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## Charles IV's attempted returns to the Hungarian throne\*

Baron Karl von Werkmann, an intimate adviser of Emperor Charles and the first chronicler of his Restoration attempts, wrote in 1923: *The attempts of dethroned princes to recover their kingdoms have almost always been unfairly judged. The story is generally written by someone who is unacquainted with the minds of kings. Historians do not come from families whose ancestors were to decide the fate of peoples and who looked upon their task as divine obligation and the preservation of the lawful heritage of their own dynasties*<sup>1</sup>. Rather than claiming to be a judge myself, I am merely making an attempt to summarise a series of events.

### INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

In the rather uncertain post-war international situation (between 1918 and 1923) practically every European state – and nation – tried to fish in troubled waters. Victorious powers like Poland and Italy, as well as defeated Turkey decided not to stop on the frontiers the peace treaties assigned to them. Instead, they occupied or recovered territories: Poland annexed parts of Lithuania, the Ukraine, and Belarus, Italy took Fiume (Rijeka) and Corfu (Kerkyra), and Turkey re-entered the war for Little Asia and the control over the Straits with the eventual consent of the Allied Powers. Others – Romania, Yugoslavia and Hungary – were reluctant to withdraw their troops and held provinces under their command long after they should have been evacuated. Monarchs fell, others (re-)established themselves, governments were formed and ousted soon after, and revolutions and ‘coups’ were on the agenda. Large territories as well as entire provinces were annexed on the basis of treaties, armed occupations, or referenda.

In Central and Eastern Europe – where most of these large-scale changes took place, and people were brought under foreign rule or forced to leave their homelands by the millions – the collapse of Great Powers and the lack of their influence was particularly strongly felt. The place of the ‘fallen giants’ – Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey – was to be occupied by the victors; among these Italy and France were the most ambitious. They intensively sought the means to economic and political influence in a region which longed for capital and trade, foreign relations, and guidance.

Great Britain, faithful to her one-time ‘splendid isolation’, tried to return to the policy of a continental balance of power. Germany and Soviet-Russia, outcast and unable to run a dynamic foreign policy, concentrated on internal consolidation. In and around the Carpathian Basin an instinctive new political alliance was in the making, the so-called Little Entente, whose member states – Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania – were all interested in supporting and strengthening the status quo created by the Paris peace treaties and suppressing any possible challenge to it. The patronage of this group, initially given by Italy, was soon to be taken over by France, which used it as an auxiliary to her alliance system which was composed of Poland, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

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\* I am indebted to the János Bolyai Scholarship which facilitated my research on relations between Hungary and the League of Nations.

<sup>1</sup> Karl WERKMANN, *A madeirai halott* [The dead man of Madeira]. München 1923, 105.

Austria-Hungary, for her part, simply disappeared at the end of the war, and the remnants of her former two major constituent states were severely struck. They had to bear – together with Germany – the burden of responsibility for the war; they suffered the secession of huge territories and population, they lost their allies and had not yet found new ones, they witnessed a very serious economic crisis, a rampant inflation, and all kinds of shortages. The Austrian and Hungarian imperial/national identity was shattered as well, and received only temporary and imperfect treatment with the emergence of Austrian Republicanism and Hungarian Revisionism.

In these troubled times of ‘trials and tribulations’ both Austria and Hungary were desperately seeking anything that could be interpreted as ‘success’, and – ironically enough – they found it at each other’s expense. The Austrian claim to annex the so-called Burgenland, i. e. the westernmost strip of land of Hungarian Transdanubia, was met with a favourable response by the Entente and duly sanctioned by the Treaties of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Trianon in 1919–1920. The Hungarians, on the other hand, managed – by combining diplomacy with guerrilla warfare – to bring Austria to the conference table and to make her accept a referendum on the possession of Sopron (Ödenburg in Western Hungary) and its vicinity. This bitter feud between former ‘brothers-in-law’ produced some profits for both sides which were negligible compared to their enormous overall losses yet symbolic for both counties’ viability and will to exist.

#### CHARLES AS AN ACTOR ON THE POLITICAL SCENE

The Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, Charles of Habsburg-Lorraine, was not an epitome of the classic monarch. His mentality was fundamentally different from that of his ancestor, the late Francis Joseph, which was clearly reflected by his casual physical appearance and warm, friendly manners. This omnipresent ease, and his liberal, almost democratic ways made him popular for many but it also earned him reproachful glances and a great deal of mistrust from others. His smoking a cigarette after his coronation in Buda – while still vested in full regalia – his negligence of courtly etiquette, and the malicious gossips surrounding him proved that he did not breathe the air of traditional authority of old-school princes.

During his reign and exile (1916 to 1922), Charles – despite his goodwill and progressive ambitions – fell victim to one political failure after another, which slowly began to ruin his prestige and consequently that of the Monarchy. His unsuccessful peace overtures and submission to Germany, his belated constitutional reform, and his provisional retirement showed how tenuous his hold on power finally became.

Charles issued two declarations on November 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 1918 in Eckartsau by which he retired from exercising his imperial and royal prerogatives in Austria and in Hungary respectively. (As far as the Hungarian throne was concerned, Charles gave his preliminary consent to any decision on the question of monarchy the Hungarian nation wished to make. This declaration, however, was never countersigned by a Hungarian Minister, nor enacted as legislation. Thus, according to Hungarian public law, this legal act was not perfectly valid<sup>2</sup>.) No wonder that Charles’s withdrawal received diverse interpretations from the interested political groups. For the monarch and his court, it was merely a temporary retirement and a return was obviously to follow. The Austrian National Assembly, however, manifested the Republic on November 12<sup>th</sup>, and dethroned the House of Habsburg early in April 1919 – laws that Charles never accepted as valid. Hungary, too, became a Republic on November 16<sup>th</sup> 1918, but – following great political turmoil – re-established herself as a formal monarchy in February 1920.

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1920, the Conference of Ambassadors – the board of Allied diplomats commissioned to help and then resume the work of the Paris Peace Conference – declared that Habsburg Restoration would *rock peace to its foundations* and could *neither be recognised nor tolerated*<sup>3</sup>. This note

<sup>2</sup> Magda ÁDÁM, *The Little Entente and Europe 1920–1939*. Budapest 1993, 111.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the resolution is reproduced in: Dezső UJVÁRY (ed.), *Papers and documents relating to the foreign relations of Hungary*, vol. II, January to August 1921. Budapest 1946 (hereafter: PDH, vol. II), no. 114.

was later endorsed by the countries of the future Little Entente as well, and referred to it as the cornerstone of anti-Habsburg policy whenever the possibility of Charles's return seemed imminent. And yet, while Great Britain, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia firmly stood against Restoration, France – desperately trying to prevent the Anschluss – did, in fact, flirt with the idea of strengthening Austria, and maybe of letting Charles re-establish a limited version of the previous dual Monarchy. Romania, whose king was personally obliged to Charles, kept sitting on the fence and did not subject herself to the manoeuvres of the 'anti-Habsburg coalition' at that time. Thus the international atmosphere for Charles's return was rather unfavourable but there were some minor promising elements in it, too.<sup>4</sup>

As for political support in Austria and Hungary proper, Charles's chances were likewise dubious. Karlists were not strong enough for a political take-over in either country, both of which – having only recently regained their full independence – did not once again seek the possibility of Monarchist union. This was particularly worrying in Republican Austria where the vast majority of the people strongly opposed it and the Viennese government accordingly ruled out the return of the Emperor. In Hungary, however, where legislation restored monarchy, Charles's claims had a better perspective since Budapest had left the door ajar for a possible national kingdom.

