

ÁRPÁD HORNYÁK, *HUNGARIAN-YUGOSLAV DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, 1918-1927*.
BOULDER, COLORADO: SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS, WAYNE, NEW JERSEY:
CENTER FOR HUNGARIAN STUDIES AND PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK: COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013, pp. x + 426.

Reviewed by Dragan Bakic*

This book analysis Yugo-Hungarian relations from the end of the First World War until the conclusion of the Italo-Hungarian friendship agreement of 5 April 1927 which truly marked the end of a distinct phase in those relations. Its greatest strength lies in the impressive range of both Hungarian and Yugoslav primary sources and literature on which it is based – it is certainly unrivalled in this respect. This reviewer was rather surprised to learn from Hornyák's bibliographic essay that Hungarian primary material deposited in the Hungarian National Archives concerning Hungarian foreign policy after the First World War is less preserved than the corresponding documents held in the Archives of Yugoslavia – given the vast destruction that Yugoslav material suffered during the Second World War.

Hornyák presents an excellent account of the chaotic and dramatic situation in which the defeated Hungary found itself in 1918 and the attempts, invariably abortive, to extricate itself from the dismemberment pinning all hopes, at least initially, on the Peace Conference. Relations between Hungary and the newly-created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) unfolded within the framework of the emerging new European order. From the demarcation line established by the Belgrade Military Convention until the signing of the Trianon Treaty it took a year and a half for the borders between the two neighbouring countries to finally take shape. The conclusion of the peace treaty did not pacify the relations between them. Hungarian irredentism – which, incidentally, does not receive much attention in this

study (the organisations such as Awakening Hungarians) – and the danger of a Habsburg restoration cemented the solidarity among Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania that eventually took the form of the Little Entente alliance. The unsettled situation in Danubian Europe was further aggravated by different and mutually competitive designs of Great Powers, most notably France and Italy. The two failed attempts of the ex-Emperor Charles IV to regain the Crown of St. Stephen nearly led to an armed confrontation between the Little Entente and Hungary, and thus demonstrated the fragility of peace on the Danube.

Hornyák's analysis of the foreign policy of Hungarian Prime Minister, Count István Bethlen, who remained in office for ten years (1921–1931), after a series of unstable and short-lived cabinets, is rather lucid. The author explains that Bethlen drew on the experience of his native Transylvania, which had once survived as a principality by balancing between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. He realised that the weak post-war Hungary had to pursue a more moderate policy than that of his predecessors. Rather than defying all of its neighbours, it had to focus on internal stabilisation of the country and achieve a set of clearly defined objectives which would greatly improve Hungary's standing and create more favourable conditions for the ultimate goal that remained the same for Bethlen as for anyone else – the restoration of historic lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. Bethlen and his supporters thus opposed those professional diplomats from

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the Imperial Ballhausplatz who argued that Hungary should wait for Germany's recovery and the changed constellation of power to pursue a more active policy (p. 259). The former's clearly defined and realistic objectives included Hungary's admission to the League of Nations, floatation of a loan for economic reconstruction and the liquidation of military supervision, all of which were attained by Bethlen. For quite some time, one of the objectives was to seek for a rapprochement with Yugoslavia, albeit for tactical reasons alone. It was bound to remain elusive as the difference between the two countries was irreconcilable. As Hornyák clearly points out, Hungary needed an agreement with Belgrade in order to drive a wedge between the Little Entente countries, whereas Yugoslavia was determined not to allow splitting up from her allies.

On the other hand, the author's account of Yugoslav foreign policy is less satisfactory. He makes some erroneous assumptions and, based on them, jumps to conclusions which can hardly be supported by the available evidence. For example, it is professed that during "the Peace Conference it was the Yugoslav delegation that protested most vigorously against the establishment of Albania as an independent country" (p. 133). Quite the contrary, the Yugoslavs plumped for the independence of Albania in her 1913 frontiers as sketched by the London Conference after the First Balkan War, under the slogan "the Balkans for the Balkan peoples". Only if the Great Powers had rendered that independence impossible to achieve, the delegates would have fallen back on a reserve policy – the absorption of the northern parts as far as the Drin River in order to gain the strategically more viable border.¹ More-

over, Yugoslavia did not consider the Albanian problem with a view to an "open access to the Adriatic" as she had already possessed the wide Dalmatian littoral (p. 134). And any reluctance that Belgrade might have had to come to terms with Hungary had nothing to do with Italian economic and political penetration into Albania. From the strategic point of view the Yugoslavs were frightened of the peril of Italians "joining hands" from Albania with the Bulgarians across the Vardar valley in Serb Macedonia, thus cutting off the vital Belgrade–Salonica railway in the same fashion the Bulgarian army had actually done in 1915.² It was mainly this consideration that prompted Belgrade to

