee in 1990, which was charged by the Foreign Ministries of the two countries to end the stereotypes and historical myths created during the Cold War and still acting as obstacles to communication between the two communities. The two most important results of this work were: Jörg K. Hoensch – Hans Lemberg (eds.): *Begegnung und Konflikt. Schlaglichter auf das Verhältnis von Tschechen, Slowaken und Deutschen 1815-1989*. Essen, 2001 and Detlef Brandes – Edita Ivaničková – Jíří Pešek (eds.): *Erzwungene Trennung Vertreibungen und Aussiedlungen in und aus der Tschechoslowakie 1938-1947 Im Vergleich mit Polen, Ungarn und Jugoslawien*. Essen, 1999.

Among the important Czech language works is Jíří Lukas: *Odsun nemeckého obyvatelstva z Prahy 1946* [The expulsion of the Germans from Prague 1946]. *Pražský sborník historický*, 1990. Tomas Štanek's four books (three in Czech and one in German) can be considered as fundamental works: (1) *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945-1947* [The expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia 1945-1947]. Praha, 1991; (2) *Vysídlení Němců z Československa* [The deportation of the Germans from Czechoslovakia]. Ostrava, 1992; (3) *Tábory v českých zemích 1945-1948* [Camps in Czechoslovakia 1945-1948]. Opava, 1996; (4) *Verfolgung 1945. Die Stellung der Deutschen in Böhmen, Mähren und Schleisen (ausserhalb der Lager und Gefängnisse)*. Wien, 2002.

Finally, we would like to point out that historical literature dealing with the Czech-German relationship is provided by Vera Břenova – Slavěna Rohlíková (eds.): *Czech and Czechoslovak history 1918-1999*. A bibliography of Selected Monographs. Volumes of Essay and Articles. Published from 1991 to 1999. Prague, 2000.

early days of May, 1945.¹⁵⁰⁵ As recounted earlier, Benes exerted serious diplomatic effort in securing the support of the Great Powers for the deportation of the German – and Magyar – minorities. Before the Great Powers could come to a decision regarding the expatriation of the Germans, various Czechoslovak organizations – on their own initiative and according to their own means – herded the German populations together and expelled them from the country.¹⁵⁰⁶ The number of persons evicted by the events of the first phase varies widely but Karel Kaplan puts the number, based on Interior Ministry data, at 600,000.¹⁵⁰⁷

The expelled Germans were primarily evicted from the Soviet Army occupied zone. The Czechoslovak government, lacking agreement from the western governments, made an agreement with the Soviets – or rather with Marshal Zhukov – that they are willing to accept the expelled Germans into the Soviet-occupied zone in Germany.¹⁵⁰⁸ During the expulsion, the Czechoslovak authorities permitted themselves to act with inhuman behavior towards the Germans, in retaliation to the acts committed by the Nazis toward the Czechoslovak nation. Arbitrary decisions, unverifiable acts and a whole series of excesses were the results.¹⁵⁰⁹ To illustrate the crudity of the situation, the excesses of the day, let us examine a few incidents. The Germans herded together in Prague were made to crawl on their knees over broken glass.¹⁵¹⁰ Mass executions were committed by having one prisoner hang another; a third hangs the second, and so on.¹⁵¹¹ On June 18, 1945, units of the 17th Infantry battalion shot to death, near the train station of Prerov, 270 persons, mainly Germans abducted from Spiš County.¹⁵¹² The Germans herded together in Usti nad Labem were driven into the Elbe River and gunfire was opened on them.¹⁵¹³

¹⁵⁰⁵ Ludvik Nemeč: *Solution of the minorities problem*. In: Viktor S. Mamatey – Radomir Luza (eds.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 419.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Lukas: *Odsun nemeckého ...* op. cit.; Soňa Gabzdilová – Milan Olejník: *Proces internácie nemeckého obyvateľstva na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1946* [The internment of the German populace during 1945 and 1946]. *Historický časopis*, roč. 50, 2002, issue 3, pp. 423-438; and the four books by Tomas Štanek two footnotes back.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 190.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 197.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Sidonia Dedinova: *Edvard Benes – der Liquidator*. Eichendorf, 2000; in Hungarian, Sidonia Dedinova: *Edvard Beneš a likvidátor*. Korona Kiadó, Budapest, 2004.

¹⁵¹⁰ Balassa, Zoltán: *A benesi dekrétumokról* [The Benes decrees]. In: Eszterházy János emlékkönyv, Budapest, 2001, p. 195.

¹⁵¹¹ Ibid.

¹⁵¹² Vicsotka, Mihály: *Még éltek a holtak. Tömegsír Csehországban* [The dead were still alive. Mass grave in Bohemia]. In: *The Presidential Decrees of Edvard Beneš*. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, pp. 117-120.

¹⁵¹³ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 193.

During the same May to October period, President Benes issued a series of his decrees.¹⁵¹⁴ The so-called ‘Benes Decrees’ is a collective noun which actually encompasses 90 various laws and decrees.¹⁵¹⁵ The constitutional basis for this type of presidential power was laid during the exile period. Benes published a Republican presidential constitutional decree on October 15, 1940, regarding the temporary wielding of executive power. In it, he endowed himself with the powers of a head of state and empowered himself with the authority to decree, amend and rescind laws. On February 22, 1945, he amended the October 15 decree to extend the effective date of those powers until such time as the Czechoslovakian Government’s provisional legislative body is formed.¹⁵¹⁶ On February 28, 1946, the provisional National Council accepted a constitutional amendment, which enshrined into law all the presidential decrees.

It is thus clear that, until the October 28, 1945 convocation of the Provisional National Council, Benes, as president of the republic, was empowered with wide-ranging authority and exercised considerable power through the decrees.¹⁵¹⁷ Exercising this power, he wanted to carry through the creation of a nation state, consisting of Czechs and Slovaks, by the expedient of removing the German and Magyar minorities. From this perspective, Decree #33, dated August 2, 1945 is extremely important as it stated that those German and Magyar nationality citizens who obtained a German or Hungarian citizenship, as prescribed by the occupying powers, lost their Czechoslovak citizenship on the same day. The remainder of the German and Magyar nationality citizens lost their Czechoslovak citizenship on the day the decree was announced.¹⁵¹⁸ With this decree, we must agree with József Gyönyör, that Benes inflicted immeasurable moral and financial damage on the German and Magyar minorities, as well as stripping them of fundamental human and citizenship rights.¹⁵¹⁹

By early 1945, the governments of both England and the United States reversed their previous position on the deportation of the German minority – a plan they gave their ‘in principle’ blessing in 1943 – and began to delay making an actual decision. Now, they were loath to hand

¹⁵¹⁴ The Beneš decrees were published in several languages in the ‘90s. In German, see Karel Jech – Karel Kaplan: *Die Dekrete des Präsidents der Republik 1945 -1946*. Prague, 1995; in Hungarian, Kövesdi, János (ed.): *Edvard Beneš elnöki dekrétumai*. Pannónia Kiadó, Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996.

¹⁵¹⁵ Balassa: *A beneši ...* op. cit., pp. 191-202; F.E. Prinz: *Az 1945 évi Beneš-dekrétumok nemzetközi jogi szempontból* [The international legal basis of the 1945 Beneš decrees]. In: *Edvard Benes elnöki dekrétumai* [The Presidential decrees of Edvard Benes]. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, pp. 121-131; Dobroslav Matejka (ed.): *Rechtliche Aspekte des Abschlusses der Sudetendeutschen*. 1995.

¹⁵¹⁶ Gyönyör, József: *A kassai kormányprogramtól a jogtörő beneši dekrétumokig* [From the government program of Kosice to the legality-trampling Benes decrees]. In: *Edvard Beneš elnöki dekrétumai*. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, pp. 83-84.

¹⁵¹⁷ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁵¹⁸ *Edvard Beneš elnöki dekrétumai* [The Presidential decrees of Edvard Benes]. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, pp. 214-216.

¹⁵¹⁹ Gyönyör: *A kassai ...* op. cit., p. 90.

Benes a blank check in regard to his German minority. Beside Czechoslovakia, Poland also opted for the radical solution to its German problem and, as such, began to deport its Germans in rapid order.¹⁵²⁰ Thus, when the unlawful expulsion of Germans began in May, British politicians reacted very sharply. The ‘spontaneous’ deportations in Czechoslovakia and Poland necessitated that the Great Powers examine the problem at the Potsdam Conference and control, or rather temporarily halt, the flood of immigration into Germany.¹⁵²¹ Article XII of the proclamation of the Potsdam Conference (July 17 – August 2, 1945) stated:

“XII. ORDERLY TRANSFER OF GERMAN POPULATIONS.

The Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.

Since the influx of a large number of Germans into Germany would increase the burden already resting on the occupying authorities, they consider that the Control Council in Germany should in the first instance examine the problem, with special regard to the question of the equitable distribution of these Germans among the several zones of occupation. They are accordingly instructing their respective representatives on the Control Council to report to their Governments as soon as possible the extent to which such persons have already entered Germany from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, to submit an estimate of the time and rate at which further transfers could be carried out having regard to the present situation in Germany.

The Czechoslovak Government, the Polish Provisional Government and the Control Council in Hungary are at the same time being informed of the above and are being requested meanwhile to suspend further expulsions pending an examination by the Governments concerned of the report from their representatives on the Control Council.”¹⁵²²

The decision of the Potsdam Conference was debated by the Czechoslovak government on August 3, who took note that the current method of mass expulsion was no longer acceptable, and then decided that the matter would be resolved through organized deportation.¹⁵²³ Accordingly, the Czechoslovak politicians began the organization and preparation for the deportation of the Germans (their position with regard to the Magyars is covered in the next chapter-*auth.*). Subsequent to August

¹⁵²⁰ Andrzej Paczkowski: *Fél évszázad Lengyelország történetéből 1939-1989* [Half century from the history of Poland]. 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 1997, pp. 103-104.

¹⁵²¹ Süle: *A közép és ...* op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁵²² Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., pp. 656-657.

¹⁵²³ Nemeč: *Solution of the ...* op. cit., p. 420; Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 197.

of 1945, they created an organization for the deportations: necessary bodies, offices and more than a hundred concentration camps.¹⁵²⁴

Beside the organizational effort required at home, the Czechoslovak government took important diplomatic steps, as well. In a note dated August 16, it asked the approval of the Great Powers for the deportation of 2.5 million Germans.¹⁵²⁵ During the autumn, the Allies came to an agreement regarding the German expulsion and the Allied Control Council (ACC) fixed on November 25 the number of permitted deportations by each country.¹⁵²⁶ According to the ACC decision, Poland was allowed to expel 3.5 million Germans, Czechoslovakia 2.5 million, Hungary 0.5 million and Austria 150,000. The ACC, then, meant to relocate 6.5 million Germans out of the countries of Central Europe. According to the plan, they were to be settled as follows:

Soviet occupation zone	2.00 million from Poland and 0.75 million from Czechoslovakia
British occupation zone	1.50 million from Poland
American occupation zone	1.75 million from Czechoslovakia and 0.50 million from Hungary
French occupation zone	0.15 million from Austria

According to the ACC timetable, the deportation of the Czechoslovak Germans was to begin on December 1, 1945 but the first train left Czechoslovakia on January 15, 1946 toward the American zone, while in the Soviet zone the first train only arrived on June 11.¹⁵²⁷ The Czechoslovak government wished to complete the deportation of its German by October 28, 1946. They wished to stress the historical significance of this act – the creation of the Czechoslovak state – with the symbolic date as the peak in the international struggle against the Germans. In line with that intent, the successful conclusion of the expatriation was officially announced on October 28. On this occasion, Benes spoke of the successful conclusion of the eternal fight with the Germans.¹⁵²⁸

There are no accurate figures available about the total number of deportees. In a speech by Vaclav Nosek – Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister – made to the Foreign Committee of the League of Nations on December 2, 1947, he gave the following figures: "In total, we relocated 2,256,000 to Germany: 1,464,000 to the American zone and 792,000 to the Soviet zone."¹⁵²⁹

As an aside, we must remark that the actual number is much higher, since the numbers mentioned by Nosek only cover the 'organized' deportation, not taking into account the 660,000 persons who were spontaneously expelled between May and August of 1945. After the official announcement of the end of the deportation, Czechoslovakia ended

¹⁵²⁴ Štanek: *Tábory v ...* op. cit.

¹⁵²⁵ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 197.

¹⁵²⁶ Süle: *A közép és ...* op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁵²⁷ Nemecc: *Solution of the ...* op. cit., p. 421; Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 202-203. old.

¹⁵²⁸ Ibid (Kaplan), p. 208.

¹⁵²⁹ Süle: *A közép és ...* op. cit., p. 116.

up with a total of 239,911 German nationals in its population. That number declined further over the next three years through belated deportations.¹⁵³⁰

Although we do not know the exact number of deportees, two facts are worth remembering in the matter: according to Kaplan the 1930 census in Czechoslovakia disclosed 3,304,641 Germans, while that of 1950 reported 165,117, or 1.3% of the population.¹⁵³¹ In his study published in 2004, Tamás Stark estimates the number to be 3 million.¹⁵³²

We must admit that Benes' plan to eliminate the German minority was almost completely fulfilled.

Attempts at the expulsion of the Magyars

The earlier chapters disclosed that during his exile, Benes attempted to link the matter of the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities but without success. The terms of the armistice signed by Hungary on January 20, 1945, there is no mention of such a Czechoslovak claim.¹⁵³³ Both Great Britain and the United States were opposed to the deportation of the Magyar minority. This, naturally enough, did not deter Benes from his original intention but only spurred him to make further attempts to change London's and Washington's position on the matter. On this question, Benes had Moscow's support since December of 1943. When a Czechoslovak government delegation was in Moscow in June of 1945, Stalin again reiterated that he agrees with the expulsion of the Magyars.¹⁵³⁴

Czechoslovak efforts in this direction continued at the Potsdam Conference. Eden, the outgoing British Foreign Secretary, raised Benes' message on July 25, 1945 to the other two powers in which he asked for a discussion on the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities. Stalin suggested that the conference hear the Czechoslovaks on the matter. Churchill agreed – "at least, I can see my old friend, Benes" – but, in the end, the matter was referred to the foreign ministers.¹⁵³⁵ In the end, the Allies made a decision unfavorable for the Czechoslovaks. They ordered a temporary halt in the ongoing deportation of the Czechoslovakian (and Polish) Germans. The western allies tried, with this decision, to alter the expulsions eagerly being carried out by the two governments into a more 'orderly and humane' relocation.

It must be noted at this point that the deportation of the Germans from Hungary was accepted. According to Andrea Süle, the Potsdam Conference extended the deportation order to include also Hungary at the suggestion of the Soviets. The Soviets – having previously agreed to the expulsion of the Magyars from Czechoslovakia – felt that the vacancy left

¹⁵³⁰ Nemeč: *Solution of the ...* op. cit., p. 422.

¹⁵³¹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁵³² Stark, Tamás: *Népszémozgások Közép-Kelet-Európában* [Population movements in Central and Eastern Europe]. *História* 2004/5 szám, pp. 3-12.

¹⁵³³ Gosztonyi: *A magyar honvédség ...* op. cit., p. 243. old.

¹⁵³⁴ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁵³⁵ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., p. 35.

by the removal of the Germans of Hungary could then be utilized to resettle the Magyars of Slovakia.¹⁵³⁶

While Benes was exerting his diplomatic efforts, the question of the expulsion of the Germans and Magyars kept cropping up more and more in Slovakia, too.¹⁵³⁷ On the territories ‘liberated’ by the Red Army, the Slovak National Council (SNC) seized power.¹⁵³⁸ The relationship between the Slovakian Magyars and the Slovaks was characterized, officially, for the first time by the Manifesto published by the SNC on February 4, 1945.¹⁵³⁹ The Manifesto classified the Magyars of Slovakia into three groups. Those belonging to the first “had a responsibility as democratic thinking Magyars to denounce from among themselves the Fascist anti-Slovak and pro-Hungarian elements.” The second group was made up of Fascist and Hungarian sympathizers, while the third group was reserved for Magyarized Slovaks. Of the last group, the Manifesto stated that those of Slovak origin but deeming themselves as Magyar and wishing to return to their origins must be given every opportunity to “rejoin the Slovak national way of life.”¹⁵⁴⁰ Essentially, this is the first statement of the possibility of re-Slovakization. It is also worth noting that the Manifesto did not mention the mass deportation of a segment of the population. The closing does, however, contain a strong threat: “We will completely uproot from our economic life the Germans, the Magyars and their Slovak traitorous friends and the influence of all anti-Slovak elements.”¹⁵⁴¹

Slovak political trends were awash with robustly nationalistic, mainly anti-Magyar, trends. The Slovak National Council – and later the Federation of Delegates – announced anti-Magyar measures, one after the other.¹⁵⁴² Of them, a sample of the more punitive ones:

Slovak National Council decree 6/1944 (of September 6), which closed the Hungarian-language schools and forbade religious liturgy in the German and Hungarian languages.¹⁵⁴³

¹⁵³⁶ Süle: *A közép és ...* op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁵³⁷ Soňa Gabzdilová - Milan Olejnik: *Proces internácie nemeckého obyvateľstva na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1946* [The internment of the German population in Slovakia during 1945 and 1946]. *Historicky časopis*, 50 roč, 2002, issue 3, pp. 423-438.