Paradoxically, it was not Austria, the core of the historic Habsburg Empire, but Hungary – a country where public opinion and political language was dominated by anti-Habsburg feelings and the concept of national independence – where Charles could count on greater internal support. This phenomenon was largely due to the fact that while the collapse of Imperial Austria was attributed largely to the ineffectual war politics of the Burg, the dismemberment of historic Hungary was looked upon as the guilt of the revolutionary Democratic and Bolshevik governments of 1918–1919 led by Count Mihály Károlyi and Béla Kun respectively.

In Hungary, three major concepts existed concerning the question of Restoration. With the Social Democrats being absent from Parliament, the Republican idea was hardly represented in national politics. The largest group was that of the so-called 'free electors' who did not rule out monarchy as such but claimed that after Charles's withdrawal, the right to elect a king had returned to the nation. Still influential but forming only a minority both in Parliament and the Government, Karlists (or Legitimists) – as the expression indicates – looked upon Charles as the legitimate king of Hungary whose return was perfectly legal and desirable. The classic partisan of this concept was a Catholic from Western Transdanubia supporting the Party of Christian National Union while the typical 'free elector' lived in the Great Plain in Eastern Hungary, belonged to one of the Protestant denominations, and voted for the Smallfarmers' Party<sup>5</sup>.

There were three distinguished groups, though, in which Legitimism was really strongly represented: 1) the aristocracy which up to this point had taken a great part in forming Hungarian politics, 2) military officers most of whom had sworn fealty to the king after his coronation and 3) the catholic prelates who led the strongest church in Hungary representing two-thirds of the population. These people, though relatively small in number, represented considerable political and spiritual influence – a force which the exiled king could make use of. Thus, it was mainly them whom Charles's counted on when he prepared and launched an attempt to resume his throne in Hungary.

Charles and his family had to leave Austria in March 1919, and they moved to the castle of Warlegg at Lake Constance. Then, in May, they settled down in Villa Prangins overlooking Lake Geneva. Here, he collected news from his envoys and agents concerning the political perspectives for a possible return.

Initially, it was Charles's long term goal to reoccupy both the Austrian and Hungarian thrones, an objective he gradually had to give up. Disquieting news about the emergence of potential pretend-

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of the international arena see Mária ORMOS, "Soha, amíg élek!" Az utolsó koronás Habsburg puccskísérletei 1921-ben [Never while I live. The attempts to the throne of the last Habsburg monarch in 1921]. Pécs 1990, mainly 17–49.

<sup>5</sup> Gusztáv GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között [Hungary between the two wars], ed. Vince Paál. Budapest 2001, 58.

ers also reached him. His distant relatives in the Habsburg family – Archdukes Joseph August (temporarily backed by French politicians), Joseph Francis and Albrecht (supported by certain Italian circles) – together with French, British, and Belgian princes were spoken of as future kings or regents of Hungary and even a personal union of Romania and Hungary – to be ruled by Ferdinand Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, king of Romania – was projected, although all these plans proved to be ultimately futile<sup>6</sup>.

Meanwhile, Charles concentrated his preparations on gaining the support of the Great Powers, and the Royalist political groups of one-time Austria-Hungary. The information he received in Prangins convinced him that he enjoyed the support of the Entente. While the memoirs of his close advisers agree with this interpretation, historians tend to believe that Charles overestimated the supportive motions taken by French and Vatican circles and neglected the hostile attitude of British, Italian, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav foreign policy<sup>7</sup>.

Charles intended to restore his power as quickly as possible. Yet, he was ready to postpone his return when early in November 1919, he was requested by Admiral Miklós Horthy, Commander-in-chief of the Hungarian National Army, not to insist on Restoration until the Hungarian peace treaty was signed. Horthy thought that the stipulations of the Hungarian peace treaty – still to be concluded – might be less unfavourable if the successor states had not to fear that Habsburgs would once again be invited to the throne. A similar message from Horthy was forwarded to Charles in February 1920 emphasising once more the hardships of Restoration due to the unclear international situation and the relative inability of Hungary to defend herself. Charles accepted this point of view reiterating, however, that he was expecting to return soon<sup>8</sup>. And as peace negotiations came to their conclusion Charles considered it necessary to remind Horthy that he envisaged his comeback taking place before the end of the year. On the very day of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920, a royal messenger delivered a letter to Horthy – who had become regent by that time – in which Charles declared himself to be *Hungary's king, crowned and anointed according to the law and constitution, who has resigned none of his rights and who wants to take part in the work for the reunion and rehabilitation of the country*. To which he added: *It is not likely that the western powers [...] would throw obstacles in my way should I again exercise my sovereign power in Hungary*, emphasising that *France through her official representative declared that she would support my return to the Hungarian throne*. He also made it clear that he wished *to take the exercise of sovereign power into my hands in all circumstances as soon as possible, possibly during this year*, and requested Horthy *to indicate the moment most appropriate for my return to my throne*<sup>9</sup>.

Soon after, a Secret Alliance was formed with the participation of influential politicians coming from different parties – like Counts Gyula Andrassy Jr. and Albert Apponyi, Prince Lajos Windischgrätz, Ödön Beniczky, Gusztáv Gratz, István Rakovszky, and Vilmos Vázsonyi – who all desired the king's return<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, Horthy was still reluctant to invite Charles to the throne and set the acceptance of an independent, national kingdom as the prerequisite of negotiations – a condition which was in obvious contradiction to the ideas of pro-Habsburg French politicians who supported Charles's Austrian claims as well in order to prevent the Anschluss. And yet, when in September 1920, the Quai d'Orsay dropped Charles – and general-director Maurice Paléologue and Berne envoy Paul Dutasta were replaced by Philippe Berthelot and Henri Allizé respectively – he reconsidered his chances and guaranteed that he fully respected the political independence of Hungary<sup>11</sup>. *I accept the point of view* – he wrote to Horthy on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1920 – *that the provisions of the Pragmatica Sanctio regarding the joint and indivisible possession of the Hungarian and the other hereditary provinces have become ineffective and that Act XII:1867 has become invalid. Accordingly, since Hungary has regained*

<sup>6</sup> ÁDÁM, *The Little Entente and Europe*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> ORMOS, *Soha, amíg élek*, 43; ÁDÁM, *The little Entente and Europe*, 113f.

<sup>8</sup> Baron Charles von WERKMANN, *The Tragedy of Charles of Habsburg*. London 1924, 118ff.

<sup>9</sup> ORMOS, *Soha, amíg élek*, 18; Miklós SZINAI, László SZÜCS (ed.), *The confidential papers of admiral Horthy*. Budapest 1965 (hereafter: CPAH), no. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Tibor ZSIGA, *Horthy ellen, a királyért [Against Horthy for the King]*. Budapest 1989, 97.

<sup>11</sup> ORMOS, *Soha, amíg élek*, 8, 20, 33f.

*her full constitutional independence I am determined that after resuming sovereign power in Hungary I will not take over sovereign power in any other country, except by an agreement between that country and Hungary, or by warranting complete constitutional independence for Hungary [...] And finally, since it is my opinion, too, the blood and wealth of Hungary should be used in the interest of Hungary alone, and not for purposes and claims alien to this country. I shall be determined to share the prerogative of declaring war and signing peace treaties with the constitutional factors of the nation in a manner to be defined by legislation*<sup>12</sup>.

