

László GULYÁS

A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája:

1. Az első évek 1919-1924

2. A húszas évek második fele 1924-1931

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László Gulyás – professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary – gives a new insight into the foreign affairs of the Horthy regime in five volumes. He writes about the necessity of his work in the preface of the first volume: the last comprehensive book on this subject was published by Gyula Juhász (Juhász, Gyula: "Magyarország külpolitikája 1919-1945", Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1969: first edition, 1988: third edition). The work of Juhász, due to the fact that the last edition came out twenty six years ago, can be regarded out-dated by now (not to mention its ideological ground). Gulyás's new work is published in the series "Fiat iustitia", in which the publisher Attraktor brings out revisionist books about the history of the Horthy regime.

Based on the first two volumes it is presumable that the following three will be similar in terms of structure and length. The main text is around 150 pages in each volume, but it does not mean that this work is superficial or hastily prepared. It is worth having a look at the notes and the exhaustive bibliography. As a consequence of the plain style the main text can be easily followed; and also, the structure is always consistent in the chronological-thematic order. Sometimes the main text seems to be even too detailed. One example: the author criticizes Balázs Ablonczy (p. 20), who analysed the Speech of Albert Apponyi during the Peace Conference in 1920 very thoroughly in his book (Ablonczy, Balázs: "Trianon legendák", Jaffa Kiadó, 2010). Gulyás notes that Ablonczy's work is too concerned with unimportant details – but a little bit later the author makes the same mistake: when analysing the first attempt of Charles IV to reclaim the Hungarian Crown, Gulyás writes even about the camouflage of the former king.

The first chapter of the first book is about the very fluid years of 1919-20. We have to agree with the author: these years were fateful about the future of Central Europe, even if the Peace Congress near Paris was in progress. László Gulyás underlines the weight of the Speech of Count Apponyi, because historians in Hungary wrote about it as a meaningless event during the Peace Congress. This Speech made direct impact indeed, but didn't change the outcome: Hungary signed the Peace Treaty of Trianon on 4th of June 1920, what was constructed without Hungary, as the author pointed to that fact.

Then the first volume analyses the alternatives of the Hungarian diplomacy to find a possible escape from the isolation. First, the French alternative is presented: it was unsuccessful, due

to the attitude of both sides: the French side wanted economical preferences in Hungary, while they gave to the Hungarian diplomats only oblique words about the revision of their peace treaty. The Hungarian side sternly stand for the full territorial revision – which was a great drawback during the later diplomatic meetings, when Hungary wanted to find a solution to escape from the isolation. There is also a discussion about the English and the Italian alternatives after the Treaty of Trianon, when the two victorious side reacted positive to the Hungarian attempt, but both of them were unsuccessful. The author also took a look to the global political questions (for example: the Polish-Soviet war), what could form even the European and the Hungarian diplomacy as well.

Hungary also had diplomatic meetings with the neighbour states, but the relation between them were very bad and the Hungarian diplomacy counted with them as a possible solution to break off from the isolation. Only after the Treaty of Trianon Hungary had meetings with Romania and also with Czechoslovakia, which was the main enemy of Hungary, and as the author showed this viewpoint, it was mutual. The meetings were unsuccessful, because at that time Hungary wanted to ease the situation of its minority and the neighbour states had fear from the Hungarian revisionism – which was also the long-term goal of the Hungarian diplomacy by the way. These disadvantages meant that the agreements with the neighbour states were unreal. Gulyás also analyses particularly the work of Edvard Beneš, as the founder of the Little Entente. The Czechoslovakian minister is an often recurring character in these books (not like his Yugoslavian or Romanian counterparts) – the author previously wrote a book about Beneš (Gulyás, László: “Edvard Beneš, Közép-Európa koncepciók és a valóság”, Attraktor, 2008).

Beneš appears in the next chapter too, where the author presents two “not wanted alternatives.” Both had connection with the failed Hungarian regimes of 1918-19. The first alternative was organized by Count Mihály Károlyi, who was just a card in Edvard Beneš’s hands: when the Polish-Soviet war was in progress, Károlyi was a worthy figure, but after the end of this war, his political value decreased rapidly, he became persona non grata in Czechoslovakia, so he had to leave this state. The second alternative was made by the Serbs, who wanted to cede Baranya to Yugoslavia, because this area was rich in coal, but the Peace Conference ceded this territory to Hungary. The Serbs made a puppet state, which was led by a group of failed politicians (for example: Béla Lindner, the pacifist secretary of war in the Károlyi government). The main goal with this state was fighting for a referendum about the annexation to Yugoslavia, but due to the pressure of the Great Powers, the Serbs withdrew from the area, and it returned back to Hungary during the August of 1921.

In the fifth chapter Gulyás represents the attempts of Charles IV to reclaim the Hungarian throne in 1921. These two attempts made great turmoil in the domestic affairs in Hungary and also the Little Entente reacted belligerently: they had fear about the rebirth of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. But Charles IV failed in both cases, and – due to the pressure of the Little Entente, especially the pressure of Beneš – Hungary dethroned the whole Habsburg family.

Hungary also earned a little diplomatic success in 1921, when the Great Powers decided to hold a referendum about the territory around Sopron, what was originally ceded to Austria. The people of this territory decided to stay in Hungary. This borderland was important even

in the last few years of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when the Pan German politicians wanted to cede this territory to Austria. During the First World War Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk wanted to establish a corridor here between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to isolate Hungary from the German states. At the Peace Conference this Corridor was played down, but a new solution emerged about this territory: the annexation by Austria. But some of the locals and Hungarian paramilitary troops were not allow the Austrian authorities to capture this land (which is now called Burgenland). The Hungarian government supported them only unspoken, but the diplomatic relations between Austria and Hungary had a bad attitude for a couple of years after this incident.

