

## From Isolation to Active Foreign Policy: The Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship of 1927

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In my paper, I present the antecedents of the Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration of 1927. After the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary tried to find allies to broke out of the international isolation, but was faced with numerous difficulties. While the Bethlen government approached Jugoslavia, Italy offered a possibility for Hungary, that could not be refused. Finally, the Hungarian leadership accepted the Italians' offer and the negotiations between the two countries commenced at the end of 1926. Both Italy and Hungary were wary of each other, they tried to get to know the other's intentions, but in the end, they arrived at an understanding. After these discussions Bethlen and Mussolini signed a Treaty of Friendship on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1927 in Rome.

[Hungarian-Italian relations; Treaty of Friendship; Central-Europe; active foreign policy; Alliance]

### **The Meeting of Hungarian and Italian Foreign Policy**

After signing the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary's foreign scope of action narrowed considerably. To stabilize the situation of the country the Bethlen government strived to fit into the new european political system. For this reason, Hungary became a member of the League of Nations in 1922, then in 1924 received a loan from this international organization for the Hungarian economy's reconstruction. Thereafter the Hungarian government wanted to find allies, but they were not quite successful in it. After signing the peace treaties, England filled the role of a curious but uninterested friend in Central-Europe. Although English foreign policy stood beside Hungary in a few instances, still it never went as far as to support one of the most important goals of the

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country, the revision of the borders.<sup>1</sup> Until the mid 1920s the foreign relations between Hungary and France were not too cordial. This situation became worse in December, 1925 when the franc counterfeiting scandal<sup>2</sup> broke out. After this case the relation between the two states stretched to a breaking point. In 1924 Hungarian-Soviet negotiations started in order to enter into diplomatic relations, but in the end the agreement was not realized because of internal and foreign pressure.<sup>3</sup> There was opening towards Germany as well, because the thought of an alliance with Germany occurred to several Hungarian politicians (for example István Bethlen, Gyula Gömbös).<sup>4</sup> However as Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann pursued a policy of reconciliation, they could not form a cooperation in the matter of the revision. Because of all this after World War I, the Hungarian diplomacy had very limited scope of action and this situation was made even harder by the Little Entente's<sup>5</sup> undermining work. The Bethlen government wanted to break out of the isolation and there were two ways accomplish this: either it comes to an agreement with the states of the Little Entente or it dissolves their unity. Both alternatives could have led to different consequences. Should Hungary reach an agreement with the three states, then it de facto acknowledges the borders set in Trianon, which was

<sup>1</sup> I. ROMSICS, A brit külpolitika és a „magyar kérdés” 1914–1946, in: *Századok*, 2, 1996, pp. 297–298.

<sup>2</sup> In the middle of December 1925 the Netherlandish authorities arrested Arisztid Jankovich Hungarian Colonel of the Hungarian army's General Staff and his two associates, after they wanted to exchange fake thousand frank notes in the banks. The participants wanted to take revenge on France for the Treaty of Trianon with this action, and they wanted to finance irredentist activity from the money that came from the exchange of fake notes. During the examination of the case several high ranking individuals fall under suspicion, among others came up the names of István Bethlen and Pál Teleki as well. The accused got a light sentence in the end. For details see: B. ABLONCZY, A frankhamisítás. Hálók, személyek, döntések, in: *Múltunk*, 1, 2008, pp. 29–56.

<sup>3</sup> L. GULYÁS, *A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája*, II. Vol., Máriabesnyő 2013, pp. 11–15.

<sup>4</sup> P. PRITZ, 20. századi magyar külpolitika, in: *Korunk*, 4, 2010, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> The Little Entente was a political and military alliance between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, which came into being by a net of bilateral treaties (August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1920 Czechoslovak–Yugoslavian; April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921 Czechoslovak–Romanian; June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921 Romanian–Yugoslavian). Its members were advocates of preventing the Hungarian revisional aspirations and the restoration of the House of Habsburg, their main objective was the preservation of the state of affairs which came to be after the first world war and was legalized in the peace treaties.

absolutely unacceptable at that time. For the other option however they would need to reach an agreement with at least one of the other countries. The Bethlen government decided in favour of opening towards Yugoslavia,<sup>6</sup> because they believed it to be the strongest Little Entente member, moreover Hungary had the least territorial dispute with this state.<sup>7</sup> Before the Hungarian government took any initiative steps towards Yugoslavia, the Hungarian Prime Minister wanted to ask the Great Powers' opinion of this idea. During the League of Nations session in March 1926, he managed to consult with Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, who was satisfied with the Hungarian initiative. Bethlen also discussed the question with Dino Grandi, the Italian Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs. During the discussion, the Hungarian Prime Minister said, that with the cessation of the financial and military supervision, Hungary plans to step on the road of active foreign politics. Because of this he wanted to find out from Grandi, that in the Italians' opinion with which of their neighbours should the Bethlen government develop a friendlier relation, and he asks this, because in this matter "*he wishes to act in harmony with the Italian government's opinion*". Grandi could not provide an appropriate answer, but he had confidence that he could give a positive response to the question soon.<sup>8</sup> To understand the Italian's reserved attitude I find it necessary to outline Italy's foreign policy after World War I.