Early in 1921, French and British diplomacy made several statements to the effect that they did not support Charles's goals. This was, in a way, a reinforcement of the declaration of the Conference of Ambassadors from a year earlier. By this time, however, Charles – faithful to his divine vocation and royal duties – decided to restore his power in Hungary<sup>13</sup>. He was seemingly sure of French support, namely that of the Premier and Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, with whom, allegedly, he had come to a 'gentlemen's agreement'. As Empress Zita later disclosed to Gordon Brook-Shepherd, a friend and chronicler of the family, it was Briand himself who urged the Restoration and gave specific verbal promises that included:<sup>14</sup>

1. *Immediate recognition of the Emperor as soon as he had taken over as King of Hungary.*
2. *Immediate setting up of economic links.*
3. *Immediate granting of French state credits.*
4. *French military aid, should the Emperor need it in Hungary against foreign attacks.*
5. *A pledge, on the other hand, that no French troops would be forced on the Emperor if he did not require them.*
6. *An undertaking to 'look again' at the large territories of Hungary allotted to her neighbours and to 'readjust the position to some extent'.*
7. *A promise, as regards those same neighbouring states, to keep them in check and to cut off all the French credits on which they so heavily depended should they give any trouble.*

However, the existence of such an agreement is highly dubious since its alleged content contradicts a series of historical facts. In addition, no French archival document has been discovered so far which could prove – even indirectly – Briand's tangible support. Nevertheless, it seems probable that Charles, indeed, still interpreted French foreign policy as favourable for his claims.

Meanwhile, the issue of Restoration was still heavily discussed in the Hungarian Parliament and, from time to time, led to severe clashes between the two major parties – Christian Nationals and Smallfarmers – which, otherwise, were partners in the coalition government. Attempts at taking the question off the agenda were made mainly by the Legitimists who understood that Restoration could only be saved through postponement. Regent Horthy and Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki tried to calm down the disputes by speeches and propositions that sought compromise but the success of their attempts proved short-lived. The temporary and fragile settlements were overthrown by 'free electors' who kept re-opening the issue of dethronement to settle the problem once and for all<sup>15</sup>.

#### CHARLES'S FIRST RETURN

Under such political circumstances King Charles, disguised and equipped with false documents, left Prangins on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1921, and arrived at Szombathely, in Western Hungary two days later<sup>16</sup>. Soon after, a meeting was called upon with the participation of the host, Bishop János Mikes, Prime

<sup>12</sup> CPAH, no. 8.

<sup>13</sup> ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 23, 29, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon BROOK-SHEPHERD, *The last Habsburg*. London 1968. Cf. ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 46f.

<sup>15</sup> GRATZ, *Magyarország a két háború között*, 59–62.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, two previous attempts were prevented by Hungarian authorities at the turn of 1920/21. Cf. Anton LEHAR, *Erinnerungen. Gegenrevolution und Restaurationsversuche in Ungarn 1918–1921*, hrsg. v. Peter Broucek. München 1973, 174 f.

Minister Teleki, Cultural Minister József Vass, and a few Karlist politicians. Though Teleki was rather hesitant, they agreed that the following day, March 27<sup>th</sup>, Charles would go to Budapest and reinstate himself as the legitimate king of Hungary. He told Regent Horthy that Briand confidentially supported his return and that the action bore no risk at all. Horthy, however, was sceptical about Briand's promise, and offered to Charles that he could inquire through the French High Commissioner in Budapest, Christian Fouchet, about French secret moves. *Should Briand accept the responsibility, I shall gladly restore your hereditary rights to Your Majesty*, he told Charles. *Should the answer be unfavourable, I shall have to beg Your Majesty to leave the country immediately before your presence here becomes generally known*<sup>17</sup>. At this point Charles consented to return to Szombathely where he stayed for another week.

Horthy's fears were justified by the escalation of the conflict during the following days. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Briand categorically declared any allegations concerning French support for Charles's recognition to be false and unfounded as well as referring to the declaration of the Conference of Ambassadors of February 4<sup>th</sup> 1920 against Habsburg Restoration<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, the High Commissioners of the Great Powers called for opposition against any attempt at a *coup de main*. During these days, the representatives of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, Václav Lejhanec and Milan Milojević, made it clear that their governments wanted to see Charles dethroned<sup>19</sup>. Lejhanec continued his daily appearances at the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to threaten reprisals should the king prolong his stay in Hungary<sup>20</sup> while Milojević went as far as qualifying Charles's return a 'casus belli'<sup>21</sup>. Baron Victor Stircea, the Romanian Minister in Budapest, on the other hand maintained a demonstratively polite behaviour and merely made a statement to the effect that the king's presence was contrary to the interests of Bucharest<sup>22</sup>.

The Hungarian government made heroic efforts to persuade the king to leave the country. Telegrams concerning the conditions of Charles's transfer to Switzerland via Austria were exchanged between the respective governments. Meanwhile, the National Assembly passed a resolution protesting against any threat to the existing political establishment – i. e. the provisional regency of Admiral Horthy<sup>23</sup>. While the diplomats of the Entente in Budapest appreciated these moves, the delay caused by Charles's reluctance and poor health – he got seriously cold during his long automobile trips – and the refusal of several Swiss cantons and towns to host the ex-Emperor urged Prague (Praha) and Belgrade (Beograd) to renew their political attacks. Charles was still waiting for reassuring news from France when Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš sent a circular telegram, on April 3<sup>rd</sup>,

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas HORTHY, *Memoirs*. New York 1957, 120.

<sup>18</sup> ÁDÁM, *The Little Entente and Europe*, 132. Briand's démenti was communicated to Teleki by Fouchet on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. See PDH, vol. II, no. 293. Despite Briand's statement most contemporaries agreed that Charles had indeed been instigated by influential French politicians. Cf. reports of Iván Praznovszky (Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Paris) to Foreign Minister Gusztáv Gratz in PDH, vol. II, no. 282 and 320. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1921, the British Ambassador in Paris, Lord Harding reported to Foreign Minister Lord Curzon that Briand *is said to have maintained a neutral attitude toward these agents* [i.e. Charles's unofficial envoys] *but gradually in conversation with them his replies and comments grew less guarded and later these agents informed the Ex-Emperor that Monsieur Briand favoured his designs*. More straightforward remarks were made three days later by diplomatic experts on Central European affairs like Alexander Cadogan (*Evidently he [Briand] was in touch with Karlist circles, and some unguarded remark of his may have been incorrectly repeated*) and Charles Tufton (*I think Mr. Briand was in the plot all the time*). The National Archives (Kew, London), FO-371-6103, C 8422/180/21. Photocopies published in Elek KARSAI, *Számjeltávirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek* [Code telegram to all Hungarian royal legations]. Budapest 1969, after p. 176.

<sup>19</sup> ÁDÁM, *The Little Entente and Europe*, 121f.

<sup>20</sup> HORTHY, *Memoirs*, 121, 123.

<sup>21</sup> PDH, vol. II, no. 260.

<sup>22</sup> PDH, vol. II, no. 261. Romania – which was not yet a member of the nascent Little Entente – kept relatively silent and followed the moves of her future allies from a distance.

<sup>23</sup> *Nemzetgyűlési napló 1920–1922* (Minutes of the National Assembly 1920–1922). Budapest, 1920–1922 (hereafter: NN 1920–1922), vol. IX, 147.

to Czechoslovakian diplomatic missions abroad ordering *Charles's adventure to be exploited to the full against Hungary* and eventually threatened Budapest with an ultimatum<sup>24</sup>.

