

Hungarian–Yugoslav Relations, 1918–1927. By Árpád Hornyák. Boulder, Co: East European Monographs, 2013. 426 pp.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the map of Europe underwent radical, fundamental changes. The Austro–Hungarian Monarchy disintegrated, the Russian Empire suffered significant territorial losses before its ultimate collapse, and the Ottoman Empire was driven completely from the European continent. In the course of these changes, entirely new countries came into being, which then strove to integrate into the European system of diplomacy. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was one of these states. In 1918, Hungary became part of the new European international constellation as an independent state for the first time in centuries. Though the reorganization of the continent in the wake of the war brought very different kinds of consequences for each of the two countries, both were compelled to address the question of integration into the new international order. The southern-Slav state was formed in December 1918, but was only recognized by the Allies over the course of the following year, and this was a cause of no small concern in its capital, Belgrade. Initially, only Serbia was officially invited to participate in the peace negotiations. As one of the defeated powers, Hungary had to struggle for recognition, and a considerable amount of time passed before it was able to pursue an active foreign policy.

In his new book, Árpád Hornyák, a scholar who has been studying Hungarian–Yugoslav relations for over a decade, examines the period between 1918 and 1927. Logically, he begins with 1918, as this was the year in which, with the conclusion of the war, a new era began. He chooses to end his inquiry with April 5, 1927, the date of the signing of the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, because the period that followed bore witness to a qualitative shift in Hungarian–Yugoslav relations. The book goes in chronological order, and it consists of three chapters. The first, which covers the period between the autumn of 1918 and the autumn of 1921, examines events up to the deposition of the Habsburg House. The second covers the period from the deposition to the accession of the two states into the League of Nations, and the third concludes with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship by Italy and Hungary.

The last phase of the war created an opportunity for leaders of the Serbian national movement to achieve many of their goals. These goals included the creation of a country territorially larger than Serbia, incorporating into

a single state all southern Slavs. Following the armistice concluded in Padua, according to the Belgrade Convention (November 13, 1918) the southern border separating Hungary and the allies would run from the Mureş River in the east through the cities of Subotica (Szabadka), Baja, and Pécs. The convention provided a legal foundation for the advances of Serbian troops (which were already underway), who were ordered to reach the Szabadka–Baja line as soon as possible. (The liquidation of the Hungarian administration of Voivodina, or Vajdaság in Hungarian, also began.) With the delineation of the demarcation line, in practice the border between Hungary and Yugoslavia was established. On August 1, 1919 the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference made its final decision regarding the border. Essentially, the Yugoslavs were satisfied with the resolution, though for months they continued to approach the Council with new propositions regarding modifications, always in vain. The border between the two countries was made international law with the conclusion of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

Official ties between the two countries were only established in the late summer and autumn of 1919, when they concluded contracts concerning the transportation of foodstuffs. Following the ratification by Belgrade of the Treaty of Trianon, the Hungarian ambassador to Yugoslavia was able to assume his position in Belgrade. The Yugoslav government remained suspicious of Hungary, however. It accused the Hungarian government of arming, and the attempts that were made by Charles I of Austria to reclaim the throne exacerbated existing tensions. In August 1920, in order to hinder Habsburg restoration, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia concluded a collective defense agreement in Belgrade, thereby laying the foundations of the Little Entente and strengthening anti-Hungarian policies. The treaty was ratified by the two countries in February, 1921, and a few months later Romania joined the alliance.

Following the attempts by Charles to reclaim the throne, one of Hungary's primary goals was to become a member state of the League of Nations, since entrance into this body meant recognition by the new system. Following its accession, Hungary had opportunities to stabilize the country's economy with the help of loans from the League. In order for this to happen, the question of reparations had to be settled. Leaders in Belgrade felt that since Hungary was not willing to desist in its irredentist propaganda campaigns or military preparations for possible revision of the Treaty of Trianon, the country should be compelled to pay very high reparations. In their view, Hungary should only receive loans if the Hungarian government were to disarm completely (though the Hungarian