<sup>6</sup> In the time period discussed by the paper officially there was no state which was called Yugoslavia yet, because the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes changed its designation to Yugoslavia only in 1929. In the paper I use Yugoslavia nevertheless, because based on the on the sources, among the contemporaries the designation Yugoslavia was as widespread as the official Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In the Hungarian and Italian diplomatic reports that I examine, we came upon the designation Yugoslavia predominately as well. Moreover both designations are used in the literature dealing with this era and the state. As a result of all this I decided to use the designation Yugoslavia in our paper, I only departed from this, if I quoted the contemporary source literally and they did not use the designation Yugoslavia in it.

<sup>7</sup> Á. HORNYÁK, *Magyar-jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok 1918–1927*, Újvidék 2004, p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (hereafter MNL OL), Reserved Records of the Department of Political Affairs (hereafter K 64), 19. csomó, 23. tétel, res. pol. 154. Discussion between Bethlen and Grandi on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1926. Budapest, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1926.

After the war, among the primary goals of Italian liberal-nationalist foreign politics was making the country's status as a Great Power more stable and to acquire hegemony over the Danube-basin region. After the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy broke apart, the Italian state could have a breath of relief, because they got rid of their big territories neighbour and with this the door to the Central-European region was open. However, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1918, with the approval of the Great Powers, Yugoslavia came into being, which significantly reduced Italy's opportunities in its aspirations towards the Danube-basin, moreover France showed keen interest towards the region.<sup>9</sup> Because of this Italian foreign politics strived to eliminate the Yugoslavian state, which they wanted to carry out based on the concept outlined by General Pietro Badoglio. Per the concept, that got known as the Badoglio Plan, Yugoslavia on one hand must be isolated from the outside, also their unsettled questions with the neighbouring countries must be instigated. On the other it must be disintegrated from the inside by bringing to the surface ethnic conflicts, and the widespread support of anti-state propaganda actions.<sup>10</sup> This plan was soon removed from the agenda, because on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1920, an Italian Yugoslavian treaty was signed in Rapallo. Per the agreement, the Italians got Trieste, Zara and some other Dalmatian islands, and Fiume was declared a free state. At the end of 1922 the fascist Benito Mussolini assumed power in Italy, who continued the foreign politics guidelines used up to then for a while. He wanted to realize the hegemony above the Danube-basin region by relying on the Little Entente, and because of this he tried to make approaches to these states. One of the neuralgic points of Italian-Yugoslavian relations was the question of authority over Fiume, on which they came to an understanding in the Treaty of Rome on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1924. Under the terms of the decision Fiume got under Italian authority and in exchange the Serbians got Susak harbour district. They also declared, that in the future they will stand guard over the adherence of the Treaties of Trianon, Saint-Germain, and Neuilly, moreover the two countries will coordinate with each other in question concerning Central-Europe. To calm the other Little Entente states, they declared, that the agreement is not

<sup>9</sup> Zs. L. NAGY, Itália és Magyarország a párizsi békekonferencia idején, 1919, in: I. ROMSICS (ed.), *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. Században*, Budapest 1995, p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> M. BUCARELLI, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922–1939)*, Bari 2006, p. 11.

directed against Czechoslovakia or Romania.<sup>11</sup> In the same year they made final the Czechoslovak-Italian Treaty of Collaboration as well, and with this Mussolini took another step in the realization of the plan about the Danube-basin region.

The international atmosphere after the signing of the Locarno Pact presented a favourable situation for Italian foreign political aspirations. The treaties of mutual guarantee were signed on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1925 and in one of them Germany's western borders were fixed. Thereafter the thought occurred to the Great Powers, that the Locarno principles should be layed down in the Central-European and Balkan region as well. To carry this out Mussolini suggested a Danube-Balkan Locarno, per which the participating countries would assure the adherence of the existing agreements by the signing of bilateral agreements, respectively they would solve any differences of opinion between each other by arbitrary means, with Italy's supervision.<sup>12</sup> Among the members of the Danube-Balkan Locarno they wanted to have Austria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. In the spirit of the plan the rapprochement between Italy and Yugoslavia was on the agenda again, however the deepening of Italian-Albanian relations caused serious tension between the states. Ahmed Zogu rose to power at the end of 1924 with Yugoslavian support, however after a short time he started to approach Italy. Yugoslavia looked upon the rapprochement between Italy and Albania relations with jealousy. This relation was confirmed when Mussolini and Ahmed Zogu signed the Italian-Albanian Treaty of Tirana on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1926.<sup>13</sup> With this step the already strained Italian-Yugoslavian relations broke off and because of this the realization of the Danube-Balkan Locarno got even farther. The situation was made even worse by the fact, that Czechoslovakia wanted rather to realize the ideas regarding the Central-European region with English and French leadership. Because of all this by July 1926 the Danube-Balkan

<sup>11</sup> BUCARELLI, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> HORNYÁK, p. 203.

