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Slovak-Hungarian relations in the mirror of the German-Soviet conflictive alliance (1939-1941).

Abstract: This article focuses on Slovak-Hungarian relations in the context of the Soviet-German framed antagonism (1939-1941). It tends to show that Slovakia and Hungary tried to rely on those two powers in order to achieve their revisionist aims. Reversely, they were exploited by Berlin or Moscow in their diplomatic chessboards until the Soviet-German war, which was underway by 1941. Between September 1939 and June 1941, Bratislava raised a few times territorial demands to Hungary. Those revisionist attempts were sometimes backed by Berlin, especially when, willing to recover Transylvania, Budapest tried to benefit from Soviet territorial ambitions in Romania. However, after the Second Vienna Award (30 August 1940), Germany exerted pressure on Slovakia so that she would abandon her revisionist ideas.

Key words: Slovak-Hungarian relations, Soviet-German relations, P. Teleki, I. Csáky, J. Esterházy, J. Tiso, F. Ďurčanský, V. Tuka, Southern Slovakia, pact Molotov-Ribbentrop, Vienna Award, 23 August 1939, 30 August 1940, 22 June 1941, border disputes, revisionism, national minorities.

The relations between small states are often influenced by great powers, especially during wartime. This article shows the dependance of Hungarian-Slovak relations on the mutual struggle for dominance in Central Europe and on the Balkans between Berlin and Moscow in 1939-1941. The Romanian partition in summer 1940 by neighbouring countries is here considered as a key-factor of strategic changes in Central Europe. Also, this study tries to restore the main features of the Bratislava-Budapest dialogue. This research is partly based on the analysis of uninvestigated documents (until now) from the Slovak National Archives and the National Archives of Hungary¹.

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Studies of Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová, István Janek and Valentina V. Maryina² have initiated historical researches about Slovak-Hungarian relations in the context of the 1939-1941 Soviet-German collaboration. Edition works of the last years also bring a lot of new information, for instance, the interesting collection of documents was prepared by Milan Krajčovič.³

Slovak-Hungarian relations on the eve of the Second World War (March – August 1939). The political climate between Bratislava and Budapest in the first half of 1939 was strongly influenced by mutual territorial claims. Hungary was divided between supporters of the “historical” borders’ renovation (as they were before 1918-1920) and protagonists of unity only with Magyars, who inhabited neighbouring regions of Hungary (Transylvania in Romania, Vojvodina in Yugoslavia, Southern Slovakia and Southern Carpathian Ruthenia in Czechoslovakia). Thereby, the Interwar Hungarian revisionism threatened either of all Slovakia or the integrity of its southern regions.

During 1938, the multiethnic Czechoslovakia was shaken by a strong internal and international crisis. As a result, Prague was forced to declare the separation right of the German, Polish and Hungarian minorities and to agree on an autonomous status for Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The First Vienna Award (2 November 1938) prescribed Czechoslovakia to secede a 12 400 square kilometer territory inhabited mainly by Magyars to Hungary. However, a numerous Slovak population also lived there (according to the 1930 census, around 290 thousand).⁴ It led to the constitution of a close to half of million Slovak minority in Hungary during the Second World War.⁵

The First Vienna Award satisfied Budapest revisionist appetites only partly, and initiated Bratislava’s intention to recover before 1938 borders or to bring back ethnical Slovak lands. At the same time, between 60 and 100 thousands of Magyars remained in Slovakia – mainly in the Nitra region and in Bratislava. Often Slovak and Hungarian state administrations were dealing with internal minority issues with an eye to facilitate

² Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Tradicia a dejiny. Vybrané otázky zo slovensko-maďarských a slovensko-ruských vzťahov (1934-1949)*, Bratislava 2009; JANEK István. *A szovjet diplomácia és a szlovák-magyar viszony alakulása 1939-1940 között*. In: *Fórum tarsadalomtudományi szemle. XII évfolyam, Somorja 2010, No 4*, pp. 41-60; Valentina V. MARYINA. *Slovakiya v politike SSSR i Germanii*. In: *Vostochnaya Evropa mezdu Gitlerom i Stalinym: 1939-1941*, Moskva 1999, pp. 198-240.

³ Milan KRAJČOVIČ. *Medzinárodné súvislosti slovenskej otázky 1927/1936 – 1940/1944: maďarské dokumenty v porovnaní s dokumentmi v Bonne, Bukurešti, Viedni a Prahe*, Bratislava 2008.

⁴ It is supposed that the data of the Czechoslovak censuses in 1930 regarding Slovaks were overestimated. The Hungarian historian Loránt Tilkovszky assumed that there were 116 thousand Slovaks in November 1938 on the territories given to Hungary. TILKOVSZKY Loránt. *Nemzetiségi politika Magyarországon a 20. században*, Debrecen 1998, p. 74.

⁵ Martin VIETOR. *Dejiny okupácie južného Slovenska, 1938-1945*, Bratislava 1968, p. 90.

position of Slovaks or Hungarians abroad. Thus, minorities became the reciprocal hostages of both governments. This reciprocity norm was even fixed in the Slovak constitution of 1939. The paragraph 95 stated that national minorities in Slovakia could be granted by the same rights that Slovaks could have in the keen-state of this minority.

On 14 March 1939, the Slovak parliament, scared by the German information about Hungarian willingness to immediately occupy Slovakia, declared independence from Czechoslovakia.⁶ This way, Slovaks hoped to receive guarantees of sovereignty and integrity from Berlin. Indeed, on 23 March 1939, Germany signed the “Protective Treaty” with Slovakia, which defined protective relations between Berlin and Bratislava. As a result, Berlin sent the Wehrmacht forces to occupy North-Western Slovakia and guaranteed the Slovak independence and integrity. In exchange, Bratislava agreed to pursue her foreign policy in close cooperation with Berlin.⁷ The Khust parliament, considering that Carpathian Ruthenia was geographically cut from Czech lands by Slovakia, also proclaimed the state sovereignty of the Republic of Carpatho-Ukraine. However, Hungary didn’t recognize its independence and immediately started to occupy Carpathian Ruthenia. Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the German chancellor Adolf Hitler declared the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia on 16 March 1939.

The head of the Soviet People’s Commissariat for Foreign Relations (NKID), Maxim M. Litvinov, protested against what was seen as a simulated Czechoslovak decay and against the brutal⁸ Hungarian invasion of Carpathian Ruthenia.⁹ Litvinov also decided to leave unanswered the Slovak request to recognize its independence.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is probable that Moscow accepted better a Hungarian domination over Ruthenia rather than a German one, because it would contain the growing Ukrainian nationalism between Rusyns.¹¹

The Hungarian occupation of Ruthenia led to a military conflict with Slovakia.

⁶ M. FABRISIUS, K. HRADSKÁ. Jozef Tiso. Prejavy a články. Vol. II, 1938-1944, Bratislava 1997, doc. 51, pp. 97-100.

⁷ Documents on German foreign policy. 1918-1945. Series D (1937-1945) (further DGFP. SD). Vol. VI. The last months of peace. March-August 1939, London 1956, doc. 40, p. 42-43.

⁸ The estimations of casualties between defenders of Carpatho-Ukraine are close to 2000, many of whom were shot as captives by the Hungarian army. See: Andrej PUSHKASH. Civilizaciya ili varvarstvo. Zakarpat’e. 1918-1945. Moskva 2006, p. 275.

⁹ Dokumenty vneshney politiki (further DVP). Vol. XXII. Book 1. 1 yanvarya – 31 agvusta 1939, Moskva 1992, doc. 151, pp. 202-204.

¹⁰ Ibedem, doc. 168, pp. 220-221.

¹¹ Mikhail MELTYUKHOV. Upuschennyj shans Stalina. Sovetskij Soyuz i bor’ba za Evropu: 1939-1941, Moskva 2000, p. 50; Attila KOLONTARI. Hungarian-Soviet relations. 1920-1941, New York 2010, p. 338-339.

Due to previous debates about a fair delimitation of the Slovak-Ruthenian frontier, Hungarian troops occupied the eastern Slovak lands on 23-24 March 1939. After few border clashes, Bratislava and Budapest set to the negotiating table. The German Minister to Hungary, Otto von Ermannsdorf, after an attempt to affect the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count István Csáky, to behave in a more compromising way with Slovaks, received the answer that „Where a Hungarian soldier has stepped, he will remain”.¹² The Budapest Treaty signed on 4 April 1939 fixed the secession of 1050 sq.km. of the Eastern Slovak lands to Hungary,¹³ inhabited mainly by Rusyns.

