ANDRÁS BECKER

Talking to the Enemy: British–Hungarian Secret Peace Negotiations in 1942–1943

In the early hours of 6 April 1941, while German tanks were rolling through the Danube embankment of the Hungarian capital, Hungarian Minister in London György Barcza (1938–1941) was hastily summoned to the Foreign Office to provide immediate explanations for this dramatic turn of events. That day, the Wehrmacht entered Hungary at the invitation of the Hungarian government, which, under immense pressure from Berlin, had capitulated and opened the country for the deployment of the German Army against its southern neighbour, Yugoslavia.[1] While earlier events gave some indication of possible Hungarian submission to similar German military pressure, the British government was nevertheless puzzled by Hungary's complete inability and unwillingness to resist such violations of its sovereignty.[2] At this momentous juncture Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden conveyed to Barcza his deepest disappointment in the Hungarian government, and

1 A pro-British coup d'état in Belgrade on 27 March 1941 had replaced the government of Prince Regent Paul, which earlier joined the Tripartite Pact. In response, the Axis invaded Yugoslavia and Greece on 3 April. Hitler immediately requested Hungary to open its territory for the deployment of the Wehrmacht against Yugoslavia, and to join the campaign. As an incentive, Yugoslav territories that formerly belonged to Hungary were offered, but, at the same time, Budapest was threatened with the creation of a South-German 'Swabian' state out of Hungarian and Serbian territories if it decided not to support German demands and declined to join the campaign. For the British role in the Belgrade coup, see Stafford 1977, 399–419.

2 During the German–Polish War in September 1939 the British had already received information that Hungary would allow the passage of German troops, if the latter were to invade Romania. Later, in April 1940, Hungarian politicians openly confirmed this information to British Minister O'Malley, see Becker 2015, 53–90.

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informed him about the British decision to break off diplomatic relations with Hungary. He stressed that attacking Yugoslavia, with which Budapest had only recently signed a pact of eternal friendship (12 December 1940), "would always be to the shame of Hungary, and Britain would remember this at the peace conference". The interview ended on a gloomy note when Eden noted that Britain "would never negotiate with those currently ruling Hungary".[3]

But, history tells us that in international politics very little should be accepted at face value, and such definitive declarations usually fail the test of time. This article concerns British – Hungarian secret peace talks between August 1942 and January 1943. This is a tale told against the backdrop of war between Britain and Hungary, and the emergence of an Anglophile group from the ranks of the Hungarian elite, which was keen to make peace with the Allies, and to distinguish itself from the pro-German and authoritarian outlook of official Hungary.[4] Dividing history chronologically is notoriously artificial, but by any historical standard this early chapter in Hungarian peace feeler history marks a completely separate period from later Hungarian overtures. The analysis here is interested in the ways this Anglophile faction pursued secret channels to the British in order to find a way out of the war, and, as one of them noted vaguely "to save what is left to be saved".[5] Being overtly anti-communists, they were reluctant to reach out to the Soviet Union, and were keen to find a détente only with the Western Allies. However, they did not seek terms of surrender, but instead aimed at making a political deal, one that would have preserved their power, in return for military cooperation with the West, and limited democratisation after the war. This article reveals their fatal optimism, and the complex

3 Barcza 1994, vol. 1, 500. Later in December 1941, at Soviet request, Britain declared war on Hungary, Romania and Finland for their continued military operations against the Soviet Union.

4 This article does not deal with Hungarian peace feeler attempts made towards the United States in the same period. In the timeframe under consideration here, neither British, nor American strategists made connections between their respective secret negotiations with Hungarians, and the question of Hungarian cease-fire and separate peace only became the subject of Allied strategy later in 1943.

5 The National Archives, Kew (hereafter: TNA), Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulates, Turkey (hereafter: FO 195) /2478/254, 59/4/43, minute by McDermott, 6 January 1943; quote by Gyula Mészáros, Hungarian ethnographer, orientalist and turkologist.

political issues dividing their ranks, as well as the flawed perceptions and strategies guiding their negotiation tactics. By examining a large number of hitherto unresearched official documents from British archives, this article claims that their emergence as a fresh force from Hungary initiated debates first in the British government (Whitehall), then between the Allies about the ways Germany's satellite should be handled.

Until now, historians have concentrated almost exclusively on a seemingly more important later peace effort (e. g. the so-called Veress mission, which famously resulted in Hungary signing a secret preliminary ceasefire with Britain in September 1943), and, generally speaking, any peace attempt originating from Hungarian government circles (including Anglophiles) was universally labelled as face-saving manoeuvres.[6] This new focus on an earlier period helps us call into question certain assumptions about the uniform pro-German character of Hungary in the war, as well as provides a means to more accurately understand both Hungarian foreign policy and British strategy towards Germany's satellites.

The analysis introduces the Ullein-Reviczky group, named after influential Hungarian Press Chief Antal Ullein-Reviczky, who became the main driving force behind the initial contacts. Documents from the archives of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)[7] confirm that he personally initiated, controlled and oversaw several secret missions in the name of this Anglophile faction. But, more importantly, they also reveal his much broader influence over secret diplomacy. For example, contrary to the existing historiography, it is revealed here that the often-quoted secret emissary of Hungarian Nobel laureate biologist Albert Szent-Györgyi in January 1943 cannot be attributed exclusively to the Hungarian democratic opposition, since, in large part, it was the work of Ullein-Reviczky.[8] This episode changes our understanding of government – opposition dynamics in Budapest, and establishes that peace efforts were kept under strict and almost complete government control.

6 Juhász 1978; Meszerics 2008, 195–216; Joó 2008. For the Veress mission; see particularly: Juhász 1980, 345–377.

7 The purpose of the SOE was to conduct espionage, sabotage and reconnaissance in occupied Europe. For the SOE; see: Foot 1984.

8 Juhász 1978, 33–34.

Regarding the British perspective, this article is interested in the ways Whitehall tracked, handled and responded to these peace efforts, and integrated them into war strategy and peace aims. The analysis throws light upon the often-differing visions of British government departments about how Hungary should be attracted to the Allied cause and handled after the war. The analysis of disagreements between the SOE and the Foreign Office, and debates within the various departments of the latter tell us about the paradoxes and interplays between short-term British tactical goals in the war, and long-term political and strategic considerations for the post-bellum era.