The last two chapters hang together. The first successful step of escaping from the isolation was the membership of the League of Nations. The Hungarian candidacy was favoured by Great Britain, but due to the events in 1921 (Charles IV attempts) the meetings about the membership were postponed. One year later only the Little Entente tried to obstruct this candidacy, but finally they also voted in favour of Hungary. With this, Hungary earned the protection of the member states and also the Little Entente couldn't threat Hungary with a military intervention in the future, because the members were not allowed to attack each other. Also Hungary could reveal the problems of the Hungarian minority in the neighbour states on an international assembly. On monetary front, Hungary now could ask for a loan from the League of Nations. This was also successful, but only partially, because – as the author says – the Little Entente put their terms into the loan agreement as consideration.

In the first half of the second volume the author wrote about the Hungarian diplomatic alternatives of the second part of the twenties again. First, the book discusses about the Soviet alternative, which was probably possible, because both states were isolated, and both wanted to overwrite the peace treaties: but the Horthy regime was anti-communist and the Soviet government despised the Hungarian, because they were anti-revolutionary. The Kemalist Turkish diplomacy – which had friendly relation with the Soviet Union, often tried to make a compromise between the two antagonist sides. They failed every time, and this mediation also complicated the fair Hungarian-Turkish diplomatic relations.

In the next chapter Gulyás analyses the French Franc forging scandal in 1925. By the views of the author it wasn't only a dark comedy, as other historians suggested, but a failed attempt to get money for support a secret revisionist movement. Gulyás presents this scandal very particularly, what is quite understandable. These events also caused instability in the domestic politics of Hungary, but – as the author points to this fact – the scandal frosted the French-Hungarian relations for a couple of years.

The search for alternatives still continued after 1925: around this year it was possible to make an agreement with Yugoslavia. Hungary wanted to crush the Little Entente by bilateral agreements with its members, but the alliance wanted a common agreement with Hungary, which was unacceptable for the Bethlen government. In the Yugoslavian attempt, Hungary wanted to access a seaport, and also wanted to solve the problem of the Hungarian minority. Due to the latter, this agreement failed. Just after these meetings, the Hungarian diplomacy turned again to Italy, which had a new, revisionist regime too. The Mussolini regime wanted also economical positions in the Danube Basin, and they also offered access to the port of Fiume. Hungary seemed to be a good diplomatic partner from Rome and it meant that Hungary finally found a influential state, which could support

the Hungarian plans about the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, and also could help against the threat of the Little Entente. This also meant that Hungary finally broke out from the diplomatic isolation in the second half of the twenties. In the fourth chapter the author analyses the diplomatic thought of István Bethlen. His thought was based on the full, territorial revision, with autonomy for the national minorities. Gulyás is sceptical about this idea: because it is a little bit belated and in the twenties for the Slovakian and for the Croatian leaders this conception wasn't a real alternative.

In the later chapters, the author analyses the relations between Hungary and other states. A part of them were possible partner for Italy too. For example: Italy wanted a Hungarian-Romanian agreement, but it wasn't possible due to minority problems. Hungary and Italy also wanted to attach Austria to their block, but it was only possible in the thirties. Hungary also desired to establish good relations with Germany, but the Stresemann-era wanted to fulfil the asserts of the Treaty of Versailles, so they didn't support the Hungarian revisionism at that time. Poland, a possible partner (Poland also stood against the Little Entente) during this decade, wasn't open to establish strong diplomatic bonds with Hungary. Italy wanted to make a Balkan block under their wings and Hungary also searched diplomatic partners on the peninsula: the meetings (with Bulgaria, Turkey) were friendly but unsuccessful.

László Gulyás mentions also the Lord Rothermere case, which raised the dust around the Hungarian peace treaty. The author rehearses some popular reason about the writing of the (in)famous article: "Hungary's Place in the Sun." According to the opinion of the author this article was written because the womanizing habit of the British Peer. This article was a private thought about the situation of Hungary, and urge and ethnic revision of the Treaty of Trianon. In Hungary this article made a great impact, even the Prime Minister was joyful about it, but – as we know from this book – he supported the territorial revision, and when he met with the British diplomats, he showed neutral attitude about the article. The article also made great impression in Czechoslovakia: Beneš fiercely fought against this article, and due to his pressure the British government declared that the article not shows the opinion of the British diplomacy.

In the last chapter the author analyses the effect of the Great Depression, which made great mess on political field too. Count Bethlen during his English tour in 1929 could get loans from the banks of London, to stabilize the monetary situation of Hungary. In these years, the diplomatically active Prime Minister wanted to solve this problem on the first place, the revision was just a secondary thing. Gulyás also mentions some ideas about the economic recovery, which failed: even Beneš wanted to make a customs union between Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary – the author agrees that it would be an operable project, but the Hungarian politicians were sceptic about the true meaning of the tender of Beneš. Hungary after all went into deep economic depression: István Bethlen resigned, and it was the end of his "active diplomacy," which was partly successful, because Hungary escaped from the isolation, but the revision of the Treaty of Trianon wasn't managed under his Prime ministership.

On the whole, we can say, that these two volumes are parts of a grandiose series, wherewith the author has clean target (he laid down it in the forewords). But the first two books also have a lack in the content: the work of László Gulyás depicts with readable language the

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diplomacy of the Horthy regime, but there isn't any word about the institutional foreground. We think that in the next volumes will be a chapter about the structure of Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and about the diplomatic missions.

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