After signs of a growing mutual conflict between Germany and Poland in spring 1939, Bratislava' and Budapest's places on the European strategic map changed. Berlin had planned to use Slovak territories as a bridgehead to attack Poland. Not surprisingly that on 22 May 1939, the British ambassador to Germany, Neville Henderson, said to his Slovak colleague, Matúš Černak, that the only right policy to Bratislava was to be a neutral state. At the same time, Henderson recognized that Bratislava would not be able to really adopt an independent policy, because of its stiff location between Germany and Hungary (and due to the German preference of friendly relations with Hungary).¹⁴

Temporally, the Slovak hope to pursue a neutral policy was maintained by an extended number of states who recognized the Slovak independence. At the end of April 1939, approvals of recognition had come to Bratislava from Berlin, Roma, Budapest, Warsaw, Vatican, Madrid and Bern.¹⁵ Soon, Great Britain and France established contacts with Slovakia. Subsequently, nearly twenty more states recognized Slovakia.

However, the relations between Bratislava and Budapest remained on a freezing point and both sides showed mutual animosity. The United Hungarian party (Egyesült Magyar Part) in Slovakia, as well as the Slovak People's Party (Slovenská Ludová Strana) on Slovak territories given to Hungary were banned. The Cultural and Educational Association of Hungarians in Slovakia (SZEMKE) also was closed. At the same time, violations of rights of Slovaks in Hungary continued. Big numbers of Slovaks, mainly people settled there after 1918 were pressed to leave their houses in Hungary and to move to Slovakia.

¹² Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához, 1936-1945 (further DIMK). Vol. IV, doc. 56, pp. 140-141.

¹³ Ladislav DEÁK. Viedenská arbitráž. 2. november 1938. Dokumenty III, rokovania (3. november 1938 – 4. april 1939), Martin 2005, doc. 200, 201, pp. 383–384.

¹⁴ Slovenský národný archív, Bratislava (further SNA), f. MZV SŠ, kart. 112, Slovenské vyslanectvo v Berlíne, M. Černak report. Berlin. 23.V.1939.

¹⁵ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112, Politický referat, politická zpráva No 1/1939. Bratislava. 27.04.1939.

Both countries were afraid of mutual territorial claims: the Slovak propaganda demanded to extend the state territories towards the Hungarian cities of Esztergom and Vác.¹⁶ At the same time, Bratislava was concerned about the concentration of Hungarian troops on the Slovak borders¹⁷ and by the launching of a Rusyn petition in Eastern Slovakia aimed at uniting with Hungary.¹⁸

In Bratislava, a threat grew up: a maturing pan-European war could bring a possible German defeat, what could take away Slovakia's protection. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that an ahead-of-schedule burning of bridges with Hungary (and Poland) should be stopped.¹⁹ On 6 July 1939, the Slovak Prime Minister Jozef Tiso met Count János Esterházy, the recognized political leader of the Hungarian community in Slovakia, who often played a mediator role between Bratislava and Budapest. Tiso emphasized the importance of normalization of relations and trade between Slovakia and Hungary. According to Tiso, finding a solution to the economic problems of Slovakia was a "matter of life and death".²⁰ The same day, the Slovak Minister to Italy, Jozef Zvrškovec, indicated to the Hungarian Minister Frigyes Villányi that Slovakia and Hungary should make a political rapprochement against Germany. Zvrškovec emphasized that Germans played a double game and set both nations against each other.²¹

Probably, the parallel Slovak revisionist propaganda had strongly impacted the Hungarian side because Budapest didn't react to Tiso's and Zvrškovec's proposals. Moreover, Esterházy delivered the ultimatum to the Hungarian government that he would resign from his position of "Hungarian leader in Slovakia" in case Budapest started economic negotiations with Bratislava.²² On 20 July 1939, the permanent deputy of the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs, János Vörösmarty, told the Slovak Minister to Hungary, Jan Spišiak, that trade negotiations would not start until a satisfactory atmosphere has established between the two states.²³

¹⁶ Milan KRAJČOVIČ, doc. 232, pp. 343–344; Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest (further MOL), f. KÜM, K-63, 457 cs., 1939/65. Számjeltávirat a pozsonyi magyar konzulátustól. Bratislava. No 95. 17.VII.1939.

¹⁷ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112, Ministerstvo národnej obrany. Prehľad No 52304. dôv./2. oddel. 1939. Bratislava. 15.VI.1939.

¹⁸ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112, Prezídium krajinského úradu v Bratislave. Podpisová akcia gr. kat. knazov namierená proti Slovenskému štátu. No 37.258/1939 prez., Bratislava. 30.VI.1939.

¹⁹ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 129, Memorandum. No.8928/39. 29.VII.1939

²⁰ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65. 6.VII.1939. Esterházy Janos jelentése.

²¹ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 84 cs., 1939/65. Magyar királyi követsége Olaszországban. Tárgy: Zvrškovec szlovák követ kijelentései a német veszélyről. No 134/főn.pol. 1939. Róma. 6.VII.1939.

²² MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 457 cs., 1939/65/7 (I-III rész). Feljegyzés a miniszter ur számára Vörösmarty követ urtól. No 3660/1939.

²³ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 457 cs., 1939/65. Vörösmarty követ ur. Napi jelentés. Budapest. No 3660/1939. 20.VII.1939.

In spite of the Hungarian demonstrations of close cooperation with the Axis powers (signing of the Antikomintern pact on 24 February 1939, and leaving of the Ligue of Nations on 11 April 1939), the Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki categorically denied that Hungary could take part in a military conflict against Poland.²⁴ His foreign minister Csáky explained that any potential intervention in Poland could put Hungary into an uncomfortable position regarding Slovakia.²⁵ Galeazzo Ciano, the foreign minister of Italy (the closest ally of Hungary since 1927), recommended Csáky to treat the Slovak issue with extreme precaution.²⁶

One month before the beginning of the operation against Poland, Berlin demanded Bratislava to abandon any contact with Warsaw what would be contrary to the German interests.²⁷ Providing a loyal policy, Hitler promised Tiso that Slovakia would get back the territories attached to Poland in 1938, and guaranteed her Hungarian borders.²⁸ At the same time, when the Führer tried to change the Hungarian position regarding Poland, he promised a German support in the future Hungarian revision. Also Hitler hinted that Slovakia wasn't important to him and that the Slovak status could be changed.²⁹

For a long time, the historiography put into a question, if the September 1939 choice of Bratislava was determinate by the fear that Warsaw would pursue anti-Slovak policy.³⁰ It is known that during summer 1939, a special department of the Polish intelligence service (Ekspozitura 2 Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego Wojska Polskiego) worked in cooperation with the Slovak Minister to Vatikan Karol Sidor and the Slovak Minister of Defense Ferdinand Čatloš, on a plan of possible Polish occupation of Slovakia. However, this project was put aside.³¹ Nevertheless, on 1 August 1939 the Slovak Minister to Poland, Ladislav Szatmáry, reported to Bratislava that, according to an unknown informant, the Polish foreign minister Józef Beck thought about partition of

²⁴ DGFP. SD. Vol. VI, doc. 712, pp. 972-974.

²⁵ DIMK. Vol. IV, doc. 103a, pp. 200-201.

²⁶ DIMK. Vol. IV, doc. 253, p. 400.

²⁷ DGFP. SD. Vol. VI, doc. 768, pp. 1063-1064.

²⁸ DGFP. SD. Vol. VII. The last days of peace. August 9 – September 3, 1939, London 1956, doc. 214, pp. 229-230.

²⁹ DGFP. SD. Vol. VI, doc. 768, pp. 1093-1100.

³⁰ L. LIPTÁK. Maďarsko v politike Slovenského štátu v rokoch 1939 – 1943. In: Historický časopis. No 1, XV, 1967, pp. 5-6; Igor BAKA. Slovenská republika a nacistická agresia proti Poľsku. Bratislava 2006. p. 64; JANEK István. Szlovák-magyar kapcsolatok az 1939-es lengyelországi hádjárat idején. In: Világtörténet. 2008, ősz-tél, p. 36.

