

BALÁZS KÁNTÁS

# THE WHITE INTERNATIONALE



POST-WORLD-WAR HUNGARIAN–  
GERMAN–AUSTRIAN ATTEMPTS OF  
MILITARY COOPERATION,  
1919–1923



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## **THE WHITE INTERNATIONALE POST-WORLD-WAR HUNGARIAN– GERMAN–AUSTRIAN ATTEMPTS OF MILITARY COOPERATION, 1919–1923**

After the end of World War One and the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles that formally ended the war as well, some politicians of the defeated states, mainly those in Germany and in the successor states of the disintegrated Austro–Hungarian monarchy were very unsatisfied with the defeat and the considerable territorial losses, and sought the possibility of revision, including the help of possible allies. From 1919 onwards, Hungary’s new right-wing political leadership continued to actively seek contacts with German-speaking, mainly Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing political forces and their associated paramilitary formations. On the Bavarian side, General Erich Ludendorff, Colonel Max Bauer and the then young and emerging far-right politician Adolf Hitler attempted to set up an international revisionist organisation at the end of 1919. The German radical right-wing politicians would have

seen the possibility of changing the political situation mainly in the coalition of the Free Corpses, which were very numerous in both Germany and Austria and mainly consisted of First World War veterans. The plan envisaged by General Ludendorff would have consisted of an agreement between the Bavarian-German Free Corpses, the Austrian extreme right militias and the leaders of the right-wing counter-revolutionary Government and participants of the paramilitary wave of violence called White Terror<sup>1</sup> in Hungary, with the aim of a violent takeover of political power in both Germany and Austria as soon as possible. In the case of Hungary, it was already foreseeable that political power would permanently be in the hands of the right-wing politicians of the counter-revolutionary Government of Szeged and the commander-in-chief of National Army, Admiral Miklós Horthy who were strongly supported by the Entente powers. Otherwise Admiral Horthy was soon elected as head of state of Hungary under the title Regent Governor in

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<sup>1</sup> Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

1920,<sup>2</sup> since formally the country preserved its form of government as kingdom, although practically it was much more similar to the Republic of Weimar of Germany.

In the winter of 1919, General Ludendorff and Colonel Bauer sent Ignác Trebitsch, the Hungarian-born international spy and adventurer to Hungary with the mission to persuade Hungarian right-wing circles to support the so-called Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch in Germany, a coup d'état formally led by Prussian civil servant and nationalist politician Wolfgang Kapp, but in reality mainly organised by General Ludendorff and his followers.<sup>3</sup> The contact with the Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations was sought primarily by a group of strongly nationalist military officers linked to the Double Cross Blood Union, the very influential Hungarian secret military organisation. Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, for example, negotiated with Lieutenant Colonel

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<sup>2</sup> Dávid Turbucz, *Horthy Miklós*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2011, 66–92.

<sup>3</sup> About the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch see in more details: *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Ludendorff Putsch. Dokumente*, ed. Erwin Könneman–Gerhard Schulze, Berlin, Olzog, 2002.

Pál Prónay, one of the most notorious paramilitary commanders of the Hungarian right-wing counter-revolution during their first visit to Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Prónay also belonged to the circles of radical right-wing officers who commanded the Double Cross Blood Union, and at the time the secret military organisation and its commanders had some influence even on Hungarian foreign policy for a while, although moderate conservative politicians tried to prevent them from leading Hungary into hazardous political actions.<sup>5</sup>

The radical right-wing forces finally attempted to take power in Germany in March 1920, but the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch, due to the hesitation of the Army, which did not support the coup, but did not defend the legitimate German Federal Government either, initially led to the

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Az igazi Trebitsch. Az átváltozóművész*, trans. György Molnár, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2016, 217–238.

<sup>5</sup> About the activities of the radical right-wing Hungarian secret military organisation the Double Cross Blood Union see: Balázs Kántás, *The Double Cross Blood Union. Outline of the History of a Secret Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920s*, Anglisticum, 2021/6, 52–70.

<https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2218>



Government's escape from Berlin, but within a few days it was overthrown by the general strike that followed the coup and the resistance of the bankers and the industrialists. In May 1920 Ignác Trebitsch together with Colonel Bauer and Captain von Stefany travelled to Budapest once again to deliver Ludendorff's letter, and they personally visited Admiral Miklós Horthy who had by then been elected Regent Governor of Hungary by the Parliament. The German radical right-wing politicians and the newly elected Hungarian head of state discussed the possibility of a possible German–Austrian–Hungarian right-wing alliance, mainly of military nature. It should be added that the parties did indeed negotiate with the serious desire to cooperate, and General Ludendorff considered it entirely feasible at that time, and he called the initiative of the cooperation between the right-wing forces of Central Europe the *White Internationale*. In his cordial letter, Ludendorff called Hungary the saviour of the nationalist idea and asked for financial support for Bavarian revolutionary organisations as well.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, ed. Miklós Szinai Miklós–László

The Germans offered Hungary a very detailed cooperation plan consisting of the following main points:

1. secret irregular military units would travel from Germany to Hungary.
2. these men would be trained in secret camps in Hungary.
3. the Hungarian Government will raise the necessary funds for training by printing and distributing counterfeit Russian rubels.
4. Bavarian military units trained in Hungary secretly infiltrate Vienna and overthrow the Austrian social democratic Government in due course.
- 5 After the capture of Vienna, the Bavarian-Hungarian-Austrian coalition troops attack Czechoslovakia.

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Szűcs, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1962, 33–38; Ildikó Szerényi–Zoltán Viszket, *Buzgó Mócsing, az igazi Trebitsch*, Archívnet, 2006/3.

[http://www.archivnet.hu/kuriozumok/buzgo\\_mocsing\\_az\\_igazi\\_trebitsch.html](http://www.archivnet.hu/kuriozumok/buzgo_mocsing_az_igazi_trebitsch.html)

6. The above-mentioned troops then occupy Prussia where Ludendorff establishes a military dictatorship.

7. Thus strengthened, the governments and armies of the White Internationale unleash a white revolution in Soviet Russia and overthrow the communist government.

8. After the successful right-wing restoration of Russia, the member states of the White Internationale declare war on the Entente, and the winners redraw the map of Europe, returning the territories of Hungary annexed by the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>7</sup>

It is also worth mentioning here that the Ludendorff and his companions had particularly high hopes for the participation of the monarchist Russian forces fighting against the Bolshevik Government in the White Internationale, since the outcome of the Russian civil war was not yet a decided in 1919, and hundreds of thousands of tsarists, or at least Russian citizens who were not

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<sup>7</sup> László Gulyás, *A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája 1. Az első évek, 1919–1924*, Máriabesenyő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2012, 42–43.

sympathetic to the Bolshevik Government had left their country since the outbreak of the communist revolution. The largest group of the so-called White Russian emigrants had settled in Germany, and there were still many Russian prisoners of war who refused to return to Soviet Russia, and several tsarist Russian generals considered it possible to overthrow the Bolshevik regime with the help of the above mentioned soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Ludendorff also contacted, through Ignác Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, tsarist General Vassily Biskupsky who himself had visited to Budapest in June 1920 and took part in negotiations between the German, Austrian and Hungarian right-wing political forces.<sup>9</sup>

The negotiations also resulted in memoranda of detailed plans, but actual cooperation with the White Russian forces fighting against the Bolshevik Army, which were otherwise

