

# The History of the Slovak-Hungarian “Little War” and Its Interpretations in National Histories

István Janek

Before tackling the events of the “Little War”, let us take a brief outlook on the study of it in Hungarian and Slovak historical literature. A great number of Slovak historians have written on this issue producing many articles and conference publications in Slovakia. Here I would like to highlight the most important ones from four historians: Ladislav Deák, František Cséfalvay, Zoltán Katreba and Ján Petrik. A lot has been written on the air warfare between the two armies as well: Juraj Rejninec and Ján Petrik from Slovakia and Iván Pataky, László Rozsos together with Gyula Sárhidai and Csaba B. Stenge from Hungary must be mentioned.<sup>1</sup> A thorough study of the diplomatic aspect has been done only by István Janek in Hungary.<sup>2</sup> Ján Petrik has worked at the local history level and he also published a short but detailed monograph on the Hungarian bombing of Spišská Nová Ves.<sup>3</sup> Cséfalvay and Katreba are military historians who work for the Slovak Institution of Military History. They focus on the military events and publish in various Slovakian historical periodicals.<sup>4</sup> Cséfalvay has also shown the political connections of military events.<sup>5</sup> It is the merit of the works



- 1 J. RAJNINEC, *Slovenské letectvo 1939/1944*, Vol. 1, Bratislava 1997; I. PATAKY — L. ROZSOS — G. SÁRHIDAI, *Légi háború Magyarországon felett*, Vol. 1, Budapest 1992; B. C. STENGE, *A magyar légierő 1938–1945*, in: *Rubicon*, Vol. 23, No. 9/10, 2012, pp. 98–109; C. BENCZE [STENGE], *Tűzkeresztység*, in: *Magyar Szárnyak*, Vol. 31, 2003, pp. 204–211; C. B. STENGE, *Baptism of Fire: The First Combat Experiences of the Royal Hungarian Air Force and Slovak Air Force, March 1939*, Solihull 2013.
- 2 I. JANEK, *Az elfelejtett háború*, in: *Történelmi Szemle*, Vol. 43, No. 3/4, 2001, pp. 299–313; I. JANEK, *Magyar-szlovák „kis háború” 1939 márciusában*, in: *Rubicon*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2008, pp. 33–35.
- 3 J. PETRIK, *Spišská tragédia*, Martin 1999; A. BÁNHI, *Az iglói repülőtér bombázása*, in: *Magyar Szárnyak*, Vol. 12, 1983, pp. 77–78; G. PUNKA, *Baljós kezdet: Igló bombázása 1939*, in: *Repülő Háttér*, No. 11, 1988, pp. 32–35.
- 4 K. ZOLTÁN, *Neznámy dokument o maďarsko-slovenskom konflikte v marci 1939*, in: *Vojenská história*, Vol. 7, Nos. 2–4, 2003, pp. 96–114, 86–103 and 78–95. F. CSÉFALVAY, *Maďarsko-slovenský ozbrojený konflikt v marci 1939*, in: M. ŠTEFANSKÝ — I. PURDEK (Eds.), *Slovensko vo vojnonách a konfliktoch 20. storočia*, Bratislava 2003, pp. 1117–1126.
- 5 F. CSÉFALVAY, *Predohra a príbeh maďarsko-slovenského ozbrojeného konfliktu v marci 1939*, in: *Vojenská história*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2004, pp. 39–58; F. CSÉFALVAY, *Začiatok maďarsko-slovenského ozbrojeného konfliktu v marci 1939*, in: M. PEKÁR — R. PAVLOVIČ (Eds.), *Sloven-*

of Cséfalvay and Katreba that they try to remain unbiased and strictly professional, and also the fact that they presented the material they found in German and Czech archives. Ladislav Deák is the real doyen of this topic in Slovakia, who organised a conference as early as 1993 and published its presentations under the title “Little War” (*Malá vojna*).<sup>6</sup> He and his co-authors present the events from a one-sided aspect underlining the heroism of Slovak soldiers. Deák did the same in another study, which appeared in the 2004 issue of *Historické štúdie*.<sup>7</sup> The research of Deák is very important; his findings must not be neglected or pushed aside; however, one must be aware of his biased attitude.

The theme of the “Little War” meant a very sensitive topic in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. It was not to be dealt with during the Socialist era, which received only a few sentences in the comprehensive works on the history of Czechoslovakia and Slovakia.<sup>8</sup> Such an event did not fit in the context of the friendship of the Socialist peoples, and therefore it could be researched only after the political transformation. It must be noted that several publications appeared in the Slovak State during 1939–1945, which were to show the glory of Slovak military successes.<sup>9</sup> A few memoirs were published in Hungary as well, but they focused on the introduction of events rather than praise the achievement of Hungarian soldiers. These works have become essential documents, as they were written shortly after the actual events. In the book of Rudo Stieženeč, the basic argument is that Slovakia had a great loss by losing territories, which they approved only in order to keep peace, but they wanted to regain those territories in due course with the help of Germany. The book was written with a Slovak patriotic tone.

The events of the “Little War” were met with great interest in Slovakia in the early 1990s as they strengthened the anti-Hungarian attitude of Vladimír Mečiar and his party. The “Little War” could be used to demonize the Hungarians. The topic became important in Slovakia because it was the first time that the army of the Slovak State could be despatched and it could prove its ability to act and withstand attacks. Many Slovak historians have set up anti-Hungarian theories based on archival research. They magnify the heroic resistance of the Slovak soldiers against the Hungarians, which has strengthened Slovak nationalism. The Slovak soldiers in 1939 were shown as an example for the Slovak youth: although outnumbered, they did not give up fighting; this persevering spirit is the heritage of the “Little War” and it must be continued by the young Slovaks. The Hungarian attack in 1939 was also used by Slovak politicians in their speeches; they used this issue to kindle nationalism and to make use of ethnic tensions. Slovak nationalist ideology communicated that the Hungarians posed a threat on Slovakia, as they might well attack the country, and therefore

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sko medzi 14. marcom 1939 a salzburskými rokovaniam. *Slovenská republika 1939–1945 očami mladých historikov VI*, Prešov 2007, pp. 241–250.

6 L. DEÁK, *Malá vojna: Vojenský konflikt medzi Maďarskom a Slovenskom v marci 1939*, Bratislava 1993.

7 The mentioned study L. DEÁK, *Nová Hranica medzi Slovenskom a Maďarskom po okupácii Podkarpatskej rusi v marci 1939*, in: *Historické štúdie*, Vol. 43, 2004, pp. 189–212.

8 See on this: M. KROPILAK (Ed.), *Dejiny Slovenska 1918–1945*, Vol. 5, Bratislava 1985, p. 358.

9 R. STRIEŽENEC, *Stráž na Východe*, Bratislava 1940.

the Slovaks must be ready to fight. The border conflict offered an excellent justification of this idea.