Despite the publication of a substantial proportion of British official documents about Hungarian peace feelers, much of the research on the subject has been exploratory in nature. What we know so far is largely based on limited empirical studies investigating policy conclusions.[9] This article remedies some of these shortcomings by including unresearched material from the archives of the SOE, as well as documents from the British legations in Stockholm and Istanbul, where most of the negotiations took place. Previously, the historiography focused almost exclusively on Prime Minister Kállay's peace efforts from the summer of 1943, and the early period of secret Anglo–Hungarian talks has been neglected.[10] Hungarian scholars have also been mainly concerned with finding explanations for Kállay's failure to steer Hungary out of the war, and have often cited Hungary's authoritarian, pro-German and corrupt character as the reasons responsible for this failure. Such approaches had a profound impact on the historiography, which until now has either related all Hungarian peace attempts to Kállay or has falsely conflated them into one Horthyist conspiracy that only aimed at ensuring the elite's survival.[11] This has

9 Juhász published a large number of British archival documents relating to British–Hungarian secret talks; see: Juhász 1978. However, this document collection only includes documents from the Foreign Office's Germany boxes, and documents relating to Hungary among the papers of the British Stockholm and Istanbul embassies, as well as from SOE's archives were not included.

10 Macartney 1957; Juhász 1978, and, more recently: Dobos 2016, 64–77.

11 This narrow focus can be partly explained by ideological tenets. In Hungary, research during the Cold War (or at least until the 1970s) was politically motivated, and permitted Marxist theory only.

resulted in a narrower perspective that has, for example, neglected the identification of different factions inside the ruling elite, although some of them made genuine efforts towards peace, particularly in late 1942. Similarly, the relationship between the government and the opposition, and the significant role the latter played in Hungarian peace endeavours were also left unexplored.

Before turning our attention to this early chapter in British–Hungarian peace talks, it is essential to recapture some of the background of the Anglo–Hungarian relationship, as well as British and Hungarian war strategies. This will explain that the failure to reach an agreement was not only the result of unique circumstances in the war (Germany's overwhelming domination of Hungary has often been mentioned), but also occurred due to the significant differences between interpretations of both the past and the present. Even before the official relationship ended in April 1941, the ties connecting the two countries, and the ones linking Hungarian Anglophiles to Britain were rather incidental. Before the war, for the most part, the relationship suffered from an almost unbridgeable gap in the assessment of the 1919-20 Versailles settlement. In essence, the inward-looking and moralising Hungarian claims about existing international issues (such as for example Hungary's contested frontiers) were in stark contrast to pragmatic British worldviews, which considered Versailles as the basis of the status quo.[12] The Hungarian state concept about the indivisibility of St. Stephen's (1000–1038) kingdom, and visions about Hungarian cultural supremacy in this realm (held widely among the Hungarian elite) seemed hard to square with the realities of interwar international relations, and British perceptions about national independence as a basis for international cooperation.

The outbreak of war further burdened Hungary's case in London. On the whole, in 1941–42, the British were looking for allies capable of fighting the Nazis, and perceptions about Hungary now centred on the single issue of its potential in this matter. In contrast to the heroic struggles of the Poles, the Yugoslavs and the Soviets, and the completion of formal alliances with Moscow and the émigré Czechoslovaks, vague Hungarian

12 For the Hungarian perspective, see: Zeidler 2007; British interwar strategy in East Central Europe is described best by Steiner 2011.

reassurances about limited commitments to the German alliance failed to convince British officials that Hungary deserved any special treatment. But, as a matter of fact, the Hungarian elite was looking to find exactly this special consideration. According to their assessments, the country rightfully occupied territories in Czechoslovakia, did its utmost to resist Germany to the best of its ability, and regarded the expectation to sacrifice itself for an obscure British cause most unfair.[13] What is more, they assessed that ideological questions were the main driving force of British strategy, and thus were convinced that Hungary's military actions against the Soviet Union would be understood by the British conservative elites, who themselves were also strongly anti-communists. This train of thought soon converged into artfully crafted pipe dreams about the possibility of negotiating a quasi-neutral status for Hungary in the war, which was the ultimate goal of overtures in 1942–43.

In sum, in British eyes, the bizarre and unconventional Hungarian worldviews, and Horthy Hungary's apparent unwillingness to actively resist Germany led to the distinctly lukewarm reception Hungarian peace feelers encountered in 1942. During the war, officials in Whitehall gauged Hungarian peace attempts according to their links to the untrusted Horthy elite and the guarantees they provided about resistance to Germany.

THE ORIGINS OF HUNGARIAN PEACE ATTEMPTS AND DIVISIONS IN THE HUNGARIAN ELITE

To begin the story of Hungarian peace attempts in the war, once again, we have to return to the momentous days of early April 1941. While German troops were passing through Hungarian territory (on their way to invade Yugoslavia), the staff of the British Embassy in Budapest was busy packing

13 On 2 November 1938, the First Vienna Award, an Italo-German arbitration concerning the Czechoslovak-Hungarian territorial dispute, transferred a strip of territory from Southern Slovakia to Hungary. Also, in March 1939, Hungary occupied Carpatho-Ruthenia during the final collapse of the Czechoslovak state.

and burning confidential material.[14] Basil Davidson, head of SOE operations in Hungary, was among the first to leave the country, and, in the company of his most trusted Hungarian agents, hastily made his way towards British Egypt.[15] Among Davidson's agents we find György Pálóczi-Horváth, an ambitious Hungarian left-wing publicist, who, with the help of a hurriedly issued British passport, now followed Davidson to SOE Mediterranean Headquarters.[16]

