

Hungary And The Little Entente: The Failed Rapprochement Of 1937

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In the mid-1920s, Prime Minister *István Bethlen* constructed the basic planks of postwar Hungary's diplomatic superstructure. *Bethlen* expected to revise the Peace Treaty of Trianon through simultaneous intervention on Hungary's behalf by two equally-balanced friendly powers, Germany and Italy. But by late 1936, *Bethlen's* grand design lay in shambles. Fascist Italy's influence in Eastern Europe had ebbed through attrition in Ethiopia and Spain, whereas the Third Reich had vanquished French preeminence in the Danubian region by remilitarizing the Rhineland. Fearing unbridled German hegemony in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as the permanent loss of her detached territories, Hungary fixed her sights on achieving two objectives: to temper Germany's eastward progress; and to destroy the effectiveness of the Little Entente, a French-inspired regional alliance system designed to contain Hungary, by isolating Czechoslovakia, its most vulnerable member, from Rumania and Yugoslavia.

These efforts were crowned with limited success, and the gains were temporary. At the end of August 1938, Hungary reached a tentative understanding with the Little Entente at the Bled Conference on two major issues: equality of armaments and mutual pledges of non-aggression. But by excluding Czechoslovakia from the minority agreement clauses of the pact, Hungary successfully detached Czechoslovakia from its allies. The Bled Conference and its antecedents, traceable to the Little Entente's August 1937 Sinaia Conference, have been adequately discussed in the historical literature. But the Little Entente's earlier, less successful efforts in the first half of 1937, to reconcile Hungary, events in which Austria played an important role, have been mentioned only in passing, or not at all¹⁾.

¹⁾ For example, Jörg K. Hoensch, *Der ungarische Revisionismus und die Zerschlagung der Tschechoslowakei*, Tübingen, 1967, claims that Hungarian Foreign Minister *Kánya* pursued a deceitful policy in negotiating with the Little Entente; he merely wished Italy and Germany to declare themselves in favour of Hungarian revisionism (p. 46). György Ránki, *Adatok a magyar külpolitikához a csehszlovákia elleni agresszió idején 1937—1939* [Documents relating to Hungarian foreign policy at the time of aggression against Czechoslovakia, 1931—1939], *Századok*, 93 (1959), pp. 117—159 and pp. 356—372, declares that Hungary rigidly rejected any kind of collaboration with Czechoslovakia, but he cites 1935—1936 sources to support this view (p. 119). John A. Lukács, *The Great Powers and Eastern Europe*, New York, 1953, only cites *Beneš's* approaches to Hungary in late 1937, by which time reconciliation was "well-

Profound changes in Europe's power distribution in 1936 forced Hungary to reconsider the wisdom of *Bethlen's* formula for achieving revision. As one observer noted: "With Germany's attitude [regarding Hungary's aspirations] unsure, and Italian support for Austria crumbling, it was clearly even more desirable than ever that Hungary follow a circumspect course²)." Hungary's Foreign Minister *Kálmán Kánya*, a *Bethlen* protégé, adopted a "free hand" policy for Hungary, and he was more than ever determined to preserve freedom for manoeuvre. In a strict sense, he was an opportunist who "wanted to wait and see which group emerged the strongest at the end of the period of rearmament, and then determine in which direction Hungary should be oriented³." But, together with Regent Admiral *Mik-*

nigh too late" (p. 89). Magda Ádám, et al., *Magyarország és a Második Világháború* [Hungary and the Second World War], Budapest, 1966, claim that, in 1937, Hungary still might have created a mutual defense pact with her neighbours to combat Nazi Germany, but that "Hungary's ruling classes" would not even hear of such an agreement (p. 16). For precisely the same viewpoint, see Magda Ádám, et al., *Allianz Hitler—Horthy—Mussolini*, Budapest, 1966, p. 23. Also in her article *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer revíziós külpolitikájához* [On the revisionist foreign policy of the counter-revolutionary system], in E. Andics, ed., *A magyar nacionalizmus kialakulása és története* [The development and history of magyar nationalism], Budapest, 1964, p. 364, Ádám claimed that Hungary conducted sham negotiations with Czechoslovakia as a means of building bridges to the Western Powers, but she offered no proof. Robert Machray, *The Struggle for the Danube, 1929—1938*, London, 1938, fails to mention the negotiations, but he does construct a plausible rationale for Hungary's willingness to negotiate at all. The Italian–Yugoslav treaty of March 1937 placed Hungary in an awkward economic and political position, and *Darányi* wished to redress the balance (p. 284). C. A. Macartney, in *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary, 1929—1945*, Edinburgh, 1956, I, p. 200, is ambiguous. *Kánya* felt bound to accept offers of negotiations, but only in order "not to put himself in the wrong." But, "he had no intention of ever binding himself by a pact with Czechoslovakia (nor, one must think... with Rumania either)," only a settlement with Yugoslavia alone, and a provisional one with Rumania, leaving Czechoslovakia isolated. Yet, "if... the Little Entente States had offered Hungary really attractive terms, who shall say that he [*Kánya*] might not have accepted them?" In *Independent Europe*, London and Basingstoke, 1962, co-authored with A. W. Palmer, Macartney reiterates the same points, with minor modifications (p. 361). In *Das Scheitern der Kleinen Entente*, Munich, 1971, Günter Reichert mentions some of the negotiations between Hungary and the Little Entente, but he fails to explain Hungarian policy or motives (pp. 72 ff.). Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary, the Great Powers, and the Danubian Crisis, 1936—1939*, Athens, Ga., 1980, pp. 74—77, alludes to the problem mainly from the vantage point of Hungary's relations with the Great Powers, but he does not discuss Hungary's negotiations with Austria and the Little Entente in early 1937 in detail. The most detailed survey is by Gyula Juhász, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919—1945* [Hungary's foreign policy 1919—1945], Budapest, n.d. Juhász's account is essentially accurate, although a few omissions tend to mislead. He minimizes Austria's role in Hungary's negotiations with the Little Entente nations; Hungary's fear of German expansion, and *Kánya's* distrust of Yugoslavia are ignored; and he subtly insinuates that Hungarian diplomacy proceeded partly voluntarily, partly by accident, in tandem with German aspirations (pp. 166—171).

²) Sakmyster, *Hungary*, p. 85.

³) *Ibidem*, and Ádám, *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer*, pp. 364—365.

lós Horthy and numerous other Hungarian political figures, *Kánya* was also a pragmatist who respected England and her sense of fair play. He believed that England would eventually champion “peaceful change” by modifying the unjust peace treaties. Patience would regain Hungary the lost territories. Indeed, during his coronation visit to London in the spring of 1937, *Kánya* was encouraged along these lines when British statesmen urged him to “form a breakwater against German pressure along with Austria and Czechoslovakia⁴.” Italy’s Foreign Minister Count *Galeazzo Ciano* also feared the spread of pan-Germanism in Eastern Europe, and urged *Kánya* to consider an Italian—Yugoslav—Rumanian—Hungarian combination in the event of *Anschluss*⁵). Other proponents suggested various degrees of amalgamation of the two regional alliance systems — the Little Entente and the Rome Protocols.

