

# The End of Empires and the Attempts at Creating a New Balance (1919-1945)

## The Late Start of the Little Entente. Regional Cooperation within East-Central Europe in Times of Adversity (1920-1921)

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*Abstract: During the first half of August 1920, it was a huge diplomatic battle where Romania had an important part, maybe a decisive one. The dispute was between a French plan that intended to set up a Polish-Romanian-Hungarian alliance with an apparent Anti-Bolshevik disposition, essential for France's interests in that moment, and a Czech plan for an Anti-Hungarian alliance of all the neighbors of Hungary. For the Romanian leaders both political designs were somehow unsatisfactory. Which proposal was picked up by Romania? And especially why? Did Romania forward its own scenario for regional cooperation in East-Central Europe? Did the Romanian proposal succeed? Which were the bases of the Little Entente? Why regional cooperation had so many misfortunes in the first inter-war years? The responses for these questions represent the substance of our text, the core of our paper, even if some answers imply more questions.*

*Keywords: Romania, Little Entente, regional cooperation, great and small powers, East Central Europe, early inter-war years*

When a state major structure, which has existed for centuries, is suddenly erased from the world map, it is quite natural that a high number of nostalgic voices appear afterwards. This number is not necessarily identical with the number of those whose interests were harmed by the radical transformation in question, but they are close. The manifestation of nostalgia could be benign – like a dream state, a recollection of a grand “golden age” when everything was “perfect” – or it could be active, trying to resurrect, by different means and in different forms, the state structure in question.

That is how things happened in the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's fall as well, in the autumn of 1918. Many of those for whom the double-headed monarchy had become a source of advantages – material, political, economic, cultural, psychological or prestige-related ones – started almost immediately to show their regrets, to compare the “nothingness” of the post-dualistic present's realities to the “exceptional” achievements of the Habsburg Empire's past and, some of them, to try even a “deconstruction” of the recently demolished edifice, that is a re-composition, from some of the constitutive elements of the former state structure, of something that should have at least looked like the defunct empire.

There was a wide range of individuals showing discouragement, contempt or hate towards the Central and Eastern Europe's realities in the aftermath of World War I: from some of the Austrian or Hungarian politicians, who found themselves all of a sudden deprived of their capacity to influence the European politics, unless to an insignificant extent, to the Hungarian gendarme from some Transylvanian or Slovakian village, who was now "chased" by those who had been the targets of his anger not long before; from the Hungarian or Austrian aristocrat who saw his properties decimated by the agrarian reforms started by almost all the successor states, to the Jewish who had made major efforts to be assimilated to the dominant cultures of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was now deemed an ethnic minority member, like any other; from Western statesmen and diplomats who had been accustomed to work with a significant influence and power factor in the region of Central Europe, and now had to deal with a multitude of States, none of them weak enough to be completely dominated, nor strong enough to replace the double-headed monarchy on the European geostrategic map, to the teacher or the civil servant who suddenly found out that he had to swear an oath to states once deemed hostile or, worse, to learn languages he once disregarded, unable to imagine until then – not in his worst nightmares – that he would be forced to revalue them; from the western businessman who quickly discovered that the benefits of a huge "Austro-Hungarian" market had evaporated, leaving behind a group of smaller and much more aggressive markets, as well as a frustrating increase of the number of kilometres of border in Europe and, implicitly, of the number of tariffs, protectionist ones in their majority, to some of the ordinary people for whom the transformation of their life savings from Austro-Hungarian kronen into the currencies of the successor states turned out to be ruining.

There was, obviously, a reverse of the medal: although those who regretted the dualistic monarchy were quite numerous, the ones who were satisfied with the disappearance of the multinational empire were even more numerous. In this case too, there was a marked diversity: from the Romanian, Czech, Slovakian, Polish, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian politicians who had seen many of their national objectives fulfilled, to the peasants who, regardless of their nationality, when they received land, felt they had a purpose and a homeland, some of them for the first time; from some western statesmen and diplomats who thought the successor states were a better anti-Bolshevik "sanitary cordon" and a more effective obstacle in the way of the natural German domination upon the Central and Eastern Europe than the Habsburg Empire could have been, to the ordinary people who were sincerely happy about the possibility to send their children to study in their native language; from the businessmen and bankers from the Western Europe or the United States of America who quickly understood that the pressure they could put on the successor states were much easier than that on a major power like Austria-Hungary, to those for whom the identity needs of a national culture were

eventually met; finally, from all those for whom the return to a situation that had seemed to be over would have meant a personal or community disaster, to those who had been long waiting for historical revenges.

