The Foundation of the Yugoslavian Hungarian Party (1922)

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By the time representatives of the Monarchy and the Entente signed the armistice on 3 November 1918, the National Council established in Zagreb on 5–6 October had proclaimed the foundation of the Slovene–Croat–Serb State (on 19 October) and its intention of merging with Serbia and Montenegro. Ten days later, the Croatian Sabor declared that Croatia was seceding from Austria–Hungary and joining the state formation proclaimed by the National Council.

However, the parties making up the National Council – the Slovenian People's Party, the Croatian Party of Law and constituent parties of the Serbo-Croatian Coalition – differed about how the union should be effected. The Serbo-Croatian Coalition, headed by Svetozar Pribičević and supported by Croatia's Serbs, sought a rapid Serb-oriented, centralist union, while Croatian and Slovenian politicians argued for federal relations between the two states. Early in November, there seemed to be a chance of Croatian statehood gaining recognition. In Geneva on 9 November, the Yugoslav Committee, grouping the South Slavs of the Monarchy and representing the interests of the Slovene–Croat–Serb State, agreed with Nikola Pašić, the Serbian prime minister, on a provisional, dual structure of state until the constitutional debates on the new state were concluded. The two constituents of the country (Serbia and the Slovene–Croat–Serb State) would run their foreign, military and naval affairs jointly, but remain independent in other respects. Croatia (the Slovene–Croat–Serb State) was itself to be a federal state. However, the agreement was thrown out in Belgrade and Pašić had to resign. The National Council in Zagreb suffered mounting internal difficulties and feared assaults from Italy on its national aspirations, so it eventually accepted an essentially centralist union to be headed by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty. This plan was supported not only in the Vojvodina, as mentioned above,

but by the National Assembly in Cetinje, Montenegro, which thereby dethroned the Montenegrin King Nikola Petrović.

Many people these days, after the second disintegration of Yugoslavia, tend to view the united South Slav state (the Serb–Croat–Slovene Royal State until 1921, the Serb–Croat–Slovene Kingdom from 1921 to 1929, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929 to 1941) as an artificial creation and "creature" of the Entente. Behind this interpretation the author sees a simplification of historical events that ignores some important factors and processes active at the time.

Historically, the South Slav peoples developed two basic types of concepts of nationhood: "Yugoslavism" on the one hand, and nationalism emphasizing the separate national development of each South Slav people on the other. The Yugoslav ideologies – the Illyrianism of the Croats and Serbian Yugoslavism, with its programme of integration into a Greater Serbia – rested on linguistic, ethnic, and cultural affinities that undoubtedly existed and then underwent conscious development. However, they differed from the outset in the type of political union they wished to achieve among the South Slav peoples: federalist or centralist. By the end of the First World War, a variant of the pan-Yugoslav solution to the national question had also been accepted by the leaders of the Slovenian national movement, which had originally moved off on other paths. Under the actual set of historical circumstances that ensued, the demands for the dissolution of the multi-ethnic monarchy and self-determination for the South Slav peoples were *not* made on the basis of separate national ideologies (among Croats, Serbs, Slovenes and so on), which were relegated to the background. One dominant notion in the period was that self-determination in a South Slav setting (and among the Czechs and Slovaks) assumed a special *collective* meaning. This was supported at the time by the international policymakers and by the vast majority of the political and cultural elite among the South Slav nations.

Yugoslavia, therefore, was not just an artificial creation cobbled together at Versailles, as Serb historians and many Slovenes and those from other South Slav peoples portray it today. It was a state in which every South Slav "tribe" or nation was to find a community of political interest. In other words, the bounds of the common state were to permit both separate, tribal development and national prosperity. Democratic Yugoslavism, calling for the homogenization and integration of nations – the federalist version of "three tribes, one nation" – did not become a dominant factor in government, if for no other reason than because it showed clearly "popular," even Croatian, republican features opposed to the monarchy. The Serbian version of Yugoslavism, which incidentally was far from uniform, was deeply imbedded in the Serbian national foreign-policy programme formulated in the 1840s, which aspired to "gather together" all the lands inhabited by Serbs. (This was expressed in the work *Načertanije* [Draft], by Ilija Garašanin, Serbian foreign minister.) The leading strata in the Serbian state that was forming were royalists, for whom recognition for the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty was an important factor in their national thinking. Republicanism became confined to Serbian left wing. There was emphasis in Serbian Yugoslavism on the role of the centralized state, which meant in this case dominance for the Serbian

elite in power. The leading groups in the nations that were founding the state did not indulge in any serious bargaining about the internal structure of the state before the union took place. As mentioned above, the only compact of that kind (the Geneva agreement of November 1918) was thwarted by opposition within the Serbian government. It remains valid to say that the Slovene, and even more the Croatian, political forces were thrown into the arms of the Serbian army, bureaucracy, and royal dynasty by fear. They were afraid of Italy's territorial aspirations and of the domestic anarchy and social revolution that loomed in the wake of the war and the disintegration of the Austro–Hungarian monarchy.

