

The Issue of Hungarian-Slovak Diplomatic Connections in the Hungarian Parliament in 1939–1940

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From 1939, Slovak-Hungarian diplomatic relations were determined by three main questions: 1) the possession of territories in former Upper Hungary with the problem of the minorities there, 2) to gain the favour of Germany at the expense of each other and 3) the principle of reciprocity. Slovakia was one of the smallest states in Europe with her 38,000 square kilometres and 2.6 million inhabitants. 85% of the population was Slovak while the rest was comprised by Hungarians, Germans, Rusins (Ruthenians) and others. At first, the leaders of the communicated to their citizens that Slovakia could play the role of a neutral state, similar to Switzerland, between Germany, Hungary and Poland. This remained wishful thinking in the contemporary international situation. Slovakia had lost her independence shortly after her birth as the “Schutzvertrag”, a treaty of protection with Germany was signed on 23 March 1939. The German Reich ensured the independence of Slovakia for 25 years, while Slovakia obliged herself to maintain her foreign policy in accordance with German interests, to organise her military forces in cooperation with the German army, and also agreed to the creation of the Schutzzone.¹ The head of state was Jozef Tiso and the Slovak People’s Party of Hlinka practised a single-party rule.

In 1939, the main objective of Slovak foreign policy was the legal acceptance of the state in both a regional and a wider European context. They also wanted to familiarise the international public with the circumstances of the birth of Slovakia and her position as a political entity in Central Europe. The Slovak political leadership formed claims for Hungarian territories and wanted to see the revision of the First Vienna Award. The Slovak government did not accept the decision on grounds that it had been signed by Czechoslovak Foreign Minister František Chvalkovský. At the same time, the Slovak government tried to prevent the country from getting under foreign rule. All this comprised the fundamental tenets of Slovak foreign policy in 1939–1940.

In July 1939, Slovak propaganda openly declared that the Slovaks must not accept the new borders of their country. They argued that the Slovak-Hungarian border should have been drawn in a way that the number of Slovak and Hungarian population would be the same in each country. They constantly said that the Slovaks would

1 The Schutzzone was a 30–40 km wide territory that ran through Slovakia from the Polish to the Austrian border before the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Only the Germans were allowed to build fortifications and station troops on this land.

reach the revision of the Vienna decision with German help. The aim of this propaganda was to make sure that the Slovak population would not regard the contemporary situation final. Such words created anxiety among both Slovaks and Hungarians in the re-annexed territories.

In order to claim worries in Hungary, József Horváth MP² made a speech in the Hungarian parliament on 2 August 1939, in which he analysed the development of Slovak-Hungarian relations. He emphasised, among other things, the good intentions of the state and the people of Hungary towards Slovakia. He pointed out that Hungarian journalists who visited Slovakia in late June had spoken positively about their experience. Also the Slovak press commented these Hungarian reports with satisfaction. On the other hand, MP Horváth also drew attention to the fact that later, Slovak newspapers wrote about Hungarians with hatred and even Slovak officials attacked Hungary with increased frequency in their speeches. He called the situation of Hungarians remained in Slovakia worrying. He quoted the speech of the leader of Hungarians in Slovakia, János Esterházy in the Bratislava parliament, which he interpreted as a cry for help as it claimed that the right of Hungarians for free speech, press, association and assembly had been violated.³ Horváth criticised the behaviour of the Slovak authorities with the Hungarian minority: arrests without causes, house searches and relocation. He found it [...] that the Slovak authorities had not given their consent to the travelling of 300 poor Hungarian children to Lake Balaton for holiday.⁴ He said it was impossible for the Hungarian government and society not to protest against such offences. He sent the message to the Hungarian minority and to the authorities that “...brothers, do not forget in the days of troubles that every child of this country, enlarged in territory and power, sympathises with you and is ready to help you in any moment”.⁵

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- 2 József Horváth (1903–1988), Catholic priest, publicist and politician. He was ordained in Győr in 1927. In 1929, he received his doctoral degree at Budapest University. Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi appointed him secretary of the Catholic Action. In 1939, he became the MP for Győr on the list of the government party with his Christian Socialist programme. In spring 1944, he protested against the German occupation of Hungary in the parliament. In 1948, he escaped to Austria and later to New York. He returned to Europe after the fall of the 1956 revolution and lived in West-Germany afterwards.
 - 3 Horváth quoted the speech of Esterházy made on 21 July 1939 in the Slovak parliament in connection with the constitution of Slovakia. Esterházy reproached, among other things, the 95th article of the constitution, which enacted the principle of reciprocity. He also mentioned that the Hungarians in Slovakia regarded themselves as a part of the Slovak state legally equivalent with the Slovak nation. The speech of Esterházy is cited by I. MOLNÁR, *Esterházy János*, Dunaszerdahely 1997, pp. 109–112.
 - 4 It was organised by the Hungarian Party in Slovakia. Hungarian children in Slovakia were to spend three weeks at Balaton on the expenses of the Child Protecting League of Budapest [*Budapesti Gyermekvédő Liga*]. Read more about this in document #6097/38; box 128; Foreign Ministry, Slovak National Archives (hereafter SNA). Also in M. HETÉNYI, *Postavenie maďarskej menšiny na Slovensku v rokoch 1939–1940*, in: M. PEKÁR — R. PAVLOVIČ (Eds.), *Slovensko medzi 14. Marcom 1939 a salzburskými rokovianiami*, Prešov 2007, p. 103.
 - 5 *The Records of the House of Representatives of the Hungarian Parliament*, (henceforward *Records*), Budapest 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 386.