¹⁵³⁸ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., pp. 231-234.

¹⁵³⁹ Ölvedi, János: *Napfogyatkozás. Magyarok Szlovákiában* [Solar eclipse. Magyars in Slovakia]. Püski Kiadó, New York, 1985, pp. 59-60; Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., pp. 136-137.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Ibid (Janics), p. 136.

¹⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴² Polányi, Imre: *A szlovákiai magyarok helyzete 1944-1948* [The situation of the Magyars of Slovakia 1944-1948]. Pécs, 1992; Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., pp. 135-138. old; Ölvedi: *Napfogyatkozás ...* op. cit., pp. 59-61; Gyönyör: *A kassai ...* op. cit., pp. 88-91; Vadkerty, Katalin: *A reszlovakizáció* [Re-Slovakization]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1993, pp. 10-19. old.

¹⁵⁴³ *The decrees of Edvard Beneš*. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, p. 229.

SNC decree 4/1945 (of February 27), which confiscated the properties over 50 hectares (approx. 125 acres-*ed.*) of German, Magyar and Slovak traitors.¹⁵⁴⁴

SNC decree 33/1945 (of May 17), which created the People's Court for the punishment of Fascists, occupiers and traitors.¹⁵⁴⁵ (This is not to be confused with Benes' presidential decree 33/1945-*auth.*)

SNC decree 44/1945 (of April 12), which let go, immediately, all Magyar public administrative employees.¹⁵⁴⁶

SNC decree 51/1945 (of May 25), which dissolved all associations and societies on territories re-annexed from Hungary.¹⁵⁴⁷

SNC decree 69/1945 (of July 3), which made it possible for private sector employers to fire, at once, "all persons deemed unreliable by the state."¹⁵⁴⁸

SNC decree 99/1945 (of August 23), which further tightened the terms of 44/1945 as pertaining to the German and Magyar minority in that governmental and public service employees were to be let go without any compensation. As well, it removed the pension entitlements of German and Magyar governmental and public service employees.¹⁵⁴⁹

Amid the declarations of decrees stripping civil rights, tangible deportations were also carried out. Between May 26 and June 31, 1945, 31,780 persons of Hungarian origin were expelled to Hungary who had settled in Slovakia after November 2, 1938.¹⁵⁵⁰

At the same time that the SNC was issuing its decrees, between May and October of 1945, Benes also issued a number of presidential decrees regarding the Germans and Magyars, which assaulted both minorities. As president of the Republic, he emphasized in several of his official speeches that coexistence with the Magyars was impossible, their deportation a necessity. "It has become impossible for us to live together with them (meaning the national minorities-*auth.*), and that is why they must leave this country," he said.¹⁵⁵¹ Consequently, he exercised a sharply anti-Magyar policy. On the last day of the Potsdam Conference, August 2, 1945, he signed his presidential decree #33, which stripped the German and Magyar minorities of their citizenship. Decree 33 made it possible for the Czechoslovak state to exercise total control over the persons and assets of the Magyar (and German) populace, without any legal restraint or recourse.¹⁵⁵² This decree was further exacerbated by presidential decree

¹⁵⁴⁴ Polányi: *A szlovákiai magyarok* ... op. cit., pp. 5-6.

¹⁵⁴⁵ *The decrees of Edvard Beneš* ... op. cit., pp. 235-237.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Gyönyör: *A kassai* ... op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵⁰ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi* ... op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁵⁵² *The decrees of Edvard Beneš* ... op. cit., pp. 214-216.

#71 of September 19, 1945, which mandated that all those stripped of their citizenship and unemployed must find employment.¹⁵⁵³

The presidential decrees and the SNC decrees deprived the Magyar minority of their citizenship, civil rights and legal protection and guarantees. They were ineligible for either active or passive voting rights, meaning they could not cast a vote or stand for election. They could not form political parties, associations or lobby groups. They were excluded from public matters, unable even to have a say in the governing of their own settlement. They could not hold a government or public administration position. The authorities treated them arbitrarily, withholding their pensions, confiscating their lands, houses and factories. The Magyars of Slovakia became stateless.

After the Potsdam Conference rejected the unilateral expulsion of the Magyars from Czechoslovakia, Prague altered its tactics. The new approach consisted of two elements. Partly, Benes and the Czechoslovak politicians intentionally misinterpreted the Potsdam decision and tried to present it – although no specific mention was made of it – as having the deportation of the Czechoslovak Magyars sanctioned by the Allies. In this way, Dalibor Krno – head of the Czechoslovak mission to the Hungarian Allied Control Commission and of ambassadorial rank – informed Hungarian foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi that “... the position taken with regard to the expulsion of the Germans implies assent to the deportation of the Magyars, as well.”¹⁵⁵⁴

As well, they began to urge the exchange of populations, saying that the number of Magyars living in Czechoslovakia barely exceeded the number of Slovaks living in Hungary.¹⁵⁵⁵ This tactic was embodied in the letter addressed by Vladimir Clementis – Foreign Secretary of State – to the Great Powers on August 16, 1945, which started from the assumption that the Allies agreed with an exchange of Czechoslovak Magyars with Hungarian Slovaks and asked for the consent of the Hungarian Allied Control Commission to proceed.¹⁵⁵⁶ On August 25, Clementis told the French attaché in Prague, Keller, that the expulsion of the Magyars is not the same as that of the Germans. It will be more of a population exchange, not a resettlement, since the Slovaks of Hungary and the Magyars of Slovakia will be repatriated in the same timeframe. He went on to say that the expulsion of the Magyars does not depend on the goodwill of the three Allied powers but exclusively on the consent of the Soviet military authorities in Hungary, since they, and only they, are responsible for order in Hungary. The Czechoslovak government will shortly send a delegation to Budapest to clarify with the Soviets the terms of the repatriation. As soon as agreement is reached, Prague will take up contact with Budapest to

¹⁵⁵³ Ibid, pp. 216-218.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., p. 36; Dalibor Krno: *A békéről tárgyaltunk Magyarországgal* [We negotiated about peace with Hungary]. Budapest, 1994.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁵⁵⁶ *Foreign Relations of United States 1945*. The Conference of Berlin Vol. II. Clementis' August 16, 1945 note to Steinhardt.

determine the dates and places of the repatriation, and the travel destinations of the various groups.¹⁵⁵⁷

In effect, the modified approach of Prague was clear. If the consent of the Allies can not be obtained in support of the deportation of the Magyars – now slyly called a population exchange – then it will be accomplished through the Hungarian Allied Control Commission or the Soviet military authorities. On October 9, 1945, Dalibor Krno suggested to the Hungarian government to begin talks with Prague regarding the population exchange.¹⁵⁵⁸ Budapest kept putting off the beginning of the talks. No Hungarian party wanted to spoil its election chances with such an unfortunate matter as talks with Prague. The Hungarian government, though, was not idle and made moves to protect the Slovakian Magyars. Between April of 1945 and July of 1946, it sent 184 notes of protest to the president of the Allied Control Commission, Marshal Voroshilov, regarding the discrimination of the Czechoslovakian Magyar minority.¹⁵⁵⁹

The Czechoslovaks met with the same delaying tactic when they tried to talk with Voroshilov. The Soviet marshal did not express agreement with the Czechoslovak interpretation of the Potsdam decision and, in spite of several insistent Czechoslovak urgings suggesting talks on the population exchange, refused to reply.¹⁵⁶⁰ In our opinion, Voroshilov did not reject the Czechoslovak suggestion for the expulsion of the Magyars because of the protest notes of the Hungarian government but, rather, his decision was influenced by the upcoming elections in Hungary. Voroshilov was worried that discussions regarding a population exchange would have a detrimental effect on the election results of the Hungarian Communists. Our opinion is validated by the sharply different behavior of Voroshilov after the November 4, 1945 elections. He received the representative of the Prague government, in fact, agreed with the population exchange and stated that the Hungarian Allied Control Commission supports the Czechoslovak proposal.¹⁵⁶¹

In the end, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, János Gyöngyösi began his talks in Prague on December 3, a month after the elections. His talks with Clementis lasted for four days.¹⁵⁶² The Czechoslovak side suggested that, as a negotiation starting point, Prague would repatriate a number of Magyars (chosen by Prague) equal to those Slovaks of Hungary who voluntarily profess their willingness to relocate. (This would have been the *de facto* population exchange-auth.) The Magyars not part of the exchange

¹⁵⁵⁷ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Kertész, István: *Magyar békeillúziók* [Hungarian peace illusions]. Európa-História Kiadó, Budapest, 1995, p. 241.

¹⁵⁵⁹ S. D. Kertész: *Diplomacy in a Whirlpool*. Notre-Dame, Indiana, 1953, p. 111. Note that S.D. Kertész and Kertész István are one and the same person.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁵⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁶² *Hungary and the Conference of Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 30-49; Kertész: *Magyar ...* op. cit., pp. 241-245; Balogh, Sándor: *Magyarország külpolitikája 1945-1950* [Hungary's foreign policy 1945-1950]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1988, pp. 111-113.

would be moved to Hungary after confiscation of their assets. (This would have been the mass deportation-*auth.*) Those Magyars, who obtained a Czechoslovak citizenship would enjoy all the rights of citizenship but would not have any minority rights.

It must now finally be noted that the number of Magyars in Slovakia was several times that of Slovaks in Hungary. According to the Czechoslovaks, there were 652,000 Magyars in Czechoslovakia in 1945. On the other side, the 1930 census in Hungary tallied 104,819 persons who considered themselves as Slovaks, which declined to 75,920 in 1941.¹⁵⁶³ Thus, if every Slovak in Hungary relocated voluntarily, it would have meant the forcible deportation of some 500,000 Magyars. Naturally, Clementis was working with a different set of numbers when counting the Slovaks of Hungary. In his view, there were 450,000 Slovaks living in Hungary.¹⁵⁶⁴

Sharp differences of opinion developed between the two parties on almost every point, not only over the numbers. The Hungarians wanted to refer the matter to the Allies or the Peace Conference, while the Czechoslovaks wanted it referred to the Allied Control Commission. During the negotiations, Clementis suggested that Hungary would gain space for the Magyars of Slovakia with the expulsion of the Germans of Hungary. In his reply, Gyöngyösi retorted that “it has no bearing”, as the two matters are not related. István Kertész, who was present at the talks as part of Gyöngyösi’s entourage, recounts in his book an event typical of the behavior of the Czechoslovaks: “... At the closing dinner organized for the Hungarian delegation, Clementis invited me to a private chat, during which he said that it would be of service for the Czechoslovak-Hungarian reconciliation if Hungary would drop from its coat-of-arms the bars and hills that signify Slovak rivers and mountains.”¹⁵⁶⁵

During the course of the talks, the Czechoslovak side behaved with extreme aggression. Clementis, for example, said that Czechoslovakia, enjoying the backing of both the Soviet Union and the western Allies, will remove the Magyars, one way or another and, that being the case, he is surprised at the stubbornness of the Hungarians.¹⁵⁶⁶ President Benes went even further. He coldly informed Foreign Minister Gyöngyösi that the victorious powers have given – in principle – their consent to the removal of the Magyars.¹⁵⁶⁷ The event continued in Budapest and is recounted by the eye witness Kertész: “When we returned to Budapest, I visited the American ambassador, Schoenfeld, and asked him about the truth of Benes’ statement. He categorically denied that any kind of decision was made in Potsdam regarding the deportation of the Magyars.”¹⁵⁶⁸

¹⁵⁶³ Kertész: *Magyar ...* op. cit., p. 242.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Clementis maintained at both the first Prague conference and the Paris Conference that 450 thousand Slovaks lived in Hungary. See *Hungary and the Conference of Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 28, 62.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Kertész: *Magyar ...* op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

We must agree with the assessment of Sándor Balogh that no agreement was reached at the Prague conference because an agreement was impossible. The representatives of the two governments approached the minority question from diametrically opposite directions and the positions of the negotiators were also very different: Clementis represented a Czechoslovakia which belonged to the victorious camp, Gyöngyösi a defeated Hungary.¹⁵⁶⁹ Over the four days, the negotiators agreed on nothing, not even a common communiqué. The two governments each released one of their own. The communiqué of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry asked the Czechoslovak government, in the name of democracy and humanity (terms so often used by Benes in his analyses-*auth.*), not to pass new decrees of discrimination against the Magyars of Slovakia and to put an end to their persecution.¹⁵⁷⁰

The Hungarian side would have liked to settle the position of the Magyar minority with the help of the Great Powers.¹⁵⁷¹ This, no Great Power was willing to do. England adopted a detached stance, while America, after the failure of the first Prague conference, sent a stern warning to the Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister through its Budapest representative that : "... you are making a serious mistake if you expect outside support for Hungary's stubborn position against Czechoslovakia. Delaying settlement is not favorable for either country and weighs heavily on those being debated over (the Slovakian Magyars-*auth.*).¹⁵⁷² Pushkin, Soviet ambassador to Budapest, was even more blunt. He openly told Gyöngyösi that: "Czechoslovakia – since it was a reliable friend in the past – enjoys Moscow's absolute backing."¹⁵⁷³

While these events were unfolding, the Czechoslovak government introduced new methods (deportation, re-Slovakization) to force an agreement. In this situation, Gyöngyösi, yielding to pressure, sent word to the Czechoslovaks on January 30, 1946 that he is willing to return to the negotiating table.¹⁵⁷⁴ The Hungarian delegation arrived in Prague on February 5 for what has been called the second Prague Conference.¹⁵⁷⁵ Agreement was now reached between the two governments covering the Czechoslovak-Hungarian population exchange. In it, the Hungarian government consented to having the Slovaks of Hungary voluntarily resettle in Slovakia; Czechoslovakia, to prepare for the resettlement of the Slovaks and to oversee the enrolment, may send a government commission to Hungary. The Hungarian government assured freedom of travel in the country for this commission and unfettered communication with the Slovak populace. To urge resettlement, the commission was free to make propaganda among the Slovaks – in person, in print and over the radio –

¹⁵⁶⁹ Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁵⁷⁰ *Hungary and the Conference of Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁷¹ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., pp. 72-73.

¹⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷⁴ *Hungary and the Conference of Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 61-64.

¹⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-87; Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., pp. 114-116; Kertész: *Magyar ...* op. cit., pp. 248-250.

but only in Slovak. As well, it could organize two public meetings in every affected settlement. Seven weeks were allotted for the propaganda campaign.

On the other side, Czechoslovakia gained the right to remove an equal number of Magyars or, more precisely, to designate the number to be deported from the Czechoslovak Republic from among those who have lost their Czechoslovak citizenship under the existing laws in effect. Also, the Czechoslovak government was free to deport – under SNC decree of May 5, 1945, paragraphs 1 through 4 – those persons deemed to be war criminals but whose number could not exceed 1,000. Hungary was obliged to accept all the deportees without exception and grant them citizenship. Czechoslovakia agreed to undertake the responsibility to ensure that the social, economic and occupational make-up of those selected proportionally represented the make-up of the Magyar totality in Slovakia. Those selected by Czechoslovakia for repatriation can take with them all their personal chattels without customs duties or import-export restrictions. Their real estate, however, become the property of the state, for which the country is to pay compensation, except for portions above 50 hectares. The expenses of moving the Magyars are borne by Hungary, the Slovaks by Czechoslovakia. To facilitate the execution of the agreement, a mixed committee of four, two from each side, was created.¹⁵⁷⁶

The records of the meetings were attached to the draft plan for the population exchange.¹⁵⁷⁷ On the record, the Czechoslovak government made a covenant that, until the situation is finally settled, it would suspend the execution of laws and decrees aimed at deportation and internal dispersion of the Magyar populace, that it would not resort to asset confiscations, and that it would provide social assistance to the Magyar public employees who were thrown out of their jobs and to pensioners. Furthermore, it was agreed that both governments have the right to present unresolved questions to the Peace Conference.

