

FOREWORD

The politics of Budapest between the two wars show the nascent hope that Hungary, significantly crippled by the Peace Treaty of Trianon, could find suitable consideration in the plans of the European powers. It would seem that this assumption was evident in the relationship between Admiral Horthy's Hungary and Fascist Italy. One of the reasons for this was the long-standing reliance that Mussolini placed on "revisionism" as a political tool for creating a Danubian hegemony. This concept proved to be the source of considerable misunderstanding between the two countries.

György Réti, the highly competent Hungarian historian, combines his historical expertise with the experiences of a successful diplomatic career when he examines Hungarian-Italian political relations at their most complex period, namely from the beginning of the 1930s to the outbreak of World War II. He offers significant documentation from the Hungarian and Italian archives together with material from the most recent publications thereby making a valuable contribution to the integration of previous research.

The research of Réti demonstrates clearly that during this period the Italian government was "interested" in Hungary but this did not mean the tight and cordial alliance that the Hungarian government would have liked to see.

It did indeed appear in 1932 that Italian foreign policy, directed personally by Mussolini after Count Dino Grandi's resignation, would produce a turning point in the political and economic status of the Danube Basin and of the Balkans. At the same time, there was an increasing chance that the growing German dynamism would gradually displace Italy from this area where it had been so influential during the previous decade.

At the onset of the Great Depression the traditional conservatism of Italian capitalists became manifest by their reluctance to make investments abroad. The same reluctance to consider any outside financial assistance or planning characterized Italian banking as well. It was not a coincidence that the Banca d'Italia's participation in the consortium established to assist Hungary came about only after considerable political pressure was brought to bear. Italian banking and industrial circles viewed Hungary with considerable misgivings in view of the traditional instability of the area.

"Revisionism" meant something quite different in Rome than in Budapest where the Gömbös government coming to power meant a new era in Hungary's relationship with her antirevisionist neighbors. It is evident that the relationships were not the same as during the days of the Bethlen-Mussolini alliance. Nevertheless, there was still substantial agreement on a number of international issues, such as the Disarmament Conference. In this area it was essential that Italy support Hungarian rearmament and Hungary's achieving "equal rights" for which the Hungarian government was striving and which Italy considered to be "a modest and rightful" demand. Gyula Gömbös's policies went beyond the bipartite ideas and envisioned a close cooperation between Italy, Germany and Hungary that could determine Central-European policies, while at the same time keeping German expansion toward the Danube Basin under control. Such expansion was a poorly concealed, frightening and oppressive reality.

Réti's work leads to the inescapable conclusion that the Hungarian politician who more than any others viewed the Duce more as a model, eventually came into conflict with Mussolini's policies when he realized that Mussolini viewed Italian-Austrian-Hungarian cooperation as the basis for Italy's political and economic hegemony in the region. In fact, as soon as Gömbös was appointed, he declared that Italian and Hungarian interests coincided in protecting Austria's integrity against the German intentions.

The Rome Protocols, signed in March 1934, strengthened Mussolini's intentions without placing Hungary into the favorable position that Gömbös wanted and hoped to achieve in the future.

So far as Mussolini was concerned, a customs union and favorable tariffs for goods between the three countries was only a tool to

convince the nations of the Little Entente that it was essential for them to align with the only major power that could guarantee stability and could block German economic pressures. The subsequent tripartite meetings were held as an outcome of the above protocols and in order to strengthen cooperation among the three countries in all areas, from the political ones to any others affecting the Danube Basin. There were new meetings and new protocols, but these were not “life enhancing” documents for this area of Europe, which was struggling with profound internal problems. The protocols of 1936 and 1938 only further illustrated this impotence.

So far as the future of Hungary was concerned, signing the economic agreement between Budapest and Berlin at this time was of far greater importance than a similar document signed later between Budapest and Rome. Economics became an increasingly determinant weapon in changing the center of gravity of this region and in becoming a major force in effective control. Future research should try to show the importance of this matter by integrating political and economic dimensions.