In the second part of his speech, Horváth gave a few examples for the vehement Slovak propaganda against Hungary. He criticised the fact that the Slovakian radio was creating anti-Hungarian emotions among the Slovak minority in Hungary.⁶ He concretely referred to the broadcast of 23 July 1939, in which they said: “We send you the message that truth and the day of return must come after every case of injustice. Motto: ‘We are waiting for you to come for us’.” Horváth resented the Slovak radio labelling public personalities in Hungarian settlements traitors; he called it rude and rejected the accusations. He was outraged by an article published in the *Slovák* on 9 July 1939, which reported that the Slovak Catholic youth had made a resolution about the start of Slovak revision with the goal of regaining Hungarian territories at their congress in Banská Bystrica. In order to familiarise his audience with the situation Horváth quoted: “We demand a just revision especially at our southern borders; that the territories that legally belong to us could be regained. To that end we have promised to sacrifice our strength and life. You, oppressed and persecuted brothers in Hungary, believe in the rebirth of Slovakia, when you will meet the citizens of the Slovak state once again.”⁷

Horváth also criticised the speech of propaganda chief, Alexander Mach,⁸ given in Skalka, near Trenčín, Slovakia, in which the speaker said, among other things: “It must be shown to the whole world, and especially to the greedy neighbours that the Slovaks have always remained soldiers. The Slovaks have allied themselves with their only neighbour who did not want to devour them. Perhaps we should have formed an alliance with the Poles or the Hungarians, who tore Slovak territories one after the other and who would have continued this robbery had they not been stopped by the Slovak soldiers and guardsmen. And who had nothing for the Slovaks but the yoke.”⁹

In Horváth’s opinion, Mach’s speech was enough evidence to show that there was government-backed irredentist propaganda in Slovakia against Hungary. More serious than that, Horváth said, was Tiso’s speech in Tapolcsány on 16 July 1939, which was also broadcast by the Slovak radio.¹⁰ Horváth highlighted the following part: “Their thousand-year tradition was artificially and violently kept in secret before the Slovaks so that they could not come to conclusions. Our former oppressor thinks she has a right to the northern territories. [...] Our duty is to leap over the past one thousand years and continue the history of our nation where our ancestors had left it. [...] Pannonia was Slovak as well”, said the Prime Minister.¹¹ Horváth concluded that after Tiso’s speech Alex-

6 On the consequences of the propaganda and the situation of the Slovak population in Hungary see M. HETÉNYI, *Slovensko-maďarské pomedzie v rokoch 1938–1945*, Nitra 2008, pp. 104–114.

7 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 386

8 Alexander Mach (1902–1980), Slovak politician. Editor of *Slovák*, the journal of the Slovak People’s Party in 1920–1939. He belonged to the radical wing of the party. He was one of the accused in the Tuka trial but he was acquitted. In the Slovak state, he was Minister of the Interior and chief commander of the Hlinka Guard. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison in 1947; received amnesty in 1968.

9 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, pp. 386–387.

10 See Tiso’s speech in M. FABRICIUS — K. HRADSKÁ, *Jozef Tiso prejavy a články*, Vol. II, Bratislava 2007, pp. 136–139.

11 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 387.

ander Mach, who was also the leader of the Hlinka Guard, encouraged the audience to join the army and remain there until they had got back the territory taken away from them. He assured his audience that the time of revision was approaching. He himself wanted to stand at the head of the Hlinka Guard until these goals are realised. After the speeches of Tiso and Mach, Horváth cited the chief secretary of the Slovak People's Party, Jozef Kirschbaum,¹² who declared with passionate words that "[...] not only Nitra, Surány, Komját and Megyer, but also Esztergom and Vác are land of our fathers. [...] If you have established this state in honest struggle, you are also obliged to retake those who have been torn away from us. I repeat, and I will always repeat that as we have been fighting under the banner of autonomy, so we have the banner of revision over Slovakia now. Back with everything that has been taken away from us now and in the past. Yes, also Vác is our land as well as the rest we want to fight for. If the 600 thousand Slovaks in Hungary do not have their rights guaranteed, it is the best way for us to create order in the spirit of natural law".¹³ We are not alone, Kirschbaum threatened, we have mighty friends, who also have problems with their neighbours.¹⁴