In the view of Sándor Vájlok, and the majority of the politicians of the day, the agreement was a typically skewed deal since it ensured one-sided advantages for Czechoslovakia.¹⁵⁷⁸ In practical terms, the population exchange agreement was not made between two equals but between a victor and a vanquished. The Czechoslovak government was given a free hand in organizing the transfer of the Hungarian Slovaks and over the fate of the Czechoslovakian Magyars. Especially unfavorable was the term in the agreement that stated that the Magyars to be deported were to be chosen exclusively by the Czechoslovak authorities. In responding to criticism, Foreign Minister Gyöngyösi replied that, in view of the deafening silence of the western Allies, signing the agreement was the only

¹⁵⁷⁶ Ibid (Hungary and ...), pp. 69-87.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., pp. 78-79. Sándor Vájlok was the Czechoslovak specialist in the political section of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. After the return of the Hungarian delegation, he wrote a memorandum for Hungarian President Tildy and Prime Minister Imre Nagy, pointing out the weaknesses of the agreement.

means open to save the bare existence of the Slovakian Magyars until the Peace Conference. He then went on to add that, in his estimate, perhaps 30 or 40,000 Slovaks will voluntarily relocate to Czechoslovakia.¹⁵⁷⁹

In spite of the criticisms, at Gyöngyösi's recommendation, the Cabinet accepted the agreement as written at its February 16, 1946 session, which the representatives of the two countries signed in Budapest on February 27. After the signing, the members of the Czechoslovak delegation met with the leaders of the governing coalition parties.¹⁵⁸⁰ At this meeting, Clementis stated that Czechoslovakia wants to become a nation state and that it intends to rid itself of the German and Magyar minorities. For that reason, he continued, the just-signed agreement does not solve Czechoslovakia's Magyar problem. Hungary and Czechoslovakia should sign another agreement in which Hungary would undertake to accept another 200,000 Magyars. If this is not done, then the Magyars living in Czechoslovakia can not expect any minority protection and Magyars living in concentrated areas can expect to be dispersed to all corners of Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian politicians present deemed Clementis' proposal – and viewpoint – as unacceptable.

The Paris Peace Conference and the fate of the Magyar minority

Czechoslovak politicians and the media heralded the signing of the agreement as a victory, an important step in the elimination of the minorities.¹⁵⁸¹ The Czechoslovak Resettlement Commission (CzRS) began its activities in Hungary on March 4, 1946. The members of the committee, and its experts, visited every settlement in Hungary where Slovak nationals lived. They organized meetings, presentations, group and individual discussions, as well as handing out written propaganda material among the Slovaks.¹⁵⁸²

Czechoslovakia presented the Hungarian government on July 14 with the list of Slovaks who registered for resettlement. The list contained 92,390 names, the overwhelming majority of the Slovaks of Hungary. (The 1949 Hungarian census found 25,988 persons who considered Slovak as their mother tongue; the 1960 recorded 30,690.¹⁵⁸³) However, public opinion and the politicians were unsatisfied with this number, since it clearly showed that the Czechoslovak reasoning, that essentially there are the same numbers of Slovaks in Hungary as Magyars in Czechoslovakia, was simply not true. Prague began to voice that the number of Slovaks registering for resettlement is so low because the Hungarian government and its lower echelon authorities are exerting pressure on Slovaks willing

¹⁵⁷⁹ Kertész: *Magyar ...* op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁵⁸¹ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁵⁸² Vadkerty, Katalin: *A belső telepítések és lakosságcsere* [Internal resettlements and population exchange]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1999, pp. 115-130; Kugler, József: *Lakosságcsere a Délkelet-Alföldön* [Population exchange on the South-east Plains]. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2000.

¹⁵⁸³ *Nemzetiségi kérdés – nemzetiségi politika* [Nationality question – nationality politics]. Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 1968, p. 20.

to go. The Czechoslovak media made sharp attacks on the Hungarian government, accusing it of breaking the agreement and putting a curb on the population exchange.¹⁵⁸⁴

Naturally, the Hungarian government was not willing to keep quiet in the matter and began a counter-campaign in the media. The number of articles critical of the Czechoslovak government and the CzRC became noticeably more numerous.¹⁵⁸⁵ Benes himself weighed in on the topic when, on April 10, while receiving a delegation of Slovakian Magyars, he opined that the population exchange represented a great victory for Czechoslovakia and that the Magyars must leave the country.¹⁵⁸⁶

Benes' April 10 comment clearly reflects that Czechoslovak politicians have not given up, even after the population exchange agreement, of the dream of ridding themselves of every Magyar in Slovakia. They swung into a diplomatic offensive. The meeting of the four allied Power's Deputy Foreign Ministers in London (April, 1946) was the venue where Czechoslovak diplomats presented their demands with regard to a peace agreement with Hungary. In the name of the Prague government, Dalibor Krno presented Deputy Foreign Secretary Gladwyn Jebb with a list of demands: beginning with the nullification of the Munich Pact and the Vienna Arbitral Award, Hungary is to accept, "as rightful, final and unalterable," the Trianon borders; renounce any allusion to the "King Saint Stephen concept" and any territorial claims associated with it; remove the double apostolic cross from the nation's coat-of-arms and the 'three hills,' reminiscent of Slovakia; destroy all memorials and mementoes that refer to, and remind of, Northern Hungary; forbid any and all forms of propaganda, overt or covert, of irredentism, revisionism, Hungarianism, Fascism, the Iron Cross or racist movements; deposit Saint Stephen's Holy Crown in the museum of the United Nations; hand over to Czechoslovakia the so-called Bratislava bridgehead; and, 200,000 Magyars to be resettled out of Slovakia.¹⁵⁸⁷

The Bratislava bridgehead – five villages on the South side of the Danube across from the capital – was justified with reasoning that city expansion of Bratislava was only possible in this direction, that the planned river port and hydro electric project could then proceed on exclusively Czechoslovak territory, and finally, the defense of the capital from the possible attack of Hungarian gunners demanded it. The necessity of the deportation was justified by arguments that the minorities have, in the past as well as today, represented the source of tension in Central Europe. The Magyar nationality former citizens of Czechoslovakia represent a serious source of internal and external threat and also, it is impossible to live in peace with them.

Since the London conference of the Deputy Foreign Secretaries refused to put the Czechoslovak item on its agenda, its diplomats began a fresh campaign to obtain the support of the allied Powers. The demands

¹⁵⁸⁴ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 124.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., p. 120.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 121.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., pp. 90-91.

were then presented to the Allied ambassadors in Prague and to the meeting of the Foreign Ministers Council, held in Paris on April 25.

On this occasion, Benes, Jan Masaryk and Clementis stressed that, above all, they want the pre-Munich borders reinstated – a non-negotiable item. Benes worked the ambassadors of the Allies to try and convince them to support the Czechoslovak proposals. On April 20, he assured French ambassador in Prague, Dejean, that he had received a formal promise from the British government of support for the Czechoslovak claims.¹⁵⁸⁸ The American ambassador, Steinhardt, he was trying to convince that it is impossible to assure the minority rights of the Magyars because then they will try to create a state within a state. Since the German and Magyar minorities opened the way for the Nazis in 1938-1939, both must be expelled. The Czechoslovak Magyars can be settled in place of the Hungarian Germans and if the Hungarian government complains of a lack of resettlement space, then it only proves that the Hungarians want to maintain a bridgehead in Czechoslovakia. And that would be as dangerous as the German bridgehead was before the war.¹⁵⁸⁹

Hungarian diplomacy, too, was making strenuous efforts. Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy made attempts (to Moscow in April of 1946 and to Washington, London and Paris between June 8 and 25) to realize some improvements in the peace terms and settle the fate of 3 million Magyars living in minority status outside Hungary's borders (the largest ethnic minority group in Europe-*ed.*).¹⁵⁹⁰ On May 6, the Hungarian government briefed the western Powers by memorandum of the state of Hungarian-Czechoslovak relations.¹⁵⁹¹ In it, they asked the Allied Powers to ensure the rights enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, which would have resulted in a special minority rights monitoring protocol, with international guarantees. The memorandum proposed the following:

“The Czechoslovak government to reinstate the Czechoslovak citizenship of the Magyar nationals and treat them in the same manner as it does the Czechoslovak nationality citizens. Grant the Magyar minority the same rights that it grants to the Ukrainian minority. The Hungarian government asks for the unconditional guarantee of the following rights:

1. The free establishment of public administrative and cultural institutions normally accepted in a people's democratic Czechoslovakia;
2. The formation of parties and unions;
3. Freedom of labor, both to work and to hire;
4. Freedom of economic opportunity.”¹⁵⁹²

Hungary was, in effect, asking the Allies to mandate that Czechoslovakia – and Romania – warrant civil and minority rights for the Magyar minorities living in their countries.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 94-95.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., pp. 192-197.

¹⁵⁹¹ *Hungary and the Conference of Paris*, vol. 2, pp. 131-137.

¹⁵⁹² Ibid, p. 137.

Heated Hungarian-Czechoslovak debate broke out at the Paris Peace Conference (July 29 to October 15, 1946). Hungarian Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi presented his views on the proposed Hungarian peace treaty at the 17th plenary session on August 14.¹⁵⁹³ In his introduction, he expressed the hope that these peace talks in Paris will be different from that of a quarter century ago and will create a lasting peace in Europe. The main topic of his address was aimed at ensuring the rights of the Magyar minorities living outside Hungary's borders. Since the United Nations charter, as well as the draft peace treaty, made reference only to a portion of human rights, Gyöngyösi felt it necessary to demand that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe accept a special responsibility for the exercise of rights and freedoms, until such time as United Nations laws take effect. Gyöngyösi then delved into the specifics of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian conflict, objecting to having the citizenship of 650,000 Magyar nationals stripped, their most basic human rights revoked. He also rejected the Czechoslovak demand for the deportation of 200,000 Magyars, over and above the population exchange. He went on to say: "If, however, this (meaning assurance of minority rights-*auth.*) Czechoslovakia will not, for whatever reason, accept and wants to rid itself, at any cost, from the Magyar minority, then the Hungarian government must insist on the principle that a people have a right to the land on which they live."¹⁵⁹⁴ Gyöngyösi, thus, promulgated the principle of 'land with the people', mirroring Hungarian efforts to have a more favorable border drawn between its northern neighbor than was done at Trianon.¹⁵⁹⁵

Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, responded to Gyöngyösi's address the following day in an audacious tone. He began with a question: "Who won the war, the United Nations or Hungary?" He then went on to reject the Hungarian observations regarding Czechoslovakia's minority policies. He continued with the observation that the Slovakian Magyar played a role in the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the Hungarian military actions against the Slovak uprising made it eminently justified to try and implement a permanent, rather than a partial, solution – that the irredentist Magyar minority must be removed from the country.¹⁵⁹⁶

The Czechoslovak delegation made every attempt to win the support of all four of the Allied Powers for their proposals but only the Soviets gave them maximum support. The western Powers exhibited a more cautious stand and suggested a direct (meaning bilateral) Czechoslovak-Hungarian settlement. In the end, the conference made the following resolutions: it only partially granted the Czechoslovak territorial demand (the Bratislava beachhead), instead of the asked-for five villages, it awarded three (Dunacsún, Horvátjásfalú and Oroszvár) – a total of 43 sq.kms. Apart from this modification, the 1920 Trianon border was reinstated.

¹⁵⁹³ Ibid, vol 4, pp. 1-3.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., pp. 167-168.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., p. 231.

As the British and American foreign ministers were adamantly opposed to the deportation of the Magyars, the peace conference rejected – more precisely, the Czechoslovaks were forced to withdraw – this demand. They mandated Hungary to open bilateral talks with Czechoslovakia “... to solve the question of those Magyar nationality residents living in Czechoslovakia who were not resettled to Hungary under the population agreement signed on February 27, 1946.” If the two parties fail to come to an agreement within six months of the signing of the agreement, Czechoslovakia has the right to present the matter before the Council of Foreign Ministers.¹⁵⁹⁷ The cancellation of the Magyar deportations was primarily thanks to the veto of the American delegation. Benes clearly saw that they were the obstacle to his plans. In fact, he openly said it when he reproached US ambassador Steinhardt, saying that “America backed Hungary, and Axis country, as opposed to its ally, Czechoslovakia.”¹⁵⁹⁸

Re-Slovakization and resettlement

It became apparent at the Paris Peace Conference that western Allied approval for Czechoslovakia’s proposal to carry out its program of ethnic cleansing was not going to materialize. That resistance rejected inclusion in the peace settlement of the Czechoslovak demand, which, if granted, would have empowered Czechoslovakia to deport 200,000 of Magyar nationality to Hungary. Hence, the introduction and resolution of the Magyar question – more precisely the ‘de-Magyarization of Slovakia’ question – at international forums was a tremendous failure. At the same time, the population exchange agreement also did not bring the expected result, since only 92,000 Hungarian Slovaks expressed their intention to relocate voluntarily to Slovakia. In this bind, Prague decided to search for a solution requiring neither western approval, nor Budapest’s. These new methods employed for the removal of the Magyar minority were resettlement (internal deportation)¹⁵⁹⁹ and re-Slovakization.¹⁶⁰⁰

It must be noted that Czechoslovak politicians employed both means even before the Paris Peace Conference but they gained popularity when Czechoslovak demands for approval of other methods failed to find support in Paris.

Forcible relocation essentially meant internal dispersion, a portion of the Slovakian Magyars being relocated to Czech border areas. Resettlement occurred in two phases: phase one, the fall of 1945 to December 4; phase two, July 1946 to February 1947.

The dates clearly show that phase one predates the Paris conference. Its legal foundation was Benes’ Presidential Decree 71/1945 (dated September 19), which made all men between 14 and 60 and women

¹⁵⁹⁷ Halmosy: *Nemzetközi ...* op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Fülöp: *A befejezetlen ...* op. cit., p. 186.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Vadkerty, Katalin: *A deportálások. A szlovákiai magyarok csehországi kényszerközmunkája 1945-1948 között* [Deportations. Forced public labor of the Slovakian Magyars in Bohemia between 1945-1948]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1996.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Vadkerty: *A reszlovakizáció ...* op. cit.

between 15 and 50, who were stripped of their citizenship based on Presidential Decree 33/1945, liable for public labor.¹⁶⁰¹ This was followed by Presidential Decree 88/1945, which directed that 10,000 Magyar men had to be transported to the Czech part of the country to help in the autumn harvest. The intent of this decree was of a short-term, temporary public work nature but, in reality, the Slovak authorities were hoping to achieve a permanent removal of their Magyar nationals.¹⁶⁰² Official reports give a total of 9,247 Magyar men being rounded up and taken to Bohemia between September and December of 1945.¹⁶⁰³

The Magyar public laborers worked according to the local customs, meaning from 5AM to 7PM, mainly in animal husbandry. They received no pay and their room and board depended on the generosity of the farmer. There were those who treated the Magyars humanely and fed them properly, others starved them. A portion of those rounded up left – with the farmer’s permission – after the end of the autumn harvest was finished and returned home, others ran away and sneaked back home. This ended phase one of the resettlement but we suspect two reasons behind it coming to a close. Continuing the internal deportation would have impacted the bilateral Czechoslovak-Hungarian talks just beginning (the first Prague talks December 3-6, 1945 and the second round on February 5-9, 1946). As well, Czechoslovak politicians were still hopeful in January of 1946 that with international help – a decision at the peace conference favorable to their cause – the Slovakian Magyars could be resettled to Hungary. Only when the peace conference rendered an unfavorable verdict did the idea of internal dispersion gain new popularity.

Czechoslovak central bodies meeting with their Slovak counterparts in Bratislava on August 5, 1946 decided that, in the interest of solving the Magyar question, they wished to employ once more the method of internal dispersion or exile. Thus began phase two. It is interesting to note that Benes considered it premature to begin this method as a solution. At a meeting with representatives of the Slovak Settlement Office and the National Rebuilding Foundation his Prague residence on November 12, he indicated his opposition to dispersion as a solution because it meant that Czechoslovakia did not wish to make use of those possibilities suggested by the peace conference (opening bilateral talks with Hungary).¹⁶⁰⁴ It clearly shows the waning state of his presidential authority when, in spite of his disapproval, dispersions began a week later, on November 19. Although official documents record the recruiting of South Slovak Magyars for agricultural work in Bohemia – participation on a voluntary basis – in reality, what we are faced with was forced labor connected with forcible resettlement. Kálmán Janics recounts the tale of 30 ‘volunteers’ from Nána, who petitioned to have their property confiscated and

¹⁶⁰¹ *Edvard Beneš elnöki dekrétumai* [The Presidential decrees of Edvard Benes]. Bratislava-Pressburg, 1996, pp. 216-218.