<sup>13</sup> With the Italian-Albanian Treaty of Friendship and Safety Italy guaranteed not only territorial, but also political *status quo* regarding Albania. They committed themselves to not sign any agreements with other powers that would hurt the others interests. In addition they reinforced the secret military agreement accepted in August, 1925, which clause contained the possibility of an uprising against Yugoslavia.

Locarno got off the agenda of Italian foreign policy and Italy went back to the realization of the Badoglio Plan.<sup>14</sup>

Given the circumstances, when Bethlen had a discussion with Grandi in March 1926, the Italian Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs was reserved, because at the time the negotiations between Italy and Yugoslavia were still on their way about the realization of the Danube-Balkan Locarno.<sup>15</sup> Most likely they made the extent of their support of Hungarian foreign policy in Belgrade depend on the outcome of this. At the League of Nations' session in March, 1926, István Bethlen had discussions with Momčilo Ninčić, Yugoslavian Foreign Minister as well, after talking with the Great Powers. The Hungarian Prime Minister offered the possibility of an arbitration agreement, which the Ninčić did not rule out, and at the same time he agreed with the fact, that Hungary, for the time being, wanted to sign a treaty like this only with Yugoslavia out of its neighbours.<sup>16</sup> During the summer of 1926 András Hory, the Hungarian Minister to Belgrade met again with the Yugoslavian Foreign Minister in Bled, where they had long and confidential discussions. Now Ninčić "*spontaneously declared that he would be willing to sign with us [Hungarians] a treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression pact*".<sup>17</sup> An agreement like this could lead to serious consequences, because on one hand Hungary could successfully break out of isolation with this, and on the other the loosening of the Little Entente's union could successfully begin. Because of all this the preparations for the agreement ought to have been kept a secret from Czechoslovakia and Romania. On 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1926, on the celebration organized for the 400<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Battle of Mohács, Governor Miklós Horthy talked in his speech about the resurrection of Serbian-Hungarian friendship. With this he made clear to everybody the rapprochement between the two countries. Among those dealing with the topic there are spirited discussions to the present day, about what kind of motivations could the Governor have had to reveal the

<sup>14</sup> Italy and Hungary supported on several occasions the separatist movements which were in Yugoslavia. For details see: P. HAMERLI, The Hungarian-Italian Support of the Croatian Separatism between 1928 and 1934, in: *West Bohemian Historical Review*, 5, 1, 2015, pp. 51–70.

<sup>15</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 19. csomó, 23. tétel, res. pol. 154. Discussion between Bethlen and Grandi on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1926. Budapest, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1926.

<sup>16</sup> HORNYÁK, pp. 216–217.

<sup>17</sup> A. HORY, *Bukaresttől Varsóig*, Budapest 1987, p. 216.

Hungarian-Yugoslavian rapprochement.<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt however that Horthy's speech elicited serious reverberations in the surrounding countries. The Little Entente states reacted immediately to the Hungarian Governor's speech through the press,<sup>19</sup> and Ninčić tried to present the situation, as if the agreement between Hungary and Yugoslavia would only be the first step in consolidating the Central-European situation.<sup>20</sup> Earlier the Hungarian historians thought that Horthy's speech was the reason why the Hungarian-Yugoslavian rapprochement became livelier, nowadays however some of them (Árpád Hornyák, Pál Pritz) believes, that the exact opposite happened, thus an alienation could be observed between the two states.<sup>21</sup> It is certain however that Horthy's speech aroused Italy's interest. I mentioned that after the summer of 1926 one of the main objectives of Italian foreign policy was to carry out the Badoglio Plan, but its realization would have met with serious difficulties, if an agreement would have happened between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Nevertheless on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1926 Dino Grandi stated the exact opposite of that before Lajos Walko Hungarian Foreign Minister, because he said that "*we would welcome a Hungarian-Yugoslavian rapprochement just as much today as half a year ago*". In Walko's opinion with the cessation of the financial supervision over Hungary, the question of active foreign policy could come to the front, which Grandi supported so much during his last discussion with Bethlen. The Italian Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs offered the signing of a Hungarian-Italian treaty of arbitration, but he distinctly emphasized that this is only his opinion, thus he did not say this in the name of his government.<sup>22</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1926 Lajos Walko had a talk with Momčilo Ninčić as well, where

<sup>18</sup> L. T. VIZI, The Hungarian Effort to Dissolve the Unity of the Little Entente in 1926, in: *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 2, 2013, pp. 140–145.