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<sup>8</sup> About the Russian aspects of the White Internationale see: Attila Kolontáry, *Alekszej von Lampe, Vrangél báró katonai képviselője Magyarországon*, Pécs, PTE BTK Történettudományi Intézet–Modernkori Oroszország és Szovjetunió Történeti Kutatócsoport, MOSZT-füzetek 1., 2015

<sup>9</sup> Wasserstein, op. cit. 254–255.

very fragmented and poorly organised, could not really take place on the part of the planned participants in the *White Internationale* from Central Europe, mainly due to the great geographical distances.<sup>10</sup>

The negotiations between the European nationalist forces, mainly based in Budapest, could not have been conducted under complete secrecy, of course, as the French and British intelligence services were also informed about them, and the Entente powers expressed their strong objections, which warned the Hungarian Government to be cautious in the field of diplomacy and foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> In parallel with Bavarian nationalist forces, the Hungarian Government also sought contact with Austrian radical right-wing political forces and paramilitary organisations in the 1920s, in the hope of establishing the same Central European white coalition. The Hungarian Government and military leadership, in close cooperation with them Hungarian nationalist social organisations, played a contradictory game, as their

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<sup>10</sup> Wasserstein, op. cit. 255.

<sup>11</sup> Elek Karsai, *Számjeltávirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek*, Budapest, Táncsics Kiadó, 1969, 63–64.

plans included assistance to overthrow Austria's elected left-wing government and to bring local right-wing and radical right-wing political forces to power, including even through Hungarian military intervention.<sup>12</sup> Hungarian radical right-wing military officers also drew up a plan for a military operation under the codename '*Remény*' – '*Hope*', which was certainly never realised.<sup>13</sup> The Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations were also in close contact with the Bavarian nationalist circles led by General Ludendorff, so the secret negotiations were not only conducted between the Hungarian and the Austrian side, but also involved the competent Bavarian politicians. The Hungarian General Staff, due to the weakness of the Austrian paramilitary organisations and the military preparations of Czechoslovakia, considered a possible intervention against Austria to be feasible only with the support of Bavarian irregular military units.<sup>14</sup> The Bavarian–Hungarian–Austrian secret

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<sup>12</sup> Katalin G. Soós, *Burgenland az európai politikában 1918–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971, 90.

<sup>13</sup> Archives of Hungarian Military History, HU-HL-VKF-1920-II-21197.

<sup>14</sup> G. Soós, op. cit. 90–91.

negotiations, which were intensively conducted during 1920, were personally led by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Count Pál Teleki and by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, commander of the secret military organisation Double Cross Blood Union and close friend to Regent Governor Horthy on the Hungarian side; on the Bavarian side, Rudolf Kanzler, leader of the right-wing militia ORKA (Organisation Kanzler),<sup>15</sup> and Georg Heim, a politician of the Bavarian Peasant Party; and on the Austrian side, mainly members of the radical right wing of the Christian Socialist Party, for example, by Prince Johannes von Liechtenstein. On 25 and 26 August 1920, the parties met at Hungarian Prime Minister Teleki's house in Budapest.<sup>16</sup> It should be stressed that while in the case of Bavarian and Austrian politicians the negotiators were mainly members of political movements aspiring for power, in the Case of Hungary, the representatives of the

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<sup>15</sup> As for the history of ORKA and other radical right-wing German paramilitary organisations see: John T. Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right in Austria, 1918–1934*, Copenhagen, The Royal Library–Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> G. Soós, *op. cit.* 91.

Government and the Army took part in the negotiations, although there were certainly tensions between the moderate conservative and the radical nationalist wings of the governing United Party and the political and military elite. However, in this period the Hungarian head of state Admiral Horthy, who was himself a high-ranking military officer and hero of the Great War very similar to General Ludendorff, strongly supported the adventurous plans of radical officers and politicians.<sup>17</sup>

By August 1920, the Hungarian Government had abandoned their plans of the military intervention against Austria due to the international situation, but they continued to do its best to ensure that a right-wing government would come to power in the forthcoming Austrian parliamentary elections, so they tried to intervene in the internal affairs of the new Austrian State by conspiratorial means. At the same time, the Hungarian military intervention was no longer approved by the Bavarian paramilitary leader Rudolf Kanzler either. Furthermore, there were

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<sup>17</sup> Turbucz, *op. cit.* 66–92.



significant conflicts of interest between the Bavarian, Hungarian and Austrian sides, for example, they could not agree on the issue of the king and the future territorial status of Western Hungary, which was an important element of Hungarian–Austrian relations. In the end, the Hungarian Government only signed an agreement with the radical right-wing political forces in Bavaria on the supply of a substantial amount of arms, to which the Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Gustav von Kahr who was also strongly right-wing and on good terms with General Ludendorff, subsequently agreed.<sup>18</sup>

In parallel, there were also lively negotiations between the Austrian and Bavarian right-wing forces in progress the main aim of which was the unification of the Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations under German command and the unification of the German-speaking states with their cooperation. However, there were significant conflicts of interest and differences of opinion between the German-speaking parties as well. On 6 and 7 September

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<sup>18</sup> G. Soós, *op. cit.* 92.

1920, further negotiations took place in Vienna between Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations, presumably with the participation of the Hungarian Ambassador in Vienna, Gusztáv Gratz where the parties agreed to mutually support each other's anti-communist aims, but at the same time Austrian Christian Socialist politicians abandoned at the last moment their plans to overthrow the Austrian Government by force. The leaders of the Austrian Heimwehr militias<sup>19</sup> said that they could not provide the armed forces that would have been necessary to overthrow the social democrat Government by military means, but that they would do everything in their power to ensure that a right-wing government of their own design would come to power in Austria in the forthcoming elections.

The Hungarian Government primarily provided financial support to the Austrian *Heimwehr* organisations, in the hope that it would be able to use them for its future foreign policy

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<sup>19</sup> As for the history of the Austrian paramilitary Heimwehr movement see: Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, *Történelmi Szemle*, 1961/2, 199–216

goals.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, in Bavaria, General Ludendorff and his very radical circle were no longer willing to hear the much more sensible scenario agreed on at the earlier September talks. They committed themselves to military action in any case, by the rapid establishment of a military alliance called the *League of the Oppressed Peoples*, to be set up by the countries that had lost the First World War. Furthermore, Ludendorff once again requested financial support from the Hungarian Government, not for the first time and not for the last.<sup>21</sup> By this time, however, Teleki was explicitly opposed to the Hungarian financial support for the Bavarian radical right, and the Hungarian Government saw the participation in the *League of Oppressed Peoples* and thus a possible new military conflict as increasingly risky.<sup>22</sup>

The Hungarian Government was, by this time, of course, cautious, and realistic political considerations finally seemed to prevail over the despair coming from the huge territorial losses and the resulting radicalism, but they did not explicitly

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<sup>20</sup> G. Soós, op. cit. 93.

<sup>21</sup> HU-HL VKF-1920-II-23152.; G. Soós, op. cit. 94.