Horváth continued to speak about the role of the leader of Germans in Slovakia, Franz Karmasin.¹⁵ Horváth shared the view of János Esterházy by claiming that Karmasin was setting the Slovaks and Hungarians in Slovakia against each other and trying to stir up conflicts between Slovakia and Hungary. This propaganda activity was harmful for both nations and it created the illusion in young Slovaks that the mentioned territories could be regained within days. He held the ideas that were being spread in several counties of Slovakia ridiculous. When the Hungarian military authorities carried away a few used desks from Kosice, rumour spread that the Hungarians began to evacuate the city. When there was a theft in the cathedral in Kosice, it was interpreted as the actual evacuation. Ill-tempered propaganda breeds hostilities between Slovaks and Hungarians and even creates tensions between Hungarians and Germans. Therefore, Horváth said, Hungarian diplomacy had to intervene in time, as these incidents were not isolated phenomena but carefully planned anti-Hungarian propaganda. He praised the decision of the Hungarian government when Hungary stopped the economic talks between the two states as a response to this propaganda.¹⁶

12 Jozef Kirschbaum (1913–2001), lawyer, linguist and politician. Editor of the periodical *Nástup*. Chief secretary of the Hlinka Party in 1939–1940. Slovak Ambassador to Bern in 1942–1945. He lived in emigration in Canada from 1949.

13 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 387.

14 *Ibidem*. Kirschbaum meant the Germans.

15 Franz Karmasin (1901–1970), a Sudeten German politician, the leader of the German Party in the Slovak Republic.

16 Hungary, in order to show the incapability of Slovakia of existing on her own, postponed the establishment of bilateral economic connections. The Hungarian administration wanted to force Slovakia to extend the rights of the Hungarian minority with this. They also spread leaflets; one of them showed Hitler among tanks, guns and other weapons while Horthy appeared with sacks of grain and loaves of bread. A caption said: "Slovaks, choose! Do you need the one that gives you arms or the one that gives you bread?" On another leaflet, Horthy holds ham and bread in his hand facing Tiso with a thin face and bent back, his saliva dropping, his hand reaching out for the bread and the ham. L. TILKOVSKÝ, *Revízió és nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon (1938–1941)*, Budapest 1967, pp. 116–117.

MP Horváth, then, asked the Hungarian Foreign Minister, István Csáky, to explain what the Hungarian diplomacy was doing in the interest of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In his response, Csáky said that Hungarian foreign policy needed a lot of patience and self-control, and they must not employ determined means of retaliation. The Hungarian government took it into consideration that Slovakia had existed only for a few months and *“like a child to his toy, she is enjoying its new statehood. We are aware of our more powerful position and of the fact that the majority of the Slovak people do not support the anti-Hungarian campaign”*.¹⁷

Csáky went on to point out that he had consulted the Slovak ambassador in Budapest, Ján Spišiak, about the anti-Hungarian statements of Slovak politicians.¹⁸ The ambassador made an affidavit that the said anti-Hungarian utterances in the press and the radio had never happened, and certain statements had been misinterpreted by the Hungarian diplomacy. Csáky commented on Spišiak's response with cynicism: *“these politicians must have overlooked the fact that their words were published in the press.”* Spišiak responded that perhaps cries from the audience were mistakenly attributed to the speaker. In connection with the Hungarian foreign policy Csáky said that they think in long terms and do not take the attacks of Slovak propaganda too seriously as long as they do not violate the fundamental interests of the Hungarian minority. He also promised that the Hungarian radio and press would be as moderate as possible when judging the Slovakian situation. He found that the Hungarian diplomacy had done its best in order to develop friendly connections. He gave the example of the Hungarian offer to settle unsolved problems and make economic treaties in March 1939. Then Tiso responded that he had much more important affairs and he would come back to these questions later.

The Slovakian government asked the Hungarian government to resume talks in July. They agreed that the negotiations would begin on 26 July but the Hungarian government postponed the event with reference to the fact that the Slovak policy and administration had deteriorated the atmosphere, which would have an unfavourable effect on the talks. They would offer another date when they see the time appropriate. If the anti-Hungarian Slovak political activity could harm the honour of the Hungarian nation in Slovakia or elsewhere, the Hungarian government would promptly take action against it, said Csáky. The Hungarian government is busy with other serious affairs at the moment but *“it sometimes notices the cavilling with which certain elements of the apparently immature Slovak government endeavour to make trouble for the Hungarian state. Nevertheless, it deals with it seriously only when they try to do against the rights of the Hungarian nationality in Slovakia”*.¹⁹

Csáky continued to ask the Hungarian parliament and the whole Hungarian nation to follow the events in Slovakia with patience and they should not let themselves be carried away by the attacks of Slovak propaganda. They must not forget that they have the experience and the traditions of a thousand-year-old state. He reassured his audience by saying that Hungary had already taken steps to defend her international

17 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 389.

