

## THE RESTORATION OF THE SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN BORDERS: POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS (1943-1947)

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From 1943 onwards the question of post-war European borders became one of the topical tasks of international diplomacy from a theoretical point of view. Political dreams were replaced by harsh realities. The idea of a Central European or Danube federation, which had seriously been considered in the preceding years, was not an interesting policy for the Czechoslovak exile Government any more.<sup>1</sup> The problem of the Slovak-Hungarian borderline was associated with the attitude of the victorious Powers to the conditions prescribed to Hungary for the case of their retreat from the war. The official opinions of the Allies had crystallized during the preparation for the first joint meeting of the USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union at the level of ministers for foreign affairs in Moscow.

Secret Hungarian diplomacy addressed the ideas and considerations on the future peace arrangement of Europe to Great Britain. Therefore, the opinion of the British Foreign Office, formulated before the Moscow conference, had to react. As far as the question of future borders was concerned, the prepared material stated that Hungary, as enemy state, could not expect "any special concerns in the region pertaining to our allies, viz. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia". Great Britain based its policy on the thesis voiced at the end of the year 1942 by Minister A. Eden who announced in Parliament his government's interest to preserve the post-war existence of independent Hungary, or as a member of one of the potential confederation.<sup>2</sup>

In the correspondence between the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Union and the British Embassy in Moscow in early June of 1943, Molotov underlined a postulate enforced by the Soviet Government: relations between the Allies and Hungary as well as other satellites of the Axis should be based on the principle of

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, AFMZV - London archives: LA (dův.) kr. 84, No. 6210/dův. 43. An attitude of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav exile governments to Hungary and Danube federation from the aspect of Hungarian London emigration. A letter to Prof. R. Vámbéry in USA (6 Sep 1943).

<sup>2</sup> JUHÁSZ, Gy.: *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919-1945*. (3rd revised edition). Budapest 1988, p. 345.

absolute capitulation. This led to an unequivocal demand to return all occupied foreign territories. The answer of the British Government accepted "the formulation of absolute capitulation" in principle as usable "for all small European satellite states".<sup>3</sup>

The enclosure to the secret protocol of the Moscow conference contains a disapproving attitude of the Soviet Union towards any efforts to combine satellite countries and create various federations, where they would be in the position of equal members next to small states "which had been overrun and occupied" by these satellites.

In a document concerning Hungary, the British Government proposed that the Allies follow the same direction and inform one another about any contracts with small satellite states in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The conference of the Big Three in Teheran at the end of November and at the beginning of December 1943 closed all confederation projects. The representatives of the victorious Powers did not deal with the question of Croatia and Slovakia during any of their negotiations since these small satellite states were regarded as parts of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

Recognition of the continuity of mutual covenant relations from May 1935 in a new Czechoslovak-Soviet pact signed on December 12, 1943 during a visit by President Beneš in Moscow was classified by official Hungarian commentaries as the recognition of the pre-Munich frontiers of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Government.<sup>5</sup>

In February 1944 experts from the Czechoslovak Ministry for Foreign Affairs in London supposed that after the fall of Italy and owing to unofficial Finnish-Soviet talks, the Hungarian government was waiting for an opportunity to negotiate a cease-fire with the Allies. The opportunity of Hungary "jumping out of war" was also considered by representatives of the democratic Hungarian emigration. They declared it to be a matter-of-course that Hungary would have to return territories seized under the patronage of Nazi Germany.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of April, the Czechoslovak Foreign minister J. Masaryk lectured in the London Club of the movement of M. Károlyi, the leading personality of Hungarian emigration. He emphasized that, as for Hungary, he would go to the peace conference "with the map of Czechoslovakia in its pre-Munich borders" and Vienna arbitration and other interventions would not be taken into account.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> International Conference. 1943 - 1945. Documents. Prague 1985, pp. 608-609. Extracts from the correspondence between A.C. Keer and V.M. Molotov (7 June - 19 Sep 1943).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 30, 35, 89, 103-104. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of USSR: V.M. Molotov, USA: C. Hull and the United Kingdom: A. Eden negotiated in Moscow on 19-30 Oct 1943.

<sup>5</sup> AFMZV, LA (dův.), kr. 422. Ministry of Foreign Affairs No. 24737/43 (21 Dec 1943).

<sup>6</sup> AFMZV, LA (dův.), kr. 84, No. 1618/secret/44. Information on the attitude of Hungary to the Allies. Ibid., LA, kr. 420, MZV No. 2671/dův./44.

<sup>7</sup> AFMZV, LA, kr. 420. MZV No. 8245/44. A Lecture of Masaryk "Post-War Europe".