³¹ Dušan SEGEŠ. Vojensko-politické aktivity Karola Sidora od 14. marca do 1. septembra 1939 na pozadí Slovensko-Poľských vzťahov. In: Vojenská história. 9. 2005-1, pp. 10, 14-18.

Slovakia between Poland and Hungary. Supposedly, this way, Warsaw could create a stabile southern border and avoid a Wehrmacht attack from Slovakia.³²

Partly, these worries about Polish-Hungarian collaboration had a real ground: already in May 1939, Csáky had informed Beck about Hungarian interests in Slovakia.³³ Moreover, tensions between Slovakia and Poland existed due to Bratislava's hope to take back the lost Slovak lands to Poland in 1938, what Warsaw didn't greet.³⁴

The invasion of Poland and the Slovak-Hungarian relations (September–October 1939). After the outbreak of the Second World War, Slovakia and Hungary were nearly in different fighting blocks. The Slovak army together with the Wehrmacht attacked Poland. Due to military friendship, already on 3 September 1939, Germany agreed to give back to Slovakia lost territories to Poland in 1920, 1924 and 1938.³⁵ As a result, Slovakia received 770 sq.km. with 34 thousands of inhabitants.³⁶ On the other hand, Hungary remained neutral and demonstrated sympathies to Poland. The kingdom accepted around 100 thousand Polish refugees and soldiers³⁷. Also, some Slovaks (we know about 400 deserters from mobilization), who didn't want to fight on the Polish front, escaped to Hungary.³⁸

On 3 September 1939, the staff of the Polish embassy in Bratislava were deported to Hungary.³⁹ The first secretary of the embassy, and at the same time an agent of the Polish intelligence service, who worked on plans to invade Slovakia, Piotr Kurnicki, informed Hungarians that Poland was preparing to occupy Eastern Slovakia until Poprad. Allegedly, this way Warsaw wanted to destroy the railway connection between Mezilaborce and Orlov, which could be used by the German soldiers. Kurnicki said that after Warsaw would offer these territories to Hungary.⁴⁰ The next day, he said that the leaders of the former Carpatho-Ukraine government, Augustin Vološin, Julian Revay and Stepan Kločaruk, were gathering with the Ukranian „Sich“ arm forces in Prešov. Supposedly, they were planning to invade Hungary and renovate independent

³² L. LIPTÁK, pp. 5-6.

³³ Martin HOLAK. Slovensko-poľske vzťahy od marca do septembra 1939. In: Slovenska republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov IV. Zborník príspevkov z medzinarodnej vedeckej konferencie Banská Bystrica 14. – 15. apríla 2005, Banská Bystrica 2005, p. 320.

³⁴ Igor BAKA, p. 69.

³⁵ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Vec: Zpráva o politickej situácii. Vyslanectvu Slovenskej republiky v Berlíne. 6.IX.1939.

³⁶ Milan KRAJČOVIČ, doc. 322, p. 369.

³⁷ ROMSICS, Ignác. A magyar külpolitika útja Trianontól a háborúig. In: Rubicon. 2000, IX, pp. 17-24.

³⁸ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Vec: Záložníci v obci Štos, Niž. a Vyš. Medzev: útek do Madarska. No 11171/dôv. 2. oddel. 1939. 16.IX.1939.; SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Fonogram. 14.IX.1939.

³⁹ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Prezídium policajného riaditeľstva v Bratislave. Vec: Zapečatanie poľského vyslanectví a francouzského konzulátu v Bratislave. Odpis. No 10030/39 prez. Bratislava. 2.IX.1939.

⁴⁰ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, cs. 457. 1939/65/7 (II rész). Aide-memoire. 4.IX.1939.

Carpathian Ruthenia. This way, according to Kurnicki, Germans wanted to use Ruthenian lands to launch the offensive to Poland. Also, Slovaks were allegedly planning to invade Hungary and get Košice back.⁴¹

It is difficult to say what was true in all this information, but there is other data showing that between Ruthenian political migrants and Slovaks were in contact in autumn 1939. The Ukrainian historian Mikuláš Mušinka believes that the Carpatho-Ukrainian government negotiated in Bratislava the possibility to create a Slovak-Carpatho-Ukrainian federation. On 30 November 1939 Vološin, Revay, Kločaruk and two other former ministers sent Ribbentrop and the Slovak government a Memorandum about attaching Carpatho-Ukraine to Slovakia.⁴² It is possible, that in autumn 1939, Slovaks got a wrong impression that due to the strategic value of Ruthenian lands, Germany could enter a conflict with Hungary that could restore the before November 1938 Slovak border.

Anyway, the demonstrated Bratislava loyalty during the Polish campaign raised the Slovak position in the German eyes and brought more self-confidence to Tiso's government. On 11 September 1939, the Slovak Minister to Hungary, Jan Spišiak, demanded the Hungarian approval for the transit of Slovak armed forces to Poland via the North-Eastern Hungarian territories.⁴³ Referring to the rising revisionist propaganda in Slovakia, Csáky refused and urgently strengthened the Hungarian Northern borders.⁴⁴ In response, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop recommended to Csáky to be accurate with Slovaks, given that they were under the German protection.⁴⁵ In the end, the Slovak transfer across Hungary didn't happen. The crowning-achievement for Bratislava in the Polish campaign was the Hitler promise on 21 October 1939 to raise the Slovak issue in Hungary in the future.⁴⁶

After the Polish campaign was over, Berlin pretended that there wasn't any aggressive plan against Hungary. Moreover, the German Minister to Slovakia, Hans Bernard, tried to convince his Hungarian colleague that the Wilhelmstrasse having contacts with Hungary was more important than with Slovakia.⁴⁷ Partly verifying this, in

⁴¹ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, cs. 457. 1939/65/7 (II rész). Aide-memoire. 5.IX.1939.

⁴² Mikuláš MUŠINKA. Moskovský „process“ s členmi vlády Karpatskej Ukrainy. In: Česko-slovenská historická ročenka: 1997, Brno 1997, p. 181.

⁴³ MOL, f. KÜL, k. 64, 84 cs., 1939, 65. Note verbale. No 3684/1939. 11.IX.1939.

⁴⁴ DGFP. SD. Vol. VIII. The war years. September 4, 1939 – March 18, 1940. Washington 1954, doc. 45, p. 43; Ibidem, doc. 49, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, doc. 67, p. 63-64.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, doc. 286, p. 326-329.

⁴⁷ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 456 cs., 1939-65/7 (I-III). Magyar királyi követség. Pozsony. Tárgy: Szlovákia a magyar-német viszonylatban. No 30/pol.1939. 20.IX.1939.

the middle of September 1939, information came to Budapest that in the Slovak inhabited Northern territories of Hungary (Sobrance), a rebellion against the Hungarian rule was planned, which was cancelled only due to the German protest.⁴⁸

Despite reassuring friendly declarations from Berlin, it was understood that Germany could be playing with more than one card at the same time. Under those circumstances, Budapest attempted to „pacificate“ Slovakia in October-November 1939. The Teleky's government opened the postponed trade negotiations with Bratislava,⁴⁹ recommended the Hungarian administration of the Slovak inhabited lands to be friendly with local people⁵⁰ and signed two secret agreements with Slovakia. The first brought a „media peace“ (a mutual refusal of revisionist propaganda on the radio and in newspapers)⁵¹ and the second granted the Hungarians in Slovakia and Slovaks in Hungary minimum national rights. Indeed, due to the big number of Germans in Hungary deprived from their rights, Budapest had asked to make this minority right agreement in secret.⁵² During those negotiations, the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ferdinand Ďurčanský, said that he unreservedly believed in the reconciliation between Slovakia and Hungary.⁵³ On 17 October 1939, the Slovak chargé d'affaires to Belgrad, Jozef Cieker, declared to Hungarian Minister György Bakách-Bessenye that the normalization of the Slovak-Hungarian relations would be possible only in case Slovaks in Hungary would be granted with school, religious and political rights.⁵⁴

At the same time, the Hitler's word to support the Slovak-Hungarian border revision in the future gave Slovak politicians the idea that a convenient time for territorial demands to Hungary would come if Budapest raised the territorial claims to Romania regarding Transylvania. On 1 December 1939, Cieker told the Romanian Minister Victor Cădere that if Hungary demanded Transylvania, Bratislava would claim the ethnic Slovak territories from Hungary.⁵⁵ Indeed, afterwards Bratislava developed a tactic to ask for border changes each time when Budapest was granted by new territories.