In the early 1900s, some Slovak publicists, in order to make advantage of the sensation, even scared their readers by predicting another Hungarian attack in a few years. They told the Slovakian public that the Hungarians had never taken the idea of coexistence seriously. The Hungarians wanted to assimilate the Slovaks through the centuries, and they should make an apology for the thousand-year oppression. Interestingly, the Hungarian public held between the two world wars that the Slovaks had enjoyed the generous hospitality and care of the Kingdom of Hungary for centuries, they had been growing in number and wealth, but when they could return what they had got, that is, after the First World War, they betrayed their former bread-giver and turned away from it. Hungarian society and the governments never came to terms with having lost the Slovak-populated northern territories, as well as other territories.<sup>10</sup> They endeavoured, in the interwar years, to regain them.<sup>11</sup> To get Slovakia or at least a part of it was the main objective of Hungarian revision; both political and military circles were dealing with the issue. It was about 1928 that the revision started to focus on Hungarian populated areas. The loss of the “Felvidék”, that is, the northern territories, was the most painful experience for the Hungarian politicians after the loss of Transylvania, for its economic significance in the Kingdom of Hungary. Also, a part of the Hungarian political elite was strongly linked to this area due to family origin or because they had had estates there. Hungarian propaganda suggested that, as Czechoslovakia had no statehood before and lacked historical tradition, these territories would be the easiest to regain. They argued that Czechoslovakia was an artificial creation which could thank its existence only to the great powers, and therefore it could be defeated more easily than others in the appropriate moment.<sup>12</sup>

The Hungarian administration endeavoured to prevent the approach of the Slovak and the Czech nations. They regarded the Slovaks as an occupied nation, which, alongside with other minorities, was struggling for liberation.<sup>13</sup> The Slovaks, in their view, formed a nation ethnographically, linguistically and historically different from the Czechs. The Hungarian leaders shared the view that Slovakia, or at least the Hungarian populated territories must return to Hungary in some way. They cherished the

10 M. ZEIDLER, *A revíziós gondolat*, Pozsony 2009, p. 160; G. SALLAI, „A határ megindul...”: *A csehszlovákiai magyar kisebbség és Magyarország kapcsolatai az 1938–1939. évi államhatárváltozások tükrében*, Pozsony 2009, pp. 84–85.

11 E. IRMANOVÁ, *Maďarsko a Versaillský mírový systém*, Ústí nad Labem 2002, pp. 276–277; J. GERGELY — P. PRITZ, *A trianoni Magyarország 1918–1945*, Budapest 1998, p. 86.

12 The necessity of revision was self-evident for Hungarian politicians and the public alike. They rejected the approval of the situation created by the Trianon Treaty. M. ZEIDLER, *Magyar revizionizmus a két háború között*, in: *Valóság*, No. 3, 2001, pp. 10–11.

13 Hungarian government circles did not regard the establishment of Czechoslovakia as the union of Slavonic peoples in historical Hungary with their mother countries. They consistently denied that Slovaks and Czechs who lived there would belong to one nation. Thereby they denied, in fact, the Czechoslovak state theory, which considered Czechs and Slovaks two branches of the same nation.

belief that the Rusins and the Slovaks would vote for joining Hungary at a possible referendum. In order to influence the public at home Hungarian propaganda spread in the 1930s that the Slovaks had regretted that they did not join Hungary in 1918, and they wanted to redress the mistake but they could not declare it in Czechoslovakia.<sup>14</sup> It was not true; the borders were determined by the interests of the great powers and changes could be made in 1938 and 1939. One of the speeches of István Bethlen can be a good example for the thinking of the Hungarian political elite. He said to an Italian journalist before the First Vienna Award that Hungary should get Northern Slovakia and Subcarpathia besides the Hungarian-populated Southern Slovakia. *“We are convinced that the great majority of the Slovak and the Ruthenian people would vote for rejoining Hungary, where they lived for a millennium if they were liberated from the yoke and incredible pressure of the Czech army and officials. We are determined to solve this question for good! [...] With peaceful means if possible, and if not, with force!”*<sup>15</sup> Bethlen’s speech foreshadowed the determination of the Hungarian leadership to intervene with military force, which was realised in the invasion of Subcarpathia and in the “Little War”.

The First Vienna Award was the result of the revisionist policy and the German orientation. The Hungarian administration regarded it as a great victory. The “Little War” was a continuation of this policy with armed forces if necessary as the Hungarians wanted a common frontier with Poland at any rate. They hoped that they could decrease the German pressure and Great Britain and France would acknowledge their gains.

Some Slovak publicists and historian, including Deák, compared the Hungarian attack in 1939 to the German invasion on the Soviet Union in 1941, and the defence of the Slovaks to the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people. The problem with this approach is that the “Little War” lasted for only a few days. Hungarian historians did not pay any attention to this event before the political transformation in 1989–1990; in fact, it was not a well-known issue. Hungarian historical memory and historiography often fail mentioning the “Little War”. It is not even mentioned in *“Magyarország története”* (the History of Hungary), which deals with the annexation of Subcarpathia. The same applies to later comprehensive works on Hungarian foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> There is a change in this trend in 2000, when the historian József Botlik gives an account of the events of the “Little War” in his work: *Egestas Subcarpathica*.<sup>17</sup> The breakthrough in the study of the story was made when I published an article in the periodical *Történelmi Szemle* on the events and diplomatic history of the “Little War” in 2001 based on documents in Slovakian and Hungarian archives. Another milestone was the publication of the book *“Meghasadt múlt”* (Split past) in 2008, which, in the context of the history of Slovaks and Hungarians, mentioned the events of the “Little War” with

14 L. STEIER, *Felsőmagyarország és revízió*, Budapest 1933, p. 32; I. BORSODY, *A magyar-szlovák kérdés alapvonalai*, Budapest 1939, pp. 37–38.

15 *A Reggel*, 1938. október 31. Gróf Bethlen István nagy nyilatkozatot adott, in: I. ROMSICS, *Bethlen István*, Budapest 2005, p. 397.

16 T. HAJDU — L. TILKOVSKY (Eds.), *Magyarország története 1919–1945*, Vol. 2, Budapest 1988; I. ROMSICS, *Magyarország története*, Budapest 2000.

