

*A Brief and Fragmented
History of Radical
Right-Wing Paramilitary
Formations in Hungary
in the 1920S*

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Chapter - 1

Introductory general remarks on the Double Cross Blood Union, the umbrella organisation of Hungarian radical right-wing, quasi-state paramilitary formations in the 1920s

It is surely not a promising endeavour to write about secret societies, since these organisations generally produce few documents, or do not produce documents at all. Furthermore, the larger is distance in time, the harder it is to trace back and reconstruct the activities of an organisation. The so-called Horthy-era (1920–1944) was one of the tumultuous periods of Hungarian history that was full of – mainly right-wing, irredentist and nationalist, and often intolerant and strongly anti-Semitic – secret associations, federations and societies that often overlapped, and had some degree of influence on politics.¹ These secretly operating formations sometimes had a legal cover organisation in the form of an association the constitution of which was approved by the Ministry of the Interior, but sometimes they operated in completely informal frameworks, based on verbal discussions and instructions between the members.

The Hungarian military secret society/secret irregular military formation called *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union* is very peculiar among these organisations, because it was definitely present in contemporary publicity, and several illegitimacies (for example, political murders, murders and robberies, assassinations, terrorism and coup attempts) were attributed to its members in contemporary newspapers and other sources, yet it produced very few documents, or at least its documents were not preserved in the custody of archives. That is, historians know only little about it, and its concrete activities can often be based on presumptions, guesses and the attribution of certain events to the organisation, which can be confirmed only partially.

Basically, the Double Cross Blood Union, if we can trust the sources

¹ Krisztián UNGVÁRY, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1914–1944*, Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2012, 97–100.

and widespread information, was not else but the military or paramilitary² wing/sub-organisation of the very influential Hungarian secret society of the Horthy-era called *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, which included the member of the political, military and bureaucratic elite. Due to the memoirs of military bishop István Zadravecz,³ the diary-memoirs of notorious paramilitary commander Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay⁴ and the diary-memoirs of General Kálmán Shvoy⁵ – these three basic documents that were also published in book form in the communist Kádár-era –, despite its secrecy and enigmatic character, we know fairly much about the Union of Etelköz, the politically influential secret society⁶ that was established as a kind of ‘white’, nationalist counter-freemasonry.⁷ The Union of Etelköz controlled the irredentist and race-defending, legal and illegal associations to some extent, or at least it tried to control them, so it can be considered as a kind of right-wing umbrella organisation. For conspirative reasons, its name was shortened by the members as EX, ET and X. The organisation was established in 1919, Szeged,⁸ in the close environment of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary government, and later it had approximately 5000 members, led by the so-called *Vezéri Tanács – Council of Captains*, a 7–12-strong leading body until 16th October 1944. The Union of Etelköz installed its seat at the hall of the strongly paramilitary *Magyar Országos Véderő*

² On paramilitarism see: *Uğur Ümit ÜNGÖR, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*

³ István ZADRAVECZ, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*, forráskiad. BORSÁNYI György, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967. The original source can be found at the Historical Archives of the State Security Services under the reference code HU-ÁBTL-A-719.

⁴ Pál PRÓNAY, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin PAMLÉNYI-Ágnes SZABÓ, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963. The source can be today found in the custody of the Hungarian Archives of Political History and Trade Unions: HU-PIL-IV-973.

⁵ Kálmán SHVOY, *Shvoy Kálmán titkos naplója és emlékirata 1920–1945*, ed. Mihály PERNEKI, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983. The original source can be found in the custody of the Csongrád-Csanád County Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-CSML-XIV-12.

⁶ The Constitution of the Union of Etelköz also remained in the records of Dr. József Minich’s People’s Tribunal trial in the custody of the Budapest City Archives: HU-BFL-XXV-2-b-8311/1947.

⁷ Hungarian historian Miklós Zoltán Fodor wrote a summarising research article on the history of the Union of Etelköz: Miklós Zoltán FODOR, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.

⁸ The Union of Etelköz certainly had some political influence, since high-ranking politicians, administrative officers and military officers were among its leaders and members. See: László ERDEŐS, *A magyar honvédelem egy negyedszázada 1919-1944*, szerk. BABUCS Zoltán, Gödöllő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2007, 115–117.

*Egylet (MOVE)*⁹ – *Hungarian Defence Force Association* which included mainly active and demobilised soldiers in Budapest, Podmaniczky street.¹⁰ As for its rites and outlook, the Union of Etelköz wanted to resemble Freemasonry, detested and considered to be unpatriotic by its members, and ironically even the common hall of MOVE and EX was confiscated from the Symbolic Grand Logde of Hungary. Through its network of relations the organisation had a serious effect on the political life of the era, since influential politicians like Prime Ministers Count István Bethlen and Count Pál Teleki, ex-Prime Minister Count Gyula Károlyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Miklós Bánffy, or Tibor Eckhardt, President of *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME)* – *Association of Awakening Hungarians*,¹¹ the

⁹ The *MOVE – Hungarian National Defence Force Association* was founded on 15 November 1918 as a paramilitary counter-revolutionary association, and gradually became one of the largest mass organisations of the Horthy Era, with a large part of its membership made up of military officers. One of its founders was Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister. In the 1920s, together with the Association of Awakening Hungarians, it was one of the most influential anti-Semitic and revisionist associations of the period, with a majority of representatives of the Arrow Cross and other extreme right-wing parties (e.g. László Bánkúti, Gábor Baross, László Endre, Berthold Feilitzsch, etc.) in its leadership from the second half of the 1930s. From 1942 onwards, its leadership mobilised to unite Hungarian far-right organisations, and its members made up a large proportion of the party militia of the Arrow Cross Party. After the German invasion of Hungary, the smaller radical right-wing associations were merged into MOVE by a decree of the Minister of the Interior. The fragmentary surviving records of the association can be searched in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-OL-P 1360. About its history see the following monograph written in the Communist period: Rudolfné DÓSA, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.

¹⁰ Zsuzsa L. NAGY, *Szabadkőművesek*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, 68.

¹¹ The *ÉME – Association of Awakening Hungarians* was the most influential nationalist social association in Hungary after the First World War and the revolutions, maintaining its own auxiliary police militias and paramilitary units in the early 1920s, and exerting a strong influence on party politics. Its members committed a number of notorious anti-Semitic and irredentist crimes, as well as acts of terror. Among its founders and board members there were many politicians and influential military officers such as Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas or Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister. At its peak, its membership was in the hundreds of thousands, and its presidents in the early 1920s were György Szmracsányi, Tibor Eckhardt and Dezső Buday, members of the parliament. Its importance gradually declined after 1923, with the emergence of the Hungarian National Independence Party (commonly called Race-defending Party) which had split from the governing Unity Party (officially called Christian-National Peasant, Smallholder and Bourgeois Party), and more significantly with the formation of the Western-style Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties in the 1930s, some of whose members were members of the association. The Awakening Hungarians continued to operate alongside various radical right-wing political parties until 1945. About its history see: Tibor ZINNER, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.; Tibor ZINNER, *Adatok az Ébredő Magyarok Egyesületének 1918. november–1920. március közötti történetéhez*, Budapest Főváros Leváltára Közleményei, 1978/1, 251–284.

most influential nationalist mass organisation of the era¹² were among its members. Those who were invited to the membership of EX, had to take oath to life and death stating that they will serve irredentist and race-defending, nationalist goals. The Council of Captains discussed all important political issues. The cover organisation of the Union of Etelköz was *Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület – Hungarian Scientific Race-Defending Association*, which was established on 28th September 1920, and the Minister of the Interior approved its constitution on the same day. The informal supreme leader of the EX was Minister of Defence, then finally Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös from 1932 until his death of 1936,¹³ while in the 1920s he also played a leading role in the activity of secret and semi-secret associations and paramilitary formations connected to the ÉME and the MOVE, although he wore no formal position beyond being the President of the MOVE for a while.¹⁴ Furthermore, Gömbös was not only the informal leader of the radical right-wing movements of the era, but he might have known about the crimes planned and committed by different paramilitary formations, perhaps he even supported them,¹⁵ while the Union of Etelköz operated as a ‘mastermind organisation’ of the different right-wing movements.¹⁶ Gömbös who left the governing party and established the so-called race-defending fraction in the Parliament in 1923, which not much later transformed into *Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi (Fajvédő) Párt – Hungarian National (popularly called: Race-Defending) Party for Independence*, had a very active and good relation with paramilitary commander First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas who was one of the establishers of the ÉME and organised its local sub-organisations in the Hungarian Plain. From November 1924 the local sub-organisations of the ÉME and the Race-defending Party arranged their political assemblies in the Hungarian rural regions together, so it is very unlikely that Gyula Gömbös did not know at all about the violent crimes committed by the ÉME militia members and the paramilitary formations of Iván Héjjas.¹⁷ After the death of Gömbös, during

¹² According to historian Miklós Zeidler, the Hungarian National Defence Force Association, the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the Union of Etelköz, the Double Cross Blood Union Association and other nationalist societies basically defined the ideology and cadres of the counter-revolutionary regime. Miklós ZEIDLER, *A revíziós gondolat*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 2009, 105.

¹³ Jenő GERGELY, *Gömbös Gyula. Politikai pályakép*, Budapest, Vince Kiadó, 2001, 208.; and SHVOY, *ibid.* 74.

¹⁴ József VONYÓ, *Gömbös Gyula*, Budapest, 2012, Napvilág Kiadó, 100–101.

¹⁵ VONYÓ, *op. cit.* 101.

¹⁶ Erről Zadravecz István tábori püspök is ír emlékiratában: ZADRAVECZ, *op. cit.* 148–149.

¹⁷ József VONYÓ, *Gömbös Gyula és a hatalom. Egy politikussá lett katonatiszt*, Pécs, Kairosz Kiadó, 2013, 169–170.

the period of the Second World War the Union of Etelköz was becoming a more and more extremist right-wing political organisation, orienting itself towards the Hungarian National Socialist Arrow Cross movement under the leadership of Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, the influential background politician of the era, while gradually losing its political importance in parallel.¹⁸ However, it must be mentioned that in the 1940s the Union had a much more moderate wing under the leadership of conservative politicians, then ex-Prime Ministers Count István Bethlen and Count Miklós Kállay which supported Regent Miklós Horthy during the unsuccessful attempt of getting out of the war in 1944.¹⁹

That is, as it turns out of the above presented historical data, we know fairly lot about the Union of Etelköz, however, as for its (para)military brother organisation,²⁰ the Double Cross Blood Union the situation is somewhat worse. If the sources are credible, then the Double Cross Blood Union was established in the end of 1919 in order to defend the counter-revolutionary regime and to fight Communist and other left-wing political powers; and later, after the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon the aims of the organisation were completed with irredentism, the intention of restoring Hungary's territorial integrity. The commander of the secret military organisation was Colonel, later General Tihamér Siménfalvy,²¹ a hero of the First World War who were also in strong contact with foreign radical right-wing organisations, mainly Austrian and German paramilitary nationalist groups. The commander of the organisation outside the capital was Artillery Captain Imre Makkay/Makai, furthermore, the commanders included the notorious detachment leaders of the Hungarian White Terror like First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Pál Prónay, the later Prime Minister Captain Gyula Gömbös, László Endre, military bishop István Zadravecz, Colonel György Görgöy, General Károly Csörgey and Colonel József Sassy Szabó. Basically, the Double Cross Blood Union was strongly bound to the

¹⁸ Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, the leader of the Union of Etelköz, one of the influential background politicians of the Horthy Era finally joined and supported the Arrow Cross Party and its pro-German puppet government in 1944–1945. See Róbert KEREPESZKI, *A Turul Szövetség 1919–1945. Egyetemi ifjúság és jobboldali radikalizmus a Horthy-korszakban*, Máriabesenyő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2012, 177.

¹⁹ Nóra SZEKÉR, *Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó 81,

²⁰ Géza Komoróczy defines the Union of Etelköz a paramilitary organisation. See Géza KOMORÓCZY, *A zsidók története Magyarországon II. 1849-től a jelenkorig*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 2012, 380.

²¹ Lajos SERFŐZŐ, *A titkos társaságok és a róluk folytatott parlamenti viták 1922–1924-ben*, Párttörténeti Közlemények, 1976/3, 79–80.

counter-revolutionary government of Szeged and the military forces commanded by Admiral Miklós Horthy, the supreme commander of the National Army in 1919–1920,²² and politicians and military officers who later became very influential and were those times very open to the idea of military dictatorship participated in the establishment of the organisation. In these very tumultuous times Admiral Horthy who was soon elected as Regent Governor of Hungary by the parliament was also open to the introduction of military dictatorship, and the Entente powers and mainly moderate conservative politician Count István Bethlen could only gradually managed to persuade him of resigning from this ambition and make him return to parliamentary, constitutional frameworks of the state.²³ Horthy himself otherwise was probably not a member of Double Cross Blood Union or the Union of Etelköz formally, he did not participate at the rites of these secret societies or swore their oath, since as a pragmatic and down-to-earth politician and military officer and deeply believing Christian, he was not attracted by any secrecy or mysticism. Nevertheless, both closely overlapping secret organisation informally considered the Regent Governor their real leader,²⁴ and Horthy could easily enforce his will and influence in the right-wing secret societies and in openly operating nationalist organisations strongly connected to them.²⁵

The members of the militarily organised units of Double Cross Blood Union swore a very strict oath with the following text:

‘I XY hereby swear to the Almighty Lord and to everything which is saint to me that, if it is a must, I fought againsts all movements and provocations of red persons subverting my country, and if it is a must, I fight with arms in order to recapture the robbed territories of my 1000-year-old Hungaruin Homeland, and if necessary, I even sacrifice my own life. I loyally execute the orders of my commanders and superiors. If I break my oath, I am subject to the sentences of the Blood Court of the Double Cross Blood Union. So help me God.’²⁶

The text of the oath otherwise remained among the documents of the criminal suit of reserve first lieutenant Gábor Jenő Kiss who was the deputy commander of the Department of National Defence of the Association of

²² See Ferenc PÖLÖSKEI, *Hungary After Two Revolutions 1919–1922*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, 15.

²³ Dávid TURBUCZ, *Horthy Miklós*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2011, 66–92.

²⁴ See PRÓNAY, op. cit. passim.; SHVOY, op. cit. passim.; ZADRAVECZ, op. cit. 130–132.

²⁵ UNGVÁRY, op. cit. 98–99.

²⁶ ZINNER, op. cit. 568.; HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940.

Awakening Hungarians which was a state-sponsored militia belonging to the Double Cross Blood Union and First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas's paramilitary formation called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain*. Gábor Jenő Kiss was involved in a serious embezzlement affair in 1923 and was sentenced to four months in prison. In 1940 he made an appeal of rehabilitation and wanted to become unpunished in a legal sense, and the most important documents of his suitcase 1923 were also attached to his case file of 1940. From these archival sources it turns out that the operation of the Association of Awakening Hungarian, its military-like detachments of national defence, the National Defence Force Association, Double Cross Blood Union and the Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain cannot be strictly separated from each other, and according to Gábor Jenő Kiss, these were not simply self-organising militias or veteran associations, but semi-official, secret military formations under the control of the General Staff of the Army which were organised mainly for anti-communist and irredentist aims by the Government. All of this, of course, is consistent with other available, scattered sources and seems to confirm the quality of the secret military corps as a state agency. At lower levels, of course, these irregular military units, largely composed of veterans, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and their commanders were bound by secrecy to avoid reprisals from the Entente powers for a country under severe arms restrictions. According to Jenő Kiss Gábor, the Chief of Staff of the Double Cross Blood Union was General Károly Uhlig (later changed his name to Csörgey), which is also in line with other sources.²⁷ However, Jenő Gábor Kis does not mention General Tihámér Siménfalvy as the commander of the Double Cross Blood Union, and it is obviously not known how much Kiss himself knew about the higher level operations of the secret military organisation.

Another version of the oath of the Blood Union is also known, which was also published by the illegal left-wing opposition press, which dealt much with radical right-wing secret societies, although we must treat it with careful criticism of the source precisely because of its uncertain origin:

I, XY, swear by Almighty God, and pledge by all that is holy before me, that I will obey the commands of my leaders and their appointed superiors with the utmost fidelity, and will keep the events of the Double Cross Blood Union in the strictest confidence. I swear that I am under no obligation to any other irredentist organization, and that I will take such orders only from my superiors in the Double Cross Blood Union. I will not deal with any

²⁷ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940.

*political questions or the issue of kingship within the framework of the Double Cross Blood Union, and if I become aware of any such case, I will report it immediately to my superiors. If I break this oath, I will acknowledge the right of the Double Cross Blood Court to judge over my fate.*²⁸

Although the constitution of the organisation has not yet been found in archival documents, the nationalist-irredentist, anti-Communist, anti-Semitic and, due to the over-representation of former and active soldiers and the paramilitary structure of the organisation, clearly militaristic spirit of the Blood Union can be inferred from the versions of the oath. The subtle differences between the three versions of the oath are not surprising either, since the organisation was probably founded in 1919 with an anti-Bolshevist aim, and irredentism became the guiding ideology of the organisation later, after signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The obligation of apoliticism is not surprising, since the ideas of irredentism and territorial revisionism in Hungary in the 1920s brought together people of very different mindsets, so, in this secret organisation, legitimists, those who wanted to freely elect a king, or those who imagined an authoritarian, military state found their common goals.²⁹ There is nothing extraordinary about the fact that several versions of the oath have survived, since like all similar organisations, the DCBU had several local sub-organisations, so there was certainly a degree of decentralisation in minor issues. Especially if we assume that the clandestine irregular military formation was never under a completely unified leadership, and that the various paramilitary commanders – usually senior officers of the army – competed with each other to get as many members as possible to obey them.³⁰

As for the number of members, it is rather uncertain, but in it is estimated to have been several thousands in the early 1920s. Endre Kürthy, a demobilised soldier and member of the Budapest battalion led by Captain Szigfrid Umlauf reported that he himself recruited around 300 members for the organisation – a figure which may of course be a gross exaggeration. The members of the association held their meetings in the gymnasium of the elementary school at 9 Nyár utca, which was made available to them by the local government of the capital.³¹ In all likelihood, the cover organisation of

²⁸See [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *A Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség eskümintája*, *Az Est*, 7 May 1926, 3.