On paper, these plans had much to recommend them as means of blocking German expansion. In practice, however, Hungary’s strategic location athwart Germany’s path in Eastern Europe augured considerable risk for the Magyars. France and Great Britain would be unable to reach Hungary to render military assistance, and Italy could no longer fulfill her extravagant military and economic commitments. The Soviet Union was a dormant giant, and considered a looming menace exceeding even Germany’s. The Third Reich’s statesmen warned Magyar politicians that, if Hungary wished to derive benefits from Germany’s *Ostpolitik*, which sought economic domination of Southeastern Europe⁶), they must dance to the Nazi tune, or face the consequences. Hungary must not even negotiate with nations of the Little Entente as a unit. Yugoslavia must be appeased unconditionally, which meant jettisoning hopes for all Hungarian territorial claims⁷), and Rumania had to be pacified as well, at least temporarily. These two states, *Hitler* maintained, were important to him as outposts against Bolshevism. He would not see them weakened by war or intimidation⁸). Hungary must therefore help Ger-

⁴) This emerged in a conversation involving *Kánya*, *Darányi*, and *Ciano*. *Galeazzo Ciano*, *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, London, 1948, p. 117, citing discussions in Budapest, 19–22 May 1937. *Horthy* basically agreed with a strategy that would harmonize with British objectives. See T. L. Sakmyster, Miklós Horthy, Hungary, and the Coming of the European Crisis, 1932–41, in: *East Central Europe*, III, 2 (1976), pp. 220–232, especially pp. 223–225; and Nikolaus von Horthy, *Ein Leben für Ungarn*, Bonn, 1953, pp. 179–180.

⁵) *Ciano* to *Darányi* and *Kánya*, Budapest, 21 May 1937. *Ádám*, *Allianz Hitler—Horthy—Mussolini*, Doc. 17, p. 140.

⁶) Franz von Papen, *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse*, Munich, 1952, p. 433. This represented von Papen’s view on 12 January 1937.

⁷) This is allegedly what *Hitler* told *George Bratianu*, according to a Hungarian Foreign Ministry minute of January 1937. See Magda *Ádám*, ed., *A müncheni egyezmény létrejötte és Magyarország külpolitikája 1936–1938* [The creation of the Munich agreement and Hungary’s foreign policy 1936–1938], Budapest, 1965, Doc. 53, p. 189. This corresponds with *Ciano*’s understanding of Germany’s position. See his *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, Minutes of 24 October 1936, pp. 58–59.

⁸) *Hitler* to *Guido Schmidt*, Memorandum of 20 November 1936. Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945. Series D, London, 1949, I, Doc. 181, p. 340.

many to dismember Czechoslovakia, designated by *Hitler* as one of Europe's non-viable countries⁹). This German scenario spelled disaster for the Magyars. Hungary would be compelled to bolster her two chief agricultural rivals for German favour, whereas the total disappearance of Czechoslovakia would permanently cashier hopes for French and English intervention in Eastern Europe, and reduce Italian influence to the vanishing point.

In addition, Germany appeared to be working behind the scenes to undermine Hungary's security by consorting with her enemies. There arose the "very real possibility that Hungary would find Germany installed as friend and patron of all three States of the Little Entente¹⁰." In January 1937, *Kánya* discovered that *Hitler's* emissaries were in Prague, secretly negotiating with President *Eduard Beneš*, even though *Hitler* had assured visiting Hungarian dignitaries weeks earlier that rumours of a German-Czechoslovak rapprochement were false¹¹). *Kánya* felt betrayed by the Germans and attempted to turn the tables on them. He was particularly alarmed because *Hitler's* personal foreign policy expert *Joachim von Ribbentrop* directed the German-Czechoslovak negotiations at the personal behest of *Hitler*, but without the awareness of Foreign Secretary *Constantin von Neurath*. Apparently, Nazi functionaries were bypassing the German Foreign Office. This was an ominous development for the survival of Hungarian sovereignty¹²).

Counteracting these aggressive German moves entailed considerable risk for isolated Hungary. It came as a relief in Budapest when, on 2 January 1937, England and Italy concluded their universally acclaimed, though ephemeral, "Gentlemen's Agreement." The pact sought to restore Italy's great power status in the Mediterranean, and hence in Eastern Europe, and contribute to the relaxation of tensions in the region¹³). Though still only a slender reed, Italy, buttressed by Great Britain, might offer Hungary more than moral support in her quest to check monolithic German power.

Even so, it would have been foolhardy for Hungary to initiate an offensive to contain Germany. But when opportunity knocked, and Czechoslovakia, aided by Austria and the rest of the Little Entente, began making pacific overtures at the beginning of 1937, *Kánya* resolved to negotiate discreetly, drive a hard bargain, try to separate Czechoslovakia from its allies, and scatter obstacles in the path of German imperialism in Eastern Europe.

⁹) *Ádám*, *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer*, p. 365.

¹⁰) *Macartney*, *October Fifteenth*, p. 193.

¹¹) *Wettstein to Kánya*, Report of 4 April 1936, *Ádám*, *A müncheni egyezmény*, Doc. 8, pp. 105—107.

¹²) *John L. Heineman*, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister, Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman*, Berkeley, 1979, p. 151; and *Gerhard L. Weinberg*, *Secret Hitler-Beneš Negotiations in 1936—1937*, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 19 (1960), pp. 366—374.

¹³) *Machray*, *Struggle for the Danube*, p. 255.

Austria's involvement with Hungary and Czechoslovakia in anti-German intrigues arose from Chancellor *Kurt Schuschnigg's* disillusionment over Germany's violations of the 11 July 1936 Austro-German agreement, and the strengthening of Italy¹⁴). Had the Chancellor's mediation efforts between Prague and Budapest succeeded, the harm to Germany's annexationist plans in Austria would have been enormous. If freed from the perils of German encirclement, Czechoslovakia would be able to assist Austria in case of German attack. This, in turn, would relieve Hungary, and might unify all of Eastern Europe to resist any further German encroachments. These prospects dismayed the Germans. Hungary's ambassador in Berlin, *Döme Sztójay*, understated the case when he reported to *Kánya*: "Every time a scheme resembling the [Milan] Hodža plan [for East Central European economic unity] surfaces, such as the sounding for a Prague-Vienna-Budapest triangle, the Germans become very nervous¹⁵."

Suggestions for a Prague-Vienna-Budapest Axis were first broached officially by *Odo Neustädter-Stürmer*, Austria's ambassador in Hungary, on 21 January 1937. The Ambassador queried *Gábor Ápor*, Hungary's permanent deputy foreign minister, on the likelihood of Czechoslovak—Hungarian reconciliation. He noted that both *Miloš Kobr*, Czechoslovakia's ambassador in Budapest, and *Kamil Krofta*, its foreign minister, had promised to reduce tensions with Hungary. Czechoslovakia would recognize Hungary's right to partial rearmament, in exchange for the conclusion of a non-aggression treaty. *Ápor* replied that *Kobr* had already tentatively raised these issues, but that *Kánya's* response had been negative. A non-aggression treaty would be worthless, because Czechoslovakia's links to her Little Entente partners would, under certain circumstances, force all three countries to attack Hungary jointly. Moreover, *Kánya* considered Hungary's right to rearm a nonnegotiable issue, not subject to reciprocal agreements¹⁶).

Two days prior to this meeting, *Kobr* had indeed revived an informal pre-Christmas conversation held with *Kánya* on these same issues, but *Kánya* had demurred. Unless the condition of Czechoslovakia's Magyar minority improved considerably, and unless the Little Entente modified its constitution to protect Hungary against a joint attack, *Kánya* saw no reason why Hungary should accommodate Czechoslovakia, particularly at a time when the latter's diplomatic position was deteriorating, whereas the former's was improving¹⁷). *Kánya* had in mind the mushrooming Sudeten-German pressure on Prague, supported morally, financially, and politically by the Reich.