Here, unlike many of his compatriots, Pálóczi-Horváth never faded into the safety of émigré life. Driven by a very strong sense of left-wing political idealism, as well as deep frustration with the government's political intolerance and pro-Axis outlook, he led the way in Hungarian affairs at SOE Middle East HQ. His conspiratorial experience and obvious knowledge of the Hungarian language and culture soon catapulted him to an important role at SOE's radio propaganda broadcasting venture. Here, by the end of the year he was involved in broadcasting subversive propaganda to Hungary, and not before long, Pálóczi made significant efforts to shape (from exile) the formation of a Hungarian domestic resistance movement inside Hungary.[17]

Since its creation in July 1940, the SOE was keen to plant as many agents into Hungary as possible, but strategists were unable to find the most suitable way to infiltrate the country. In this effort, Davidson and Pálóczi-Horváth seemed to be the convenient choice to reorganise the Hungary

14 After the fall of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the British Legation in Budapest, in fear of imminent German occupation had incinerated its confidential papers at least four times until April 1941 (first in April 1939 when there was concern of German occupation of Romania and Hungary; second, at the outbreak of war in September 1939; third in April 1940, when Hungary granted military passage to Germany, and finally in April 1941). For historians, this is a major obstacle in the research of the Anglo-Hungarian relationship.

15 Davidson 1980, 54–60, 88–89.

16 Pálóczi recounted his experiences of Horthy Hungary and émigré life in two memoirs: Pálóczi-Horváth 1944); Pálóczi-Horváth 1959. For a summary of Pálóczi's work in the SOE in 1941–42; see particularly: TNA, Special Operations Executive: Eastern Europe (hereafter: HS 4) /115.

17 The SOE's subversive propaganda stations purported to originate from resistance groups in occupied Europe, but in reality they operated from abroad. In this case, the Hungarian subdivision worked from Jerusalem, and, from here, Pálóczi drafted and broadcasted incendiary messages to Hungary against the government. For SOE radio broadcasting, see: Mackenzie 2002, 142–143.

project. Davidson's positive reports about Pálóczi's dedication to the British cause, and not least the extent of his proven network of collaborators inside Hungary, soon convinced decision-makers about his potential usefulness.[18] In 1942, the SOE supported Pálóczi's network with hundreds of thousands of *pengős* and according to his own admission, money was no object when it came to the question of SOE support.[19] Later in 1943, Pálóczi's network became instrumental in bringing about a peace-attempt from the Hungarian opposition, which historical memory remembers as the Szent-Györgyi mission. But, regardless of Pálóczi's effort in empowering Hungarian democrats, and bringing about Hungarian attempts at switching sides in the war, it was the Anglophiles within the Hungarian political elite who made the first tentative peace moves in 1942.

The promise of territorial expansion was a primary reason for Germany's allies to enter the war. All of Germany's satellites (Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria) were only interested in fighting either to secure German protection from their enemies, or to recover lands that were taken away from them by previous wars or peace treaties. However, as one historian rightly put it, "once they had achieved their goals, their concern with the war waned quickly".[20] There was a particular lack of enthusiasm for the war in Hungary. The country was economically and militarily weak, and by April 1941 it had achieved most of its territorial ambitions.[21] Consequently, collaboration carried no real conviction, and the elite viewed the German alliance as a balancing act that helped preserve Hungary's recent territorial gains and their own political rule.[22]

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18 Among the most prominent contacts of Pálóczi we find liberal politician and publicist Imre Csécsy, the socialist journalist and politician Béla Zsolt, radical national-populist and peasant leader Imre Kovács, and the journalist András Frey, see Dobos 2016, 64–77.

19 TNA, HS 4/115, Pálóczi (unsigned) to Imre Kovács, undated (late 1941); Pálóczi (unsigned) to Imre Kovács, undated (February 1942?). The amount of 100 000 pengős is the approximate equivalent of $2 million in 2021 purchasing power value.

20 Mazower 2009, 327.

21 Between November 1938 and April 1941, Hungary regained approximately 1/3 of the territories it lost in the Treaty of Trianon (1920). These territories encompassed about 80% of the ethnic Magyars, who were forced into minority in 1920.

22 Of course, there was a strong and influential Germanophile faction in the political elite of Hungary. They occupied influential positions in government, politics, public administration and business, and were against the Anglophiles over policy. Although Germanophilia had been strong since the middle of the 19th century, Germanophiles should not be confused

Furthermore, from late 1941, Axis setbacks left their mark on perceptions in Budapest. The German defeat under Moscow in December 1941, the turning of the tide at Stalingrad and El Alamein in late 1942, Allied landings in North Africa in November 1942, and even more so, the destruction of the 2nd Hungarian Army on the Eastern Front in January 1943 intensified anxieties about the potential consequences of German defeat. Being particularly concerned with being associated with the pro-German character of the government, and terrified at the prospect of Hungary's military defeat and territorial reduction (now for the second time in their lives), Hungarian Anglophiles realised that seeking out contact with the Western powers was the only possible refuge to avert disaster. From the outset, despite their brave and determined efforts, their peace attempts were mired in contradiction, and ran into a number of serious difficulties. Most crucially, they lacked unity and a figurehead. We can identify three loosely-defined factions, which were neither completely separate from each other, nor exclusive in membership. They all agreed that in order to preserve Hungarian independence German influence over Hungary had to be reduced, and peace with the West had to be restored.

The first informal consultative group existed on the highest political and financial levels, and comprised Anglophile ministers of the Cabinet, and high-ranking officials in the Foreign Ministry and the Hungarian National Bank. They included Prime Minister Kállay, Interior Minister Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, Agrarian Minister Dániel Bánffy, First Deputy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jenő Gyczy, head of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry Andor Szentmiklósy, deputy head of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, Press Chief Antal Ullein-Reviczky, and, for example President of the Hungarian National Bank Lipót Baranyai. Loosely linked to them we find the second group, the so-called grey eminences of government, the circle of former Prime Minister István Bethlen (1921–31), with influential political figures and diplomats from the

with Hungarian Nazis and the far-right in general. On the whole, Germanophiles advocated preserving Hungarian independence, but imagined a closer relationship with Germany. In contrast, Nazis and the far-right, such as Ferenc Szálasi or Béla Imrédy hastened Hungary's increased participation in the war and aimed at transforming Hungarian life into a fascist and ultra-nationalist vision. For the Hungarian far-right; see: Paksa 2012; Paksa 2013; Karsai 2016.