17 J. BOTLIK, *Egestas Subcarpathica adalékok az Északkeleti-Felvidék és Kárpátalja XIX–XX. századi történetéhez. Hatodik síp alapítvány*, Budapest 2000, pp. 231–233.

critical remarks on the invasion of the Hungarian troops:<sup>18</sup> “Psychologically it gave an aggressive tone to the Hungarian policy towards Slovaks, and amplified the distrust towards Hungarian foreign political thinking on the Slovak side.”<sup>19</sup> We can agree with these ideas; the Hungarian invasion was not a good decision as it aggravated the relations between the two countries.<sup>20</sup>

## DIFFERENCES IN THE SLOVAK AND THE HUNGARIAN ASPECTS

One big difference in the interpretations of Hungarian and Slovakian historians is that while the former speak about a border incident, the latter regard it as a war. In the legal sense the Hungarian side is correct as no declaration of war took place. It must be noted that the Hungarian military leadership had planned a simple entry of the troops but the events took a different path. It was during the “Little War” that the Hungarians realised that local people could shoot back in the former Hungarian territories, and they are not any more the soldiers of the “Czechoslovaks or Czechs”. It was clear that twenty years in separation was enough for the Slovaks to develop their own national consciousness and the wish to have their own country, which came true in 1939. Not everyone accepted this in the Hungarian leadership: for instance, István Bethlen spoke about Czech-Hungarian opposition even in 1940, and he considered the hostile attitude of Slovak politicians to the Hungarians the result of German and formerly Czech agitation rather than the negative consequence of the “Little War”.<sup>21</sup>

Before tackling the events of the “Little War” in detail, its name must be touched upon. It was a journalist’s phrase, which was not objected to by any Slovak historians for long, and so it became the accepted term in public knowledge as well as at historical conferences. In Slovakia, military historian František Cséfalvay criticised the term in the 2004 volume of *Vojenská história*; he thought that “armed conflict” would be a more appropriate phrase, which could as well be agreed by the Hungarian side.<sup>22</sup> However, as the term “Little War” has become generally used in Slovakia and Hungary alike, perhaps it would not be feasible or expedient to change. The military events of the “Little War” began on 23 and finished on March 25, 1939. Between March

18 I. KOLLAI, *Meghasadt múlt. Fejezetek a szlovákok és a magyarok történelméből*. Terra Cognita Alapítvány, Budapest 2008, pp. 149–150.

19 Ibidem, p. 150.

20 A contemporary witness shows us the bilateral relations. Lujza Esterházy was the sister of János Esterházy, the leader of Slovakian Hungarians, who happened to be in Bratislava at the time of the Hungarian attack. In his memoirs, he wrote down his talks with a Slovak journalist in connection with the “Little War”: The Slovak journalist said: “This is the sneakiness of the Hungarian government. A beautifully performed comedy!” He thought that Hungary “[...] acknowledged the sovereign Slovak state in order to calm down our distrust and then attack us from behind.” Lujza Esterházy closed her notes with these words: “[...] We have lost the trust of the Slovaks completely due to Szobránc.” L. ESTERHÁZY, *Szívek az ár ellen: Püski*, Budapest 1991, p. 108.

21 I. ROMSICS (Ed.), *Bethlen István: Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek*, Budapest 2000, pp. 381–382.

22 CSÉFALVAY, *Predohra...*, p. 41.



25 and April 4, there were minor clashes but no significant engagement of troops, the frontlines were fixed, so the army manoeuvres lasted for 3 days altogether, and therefore perhaps the term “Three Days’ War” would be appropriate, if there was a Six Days’ War in history.

During the “Little War”, a plan for a “little solution” and a “big solution” turned up, which Deák explains in a false way. He says that the Hungarians attempted to carry out the “big solution” from the beginning, which was prevented only by the heroic resistance of the Slovak soldiers.<sup>23</sup> Deák even claims that the Hungarians could as well occupy the whole of Slovakia had it not been for the resistance.<sup>24</sup> Reality seems to be rather different in the light of archival documents, so Deák can be challenged. A contemporary document says that Döme Sztójay, the Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin sent a telephone number telegram to Hungarian Foreign Minister István Csáky on March 28, 1939, in which he informed his supervisor that the “little solution” could be carried out, that is, Hungary might keep the territory that Hungarian troops had occupied along the border of Subcarpathia and Slovakia until March 23. In his opinion the German government would not interfere if the border problem in the given region could be peacefully “modified” between Slovakia and Hungary in favour of the latter.<sup>25</sup> The “big solution” would have been that the Hungarian troops could advance as far as the Tatras and Poprad. In my opinion the Hungarian military leadership did not regard it as a practicable plan and did no effort to implement it. What is more, such a step would have elicited the resentment of Germany, which would be against the interests of Budapest. Deák’s argument can certainly be challenged with documents. The Germans did not support any further expansion of Hungary including the occupation of the whole Slovakia because the Hungarian Regent Nicholas Horthy and the government had rejected Berlin’s offer that Hungary should attack Czechoslovakia in return for the Slovakian territories.<sup>26</sup>

German foreign policy paid little attention to Slovakia before the summer of 1938; they considered it only as the target of Hungarian revisionist attempts, a factor that they could later use to influence Budapest according to their own interest.<sup>27</sup> German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop informed the Hungarian government that Germany had no claims for Slovakia and it was the duty of Hungary to make order there. They did not want simply to give the land as a present to Hungary. German foreign intentions changed from mid-September 1938, when they were interested in the creation of an independent Slovak state, which would serve as a bridge for Germany

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<sup>23</sup> DEÁK, *Nová...*, pp. 202–203.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> M. ÁDÁM (Ed.), *Diplomácia Iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945: Magyarország külpolitikája 1938–1939 [thereafter DIMK]*, Vol. 3, Doc. No. 553, pp. 672–673.

<sup>26</sup> On the advice of the Germans the Hungarians rejected the idea, which can be explained with two reasons: they wanted peaceful revision and the Hungarian army was weak. The first rejection took place in Kiel and the second came before the Munich pact. On the Kiel talks see P. PRITZ, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között*, Budapest 1995, pp. 296–333.