18 Ján Spišiak (1901–1981), lawyer, diplomat and university professor. The Ambassador of Slovakia in Budapest from 23 May 1939 to 1944.

19 *Records*, 1940, Vol. II, 18th session, 2 August 1939, p. 389.

interests. He warned the Slovak leaders to be cautious and careful with the Hungarian nation because *“it bears a lot but not everything”*. Csáky trusted that a more sober policy would prevail in Slovakia and bilateral connections would return to normal. To reassure the Hungarian nation and the MPs he declared: *“Be convinced that the government will notice every offence against the country and will not be hesitant to take every measure to enforce reparations when they seem to be necessary and due with regards to the great national goals.”*²⁰ These words in the Hungarian parliament elicited vehement negative response in Slovakia, which further widened the gap between the two sides. The relations did not improve in the second half of 1939. Some improvement could be seen in early 1940 only to deteriorate again after anti-Hungarian demonstrations in Nagymihály on 21 April. The Minister of Economy in Slovakia, Gejza Medrický²¹ and the chief secretary of the Slovakian People’s Party, Jozef Kirschbaum gave speeches. The latter spoke about the Hungarians with such words: *“There are enough trees in Slovakia to hang the Hungarians, there is enough lead to make bullets for them and there is enough room in jail to place the Hungarians. The Hungarians are a Jewish-Gipsy race, brought up on horse milk, and what culture they have they received from the Slovaks.”*²² The Nagymihály demonstration was not an isolated event: the organisers of the campaigns made sure that other towns in Slovakia would be scenes for similar anti-Hungarian rallies.

On 22 April 1940, anti-Hungarian demonstrations took place in Bratislava. Leaflets were spread in the streets with the demand of the destruction of Slovakian Hungarians. On 24 April, Hungarian sign boards were knocked down with axes and Hungarians were insulted in the street.²³ Windows of Hungarians’ houses were broken. Hungarians and Jews were beaten in the street and were driven out of cafés and restaurants. The demonstrators also tried to break into the office of the Hungarian Party but they failed and only broke the windows. The violence continued on the following day. Stall keepers on the marketplace were warned that speaking in Hungarian was forbidden from then on. According to the report on the events the Nitra police did not even attempt to stop the demonstrators.²⁴ Another demonstration took place in Kežmarok on 27 April, when, among other things, anti-Hungarian drawings were spread. 1 May saw similar attacks in Levoča, Prešov and Nitra; many demonstrators were members of the Hlinka Guard. The marching crowd stuck posters which said: *“From Vác to Miskolc and Poprád, everything is ours! Asia is yours, this land is ours!” “Take guns and helmets against the liar Hungarians!” “Slovakia to the Slovaks, Asia to the Hungarians! Take your piled up rags and go to Asia! We want back everything right now!”*²⁵

In Prešov, Alexander Mach gave an anti-Hungarian speech. *“The fate of Central Europe may be decided soon.”*²⁶ *We have nothing to fear. Also the foreign press acknowl-*

20 Ibidem.

21 Gejza Medrický (1901–1989), Slovak politician, MP and journalist; Minister of Economy in the Republic of Slovakia.

22 Hungarian National Archives (henceforward HNA), Prime Minister’s Office (henceforward PMO), K-28, Bound 25, Item 65, No. 17528/1940.

23 Slovak sources confirm the attacks. HETÉNYI, *Postavenie*, Footnote 64, pp. 108–109.

24 HNA, PMO, K-28, Bound 25, Item 65, P 17339/1940.

25 HNA, Foreign Ministry (henceforward FM), K-63, Bound 460, 15178/1940, (18 May 1940).

26 He meant the war of Germany against Britain and France.

edges our capability of existence. During our thousand-year oppression the world knew us as tinkers thanks to our oppressors. It is not so today. Hungary envies us, they would like to be in our place. The Hungarians should deal with themselves and their own problems."²⁷ Fanning the anti-Hungarian atmosphere further worsened the situation in Slovakia. The Hungarian ambassador to Berlin had to protest at German state secretary Ernst Woermann about the attacks of the Slovak and German press against the Hungarians. Sztójay had the opinion that certain members of the Slovakian government were behind this activity. The Hungarian government is interested in keeping good connections with Slovakia; that is why the Hungarian press had not responded to the Slovak attacks and remained silent. Woermann told Sztójay that he had been visited by the Slovak ambassador, who said exactly the opposite. He drew Sztójay's attention to the fact that Slovakia was in her adolescent years, and they endeavoured to have an educational effect on her. The Hungarian ambassador responded like this: *"If they are the parents, it is all the more their duty to discipline her when she puts out her tongue at her thousand-year-old grandparents."*²⁸ Woermann promised to intervene at the Slovak government for the cessation of the anti-Hungarian actions but he added that he must do it very carefully because Slovakia was very sensitive to her sovereignty. As a conclusion of their talks Sztójay told the Hungarian government not to expect Germany to create a pro-Hungarian attitude in Slovakia.