¹⁶⁰² Vadkerty: *A deportálások ...* op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁶⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 252.

themselves relocated to Bohemia, while eight armed guards in each truck guarded their 'volunteer commitment.'¹⁶⁰⁵

After the preparatory phase (creation of plans, harmonization between the authorities, drawing up the lists, etc.) lasting from August to mid-November, the actual resettlements began on November 19.¹⁶⁰⁶ They were carried out based on precise plans. A target settlement was encircled by military units and the families who were indicated on the previously prepared list were told to pack. They were told that they had to leave their current domicile, real estate, animals and agricultural implements for confiscation. There was no legal recourse for the families, they had to go. Most were transported to their new Bohemian location in cattle cars. Their confiscated lands and houses were taken over by Slovak farmers or the re-émigrés.¹⁶⁰⁷ Countless, Magyar families chose escape to Hungary over deportation, trying to reach Hungary by boat under in the darkness, with their meager belongings. The Hungarian government raised strenuous objections against the resettlements, handing a note to Prague already on November 23, and another to the Council of Foreign Ministers on the 25th.¹⁶⁰⁸

Count Mihály Károlyi asked Benes in a polite, friendly letter to call a halt to the dispersal of the Magyar population. In his reply, Benes wrote – according to Vadkerty, the letter was drafted by the Czechoslovak government and merely signed by Benes – that 120,000 Slovaks voluntarily undertook to work in Bohemia and Moravia as part of a 2-year plan but, since the Magyars did not freely volunteer, they had to be 'prodded.'¹⁶⁰⁹

The resettlement effort went on for 99 days, ending on February 25, 1947. It affected 44,129 persons, representing about 11,000 families.¹⁶¹⁰

Beside deportation and resettlement, re-Slovakization was the second method of responding to the Magyar question after the Paris Peace Conference. In its official interpretation, re-Slovakization was meant to return to the 'nation of their ancestors' those of Slavic origin but who, by upbringing, persuasion or conviction, consider themselves as a member of another – in our case Magyar – nation. In theory, re-Slovakization was supposed to be voluntary but, knowing the results and weighing the methods used, we can honestly say that it can be held to be forcible (re)assimilation. Slovak politicians cited historical grounds for this assimilative onslaught: that South Slovakia was Slovak in its entirety until the 150 years of the Turkish occupation when Magyars from the occupied territories robbed the Slovaks of their national identity. Then, in the 19th century, another wave of conversion to become Magyars continued this

¹⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 257.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Vadkerty: *A deportálások ...* op. cit., pp. 22-26.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 36-49; Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., pp. 249-276.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Balogh: *Magyarország ...* op. cit., p. 126.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Vadkerty: *A deportálások ...* op. cit., pp. 54-55.

¹⁶¹⁰ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 137.

process. These ‘Magyar sins’ were to be corrected by re-Slovakization – a return to the original ethnic conditions.¹⁶¹¹

The pace and methods of re-Slovakization were decided at a meeting in Prague on June 13, 1946. Led by Clementis (representing the Czechoslovak government), those present (Daniel Okali for the Slovak government, as well as others from the Settlement Office, the Nationality Department of the Interior Ministry, Education Ministry, Attorney General, Agricultural and Land Reform Ministries, the National Rebuilding Foundation and the Slovak Statistical Office) worked out the precise details for the timetable and administration of re-Slovakization.¹⁶¹² On June 21, the Central Re-Slovakization Committee was created as the central managing body of the process.¹⁶¹³ At this point in time, though, the Committee’s main activity did not revolve around re-Slovakization but the work that arose from the Czechoslovak-Hungarian population exchange. It was the Committee that assembled and approved the names of the Magyars drawn for the exchange. The emerging argument between Prague and Bratislava regarding areas of responsibility forced Prague to close down the Committee (its last meeting was on October 24, 1946) and administration of re-Slovakization petitions were administered by a department of the Settlement Office. On April 24, 1947, the Interior Ministry created the Re-Slovakization Committee, as a department of the Interior Ministry in Bratislava (hence, it is no longer a Slovak body but a Czechoslovak one-*auth.*).¹⁶¹⁴

To return to the events of 1946, the Office of Internal Affairs decreed, on July 17, the re-Slovakization of the population in decree 20.000/I-V/1-1946. Accordingly, Slovak nationality attaches to those who declared themselves as Slovaks during the 1930 census (group A), as well as those who consider themselves as such and are of Slovak, Czech or other Slavic origin (group B). The decree contained stipulations for the granting of Slovak nationality. It was only to be granted to persons who never committed a crime against the Czechoslovak Republic, were never officials or members of a Magyar Fascist party, or supported Magyarization.

We do not intend to delve into the process of re-Slovakization, merely to note the end result. According to the similar figures of both Ölvedi and Kaplan, 410,820 people requested confirmation of Slovak nationality: of that 84,141 were rejected, 326,679 were approved.¹⁶¹⁵ Thus, more than 400,000 Magyars were forced to renounce their origins, mother tongue and culture to escape deportation and confiscation of assets, to gain a small measure of civil rights.

¹⁶¹¹ Janics: *A hontalanság ...* op. cit., p. 218.

¹⁶¹² Vadkerty: *A reszlovakizáció ...* op. cit., pp. 33, 37-38, 44.

¹⁶¹³ Ölvedi: *Napfogyatkozás ...* op. cit., p. 64; Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁶¹⁴ Ibid (Ölvedi), p. 70.

¹⁶¹⁵ Gyönyör, József: *Államalkotó nemzetiség. Tények és adatok a csehszlovákiai nemzetiségekről* [Founding nationality. Facts and data of the nationalities of Czechoslovakia]. Madách Kiadó, Bratislava, 1989.

The process of re-Slovakization – or the overt persecution of the Magyar minority – came to an end with the Communist takeover in February of 1948 and the shift in international power relations (the crystallization of the two blocks and their deteriorating relationship). In 1947, the Soviet Union began to consolidate the zone of influence it acquired in 1945. Both Czechoslovakia and Hungary were incorporated into the block directly overseen by the Soviet Union; hence, a solution to the minority question was subservient to Moscow's interests. The policies carried out by the Czechoslovak politicians against the Magyar minority created a great deal of tension between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. It was against Moscow's interest that two countries in its jurisdiction exhibited hostile behavior toward each other. Prague was forced to give up its quest for a final solution to its Magyar question, was forced to alter its nationality policies. Under Soviet pressure, the slogans of 'countries, nations and nationalities struggling for a socialist world order' began to appear on the lips of leading Czechoslovak politicians. On this principle, the decrees that stripped the Magyar minority of its rights began to be amended, including halting the resettlement to Hungary on September 30, 1948. On October 12, the members of the Magyar minority regained their Czechoslovak citizenship; beginning on May 1, 1949, those resettled into Bohemia were gradually allowed to return to Slovakia; on May 17, 1952, the Czechoslovak government enacted laws that assured the rights of the Magyars in economic and cultural life.

In this altered environment, the 'results' of re-Slovakization were re-interpreted. In our view, the mass inclusion by the Magyar minority was an act of desperation to stay alive. This view is best validated by the census figures of later years, since an increasing number again deem themselves to be Magyars. The table below illustrates that the Czechoslovak politicians and authorities, in spite of the use of every possible means at hand, failed in their efforts to erase the Magyar minority.

Year	Census ethnicity:
	Magyar
1949	190,000
1950	367,733
1960	533,934
1970	570,478
1980	579,166
1991	566,741

Post-WWII Czechoslovak census figures. (Source: By the author.¹⁶¹⁶)

In summary, it can be said that the second pillar of Benes' concept – the creation of a national Czechoslovak state with the expulsion of the non-Slav population – came partially true. With regard to the German minority, he secured the blessing of both the Soviet Union and the western Allies, giving him free reign to unilaterally remove the German population from

¹⁶¹⁶ Based on data to be found in Rothschild: *East Central ...* op. cit.; Vadkerty: *A reszlovakizáció ...* op. cit., p. 152; Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit.

Czechoslovakia. The former 3.25 million German minority was reduced to 150,000. He failed to obtain the same approval with regard to the Magyar minority, although the Soviet Union supported the Czechoslovak politicians at every possible forum, in every possible way. Hence, the cleansing of Slovakia of the Magyars through population exchange, re-Slovakization, deportation and resettlement was only partially successful. More than what any analysis can impart, the ‘success’ of Benes’ anti-minority policy is reflected in the data of the 1930 and 1950 Czechoslovak census.

Year	Census ethnicity: Magyar	Census ethnicity: German
1930	691,923	3,231,688
1950	354,532	167,117

Magyar and German minorities in Slovakia. (Source: By the author.¹⁶¹⁷)

The apparent discrepancy between the 1950 Magyar census numbers in this table and the previous one is due to one referring to all of Czechoslovakia, while this one strictly to Slovakia.

4.2 THE FAILURE OF THE FOURTH CONCEPT ATTEMPTS AT COOPERATION WITH THE COMMUNISTS

Beneš’ suppositions and the reality

As a starting point, the parallel must be noted that a victorious Benes entered Hradcany Castle after his second bout of exile, same as after his first. The second victory, however, was different. A victory it was, certainly, but it came with omens which already foreshadowed the fall. One biographer, Hanzal, wrote: “Prague was liberated by the Red Army, and the second President of Czechoslovakia returned to the country, from the East, under the auspices of Soviet soldiers and Czechoslovak Communists.”¹⁶¹⁸

In our opinion, by 1945 Benes fell into the trap of his own fourth concept. Nothing illustrates it more clearly than his having to admit defeat on several of his key arguments at the March Moscow talks. For one, he had to back away from his vision of a unitary state on the Slovak matter, and secondly, he failed to obtain complete acceptance of his radical position on the nationality issue. Finally, the government program included such radical Communist demands as a general agrarian reform and the nationalization of industry.¹⁶¹⁹ The bitter-sweet victory reaped in Moscow, in the end, went unsigned by Benes and, when officially announced, he meaningfully walked out of the event.¹⁶²⁰ The constitution of the

¹⁶¹⁷ Based on data to be found in Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 134; Gyönyör: *Államalkotó ...* op. cit.

¹⁶¹⁸ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁶¹⁹ Borsiné Toldy–Szokolay: *Harc a hatalomért ...* op. cit., pp. 101-105.

¹⁶²⁰ Ádám: *Edvard Benes ...* op. cit., p. 159; the government program was finally signed by 25 politicians, see Janics: *A kassai ...* op. cit., pp. 50-51.

government and the distribution of the portfolios reflected the will of the Communists more and not his. The Prime Ministership went to Zdeněk Fierlinger – long time ambassador to Moscow – who never hid his sympathies towards the Communists. Of the 25 ministers in the government, 8 were Communists, among them Interior, Agriculture, Education and Welfare; Gottwald and Siroky became Deputy Prime Ministers; Clementis became Deputy Foreign Minister beside Jan Masaryk.¹⁶²¹

The fact is that the Communists secured some key portfolios, such as the Interior Ministry, which significantly reduced Benes' ability to make internal policies. Taborsky takes the position that Benes hoped to be able to make changes later, more amenable to his views, than the political situation that developed in May of 1945. In his view, Benes' strategy against the Communists rested on eight preconceptions.¹⁶²² They were:

1. The support of the people. He believed that the people – and the organizations that they maintained – would be brave enough and would take a stand for democracy.
2. An agreement could be reached with the Communist Party, as with any other party. He thought that if he made a proper agreement with the Communists they, in turn, would play by the same democratic rules.
3. If he shared government power with the Communists, it would then prevent the growth of their popularity. He hoped that the unpopular decisions, which must, of necessity, be made after a war, would reduce the popularity of the Communists, as well.
4. The Communists will not be able to gain a parliamentary majority. He figured that democratic forces would reawaken and the Communists would make a poor showing at the elections for the National Assembly.
5. The basic freedom of the political institutional system could be retained. He trusted that, although the Communists strove for total collectivization of the economy, the economic foundation of democracy could be kept.
6. His popularity among the Czechoslovak people, his prestige and moral authority could be used as a weapon against the Communists. He hoped that the political assets he gathered in his first and second exiles would be adequate against the Communists.
7. That westerns contacts could be maintained. He hoped that Czechoslovakia would be the bridge between East and West.
8. Soviet intervention in Czechoslovak domestic matters could be minimized. He trusted that Stalin would honor paragraph 4 of the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement of December of 1943, which stated that the Soviet Union would not interfere in matters of internal affair.

If the expectations listed above came to be, reasoned Benes, then he could forge the future of Czechoslovakia according to his own intentions. In reviewing Taborsky's 8 points, we feel they can be summed up in two:

What results will the Communists garner in the elections?

¹⁶²¹ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁶²² Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., pp. 213-223.

Will the Soviet Union interfere in Czechoslovakia's internal matters?

The answer to the first one came in the results of the May 26, 1946 National Assembly elections, with the following breakdown:

Party *	Result %
Czechoslovak Communist Party	40.2%
Czech National Socialist Party	27.7%
Czechoslovak People's Party	20.2%
Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party	15.6%

1946 election results in Bohemia. (Source: By the author.¹⁶²³)

* Only these four parties were permitted to contest the election. All others, such as the popular pre-war Agrarian Party, were banned.

Party **	Result %
Democratic Party	62.0%
Slovak Communist Party	30.4%
Freedom Party	3.7%
Slovak Workers' Party	3.1%

1946 election results in Slovakia. (Source: By the author.¹⁶²⁴)

**Only these four parties were permitted to stand for election. All the others, including the always-well-performing Slovak People's Party of Hlinka, were banned.

Party ***	Result %	Seats
Czechoslovak Communist Party	31.2%	93
Czech National Socialist Party	18.4%	55
Czechoslovak People's Party	15.7%	46
Democratic Party (Slovakia only)****	14.1%	43
Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party	12.1%	37
Slovak Communist Party (Slovakia only)	6.9%	21
Freedom Party (Slovakia only)	0.9%	3
Slovak Workers' Party (Slovakia only)	0.7%	2

Consolidated results of the 1946 Czechoslovak elections. (Source: By the author.¹⁶²⁵)

*** The German and Magyar minorities were not permitted to vote.

**** Czech parties could not run in Slovakia and vice versa.

The three tables clearly show that the Communist Party won the 1946 elections in Bohemia but suffered a defeat in Slovakia (if indeed 30% can be seen as a defeat in an agrarian country).¹⁶²⁶ Looking at the consolidated

¹⁶²³ The table figures were based on data from Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., pp. 253-255; Zdenek Suda: *Zealots and Rebels. A History of the Ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1980, pp. 196-197.

¹⁶²⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁶ Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 228-260.

results, the combined total for the Czechoslovak and Slovak Communist Parties was 38% for the entire country, meaning they won the elections. Hence, Benes' supposition, that the Communists could not gain a majority in an open election, fell apart. At the same time, the showing of his own party – the Czech National Socialist Party – with only 18% came as a disappointment.¹⁶²⁷

The post-election parliament, also known as the Constitutional National Assembly, elected Benes as president on June 19, 1946. Two weeks later, on July 2, a new government was sworn in under the Communist Klement Gottwald. Thus, the road opened for the Czechoslovak Communists to make use of their stated principle 'the democratic way to socialism', to seize power through democratic means.¹⁶²⁸ After the elections, a tense situation developed in the country, which continued to grow. It became evident that the words of the Communists, regarding democracy, had to be taken with caution. They placed their people in all the important places from the presidential suite to the settlement offices, issuing directives to their trusted men. Their demands increased over all aspects of public life and the economy, striving for a continuation of nationalization and control of the private sector.¹⁶²⁹ At their initiative, the National Assembly passed the law proclaiming a Two-Year Plan, which marked the first instance of a command economy.¹⁶³⁰

Benes made an attempt to slow the Communist takeover of power, thinking he could control the situation.¹⁶³¹ However, events regarding the Marshall Plan showed that, in Czechoslovakia, Benes' intentions and actions were no longer the deciding factors. On June 5, 1947, at Harvard University, American Secretary of State George Marshall announced the European Reconstruction Program, better known as the Marshall Plan, for the rebuilding of Europe with American economic aid.¹⁶³² Twenty-two European countries were invited to Paris for a preparatory conference. On July 4, the Communist Czechoslovak government of Gottwald unanimously voted to accept the Secretary of State's invitation and go to Paris.¹⁶³³ It must be noted that Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Hungary declined participation in the Marshall Plan, while Poland also accepted the invitation to Paris. The spokesmen for the CzCP justified the decision in the mass information media by saying that this was "the only correct direction dictated by an enlightened self-interest", keeping in mind that Czechoslovakia was a developed industrial country where the high standard of living could only be restored and maintained if the country

¹⁶²⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 260.

¹⁶²⁸ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁶²⁹ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁶³⁰ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 237.

¹⁶³¹ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁶³² Berend, Iván: *Terelőúton. Közép- és Kelet-Európa 1944-1990* [Detour. Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1990]. Vince Kiadó, 1999, p. 61.