The Conference of Ambassadors formally reiterated the resolutions of their declaration of 1920 – Habsburg Restoration could *neither be recognised nor tolerated*<sup>25</sup> – and requested the Hungarian government to take the necessary measures for Charles's expatriation<sup>26</sup>. In a way, this resolution built a 'golden bridge' for the king's withdrawal offering him a chance to yield to the orders of the highest diplomatic board and not to claims of the neighbouring countries. Accepting that his immediate return to the throne *would expose the nation to unbearable tribulations* he agreed to leave the country and the only condition he made was to see his manifesto published soon after his departure. *I put my faith in divine Providence and I hope that the moment shall come when I can once again remain in my country united with my nation to work on mutual aims with mutual efforts* – he declared and asked the people to support Horthy in the meantime. Prime Minister Teleki saw to it that Hungarians could read the text in several newspapers on April 7<sup>th</sup><sup>27</sup>.

Finally, Charles was escorted by Entente officers to a train waiting for him at the Austrian border, on April 5<sup>th</sup>. Here, the farewells of his loyal subjects – *Long live the King!* – were echoed by the *Abzug!* cries of Austrian railwaymen<sup>28</sup>. Charles met Zita at Luzern that afternoon where the Queen waited for her husband to arrive. The royal family could not return to Prangins since canton Vaud did not renew their residence permit. They stayed in canton Luzern instead and, early in May, rented a huge house in Hertenstein at the Vierwaldstätter See.

#### IN SWITZERLAND AGAIN

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, in the Hungarian Parliament, Prime Minister Teleki gave a cautiously worded account of the events in which he tried to avoid any kind of controversy. The report presented by Foreign Minister Gratz was far more straightforward in putting the blame for the crisis on Prague and Belgrade, and also on the League of Nations which – contrary to Articles 12–17 of its Covenant – did not condemn the martial manoeuvres of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav diplomacy<sup>29</sup>. Deputy Károly Rassay, an anti-Karlist Liberal, accused the Legitimists, and urged the foundation of a parliamentary committee to investigate the responsibility of the Government<sup>30</sup>. The next day Teleki managed to prorogue Parliament, and soon handed in his resignation. The new Government was formed on April 14<sup>th</sup> by Count István Bethlen who invited his cousin Count Miklós Bánffy to take care of foreign affairs. Gratz who had strongly supported the king during his stay in Hungary, and who was particularly sharply criticised in Parliament during and after the crisis, was replaced.

<sup>24</sup> ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 77; ÁDÁM, The Little Entente and Europe, 123–126. Thomas Hohler, British Chairman of the Conference of Allied Representatives in Budapest, eventually convinced Lejhanec not to hand the ultimatum over since by this time, April 5<sup>th</sup>, Charles was already heading to Switzerland. Fouchet's telegram to Briand (April 3<sup>rd</sup>) quoted by ÁDÁM, The Little Entente and Europe, 125.

<sup>25</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>26</sup> This statement was communicated to the Hungarian government on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1921. See PDH, vol. II, no. 303.

<sup>27</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 72. Charles's statement was reproduced in: IV. Károly visszatérési kísérletei (Charles IV's attempts to return), vol I–II. Budapest [1921], vol. I, Appendix 31.

<sup>28</sup> Szilárd Masirevich (Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Vienna) to Gratz. Code telegram, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1921. PDH, vol. II, no. 315.

<sup>29</sup> NN 1920–1922, vol. IX, 160–165. It was, of course, a matter of interpretation since Prague and Belgrade – for their part – interpreted Habsburg Restoration as a threat to international peace. On the other hand, Article 12 of the Covenant declared that the Member States of the League of Nations could not resort to arms in case of any international rupture before seeking arbitration, judicial settlement or enquiry by the Council. *Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not* – says Article 16.

<sup>30</sup> NN 1920–1922, vol. IX, 165–173.

When, on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the new Premier introduced his Government in Parliament, he did not speak a single word about Charles's attempt. This was an obvious attempt to shelve the question and prevent further disputes. Consequently, Rassay's proposal was not put to the vote, either.

While the policy of Regent Horthy and the Bethlen Government towards Charles was basically to sit and wait and not to do anything compromising, the king was convinced that a future attempt had to be made with the use of force. This time his preparations seemed more careful: he remained in contact with the friendly French circles, sent his emissaries to pave the way for his return to Eastern and Central Europe, and left behind his supporters in Hungary to carry out the necessary political and military preparations. Among his agents it was the Hungarian-based politicians who came up with by far the most cautious suggestions.

Ex-Minister Gratz – who now acted as Charles's intermediary to the Hungarian Government – took a very careful line, trying to avoid another ill-prepared attempt which would only result in dethronement. His negotiations with Bethlen and Royalist circles, at the end of April, brought about a concordance of ideas among leading Karlist politicians – namely Andrásy, Apponyi, and Rakovszky – to bring the king back to Hungary in conjunction with the Government. Gratz soon informed Charles about his talks and asked him to delay his return. The king set July 6<sup>th</sup> as the final date. Two weeks before this deadline, Gratz paid a personal visit at Hertenstein trying to dissuade the King from taking immediate action. Charles, however, caring little about the Little Entente – which had recently come into being with the conclusion of treaties of mutual assistance between Czechoslovakia and Romania in April and Yugoslavia and Romania in June – was determined to use the force of surprise instead of further negotiations and merely postponed his move to August 22<sup>nd</sup> at the latest<sup>31</sup>.

Meanwhile, two other groups, Charles's personal agents and Hungarian Legitimist officers, who were much less bound by the exigencies of the Budapest Government, called and prepared for armed action. A personal secretary of the king, Aladár Boroviczény, made consecutive journeys during the summer to secure the support of all Royalist groups in Central Europe for Charles's Restoration. His reports on talks with Horthy, Apponyi, Rakovszky, and Colonel Antal Lehár – a Legitimist officer commanding several thousands of troops in Western Hungary –, with Czech, Croatian, and Romanian circles only added to the king's determination, albeit that his return was postponed to September<sup>32</sup>.

Horthy was persuaded by Andrásy and Gratz to give written guarantees to the king promising to prevent his dethronement, take care of the preparations for his return, and share with him important military and political information. Horthy's letter, however, disappointed Andrásy and Gratz, who learned about it from Bethlen on August 30<sup>th</sup>, and Charles himself who received it five days later. For Horthy focussed on the difficulties of Restoration rather than his readiness to further help it<sup>33</sup>. He wrote: *Our foreign relations have become decidedly worse since your Majesty's visit at Easter. The Little Entente, which, earlier in the year, was merely the practical expression of the hostility of a few individuals, has now become a strong and aggressive alliance, with a definite policy directed against Hungary. [...] Italy, in completing the Treaty of Rapallo, identified herself with the interests of the Little Entente and consequently with a policy which is specifically directed against the dynasty. Our only neighbour who perhaps is indifferent on the subject is Austria, and her economic troubles expose her to the influence of Czecho-Slovakia and to the effects of Pan-German propaganda.*

<sup>31</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 78–83. Upon Gratz's return, Prime Minister Bethlen let him know that instead of Restoration he would rather have Charles resign and pass the crown to his son Otto, for whom, until reaching his full age, a Hungarian regent would govern the country. Gratz claims not to have informed the king of Bethlen's wish to see him resigned. GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 87. Nevertheless, Charles may have feared something similar, and a few months later, as we shall see, he gave orders concerning succession and regency.