<sup>19</sup> For a summary of the reactions in Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Serbian and Austrian press see: L. T. VIZI, „Hiszem és remélem, hogy... hamarosan visszatérhet a régi barátság és megértés.” Horthy Miklós mohácsi beszéde és a szerb orientáció alternatívája a magyar külpolitikában, in: *Közép-Európai Közlemények*, 4, 2013, pp. 15–22.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> R. KEREPESZKI, Horthy Miklós mohácsi beszéde, 1926, in: P. VARGA – O. SZÁRAZ – M. TAKÁCS (eds.), *A magyar emlékezhelyek kutatásának elméleti és módszertani alapjai*, Debrecen 2013, p. 314.

<sup>22</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 19. csomó, 23. tétel, res. pol. 448. Record of the discussion between Lajos Walko and Dino Grandi. Budapest, 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1926.

they discussed further the possibilities of an agreement between the two states. The Yugoslavian Foreign Minister found it conceivable to establish an agreement of friendship, non-aggression and arbitration, in a way that it would not offend other agreements between Belgrade and other states. In any case, they agreed at the end that the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work out a draft-contract which they will forward to Belgrade. Walko added that it is absolutely necessary that they find solutions to pending questions, among others they have to negotiate about railway-connections, the egress to Adria and other matters as well.<sup>23</sup> A month later Ercole Durini di Monza Italian Minister to Budapest visited Bethlen and told him, that Mussolini would like to collaborate in the arrangement of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian agreement, and he wants to have discussions about this with the Hungarian Prime Minister at the end of October or the beginning of November. In the fascist leader's opinion, even a "à trois", a triple agreement could be signed between Hungary, Yugoslavia and Italy.<sup>24</sup> After the discussions Walko asked Albert Nemes Hungarian Minister to Rome, to try and ascertain the Italian's plan. Mussolini told Nemes that he is not against the Hungarian-Yugoslavian agreement, as an economical contract. The fascist leader added that he wants to establish a far-reaching political agreement with the Hungarian government, which in his opinion, would have greater advantages for Hungary, than an agreement with Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup>

There were two courses before the Bethlen government. On one hand, it could continue with the so called Central-European road and could strengthen the Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations. On the other however by the summer of 1926 the financial supervision over the country ceased, and was only a matter of time before the military supervision ends as well. After this active foreign politics became possible for Hungary, and one of its primary goals was the revision, and they wanted to achieve it with Great Power support.<sup>26</sup> After Mus-

<sup>23</sup> HORNYÁK, p. 232.

<sup>24</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 19. csomó, 23. tétel, res. pol. 499. Record of the discussion between Durini and Bethlen. Budapest, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1926.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, res. pol. 515, telegram 81. Report of Albert Nemes. Budapest, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1926.

<sup>26</sup> M. ORMOS, Bethlen koncepciója az olasz-magyar szövetségről (1927–1931), in: *Történelmi Szemle*, 1–2, 1971, pp. 135–137.



solini's proposition István Bethlen decided on the Italian alternative and the negotiations for the Hungarian-Italian treaty began.

### Preparations of the Hungarian-Italian Treaty

The Italian government still showed interest in the current state of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations, but they usually only got hazy answers to their questions about it. The Italian Minister to Budapest tried several times to acquire information from prominent figures of Hungarian foreign policy. On 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1927 in his conversation with György Barcza, who was the leader of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Durini made inquiries whether it is true that Belgrade urged the signing of an arbitration agreement lately. Barcza replied only that he is not aware of anything like this. Durini was also interested in whether the Hungarian-Yugoslavian relations were as cordial as it was a few months ago. Per Barcza there is no change between the two countries, moreover they want to settle any pending questions they have.<sup>27</sup> Durini's first question was eventually answered by István Bethlen, who refuted the news, that Yugoslavia suggested the signing of an arbitration agreement in the last few days. The Hungarian Prime Minister believed that this fake news was based on Yugoslavian sources, and according to him with this they wanted to fly a "ballon d'essai", an experimental balloon in the air.<sup>28</sup> The Italian Minister to Budapest inquired about the current situation of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations in his conversation with Sándor Khuen-Héderváry, who was the permanent Deputy of Foreign Minister, but as an answer he got that "*parallel conversations are happening here and there too, sometimes we make a move there and the Yugoslavians act the same way*".<sup>29</sup> In the light of the previous cases it is clear to see that Durini could not acquire confidential information from the representatives of Hungarian foreign policy. Because of this the Hun-

<sup>27</sup> Daily report from the conversation between Barcza and Durini. Budapest, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1927. In: E. KARSAI (ed.), *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945*, Vol. IV, Budapest 1967, pp. 10–11.

<sup>28</sup> Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASDMAE), Affari Politici (hereafter AP) 1919–1930, Ungheria, busta (hereafter b.) 1755, fascicolo (hereafter f.) 8137, n. 142. The report of Durini. Budapest, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1927.