<sup>27</sup> D. KOVÁČ, *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku 1871–1945*, Bratislava 1991, p. 130; V. BYSTRICKÝ, *Nacistické Nemecko a vznik Slovenského Štátu*, in: *Vojenská história*, No. 2, 2001, p. 47.

towards the east, and which would also separate Hungary from Poland for a long time. Hitler realised that an independent Slovakia, which could be played against Hungary, served the interests of Germany, and therefore he started to drift gradually apart from backing the Hungarian revisionist attempts from October 1938. Sztójay informed the Hungarian government about this: “Germany would not be pleased to see the decrease of Czechoslovakian raw material resources, that is, giving the timber and other materials in Slovakia to others.”<sup>28</sup> They would not support the establishment of a Polish-Hungarian border, either.<sup>29</sup>

Slovakia sought an alternative solution in 1938, and they brought forth seven legal solutions. 1) To stay in the neutralised republic in federal connection with the Czechs, 2) Polish-Czech-Slovak trialism, 3) Polish-Slovak union, 4) Czech-Slovak-Hungarian trialism, 5) Hungarian-Slovak union, 6) To become a vassal of Germany within the framework of Czechoslovakia, and 7) An independent Slovakia under German protectorate or in neutral status guaranteed by the great powers.<sup>30</sup> The Slovakian politician Jozef Tiso had talks with both Poles and Hungarians on the conditions of a possible union with Slovakia.<sup>31</sup>

Coming back to German foreign policy it can be concluded that they had no concrete viewpoint regarding the future of Slovakia. Germany allowed the occupation of the whole of Subcarpathia and they did not take steps to make the Hungarians withdraw their troops during the “Little War”, either. The question can be raised: why did Germany fail to support Slovakia at negotiations? The answer is the former pro-Hungarian sentiments of the German politicians.

Another important question concerning the “Little War” which shows different interpretations by Slovak and Hungarian historians is whether there had been a Hungarian-German pact on the border conflict before March 1939, and if so which territories were mentioned. Slovak historians say there had been such an agreement as the Hungarian troops arrived with white flag in some places and they announced that an agreement had been made between Germany and Hungary on the territories and they had come to put it into effect.<sup>32</sup> It really happened that the Hungarian troops used this method here and there but the following document refutes the existence of a pact between the two governments: Hungarian Foreign Minister István Csáky sent a coded telegram to the Hungarian Ambassador in Warsaw, András Hory, on March 24 and instructed him to let the Polish Foreign Minister, Jozef Beck, know that there was no agreement between Hungary and Germany about Slovakia, not even an attempt had been made. “All I did”, Csáky wrote, “was to have the most important strategic points occupied for the defence of the railway in the Ung valley, for the Rusin-Slovakian border had always been disputed.”<sup>33</sup> Csáky summarised his role in this affair as follows: “On

28 DIMK, Vol. 2, Doc. No. 539, pp. 805–806.

29 Ibidem.

30 L. LIPTÁK, *Slovensko v 20. storočí*, Bratislava 1998, p. 161.

31 On the talks see: I. JANEK, *Magyar törekvések a Felvidék megszerzésére 1938-ban*, in: *Történelmi Szemle*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 41–46.

32 DEÁK, *Nová...*, pp. 199.

33 G. JUHÁSZ (Ed.), *Diplomácia Iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945* [henceforward DIMK], Vol. 4, Budapest 1962, Doc. No. 24, p. 109.

*the harsh protest of the Slovaks and the Germans I have stopped the advance of our troops on the one hand because I don't want to aggravate the Hungarian-Slovak and the Hungarian-German relations, on the other hand because we have reached our strategic objective according to our military experts. I will try to make some further gains through peaceful negotiations.*"<sup>34</sup>

By further gains he meant a few smaller hills occupied by the Hungarians in the border area between Subcarpathia and Slovakia. Csáky's words make it clear that there was no detailed agreement between the Hungarian and the German governments. The Germans gave permission to the occupation of Subcarpathia but they failed to draw the exact path of the border line.<sup>35</sup> The Hungarians made use of this. Beyond strategic reasons, a myth that was alive in the Hungarian political leadership also played a role in the occupation of the land in question: the idea that the Slovak and Rusin (Ruthenian) population east of Poprad would welcome the Hungarian occupation. The Hungarians, through Polish diplomacy, also contacted Karol Sidor<sup>36</sup>, who was noted for his pro-Polish attitude in Slovakia. The Hungarians let him know that the Hungarian attack "*was by no means a hostile step towards the Slovaks*", and also that they expected him to give suggestion regarding the appointment of the leader of the territory in Eastern Slovakia; a person who would enjoy the trust of Sidor and the Slovaks.<sup>37</sup> This was probably a tactical step on the part of the Hungarians, and they did not want serious talks with him.

The military invasion put the wind up in the Slovakian government and threw them into the clutches of the Germans. As a consequence of the wrong step of the Hungarian government even the minimal trust towards each other had disappeared, and the principle of reciprocity (mutuality)<sup>38</sup> developed, which remained a decisive factor in the later stages of the war.

## THE HISTORY OF THE "LITTLE WAR"

The events of the "Little War" are in close connection with the Hungarian occupation of Subcarpathia in March 1939. With this step, the Hungarians established a border with Poland, which, they expected, would extend their political activity sphere to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> B. ZSELICZKY, *Kárpátalja a cseh és a szovjet politika érdekében 1920–1945*, Budapest 1998, p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> Karol Sidor (1901–1953) Slovak politician, journalist and minister. In 1931–1938, editor of the Bratislava daily "Slovák". A leader of the Hlinka Guard in 1938–1939. Slovakian Ambassador to the Vatican in 1939–1945.

<sup>37</sup> *DIMK*, Vol. 3, Doc. No. 528, p. 648.

<sup>38</sup> The consequences of reciprocity were borne by the minorities in each other's territories. The connections of the two states were determined by the school for the school and association for association principle. The principle of mutuality seriously hurt the rights of the Hungarians in Slovakia and the Slovaks in Hungary. This policy gave the opportunity to both parties for reprisals against each other's minorities. Reciprocity had become a weapon in the struggle between Hungary and Slovakia.



some extent. The necessity of revision was self-evident for the Hungarian public and for most of the politicians who controlled it, and they did all they could to expand the territory of their country. In early May 1939, the Hungarian government received news about Germany's intention to occupy all Slovakia.<sup>39</sup>

It was not true, of course, but the Hungarian politicians could not be sure about it. The uncertainty and the fear of losing the favourable moment made Hungarian Premier Pál Teleki put pressure on his cabinet at the government meeting of March 10, 1939, to decide that if the German army marches in Czecho-Slovakia or if Slovakia declares independence, the Hungarian army must occupy Subcarpathia. This must be done even without the consent of Germany. For, if the Slovaks got under the control of the German Reich, "*Hungary, undertaking all risk and pushing aside the resolution of the Vienna Award, which has been violated by others, in order to restore the balance of power will occupy Ruthenia without delay. From a strategic point of view the Hungarian army, at the back of the Slovak population, could weaken any military or political pressure from western direction which would lack the protection of natural borders*".<sup>40</sup> The Italian and the Polish governments were urgently informed on this decision,<sup>41</sup> and they did not miss to mention that if Slovakia had got under the power of the German Reich and no Polish-Hungarian border had been created, it would ensure such weight of power to Germany that would jeopardize not only Hungarian but also Polish and Italian interests. The Hungarian government, for strategic reasons, considered the creation of a Polish-Hungarian border, and therefore the occupation of Subcarpathia essential.