Germany attacked Denmark and Norway on 7 April 1940, which raised new hopes in Slovakia. They expected to get the opportunity to increase their territory. The victory of the Germans is also the glory of the Slovaks, they said all over the country.²⁹ News arrived from Vienna that twenty German divisions were ready to march against Romania through Hungary. Mach and the Hlinka Guard began anti-Hungarian agitation to this; they called all to arms against the Hungarians, *"whose last hour had come"*, they thought. They started to spread that, alongside the Germans, the Slovaks would also march in Hungary; they would occupy all the land that should duly belong to them as long as the Danube and liberate the Hungarian peasants from the rule of the counts and the Jewish barons.³⁰ These threats elicited resentment in Hungary.

As a response, Géza Szűllő³¹ had a sharp speech about the Slovak behaviour in the upper house of the Hungarian parliament on 30 April 1940. He emphasised that he did not want to create tensions between the two states but he could remain silent no more. Hungary had maintained friendly connections with Slovakia until then but the Slovak leadership had taken aggressive steps against her. Even though Slovakia was a *Schutzstaat*, she did not behave accordingly. *"There are embers under ashes in Slovakia, and those who want to burn our dreams want to make a fire of those embers. [...] We Hungarians have always noticed the pin-pricks and stings that the government, the press*

27 HNA, PMO, K-28, Bound 25, Item 65, K 17666/1940.

28 HNA, FM, K-63, Bound 97/pol. 1940, (8 April 1940).

29 HNA, FM, K-63, Bound 459, 133/pol. 1940, (20 May 1940).

30 *Ibidem*.

31 Géza Szűllő (1872–1957), lawyer and Hungarian politician in Czechoslovakia. In 1920, founding member of the National Christian Socialist Party in Czechoslovakia; president of the party from 1925–1932. MP in Prague. Member of the Hungarian Upper House after the First Vienna Award (1938–1944). After 1945, he lived in Hungary retired from politics.

or the Slovak nation thought appropriate to use against us both in Slovakia and here. However, they had no influence on the sovereignty of the state and we did not take them seriously into consideration, gave no response to them because we must not forget our manners.”³²

Szüllő also said that there had been anti-Hungarian incidents in several towns of Slovakia from 25 April 1940 onwards. He highlighted the one in Nitra where, as he said, the local leader of the Hlinka Guard said as follows: “[...] *Who speaks in Hungarian in Nitra or Slovakia, must have his tongue torn out, who speaks in Hungarian in the republic must be silenced.*”³³ He also reproached the fact that Slovak demonstrators had broken the windows of the Hungarian embassy in Bratislava and the local police did not prevent it. He found it unacceptable that anti-Hungarian leaflets which call for military action to conquer territories in Hungary as far as Szolnok and the Tisza River were spread in Slovakia. In Szüllő’s opinion the Slovaks had begun a dangerous game; it was their purpose to spoil the Hungarian-German relationship while another group was seeking agreement with the circle of Beneš. He also made critical reference to Mach: if the Germans make manoeuvres in Slovakia, Mach interprets it as if they had obtained the consent of Germany to retaking the territories lost in the First Vienna Award. Szüllő asked the Hungarian leaders to take steps against the Slovak political attacks and force Slovakia with economic contracts to develop better relationship with Hungary: “*I ask the government to make it clear that even though Hungary is a small state, she can be strong being aware of her rights against those who violate them or fail to understand her noble gesture.*”³⁴

István Csáky responded to the words of Szüllő by expressing his regret, on behalf of the whole Hungarian nation, that the friendly right hand reached out to the Slovaks had met with no appropriate reception, and some groups were trying to spoil the Hungarian approach with malevolent slanders. The Hungarian government is endeavouring, with the utmost self-control, to build acceptable relationship with Slovakia. It has overlooked a lot for the sake of peace and tranquillity and it is willing to continue with such patience because it considers not only the activity of the present-day leaders but also the future of the two friendly nations. Csáky said he knew the atrocities mentioned by Szüllő and he had already consulted the Slovakian authorities in connection with them but the policy of Hungary must be cautious and self-controlled in the current international setting. Still, there is a point when “*the cup can be full*” and then the Hungarian government must act. “*Our patience runs out if the right of the Slovakian Hungarians to life and property as well as the right of the Hungarian subjects to their property in Slovakia is violated in any way,*”³⁵ Csáky said threateningly. He emphasised that Hungary is not weak and is ready to protect her interests, but he finally pointed out that his government intended to continue the policy of patience and peace. Csáky’s words can be interpreted as a warning to the Slovak leaders to stop the persecution of the Hungarian minority.