In the end, the constitutional questions in dispute were referred to a Constitutional National Assembly, which was to be convened later. The political forces of the Croats and Slovenes hoped reasonably that the universal male suffrage, one of the most democratic institutions of the Serbian state, would ensure that they obtained proportionate representation in the new *Skupština* or House of Representatives. This in turn would allow them to turn the structure of the state towards a federation. In the event, their hopes were confounded. Domestic political events under the provisional government of 1918–1921 already demonstrated the political and administrative dominance that the Serbs would exercise and the political intolerance that spread to all areas of state activity. The *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus' Day) Constitution passed on 28 June 1921 ignored the relative political strengths reflected in the general elections of the previous November. A process of political bargaining was used to obtain an endorsement of the new centralist structure of state, without the support of the Croatian members. Thereafter, the history of Yugoslavia can be viewed as a struggle between the forces of centralism and federalism, and inseparably from that, a battle fought among the South Slav peoples.

One of the main structural features of the political scene was that the political parties were not primarily parties grouped around a political programme. They were national parties, whose support coincided, more or less, with national communities within the new state. This applies even if some parties, especially ones with Serbian roots such as the Radical Party and Democratic Party, adopted a nationwide, pan-Yugoslav guise. Among the major political problems facing the rival Radicals and Democrats and the Serbian court was how to prevent the opposition Croatian (Republican) Peasant Party from becoming a focus for the opposition forces on a nationwide scale.

The Serbian People's Radical Party, founded in 1881, had lost its character of a peasants' party by the time the South Slav state formed, although the Serbian peasantry still voted for it in the main. From the beginning of the twentieth century, it steadily became a party of the Serbian elite and middle class, associated with the Serbian state and strongly advocating a national, Greater Serbian programme within the South Slav state. By that time, its peasant, patriarchal roots had atrophied irrevocably, so that it supported a strong, centralized monarchy. However, as the *Vidovdan* Constitution reflected, the party coupled its insistence on unitary nationhood with advocacy of broad public administrative (not national) autonomy.

The Democratic Party had been formed by opposition groups in historical Serbia that broke away from the Radicals. These were joined in 1919 by representatives of the so-called *prečanin* Serbs[1] of Croatia, dwelling between the Sava and Danube rivers. The party was more "Yugoslav" and centralist than the Radicals, so it did not support regional administrative autonomy either. For historical reasons, neither party had any experience of cohabitation with minorities or handling the minority question. In political terms they had nothing to say to the Hungarians or the Germans or, least of all, to the Albanians. They made some use of the Vojvodina minorities during their battles with each other as a means of promoting their objectives, especially in the frequent parliamentary and local government elections that were held. However, the governing parties were not capable of doing more than that at any time during the existence of the first Yugoslavia.

The largest opposition party was the Croatian Republican Peasant Party, formed in 1904 and headed by the real ruler of Croatia, Stjepan Radić. As its name suggests, the party was at odds with the monarchical form of state, at least until 1925. Furthermore, it was a strong foe of centralism and curtailment of Croatian state rights. Even in the 1920s it retained its special blend of peasant socialism, pacifism, and however paradoxical it may sound, internationalism, as well as its idea of a peasant republic based on a referendum. By representing the national and the peasant cause at once, Radić was able to make himself the uncrowned king of Croatia and the "wise man" of his people.

Tipping the balance of Yugoslav politics was the Slovenian People's Party, headed by Anton Korošec, who likewise retained the confidence of Slovene voters almost throughout the period. However, the party's attention was not devoted exclusively to constitutional matters, which Korošec considered secondary so long as the Slovenes could form an administrative unit and hold dominant positions in the administration, the arts, and the economy of Slovenia. That, fundamentally, was why Korošec joined the government of the country and cooperated with Belgrade.

The strongest Bosnian party was the Yugoslav Muslim Organization. The interests of Turkish-speaking and Albanian Muslims were represented by another Muslim party, the Džemije.

Clearly, each political party was tied strongly to a specific nation within the country. It is not surprising, therefore, to find also in multi-ethnic Vojvodina parties organized around a nation or minority, such as the Yugoslavian German Party, the Yugoslavian Hungarian Party (*Jugoszláviai Magyar Párt*) and the Šokac–Bunjevac (*Sokác–Bunyevác*) Party. It will be seen in detail in the case of the Hungarian Party how these parties reflected the characteristics of domestic politics in Yugoslavia and saw it as their most important task to take up the affairs and grievances of their minority before the state.