<sup>22</sup> G. Soós, op. cit. 95.

reject the possibility of joining the *League of Oppressed Peoples*, which was rather only a conceptual cooperation, and in their reply to Ludendorff and his circle they wrote that they would continue to maintain good relations with the Bavarian nationalist organisations. Teleki also indicated that Austria, which geographically separated Hungary and Germany, should in any case be put at the service of their own political and military aims, but not by an immediate military intervention.<sup>23</sup>

The relations between the Austrian counter-revolutionary groups and the Hungarian Government were spoiled by the fact that the two largest successor states of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy failed to reach an agreement on the question of the belonging of Western Hungary, and the issue was to be decided by the victorious Entente powers, primarily by France.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup> Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1920/384.

<sup>24</sup> Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar–bajor–osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/Tomus XXVII., 3–43, 23.

question remained unresolved for some time, but it worsened the relations with both the official Austrian Government circles and the Austrian radical right-wing movements which was fuelled by aspirations for power, and the parties tried to obtain a decision from the great powers that was as favourable as possible for them.

In October 1920, the Social Democrat Karl Renner was replaced by the Christian Socialist Michael Mayr as Chancellor (Prime Minister) of Austria, but the Hungarian Government, or at least the radical right-wing Hungarian military circles close to the Government were still secretly considering the possibility of military intervention against Austria again. In November, the Hungarians again contacted Ludendorff through their military attaché in Munich, Colonel Béla Janky, and in January 1921, on the orders of Minister of Defence General Sándor Belitska. The Hungarian General Staff, which was at the time operating under secrecy due to the strict limitations of armament of the Peace Treaties of Paris over the defeated countries, drew up a plan for military intervention against Austria in the event of a communist takeover in the

neighbouring country and the coming to power of a radical left-wing government.<sup>25</sup> After the plan had been worked out, Count Gedeon Ráday travelled to Munich on behalf of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the details of the possible action with Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Gustav von Kahr and paramilitary commander Rudolf Kanzler. On 16 January 1921, at a secret meeting held in the presence of Regent Governor Horthy, the Hungarian Government decided that any military action against Austria could only take place with German (Bavarian) participation.<sup>26</sup> The Hungarian Government's decision also implied that if the Bavarian political forces saw the need for military intervention in Austria of their own accord and carried it out, Hungary would support them, providing them primarily with material support, equipment and munitions, and Hungarian irregular military units would also volunteer to help the Bavarian forces. These Hungarian units would have been provided by the secret irregular, reserve-force like military

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<sup>25</sup> HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266. Cited by G. Soós, *op. cit.* 25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

organisation, the Double Cross Blood Union under the command of Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy,<sup>27</sup> which, as it was already mentioned above, played a very important role in the clandestine revisionist negotiations, and in fact, from the Hungarian side, it was precisely the radical right-wing military officers of the Blood Union who were the main promoters of such a military cooperation.

The plan for military cooperation against communism in Central Europe was not looked upon too favourably by the Entente powers, especially France and Britain, mainly because the Austrian and Bavarian positions also strongly implied the intention of unifying Austria and Germany, the so-called Anschluss. At the end of January 1921, Gusztáv Gratz, the former Hungarian ambassador in Vienna, and by then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, had a great deal of diplomatic information and tried to dissuade the Hungarian Government from even the idea of participating in any reckless military action. He indicated that Britain and France would

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<sup>27</sup> HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266.

regard the Hungarian–German–Austrian anti-Bolshevik league as a pretext for the territorial revision of the peace treaties of Paris, and that in his opinion there was a real danger that in the event of any Hungarian military action against Austria, the neighbouring Little Entente states, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would also intervene against Hungary.<sup>28</sup>

Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Kahr was increasingly losing ground against France in the international diplomatic arena, and the Bavarian side gradually passed the right to negotiate to Rudolf Kanzler. In February 1921, Count Gedeon Ráday and the Bavarian paramilitary commander also signed a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian Government and the Bavarian ORKA militia, but this was mostly a symbolic declaration. The parties agreed that if the opportunity arose, the ORKA would attempt to ‘restore order’ in Austria, with the Hungarian Government providing financial assistance, and that if the ORKA were successful,

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<sup>28</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-34.



the Trianon Peace Treaty would be declared invalid. However, Kanzler asked the Hungarian Government for too much money, a sum of 4,5 million German marks, to organise the very risky operation, which the Hungarian side refused to provide, and for this reason no actual agreement was reached between the parties.<sup>29</sup>

All in all, the idea of military intervention against Austria was unrealistic in the given political situation, and the parties finally realised this in the first half of 1921. Although Austria's new Chancellor was a right-wing Christian Socialist politician, he belonged to the more moderate wing of the party, and the Hungarian Government was moving closer to the radical wing of the Austrian Christian Socialists. Very close links existed between the Austrian Heimwehr militias and the radical wing of the governing Christian Socialist Party, and the possibility of overthrowing the moderate Mayr Government was soon raised. Instead of a Hungarian or Bavarian military intervention, however, the new negotiations were dominated by the idea that the Austrian right-wing

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<sup>29</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-41-72.

paramilitary organisations should themselves force a change of government in Austria, and the Austrian side was represented by General Josef Metzger and the later Chancellor Ignaz Seipel on behalf of the Heimwehr organisations of Vienna and Lower Austria. The Austrians expected the Hungarian Government to provide financial support for the major arming of the Heimwehr militias, and the Hungarian Government demanded in return that if the Austrian radical right-wing forces succeeded in bringing to power a government of their own design in Vienna, Austria should temporarily give up the territory of Western Hungary, and negotiations should continue until the new Austrian Government was able to settle the question of Western Hungary in a way that was favourable to the Hungarian side. Although the leadership of the Austrian Heimwehr organisations and the group led by Seipel were by no means free from the idea of royalism, the attempted return of King Charles IV of Habsburg to Hungary at the end of March 1921 also made the idea of a Habsburg restoration in Austria completely unrealistic. On 31 March 1921, the Hungarian Ambassador in Vienna, Szilárd Masirevich

reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs Gusztáv Gratz that he had personally negotiated with Seipel who was deeply shocked by Charles IV's decisive removal from Hungary. Certainly, the Entente powers did not allow any attempts of restoration of the House of Habsburg in any successor states of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, therefore, the Hungarian Government had decisively denied Charles IV to return to the throne of Hungary. Among other things, this was the moment that made Seipel realise the extent of the political and military influence of the Entente powers in the region, and that an armed change of government in Austria with the help of the *Heimwehr* militias was as unrealistic as the Habsburg restoration itself.<sup>30</sup> In Austria, the attempted return of Charles IV to Hungary was followed by vivid political debates, and Federal Chancellor Mayr expressed in Parliament his firm belief that he considered the republican form of government laid down in the Treaty of Saint Germain to be obligatory on Austria, and that he would defend it by all means

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<sup>30</sup> G. Soós, op. cit. 35.

against any legitimist-monarchist plotting.<sup>31</sup> Although Seipel came to power shortly afterwards, he himself was forced to adapt to the interests of international politics and to consolidate. Furthermore, the attempted return of Charles IV caused a domestic political crisis in Hungary as well, with the resignation of Gustáv Gratz, the Minister of Foreign Affairs who was a well-known legitimist on 4 April 1921, followed by the resignation of Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki on 8 April. Teleki was succeeded as Prime Minister by Count István Bethlen, and Gratz was replaced by Count Miklós Bánffy. Although the period of Bethlen's policy of consolidation had begun, the secret negotiations between Hungary, Bavaria and Austria on the establishment of a possible anti-communist and revisionist alliance still continued for some time. While the parties continued to agree on the main points of the earlier negotiations, relations between Austria and Hungary became even more negative, partly because of the attempted legitimist coup in Hungary. Alongside the Bavarian Kanzler, the

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<sup>31</sup> G. Soós, *op. cit.* 36.