¹⁶³³ Beneš took the position that, for economic reasons, Czechoslovakia must take part in the Marshall Plan, see Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 262.

takes part with other developed industrial economies in international labor distribution and trade.¹⁶³⁴

On July 8, a high-ranking Czechoslovak government delegation traveled to Moscow, made up of Prime Minister Gottwald, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk and Drtina (representing an ill Minister of Trade Ripka). Initially, the trip was independent of the Marshall Plan. Originally, the delegation wanted to get Stalin's opinion on the French-Czechoslovak agreement but, due to events, the Marshall Plan became the main topic. Stalin categorically stated to the delegation that "the only aim of the Marshall Plan is to isolate the Soviet Union."¹⁶³⁵ In line with his announce position, Stalin insisted that the delegation, while still in Moscow, reject Czechoslovakia's participation in the Marshall Plan.¹⁶³⁶ The members of the delegation informed their colleagues in Prague by telephone, finally announcing on July 10 Czechoslovakia's rejection of taking part in the Marshall Plan, saying "Czechoslovakia's participation could be interpreted as being harmful to the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and its allies."¹⁶³⁷

After their return from Moscow, Jan Masaryk summed up to Ripka: "My dear friend, from now on we are only vassals."¹⁶³⁸ We must agree with Masaryk's statement since Czechoslovakia's forced about face on the European reconstruction program clearly showed that the Soviet Union would not suffer any sovereign decisions to be made in the East-Central European region that it considered as its sphere of influence. Benes must have noticed by now that Czechoslovak foreign policy, and increasingly domestic policy, was no longer directed from Hradcany Castle in Prague but from the Kremlin.

The creation of the Information Office (COMINFORM) also pointed in this direction. Communist party functionaries were meeting in Sklarska Poreba, Poland, between September 22 and 27. In attendance was the Soviet Communist Party, every European 'People's Democracies' and the delegates from the French and Italian Communist parties. The closed door meeting decided to create an "Information Office of Communist and Worker's parties" with the aim of "easing the flow of information and experiences between the various national Communist organizations" and "assist in the coordination of their activities." The creation of such an organization was justified by the "reactionary subversive maneuvers of the capitalist powers attempting to destroy socialism", for which the alleged example was the almost successful attempt to draw Czechoslovakia and Poland into the Marshall Plan, which is "a plan for the creation of American capitalism over Europe."¹⁶³⁹

¹⁶³⁴ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁶³⁵ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák* ... op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁶³⁶ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁶³⁷ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák* ... op. cit., p. 133.

¹⁶³⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁹ Ibid, pp. 136-143; Gail Stokes (ed.): *From Stalinism to Pluralism*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1991, pp. 40-42.

The Communist takeover

In the 1946 elections in Slovakia, the Democratic Party won a clear majority, having garnered twice the votes that the Communists received, so the Communists decided to invalidate the Democratic Party victory. Their campaign began the day after the election.¹⁶⁴⁰ The excuse used was the case against Tiso, the former Slovak head of state. The court case took place between December 2, 1946 and April 15, 1947.¹⁶⁴¹ The Communists wanted to aim the case against the 'Catholic wing' of the Democratic Party. They assumed that the Democratic Party promised the Slovak Catholics to take a principled stand on Tiso's behalf, especially to prevent his execution. The Communists wanted to create a schism in the Democratic Party. They began from the assumption that, if the Democratic Party was unable to prevent Tiso's execution, the political Catholics would split from the party. Hence, they did all that was possible to have Tiso sentenced and executed.¹⁶⁴²

At the close of the case on April 15, Tiso was sentenced to death. The former president pleaded for clemency. The decision was up to the government – in the end Benes, as President of the Republic. Benes leaned toward carrying out the sentence but was loath to shoulder all the responsibility in such a delicate matter. Immediately before the session of the Czechoslovak government, he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Gottwald, stating that in the matter he primarily saw a 'human question' because, "after all, a human life is at stake." On the other hand, he noted that the question of clemency also has a distinct political aspect, thus, he, as a president independent of all parties, must submit to the decision of the government.¹⁶⁴³ At the parliamentary session, 17 ministers (on this occasion, the Czech and Slovak Communists were allied with their opponents, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party) voted to reject clemency, six voted to grant clemency (the ministers of the Slovak Democratic Party and the Catholic ministers of the Czechoslovak People's Party). Following the government decision, Benes rejected the plea for clemency and Tiso was executed on the morning of April 18.

In spite of it, the rift in the Democratic Party, presumed by the Communists, did not take place. Thus, another massive offensive was begun in the fall of 1947 to break the strength of the Democratic Party. The Communists made use of the fact that they controlled key positions in the State Security Office. Based on false confessions, forged documents and coerced admissions, they presented the so-called 'anti-government conspiracy' case.¹⁶⁴⁴ The heart of it was the assertion that a number of the Democratic Party politicians were cooperating with émigré groups and preparing anti-government actions, whose aim was the proclamation of a

¹⁶⁴⁰ Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., p. 241.

¹⁶⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 243-246; Ivan Kamenec: *Josef Tiso*. In: *Arcképek kettős tükrében* [Portraits in a dual mirror]. Dunaszerdahely, 1997, pp. 154-159; Kovács: *Jozef Tiso ...* op. cit., pp. 72-74; Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., pp. 189-190.

¹⁶⁴² Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 190.

¹⁶⁴³ Kamenec: *Josef Tiso ...* op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., p. 250.

Slovak state. The Communist's aim is clearly seen behind the idea: linking an illegal anti-government group with leaders of the Democratic Party.

Interior Minister Vaclav Nosek first publicized a report on September 14, 1947, of the unmasking of a conspiratorial group in Slovakia, followed almost weekly, to shock the populace, by reports of various conspiracies.¹⁶⁴⁵ The Communists presented their fabrications to the people with uninhibited demagoguery, even to the invention of an attempt against Benes.¹⁶⁴⁶ As part of the 'conspiracy', more than 300 people were arrested, almost every secretary to the leaders of the Democratic Party, the two general secretaries of the party. Suspicion was raised of the party president, who was forced to resign. On October 30, the Communists began a new skirmish to gain control.¹⁶⁴⁷ Gustav Husak, president of the Office of the Delegates (the executive committee of the Assembly-*ed.*), tendered his resignation along with the four Communist members of the body and Mikulaš Ferjenčík, the Interior delegate. Since two members of the Democratic Party also resigned earlier, Husak grasped the opportunity and announced to the presidium of the Slovak National Council that the Office of the Delegates was unable to fulfill its mandate and quit *en masse*. The Slovak National Front empowered Husak on October 31 to begin selection of members for a new Office of the Delegates. The Democratic Party immediately objected, setting off an internal crisis of several weeks. The Communists used mobs to increase the pressure, calling for mass meetings at places of work, convening a congress of farmers, and threatening a general strike. Finally, on November 18, the Democratic Party backed down as a result of Communist pressure. At the meeting of the National Front, they conceded three of the Delegate positions (Health, Postal Services and Justice) and replaced the others.

In the newly constituted Office of the Delegates, the Democratic Party had six seats instead of the former nine, the Communists had four, plus the president, two smaller parties had one each, while non-party experts represented two areas (Interior and Justice).¹⁶⁴⁸ The Communist objective was clear. They wanted to alter the power structure that came into being with the 1946 elections, negating the majority of the Democratic Party in the Office of the Delegates. This they achieved. After November 18, without elections but through political pressure, the Democratic Party lost the majority in the Office of the Delegates that the 1946 elections gave them.

The November 1947 turn of events in Slovakia were, in essence, a dress rehearsal for what the Communists mounted nationally between February 20 and 25, 1948, employing similar political pressure in Prague.¹⁶⁴⁹ With the creation of the COMINFORM, the Czechoslovak Communists openly changed direction – dropping the 'democratic road to socialism' slogan – and struggled to gain power with Stalin's undisguised

¹⁶⁴⁵ Ibid; Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 247-250.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 242.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Lettrich: *History of ...* op. cit., pp. 249-252.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 245.

support. As we just saw previously, the first step of this new strategy was the forcible alteration of the power structure in Slovakia in the fall of 1947. At the end of 1947, the internal political situation in Czechoslovakia became more tense, leading to regular political skirmishes between the Communist Party and the parties of the National Front. The question legitimately arises: What did Benes, as the President of the Republic, do and think?

In his book, Taborsky opines that Benes evaluated the situation optimistically. In November of 1947 (while the Communist takeover attempt is under way in Slovakia-*auth.*), he tells Steinhardt, the American ambassador in Prague, that very shortly “we shall reach a turning point” and assures him that Communism could not win in Czechoslovakia.¹⁶⁵⁰ He made a similar statement on January 12, 1948 to Josef Korbel, ambassador to Belgrade. We must not forget that this was a mere six weeks before the February Communist takeover, so we are on safe ground if we say that Benes assessed the situation completely incorrectly. How could a seasoned politician, tempered by countless external and internal political battles, make such an error?

We feel that Benes based his optimism on two facts.¹⁶⁵¹ On the congress of the Social-Democratic Party, held in Brno between November 13 and 16, 1947. The majority of the delegates felt that, from the party’s perspective, it was harmful to continue the close collaboration of Fierlinger with the Communists, wishing, instead, to take a more independent direction. Accordingly, Fierlinger (former ambassador to Moscow and in close contact with the Communist émigrés) was replaced as party president by Bohumil Laušman, a representative of the more independent line. In his view, Benes took this change as indication that the centrist Laušman would not support the Communist policies. Hence, even if the Communists do well in the upcoming 1948 elections, the possibility of a parliamentary alliance between the Communist and Social-Democrat factions – to ensure a majority – is not realistic.

And secondly, in January of 1948, Benes came into possession of a public opinion poll commissioned by the Information Ministry (already under strict Communist control), which disclosed that, if elections were held within 12 months, the Communists would poll 25% less than they did in the 1946 elections.¹⁶⁵²

It is probable that Benes, in possession of the previous information, worked according to the following scenario: the Communists will make a poorer showing in the 1948 election than they did in 1946, making it possible for the National Socialist Party – Benes’ party – and the realigned Social-Democratic Party (with, perhaps, the inclusion of several smaller non-Communist parties) to gain a parliamentary majority, form a government and thus, through democratic means, force the Communists into the role of opposition. We must admit that the scenario is, in theory, realistic and attainable. What’s more, Benes took part in the formation of

¹⁶⁵⁰ Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁶⁵¹ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁶⁵² Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 223.

several such governments between the wars. Alas, we feel that in this assessment, Benes omitted two important facts. On the one hand, he did not include the fact that the Communists were willing to use methods outside of parliament (organizing and directing mass demonstrations) to retain power, or grasp total control. He seemed not to have drawn any conclusions from the November 1947 events in Slovakia. On the other hand, he did not perceive that the Czechoslovak Communists were coming under ever greater pressure from their Soviet comrades. The importance of this aspect is well illustrated by the first regular meeting of the COMINFORM in Belgrade in December of 1947. There, Anna Pauker, representing the Romanian Worker's Party severely chastised the Czechoslovak Communists for their seemingly endless patient behavior toward their coalition partners.¹⁶⁵³ According to any objective measure, this accusation was exaggerated. The Czechoslovak Communists could hardly be accused of an excess of conciliatory spirit but Pauker's comment showed that every Communist must line up behind the COMINFORM position.

The Czechoslovak Communists understood the veiled message and began earnest activity. The continuously created conflicts within the government and Prime Minister Gottwald incessantly ignored a series of government decisions.¹⁶⁵⁴ Also, the indiscretions of the Communist Foreign Minister, Vaclav Nosek, transformed the Interior and Security apparatus into a tool of the Communist Party. It was only a matter of time before the increasing tensions led to a violent confrontation. By early 1948, all that was needed was a spark.

The final conflict was provided by the transgression of Nosek's Interior Ministry. The National Socialist Party and its allies tried to defend themselves against the Communist maneuvers by taking the police question to parliament. Prokop Drtina – National Socialist Party member and Justice Minister since 1945 – read a report in parliament, which implicated the Communist members within the Interior Ministry with attempting to wring confessions from those arrested that would compromise members of the National Socialist Party.¹⁶⁵⁵ The event concerned officers of the internal security service offering several minor Nazi war criminals – awaiting their day in court in a Prague jail – to make depositions of collaboration against a few of the non-Communist leaders of the Resistance and the Gestapo. As well, they tried to create a spy case implicating the non-Communist politicians being in the employ of western intelligence agencies.¹⁶⁵⁶ These tactics, it must be noted, were reminiscent of those employed in neighboring Poland and Hungary, where, with the assistance of the police and the courts, the Communists gradually removed from public office all their political opponents. At the end of his speech,

¹⁶⁵³ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 213.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Kovač: *Szlovákia* ... op. cit., p. 245.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák* ... op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 215.

Drtina demanded that the recently named Communist police officers be recalled, and demanded an investigation into the matter.¹⁶⁵⁷

Minister Nosek, on the excuse that the secretive work of internal security made such investigation impossible, did nothing. In fact, he replaced the police commissioners of eight Prague districts with Communist Party members. Their function was extremely important: they had the right to provide arms and ammunition to police units, as well as to provide the uniformed members of the internal security forces with the kind of weaponry that they might deem necessary in a situation.¹⁶⁵⁸ It seems obvious to us that Nosek was ensuring Communist direction of the police forces in an emergency.

At the February 13 sitting of the Cabinet, the non-Communist ministers were in the majority and they decided to have the Interior Minister suspend the appointment of the police commissioners. Nosek, however, reports on February 17 of the appointments, as a *fait accompli*. In response, the ministers of the National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party and the Democratic Party, after due authorization from their party executives, decided to boycott all government meetings until the question was resolved to their satisfaction.¹⁶⁵⁹ When the Communists learned of it, they immediately convened their Central Committee, which passed a resolution accusing the civil parties of trying to overthrow the government, of trying to replace government with a government of civil servants, so that "in the atmosphere of political and economic chaos, anti-democratic elections can be prepared."¹⁶⁶⁰ To frustrate the 'conspiracy', the Central Committee turned to the people, namely the National Front, the factory committees, the unions and village committees. They convened a meeting of the unions for February 22, a national assembly of village committees for February 28. The Communists, thus, responded to the steps of the civil politicians with the method of manipulated mass public pressure. Dušan Kováč points out that many workers and farmers had no idea of what was happening but fell prey to the populist slogans, becoming tools in the hands of the Communists.¹⁶⁶¹

Gottwald visited Benes' residence already on February 17,¹⁶⁶² who recounted the visit the following day to two National Socialist Party ministers, Petr Zenkl and Hubert Ripka, in the following words "It seems to me that the Communists are not sure of things, and they are afraid ... They come to me because they want me to protect them. This is the first victory ..."¹⁶⁶³

In the morning of February 20, the ministers of the National Socialist Party (Zenkl, Stransky, Drtina and Ripka), of the Czechoslovak People's Party (Šramek, Hála, Kopecky and Proháska), and of the Slovak

¹⁶⁵⁷ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 215.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁶⁶¹ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 245.

¹⁶⁶² Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 264-269.

¹⁶⁶³ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 228.

Democratic Party (Kocvara, Pietor, Rranek and Lichner) – twelve in all – handed in their resignations on the grounds that Interior Minister Nosek did not execute the February 13 decision of the government regarding the police commissioners.¹⁶⁶⁴ They speculated that Benes would not accept their resignation and force Gottwald into sacrificing his Interior Minister. If Gottwald is unwilling to back down, then Benes dissolves the National Assembly and calls for an early election.

Suda – a historian of Czech descent living in America – points out that the resigning ministers made three serious tactical mistakes.¹⁶⁶⁵ For the resignation, the National Socialist quartet who suggested resignation as a strategic weapon did not consult with the Social-Democratic Party, which also had ministers in the government. Secondly, they also neglected to consult with the two non-party ministers, Jan Masaryk and Svoboda. Thus, the Social-Democrats and the two non-aligned remained in the government. Finally, they did not consult with Benes regarding steps to be taken after their resignation. This last one was a definite error, especially if we consider that they expected Benes not to accept the non-Communist ministers' resignation but to order Nosek to execute the government's decision of February 13.