[1] *Prečanin* were Serbs who lived beyond the Drava and Sava rivers in the Monarchy, to the north of Serbia proper. The term has slightly derogatory undertones.

The Communist Party was the only party in Yugoslavia whose programme and activity was not centred on national and constitutional issues. Its branches extended across the national boundaries within the country. The party came into being as a specific combination of Orthodox Serbian and Bosnian Marxists with Croatian and Slovenian pro-Bolshevik radical socialists who supported a unitary state. Despite their heterogeneity, the Communists managed to obtain the third largest number of seats in the first legislature of the new state, elected in November 1920. The party became especially influential in areas on the periphery of Yugoslavia where there was no party to represent the region's national grievances. The party, which operated to great political effect until 1921, before being banned and shrinking into a small sect, argued for "equality of rights for all national communities." However, it adopted the government parties' notion of "three tribes in one nation" with the important proviso that the national question was a matter for the bourgeoisie, with which "a proletarian party need not concern itself, because it simply confuses the class war." Only in the 1930s, after long internal debates, did the party recognize the very important part that the national question was playing in Yugoslavia's domestic affairs and formulate the need to turn the state into a federation.

Provisional administration of the country was regulated by a royal decree of 7 January 1919. The national governments that had formed in the former territory of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy in the autumn of 1918 were dissolved in favour of narrower provincial governments. However, at that juncture, the eight provinces of the country still covered the national territories or regions that had developed historically: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Vojvodina.[2]

The Hungarian community, weakened economically and culturally (this is returned to below) and after being denied its political rights for a long period, began to formulate for the first time in its history possible ways of surviving under the new conditions while preserving its national identity. The scope was defined not only by the ethnic weight of the Hungarians in the country, the combative nationalism of the new authorities, the assistance from Hungary (restricted at this time mainly to funding and political advice), but by the specific history of the region. The South Country had always been a peripheral region of Hungary, without a local, cultural Hungarian consciousness of its own. It was not fortuitous that Újvidék (Novi Sad) had been known as the Serbian Athens. Unlike the Germans of the Banat, the Hungarians had not possessed a stratum of wealthy peasant-citizens. Its politically active middle class had been associated mainly

[2] Notable monographs on the inter-war history of Yugoslavia include F. Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata.* [Yugoslavia between two wars] 2 vols., Zagreb 1961; B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije.* [History of Yugoslavia] 3 vols., 1918–1988, Belgrade 1988; J. R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice There Was a Country.* New York 1996; Š. Đodan, *Hrvatsko pitanje.* [The Croatian question] Zagreb 1991; J. Juhász, *Volt egyszer egy Jugoszlávia.* [Once There Was a Yugoslavia] Budapest 1999; B. Petranović–M. Zečević, *Agonija dve Jugoslavije.* [Agony of two Yugoslavias] Belgrade 1991.

with the old apparatus of the state, along with landowners and the self-employed professions, all of which were substantially weakened by the change of rule. Of the peasantry who made up 60 to 70 percent of Hungarian society, about 10 percent did not have land. These and the working class, employed mainly in the food industry and small-scale industry, were less inclined towards nationally based party programmes than towards social, egalitarian objectives in the early 1920s, so they gravitated towards the communist, socialist and trade-union movements. There were Hungarians (Lajos Csáki and József Juhász) among the perpetrators of the communist outrages against Regent Alexander and Interior Minister Milorad Drašković, which precipitated the act on state defence and reinforced the strong official suspicions of the Hungarians and charges of irredentist, anti-state conduct against them.

The old local political antagonism between the Independence Party *(Függetlenségi Párt)* and the Party of Labour *(Munka Párt)* arose as an obstacle while the Hungarian Party was being established. Nor had the South Slav–Hungarian political conflicts of the Dual Monarchy period died down entirely.[3] The new politically active stratum among the Hungarians, consisting mainly of attorneys, lawyers, doctors, and middling landowners, lacked experience of communicating with the peasantry or the working class. No useful advice in this respect came from the mother country.

The centres of political and cultural organization among the Hungarians were Veliki Bečkerek (Nagybecskerek) in the Banat, Subotica, Sombor, and Senta. Veliki Bečkerek was the home of Dr. Imre Várady, who had been prominent in the politics of former Torontál County and served as a member of the Hungarian Parliament. He was among the few South-Country Hungarian politicians to speak excellent Serbian and maintain good relations with the local Serbian and German intelligentsia. The Hungarians of the Banat also had a high-quality, long-established daily paper, *Torontál*. However, Veliki Bečkerek was a long distance from the ethnic centre of the South-Country Hungarians and Várady was suspect in the eyes of many for the ideas he had about reaching agreement with Belgrade. Political life in Sombor relied on two former governing party (Party of Labour) politicians: Dr. Ödön Palásthy and Dr. Árpád Falcione, a former member of the Hungarian Parliament. Organization in Subotica was impeded by old rivalries between the Farmers' Circle (*Gazdakör*) and the People's Circle (*Népkör*), known earlier as the Independence Circle (*Függentlenségi Kör*). Nonetheless, Subotica may well have been the most important focus of organization in the early period. Among those prominent were the landowner Bálint Törley, later a Hungarian state secretary, Dr. Károly Bíró, the last Hungarian mayor of the town, János Janiga, a former Party of Labour member of the Hungarian Parliament, and Dr.