Between the two categories of people, the conflict of interest was obvious, and it took place at several levels. From the standpoint of our research, we are only interested in that side of the conflict that is related to the field of international relations. In other words, we will try to present and analyse the opinions and actions of those political, military and economic leaders – of both the successor states and the great powers – who tried to modify the territorial arrangements made after World War I or to preserve the status quo in this issue. We will put forward and investigate the establishment and the initial evolution of a security structure – the Little Entente – whose primary purpose was this very one, to neutralize backward-looking plans.

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The leaders of Warsaw had decided, in the spring of 1920, to solve, by force of arms, the territorial conflicts with the Soviets: at the end of April, the Poles started an offensive in Ukraine, which initially enjoyed much success.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of May 1920, Hungary offered its military aid against the Bolsheviks and its support against Czechoslovakia, in exchange for the Polish assistance in the negotiations with the neighbours and the equipping of the army.<sup>2</sup> The Poles, although cautious, promised military aid and contemplated the advantages of a Polish-Romanian-Hungarian alliance.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian counteroffensive against Poland, started in June 1920<sup>4</sup>, stimulated the Hungarian aid offers, as well as the French fears. As the Russians continued to move forward, Czechoslovakia declared its neutrality on August 7 and impeded the transportation of weapons to Poland<sup>5</sup>, providing thus arguments to those who said that Hungary was a better barrier in the way of communism and against Germany than Czechoslovakia was.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the French were extremely wor-

1 Kalervo Hovi, *Alliance durevers, Stabilization of France's Alliance Policies in East Central Europe, 1919-1921*, Turku: Akateeminen kirjakauppa, 1984, p. 41.

2 *Papers and Documents relating to the Relations of Hungary (P.D.F.R.H.)*, vol. 1, 1919-1920, Budapest: Royal Hungarian University Press, 1939, pp. 332-333.

3 Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, A.M.A.E.), *Fund 71/1920-1944*, Transilvania, vol. 348, f. 109.

4 Andrzej Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski, 1867-1935*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995, p. 101; K. Hovi (1984), p. 51.

5 Antoine Marès, "Mission militaire et relations internationales: l'exemple franco-tchécoslovaque, 1918-1925", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XXX, 1983, pp. 575-576.

6 Raymond Poincaré was such an example (Cf. vol. *Histoire politique, chronique de quinzaine*, Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1921, p. 18).

ried about Poland's military situation; a desperate one in July-August 1920, when losing Warsaw was an actual possibility.<sup>7</sup> France joined Great Britain and Italy in blaming the Polish "imperialism", but at the same time promised aid. The French assistance manifested itself in several forms. First, a military mission was sent, run by General Maxime Weygand, as well as several transports of war material. Second, the French adopted a diplomatic tactic meant to keep Germany away from the conflict. Finally, the promotion of a Polish-Romanian-Hungarian combination was attempted, the only one able to block, according to the French, the spreading of the Bolshevik plague towards Europe. This French wish matched very well the Hungarian-Polish affinities and contacts mentioned above. But Romania's inclusion in such an arrangement turned out to be much more difficult to make.<sup>8</sup>

As one can notice, in the summer of 1920 the Romanians showed a relative availability to talk to the Hungarians. It was probably an attitude promoted on the express request of France.<sup>9</sup> In July 1920, the direct discussions between Romania and Hungary started on the normalization of the relations between the two countries. As far as Romania was concerned, it seems that King Ferdinand and General Averescu supported a rapprochement to Hungary<sup>10</sup>, while Take Ionescu was still oscillating, trying to reconcile the irreconcilable: his negotiations with Beneš on the Little Entente and the rapprochement to Hungary. This dilemma of the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs was solved by the Hungarian Cabinet, who only had one preoccupation – the lost territory; so the negotiations failed quite quickly, as the antagonism was implacable. If Romania's only interest was to discuss juridical, economic and civic issues, the major topic of the Hungarian government was the rectification of the borders. The Romanians firmly rejected it. Romania – as well as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – did not show, neither then nor later, any kind of availability in debating the territorial issue.