⁴⁸ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 456 cs., 1939/65/7 (I-III). Magyar királyi követség. Pozsony. Tárgy: Szabadcsapat szervezése Magyarországgal ellen. No 26/pol.1939. 16.IX.1939.

⁴⁹ Ján SPIŠIAK. Spomienky z Budapešti, 1939-1944, Bratislava 2010, p. 57.

⁵⁰ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Prezidium ministerstva vnútra. Vec: Zprávy z maďarského pohraničia. 20.118/1939. prez. Bratislava, 18.X.1939.

⁵¹ L. LIPTÁK, p. 13.

⁵² Ján SPIŠIAK, p. 61.

⁵³ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63. 457 cs., 1939/65/7 (III). Magyar királykövetség. Pozsony. 45/pol.-1939. 7.X.1939.

⁵⁴ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Slovenské vyslanectvo v Belehrade. Vec: Politická zpráva – návšteva maďarského vyslanca. No 139/1939. Belehrad. 17.X.1939.

⁵⁵ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 112. Slovenské vyslanectvo v Belehrade. Vec: Pomer rumunsko-maďarský. No 452/1939. Belehrad. 2.XII.1939.

The reinforcement of the Soviet factor in Central Europe and its perception in Bratislava and Budapest (autumn 1939-summer 1940). Due to the anticommunist position of some Hungarian circles around the regent Miklós Horthy, the Soviet-Hungarian interwar relations never were perfect. In the first half of 1939, they reached a problematic stage: in protest against the Hungarian signature below the Antikomintern pact on 24 February 1939, the Kremlin closed Soviet and Hungarian embassies in both capitals. However, after a “thaw” in the German-Soviet relations during summer 1939, the Soviet-Hungarian relations got better.

Indeed, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact signed on 23 August 1939 created a ground of cooperation between the two totalitarian powers and drew the German and Soviet spheres of influence in Eastern and Northern Europe. Nevertheless, this pact didn't solve all the possible conflict issues between Moscow and Berlin. The statuses of Slovakia, Hungary and the Balkans remained out of the agreement. The Hungarian historian Attila Kolontári, referring to the questionable “Stalin's speech on 19 August 1939”,⁵⁶ suggests that in the Kremlin's plans for the Soviet infiltration in Europe, Hungary was put in the future Soviet domain.⁵⁷

In autumn 1939, the intensification of Soviet pressures in Central Europe began with the occupation of Eastern Poland and Baltic countries. The end of the German-Soviet partition of Poland (accompanied by Slovakia and Lithuania) made the USSR and Hungary neighbours.⁵⁸ In parallel with those military advances, the Soviet diplomats tried to set up their presence into other states. Within 3 days, on 15 and 18 September 1939, the NKID confirmed to the Slovak and Hungarian Ministries of Foreign Affairs its wish to establish direct diplomatic relations.⁵⁹

The Soviet expansion to the Carpathian ridge created new strategic perspectives in Slovak and Hungarian planning, Russians being seen as a German counterbalance in the region. Budapest hoped that the USSR, due to the Bessarabian dispute, would help weakening Romania, what could lead to the return of Transylvania. Already, on 27 September 1939, Csáky informed Italy that in case the Soviet Union would occupy Bessarabia, Hungary would raise claims to Romania.⁶⁰ Simultaneously, according to the

⁵⁶ See for example: V. L. DOROSHENKO, K. V. PAVLOVA, R. Ch. RAAK. Ne mif: rech Stalina 19 avgusta 1939. In: *Voprosy istorii*. 2006. No 8, pp. 3-20.

⁵⁷ Attila KOLONTARI, p. 327.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

⁵⁹ DVP. Vol. XXII. Book. 2. 1 sentyabrya-31 dekabrya 1939, Moskva 1995, doc. 582, p. 80; Attila KOLONTARI, p.315.

⁶⁰ DIMK. Vol. IV. Budapest 1962, doc. 416, p. 544.

Russian historian Marina M. Maryina, it was believed in Bratislava that Soviets could support Slovakia against Hungary. Apparently, the Soviet-Hungarian tensions could be based on pretensions over Carpathian Ruthenia.⁶¹

On 26 September 1939, the next day after the Red army came to the Hungarian borders, the Slovak vice Prime Minister, Vojtech Tuka, stated to Esterházy that Ruthenia would cause problems between Moscow and Budapest.⁶² At the same time, Bernard recognized that “Slovaks would try to receive from Russians what they could not get from Germans”. The Hungarian Minister to Slovakia, György Szabó, reported that, in the German’ opinion, the Slovaks would pursue a revisionist policy, in spite of Berlin positions.⁶³

Indeed, when the first contacts between the Slovak and Soviet Ministers took place in Budapest and Berlin, Slovaks never forgot to remind two important political features of the region: first, that around 600 thousand Slovaks lived in Hungary and desired to reunite with Slovakia, and second, that approximately the same number of Rusyns dreamed about a reunion with Russia.⁶⁴

The temporary restraint of the German army on the Western front gave Slovakia a chance to make different diplomatic maneuvers. At the end of April 1940, an important Slovak politician, Jozef Kirshcbaum, said to the Soviet Minister in Bratislava, Georgi M. Pushkin, that Slovakia was intending to remain neutral in the war. However, Kirshcbaum suggested that with the help of a “third power”, Slovakia could start a war against Hungary.⁶⁵ In fact, since September 1939, Slovak-Soviet relations had actively developed, what gave an impression of secret negotiations between the two countries. For example, after a meeting in the Kremlin on 10 May 1940 between a Livinov successor, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, and the Slovak Minister of Education, Jozef Sivak,⁶⁶ the rumors spread that the USSR gave guaranties to Slovakia against a potential Hungarian attack.⁶⁷

The Slovak belief in the Soviet help reached its climax during June 1940 Soviet

⁶¹ V. V. MARYINA. Zakarpatskaya Ukraina (Podkarpatskaya Rus) v politike Benesha i Stalina, 1939-1945, Moskva 2003, p. 15.

⁶² MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 84 cs., 1939/47. Tamás jelenti. 26.IX.1939.

⁶³ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63. 457 cs., 1939/65/28. Magyar királyi követség. Pozsony. Tárgy: Szlovákia diplomáciai kapcsolatainak felvétele Szovjetországgal. No 60/pol.1939. 23.X.1939.

⁶⁴ DVP. Vol. XXII. Book. 2. 1 sentyabrya-31 dekabrya 1939, Moskva 1995, doc. 712, p. 210-211; Attila KOLONTARI, p. 330.

⁶⁵ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. Tradičia a dejiny, p. 162.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 199-200.

⁶⁷ PASTOR Peter. A moszkvai magyar követség jelentései 1935–1941, Budapest 1992, dok. 170, p. 243.

expansions. Watching the annexation of the Baltic States, Bessarabia and North Bukovina by the USSR, Bratislava started to think that the Kremlin would solve in the same breath the “Carpathian Ruthenia” issue (what could facilitate other demands towards Hungary). The head of the political department of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jozef Mračna, informed the Soviet embassy in Bratislava that Slovakia would like to launch negotiations with Hungary through the mediation of Germany and USSR. Mračna hinted that Slovakia wished to have the USSR as neighbour, meaning a Soviet occupation of Ruthenia.⁶⁸ The Soviet passivity in this issue gave the opportunity to the Ferdinand Ďurčanský, to ask directly the Soviet Minister to Bratislava, Georgi M. Pushkin, about the expected date for the occupation of Ruthenia. Yet, Moscow didn’t give any clear answer.⁶⁹

Generally, Soviet representatives took refuge in silence or denied their interests in Ruthenia.⁷⁰ It seemed that the Soviet advance in Central and Eastern Europe was encouraged by the West or by small local states, such as Slovakia, in order to shake the German dominancy. Once, the Soviet Minister to Hungary, Nikolai I. Sharonov, nervously answered his Yugoslav pair, Svetozar Rašić, who was asking about possible “aggressive Kremlin planes” regarding Ruthenia that “no one would be able to wait enough time to see our invasion”.⁷¹ Nevertheless, even if the USSR never demanded Ruthenia from Hungary, Moscow vaguely evoked (e.g. the conversation between Vyacheslav Molotov and the German Minister Friedrich-Werner von der Schulenburg on 25 June, 1940)⁷² that she would raise in the future the issue of the territorial belonging of Ruthenia. In some way, the annexation of the Carpathian Ruthenia by the Soviet Union in 1945 proved that rumors about the Kremlin interests in this region between 1939 and 1941 weren’t totally devoid of sense.