Gömbös's endeavors to achieve his goals were not made any easier by the fact that he tried to play both the Italian and the German side simultaneously, as is shown clearly by some of the Italian documents. There were significant differences in opinion between Rome and Budapest even though they were united in their opposition to the French policy of Foreign Secretary Louis Barthou, which had led to the agreement between Paris and Moscow. Budapest and Rome were also united in their opposition to the countries of the Little Entente, particularly Yugoslavia. The antagonism against the latter became sharply accentuated after the Marseilles murders.

Even though Gömbös might not have fully understood that Mussolini no longer regarded revisionism as a cause in and of itself but was thinking along more elevated lines including economic matters, the relationship between the two countries was certainly not improved by Hungary's refusal to go along with Mussolini's recommendation for a European directorate within the quadripartite pact. The difficulties facing Hungarian diplomacy were further compounded since Hungary was accused by the Germans of being too friendly toward Italy and by the Italians of being too willing to side with the Germans.

It is also essential to consider the complex personality of the Hungarian statesman when we talk about his relationships with Italy and with Mussolini. Amadeo Giannini, the noted Italian historian, in one of his "Profiles of Political Personalities," published in the July-September 1936 issue of the *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, emphasized that Gömbös believed in tripartite cooperation and "frequently visited Vienna and Rome to sustain and support it. He was aided in these efforts by the support of the Hungarian people that he enjoyed and by the confidence he had in Dollfuss and Schuschnigg and, even more so, in Mussolini." A study of Hungarian documents may slightly alter the veracity of this statement, but does certainly not negate it.

The ambiguity of the Hungarian-Italian relationship did not change appreciably even during the period following the Gömbös government. The period of the Ethiopian war and of the League of Nations sanctions was also not free of frictions, as shown in the Italian documents. This was particularly true during that brief period of time when Hungary's attitude concerning the sanctions was somewhat ambiguous. The African conflict significantly reduced Italy's ability to maneuver in Central and Southern Europe.

Another reason for the "cooling" of the bilateral Rome-Budapest relationship appeared when Rome made advances toward Belgrade. This was one of the facts that led, as a response, to Budapest's increased attention to German politics. It was obvious that this was a matter to be reckoned with in the future, but it did widen the chasm in the Hungarian domestic politics.

Agreement between Rome and Budapest was not entirely complete and cloudless on the complex and controversial matter of the Danube pact that was one of Mussolini's cherished ideas. This may be a matter worthy of careful study.

Mussolini's general policy consisted of avoiding all specific and concrete agreements and this was entirely contrary to the ideas of Gömbös who wanted such agreements in order to preserve the Danube-Balkan equilibrium. This state of affairs prevailed until 1936 when the appointment of Galeazzo Ciano as Italian minister of foreign affairs brought a marked change to the bilateral relationship. Réti points out that Italy had lost interest in the role Hungary was to

play and, at the same time, Mussolini began to relent his intransigent stance regarding the Anschluss. The author also points out that in the transitional period Gömbös tried to gain advantages for Hungary by being the balance wheel between Rome and Berlin. It was no longer a matter of blocking any German advance toward the Danube Basin, but rather, how cooperation with Germany could be used in revising Hungary's attitude vis-à-vis the Little Entente and the French influence. It was also the time to beat the drum loudly for the never quiescent demands for revision.

Gömbös had a very difficult political heritage even though the German-Italian Axis neared realization at a time when Ciano's foreign policy became increasingly dubious so far as Hungary was concerned. Incidentally, it was Gömbös who coined the term "Axis" for the Italian-German understanding and the arrangement was a real triumph for him.