²⁹ Miklós ZEIDLER, *Külpolitika és revízió – Mindent vissza?*, in *A Horthy-korszak vitatott kérdései*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2020, 175–196.

³⁰ Prónay's diary, HU-PIL-VI-973-volume III. p. 355.

³¹ SERFŐZŐ, op. cit. 79.

the DCBU was Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – National Cultural Association of Our Past, which was formed much later than the secret society itself, with its constitution only approved in 1922.³² According to a political police report that remained in custody of the Budapest City Archive from 1946:

‘The Blood Union was divided into territorial divisions in Budapest and in the countryside. Each division had general observers, chief observers and observers. These reported monthly on left-wing movements in their areas. If any data was needed on anyone, these observers were obliged to obtain it immediately. The political convictions of the members were not restricted within the antisemitic and anti-Bolshevik character of the right. Thus, among its members one could find pro-Horthy, legitimists, race-defenders and national socialists.

Their aim was not only to monitor the left, but also to rally and arm reliable elements on the right. Their armed terrorist units worked mainly in the Great Plain.

Their anti-Bolshevik objectives gave them considerable political influence, but this began to fade during the Bethlen-era, as did the importance of the whole Blood Union in the 1930s, especially due to other modern right-wing movements. They were replaced by the Union of Etelköz.’³³

According to the above cited political police report, which is probably largely speculative and tries to exaggerate the past role of the organisation, Regent Miklós Horthy’s membership in the organisation cannot be proven, but he undoubtedly exerted his influence in it. Among the members of the DCBU leadership we find such prominent, mainly right-wing persons as: Baron Károly Than, General Kamilló Kárpáthi, General Kocsárd Janky, István Horthy Jr. son of the Regent, Lóránt Erdélyi, the chief notary of the county, Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Szigetváry, Counts Mihály and Béla Teleki, Countess Vass, Dr. Petrányi Rezső, Count Teleki Tibor, MP, Chief Notary Vilmos Ernst, School Director Kálmán Ferentzy, Baron Lajos Hatvany, Captain Helle, Chief Notary János Kemény, Kunó Klebelsberg, Pál Prónay, Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, etc. Perhaps the most surprising in this list of names - which includes mostly right-wing historical figures, but also

³² SERFŐZŐ, op. cit.; HU-BFL-IV-1407-b-XI. úo.-151/1922. cited by ZINNER, op. cit. 564.

³³ HU-BFL-VI-15-c-205/1945. Report of the Political Department of the Budapest of State Police to the Mayor of Budapest on the data of the dissolved Double Cross Blood Union, Budapest, 3 December 1945.

³³ Ibid.

seems random – is the person Baron Lajos Hatvany, the member of an assimilated Jewish bourgeois family, who can hardly be accused of Horthyism, exaggerated nationalism or anti-Semitism, and who the best demonstrates that this source should also be treated with careful criticism.

According to Krisztián Ungváry, the organization held its secret meetings in the Nádor Garrison (one of the headquarters of the Prónay's detachment, which suggests a close personal overlaps with the paramilitary corps of Pál Prónay), and its members were mainly gendarmerie and military officers, landowners and administrative officials. In addition to the Budapest headquarters, there were sub-organisations in every major city and county seat, and the members of the DCBU were mainly involved in the state apparatus in order to identify and prevent individuals and organisations with communist tendencies.³⁴ At the same time, the DCBU also included a large proportion of demobilised and therefore decommissioned officers from the enormous army of the dissolved Habsburg Monarchy³⁵ who were struggling with existential problems.³⁶

An encyclopaedia article on the organisation which is often quoted in a number of publications, says:

*'The Double Cross Blood Union was a covert intelligence and terrorist organisation directly subordinated to the Union of Etelköz. Founded in July 1919, it supported the irredentist and race-defending policies of the Hungarian leadership through camouflaged assassinations, the organisation of free troops carrying out subvertive actions in the Hungarian-populated areas of the surrounding countries, and intelligence activities (e.g. in 1938 its members also took part in the actions of the Ragged Guard Operation in Transcarpathia). The leadership of the organisation was never unified. During World War II, this was particularly evident when a legitimist group of the organisation joined the parties of the Hungarian Front under the name Double Cross Alliance, while another group joined the Arrow Cross Party.'*³⁷

³⁴ UNGVÁRY, op. cit. 98–99.

³⁵ On the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its consequences see in detail: Ferenc SZÁVAI, *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia felbomlásának következményei. Az államutódlás vitás kérdései*, Pécs, Pro Pannonia Kiadó, 2004.

³⁶ Iván T. BEREND, *Magyarország gazdasága az első világháború után 1919-1929*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966, 13.

³⁷ *Magyarország a második világháborúban. Lexikon A–Zs*, ed. Péter SIPOS, Budapest, Petit Real Könyvkiadó–Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete–Honvédelmi

The notes written by General István Ujszászy, the head of the Hungarian military secret service and later of the centralised intelligence agency called *Államvédelmi Központ – the State Protection Centre*, while in the custody of the ÁVH, the Communist *State Protection Authority* in 1948, coincide with this publicly circulating information, and among them we can find a very interesting document. According to this document, in the 1920s, a secret group of officers – mainly irredentistically motivated – were operating illegally within the Hungarian Defence Forces, but with the knowledge and consent of the Government and the Regent Governor. The group was led by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, director of the Double Cross Blood Union, and later by Lieutenant Colonel Dezső Papp. The Siménfalvy Group was based in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Buda Castle, and its activities were primarily focused on the Little Entente states, with the goal of preparing the reconquest of the Hungarian-inhabited territories. According to General Ujszászy's note, Iván Héjjas' detachments, and from 1932 the so-called (second) Ragged Guard were also subordinated to the same organisation, and in 1936 the 5th Press and Propaganda Department of the General Staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces, now under the command of Colonel Sándor Homlok, grew out of this secret military group. This department did not only serve the propaganda purposes of the Hungarian Defence Forces, but, like the previous secret group, it also prepared and carried out sabotage and sabotage operations in the neighbouring Little Entente states, and did all this in close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁸ The Siménfalvy Group, later the Papp Group, and finally the 5th Department of the General Staff led by Colonel Sándor Homlok undoubtedly existed, and from their activities, as well as from the organizing activities of General Tihamér Siménfalvy (until his death in 1929), we can conclude that there were close overlaps with the Double Cross Blood Union. The planned establishment of a secret intelligence, sabotage and subversion group under the joint control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence was also documented in a brief archival record written in 1920:

'Agreement on the organization of the irredenta in the annexed territories: for the supreme leadership of the irredenta, a secret body under

Minisztérium Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum–Zrínyi Miklós Nemzetvédelmi Egyetem–Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság, 1997.

³⁸ István UJSZÁSZY, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései*, ed. György HARASZTI–Zoltán András KOVÁCS–Szabolcs SZITA, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007, 356–359.

*the control of the Government is to be established, under the leadership of one civilian and one military individual. This body shall receive instructions on general directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in political matters and from the military leadership in military matters, but shall act in agreement with the Minister for National Minorities in political matters. As executive organs of this central secret body, social organizations (leagues) shall be established separately for each national minority group. Financial support for irredentist purposes may be provided by the Regent Governor or by individual resorts only through the secret organisation.*³⁹

The document quoted above is not a mere draft, as the Hungarian Archives of Military History do indeed contain documents on the activities of a military unit of intelligence nature under the command of Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy. For example, the Siménfalvy group was involved in the Hungarian irredentist diversionary activities in Transylvania in 1919–1920, which, among other things, resulted in the so-called ‘Levente Suit of Timisoara (Temesvár)’, based on largely fabricated accusations, but which nevertheless had some real basis.⁴⁰ In this case, young Hungarians from Timisoara, mostly high school and university students were brought before the Romanian Extraordinary Military Tribunal for plotting against the Romanian state power (at the time when the future borders of Romania and Hungary had not yet been clarified by international peace treaties and the status of Romanian-occupied Transylvania was still in question!) and for acquiring large quantities of firearms and explosives. It is difficult to clarify to what extent the Hungarian military intelligence services of the National Army were behind the Hungarian student conspiracy which did not mean a serious threat to the Romanian State. However, a certain Hungarian intelligence officer named Lieutenant József Mike was involved in the case, and documents relating to the Timisoara student conspiracy and the criminal trial were also sent to Colonel Siménfalvy. It is probably that the officers of the Hungarian military secret service started organising an irredentist conspiracy on their own initiative, without any higher orders, or at least they were involved in a spontaneously evolving movement, and Colonel Siménfalvy himself initiated the prosecution of Lieutenant József Mike

³⁹ HU-MNL-OL-MOL-K 64-1920-2-60. Record without title or signature, 1920. 04. 06. Cited by Béla ANGYAL, *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből*, Fórum Intézet–Lilium Aurum Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 2002, 50.

⁴⁰ About the ‘Levente Trial’ at Timisoara see Béla BORSI-KÁLMÁN’s monograph: Béla BORSI-KÁLMÁN, *Kisfiúk a nagy viharban. A temesvári „Levente-pör” – az első román „irredenta per” története, 1919–1922*, Budapest, Kortárs Kiadó, 2020.

József at the Hungarian General Staff.⁴¹ It would be a mistake, therefore, to simplify the Timisoara student conspiracy to a covert operation of the secret military unit known as the Double Cross Blood Union which operated for irredentist aims. However, based on the sources, it is certain that the secret military formation under the command of Colonel Siménfalvy played some role in this case, and its members influenced the events.

However, it is worth treating the above mentioned sources with thorough criticism, because on the one hand István Ujszászy, for example, wrote his own notes at least partly under the influence of communist state security bodies, and on the other hand, no sources about the Siménfalvy-group called the Double Cross Blood Association by its name. However, legal historian Pál Nándori, in his highly marxist but usable monograph on the international legal aspects of the assassination of the Yugoslav King Alexander I and the French Foreign Minister Barthou in Marseilles, which resulted in death, clearly described half a century ago that the Siménfalvy-group was identical to the DCBU, and later the Hungarian military secret services, of which the DCBU can be regarded as a kind of predecessor, were also in close contact with various Croatian paramilitary groups.⁴² Referring to archival sources, Nándori claims that from the very beginning the DCBU was under government control, and was not a self-organising organisation, but a state agency, a clandestine military formation, whose primary objective was indeed to prepare terrorist attacks, sabotage and subversive actions against the Little Entente states, and in the medium term, territorial revision of Hungary.⁴³ According to a Foreign Ministry draft, the military commander of the organisation was really Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, while the political leader was high-ranking diplomat Kálmán Kánya, later Foreign Minister. The diversionary activities were planned to be directed mainly against Czechoslovakia, Romania and especially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. Another submission passed to the Hungarian Foreign Minister describes in great detail how acts of diversion, sabotage and terrorism were to be carried out beyond the borders.⁴⁴

According to the testimony of the sources, the Double Cross Blood Union/Siménfalvy group did not only prepare acts of sabotage in the territory of the Little Entente states, but also actively sought contacts with

⁴¹ BORSI-KÁLMÁN, op. cit. 113–114.

⁴² About paramilitarism in Yugoslavia see: DMITAR TASIĆ, *Paramilitarism in the Balkans. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania, 1917–1924*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

⁴³ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-187.

⁴⁴ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1920-41-515.

German and Austrian far-right paramilitary organisations, including the militias named ORGESCH (Organisation Escherich) and ORKA (Organisation Kanzler) led by paramilitary commander Georg Escherich and Rudolf Kanzler. In 1921, at a meeting in Graz, the possibility of a joint Hungarian-German occupation of Czechoslovakia in the event of a future war was negotiated about.⁴⁵ In addition, the aim of the DCBU was not only to carry out diversionary and terrorist operations,⁴⁶ but also to circumvent the restrictions of armament imposed on the defeated states of the First World War, since it allowed a large number of people to be recruited and trained in secret military status.⁴⁷ The Blood Union in this sense may have been very similar to the *German Black Army (Schwarze Reichswehr)*. Among the militias within the German Black Army, there was also a paramilitary unit, the so-called Organisation Consul, under the command of senior navy officer Corvette Captain Hermann Erhardt, which operated as a secret society and had a secret service character at the same time, and to which several political assassinations were attributed, and whose members often carried out diversionary activities against the Entente states, with the silent assent of the German Government. With some simplification, it can be said that this irregular military unit which operated clandestinely and far exceeded the limits of the law even at home, not only abroad, gradually grew up into the military secret service of National Socialist Germany, the Abwehr, under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris.⁴⁸ Based on international, mainly European examples, the Double Cross Blood Union can therefore be compared with other secret, state-maintained or quasi-state paramilitary organisations after the First World War. Nevertheless, Pál Nándori's monograph cited above also acknowledges that the sources of the Hungarian irredentist secret military formations⁴⁹ are rather scarce, so we can only draw some general conclusions about their actual activities from the sources rather than make definite statements about them.⁵⁰ Of course, not only Hungary,

⁴⁵ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-221.; HU-MNL-OL-K-64-1921-41-199.; Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.

⁴⁶ Pál NÁNDORI, *A hirtenbergi fegyverszállítás*, Hadtörténelmi Közlemények, 1968/4, 636–657.

⁴⁷ Pál NÁNDORI, *A Marseille-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.

⁴⁸ Robert G. L. WAITE, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.

⁴⁹ S. d. N. C. 518.M. 234. VH. Requête du Gouvernement Yougoslave en vertu de l'article paragraphe 2, du Pacte. Communication du Gouvernement Yougoslave, 34–41. I. Cited by NÁNDORI, op. cit. 88.

⁵⁰ NÁNDORI, op. cit. 88–89.

but also the Little Entente states, like the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, operated intelligence services, and for understandable reasons, they were most suspicious of Hungarian activities. A Serbian intelligence report from 1926 started that in addition to the *Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége – Federation of Social Associations*⁵¹ and the banned *Területvédelmi Liga – League for the Protection of Territory*,⁵² there were some twenty secret irredentist-terrorist organisations operating in Hungary, whose members were engaged in intelligence activities in the Little Entente countries:

‘From these organisations come the so-called Christian Socialist workers who replace socially organised workers wherever possible. These Christian workers work in factories where war material is secretly produced. They were used to counterfeit French francs, as well as passports, banknotes, revenue stamps and the seals of certain military commands of the Little Entente states. In addition, Hungarians living in the Little Entente states are used to obtain official documents, proclamations or instructions from the authorities on how to behave towards local non-national elements. On the basis of these proclamations or instructions, they produce false documents in which they accuse the governments of the Little Entente and send them to London, America, Rome and Paris.’⁵³

These lines could certainly refer to the Hungarian paramilitary auxiliary police organisation called *Nemzeti Munkavédelem – National Labour Protection*, which, according to the sources, was a form of survival of the Double Cross Blood Union, and which will be discussed later in more detail.

We have already discussed the overlaps of the personnel between the various nationalist and irredentist associations, secret societies and the armed forces and other state bodies in the beginning of the Horthy Era. In addition,

⁵¹ The *Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége (TESZ) – Federation of Social Associations* was a right-wing umbrella organisation under the control of the Hungarian Government in the 1920s which included all the influential irredentist social associations like the Association of the Awakening Hungarians and the Hungary Defence Forces Association as well. It was presided by the influential politician Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, but it was really controlled by its vice president later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös. About its history see: Róbert KEREPESZKI, *A politikai és társadalmi élet határán. A Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége a Horthy-korszakban*, in „...nem leleplezni, hanem megismerni és megérteni”. *Tanulmányok a 60 éves Romsics Ignác tiszteletére*, ed. Sándor GEBEI Sándor – Iván BERTÉNYI JR. – János M. RAINER, Eger, Esterházy Károly Főiskola, 2011, 373–388.

⁵² NÁNDORI, op. cit. 90.

⁵³ *Délszláv levéltári források 1919–1941*, ed. Áprád HORNYÁK, Pécs–Bp., Kronosz Kiadó–MTA BTK TTI, 2016, 126–127.

in the early 1920s, the various (right-wing) civilian militias claimed and/or exercised authority in the manner conferred on them by the (then still fragile) state, or by arbitrarily exceeding the powers conferred on them by the state, so it is not at all to be excluded or surprising that the members of the Double Cross Blood Union in the 1920s closely overlapped with the apparatus of the later Hungarian secret service agencies.⁵⁴ Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister and chairman of MOVE, often stressed that he was in possession of much secret information and gave the impression to his military and political colleagues that he exercised considerable influence over the army's intelligence and counter-intelligence apparatus, which was not without any basis at all. Namely, in 1919–1921, there were close informal links between the National Army, the military intelligence and counter-intelligence services and the MOVE, which were also formed in Szeged, and the secret societies had a great influence on their operation.⁵⁵ In contrast to the Union of Eteköz, which was not just a secret political organisation with pragmatic aims, but a mysterious, mystical, philosophical-esoteric organisation of spirituality, which wanted to create a kind of special Hungarian nationalist religion for its members, it is not known whether the DCBU had any mystical rituals apart from the very strict oath which threatened the members even with death penalty for members in the event of treason/insubordination. The UoE, although its meetings presumably resulted in political decisions, or at least exerted real influence on them through its senior public officials, can be described as a political speculative secret society. Its members did not gain their influence by becoming members, but the other way round, the society tried to recruit people with a certain level of influence, who were considered trustworthy and loyal to the right-wing political regime. Certainly, however, as is the case with any man-made organisation, the personal connections made here did not necessarily hinder anyone's career.⁵⁶ The DCBU, on the other hand, was an armed paramilitary organisation, mostly composed of active and ex-soldiers, and its aim was to carry out operational activities (intelligence gathering, data collection, even armed repression if necessary) against left-wing movements, and later to prepare the revision of the Paris Peace Treaties and restore the country's territorial integrity. The DCBU was therefore much more a clandestine military formation and intelligence service, operating with the knowledge and consent of the Government, although sometimes arbitrarily deviating from

⁵⁴ Tamás KOVÁCS, *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer politikai rendészetének genezise, 1919–1921*, Múltunk, 2009/2, 66–92.