In spite of this failed attempt of Romanian-Hungarian rapprochement, one should notice that in the first half of August 1920, so in the most difficult moment for the Poles in their conflict with the Soviets, a major diplomatic duel took place, in which Romania played a significant, if not decisive part. The dispute did not occur between the supporters of a so-called "Danubian economic confederation" and those of a "Little Entente" as a project<sup>11</sup>, but between a French plan, aiming at the construction of a Polish-Romanian-Hungarian alliance of anti-Bolshevik nature, whose emergence seemed to be vital for Paris' interests at the moment,

7 Piotr S. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, pp. 215-225.

8 Cf. A.M.A.E., *Fund 71/1920-1944, Transilvania*, vol. 348, f. 107-109.

9 Vasile Netea, "Budapesta", in vol. *Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României*, II, 1911-1939, București : Ed. Politica, 1971, p. 163.

10 Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, vol. III, București: Scripta, 1995, p. 378.

11 I. Ciupercă, "Din istoria contemporană a unei idei: Confederația economică danubiană", in *România în istoria universală*, III/1, Iași: Univ. Al.I. Cuza, 1988, p. 672.

and a Czech plan concerned with an anti-Hungarian alliance of all Hungary's neighbours. One can easily notice that the only common element of these two potential alliances was Romania. But for the leaders in Bucharest, none of the two schemes was completely satisfactory. On the one hand, the Romanian interest in a rapprochement to Poland was clear<sup>12</sup>, but not as solid as to determine the involvement of the country into a military anti-Soviet adventure<sup>13</sup>, or, even less, to cause the acceptance of any Hungarian territorial claim. On the other hand, the Czech alliance scheme was not very attractive for Romania because of the Slavonic obvious preponderance, considering that the main danger for the Romanian state was not the Hungarian, but the Eastern menace, even if it wore the Bolshevik ideological mask.

In these very complex circumstances, the Romanian government adopted an attitude of expectation, waiting for certain clarifications that were supposed to supply with substance the important decision that was going to be made. Consequently, the Romanian government paid attention to the French advice to get closer to Poland and to talk to the Hungarian officials, but these actions did not result in any significant commitment<sup>14</sup>; the authorities of Bucharest showed actually justified concerns towards the Polish-Hungarian effusions<sup>15</sup> and they could not ignore the firm opposition of the governments of London and Rome with regard to the French plan.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Hungarian activity during the Polish crisis precipi-

12 Cf. as well Florin Anghel, "O dilemă teritorială și un debut diplomatic. Ocuparea Pocuției de către armata română (24 mai – începutul lunii august 1919) și debutul relațiilor româno-polone", in *Revista istorică*, VI, 9-10, 1995, pp. 761-771.

13 Cf. *Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român. 1918, Documente interne și externe*, VI, București: Ed. Științifica și Enciclopedica, 1986, pp. 122-123.

14 G. Juhász (*Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1919-1945*, Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1979, p. 56) sets forth that some military supplies had arrived in Poland coming from Romania, but there is no other confirmation for such an assertion. There is just a report, dated in April 1922, of colonel Bădulescu, the Romanian military attaché in Warsaw, in which it is stated that the Polish would have asked, on the 11th of August 1920, the Romanian government that the Hungarian troops to transit Romania. It seems that the Romanians would have accepted the request on the 5th of September 1920, but afterwards, with the military situation changed, the leaders of the Polish Army would have cancelled that demand, on the 23rd of September 1920 (A.M.A.E., *Fund Dosare speciale*, Problema 71/1920 – Polonia, Relații cu Ungaria, vol. 40/1, f. 40-42); Cf. as well Traian Sandu, "La coopération franco-roumaine face à la Russie lors du passage de Take Ionescu au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (juin 1920-décembre 1921)", in *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, XXXIV, 3-4, 1995, pp. 369-371 (the author writes about delaying, with the Czech's approval, of the withdrawal of Romanian army from Carpatho-Ruthenia, which has facilitated the transit of military supplies to Poland).