Austrian radical right was represented at this stage of the negotiations mainly by politicians from Styria, such as the Styrian Provincial Prime Minister Anton Rintelen who later became Austria's Federal Minister of Education. During these negotiations, the leadership of the Bavarian ORKA organisation argued for the general invalidity of the Paris Peace Treaties and urged the Austrian and Hungarian sides to settle the dispute over the territorial integrity of Western Hungary within the framework of a friendly agreement.<sup>32</sup> However, given that Austria was then only represented in the negotiations by politicians with local influence, their position on the issue was of no importance as for international politics. Both the Austrian and German radical right-wing organisations asked for additional financial support from the Hungarian Government, and there was rivalry beginning between them. From May 1921 onwards, representatives of the Hungarian side – with the Government's knowledge and authorisation – were present at the negotiations, and Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy asked the ORKA

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<sup>32</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/198.

militia to try to involve not only the Styrian radical right forces but all similar organisations in Austria, especially influential Viennese politicians, in the cooperation.<sup>33</sup> During the negotiations, the question was raised whether Austria would be prepared to make concessions to Hungary on the issue of Western Hungary if the ORKA succeeded in bringing a radical right-wing government to power in Austria, to which Styrian Prime Minister Rintelen could not give a definite answer. General Josef Metzger attempted to reconcile the differences between the parties, but he failed. In May 1921, Ervin Morlin, the official of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Hungarian Government that even Anton Rintelen himself did not seriously believe that he could replace the Mayr Government with the men of the ORKA.<sup>34</sup> The activities of the Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations became more and more limited to obtaining more and more financial support from the Hungarian Government, but they did less and less political

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<sup>33</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/199.

<sup>34</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-221.

activity in their own countries that was of any use to the Hungarian Government. At the end of May 1921, Hungarian military diplomat Colonel Boldizsár Láng informed the Hungarian Government about the fragmentation and poor equipment of the Austrian Heimwehr organisations.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Bavaria was experiencing a huge economic and social crisis, and the local government could less and less afford to pursue a foreign policy that differed from that of the Federal Government, while there was also a disunity between the various radical right-wing paramilitary organisations, and their political activities were increasingly confined to the provincial borders of Bavaria. The rise to power of the Bavarian and Austrian radical right then and there was becoming more and more the simple daydream of a few politicians who unable to accept the changes that had taken place after the end of the First World War rather than a real political possibility.

Hungary was not able to reach a compromise with the Austrian side either through

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<sup>35</sup> HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/244.

the secret negotiations with the radical right which was trying to rise to power or through formal diplomatic negotiations with the legitimate Government of Austria. The dispute over the status of the region of Western Hungary which had been debated since the disintegration of the Monarchy in 1918 was not solved. Although the peace treaties of Paris eventually awarded the territory to Austria, the Hungarian Government refused to evacuate and hand over the area called Burgenland by the Austrians as long as possible. Since peaceful negotiations reached no results, by the summer of 1921, irregular military units were already being organised, with the strong but silent support of Prime Minister Bethlen himself to break in the region shortly afterwards.<sup>36</sup> In the autumn of 1921, the so-called Uprising of Western Hungary<sup>37</sup> finally broke out, and Hungarian irregular military units, with the silent consent of

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<sup>36</sup> G. Soós, op. cit. 42.

<sup>37</sup> About the Uprising of Western Hungary see: József Botlik, *Nyugat-Magyarország sorsa, 1918–1921*, Vasszilvágy, Magyar Nyugat Könyvkiadó, 2012.; Imre Tóth, *Két Anschluss között. Nyugat-Magyarország és Burgenland Wilsontól Hitlerig*, Budapest, Kronosz Kiadó, 2020.



the Government, marched in Western Hungary and prevented Austrian troops to occupy the region. This action finally deteriorated the otherwise tense relationship between Austria and Hungary to an unresolvable degree, both between official government circles and secretly negotiating radical right-wing movements. Apart from the international political situation itself, it was a further reason why the Hungarian–Bavarian–Austrian secret negotiations gradually became symbolic, and the political situation of Central Europe was completely determined by the Entente powers, mainly England and France by 1922.

Although Hungarian domestic policy was fully determined by British and French interests after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, secret negotiations with radical right-wing German and Austrian organisations still continued for a time in 1922, but with much less intensity than before. The Bethlen Government carefully continued to maintain moderate contacts with German radical right-wing politicians, including former Bavarian Prime Minister and later Commissioner General Gustav von Kahr, General Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler, who was then

an emerging young far-right politician in Munich, the centre of the German radical right-wing movements. In the spring of 1922, Hungarian Prime Minister Bethlen sent the influential Hungarian background politician Miklós Kozma, then the director of the Hungarian Telegraph Office to Munich to negotiate, gather information and to revive Bavarian–Hungarian political relations, which had been declining since the end of 1921.<sup>38</sup> Kozma also personally negotiated with General Ludendorff, a leader of the German radical right about a possible Bavarian–Hungarian cooperation initiative, in which the Hungarian Government circles would have bought weapons from Germany, for example. The German general complained to him that his political influence had recently declined considerably within the Weimar Republic, and even within Bavaria, the centre of the radical right-wing movement, and that there was such a great disunity among Bavarian right-wing politicians that they essentially did not agree with each other on anything.<sup>39</sup> Bethlen, informed

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<sup>38</sup> Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, 110–113.

<sup>39</sup> Ormos, op. cit.112.

by Miklós Kozma and Gyula Gömbös, Chairman of Hungarian Defence Force Association (MOVE) and a prominent politician of the Hungarian radical right (who was then still a member of the governing United Party), concluded that the Hungarian Government could not hope for any useful cooperation with the Bavarians, and negotiations on such cooperation were temporarily suspended.<sup>40</sup> Behind the negotiations, of course, the name of the secret military organisation, the Double Cross Blood Union was involved, since among others, Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, the head of the organisation was one of the influential figures on the Hungarian Government side who had previously encouraged the maintenance of lively relations with the Bavarian and Austrian far-right movements.<sup>41</sup>

As we have mentioned above, from 1922 onwards, Bethlen's consolidation policy led to a decline in attempts of cooperation between the Hungarian Government and the German-Austrian far-right organisations. At the same time, the

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<sup>40</sup> Ormos, *op. cit.* 113.