⁵⁵ GERGELY, op. cit. 80–83.

⁵⁶ ZADRAVECZ, op. cit. 140–141.

its objectives at the level of individual members or groups, than a self-organising, independent secret association.

In line with all this is István István T. Ádám's memoir-monograph on the West Hungarian uprising, written in 1935 partly for propaganda purposes, based on the memories of the insurgents, and thus politically rather biased, which also devotes a short chapter to the DCBU, mostly about the organization's participation in the uprising.⁵⁷ According to the author, the DCBU was a patriotic, disciplined military organisation whose members took a strict oath to serve their country, and membership gave them essentially no rights, only duties. Their meetings were held in the gymnasium of the Szalag Street Primary School in Buda, they closely overlapped with Pál Prónay's detachment in the Nádor Garrison, and in 1921 they participated with the greatest enthusiasm and honour in the defence of Burgenland on the Hungarian side, since the Entente had decided that the area would be annexed to Austria. In the Communist Kádár Éra, Marxist historiography tried to oversimplify the importance and activities of the radical right-wing social associations and secret societies of the Horthy Era, which really existed and were influential, sometimes even portraying them as a kind of shadow government.⁵⁸ The situation is the same in the case of the Double-Cross Blood Union. In his monograph on the counter-revolution, which is useful in terms of its data content, but highly propagandistic in tone, Marxist party historian Dezső Nemes, for example, writes that the DCBU was one of the most significant secret organisations of the first period of the Horthy Era, and it was founded by the so-called 'twelve captains'⁵⁹ of Szeged, the later commanders of the National Army in July 1919. The organisation was all the time under the control of the Hungarian military, and its medium-term aim was to use its paramilitary units to break out tension and rebellion in the Hungarian-populated areas annexed to neighbouring states after the Treaty of Trianon (mainly in the Highlands, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia), where the regular army would then move in to reoccupy these areas with the pretext of restoring the order. According to Dezső Nemes, the DCBU was also involved in counter-espionage, internal counter-reaction and the commission of domestic terrorist attacks allowed by the Government, and he also claims, referring to Prónay's diary, that the organisation was established before the formation of

⁵⁷ István T. ÁDÁM, *A nyugat-magyarországi felkelés története*, Budapest, Külpolitika Kiadása, 1935, 115–118.

⁵⁸ Rudolfné DÓSA, op. cit. 84–132.

⁵⁹ Tamás KOVÁCS, op. cit. 64–92, 75.

the Union of Etelköz, even though it was later somehow supervised by the political secret society.⁶⁰ Although Dezső Nemes makes rather definite statements about the DCBU, he refers only mainly to press sources, apart from Pál Prónay's diary, so although his statements have some truth, they should be treated with thorough criticism. Prónay himself also writes in his notes – obviously with some exaggeration, in order to emphasise his own historical role – that he himself organised the irredentist military units, including the Double Cross Blood Union. Prónay names as the leaders of the organisation, among others, officers and senior officers György Görgey, Sándor Teleki, Imre Makay, Jenő Ranzenberger (later Ruskay), General Pál Nagy, Commander-in-Chief of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and General Károly Uhlig (later Csörgey), Chief of the General Staff of the Budapest Law Enforcement Troops of the Army those times. The number of members of the DCBU in the 1920s was relatively large, considering that it was not an ordinary, self-organizing association, but an irregular military unit (mostly consisting of armed members) – it could reach even 15–20.000 men, although this data is not very trustworthy.⁶¹ As we can see, the source base of the DCBU is very scattered, and the information available to researchers on the functioning of the organisation is still contradictory. However, in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Horthy Era, following the civil war after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Councils of Hungary, there were a number of shockingly serious crimes, sometimes demanding several people's lives, committed by the secret and less secret social associations and paramilitary formations of the period. The Double-Cross Blood Union was associated with them in public discourse, in the press and in parliamentary debates. Thus, maybe the most useful approach is to take a look at the most notorious ones of these cases, starting with one of the possible genesis of the organisation, the crimes committed by First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas's detachment during the wave of paramilitary violence that is popularly called the White Terror in Hungarian historiography.⁶²

⁶⁰ Dezső NEMES, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 155–160.

⁶¹ ZINNER, op. cit. 173.

⁶² Béla BODÓ, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

Chapter - 2

The activities of Iván Héjjas's detachment in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve during the White Terror, and the afterlife of a radical paramilitary commander

Iván Héjjas, a young first lieutenant of the Air Force of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from a well-to-do peasant family who returned home from the First World War quickly became one of the most notorious commanders of the counter-revolutionary reprisals after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, and perhaps he was the man who was responsible for the most arbitrary murders.⁶³ In the spring of 1919, as a soldier who had served on the front, he began to organise his detachment near his farming family's estate in the Kecskemét area, with the aim of overthrowing the Communist Government.⁶⁴ The core of his detachment was made up of members of his Air Force squadron, who had returned home with him from the war, but young people of peasant origin from the area also joined the formation.⁶⁵ Most of these insurgents had been served in the army. In April of 1919, the young reserve first lieutenant rose to become the leader of one of the major right-wing uprisings against the Communist regime.⁶⁶

Héjjas was also one of the founders and leaders of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, so this nationalist social association – which was increasingly organised along paramilitary lines at the time – could not have been left out of the rebellion, and in fact, due to the personal overlaps, its early activities were practically inseparable from the operation of the Héjjas's military detachment. After losing battle in Kecskemét against the Communist troops, Héjjas and his armed comrades – including, for example,

⁶³ Béla BODÓ, *Héjjas Iván. Egy ellenforradalmár élete*, 2000, 2010/10.

⁶⁴ Ignác ROMSICS, *A nagy háború és az 1918–1919-es magyarországi forradalmak*, Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2018, 108–109.

⁶⁵ Rudolf PAKSA, *A fehérterror „logikája”*. *Események, olvasatok, kontextusok*, in *Terror 1918–1919. Forradalmárok, ellenforradalmárok, megszállók*, ed. Rolf MÜLLER–Tibor TAKÁCS–Éva TULIPÁN, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2019, 217–245.; Béla BODÓ, *The White Terror in Hungary. The Social World of Paramilitary Groups*, *Austrian History Yearbook*, 2011/42, 133–163.

⁶⁶ Ignác ROMSICS, *A Duna–Tisza köze hatalmi-politikai viszonyai 1918–19-ben*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.

Sergeant Major Mihály Francia Kiss, one of the most notorious soldiers who committed murders during the White Terror, and the later radical right-wing mayor of Kecskemét, Béla Liszka – eventually joined the counter-revolutionary government organising in Szeged.⁶⁷ In April 1919 Admiral Miklós Horthy, later commander-in-chief of the National Army and from 1920 head of state of Hungary, personally received Iván Héjjas and commissioned him to operate his detachment as an auxiliary police force of the National Army and to eliminate the remaining Communist groups in his homeland, the Great Hungarian Plain.⁶⁸

The Royal Romanian Army which occupied a large part of Hungary soon dismantled the remnants of the Communist Government, and in the summer of 1919 Héjjas's troops were also given permission by the military authorities of the occupying army to provide auxiliary police services in the Kecskemét area in order to restore the disintegrated social order. Héjjas proclaimed himself city commander in Kecskemét – also with the approval of the Romanian Army and the Szeged counter-revolutionary government – and thus soon began the internment and arbitrary execution of those who allegedly held positions during the Soviet Republic or even only sympathized with the short-lived Communist government.⁶⁹

During October and November 1919, when the Romanian military still kept the Great Hungarian Plain under occupation, the auxiliary police units of Héjjas murdered about a hundred people (and of course took and turned their belongings in their favour) most of whom had nothing to do with the Soviet Republic and the communist wave of violence called the Red Terror.⁷⁰ Iván Héjjas, if the sources are to be believed, took advantage of the nearly anarchistic conditions and operated an almost separate quasi-private state in and around Kecskemét during 1919–1920 under his own de facto leadership, whose peculiar order was maintained by armed men loyal to him as the National Army's auxiliary police forces. Héjjas's fiancée and later wife was Sarolta Papp, daughter of Dr. György Papp, the police commissioner of Kecskemét, and Héjjas as city commander together with his armed militiamen controlled the whole town and its neighbourhood. His father, Mihály Héjjas Sr., was the director of the Kecskemét Vineyard Company, an influential person in the region, and at the time he was driving a car stolen by his son's militiamen in full public view. The Héjjas family

⁶⁷ BODÓ Béla, *Héjjas Iván. Egy ellenforradalmár élete*. op. cit.

⁶⁸ BODÓ, op. cit.

⁶⁹ IBID.

⁷⁰ Győző DROZDY, *Elvett illúziók. Drozdy Győző emlékiratai*, ed. Zoltán PAKSY Zoltán, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2007, 408–416.

already had extensive connections in and around Kecskemét even before the White Terror, but after the paramilitary armed force was organised, they started to act like criminals, taking advantage of the anarchistic conditions, claiming themselves to be the representatives of the law and order. There are also indications that the Ministry of Interior and the State Police knew a great deal of details about the murders committed in the villages Izsák and Orgovány by Héjjas's militiamen, as well as other individual robbery murders by members of the detachment, but for some time they delayed taking action against the armed men.⁷¹ It is also certain that the Kecskemét police knew about the murders committed by members of the Héjjas detachment as early as the end of 1919, as the Commissioner of Police of Kecskemét forwarded a list of about 40 missing persons to Government Commissioner Count Gedeon Ráday who also sent a copy of the same document to the General Command of the National Army.⁷² The report of the head of the Royal Public Prosecutor's Office of Kecskemét to the Chief Public Prosecutor from November 1919 documents roughly similar conditions and the same events, emphasizing that Iván Héjjas's detachment was a relatively large and well-armed force, and therefore, attempts to bring the perpetrators of the atrocities to justice could even result in armed confrontations.⁷³ It can therefore by no means be claimed that the authorities were unaware of the atrocities committed by Iván Héjjas's detachment in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve. Thus, in addition to the exaggerated nationalism, obsessive anti-Communism and anti-Semitism, the desire for profit and perhaps the belief in the possibility of rapid social mobility also played a very important role in the actions of Héjjas and his militiamen who invariably robbed their murdered victims and used their stolen goods for their own benefit. Their actions were accompanied not only by murders, but also by other acts of violence, such as numerous pogroms involving hundreds of small or large-scale beatings of Jews, most of which resulted in no deaths but serious injuries – one need only think of the well-known pogrom in Izsák on 17 November 1919.⁷⁴

⁷¹ József HALMI, *17699/920 belügyminiszteri akta Héjjas Ivánról. A Bécsi Magyar Újság munkatársától*, in *Magyar pokol. A magyarországi fehérterror betiltott és üldözött kiadványok tükrében*, ed. Györgyi MARKOVITS, Budapest, Magvető Könyvkiadó, 50–53.

⁷² *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945, I. kötet. Az ellenforradalom hatalomra jutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919–1921*, ed. Elek KARSAI–Imre KUBITSCH Imre–Dezso NEMES–Ervin PAMLÉNYI Ervin, Budapest, Szikra Kiadó, 1956, 221–223.

⁷³ *Dokumentumok az 1918/19-es forradalmak Duna–Tisza közti történetéhez*, ed. Ignác ROMSICS, Kecskemét, Bács-Kiskun Megyei Levéltár, 1976, 677–685.

⁷⁴ BODÓ, op. cit.

Even today, researchers do not have exact numbers and list of names,⁷⁵ but after the Romanian Army withdrew from the areas eastward of the Tisza in April 1920, between December 1920 and December 1922, Iván Héjjas's men, the so-called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Hungarian Plain* may have murdered about 400 people.⁷⁶ The formation of the Double-Cross Blood Union can be dated to sometime during this period as well, the first months of the right-wing counter-revolution, and the organisation was certainly closely overlapping with Ivan Héjjas' detachment. As it was already mentioned above, Héjjas, if we are to believe the sources, was the deputy military commander of the Double Cross Blood Union in the 1920s.⁷⁷

The members of the Héjjas detachment/Brigade of the Hungarian Plain also took an oath, swearing to their leader, detachment commander Iván Héjjas. The wording of the oath was quite similar to the oath of the Double Cross Blood Union:

*'I, XY, a member of the Héjjas Brigade, swear and pledge to work with all my strength to create the greatest fraternal understanding among the members of the organization. I vow and swear that I will obey the orders of the Héjjas Brigade and of my superiors appointed by Commander Héjjas as far as possible under all circumstances. I swear and affirm that I will keep all secrets concerning the corps, and that I will never betray the members of the corps or its commanders to any person. My obligation of secrecy shall survive the termination of the corps. I swear that I will do my utmost to promote the value and public esteem of our organisation through my talents and work. I swear that I am not and will not be a member of any secret or openly destructive association. I swear and affirm that while I am a member of the Héjjas Brigade I will not concern myself with politics or the issue of kingship. I swear that I will keep and maintain the utmost discipline among the members of the Héjjas Brigade. I pledge that I will never associate with our enemies openly or secretly. I will not leave my comrades under any circumstances, alive, wounded, or even dead alone, and I will help them under all circumstances. I submit myself to any punishment by the disciplinary and punitive committee to be elected by the members of the Héjjas Brigade. May God help me.'*⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Máté KÓRÓDI, *Adattár a Magyar Nemzeti Hadsereg különítményes csoportjai és más fegyveres szervek által elkövetett gyilkosságokról, 1919. augusztus 3.–1921. október 23.*, Budapest, Clio Intézet, Clio Kötetek 2., 2020.

⁷⁶ BODÓ, op. cit.

⁷⁷ János GYURGYÁK, *Magyar fajvédők*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2012, 256; József BOTLIK, *Nyugat-Magyarország sorsa, 1918–1921*, Vasszilvágy, Magyar Nyugat Könyvkiadó, 2012, 123.

⁷⁸ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940; Idézi: ZINNER, op. cit. 568–569.

Iván Héjjas was thus surrounded by a cult of personality on the part of his sworn men, and the will of the paramilitary commander was equal to the law for them. They were bound by a serious obligation of secrecy, and if they broke it or disobeyed orders, they could face severe punishment, even death – just as they had to take an oath as members of the DCBU. The members of the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain, which operated as a separate unit of the Double-Cross Blood Union, undoubtedly committed serious crimes during the White Terror between 1919 and 1921. Iván Héjjas and some of his men then joined the uprising in West Hungary, where as the members of paramilitary group of active, reserve and demobilised soldiers, students and young people of peasant origin, known as the *Rongyos Gárda – Ragged Guard*, they played an active role in forcing the referendum in Sopron, as a result of which Sopron, the so-called city of loyalty, remained part of Hungary today, and finally was not annexed to Austria.⁷⁹

At the same time, in order to prevent vigilante justice, the Government of István Friedrich, with its questionable legitimacy, decided as early as 1919 that all persons who had been engaged in any political activity during the Soviet Republic of Hungary should be held accountable, in order to prevent increasing arbitrary atrocities committed by armed groups.⁸⁰ The Government entrusted the prosecution to Deputy Crown Prosecutor Albert Váry. Many reports were received, resulting in thousands of people being arrested between August and December 1919. From these confessions, reports, accounts and court sentences, the prosecutor compiled his book *The Victims of Red Rule in Hungary*,⁸¹ first published in 1922, which sought to document the atrocities of the Red Terror in an unbiased way. According to this book, there were 587 proven deadly victims of the communist government. At the same time, Albert Váry also began to investigate the crimes committed by nationalist military units after the fall of the communist government. After Miklós Horthy's march into Budapest on 16 November 1919, various right-wing military units intervened in Albert Váry's work. It was mainly the detachments commanded by Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay that unlawfully attacked civilians – mainly of Jewish origin – and tried to hinder the investigation.

There was a social protest against the White Terror, which resulted in

⁷⁹ Imre TÓTH, *Két Anschluss között. Nyugat-Magyarország és Burgenland Wilsontól Hitlerig*, Budapest, Kronosz Kiadó, 2020.

⁸⁰ Ignác ROMSICS, *A Horthy-korszak*, Budapest, Helikon Kiadó, 2017, 347.

⁸¹ Albert VÁRY, *A vörös uralom áldozatai Magyarországon*, Vác, A Váci Királyi Országos Fegyintézet Könyvkiadása, 1922.

the draft decree, also attributed to Albert Váry, being adopted by the Government on 12 June 1920 and published in the official gazette on the same day. The decree stated that all military units and detachments were to cease all actions against civilians immediately, and that any soldier who violated the decree was to be arrested immediately. Although the decree was effective, it was greeted with suspicion by right-wing politicians. As a result, on 26 October 1920 Váry was relieved of his position of President of the Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest.