15 A.M.A.E., *Fund Dosare speciale*, Problema 71/1920 – Polonia, Relații cu Ungaria, vol. 40/1, f. 2, 4, 8.

16 Carlo Sforza, *Diplomatic Europe since the Treaty of Versailles*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928, *passim*; R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960*, London:

tated the Czechoslovakian-Yugoslavian alliance, the first step of what was going to become the Little Entente.<sup>17</sup> On 14 August 1920, in Belgrade, Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovakian minister of Foreign Affairs, signed a defensive alliance with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, deeming Hungary a possible aggressor<sup>18</sup>. Immediately afterwards, Beneš came to Bucharest to talk to the Romanian officials. The Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, Take Ionescu, approved then of the protocol of neutrality in the Soviet-Polish war only<sup>19</sup>, with an oral promise of mutual assistance in the case of a Hungarian attack. Therefore, this was, after all, the same expectant attitude.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Take Ionescu put forward a proposition regarding a variant of alliance made of five states (Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Greece), which could be subsequently extended to other countries of the region. This was also the main motivation for postponing Romania's joining the scheme proposed by the Czechs: the decision was that Romania would adhere to the convention of alliance between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but not right away, only after all the possibilities to construct a larger alliance were exhausted.<sup>21</sup>

At that time there were records, and many of the Romanian, Czech and Serbian historians stated it afterwards, that even in that situation, with no full commitment from Romania, the system that would quickly be known as the Little Entente was actually working since the summer of 1920; and it was almost immediately said to be directed against the French patronage upon Hungary. This step was not well seen at Paris, being deemed an obstruction of the French politics related to the construction of an anti-Bolshevik combination made up of Poland, Romania and Hungary, that even Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia could join.<sup>22</sup>

It seems that the Romanian leaders did not either accept or completely reject any of the two alliance plans proposed at that moment. Our standpoint is that the Little Entente was not established yet in August 1920. We should underline that the Beneš plan and the Ionescu plan with regard to the Little Entente were not complementary, as significant differences and only few resemblances existed between

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Routledge, 1996, p. 34.

17 See Eliza Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, București: Ed. Academiei, 1997, p. 54.

18 D. Perman, "The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1920", in W. Philipp and P. Scheibert (eds.) *Studies in East European History*, VII, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962, pp. 263-264.

19 V. Moisuc, "Praga" in vol. *Reprezentanțele diplomatice ale României*, II, 1911-1939, București: Ed. Politica, 1971, p. 193.

20 The Romanian reservations were probably encouraged by the presence of the French fieldmarshal Joffre in Bucharest when Beneš arrived (A.M.A.E., *Fund Mica Înțelegere*, vol. 4, f. 1, 210; Idem, *Fund Dosare speciale*, 71/1920-1944, vol. 47/3, *passim*; M. Ádám, *The Little Entente and Europe (1920-1929)*, Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1993, p. 91).

21 E. Campus (1997) 54.

22 See the report of the Romanian minister in Paris, Dimitrie Ghica, dated on the 27th of August 1920 (A.M.A.E., *Fund Mica Înțelegere*, vol. 3, f. 6); nor the French press was initially supportive to the project promoted by Beneš (*Ibid.*, f. 33).