[3] J. Csuka, *A délvidéki magyarság története 1918–1941.* [History of the South-Country Hungarians 1918–1941] Budapest 1995, 47–48. On the pre-1918 operation of the bourgeois political parties in the South Country, see A. Lebl, *Građanske političke stranke u Vojvodini 1887–1914.* [Civil political parties in the Vojvodina, 1887–1914] Novi Sad 1979.

Lukács Pleszkovich. Organization of the Hungarians living along the Tisza River was directed by two lawyers in Senta, Dr. Ádám Sóti and Dr. János Csettle.

After much planning and scheming in private houses, the first public reference to the idea of founding a Hungarian party appeared on 17 January 1921 in the Subotica *Hírlap* (News), which later became the organ of the Hungarian Party. Two possible approaches were suggested during the organization phase. No one doubted that the Hungarians had to progress beyond the stage of "patient passivity," but opinions differed about what the subsequent methods and objectives should be. The "passivists," drawn mainly from those Octobrists who had fled from Baranya County into Yugoslavia, argued that the time had not yet come to found a separate political party; the Hungarian community should focus its attention on cultural and economic issues. This view was shared, for example, by Pleszkovich, the longstanding leader of the Subotica People's Circle, who had played an important part in the organization. Pleszkovich, who incidentally had been the last Hungarian lord lieutenant of the town, saw as more appropriate a joint organization of the national communities of the Vojvodina, pressing for autonomy there. The idea of a Vojvodina party would also have gained support from the Bunjevac. The "activists," on the other hand, maintained that there should be a separate Hungarian political party, which should also take up the cultural and economic defence of the Hungarian community. This was all the more important, they argued, because the big Slav parties could not be trusted and the Hungarians would become split among them if they did not have a political party of their own.[4] This approach was taken, for instance, by Falcione, Palásthy and Várady, later a Yugoslav representative and senator, as well as by the former Independence Party politician Dr. László Gráber, the Subotica surgeon Dr. György Sántha, and several others.

Official South Slav circles did not look kindly on the separate political organization going on among the Hungarians, which they tried to prevent or divert into the large, "viable" Slav political parties. The idea was also raised of forming a single minority party with the Bunjevac and the Germans. The decisive contribution to resolving the dilemma was the position taken by the Hungarian government. Budapest firmly supported the "activists" seeking to organize on a national basis. Otherwise, it threatened to withdraw its financial support and institute "a complete boycott of participants in this unpatriotic procedure."[5]

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[4] MOL (National Archives of Hungary) K–64. (A Külügyminisztérium politikai osztályának reservált iratai [Reserved documents of the Foreign Ministry's Political Department], henceforth: Küm. res. pol.) 1925–16–260.

[5] MOL K–64. 1925–16–432; E. A. Sajti, "A jugoszláviai Magyar Párt megalakulása és részvétele az 1925-ös választásokon." [Foundation of the Yugoslavian Hungarian Party and its participation in the 1925 elections] in *Nemzettudat, jugoszlávizmus, magyarság*, Szeged 1991, 91–92. On the activity of the Hungarian Party, see E. A. Sajti, "A jugoszláviai magyarok politikai szervezkedésének lehetőségei és korlátai (1918–1941)." [Scope for and constraints on political organization by the Yugoslav Hungarians, 1918–41] *Regio. Kisebbségi Szemle* 8:2 (1997), 3–30.

The Hungarian government used secret channels to maintain contact with the South-Country Hungarians in the first half of the 1920s. This was because of Hungary's international situation and its extremely tense relations with the South Slav state. An important factor behind the latter was Belgrade's conviction that the South-Country Hungarians collectively were an anti-state, irredentist minority and willing tools of Hungary's territorial revisionism. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry expressly forbade the Hungarian mission in Belgrade to maintain direct relations with the Hungarians, although it drew legation staff into its secret channels of communication.