On March 9, 1939, riots broke out in Slovakia against the Prague administration. The Czechoslovak government sent gendarmes and soldiers to stop the revolt, who arrested the leaders of the Hlinka Guard and the discredited members of the Slovakian political elite. The Czech Central Government had to stop the pacification on German pressure on March 12. Hitler could make good use of the riots as a pretext to raise claims to the rest of Czechoslovakia, so he ordered Tiso to himself and received the Slovak leader in the evening hours on March 13, 1939. After this meeting, the Slovaks, led by Tiso, proclaimed independence on March 14, 1939. The Czecho-Slovak state union formally ceased to exist. On March 14, Hitler ordered Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha to Germany and forced him to give his consent to the German occupation of Bohemia, and to its annexation under the name "Czecho-Moravian Protectorate" by the German Reich. On March 15, Hungary formally acknowledged the sovereignty of Slovakia.<sup>42</sup> On March 15–18, Hungary occupied those territories in Subcarpathia which remained part of Czechoslovakia in the First Vienna Award, and a decision was made to march on towards Slovakia.<sup>43</sup> The Hungarians were convinced that the common border would improve the geopolitical situation of the country; as Miklós

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<sup>39</sup> DIMK, Vol. 3, Doc. No. 408, p. 548.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, Doc. No. 414, p. 552.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, Doc. Nos. 414–415, pp. 551–552.

<sup>42</sup> The document is presented in: D. SEGEŠ — M. HERTEL — V. BYSTRICKÝ, *Slovensko a Slovenská otázka v Poľských a Maďarských diplomatických dokumentoch v rokoch 1938–1939*, Bratislava 2012, Doc. No. 268, p. 538.

<sup>43</sup> F. CSILLA — V. MIKOLA, *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra*, Budapest 2010, p. 107.

Kozma<sup>44</sup> put it in his journal: “9 million Hungarians live locked in the cage of Trianon Hungary. The country is bordered by the Little Entente on three sides, while its fourth neighbour is Germany since the Anschluss. If in the future, and nobody has any doubts about it now, we regain the Hungarian territories in peace or with blood, it only means that some more Hungarians will leave in a somewhat bigger cage. Ruthenia (Subcarpathia), however, means that we have made a break on the bond of the Little Entente between Romania and the Czech state and we have a common border with Poland [...]”<sup>45</sup>

After the occupation of Subcarpathia, the units of the Kárpát Group of the Hungarian Royal Defence Forces received command to march in the territory west of the Ung valley as far as the Zellő — Círókafalu — Takcsány — Remetevasgyár — Szobránc — Sárosremete line. Three combat units were designated to carry out the plan: the 9<sup>th</sup> independent battalion in the north, the 2<sup>nd</sup> mechanized battalion in the centre at Ungvár and the 2<sup>nd</sup> cavalry battalion in the south near Nagykapos. 20,000–25,000 Hungarian soldiers participated in the action under the command of Lieutenant General Vitéz Ferenc Szombathelyi. The Hungarian government used the pretext that the railway line at Ungvár was not safely secured and cannot be protected without the annexation of more territories. The highway and railway lines were too close to the border, which made them vulnerable, and therefore Hungarian troops set out towards their destination at 5:30 am on March 23, 1939. On March 24, after an advance of twenty kilometres, the troops were ordered to halt, as the territory they occupied was large enough to secure the railway line in question. Slovakia, as the successor of Czechoslovakia, claimed this part of Subcarpathia, so they launched fierce attacks on the Hungarian troops in the following days. At 5:30 on March 23, 1939, the Slovak troops were entirely surprised by the Hungarian attack. The press communicated it as they had not expected that Hungary, which was the first to acknowledge their sovereignty, would be the first to attack them within a week.<sup>46</sup> The press also reported that both Slovak land troops and air force were deployed against the Hungarians, which made the latter withdraw immediately. “As fast they came, so fast they withdraw.”<sup>47</sup>

Now, we know this was not true. The Bratislava daily “Slovák” tried to strengthen the patriotism of its readers. “We do not want what belongs to others but we will not give what is ours. Even though Slovakia is a young state we have the right to live and exist just as well as any thousand-year-old state among the states. We will protect our sacred land and freedom at any rate.”<sup>48</sup> The Slovak leaders decided that the whole Hungarian border line must be militarily reinforced, and they mobilized the units of the Hlinka Guard. As Slovakia had just been established on the ruins of Czecho-Slovakia, their army was under organisation from the former common army. They tried to withstand but they could only slow down rather than stop the Hungarian advance. The border

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44 Miklós Kozma (1884–1941), politician, Minister of the interior, the President of the Hungarian Telegraphic Office. One of the organisers of the Rongyos Gárda (Rug Guard). Government commissioner of Subcarpathia from 1940.

45 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive; thereafter MNL), K-429. Ministry of the Interior, Kozma documents.

46 Slovák, March 24, 1939, p. 1.

47 Ibidem.

48 Ibidem.

guards of the Slovak Republic were mostly Czech, Moravian and Slovak gendarmes and customs officers, who were joined by the forming Slovak army and the groups of the Hlinka Guard. The Hungarians knew the locations of their bases thanks to the former intelligence and gendarme units along the border. Therefore the Czecho-Slovak customs patrols were surprised and disarmed in their stations.

General Ferdinand Čatloš was appointed commander of the Slovak forces. He organised three tactical groups to stop the Hungarian advance. These three divisions were marked with the numbers V, VI and VII. They were quartered in Trenčín, Spišská Nová Ves, and Banská Bystrica.<sup>49</sup> The Slovakian north group (Division V) was called “stakčini”. They were created from the 16<sup>th</sup> regiment and the group numbered about 700 soldiers. This unit was intended to operate around Malý Berezný (today in Ukraine, *Малий Березний*) and Stakčín. The southern group (Division VII) received the name Michalovská or, as others reported, Zemplínská. They were formed from the 20<sup>th</sup>, 112<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> divisions.<sup>50</sup> Their task was to advance towards Užhorod and Michalovce (former Michalany). The third group (Division VI) was formed by the ‘Prešovská’, whose soldiers came from the 11<sup>th</sup> infantry division and the 17<sup>th</sup> mountain division. They were the tactical reserves.<sup>51</sup> The fourth combat unit was the air force, whose main operation base was the airport of Spišská Nová Ves.<sup>52</sup> Their commander was Lieutenant Colonel Augustín Malár. The task of the air force units was reconnaissance to support land troops, to fend off Hungarian air strikes and to slow the Hungarian advance on land. On March 17, 1939, Czech officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers were ordered to leave Slovakia. They had to return to the Protectorate as soon as possible. They had to leave their handguns and ammunition behind.<sup>53</sup>