the two. The Czech proposition was simply an expression of Prague's concerns in respect to Hungarian aggressiveness, which at the moment seemed to be focused on the young Czechoslovakian state.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the leaders of Bucharest were not so frightened by the Hungarians, as the experience of the 1919 military confrontations was favourable to the Romanians, who seemed to be able to settle the conflicts with the Hungarians by themselves. But the Romanian worries were then much more visible in the relation with the eastern enemy. Consequently, Take Ionescu's project advocated the establishment of an alliance of five states directed against any aggression, a formula meant to provide Romania with a plus of security at the eastern border. But Beneš doubted the feasibility of the project put forward by the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, his hesitations concerning the possibility of a Polish-Czech rapprochement; furthermore, the Czech leader objected that Take Ionescu's plan would perpetuate the regime of the two armed camps before the war, would block the way to reconciliation and would place the new states under the diplomatic guardianship of the Allied Powers.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, we could say that Edvard Beneš' visit to Bucharest, in August 1920, resulted mainly in a failure. The common declarations of collaboration, as well as the mutual promises made at the end of the discussions were only protocol formulas meant to cover a diplomatic lack of success.

Meanwhile, in the period between September-November 1920, an ample action of the Romanian diplomacy occurred, in the form of a tour the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, Take Ionescu, made in several European capitals, especially in the Occidental ones. The main part of this diplomatic journey took place in Paris, where Take Ionescu paid a long official visit, leaving later for Rome and London. After a short return to Bucharest, the head of the Romanian diplomacy left for Prague and Warsaw. Ionescu's European tour should have ended in Athens (or, the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos should have come to Bucharest), but this last phase did not happen for various reasons.

The objectives of these Romanian sustained diplomatic activities aimed at solving issues suspended during the Paris Peace Conference (first of all, obtaining the international acknowledgment of Bessarabia's belonging to the Kingdom of Romania<sup>25</sup>), at getting some loans meant to cover, even if partially, the stringent financial needs that the Romanian State was confronted to, at calming down the French worries related to the transformation of the Czechoslovakian-Yugoslavian alliance into a central and eastern European combination beyond France's control and, eventually, at convincing different European chancelleries about the necessity and viability of the establishment of a Little Entente in an extended form (Take Ionescu's plan of an alliance "of five"). After the Paris phase of his tour,

23 Cf. *Desăvârșirea unității național-statale ...*, vol. VI, 57.

24 John O. Crane, *The Little Entente*, New York: Macmillan, 1931, p. 105.

25 See T. Sandu (1995) 372-373.

the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs was enthusiastic, but the London rain stopped the momentum, and the sun of Rome withered his hopes; finally, the visits to Prague and Warsaw confirmed his avatars of cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, so he did not even go to Athens any more. The tour was a fiasco.

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When Aristide Briand was invested Prime Minister of France, in January 1921, the French politics seemed clear, and the French leader expressed his “special sympathy” for the Little Entente<sup>26</sup>. This had been finalized in 1921, after the first attempt of Habsburg restoration; on 21 April 1921, Romania signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia and in August a similar one with Yugoslavia, the only difference being that the latter obliged the parties to defend not only the Treaty of Trianon, but also the Treaty of Neuilly.<sup>27</sup>

Romania eventually joined the Little Entente, but only in the international context of 1921, which was quite different from the summer of 1920. Moreover, the adherence to the anti-Hungarian scheme promoted by Edvard Beneš occurred only after the Polish-Romanian alliance was signed in March 1921.<sup>28</sup> The latter one was a reminiscence of the French plan from the summer of 1920, concerning the achievement of an anti-Bolshevik Polish-Hungarian-Romanian alliance; as far as the form was concerned, it also resembled other documents issued Quai d’Orsay: the Franco-Belgian military agreement of September 1920 and the Franco-Polish alliance of February 1921.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, in a period of recrudescent tension in the Romanian-Hungarian relations, in the spring of 1921, occurred the first attempt to bring back on the throne of Hungary Charles IV, the last Habsburg that had been emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. Charles had never abdicated formally, but he had “relinquished the exercise of his functions” in November 1918 and was living in Switzerland ever since.<sup>30</sup>

26 Anne Orde, “France and Hungary in 1920. Revisionism and Railways”, in Bela K. Kiraly, Peter Pastor and Ivan Sanders (eds.), *War and Society in East Central Europe*, vol.VI, *Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking, A Case Study on Trianon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 194.