<sup>32</sup> Aladar von BOROVICZENY, Der König und sein Reichsverweser. München 1924, 169–182, 216–221. Lehár himself, in his memoirs, confirms that influential military and political leaders guaranteed at least benevolent neutrality in case of Charles's take-over. LEHÁR (1973), Erinnerungen, 221.

<sup>33</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 89f.; BOROVICZENY, Der König und sein Reichsverweser, 241f.

*These facts impress me with the extent to which the foreign obstacles to a Restoration have increased since your Majesty's last stay in Hungary. It is therefore my duty to express to you with the greatest frankness my conviction that a Restoration is for the moment impossible. If your Majesty is determined on another attempt, I believe that it will bring ruin and destruction on the country and will extinguish the last hope of Restoration.*

Horthy went as far as mentioning certain plans of Poland and the Little Entente concerning the partition of Hungary which would probably be backed by the Great Powers should Charles attempt Restoration. On the other hand, he added, the rapid political changes in Europe offered a potential chance for future action if it was carefully and quietly prepared and cleverly executed. Finally, he made a vague reference to *internal objections* to the king's return as well which *would, if ignored, combine with the threatening attitude of neighbouring States to make our situation more desperate than ever*<sup>34</sup>.

Gratz had the unpleasant task of bringing this bad news to Hertenstein and although he let Charles know that Bethlen was considering certain concessions towards the Legitimists – e. g. the replacement of Foreign Minister Bánffy with Gratz himself –, the king flatly refused to send any communication to Budapest. He merely wrote a short letter to Gratz in which he declared that *he considered Horthy's government to be illegitimate and revolutionary* and reiterated his will to return to Hungary the soonest possible<sup>35</sup>.

By this time Karlist commanders had prepared a list of reliable officers and began to strengthen Gyula Ostenburg's battalion up to 5 thousand troops. The battalion – encamped in Western Hungary, partly in territories which were to be ceded to Austria – was about to be dissolved by the government as the land dispute over the possession of the Burgenland was coming to its conclusion. Therefore, they urged Charles to act soon so that he could make use of this well-positioned army if he wanted to resort to force. Legitimist politicians, faithful to their more moderate attitude, and still seeking a compromise between Charles and Horthy, considered the plan too hazardous as it risked eventual dethronement<sup>36</sup>.

At the end of September and then on October 3<sup>rd</sup> the leading military and political exponents of the Legitimists – except for Apponyi and Andrásy, as it seems – assembled to present a final proposal to the king. The soldiers' will being stronger, Beniczky, Gratz, and Rakovszky gave their consent to the effect that *once the coup d'état is successfully accomplished they would provide constitutional support for his Majesty and likewise take the responsibility for the events before the international world*<sup>37</sup>. The conference then agreed on a message which enumerated the pros and cons of immediate action and, for safety reasons, was to be communicated orally to Charles. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, the necessary instructions were given to Baron Albin von Schager who, according to the accounts of Gratz and Boroviczeny, distorted the spirit of the message by putting more emphasis on the military arguments than on foreign political doubts<sup>38</sup>. Thus, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, the decision was fairly easily made by the king who instantly ordered final preparations to be made.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Boroviczeny bought an aeroplane in Zürich for 50 thousand francs to avoid control and possible detention when crossing the borders. That very day Charles issued his last will, in which, in the case of his death, he appointed Zita as Regent until his heir, Otto, reached his full age<sup>39</sup>. Four days later Boroviczeny informed Count József Hunyady, Steward of the Royal Household, of the King's visit.

<sup>34</sup> Horthy's letter quoted by WERKMANN *The Tragedy of Charles of Habsburg*, 228 ff.

<sup>35</sup> BOROVICZENY, *Der König und sein Reichsverweser*, 247; On Charles's reaction see GRATZ, *Magyarország a két háború között*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> GRATZ, *Magyarország a két háború között*, 92 f.

<sup>37</sup> BOROVICZENY, *Der König und sein Reichsverweser*, 255.

<sup>38</sup> GRATZ, *Magyarország a két háború között*, 94–100; BOROVICZENY, *Der König und sein Reichsverweser*, 255 f.

<sup>39</sup> Charles's last will dated 15 October 1921, in Hertenstein, *Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives)*, K 58, Fasc. 20, 1923–III/5–13.



*Karl und Zita beim zweiten Restaurationsversuch am Bahnhof von Ödenburg. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv*

#### CHARLES'S SECOND RETURN

Departing from Hertenstein at 10 o'clock in the morning on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, Charles and Zita took the precaution of changing their car at Rapperswil before they arrived at the airport of Dübendorf outside Zürich. They took off at 12:14 for Hungary.

Their landing in the afternoon at Dénesfa near the Austrian border caused a major uproar in Count József Cziráky's castle, where the landlord and the guests celebrated the baptism of a new-born baby in the family. Nobody expected the King's arrival – at least not at that particular date – but the most surprised of all the guests was Andrassy who had been left out of the final phase of secret negotiations. Even those who knew about Charles's return expected his arrival to take place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> or to have been postponed once again.

No wonder the preparations in Sopron – which served as the starting-point of the military manoeuvres – were not yet perfectly carried out. Gratz who, on the 19<sup>th</sup>, was bound for an economic conference in Portorož (Portorose) had to change his plans and, together with Rakovszky, took an afternoon train the next day to meet the king in Sopron. When they finally arrived, the king and queen were hastily transported there as well and got some sleep in the military barracks of the town. The royal presence could not be kept a secret for long. By the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the whole town knew about it, and a file of young girls dressed in folk costumes presented Zita with fresh flowers. Soon after, the Ostenburg regiment swore fealty to the king.

Late at night four trains were assembled in the railway station to transport an Ostenburg elite battalion, Charles and his retinue, and the rest of the troops towards the capital. Despite the communications block, an Entente officer managed to drive to Vienna the same night to inform his superiors about the events. By the time the first train set out with the troops towards Budapest, the British Minister in Vienna, Francis Lindley informed the British diplomats in London, Paris, Buda-

pest, Prague and Belgrade that *Sopron Commission report Karl arrived there by aeroplane on 21<sup>st</sup> October. He intends to go to Budapest on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, accompanied by Ostenburg battalion, which has acknowledged him as King*<sup>40</sup>.

The Hungarian Government received the first news of the events in the small hours of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. In the afternoon of October 19<sup>th</sup>, in a speech delivered at Pécs, in southern Hungary, Prime Minister Bethlen disclosed his views on the dilemmas of 'Republic vs Monarchy' or 'Regent vs King' or 'Charles vs Otto' and he summarised his politics in the following formula: *We cannot accept neither a coup d'état nor dethronement, we want to negotiate and we can only make a decision afterwards*<sup>41</sup>. Less than three days later, circumstances forced him to make quick decisions when negotiations proved to be futile.

While the royal trains slowly approached Budapest and forced all the local garrisons on the way to join them, Bethlen issued orders for the defence of the capital. The king and his followers were driven by enthusiasm and the sense of triumph as they added new troops to the royal army at every train station. In contrast, the Castle of Buda turned into a kitchen of political witchcraft where Bethlen played the chef impressing his colleagues and foreign diplomats with his imposing calmness and resolute decisions.<sup>42</sup> He had the Cabinet declare that, in the spirit of Act I 1920, Charles could not resume his royal prerogatives at the moment and that he should leave Hungary again. In order to add more weight to the Government's decision in persuading the king to retreat, he had the Entente Commissioners renew the note of protest against the return of the Habsburgs<sup>43</sup> – an obvious reference to the previous declarations of the Conference of Ambassadors.