It is probable that due to the importance of maintaining good relations with the Third Reich, Moscow didn’t want to deepen political contacts with Bratislava. On 24 June 1940, Georgi Pushkin confirmed to Bernard, that according to the Soviet opinion, Slovakia had its place in the German influence zone.⁷³ In Moscow, it was supposed that

⁶⁸ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Tradicía a dejiny*, p. 167.

⁶⁹ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Pohľady na východ. Postoje k Rusku v slovenskej politike 1934–1944*, Bratislava 2002, p. 167.

⁷⁰ DVP. Vol. XXII. Book 2, doc. 712, p. 210-211.

⁷¹ *Transilvankiy vopros. Vengero-rumynskiy territorialnyj spor i SSSR. 1940-1946. Dokumenty rossijskih arhivov*, Moskva 2000, doc. 1, pp. 13-16.

⁷² DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 1. 1 yanvary - 31 oktyabrya 1940, Moskva 1995, doc. 225, pp. 374-376.

⁷³ DGFP. SD. Vol. X. *The war years. 23 June-August 31, 1940*, Washington 1957, doc. 217, p. 284.

Slovakia could be used by Germany as a bridgehead to attack Hungary or, conversely, as a gift to Budapest providing it would conduct the policy expected by Berlin.⁷⁴

Even though Moscow agreed with the German protection over Slovakia, the USSR hatched other plans regarding Hungary. Evidently, Hungary had much more strategic value than Slovakia for both the USSR and Germany. Different human (Slovakia had 2.6 million inhabitants and Hungarian population grew between 1939 and 1941 from 9.3 million to 14.6 million inhabitants) and economic resources raised a bigger interest from Moscow (and Berlin) in developing friendly relations with Budapest rather than with Bratislava. For example, probably, it is no accident that the Soviet-Hungarian exchange of diplomats was already conducted in autumn 1939,⁷⁵ while the ones with Slovakia were held during the winter 1939-1940.⁷⁶

It seems possible that the absence of any clear agreement between the Soviet Union and Slovakia (or Hungary) was determined by the uncertainty of the Soviet foreign policy in the first half of 1940. We could assume that the Soviet orientation in the Slovak-Hungarian relations depended on a “soft” struggle against Germany, especially for domination over the Balkans. Indeed, in April 1940, Moscow gently hinted Bucharest that in exchange of the Romanian re-orientation towards the USSR, Moscow could forget about Bessarabia.⁷⁷ Even though Bucharest didn't accept this proposal, it is probable that Moscow had planned to prevent Romania from territorial losses. This way, the Slovak animosity towards Hungary could have been used to put pressure on Budapest, and even more, maybe to get Carpathian Ruthenia. However, Bucharest didn't react to the Moscow offer, and the Kremlin decided to place a bet on Hungary and Bulgaria.

The repeated declarations from Moscow about Soviet-Hungarian border stability created an appropriate atmosphere for negotiations with Budapest in the “Romanian issue”. On a meeting with Nikolai Sharonov on 13 February 1940, Csáky assured that Hungary “wouldn't wait until the Greek calends” to start a new war for revision of her borders.⁷⁸ In mid-June 1940, Csáky indicated to N. Sharonov that Romania, surrounded on 3 sides (by the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria), would not be a source of problems. On the other hand, Csáky reminded that Slovaks were tensing the

⁷⁴ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Tradicía a dejiny*, p. 163.

⁷⁵ DVP. Vol. XXII. Book 2, doc. 721, pp. 220-221.

⁷⁶ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Pohľady na východ*, pp. 100, 106.

⁷⁷ REPIN, V. V. *Izmenenie territorial'noy prinadlezhnosti Bessaradii v iyune 1940 g.: v kontekste geopoliticheskikh planov SSSR i Germanii*. In: *Pracy gistarychnaga fakul'teta BDU*, 2010/5, pp. 184-185.

⁷⁸ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 1, doc. 43, pp. 86-88.

Hungarian situation, given that they tended to antagonize Germans with Hungary.⁷⁹

But even on the background of parallel actions against Romania, serious doubts emerged in Budapest about a future peaceful neighbourhood with the Soviet Union. On 2 July, 1940, Csáky told Otto von Ermansdorf, that in case the Red army would cross the Prut River in Romania, Hungary would attack the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ This readiness to “go marsh on Moscow” was explained by Budapest concerns about Carpathian Ruthenia.⁸¹ Moreover, the Hungarian historian Loránt Tilkovszky assumes that the collecting of ethnic Ukraine territories by Kremlin in 1939-1940 affected the Teleki government’s desire to grant Ruthenia with autonomous status on August 1940.⁸²

Hungarian-Romanian tensions and the Slovak revisionism (April-September 1940). In April 1940, Budapest started to persistently remind Berlin that the time to solve the “Transylvanian issue” had come. However, Hitler tried to dissuade Hungarians because he thought they could bring Russians to the Balkans.⁸³

Synchronically, in the beginning of April 1940, rumors spread in Budapest about Slovakia preparing the occupation of Košice with German support.⁸⁴ Those rumors seemed even more real following the anti-Magyar demonstrations that took place between 21 and 27 April 1940 in Bratislava and other Slovak cities. When the Hungarian Minister to Germany, Döme Sztójay, tried to protest in Berlin, he was answered that Germany was not able to constrain Slovak revisionism.⁸⁵ On 6 May 1940, the state-secretary of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ernst von Weizsäcker, reminded once more to Sztójay that German sympathies were lying on Bratislava’s side in the Slovak-Hungarian dispute.⁸⁶

The French military defeat and later surrender in June 1940 brought a rapid remodeling of the European balance of power and provoked a series of strategic shifts. Germany became the strongest power in Western and Central Europe. In response, Moscow tried to expand the Soviet borders and zones of influence. The USSR demanded and received from Romania Bessarabia and the Northern Bukovina in the end of June 1940. Simultaneously, Moscow declared that she could support the Budapest territorial

⁷⁹ Ibidem, doc. 194, pp. 329-331.

⁸⁰ DGFP. SD. Vol. X, doc. 78, p. 87-89.

⁸¹ Ibidem, doc. 81, p. 91-92.

⁸² TILKOVSKY Loránt, p. 76.

⁸³ DGFP. SD. Vol. IX. The war years. 18 March-22 June, 1940, Washington 1956, doc. 135, p. 197-198.

⁸⁴ Ján SPIŠIAK, p. 81.

⁸⁵ JANEK István. Magyar-szlovák kapcsolatok 1939-1941 között a két állam diplomáciai irataiban. In: Aetas, 22 évf., No 4, 2007, pp. 128-129.

⁸⁶ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 113. Úradný záznam. Bratislava. 8.V.1940.

claims to Bucharest in case of war between Hungary and Romania or on an international conference.⁸⁷ The Hungarian Minister to the USSR, József Kristóffy, asserted that the Kremlin wanted to see a Hungarian-Romanian military conflict which could break the German hegemony in the region and would open a new possibility in Romania for the USSR.⁸⁸

During August 1940, Moscow made few sharp protests (especially on 29 August 1940)⁸⁹ against violations of Soviet borders by the Romanian aviation. Indeed, the reasons of those trespasses were highly suspicious. In Bucharest, those protests were understood as a Soviet ultimatum supporting Hungarian revisionist claims.⁹⁰ They were interpreted the same way in Budapest. One of the most influential Hungarian politicians, István Bethlen, who served as Prime Minister from 1921 to 1931, deeply thanked the USSR for the organized incidents on the Soviet-Romanian border on a meeting with N. Sharonov, on 9 September 1940.⁹¹

The fakely hidden Russian support in continuing the cutting of a “Romanian pie” was used by Hungary to persuade Germany to come to a solution on the “Transylvanian issue”. Budapest made clear that in case of a subsequent protraction of the status-quo, Hungary would start a war against Romania (with a possible Russian support). Already, in January 1940, Csáky shared with Berlin the information that the USSR was interested in a Hungarian reaction in case of a Soviet attack on Romania.⁹² Berlin, being afraid of a Soviet intervention following a possible war break in the Balkans, agreed to mediate in the Hungarian-Romanian tensions.⁹³ On 30 August 1940, the German-Italian award forced Romania to give back North Transylvania (43 000 sq. km with 2,5 million people) to Hungary was held in Vienna. Additionally, a German-Hungarian agreement was signed, which granted Germans in Hungary with collective rights.