Within days, *Kobr's* offer was replicated in the course of visits by the Yugoslav

¹⁴) Lajos Kerekes, *Anschluß 1938. Ausztria és a nemzetközi diplomácia 1933—1938* [*Anschluß 1938. Austria and international diplomacy 1933—1938*], Budapest, 1968, pp. 244—245.

¹⁵) *Sztójay* to *Kánya*, Secret Report of 29 May 1937. Országos Levéltár. M. K. Külügyminisztérium, Pol. Oszt. 1780 — 6/4 — 1937.

¹⁶) Kerekes, *Anschluß 1938*, pp. 244—245.

¹⁷) *Ádám*, A müncheni egyezmény, Doc. 54, pp. 191—193.

and Rumanian ambassadors¹⁸). To *Kánya*, these combined efforts portended a coordinated plan to include Hungary in a regional scheme with the Little Entente and Austria to arrest the German steamroller¹⁹). *Kánya* tried tactfully to maintain negotiations at a leisurely pace without discouraging his adversaries, but also without arousing German suspicions. He responded evasively to the Yugoslavs, whereas the Rumanians received much the same reply as the Czechs. *Sztójay* was ordered to acquaint *Neurath* with the gist of his recent conversations with the four ambassadors, to assure him that the *Kobr* request had been treated “in a dilatory fashion,” and that *Kánya* hoped Germany, too, would pursue “unshakeably” its current public policy of refusing to negotiate with Czechoslovakia. Hungary’s ambassador in Rome was to advise *Ciano* about the *Kobr* interview, and to inquire discreetly whether Italy would authorize a Czechoslovak-Hungarian rapprochement²⁰).

At this time, *Mussolini* lacked a definitive Eastern European policy. Hitherto, Italian views on the inclusion of Czechoslovakia in any regional scheme had been erratic, though largely negative²¹). But *Kánya* believed that diplomatic developments in Western Europe would prompt Italy tacitly to tolerate bolstering Czechoslovakia against the Germans. The Anglo—Italian Gentlemen’s Agreement had not only strengthened Italy’s position in the Mediterranean and the Balkans, it also signalled a possible great power rapprochement, from which Italy and Hungary wished to benefit. Apprehensive about Italy’s sudden renaissance, Germany also began courting England²²). For Italy, obstructing German designs in Czechoslovakia became not only feasible but profitable, whereas *Kánya* wished to promote Hungary’s interests while the Germans, “uneasy over Italy’s flirtation with Britain²³),” were on the defensive.

Kánya exploited Germany’s temporary vulnerability, and in disguising the tracks of Hungary’s contacts with the Little Entente, he displayed pugnacity and wile. On 23 January he subjected *Hans von Mackensen*, Germany’s minister in Budapest, to a long litany of Hungarian grievances. He focussed on *Alfred Rosenberg*’s 15 November 1936 *Völkischer Beobachter* article, which had disavowed German aid for Hungarian revisionism; German underhandedness in dealing secretly with Czechoslovakia behind Hungary’s back; and various anti-Hungarian provocations by Germany. *Mackensen* defended his government’s policies, and assured *Kánya* that not the slightest possibility existed for the conclusion of a Czech—German non-aggression treaty²⁴).

A similar exchange occurred in Berlin, except that *Sztójay*’s dialogue with *Neurath* on 6 February was even more to the point. *Sztójay* explained the awesome

¹⁸) Ibidem, Docs. 56 and 57, pp. 194—197. Also see Reichert, *Das Scheitern der Kleinen Entente*, pp. 147—148.

¹⁹) Ádám, *A müncheni egyezmény*, Doc. 56, p. 195.

²⁰) Ibidem.

²¹) Kerekes, *Anschluß 1938*, pp. 246—247.

²²) Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny*, New York, 1961, pp. 312—313.

²³) William M. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, New York, 1960, p. 301.

²⁴) Ádám, *A müncheni egyezmény*, Doc. 59, pp. 197—199.

alternatives confronting Germany, should it refuse to abet Hungary's revisionist efforts. The Little Entente nations had become convinced that the *Rosenberg* affair had irreparably damaged German—Hungarian relations, and hence they saw this as an auspicious occasion to draw Hungary into a Danubian confederation to combat the German menace. But Hungary was proof to these overtures. Her foreign policy rested on Germany and Italy alone. At the same time, Magyar pro-German sentiments could not survive another blow such as the *Rosenberg* article. Should Germany spurn Hungary, the Magyars would perforce abandon the Third Reich and conclude non-aggression pacts with Hungary's Little Entente neighbours, even at the cost of certain territorial sacrifices. *Sztójay* taunted *Neurath* that the status of Hungary's expatriate minorities would improve under Little Entente and French auspices, and so would economic conditions in the region²⁵). According to *Sztójay*, *Neurath* was "visibly surprised and unprepared" when confronted with these plans. The presentation allegedly made a "deep impression" on *Neurath*, who assured the ambassador of Germany's fidelity. In *Sztójay's* view, this interchange no doubt alerted *Neurath* to the prerequisites of harmonious German—Hungarian relations. On 2 February 1937, Italy's reply discouraged the Magyars from any further efforts to treat with Czechoslovakia, advising them to pacify Yugoslavia and Rumania, in that order²⁶). But *Kánya* had achieved his objectives: he had the Germans on the defensive, and he had justified further negotiations with the Little Entente in advance.

Czechoslovakia's intense diplomatic offensive, exploiting the widening German-Hungarian rift, overshot its mark. On 9 February *Kobr* hoped to goad *Kánya* into action by accusing him of taking orders from Germany. The Third Reich encouraged Hungary to befriend Rumania and Yugoslavia, while Hungary still looked for a German assault on Czechoslovakia, from which Hungary hoped to profit. *Kánya* refused to be baited, and merely reiterated his earlier reserve²⁷). To intensify the pressure on Hungary, on the same day, the Czechs leaked information to *János Wettstein*, Hungary's ambassador in Prague, that the Czech government seriously considered renouncing its mutual aid agreement with the Soviet Union, if Germany would grant Czechoslovakia an ironclad non-aggression agreement. Italy's ambassador in Prague *Domenico de Facendis* confirmed the accuracy of this report to *Kánya*, and *Krofta* would not deny it explicitly²⁸).

Wittingly or unwittingly, the Czechs had jarred the Magyars off balance, but not for long. To counter the possibility of German punitive measures against Hungary in the form of a Czech—German accord, *Sztójay* was instructed on 17 February to disparage the 27 January Yugoslav—Bulgarian agreement of eternal friendship with the German Foreign Office. Acting State Secretary *Hans Heinrich Dieckhoff* observed proudly how long and hard Germany had laboured to bind the

²⁵) Ibidem, Doc. 61, pp. 200—201.

²⁶) Ibidem, Doc. 60, p. 199.

²⁷) Ibidem, Doc. 62, pp. 201—202.

²⁸) Ibidem, Doc. 63, pp. 202—204.

Yugoslavs with Bulgaria, by then one of Germany's client states. *Sztójay* pointed to the other side of the coin. Germany might eventually suffer disastrous reverses in the East by encouraging the rebirth of a pan-Slav bloc in the Balkans now. This would automatically strengthen Czechoslovakia, and if the Soviet Union should ever become nationalistic, as Russia before the War, then the entire Slavic world might merge to thwart German designs. Only Hungary could serve Germany's interests by acting as a bulwark against the Slavic menace²⁹). Up to this point, *Kánya's* skillful diplomacy had enabled Hungary to hold the Little Entente in abeyance without rejecting its members' advances outright, while keeping Germany vaguely uneasy about Magyar intentions, and guilty regarding renunciation of past German commitments.