interwar period, such as Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya (1933–38) and many others. A third and more diverse, but less political faction was taking shape around the colleagues, students and associates of late Prime Minister Pál Teleki (1939–41). This group was loosely held together in the *Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalom,* a highly secretive consultative organisation aiming to pool influential personalities from all walks of life.[23]

In 1942, the resistance these factions offered was primarily defined not by their desire to join the Allies, but rather by their fear of Germany. Hence, their actions were strictly limited and carefully designed to avoid provoking German countermeasures. Their preferred methods of resistance included the adoption of narrow political and economic measures (aimed at limiting, but not challenging German influence), the passive sabotage of pro-German policies on the administrative levels, or the publication of carefully phrased pro-Allied and anti-war writings in the Hungarian press. Such precautions, and the narrow and fragmented nature of their organisations made their efforts painfully sluggish and very ineffective. They were strongly anti-Soviet, but disagreed about the right approach towards the West, particularly about the strategy to adopt in secret talks. For the Bethlen group, salvation from Germany came from an increased and fuller Hungarian cooperation with the Anglo–American allies, but senior government officials and Prime Minister Kállay were less ready to openly defy Germany, and instead speculated that neutrality was the right choice to save the country.[24] Crucially, in early 1942, coordination between them was at an embryonic stage, and any activism existed only on the level of theoretical discussions. This passive resistance eventually morphed into complex *ad hoc* strategies, which in many cases confused the Allies. What is more, they commanded such secrecy that later, when their representatives approached the British in 1942, their Anglophile character was difficult to verify. On the other hand, this circumspect strategy left the stage open for

23 Szent-Iványi 2013.

24 Historical memory closely linked Prime Minister Kállay to secret Anglo-Hungarian talks in the war. However, it is mostly unknown that Kállay was more the proponent of achieving a quasi-non-belligerent status, and viewed good relations with the West only as a means to achieve this goal. During the war, he aimed at making as little commitment to the Western Allies as possible. See particularly: Joó 2008.

the bold action of courageous individuals who were ready to take higher risks.

THE ULLEIN-REVICZKY GROUP

One of these audacious characters was government Press Chief Antal Ullein-Reviczky, who set Hungarian peace efforts in motion in early 1942. Until today, he remains a controversial, and little-understood figure in Hungarian history.[25] His story describes a world of ambition, courage and patriotism. From early on in his life, he held conservative values, mixed with Hungarian patriotism and a passion for national independence. He served as a junior official at the Hungarian Consulate in Turkey from 1929, where he met his English wife. There he developed a close relationship with his father-in-law, British consul in Turkey Cyril James Cumberbatch, a connection that became instrumental later in establishing Anglo–Hungarian secret links in the war. After serving three years as Hungarian consul in Zagreb (1935–38), Ullein-Reviczky returned to Budapest, where he was confronted with the pro-German turn of Hungary's political leadership. Then, we find Ullein-Reviczky among the Anglophiles whose views and actions were formed and motivated by a deep sense of patriotism, rejection of Nazification, and strong disapproval of Hungary's officially pro-German foreign policy.

Ullein-Reviczky would have been the ideal candidate to prepare the ground for the pro-Allied turn of Hungary, if he had had the machinery of the Hungarian government apparatus behind him. Since 1938 he gradually consolidated his power over the Hungarian press, as well as domestic and international propaganda, which gave him unprecedented authority over

25 So far, historiography has been unkind to Ullein-Reviczky. Hungarian Cold War historians have either largely ignored his role in establishing a link with the British, or unjustly conflated his efforts with Kállay in 1943. Interestingly, although his memoirs are available in the Hungarian language since 1993, his war activities have not been adequately researched. Tibor Frank's recent work and the publication of his memoirs in the English language have opened new avenues into the understanding of his unique role in Hungarian history: Frank 2015, 591–613. See also: Ullein-Reviczky 2014.

influencing domestic opinion and Hungarian diplomacy. Regardless of government paralysis, which prevented any action that might upset the Germans, Ullein-Reviczky's traits and background significantly aided his efforts to break through the lethargy that overwhelmed the Anglophile group in the government, and the first tentative steps were made towards the Western Allies.[26] But, his activities were constantly surrounded by controversy. First, his immeasurable personal and political ambition made him a very unpopular character in Budapest, Berlin, and London. Also, in order to hide his pro-British activities, he regularly expressed his pro-German sympathies in public. As a result, he was distrusted in the Foreign Office, and his continued attempts to prove his otherwise genuine pro-British sentiments were to no avail.[27] Such British perceptions lingered, and in the end became responsible for the difficulties in finding acceptance for his emissaries in 1942. Regardless, Ullein-Reviczky's efforts deserve closer scrutiny, not only for the reason they genuinely sought to steer Hungary out of the war, but also because they helped establishing new channels of communication between Britain and Hungary, which were used until the German occupation of Hungary in 1944.[28]

Curiously, Ullein-Reviczky's peace activities date back to the tenure of Prime Minister László Bárdossy (1941–42), whose premiership is usually associated with more international isolation for Hungary and the government's weakening ability to resist German demands for increased Hungarian participation in the war.[29] While Bárdossy did not conceal his absolute conviction that Hungary's place was beside Germany, he never

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26 Only further research on Ullein-Reviczky's mostly unresearched papers could conclusively measure his influence in the government. The most likely scenario was that both Prime Minister Bárdossy, and later Kállay, allowed his activities, as long as they were in an individual capacity. This way, if anything went wrong, he could be easily sacrificed.

27 Because of his public pro-German utterances, Ullein-Reviczky was not trusted in Whitehall. What is more, key officials suspected him of being a German spy: TNA, FO 195/2478/254, 254/15/43G, Foreign Office to Moscow, 13 March 1943. Macartney did not share the Foreign Office's negative views of Ullein-Reviczky: Macartney 1957, vol. 2., 122.