memoir submitted to the Peace Conference at Paris in relation to revendications of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, undated; No. 874, The Serbo-Croato-Slovene state and Albania [memorandum in English], 6 September 1919; No. 932, Pašić to Davidović, 13 September 1919; No. 933, Delegation to Clemenceau, 17 September 1919; No. 964, Record of the Delegation's meeting of 17 December 1919; No. 968, Pašić to Davidović, 23 December 1919; No. 972, Memorandum on Albania submitted to Wilson [American President], undated; *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci*, II, No. 12, The position of the Yugoslav Delegation in relation to the memorandum of 9 December 1919, 8 January 1920; No. 17, The record of the Cabinet meeting, 11 January 1920; No. 86, Delegation to Clemenceau, 9 January 1920; No. 108, Pašić to Protić, 21 March 1920; No. 114, Memorandum submitted to the American Embassy at Paris, 29 March 1920 [the interpretation concerning the frontier rectifications given by Radović contradicts the content of the document]; No. 129, The current position of the Adriatic question written by Otokar Ribarž, 13 May 1920.

² *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci*, II, No. 14, Dr Trumbić's [Foreign Minister] expose at the meeting of the allied Prime Ministers on 10 and 12 January 1920.

¹ *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci*, eds. Ljubodrag Dimić and Djordje Borozan, 2 vols. (Belgrade 1998), I, No. 822, From the

support Albania's independence. It was not the Yugoslav Minister in Tirana, Branko Lazarević, but Military Attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Tanasije Dinić, that reported to the Great General Staff in May 1926 that Ahmed Zogu had definitely transferred his and his country's allegiance to Italy in return for generous financial support (p. 375, n. 44).³ In fact, Dinić vehemently argued that Lazarević was causing an immense damage to Yugoslav interests through his unrelenting support of Zogu's regime and requested to be removed from his post if there was no change at the head of the Legation.⁴ Later on, Hornyák revisits his argument that Yugoslav-Hungarian relations in 1924–26 were but a function of the vacillations that characterised the relations between Rome and Belgrade and the attendant – but not specified – failures of King Alexander's Balkan policy (pp. 228–229). In doing so, he entirely overlooks the fundamental premise of Yugoslavia's conduct of external affairs: the Little Entente's main value to Yugoslavs was that it allowed them to focus on the Balkans and Italian danger by protecting them from the north. Italy was no doubt a bogey that endeavoured to besiege Yugoslavia both from the direction of Central Europe and in the Balkans but not to the point of depriving her of any diplomatic initiative. Otherwise, she would not have been capable of conducting any active policy that Hornyák mentions.

The author is also mistaken in assuming that Belgrade did not earnestly believe that Hungarian breaches of the

restrictive military clauses of the Trianon Peace Treaty were substantial and constituted a real threat to Hungary's neighbours (p. 137). However, it was not just the Hungarian irredentist organisations and the suspicion of disarmament's being effectively carried out that accounted for Yugoslavia's firm opposition to Hungary's adherence to the League of Nations or, for that matter, the floatation of a loan for economic reconstruction. The Yugoslav Minister in Budapest, Milan Milojević, dismissed the prospect of establishing closer and more loyal relations with the Hungarians whose government, he was adamant, did not want any rapprochement as it was intent on the restoration of Great Hungary.⁵ Milojević thus found that Hungary remained a serious adversary and advised his government accordingly: "The weaker she is economically, the less [of an adversary] she would be."⁶ His views also chimed with those held in the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry at large. The account of Yugoslavia's role in the Chanak crises of September 1922 (pp. 153–154) is also somewhat problematic. Belgrade was certainly not willing to side with France against Great Britain regardless of a loan for arms purchase. It was rather anxious that such a conflict might bring about an overt rupture between the two Allies and force the smaller states to take sides, a contingency that spelled uncertain prospects for the future. Most importantly, Belgrade could not afford to resort to military ac-

³ Belgrade, Vojni arhiv [The Military Archives], registry 17, box 95b, fascicle 1, doc. 4, Dinić to Great General Staff, 25 May 1926.

⁴ Živko Avramovski, "Akcija jugoslovenske vlade protiv Zoguovog režima u Albaniji preko Cena-bega Kryeziu, 1926–1927", *Albanološka istraživanja* 2 (1965), 235–238.

⁵ Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ)], London Legation, Milojević to Ninčić, 26 August 1923, confid. no. 1374; his experience of Hungary at that time the Yugoslav Minister described in his autobiography Milan Milojević, *Balkanska ravnoteža* (Belgrade: Signature, 1994), 186–188 and 192–206.

⁶ AJ, London Legation, Milojević to Ninčić, 26 August 1923, confid. no. 1374.

tion on a larger scale in order to support the British in their confrontation with the Turks when no tangible Yugoslav interests were involved.