Although in his book, Hanzal, in opposition to Suda, states that regarding the third 'error', the ministers apprised Benes of their plan and discussed that the resignations would not be accepted.¹⁶⁶⁶ This disagreement we can not resolve here but we lean toward Suda's opinion as another historian, Zinner, also stresses in his recording of the events of these days that, during the crisis, the ministers tendering their resignations were not in close contact with Benes. They only met with Benes once, on February 23, three days after handing in their resignation. During this short meeting, Benes said to Ripka and a few of his associates: "I will not yield."¹⁶⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that the important players on the non-Communist side behaved as if there was no crisis. Two of the people's Party ministers – Hála and Prohaska – attended a reception of the Women's Congress. Another, Hubert Ripka, was in his riding attending to ordinary tasks as befitting a representative. Peter Zenkl, president of the National Socialist Party, was in Moravia, accepting an honorary citizenship from a small town.¹⁶⁶⁸ Thus, while the Communists spent every minute to turn the emerging crisis to their advantage, the leaders and important players of the other side devoted themselves to routine tasks. Since only 12 of the 26 ministers tendered their resignation – meaning it did not reach 50% - the Communist had an opportunity to interpret the events as only a partial government crisis, that the government still retained a majority for a quorum. Hence, reasoned the Communists, the situation can also be resolved by Benes accepting the resignations and appointing new

¹⁶⁶⁴ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., pp. 264-265.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 218.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 228.

ministers. Gottwald, in his meetings with Benes – Benes was notified of the resignations at 11:30 on February 20 and was visited by Gottwald and Nosek at 16:40 – demanded that he accept the 12 resignations and call on Gottwald to form a new government, without any reactionaries.¹⁶⁶⁹

Gottwald made a speech to ‘the people’ on February 21 at the main square of Prague’s Old Town, in which he articulated that the vacancies left by the resigned ministers should be filled by representatives from the various public organizations.¹⁶⁷⁰ This manner of resolving the crisis was enthusiastically supported by the mobs assembled by the CzCP. The Congress of Factory Councils announced on February 22 that they support the Communist demands, as well as demanding more nationalization. On February 23, the self-proclaimed ‘revolutionary’ body – naturally under Communist direction – the National Front Central Action Committee was formed. The following day, at the call of the unions, a one hour general strike was observed in Prague. On February 25, Laušman – the president of the Social-Democratic Party, belonging to the centrist wing – accepted Fierlinger’s political direction of supporting the Communists. In effect, the Communists were able to assemble the crowds in the streets and marshal them under their own banners, while luring the Social-Democrats back into their camp.

While these events were swirling about, the CzCP made effective use of the fact that they controlled some key ministries (mainly the Information and Interior Ministries). The police, under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, began to arrest the middle-tier activists of the non-Communist parties,¹⁶⁷¹ and the media outlets were fed a particularly slanted view of the events by the Information Ministry. Non-Communist members of the Information Ministry were locked out on February 21.¹⁶⁷² The Ministry also ensured that the radio also supported the Communists, so that those who disagreed with this dictum – similar to Ministry workers – were prevented from working. In the printed media, the printers were urged not to print and circulate “anything that is aimed against the people” (the ‘people’ here meaning the CzCP-auth.).¹⁶⁷³

While these events were unfolding, the Minister of War, General Svoboda, announce the neutrality of the armed forces. It was at this juncture that the Soviet government openly joined the fray, sending Valery Zorin – Deputy Foreign Minister, former ambassador to Prague – to Prague.¹⁶⁷⁴ The excuse for his visit was to check on the Soviet grain shipments but, in reality, his task was to conduct on-site management of affairs and to apply more pressure. According to German historian Kogelfranz, Zorin brought Stalin’s order to the Czechoslovak Communists to attack immediately, meaning to take over the country immediately.¹⁶⁷⁵

¹⁶⁶⁹ Zeman-Klima: *The life of ...* op. cit., p. 265.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 219.

¹⁶⁷¹ Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁶⁷² Ibid.

¹⁶⁷³ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 343.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Fejtő: *A népi demokráciák ...* op. cit., p. 157.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége ...* op. cit., p. 142.

Dušan Kovač agrees with Kogelfranz that Stalin sent Zorin to Prague to suggest to the Czechoslovak Communists to ask for military assistance from the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷⁶

Zorin expressed to Benes, who received him, the concern of the Soviet leadership “regarding potential outcomes, which would endanger the Soviet Union’s interests and security.”¹⁶⁷⁷ The actions of the CzCP – primarily through the well-organized mass demonstrations and the actions of the Information and Interior Ministries – and the increased pressure, in the person of Zorin, all served to restrict Benes’ field of action. The Communists strived to isolate Benes; the Information Ministry put out an order to prevent Benes from accessing a microphone, from going on the air. The guard at the presidential residence was replaced by Communist soldiers and officers, every visitor was strictly checked and significant portions of the residential staff were spies of Nosek.¹⁶⁷⁸

On top of it all, the non-Communist side was not unified – the Social-Democrats were again warming up to the Communists – and the civil politicians were making one serious tactical and strategic blunder after another.

On February 24, Benes wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.¹⁶⁷⁹ In the letter, he wrote: “... it is clear to me that Gottwald, the president of the strongest party, will be the Prime Minister” but makes no mention of the key question whether to accept the resignation of the ministers as the Communists request. Instead, he asks the Communists to resolve the crisis through consultation with the other parties. In their written reply on the following day,¹⁶⁸⁰ the Communists said that the CzCP “could not enter into discussions with the current leaders of the National Socialist, People’s and Slovak parties because it would not be in agreement with either the interest of the people, or the interest of the continued peaceful development of the Republic.” Instead, they again repeat their position that Benes accept the ministers’ resignations and that their vacancy be filled by those recommended by Prime Minister Gottwald.

After sending their letter, a three-member delegation (Gottwald, Nosek and Zapoticky) was also sent to Benes. To this day, we do not know exactly what took place. The duo of Zeman-Klima do not mention the meeting in their book, while Hanzal only wrote a much abbreviated note in Benes’ biography: “... it is certain that they exerted pressure on the President, although we do not know how and how strong.”¹⁶⁸¹ Zinner also wrote that the exact events of the meeting are unknown but speculates that

¹⁶⁷⁶ Kovač: *Szlovákia ...* op. cit., p. 246; Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége ...* op. cit., pp. 142-143.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 220.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége ...* op. cit., p. 144.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Mezei, Géza: *Európa és a hidegháború a dokumentumok tükrében. I. Európa kettészakítása és a kétpólusú nemzetközi rend születése* [Europe and the Cold War reflected in documents. The splitting of Europe and the birth of the two power international order]. Új Mandátum Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, pp. 281-282.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 282-283.

¹⁶⁸¹ Hanzal: *Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 70.

the Communist delegates threatened Benes with a general strike, Soviet intervention and a possible bloodbath.¹⁶⁸² Taborsky takes the view that Benes backed down from Gottwald because he was afraid of a possible Soviet military intervention. He concluded from Zorin's appearance and actions that Stalin had decided to support the Czechoslovak Communists and military intervention could well be included.¹⁶⁸³ According to Kogelfranz, during the meeting Gottwald presented a 'liquidation list' to Benes, containing a roster of democratic politicians, saying that they would all be shot if the President did not accept the new ministers nominated by the Communists.¹⁶⁸⁴

Having said all that, a great number of unanswered questions remain regarding the February 25 final meeting and Benes' decision. One thing is certain. At 4:00 PM, Benes yielded to the pressure and accepted both the ministers' resignations and the new government as recommended by Gottwald to, as he claimed, expand and revive the National Front.¹⁶⁸⁵ Before signing the new slate of ministers, Benes went into the next room and asked his wife: "Hanichka (Hana), what can I do, what can I do?" To which his wife asked back: "Who do you help if you don't sign?"¹⁶⁸⁶ The question remained unanswered; Benes signed the new government appointments and, in essence, sanctioned the success of the Communist takeover.

In the new government, the Communists ensured the majority of the portfolios for themselves – 12 out of 24 – and of course the key ones. Three Social-Democrats – Fierlinger, Laušman and Erban – also received portfolios. Complete Communist control over the government was ensured by having the remaining nine ministers, who were representatives of large communal organizations, and who, if not formally CzCP members, were all dedicated Communists. The sole non-Communist Minister in the government was Jan Masaryk. He, however, was found dead on March 10, 1948 – two weeks after the new government was constituted – under a window of his official residence in the Czernin Palace. Officially, the matter was termed as a suicide – or an accidental death, having fallen from a balcony – but rumors have never died away (pun semi-intended-*ed.*) that Soviet Secret Service officers threw Jan Masaryk through the balcony door.¹⁶⁸⁷

The exile of Sezimovo Usti

After the successful Communist takeover, Benes left the Presidential Palace of February 27, 1948 – never to return – and took up residence at his country house in Sezimovo Usti.¹⁶⁸⁸ This was a voluntary internal exile,

¹⁶⁸² Zinner: *Communist Strategy* ... op. cit., p. 216.

¹⁶⁸³ Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 226.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Kogelfranz: *Jalta öröksége* ... op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 221; Zinner: *Communist Strategy* ... op. cit., p. 216.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., p. 229.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Claire Sterling: *The Masaryk case*. Harper and Row Publishing, London, 1968.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Zeman-Klima: *The life of* ... op. cit., pp. 269-282.

as opposed to 1915-1918 and 1938-1945, when he had to leave the country. Taborsky – who was Czechoslovak ambassador to Sweden at the time – recommended in his note that he leave the country and begin a third external exile. Benes rejected the suggestion.¹⁶⁸⁹ The man who always had a plan for everything through 30 years was now without one. He faltered, he vacillated, in essence, he gave up. When Gottwald called by telephone on March 7, Benes assured his victorious opponent that he does not wish to go into foreign exile and will not take part in any resistance activities. According Magda Ádám, his behavior already showed signs of illness, an illness that overpowered him after the critical February days, broke his will and may have contributed to his capitulation to Gottwald.¹⁶⁹⁰

In spite of it, his fighting spirit occasionally revived. This can be illustrated by the skirmishes around his resignation. On February 25 – after signing the new ministerial slate – he informed the president of the National Assembly of his intent to resign, drafting a resignation letter on March 1.¹⁶⁹¹ During his March 7 telephone conversation with Gottwald, who urged him to put off the resignation, he reversed his decision and did not hand in his letter of resignation. This step was advantageous to the Communists – hence, why Gottwald was trying to convince him to stay on – because if he continued to remain President, the Communist takeover could be interpreted not as a usurping of power but as a solution to a constitutional crisis with the appointment of a new government.

Taborsky explains this move of Benes as a hope that, as President, he could prevent the persecution of the civil politicians. In this hope, too, he was to be disappointed. Those leaders and members of the non-Communist parties who supported the February tactic of resistance to the CzCP were begun to be persecuted. In the weeks after the new government took office, mass cleansing took place in government offices, in the armed forces, in public education and in industry. The Communists removed enemies, real or imagined, whom they felt opposed the Communist line. During this housecleaning, many people were let go from their jobs, others demoted, while many were arrested.¹⁶⁹² The leaders of the non-Communist parties were forced into foreign exile (Zenkl, Stránský and Ripka of the National Socialist Party, Adolf Procházka and Ivo Duchaček of the Czechoslovak People's Party, and Josef Lettrich¹⁶⁹³ of the Slovak Democratic Party).¹⁶⁹⁴

While cleaning house, the Communists 'legalized' the power they grabbed in February by voting in a new constitution on May 9, 1948.¹⁶⁹⁵ At the general elections of May 30, the Communist controlled National Front received 90% of the votes in Bohemia and 86% in Slovakia. These elections were already organized along Communist lines, the voters received only two slips: one contained the slate of National Front

¹⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹⁰ Ádám: *Edvard Beneš ...* op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁶⁹¹ Taborsky: *President Edvard ...* op. cit., p. 236.

¹⁶⁹² Suda: *Zealots and Rebels ...* op. cit., p. 221.

¹⁶⁹³ Josef Lettrich: *History of modern Slovakia*. New York, 1955.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Zinner: *Communist Strategy ...* op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Kaplan: *Csehszlovákia igazi ...* op. cit., pp. 253-255.

candidates, the other was blank. Casting a blank slip meant abstention, which required considerable bravery since secret ballots were partially abolished (only those who asked for it could vote in a booth). The front two-thirds of the National Front list was reserved for the Communist and their fellow traveler candidates, non-Communist candidates being listed on the final third.¹⁶⁹⁶

Benes refused to sign into law the May 9 constitution and finally resigned from his presidential post on June 8, 1948. The National Assembly voted (June 14) to have Klement Gottwald succeed him.¹⁶⁹⁷ Taborsky reports that, after he resigned, Benes changed his view on foreign exile and was already prepared in July to escape abroad and start a new resistance.¹⁶⁹⁸ In truth, there was no realistic hope for this, as the state of his health declined; by August 20, he was barely able to speak. He died, finally, after an 85 hour death struggle, on September 3, 1948.

In the situation that confronted Benes between April of 1945 and February of 1947, the fundamental question must be: What are the chances of a democratic attempt in a country within the Soviet sphere, while relations between East and West are rapidly declining (due to the conflict over the fate of Germany¹⁶⁹⁹), the two opposing power blocks are emerging and the Cold War that sprang from it? Today, we know that history gave a negative answer. But then and there, Benes gave a Yes answer and attempted to carry through his ideas. One of his biographers summed up his attempts: "He carried out many things with which he did not agree and gave up many things he thought important. He was afraid to confess even to himself that he was a puppet, a mere tool, in the hands of Stalin and the Czechoslovak Communist Klement Gottwald. He deluded himself that, with clever policies and parliamentary methods, he could withstand the onslaught of Gottwald and save democracy."¹⁷⁰⁰

¹⁶⁹⁶ Suda: *Zealots and Rebels* ... op. cit., p. 227.

¹⁶⁹⁷ Zeman-Klima: *The life of* ... op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 274-275; Taborsky: *President Edvard* ... op. cit., pp. 243-244.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Mezei, Géza: *Németország és a hidegháború. A szövetséges hatalmak és a német kérdés* [Germany and the Cold War. The Allied powers and the German question]. Új Mandátum Kiadó, Budapest, 1990.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Ádám: *Edvard Beneš* ... op. cit., p. 161.

PART V: CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters, we have covered, in some detail, the four concepts of Benes and the steps taken toward their realization. Let us now look back and sum it up.

The First Concept

This concept was, it is clear to see, totally loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a variant of the Palacky Austro-Slav direction. He did not wish to liquidate the Monarchy but did feel the need for significant reorganization. Within Bohemia, Benes suggested a Czech-German compromise agreement. He did not accept, in fact sharply criticized, the return to the historical Kingdom of Bohemia, suggested as a statehood program by both the Old and Young Czechs, saying that it was impossible to implement; a country can not be created against the wishes of a third of its population, the German minority. He stressed that the coexistence of the Czechs and Germans within the traditional provinces can only be solved by decentralization and autonomy, meaning autonomy for both ethnic groups. His first concept demands less for the Czechs – and offers more for the Germans. The program of statehood, as proposed, would have united the three traditional provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. In this group, the Germans would have become a minority. Benes was willing to let the Germans ‘avoid’ Czech governmental control. In his theory, the Czechs and Germans live segregated lives, each with its own autonomy.

There was no chance for the realization of this plan. At its drafting, Benes was an unknown young social scientist and, with the outbreak of the First World War, he himself discarded the idea.

The Second Concept

This concept can not be attributed in its entirety to Benes since several of its key ideas were contributed by T.G. Masaryk, some before WWI (e.g.- the multi-national state and coexistence among the nations) and some during the war (see the London lectures of 1915). This concept should be seen as a product of their intellectual collaboration, which became one of the fundamental starting points in the creation of the Czechoslovak state.

The complete concept was presented to the public in 1916 in Paris in “Détruisez...”. The theory was based on two fundamentals: One, a review of history clearly shows that the Germans, Austrians and Hungarian always operated an anti-democratic and absolutist system. Essentially, Benes was trying to lend support to Masaryk’s interpretation of the war, to wit: there are two camps in the war, the Allies fighting for democratic principles and the absolutist Central Powers. Two, an attempt to assert that the pre-war cultural and historical development of the Czechoslovaks, their psychological and philosophical concepts, their intellectual make-up and social structure, make them members of western European camp.

Built on these two pillars, the conclusion was phrased as: “Demolish Austria-Hungary.” According to Benes, since Austria-Hungary abetted Germany’s military ambitions and pan-German aims, there is but one option to win the war. Austria-Hungary must be broken up and in its place new, independent countries must be created. Out of this process, a unified Czechoslovakia must be formed out of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. This Czechoslovak state, together with Russia, will form a barrier against Germany. In the East, Transylvania must be given to Romania, in the South, a Yugoslavia created out of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia must be linked with a corridor running between Austria and Hungary.

Benes justifies the appropriateness of his suggested re-drawing of Central Europe from the perspective of French politics. If Austria-Hungary is dismantled, it can no longer act in support of Germany. Germany will be reduced only to its own resources and, standing alone, “will be unable to do anything.” At the same time, the Hungarians, separated from Austria, will also be unable to renew their former policies. On top of it all, the independent small nations will be the natural allies of France against Germany.

It is our contention that in “*Détruisez...*”, Benes sketched a Central European reorganization plan, which took into consideration the long-range interests of France. Historians all agree that France’s main war aim was the military defeat of Germany and its diminishing afterwards. The French merely wanted to reform Austria-Hungary with perhaps some territorial exchanges, some border adjustments in favor of her allies. The French ambivalence toward the Monarchy is indicated by the real possibility of making a separate peace with Austria – in the third year of the war. Benes couched into this French framework, rather unpalatable for the Czech and Slovak émigrés, the program of the exiles – the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia – in such a manner as to be completely in harmony with French interests and war aims. He found a brilliant solution. He offered the French the key to overcoming Germany, while making sure that Czechoslovak needs were satisfied. He suggested the dismantling of Austria-Hungary – and the subsequent redrawing of the map of Central Europe – as the most direct means of defeating Germany.