The equipment of the Czecho-Slovak army was divided between Germany and Slovakia. What was stored in Bohemia was taken by the Germans, the rest became Slovak property. The division did not apply to the units in the “Schutzzone”.<sup>54</sup> The German army did not only take the military storehouses in the “Schutzzone” but they also occupied the military bases, airports, barracks and most of the factories as well. It is important for us now because the greater part of the artillery and anti-aircraft ammunition was stored here. The Slovak infantry and heavy artillery suffered from serious shortage of ammunition during the war. They could not carry out a counter-strike or engage the enemy seriously without ammunition. As a consequence of the German military policy the anti-aircraft battalions had no ammunition against Hungarian bombers at Spišská Nová Ves. Still, on March 23, 1939, General Čatloš gave order: “[...] *no matter what it costs, the enemy must be stopped immediately and driven back behind the borders. Our statehood is at stake; we have to prove that we can defend our own*

49 RAJNINEC, p. 21.

50 The soldiers of the 12<sup>th</sup> unit were provided with anti-tank guns. Ibidem.

51 J. KRŇÁČ, *Prvé Boje*, in: Slovenské Vojsko, No. 8, 1940, pp. 134–136.

52 PETRIK, pp. 14–15.

53 STRIEŽENEC, p. 32.

54 The territory of the “Schutzzone” ran along the border of the Czecho-Moravian Protectorate and Slovakia from Poland to Austria in a 30–40-km wide strip in Slovak territory. Only German garrisons were allowed here; the Germans were free to build fortresses here.

borders [...]”<sup>55</sup> About 13,000 officers had served in the former Czechoslovak army, out of which only 435 were Slovaks.<sup>56</sup> Out of 140 generals only one was of Slovak origin.<sup>57</sup>

The statistics prove that there was a serious shortage of leaders in the Slovak army, especially regarding qualified officers in higher units with experience in commandship. In order to improve this situation the new commander of the Slovak army after the separation, Ferdinand Čatloš appealed to the officers of the former Czecho-Slovak army several times. He asked officers with any personal links to Slovakia to continue to serve in the Slovak army. Those who joined the Slovak army from the former one were promoted to higher ranks immediately. He gave order that every soldier had to swear to the Slovak Republic and its government. After taking the oath senior officers took command over the units in Slovakia. Those Czech officers and soldiers who did not join the Slovak army had to leave Slovakia within 14 days due to the agreement with Germany. After the departure of the Czech and Rusin soldiers the strength of regiments decreased from 2,000–3,000 to 70–400. The chaos in the Slovak army facilitated the advance of the Hungarians. The new Slovak army retained the former uniforms. To make a difference from the Czech soldiers, the Slovaks pinned a badge-shaped national flag on their caps.<sup>58</sup> The objective of this measure, besides the differentiation of Czech and Slovak soldiers, was to strengthen the dedication in the soldiers to the new state. After March 17, 1939, the Slovak staff had to solve several urgent problems. The most important tasks were as follows: 1) They had to guarantee that the Czech and Rusin soldiers could leave without harassment, 2) to disarm the remaining units of the 12<sup>th</sup> Czech division and escort it to the border of the Protectorate, 3) to accommodate and cure those who got injured in the fights in Subcarpathia, 4) to liquidate or disarm the members of the Carpathian Sich who got to Slovak territory, 5) monitor the Hungarian, German and Polish border guard activity, and 6) to secure the Slovak borders.

The Slovak military leadership also deployed the air force against the Hungarians; at first for reconnaissance, later to carry out strikes. On March 23 and 24, Slovak aircraft took off in Spišská Nová Ves and opened machine gun fire on the advancing Hungarian tank columns and caused minor losses to them. On March 24, the Slovak air force bombed Uzhorod, Sobrance and Velká Berezna (today in Ukraine, *Великий Березний*) Over Sobrance, an air fight developed with Hungarian victory at the end. On March 24, 1939, the Hungarian air force intended to attack the Slovak air base with 45 Ju-86 bombers and 18 CR-32 fighters, but only 9 reached Spišská Nová Ves, the others either got lost or bombed wrong airport. The Slovak defence fighters were not in deployable condition so the Hungarians could attack the town undisturbed. The Hungarians ruined or destroyed 17 planes without having any losses. The Slovak sources only acknowledged the loss of 10 aircraft. Slovak land troops carried out counterattacks at several places on March 24 and 25. The fiercest fight developed at Pálóc but the Slovak attempts failed everywhere.

55 Vojensko Historický Archív (henceforward VHA) Trnava, Fedinand Čatloš fond, Box 6. (Still to be organised).

56 C. VIDA, *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia katonája a csehszlovák haderő tisztje, a Szlovák Köztársaság védelmi minisztere és a csehszlovák állam kishivatalnoká*, in: Valóság, No. 12, 2012, p. 41.

57 He was General Rudolf Viest, who later gained fame in the Slovak National Uprising.

58 STRIEŽENEC, p. 33.

## THE CONCLUSION OF THE “LITTLE WAR”

On the intervention of the German government the Slovak and the Hungarian sides declared ceasefire in the evening hours of March 24, 1939. The Hungarian diplomacy emphasised that there had never been a fixed border between Slovakia and Subcarpathia.<sup>59</sup> The First Vienna Award did not determine the eastern border of Slovakia.<sup>60</sup> The Slovak government protested with the Hungarian foreign minister in a telegram; they reproached that Hungarian troops marched in Slovak territory from Subcarpathia and they asked the immediate withdrawal of those troops.<sup>61</sup> Hungarian Foreign Minister István Csáky promised the investigation of the affair without delay. In his view the root of the local conflict lay in the fact that the borders had never been clearly determined.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, General Ferdinand Čatloš remembers this differently. In his memories the Hungarian leadership did not want to know about their troops marching into Slovak territory and they claimed that there had been some misunderstanding in the question of the borders.<sup>63</sup>

The Hungarians probably delayed the clarification of the case in order to gain time for the troops to advance. The Hungarian government drew the attention of the Slovaks to stop unnecessary bloodshed. They added: Hungary did not want to use his greater power against Slovakia; on the contrary: it was very important for them to maintain good connections with their neighbour. Csáky invited the Slovak leaders to Budapest to clear the debated issues.<sup>64</sup> At 20.50 on March 24, Minister of Defence Čatloš gave command for the Slovak troops to stop action but a few units only received it on the 25. At the same time, Čatloš gave strict order to keep the gained positions at any rate. The Slovak attack with great forces, whose goal was to drive the Hungarians out of the debated territories, came to a quick end without success on March 25. In the morning of that day chief commander of the Slovakian air force Ján Ambruš arrived in Spišská Nová Ves to organise a counterattack on Budapest and Ungvár.<sup>65</sup>

However, by the time the planes had become ready to fight, the command arrived to stop the attack. However, the war machine had been in motion, and therefore it was hard to stop. A few Slovak planes received the news of the ceasefire after the bombing of Rimavská Sobota, Miskolc and Uzhgorod but the damage they had caused was negligible.<sup>66</sup> A bombing attack on Budapest could have led to the escalation of the conflict between the two states. What is more the Slovak airports would have suffered unnecessary losses as further planes were ordered to defend the Hungarian

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59 The Hungarian diplomacy referred to Article 10 of the minority treaty of September 10, 1919, which Czechoslovakia had to sign, and which said that the borders of would-be autonomous Ruthenia and Slovakia would be settled by the great powers. This never came true, however. MNL, K-28., No. 460, 1940-P-17688.