Thus far, Czechoslovak efforts to tempt Hungary into a reconciliation scheme involving the Little Entente had failed. But the Magyars had derived considerable short-run diplomatic leverage by merely remaining on the negotiating scene. To break this impasse, on 18 March, *Schuschnigg* descended on Budapest to plead for continued Czech—Hungarian conversations, in view of Austria's mounting precarious position. His timing was most opportune. On 5 March, the Hungarian state police had uncovered an anti-government conspiracy by *MOVE*, a Nazi-supported and financed, clandestine, racist-fascist organization. This not only turned Hungary's government and public against Nazi Germany, it also aroused Magyar fears that Hungary might soon share Austria's impending doom³⁰).

Shortly after, the diplomatic waters were muddied, when, on 25 March, Italy and Yugoslavia signed a five-year non-aggression and neutrality pact³¹). The agreement normalized embittered relations between the two countries. Whether the pact would benefit or harm German or Hungarian interests remained unclear for some time. Apparently, though, it did relax Yugoslav Prime Minister *Stojadinović's* fears of an imminent German drive to the Adriatic, whereas Italy's protection made it far less desirable for Yugoslavia than before to seek closer German ties³²).

For Hungary, the pact offered certain dubious advantages. *Ciano* pledged that the agreement would profit Hungary. Italy would not sacrifice Hungary for the sake of the Serbs. The agreement would loosen the bonds of the Little Entente; weaken Soviet, English, and French influence in the Balkans; and bring a Hungarian—Yugoslav rapprochement one step closer to fruition³³). On the debit side, if Hungary attacked Czechoslovakia or Rumania, Yugoslavia could succour her Little Entente allies, whereas Italy would have to remain neutral. The Magyars also believed that the economic clauses in the agreement compromised their own and Austria's interests. Italy had agreed to grant Yugoslavia the same trade prefer-

²⁹) Ibidem, Doc. 65, pp. 205—206.

³⁰) Kerekes, *Anschluß 1938*, pp. 244—245.

³¹) For details, see J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*, New York, 1962, pp. 62 ff.

³²) Johann Wuescht, *Jugoslawien und das Dritte Reich*, Stuttgart, 1969, *passim*.

³³) *Ciano*, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 117—120.

ences formerly enjoyed by Hungary and Austria exclusively under the Rome Protocol Pacts. But Italy's absorption capacity was limited, and, despite disclaimers, she had to reduce imports from these two states in order to accommodate Yugoslavia. This partially accounts for the sudden chill in Austria's and Hungary's relations with Italy, and it explains why Hungary soon resumed heeding Czechoslovakia's overtures once more.

Hungarian-Yugoslav relations became still another temporary casualty of the agreement. Contrary to *Ciano's* expectations, Yugoslavia lost interest in the unilateral accommodation with Hungary, now having secure frontiers with Italy and Bulgaria³⁴). To complicate matters even further, *Beneš* condemned *Stojadinović* as perfidious, and the agreement as a shoddy Italian attempt to pull Yugoslavia into the Rome—Berlin Axis, with the complicity of Hungary³⁵). In sum, the Italian—Yugoslav treaty created more problems than it solved, and sowed confusion and suspicion in both political camps. Indeed, further progress in Czechoslovak-Hungarian reconciliation nearly foundered on these obstacles.

Fortunately, other events assured the continuance of these pacification efforts. A German diplomatic offensive to sunder the Little Entente by pretending to befriend its three members separately failed³⁶), as did Polish attempts later that spring to detach Rumania from her allies³⁷). Italy's growing preoccupation with Spain, and deteriorating relations once more with England diminished *Mussolini's* influence in Eastern Europe, and this left Hungary dangling. Despite these difficulties encountered by Germany and Italy, *Kánya* exercised extreme caution in treating with the Little Entente. On 26 March, *Hodža* conveyed to *Schuschnigg* his government's continuing desire to normalize relations with Hungary, but he claimed to have become discouraged by the Magyars' hesitancy³⁸). Thus matters stood for one month, while the various European diplomatic relationships matured.

On 27 April, *Alexander Vukcević*, Yugoslavia's ambassador in Hungary, approached *Kánya* at a private dinner, and tried to convince him to launch Hungary on the road to normalization with the Little Entente. Thus far, *Kánya* had been dawdling with theoretical questions, instead of taking concrete steps. The four countries must find a way to reconcile Hungary's equality in armaments with the terms of non-aggression treaties that would protect them all. Hungary had the choice of considering these options with the Little Entente either en bloc, or with each member state separately. Hungary would benefit by having all her frontiers guaranteed from both unilateral or joint Little Entente invasions.

Kánya demurred. Reconciliation was unworkable as long as the Little Entente's mutually binding military provisions clashed with similar engagements involving

³⁴) Machray, *The Struggle for the Danube*, pp. 269ff., and Reichert, *Das Scheitern*, pp. 103—104.

³⁵) Eduard Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš*, London, 1954, pp. 30—33.

³⁶) Sakmyster, *Hungary*, p. 76.

³⁷) *The New York Times*, 2 May 1937.

³⁸) Kerekes, *Anschluß 1938*, pp. 246—247.

Hungary. *Kánya* denied never having made concrete proposals to the Little Entente nations. He had, but they had either rejected them outright, or they had accepted, and then repudiated them. Moreover, if Yugoslavia could conclude agreements with Bulgaria and Italy, why should it be different with Hungary? Why should Hungary have to offer concessions to the Little Entente in exchange for having her right to rearm recognized? Austria had done so recently, yet the Little Entente had only delivered a mild rebuke. Indeed, Hungary might soon emulate Austria's example, and all her true friends would support her action.

Vukcević waxed indignant. An unilateral Hungarian declaration would cause "great consternation" and undermine slowly improving Yugoslav-Hungarian relations. If *Kánya* really meant to promote such a plan, *Vukcević* would protest by obtaining a transfer from Budapest³⁹). *Kánya* had extricated himself from a tight corner, although nearly at the cost of offending Yugoslavia. But, for the time being, he preferred jousting with Little Entente ambassadors rather than with Germany and Italy, both of which objected, in varying degrees, to Hungarian attempts to deal simultaneously with Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. Respecting reconciliation with Yugoslavia, *Kánya* was in no hurry. Either Germany or Italy, or possibly both, would sooner or later smooth the way for any further Yugoslav—Hungarian negotiations.

This phase of the Little Entente's diplomatic offensive was short-lived, owing to internal dissension. The Czech and Rumanian ministers attending the 1—2 April meeting of the Permanent Council of the Little Entente in Belgrade pilloried Yugoslavia for not having forewarned its partners about the impending Yugoslav—Italian and Yugoslav—Bulgarian agreements. This was hypocritical, because in 1935, Czechoslovakia had also failed to publicize her non-aggression pact with Russia. Rumania and Czechoslovakia insisted that, henceforth, member nations must conclude agreements only jointly, or after prior consultation and unanimous agreement⁴⁰).

The Belgrade conference dashed Hungary's hopes of conducting negotiations with each of the Little Entente nations separately, and complicated her efforts eventually to isolate Czechoslovakia. The conference temporarily terminated even some desultory and fruitless Rumanian—Hungarian negotiations. Responding to pressure from Rumania's Foreign Minister *Victor Antonescu* and Czechoslovakia's *Kamil Krofta*, *Stojadinović* also evaded further contact with Hungary, at least for the time being. *Sztójay* notified *Neurath* that, under the circumstances, Hungary would have to negotiate with the Little Entente en bloc, if she ever wished to get anywhere. *Neurath* disagreed. *Stojadinović* had not bowed to Czech and Rumanian pressure, but to internal objectors to Hungary. Later, he would reopen talks, notwithstanding the opposition of his allies⁴¹). *Neurath* tried to intimidate Hungary, but the Magyars had once more forced Germany on the defensive. The Reich

³⁹) *Ádám*, A müncheni egyezmény, Doc. 74, pp. 217—218.