28 Ullein-Reviczy 2014, xix, 92–93.

29 Famously, it was Bárdossy, who allowed the deployment of the 2nd Hungarian Army to the Eastern front, which was almost completely destroyed there in the winter offensive of the Red Army in January 1943. This military disaster contributed significantly to increased Hungarian efforts to find a way out of the war. For Bárdossy; see: Pritz 2001.

believed Hungary must completely submit to every German demand. While his legacy is badly tarnished, it is less known that he never discouraged or prevented others from seeking out contact with the West in the hope of finding a counterbalance.[30] With Bárdossy's tacit approval, Ullein-Reviczky made tentative steps towards the Western Allies with the aim of sounding their terms for ending hostilities.

First, from late 1941, Ullein-Reviczky made steps to enforce a standardised tone in the Hungarian press, one, which presented the conservative Hungarian case (as well as some Allied news) at the expense of German ones, which until then dominated the printed media. Also, he attempted to involve key figures from the General Staff (e. g. Vilmos Nagy Nagybaczoni) and the Centre for State Defence (e. g. István Ujszászy) in a conspiracy to make a concentrated effort to purge the military of German and Nazi sympathisers. What is more, Ullein-Reviczky, acting, as it appears on his own initiative, established a second diplomatic front composed of trustworthy press attachés and journalists, whose task was to get in touch with the Allies and act as intermediaries.

Ullein-Reviczky's memoirs bristle with exaggeration about his international influence, but without a doubt, laying down the foundations of Anglo–Hungarian secret talks in World War II is one of his biggest, but hitherto unacknowledged achievements. According to his memoirs, his father-in-law British consul in Turkey Cyril James Cumberbatch agreed to facilitate secret meetings in the summer of 1942. [31] However, the first verifiable contact with the British was made in Stockholm by one of Ullein-Reviczky's trustworthy journalists, Andor Gellért in July 1942.[32] The Hungarians considered that the best way to make contact was to work through Hungarians already employed by the British government, as it

30 Ullein-Reviczy 2014, 91–93.

31 Ullein-Reviczy 2014, 131.

32 Gellért was a journalist with worldwide experience. For many years he was the correspondent of *Pesti Hírlap* in France and Germany. He was the student of prime minister Teleki, and had a close knowledge of affairs both in Hungary and Germany. The question naturally arises: why was Stockholm chosen as a secret location? Obviously, Sweden's neutral status in the war attracted both Axis and Allied secret activities. But, Stockholm was perhaps seen by both parties as the ideal location, since it was the Swedish embassies in London, as well as in Budapest that continued the representation of British and Hungarian interests after diplomatic relations were broken between London and Budapest.

was hoped they could provide easier access to Whitehall. Ironically, they mostly had to work with émigrés, who left Hungary due to the country's political intolerance. This improvised instrument laid bare not only the authoritarian character of Hungary, but added additional difficulties in trying to restore good relations with Britain. Regardless, the Ullein-Reviczky group trusted that in times of crisis patriotism would override ideological differences, and hoped these émigrés would take up the case of Hungary as "honest brokers". Vilmos Böhm (commander-in-chief of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic's Red Army), in 1942 a Hungarian officer at the British Press Reading Bureau at the Stockholm Embassy, seemed to be a good choice for conveying messages to Swedish diplomats and British Minister in Stockholm Victor Mallet.[33]

Evidently, in order to gain British support, the Ullein-Reviczky group recognised the need to clearly distinguish itself from the so-called 'Horthy regime' as a fresh and politically more tolerant movement. Gellért was keen to project to the British through Böhm that they were now in touch with an influential reform faction, which, in collaboration with the Hungarian democratic opposition, was ready "to act and save the country". In no uncertain terms, Gellért described the group he represented, as opponents of the regime, and assured the British that they all worked for Hungary's exit from the war, and stood on the platform of the social and democratic transformation. He claimed that the main political force behind them came from the political collaboration of Anglophiles in the government (such as Ullein-Reviczky and Szegedy-Maszák), as well as the leaders of the peasant movement, Imre Kovács, Ferenc Nagy and many others. Moreover, he counted among his group leading Hungarian industrialists Baron Móricz Kornfeld and Ferenc Chorin, and claimed the movement included intellectuals, such as the historian Gyula Szekfű, as well as well-known journalists from the liberal paper *Pesti Hírlap* and the social democrat *Népszava*.[34]

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33 As a social democrat Böhm still opposed the Horthy regime, but, by the 1930s, he lost much of his far-left radicalism, and, until the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, he served as a regular and honest contact between the British and Andor Gellért.

34 TNA, Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulate, Sweden (hereafter, FO 188) /399, Parrott, Memorandum, 21 November 1942; FO 188/399, Parrott to PID, 5 December 1942. The specific political and military goals of the Ullein-Reviczky group is rather unclear beyond

Although the archival evidence is rather thin and contradictory, it seems that the collaborations of these parties and public figures at best were only consultative in nature. There is some evidence for meetings between Ullein-Reviczky and social democrat leader Árpád Szakasits and liberal leader Károly Peyer before Gellért's departure, but, until now, no reliable evidence has been uncovered to prove their closer collaboration.[35] It seems more plausible that Ullein-Reviczky and Gellért deliberately distorted the importance of any resistance which at this point was rather passive and mostly only political in nature. Although the evidence suggests that Ullein-Reviczky's efforts were genuine in their goal to make peace with the Allies and find a way out of the war, he, it seems, falsely portrayed his efforts as part of a broad and potent movement in order to gain British attention and support.[36]

Furthermore, in order to underline Hungary's significance for Britain in the war, Gellért went a step further, and offered military aid to the Western Allies. To the British, he laid great stress on Hungary's willingness to welcome Allied agents and to accept Anglo-American military occupation, and noted his group's readiness to carry out unofficial negotiations about Hungary's exit from the war. But, evidently, Gellért used delaying tactics. Instead of discussing the details of the latter, he focused heavily on whitewashing Hungary's controversial policies, and demonstrating the country's difficult position as Nazi Germany's neighbour.[37] He blamed

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the declared aim "to end the war", and "to restore and improve relations with the Allies". What the Foreign Office presumed about their political intentions came primarily from the reports Böhm and officials of the Stockholm Embassy sent to London.