Although it was clear from the outset that the Hungarian Government – partly as an act of self-defence – adhered to the policy of the Great Powers, the Little Entente wanted to exploit the situation. Their representatives paid a visit to Horthy and then to Bethlen. Their spokesman, Milojević, qualified Charles's eventual Restoration as *casus belli*. On the next day, Beneš urged the permanent co-operation within the Little Entente, threatened to mobilise and, in case of Charles's take-over, to occupy Hungary. He demanded the full dethronement of the House of Habsburg, disarmament of the Hungarian army under the control of the Little Entente, strict execution of the Treaty of Trianon, and reimbursement for the costs of mobilisation.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, Bethlen tried to prevent Charles's manoeuvres from reaching the point of no return. His telegram sent at 14:40 to the king to Győr (Raab) – about 130 kms west of Budapest – arrived too late. Somewhat later, however, when the royal train stopped at Ács – now only 100 kms from Budapest – 'designated Prime Minister' István Rakovszky called him by telephone, and claimed ultimate power for the king and his government while Bethlen asked the king not to attack<sup>45</sup>. At 18:15 the trains reached Komárom (Komorn, Komárno) – 90 kms of Budapest – where Horthy's Minister of Culture, József Vass finally managed to get on the royal train and establish direct contact – if not with the king himself – then with Charles's retinue. He had with him Horthy's letter which depicted an almost apocalyptic vision should the king enter Budapest by force. The message was so

<sup>40</sup> The National Archives (Kew, London), FO-371-6105, C 20156/180/21. Photocopy published in KARSAL, Számjeltávirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek, 224.

<sup>41</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 104. In fact, Bethlen considered Charles's restoration to be 'impossible' and his resignation to be an 'inevitable necessity' well before the king's second return. Cf. GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Ignác ROMSICS, István Bethlen: a Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary 1874-1946. Boulder (Co.) 1995, 165.

<sup>43</sup> The Hungarian request and the Allied note to be found in: A Magyar Külügyminisztérium "Papers and documents relating to the foreign relations of Hungary" című kiadványban közétendő diplomácia okiratok ideiglenes lenyomata [Provisional print of the diplomatic papers to be published in "Papers and documents relating to the foreign relations of Hungary" by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, vol. III, September to December 1921]. Budapest n. d. (hereafter: PDH, vol. III), nos. 1100 and 1101.

<sup>44</sup> ÁDÁM, The Little Entente and Europe, 157f.

<sup>45</sup> As Bethlen later commented, Rakovszky threatened him to be the first to be hanged after Charles had been restored. Pál CSICS, Amit a királypuccsból láttam [What I saw during the royal coup d'état], in: Aladár BOROVICZÉNY, A király és kormányzója [The king and his regent], ed. Pál Pritz, Budapest 1993, 373.

contrary to the expectations of the Karlists that Andrásy and Rakovszky decided not to forward the letter to Charles<sup>46</sup>.

At the same time Bethlen, who wanted peace, prepared for war. His and his colleagues' efforts to assemble a force that could match the numerous and experienced troops under Charles's command were not very promising. In such circumstances, he agreed that his Foreign Minister Bánffy should find shelter, in case of an emergency, at the French Legation which was situated just opposite his apartment. The seriousness of the situation was proven by the fact that Bánffy, a heavy smoker, immediately deposited there large quantities of cigarettes<sup>47</sup>.

Early the next morning, Charles's trains finally reached the outskirts of Budapest where, at Budaörs, royal forces were stopped by quickly mobilised – but much less experienced – troops who had hardly arrived at the scene. The next couple of hours were filled with a series of misunderstandings, treason, incompetence, and confusion in both camps – the caricature of serious warfare – which was basically due to the political division of the officer corps whose allegiance to King or Regent was a matter of personal, sometimes 'ad hoc', decisions. At a meeting in Buda Castle, Bethlen quickly convinced Charles's emissary, General Pál Hegedűs of the impossibility of Restoration. From then on, Hegedűs acted as a 'double agent' and co-operated for the conclusion of a cease-fire in the afternoon which not only stopped royal advance but clearly favoured government forces. Thus, while initially, the royal army – by its strength and impetus – was superior to Horthy's forces, the government was able to collect more troops from the provinces and take over the initiative. Bethlen became the master of the situation and royal forces began to disperse or change sides. By the next day, October 24<sup>th</sup>, the government gained the upper hand and dictated an armistice.

While negotiations were under way early in the morning, Horthy's troops, in violation of the cease-fire, encircled and captured most of Ostenburg's regiment<sup>48</sup>. The conditions of the armistice were harsh. The government demanded the disarmament of royal forces, the voluntary written abdication of the king, and promised amnesty to all participants except for the military and political leaders whose case was to be judged by military and civil tribunals respectively. The government guaranteed the personal safety of the king who was to be held at a secure temporary residence in Hungary, until an agreement was concluded with the Great Powers concerning the place of exile<sup>49</sup>.

Gratz brought the terms of the armistice to Charles and suggested that in the present case abdication must be accepted, especially if the government would be ready to accept Otto's succession to the throne. Charles never answered the offer but ordered an immediate retreat and practically let his army dissolve. He insisted that Lehár and Ostenburg should save their lives and Lehár, accordingly, left the king's retinue dressed as a civilian. The travellers of the royal train passed the night at Tata, at the Esterházy Castle where they were finally arrested by the Gendarmerie. Ostenburg was taken captive and transported to Budapest. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Charles and Zita were brought to the Benedictine Abbey at Tihany: *the safest place for his temporary sojourn* according to Horthy's memoirs – custody to be precise<sup>50</sup>.

Although the King's presence in Hungary was no longer of any particular political danger, Beneš made use of this golden opportunity to test the political power of the Little Entente. He was keen to turn the propagandistic value of turmoil in Hungary into political gain by drawing attention to the indecision of the Hungarian government and the insecurity Charles's attempted Restoration would allegedly bring to the region. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, he demanded the dethronement of the entire Habsburg dynasty, the refunding of the expenses of mobilisation, the invalidation of the Treaty of Venice – an agreement between the Austrian and Hungarian governments on the Sopron referendum –, and, in general, the prompt and relentless execution of the Treaty of Trianon. He did not pass up the chance to warn the Hungarian Minister in Prague declaring that *until Hungary has the necessary*

<sup>46</sup> BOROVICZENY, *Der König und sein Reichsverweser*, 293.

<sup>47</sup> MIKLÓS BÁNFFY, *Huszonöt év. 1945* [Twenty-five years. 1945]. Budapest 1993, 95.

<sup>48</sup> ORMOS, *Soha, amíg élek*, 120.

<sup>49</sup> For the terms of the armistice see PDH, vol. III, no. 1113.

<sup>50</sup> GRATZ, *Magyarország a két háború között*, 115. For the quotation see HORTHY, *Memoirs*, 126.

*moral courage to solve the Habsburg question on her own account, merciless military and economic measures will be put in force against her. Vous passerez par l'enfer, comme je vous ai dit en avril* – he added<sup>51</sup>.