The armed militiamen of the Association of Awakening Hungarians – who were also members of Iván Héjjas's paramilitary detachment and presumably of the Double Cross Blood Union – murdered Adolf Léderer, an Israelite resident in Solt on 16 August 1921. This caused a great public outcry, and the press demanded that the killers should be brought to justice. At the same time, Prime Minister Count István Bethlen announced in the Parliament that he would entrust Albert Váry with the task of apprehending the perpetrators of the murder in Solt. He also announced that in order to investigate the atrocities committed in 1919, 1920 and 1921 on the Danube-Tisza Interfluve and to prevent similar incidents in the future, he would send Váry to the Great Plain, reinforced by serious police and gendarmerie escort.⁸²

In the archival records of the rather belated criminal trial of Iván Héjjas and his associates at the People's Tribunal from 1947–1949, practically one of the most significant documents from the 1920s, from the very period when the crimes really happened, about the investigations or the White Terror, is the 1922 summarising report of Albert Váry on the events that took place on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve. In his report of 1922, the prosecutor described much the same things as he told before the People's Tribunal in 1947, twenty-five years later, when he was an elderly man, in the criminal trial of the absent Iván Héjjas and his fellows. His testimony survived in the same case file. According to these archival sources, Albert Váry had indeed been commissioned by the Prime Minister to investigate the atrocities of the White Terror in connection with the murder of Adolf Léderer on 16 August 1921, in Solt. Váry was then the President of the Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest, and in the light of his investigations after the perpetrators of the Red Terror, which were largely unbiased, the Government rightfully expected him to investigate the serious abuses of the White Terror. Soldiers, or at least persons dressed in military uniforms who appeared to be soldiers,

⁸² HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630. – Trial of Iván Héjjas and his associates at the the People's Tribunal p. 282.

were also abducting civilians in Budapest, and the intervention of the Royal Prosecutor's Office of Budapest seemed increasingly justified, although most of the abducted people were later released by the military authorities in the capital.⁸³ Finally, the Government clearly abolished the right of the military authorities to take actions against civilians in 1921, and prosecutor Dr. Péter Kovács was also assigned as the deputy of Dr. Albert Váry to investigate the murders committed on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, while the Central Investigation Department of the Ministry of the Interior – at that time operating independently of the Royal Hungarian State Police as a central criminal police force with nationwide jurisdiction – placed a number of detectives at the disposal of the prosecutors.⁸⁴

Váry arrived in Izsák on 29 August 1921 with a large police and gendarmerie escort, but the investigators soon reported to him that many of the individuals suspected of serious crimes had gone to West Hungary to take part in the Burgenland uprising. Policemen and gendarmes arrested 20–22 people, but none of them were later suspected of serious crimes. In Albert Váry's view, the murders of Adolf Léderer of Solt, and Zoltán Pánczél, Sándor Beck and Árpád Schmiedt of Izsák were simple robbery-murders, where the alleged Communist sympathies or Jewish origin of the victims were merely a pretext for committing a crime of vile motive, motivated essentially by profit.⁸⁵ On 19 October 1921, Váry addressed a request to the Commissioner General of the Government of West Hungary, Count Antal Sigray, to hand over 50–60 persons who had fled there and were suspected of murder to the prosecutor's office. Although Albert Váry did not receive any reply from the Government Commissioner, he initiated criminal proceedings and issued arrest warrants against the following persons, mainly demobilised soldiers: Mihály Francia Kiss, Mihály Danics, Ambrus Tóth, Mihály Nagy, Sándor Bán, Gábor Kállai, Rezső Schmidt, József Korom, Aladár Danics, Gábor Király, Nándor Pataki, István Juhász, Kálmán Papp, József Kenei, Gyula Kállai, Sándor Papp, Árpád Rád, Géza Korb, Gergely Tasi, Antal Makai, Lajos Baski.⁸⁶ The prosecutor was able to link the murders committed in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve with the activities of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, especially based on the name of First Lieutenant Árpád Raád, who was also one of the notorious soldiers of the White Terror killing several people.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid. 284.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 284.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 285.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 285.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 286.

During his investigations, Albert Váry focused primarily on the murders committed in Izsák, Lajosmizse and Solt, as he was convinced that in these cases there was less political motivation than the simple motive of financial gain.⁸⁸ The prosecutor could not, however, continue the arrests and on-the-spot interrogations that he had begun for long, since the amnesty order⁸⁹ of the Regent Governor of 3 November 1921 had virtually nullified his work, or at least reduced it to a symbolic one. At the end of the investigation, he decided to collect the names of the victims of the White Terror after the publication of the list of victims of the Red Rule, but he was unable to complete his work successfully.⁹⁰ Although he attempted to arrest Mihály Francia Kiss, Mihály Danics and others for simple public offences not covered by the amnesty order, he was instructed by his superiors to keep their arrests pending.⁹¹

Finally, Dr. Péter Kovács, the prosecutor previously assigned to be Albert Váry's deputy, was commissioned to complete the investigation, and since the armed militiamen who had served as members of the Héjjas Brigade in the Kecskemét area were legally considered soldiers, he referred the cases to the military authorities.⁹² In most cases, the investigation was closed by the military authorities,⁹³ which had not previously shown much cooperation with Albert Váry, who had approached them in several cases.⁹⁴ There was only one case in which the soldiers, who were suspected of the murders and had served as auxiliary police troops mentioned the name of their commanding officer, First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, during their interrogations.⁹⁵ In the end, there was no prosecution, and in 1922 only Mihály Danics, János Zbona and other lower-ranking perpetrators were

⁸⁸ Ibid. 287.

⁸⁹ Laura CSONKA, *Nemzetközi és hazai fellépés a népbiztosok megkegyelmezése érdekében*, ArchívNet, 2015/3.

https://archivnet.hu/politika/nemzetkozi_es_hazai_fellepes_a_nepbiztosok_megkegyelmezese_e_redeben.html; Péter KONOK, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban. Vörösteror–fehérterror*, Múltunk, 2010/3, 72–91, 84.; *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez 2.*, ed. Ibolya HORVÁTH–Pál SOLT–Győző SZABÓ–János ZANATHY–Tibor ZINNER, Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1993, 21–42.

⁹⁰ HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630 p. 287.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 287.

⁹² Ibid. 288.

⁹³ HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630.

⁹⁴ *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945, I. kötet. Az ellenforradalom hatalomra jutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919–1921*, ed. Elek KARSAI–Imre KUBITSCH–Dezső NEMES–Ervin PAMLÉNYI, Budapest, Szikra Kiadó, 1956, 225–228.

⁹⁵ HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630. p. 287–288.

sentenced to a few years in prison for various public offences.⁹⁶ Although his detachment had in principle been disarmed by this time, Héjjas initiated a press attack in the summer of 1922 and felt offended that he had been granted amnesty for his actions during the counter-revolution. He also declared that, although he would bow to the Government's will, he had not yet given the final order and that 'if lightning should strike anywhere in the Hungarian sky', he would be the 'God's arrow for Budapest'.⁹⁷ Then, on 20 July 1922, by the intervention of Prime Minister Bethlen, he was briefly detained by the police for attempting to organise and recruit a second uprising in Western Hungary,⁹⁸ but was soon released.⁹⁹

In parallel with the pacification of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, Iván Héjjas, a key figure of the White Terror and the leader of the atrocities committed on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, who played a leading role in the DCBU, was also – apparently – consolidated and pacified. He was able to avoid punishment throughout the Horthy Era, mainly thanks to his relationship with Regent Horthy and Gyula Gömbös. From among all of the former detachment commanders involved in the White Terror, it was perhaps Héjjas who achieved the highest social and political status. Between 1927 and 1931, he was a member of parliament for the Kunszentmiklós constituency of Gömbös's Party of Hungarian Independence (commonly known as the Race-defending Party), that had earlier split from the ruling United Party. On 16 June 1929, in a grandiose ceremony held on Margaret Island, Regent Governor Miklós Horthy conferred the title of Vitéz on Iván Héjjas, his brother Aurél Héjjas, Gyula Gömbös and dozens of other former and active soldiers.¹⁰⁰

In the meantime, Héjjas had obtained a degree and a doctorate in law with his book on aviation law¹⁰¹, and as a former fighter pilot and otherwise competent aviation expert, he worked as a senior civil servant in the 1930s in the Transport Policy Department of the Ministry of Trade and Transport. From 1940 he was head of the Department of Public Aviation, adviser to the minister, later promoted to titular state secretary,¹⁰² and at the same time a member of the board of directors of the state-owned Hungarian Air Traffic

⁹⁶ ZINNER, op. cit. 174.

⁹⁷ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Héjjas Iván ügye a nemzetgyűlésben*, Népszava, 15 July 1922. Cited by Ignác ROMSICS, *Bethlen István*, Budapest, Helikon Kiadó, 2019, 270.

⁹⁸ ROMSICS, op. cit. 270.

⁹⁹ ZINNER, op. cit. 173.

¹⁰⁰ BODÓ, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ Iván HÉJJAS, *Légi jog*, Kecskemét, Első Kecskeméti Hírlapkiadó- és Nyomda Rt, 1934.

¹⁰² HU-MNL-OL-K 27-1942. 02. 08.-26.

Company, and the governor promoted him from first lieutenant to captain. Officially, he was responsible for the supervision and organisation of civil aviation, but as a former fighter pilot he also played a role in the organisation and development of the Air Force of the Hungarian Home Defence Forces.¹⁰³

With the death of his friend and protector, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, in 1936, Héjjas suffered a great loss politically, but his position and influence remained stable as an unstinting supporter of the Regent Governor. In 1938, following in the footsteps of the former Race-defending Party, he founded a new radical right-wing party under the name of the National Association of Hungarian Race-defenders,¹⁰⁴ which, however, kept strictly aloof from the Arrow Cross Party and other Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties organised on the Western model, and acted mainly as a loyal opposition to the authoritarian conservative government, thus failing to become a significant force on the Hungarian far-right.¹⁰⁵

With the Government's knowledge and consent, Héjjas was also able to return to military/paramilitary activities for a time during the Second World War, when Hungary entered the war and committed itself to the German policy of aggression. In 1938, under the direction of former Interior Minister Miklós Kozma (an influential politician of the era close to Regent Horthy, at that time President and CEO of the Hungarian Telegraphic Office, later Governor of Transcarpathia), he participated as one of the leaders of the reorganised (second) Ragged Guard in the Transcarpathian diversionary operation, which prepared the reoccupation of Transcarpathia which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia in 1920 under the Trianon Peace Treaty, with the assistance of the German military.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Héjjas also probably played a role in organising the election of Miklós Horthy's son, István Horthy as Deputy Regent Governor.¹⁰⁷ At the end of 1943, General Ferenc Szombathelyi, the Chief of the General Staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces entrusted Colonel Gyula Kádár to organise an irregular military force of 5,000 men, in which Héjjas

¹⁰³ *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, ed. Miklós SZINAI Miklós–László SZÚCS, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1962, 33–38, 194–197.

¹⁰⁴ The fragmented fond of the records produced by the party is in the custody of the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-OL-P 2249-81.

¹⁰⁵ BODÓ, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Mária ORMOS, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Kiadó, 2001, 549–571.

¹⁰⁷ Lajos OLASZ, *A kormányzóhelyettesi intézmény története, 1941–1944*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007.

also participated as an expert in diversionary/irregular warfare, on the Regent Governor's order.¹⁰⁸ This unit, however, ultimately played no role in the military defence of Hungary, and in 1945 Héjjas fled the advancing Soviet troops to Germany, and then to Spain, where he settled in Vigo, Galicia, with the knowledge and consent of the right-wing dictator Francisco Franco who was glad to give shelter to German war criminals and their allies. Although Iván Héjjas was finally sentenced to death in absentia by the People's Tribunal on 25 August 1949, mainly for the murders committed in Orgovány during the time of the White Terror, in 1919–1921, the former militia commander and radical right-wing politician finally died in Spanish exile in 1950, aged 60, presumably of natural causes.

¹⁰⁸ BODÓ, *op. cit.*

Chapter - 3

The murder of social democratic journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó

One of the important events of the wave of paramilitary violence in Hungary, commonly known as the White Terror, which has been extensively studied in historical literature, was the murder of the social-democratic journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó on 17 February 1920. Our short monograph cannot add much to the already known history of this event, but if it undertakes to explore and present the fragmentary history of the Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement, it will have to include this event in its narrative. That is, it is worth writing a few words about the murder, because the Double Cross Blood Union was also involved in the case.

Béla Somogyi, the editor of the newspaper *Népszava* (People's Voice), published several fact-finding articles in 1919–1920 about the murders committed by right-wing military detachments, thus incurring the fury of the officers of the National Army. Among others, Győző Drozdy, an opposition member of parliament, good friend of Somogyi and a historical witness of the era, recalls in his memoirs that Béla Somogyi had told him before his death that he had been personally visited by First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas in the *Népszava* editorial office. He had been openly threatened by the National Army to stop investigating the actions of the detachments because there would be consequences.¹⁰⁹ By this time, Somogyi already carried a pistol with him and were considering moving abroad with his family, but he finally did not give up his journalistic activities.¹¹⁰

However, Somogyi's actions had serious consequences, as the soldiers' warning did not prove to be an empty threat. On 17 February 1920, in the evening, Somogyi and his younger journalist colleague Béla Bacsó were leaving the *Népszava*'s Conti Street (now Lajos Tolnai Street) editorial office, when two men in military uniforms stopped them, caught them and

¹⁰⁹ DROZDY, *op. cit.* 171–177.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

pushed them into a nearby parked six-seater car. The operation, as it later became clear, was led by First Lieutenant Emil Kovarcz, an officer of Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek's detachment, and included Lieutenant László Megay, Lieutenant István Soltész and Navy Ensign Árpád Lehrer. The soldiers drove the car northwards on Teréz Boulevard and then on Váci Street. They did not stop at the customs barrier in the Káposztásmegyer area, but broke through it. Even the finance guards fired at the car that violently passed the barrier, but only the mudguard of the vehicle was hit. The soldiers then shot Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó dead, presumably on the bank of the Danube, and then tied up their bodies, stuffed their pockets with stones and threw them into the Danube, crushing their faces to make them more difficult to recognise.¹¹¹

Béla Somogyi's body was found the next morning on the bank of the Danube by a the security guard of the nearby waterworks, while Béla Bacsó's body was fished out of the river a day later, on 19 February 1920, and was clearly identifiable from the documents in his pocket.¹¹² The brutal double murder sparked a huge outcry, and an apparently extensive investigation was launched. Among others, Prime Minister Károly Huszár himself made the following statement:

*'Neither the Government, nor the National Army, nor the Commander-in-Chief, nor the National Assembly will tolerate the organization in this country of secret societies of irresponsible people, who are running riot in Budapest and in the countryside, and who, in spite of all legal certainty, all state order and all laws, are defiling the reputation and honour of this country before foreign countries.'*¹¹³

Along with all this, military officer circles in the background did their best to confuse the matter as much as possible and try to cover up the officers of the Ostenburg detachment – this is also testified by Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay himself in his notorious memoirs.¹¹⁴

It is an important aspect of the case that, according to some sources, Miklós Horthy, who was elected Regent Governor by the National Assembly two weeks after the bloody events, was indirectly responsible for the case. It is Prónay, among others, who recounts in his memoirs that immediately after

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ernő GERGELY Ernő-Pál SCHÖNWALD, *A Somogyi-Bacsó-gyilkosság*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1978, 13–34.

¹¹³ *XX. század magyar beszédei*, ed. Barnabás VAJDA, Budapest, Agave Kiadó, 2007, 92–94.

¹¹⁴ PRÓNAY, op. cit. 172–173.

the discovery of the assassination, Horthy asked him to come to the Gellért Hotel and was expressly concerned that the serious atrocity connected with the National Army would have a negative impact on his future election as head of state, Prónay, however, responded by saying that it was the Commander in Chief himself who had earlier made reference to the liquidation of the editor of *Népszava*, who had reported on the White Terror, and that the soldiers who had committed the murder had therefore essentially been carrying out the wishes of the Commander in Chief and the leadership of the Army.¹¹⁵ Prónay, of course, writes with his typical cruel callousness about the circumstances of the murder of the two social-democratic journalists he considered to be traitors, but his position allows us to give his memoirs some credit.

The investigation was led by Chief of the Detective Body of the National Police Dr. Károly Nagy himself, and the police identified the military vehicle used in the murder with the plate numbered A/III-36, and after it was established that the suspects were soldiers in actual service, the police were forced to refer the case to the military justice authorities. The perpetrators were prosecuted by the military authorities, but were later released, and Miklós Horthy, now Regent Governor of Hungary, pardoned not only them, but many other soldiers who had committed serious crimes, and the prosecutions against them were dropped.¹¹⁶

In the aftermath of the Somogyi-Bacsó murder, the social-democratic press repeatedly publicised the case and wrote about the responsibility of the army even in 1923, as a result of which Ödön Beniczky, the former Interior Minister of the Government led by Huszár Károly, finally published his confession in the columns of the daily newspaper *Az Újság* (The Newspaper) on 31 May 1925. This testimony also revealed the indirect responsibility of Miklós Horthy, then Commander-in-Chief of the National Army, in the murder committed by the detachment officers, since he had indeed hinted, in the company of officers, that left-wing journalists, especially Béla Somogyi, who had exposed the acts of the White Terror, should be murdered. Furthermore, it was also the former Interior Minister who clearly described the involvement of the Double Cross Blood Union.¹¹⁷ In the course of the investigation, Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, the commander of the detachment responsible for the murder, visited Beniczky

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Ervin HOLLÓS– Vera LAJTOS, *Horthy Miklós, a fehérek vezére*, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1985, 237-245.

¹¹⁷ *Magyar pokol*, 92–113.

while he was still Interior Minister and admitted that the two journalists had indeed been kidnapped by soldiers under his command, but he stated that he personally had nothing to do with the murder, while at the same time warmly recommending that Beniczky should not invest too much energy in the investigation.¹¹⁸ Ostenburg also stated that he is backed by a secret society with unlimited power, which will not only assassinate the Interior Minister, but even himself if necessary. In Beniczky's testimony, he identifies this secret organisation mentioned by Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek with the Double Cross Blood Union, founded in Szeged in 1919, of which Ostenburg, as an influential army officer and paramilitary commander, was one of the leaders.¹¹⁹ Ödön Beniczky's testimony published in the press also revealed the interesting fact that two of the soldiers involved in the Somogyi-Bacsó murder, Navy Ensign Árpád Lehrer and a certain Lieutenant Árpád Szakács, had in the meantime committed suicide.¹²⁰

Beniczky's compromising testimony against the Regent Governor and the Army did not remain unpunished, as the newspaper *Az Újság*'s issue that published it was seized by the authorities, and Beniczky was prosecuted for misconduct against the Regent Governor, breach of official secrecy and illegal disclosure.¹²¹ Beniczky was eventually sentenced to three years of imprisonment by the Budapest Royal Court of Appeal, which was commuted by the Hungarian Royal Curia to 20 months in prison and a fine of 13 million koronas. The 20-month prison sentence was finally served in Markó Street Prison.¹²² Incidentally, Beniczky, who seems to have been deeply disappointed with the political system that he had helped to build up as a former member of the Government, took his own life in January 1931.¹²³

As for the afterlife of Lieutenant Emil Kovarcz, the main perpetrator of the assassination, he served in the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie between 1922 and 1931, and later became a teacher at the Ludovika Military Academy, where he was promoted to the rank of major.¹²⁴ He retired in 1938 and, like many former detachment officers, continued his career as a politician of the radical right, becoming one of the leaders of the Arrow Cross Party of Ferenc Szálasi and a member of parliament between 1938 and

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 102–103.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 102.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 111.