This second concept came to be, in its entirety, within the framework of the Versailles peace order. The victors dismantled the Monarchy, created a Czechoslovakia, along with other so-called ‘nation states’ as Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland. Although the Central European states that emerged after Versailles are termed in historical literature as the ‘emergence of nation states’ – the replacement of a pre-1914 empire framework with a post-1918 national framework – the reality was that the new units created did not always produce a homogeneous nation state. Compared to the pre-1914 reality, the tendency of the restructuring of Versailles was truly an attempt towards ethnic needs. Many nationalities (Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvian and Estonians), which previously lived as minorities were able to have independent countries after 1918, or at least to be the majority people in the new countries. The new ‘nation states’, however, enclosed significant minority populations

within their borders. In some, especially Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the concept of the majority nation (i.e., a Yugoslav nation and a Czechoslovak nation) was but a catchy slogan and popular fiction.

In defense of the Second Concept

The main aim of the Benes directed foreign policy of Czechoslovakia between the two wars was maintenance of the existence of the Czechoslovak state, the protection of the borders drawn in Versailles. These borders could be threatened, theoretically, by four countries: Austria, Germany, Hungary and Poland. Of these threats, during the 20's, Benes looked at Hungary as the most pressing, as the chief foe of Czechoslovakia, as the major threat to Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity. To reduce the revisionist threat from Hungary, he exerted intensive activity in four directions: ONE, he created the Little Entente, thinking it would be suitable to safely organize the region. He felt the need for the creation of the Little Entente so important that he took a sharply opposing position to France over it. TWO, he signed various bilateral agreements, of which the most important was with Austria. During the 20's Benes followed an isolationist policy toward Hungary, which was very successful. With the 1921 Little Entente agreements and the Lany agreement with Austria, the cordon closed around Hungary. THREE, he was active on the international stage, primarily in the League of Nations. It was there that Benes and his deemed greatest enemy, Hungary, clashed most often. The main intent of the Hungarians was to keep the minority question on the agenda continuously and to try and secure international remedy for it. This had twin goals: to ease the situation of the Magyar minorities now under foreign governments, and to take a moral, legal and political stand against Czechoslovakia. To counter Hungarian charges, Benes tried to present the most positive picture of his country. FOUR, he cultivated the French-Czechoslovak alliance, seeing France as the greatest guarantor of Czechoslovak security.

Benes fought for a Czechoslovak directed Central Europe, attempting to become the indispensable politician without whom Central European questions could not be addressed. While he tried to wage 'Central European politics', or even 'international politics', on behalf of Czechoslovakia, he did not seem to be cognizant of the fact that the real international decisions were made by the Great Powers. And this after receiving four serious reminders in the 20's. The first reminder was in Rapallo, with the 1921 German-Soviet agreement, which showed that the victors can not keep countries in economic and political isolation as they choose. There will always be opportunities to break out. The second reminder was Locarno, where the powers failed to guarantee the borders of Czechoslovakia. The third warning was the Italian-Hungarian agreement, in which Italy changes its position from the guarantor of the *status quo* to the supporter of revisionism. The fourth, and last, reminder was Lord Rothermere's action, a series of articles in the *Daily Mail*, which called into question the right to existence of Czechoslovak Republic.

As a result of the world economic crisis of 1929-1933, Czechoslovakia found itself in a difficult position. The security and alliance system, so carefully constructed in the 20's, was deeply shaken. The European powers – France, England, Italy and a gradually more powerful Germany – realized that the power that can offer effective assistance in solving the economic crisis will have decisive influence in Central and Eastern Europe. This realization was reflected in the various economic and/or reorganization plans (see the Briand, Brocchi, Tardieu, German-Austrian customs union and British Foreign Office plans). As well, Austria took the position that “Austria has no solution without Germany”, in effect breaking the ring forged around Hungary. And more holes were becoming apparent: Romania and Yugoslavia were in trade talks with Germany, making the breakup of the Little Entente a real possibility. Of his former allies, Benes could only continue to rely on France.

In an attempt to respond to the various plans, he proposed his own Czechoslovak-Austrian-Hungarian economic plan in the fall of 1931. In our view, this plan – connecting the Vienna-Prague-Budapest triangle, the most developed areas of the former Monarchy – had great economic potential but completely devoid of political reality. After all, there was the decade and a half anti-Hungarian effort of Benes, the foreign policy cooperation between Italy and Hungary and the increasing presence of Germany all added up to a stillborn plan.

The foreign diplomacy and economic environments of the 20's, during which Benes fought relatively successfully on Czechoslovakia's behalf, changed drastically in the early 30's. As a result, Benes was forced to take a more and more defensive position. Hitler's coming to power in 1933 significantly reduced his field of foreign policy action. Hitler not only wanted to revise the terms of the Versailles treaty but set as his goal the economic and political subjugation of Central and Eastern Europe – a program that questioned Czechoslovakia's current, and continued, existence.

Germany grew significantly stronger and German demands had to be considered. England began its appeasement policy, showing signs of being ready to give in to a number of German demands. France remained alone against Germany. To make matters worse, of the two pillars of France's Central European system of alliances – the French-Czechoslovak and the French-Polish agreements – one disappeared with the January 1934 signing of the Polish-German agreement. Italy made significant attempts to make inroads into the Danubian region and found a willing partner in Hungary. The resultant Rome pact of March 1934 forecast an Italian-Hungarian-Austrian cooperation.

Negative tendencies were also growing within Czechoslovakia's Central European allies, Romania and Yugoslavia, posing a threat to Benes (and Czechoslovakia). A sector of the political elite in these two countries had begun to flirt with the idea of friendship with Germany. This was in close correlation with the growth of Germany's economic influence in the Central European region. Benes correctly interpreted that German economic encroachment in the Danubian basin presented a great danger for

the existence of the Little Entente. In 1932, he tried to reorganize the Little Entente and make it economically more robust. He created the Economic Council to coordinate the economic interests of the three countries. But Yugoslavia signed a trade agreement with Germany in the spring of 1934 and Romania did the same the following year. The two agreements showed that Benes was unable to exclude German inroads into the Little Entente. As German influence grew in Central Europe, the Little Entente became increasingly impotent in the political arena. In essence, Germany won the economic battle in the region and, building on that, began to undertake the political conquest of the Danubian basin. Soon, Yugoslavia's and Romania's economic deference to Germany began to show on the political podium, too. Their politicians took the position that because of the magnitude of the economic influence, it is in their best interest to maintain good relations with Germany. A good example is the 1936 Geneva conference where Benes was unable to convince his partners to have the Little Entente officially criticize Hitler's entry into the Rhineland. Due to their economic interests being closely intertwined with Germany, the Romanian and Yugoslavian Prime Ministers prevent the passage of the critical resolution.

At this time, Benes was still able to alter his foreign policies. He discovered that the Soviet Union has slowly returned to the international stage. Thus, he makes vigorous overtures toward the Soviets to improve Czechoslovakia's international position. French political intentions contributed significantly to the intensification of Czechoslovak-Soviet contacts. Since the early 30's, France was exploring possibilities of establishing contacts, cooperation, even alliance, with the Soviet Union. The real turning point came in February of 1934, when Louis Barthou became France's Foreign Minister. Although his 'Eastern Locarno Plan' failed (May 1934) and he himself was assassinated (October 1934), the French-Soviet rapprochement continued unabated. It resulted in the mutual assistance pact signed in Paris on May 2, 1935. Benes thought that a Paris-Moscow-Prague cooperation would be suitable to curb Germany and hence guarantee Czechoslovakia's existence and security. In that mindset, he signed the Czechoslovak-Soviet mutual assistance pact on May 16.

Benes considered the signing of the pact as a great coup, thinking that his country's security was greatly enhanced through the inclusion of the Soviet Union and the further isolation of Germany. Moreover, thought Benes, the pact also excluded the possibility that France abandon her Czechoslovak ally under British pressure. The significance of the two mutual assistance pacts was that the linking of France and Russia through Prague changed the European power structure, creating a situation similar to 1892, when a similar French-Russian coalition was formed around Germany. Except now, the third party was Czechoslovakia.

Regarding the value of the Czechoslovak-Soviet pact, one significant question must be noted. At the time of the signing, the two countries did not have a mutual border, thus, the agreement did not carry any practical value until some solution could be assured for the transit of the Red Army. Poland rigidly rejected the idea (strained Polish-Soviet relations, Poland's anti-Soviet position). The other possible country, Romania, had some

politicians who could envision letting the Red Army cross their territory but were in a minority against the pro-German and anti-Soviet blocks. Thus, it was extremely questionable how mutual assistance was to be rendered. Still, we feel that Benes tried to protect Czechoslovakia with a system of alliance which was, in essence, unfeasible.

On the other hand, in the second half of the 30's, the German-Polish-Hungarian pincer developed around Czechoslovakia. Note that German and Hungarian interests did not coincide exactly in Central and Southeastern Europe. Both countries were proponents of revisionism, especially the Versailles borders, but had different positions regarding actual boundary changes. In reality, Hitler took the view that German-Hungarian interests in the region only coincided when it came to Czechoslovakia.

In spite of the existing German-Hungarian differences, the German-Hungarian-Polish pincer slowly closed around Czechoslovakia in 1938. Hitler wanted to disband the Czechoslovak state, which also meant that Hungary could expect far more Czechoslovak territory from its German ally than Benes was ever willing to concede. In this situation, Benes' attempts to sign agreements between the Little Entente and Germany, the Little Entente and Hungary and Czechoslovakia-Hungary were, from the outset, futile. Also, the two European powers, England and France, were unwilling to assume the risk of war for Czechoslovakia. All these aspects led logically to the Munich Pact and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia a few months later.

After Munich, Benes was convinced that the Versailles peace order fell apart for two reasons: 1. Germany and Italy decided to liquidate the Versailles system. 2. England and France did not understand the train of events and could not unite and offer protection to the Versailles scheme.

Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, expended superhuman efforts for a long time trying to create a united defense but the Munich Pact showed the Czechoslovak politicians that the West did not understand their efforts. Without allies, Czechoslovakia was not strong enough to defend its own freedom. Yet, what happened to Czechoslovakia was only one event of an ongoing process, the emergence of dictatorships. The European democracies failed to understand that settlement can not be made between democracy and dictatorship.

The Third Concept

Forced into exile, Benes drew three conclusions from the collapse of Czechoslovakia and the entire Versailles order (according to a study of his published in 1942): 1. Germany attempted to gain hegemony over Europe, hence is responsible for both world wars. 2. The European countries, especially the small states of Central Europe, are not able to resist by themselves Germany's attempts at European domination. 3. An ethnic minority within a country, in cooperation with its mother country, presents a significant potential danger for that country. This 'danger' is increased by the minority protection policies of the League of Nations.

Accordingly, Benes formulated three aims for his third concept. ONE, Europe must be reorganized in such a manner as to create larger

territorial / political units – seven in number. In the restructuring of Central Europe, the territorial / political grouping that must serve the purpose is a confederation of Czechoslovakia and Poland. TWO, in the interest of preventing World War III, Germany must be broken up. THREE, the minority question must be solved, keeping three general principles in mind: (a) even in post-war European restructuring, countries with homogeneous populations are impossible to create, since certain countries will not be able to exist without territories populated by a mixed ethnic populace. As an example, Czechoslovakia would not be viable without those territories where they live intermingled with the German minority (meaning the Sudetenland-*auth.*). (b) After the war, it will be necessary to relocate a portion of the population. This must be achieved with the greatest possible kindness, international assistance and financial support. (c) With the resettlement of the ethnic population to the mother country, the number of national minorities can be substantially reduced. If, however, there still remain some ethnic minorities within the country, they may not lay claim to the rights enshrined by League of Nations policies between the two wars. In the future, the protection of minorities must rest on human rights and not minority rights.

To return to the first aim of this concept, Benes felt that a Polish-Czechoslovak federation could be the cornerstone of stability in Central Europe and he made serious diplomatic efforts in that direction. The two agreements signed with Poland were significant steps toward the Central European confederation and the realization of this third concept. However, since the Soviet Union, now taking a leading role in the creation of a new order in Central Europe, objected this federation, Benes was forced to give up his third concept.

The Fourth Concept

His fourth concept was based on three pillars: ONE, the triumph of the idea of continuity, leading to the invalidation of the Munich Pact and the restoration of the pre-September 29, 1939 borders of Czechoslovakia; TWO, the creation of a Czechoslovak nation state with the divestiture of the ethnic minorities; THREE, cooperation with the Soviet Union on foreign policy.

It should be noted that the ideas behind the first and second pillars of this concept were already noticeably present in his third concept. Greatly simplified, the third and fourth concepts only differ from each other in that Benes wanted to make a strategic alliance with Poland in the third and with the Soviet Union in the fourth.

If we examine the third pillar of this concept, it is clear from the steps Benes took – mainly the December 1943 Moscow conference – that he was attempting to ensure the security of a reemerging Czechoslovakia. He suspected, or deduced from the turn of events, that the Red Army will be the one clearing Eastern Europe of German troops, meaning that there would be – for some time to come – strong Soviet military and political presence in the region. Thus, he directed his foreign policy initiatives from 1943 onwards toward an alliance with the Soviet Union. Several historians

continue the previous line of reasoning with saying that behind Benes' Soviet orientation was a desire to place Czechoslovakia's security on a broader foundation, not only on the western powers who deserted him in 1938.

In our view, Benes thought that the Soviet Union, victorious in the war, militarily strong and geographically close, shared with Czechoslovakia a common foreign policy objective in Central Europe, to wit, Germany was the chief enemy for both. This impression was reinforced when the Soviets rejected the Munich Pact and recognized Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich borders. In the Central European presence of the Soviet Union, Benes saw assurance that Czechoslovakia will be able to deal, for good, with both Germany and Hungary.

The Moscow trip, and its outcome (the Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship and mutual assistance agreements), was a key event. Its short term result was the drawing of the émigré government into the Soviet circle of influence; long term, Czechoslovakia voluntarily linked its fate to the Soviet Union. These aspirations produced favorable results in the short term (the deportations of the Germans and Magyars, the reinstatement of the pre-Munich border – minus Ruthenia – and the significant assistance that Soviet diplomacy offered on international forums).

As important as good relations with the Soviet Union was for the fourth concept, it rested on the belief that the Soviet would stay out of Czechoslovakia's domestic matters. Faulty premise, faulty conclusion. By signing the 1943 agreement, he set events in motion that contributed to the failure of his concept and directly led to February of 1948.

The second element of the Fourth Concept

From the events of Munich, Benes drew the conclusion that an ethnically homogeneous Czechoslovakia must be created; from the fact that Hitler was able to use the German minority as a 'fifth column', he then concluded that the assimilation policy carried out between the wars was a failure. A more radical solution was needed. This radical solution was the removal of the national minorities. Benes consistently tried to link the deportation of the Germans with the removal of the Magyar minority, trying to foster the same view in his patrons – to be able to employ the same means with both. He expended serious diplomatic efforts to achieve this – with mixed results. Washington and London supported the deportation of the Germans but not the Magyars, while the Soviet Union wholeheartedly supported the removal of both minority groups.

On his triumphant return to Prague (May 1945), Benes began work on realizing this aspect of his concept, the removal of the non-Slavs. The main method was the series of presidential decrees which, in regard to the Germans, brought almost complete success, reducing the 3.5 million ethnic group to 150,000. Since Britain and America did not support the same method in regard to the Magyars, they escaped this fate. The total de-Magyarization of Slovakia through a population exchange, deportation and re-Slovakization brought only limited success.

The third element of the Fourth Concept or, Beneš' downfall

After his second exile, as after the first, he again entered Prague victorious but this time it was different. It was a victory in the shadow of Stalin. Many key ministerial posts in the new government had to be given to the Communists, restricting Beneš' field of action. Beneš may have felt, in the spring of 1945, that, with time, the situation will improve and he can make changes more to his liking. His strategy rested on two assumptions: that the Communists will have a poor showing at the polls, and that the Soviet Union will take a hands-off attitude toward Czechoslovakia.

But the Communists won the overall elections in May of 1946, sinking one assumption. Having to reject participation in the Marshall Plan at Stalin's insistence sank the other. He should have, at this point, realized that Czechoslovak foreign policy, and increasingly domestic policy, was now dictated from the Kremlin. Yet, in November of 1947 – three months before the Communist takeover – he still assured people that Communism could not win in Czechoslovakia, so badly did he assess the situation.

Beneš tried to achieve his vision, as phrased in concept four, but the events that unfolded between April 1945 and February 1948 left him with a weak hand against the Moscow-backed Communists.