⁴⁰) Macartney and Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe*, pp. 358—359.

⁴¹) Secret Report of 30 April 1937. *Ádám*, A müncheni egyezmény, Doc. 75, pp. 218—219.

would have to offer the Magyars tangible evidences of support, in order to deter negotiations with the Little Entente as a unit.

Soon the diplomatic hiatus was filled once again by *Schuschnigg*, who sought to bolster Austria's crumbling defenses by obtaining *Mussolini's* reassurances that Italy would parry the German menace, as in 1934. But at the 22–23 April Venice conference with *Ciano* and *Mussolini*, *Schuschnigg* sensed his hosts' diminished commitment to Austria's preservation. His hosts grilled him on a number of burning controversies, such as the Habsburg Restoration, which *Schuschnigg* favoured in principle; Austria's emergence as "the point of friction in Italo-German relations" owing to Germany's displeasure over "how badly Austria was behaving ... by applying the agreement of 11th July inadequately and with so many mental reservations;" and promising contacts between Austria and Czechoslovakia, both of which countries, *Schuschnigg* asserted, shared "a common interest — that is, not to be attacked by Germany."

Mussolini rebuffed *Schuschnigg* on all points. Restoration was "impracticable," and would precipitate "a grave danger of disorders." *Mussolini* pledged to maintain Austrian independence, but only at the cost of "synchronising it and bringing it into harmony with the Rome—Berlin Axis" — an euphemism for *Gleichschaltung*. On Czechoslovakia, *Schuschnigg* required no prodding. He reluctantly pledged that "there is no possibility of authoritarian Austria's aligning herself with the ultra-democratic Paris—Prague axis." Despite the short-run advantages, therefore, to Austrian security, "no agreement of a political character exists or is foreseen between the two countries⁴²." Having secured but vague promises of further Italian economic support, *Schuschnigg* left the meetings faintly uneasy, sensing that henceforth, Austria's chances for survival would hinge more on the good graces of the Western democracies⁴³).

In view of his failure to obtain ironclad guarantees from *Mussolini*, *Schuschnigg* redoubled his efforts to forge a Vienna—Budapest—Prague axis as a deterrent to Nazi aggression. When Austria's President *Wilhelm Miklas* arrived in Budapest on 4 May 1937 on the first postwar Austrian state visit, he was received with all the pomp normally reserved for crowned heads. This was a symbolic Hungarian anti-German gesture, and a rebuke to *Mussolini* for his gradual abandonment of Austria to the Germans. *Miklas* was accompanied by *Schuschnigg* and Foreign Minister *Guido Schmidt*, suggesting that the ceremonial visit would be accompanied by a conference, the object of which was defiantly "political rather than economic⁴⁴." In view of the common Nazi threat, *Schuschnigg* wanted to

⁴²) *Ciano*, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, Minutes of 22–23 April 1937, pp. 108–115.

⁴³) Kurt Schuschnigg, *Ein Requiem Rot-Weiß-Rot*, Zurich, 1948, pp. 184–185. Also see *Schuschnigg's* conversation with Prince *Starhemberg* in November 1937, to the effect that the basis of Austria's foreign policy, even before Stresa, "was not broad enough," because it failed to consider the democratic sympathies of the Western Powers. Ernst Rudiger Prince *Starhemberg*, *Between Hitler and Mussolini*, New York and London, 1942, p. 267.

⁴⁴) *The New York Times*, 4 May 1937.

reconcile Czechoslovakia, devise a scheme for Danubian collaboration, and ask Hungary to join Austria in some striking economic good-will gesture to Prague. The joint communiqué stressed the deepening Austro-Hungarian friendship and vigorous cooperation. But the real intention of the conference was to create an Austro—Hungarian front against too much Italo—German friendship. Sooner or later, Czechoslovakia would have to augment such an accord, if German and Italian predominance in the Danubian Basin was to be diminished, but Hungary still balked at the suggestion⁴⁵).

Krofta hoped that *Schuschnigg's* pleas in Budapest would resonate among the Magyars. On 15 May, he attempted to undo the damage caused by *Vukcević's* 27 April interview with *Kánya*. He told *Wettstein* that the Little Entente would regret any unilateral Hungarian declaration of equality in armaments, but that, “of course, no great harm would come of it,” even if Hungary should take this fateful step. Naturally, Hungary would be treated with greater consideration if prior agreement preceded the action. Sensing far greater flexibility in Czechoslovakia, as German and Sudeten pressures intensified, *Kánya* wrung the important concession from *Krofta* that Hungary indeed had the moral right to equality in armaments⁴⁶). This windfall resulted from Hungarian negotiating perspicacity exercised during the preceding months.

Krofta also relented on the question of a non-aggression treaty. Thanks to his efforts, he said, his Little Entente partners now would ratify an agreement resembling the innocuous *Kellogg-Briand* Pact. In plain language, the three allies no longer desired anything more from Hungary than a gesture. *Krofta* even hinted that they would reconsider the imperatives guiding their minority policies, if Hungary cooperated. *Krofta* did not wish to have his offer treated as an official Czech or Little Entente proposal, at least for the time being, but merely as a personal communication⁴⁷). Presumably, the three partners wished to avoid the humiliation of still another official Hungarian rebuff. But for Hungary the new offers provided excellent diplomatic ammunition against Germany. As for the Little Entente, its increasing willingness to mitigate the concessions expected from Hungary while escalating its own offers to the Magyars, had an excellent cause. Czechoslovakia was in the front line blocking German imperialism. It was imperative not only for the Czechs, but for their allies as well, to settle disputes with a nation that would find assisting the German juggernaut against them profitable.

Confronted by the belligerent Germans, who currently focussed on Austria, the vacillating Italians once again loosened the reigns on their Rome Pact partners. On

⁴⁵) Ibidem and 6 May 1937. Cf. G. E. R. Gedye, *Betrayal in Central Europe*, New York and London, 1939, pp. 202—203. *Bethlen* most ably explained why Hungary shied away from joining a Danubian scheme of this sort. See Count Stephen Bethlen, Hungary's Position after the Austrian Anschluß, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, VI (1938), p. 203.

⁴⁶) Ádám, A müncheni egyezmény, Doc. 77, pp. 220—221.

⁴⁷) Ibidem.

21 May, King *Victor Emmanuel* of Italy arrived in Budapest on a three-day state visit, accompanied by *Ciano*. Agitated over recent developments in Central Europe, the Hungarians raised certain questions concerning Italian intentions. *Kánya*'s chief worry entailed Austrian security. He no longer believed in Italy's "active interest in Austrian independence." He was convinced that "Italy was gradually withdrawing from her position on the Austrian question." But *Ciano* countered that only "Vienna's alignment with the Democratic-Bolshevik axis of Paris-Prague-Moscow" could possibly jeopardize Italy's support of Austria. *Kánya* also feared Hungary's abandonment in the event of an Italo-Rumanian agreement. *Ciano* pledged that "until such time as Hungary has informed us that the situation produced by a pact... was not only admissible, but was considered useful and acceptable to Hungarian policy," Italy would not even negotiate with Bucharest. Concern over deteriorating Anglo—Italian relations prompted Prime Minister *Kálmán Darányi* to inquire: "Does Mussolini want to make war on England?" *Ciano* replied evasively, citing "the incontestable series of numerous [English] provocations," "English preparations," and "British aggression." Italy would not flinch from any of these threats. Finally, *Darányi* complained that Italy's recently concluded commercial treaty with Yugoslavia would injure the Hungarian economy. *Ciano* promised that "Hungarian interests would be given special consideration by us."