The Hungarian envoy in Belgrade from 1924 to 1927 was András Hory, who wrote the following in his memoirs:

Very little news of the Hungarian minority reached me. I did not know the leaders of the Hungarian community there and I had no contact with them. They did not seek intercourse with me, and especially in the early period it would have been difficult for me to visit the South Country, where I had no contacts at all. The idea held in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry was that it would be better for the minister in Belgrade not to have contact with the leaders of the Yugoslavian Hungarians, who in any case had other possible channels for forwarding their complaints and requests to Budapest... The position of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry on this question was not entirely logical, because while they banned direct contact with the South-Country Hungarian community, Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya expressly ordered me to receive very cordially and maintain contact with people coming to me from ORIM. To prove their legitimacy, they would produce one piece of the music of a Serb folksong, which had been torn in two. I brought the other piece of the music with me from Pest.[6]

The government was concentrating its attention on three aspects of the Hungarians now beyond the Trianon borders of the country. It gathered data on the life of the minority, exploring the grievances as accurately as possible. It gave them financial, moral, and political support, and even directed the emerging political, cultural, ecclesiastical, and other organizations of the Hungarian minorities in the Uplands, Romania and the South Country. Furthermore, it built the minority question into its diplomacy with neighbouring countries. During the initial post-war stage of revolution and counterrevolution, it kept in contact with areas beyond the demarcation lines in a disorganized, sporadic, occasional way, without following any uniform criteria. This applied to the South-Country Hungarians as well. The main purpose was to emphasize that Hungary retained its rights (which is why state officials and senior school teachers were still paid from Budapest) and to gather evidence of the wrongs done by the occupiers. These tasks were done mainly by railway employees, army officers, enthusiastic stu-

[6] A. Hory, *Bukaresttől Varsóig*. [From Bucharest to Warsaw] Edited, introduced and annotated by Pál Pritz. Budapest 1987, 184. ORIM (Organisation Révolutionnaire Intérieure Macédonienne) sought to unite Yugoslavian Macedonia as part of Bulgaria through acts of terrorism.

dents, and county officials who had remained at their posts, often independently of each other.

The present study does not set out to analyse in detail the policy of successive Hungarian governments towards the Hungarians living abroad, but the present subject calls for a brief outline of the institutional and structural characteristics of that policy. Before the First World War, the affairs of Hungarians residing abroad (emigrants and scattered communities) were the concern of the prime minister's office. Even at that time, the government preferred not to give direct support to Hungarian institutions abroad, tending instead to work through voluntary organizations created for the purpose or often through occasional secret provision of funds. The scattered Hungarian communities in Slavonia and Bosnia, for example, were cared for by the *Julián* Society, established in 1904. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the autumn of 1918, responsibility for the occupied lands became decentralized, with the Foreign, Propaganda, and Minority ministries often competing with each other to perform the tasks. From that juncture onwards, as one of the key issues of government policy, the question of the lands occupied by neighbouring countries was bound up with the peace negotiations, refugees and the Hungarian communities of the South Country, the Uplands and Transylvania. It became increasingly clear that the existing institutional frameworks were insufficient for the size of the task. It was increasingly urgent to coordinate and professionalize the work done by the organizations mediating between the government and the Hungarians beyond the demarcation line.

Those initiating this process of centralization and rationalization were a group of prominent Transylvanian Hungarians who had fled or been deported to Hungary: Count István Bethlen, Count Pál Teleki, Benedek Jancsó, Dénes Sebess and others.[7] The relative importance attached to the ceded territories is apparent from the actions of Prime Minister István Friedrich at the end of September 1919. Friedrich appointed Bethlen to head a secret ministry dealing exclusively with Transylvanian affairs, while the Propaganda, Foreign and Minority ministries continued to look after the Upper-Country and South-Country Hungarians.[8] Although the secret Transylvanian ministry ceased to exist when the Huszár government took office on 24 November 1919, its staff and tasks were taken over by Group B of the Peace Preparations Bureau (*Békelőkészítő Iroda*). In April 1920 it became the National Office for Refugee Affairs (*Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal*), with responsibility for all three ceded territories, including the South Country, but the ministries noted above also continued their previous activities.

After the peace treaty had been signed, Prime Minister Bethlen convened an important meeting on 11 May 1921 to discuss the domestic and foreign policy

[7] For more detail, especially on the Transylvanian activity of the Centre for the Federation of Social Societies, see N. Bárdi, "A Keleti Akció." [The Eastern Campaign] *Regio. Kisebbségi Szemle* 6:3 (1995), 89–134.

[8] I. Romsics, *Gróf Bethlen István politikai pályája 1901–1921.* [The Political Career of Count István Bethlen, 1901–21] Budapest 1987, 208–211.

consolidation of the country. Among those present were Foreign Minister Miklós Bánffy, Interior Minister Gedeon Ráday, and Defence Minister Sándor Belitska. The army general staff was represented by Colonels Rőder and Siménfalvi, the voluntary organizations by Zsigmond Perényi, chairman of the Hungarian National League (*Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség*), and the prime minister's office by two well-known Transylvanian politicians, Counsellors Benedek Jancsó and Pál Petri.