35 Political collaboration between the Kállay government and the democratic opposition in foreign policy during the war is a thinly researched topic. Papers of leading Hungarian oppositional figures have not been researched from this perspective. Research on this topic is also hindered by the fact that due to the communist takeover in Hungary after 1947, left-wingers were very keen to deny and destroy any evidence linking them to the British in the war. For example, György Pálóczi-Horváth himself was imprisoned for 5 years in 1949 for his contacts with the SOE during the war.

36 Gellért 1974, 365–378; 441–458.

37 TNA, FO 188/399, Parrott to PID, 5 December 1942. TNA, FO 188/399, Parrott (British Press Reading Bureau, Stockholm) to Political Intelligence Department (PID), 7 December 1942.

Hungary's entry into the war and refusal to withdraw troops from Soviet Russia on fears of Germany.[38]

Despite Gellért's bombastic declarations, the British were able to see through the façade, and accurately decipher the true intentions of the Ullein-Reviczky group. For one, they had very little information on the parties and personalities Gellért brought up, and, in general, saw very little potential from the Hungarian opposition, based on their past inability to apply pressure on the government. Gellért's unexpected appearance, his grandiose offers to negotiate Hungary's exit from the war on a broad political basis, and his proposals for military cooperation seemed too good to be true. The British quickly realised that the Hungarians were unable to make concrete and effective military commitments, and their declared unwillingness to confront Germany (as well as their repeated references to the Soviet Union as an enemy) decided their fate. Gellért's admission of having links to the government were seen to be part of a plot designed only to gain British sympathy for the survival of the political elite, and evoked strong suspicions harboured against the Hungarian elite, which, according to British assessments, never displayed any real enthusiasm to resist Germany. British officials soon came to the conclusion that although a new group emerged in Hungary with the aim to find a way out of the war, the time had not yet come to separate Hungary from the Axis, since the Hungarians were only sounding out British opinion, and were unwilling to make sacrifices. For these reasons, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden assessed that "at present, Britain saw no advantage in negotiating with Hungary, particularly because such engagements would unnecessarily

38 Although the analysis of American policy lies beyond the focus of this book, it is worth mentioning that Gellért also met American representatives in Stockholm, and made somewhat more far-reaching promises to them. Gellért promised that no further troops would be sent to Russia, and that the remaining contingent would be withdrawn as soon as possible. This signifies greater Hungarian interest in pleasing the Americans than the British, which are even more apparent in later peace attempts. Compared to Whitehall, the US State Department also had a more conciliatory approach to Gellért, and noted that while at present Washington was not interested in these approaches, however, it would not close its ears to meaningful Hungarian propositions. At this point, the differences in British and American approaches had no impact on British or Allied policy towards Hungary (TNA, Foreign Office General Political Correspondence (hereafter, FO 371) /34447, C795, Halifax (Washington) to Eden, 14 January 1943.

increase the suspicion of British Allies (the Czechoslovaks) in the region".[39] Thus, the Foreign Office maintained the standard view about Hungary, which, since April 1941, dismissed the possibility of establishing contacts with Hungarian government emissaries.[40]

After the Ullein group realised that the British were largely unaffected by Gellért's promises, they reverted to shrewder tactics. Skillful in their strategy, they launched simultaneous diplomatic attempts (along with Gellért's), primarily in order to probe British responses towards alternative scenarios. Hungarian Marxist historians in the Cold War period failed to separate these from the Gellért–Böhm link, and assessed them to be part of the same regime effort. Most prominent of these was the mission of Edmund Demaitre, Stockholm correspondent of the British paper *Daily Express*. Despite being a naturalised British subject, Demaitre had wholeheartedly taken up the project of representing the Hungarian perspective. His hitherto unconsidered mission explains the true intentions of Ullein-Reviczky, and shifts our perceptions of Hungarian strategy towards peace talks. British documents about Demaitre demonstrate that in 1942 Hungary's priority was neither surrender, nor switching sides in the war. Instead, Anglophiles in the ruling elite aimed at making use of Hungary's still considerable economic and military potential in order to strike a bargain about Hungary's post-war role and shape.

First, in October 1942, aiming to circumvent the leftist influence of Böhm, Ullein-Reviczky instructed Gellért to approach Demaitre[41] in Stockholm, who, as the correspondent of the conservative *Daily Express* was expected to be more patriotic. Demaitre soon assumed the role of middleman between Ullein-Reviczky and the British, and, compared to Böhm, set a more nationalistic and revisionist tone. The new tactic was about opening British eyes to the strategic significance of Hungary's economic and military resources in the war. *Ad nauseam*, Demaitre explained to the Stockholm British press attaché why Hungary could not

39 TNA, FO 371/34495, C485, minute by Roberts, 14 January 1943; Eden to Knatchbull-Hugessen, 15 January 1943.

40 TNA, FO 371/30970, C12087/9685/G, H. L. Baggalay (Moscow) to Foreign Office, 4 January 1943.

41 For more on Demaitre, please see: Peter Tennant: Touchlines of War. University of Hull Press. 1992. 62., 121., 153.

resist Nazi Germany if the Allies invaded the Balkans, unless, "the overtures of the pro-Allied Hungarian circles will not remain without response and support". These fortified elements, explained Demaitre, would then be able to shift the strategic situation by producing an internal crisis in Hungary, such as had occurred in Yugoslavia in March 1941, which would allow Hungary to come to the aid of the invading Allied armies in the Balkans. In order to underpin his point, Demaitre added (with some exaggeration) that Hungary could provide 1 million well-equipped fresh troops, and would be able to supply hundreds of thousands of tons of agricultural produce, raw materials and petroleum products for the Allies. Exhibiting a good deal of unjustified confidence about Hungary's bargaining position, Demaitre suggested that such human and material capacity would tilt the balance in the war, and, as a matter of warning, added that if such British support would not materialise, Hungary (and its resources) would fall victim to either Nazism, or Communism, which would also wipe out the friends of Britain in Hungary.[42]

But, Demaitre soon gave away the true intentions of Hungarian peace attempts. While through the Gellért–Böhm link the peace feelers aimed to avoid directly raising the web of outstanding territorial issues, Demaitre made it clear that the Ullein-Reviczky group asked for a territorial price for Hungary's defection. Through him, it was made plain that the defectors would work with the Allies against Germany and Romania if Magyars "would not be included in those states after the war" (meaning: German and Romanian territories inhabited by Magyars would be ceded to Hungary).[43] What is more, Demaitre also requested British assistance for putting together a Hungaro–Czechoslovak–Yugoslav cooperation against Berlin and Bucharest, with the underlying aim to salvage as much as possible of Hungary's recent territorial gains in these countries with the help of a British-brokered deal.