<sup>29</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol. 75. Recording of the conversation between Khuen-Héderváry and Durini on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1927. Budapest, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

garian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was prepared, that the Italians will put a lot of questions to András Hory, the new Hungarian Minister to Rome about the negotiations with Yugoslavia. This could be expected because Hory was the leader of the Hungarian Legation in Belgrade, and after the Walko-Ninčić discussions in September 1926, he was sent to the capital of Yugoslavia for two months to see through the following arrangements that had to be made. After Hory was appointed as the new Minister to Rome, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave specific directions to him about the Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations. Hory had to say in Italy, that Hungary and Yugoslavia are still working on building good-neighbourly relations which is by the way something that the Italians encouraged them to do, they should just think about the last Grandi-Walko discussions in Genf. The two countries plan to make an arbitration agreement between them which would not include any clauses about friendship or alliance. Should they inquire whether the Hungarian government made any memorandum for Belgrade, then he should answer that records were only made of ongoing cases. If Mussolini were to ask to see the documents wording, then in accordance with the instructions, he should avoid complying with the request.<sup>30</sup> It is worthy of note that in February 1927 Alessandro Bodrero, the Italian Minister to Belgrade, acquired a complete copy of the memorandum and forwarded it to his government.<sup>31</sup>

From the middle of January 1927, it was no secret before anyone that Bethlen and Mussolini will meet in a very short time. The Italian government wanted to know as soon as possible, when the Hungarian Prime Minister plans to make his journey to Rome. Bethlen did not give a specific answer for a considerable amount of time. The primary reason behind this stalling was, that the Hungarian government wanted to be clear on the real intentions of Italian foreign policy, and for this reason on one hand they wanted to find out the Italian's plan from Durini and on the other they wanted to get information through the Hungarian Minister to Rome.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Record of the verbal instructions given to Hory. KARSAL, pp. 18–19.

<sup>31</sup> ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 462. Report of Alessandro Bodrero. Belgrade, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

<sup>32</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol 75. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs information material to Hory. Budapest, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

In the first place both states were eager to know what kind of treaty the other wants to sign and in what form do they want to carry it out. In the middle of January 1927 István Bethlen expressed before the Italian Minister to Budapest, that during his journey to Rome, he wishes to get to an agreement of political nature with Italy and after that the two Ministry of Foreign Affairs' competent people would continue the negotiations.<sup>33</sup> Mussolini granted this form of consensus proposed by the Hungarian Prime Minister, in his opinion there is nothing to prevent them from signing a clean and simple conciliation and arbitration agreement, although he does not see an urgent need for this, as there are no concrete debated questions between the two countries. The fascist leader's point of view was that it would more useful for Hungary, if they signed a treaty of friendship, to which they would add a conciliation agreement, an arbitration agreement and also an agreement of mutual obligation of consultation as well. With this step the Hungarian state could break through the Little Entente's circle and it was also not negligible, that they would enjoy the benefits of a Great Powers' political and moral support. According to Mussolini, it would be more favourable, if the Bethlen government made the first steps concerning the form of the agreement, because this way Italy could not be accused of trying to pressure Hungary.<sup>34</sup> On 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1927 at the time of András Hory's introductory visit, the fascist leader suggested that the two countries' governments should start the negotiations of the agreement, and in his opinion it would be enough, if Bethlen arrived only by the end of the negotiations in Rome.<sup>35</sup> Eventually they started working out the agreement in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1927 Khuen-Héderváry talked about his concerns regarding this matter to Durini. The Hungarian permanent Deputy of Foreign Minister said that in responsible quarters the question is being dealt with, but in his opinion there is little chance of creating a draft in advance, this could probably happen only after the discussions in Rome. Durini however still insisted that a draft should

<sup>33</sup> ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 199. The report of Durini. Budapest, 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1927.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, n. 138/24. Benito Mussolini's letter to the Italian Legation in Budapest. Rome, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1927.

<sup>35</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol 69. Hory's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rome, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

be made in advance and Khuen-Héderváry confirmed again, that fulfilling this will run into serious difficulties.<sup>36</sup> On the same day the Italian Minister to Budapest presented his thoughts to György Barcza as well, and discussed in great detail and length, how much Italy stood by Hungary in the case of calling back the Commission of Military Control. Barcza felt Durini's disquisition almost excessive, and in his opinion the Italian Minister emphasized the support of his country this much, so that later they could present the bill to Hungary for the gratitude that is due to them. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote a detailed report to Hory of the discussions with Durini. Based on the Italian Minister's expressions they drew the conclusion that Italy does not wish to establish a treaty which would mean strong political constraints, although they were not entirely convinced that Durini was well-informed. For this reason, they instructed Hory, to present himself before the Italians, as if he knew very little of the planned treaty and inquire about what Durini said to his government. Exclusively for informing Hory the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote down its ideas about the form of the planned Hungarian-Italian treaty. First, they thought about signing an arbitration agreement which would get a cordial introduction and it should be free of any political obligations. Should this be insufficient to the Italian Government, then in addition to this they could express through a secret exchange of notes that a friendly relationship exists between the two countries and they would exchange views with each other in questions concerning them. They emphasized distinctly that this note could not include any obligations regarding alliance, neutrality, guarantee or non-aggression.<sup>37</sup> At the end of February 1927 Hory and Grandi discussed in great length the situation between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Grandi took offence at the fact, that they still don't get adequate information from the state of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations and expressed that in Italy it would have unpleasant reverberations, if they would establish any agreement that would do more than