During the successive Darányi, Imrédy and Teleki governments Budapest's concerns about the slackening Italian interest took on a new dimension relative to the possible understanding between the Axis powers and countries opposed to Hungary. The March 1937 agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia was clearly a straw in this wind. It was the Spanish Civil War that raised Hungary's hopes of again becoming a major player. The pages of Réti's monograph list ample evidence about the Hungarian government's hesitations vis-à-vis Italian policies while the Hitlerian threat continued to grow.

For both Pál Teleki and for his Minister of Foreign Affairs István Csáky, Italy became a key factor. The policy of these two statesmen, described in the monograph, confirms the findings in another very successful "profile" by Amadeo Giannini, published in the July-September 1941 issue of the *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*. In this study the virtues of both statesmen are highlighted, particularly the shining and deeply felt consistency of Teleki, who chose death rather than participating in Hitler's aggression against Yugoslavia.

The fateful Anschluss, taking place in March 1938, had a major effect on subsequent events and Réti clearly shows these important relationships. Budapest noticeably adapted to the German point of view and accepted Berlin's policies as the starting point and key to its revisionist endeavors. This was to be directed primarily against Czechoslo-

vakia, in harmony with Hitler's first steps along the road eventually leading to Munich and to the thorough upheaval in the Danubian-Balkan relationships. These endeavors instituted by Budapest were based on the fear that if Hungary did not participate in Hitler's aggressions, it might become his victim.

There remained only a few remnants of the "barrier" that Mussolini wished to erect as a joint effort between Rome, Budapest, Warsaw and Belgrade. This "barrier" was supposed to put a halt to German political and economic advances toward the southeast. The plans of Rome that tried to bring Hungarian policies into harmony with its own interests and with the other nations of the region also slipped into the shade. Consequently, the dynamics of Hungarian politics were forced to conform to Germany's much broader and much more threatening goals. This was a most dubious endeavor that was brought to fruition, after the Munich Conference, with the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. As is well known, Budapest participated in phase two of this regrettable event.

The beginning of 1939 brought a very significant period of transition toward the forthcoming events, when the anti-Soviet spirit became important in Hungarian political thinking and the fear of Germany continued to grow. An important part of the monograph is devoted to 1939 and shows very clearly that the above factors profoundly affected the Italian-Hungarian relationship and produced a new type of cooperation between the two countries, quite different from those of the previous years. Arresting or at least limiting German economic and commercial penetration into the Balkans and into Central Europe became the common goal. Unfortunately German advances were so forceful that Budapest was totally unable to escape their effects. The possibility of an alternative solution, based on an Italian-Hungarian joint endeavor, gradually but unalterably disappeared when the subordinate role of Italy was made manifest by Hitler's unexpected and unannounced initiatives. These terrible months should have united Italy and Hungary and strengthened their position as negotiating partners. This did not happen, as can be learned from a careful examination of Teleki's April 1939 visit to Rome and from the description of the ensuing pilgrimages made by Hungarian politicians to the Italian capital.

During his visit to Italy, Teleki had the opportunity to express his admiration for the country and for its culture, when he met his great friend and fellow geographer and geologist Giotto Dainelli. This encounter compensated him for the coolness with which Mussolini and Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano treated him. I have addressed this matter in a presentation to the Hungarian Academy in Rome, on June 20, 1994, at a conference dedicated to the *Rivista di Studi Politici Inter-nazionali*.

The conquest of Albania and the Axis pact were additional negative factors for Hungary and there developed an inevitable internal contradiction between the fear of becoming a satellite of Germany and the fear that her revisionist hopes would remain unfulfilled. Teleki's letters to Mussolini clearly show the conflict between the desire to participate with Germany in the reorganization of Europe and the feeling of complete helplessness.

For Berlin, Hungary was truly a vassal state that was not allowed to cause any trouble in the Danube region. It had to curb its demands particularly vis-à-vis Romania's Transylvania, since an ethnical-territorial conflict in that area was the very last thing that the Axis powers wanted to see. Such a conflict might have demanded a direct intervention in an area that the Axis powers wished to remain rock-stable, regardless of whatever differences might have arisen between the German and Italian interests.