<sup>41</sup> Nándori, *A Marseilles-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, 24–25.

nationalist-irredentist organisations, which were increasingly opposed to the Hungarian Government, though sometimes united with it in common interests, especially the then still influential Association of Awakening Hungarians which had considerable political influence and a large number of members, and the radical circles of military officers that were also part of its leadership, continued to actively seek international cooperation with organisations on a similar ideological platform. In 1921 the Awakening Hungarians represented the Hungarian radical right in the international anti-Semitic congress in Vienna where the possibility of forming an International Anti-Semitic League was raised.<sup>42</sup>

The first years of consolidation continued to be characterised by a social and economic situation that was very favourable of political extremism. Several political groupings also played with the idea of attempted coups and violent takeovers. The failed revisionist right-wing alliance, the White Internationale dreamed up by General Ludendorff was the predecessor of such an adventurous and

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<sup>42</sup> Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 111.

essentially frivolous coup plan, which nevertheless attracted great political and press attention, and was put forward by Dr. Béla Szemere, a hospital director, the used-to-be commander of the auxiliary police militia known as the *National Organisation of State Security Agents* (*Állambiztonsági Megbízottak Szervezete*, shortended as ÁBM) (by then in principle under the control of the National Labour Protection, a right-wing workers's militia under the supervision of the State Police), Hungarian-born American architect Títusz Bobula, and Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a lawyer and race-defending member of the National Assembly who had left the governing United Party and was the confidant of Gyula Gömbös, the leading politician of the Hungarian far-right movements. Given that the three men planned to overthrow the Bethlen Government, which they believed to be excessively liberal, pro-Entente and pro-Jewish, by force with the armed support of the German National Socialist movement led by Hitler and General Ludendorff, carrying out their plans at roughly the same time as the Beer Hall Putch, making their action dependent on its success, their coup plan is

perhaps most aptly and ironically should name the plan of the ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’.

The preparations for the strange coup plan must have begun sometime in early August 1923, when a young German man named Friedrich ‘Fritz’ Döhmel appeared in Budapest, claiming to be a representative of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led Bavarian National Socialist movement and the closely allied paramilitary organisation *Kampfbund*, and approached several Hungarian far-right organisations and public figures with various seemingly credible German-language letters of recommendation. One of Döhmel’s first trips, whose motives were not entirely clear, led to the headquarters of the *Association of Awakening Hungarians*, which had previously maintained good relations with the Bavarian nationalists, where he wanted to meet members of the organisation’s leadership. He got to one of the association’s leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but Prónay did not believe the German young man’s claims. However, Döhmel did not give up, and he finally reached Titusz Bobula, a wealthy Hungarian-born architect who had returned from the United States of America and who held a confused radical right-

wing perspective, and his friend, Dr. Béla Szemere, a doctor and hospital director, and his circle. Szemere, as the de facto commander of the above mentioned State Security Agents militia, which continued to operate with some intensity, and Bobula who provided financial support to the Hungarian radical right-wing organisations had been thinking for some time about how to remove the Bethlen Government, but their activities were limited to mere planning. It is not clear from the available sources when Döhmel exactly contacted them, but it is likely that he was in contact with members of the radical right-wing association of the Hungarian Cultural League led by Szemere as early as August 1923.<sup>43</sup>

It seems, however, that Döhmel approached Bobula who rented a suite in the Gellért Hotel at the end of October 1923, and Bobula almost immediately called Szemere to him as well. This may not have been the first time that Szemere and Döhmel met, but in any case it was at this time that the Hungarian parties believed that Döhmel

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<sup>43</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisations, who was visiting Hungary to make concrete arrangements for cooperation with similar Hungarian far-right formations. Negotiations began in German language, and Bobula translated what Döhmel said to Szemere who did not speak German at all. Döhmel asked how many people Szemere as former commander of the State Security Agents could call into arms in the event of a takeover attempt. Szemere replied that although the State Security Agents had not previously been set up for the purpose of conspiring against the Government at all, there would certainly be some people willing to join the cause. There is also contradictory information about whether the majority of the members of the State Security Agents had previously surrendered their anti-riot service weapons, but it is certain that the Szemere were not backed by a serious armed force, and could have fielded at most only a few hundred men equipped with handguns. Soon afterwards, the race-defending Member of Parliament Dr. Ferenc Ulain was brought into the plotting, since he himself had long been in contact with Bavarian nationalist organisations, including a close



acquaintance with Hitler, and he also gave credence to the claims made by Fritz Döhmel. On Döhmel's initiative, the parties also drew up a treaty in German on how the Bavarian State (which was to be established as an independent state of Germany) and the Hungarian State (which would be led by a new, radical right-wing government after the removal of the Bethlen Government) could cooperate in the realisation of their irredentist and anti-Semitic aims. The document was drafted in German by Döhmel himself and dealt with political, military and agricultural issues in eleven articles and three annexes. The essence of the document was that the newly created Bavarian State would recognise the newly created Hungarian State with its borders of 1914, before the beginning of the First World War and the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty, and that the contracting states would do everything possible to help each other militarily. In particular, they decided to send forces against the Little Entente Czechoslovakia and provide military assistance to each other if either Bavaria or Hungary were attacked by the Czechoslovakians. The treaty was signed on 5 November 1923 by

Szemere, Bobula and Ulain, and was scheduled to be signed in Munich by Ludendorff and Hitler on the German side. Dr. Ferenc Ulain otherwise knew exactly what was being prepared in Bavaria, how and especially when the Bavarian far-right organisations wanted to take over the power in Germany, independently of Fritz Döhmel, and he envisaged the possible overthrow of the Hungarian Government in close coordination with the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. If Fritz Döhmel may have been an impostor/agent provocateur who may never previously have been in contact with Bavarian revolutionary organisations in the way he claimed to the phantasmagorical Hungarian conspirers, Ulain, based on his previous negotiations and information, possibly knew much about the processes in Bavaria. It is therefore worth examining the Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch/Hitler–Ludendorff Coup at least for a few sentences, so that we can place the activities of the Szemere–Bobula–Ulain group with all its absurdity and frivolity in international context.

As Ulain later confessed before the Police, he had already held talks with Hitler and Ludendorff in the summer of 1923. Bavaria, which

had a high degree of autonomy within the Weimar Republic as a federal state was at this time in a very turbulent political situation with a devastated economy and social discontent that favoured extremist political formations. These included the NSDAP, that is, the National Socialist German Workers' Party, and its close allies, the paramilitary Kampfbund. Political power was exercised by the former Bavarian Prime Minister Kahr who at the time was the Commissioner of the German Federal Government with provisory powers and had been given a mandate to solve the political and economic problems, together with Colonel Hans von Seisser, the commander of the Bavarian Police and General Otto von Lossow, the Reichswehr's District Commander in Bavaria. The representatives of the executive who exercised special powers to solve the crisis were ideologically not very far from the political extremists and the group led by Hitler and General Ludendorff, but they would have sought to make political capital out of the crisis by excluding the National Socialists.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mária Ormos, *Hitler*, Budapest, T-Twins Kiadó, 1994, 73–86.

Hitler and Ludendorff feared that although the power in Bavaria had been taken over by nationalist politicians, they would be ignored. That is why in early November 1923 they organised a coup d'état and tried to seize power by force. The so-called Beer Hall Putsch began in the *Bürgerbräukeller*, the large beer hall in Munich where Gustav von Kahr was addressing a speech to his supporters, and where Hitler and his armed men stormed in on the evening of 8 November and declared the arrest of the politicians in power. To demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, the building was surrounded by some 600 armed SA-militiamen under the command of Captain Ernst Röhm, and Commissioner Kahr, under the threat of armed force, assured Hitler and his armed men of his support. Hitler, a politician with truly outstanding oratory skills, made an incendiary speech at the same venue, and within moments had persuaded the thousands of people gathered in the beer hall to stand by his side. The National Socialist militia then mounted an operation to seize Munich's main government buildings and public facilities, and later that night, Hitler and his men,

believing they no longer needed Kahr and his associates, released the Commissioner.<sup>45</sup>