In the summer of 1944, Hungarian diplomacy with respect to Great Britain and the USA directed its activities towards obtaining information on how the Western Powers saw the conditions of "jumping out of war" in the particular case of Horthy's Hungary.<sup>8</sup> The proposal for the conditions of capitulation prepared with regard to Hungarian specifics at the end of July 1944 by the State Department of the United States is interesting because it presents, in addition to the known attitudes of British and Soviet governments, a view of the third Allied Power. Referring to the appeal of the US Government on May 13, 1944 addressed to all of European Hitler's satellites, the material underlines the advantages of immediate capitulation, which might, in the case of Hungary, be honoured by less difficult cease-fire conditions as would be established if Hungary did not give up before the definite defeat of Germany. In the first place, guarantees of the independence and sovereignty of Hungary within its pre-December 31, 1937 borders were emphasized with a condition of military and administrative retreat from the territories seized and occupied after this date. The abatements assumed when the conditions of capitulation to be satisfied concerned Czechoslovak and Yugoslav borders, namely the borders between Slovakia and Hungary and between Croatia and Hungary. Although based on the necessity of restoring the 1937 or 1940 borders, the material admits negotiations about certain modifications in order to resolve controversial questions conditioned, however, by the approvals of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.<sup>9</sup>

The delegation of the Slovak National Council arrived in London by plane on October 13, 1944. It was just at the time when diplomacies of the Allies and political world press commentators were occupied by a conflict between the exile governments and the domestic revolts in Poland and Yugoslavia. The attitude of the Slovak deputies to the propositions put forward by E. Beneš stressed that "Slovak National Council continued and would proceed in the future so as to secure the international position of the ČSR". Its members did not raise any objections to the international activities of the President and the Government, which meant "agreement". This definitely eliminated the possibility that a situation similar to "Poland or Yugoslavia" would arise.<sup>10</sup>

The attitude of the deputies of the Slovak National Council was, from the perspective of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations, also an authorization for the

<sup>8</sup> KOROM, M.: *A magyar fegyverszünet 1945*. Budapest 1987, pp. 50–56.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States. 1944. Vol. III. Washington D. C. 1965, pp. 882–887.

<sup>10</sup> Cesta ke květnu I. Vznik lidové demokracie v Československu. (A Road to May I. Formation of people's democracy in Czechoslovakia), (KLIMEŠ, M. – LESJUK, P. – MALÁ, I. – PREČAN, V.). Vol. 1, Prague 1965, p. 296–302. E. Beneš's remarks on the provision of the Slovak National Council (1 Nov 1944, London). Reply of the delegation of the Slovak National Council, signed by: for civil block J. Ursíny, for the Left L. Novomeský and the representative of the I. Czechoslovak Army Corps, lieutenant-colonel M. Vesel.

London Government to represent the interests of Slovakia in the case of cease-fire negotiations between the Allies and Hungary. This assignment was very topical for the London Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 1944. Minister H. Ripka handed over a special note to the Soviet ambassador in London as early as November 14. It was based on the fact that Czechoslovakia, as a neighbouring state of Hungary and a victim of Hungary's aggression and occupation, had its own interests to establish conditions that should be imposed on Hungary after the cessation of hostilities. The Czechoslovak Government referred to the Soviet Union in terms of Article No. 2 of the covenant of December 1943, which was directly connected with the cases, such as cease-fire talks.<sup>11</sup>

Within the Czechoslovak foreign policy and the policy of London Government, the evaluation of new phenomena in Hungarian development, whether it concerned attitudes of individual personalities or opposition programmes, was concentrated on the question to what extent they deviated from anti-Czechoslovak revision conceptions. Watchfulness and distrust predominated in the attitude to Hungary which multiplied after the advent of F. Szálasi on October 15, 1944.<sup>12</sup> By its decision to remain on the side of Nazi Germany, the leader of the party of Arrow-Crosses made the complex situation of Hungary yet more difficult. The possibility of immediate capitulation was eliminated when, from the end of September 1944, Soviet troops were already present on Hungarian territory.

The provisional Hungarian national government established on December 22, 1944 asked the Soviet Union for cease-fire conditions.<sup>13</sup> During consultations about the members of the government the leitmotif of Soviet leaders was their effort to gain the support of the Army and officers true to Horthy for their participation in the war against Germany. It would have simplified the military actions of the Budapest operation and the strategy in the trans-Danube region. This motif was not known abroad and even the chairman of the Hungarian Council in London M. Károlyi had at first taken a negative attitude to the provisional Government.<sup>14</sup> The provisional Hungarian Government declared war against Hitler's Germany on December 28.