<sup>36</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol 75. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs information material to András Hory. In appendix they attached the two records that contained the discussions between Durini and the two Hungarian foreign political persons, Khuen-Héderváry and György Barcza. Budapest, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

settle technical questions. Hory answered the question in accordance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' instructions mentioned, and his words put Grandi off. The Italian Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs explained his declaration in Geneva with being in a serious dilemma at that time since "he could hardly talk us [Hungarians] out of having discussions with Yugoslavia, who is in a friendly relation with us. Otherwise, – he added – at that time only the signing of a Hungarian-Yugoslavian arbitration agreement was in question". After this Grandi made it clear, that "reality is different today", then what it was in the time of the Italian-Yugoslavian agreement which signed in 1924. Based on this conversation Hory believed that the Italians wanted to know in any case, what the Hungarian government expects from Bethlen's journey to Rome, to set the price of friendship per that.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear to see that both countries took steps to get to know the other side's intentions thoroughly. At the beginning of March, 1927 István Bethlen told Durini that he wishes to sign an arbitration agreement with Italy, which would include a clause that would highlight the friendship between the two states. The Hungarian Prime Minister asked if this conception would be suitable, for what the Italian Minister to Budapest replied only, that he would inquire at his government.<sup>39</sup> Thus the Italians still did not give a precise answer to the exact form of the planned treaty. The Hungarian government however still wanted to make Mussolini show his hand. Lazar Marković Yugoslavian diplomat visited to Budapest in the beginning of March, 1927 and the Hungarian press continuously informed about his presence. The Italians interest was aroused with this indeed, Durini asked directly from Khuen-Héderváry, if Marković's visit had any political purpose. The Hungarian permanent Deputy of Foreign Minister reassured the Italian Minister to Budapest, because according to him Marković was only in Budapest because of his economic interests. Khuen-Héderváry added confidentially that the relation between Marković and the new Yugoslavian Foreign Minister, Ninko Perić is very bad, they have not talked to each other in nearly five years, therefore the Yugoslavian diplomat could not have had any political missions. Con-

<sup>38</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol 87. Hory's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rome, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, res. pol 87ad., 26. számjeltávirat. The report of Khuen-Héderváry to András Hory. Budapest, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

tinuing the conversation Khuen-Héderváry asked Durini what kind of reply did he get from his government regarding the planned agreement. The Italian Minister to Budapest replied that they thought about the same kind of treaty in Rome, like the one Bethlen talked about, but they want to insert another paragraph which would contain that the two countries would consult with each other in certain cases.<sup>40</sup> The Hungarian permanent Deputy of Foreign Minister thought that there is nothing to prevent the assurance of the mutual consultational obligation by exchange of letters, but he added, that in this question Bethlen's opinion would count in the first place.<sup>41</sup> With this conversation the Italian's intentions became clear as well and the Hungarian side could set its mind at ease, that Mussolini does not plan to sign a treaty involving political constrictions with Hungary. In addition to all this, the exact date of Bethlen's journey started to take shape, the Hungarian Prime Minister intended to go to Rome around 2<sup>nd</sup> April, where he wanted to conduct discussions with Mussolini about the Central-European situation, the Anschluss, the Slavic danger and the Habsburg-restoration.<sup>42</sup> The Italian government wanted to see the draft-contract now. The leader of the Political Department of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Raffaele Guariglia told András Hory, that the document which will be sent through Durini to Rome, will be the foundation of the two Prime Ministers' discussions. Guariglia pointed out, that during the examination of the draft, they will pay attention, that it would not conflict with the Italian-Czechoslovak agreement signed in July 1924 and the Italian-Yugoslavian agreement signed in January 1924. He added that the two state's governments had to be informed a few days before signing the Hungarian-Italian agreement in order to avoid unnecessary excitement.<sup>43</sup> The Italians informed the third member of Little Entente, Romania who was in alliance with Italy, about the upcoming agreement. Mussolini ordered the Italian Minister to Bucharest, Carlo Durazzo, to inform Romanian Prime Minister Alexandre Avarescu personally, that during Bethlen's

<sup>40</sup> HORNYÁK, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 696. The report of Durini. Budapest, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1927.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 1320. The report of Durini. Budapest 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1927.