military hardly constituted a threat to the Little Entente) and the League were to monitor strictly the ways in which the monies were spent, for instance by allowing one of the Little Entente states to delegate one of the members of the committee overseeing the use of the funds. As the conditions proposed by the Yugoslav government clearly indicate, the southern Slav state did not regard Hungary's economic stabilization through the acquisition of foreign loans or the de-sequestration of the country's capital as desirable. Yugoslav leaders felt that were it to be granted the loans, the Hungarian government would pursue revision even more resolutely. Yugoslav foreign minister Momčilo Ninčić stated this openly, saying that for Yugoslavia a poor Hungary was preferable to a wealthy Hungary, since a wealthy Hungary could be drawing into machinations against Serbia. With the addition of certain conditions, the states of the Little Entente eventually gave their consent and the loans were made. Yugoslavia was interested primarily in the question of the continuation of the transportation of coal and the delivery of materials for the railway. In the end, the states of the Little Entente did not insist on playing an active role in monitoring Hungary's military or finances, and on March 14, 1924 Prime Minister István Bethlen was able to sign the documents that stipulated the conditions of the loan. (At the same time, Yugoslavia was reaching an agreement with France regarding loans to purchase arms.)

Yugoslavia regarded closer ties with Hungary as potentially useful because of the pressure that were being put on the southern Slav state by Italy, whereas for Hungary it was hoped that a rapprochement with Yugoslavia would facilitate the acquisition of funds from the League of Nations. In 1925, while the two states were pursuing negotiations regarding economic issues, Belgrade suggested that they also might begin talks regarding political cooperation. The idea of normalization relations with Yugoslavia found support in Hungarian public opinion as well. In 1926, Italy even called the attention of the Yugoslav foreign minister to the possibility of reconciliation with Hungary (while at the same time Italy threatened to treat Yugoslavia very differently if the southern Slav state were to conclude a treaty of friendship with France). Since in Yugoslavia at the time the supporters of Yugoslav–Italian rapprochement were more prominent, there was hope that Yugoslav–Hungarian relations might improve. Following the franc forgery scandal (in 1926, Lajos Windischgraetz and Imre Nádosy were convicted of having forged French francs in part to undermine the French currency but also to fund their irredentist efforts), the Hungarian government had to prove that it was not driven by revisionist designs and it sought to establish

and maintain good relations with its neighbors. By normalizing relations with Yugoslavia, the Hungarian government sought to demonstrate its intentions by example. On March 15, 1926, Bethlen met with the Yugoslav foreign minister and raised the possibility of signing an arbitration convention. The negotiations went well, and over the course of the summer, when circumstances had changed (Italy was again pursuing policies that were to some degree hostile to Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavia's relationship with Greece had worsened), Ninčić began to take the idea increasingly seriously. In the fall, however, Budapest began to take efforts to win the good favor not of Belgrade, but of Rome. For Italy in the meantime had revived the Badoglio Plan, which had been made in the wake of the war and which envisioned the encirclement of Yugoslavia, and had offered to sign a pact with Hungary. For the first time in a long time, Hungary found itself presented with a choice of international allies, and the architects of Hungary's foreign policy chose to side with Italy, the great power that was discontent with the existing order. Towards the end of the year (and particularly in the wake of the signing of a pact between Italy and Albania), support for a pro-Italian foreign policy in Yugoslavia faded. The new foreign minister revived policies that sought support in alliances with France and the Little Entente. Following the signing of the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, efforts to normalize relations and foster closer ties with Yugoslavia were broken off.

In addition to acquainting its readers with the bilateral negotiations and the various standpoints that were taken by the two states, Hornyák's study very clearly demonstrates that one of the most characteristic sentiments of the era was quite simply mistrust. For the government of Yugoslavia, the most important task was to ensure the safety of the northern and northwestern borders and to find an ally that could offer support against Italy. If Yugoslav diplomats were to prove unable to find an ally (usually as a consequence of a shift in or the weakness of French foreign policy), they considered the ways in which they might eventually reach a compromise with Italy (although this would demand sacrifices and would occasion domestic political conflicts) and obtain a certain scope for action in the Balkans (one thinks of the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo, the Santa Margherita Convention, the Rome Convention, and the Treaty of Nettuno). Yugoslav interests lay primarily to the south, and the southern Slav state was more concerned with pursuing an active foreign policy in the Balkans. Yugoslavia sought to reach the Aegean Sea through Thessaloniki and also hoped to exert more influence on Albania. It was also in constant conflict with the neighboring states, first and foremost Bulgaria, because of disputes

over the Macedonian question. Because of these many concerns, for Yugoslav foreign policy the territories of Central Europe were the priority. In the interests of securing its border with Hungary, preventing a Habsburg restoration, and ensuring that it would have reliable allies, Yugoslavia was one of the founders of the Little Entente and remained an active member throughout the period. The Yugoslav government always strove to prevent Hungary from becoming economically stronger and consistently opposed any effort to allow Hungary to rearm.