60 RAJNINEC, p. 20.

61 DEÁK, *Nová...*, p. 190.

62 *Felvidéki Magyar Hírlap*, March 24, 1939, p. 3.

63 VHA, *Spomienky Ferdinánd Čatloš*. Box 4, f. 25.

64 *Felvidéki Magyar Hírlap*, March 28, 1939, p. 2.

65 RAJNINEC, p. 29.

66 PETRIK, p. 46.



capital and the anti-aircraft batteries were made ready. On the one hand Budapest would have been a too heavy target, on the other hand the Slovaks could not have caused any serious damage beyond terrifying the political and public atmosphere. From a strategic point of view, the air attack would have been suicidal regarding its possible consequences on the conflict at the border zone.

In the morning hours of March 26 the complete ceasefire had been established, which was to be occasionally violated by both parties.<sup>67</sup> A joint committee was appointed to determine the border between the two countries. Fights came to an end by March 28. Negotiations were held in Budapest led by Envoy Extraordinary János Vörle and Slovakian foreign secretary Jozef Zvrškovec on March 28, 1939. They agreed to stop hostilities, the exchange of prisoners of war as well as the creation of a neutral zone between the two armies.<sup>68</sup> The Slovak delegation laid claims to Hungarian territories as compensation but the Hungarians refused it.<sup>69</sup> The Slovaks also turned to Germany for support. The Germans refused the Slovak request to force the Hungarians to satisfy Slovak territorial claims.<sup>70</sup> In the end the Slovakian government had to accept Berlin's offer and to sit down to the negotiating table with the Hungarians. The members of the two delegations also agreed that the Hungarian troops could remain in their position and the Slovak troops would retreat 2–3 kilometres. They also agreed to avoid clashes and exchange prisoners of war within 48 hours.

On March 30, Csáky was informed by Ambassador Hory in Warsaw that the Poles had learnt that all Prešov and its vicinity wanted to join Hungary. Therefore the Poles found the Hungarian demands on Slovakia too lenient and expressed their disappointment to the Hungarian government on March 31.<sup>71</sup> They expected Czecho-Moravia to become the vassal of Germany after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, and Slovakia to unite with Hungary, and so the former Polish-Hungarian border will be re-established. During the work of the border determining committee, several civil organisations, among them the Association of Rusinsko (*Ruszinszkóiak Egyesülete*), the Union of Associations in Upper Hungary (*Felvidéki Egyesületek Szövetsége*) and the Association of Zips (*Szepesi Szövetség*), submitted a common request to the Hungarian Prime Minister's office. They wanted to fix the new Hungarian-Slovak border at the Csorba River.<sup>72</sup> The Hungarians put the proposal *ad acta*, however.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> On the further clashes see: Slovenský Národný archív (hereafter SNA), Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí (hereafter MZV), Box 79, Documents 51653 /1939, 51675/1939, 51708/1939.

<sup>68</sup> Representative Štefan Hašík and General Rudolf Viest and Štefan Janšák. Slovák, March, 31 1939, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Slovák, April 1, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> DIMK, Vol. 3, Doc. No. 560, pp. 682–683.

<sup>71</sup> DIMK, Vol. 4, Doc. No. 42, p. 127; DEÁK, *Malá...*, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> The Csorba River was the border of the historical Liptó and Szepes counties between the Poprád River and Dunajec River. If this proposal had come true, the Slovak-Hungarian border could have been moved as far as the feet of the Tatra Mountains.

<sup>73</sup> MNL, K-28. Miniszterelnökségi Iratok (hereafter Documents at the Prime Minister's Office) M.E., 2 archives piles, No. 16141.

Negotiations on the new eastern border between Hungary and Slovakia continued on March 27–30 and early April, 1939. The Hungarian and the Slovakian delegations held a meeting chaired by minister plenipotentiary János Vörle on March 31 and the talks continued on April 1. The stand of Germany, which both sides wanted to turn to their advantage, had a great influence on the agreement. The Germans wanted to know the Hungarian intentions, and therefore Ambassador in Budapest, Otto von Erdmannsdorff visited Hungarian foreign minister Csáky on April 3, 1939. They talked, among other things, about the Slovak-Hungarian border. The Ambassador told Csáky that the Slovakian government turned to Germany for help and added that they let the Slovaks know: in the given situation the restoration of the former borders would be a futile attempt. When asked whether the Hungarian government would be willing to give up certain territories Csáky responded with a definite no by saying that “*where a Hungarian soldier set his foot, he will remain there*”.<sup>74</sup> The Hungarian government would be, at most, willing to give some economic concessions, as they had received news, from their Ambassador in Bratislava, about shortages in Slovakia. Erdmannsdorff pointed out that he would not have brought up the issue “*had the Slovaks not referred to the statement of the Hungarian delegation at the opening session on 28 of the present month that there might also be ethnographic victims*”.<sup>75</sup> Csáky acknowledged that those words had been said but such victims could have been possible if the border determining committee had accomplished the request of former Subcarpathian minister András Bródy.<sup>76</sup> The agreement<sup>77</sup> on the Slovakian-Hungarian border was signed on April 4.<sup>78</sup>

The conflict also indicated the weakness of Slovakia. Premier Tiso did not sign the protection treaty offered by the Germans until March 23, after the launch of the Hungarian attack. The Slovakian politicians Vojtech Tuka and Ferdinand Durčanský already travelled to Vienna on March 18 in order to have talks about certain points of the protection treaty. Tiso, however, who followed them a few days later, was cautious. As he told Hitler, the defence zone would mean the occupation of Slovakia. Hitler assured the Slovak delegation that Germany had no harmful objectives, and the defence zone had strategic significance. “*No doubt, German troops will be stationing there, but the territory will be under Slovak administration.*”<sup>79</sup> The end of the “Little War” was that Slovakia could not keep even the nominal independence from Germany that

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<sup>74</sup> DIMK, Vol. 4, Doc. No. 56, pp. 140–141.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> András Bródy lawyer, journalist. Member of the Parliament in Prague and later in Budapest. The first Prime Minister of the autonomous government of Subcarpathia in 1938. In 1946, the Soviets executed him for collaboration. Bródy asked that the Ruthenian populated Eastern Slovakia, together with the Slovak enclaves, would be annexed by Hungary.