Hungary was not the only one trying to play with another power during the time when Germany was caught by the slowly war in the West. Slovakia tried to reanimate her contacts not only with a formal Berlin ally – Moscow, but even with London. Slovak

⁸⁷ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 1, doc. 251, pp. 415-416.

⁸⁸ PASTOR Peter, doc. 183, pp. 259-260.

⁸⁹ Transilvankiy vopros, doc. 20, pp. 73-75.

⁹⁰ T. M. ISLAMOV, T. A. POKIVAYLOVA. Vostochnaya Evropa v silovom pole velikih derzhav. Transilvanskiy vopros: 1940-1946 gody, Moskva 2008, p.108.

⁹¹ SERES Attila. Újabb szovjet dokumentumok a második bécsi döntés és magyar-szovjet kapcsolatok történetéhez (1940). In: Pont. Társadalom tudományi folyóirat, 2004, No 1, doc. 1, pp. 78-82.

⁹² DGFP. SD. Vol. VIII, doc. 545, p. 676.

⁹³ DGFP. SD. Vol. X, doc. 407, p. 566-570.

Minister to Italy Zvrškovec (on 11 January and 29 March 1940) attempted twice to start a dialogue with the English. He proposed London to acknowledge the neutral status of Slovakia and to return the British consul to Bratislava.⁹⁴

Those activities bothered the Germans. The Hungarians also nourished Berlin with information about the double-face Slovak policy. Budapest drew Nazi's attention to rumors about negotiations between the Slovak President Jozef Tiso and the leader of the Czechoslovak exile Eduard Beneš.⁹⁵ The other favorite Hungarian subject of anti-Slovak propaganda in Berlin was the apparent Slovak exposure to Pan-Slavism.⁹⁶ Also Hungarians often reminded the Germans that Slovakia was an unstable state, and that a better choice would be to reunite this territory with Hungary. For example, during the internal struggle for power between the groups of Tiso and Tuka on January 1941, Szabó advised Budapest to ask Berlin's approval to divide Slovakia between Hungary and Germany, or to give all Slovakia to Hungary.⁹⁷

Little by little, the Berlin wish grew to remove the main leader of the Slovak swinging policy – the internal and foreign minister F. Ďurčanský. Berlin decided to divide his ministries between more reliable to Berlin Slovaks – the chief of propaganda Alexander Mach and the Prime Minister V. Tuka.⁹⁸ The Wehrmacht victories in Norway and France in April-May 1940 released Germans' hands in East and Central Europe. Soon, the Wilhelmstrasse, decided to show that Slovakia was part of the German lebensraum.⁹⁹ The final straw for the German was the removal of A. Mach from the charge of head of the Slovak paramilitary organization Hlinka Guard. On the 23 May, 1940, the day following Mach's "resignation" the German Minister Bernard left Bratislava. He came back only 2 months later, when it was decided to lecture Ďurčanský and Tiso. As Bernard said to the Hungarian Minister, Ďurčanský's coquetry with the USSR was the main reason of Berlin to take acute measures towards Slovakia.¹⁰⁰

On 28 July 1940, Hitler met Tiso, Tuka and Mach in Salzburg. The Reich Chancellor threatened Slovaks with taking back guarantees from the "Protection Treaty",

⁹⁴ Beáta KATREBOVÁ-BLEHOVÁ. Pokusy Ríšskeho ministerstva zahraničných vecí o odvolanie Karola Sidora v dôsledku salzburských rokování. In: Slovenská republika (1939-1945) očami mladých historikov. VI. Slovensko medzi 14. marcom 1939 a salzburskými rokovániami, Prešov 2007, pp. 437-439.

⁹⁵ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65/238. Magyar királyi követség Berlinben. No 141/Res.Pol. 1940. 15.III.1940.

⁹⁶ DGFP. SD. Vol. X, doc. 284, p. 392-394.

⁹⁷ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64. 93 cs., 1941/65. Helyezetkép.

⁹⁸ DGFP. SD. Vol. IX, doc. 309, p. 420-422.

⁹⁹ DGFP. SD. Vol. X, doc. 17, p. 16-18.

¹⁰⁰ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63. 458 cs. 1940/65/1. Magyar kir. külügyminisztérium. Budapest. 5.VIII.1940. No 4183/Pol.-1940. Másolat. Magyar kir. követség. Pozsony. Tárgy: Szlovák államferfiak Hitler kancellárnál. No 166/Pol.-1940. 30.VII.1940.

if Slovakia would not conduct a loyal policy. Also, Ribbentrop proposed to postpone the solving of the “Slovak issue” in Hungary.¹⁰¹ During the Salzburg meetings, Slovaks presented to the Germans 6 zones of the territorial claims in Hungary: 1. Vráble-Šurany, 2. Lučenec, 3. Jelšava, 4. Košice, 5. the northern territories from Sátoraljaújhely, 6. Sobrance district.¹⁰² According to the project prepared in the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Relations, Slovakia was planning to demand around 3600 sq. km. with 350000 people (between them 209 thousand Slovaks and 100 thousand Hungarians) to Hungary.¹⁰³

After the Salzburg meeting, Ďurčanský and his closest supporters were removed. Tuka sat on the chair of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mach became Minister of Interior. The Hungarian Minister to Slovakia concluded that the Salzburg meeting revealed the futility of the Slovak hopes in the USSR. Szabó thought that in case the changes in Slovak high political circles that followed Salzburg wouldn't work, Germany would leave Slovakia to Hungary.¹⁰⁴

Probably, the growing Hungarian claims to Romania during the summer 1940 affected Berlin to support Slovak demands towards Hungary. The “Slovak card” could have frozen the courage of the Teleki's government to venture into Romania. Tuka was convinced that Hitler had approved Slovak claims to get back some of their former territories from Hungary and this belief was confirmed by different German diplomats. At the end of July 1940, Sharonov heard from the German embassy in Bratislava that soon Slovak wishes would be satisfied in Hungary.¹⁰⁵ On 12 August 1940, the new German Minister to Slovakia, Manfred Fr. von Killinger, told Esterházy that Hungarian revisionism in Romania was very similar to the disastrous Ďurčanský's policy. Killinger advised Budapest, through Esterházy, to care more about their Slovak minority and warned them about Slovakia's insistence to recover its lands lost in Vienna in 1938, where lived 300 thousand Slovaks.¹⁰⁶

With the German support, Bratislava decided to use the Hungaro-Romanian dispute as a call to action. On 2 August 1940, Tuka told the Minister Szabó that in case of the annexation of Transylvania by Hungary, the moment would be appropriate for an adjustment of the Slovak-Hungarian border according to the ethnic principle.¹⁰⁷ On 16

¹⁰¹ DGFP. SD. Vol. X, doc. 248, pp. 345-349.

¹⁰² JANEK István. A szovjet diplomácia és a szlovák-magyar viszony alakulása 1939-1940 között, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰³ L. LIPTÁK, p. 12.

¹⁰⁴ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65/574. Magyar királyi követség Pozsonyban. 14.VIII.1940.

¹⁰⁵ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. Tradičia a dejiny, p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ MOL, f. KÜM. K-64, 89 cs., 1940/65/206. János Esterházy jelentése. 12.VIII.1940.

¹⁰⁷ DIMK, Vol. IV, doc. 261, pp. 405-408.