He was forced to admit defeat. After the successful Communist takeover on February 27, he retreated to his country estate, into self-imposed internal exile. The defeat took its toll on his health, which rapidly declined until his eventual death on September 3, 1948.

And finally ...

At the beginning of this dissertation, I originally posed the question: Is Edouard Beneš a positive figure in Central European history – a great man and statesman, as the majority of Czech historians tend to depict him – or a negative figure whose mistakes, Machiavellianism and unrelenting cynicism brought severe suffering to several Central European nations, not only Hungarians but Germans, Slovaks, Poles and, indeed, to Czechs?

The answer could be phrased from any one of three angles: nationality or ethnic, Czechoslovakian, or Central European point of view. By an ethnic or nationality view, I mean from the perspective of all the ethnic groups affected by his actions.

Due to the role played by Beneš in the dismemberment of historical Hungary, the defining of the Trianon borders, the persecution of the Czechoslovakian Magyar minority between the wars, and the attempt after WWII to root out the remaining Magyars in Czechoslovakia (this collective word to cover the depriving of civil rights, forcing the issue of population exchange, deportations and efforts at re-Slovakization), from the perspective of the Magyar nations, it can be unequivocally stated that his actions can be deemed as negative. If there were to exist a list of successful anti-Magyar politicians, his name would be close to the top.

From the German perspective – in this context meaning only the German minority inside Czechoslovakia – and mainly for the deportation

of 3 million, ethnic cleansing in our terms today, his actions must also be seen as negative.

The point of view of the Ruthenians must also reflect negatively on his reputation: during the Peace Conference Benes promised autonomy within Czechoslovakia for sub-Carpathia – a promise he never honored.

Among Czech nationals, Benes – and Masaryk – is venerated as the Founder, the Father of the Country. Indeed, as Masaryk wrote: “Without Benes, we would not have our republic.” The respect afforded him even today is amply shown by the May 2005 dedication of a statue in his honor – on the 60th anniversary of the end of the war – in front of the Foreign Ministry in Prague, the ceremony attended by Jirí Paroubek, head of state, and several members of the government. Two weeks later, a museum dedicated to showing his life was opened in his villa at Sezimovo Usti, again attended by Jirí Paroubek and Pavel Dostal, Cultural Minister. In his ceremonial speech, Dostal rejected every and all reproach of Benes, focusing on his accomplishments in renewing Czech statehood and the growth of democracy. These events of May clearly show that, for the Czech political elite, Benes is the clear and unassailable example of statehood and sovereignty. This is the reason why they are unwilling to distance themselves from the Benes decrees and the principle of collective guilt of the German and Magyar minorities. In this political atmosphere, it will be extremely difficult for Czech historians to replace the image of ‘Benes, great man and statesman’ with a more complex and human picture.

From the point of view of Czechoslovakianism, the key question is benes’ role in Czechoslovakianism. The Czechoslovak Republic, born on October 28, 1918, defined itself as a ‘Czechoslovak nation’ in its First Law. Slovak politicians declared on October 31 to be the ‘Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak nation’ when they opted to join the Czechoslovak Republic. However, it rapidly became clear that the ‘Czechoslovak nation’, created by Benes and Masaryk during their exile for expediency, simply did not exist. The Slovaks wanted to live as Slovaks within Czechoslovakia, hence, they had autonomy expectations from the first moments of the creation of a common country (see Hlinka in Paris). Benes and Masaryk, on the other hand, rigidly insisted on the ideology of a Czechoslovak national unit, rejecting every Slovak demand, which aimed at autonomy or attempted to shift direction from a centralist government model toward a federal state. The unresolved conflict of these two founding nations threatened the continued existence of the country and led, in a logical progression after Munich, to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the birth of an independent Slovakia.

During his second period of exile, Benes continued to cling rigidly to Czechoslovakianism, a centrist, unified state, not recognizing Slovaks as an independent nation but continued to treat them as a branch of a Czechoslovak nation. The Slovaks Hodža and Osuský, threatening this thesis, were eased out of the émigré leadership during 1939-1941. Only then was a unified view created among the western émigrés regarding the Slovak question. During his entire second exile, Benes always spoke of a unified Czechoslovak nation, and urged a return to the style of government of the first Czechoslovak Republic. When hammering out the

government's program in the spring of 1945 between Benes and the western delegates, the Moscow Communists and the Slovak National Council, Benes received clear indication that his view of the proposed government structure was totally unacceptable to the Slovaks, who wanted a federation. While Benes wanted a Czechoslovakia with 'three provinces', the Slovaks wanted a country of 'two nations'. During the negotiations, the SNC compromised with the Communists, forcing Benes into a compromise. The matter of the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks was addressed by the program by containing certain aspects of both federal and centralized governments. The compromise satisfied neither party. Although Benes recognized the independent being of the Slovak nation and endowed Slovak bodies with a number of powers, in the matter of state's rights vs. federal rights, instead of symmetry (federation), asymmetry (centralism) was the final result. Between 1945 and 1948, Benes and the opposing Communists came to agree on only this question – to gradually restrict the partial autonomy of Slovakia. The Slovak national institutions, endowed with a measure of autonomy in 1945, were gradually brought under the aegis of some central Czechoslovakian body.

The greatest problem of the Czechoslovakia created by Masaryk and Benes was the absence of a Czechoslovak nation. This observation of ours is confirmed by history itself. As soon as an opportunity arose – in 1939 and 1993 – the Slovaks struck out on their own. To maintain the fiction of a Czechoslovak nation, Benes continuously had to frustrate Slovak aspirations. And that clearly means that, from a Slovak perspective, Benes and his actions must be deemed as negative.

Next, let us look at his role from a Central European point of view. From this angle, we can charge him with three serious mistakes.

The first came at Versailles, when he demanded borders for a future Czechoslovakia, which assigned a large number of national minorities within the emerging country. The Czechoslovak Republic was born as a self-declared nation state – the country of the Czechoslovak nation – but, in reality, it was a multicultural country. The following table clearly shows that one-third of the country (34.3% in 1921 and 32.7% in 1931) belonged to some minority; the label of 'nation state' was extremely dubious.

Ethnicity	1921 Census		1931 Census	
	Number	%	Number	%
Czechoslovak	8,760,937	65.51	9,688,770	66.91
German	3,123,568	23.36	3,231,688	22.32
Hungarian	745,431	5.57	691,923	4.78
Ruthenian	461,849	3.45	549,169	3.79
Hebrew, Jiddish	180,855	1.35	186,642	1.29
Polish	75,853	0.57	81,737	0.57
Other	25,871	0.19	49,636	0.34
Total	13,374,364	100	14,479,565	100

Czechoslovakia's ethnic distribution by mother tongue.

(Source: Joseph Rothschild: East Central Europe between Two World Wars. History of East Central Europe.)

With regard to the census figures, we must point out the statistical practice followed by the Czechoslovak officials between the wars by not breaking down the figures into Czech and Slovak components, perpetuating the myth of a unified Czechoslovak nation – a nation that only existed on paper.

The second mistake was committed by Benes and his political friends by being unable to address the ethnic problems of a multi-national country. Czechoslovakia was a smaller Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As the Austrians and Hungarians oppressed their minorities in the Monarchy, so the Czechs oppressed their own minorities within the Republic. The same way that the Hungarian political elite did not grant autonomy to the Slovaks before 1918, Benes denied it to them afterwards.

A glance at the table shows that one-third of Czechoslovakia's population belonged to some external ethnic group. Four of those minorities (Polish, Magyar, German and Ukrainian) had a mother country, three of which (Poland, Hungary and Germany) also formed its own nation state, which continually provided assistance. Between the two wars, Benes the leading politician of Czechoslovakia forgot the statement of the young doctoral candidate Benes that "one can not create a country in opposition to one third of the population." Nor, we must add, to run it. Benes was unable to solve the Slovak question that arose from Czechoslovakianism becoming official ideology. In fact, he deliberately stood in the way of any step in the direction of autonomy. He was equally unable to handle the minorities, to ensure their loyalty to the Czechoslovak state. With some over-simplification, Benes made the same mistakes within the confines of Czechoslovakia as the Austrian and Hungarian politicians made within the confines of the Monarchy.

The third mistake made by Benes came after 1945, when trying to create a nation state through the deportation of the German and Magyar minorities. One can not give a rational explanation in his support, even if the Germans called on Hitler for help. Of no help was making use of Stalin's aid to carry out the deportations.

In light of these three serious mistakes, we must rate Benes in a negative light from a Central European perspective, also. Many have said that, in history, there is no value in the "What if ..." question. Let us break that rule and try and complete the sentence.

If the talented, diligent and hard working Benes (even his worst enemies will grant him these traits) took a more moderate and restrained stand in the interest of the Bohemia and/or Czechoslovakia – meaning the acceptance of ethically more just borders in Versailles, more understanding and flexible handling of the Slovaks and the minorities within Czechoslovakia, and if he had not gone down the road of ethnic cleansing in 1945 – then he could have contributed to a more peaceful, conflict-free, livable and happier Central Europe. Alas, the preceding pages show that the result was almost the opposite. For that reason, we do not consider Benes a positive figure in Central European history.

Future debate can only focus on whether Benes was a cynical politician or an idealist who actually believed that his plans and actions would lead to a better, more democratic Central Europe.

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Note 1: A general note about biographies published about Edouard Beneš.

They can be grouped into several categories. The first are those published in his lifetime, such as (in publication order): Weil, Fritz: *Das Werden eines Volkes und der Weg eines Mannes. Dr Edvard Beneš*. (Dresden, 1931); Hajšman, Jan: *Dr E. Beneš, státník a člověk*. (Praha, 1934); Hansena, C.E.: *Edvard Beneš*. (Kobehavn, 1934); Eisemann, Louis: *Grand Européen: Eduárd Beneš*. (Paris, 1934); Crabites, Pierre: *Beneš*. (New York, 1936); Stroh, Heinz: *Der Grosse Europäer Edvard Beneš*. (Mährische Ostrau, 1936); Linde, Bernard: *Dr Edvard Beneš*. (Tallin, 1936); Werner, Arthur: *Edvard Beneš, der Mensch und Staatsman*. (Prague, 1936); Papousek, Jaroslav: *Dr Edvard Beneš. Sein Leben*. (Orbis, Prague, 1937); Hartl, Antonín Hartl (ed.): *Edvard Beneš. Filosof a státník*. (Praha, 1937); Hitchcock, Edward B.: *I built a Temple of Peace. Life of Edouard Beneš*. (New York, 1942); Opocensky, Jan (ed.): *Edvard Beneš: Essays and reflections Presented on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday*. (London, 1944); and, Mackenzie, Compton: *Dr Beneš*. (London, 1946). There are two major problems with these biographies: they are incomplete, as their subject is still alive; as well, the majority are gushing sycophants with a tangible bias toward their subject.

The second group is the treatment by the socialist historians of Czechoslovakia dealing with the various facets of the political career of Beneš, - especially the Munich period, see Lvová, Míla: *Mnichov a Edvard Beneš*. (Praha, 1968) – yet, in my research into the specialist literature, I have found only one complete Beneš biography from this period by Křena, Jana: *Dr Edvard Beneš. Náčrt politické biografie*. In: *K 50 výroci ČSR*, red. I. Kolesar, (Praha, 1968).

The third group, the post-Second World War English literature, examined specific aspects of the life of Beneš. These are: Wandycz, P.S.: *Foreign policy of Edvard Beneš 1918-1938*. In: *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948* In: Mamatey, Victor S. – Luza, Radomír Luza (ed.): *History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1973); Táborický, E.: *President Edvard Beneš between East and West*. (Hoover Institution Press, 1981); Lukes, Igor: *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler. The diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s*. (Oxford University Press, 1996). The sole complete English-language Beneš biography appeared in 1997 (Zeman, Zbyeněk – Klima, Antonín: *The life of Edvard Beneš*. (Oxford University Press, 1997)). A slightly enlarged Czech-language version was published in 2001 (Zeman, Zbyeněk: *Edvard Beneš. Politický životopis*. (Praha, 2001)).

The fourth group is the post-1989 Czech-language treatments (in publication order): Havlíček, František: *Edouard Beneš – člověk, sociolog, politik*. (Praha, 1991); Fantl, Jindřich: *Edvard Beneš*. (Praha, 1991); Klimek, Antonín: *Zrození státníka*. (Praha, 1992); Ort, Alexander: *Dr Edvard Beneš – evropský politik*. (Praha, 1994); Peroutka, Ferdinand: *Byl Edvard Beneš vinen (?)*. (Praha, 1993); Hanzal, Josef: *Edvard Beneš*. (Praha, 1994). This was also published in Hungarian in 1997 by Magda

Ádám (Nap Kiadó). The latest treatment is by Sidonia Dedinova: *Edvard Beneš*. (Praha, 2003). It also appeared in Hungarian as *Edvard Beneš a likvidátor*. (Korona Kiadó, Budapest, 2004).

The fifth group, Hungarian-language treatises, is, to date, comprised of the following four works: Sebestyén, József – Spielberg, Leó: *Beneš. Egy nemzet élete egy államférfi portréja*. (Slovenska Grafia, Bratislava, 1934); Borsody, István: *Edvard Beneš*. (Budapest, no date /but in reality 1943/); Ádám, Magda: *Edvard Beneš. Arcképek kettős tükörben*. (Nap Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 1997). Contained in the same volume was Josef Hanzal: *Edvard Beneš*, the translation of the 1994 Prague edition.

Finally, we wish to note that an in-depth overview of the Beneš biographies, or studies dealing with a particular aspects of his political career, is given by Jindřich Dejmek in his treatise *Přehled bádání Edvard Beneš – obtížná cesta k politické biografii*, published in *Česky časopis historický* (2003/1).

Note 2: A general note about biographies published about Tomas Garrigue Masaryk.

There have been numerous studies and biographies about the life and activities of Masaryk. Of these, it is worth noting the following:

English language publications: Zbyenek Zeman: *The Masaryks: The Making of Czechoslovakia*. (London, 1976); Roman Szporluk: *The political thought of Thomas Masaryk*. (Columbia University Press, New York, 1981); Eva-Schmidt Hartmann: *Thomas G. Masaryk's Realism. Origins of Czech Political Concept*. (Munich, 1984); Jan Kalvoda: *The Genesis of Czechoslovakia*. (East European Monographs, vol. 209. New York-Boulder, 1986). Almost every aspect of Masaryk's activities are covered in the 3 volume work by Stanley B. Winters (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937) vol I. Thinker and Politician*. (London, 1990); Robert B. Pynset (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937) vol II. Thinker and Critic*. (London, 1989); Harry Hanak (ed.): *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937) vol III. Statesman and Cultural Force*. (London, 1990).

German language publications: Roland J. Hoffman: *T.G. Masaryk und die tschechische Frage*. (München, 1988). Also important is the collection of documents edited by Frank Hadler; *Weg von Österreich! Das Weltkrieg von Masaryk und Benes im Spiegel ihrer Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus des Jahren 1914-1918*. (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1995).

Czech language publications: Jíri (George) Kovtun: *Masarykov triumf. Příběh konce války*. (Toronto, 1987); Jaroslav Opat: *Filozof a politik T.G. Masaryk 1882-1893*. (Praha, 1990); Lubomír Novy: *Filozof T.G. Masaryk. Problematické skici*. (Brno, 1994).

Hungarian language publications: Dobossy, László: *A cseh kérdéstől a magyar kérdésig* in: Dobossy, László (ed.): *Gondban reményben azonosan*. (Budapest, 1989); E. Fehér, Pál: *Masaryk legendája és a valóság* in: Ring, Éva (ed.): *Helyünk Európában. Nézetek és koncepciók a XX. századi Magyarországon*. (Budapest, 1986, vol. I-II); Kovács, Endre (ed.): *Tomás Garrigue Masaryk* in: *Történelmi arcképek*. (Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1976); Szarka, László: *Utószó- Egy XX. századi államalapító*

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ADDENDA: MAPS

Map 1. Alexander Bach administrative partition, 1854. Source: Hajdú, Zoltán: *Magyarország közigazgatási földrajza* [Administrative partition of Hungary]. Dialóg Campus Kiadó, Budapest-Pécs, 2000, p. 124.

Map 2. Draft of the planned Northern Hungarian Slovak national region, 1861.
Source: The author's own interpretation, based on the book by Frantisek Bokes:
Vyvin predstáv o slovenskom uzemi v 19. storoci. Vydala Matica
Slovenska, 1945, p. 35.

Map 3. Triasmappa from 1910. Source: Through the kindness of Dr István Tóth.

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Map 4. The Hodža-Barha-line and the line according to the Vix note.

Map 5. The Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor.

Map 6. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia, 1938 – 1939.