While the Yugoslav army did, in fact, mobilise its troops on the Hungarian frontier, and the diplomats accredited in Prague supported Beneš's militant attitude, a session of the Conference of Ambassadors on October 24<sup>th</sup> took into account the measures taken by the Hungarian Government and strongly advised the Little Entente *to keep calm and not to act without the consent of the Great Powers*<sup>52</sup>. Five days later, the Conference approved the Venice Agreement and finally refused to support Beneš's claims except the one regarding dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty; this was unanimously accepted. However, it was as late as October 31<sup>st</sup> the Hungarian government had received an official note of this declaration<sup>53</sup>.

While in the international arena the decision had been made and the king had fought his last battle for crown and dignity. His 'ministers' – deeply influenced by the deterioration of Charles's position – became increasingly doubtful and began to build a golden bridge for the king to retire in style. Bethlen's government likewise wanted to avoid the humiliation of the king and of the country, and sent General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry Kálmán Kánya to Tihany, equipped with a Hughes telegraph, with the commission to convince Charles that his voluntary abdication, though a great personal sacrifice, was the only means to avoid dethronement and to save the dynasty. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, this concept was communicated to the king by Gratz, Andrassy and Rakovszky<sup>54</sup>. Charles's answer was theoretical and practical at the same time. While his remarks on the divine origins of his kingship obviously did not belong to the realm of political reality, his preference for *an act of dethronement which will always be considered null and void* as opposed to spontaneous abdication and the subsequent *sedes vacantia* which *would be the most unfavourable turn of the events* was, from a political point of view, a more useful argument<sup>55</sup>. The next morning, it was Cardinal János Csernoch, the Primate of Hungary, who had crowned Charles five years before, who gently persuaded the king to withdraw until the National Assembly invite him to the throne again<sup>56</sup>. All in vain. Gratz's further efforts, on October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, to change the king's mind and gain his consent to abdicate in favour of his nine-year-old son, Archduke Otto, also proved unsuccessful.

By this time the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors to take the king on board a British river gunboat was generally known. Charles was also informed that he would be taken to the Isle of Madeira.

Under pressure from the Little Entente and still unaware of the declaration of the Conference of Ambassadors, Horthy and Bethlen were desperately seeking a way to avoid full diplomatic defeat and a probable conflict in internal politics. After detailed negotiations and the exchange of lengthy telegraphic messages between Tihany and Budapest, the text of a secret agreement – to the effect that Charles's abdication would not ruin the rights of the Habsburg dynasty to the Hungarian throne – was consented by Gratz, Horthy and Bethlen in the afternoon of October 29<sup>th</sup>. The text of the proposed agreement was as follows: *We, King Charles IV, declare as from now the document containing our abdication of the Hungarian Throne, given at Tihany, on the ... of ... 1921 as null and void. However, our abdication of the Hungarian Throne becomes valid at the moment when Our Son, called according to the Pragmatic Sanction to succeed to the Throne, shall be crowned with the Hungarian Crown. This document will be kept strictly secret by Ourselves as well as by the personages who signed it as witnesses and we simultaneously affirm by separate oath this secrecy. This document will be deposited with the Holy See for custody with the stipulation that it can only be delivered to Us if some other person than Our Son*

<sup>51</sup> PDH, vol. III, no. 1109.

<sup>52</sup> ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 123 ff., 129 f. For the quotation see PDH, vol. III, no. 1150.

<sup>53</sup> ÁDÁM, The Little Entente and Europe, 168 f. Fouchet called on Bethlen at 4 o'clock in the morning so as to communicate the good news as early as possible. ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 145.

<sup>54</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 119.

<sup>55</sup> PDH, vol. III, no. 1153.

<sup>56</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 120. A year before, the board of Catholic prelates unanimously declared their firm Legitimist attitude and their affection to the crowned King. See ORMOS, Soha, amíg élek, 40.

*called to succeed to the throne should be elected King of Hungary. Given in Tihany, on the ... of ... 1921.*<sup>57</sup>

Before this document was to be handed over to Charles, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, Bethlen sent him another letter, the day before, begging for his abdication but not making any reference to a secret agreement. Albeit that the king did, in fact, read the letter he preferred to declare that he was not willing to receive it. Instead, he declared: *So long as God grants me the strength to do my duty, I will not renounce the throne of Hungary, to which my coronation oath binds me. I will keep intact the rights which have descended to me as wearer of the Holy Crown, and I am ever prepared to fulfil the obligations which I have assumed. It is my deepest conviction that thus only can I adequately uphold the great traditions and the abiding interests of the Hungarian nation.*<sup>58</sup>

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, the Allied Representatives in Budapest forwarded to Bánffy the declaration of the Conference of Ambassadors requesting the Hungarian Government to declare the immediate dethronement of Charles and all members of the Habsburg family in order to calm down the agitation of the Little Entente which had until then reiterated threats of sanctions including the military occupation of Hungary. The Conference also claimed that dethronement should be ratified by Parliament within a week after Charles was handed over to Allied authorities<sup>59</sup>.

In this situation, the secret agreement which was on its way to Tihany signed by the regent and the prime minister no longer had any practical value. In fact, soon after midday, Bethlen sent a message explaining that Charles's mere abdication would not satisfy the Great Powers. An evening telegram from Tihany, however, stated that *this afternoon the last attempt to persuade the King, lasting over one hour and a half, was also unsuccessful*<sup>60</sup>. Instead, the king left two written protests with Kánya – one against his eventual deposition and another against his expulsion from Hungary. He wanted the first one to be communicated by Apponyi to the National Assembly in the event of an Act of Dethronement. In it he wrote: *I declare the decision of the National Assembly, ordering my deposition, having been taken under foreign pressure, to be unlawful and ineffective because contrary to the spirit of the Hungarian Constitution; and I enter a protest against it. I emphatically maintain the rights which the Constitution has entrusted to me as the apostolic King, crowned with the crown of Saint Stephen*<sup>61</sup>.

At 7 o'clock in the evening the royal couple and their retinue left Tihany Abbey, and an hour later were on board a train due to Baja, a town in Southern Hungary at the River Danube. Here they arrived at 7 o'clock in the morning on November 1<sup>st</sup>, and after descending from the train they walked, between two files of soldiers, down to the river where HMS Glowworm was waiting for them. The gunboat weighed anchor at half past 8 and the king left Hungary forever.

The deadline for dethronement set at November 8<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Bethlen quickly issued a bill on November 3<sup>rd</sup> for the liquidation of the sovereign power of Charles and of the succession of the Habsburg dynasty. He also requested a process of immediacy so that the debate commence the following day. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, he condemned the *irresponsible attempt which made a victim of the King, of the dynasty and of the tranquillity of the nation* but placed the greater part of the blame on neighbouring states which interfered with Hungary's internal affairs<sup>62</sup>. Apponyi finally chose not to present Charles's declaration before the Assembly and he merely stated that the bill was a deviation from the old constitutional tradition, and *even if it should take the form of a law it will remain invalid*. Then the Legitimists retired from debate<sup>63</sup>. They were lucky to not have to listen to the upcoming ironic – even sarcastic – speeches directed against the king and his supporters.

<sup>57</sup> PDH, VOL. III., NO. 1214, note 1.

<sup>58</sup> WERKMANN, The Tragedy of Charles of Habsburg, 275.

<sup>59</sup> PDH, vol. III, no. 1207.