The chapters dealing with the plans to materialise a “Central European” and “Balkan Locarno” on British initiative are least satisfactory and contain a number of inaccuracies. These stem from the fact that the prominent role of Sir Austen Chamberlain and the British Foreign Office is examined on the basis of Hungarian and Yugoslav material rather than British primary sources.⁷ For that reason, some major points are either distorted or not clear. To begin with, it is important to understand that neither Central European nor Balkan Locarno – had they been materialised – could have been a true replica of the original agreement between Germany and France for the simple reason that there was no power willing to act as a guarantor of a potential pact in the same way that Britain and Italy had done in Western Europe. In this case, a Locarno-like pact would be reduced to arbitration treaties on the pattern of those concluded by Germany, on the one hand, and Poland and Czechoslovakia, on the other. Yet, Hungary was opposed even to that as such arrangement could have been interpreted as a tacit acquiescence in the terms of the Trianon Treaty. The Little Entente countries were also suspicious, so chances were slim that the British initiative could bear any fruit. Hornyák seems to suggest that Britain and Italy acted in agreement although he clearly points out that the latter country was solely interested in establishing its own

sphere of influence in the region and excluding France. That was certainly not the case. Chamberlain co-ordinated his efforts with Aristide Briand of France and Mussolini avoided their repeated invitations for co-operation. Nevertheless, the British Secretary of State did not lose hope that Italy would be finally induced to promote British plans and he remained extremely lenient towards the Duce. He was proven wrong and therefore a united front of Great Powers that could only have roped the smaller Danubian countries into making at least arbitration agreements never took shape. Without it and without good will among the potential signatories, a Locarno-modelled treaty was just a pipe dream. It is only against this international background that it is possible to comprehend the – inevitable – failure of Chamberlain’s noble initiative.

The concluding chapters detailing the final break-down of all attempts to reach a Yugo-Hungarian agreement are of particular interest as they clearly demonstrate that Mussolini’s disruptive influence was a decisive factor in this matter. He was intent on isolating Yugoslavia, while Bethlen considered, not without foundation, to have achieved a major diplomatic success by concluding a pact of friendship with one of the Great Powers. Their pact was also a harbinger of militaristic plans hatched by both countries: Mussolini promised Hungary a military loan and the weapons captured in the war from the Habsburg Monarchy as well as full diplomatic support to Budapest at the time of its showdown with Czechoslovakia (p. 279). Another unpublished study based on Italian primary sources claims that the details of this arms smuggling into Hungary as well as the training of Hungarian pilots in Italy and the purchase of three hundred aircraft in contravention of the Trianon Treaty were worked out during the visit to Rome of Bethlen’s personal

⁷ For a full account of the British role see Dragan Bakić, “‘Must Will Peace’: the British Brokering of ‘Central European’ and ‘Balkan Locarno’, 1925–1929”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 48:1 (Jan. 2013), 24–56.

emissaries in July 1927.⁸ Hornyák does not add any new information on this clandestine military co-operation. Perhaps Hungarian records have not survived, if they existed at all.

There are some minor deficiencies that should also be pointed out. Serbian Colonel who negotiated armistice with the Hungarian delegation in early November 1918 was Danilo, and not Daniel, Kalafatović (p. 285, n. 5). The *Politika* and *Tribuna* were government-controlled newspapers and not parties (pp. 104 and 326, n. 16 respectively). VMRO stands for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation and not Macedonian Liberation Organisation (p. 146). Miles Lampson was Head of the Central Department of the British Foreign Office, not a “deputy foreign minister” or an “un-

dersecretary of state” (pp. 220 and 240 respectively).

In conclusion, Hornyák has produced the most comprehensive study on the subject of Yugo-Hungarian relations in the first decade after the Great War which will serve as a sound foundation for international historians interested in the Danube region. It is rather unfortunate that his diligent work is seriously marred by poor English translation which often makes it difficult to follow the text.⁹ There are also a number of typographic errors (for instance, Vešnić instead of Vesnić). The worst example of an inadequate proof-reading is no doubt the disparity in a few chapters between the actual number of references in the main body of texts and the endnotes listed.

⁸ Vera Jelinek, “The Hungarian Factor in Italian Foreign Policy, 1918–1927” (unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1977), pp. 319–320.

⁹ Originally published as *Magyar-jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok 1918–1927* (Forum, 2004).

DEJAN DJOKIĆ, NIKOLA PAŠIĆ AND ANTE TRUMBIĆ: *THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES*. LONDON: HAUS PUBLISHING, 2010, pp. xxi + 227.

and

ELUSIVE COMPROMISE: A HISTORY OF INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA. LONDON: HURST & COMPANY, 2007, pp. xvii + 311.

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The first book forms part of the *Makers of the Modern World: The Peace Conferences of 1919–23 and Their Aftermath* series edited by Professor Alan Sharp, which brings new insights into the proceedings and legacy of the Paris Peace Conference through biographies of the most prominent participants. Dejan Djokić has contributed parallel biographies of two leading members of the Yugoslav delegation, Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić. The for-

mer was a long-serving Prime Minister of Serbia and the latter a distinguished Croat politician who vigorously campaigned for a Yugoslav union during the First World War as the head of the London-based Yugoslav committee, a body composed of Croat, Serb and Slovene exiles from the Habsburg Monarchy. In drawing attention to differences between the two men,

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