All diplomatic activities of the London Government were directed towards the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic in its pre-Munich borders and towards reaching international guarantees of the state's post-war territorial integrity. Infor-

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<sup>11</sup> AFMZV, LA (secret), kr.153. A note of the Czechoslovak London Government on the armistice with Hungary (London 14 Nov 1944), No. 9903/d/44/P 521.

<sup>12</sup> LA (dűv.), kr. 84. Ministry of the Interior No. 6507/dűv.-4/44. London 18 Nov 1944); Ibid.(1 Dec 1944) No. 100498/dűv. 44).

<sup>13</sup> *Magyar szovjet kapcsolatok 1945-1948. Dokumentumok.* Budapest 1969, pp. 22-24.

<sup>14</sup> AFMZV, LA (dűv.), kr. 85 Ministry of the Interior, No. 3001/dűv.-4/45. Reaction of Hungarian London emigration to the new government in Hungary (London 3 Jan 1945). It concerned premier B. Miklós-Dálnoki and other members of the government: J. Vörös, G. Faraghó and Count G. Teleki.

mation from the political scene of Horthy's Hungary throughout the war, as well as objections raised against the members of the provisional government, supported E. Beneš's conviction of the persistent danger of Hungarian revisionism.

President Beneš was informed by the Soviet Government of the wish of the provisional Hungarian government to make peace and declare war on Germany in a special memorandum on December 26, 1944 asking Czechoslovakia for its attitude. Minister H. Ripka presented specific Czechoslovak demands concerning the cease-fire agreement with Hungary to the Soviet representative in London, summarized in five points. The issues important for our study are as follows: Hungary should withdraw its troops and all its administration from Czechoslovak territory overrun in 1938 and in March 1939; it should repeal Vienna arbitration and the act of March 1939 and finally, recognize the beginning of the state of war between Czechoslovakia and Hungary from October 7, 1938. The Soviet diplomat assured the London Government that the Czechoslovak envoy to Moscow, Z. Fierlinger, would obtain all necessary information on the course of the cease-fire negotiations with Hungary and would have an opportunity to defend Czechoslovak demands.<sup>15</sup>

V.G. Dekanozov, the Soviet Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, organized talks with the Czechoslovak ambassador to take place on January 14, 1945. Most Czechoslovak exigencies concerning the border questions were included either directly in the proposal of the cease-fire agreement or into its modified text. The introduction of the exact date of the beginning of the state of war between Hungary and Czechoslovakia should have, as H. Ripka explained, protected Czechoslovak interests from the point of view of international law from the time of the occupation of the Slovak borderlands by Hungarian troops before the outbreak of the war in Europe. Although US ambassador to Moscow W.A. Harriman, British representative J. Balfour and V.M. Molotov did not agree with the introduction of the exact date into the text of the cease-fire agreement, the question was resolved through compromise, namely by mentioning Czechoslovakia in some of the articles and by settling the Hungarian borders to their state as of December 31, 1937.<sup>16</sup>

The request of Czechoslovakia supported by Yugoslavia concerning their participation in the Allied control commission for Hungary did not arouse any objections. The representatives of the Powers did not consider it suitable to include the membership of these states in the control commission into the text of the

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<sup>15</sup> AFMZV, LA (secret), kr. 153. The Soviet chargé d'affaires Chichaev's visit of the president E. Beneš on 26 Dec 1944. Ibid., No. 11813/dův. 44. Telegram of H. Ripka to Moscow (sent 1 Jan 1945).

<sup>16</sup> AFMZV, LA (secret), kr. 153, No. 683/dův./45. Negotiation of the delegations from USSR, USA, GB, 15 Jan 1945 in the Kremlin, Z. Fierlinger and S. Simic participated. Ibid., No. 738/dův./45.

cease-fire agreement: the affirmative decision was announced by V.M. Molotov in the written form.<sup>17</sup>

The Moscow negotiations ended on January 20, 1945 with the signing of the cease-fire treaty with Hungary: the allied governments were represented by the Soviet Union's representative K.E. Voroshilov, who became Chairman of the Control Commission. The armistice between the Allies and Hungary declares in Article 1.a) that Hungary ceased war against the Soviet Union and other allied nations including Czechoslovakia. In the Article 2. Hungary committed itself to withdrawing its forces and administration from the occupied territories of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania to the state of their borders with Hungary on December 30, 1937 and to repeal measures relating to the annexation of these territories. "Decision of Vienna arbitration of November 2, 1938 and the Vienna arbitration of August 1940" were declared invalid by Article 19. Supplement D to Article 12 on reparation commitments states the necessity of immediate financial help and restitution for the damage done to the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and "afflicted during Hungarian aggression".<sup>18</sup>