¹²¹ GERGELY–SCHÖNWALD, *op. cit.* 129–153.

¹²² *Uo.*

¹²³ Vö. [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Beniczky Ödön volt belügyminiszter öngyilkos lett*, *Pesti Hírlap*, 21 January 1931.

¹²⁴ László KARSAL, *Szálasi Ferenc. Politikai életrajz*, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2016, 480.

1941. Among other things, Kovarcz organised the Arrow Cross movement's illegal armed militia groups,¹²⁵ which operated like a secret society and terrorist organisation in preparation for a violent takeover, and as a result he was prosecuted in 1940 for his involvement in an bomb outrage attempt on the Dohány Street Synagogue, and was sentenced to five years of imprisonment, but escaped prosecution by fleeing to Germany. He returned home only in March 1944, after the German occupation of Hungary, and became one of the main organisers of the October 1944 Arrow Cross coup, and in the pro-German Government of Ferenc Szálasi, he was appointed Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Mobilising the Nation and Bringing it to Total Warfare. After the Second World War, he was finally sentenced to death by the People's Tribunal on 2 May 1946 for war crimes and crimes against the people, and the sentence was carried out the same day.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Péter SIPOS, *A konspiráció mítosza. Titkos szerveződések Magyarországon 1919–1944*, Beszélő, 1995/29–30, 41–43.

¹²⁶ KARSAI, op. cit. 480.; HU- BFL-XXV-2-b-4767/1946. Emil Kovarcz's trial at the People's Tribunal.

Chapter - 4

Secret negotiations between Hungarian, German (Bavarian) and Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations – the idea of the White Internationale

After the signing of the Peace Treaties of Versailles, some politicians of the defeated states were not satisfied 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 counter-revolution and White Terror 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.

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.¹²⁷ 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, and Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, for example, negotiated with Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay during their first visit to Hungary.¹²⁸ It can be seen, therefore, that the secret military organisation and its commanders had some influence even on Hungarian foreign policy for a while.

The radical right-wing forces attempted to take power in Germany in March 1920, but the so-called Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch, due to the hesitation of the Army, which did not support the coup, but did not defend the legitimate German Government either, initially led to the 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. 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.¹²⁹

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.

¹²⁷ About the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch see in more details: *Der Kapp–Lüttwitz–Ludendorff Putsch. Dokumente*, ed. Erwin KÖNNEMAN–Gerhard SCHULZE, Berlin, Olzog, 2002.

¹²⁸ Bernard WASSERSTEIN, *Az igazi Trebitsch. Az átváltozóművész*, ford. MOLNÁR György, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2016, 217–238.

¹²⁹ *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, 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

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.
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.¹³⁰

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 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. Ludendorff also contacted, through Ignác Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, 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.¹³¹

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 very fragmented and poorly

¹³⁰ László GULYÁS, *A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája I. Az első évek, 1919–1924*, Máriabesenyő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2012, 42–43.

¹³¹ WASSERSTEIN, op. cit. 254–255.

organised, could not really take place on the part of the planned participants in the White Internationale from Central Europe, due to the great geographical distances.¹³²

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.¹³³ 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 plans included helping 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.¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵ 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.¹³⁶ The Bavarian–Hungarian–Austrian secret negotiations, which were intensively conducted during 1920, were personally led by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Count Pál Teleki and by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, head of the secret military formation Double Cross Blood Union on the Hungarian side; on the Bavarian side, Rudolf Kanzler, leader of the right-wing militia ORKA (Organisation Kanzler), and Georg Heim, a peasant-party politician; and on the Austrian side, mainly members of the radical

¹³² WASSERSTEIN, op. cit. 255.

¹³³ Elek KARSAI, *Számjeltávirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek*, Budapest, Táncsics Kiadó, 1969, 63–64.

¹³⁴ G. SOÓS, op. cit. 90.

¹³⁵ HU-HL-VKF-1920-II-21197.

¹³⁶ G. SOÓS, op. cit. 90–91.

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.¹³⁷

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 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 Ludendorff, subsequently agreed.¹³⁸

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 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 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.

¹³⁷ G. Soós, *op. cit.* 91.

¹³⁸ G. Soós, *op. cit.* 92.

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 goals.¹³⁹ At the same time, in Bavaria, General Ludendorff and his 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.¹⁴⁰ 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.¹⁴¹

The Hungarian Government was, 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 reject the possibility of joining the League of Oppressed Peoples, which was 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 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.¹⁴²

The relations between the Austrian counter-revolutionary groups and the Hungarian Government were spoiled by the fact that the two great successor states of the Dual Monarchy failed to reach an agreement on the question of the belonging of Western Hungary, and the issue was left to the victorious Entente powers, primarily to France.¹⁴³ The question remained unresolved for some time, but it worsened the relations with both the official Austrian Government circles and the Austrian radical right 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.

¹³⁹ G. Soós, op. cit. 93.

¹⁴⁰ HU-HL VKF-1920-II-23152.; G. Soós, op. cit. 94.

¹⁴¹ G. Soós, op. cit. 95.

¹⁴² HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1920/384.

¹⁴³ 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.

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 was 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, then operating under secrecy, 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.¹⁴⁴ 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 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.¹⁴⁵ 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 Double Cross Blood Union under the command of Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy,¹⁴⁶ which, as already mentioned, 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

¹⁴⁴ HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266. Cited by G. Soós, op. cit. 25.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266.

Hungarian Government from even the idea of participating in any reckless military action. He indicated that Britain and France would 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 would also intervene against Hungary.¹⁴⁷

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, the Trianon Peace Treaty would be declared invalid. However, Kanzler asked the Hungarian Government for too much money, some 4,5 million German marks, to organise the risky operation which the Hungarian side refused to provide, and for this reason no actual agreement was reached between the parties.¹⁴⁸

All in all, the idea of military intervention against Austria was unrealistic in the given political situation, and the parties 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. Close links existed between the Austrian Heimwehr militia 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, the new negotiations were dominated by the idea that the Austrian right-wing 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 in 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

¹⁴⁷ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-34.

¹⁴⁸ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-41-72.

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. Among other things, this was the moment that made Seipel realise the extent of the political 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.¹⁴⁹ In Austria, the attempted return of Charles IV was followed by political controversy, 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 against any legitimist-monarchist plotting.¹⁵⁰ Although Seipel came to power shortly afterwards, he himself was forced to adapt to the interests of international politics and to consolidate. 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 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 Austrian radical right was represented at this stage of the negotiations mainly

¹⁴⁹ G. Soós, *op. cit.* 35.

¹⁵⁰ G. Soós, *op. cit.* 36.

by politicians from Styria, such as the Styrian Provincial Prime Minister Anton Rintelen who later became Austria's 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.¹⁵¹ 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 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.¹⁵² 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 Anton Rintelen himself did not seriously believe that he could replace the Mayr Government with the men of the ORKA.¹⁵³ 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 activity in their own country 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.¹⁵⁴ 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

¹⁵¹ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/198.

¹⁵² HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/199.

¹⁵³ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-221.

¹⁵⁴ HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/244.

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 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 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 did not reach results, by the summer of 1921, irregular military units were already being organised, with the strong support of Prime Minister Bethlen himself to break in the region shortly afterwards.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ G. Soós, *op. cit.* 42.

Chapter - 5

Briefly about the Uprising in Western Hungary, and about one of the major operations of the Double Cross Blood Union

The military nature of the largest Hungarian far-right association of the era, the Association of Awakening Hungarians was reinforced by the very prominent presence of the Awakening in the uprising of Western Hungary in 1921.¹⁵⁶ The functioning of the Association of Awakening Hungarian, the Hungarian National Defence Force Association and the Double Cross Blood Union, especially regarding military operations and the activities of paramilitary units, are inseparable, even if the two radical right-wing associations cannot be simply considered as front organisations of the Double Cross Blood Union,¹⁵⁷ since Prónay, Héjjas, Gömbös and various military leaders of the DCBU held senior positions in both associations. In the autumn of 1921, following the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, the question whether Burgenland should belong to Austria or to Hungary became a primary source of tension. Although the peace treaties around Paris had assigned the territory to Austria, the Hungarian Government refused to hand it over, as it was mentioned above. Within the Association of the Awakening Hungarians, a conspiracy started under the leadership of Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas, Sándor Dániel and other used-to-be detachment officers, and the plot was tacitly supported by the Bethlen Government. Although the former officers' detachments had been formally disbanded, in 1921 there were still national defence units subordinate to the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians. These were essentially irregular military/auxiliary police forces still tolerated by the Government, which would have had a role in maintaining internal order and they received some training and financial support from the Ministry of Defence.¹⁵⁸ Partly despite the intentions of the Bethlen Government, the Awakening militiamen finally took a very active part in the Uprising of Western Hungary, and the

¹⁵⁶ József BOTLIK, *Nyugat-Magyarország sorsa, 1918–1921*.

¹⁵⁷ Janet KERÉKES, *Álarcosból a Fehér Keresztben. A zsidó asszimiláció*, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2018, 227.

¹⁵⁸ ZINNER, *Az ébredők fénykora*, 124–126.

irregular military units collectively called the *Rongyos Gárda – Ragged Guard*, organised by Prónay, Héjjas, György Hir and other former detachment commanders, allegedly numbering around 3000–4000 militiamen marched into the region named Burgenland by Austrians. The so-called Uprising began on 28 August 1921 in the area around present-day Burgenland and Sopron. The sides clashed at Ágfalva, where about 120 of Iván Héjjas's men engaged in a firefight with Austrian gendarmes. The Ragged Guardsmen engaged the Austrians in guerrilla warfare, making it impossible for Austria to take possession of the territory it had been officially awarded. The Hungarian guerrilla rebels were present in almost every village eastwards of Sopron. On October 4, 1921, Pál Prónay's rebel troops boldly proclaimed the de facto state of Lajtabánság/Banate of Leitha, with Prónay himself as the head of state. It is worth noting that the attempts of cooperation between Hungarian nationalist organisations such as the Double Cross Blood Union and the German ORGESCH and ORKA organisations as well as their Austrian counterparts, the Heimwehr militias which had previously seemed hopeful failed precisely because of the conflict caused by the Uprising in Western Hungary.¹⁵⁹

The Uprising of Western Hungary, this irregular military operation, however, did not take place according to some unified and predetermined scenario as a well-organised operation, since it would have been very difficult to expect the various paramilitary formations to obey a single central will under the given circumstances. The rebels included legitimists, people who wanted to freely elect a king, republicans, and, in some cases, people who were less concerned with the issue of kingship and followed simply irredentist ideas, and adventurers as well. As László Gulyás aptly points out in his series of monographs on the foreign policy of the Horthy Era, there were five interest groups among the rebels, and these were: the legitimist Colonel Antal Lehár who had who had discredited himself before the Government during the first attempted return of Charles IV; former Prime Minister István Friedrich, one of the right-wing adventurer politicians of the era; Captain Gyula Gömbös, more or less the agent of the Bethlen Government, who also tried to mediate between the various rebel groups; Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay's armed militiamen; and finally the gendarmerie battalion under the command of Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, who was also a legitimist and earlier supported King Charles IV in his unsuccessful attempt of return.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Béla BELLÉR, *Az ellenforradalom nemzetiségi politikájának kialakulása*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975, 199.

¹⁶⁰ GULYÁS, op. cit. 114–115.

Regent Horthy eventually appointed Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister, President of MOVE and member of the ÉME leadership as Government Commissioner for the Affairs of Western Hungary, and his mission was to try to bring the rebels under some unified control. Gömbös, however, took no small risk by assuming this mediating role, and the sharp differences of opinion and interests between the various paramilitary rebel groups are well illustrated by the fact that – if we are to believe Pál Prónay, who documented the information – some of Ostenburg’s officers even had plans to assassinate Gyula Gömbös, and they only abandoned their intentions when Government Commissioner Count Antal Sigray intervened.¹⁶¹ István Bethlen and his Government could formally distance themselves from the Hungarian rebels in control of Burgenland, about 70% of whom were members of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and many of them presumably also members of the Double Cross Blood Union. Colonel Tihámér Siménfalvy, the military commander of the DCBU had himself previously been involved in organising the Uprising of Western Hungary and recruiting the diversionary troops.¹⁶² During this time, Prime Minister Bethlen, through one of his confidants, Baron Zsigmond Perényi, partly controlled the activities of the free corps himself from the background, certainly, only as far as the troops obeyed the Government. Among his plans there was a compromise with the Entente powers which would keep a quarter to a fifth of the disputed territory within the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary. At the Italian-initiated Conference in Venice on 11 October 1921, Bethlen, with the help of the Italian Foreign Minister, Marquis Torretta finally managed to reach a deal whereby, if the irregular Hungarian troops withdrew from Burgenland, the people of Sopron could decide on the city’s affiliation in a referendum. Of course, some of the Hungarian free troops were still reluctant to withdraw from the area, and only did so on the orders of Horthy who also threatened to use the regular army against them. Lieutenant Colonel Prónay refused to comply with the Government’s orders for a while, but the *de facto* state of *Lajtabánság* was finally dissolved after barely a month, and on 11 November 1921 the Hungarian Government finally informed the Austrian Government that most of the irregular Hungarian military units had withdrawn from Western Hungary.¹⁶³

After the Austrian troops had entered the territories handed over to them, the referendum in Sopron could take place, and it really took place

¹⁶¹ PRÓNAY, *op. cit.* 279.

¹⁶² G. SOÓS, *Burgenland az európai politikában 1918–1921*, 106, 139–140.

¹⁶³ GULYÁS, *op. cit.* 118.

between 14 and 16 December 1921. The referendum on the affiliation of the town of Sopron and the eight villages in its surroundings was finally in Hungary's favour, partly due to the presence of Hungarian armed people in the town, and Sopron and its surroundings remained part of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹⁶⁴

It is also an interesting fact that although the Double Cross Blood Union is generally associated with Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, Pál Prónay and Iván Héjjas, and according to the sources, its members also participated in the Uprising of Western Hungary, a letter of 1921 from Gyula Gömbös to Prime Minister István Bethlen, dated 30 September 1921 Hungary, has remained. In this letter, Gömbös as the Government's representative asks Bethlen to make available to him, if possible, 500 men of the DCBU equipped with machine guns, because he cannot reach an agreement with Héjjas. Among other things, therefore, this source also indicates that the Blood Union was under government control at the time as a secret military unit, and that its armed soldiers were to be deployed on the orders of the Prime Minister against those paramilitary commanders who were not obeying the Government's will, but who, according to the information available about the organisation, were also among its leaders. This also shows how the history of the DCBU is full of contradictions, and – as it is not at unusual for paramilitary formations operating under much looser discipline than the regular military – how different factions existed within the organisation, it was never under a completely unified leadership, and how openly the opposition between the pro-Horthy and the legitimist wings was demonstrated, even during the Uprising of Western Hungary which was in fact an irregular military operation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ ROMSICS, *op. cit.* 179.

¹⁶⁵ NEMES, *op. cit.* 160–161.

Chapter - 6

The 'Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch' – the Szemere–Bobula–Ulain coup plan, 1923

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, which went back to 1919, continued for a time in 1921 and 1922 with less intensity than before. The Bethlen Government 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 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 1921.¹⁶⁶ 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.¹⁶⁷ Bethlen, informed 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 party), concluded that the Hungarian Government could not hope for any useful cooperation with the Bavarians, and negotiations on such cooperation were temporarily suspended.¹⁶⁸ Behind

¹⁶⁶ Mária ORMOS, *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós*, 110–113.

¹⁶⁷ ORMOS, op. cit. 112.

¹⁶⁸ ORMOS, op. cit. 113.

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.¹⁶⁹

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 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.¹⁷⁰

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 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 Titusz 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

¹⁶⁹ NÁNDORI, *A Marseilles-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, 24–25.

¹⁷⁰ UNGVÁRY, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 111.

German National Socialist movement led by Hitler and General Ludendorff, carrying out their plans at roughly the same time as the Beer Hall Putsch, making their action dependent on its success, their coup plan is perhaps most aptly and ironically should named 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 1923.¹⁷¹

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 was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisations, who was visiting Hungary to make concrete arrangements for cooperation with similar Hungarian far-right

¹⁷¹ HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate’s trial.

formations. Negotiations began in German, 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, 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 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.¹⁷²

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 Ersnt Röhm, and Commissioner Kahr, under the threat of armed force, assured Hitler and his 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

¹⁷² Mária ORMOS, *Hitler*, Budapest, T-Twins Kiadó, 1994, 73–86.

public facilities, and later that night, Hitler and his men, believing they no longer needed Kahr and his associates, released the Commissioner.¹⁷³

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.¹⁷⁴

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 nationwide 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.¹⁷⁵

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 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

¹⁷³ ORMOS, op. cit. ibid.

¹⁷⁴ ORMOS, op. cit. ibid.

¹⁷⁵ ORMOS, op. cit. 196–321.

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 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.¹⁷⁶

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

¹⁷⁶ HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610.

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 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,¹⁷⁷ 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.¹⁷⁸ Even in the international literature, the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch appears at the level of mention, and academic works written in English usually treat it as a *fait accompli* that there was a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian and German sides.¹⁷⁹ 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 on various corruption cases, thereby discrediting Bethlen's Government.¹⁸⁰ Namely, some senior government officials including Interior Minister Iván Rakovszky had been bribed with

¹⁷⁷ 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.