<sup>77</sup> The text of the agreement in Hungarian: JANEK, *Az elfelejtett háború...*, pp. 310–311; T. GERBOC, *Bojová činnosť slovenských pozemných vojsk a dobrovoľníkov v marci 1939 v tzv. „Malej vojne”*, in: A. HRUBOŇ (Ed.), *Moderné dejiny slovenska: Zborník príspevkov k dejinám Slovenska v 20. storočí*, Vol. 2, Rožumberok 2009, pp. 96–98.

<sup>78</sup> SNA, (MZV), box 120, No. 23471/ 1939.

<sup>79</sup> SNA, Národný súd, Vojtech Tuka II. Microfilm No. 918. The testimony of Tuka on 14 May 1946.

other satellite states could. Clashes along the new Slovak-Hungarian border did not come to a complete end even after the signature of the defence treaty. They died away as late as May 1939. They were rather local power demonstrating incidents.<sup>80</sup>

25 Hungarians died and 56 were injured in the clashes with the Slovak armed forces in March 23–28. On the Slovak side, 22 soldiers and 36 civilians died; the exact number of the injured has not been found. 360 Slovaks and 211 Czecho-Moravians fell into captivity.<sup>81</sup> Slovak sources acknowledged the loss of 30 civilians and soldiers.<sup>82</sup> At the end of the conflict Hungary could retain the 60-kilometre long and 20-kilometre wide strip, which made 1,056 square kilometres and included 74 villages with a population of 40,777, mostly Rusins and Slovaks.<sup>83</sup> The conquered territory was annexed to Subcarpathia and it remained so until 1944. Czechoslovakia dropped claims to the territory in 1945.

Both sides evaluated the military operations successful. The Slovaks felt that they had succeeded in preventing further Hungarian gains and they could secure the territorial integrity of the country. The Hungarians emphasised that their troops had reached the intended goal and secured the Ung valley. German policy in the region tried to weaken the small states and to increase her influence thereby. They masterly employed the *Divide et impera* — Divide and conquer principle in the Slovakian-Hungarian problem. A common Hungarian-Slovak resistance was, therefore, out of the question during the Second World War.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN “LITTLE WAR” AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS IN NATIONAL HISTORIES

##### ABSTRACT

The events of the Slovak-Hungarian “Little War” are closely connected to the circumstances of Hungary’s re-annexation of Sub-Carpathia in March 1939, which took place under the motto of re-establishing a common Hungarian-Polish border. Corps belonging to the Carpathian section of the Hungarian army advanced into Sub-Carpathia and then proceeded to attack Slovak territories. Hungary’s official explanation for its occupation of Sub-Carpathia ran as follows: since Slovakia has become an

80 On April 30, Henrik Werth sent draft minutes to Teleki, in which he informed him about the situation following the armed incident around Szobránc on April 20–22. Teleki gave orders for the thorough investigation of the case. A joint committee was set up, which took record of the testimonies of the soldiers in Szobránc on April 27. According to it, mutual unrest prevailed at the border since mid-April 1939. The committee put it down to the fact that the border guard, unfamiliar with the conditions along the border, crossed the border accidentally in the night fog. MNL, K-28. M. E. 2 archives piled, No. 3762/ I. VKF. 1939. and SNA, MZV, 20 box 51809/1939.

81 *Felvidéki Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Journal in Upper Hungary) reports the death toll of the clashes with the Slovaks in March 23 — 28, 1939. 28 March 1939 p. 2, and 29 March 1939 p. 1.

82 M. LACKO, *Slovenská republika 1939–1945: Ilustrované dejiny*, Bratislava, 2008, p. 42.

83 According to the former Czechoslovak administration, parts of two districts got here: 604 sq kms from the so-called Szinna district and 452 sq kms from the Szobránc district. The census of 1930 showed here 19,946 and 21,281 inhabitants respectively who now got to Hungary. This territory became part of Ung County. L. THIRRING, *Az 1939 március közepén birtokba vett kárpátaljai terület: Az 1939 április eleji területgyarapodás*, in: *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*, No. 3, 1939, p. 237.

independent state and thus Czechoslovakia no longer exists as a state, the Viennese arbitration is no longer valid. Hungary has won the right to exercise its claim to Sub-Carpathia. The military conflict between Slovakia and Hungary came to an end when Germany intervened and ordered the two parties to conduct bilateral negotiations with a view to reaching an agreement. At the negotiations on March 28, 1939, the parties agreed to end hostilities and to establish a neutral zone between the two armies. They also agreed that Hungarian troops might remain at their occupied positions. On March 28 the Slovak delegation announced claims on Hungarian territory by way of compensation, but the Hungarian government rejected these claims. Germany offered no support to the Slovaks on the border issue; indeed, on April 7 Slovak troops were even required to withdraw from various settlements on the Slovak side of the demarcation line. On April 3, 1939, the German Ambassador to Budapest, Otto von Erdmannsdorff, paid a visit to the Hungarian foreign minister, István Csáky; in the course of their discussions, the two men touched upon the issue of the border established with Slovakia. The Ambassador informed Csáky that the Slovak government had turned to Germany for support, but that it had been told that under the circumstances any attempt at the full restoration of the old border, which was Slovakia's wish, would be futile. The German Ambassador then asked Csáky whether the Hungarian government would be willing to make certain territorial concessions. Csáky responded that this would be inconceivable — *“where Hungarian soldiers have trodden, they will stay”*. Hungary could keep the 60-kilometre long and 20-kilometre wide strip of land that it had taken from Slovakia. The Hungarian authorities attached the area of land Sub-Carpathia, of which it remained a part until 1944. In 1945 the newly re-established Czechoslovakia was obliged to surrender the railway line between Csap and Ungvár as well as the Ung line: the Czechoslovak-Soviet border — today's frontier between Slovakia and Ukraine — was drawn ten to fifteen kilometres further west. During its engagements with the Slovak armed forces from March 23–28, 1939, the Hungarian army suffered 25 fatal and 56 non-fatal casualties; it captured 360 Slovak and 211 Czech/Moravian soldiers.

#### KEYWORDS

History; Diplomacy; Slovak-Hungarian relations; Slovak-Hungarian “Little War”; Question of Sub-Carpathia

**István Janek** | Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Úri u. 53, 1014, Budapest, Hungary, janek.istvan@freemail.hu