August 1940, Tuka and Mach met Esterházy and declared that Slovak claimed to Hungary 2500 sq.km. (including Košice) with 140000 people.¹⁰⁸

In the beginning, it seemed that Slovakia was going to achieve the renewal of her southern borders. It is probable that a Tiso's article, published in "Slovák" on 1 September 1940, where he anticipated the imminence of the "völkisch" triumph, was aimed to prepare the public opinion regarding expected revision.¹⁰⁹ The same day, Tuka repeated the 2500 sq.km territorial claims to the Hungarian Minister of Industry, Jozef Varga, who visited Bratislava. It is remarkable that Varga admitted that some border corrections could be done. For example, he personally agreed about returning Šurany to Slovakia.¹¹⁰ Also, the Slovaks informed Moscow that soon Ribbentrop would organize the return of some Slovak lands.¹¹¹

However, the German support to Slovak revisionism rapidly finished. It is possible that, after the Second Vienna Award, when Berlin deterred Budapest from acting recklessly in Romania, Germans thought that Slovak revisionism should be stopped. On 5 September 1940, according to data collected by the Hungarian embassy in Bratislava, the Germans informed Tuka that the Slovak-Hungarian border correction would only be possible in exchange of Slovak territorial concessions. It was supposedly said to Tuka and Mach on their visit to Vienna that "just to demand and to give nothing is impossible".¹¹²

This information was soon confirmed in Berlin. Ribbentrop told Černak that, due to the impossibility to design purely ethnic borders in Europe, Slovakia should give up her efforts to correct borders.¹¹³ The Slovaks could do nothing else than postponing those demands to a better time. They could only continue to insist on the extension of the Slovak rights in Hungary.

Reflecting those changes, the Slovak press turned to calling to grant the Slovaks in Hungary with the same rights like those given to Germans after the Second Vienna Award.¹¹⁴ Soon, the Slovak Interior Ministry registered the German nazist party (Deutsche Partei) and promised to register the Slovak Magyar Party (Szlovenszköi Magyar Párt), which were supposed to protect the German and the Magyar minorities in

¹⁰⁸ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65/206. János Esterházy jelentése. 16.VIII.1940.

¹⁰⁹ M. FABRISIUS, K. HRADSKÁ, doc. 149, pp. 263-265.

¹¹⁰ DIMK, Vol. IV, doc. 338, pp. 544-546.

¹¹¹ Transilvankiy vopros, doc. 17, s. 61-64.

¹¹² MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65/650. Magyar királyi követség. Pozsony. 1940.IX.9.

¹¹³ DGFP. SD. Vol. XI. The war years. September 1, 1940-January 31, 1941, Washington 1960, doc. 37, pp. 46-47.

¹¹⁴ DIMK. Vol. IV, doc. 353, pp. 579-581.

Slovakia. This way, Tiso's government hoped to facilitate the establishment of a Bratislava-oriented Slovak political party in Hungary. On 12 December 1940, Mach reminded Esterházy that Bratislava was waiting for a reciprocal step by Budapest, otherwise, he would not maintain the Slovak Magyar Party. As a result, Esterházy asked Csáky to stop the persecution of Slovak activists in Hungary and to register a new Slovak party.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Budapest didn't facilitate the opening of a Hlinka-style political party in Hungary and in response, Bratislava refused to register the Slovak Magyar Party.

The Slovak-Hungarian dispute in the background of the Soviet-German relations crisis (September 1940-June 1941). Formed after the Salzburg meeting, the political tandem Tiso-Tuka tried to avoid any step that could be wrongly interpreted in Berlin. Special attention was put on minimizing the Soviet-Slovak relations. In order to prove it, the Soviet embassy in Bratislava was even put under police control in September 1940.¹¹⁶ The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received information stating that the USSR apparently wanted to close her embassy in Slovakia.¹¹⁷

Despite its refusal to save its influence in Slovakia, Moscow was not ready to abandon its contacts with Hungarians. The Second Vienna Award, which was passed without the USSR and even without German previous warning to Moscow, caused an immediate Soviet protest against a violation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact regarding common consultations on important issues.¹¹⁸ During a visit of Molotov in Berlin in November 1940, the Soviet Minister specially emphasized, between other issues, the importance of future Soviet-German negotiations concerning Hungary (and Romania).¹¹⁹ The Belarusian historian Anatoly P. Sal'kov thinks that the Second Vienna Award and the failure of the Molotov negotiations in Berlin mark the end of the Soviet-German collaboration, evolving towards the German attack of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.¹²⁰

Moscow tried to preserve good relations with Budapest and, for example, didn't react to the Hungarian joining of the Tripartite pact on 20 November 1940, which declared the German-Italian leaderships in Europe.¹²¹ The Kremlin stated that the Hungarian (and

¹¹⁵ MOL. f. KÜM, k. 64, 93 cs., 1941/65. Pozsony. Eszterházy János levele. 12.XII.1940.

¹¹⁶ Dagmar ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ. *Tradicia a dejiny*, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 64, 89 cs., 1940/65. No 190./res.pol. 8.X.1940.

¹¹⁸ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 1, doc. 348, pp. 546-547.

¹¹⁹ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 2 (part 1). 1 noyabrya 1940-1 marta 1941, Moskva 1998, doc. 491, pp. 30-32.

¹²⁰ A. P. SAL'KOV. *SSSR i Vtoroj Venskij Arbitrazh: diplomaticheskie ocenki rezulytatov i posledstvij*. Belorusskij zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezhdunarodnyh otnoshenij. 2003, No 3, pp. 60-66.

¹²¹ Also, the signers of the Tripartite pact acknowledged that this agreement didn't affect relations with the USSR.

Slovak) signature didn't violate its interests.¹²²

The maintenance of the Soviet-Hungarian friendship was symbolically proven on March 1941 by returning to Budapest the Hungarian flags that were captured by Russians during the oppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1849.¹²³ Besides, the Hungarian embassy to the USSR presented a special gift to Stalin – a translation in to Hungarian of a Middle Age Georgian epic-poem “The knight in the panther's skin” by Shota Rustaveli.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, the “April” war in Yugoslavia in 1941 caused a cooling between the USSR and Hungary. After the coup d'état in Belgrade by the anti-German military group, Moscow supported the new Yugoslav government in sign of the non-aggression and friendship treaty of 5 April 1941.¹²⁵ Yet, Germany started an invasion of Yugoslavia and promised Hungary a revision of her borders providing her participation in this invasion.¹²⁶ Hungary couldn't resist to this idea and occupied Yugoslavia in Bačka, Međimurje and the Baranya triangle (together 11,5 thousands sq.km.). In response, the Soviet Union made a verbal protest towards Hungary¹²⁷ and recalled the Minister to Moscow. The concentration of Soviet troops on the Hungarian borders fed the growth of concerns in Budapest.¹²⁸

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the recent Hungarian territorial increment gave a new hope to Slovak politicians that an appropriate moment had come to get back the ethnic Slovak lands¹²⁹. Bratislava, following German instructions, severed its diplomatic relations with Belgrade. However, on 26 April 1941, Ribbentrop answered that resolving the Slovak-Hungarian dispute was undesirable before the end of the war. According to him, a border correction would have been able to whip up Romanian revisionism.¹³⁰ At the same time, strong concerns rose in Bratislava regarding the fate of the Slovak minority in the Yugoslav territories occupied by Hungary. Mainly, a big Slovak community – around 30 thousand people – lived in Bačka. In order to ensure their protection against magyarization and persecution, Bratislava used the „reciprocity

¹²² DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book. 2 (part 1), doc. 699, pp. 434-436.

¹²³ Ibidem, doc. 729, p. 489.

¹²⁴ SNA, f. MZV SŠ, k. 130. Slovenské vyslanectvo v Budapešti. Vec: Zprávy do časopisov – zaslanie (Stalin, Eckhardt). No 89/1941 dôv. 13.III.1941.

¹²⁵ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 2 (part 2). 2 marta – 22 iyunya 1941, Moskva 1998, doc. 747, pp. 522-523.

¹²⁶ DGFP. SD. Vol. XII. The war years. February 1-June 22, 1941, Washington 1960, doc. 215, pp. 369-371.

¹²⁷ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 2 (part 2), doc. 769, p. 553.

¹²⁸ DGFP. SD. Vol. XII, doc. 296, p. 493-496.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, doc. 424, p. 669.

¹³⁰ Ibidem, doc. 406, p. 640.

principle“, according to which the Hungarians in Slovakia would receive the same treatments, whether oppressive or advantageous, as Slovaks in Hungary.¹³¹

Due to the spring deterioration of the Soviet-German relations, the Kremlin attempted to save its friendship with Budapest. Soon, Sharonov came back to Budapest. On 8 May 1941, Moscow de facto disavowed the Yugoslav protest.¹³² Spišiak told Sharonov that Bratislava wished to see the maintaining of good relationships between Moscow and Budapest. Spišiak also said that Germany was preparing to attack the USSR and that Slovakia, as a German protectorate, was being filled with German troops.¹³³ He wasn't far from the reality: simply due to the spirit of the Protection Treaty, Bratislava, following Berlin, joined war against the USSR in June 1941.¹³⁴

It is highly difficult to assume what were the plans of Moscow concerning Hungary and Slovakia before the German aggression on 22 June 1941. If the supporters of the theory stating that Stalin had decided to attack Germany in summer 1941 are right¹³⁵, the Kremlin had to have a prepared plan for a new order in Central Europe, in which, probably, Hungary was seen as an ally.