<sup>43</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol. 110, 37. számjeltávirat. The report of Hory. Rome, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1927.

journey to Rome they will arrange a Hungarian-Italian treaty. The Italian leader summed up the contents of this agreement, then asked the Romanian government, to look at this treaty as another step from Italy towards consolidating order and peace. In his opinion this agreement will make Hungarian-Romanian approaches easier, which was always desired by the Italian government.<sup>44</sup>

Beside the discussions about the Hungarian-Italian treaty, they also worked on strengthening the cultural connections between the two countries, and because of that on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1927 Kunó Klebelsberg<sup>45</sup> Minister of Religion and Education went to Italy. Aside from fulfilling official goals, this visit served to get a good grip of the situation, before the Hungarian Prime Ministers' journey to Rome. Klebelsberg was accompanied by Bethlen's good friend, the director of the Hungarian News Agency, Miklós Kozma, who made numerous records of his impressions he got during his Italian journey. Kozma felt that the Italians overstated the importance of the visit too much and he believed this was not done without some ulterior motives. In his point of view this exaggeration was meant on one hand for Yugoslavia and on the other however for the Hungarian Prime Minister, whom they wanted to be able to in force his will less during his journey to Rome.<sup>46</sup> The Italians started preparing for the reception of Klebelsberg months before, because the Minister visited Naples, Florence, Bologna and Milan as well besides Rome and stayed in Italy up to 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1927. Most assuredly they wanted to dazzle the minister with the enormous interest of the press, the big crowds, the pompous banquets and other programmes, the reason for this among other things, was that they knew very well, what a significant role he had in Hungarian culture and politics. This conclusion can be drawn from the diplomatic report of Pasquale Diana, First Secretary of the Italian Legation in Budapest, who wrote in the autumn of 1926 before the parliamentary election the following about the minister: "*Count Klebelsberg is one of the most outstanding members of the current Hungarian government, he has numerous followers in the country and is the most noteworthy candidate of Bethlen's*

<sup>44</sup> ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 558/133. Mussolini's letter to the Italian Legation in Bucharest. Rome, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1927.

<sup>45</sup> About Klebelsberg Kunó's life and cultural policy see for details: G. UJVÁRY, *Egy európai formátomú államférfi Klebelsberg Kuno (1875–1932)*, Pécs – Budapest 2014.

<sup>46</sup> M. ORMOS, *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós*, Vol. I, Budapest 2000, p. 145.

*successor, if he nominates himself in the near future.*"<sup>47</sup> To sum it up with Klebelsberg's journey both sides had political interests as well behind the noble cultural goals.

During Klebelsberg's journey to Italy on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1927, the Hungarian government handed Durini the 22 paragraph long draft of the Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration and they attached to this the draft for the exchange of letters about mutual consultational obligation.<sup>48</sup> Mussolini inspected the documents and found that they will suffice for the goals, but he reserves the right, that they will only talk with Bethlen about some changes regarding matters of form during their meeting in Rome. Moreover, he thought the idea worth considering that the text should be divided into two records, practically to give prominence with one to the most important leading principles of the friendship and conciliation treaty and to insure the details of the arbitration process with the other. In the end, Mussolini announced that the following four documents would be signed in Rome: a treaty of friendship, conciliation and arbitration, a protocol of the arbitration, a protocol, or an exchange of letters about Fiume, and a secret exchange of letters about the mutual obligation of consultation.<sup>49</sup> The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs rewrote the treaty in accordance with the Italian request and on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1927 István Bethlen and his retinue set off to Rome.

### **The Meeting of Bethlen and Mussolini**

The two Prime Ministers met with each other on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1927 at noon at the Palazzo Chigi. During the discussion Bethlen described Hungary's foreign affairs situation, in which Bethlen told, that with the cessation of the financial and military supervision, the roads of active foreign politics opened before the country. Concerning Central-Europe he remarked, that France plays the main role in the region right now, but in his opinion in the future Germany and Russia will pick up the baton. Bethlen also believed, that there is a possibility, that a Slavic

<sup>47</sup> ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1754, f. 8121, n. 3081/699. The report of Pasquale Diana. Budapest, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1926.