¹⁷⁸ Mária ORMOS, *Kozma Miklós. Egy magyar médiavevő*, 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.

¹⁷⁹ 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.

¹⁸⁰ UNGVÁRY, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 112.

free shares, and several state officials appeared to be implicated in the corruption case.¹⁸¹ 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 coronas, and they also seriously violated speculation rules.¹⁸² 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, 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.¹⁸³

We may ask the question whether or not it is possible that a strange

¹⁸¹ Dezső NEMES, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, 108–109.

¹⁸² *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, 326–328.

¹⁸³ 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.

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 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.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, he deliberately sought to create as large a 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.¹⁸⁵ 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 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.¹⁸⁶ The same could also be true of the 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 and independent and as one of the successor states to the Austro-Hungarian

¹⁸⁴ HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/610.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ 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.

https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2009/11/19/adolf-hitler-genre-fasciste_1269349_3214.html

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 cooperations with politicians from other nations with similar ideological platforms.¹⁸⁷

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 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 Döhmél was in contact with the German state security services as early as August 1923, and

¹⁸⁷ See: Róbert FIZIKER, *Habsburg kontra Hitler. Legitimisták az anchluss ellen, az önálló Ausztriáért*, Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2010.

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.¹⁸⁸ 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 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 Hungarian and German far-right organisations.¹⁸⁹ 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 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.¹⁹⁰ Although this is all in the realm of conjecture, it cannot be excluded that Fritz Döhmel,

¹⁸⁸ PA AA (B)-R 30531-Bd. 1. Cited by: István NÉMETH, *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. I. rész*, 80.

¹⁸⁹ 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.

¹⁹⁰ István NÉMETH, *Magyarok és németek (1914–1934)*, 385.

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 Döhmél 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.¹⁹¹ 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, Döhmél 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 Döhmél'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 Döhmél 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 Döhmél'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

¹⁹¹ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Hitler nyilatkozata az Ulain-ügyben. Sohasem akart beleavatkozni a magyar ügyekbe Döhmél, köpenicki diplomata*, *Szózat*, 23 December 1923, 7.

the Bethlen Government succeeded in isolating Gömbös and his circle 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.

Chapter - 7

The crimes of the Kovács brothers and the controversial role of the police

In our case study, we continue our analysis of the domestic political activities of the Double Cross Blood Union whose prominent figures were the Kovács brothers, Árpád, Kornél and Tivadar, three young private officials with military background. Kornél Kovács and Tivadar Kovács had previously served as detectives in the Budapest State Police in the years before and during the Soviet Republic of Hungary, but later, around 1918–1919 – for unknown reasons unknown – left the law enforcement career and took up something completely else.¹⁹² The three young brothers were among the founders and main organisers of the Double Cross Blood Union, and they were also among the founders of the *Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – Our National Past Cultural Association*, one of the front organisations of the secret military society.¹⁹³ In 1922-1923, the Kovács brothers thus created a more restricted sub-organisation within the Blood Union in order to achieve their goals. They had previously been members of the officers' detachment at Hotel Britannia, and they were probably also involved in the irredentistically motivated forgery of Czechoslovakian korona ('sokol') in 1921 the main organiser of which was Gyula Mészáros, a professor of Turkology and close friend of Prime Minister Pál Teleki.¹⁹⁴ They may have been involved in the murder of piano manufacturer Jakab Reismann,¹⁹⁵ took part in the Uprising of Western Hungary, and then started to raise money for a so-called cultural cause in the name of the Our National Past Cultural Association, but in reality they acquired large quantities of explosives and firearms. They were conspiring to overthrow the Government, assassinate several members of the government and introduce a military dictatorship, and they were also planning to blow up the Dohány Street Synagogue.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Leleplezett ellenforradalmi összeesküvés Budapesten*, Népszava, 10 May 1919, 6.

¹⁹³ SERFŐZŐ, op. cit. 79.

¹⁹⁴ ABLONCZY, op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ KÓRÓDI, op. cit. 18.

¹⁹⁶ SERFŐZŐ, op. cit. m. 80.

From among the opposition politicians the Kovács brothers allegedly wanted to murder Vilmos Vázsonyi, Rezső Rupert, Károly Rassay and Győző Drozdy,¹⁹⁷ mainly liberal members of the Parliament who had frequently spoken out against far-right organisations and the atrocities they had committed, but their death list also included Prime Minister István Bethlen and former Interior Minister and incumbent Minister for Culture and Education Count Kunó Klebelsberg. The conspiracy of the Kovács brothers could not remain unnoticed by the police, and in June 1923, during a search of the apartment of one of their accomplices, Sándor Czigány, a Christian Socialist representative of the Budapest local government detectives found and confiscated 18 kilograms of explosives.¹⁹⁸

The Kovács brothers repeatedly referred to the High Command as their superior body, by which they obviously meant the higher military command of the Double Cross Blood Union. Sources also testify that the Kovács brothers' military superior was probably General Károly Csörgy, a senior officer of the National Army, which was later, in 1922 reorganised under the name Hungarian Defence Forces. General Csörgy played a significant role in the leadership of the Double Cross Blood Union.¹⁹⁹ However, highest ranking protector of the Kovács brothers was probably Dr. Károly Andréka, Deputy Police Commissioner Budapest and head of the Hungarian Political Police²⁰⁰ who was himself a member of several far-right organisations, possibly including the DCBU.²⁰¹ His relationship with Kornél Kovács and Tivadar Kovács presumably dated back to the two young men's past as police detectives. Károly Rassay, a liberal opposition MP, spoke up in the Parliament on the actions of the Kovács brothers,²⁰² and the three young men were eventually detained on the personal orders of Prime Minister Bethlen.

However, Deputy Police Commissioner Andréka himself intervened and made statements to the investigating judge that soon led to the release of the Kovács brothers. Andréka claimed, among other things, that the Our

¹⁹⁷ DROZDY, op. cit. 195–196.

¹⁹⁸ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Tizennyolc kilogramm ekrazitot találtak Czigány Ferenc pót-városatyá lakásán*, Pesti Napló, 23 June 1923.

¹⁹⁹ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Rakovszky belügyminiszter: Andréka Károly holnaptól kezdve nem detektívönök!*, Magyarország, 6 December 1923, 1–2.

²⁰⁰ Krisztián VARGA, *Ellenség a baloldalon. Politikai rendőrség a Horthy-korszakban*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2015, 51–61.

²⁰¹ Tibor WAYAND, *Önvallás. Wayand Tibor fogságban írt visszaemlékezései, 1945–1946*, ed. Krisztián VARGA, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Kronosz Kiadó, Budapest, 2019, 81.

²⁰² Rassay Károly felszólalása 1923. november 29-én, Nemzetgyűlési Napló 1922/XIV., 155. Cited by: SERFÖZŐ, op. cit. 78.

National Past Cultural Association had close links with the DCBU, an organisation with patriotic aims, and that he himself as a senior police officer had been able to rely on the Kovács brothers on numerous occasions when they had been informed of left-wing or legitimist plots, and that they had been very useful informants for the political police for years.

The three Kovács brothers were also accused of conspiracy to counterfeit money, and this is what we know most about: the three brothers and their associates wanted to put counterfeit Czechoslovak koronas into circulation in the Highlands, presumably for diversionary purposes. Investigative testimonies show that Tivadar Kovács received the glass cliché for the forgery, some drawings and 2 banknotes as a sample from a Hungarian first lieutenant named Jenő Jablonszky who was allegedly an intelligence officer in the Highlands. First Lieutenant Jablonszky suggested that the counterfeit money should be granted to the DCBU who would use it for irredentist purposes in the future, thus causing confusion in Hungarian-populated areas that had been annexed to Czechoslovakia. Tivadar Kovács communicated his intention to counterfeit to a certain Pál Tarnovszky, on the grounds that they wished to implement this plan 'at a higher level'. Tarnovszky had received 150,000 Hungarian koronas from a friend in the Highlands, a certain first lieutenant called Jenő Balázsovich for the material preparations for the forgery. Kovács introduced Tarnovszky to the technical draughtsman János Szalay who was entrusted with the construction, and together Tarnovszky and Szalay they bought the necessary materials. The zinc plate cliché prepared in Szalay's laboratory was sent to military officer Artillery Captain Imre Makay, one of the commanders of the Double Cross Blood Union, but the defendants claimed that they had received instructions that they would not contribute to the forgery of the cliché 'from above', so the cliché and the drawings were destroyed. The 'higher authority' in this case also meant the Command of the Double Cross Blood Union, either Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy himself or the aforementioned General Károly Csörgey; i.e. the senior officers of the military.

Although the accused withdrew their confessions during the investigation and claimed that the equipment confiscated from them was needed for an experimental photographic procedure, the Royal Criminal Court found them guilty of conspiracy to counterfeit money on the basis of detailed and complementary statements, sentenced them to two months' imprisonment on 22 October 1925, and made their sentences complete with their time spent under arrest.²⁰³

²⁰³ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-10559/1925.

In the same case, the court also tried Kornél Kovács, Árpád Kovács, Tivadar Kovács, István Becker, János Szalay, Aladár Szobodeczky, Szigfrid Umlauf, Pál Tarnovszky, Szavér Sztahó and Ede Láng who were accused of conspiracy to violently subvert the law and order of the state and society, but were all acquitted for lack of evidence.²⁰⁴ Interestingly, the trial was held behind closed doors, presumably due to its political importance. In any case, the only physical evidence, the seizure of 18 kilograms of explosive was not sufficient to secure a conviction. Although the indictment submitted by the Royal Prosecutor Dr. Mihály Dolowschiák also included serious charges such as the intention of a bomb raid against the Dohány Street Synagogue, the kidnapping of well-known politicians, the organisation a terrorist groups and the preparation of a bank robbery in Oradea, and the acquisition of various firearms and explosives for the above purposes, the accused were all acquitted and released.²⁰⁵

The Royal Criminal Court of Budapest interrogated Artillery Captain Imre Makay Colonel László Bartha, the members of the higher command of the Double Cross Blood Union as witnesses in the closed trial. The two professional military officers also testified and emphasised the Double Cross Blood Union was a secret state organisation under the control of the Hungarian Army, although its members were mostly unpaid, and that it was used both for internal counter-intelligence against left-wing movements and for irredentist (diversionary) purposes in the neighbouring countries. Both Captain Makay and Colonel Bartha stressed that they were bound by official secrecy regarding the organisational frameworks and the specific activities the secret military formation, and could therefore only speak in general terms, but they emphasised that they both knew the accused, especially the Kovács brothers, and considered them to be reliable men and true patriots, and that they had no knowledge of any conspiracy to subvert the State or social order, but rather that their activities were aimed to defend the Hungarian State and Government. Captain Makay also pointed out that the Double Cross Blood Union in the form in which it had previously operated had ceased to exist around 1923, but that it continued to within the frameworks of the National Labour Protection, a strike-breaking auxiliary police organisation under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.²⁰⁶

Finally, the Kovács brothers and their associates, although they seem to

²⁰⁴ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Elmaradt a Kovács testvérek képviselőirtó és zsinagógarobbantó szövetkezetének mai tárgyalása*, *Az Est*, 16 May 1925, 6.

²⁰⁵ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

have committed and was planning to commit further serious crimes, – presumably thanks to their patrons and secret irregular military service – received essentially no punishment, but Deputy Police Commissioner Károly Andréka paid with his position for his ongoing collusion with the far right, and was succeeded in the political police leadership by Deputy Police Commissioner Imre Hetényi.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Krisztián VARGA, *Az 1945 előtti politikai rendőrség Wayand Tibor detektívfelügyelő önvallomásaiban*, Betekintő, 2009/1.
http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/betekinto-szamok/2009_1_varga_k.pdf

Chapter - 8

Consolidation with hand-grenades, that is, the assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő

One of the instances of relatively fortunate outcomes of the radical right-wing political terrorism that spread in Hungary for a short time – uncovered in the preparatory stage – was the 1922 hand-grenade assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő.

István Keő, originally named Kucséra, in some sources called István Keő-Kucséra, a farmer and innkeeper from Jászkarajenő was one of the leaders of the local sub-organisation of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and a well-known local activist of the radical right in the small Pest County village near the Hungarian capital, began to complain strongly to his friends in February 1922 that another catering establishment in the village which happened to be owned by a Jewish person was generating more turnover than his pub. He therefore decided to ‘teach the local Jews a lesson’, to intimidate them in some way, and in any case to carry out some unspecified act of violence against them.²⁰⁸

As the leader of the Jászkerajenő local sub-organisation of the ÉME, István Keő-Kucséra was a regular guest at the headquarters of the Association of Awakening Hungarians at 3 Sörház Street in the downtown of Budapest, and in connection with this he also visited the pub at the bottom of the building frequently. It was here, on an unspecified day in February 1922, that he met his friend Mihály Gyalay, a radical right-wing journalist and editor of one of the political newspaper of the Awakening movement called *Hazánk (Our Homeland)* (the editorial office was also located in the Awakening headquarters), and complained to him that, in his opinion, the Jews of Jászkarajenő were plotting against the local Awakening activists. That is, the local Jewish restaurant owner was spoiling his business – and Keő-Kucséra suggested that this should be tackled. The far-right journalist naturally agreed with his friend and Awakening brother, and the more wine the two men drank, the louder they became about their aversion to the Jews

²⁰⁸ HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924. István Keő-Kucséra and his associates' trial.

of Jászkarajenő. Gyalay, in a wine-induced state, suggested that handgrenades should be thrown at the houses of certain Jewish people in Jászkarajenő as a means of intimidation.²⁰⁹ The anti-Semitic rhetoric and the unfolding assassination plans caught the attention of a 21-year-old young man at the next table, József Kovács, an impoverished demobilised soldier and former participant of the Uprising of West Hungary who was in need of money and was now working private official, but who, of course, was also a member of the Awakening Hungarians, and he sat down with the beside the two men who were drunkenly hatching anti-Semitic plans. Kovács himself voiced his agreement.²¹⁰

If the archival sources of the case are to be believed, the radical right-wing gentlemen were now drinking wine in a threesome, and their determination to carry out the planned assassination attempt with a grenade seemed to be becoming more and more clear. József Kovács volunteered to carry out the assassination on behalf of István Keő-Kucsera for a fee, and Keő-Kucsera enthusiastically accepted his offer. They agreed that Kovács would travel from Budapest to Jászkarajenő the next day to survey the area, that is, in order to inspect the specific house on which he would have to throw grenades. At the same time, Mihály Gyalay took it upon himself to acquire the grenades that were necessary to carry out the assassination.²¹¹

The drunken anti-Jewish assassination pans of the radical right-wing young men then took a very serious turn, as József Kovács actually travelled to Jászkarajenő to Keő-Kucsera the next day to survey the targets, including the house of Izsák Fischmann, a local Jewish resident. After the survey, the parties agreed that József Kovács would contact Mihály Gyalay, collect the explosive devices he had promised, and then report back to Keő-Kucsera to discuss the details of the assassination.²¹²

A few days later, at the beginning of March 1922, József Kovács visited Mihály Gyalay at the Awakening headquarters, in the editorial office of the newspaper *Hazánk*, and asked him for the promised grenades, which Gyalay had not yet obtained. At Kovács's urging, however, Gyalay became active and immediately went from the editorial office to the office of Géza Adorján, a student engineer and leading officer of Awakening Hungarians also located in the headquarters. Despite his young age, Géza Adorján was a relatively influential figure of the radical right-wing movements of the time, deeply

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

involved in a number of political assassinations. He held a leading position in the paramilitary wing of the association, the National Defence Department, and had close ties with the commanders of the notorious (by then disbanded, but still alive in various forms) detachments of the Army, including Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, who was at the time one of the Vice-President of the Awakening Hungarians and also the Head of the National Defence Department.²¹³ Mihály Gyalay, citing higher orders and patriotic purposes, asked for the support of the National Defence Department through Géza Adorján, and Adorján simply took out two working, German-made, World-War-One hand-grenades from his desk drawer and handed them to the journalist without any further dispute.²¹⁴ Gyalay thanked him for his support and for the explosive devices he had provided, then walked back to the editorial office of *Hazánk*, and for safety's sake – like most of the members of his generation, he had served as a soldier himself in the Great War and had basic knowledge of explosives – unscrewed the handles of the grenades, wrapped them in newspaper and handed them over to József Kovács. Kovács put the grenades in his briefcase, received a small sum of money (100 koronas) from Gyalay and left the Awakening headquarters.²¹⁵

Here events took another surprising turn, as József Kovács seemed to have lost his courage with two working handgrenades in his briefcase, and just a few hundred metres away from the Awakening headquarters on Sörház Street, on Kálvin Square, he called to István Pikola, a police officer on duty, and told him that he had found grenades on the train, and that he thought they were dangerous and wanted to hand them over to the police as soon as possible.²¹⁶ However, the policeman became suspicious of the young man's story and brought Kovács to the police station of District 4, where he was interrogated by detectives, and the hand-grenades were seized by the police and handed over to the military body responsible for collecting military equipment left over from the World War, mainly in the possession of demobilised soldiers. The military officers in charge quickly established that the German-made military grenades were really functional, dangerous and unreliable, and destroyed them within a short time, drawing up a detailed report about their annihilation.²¹⁷

At first, József Kovács tried to maintain his earlier story to the

²¹³ SERFŐZŐ, *A titkos társaságok és a róluk folytatott parlamenti viták 1922-1924-ben*, 75.

²¹⁴ HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

detectives that he had found the two grenades on the train during his journey, but later he broke down and confessed everything to the police, who soon opened an investigation for conspiracy to commit murder. István Keő-Kucsera, Mihály Gyalay and Géza Adorján were soon arrested by the police in March 1922, and based on the detailed testimonies of József Kovács who had been broken, renounced the assassination attempt and cooperated with the authorities to a great extent, they were soon suspected of having formed an alliance to prepare the assassination.²¹⁸

József Kovács's testimony and the operability of the hand-grenades were enough evidence for the prosecution to accuse all four radical right-wing men, and the indictment also included a conspiracy to commit murder.