The two Hungarian statesmen briefed *Ciano* on several current issues. Hungarian diplomacy was "based on friendship with Italy and collaboration with Germany." With the Little Entente, relations were confused. In view of the Little Entente's recent solidarity, "a separate agreement with Yugoslavia must be considered out of the question." Connections with Rumania were even more difficult. Momentarily, Czechoslovakia was "the only State with which [Hungary] could draw up a pact at any moment," but, for the present, this was not among the intentions of the Hungarian government. In the economic field, improvements were possible. There was also the feasibility "of carrying on negotiations with the three States simultaneously so as to arrive at bilateral pacts with each of them," and then permitting "the one which is not wanted in Hungary to perish — that is to say, the pact with Czechoslovakia."

The conference yielded a joint communiqué, which emphasized *Mussolini*'s support of the idea of Danubian cooperation — a code phrase for resistance to German expansionism. The two countries reaffirmed their "full concordance of views on important political questions," deciding that, for the present, Hungary should not renounce the military clauses of the Peace Treaty of Trianon unilaterally, but that — significantly — an attempt should first be made to negotiate an accommodation on this question with the Little Entente nations⁴⁸).

The next episode in the wooing of Hungary occurred in Geneva on 27 May, at the Little Entente's meeting of its Permanent Council. The Little Entente, which

⁴⁸) *The New York Times*, 22 and 23 May 1937; and *Ciano*, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, Minutes of 19—22 May 1937, pp. 117—120.

stood unified on a number of issues, including Hungary, agreed on a common procedure to be followed regarding Hungarian rearmament, regardless of whether it materialized through negotiations, or unilaterally⁴⁹). Germany, and to some extent Italy, pressured Rumania and Yugoslavia to break ranks with Czechoslovakia, but in vain. This show of strength made it ever more difficult for Hungary to refuse negotiating with the Little Entente as a unit.

At Geneva, Rumania and Yugoslavia hovered in the background, while *Krofta* reiterated his 15 May conversation with *Wettstein* in the presence of Hungary's League of Nations representative, *László Velics*. Nothing had changed substantively since, except that the offer now represented the Little Entente's official policy. *Krofta* thought an agreement was long overdue, particularly in view of Yugoslavia's rapprochement with Italy, and the growing influence of Italy in Rumania. The inclusion of Czechoslovakia in this thawing process might well follow. Obviously, *Krofta* believed that the shortest route to Berlin led through Rome. Moreover, he declared, France and England favoured rapprochement, and consequently he had requested their intercession. Unfortunately, France and England had declined, not wishing to make it appear as if they tried to intervene in East Central European affairs. This was meant to pamper overinflated German and Italian egos. Indeed, *Krofta* implied the dawning of a new era in the region. The Little Entente had reduced its demands on Hungarian reciprocity to the point where revision would no longer be taboo, but left in abeyance, to be settled at some later date. All Hungary had to do was to sign separate, identical non-aggression treaties with her three neighbours. The next day, *Krofta* even offered to replace the harsh word "non-aggression" with a more pleasing cognate, and as a further inducement hinted that, eventually, Czechoslovakia might emancipate herself from France⁵⁰).

This time, *Kánya* did not disparage the Czech plan, but instructed *Velics* to thank *Krofta* for having made the offer⁵¹). *Velics* later expounded his views to *Kánya*. Obviously, the Czechs felt isolated, and that is why they initiated the "Geneva campaign." *Krofta* had tried to get England and France to mediate, failed, and then pretended that he did not really desire Anglo-French involvement in the first place. Rumania apparently supported the Czech effort with conviction, but Yugoslavia only reluctantly. For the time being, Little Entente unity versus Hungary was certain. In general, the Little Entente wished to place Hungary on the defensive by offering magnanimous terms for settlement, thus leaving Hungary with the burden of guilt in case of refusal⁵²).

Velics might have added that the Little Entente nations' solidarity resulted from their awareness that pacifying Hungary was a sine qua non for an understanding with all three Rome Pact countries, and that this scenario was also much favoured in London and Paris. Joining the two alliance systems would thwart

⁴⁹) Machray, *Struggle for the Danube*, pp. 280—281.

⁵⁰) *Ádám*, *A müncheni egyezmény*, Docs. 78 and 79, pp. 222—226.

⁵¹) *Ibidem*, Doc. 80, pp. 227—228.

⁵²) *Velics's Report of 27 May 1937*. *Ibidem*, Doc. 78, pp. 222—226.

Germany's *Ostpolitik*, and restore Italy's pride by letting her become the West's chief watchdog in the Danubian Basin. It would also blunt the edge of Hungarian revisionism by removing it from German intrigue. Hungary stood at the crossroads. Approval of the *Krofta* plan would force Germany's hand. *Hitler* would either have to abandon his Eastern policy, or curb it, or fight before his war machine was in readiness.

The Magyars also had to weigh certain other considerations. *Kánya* doubted whether Italy would accept a settlement that included Czechoslovakia, because *Ciano* held that country in low esteem, preferring Poland. Berlin would certainly balk, and without German acquiescence, any agreement would be worthless⁵³). Furthermore, *Kánya* believed that the Yugoslavs, and most particularly *Stojadinović*, were unreliable. While professing to support his allies, *Stojadinović* had promised *Neurath* that Yugoslavia would immediately abandon Czechoslovakia in the event of a reconciliation with Hungary⁵⁴). Finally, *Kánya* wondered whether it would benefit Hungary, in the long run, to support Germany, and regain her former preeminence by sharing in the territorial spoils, though possibly at the cost of a bloody and unpredictable armed conflict; or whether Hungary should adopt the more modest and peaceful alternative of supporting an Italian-monitored East Central Europe blessed by England and France, in which territorial aggrandizement for Hungary might be meagre and gradual, but in which the Magyars might not enjoy the hegemony they so ardently craved.

In the meantime, international events ought to have spurred Hungary to resolve her problems with the Little Entente speedily. Italy and Germany, which had gradually drifted apart on the Spanish Civil War issue, were suddenly galvanized into greater unity than ever before. The Valencia government, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union had nearly driven a wedge between the two Axis partners. *Hitler* had been favouring disengagement from Spain, whereas *Mussolini* had insisted on launching just one more supreme military effort to end the conflict. Republican Spain's air attack on the German cruiser *Deutschland* on 29 May completely transformed the international situation, undoing whatever success the Republicans had had in fostering German—Italian disunity⁵⁵). Reinvigorated cooperation in Spain between *Hitler* and *Mussolini* portended renewed aggressive Italian support of German initiatives in East Central Europe, and threatened to nullify *Ciano's* recently sanctioned approval of Hungarian negotiations with the Little Entente.

Kánya continued playing for time. First, he informed *Krofta* that a final Hungarian response would not be forthcoming, because the Prague and Geneva proposals were not identical, and neither of the two Czech drafts tallied with kindred

⁵³) *Kánya's* notes on his conversation with *Darányi* and *Ciano*, 21 May 1937. *Ádám*, *Allianz*, Doc. 17, pp. 139—145.

⁵⁴) Report of *Neurath's* conversation with *Darányi* and *Kánya*, 13 June 1937. *Ibidem*, Doc. 18, pp. 146—150.