Even though Hungary increasingly censured the uncertainties and ambiguities of the Romanian policies, the Hungarian government was deeply concerned about the possibility of German troops crossing Hungary for the defense of the Romanian oil fields that had become critical for the German economy.

Réti makes it perfectly clear. The refusal to grant permission for troop movements across Hungary proved that Hungary could not be considered an ally of the Axis. Ciano's repeated requests for restraint toward Romania in the matter of Transylvania, particularly when the Soviet threats about Bessarabia emerged, brought to the surface the lasting conflicts of interest that coerced Hungary to criticize the Italian government for not participating with Germany in the reorganization of the Danube Basin. It is evident that the Hungarian leadership wished to see equal participation of Germany and Italy in the affairs

of the Danube Basin in order to prevent the preponderance of Germany in the area.

The plan for a neutral bloc illuminates this matter. Italy would have had to act unilaterally in this area and when Budapest realized the complete absence of an Italian autonomy it drew the necessary conclusions.

The outbreak of the European conflict reinforced the differences between the points of view of the two countries and increased the misunderstandings between Italy and Hungary. This is shown by the hope Hungary maintained, believing that Italy would help should Germany decide to invade Hungary on its way toward the Romanian oil fields.

Ciano's urging and advising that Hungary refrain from overstepping the boundaries of caution concerning Transylvania was an indication of Rome's unease. Italy felt that its position was being undermined by countries it considered second-class and that even the tentative plans about Yugoslavia were negated by German "supervision." It was well known in Budapest that Italy's increasing subservience to German policies increased Hungary's isolation and vulnerability.

Mussolini's lack of interest in Budapest's demands could not have been more evident. It was obvious that his interests were purely economic and commercial but even these were increasingly curtailed by the aggressive German policy directed toward acquiring Hungarian raw materials. This was demonstrated by the Second Vienna Award. At the end of August 1940, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Ciano arbitrarily decided that, subsequent to the threatening Soviet ultimatum about Bessarabia, the stability of the Danube Basin could be preserved only by a division of Transylvania that left both Hungary and Romania dissatisfied. Independent, bilateral relationships were no longer a consideration.

Italy seemed to abdicate its responsibility of supervising the proper implementation of the Second Vienna Award, acted with indifference and more as though she was bound by German initiatives. She stood idly in the middle while Hungary and Romania accused each other of violating the rules of the game. It was strange, but the Italian government had to suffer the recriminations of Budapest, as

seen in the letter from Horthy to Mussolini in October 1940. Italy was accused of undermining the revisionist efforts when, in fact, she prided herself of being the primary mover of those efforts. Signing the Berlin Tripartite Pact was a manifestation of the inevitability of the Horthy regime being forced into following extreme nationalist policies.

Shall we draw up a balance? It is certain that Mussolini contributed more to the strengthening of the Hungarian illusions and to their eventual failure than anybody else. But Budapest also committed a grave error, proven by Hungarian documents, when it placed too much confidence in the possibilities offered by Italian Fascism and in its intent of making Hungary into a regional power, almost equivalent to the Axis powers.

The numerous documents, letters, memoranda and notes, sent with feverish frequency to Rome, could not allay the mistrust generated by the dangerous irredentism raising the question of the "New Order" in the Danubian-Balkan area well before it fit in with Hitler's plans for the region. It is the major triumph of Réti's book that it follows the motives and consequences of Italy's political failures, which were unable to gather the fruits of the "paternal protection" of Hungarian irredentism, sown during the 1920s and 1930s. The reason for this failure was that Italy lacked the strength to establish her hegemony in the Danube Basin although she kept boasting about it in flowery speeches. It must also be noted, as shown in the book, that Hungarian policy, having the reduction of the injustices imposed by Trianon as its primary goal, made no effort to ascertain that the price it demanded from Mussolini was more than he could afford, in spite of the fact that he was hostile to the countries of the Little Entente. When Germany made its insolent appearance in the Danube Basin, the true magnitude of Mussolini's impotence became manifest.