István Keő-Kucsera denied everything during the investigation and the inquiry, and did not even admit that he knew József Kovács at all, let alone that he had commissioned him to throw grenades at the houses of Jewish people he did not like in exchange for money. All he admitted was that although he did not remember it exactly, he thought it possible that he had in front of Mihály Gyalay while drinking wine and in a very drunken state berated the Jewish residents of Jászkarajenő whom he considered to be unpatriotic, and even hinted at teaching them a lesson in front of his friend. However, he stated that he had said this out of impulsiveness at most, without any specific plans or aims.²¹⁹

Mihály Gyalay, a radical right-wing journalist proved to be somewhat more cooperative than his friend who incited József Kovács to the assassination, and admitted that he had heard Keő-Kucsera speaking several times about committing atrocities against the Jews of Jászkarajenő, and he himself also supported the idea to some extent. Finally, Keő-Kucsera clearly instructed Kovács to carry out the assassination, they agreed on the details, Kovács travelled to Jászkarajenő and together they carried out a number of preparatory acts, for example, a detailed survey of the houses on which it was planned to throw grenades to intimidate the people living there. Gyalay, of course, in order to save himself, did not admit unequivocally that he himself had acquired the explosive devices and handed them over to József Kovács, but defended himself by claiming that he had acquired the grenades for patriotic purposes, for the purpose of carrying out possible military (irredentist?) acts against an unspecified enemy (in the territory of neighbouring states). Vaguely, the same argument was made as in many

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

similar criminal cases that the militias of the Association of Awakening Hungarians mainly composed of demobilised soldiers were in fact auxiliary units of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and therefore operated legally, with the knowledge and consent of the Government, and as such, the people involved would have been serving their country and could not be considered criminals, terrorists or individuals plotting against the established order of the State.²²⁰ Although the investigation, the inquiry and the trial did not unequivocally reveal the involvement of the Double Cross Blood Union, the highly influential secret irregular military unit of the era, the role of Géza Adorján, his close ties to Prónay's detachment, and the extensive overlaps between the national defence militias of the Awakening and the Blood Union also suggest the involvement of the DCBU in this case. In addition, Mihály Gyalay was found to be a member of the Double Cross Blood Union's leadership in a somewhat later case of concealment of weapons in 1924, so it seems clear that the secret military organisation may have been behind the assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő as well.²²¹ Gyalay made contradictory statements during the investigation, and he tried to defend himself and his group by claiming that the grenades he had received from Géza Adorján were not operational, and he strongly doubted that the devices taken over and destroyed by the military authorities were the same as those he had received from Géza Adorján and handed over to József Kovács who eventually brought the whole company to the police.

Géza Adorján, an officer of the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians and close subordinate of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay denied all along that he knew anything about the assassination attempt of István Keő-Kucsera and József Kovács against Jewish residents in Jászkarajenő. He only admitted that Mihály Gyalay, citing superior orders and patriotic purposes (by superior orders Gyalay probably meant Lieutenant Colonel Prónay, Adorján's military superior and one of the main organisers of the nationalist militias of the time), which he naively provided to the newspaper reporter. However, he denied that he had any discussions with István Keő-Kucsera and József Kovács about the specific use of the grenades, nor did he believe that the grenades he had given him were not operational.²²²

However, the testimony of József Kovács, who was probably only

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *A Kettős Kereszt Vérszövetség tulajdona volt a lefoglalt fegyverkészlet*, Friss Újság, 22 January 1924, 1.

²²² HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924.

pretending to take the execution of the assassination because of his financial difficulties, but who quickly backed away from it and revealed the whole affair in detail to the authorities, was in contrast to all of them. Kovács's testimony was consistent, thoroughly detailed, and he fully admitted his own role in the prepared crime, while his confession's consistency and credibility contrasted sharply with the confused, contradictory and repeatedly changing details of the testimonies of the other three defendants.²²³

After the indictment, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest finally heard the case of the Jászkarajenő bombing plot, a little late, between 11 and 18 June 1924, with the presidency of Judge Dr. Achil Schirill. The accused had been at liberty for some time, having spent only a few months, mostly between April and June 1922, in pre-trial detention.²²⁴

During the trial, the defence tried to confuse the criminal court, citing trumped-up charges and patriotic reasons, but could use only inconsistent arguments against the full confession of the accused József Kovács and Captain Pál Reinhardt, Chief Artillery Foreman, according to which the German-made military hand-grenades were clearly functional and dangerous devices, capable of killing human life. The defendants' position was further aggravated by the testimony of Rezső Balázsi, a member of the Association of Awakening Hungarians who, according to his own statement, was also present when Mihály Gyalay handed over the hand grenades he had received from Géza Adorján to József Kovács. Balázsi distinctly recalled that one of them, presumably Gyalay, had said: 'the newspapers will write a lot about this, we will seriously disturb the Jews'. So, not only had the grenade attack been carefully planned by the radical right-wing young men with terrorist tendencies, but they had also anticipated its public impact and possible press coverage. It seems that they would have been delighted if it had been able to create fear among Jews in the whole country.²²⁵

The Royal Criminal Court of Budapest finally accepted as true and credible the repentant and detailed confession of József Kovács, the expert opinion of military expert Captain Pál Reinhardt and the incriminating testimony of witness Rezső Balázsi. The court also took into account the strong anti-Jewish sentiments and radical anti-Semitism of the accused, the fact that they themselves did not deny their strong anti-Jewish sentiments and political views for a single moment, and on the basis of all these factors,

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

the court decided to convict the accused in 1924. In its judgment of 18 June 1924, the court found István Keő-Kucsera István first, Mihály Gyalay second and József Kovács third guilty of the crime of conspiracy to commit murder. The court finally sentenced Keő-Kucsera to four months of imprisonment, Gyalay to three months of imprisonment and József Kovács to two months of imprisonment, and also ordered them to pay the costs of the criminal process. However, the court acquitted Géza Adorján, the fourth defendant of the charge of conspiracy to commit murder, since it was not clearly established that he had been aware of the fact that Mihály Gyalay had asked him for the hand grenades in order to carry out an anti-Semiticly motivated assassination.²²⁶

Although the Awakening Hungarian activists who prepared the grenade raid in Jászkarajenő which fortunately was never carried out were found guilty and convicted by the court in their criminal trial, in this case too, they received surprisingly light sentences compared to the gravity of their actions. The prosecutor appealed, of course, and the criminal case of István Keő-Kucsera and his fellows continued at the second instance, but the Budapest Royal Court of Appeal and the Judicial Council presided by judge Dr. István Gadó did not significantly increase the sentence of the terrorists of Jászkarajenő. The second instance judgment of 14 October 1925 largely upheld the provisions of the first instance judgment of the Royal Court of Budapest, adding only that the defendants had to pay compensation of 1,000,000 koronas to Izsák Fischnamm, the victim, an Israelite resident of Jászkarajenő and his family, whose house had been designated by István Keő-Kucsera as the target of the hand-grenade attack by József Kovács.²²⁷

István Keő-Kucsera, the local paramilitary leader in Jászkarajenő was not only known for the assassination attempt that ended up in court. As the leader of the local sub-organisation of the Awakening Hungarians, he had been linked to a number of violent atrocities like beating Jewish people and illegal acts disguised as auxiliary police activities of the Army in 1920–1921, during period of the White Terror. Several official investigations were carried out against him, and it seems clear that not only Géza Adorján, but also Keő-Kucsera himself had very close links with the former detachments and detachment members associated with Pál Prónay and Iván Héjjas, as well as with radical right-wing paramilitary groups that were still active in

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

By the way, the criminal case of the terrorists from Jászkarajenő did not end completely with the second instance verdict. Namely, with the help of their defence lawyer Dr. Kálmán Fehérváry, István Keő-Kucsera and Mihály Gyalay filed a nullity complaint to the Hungarian Royal Curia (Supreme Court) after the second instance verdict was delivered, so the case reached the third instance, the highest Hungarian judicial forum. The nullity complaint was heard by the Curia on 27 September 1927, more than five years after the hand grenade assassination in Jászkarajenő, and in its order of the same day it rejected the defendants' nullity complaint.²²⁹

It can be seen as a symbolic gesture of justice that the Hungarian Supreme Court also ruled – now irrevocably – that the radical right-wing activists István Keő-Kucsera, Mihály Gyalay and József Kovács were guilty of the crime of conspiracy to commit murder, and it was only by luck that József Kovács changed his mind before it was too late, refrained from carrying out the assassination attempt and disclosed the preparations to the investigating authorities in detail. In spite of this, the Awakening terrorists of Jászkarajenő were not punished in any meaningful way, and the prison sentence of a few months imposed on the three defendants part of which the court of first instance took to be completed by pre-trial detention cannot be regarded as a sentence commensurate with the act of murdering people which endangered human life. It is also suspicious that Géza Adorján, an officer of the Association of Awakening Hungarians who had been involved in higher military and political circles and had organised paramilitary units, and whose name was associated with many other serious politically motivated crimes after 1922, was acquitted of all charges against him, and he was not even given a symbolic sentence.

There is usually no clear evidence or no written source of this kind available to researchers, but based on the often very similar outcomes of similar criminal cases in the 1920s, we can perhaps allow ourselves some generalisations and draw some conclusions based on the network of contacts of the accused. Especially it is the socially highly mobile Géza Adorján and his close acquaintance with paramilitary commanders Pál Prónay and Iván Héjjas that makes us draw the conclusion that certain influential political and military circles may have been also involved in the case of the Awakening

²²⁸ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *A szolnoki ügyészség újabb vizsgálatot rendelt el Keő-Kucsera „kilengései” ügyében*, Pesti Napló, 4 November 1924, 7.

²²⁹ HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924.

terrorists of Jászkarajenő, and they somehow managed to ensure that the young men with radical right-wing affiliations who had perpared for an undoubtedly serious crime received the minimum possible punishment for their actions, even though it was proven that they had conspired to carry out actions that could have resulted in serious injuries or deaths.²³⁰

²³⁰ ZINNER, op. cit. 159–160.

Chapter - 9

The bomb raid in Erzsébetváros

The struggle of the Hungarian political parties before the parliamentary elections in 1922 was disrupted by a series of events that also provided the state with another opportunity to take stronger action against political extremism. In the spring of 1922, the members of the District 9 National Defence Department of the Association of Awakening Hungarians – despite the government’s measures to disarm various militias in several stages, the Awakening Hungarians were still operating such armed paramilitary units, which were operating practically without any real state control – decided to commit a bomb outrage against the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, a liberal political-social organisation at 76 Dohány Street, presided by opposition liberal MP Vilmos Vázsonyi, thereby killing several people they considered enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent trial of the alleged perpetrators was one of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the ‘bombing trial’ and the ‘Márffy trial’ after the accused number one called József Márffy.²³¹ Unsurprisingly, the name of the Double Cross Blood Union also appears here, and the documents of the criminal trial include one of the most valuable and fundamental archival sources of history of the secret military organisation’s activities. This document is the testimony of the Hungarian Minister of Defence, General Count Károly Csáky.²³²

On 2 April 1922, a bomb exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, killing eight and seriously wounding twenty-three people. Given the extreme political situation of the time, assassinations of Jews and of persons and institutions considered to be pro-Jewish by radical right-wing persons, and the fact that behind them there was the Association of Awakening Hungarians in nearly each cases, and, more specifically, the figures of Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay, the bomb raid of Erzsébetváros was no longer tried alone, but was finally tried in a triple indictment, together with other serious anti-Semitic and anti-Entente crimes:

²³¹ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. József Márffy and his associates’ trial.

²³² *Ibid.*

1. The explosion the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was linked to an attempted pogrom against the Újpest Synagogue, planned by two young individuals associated with the Association of Awakening Hungarians named Tivadar Péter and János Salló, but it was not finally carried out.
2. There was also an attempted bomb attack on the Courts Palace of Koháry Street and the French and Czechoslovak embassies in Budapest, and it was only by luck that these bombs finally did not explode.
3. Liberal newspaper owner and journalist Andor Miklós and Károly Rassay, a liberal politician and member of the Parliament, well-known opposition politicians of the time, were sent packages containing grenades, and it was also only by luck and the vigilance of those present that these bombs did not explode when opening. At the same time, the Headquarters of the Hungarian State Police in Budapest, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the French Embassy received a life-threatening letters signed by unknown people under the name of the 'Committee 101'.

The investigation was personally led by Dr. József Sombor-Schweinitzer, one of the prominent leaders of the political police of the era, and the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest accused the young national defence militiamen on the basis of documents seized from the Awakening Hungarians that the militiamen 'had deviated from the central national defence objectives, prepared anti-social attacks, and sought to make it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by so-called Jewish beatings and bomb raids.'²³³ József Márffy and his associates were also accused of organising a so-called blood court, an internal, arbitrary judiciary body of the organisation, which was to impose death sentence in the event of disobedience, desertion or any acts judged as treason by its members, and József Márffy, in turn, used intimidation and death threats to persuade his accomplices to help him organise and carry out the assassinations. This is however contradicted by the fact that, according to the documents, József Márffy only ordered the establishment of the blood court on 14 April 1923 when many of the crimes charged had already been committed. The political gravity of the case is illustrated by the fact that Minister of Defense General Count Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen were called as witnesses at the main trial. As Károly Csáky

²³³ Ibid.

told in his testimony,²³⁴ after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, during the turbulent civil war, Hungary had no unified regular army, and in addition to the semi-irregular National Army organised by Admiral Miklós Horthy there were about fifty civilian militias operating in Budapest alone. Among these were the national defence units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians. In this chaotic situation, the consolidating new Hungarian Government needed these armed paramilitary units to maintain order, and in 1919–1920 Chief of the General Staff General Béla Berzeviczy tried to bring these militias under the control of the Hungarian Army. Among other things, this led to the creation of the Double Cross Blood Union as an umbrella organisation for the various irregular military formations under the control of the army. In order to preserve the honour of the military, the Minister of Defence also stressed in his testimony that although the various militias were under some military control, the Army had no influence on personnel matters, including the composition of the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians, and the members were not seriously trained and armed by the professional military but they were rather treated as a kind of reserve military force which could be deployed if necessary to restore the very fragile order.²³⁵ According to the Minister's interpretation, they basically had no authority in the legal sense, at most they had arbitrarily authorised themselves to act as an authority, and the members of the various national defence militias were only actually called in one time, on 23 October 1921, during King Charles IV's second attempt to return, and the militiamen mobilised were only given weapons and salary for that short period. After that, the Ministry of Defence no longer needed the various irregular military units. The restoration of the Soviet Republic of Hungary and a possible new communist takeover were no longer a real threat to the Government by 1922, so paramilitary units such as the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians that mostly consisted of radical right-wing young men became superfluous for the consolidating Horthy-Bethlen government and the Kingdom of Hungary which was seeking to settle its good relations with foreign countries after the Trianon Peace Treaty was signed. It was precisely because some of its members had committed serious crimes that the government had to disband the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. By the dissolution of the Double Cross Blood Union, Károly Csáky most probably meant the dissolution and/or

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 457–469.

²³⁵ Tibor ZINNER, *Adatok a szélsőjobboldali egyesületek megalakulásának körülményeihez*, *Történelmi Szemle*, 1979/3-4, 562–576; 566–567.

regularisation of the various paramilitary units and the creation of an auxiliary police force called the earlier mentioned National Labour Protection on their basis. At the time of the bomb outrage Erzsébetváros, the members of the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians of District 9 of Budapest led by József Márffy were already operating as a self-proclaimed civilian militia without any serious military control or instructions, and what they did was done of their own free will.

Prime Minister István Bethlen appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case rather than clearing himself as a private citizen.²³⁶ Namely, József Márffy, in order to show off his own importance and influence, had claimed at an early stage that he was on good personal terms with the incumbent Prime Minister and his family, that he had played tennis with István Bethlen's sons and that he had often travelled in the Prime Minister's car. Bethlen, on the other hand, categorically denied before the court that he or any of his family members knew Márffy even superficially. The Márffy trial, in Tibor Zinner's correct view, was primarily necessitated by foreign pressure for the Hungarian State to demonstrate to the Entente, and especially to France that the revolutionary and civil war years following the First World War were over.²³⁷ The Government wanted to prove that political and social order had been restored, Hungary accepted the territorial losses imposed by the Trianon Peace Treaty, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Nevertheless, we cannot and do not intend to claim that the bomb outrage the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was not organised and carried out by József Márffy and the militiamen of the national defence unit of District 9 of the Awakening Hungarians, as there is a lot of convincing direct and indirect evidence in this case, as the record of the main trial in the first instance testifies. However, it seems highly probable that the other crimes attributed to them were arbitrarily linked to them by the police for political purposes, and the prosecution and the courts also to linked these crimes to the horrific bombing perpetrated by Márffy and his associates under political pressure. Although Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his fellow prisoners who were also sentenced to death were ever really executed. The trial was continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia, and ended up with much lighter sentences.

The Budapest Royal Court of Appeal sentenced József Márffy, the first

²³⁶ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

²³⁷ ZINNER, *Az ébredők fenykora*, 172.

defendant, to 6 years of imprisonment as the main punishment and obliged him to pay 1,500,000 koronas as a subsidiary punishment.

The Royal Supreme Court sitting in third instance, sentenced József Márffy to 8 years of imprisonment as the principal punishment and also obliged him to pay a fine of 1,500,000 koronas as a subsidiary penalty, while the other pleas of nullity were rejected or dismissed.

József Márffy died in 1971 in Kőszeg at the age of 73 as a pensioner.²³⁸ He served most of his prison sentence in the prison of Vác.²³⁹ He was released on parole in 1929 after being diagnosed with severe lung disease. He then settled in Kőszeg where he had family ties, and began a political career. At first he was the local party secretary of the ruling United Party, but later became one of the local leaders of the National Socialist Arrow Cross Party. Márffy never denied his identity or his past in prison, although he never publicly admitted to the acts he had previously been accused of either.