The speech of Szüllő made politicians think in Slovakia, and it also raised doubts

32 *The Records of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament* (henceforward *UH Records*), Vol. I–II, Budapest 1940–1941, Vol. I (30 April 1940), Session 22, pp. 283–284.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 284.

34 *Ibidem*.

35 *Ibidem*.

to the great hopes of the public for revision. Suspicion was aroused that the words of the Hungarian MP could hint a Hungarian-German agreement at the expense of Slovakia, which could lead to further territorial losses.

However, Spišiak gave no credit to the threat of Csáky. He thought that Csáky only took the opportunity to gain popularity, and “*no great importance should be attached to it*”.³⁶ Csáky explained to Spišiak that he had to give that speech against his will on the pressure of Szüllő, but he wants to develop the relationship with Slovakia anyway. When the American Ambassador in Budapest asked Spišiak about the opinion of the German Ambassador, Otto von Erdmannsdorff, about the speeches of Szüllő and Csáky, he replied that he had not spoken to Erdmannsdorff because he always sided with Csáky, who is the only pro-German politician in the Hungarian government. Therefore the Germans could not count on the sympathy of the Slovaks. “*However, he is of the opinion that the Germans do not support the idea even though Germany did not mention the case.*”³⁷ Spišiak did not expect the former bilateral relationship to change.

The Hungarian Ambassador in Bratislava, György Szabó mentioned in his report to the Hungarian Foreign Minister that the speech of Géza Szüllő elicited great excitement in Slovak government circles. He, as the representative of the Hungarian government received a “lesson” from the Slovak leadership. The Slovak Foreign Ministry organised a celebration performance in the Bratislava theatre for 30 April 1940. He was told that Tiso and the diplomats accredited to Slovakia would be present. Upon arriving at the theatre, the Hungarian Ambassador saw that the other foreign politicians had not come. He did not know about Szüllő’s speech so he went to the performance. Meanwhile Tiso appeared accompanied by the German ambassador and Ďurčanský but they deliberately failed to greet or take notice of Szabó. Feeling inconvenient Szabó left hastily at the beginning of the second interval. It was obvious for him that the Slovaks wanted to demonstrate the intimate nature of the Slovak-German connections by inviting Erdmannsdorff to the presidential box on the very day when the policy of Slovakia was sharply criticised in Budapest. On the following day, Szabó mentioned to Erdmannsdorff into what an embarrassing situation he was put, to which the German ambassador replied that he could not reject Tiso’s invitation. The other diplomats were either not invited or sent notice too late and were unable to attend the performance. The objective of the Slovaks was to let the Hungarian ambassador feel that the Germans were on their side.

The Slovak leadership further deepened the tension when Foreign Minister Ferdinand Ďurčanský³⁸ made an onslaught on Hungary in Bratislava on 1 May 1940. He scolded the “counts” and claimed that they were the primary obstacle in the agree-

³⁶ T. FRANK (Ed.), *Roosevelt követe Budapesten 1934–41: John F. Montgomery bizalmas politikai beszélgetései: 1934–41*, Budapest 2002, p. 277.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 278.

³⁸ Ferdinand Ďurčanský (1906–1974): Slovak politician and lawyer. Since 1935, MP of the Slovak People’s Party. Editor of the journal *Nástup*. From 7 October 1938 to 9 March 1939, minister in the autonomous government of Jozef Tiso. Foreign Minister from the establishment of sovereign Slovakia to 1940. After this, he did not fill any significant position. In 1945, he escaped to the West. Sentenced to death in his absence in Czechoslovakia. He was one of the leaders of Slovak emigration until his death.

ment of the two countries. “[...] it is not the fault of the Slovak government that they are riding such a high horse in the South, that they are speaking to the Slovaks from so high that the horseman cannot see the ground. And if the horseman does not look down to the hooves of his horse, he cannot see when the horse stumbles and he could fall off. It is not the fault of the Slovak government either that a Slovak cannot understand how they can speak about brotherhood in the south when he has the experience that the face that turns to us strongly resembles the face of Cain. Nevertheless, we assure everyone that we will not play the role of Abel.”³⁹ He added that the Slovaks wanted peace. They wanted Slovakia to be a state where all Slovaks, 45% of which lived abroad, would find a cosy home. Jozef Kirschbaum, reported by trustworthy witnesses, used an even more radical tone at a meeting in Bratislava: “Let us make it clear for everyone who would threaten the Slovaks that they stand here with pride and self-confidence, and they are ready to take to arms for the defence of their land any time.”⁴⁰ He also mentioned the idea of revision: “They do not intend to solve the European conflict but they have the right to demand and defend their property.”⁴¹