42 TNA, FO 371/30970, C 10324/2672/21, Mallet to Foreign Office, 24 October 1942.

43 TNA, FO 188/399, 186/3/42, Parrott to British Minister in Stockholm, 24 October 1942; FO 371/30970, C 9685/2672/21, Mallet to Foreign Office, 6 October 1942. In effect, the Ullein group proposed the British recognition of the Second Vienna Award, as well as the possible Hungarian reoccupation of the rest of Transylvania from Romania, and Burgenland from Austria.

In reality, the Foreign Office paid minimal attention to Demaitre. While officials saw Hungary's willingness for talks with Czechoslovaks, Yugoslavs, and the Allies as a "promising sign", senior officials saw the resurfacing of territorial questions to be the continuation of interwar Hungarian ambitions to overturn the Versailles status quo, which London had discouraged since 1920. Now that Yugoslavia was a British ally, and that Britain had recently declared the 1938 Munich Agreement (and the First Vienna Award) null and void, Hungarian suggestions to rethink the status quo could not be fitted into the British desire to create long-term stability for this region, especially not by rewarding a pro-German Hungary. As a result, Demaitre's offer was rejected, as his mission was viewed as the machination of the Horthyist old guard.[44] At this point, concerns about the negative political implications of supporting Hungary had on the Anglo–Czechoslovak and Anglo–Yugoslav partnership massively outweighed the uncertain military gains Demaitre promised. Thus, neither the military's, nor the cabinet's opinion was consulted, and contacts with Demaitre were cut.[45] The policy of "no negotiation with Hungary" remained the official line, and, as a response to the growing number of feelers, it was supplemented with the formula "as long as Hungary fights our allies, it can expect no sympathy or consideration".[46] Crucially, this formula became the standardised approach towards future Hungarian peace efforts, and, even more importantly, future peace attempts from other satellite countries until an Allied strategy towards this subject was finally drawn up in mid-1943.

But, Hungarian bids did not end with Demaitre, whose mission was followed by a myriad of arguably less important emissaries between September 1942 and January 1943. Their common denominator, once again, was Ullein-Reviczky, whose explicit goal with these missions was to support the existing Gellért–Böhm link (the only open connection the British tolerated), and to influence British perceptions about the extent

44 TNA, FO 371/30970, C 9685/2672/21, minute by M. J. A. Spears, 10 October 1942.

45 Interestingly, the British continued to tolerate the Böhm–Gellért link until March 1944, presumably due to Böhm's extensive connections in the Hungarian democratic opposition. Officials at the Stockholm Embassy perhaps failed to realise that both Gellért and Demaitre represented the same Hungarian group.

46 TNA, (FO 371/30970, C 985/2672/21, M.J.A. Spears, 10 October 1942).

of Hungarian resistance within the political elite.[47] But, in the end, these emissaries were short-lived, since the Foreign Office prohibited any contact with them based on the new policy formula.

THE SZENT-GYÖRGYI MISSION

As we have witnessed, British official policy towards Hungary in late 1942 was defined by existing dynamics in the war. Hungarian promises about a future pro-Allied orientation failed to dislodge deeply entrenched British strategic priorities, and Whitehall remained passive and undecided about the appropriate strategy regarding Hungary. In the war, the country's role had been clear, and according to Cabinet and Foreign Office assessments it lay in the German sphere as an enemy by its own wrongdoing. But Hungary's future place in post-war Europe remained undecided. By 1942, the centrality of notions about post-war Central Europe cemented around two alternatives. One was about the restoration of the 1919–20 Versailles status quo in an alternative form, while others proposed the creation of a multinational confederation in the region in order to bolster cooperation and stability.[48] Both plans recommended the political and social democratisation of Hungary (which de facto meant the removal of the top political leaders, including Horthy) and the reversal of Hungary's recent territorial gains as minimum prerequisites for a peaceful and stable post-war East Central Europe.

Insofar as there was a British vision for Hungary's separation from Germany, in 1942 it belonged almost exclusively to former SOE chief in Hungary Basil Davidson and left-wing émigré György Pálóczi-Horváth, who both fled Hungary in April 1941. Unlike the British government, they worked tirelessly to organise an active and nationwide resistance movement inside Hungary, and to lay the foundations of a future leftist-democratic political

47 The most important ones included the Kövér, the Mészáros and the Széll missions. See TNA, FO 371/34504, C 1421/1421/21; FO 195/2478/254, 59/4/43; FO 371/30970, C 12087/2672/21.
48 Bán 1997.

and social vision. From late 1941, Pálóczi sent countless letters of support from the Middle East to his comrades in Hungary calling for immediate action against the "oppressive, war-mongering and pro-fascist Horthy regime".[49] Pálóczi's efforts, and the turning of the tide in the war swung the Hungarian democratic opposition into action which resulted in a new wave of peace approaches towards the Allies in early 1943. The real highlight of these efforts was the emissary of Hungarian Nobel laureate biologist Albert Szent-Györgyi, whose mission is the subject of this section. Until now, historical memory has preserved this bid as the only unified attempt of the Hungarian democratic opposition to overthrow the Horthy elite and to find a way out of the war. Now, fresh evidence from British archives sheds new light on this mission, and suggests that it had closer ties to the government than historians hitherto thought possible.