Reading Réti's work furnishes additional details of the development of the Italian-Hungarian relationship, in the shadow of Berlin. The work views the events in a light hitherto absent in Italian historical writings. It also makes it possible to study the complex personalities of the principal actors of the period. This is particularly true of the Hungarian leaders, primarily Gömbös and the Teleki-Csáky duo, whose policies were consistently characterized by an irrational confidence in the possibilities offered by Italy. The fact that Réti could

grasp the sentiments that resisted the hostile assessments of international politics until the bitter end when both Italy and Hungary were swept away in the crisis of the Hitlerian system is one of the features that make Réti's undertaking most valuable.

Having read the work, the question remains whether the Italian-Hungarian relationships of the period, studied so carefully by Réti, truly exhausted all historical and cultural possibilities or not. The answer is obviously, no.

In the policies of Bethlen, Gömbös, Teleki and even Admiral Horthy, beyond the confidence placed in Mussolini, there is an echo of a much older political and cultural friendship that dates back to the nineteenth century battles that both countries fought for their national identity and that are hallmarked by the names of Giuseppe Mazzini and Lajos Kossuth, Giuseppe Garibaldi and István Türr. This was a friendship forged in a fight against a common oppressor, in a shining period of history when Hungary played a particularly important role in fulfilling the mission of civilization against the alien populations of the Habsburg and Turkish empires. This was a joint asset and such a feeling of sympathy that was inseparable from the rise of nations and from the renaissance of countries.

The two countries followed a parallel pathway, even though there were substantial differences, as was pointed out by the great friend of Hungarian culture, Giovanni Spadolini in his speech in Budapest, on May 27, 1994 when he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Loránd Eötvös University. Spadolini said, "While in Italy the liberal revolution was tightly linked with national unity, in Hungary the national movement was handicapped by the problems of the national minorities." Yet, at the end, "both countries represented the European Idea that made Country and Democracy into an inseparable unit and set ideals as their goal for which we have to fight even today." Spadolini concluded by saying, "Behold! The European Ideal is the only one that can reduce the vehemence of existing conflicts and prevent the outbreak of new ones. It is the only one that makes our firm commitment to the philosophy of democracy possible. Placing this ideal alongside the fate of the two countries, oppressed throughout the centuries, gives us a hopeful indication of the coming of a truly free and united Europe."

In spite of the common heritage, the relationships between the two countries during the period under study were seriously affected by the dubious “Realpolitik” and by the subservience to goals that did not serve the best interests of freedom. Yet, reverting fully to the values of their common heritage, Italy and Hungary may again play an important part in the “New Europe” emerging from such troubled birth.

Giuseppe Vedovato

PREFACE

This work was prepared according to the methods of comparative diplomatic history. This means that in the discussion of the Hungarian-Italian diplomatic contacts an attempt is made to compare the Italian and the Hungarian points of view on every debated issue and to analyze the similarities and differences between the two points of view and the reasons for same.

It is only natural that, dealing with the cooperation of two regimes sharing ideologies and interests, similarities of points of view dominated almost every instance and disagreements were relatively rare. Consequently, both the Italian and Hungarian documents are not always identified in every case, but when the points of view coincided, only the set of documents is referred to, which show more clearly the common view. Documents from both countries are analyzed only when their contents conflict with each other or when they are complementary to each other.

As seen from the notes this volume, a large number of monographs and other documents were used in the preparation of this material. Yet primarily the sources are the documents found in the Italian and Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives. The reader will find a large number of quotes, perhaps more than usual in historiography works. I realize that this makes the text more complex, but I have accepted the odium of this approach in order to illustrate the style of the period under study but, more importantly, to increase the value of this work as a source of information.

The nature, virtues and trespasses of Italian and Hungarian society between the two World Wars has been a matter of vigorous debate in the historical works of both countries and will continue to be such.