The German Ambassador in Budapest wrote a report of Szüllő's speech and sent it to the foreign ministry in Berlin. It was probably this that made the German foreign secretary, Ernst von Weizsäcker to have talks with Sztójay in Berlin on 3 May 1940.⁴² The Hungarian Ambassador explained that while Hungary was working on creating friendly relationship with the Slovaks with endless patience, the Slovak government was fighting hard against Hungary with the implication that they were doing all that with the consent of the German government. Sztójay emphasised that the Hungarian government did not assume the consent of Germany and that they were convinced that it is the interest of Germany to see peace along the Slovak-Hungarian border. Weizsäcker did not form an opinion in connection with Szüllő's speech but he reproached the presumption of the Hungarian government that the Germans would cover the anti-Hungarian behaviour of the Slovaks.⁴³

In the Slovak parliament, MP Konštantín Čulen⁴⁴ remarked on Szüllő's words. He referred to the fact that “the Hungarians had adopted their culture from the Slavs and had the Slovaks not been so soft, Petőfi would not have written under such a name.” The Hungarians do not deserve grace for the establishment of economic connections because they needed the Slovak timber, which they had purchased for their surplus. The Slovaks did not want more than what they can legally claim; they wanted that the Hungarians and Slovaks belong to Hungary and Slovakia respectfully. “The Slovaks never want to live under the crown of St Stephen; if somebody forced them to do so,

39 HNA, FM, K-63. 459. cs. 120/pol. (Report and the enclosed document), 7 May 1940.

40 Ibidem.

41 Ibidem.

42 HNA, M.E, K-28. Bond 6. 118/pol-1940. sz. P 17529/1940, (3 May 1940).

43 Ibidem.

44 Konštantín Čulen (1904–1964): Slovak writer, journalist, MP and politician. He was also cultural attaché of his country in Washington until March 1940. In 1945, he emigrated to Austria and then to Canada, from where he attacked Czechoslovakia in his writings. One of the supporters of the rehabilitation of Jozef Tiso. In 1948, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison in Czechoslovakia.

they would rather burn their villages, towns, churches, schools and houses and would have themselves be killed to the last man rather than return to a state link that had been worse than slavery.”⁴⁵ Čulen pointed out that they had no problem with the Hungarian people; they would take steps only against the aristocrats and the plutocrats: “They will liberate the Slovaks as well as the oppressed Hungarian peasantry on the territories ceded to Hungary, and after this mission, the Slovaks will join to us.”⁴⁶ János Esterházy was present at Čulen’s speech but he did not remark upon it immediately. However, he denied it later with facts that the situation of Hungarians in Slovakia was excellent and they would have so many rights as Čulen claimed. The Hungarian ambassador in Bratislava protested against Čulen’s speech at his German colleague.

The Hungarian Ambassador, György Szabó, had the impression that the German administration made no remarks on Čulen’s speech because they wanted to spare the dignity of the Slovaks. “Since they want to set an example with Slovakia as a sovereign state under German protection towards the ‘Südost’, they want to avoid the implication, by regulating her in public, that doubts can be raised regarding her independence.”⁴⁷ By leaving Slovak ideas for revision without comment, the Germans let domestic tensions calm down, in order to prevent public opinion from turning against Germany. They thought it possible that the Slovaks could turn to Edvard Beneš or to Moscow for patronage. The Hungarian ambassador did not think that the Slovaks were planning to march into Hungary with German troops. In fact, as some sources show it, they were afraid that the Hungarian-German relationship would develop to the disadvantage of Slovakia. Szabó called the attention of his government that no punitive action was possible against Slovakia without German approval. “Such an action without preliminary agreement could offer a pretext and opportunity for the empire, on grounds of guaranteeing the protection of Slovakia, to settle the constantly topical ‘transit’ question⁴⁸ through Hungary with arms.”⁴⁹

The speeches of Szűllő and Čulen raised the interest of Italian diplomacy as well. The Italian ambassador to Slovakia, Guido Roncolli, reported Ciano about the anti-Hungarian attacks of the Slovak press, in which, as he knew, also the leader of the Slovakian Germans, Karmasin took part. Roncolli had information about Karmasin’s receiving the instruction from Berlin “to pour water on the fire”. However, the instruction reached him only after he explained his view in the press. In his talks with the Hungarian ambassador, Roncolli said that the irresponsible anti-Hungarian speeches of Slovak politicians had poisoned the atmosphere in Slovakia too much. Szabó expressed his pessimism regarding the connections between the two countries as well as the achievement of Esterházy, as several arrangements which had an unfavourable impact on the future of her relationship with Hungary had been made in Slovakia.⁵⁰

45 HNA, K-28, M. E, Departement of Nationality and Minorities. 44. cs. 124/pol. 1940. sz. (the report of György Szabó), (16 May 1940).