The purpose of the discussion was to end military and irredentist activities in the ceded territories, or rather to reorganize them to suit the official policy interests and scope of Hungary. Opening the meeting, Bethlen laid emphasis on "the great danger caused to our kinsmen in the newly ceded territories by the fact that messages have gone out from here, purported military emissaries have approached the leaders of our kinsmen there, compromising them and often exposing them to arrest and mistreatment." The meeting also noted that "military organization aimed at liberating the occupied lands has ceased. Anyone who indulges in such activity and thereby gets into trouble cannot count on any support." The Hungarian military organizations were forbidden to maintain contact with any Hungarian military organizations or individuals beyond the borders and obliged to keep Pál Teleki informed of any contacts of another character. The meeting found it important to state that "the intelligence service should be completely divorced from the affairs of the military organization." Miklós Bánffy, the foreign minister, recommended not just reviewing the irredentist associations, but dissolving "the most dangerous" of them, since "they cause the greatest diplomatic difficulties at home with their unguarded statements and could plunge the country into fatal danger sooner or later."[9]

After the meeting, government policy towards the lands beyond the country's borders began to consolidate and adjust to the norms of international and domestic law. The main objective of Hungary's foreign policy at that stage was to break out of its international isolation. It was thought to be injudicious to pursue territorial revision openly, so that the subject had to come off the agenda for the time being. Even the question of supporting and contacting Hungarians living beyond the borders took second place to the broader diplomatic purpose. The pronounced domestic support for revision was directed and consolidated into forms where it could be kept under observation. A sharp division was made between official and voluntary efforts in this direction. This approach led to the establishment in August 1921 of the Centre for the Federation of Voluntary Associations (*Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetségének Központja*, TESZK), headed by Pál Teleki. Thereafter, the Bethlen government's support and protection for the Hungarians in the South Country, the Uplands and Transylvania was handled by the Centre, working through the St. Gellért Society (*Szent Gellért Társaság*) in the case of the South Country. The meeting of ministers on 11 August 1921 adopted the following basic principles for the operation of the organization:

1) In the government's name, the *Rákóczi* Association responsible for the Uplands, the Popular Literary Society supporting the Hungarian minority in the East-

[9] MOL K–26. ME (Prime Minister's Office) 1921–XXX VIII–3581.

ern Hungarian territories ceded to Romania, except for the Banat territories, and the *Szt. Gellért* Society responsible for the Hungarians of the South Country and the Banat territories ceded to Romania might maintain contacts with the Hungarians in the aforementioned territories only through the central leadership of TESZK.

2) The central apparatus of the organization was subordinated directly to the prime minister, István Bethlen, who would perform this task with assistance from the competent Second Department of the Prime Minister's Office.

3) The Second Department of the PMO dealing with minority affairs was able to prepare the budget of the organization in agreement with the finance minister, and this had to be endorsed only by the government, on the motion of the prime minister, circumventing the National Assembly.

4) Finally, the financing the organization was laid down at the same time.[10]

The president of the *Szt. Gellért* Society was the writer Ferenc Herczeg, who was of South-Country origin. Its executive director, Olivér Eöttevényi, was the retired lord lieutenant of Lugos (Lugoj) and had headed the dissolved South-Country League *(Délvidéki Liga)*, which can be seen as the society's predecessor. Eöttevényi was succeeded by Tibor Tubán, a member of the Piarist order, who had served as a counsellor in the Ministry of Religion and Public Education under the Szeged counterrevolutionary government. The tasks of secretary were performed by Endre Fall, formerly headmaster of Temesvár City College. The society operated in great secrecy throughout its existence.

Several other institutions were also subordinate to TESZK. One was the Hungarian National Federation (*Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség*), which dealt with propaganda abroad, while also acting as an "unseen hand" to counteract the "mounting espionage" of the neighbouring countries.[11] Bethlen forbade the societies belonging to TESZK to approach the prime minister's office and the ministries directly. They had to channel all their affairs through the head of TESZK, former Prime Minister Pál Teleki, or his second-in-command, Deputy State Secretary Antal Papp. These two men were also the only contacts for the leading politicians among the Hungarians across the border. The activity of TESZK was at its most intensive from 1921 to 1925. Thereafter it tended to confine itself to humanitarian work. Its functions were taken over at the beginning of the 1930s by the Revisionist League (*Revíziós Liga*) and the Institute of Political Science (*Államtudományi Intézet*), which Teleki founded.