This prognosis is perhaps more applicable to Hungarian historiography since the end of the state socialist system in 1989 surely demands the review of a number of semantic matters and many preconceptions. It cannot be the duty of this work to give a universally applicable assessment of the Horthy regime and its prominent personalities. At the same time, I hope that, by presenting and evaluating one of the principal directions of Hungarian foreign policy, this work may serve to provide useful information for future discussions.

As I present the results of thirty years of labor, I would like to express my grateful thanks to István Diószegi, Aladár Kis, Emil Niederhauser, Pál Pritz and Ágnes Szabó. I also wish to thank the Russian Professors Andrey Pushkash and Nina Smirnova and the Italian Professors Renato Grispo, Pietro Pastorelli, Enrico Serra and Giovanni Spadolini. I am also indebted to the staff of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the Hungarian National Archives and of the Historical Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their many kindnesses. The merits of the work are due to them, the shortcomings are the exclusive responsibility of the author.

Very special thanks and gratitude are due Giuseppe Vedovato, the eminent Italian politician and political expert who honored my work with an outstanding introduction and who published several segments of it in that prominent periodical that he has edited for more than six decades, the *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*.

Grateful appreciation is due to Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen D. Hiltabidle for their expert translation from the Hungarian. I am indebted to my wife and to my son without whose love and patient understanding this work would have never seen the light of day.

I dedicate this work to the memory of my father, László Réti, also a historian, who was its most diligent reader and reviewer. He languished for almost six years in the prisons of the Horthy regime and it is thus readily comprehensible that my intellectual development was not sympathetic toward this system or toward Italian Fascism. Yet, in spite of this, I have tried to be objective and to write "the truth and nothing but the truth."

INTRODUCTION

After World War I Hungary lost almost two thirds of its area and nearly one third of its population. This fact has damaged the relationship between Hungary and its neighbors and traumatized Hungarian political thought to this day.

The Horthy regime, coming to power after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, made the revision of the Peace Treaty of Trianon its principal goal. C. A. Macartney, the expert analyst of Hungarian history, wrote the following thoughtful description, at the beginning of the 1930s, about the variously pervasive revisionist demands characterizing Hungarian society:

Some sections of Hungarian opinion concentrate their efforts on, and would be satisfied with, a revision of the Treaty on ethnographic lines; others demand the larger revision, with restoration of something approximating to the old frontiers, but are prepared to read just the relationships which used to prevail between the Magyars and the nationalities; while a few of the old guard appear to have forgotten nothing and have learned nothing from the old struggles and old failures. These divergencies may become important in the future; but for the present they are insignificant compared with the community of conviction that the present frontiers are unjust and intolerable.

Being too weak to attain her objects through her own resources, Hungary must naturally seek for allies.¹

Among the victors of World War I only Italy could be considered as a potential ally. Italy became a united country only in 1861 and its principal foreign policy dilemma arose from the fact that it was too late

for the distribution of colonies and this affected its standing and influence as a major power. It is true that changing sides in 1915 aligned its side with the victors in World War I, but it did not get the colonies and the area in the Balkans that were promised to it for entering the war on the side of the Allies. Consequently Italy was viewed by her people as a “disabled victor” even though the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the defeat of Germany and the internal struggles of the Soviet Union, made Italy, after France, the most powerful nation on the Continent until the middle of the 1930s. Mussolini’s revisionism was based on these precedents and had as its goal the Mediterranean Basin and the Balkans.²

An endeavor to change the European status quo was thus an identical foreign policy goal of both Italy and Hungary. Yet in the 1920s those powers controlled Europe that had created the Versailles system and were committed to its preservation. Consequently the revisionist endeavors of Hungary collided with the militarily and economically stronger bloc of Little Entente countries, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, that had the support of both France and Great Britain. The Little Entente, with French support, was also the barrier for the increase of Italian influence in the Danube Basin and in the Balkans. Hence, disrupting the unity of the Little Entente became an important feature of both Italian and Hungarian foreign policy. The road toward this goal was different for the two countries. In the mid 1920s Italy tried to improve its relationship with Romania, while Hungary tried to accomplish the same with Yugoslavia, the greatest obstacle to Italy’s entry into this area.