27 E. Campus (1997) 62-67.

28 A.M.A.E., *Fund 71 – Polonia*, Relații cu România, vol. 52, f. 8-18.

29 See Jonathan Helmreich, “The Negotiations of the Franco-Belgian Military Accord of 1920”, in *French Historical Studies*, III, no. 3/1964, pp. 360-378; Robert J. Young, *France and the Origins of the Second World War*, New York: Macmillan, 1996, p. 17; Henryk Bulhak, “L’alliance franco-polonaise dans le système politique et militaire de Versailles en Europe de l’Est et du Sud-Est”, in Pierre Aycoberry, Jean-Paul Bled, Istvan Hunyadi (eds.), *Les conséquences des traités de paix de 1919-1920*, Strasbourg: Presses universitaires, 1987, pp. 323-332.

30 William M. Batkay, *Authoritarian Politics in a Transitional State. István Bethlen and the Unified Party in Hungary, 1919-1926*, Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 113.

Thus, although Hungary's domestic situation and the international context at the beginning of 1921 did not seem propitious to a Habsburg restoration in Budapest, such an attempt was going to occur at the end of March 1921. It seems that the ex-king Charles, discontent with the oscillating attitude of the Hungarian leaders, who theoretically were all monarchists and most of them legitimists too, as well as with the fact that the anti-Habsburg front initiated by Italy seemed to enjoy a great success, with real chances to be extended, decided to face his adversaries with a *fait accompli*. He could not have afforded to start an adventure that could have ended badly if he had not had promises of help from several political, military and religious Hungarian personalities, as well as the support of external circles. It seems that an important part in the attempt to bring Charles back on the Hungarian throne was played by some of the French leaders.

At the same time, there was an opinion in the Hungarian historiography, that the royal family in Romania would have helped Charles at that moment. The former emperor thought that Ferdinand owed him for having saved his throne in 1918, when Wilhelm II had intended to remove him in order to give Romania's Crown to a pro-German sovereign. Anyway, Charles had maintained good relations with the Romanian royal family, Queen Mary visiting him in Switzerland and even facilitating his getting closer to some circles in France.<sup>31</sup>

The divergent standpoints of the great powers, the firm attitude of Hungary's neighbours, catalysed by the government of Prague, as well as the disagreements between the different political and influential groups in Hungary led to the failure of the Habsburg restoration attempt; after a few days of peregrinations in Western Hungary and in Budapest, the former sovereign was forced to leave the Hungarian territory.

It had become clear that in April 1921, it was the best time for Romania and Czechoslovakia to materialize their rapprochement, because of their common enemy, in a bilateral treaty. This was the opportunity for the Romanian diplomacy to admit, in a discrete way, that the so-called "Take Ionescu plan" was no longer topical, but the "Beneš plan" could, at that moment, be materialized. Since the crisis, more precisely since April 4, the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs communicated at Prague that he was ready to sign with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia defensive conventions in order to maintain the Trianon Treaty.

On 7 June 1921, at Belgrade, the convention of defensive alliance between the Kingdom of Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is signed. Once the conventions of alliance between Romania and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were signed, the Little Entente was established. At the same time, we should not forget that in the spring of 1921, in the Parliaments of France, Italy and Great Britain, a series of debates took place with regard to the ratification of the Trianon Treaty. Many voices asked for the revision of the treaty in Hungary's

31 M. Ádám (1993) 114; A.M.A.E., *Fund 71/1914*, E2, part II, Paris, 1914-1924, vol. 3, f. 511.

favour.<sup>32</sup> Even if the opinions of some parliamentarians did not influence the policies of the executive branch in the countries in question<sup>33</sup>, the hopes in Budapest, as well as the worries in Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest, could not but increase.