46 Ibidem. Čulen’s speech is cited in *Slovák*, 8 May 1940, p. 3. and also 16 May 1940, p. 5.

47 HNA, FM, K-63. 459. cs. 120/pol. report and its enclosed document, (7 May 1940).

48 That is, the passage of German troops through Hungary.

49 HNA, FM, K-63. 459. cs. 120/pol. report and its enclosed document, (7 May 1940).

50 Gy. RÉTI, *A Palazzo Chigi és Magyarország: Olasz diplomáciai dokumentumok Magyarországról a Darányi-kormány megalakulásától a szovjetunió elleni hadüzenetig, 1936–1941*, Budapest 2007, p. 328.

In early May 1940, János Esterházy, seeing the tensions after the speech of Géza Szűllő, in order to reassure the public, gave a speech in the Slovak parliament. He had to respond to the attacks of Slovak MPs, who blamed him for visiting Budapest too frequently. Esterházy admitted that he regularly travelled to Budapest and met with the Hungarian Prime Minister and the foreign minister. He commented on it as follows: *“I go when I feel that there is a problem to solve. I also reveal, I am not boastful, that we did not discuss questions of international politics nor did we negotiate the map of post-war Europe but I do intervene on behalf of the non-registered Slovakian railwaymen and postmen and similar affairs; and if anyone should raise doubts about my words, I shall present written evidence about the number of state officials who regained his position through my intervention”*⁵¹ He also emphasised that Hungarians and Slovaks had to seek in each other what brings them together rather than what separates them. *“Here I stand before the Slovakian parliament with clean conscience because I have been dedicated to the idea of friendship with the Slovaks and I have served and declared it since the beginning of my political career. [...]”*⁵² He himself, keeping to his principles, worked on redressing the grievances of the Slovaks who got to Hungary after the Vienna Award. He did not want to make capital of this; he worked out of sympathy for the Slovaks and out of honesty. Esterházy also criticised the anti-Hungarian atrocities mentioned by Szűllő as well as the role of the Hlinka Guard. *“It must not be the duty of the guard at any rate that certain members throw stones through the windows of peacefully sleeping people at night. I would like to believe that they are but temporary symptoms and that the policy of sober consideration, based on the principle of live and let live, will prevail here as well. [...] there is a historical pun relevant these days: as the oppression of the Bach era was followed by the compromise and a period of general development, so will the Mach era be followed by reconciliation and normal life.”*⁵³ Esterházy regularly informed the Hungarian government and a few MPs about the problems and the situation of Hungarians in Slovakia, but the bilateral relationship was not brought forth in the Hungarian parliament any more.

In the months and years to come, the Slovak-Hungarian connections were based on observing each other, gaining the favour of the Germans and the policy of reciprocity. Mutual jealousy and claims for territories also played their role in shaping the connections all through the war. Neither the Hungarian nor the Slovak administration could overcome these factors. The speeches in the Hungarian parliament called the attention of the public in both countries to the problems, especially after they were published in the press. In practice, they limited the transgressions of officials and police on both sides to some extent.

51 HNA, FM, K-63, 459. cs. (Esterházy's speech in the Slovak house of representatives), (7 May 1940).

52 *Új Hírek*, 9 May 1940, pp. 1–2.

53 SNA, Snem Slovenskej republiky, Tesnopisecká zpráva o 34. zasadnutí Slovenského snemu, (7 May 1940), pp. 22–26.

ABSTRACT

This article focus on Slovak-Hungarian relations. The study aims to draft a more differentiate and precise picture on Hungarian and Slovak revision efforts and the bilateral relations as one may find in any professional literature till now, in particular in non-Slavic works. The author has used new archive documents and materials. The political climate between Bratislava and Budapest in the first half of 1939 was strongly influenced by mutual territorial claims. Diplomatic relations between Slovakia and Hungary were characterised by three main problems since 1939 and in 1940: the affiliation of the territories in the Upper Hungary and national minorities living there; gaining Germany as an ally at the expense of the other party, and the principle of reciprocity. Ratification of the Slovak State was the most important goal of the Slovak foreign policy in 1939, both within the regional and European context. The Slovak policy also strived to find new and influential allies and believed that Germany and the Soviet Union could play that role. Slovak leaders wanted revision in respect to Hungary and wanted also to reach the revision of the 1st Vienna Award. In July 1939 the Slovak propaganda clearly presented the idea that Slovaks could not accept the borders of their homeland. The speeches in the Hungarian parliament called the attention of the public in both countries to the problems, especially after they published in the press. In practice, they limited the transgressions of officials and police on both sides to some extent.

We can say the biggest mistake in the given period was that the governments were not able to rise above the issue of reciprocity and territories, what hindered their possible cooperation against Germans in the future.

KEYWORDS

History; Diplomacy; Hungarian-Slovak Relations; Hungarian Parliament 1939–1940; National Minorities

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