The Italian-Hungarian rapprochement was facilitated by relationships going back for almost a thousand years and by the revisionist endeavors characterizing the foreign policy of both countries. It was made more difficult by the fact that after World War I, Hungary had a right-wing government while Italy came under Liberal rule.³ When Mussolini came to power the situation changed. Even before the 1922 March on Rome, the leader of Italian Fascism promised visiting representatives of the right-radical organization, “Ébredő Magyarok” (Awakening Hungarians), that he would support the cause of Hungarian revision.⁴

The first significant political triumph of the internationally isolated Hungarian government was the Italian-Hungarian Friendship

Treaty, signed by Bethlen and Mussolini in Rome on April 5, 1927. This treaty sealed the cooperation of the two right-wing European regimes that worked against the European status quo of the day.⁵ By signing the treaty, Italy wished to increase its influence in the Danube Basin, wished to sabotage the ongoing discussions between Hungary and Yugoslavia and wished to secure the support of the Hungarian government against Yugoslavia and the other Balkan countries in her fight for the control of the Adriatic Sea. The primary goal the Hungarian government had in signing the treaty was to escape from suffocating diplomatic isolation and to secure Italy's support in its demand for revision. The Hungarian establishment believed that these demands could be achieved mainly by military means. Hence their primary goal was the rearmament of Hungary, which was forbidden by the Peace Treaty of Trianon.

During the negotiations preceding the signing of the treaty Mussolini and Bethlen agreed on a joint policy to be followed vis-à-vis the Little Entente countries and also on the matter of Hungary's rearmament. Mussolini agreed to transfer to Hungary the weapons taken from the Austro-Hungarian forces during World War I.⁶ From then on, Italy actively participated in the covert rearmament of Hungary. This became known in January 1928, in the so-called St. Gotthard incident, when a secret Italian arms shipment, destined for Hungary, was discovered on the Austrian border. The Hungarian-Italian treaty and the above incident undoubtedly increased the cohesion of the Little Entente countries and further aggravated the relationships between Hungary and her neighbors.

The witty and telling words of Gyula Juhász accurately describe the significance and the consequences of the 1927 Italian-Hungarian Treaty:

From that time on, Italian orientation was prominent in Hungary's foreign policy until, in the flaming light of the world conflagration, it became clear that only in the distorting mirror of European power relations in the interwar years did Italy seem to be a serious power factor, and that Mussolini's strength was just like that of a circus athlete who cheated his spectators by lifting papier-maché dumbbells made to appear solid iron weights. With the Italo-Hungarian treaty, the Hungarian ruling quarters set out to create new alliances, on which they could build their revisionist

plans, and which linked Hungary's foreign policy to the most aggressive Powers in Europe.⁷

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the Hungarian-Italian relations from the time Gyula Gömbös came to power until the signing of the Tripartite Pact in 1940. I have selected this particular period since it was undoubtedly the most intensive period of cooperation between the Horthy regime and Fascist Italy.

Since the principal topic of this study is the evolution of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Hungary, the other relations between the two countries, such as economic, cultural, etc., are discussed only briefly or not at all. For the same reason the relations of the two countries with other nations are discussed only if this reflected on the principal topic. The study deals extensively with the Hungarian-German and Italian-German relations. The reason for this is that the Hungarian and Italian establishments realized that changing the European status quo would be possible only by cooperating with Hitler's Germany. Hence the relationships with Nazi Germany became a central issue in the Hungarian-Italian cooperation from the second half of the 1930s on. This study follows the gradual submission of the Hungarian-Italian interests to the interests of the Nazi Germany.