Finally, another important reason for the facilitation of the Romanian decision to join the Little Entente was the intensification, in the spring of 1921, of the Hungarian revisionist and irredentist activities, whether they were actions of the government of Budapest or “private” operations, carried out with the tacit or explicit consent of the Hungarian authorities. For instance, at the end of 1920 and in the first months of 1921, the Romanian government received stupefying pieces of information: more than two years after the union of Transylvania with Romania, the Romanian State’s institutions in Transylvania (school departmental offices, schools, hospitals, city councils, notary offices, courts!!!) were exchanging official correspondence with the authorities in Hungary, enforcing the orders of Budapest<sup>34</sup>; on every envelope of this official correspondence were written, in Hungarian, the two cardinal slogans of the Hungarian irredentism: “Broken Hungary is no country / Hungary united is heaven!” and “I believe in one God, / I believe in one Homeland, / I believe in one divine eternal Truth, / I believe in the resurrection of Hungary. Amen”<sup>35</sup>; on all the private telegrams and letters coming from Hungary, after the name of the place in Romania, the following text was written: “territory under occupation”; the Hungarian border authorities were stamping the travellers’ passports with “Seen for passage in the occupied territory”.<sup>36</sup>

In 1921, the states composing the Little Entente were also confronted to what was called the “Burgenland affair”. This was a strip of territory in the west of the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary; although formally it had belonged to the government of Budapest, the region was inhabited by a German majority, but there were also Hungarians, especially in the area of the city of Sopron (Ödenburg).<sup>37</sup>

Then, in the summer and autumn of 1921 the crisis of Burgenland grew graver, when Hungary should have evacuated the region in August, and Yugoslavia should have proceeded identically in the case of the regions of Baranya and Pécs in southern Hungary. As the Serbs did not obey the order of the Conference of Ambassadors

32 See *The Hungarian Peace Treaty (British Statesmen about the Hungarian Question)* (Budapest, 1921) 36-50; A.M.A.E., *Fond 71/1920-1944*, Ungaria, presă, 1920-1923, vol. 25, f. 58-59.

33 Cf. *Argus* (2446/16 iunie 1921) 3.

34 A.M.A.E., *Fond 71/1920-1944*, Transilvania, Iridenta ungară, 1920-1921, vol. 31, f. 9, pp. 28-29.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

37 B. Hamard, “Le transfert du Burgenland à l’Autriche 1918-1922, un arbitrage international de l’après-guerre”, *Revue historique*, CCXCIV, 2/1995, p. 285.

but partially, the Hungarians did the same, refusing to withdraw their troops from the whole Burgenland.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1921, Beneš offered himself to be the mediator between Austria and Hungary, arousing thus the discontent of Rome, Belgrade and Bucharest. The Yugoslavian and Romanian leaders were vexed by the position of leader of the Little Entente that Beneš arrogated for himself and especially by the fact that sometimes he was acting in the name of the three countries without consulting the partners of alliance. But the Italians in particular felt disturbed by Edvard Beneš' claims – who had meanwhile become the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, keeping also the position of minister of Foreign Affairs – to control and influence the diplomatic evolutions in Central Europe. The Italian diplomacy, led since July 1921 by the Marquis DellaTorretta (Pietro Paolo Tomasi) – a former ambassador to Vienna who modified some of the directions of foreign policies established by his predecessor Carlo Sforza<sup>39</sup> – managed to remove Beneš from the mediation of the Hungarian-Austrian conflict, succeeding in finding a solution to the crisis of Burgenland. On 15 October 1921, at Venice was signed a convention stipulating that the greatest part of Burgenland had to go to Austria, but in the area of Sopron a plebiscite was to take place, supervised by the great powers.<sup>40</sup>

The Italian involvement in the identification of the compromise meant to solve the crisis of the Burgenland demonstrated that the Little Entente, in spite of its aspirations, could not play the role of a great power in the Central and Eastern European region.<sup>41</sup> Even if the Czechoslovakian-Yugoslavian-Romanian alliance represented 50 million people, it was not a great power. The lack of unity in terms of objectives, the interests that were sometimes distinct even if not necessarily contradictory, the vanities of the leaders of Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest, as well as the economic and military malfunctions in the alliance, indicated that the Little Entente was far from reaching its final purpose, that is to have a decisive word to say in the issues of the Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>42</sup>

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38 *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293.

39 Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925*, London: Methuen, 1967, p. 602.

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41 A.M.A.E., Fond 71/1920-1944, Ungaria, presă, 1920-1923, vol. 25, f. 103.

42 See the commentaries in *Democrația* (IX, nr. 10/1921), pp. 486-488.

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