⁵⁵) *The New York Times*, 6 June 1937.

Rumanian and Yugoslav offers⁵⁶). But on 10 June, *Wettstein* was ordered to submit Hungary's reply. Any non-aggression treaties would have to be coupled with far-reaching concessions to the Magyar minorities in all three Little Entente countries. This demand evoked such an angry outburst from *Krofta* that the carefully cultivated friendly atmosphere evaporated. *Krofta* did calm down, but he insisted that Czechoslovakia's minority policy could not be linked to the terms of an international treaty. Czechoslovakia maintained a similar position in negotiations with Germany concerning the Sudeten Germans. But he did pledge that his country would meticulously observe the minority provisions of the Versailles Treaty, provided that Hungary cooperated on Czech terms. Should Hungary declare her equality in arms unilaterally, then the Little Entente would denounce not only its minority obligations, but all the other onerous duties arising from the peace treaties as well. Despite these, and other, contentious issues, the conference thereupon proceeded smoothly, and the negotiators parted "with the greatest friendliness⁵⁷).

Hungary's recurring contacts with representatives of the Little Entente nations annoyed the Germans. One day after *Wettstein's* 10 June conversation with *Krofta*, *Neurath* arrived in Budapest for consultations with *Kánya* and *Darányi* on a number of wide-ranging issues of common concern, especially Hungary's relations with the Little Entente. On this occasion, as before, *Neurath* tried to promote the cause of a Yugoslav—Hungarian rapprochement. But *Neurath* blundered by trying to present reconciliation not as a beneficial end to be sought for Hungary's own sake, but as a windfall for the good of German imperialism. *Neurath* wanted to secure Yugoslav neutrality in anticipation of Austria's *Anschluss*, now touted as a foregone conclusion. Hungarian—Yugoslav amity would facilitate Germany's *Ostpolitik* by removing all possible friction dividing Italy, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. It would also further Germany's post-*Anschluss* annexationist ambitions in Czechoslovakia by sundering the Little Entente, and by destroying the final vestiges of French influence in the region.

Kánya's negotiating skills exceeded *Neurath's*. Germany's vaunted defensive shield in the Balkans was worthless, he argued, because "just like Ciano, he [*Neurath*] had too much confidence in the Yugoslavs." *Kánya* claimed to have had long and bitter experience with the Serbs. Consequently, he did not share *Ciano's* and *Neurath's* optimism about them. *Stojadinović* was a crass opportunist who consistently lied to his allies, and had misled Hungary on a number of occasions. *Stojadinović* thus had to be treated with extreme caution. Moreover, Italy and Germany complicated Hungary's negotiations with the Yugoslavs by courting them so ostentatiously as to diminish Hungary's relative importance. The Yugoslavs would remain true to their present allies, while simultaneously promoting friendly relations with Italy and Germany. In the end, they would choose sides on the basis of who dominated the European power structure. But, in view of Yugo-

⁵⁶) O.L. M.K. Kül. pol. 1938 — 7/7 — 541 (1825).

⁵⁷) *Ádám*, A müncheni egyezmény, Doc. 82, pp. 230— 232.

slavia's continuing fidelity to the Little Entente, Hungary had to "engage in an exchange of views" with all three little Entente countries at once. *Kánya* explained that he had rejected their non-aggression treaty offer, but that Hungary would accept a mutual declaration resembling the *Kellogg* Pact.

Kánya's mere mention of the phrase "non-aggression treaty" in connection with the Little Entente prompted *Neurath* to interject agitatedly: "I beg of you, please don't do it!" He apparently tolerated the alternative wording, however. *Neurath*, trying to defend Yugoslavia, deplored *Kánya's* pessimism, and urged patience. In a few months, *Kánya* would see *Neurath's* confidence in *Stojadinović* justified. Upon *Kánya's* inquiry as to whether Germany had any agreement currently in force with Yugoslavia, *Neurath* said "no." Had the two nations concluded some sort of gentlemen's agreement whereby neither side would join a coalition inimical to the other? To this, *Neurath* refused to reply⁵⁸).

If *Neurath* wished to intimidate the Magyars because Hungary was being secretly outflanked by Germany and Yugoslavia, he failed dismally. *Kánya* knew that *Neurath's* recent Belgrade visit had not gone well. *Stojadinović* had angrily bombarded *Neurath* with a string of accusations centring mainly on intolerable German subversive actions in Yugoslavia. A sharp passage of words ensued, and, according to members of *Neurath's* entourage, the Foreign Minister left Belgrade "in a very ill humour⁵⁹." *Kánya*, too, maintained the upper hand with the German diplomat, who returned home doubly empty-handed.

After this discussion, the diplomatic situation remained essentially static until the foreign ministers of the Little Entente convened in Sinaia in August 1937 to reconsider the impasse with Hungary. On that occasion, the allies satisfied *Kánya's* chief demands for combined Little Entente action by tendering the draft of a non-aggression treaty produced jointly. *Kánya's* diplomacy of moderation thus bore fruit. Hungary gained an additional year's negotiating grace with the Little Entente, and could, if she wished, postpone decisions involving Germany, while awaiting further international developments.

As of mid-June of 1937, the Hungarian-Little Entente negotiations thus had entered another dormant phase. But the new turn of events in Spain favouring the Axis, and revived German—Italian intimacy prompted the Magyars to observe caution. French weakness, compounded by Great Britain's deepening non-concern with Europe's fate east of Germany, provided changes came peacefully, threatened to deliver the entire Danubian region into Germany's hands by default. Since Italy still lacked, and apparently never would have, the might to "balance Germany in the Danubian area⁶⁰," the future seemed bleak if Hungary should

⁵⁸) Ádám, *Allianz*, Doc. 18. Also published in L. Zsigmond, ed., *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország kúpolitikájához 1936—1945*. Volume I 1936—1938, Budapest, 1962, Doc. 264, pp. 440—444. Also see Hoensch, *Der ungarische Revisionismus*, pp. 45—47.

⁵⁹) *The New York Times*, 12 June 1937.

⁶⁰) Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, Seattle and London, 1974, p. 177. On French policy, see A. A. Komjathy, *The Crises of*

defy the impending Nazi avalanche. Moreover, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were still too far apart on vital issues to reach an accommodation. The Czechs wanted an ironclad shield against German economic encroachments, whereas Hungary still preferred to become the dominant small power in the region under the joint auspices of Germany and Italy.

In this political environment *Neurath* enjoyed far superior manoeuvrability than Germany's recent dismal political performance in Eastern Europe would have suggested. Whereas Italy encouraged Hungary to seek commercial accommodations with Czechoslovakia, and Austria favoured political ones as well, *Neurath* counselled *Kánya* and *Darányi* to avoid either course⁶¹). The Magyars might have enjoyed a temporary tactical advantage in dealing with Germany, but *Neurath*'s thinly veiled threats struck home. Besides, Hungarian pacification of the Little Entente meant tempering revisionism, and the Germans knew that no Budapest government could possibly survive the resultant outburst of public rage⁶²). Consequently, prospects for Czechoslovak—Hungarian cooperation, even with reservations, dimmed in Budapest, at least temporarily. The Germans sought a permanent deadlock, utilizing both enticement and threat in the form of overwhelming economic power. They were not above whipping recalcitrant agricultural countries such as Hungary into line⁶³).