Hungary's new conception of foreign policy began to take form during Bethlen's tenure as prime minister, following the unsuccessful attempts of Charles I of Austria to reclaim the throne. Bethlen and his government believed that it was necessary to adapt to the situation that had been forced on Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon. They felt that the country had to begin or rather continue to pursue a policy of concord and compromise, while at the same, if circumstances were to shift in Hungary's favor, certain territories might be recovered (first and foremost with the assistance of a stronger Germany). Attempts to foster close relations with Yugoslavia were always motivated in large part by the desire to loosen the bonds that held the Little Entente together. Of the three states of the Little Entente, Yugoslavia seemed to offer the most promise in this regard, since in comparison with Romania and Czechoslovakia Yugoslavia had acquired the smallest compact Hungarian territory and for some reason of the nationalities in question the Serbs were held in the highest regard by Hungarian leaders (perhaps because of the reputation of the Serbs as a defiant nation that had fought against Ottoman occupation). At the same time, Hungary did not regard the friendship with the new southern Slav state as everlasting. To the architects of Hungarian foreign policy, it seemed preferable to have not a large southern Slav state of 13,000,000 people to the south, but rather several smaller states. In private, they hoped that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would fall apart, and sometimes they even supported groups in Yugoslavia that shared this goal (though without success). However, Hungary, which never abandoned the goal of undermining the unity of the Little Entente, also considered it important to find a great power ally. In 1927, with the signing of the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, Hungary seemed to have reached this goal.

Hornyák's study, the style of which is vigorous and animated, bears ample testimony to thorough scholarly research. Hornyák pursued research in archives in Hungary, Serbia, and England, and he has brought to light and compared a number of new sources. He presents the shifting relations between the two

countries on the basis of a vast wealth of facts and carefully attempts to elucidate causal relationships. He also goes into detail regarding the circumstances that shaped relations between Hungary and the southern Slav state, the plans of the great powers regarding Central Europe, and the responses of the states of Central Europe to these plans. He examines the tools that were available to the great powers in their efforts to blunt the often excessive demands of the smaller countries of the region (for instance monitoring the ways in which loans made by the League of Nations were used). He draws the attention of his reader to innumerable facts that have failed to become part of common knowledge among Hungarian historians. For instance, in his presentation of Italy's policies regarding the Balkans he explains why Yugoslavia was not able or did not want to devote more energy to the region of Central Europe. In many cases, Hornyák complements or makes more precise assertions that have been made in the Hungarian secondary literature, and he offers valuable observations regarding current scholarly debates. One could mention, as an example, the section of the book in which he examines the shifts that took place in the views of Mihály Károlyi, who served briefly as prime minister and then president of the short-lived Hungarian Democratic Republic in 1918–19, regarding Wilson's principle of national self-determination. Károlyi lost his faith in Wilson's ideas when he was confronted with Serbia's demands and the conduct of the other great powers. Hornyák also presents how, given the changes in the circumstances, Miklós Horthy and his government were perceived in Yugoslavia. The book acquaints the reader with the particular perspectives and considerations that emerged in the evolution of Yugoslavia's stance. In the formation of its foreign policy, Yugoslavia had to confront the problem that it was compelled to represent the interests of a diverse array of territories. For instance, it was important to Yugoslav politicians to know whether or not prominent political circles in Hungary were pro-Serb or pro-Croat. Lazar Bajić's 1919 report discerns "Serb" and "Croat" tendencies within Hungarian foreign policy.

One can only hope that Hornyák will continue his inquiries and will study the developments of later periods with the same thorough and penetrating attention to detail. The subsequent periods, and in particular last years of the 1930s and first years of the 1940s, were also marked, from the perspective of foreign policy, by the search for ways out of complex entanglements. Hornyák's book represents a new and valuable contribution to Hungarian historiography, since the community of historians does not yet have comprehensive monographs on relations between Hungary and each of the neighboring states. The publication

of this book in English enables readers who do not speak the languages of Central Europe to acquaint themselves with the most recent findings and will further the emergence of more nuanced interpretations that incorporate a wider array of perspectives and approaches.

*Translated by Thomas Cooper*

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