The *Szt. Gellért* Society had other tasks besides looking after the Hungarian community beyond the country's southern border. It provided hostel accommodation for secondary-school pupils from the South Country at *Szt. Gellért*'s College (*Szent Gellért Internátus*) in Szeged. It supported and controlled the operation of the South Country University and College Association (*Délvidéki Egyetemi és Főiskolai Egyesület*). It also supervised the South-Country House (*Délvidéki Ott-*

[10] MOL K–27. Mt. jkv., August 21, 1921; MOL K–437. Társadalmi Egyesületek Központjának iratai [Documents of the Centre for the Federation of Voluntary Associations, hereafter TESZK] 1921–10–7.

[11] *Ibid.* 1922–12/12–980; 12/14–1043.

hon), established in August 1921 as the voluntary organization for South-Country Hungarians who had settled in, opted for or been deported to Hungary. On the government's instigation, the last of these joined the International Union of League of Nations Societies and presented the grievances of the South-Country Hungarians at the union's conferences in Munich, Prague and Vienna.[12] Although this is not appropriate to discuss in detail here the financial support given to these organizations, it is worth noting that the overall budget of TESZK for 1921–1922 was 251 million crowns. Of this, 16 million was spent on central and foreign propaganda, 25 million on secret military organizations beyond the borders, some 48 million on the Uplands, 110 million on Transylvania, and more than 37 million crowns on the South-Country Hungarians. The last allocation also covered the funds provided by the *Szt. Gellért* Society for the college in Pécs that the *Julián* Association maintained for the scattered Hungarian communities in Slavonia and Bosnia and for the Slavonian campaign by the Universal Synod of the Reformed Church (*Református Egyetemes Konvent*).[13] According to the TESZK accounts, the biggest sums of assistance went to the Protestant and Catholic churches, various South-Country schools, the press, cultural and peasant circles, and the Hungarian university students of Zagreb.[14] The TESZK leaders insisted that the institutions, papers, and associations receiving assistance should not learn where it came from. For instance, the *Hírlap* (News), which was the newspaper of the Hungarian Party, received regular backing, but Budapest stipulated that "neither the editorial nor the publishing offices of the paper should know about the source of the assistance."[15] The political leaders of the Hungarians were aware of the origin of the subsidies, of course. Within the overall TESZK budget, Transylvania always received the highest proportion of support, although it tended to decrease. Next came the proportion allocated to the Uplands. The South Country received the smallest proportion throughout the period. In 1921–1922, for instance, the annual financial allocation to TESZK made up 0.4 percent

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[12] *Jelentés a Délvidéki Otthon ötéves működéséről. Készítette: dr. Fall Endre igazgató, a DO főtitkára.* [Report on Five Years' Operation of the South-Country Home. Prepared by Dr. Endre Fall, Director, SCH General Secretary] Budapest 1926, 29–30.

[13] For more on support for the Hungarians of Slavonia and Bosnia, see F. Bernics, *A Julián akció (Egy "magyarságmentő egyesület" tevékenysége Horvátországban és Bosznia-Hercegovinában és a jelen 1904–1992).* [The Julián Campaign (Activity of a "Hungarian-Saving Association" in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Present Day, 1904–1992)] Pécs 1994; B. Makkai, "Magyar szórványgondozás Bosznia-Hercegovinában." [Care of Scattered Hungarian Communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina] *Regio. Kisebbségi Szemle* 6:3 (1995), 65–88.

[14] MOL K–437. TESZK 1921–22–11–sz.n.; 1922–10570; 1922–1930–10 (8) III. 1929–9. Misc., unnumbered. On the budget of TESZK and how it was allocated, see also Bárdi, "A Keleti Akció." 114–123. His data differ somewhat from those given here. In August 1919, 100 Hungarian crowns were worth 11.60 Swiss francs. By 1922, mounting inflation had reduced this to 0.47 Swiss francs. Inflation in Hungary was curbed at the end of 1924, but it was 1927 before a new unit of currency, the *pengő*, was introduced.

[15] MOL K–437. TESZK 1922–1930–10/8. IV.

of the state budget, but there were years when it amounted to less than 0.2 percent. However, if the TESZK budget is compared to those of other portfolios, the financial scope for the "Teleki ministry" does not seem so small. It ranged between 10 and 35 percent of the budget of the Foreign Ministry, for example.[16]

Organization of the Hungarian Party began with great energy in January 1922. The local Yugoslav authorities and government circles tried hard to obstruct this with proscriptions and threats, and occasionally by violent means or with promises.