<sup>60</sup> PDH, vol. III, no. 1203. The intervention was probably made by Count Miklós Szécsen and since its length suggests that it may have been an important one we can only regret that, seemingly, no detailed report of it has survived. It is very hard to tell, too, whether the King saw the secret agreement at all. Knowing his reluctance to read documents emanating from the Government there is reason to believe that he did not.

<sup>61</sup> WERKMANN, The Tragedy of Charles of Habsburg, 275f.

<sup>62</sup> NN 1920–1922, vol. XIII, 102f.

<sup>63</sup> NN 1920–1922, vol. XIII, 108f.

The second day of debate witnessed various other speeches critical of the Habsburgs, and 'putschists'. Rassay enumerated the classic arguments of 'free electors' for dethronement and proposed the enactment of the Eckartsau declaration as Article 1 of the new law and, in addition, the exclusion of all Habsburgs from among the eligible candidates to the throne<sup>64</sup>. Bethlen, however, was able to win the majority of votes for the original bill. On that very day, the Entente claimed that no Habsburg should come to the throne by election either. Since the National Assembly had already finished the debate and only the final voting was to come, the Entente decided to accept a declaration of the Hungarian government to the effect that they would consult with the Great Powers represented in the Conference of Ambassadors in the event of succession to the throne<sup>65</sup>.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, the Act of Dethronement won a comfortable majority in the National Assembly. On the next day, the countries of the Little Entente declared that *the solution of the dynastic question satisfies their claims*<sup>66</sup>. Czechoslovakia began to demobilise on the 8<sup>th</sup>, Yugoslavia followed suit on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Five months later, On April 1<sup>st</sup> 1922, Charles died in exile.

#### THE AFTERMATH OF THE ATTEMPTS AT RESTORATION

Charles's returns left Hungarian political forces desperately opposed and public opinion dramatically split. The interpretations and evaluations outside the frontiers of the country also differed. For the Entente, dethronement was the legal and final execution of the former declarations of the Conference of Ambassadors. For Great Britain and Italy in particular this was a political success – for France it was a missed chance to prevent the Anschluss. For the Little Entente it was an invaluable political achievement: the deposition of the king who, in his coronation oath, swore to defend the integrity of the lands of Saint Stephen's crown and never recognised the Treaty of Trianon, meant that one of the strongest legal arguments for territorial revision was eliminated<sup>67</sup>.

For the Karlist groups of Austria, Charles's failure was a major political setback, the unfavourable effects of which they felt at once. After the Easter crisis they abandoned the idea for a desired take-over and took a far more cautious line. Meanwhile, the triumphant Republicans – the Social Democrats, above all – exploited the situation to the full. Chancellor Michael Mayr found himself obliged to officially confirm in Parliament that Austria would stick to the Republic stipulated by the Treaty of Saint-Germain, and that the Restoration in Hungary would be dangerous for Austria<sup>68</sup>. No wonder that Charles's second failure and his subsequent dethronement dealt a deadly blow to Karlist aspirations in Austria – for which Ignaz Seipel and his colleagues desperately condemned the anonymous 'irresponsible advisers'.

In Hungary, since the two parties – Legitimists and anti-Habsburg groups – were somewhat more balanced in terms of political influence, the dispute over the attempts were sharper and lasted longer. After the Easter attempt, the government kept silent about the question of Restoration and discretely tried to convince the king to do so himself. During the Autumn crisis, however, the regent and his government reacted in a quick and resolute manner by stopping Charles's troops by force. Politicians and soldiers of the king's retinue were arrested and held captive, although shortly before their trial was to commence, the lawsuit was cancelled.

There have been various interpretations of these events. The Legitimists maintained that during the first visit Regent Horthy was disloyal to his king which he topped by committing high treason when he took up arms against Charles in October. According to anti-Habsburg arguments, it was Charles who was to be blamed for the events – first by involuntarily creating serious political confusion then by attacking the legitimate government and bringing the country on the verge of complete destruction. In any case, the positions of Legitimism – and even Monarchism – severely deteriorated

<sup>64</sup> NN 1920–1922, vol. XIII, 135–145, 158f.

<sup>65</sup> GRATZ, Magyarország a két háború között, 124.

<sup>66</sup> PDH, vol. III, no. 1259.

<sup>67</sup> ÁDÁM, The Little Entente and Europe, 117f.

<sup>68</sup> Katalin Soós, Burgenland az európai politikában 1918–1921 [The Burgenland in European politics 1918–1921]. Budapest 1971, 114ff.

despite the fact that, from time to time, vague ideas of inviting a Habsburg prince or a foreign aristocrat to the Hungarian throne emerged.

The days of the Restoration attempts continued to haunt some of the protagonists in their later lives. The political careers of many distinguished politicians like Count Gyula Andrássy Jr., Ödön Beniczky, and István Rakovszky were broken and they could never recover their one-time influence. Former Foreign Minister Gusztáv Gratz was lucky to remain one of the most able economic experts to be delegated to international conferences and was later to be given the difficult task of being the leader of the German minority in Hungary. In his masterful work on the Horthy era – written shortly after World War II –, Gratz gave a committed but fair report on both of Charles's returns. Aladár Boroviczény also published his account of the events – in 1924 – the circulation of which was banned many years later and the author was made to feel like a *persona non grata* in Hungary. Another Foreign Minister, Count Bánffy, left behind his memoirs – an interesting and delightful yet very unreliable reading – in which he made rather contemptuous remarks about Zita and Charles, and his Restoration attempts on the whole which, as Bánffy says, *gave evidence to every intelligent person of Charles's childish rashness*<sup>69</sup>. And yet another diplomat, Kálmán Kánya – who had the unpleasant task of convincing Charles to abdicate and of handing him over into the custody of the Entente commission – was made to remember those days on a very particular occasion. Soon after he was appointed Foreign Minister, in January 1933, he wanted to join Park Club – an exclusive circle of the elite dominated by aristocrats – and was immediately blackballed by the overwhelmingly Legitimist commission which – like the Bourbons – may indeed have learned nothing but surely also had forgotten nothing.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

While most of the motives for the king's return and the regent's resistance are well-researched, understood, and clearly explained by historians, there are a few questions that still remain obscure.

We can come to the conclusion that both the king and the regent had three major arguments for or against quick Restoration which contrasted with each other respectively. For Charles they were 1) personal and dynastic obligation deriving from historic tradition and divine vocation, 2) conviction of international support based on promises from French circles, 3) fear of successive diminution of his chances due to the consolidation of the 'status quo'. For Horthy the arguments were 1) maintenance of political power for the new regime which represented the political interests of the country more satisfactorily, 2) defence of important aims of foreign policy like joining the League of Nations and securing a referendum on the possession of Sopron and its vicinity, 3) prevention of the renewal of recent internal disputes which would hinder the effectiveness of political and economic consolidation.

We also come across with three yet unanswered questions. They are: 1) Whether or not the French government was indeed ready to accept Charles's return should the Hungarian Government reinstall him? (We know that there are several documents that refer to such support but we do not have any which would definitely prove them right.) 2) What was the role of the king's various advisers in persuading him to take action? 3) What was the intention of the Hungarian government with the last offer they made to Charles suggesting his abdication to the benefit of young Otto? (Would such a transmission of power result in a Habsburg regency as Charles envisaged it in his last will or, rather, in a Hungarian-run regency as – most probably – Bethlen and Horthy desired?)

<sup>69</sup> BÁNFFY, Huszonöt év., 63 (quotation), 87–92, 92–106.