<sup>48</sup> Durini sent both French-written drafts to the Italian government. ASDMAE, AP 1919–1930, Ungheria, b. 1754, f. 8121, n. 743 and n. 746. Budapest, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1927.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, b. 1755, f. 8137, n. 559/113. Benito Mussolini's letter to the Italian Legation in Budapest. Rome, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1927.



preponderance may develop in the Danube-basin, which would be dangerous for both Italy and Hungary, therefore it is both states' common interest to break up the Little Entente's unity. Mussolini accepted this conception and made it clear, that he would not like, if anything more significant than an arbitration treaty would be established between Hungary and Yugoslavia. The Italian leader would have urged the Hungarian-Romanian advances, but Bethlen told him, that there is no possibility of that, until Romania makes changes in its politics concerning minorities. The Italian-Yugoslavian relations came up as well, about which Mussolini said, that "*Italy and Yugoslavia will either be friends or enemies, but they cannot stay neutral*".<sup>50</sup> After foreign politics they switched over to the question of Fiume. Bethlen told, that originally, they wanted to make use of an entire basin, but since the current Hungarian goods traffic could not fully utilize it, they gave up the idea. For that very reason he asked Mussolini to promise to relinquish even a full basin through negotiations to Hungary, should the volume of Hungarian goods traffic increase later. The Italian leader accepted Bethlen's request.<sup>51</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1927, Khuen-Héderváry conducted discussions with Grandi and Guariglia, where the two Italian politicians told him, that they agree with the wording of the secret exchange of letters, but they want to change out a half sentence, which was eventually accepted by the Hungarian Deputy of Foreign Minister. On 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1927 Bethlen and Mussolini signed the Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration. As per the earlier discussions the treaty consisted of two parts: in the first they put on record the text of the friendship, conciliation and arbitration agreement in five points, and in the second part the protocol. The first point of the first part declared, that a constant and unending friendship will be among the two states. In the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> points they put on record, that in the following period they will use arbitration process to settle any disputes that may arise between them, and that it can only come into question in legal disputes. In the 5<sup>th</sup> point they made a promise, to exchange the documents of approval regarding the treaty as soon as possible in Rome, and following that the agree-

<sup>50</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol. 171. Recording of the discussion between Bethlen and Mussolini. Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1927.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem. Recording of the discussion between Bethlen and Mussolini in the topic of the harbor in Fiume. Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1927.

ment will remain in force for ten years “and so on”.<sup>52</sup> Alongside the protocols about the proceedings and Fiume, they also signed the secret exchange of letters. In this it was stated, that the two country’s political interests are the same on several points and since they wish to be in close friendship, therefore they undertake to give diplomatic and political support to each other in questions concerning them, and for all this they accept the mutual obligatory consultation.<sup>53</sup>

The two Prime Minister discussed the Habsburg-restoration as well on 5<sup>th</sup> April. Bethlen told that the solution for questions about the Hungarian throne is not timely right now, the question has not matured enough neither in terms of internal politics or foreign politics. As I mentioned before, earlier there were news in the press, that as a solution for the Habsurg-restoration Habsburg Albert is meant to be married with the daughter of either the Italian or the Romanian king. This statement was expressly refuted back then. During the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> April however Bethlen brought the question up: “For the purpose to see how Mussolini reacts to it, I mentioned that it would be time for Albrecht [Albert Habsburg] to marry, but Mussolini did not give the slightest reaction to it.”<sup>54</sup> The negotiations continued 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1927. This was the time when Bethlen brought up Hungary’s necessary armament, as he had knowledge of the fact, that the Hungarian-Italian weapons from World War I were still in Italy, and asked Mussolini to transport them back in secret. The Italian leader not only supported the Hungarian minister’s request, but also took it upon himself, that the weapons would be repaired in Italy and after will be sent on their way to Hungary.<sup>55</sup>

### Closing Remarks

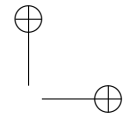
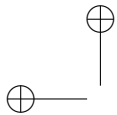
In my paper, I wrote about the antecedents of the Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration. The Hungarian

<sup>52</sup> D. HALMOSY (ed.), *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918–1945*, Budapest 1983, pp. 267–268.

<sup>53</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol. 171. The wording of the letter of exchange about the mutual obligatory consultation in French. Rome, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1927.

<sup>54</sup> Bethlen’s records about his discussion with Mussolini. Rome, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1927. KAR-SAI, pp. 58–59.

<sup>55</sup> MNL OL, K 64, 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 144. alszám, res. pol. 166. Record of the discussion between Bethlen and Mussolini about the topic of Hungary’s armament. Rome, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1927.



and Italian archival sources complemented each other excellently, with their help we could map some less or completely unknown momentums.

It may not be an overstatement to say, that in the period of the treaty's preparation both sides could be described with mutual distrust. The conversations imply this, that occurred between the Hungarian and Italian representatives. Italy wanted to get to know more thoroughly the actual state of the negotiations between Hungary and Yugoslavia, but the Hungarian side tried to give as vague answers to questions regarding this as possible. And the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted to know as soon as possible what kind of treaty the Italian side wants to sign with Hungary, but they did not get an exact answer until March, 1927. It was important for the Bethlen government, that Mussolini would not want to make final a strict treaty that would come with political restrictions, since now they did not want to fully commit themselves to Italian policy.

Although the discussions between Hungary and Italy were not entirely without hitches, the signing of this Treaty was important for both countries. By signing the Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration, Hungary could step on the road of active foreign politics and Italy could acquire a stable ally in the Danube-basin region.