The Nazi Party's free troops were rioting on the streets of Munich, but the coup attempt had the very serious shortcoming that the police did not stand by and support the Nazis at all. On the following morning, 9 November, Hitler and his gunmen took the Bavarian Provincial Government hostage, and at the suggestion of General Ludendorff a march of 2,000 men set out to occupy the building of the Bavarian Ministry of Defence, but at the Odeonplatz in Munich Hitler and his militiamen were confronted by the armed forces loyal to Gustav von Kahr and the Federal Government, and a gunfight broke out. Sixteen coup fighters and four policemen were fatally wounded in the clash, and Hitler, together with the leaders of the coup fled the scene. It was here that it became clear that the coup attempt miserably failed, and Hitler was arrested by the police within a few days.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ormos, op. cit. *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Ormos, op. cit. *ibid.*

The future German dictator was eventually sentenced to five years in prison for treason, while General Ludendorff, a great hero of the First World War, was acquitted of all charges despite his leading role in the Beer Hall Putsch. Partly thanks to his growing popularity, Hitler himself spent only nine months in prison and wrote his memoirs *Mein Kampf – My Struggle*. The attempted coup made Hitler a nation-widely renowned and popular politician in the longer term, and ten years later, in 1933 he was constitutionally elected as Federal Chancellor of Germany, but soon became a bloodthirsty dictator.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch, just like the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch which had a much less serious background and was essentially devoid of armed forces, miserably failed miserably, both – probably closely related – far-right political actions already pointed out in the first half of the 1920s what crises and traumas were at work in the societies of the states that had lost the First World War, and foreshadowed the subsequent, seemingly

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<sup>47</sup> Ormos, op. cit. 196–321.

unstoppable rise of political extremism in the 1930s.

As for the Hungarian putschists, Ferenc Ulain left by train on the eve of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch as planned, but never arrived in Munich, so he was unable to meet the Bavarian nationalist politicians who were preparing for the Beer Hall Putsch. Namely, at Hegyeshalom, on the Austro–Hungarian border, he was stopped by the police, told that the Hungarian authorities were aware of the plot and confiscated the documents addressed to Hitler. Ulain was not detained on the grounds of his immunity as a member of the Parliament, but was kindly asked to visit the Budapest Police Headquarters the next day, where he was already arrested. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Béla Szemere and Titusz Bobula were also detained by the detectives.

It became clear to the Hungarian conspirators that the coup plan had not escaped the attention of the police, and archival sources make it clear that the authorities had been monitoring the group's activities for weeks when Ulain travelled to Munich. As already mentioned, Fritz Döhmel appeared in Budapest in August

1923 as a lobbyist for the Bavarian-German National Socialist organisation. The details of his stay in Budapest between August and October are unclear, but it seems certain that he was not the only representative of the Bavarian National Socialists in Budapest at this time. In fact, in the autumn of 1923, the police arrested no fewer than fifty-seven young German men in the Hungarian capital who, as agents of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led organisation had letters of recommendation addressed to the Association of Awakening Hungarians. Several of these German lobbyists were arrested and expelled from Hungary. Szemere, Bobula and Ulain were eventually suspected and charged with forming an alliance to incite rebellion. The case of MP Ferenc Ulain's immunity was discussed also by the Parliament's Committee on Immunity in the last days of November 1923, and a thorough investigation was carried out. The race-defending MPs led by Gyula Gömbös sought to excuse Ulain and his associates, and they emphasised their opinion that Ulain and his associates were victims of an agent provocateur hired by the police, and they made accusations primarily against the bourgeois liberal



representatives whose aim, they claimed, was to openly discredit the race-defending politicians. On 24 January 1924, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest conceived the first-instance verdict in the case, sentencing all three defendants to one month and fourteen days in prison. The defendants were released in December 1923, and their sentences were deemed to have been completed in arrest. They exercised their right of appeal, and they were acquitted by the Court of Appeal shortly afterwards.<sup>48</sup>

Although Béla Szemere, Titusz Bobula and Ferenc Ulain were eventually found innocent by the Hungarian Supreme Court even of the relatively mild charge of forming an alliance to incite rebellion, the coup attempt they had planned with Bavarian–German collaboration was undoubtedly frivolous precisely because it was no more than a mere plot, but it caused a major political scandal in 1923–1924. Furthermore, it raises many questions up even to this day. The largest question mark is, of course, the identity and motives of Fritz Döhmel, the young German man

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<sup>48</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610.

who approached the coup plotters and tricked them into it, presumably to mislead everyone. The historical literature on the Szemere–Bobula–Ulain conspiracy is generally of the opinion that Fritz Döhmel was probably nothing more than an agent provocateur hired by the Bethlen Government to use him to discredit and politically isolate Gyula Gömbös's far-right race-defending group of MPs that had left the governing party,<sup>49</sup> or historians are content with the even simpler explanation that Döhmel was in fact an agent of Hitler and his associates, and that there was some real connection between the German and Hungarian far-right organisations.<sup>50</sup> Even in the international literature, the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch appears at the level of mention, and academic works written in

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<sup>49</sup> Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, Tomus LVII, 1976, 3–60, 17–27.; Prónay, op. cit. 210.

<sup>50</sup> Mária Ormos, *Kozma Miklós. Egy magyar médiavezér*, 113; Ungváry, op. cit. 111.; Romsics, op. cit. 128.; *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, 7–120, 110.; József Zakar, *Fajvédők az 1920-as évek Magyarországon*, in *Tanulmányok a Holokausztról V.*, ed. Randolph L. Braham, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2011, 52–111, 89.

English usually treat it as a *fait accompli* that there was a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian and German sides.<sup>51</sup> Döhmel is referred to in various works as a diplomat, and agent, a swindler, an international adventurer and an agent provocateur, but since the works that mention the coup plan at all mostly do not discuss the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch in any great detail, nor do they really refer to its archival sources, they do not shed light on the apparent contradictions. It is undoubtedly true that Ferenc Ulain and the race-defending faction of MPs leaving the governing United Party which not much later became a party caused relative inconvenience to the Bethlen Government which was working on consolidation by the disclosure of numerous corruption cases connected to the Government. Ulain himself had interpellated in the Parliament on several occasions

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<sup>51</sup> Béla Bodó Béla, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019, 301.; Thomas L. Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback. Miklós Horthy, 1918–1944*, Washington, Columbia University Press, 1994, 132–134; David King, *The Trial of Adolf Hitler. The Beer Hall Putsch and the Rise of the Nazi Germany*, London–New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 2017, 118–119.

on various corruption cases, thereby discrediting Bethlen's Government.<sup>52</sup> Namely, some senior government officials including Interior Minister Iván Rakovszky had been bribed with free shares, and several state officials appeared to be implicated in the corruption case.<sup>53</sup> In the summer of 1923, the Hungarian General Credit Bank granted 'gift shares' to several government and opposition MPs for a total of about 300 million koronas, and they also seriously violated speculation rules.<sup>54</sup> Even under pressure from the ruling party, Justice Minister Emil Nagy refused to cover up the case and ordered the Prosecutor's Office subordinated to his ministry to launch a serious investigation. This case was partly responsible for his resignation from the Ministry of Justice shortly afterwards in 1924, and his relations with Prime Minister Bethlen also strongly deteriorated. Ulain personally had a great deal to do with the breakout of one of the biggest corruption scandals of the Horthy Era,

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<sup>52</sup> Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 112.

<sup>53</sup> Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, 108–109.