The end of the war in Europe attracted the attention of international policy which concentrated on peaceful settlement; the border question concerning the countries neighbouring Hungary intensified. The programme of the provisional Hungarian Government of December 1944 and the official statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Gyöngyösi, that followed in April 1945 showed considerable deviation from the illusions of "Great Hungary".<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of the Czechoslovak Government these materials were too universal and did not contain any concrete Hungarian attitude to the problem of the Slovak-Hungarian borders. The attitude of M. Károlyi, who had denounced the Vienna arbitration of November 1938 long before the armistice, became a criterion of democratism of Hungarian foreign policy for the Czechoslovak representation in London.<sup>20</sup> Post-war Hungary remained an adversary to be feared for the Czechoslovak Government, one whose democratic declarations were understood as camouflage for the irredentist programme.

In the atmosphere of tension between Czechoslovakia and Hungary the question of the security of the Slovak-Hungarian borders came to the fore in the considerations of international policy. An application for the extension of the

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<sup>17</sup> AFMZV, LA (Taj), kr. 153, č. 936/dűv./45.

<sup>18</sup> AFMZV, LA kr. 430. Cease-fire Treaty with Hungary (Moscow 20 Jan 1945), texts: Russian, English, Hungarian; *Magyar-szovjet kapcsolatok 1945-1948*, quoted documents, pp. 35-42.

<sup>19</sup> AFMZV, LA (secret), kr. 85, MZV, No. 3000/dűv./45. Hungarian government in Debrecen. Ref. M. Kóbr (London 12 March 1945). *Az Ideiglenes Nemzetgyűlés Értesítője*. Sitting 21 Dec 1944. Reaction of the provisional National Assembly, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> AFMZV, LA, kr. 420. Constituting meeting of the Hungarian Council (28 March 1944, London). Programme signed by M. Károlyi.

Bratislava bridgehead was submitted by the National Committee of the town of Bratislava at the end of November 1945 for an essential reason: to deprive the capital of Slovakia of the character of a borderland. It proposed annexing to Bratislava not only villages from Hungarian territory but also from Austria. The request was based on the known fact that villages on the right bank of the Danube River situated south of Petržalka had been from as early as the 16th century Croatian hamlets and their Slavonic character had been preserved. On the part of Hungary the following villages should have been taken into account: Horvátjārfalu (Jarovce), Oroszvár (Rusovce), Dunacsún (Čunovo), Rajka and Bezenye. Since in that period the signature of the Peace Treaty was expected to be exclusively with Hungary, the request was recognized only in these terms. The report of the Ministry of the Interior prepared in December supported the application of the Bratislava National Committee "since it is not desirable and purposeful that Bratislava would remain a border town after merging it with the neighbouring villages" for political, economic, and urban reasons as well as "for the purpose of security of the town, port, bridges and other important spots".<sup>21</sup> The request and the report were attached to the materials for the preparation of peace negotiations with Hungary. The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that the application to rectify borders included in the memorandum of May 1946 was based on the necessity of encouraging the development of the capital of Slovakia in future years and did not have "any aggressive character with respect to Hungary".<sup>22</sup>

The increased diplomatic activity at all levels marked the year 1946 – a period of decisive importance for the peace settlement of Europe. Before the official preparation of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the peace conference had started, a press campaign stirred public opinion: the possibility of setting ethnic borders was interpreted as "a justified hope of Hungary".<sup>23</sup> Governments of neighbouring countries understood these considerations as efforts to achieve a revision of the borders in favour of Hungary and as a continuance of the officially refused revisionist policy. The Czechoslovak Government concentrated on obtaining information about the attitude of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Hungarian peace aims.

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<sup>21</sup> State Central Archives of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava (ŠÚA SR). ÚP SNR, inv. No. 247, krab. No. 284 NV in Bratislava (27 Nov 1945). Application for the extension of Bratislava bridgehead. Ibid., Home Office 7571/1-II/2-45. Report addressed to the Presidium of the Slovak National Council.

<sup>22</sup> Archives of the Federal Assembly of ČSFR in Prague. VZ-ÚNS, kr. 44/2492. Meeting of the foreign committee 0031 Oct 1946, exposé of V. Clementis, p. 5; Shorthand reports on the meetings of the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic 1946-1948. Sitting 30 Sep 1947, appearance of V. Clementis, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> BALOGH, S.: *Magyarország külpolitikája 1945-1950*. (2nd enlarged and revised edition). Budapest 1988, pp. 132-158.