The German attack of the USSR on 22 June 1941 raised in Budapest the final question about its position towards the Soviets. Moscow continued its policy aimed to keep Hungary as a neutral state. On 23 June 1941, Molotov promised to support Hungarian claims in Transylvania in the future if Hungary would remain out of the war.¹³⁶ In the beginning, the Hungarian Prime Minister, László Bárdossy, just wanted to sever diplomatic relations with Moscow. Bárdossy advanced the argument that Hungary could not send its troops to the East, because of the permanent danger of the Romanian and the Slovak revisionism.¹³⁷ However, after the bombing of Košice allegedly operated by the Soviet air forces on 27 June 1941, Hungary declared war to the USSR.¹³⁸

The failed attempts to take back Slovak ethnic lands from Hungary probably pushed Bratislava to normalize its relations with Budapest. Permanent mutual complains about treatments suffered by the national minorities made such a rapprochement very difficult. Bratislava accused Budapest of violating the rights of the Slovak minority in

¹³¹ Ján SPIŠIAK, p.162.

¹³² PASTOR Peter, doc. 224, pp. 310-311.

¹³³ DVP. Vol. XXIII. Book 2 (part 2), doc. 804, pp. 634-635.

¹³⁴ DVP. Vol. XXIV. 22 iyunya 1941-1 yanvarya 1942, Moskva 2000, doc. 12, pp. 22-23; Ibedem, doc. 97, pp. 139-140; DGFP. SD. Vol. XII, doc. 672, p. 1081.

¹³⁵ See for example: Mikhail MELTYUKHOV.

¹³⁶ DVP. Vol. XXIV, doc. 11, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁷ DGFP. SD. Vol. XIII, doc. 10, pp. 13-15.

¹³⁸ DVP. Vol. XXIV, doc. 138, pp. 201-203.

Hungary and in response Budapest proclaimed that the Slovak administration was persecuting thousands of Magyars in Slovakia. The issues dealing with Slovaks and Magyars without citizenship from their states of residence were of greatest complexity. Even though their amount is difficult to estimate, this concerned many thousand people. The Slovak historian Martin Vietor assessed there were 25-30 thousand stateless Slovaks in Hungary and 11 thousand stateless Magyars in Slovakia.¹³⁹ According to the Hungarian embassy in Bratislava, between 16 and 22 thousand of Magyars in Slovakia were without citizenship.¹⁴⁰

The Slovak-Hungarian Treaty from 5 February 1941 was one of the first important steps aiming at improving the situation of both minorities. This treaty allowed the evicted Slovaks and Hungarians to return to their homes. It recognized that those who were living in their state of residency before 1 November 1919, had the right to receive a citizenship.¹⁴¹ It wasn't a success for Bratislava, due to the numerous Slovak colonists, who came to the territories yielded to Hungary in the 1920s and 1930s. The next step of pacification was reached with the creation of the Party of the Slovak National Unity in Hungary on 21 August 1941, which was registered by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior the next year. The Slovak National Unity in Hungary strived for the defense of Slovak rights and pretended to represent all Slovaks in Hungary.¹⁴² In response, in November 1941 Bratislava agreed to register the Slovak Magyar Party.

Nevertheless, in the beginning of summer 1941, when Budapest offered Tuka to set the final delimitation of the Slovak-Hungarian frontier, he refused. Tuka stated that it wasn't a convenient moment and reminded that Slovakia would raise in the future revisionist demands. After a Hungarian appeal, Weizsäcker asked the Slovaks to abandon their illusions and not to hinder the stabilization of the Danube basin. Sztójay warned Ribbentrop that a German endorsement of the Slovak revisionism would have a "catastrophic impact" on the Hungarian-German relations.¹⁴³

The border dispute remained a reason of tensions between Bratislava and Budapest. In November 1941, the two states were very close to severe diplomatic relations. However, Ribbentrop explained to Bárdossy that "what matters now is to win

¹³⁹ Martin VIETOR, p. 400, poznámky. No 400.

¹⁴⁰ MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 458 cs., 1940/65/4. Számjeltávirat a pozsonyi magyar kiralyi követségtől. Szám: 22.

Bratislava-Budapest. 5.III.1940; MOL, f. KÜM, k. 63, 458 cs., 1940/65/4. Böszörményi László jelentése. 29.III.1940.

¹⁴¹ SNA, f. MZV SŠ. k. 114. Slovenská národná skupina v Madarsku v máj 1941. Príloha k č. 32.536/II. Opis; Martin VIETOR, p. 96.

¹⁴² Emanuel BÖHM. V šestiročnom zajatí. (Spomienky na roky 1938-1945), Martin 1994, pp. 160-161, 167.

¹⁴³ DIMK. Vol. V, Budapest 1982, doc. 876, pp. 1224-1225.

the war and that quarrels within the family has to be settled".¹⁴⁴ Thus, Slovak-Hungarian relations improved.

The declarations of war to the USSR on 22 June 1941 ended the complicated evolution of the Slovak and Hungarian foreign policies during the beginning of the Second World War. This act finally made both countries belligerent states and pushed them deeper into the Berlin-Rome block. On the other hand, this dependence on Axis-powers buried Bratislava's and Budapest's hopes to achieve territorial revisions, due to the German fear to provoke an uncontrolled territorial fight between her satellites.

The impact of the Slovak and Hungarian aggressions against the USSR on the Kremlin strategic plans (1941-1944). The summer 1941 events caused a U-turn in the Soviet perception of its interests in the Danube region. Moscow became a strong supporter of the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic, what quickly led to the full recognition of the Eduard Beneš exile government by the USSR and Great Britain. Moreover, the Kremlin expected the British to declare war to Hungary, what was finally done in December 1941. Soon, the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin proposed British a draft for a future European readjustment of borders: it included the restoration of Czechoslovakia (granted with some Hungarian territories) and the "punishment" of Hungary.¹⁴⁵ This Moscow decision remained valid until the end of the war.

In 1944 the head of a special NKID commission, M. Litvinov, assumed that Czechoslovakia and Hungary could be in the Soviet zone of influence after the war.¹⁴⁶ His colleague, Ivan M. Maisky, programmed to pursue polarly opposite policies towards Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the future. Maisky insisted on Czechoslovak reinforcement and on awarding her territorial increments where possible. In opposite, Hungary should be weakened and the territorial disputes should be solved against Hungary.¹⁴⁷ The Hungarian localization in the Soviet zone was partly acknowledged by the so-called "Percentage agreement" between Stalin and Churchill in October 1944.

More-less, this project was implemented after the war: the winner states approved the replacement of the Slovak republic by Czechoslovakia, nullified the Vienna awards of 1938 and 1940, and supported the restoration of the Trianon borders in Hungary

¹⁴⁴ DGFP. SD. Vol. XIII, doc. 503, p. 839.

¹⁴⁵ DVP. Vol. XXIV, doc. 328, pp. 501-514.

¹⁴⁶ V. N. MARDULIN. Formirovanie i razvitie blokovogo protivostoyaniya v Evrope posle Vtoroy mirovoy vojny, 1939-1945, p. 4. In: Mir i soglasie. 2/47, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Sovetskiy faktor v Vostochnoy Evrope: 1944-1953. Dokumenty. Vol. I. 1944-1948, Moskva 1999, doc. 1, pp. 23-48.

(plus a few more villages given away to Czechoslovakia).

In the first post-war years, the Prague government dealt with the Hungarian issue through radical measures. Magyars were deprived from civil and political rights, deported to Hungary and Czech borderlands and forced to declare Slovak ethnicity. Those violations were stopped only after the Communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia in 1948. During the following 40 years, when the Soviet Union established an exceptional political dominance in Central and Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Moscow insisted (as Berlin did during the Second World War) on freezing all ethnic and border conflicts between its satellites.