<sup>54</sup> *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, 326–328.

which did not directly cause a government crisis, but discredited the Bethlen Government to some degree and led to a major press campaign against it. It may have been Bethlen's interest to discredit the race-defending MPs led by Gömbös, including Ulain Ferenc, but based on the archival sources it is doubtful that Döhmel was simply an agent provocateur hired by the Hungarian Government for this purpose, and nothing more.

If we look closely at the testimony of Imre Hetényi, the deputy police commissioner investigating the case, the report sent to the Budapest Police Commissioner and the testimony of Detective Inspector Jenő Seibold, it becomes clear that Fritz Döhmel was probably in Budapest and was already seeking contacts with Hungarian far-right organisations as a representative of Hitler's Bavarian nationalist organisation before his activities came to the attention of the police. Döhmel later did indeed become an agent of the Hungarian political police for a short time, as Döhmel and Hetényi confessed the same. Döhmel reported to the authorities and some members of the Government on the activities of the conspirators, mainly in the hope of gaining

financial benefits, but initially he seems to have sought contact with them independently, without the knowledge or involvement of the Hungarian authorities. There are also indications that Döhmel was indeed acting as an agent of the German radical right-wing political forces, but that he had already reported to the German State authorities in August 1923 that the Bavarian radical right was preparing to enter into serious international cooperation with its Hungarian counterparts.<sup>55</sup>

We may ask the question whether or not it is possible that a strange situation could have arisen in which the Political Investigative Department of the Hungarian Police and Iván Rakovszky, the Minister of the Interior would have recruited a person who was apparently a native German speaker to act as a mole for the conspirators, by the authorities conspiratorially pretended that they had only learned of his activities later, after Döhmel had already incited the Szemere–Bobula–Ulain group, which really

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<sup>55</sup> PA-AA-(B)-R 30531-Bd. 1. Cited by: István Németh, *Német haditengerészeti és légügyi lépések a versailles-i békeszerződés kijátszására a weimari köztársaság (1919–1933) éveiben*, Acta Academiae Agriensis. Sectio Historiae, 2017/XLIV, 523–534.

wanted to overthrow the Government, to some degree of action. Would the police have conspiratorially produced documents largely for internal use which seemingly prove that Döhmel had initially acted independently of them, but later cooperated with the authorities, even though he had been a hired provocateur for the state authorities themselves from the beginning? The answer is, of course, this is possible, but hardly likely or realistic.

It is also possible that Fritz Döhmel may have been recruited by another Hungarian state agency, at the highest order of the Bethlen Government, and in the greatest secrecy, for example by the military secret service, the Department 2 of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defence, which was operating under secrecy at the time because of the restrictions of armament on Hungary, to discredit Ferenc Ulain and his associates with a conspiracy that he himself had practically incited them to pursue, but the likelihood of this is also very small. The idea sounds impossible and irrational because, if the sources are to be believed, Döhmel originally approached Béla Szemere and Titusz Bobula who

were indeed thinking about the possibility of overthrowing the Government completely independently of Döhmel, and Ulain as an MP with some political influence and a person with real links to Bavarian nationalist circles was only involved in the conspiracy somewhat later. That is, when Döhmel contacted Szemere and Bobula, he possibly did not know that Ferenc Ulain would soon become a key figure in the conspiracy. In fact, it seems that Döhmel was not originally the agent of the Hungarian Government, but acted independently, it is not known exactly on whose behalf, and only later did he start reporting to the Hungarian political police.

It is also possible that Fritz Döhmel was originally an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisations – it seems the most likely scenario –, but later he became self-employed and literally sold out the conspiracy and the information he possessed, primarily for financial gain, while at the same time he was trying to magnify the activities of the conspirators to suit his own interests. The contradictions in his repeated testimonies, the almost laughable elements in which he said, for example, that although he was originally linked to



the German far-right, but as for his political beliefs he were in fact an idealistic communist and philo-Semite, and that he had exposed the radical right-wing conspirators in order to prevent the violent anti-Semitic acts they were allegedly planning also suggest that he may have been motivated by financial gain.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, he deliberately sought to create as a large scandal as possible and confuse everyone as much as possible.

However, the first instance judgment of the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest conceives interestingly, saying that Döhmel's identity is a mystery even to the Hungarian state authorities, and although it is likely that the circles behind him are to be sought abroad, they are certainly not in Bavaria, and Döhmel badly misled both the participants in the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch and the Hungarian authorities.<sup>57</sup> Abroad but not in Bavaria could also mean – although we do not have to agree with the criminal court in the absence of written evidence – that the mysterious young man in question was an agent of the secret

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<sup>56</sup> HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/610.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

services of a foreign state who was instructed to try to sabotage the attempts of cooperation between German and Hungarian far-right organisations and to discredit them in the eyes of each other.

If we allow ourselves to speculate, we could ask the logical question of which state or states had an interest in preventing the emerging German far-right organisations from building international links during this period. The answer is obvious: France, Austria, or even the Weimar Republic itself. Indeed, in the relatively recent past, in 2009, a French intelligence report was discovered in the National Archives of France and received some press coverage according to which the French intelligence service had been monitoring the emerging National Socialist leader and his circle, and which painted Hitler as a politician with the oratorical qualities and charisma similar to that of Mussolini.<sup>58</sup> The same could also be true of the

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<sup>58</sup> Vö. Thomas Wieder, *Genre fasciste. Dans les années 1920, Adolf Hitler était surveillé par les services français. La fiche rédigée sur le futur Führer dort dans une armoire des Archives nationales*, Le Monde, 2009. november 20.

neighbouring Little Entente states which also clearly did not want Hungarian political forces to have serious foreign allies for their revisionist ambitions, so they cannot be excluded from such assumptions either.

Furthermore, there was also Austria that had newly become an independent state and as one of the successor states to the Austro–Hungarian Empire, was struggling with serious domestic political and economic problems as well. The crisis after the loss of the First World War provided an excellent breeding ground for political extremism here as well, and the Government faced the real danger that Germany would eventually annex Austria in order to restore the unity of Germany, as the National Socialist German Regime under Hitler really did it fifteen years later in 1938. National Socialist-style, pro-Anschluss movements had already made their appearance here early, and it was therefore not in the interest of the Austrian State that the Hitler–Ludendorff circle should build successful international cooperation with

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[https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2009/11/19/adolf-hitler-genre-fasciste\\_1269349\\_3214.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2009/11/19/adolf-hitler-genre-fasciste_1269349_3214.html)

politicians from other nations with similar ideological platforms.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, there was the Republic of Weimar itself there, then under the leadership of President Friedrich Ebert and Federal Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, which, as the biggest loser of the First World War, was also struggling with huge economic and social crises as the empire was transformed from a monarchy into a republic. It was precisely these crises and the growing discontent that increased the popularity of demagogic politicians such as Hitler and the National Socialists who professed and promoted extremist ideas. It is certain that the secret services of the Weimar Republic had undercover agents in radical political movements, since it is a little known fact of Hitler's life that he himself initially came into contact with National Socialism after the defeat of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919 as an officer of the German Army's intelligence and propaganda unit in Bavaria. Hitler's task was to gather information on

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<sup>59</sup> See: Róbert Fiziker, *Habsburg kontra Hitler. Legitimisták az anchluss ellen, az önálló Ausztriáért*, Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2010.