The afterlife of the bomb outrage also includes a propaganda publication in the form of a small booklet by the Associations of the Awakening Hungarians, published by the unknown author under the pseudonym Dr. Benevolus (Dr. Benevolent), entitled *The real perpetrators of the Dohány Street bomb raid*. The author of the publication has not been clearly identified, but we can only suspect László Budaváry, Ferenc Ulain, Mihály Kmoskó or another enthusiastic contemporary leader and propagandist of the far-right mass association. The severely libellous and provocative pamphlet, for which the Awakening Hungarians were granted a distribution licence for only three months, claims nothing less than that it was radical Jews who killed or had killed their own fellows of religion in order to frame the assassination of decent, Christian Hungarians, and that behind the whole Dohány Street bomb raid there was nothing other than a well-organised Zionist conspiracy. As it is typical of the anti-Semitic propaganda literature of the time, this piece of writing begins its own narrative with citing the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, while at the same time it calls on the Jews of Hungary to take action, to join with Associations of the Awakening Hungarians and help Hungary recover from the shameful situation to which their fellow believers had led it through the First World War, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Soviet Republic of Hungary and the

²³⁸ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Halálozás*, Vas Népe, 23 August 1971. Furthermore, the death records in custody of the Vas County Archive of the National Archives of Hungary verify that the man called József Márffy who deceased in 1971 is the same person involved in the bomb trial.

²³⁹ HU-BFL-VII-101-c-figyenc-I-8184. József Márffy's prison record.

Trianon Peace Treaty. The scandalous pamphlet caused outrage among many people and disillusioned many former supporters of the Associations of the Awakening Hungarians.

Chapter - 10

The bomb attack of Csongrád

In addition to the bomb outrage against the Democratic Circle in Erzsébetváros, the bomb attack in Csongrád a little later was another highly publicised terrorist act of the period, also committed by radical right-wing militiamen, presumably under the leadership of First Lieutenant János Piroska. On 26 December 1923, the terrorists threw an explosive device into the ballroom of the Hotel Hungarian King in Csongrád at a charity event organised by the local Jewish Women's Association, killing three people and seriously injuring twenty-five others, while fifteen people were injured only slightly. Other people involved in the attack were First Lieutenant János Piroska's brothers István and György, and certain local farmers János Sági and János Kővári, local militiamen of the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain. János Piroska himself had made the explosive device and had also brought it from Budapest.²⁴⁰

The assassination was carried out by Miklós Bölöni and László Sinkó. During his interrogation, Sinkó defended himself by claiming that First Lieutenant Piroska had told him in a meeting at his apartment that the bomb was only intended to cause alarm, but that its explosive power was not sufficient to kill a human being. Yet he was reluctant to throw it when they appeared outside the Hotel Hungarian King at midnight. Miklós Bölöni then called László Sinkó a coward, who finally lit the fuse of the bomb with his cigarette and threw it into the crowded ballroom. The bomb exploded immediately, killing Julianna Nagyjános, a maid, Sándor Wolff, a university student, and Balázs Farkas, a gypsy violinist. Other people who sustained life-threatening injuries were: Mrs. Gézán Barna, Henrik Barna, Mrs. Henrik Barna, Piroska Barna, Dr. Herman Buk, Margit Buk, Ilonka Buk, József Buk, Mariska Buk, Béla Dékány, Mrs. Mihályng Engel, Mrs. István Fehér, László Grósz, Magda Grósz, Sára Grósz, Lajos Kovács, Lenke Kovács, Aladár Béla Krizsán, István Princz and Mrs. Sándor Dr. Vida.

The Hungarian State Police put a lot of effort into collecting data, soon

²⁴⁰ SERFŐZŐ, op. cit. 98.

caught the perpetrators, and the investigation conducted the next day with the assistance of Jenő Zombori, the Szeged Chief Prosecutor, József Szalay, the District Police Commissioner and Jenő Borbolya, a high-ranking police inspector, and so much material evidence was collected that on 30 December 1923 the perpetrators also confessed. The police also arrested their accomplices, almost the entire local group of the Race-defending Party, 25 young men in all, including László Sinkó, a farmer, Mihály Zubek, a teacher suspended from his job, Sándor Kasztell, a mechanic, Rókus Sági, a farmer, György Piroška, a merchant, Miklós Bölöni, a young man without a job, and Ferenc Forgó, a farmer. Not surprisingly, it turned out that most of the assassins were also members of the Association of Awakening Hungarians. János Piroška was a professional military officer, so his crimes were subject to military justice, and he was handed over to the Budapest Military Court

The increasingly high-profile investigation also involved János Diószeghy, the head of the Public Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior which was the superior organ of the State Police, and it was revealed that the assassins were also all the members of the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain led by Iván Héjjas, and also had close links with the Double Cross Blood Union, the controlling body of the Hungarian militia movement as well.²⁴¹ In the course of the investigation, János Sági was also found to have a letter of appointment from Iván Héjjas appointing him commander of the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain's battalion in Csongrád.²⁴² Héjjas and the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain were therefore also there behind the Csongrád bomb attack, and the Double Cross Blood Union was clearly deeply involved in the case as well.

Minister of Defence General Károly Csáky in order to save the honour of the military, achieved – not for the first time in his career – by creating confusion that First Lieutenant János Piroška should not be considered a professional soldier in the legal sense. The Army argued that First Lieutenant Piroška had previously been the subject of ethical proceedings after he had continued to harass and threaten his former fiancée, who was otherwise of Jewish origin and had broken off her engagement to him, and Piroška had been forced to retire as a result. There were various versions of where János Piroška ended up working, as a teacher of drawing at the College of Fine Arts or the Bocskay Educational Institute, but he was eventually tried as an accused together with his accomplices in a civil court. The case was finally

²⁴¹ Az eset részleges rekonstruálására leginkább Csongrád megye főispánjának iratai alkalmasak. HU-MNL-CSML-IV-401-a-24/1923.

²⁴² SERFŐZŐ, op. cit. 97.

heard by the Royal Court of Szolnok, where one of the counsel for the defendants was Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a leader of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, a race-defending member of the Parliament involved in the above discussed ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’.²⁴³

The main trial of the bomb case took place in the Royal Criminal Court of Szolnok between 17 and 26 September 1924. The defendants spent relatively little time in prison, as they were released on high bail well before the trial. Lawyers Dr. Ferenc Ulain and Dr. István Széchenyi argued the patriotic merits of the defendants, in particular First Lieutenant János Piroška in the establishment of the counter-revolutionary regime, stating that among others it was Piroška who, as a member of the paramilitary unit of Iván Héjjas reorganised the gendarmerie from volunteers in Csongrád after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, and as the local commander of this paramilitary auxiliary police unit had made a major contribution to the restoration of state and social order. In his defence, Dr. Széchenyi went so far as to say that certain prominent members of the local Jewish community, including a certain lawyer, Zoltán Kalmár harboured grievances against First Lieutenant Piroška who had expelled Kalmár from the Csongrád volunteer gendarmerie force at the time because of his indiscipline, drinking and gambling. The defence lawyer also expressed his definite opinion that János Piroška and the members of the local Awakening militia were not anti-Semites, and that the Jewish–Christian conflict was mainly fuelled by the representatives of the Jewish community in Csongrád who had also tried to influence the investigation of the bomb raid against the Hotel Hungarian King in order to shift suspicion to local Christian nationalist political activists.

The accused defended themselves, among other things, by claiming that they had been abused by the police during the investigation, and that this was the only reason why they had confessed earlier. The Royal Criminal Court of Szolnok finally found the witnesses mostly untrustworthy, the investigation insufficiently thorough, the evidence presented insufficiently conclusive and tended to the conclusion that the defendants may have been tortured into confessing during the investigation.²⁴⁴ Consequently in its judgement of 26 September 1924, the Judicial Committee headed by judge Dr. Gyula Fuchs acquitted László Sinkó, Miklós Bölönyi, first degree, and Andor Fülöp, György Piroška, János Piroška, János Sági and Rókus Sági of the charges of three counts of murder and twenty-five counts of attempted murder. It is

²⁴³ Nemzetgyűlési Napló 1922–1926/XVIII., 344–345. Cited: SERFÖZŐ, op. cit. 100.

²⁴⁴ [ANONYMOUS AUTHOR], *Egy felmentő és egy marasztaló ítélet*, Világ, 28 September 1924.

highly likely that influential military and political circles intervened to help the defendants, and the acquittal in this case was not a coincidence in this case either.²⁴⁵

The probable mastermind behind of the Csongrád bomb attack János Piroška, who was a drawing teacher and painter by his civilian profession, later became fully consolidated and started a political career.²⁴⁶ He graduated in law in 1930, became the chief notary and then mayor of Csongrád in 1933, and during his tenure large-scale construction projects were started in the city. In 1945, after the Second World War he was arrested and tried in the People's Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against the people, but was acquitted of all charges.²⁴⁷ Even so, all his family's property and estates were confiscated and they were kept under constant police surveillance. In 1952 János Piroška was also briefly interned in the forced labour camp at Hortobágy.²⁴⁸ In 1956, he took part in the Hungarian Revolution against the occupying Soviet Union, and after the fall of the revolution and war for freedom he was briefly arrested once again. He then retired from public life for ever, spent most of his time with painting, and finally deceased in 1987 at the age of 92. János Piroška lived a very controversial life, and during his political career, he indeed did a great deal for the development of Csongrád. Therefore, today there is a square named after him in his hometown.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ SHVOY, op. cit. 97.

²⁴⁶ Péter ERDÉLYI, *Képviselőtestületi választások 1929-ben Csongrádon*, Múzeumi Kutatások Csongrád Megyében 2003, ed. Péter ERDÉLYI–Judit SZÜCS, Szeged, Móra Ferenc Múzeum, 2002, 119–125.

²⁴⁷ HU-MNL-CSML-XXV-8-5-d-NB-148/1945.

²⁴⁸ Martin GULYÁS, *Az 1945-ös csongrádi földosztás vesztesei*, Emlékeztető, 2016/1–2, 52–68.

²⁴⁹ Attila TÓTH, *Piroška János élete és festészete*, Csongrád, Magánkiadás, 2009.

Chapter - 11

Attempts to disband radical right-wing clandestine organisations and to disarm armed irregular military formations

For the Bethlen Government which was striving for consolidation in domestic and foreign policy as well, the bomb raid of Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which caused a great outcry and claimed the lives of three people was one of the last drops in the glass. Bethlen promised at the parliament on 3 January 1924 that he would personally interrogate paramilitary commander Iván Héjjas about the Csongrád bomb outrage among other things, and if his responsibility was to be found, he would be treated in the same way as anyone else.²⁵⁰ Héjjas was also interrogated by the police in connection with the Csongrád bomb explosion and the conspiracies of nationalist secret societies and paramilitary groups in general, in the presence of the National Police Commissioner Imre Nádosy himself, but in the end it was not proven that he was personally involved in any criminal activity.²⁵¹ Of course, this was certainly nothing more than a bargain between the paramilitary commander and the Government, possibly including Regent Governor Miklós Horthy himself.²⁵² Besides Horthy, Gyula Gömbös, who later, in 1932 became Prime Minister of Hungary, must have played a major role in the fact that Héjjas was never brought to trial during the Horthy Era, and was never seriously prosecuted for the acts committed by him and others under his command, even though his crimes were obvious to many people.²⁵³ The example of Iván Héjjas described earlier tells us a great deal about the relationship between radical irredentist-nationalist associations, secret societies and the paramilitary units with countless links to them and the Hungarian Government. Not only did the former paramilitary commander not have to answer for his actions before the judiciary system, but he later received Vitéz's title,²⁵⁴ a kind of specific

²⁵⁰ Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–1926/XVIII, 337–338. Lajos SERFÖZŐ, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, 36.

²⁵¹ SERFÖZŐ, op. cit. 36.

²⁵² BODÓ, op. cit.

²⁵³ BODÓ, op. cit.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Hungarian knighthood that provided certain social advantages, earned a doctorate in law for his book on aviation law, became a member of Parliament and was later a well-paid and respected official of the Hungarian State. Iván Héjjas's and Gyula Gömbös's examples also illustrate well how (in the 1920s fairly) young, ambitious military officers could quickly become influential politicians of the radical right, rising to the level of the Hungarian political elite.

Of all the paramilitary commanders who shared a common past and common crimes, and once practiced formidable power, it was Pál Prónay who was the most unable to achieve any kind of consolidation. Because of his failure to show sufficient loyalty to the Regent Governor on the occasion of King Charles IV's second attempt of return, and because the brutal activities of his detachment, his arbitrary assassinations and adventurer-like political actions he became increasingly burdensome for the Bethlen Government,²⁵⁵ and he was eventually forced to retire, become sidelined, and was also expelled from the Union of Etelköz, the pro-government political secret society of the era.²⁵⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Prónay, a nobleman and the member of one of the ancient landowner noble families of Hungary, who was practically by birth a member of the social and political elite, is, on the other hand a good counter-example how someone could gradually lose his elite status due to his extreme radicalism.²⁵⁷ Prónay originally, in the beginning of the right-wing counter-revolution, perhaps had the good chance to rise among the most senior military officers (he could have easily reached the rank of General or might have become Minister of Defence as well) with the support of Admiral Horthy if he had had the capability of consolidating and moderating himself to some degree. However, due to his extreme radicalism and brutality, he could not fit into the consolidated political system of Prime Minister Bethlen at all, so he quickly lost his influence and became a marginal figure in the radical right.

In the spirit of consolidation, the paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Héjjas Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain and other armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians were then essentially disarmed and regularised, and their law enforcement and military powers which could be traced back to the turbulent civil war, were definitely and unequivocally abolished. At the same time, a paramilitary organisation, the Office of

²⁵⁵ Péter KONOK, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban*, 84.

²⁵⁶ PRÓNAY, op. cit 322–324.

²⁵⁷ On Prónay's political downfall see: BODÓ, *Pál Prónay. Paramilitary Violence and Antisemitism in Hungary, 1919–1921*.

National Labour Protection was set up under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, primarily to break strikes and labour movement organisations. It was a kind of white, right-wing volunteer workers' militia whose members were equipped with handguns and had the same powers of action and use of weapons were the same as those of the police, but it was rather an auxiliary police rather than a military force.²⁵⁸ The majority of its members practiced their civilian professions, but occasionally were called into duty.

The Brigade of the Plain, the State Security Agents and the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians were also integrated into this organisation, so they were under much more serious government control, but could essentially continue to operate.²⁵⁹ The Double Cross Blood Union also continued its activities within the framework of the National Labour Protection, but it is interesting to note that General Kálmán Shvoy wrote in his diary that the DCBU was founded under this name in 1923, as a kind of successor organisation to the Brigade of the Great Plain led by Iván Héjjas, and that it allegedly continued its activities under the codename *Fő tartalék – Main Reserve*²⁶⁰ as a secret special operations military unit, formally within the Ministry of the Interior and the National Labour Protection, but in reality subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. Shvoy thus dates the genesis of the organisation itself to this period, to the end of 1923. This is evidently a mistake made by the General, since the Double Cross Blood Union really ceased to exist under its former name by 1923–1924. There is also an archival source about the integration of the DCBU into the Office of National Labour Protection: a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 which forbids the members of the National Labour Protection to refer to the new strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the 'Double Cross Blood Union' even among themselves, as it is associated with rather bad public memories.²⁶¹ The National Labour Protection was a strike-breaking auxiliary police force and a de facto covert military reserve force at the same time. Although it obviously had no significant combat value, its tens of thousands of members who were otherwise civilians in their daily occupations, but who owned firearms and were trained and could be mobilised to a certain extent, made a significant contribution to circumvention of the serious military restrictions imposed by the Trianon

²⁵⁸ HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010; 5.818. M. E. számú rendelet a nemzeti munkavédelmi intézmény fegyverhasználati jogáról, 1923. augusztus 2., Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1923, 274.

²⁵⁹ DÓSA, op. cit. 151–152.

²⁶⁰ *Csak szolgálati használatra! Iratok a Horthy-hadsereg történetéhez, 1919–1938*, ed. Tibor HETÉS–Tamásné MORVA, Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1968, 499–500.

²⁶¹ HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.

Peace Treaty. In this way, it also helped to pacify the former (in some cases irregular) soldiers of the National Army, which had once numbered over 100,000 and was reduced to a maximum of 35,000 after 1921. In this strange, voluntary auxiliary police and reserve military status many people still felt useful and being in the service of the state. That is, the Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement thus continued to exist partly within the framework of this organisation, in a, so to say, domesticated form.²⁶²

The testimony of General Count Károly Csáky, Minister of Defence in the bombing trial of József Márffy and his associates, one of the most important archival documents of the history of the Double Cross Blood Union already cited earlier also testifies that the DCBU was established after the fall of the Soviet Republic with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations operating in the capital and the countryside under unified (state and military) control in order to restore the order, presumably sometime around 1919-1920, on the initiative of General Béla Berzeviczy, Chief of General Staff. It was then dissolved in 1923 in the form in which it had previously operated, and Minister Csáky presumably means the integration of the DCBU into the National Labour Protection which officially took place towards the end of 1922, but in practice perhaps it happened somewhat later, in several steps.²⁶³

In parallel with the integration of the different militias into the National Labour Protection, the Government Decree No. 7502 of 19 October 1923 prohibited the participation of state employees, including members of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies to be members in associations whose activities were against or incompatible with the lawful order of the state, or which did not have a constitution approved by the Minister of the Interior. That is, it was essentially the membership in secret societies that become prohibited for state employees.²⁶⁴ In reality, of course, it was still not easy for the state to check – if it really wanted to check in the case of right-wing, pro-government organisations – who was a member of what kind of association or with whom, how and for what purposes cooperated, especially if the given secret organisation produced no written documents for conspiratorial reasons. In this way, although the Double Cross Blood Union officially ceased to exist in 1923, its members, in some form, were still partly in the service of the state, and they could continue their activities to achieve the goals which they thought to be patriotic...

²⁶² DÓSA, op. cit. 134.

²⁶³ HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

²⁶⁴ Budapesti Közlöny, 24 October 1923.

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