Despite these gloomy prospects, the lively diplomatic activities involving Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in early 1937 created conditions that might have served as ammunition against the Third Reich. Gone was the extreme acrimony that had poisoned Hungary's postwar relations with the Little Entente. As one observer noted, *Kánya* and the diplomatic representatives of France and the Little Entente in Budapest could talk together on a much more practical and friendlier basis than before, even though concrete proposals seemed as far away as ever⁶⁴). Hungary, too, exercised extreme caution in choosing the correct method of declaring military equality, and preferred to let rearmament materialize gradually without fanfare. The Little Entente nations sought not to humiliate Hungary again by extorting impossible concessions in return for meaningless gestures.

The other felicitous development in aid of regional reconciliation was the Little Entente's seeming strength, confidence, and unity. The alliance's Bucharest parley on 17 June reflected new hopes, and the three allies' vitality. The final communiqué demonstrated the Czechs' success in thus far preserving and strengthening the alliance, even in the face of prodigious German efforts to isolate them. The three countries also stressed their determination to bolster mutual security by coordinating their economies and through intensive cooperation in all matters⁶⁵).

France's East Central European Diplomacy 1933—1938, New York, 1976, Chapter XI. On England's Eastern policy, see Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France between Two Wars*, New York, 1966, Chapter XVII.

⁶¹) *The New York Times*, 13 June 1937.

⁶²) Sakmyster, *Hungary*, p. 25.

⁶³) See Paul Einzig, *Bloodless Invasion*, London, 1938, pp. 67 ff.

⁶⁴) *The New York Times*, 13 June 1937.

⁶⁵) *Ibidem*, 18 June 1937.

For Hungary's Western-oriented conservative statesmen, such as *Tibor Eckhardt*, *Bethlen*, and *Horthy*, this flash of Little Entente viability was a welcome reprieve. It promoted Hungary's bargaining position "for Germany and Italy to feel that Hungary had a second string to her bow⁶⁶," and thus gave *Kánya* the breathing spell to consider other options besides abject submission to German economic, political, and military demands. There might well have been a third solution in sight for Hungary, apart from total subservience to either England—France or Italy—Germany. As Henry L. Roberts has pointed out,

France was the one great power really committed to the status quo in Eastern Europe, and France, as it proved, was not enough, as Czechoslovakia was discovering to her sorrow. It could still be argued in mid-1937 that the same was also true of Germany, which, unaided, could no more ensure Hungarian revisionism than France could guarantee the integrity of her Little Entente client states⁶⁷).

Hopes for just such a settlement, one that was not entirely German-dominated, yet one that would restore some power to Hungary, dominated the thinking of Hungarian statesmen. Their expectations were not entirely unrealistic, even seen in retrospect. As *Franz von Papen* noted shortly after the war, for a while it seemed that the year 1937 would bestow a new spirit of harmony on Europe⁶⁸), portending renewed Four-Power cooperation to settle grievances in the Danube Basin on the principles of equity and justice for all⁶⁹).

Unfortunately, the Third Reich's potential for domination exceeded nearly everyone's expectations at the time, and the geopolitical stakes in Eastern Europe were sufficiently steep to encourage Nazi intervention at high risk. The strategic importance of "Mid-Europe," an area comprising a group of small and weak states between the Soviet Union and Germany is so vital that, in the words of Henry L. Roberts, "if it is brought under the effective domination of the great powers on its flanks, Germany or the Soviet Union, these powers thereby gain such a preponderance of strength in Europe that the balance is to be redressed, if at all, only by calling in extra-European powers⁷⁰)." *Hitler*, who named this region "Inter-Europe," was determined, in view of current Soviet, British, Italian, and French vacillation, to dominate it as a "German military protectorate⁷¹)." These plans would have transformed Europe into a vast system of Nazi-dominated political-economic vassalage⁷²).

⁶⁶) Macartney, *October Fifteenth*, p. 200.

⁶⁷) Henry L. Roberts, *Eastern Europe. Politics, Revolution and Diplomacy*, New York, 1970, p. 62.

⁶⁸) This optimistic view was not shared by Flandin and François-Poncet. See André François-Poncet, *The Fateful Years*, New York, 1972, pp. 223—224.

⁶⁹) Gerhard Schacher, *Germany Pushes South-East*, London, 1937, Chapter VIII. Cf. Ivan Maisky, *Who Helped Hitler?* London, 1964, p. 69.

⁷⁰) Roberts, *Eastern Europe*, p. 206.

⁷¹) Edouard Calic, *Secret Conversations With Hitler*, New York, 1971, pp. 62—63.

⁷²) Dietrich Orlow, *The Nazis in the Balkans*, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1968, Chapter IV, especially pp. 110—111. Rauschning ably summarized the outlines of such an imperium. See Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler's Aims in War and Peace*, London and Toronto, 1940, pp. 50—54.

Hungary's leaders justifiably dreaded exclusive German hegemony in the Danubian region⁷³). It is not surprising that, throughout the Nazi era, and despite pro-German public rhetoric to the contrary, Hungarian statesmen, even the Germanophil *Gyula Gömbös*, sought to temper monolithic German control of the region⁷⁴). The evidence suggests that, during the first six months of 1937, Hungary refused to be recruited as Germany's accomplice in Eastern Europe. Rather, Hungary's 1937 tactics with the Little Entente represented an imaginative, if hopeless, manipulative effort in the service of national self-preservation. Even Hungary's comprehensive Little Entente policy was subordinated to a more farreaching imperative. Hungary hoped to obstruct Germany's eastward progress until Italy and Great Britain occupied the power vacuum created by France's abdication of her regional responsibilities in 1936⁷⁵). Then, perhaps, the Third Reich, which appeared to be the only power capable of dominating Eastern Europe single-handed, but only if left undisturbed, would be unable to realize her ambitions.

Hungary's skillful diplomatic manoeuvres in the first six months of 1937 were an important element in Europe's German containment policy. In retrospect, Hungary's diplomatic contribution might appear insignificant and hardly worth relating, because the rest of Europe failed to stem the German tide short of war, and interest has focussed ever since on analyzing the mainsprings of the period immediately preceding the war. The failure, however, was not Hungary's, and thus should not detract from her considerable diplomatic achievements. Unconditional negotiations with the Little Entente would have invited German retaliations. Refusal to negotiate would have debased Hungary to German satellite status and earned the West's disapproval. Limited negotiations meant keeping Hungary's options open, Germany at bay, and gaining time⁷⁶). Treating with her three neighbours also proved to be the correct formula for rapprochement, the foundations of which were laid by the Little Entente at Sinaia in August 1937, in response to Hungarian encouragement. This offer considerably expanded Hungary's diplomatic options and enhanced her manoeuvrability. *Kánya's* diplomacy proves that even a small, militarily and economically weak country such as Hungary can delay, harass, and confound imperialistic thrusts by mighty nations, provided it has the strategic advantage, the courage to act, and the wisdom of a statesman to execute the appropriate policy.

⁷³) L. Zsigmond, *Adalékok a magyar ellenforradalmi rendszer külpolitikájához 1929—1945* [Documents on the foreign policy of Hungary's counter-revolutionary system 1929—1945], Budapest, 1953, pp. 35 ff.

⁷⁴) Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München, 1943, p. 705, and Calic, *Secret Conversations*, second interview, throw light on these German plans.

⁷⁵) France tried, in 1936 and 1937, to reassert her power in Eastern Europe, but failed. See John E. Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai D'Orsay*, Lawrence, Kansas, 1973, Chapter VII.

⁷⁶) On this, see C. A. Macartney, *Hungary. A Short History*, Chicago, 1962, pp. 226—227, and his *October Fifteenth*, p. 153. Cf. Juhász, *Magyarország külpolitikája*, p. 171.