organisations and individuals propagating political extremism and to carry out vigorous anti-communist propaganda. One such radical organisation monitored by German military intelligence was the then insignificant DAP, the German Workers' Party, which Hitler managed to infiltrate so well that he soon became its leader and, within a few years, had organised it into a nationwide political movement under the name NSDAP, the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The predominantly liberal and social-democratic Government of the Weimar Republic thus understandably had no interest that the National Socialist movement should build up significant international relations and fought against political extremism within Germany in much the same way as the consolidationist Bethlen Government did in the Hungarian context. There are also indications that Döhmel was in contact with the German state security services as early as August 1923, and that he reported to them that Bavarian and Hungarian far-right organisations were trying to re-establish contact and revive the

cooperation that had been initiated earlier.<sup>60</sup> It also seems certain that Döhmel was indeed originally in contact with Hitler and his circle, as a Hungarian detective had followed him to Bavaria on behalf of Deputy Police Commissioner Imre Hetényi and checked if Döhmel had really in connection with the National Socialists. Although Hungarian historian István Németh has also published some German diplomatic documents in his extensive source publication on German–Hungarian relations in connection with the Ulain case as well, primarily from the correspondence between the Hungarian and German law enforcement and diplomatic services, these do not, of course, reveal the true identity of the German key figure in the conspiracy, Fritz Döhmel. All that is known is that in November 1923, Deputy Police Commissioner Hetényi informed the German Embassy in Budapest that Döhmel had been under surveillance by the Hungarian police for some time and that dozens of young German men were in Budapest to initiate a cooperation agreement between the

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<sup>60</sup> PA AA (B)-R 30531-Bd. 1. Cited by: István Németh, *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. I. rész*, 80.

Hungarian and German far-right organisations.<sup>61</sup> The scarce German sources of the case reveal that Döhmel's motives were not known to German authorities, and mention that Gerhard Köpke, an official of the German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt) wrote to the Imperial Commissioner for the Supervision of Public Order (Reichskommissar für die Überwachung der Öffentlichen Ordnung) and asked information of him about the case. A few days later, the Foreign Ministry sent a summary of the case to the representative of the German Federal Government in Munich, requesting further information, in particular on the links between Hungarian and German radical right-wing organisations. However, the German Imperial Commissioner for the Supervision Public Order, who was practically the head of the German federal political police service interestingly confused the issue even further by not providing the Foreign Ministry with any relevant information, and in his reply expressed the opinion that Fritz Döhmel had really no connection with

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<sup>61</sup> PA-AA-(B)-R-30531-Bd. 1. István Németh, *Magyarok és németek*, 384; *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról (1918–1934). I. kötet. Az 1920-as évek*, 346.

the National Socialists, and, referring to a rather unreliable press source, the issue of the daily newspaper titled *Germania* of 25 November 1923, claimed that he was in fact a communist.<sup>62</sup> Although this is all in the realm of conjecture, it cannot be excluded that Fritz Döhmel, among his other motives and activities, possibly in conjunction with his earlier actual National Socialist involvement, was an agent of the German secret service whose aim was to disrupt the activities of the National Socialists, especially their international relations, and that the German political police and secret services were therefore not interested in exposing his true identity.

Although Hitler also issued a press statement in the Hungarian far-right newspaper called *Szózat* (*Voice* or *Speech*) in which he categorically denied that Döhmel was his or his party's agent, and all of this was also stressed by National Socialist politicians Alfred Rosenberg and Anton Drexler, this proves absolutely nothing.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> István Németh, *Magyarok és németek (1914–1934)*, 385.

<sup>63</sup> [Anonymous author], *Hitler nyilatkozata az Ulain-ügyben. Sohasem akart beavatkozni a magyar ügyekbe Döhmel, köpenicki diplomata*, *Szózat*, 23 December 1923, 7.



Hitler had just been arrested for an unsuccessful coup attempt, and he did not want to add to his already difficult situation by admitting that he would have wanted to carry out the Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch with some international involvement if it had been possible, or that he would have interfered in the internal affairs of another states if it had been successful. That is, Döhmel may well have been in contact with the Hitler–Ludendorff circle in some way, as his knowledge of the Bavarian domestic political situation and his ability to convince Ferenc Ulain who was indeed in contact with Hitler would suggest. Fritz Döhmel’s unusually high level of education and diplomatic skills may also be indicated by the fact that, according to the conspirators’ testimonies, he put his somewhat absurd but nevertheless professional draft treaty about the Bavarian–Hungarian political cooperation on paper without drafting.

While it is also possible that Döhmel was a simple swindler driven purely by the prospect of financial gain, his high-level disinformation activities with which he deceived the conspirators themselves as well as politicians and policemen

may suggest an international intelligence game in the background.

Of course, Fritz Döhmel's true identity will probably never be completely known, even after almost a hundred years, so we can only rely on what seems to be logical theories. Whatever the truth about the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch is, it is certain that, like the much more serious Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch, it failed at the very beginning. The White Internationale between the radical right-wing forces under General Ludendorff's leadership did not come into being, and just as the German Federal Government succeeded in marginalising the radical right for a time, so by the end of 1923 the Bethlen Government succeeded in isolating Gömbös and his race-defending fraction in Parliament and in marginalising to some extent their political activities which were dangerous to consolidation.

However, it is ironic and at the same time somewhat frightening that the representatives of the Hungarian far-right sought contact with the German politician who was not taken too seriously at the time, and was even considered ridiculous by many, and expected him to help them realise their

own political legacy who less than twenty years later, became the most notorious, mass-murdering dictator of the 20th century. It is perhaps an exaggeration to say such a thing, but nevertheless, the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch, this attempted coup which at the time seemed so ridiculous somehow foreshadowed and predestined Hungary's mournful political and military involvement in the 1940s and its becoming one of Nazi Germany's most loyal allies in the Second World War. Interestingly, on an individual level, the same could be said of the Hungarian leader of the 1923 conspiracy: Ferenc Ulain who began his political career in the United Party and later was the MP of the Race-defending and Peasant Parties, finally joined the Arrow Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi in the 1940s, which, in the final months of the war, staged a coup with German help and brought to power a pro-German puppet government, causing enormous losses to a country that had already evidently lost the war.

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After the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles, some politicians of the defeated states, mainly those in Germany and in the successor states of the disintegrated Austro–Hungarian monarchy were very unsatisfied with the defeat and the considerable territorial losses, and sought the possibility of revision, including the help of possible allies. From 1919 onwards, Hungary’s new right-wing political leadership continued to actively seek contacts with German-speaking, mainly Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing political forces and their associated paramilitary formations. On the Bavarian side, General Erich Ludendorff, Colonel Max Bauer and the then young and emerging far-right politician Adolf Hitler attempted to set up an international revisionist organisation at the end of 1919. The German radical right-wing politicians would have seen the possibility of changing the political situation mainly in the coalition of the Free Corpses, which were very numerous in both Germany and Austria and mainly consisted of First World War veterans. The plan envisaged by General Ludendorff would have consisted of an agreement between the Bavarian-German Free Corpses, the Austrian radical right-wing militias and the leaders of the right-wing counter-revolutionary Government. The present short monograph makes an attempt to explore the history of the Bavarian–Austrian–Hungarian secret negotiations the aim of which would have been a Central European military association against the Entente powers called the White Internationale, which, of course, was never realised due to the international political situations