Information on a secret meeting of the Foreign Committee of the Hungarian Parliament to be held on April 24, 1946 obtained from reliable sources reflected the official stance. In his exposé Minister J. Gyöngyösi stressed that the Hungarian Government had no territorial demands on Yugoslavia. As for Czechoslovakia, guarantees of civil rights for those Hungarians, who would not be displaced from Slovakia during the exchange of population were required. If no agreement on this issue could be reached before the peace conference, the Hungarian Government was ready to raise "some territorial demands". In their dispute with J. Gyöngyösi, some members of the Foreign Committee asked to fix the Slovak-Hungarian borders in accordance with ethnic principle. In his reply to the criticism, the Hungarian Minister alerted to the strong international position of the Czechoslovak Republic. He mentioned that the Hungarian Government applied as early as in the winter to the USA and Great Britain to establish an Anglo-American commission to investigate the position of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia but both powers refused that initiative. Great Britain declared in a special note that no unilateral claim on the change of borders with respect to Czechoslovakia would be accepted and challenged the Hungarian Government to make efforts to reach mutual agreements with neighbouring countries.<sup>24</sup>

The peace conference in Paris opened on July 29, 1946 and lasted till October 15. V. Clementis, the State Secretary, explained the procedure of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Parliamentary Foreign Committee at the Paris conference in a comprehensive exposé. During Paris negotiations the US delegation came with a compromise proposal for a definite resolution of the Hungarian question in connection with the discussion about the Czechoslovak conception. Unification of the issue of the transfer and rectification of the Czechoslovak borders were recommended. In case of agreement, the number of people transferred would be kept to the minimum by ceding Slovak territories inhabited exclusively by Hungarian minority. The unofficial proposal of the British delegation associated the principle of transfer with the exchange of territories, which would concern the three areas on the side of Slovakia: 1. Parkan (Štúrovo) district, 2. an area under Filákov and 3. Kráľovský Chlmec district. On the other side, Hungary would be compelled to cede several villages southwest of Košice and others, east of Rožňava. The Czechoslovak delegation led by J. Masaryk, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, refused to negotiate on this basis whether officially or unofficially.<sup>25</sup>

The definite version of the Peace Treaty with Hungary was at first signed by the representatives of the Soviet Union, the USA and Great Britain. Then, on February 10, 1947 it was signed in Paris by the representatives of the Allied

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<sup>24</sup> AFMZV. Representation abroad: ZÚ Budapest/1946, No. 216/dův./46. Political report No. 8. Secret (26 April 1948).

<sup>25</sup> AFS ČSFR Prague. VZ-ÚNS, kr. 44/2492. Minutes of the meeting of foreign committee on 31 Oct 1946. Appearance of V. Clementis, pp. 5-8, 14-16.



countries, among them Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs J Masaryk and State Secretary V. Clementis. On the part of Hungary, the Peace Treaty was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. Gyöngyösi. Hungarian borders are mentioned in Part I of the Treaty: in paragraphs 1 and 2 the borders with Austria, Yugoslavia and Rumania are prescribed. Paragraph 3 settles the line of demarcation between the USSR and Hungary (the region of Trans-Carpathian Ukraine) according to the former Czechoslovak borders valid before January 1, 1938. A separate paragraph 4 a) of Article 1 annuls and repeals the decision of Vienna arbitration of November 2, 1938. The border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was restored according to the pre-1938 status quo, containing a modification of the "Bratislava bridgehead" established by attaching three villages on the right bank of the river Danube, viz. Horvátjárfalu (Jarovce), Oroszvár (Rusovce) and Dunacsún (Čunovo) to the territory of Czechoslovakia.<sup>26</sup>

Negotiations about the Slovak-Hungarian borderline near Bratislava began after October 15, 1947, when the Peace Treaty came into force and diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary were renewed. The first meetings were held at the tripartite Czechoslovak-Hungarian-Austrian level. The state act of taking over the three villages took place in the presence of representatives of the Government and Parliament in October also. The precise demarcation of borders and the take-over of the whole territory by Czechoslovak administration took more time. The Protocol about Czechoslovak-Hungarian borders was signed on December 22, 1947 in Bratislava by a commission established according to the terms of the Peace treaty consisting of representatives of the governments of both Czechoslovakia and Hungary.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Collection of acts and provisions of the Czechoslovak Republic 1947. Peace Treaty with Hungary (10 February 1947), pp. 961-1033.

<sup>27</sup> ADS ČSFR Prague. ÚNS - Presidium, kr. 70/II. Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the constituent National Assembly on 9 October 1947, p. 2; Hatályos Jogszabályok Gyűjteménye 1945-1958. IV. Kötet. Nemzetközi szerződések. Törvényerejű rendeletek, p. 177.