On 19 April, Prime Minister Nikola Pašić summoned before him a group of the organizers headed by György Sántha and Imre Várady. This was the first opportunity to acquaint the prime minister with the party's draft programme. Important features included a clear rejection of the charge of irredentism, emphasizing that they wished to be loyal citizens of the Serb–Croat–Slovene Kingdom and conduct their activity *exclusively* in a strictly constitutional way. Pašić made a short speech underlining the familiar position that it was needless for the Hungarians to found a separate political organization. His government had secured them civil equality and freedom through the constitution, as well as the right to elementary education in their native language. Reflecting on the complaints made by the delegation against the activities of local organizations of power, Pašić urged them not to generalize from these "tiny, paltry disputes," let alone identify them with the policy of the government. The Hungarians, he went on, "entered this country under difficult circumstances, so that one should not be surprised if some instances of disloyalty had to be suppressed." Finally, he asked them to submit to him the grievances of the Hungarians, which he would remedy.[17] Stojan Protić, the Democratic Party minister of the interior, sent word to the Hungarians through the *Hírlap* that he hoped the present organizing activity "amounts just to the beginning of an evolutionary process that will lead ultimately to a merger with one of the existing political parties." Anton Korošec, leading Slovene politician, visiting Sombor for election reasons, argued that the three minorities – the Hungarians, the Germans and the Romanians – should form a common party. This minority party, he said, should struggle for the autonomy of the Vojvodina.[18] The memorandum requested by Pašić was completed at the end of May. Since the prime minister, despite his promise, "could not find time" to receive the Hungarian delegation, the memorandum was sent to him by post. It was also sent to every Yugoslav political party and to many representatives of the Hungarian political elite, and published in Hungary through the *Szt. Gellért* Society.[19] The memorandum listed the economic, political, legal, cul-

[16] Bárdi, "A Keleti Akció." 120–121.

[17] MOL K–28. A Miniszterelnökség Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai (Documents of the Minorities department of the Prime Minister's Office, hereafter ME Kisebbségi o.) 1926–R–85; *Zastava*, April 23, 1922.

[18] *Hírlap*, 22 February 1922; MOL K–26. ME. 1922–III. bizalmas [confidential]–21.

[19] *A Jugoszláviai Magyar Párt memoranduma Pašićhoz. Az elszakított Délvidék sorsa III.* [Memorandum of the Yugoslavian Hungarian Party to Pašić. Fate of the Ceded South-Country III] Budapest 1922.

tural, educational and other grievances of the South-Country Hungarians under 15 points. It pointed, for instance, to deportations of politically active Hungarians who had taken Yugoslavian citizenship, to frequent police harassment, and to Belgrade's inability to enforce its legislation locally. The document complained that Hungarians were being left off the electoral rolls, omitted from the land reform and so on. No substantive response to the memorandum was ever received. It was characteristic of the atmosphere at the time that one member of the Hungarian mission to the prime minister was "urged" by the Sombor chief of police to leave the country, as "he too was one of the cowards who had gone complaining about grievances to Pašić."[20]

The plan had originally been to hold the national inaugural meeting in Subotica. Pavel Dobanovački, the mayor of the town, refused permission for this, arguing that it was "inappropriate for the Hungarians to hold their inaugural meeting in the most extreme town in the country, near the Hungarian border, after the manner of a protest." In Sombor, the organizers were openly threatened with deportation.[21] The national conference was eventually held in Senta after the branches had been established, before about three thousand delegates, on 22 September 1922. It was the last of the Hungarian minority parties to form in the successor countries and it was preceded in the South Country by the Šokac-Bunjevac Party and the German Party.

The programme adopted at the national conference remained strictly within the constitutional framework of the Serb–Croat–Slovene Kingdom. It was emphasized that the Hungarians wished to be loyal citizens of the kingdom. The party leaders were prompted to adopt this policy by the realities of the situation and by the intentions of Budapest. It has already been mentioned that Hungary had been striving, since the conclusion of the peace treaty, to break out of its international isolation. One indication of this was that Hungary raised its diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia to ambassador level in May 1922, appointing as its first ambassador in Belgrade Ferenc Kolossa, who had headed the mission hitherto.[22] The Yugoslav foreign minister, Momčilo Ninčić, described Hungarian-Yugoslav relations at this time simply as bad, unhesitatingly and with good grounds. He went on to say that they would remain bad while the Hungarian government was ruled by "a secret, but very powerful organization... the Association of Awakening Hungarians" [sic]. He described the Bethlen government as aristocratic and despotic and "a danger to Europe,"[23] since it sought to upset the status quo.[24]

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[20] *Hírlap*, 7 May 1922.

[21] *Hírlap*, 31 March 1922; MOL K–28. ME Kisebbségi o. 1926–R–85.

[22] MOL K–27. Mt. jkv., 5 May 1922.

[23] MOL K–28. ME Kisebbségi o. 1923–R–19.

[24] For the later activity of the Yugoslavian Hungarian Party, see E. A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Voivodina: 1918–1947*. New York 2003, 35–65.