In contrast to the passivity of official British circles, the SOE actively sought ways to engage the enemy inside Hungary since 1941. Since Davidson and Pálóczi fled from the country, the SOE had virtually no agent in Hungary, and could only count on a handful of diehard sympathisers. But, enjoying more room for tactical manoeuvring, and having virtually no political limitations on its freedom of action inside Hungary, it worked with great enthusiasm to influence Hungarians against Germany, and to cause as much damage to the enemy as possible.[50] In these circumstances, the SOE hesitated between two different strategies. One imagined a two-pronged attack on Hungary, proposed by Basil Davidson, which aimed to strengthen resistance and the overthrow of the government by supporting both the working class and the Anglophile middle classes.[51] The other, advocated by SOE London desk officer for the Western Balkans Major Boughey, instead

49 The letters were mostly addressed to "Imre" (Imre Kovács – populist national peasant leader). These letters were often of great length, theatrical and moralising in character. They, however, offer insights into Pálóczi's links in Hungary and also to the extent of the Hungarian opposition; see particularly: HS 4/125. See also: Szeredi 2013.

50 Throughout the war, operations in Hungary were limited in their scope, especially compared to the main theatres of subversive activities in France, for example. Nevertheless, these SOE operations inside Hungary provided the only opportunity for most Anglophiles to establish direct contacts with the British.

51 TNA, HS 4/131, D/H18 to Cairo, 10 March 1942; Meszerics 2008, 195–216.

opted for inciting immediate revolution among the industrial workers and peasantry.[52]

Considerable thought and effort went into these considerations, but it was the broader Davidson strategy that finally gained the upper hand. By early 1942, Davidson managed to convince his superiors at Mediterranean HQ that he and Pálóczi had built and commanded a widespread and potent Hungarian underground network, one that could form the basis of an anti-German resistance. His and Pálóczi's efforts to force the pace, and the generous financial provisions of the SOE helped energise elements inside the Hungarian Social Democrat and the National Peasant Party by providing a much-needed moral and financial support at the right moment.[53] By early 1942, fuelled by Axis difficulties in the war, Hungarian political resistance towards the government (and pro-Western sentiments in general) had already gathered heart, and activism burgeoned. For example, a united anti-fascist movement, the *Magyar Történelmi Emlékbizottság* (Committee of Hungarian Historical Memory) was founded, which, in the coming months, organised a number of mass anti-war demonstrations and petitions. [54] Other parties and national figures, such as nationalist-radical Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, or social democrats such as Anna Kéthly and Árpád Szakasits (among many others) also became more outspoken against Nazism and the war.[55] While one cannot draw a direct link between SOE financing

52 TNA, HS 4/131, 4315, London to Jerusalem, 15 July 1942; HS 7/268, SOE War Diary for the Balkans and the Mediterranean, 34–35.

53 We know of at least one occasion, when, according to Pálóczi's Hungarian language correspondence, the SOE sent the amount of 100 000 Hungarian pengős for the purpose of book and pamphlet publishing, poster and leaflet printing and for general subversive activities to the Hungarian underground; TNA, HS 4/115, Pálóczi (unsigned) to Imre Kovács, undated (late 1941); Pálóczi (unsigned) to Imre Kovács, undated (February 1942?).

54 Officially, the Committee was founded with the aim to research and collect data from the era of the 1848-49 Hungarian War of Independence from the Habsburgs. In truth, the underlying aim was to create an anti-Nazi and anti-war platform. The topic of 1848-49 resonated well with Hungarian patriotism and the nation's current challenge to separate from Nazi Germany. It thus signalled the return to the long tradition of Hungarian national independence struggle against foreign oppressors. In March 1942, Imre Kovács, Pálóczi's closest contact, became the president of the Committee.

55 It is not the goal of this paper to introduce the Hungarian democratic opposition. It only concentrates on its elements that had any substantial connections to the British in relation to secret talks.

and intensifying Hungarian political resistance, but in the assessment of Hungarian democrats, this newly found British support added a new international dimension to domestic activism. British official documents clearly suggest that the SOE links not only encouraged anti-war and anti-Nazi sentiments in Hungary, but also opened up new possible avenues of peace with the Western Allies.

But, Hungarian authorities responded to any political resistance with harsh reprisals. Since the outbreak of war, the opposition was under close surveillance, and some of Pálóczi's secret correspondence with his network was intercepted, and links with the SOE were uncovered.[56] Also, by May 1942, several opposition leaders were arrested and the Committee of Hungarian Historical Memory was shut down.[57] While similar reactions were commonplace under the openly pro-German premier László Bárdossy, the prosecutions continued under the premiership of the more pro-Allied Miklós Kállay (9 March 1942–19 March 1944).[58] Until now, historians have agreed that Kállay genuinely (although with much hesitation) searched for ways to please the Western Allies, however, the evidence tells us that the underlying reason for destroying the opposition in its wake was, in some part, due to their British links.[59]

For example, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party was almost thrown into illegality in May 1942 when the secret police came to realise the extent of its British ties. General Secretary Árpád Szakasits was interrogated after a house-search found him in possession of a letter from Basil Davidson, in which Davidson urged him to lead the opposition and overthrow the

56 Szeredi 2013.

57 Committee president Imre Kovács, as well as György Bálint, Imre Cserépfalvi, Károly Háy and various social democrat and communist politicians were arrested in the spring of 1942. It is important to note that despite this far-reaching clampdown, several oppositions parties, such as the social democrats, small-holders or radical liberals still operated legally until the German occupation (19 March 1944).

58 According to the historical consensus, Horthy removed László Bárdossy (1941–42), Kállay's predecessor, for pushing Hungary to the point of full-scale collaboration with Nazi Germany, and for seriously aggravating relations with the Allies. During Bárdossy's premiership, Hungary, in alliance with Germany, attacked the Soviet Union (26 June 1941) and declared war on the United States (15 December 1941). After the war Bárdossy was found guilty by the People's Court in Budapest of war crimes and collaboration with the Nazis, and was executed on 10 January 1946.

59 Balogh et al 2006, 11–12.

government.[60] As a consequence, prominent social democrat leaders, such as Anna Kéthly and Károly Peyer, only narrowly escaped imprisonment. Closer analysis reveals that Kállay made efforts to clear them of all charges, but his inability to prevent the case from developing into a major domestic and international scandal, and his appeals to London to bury the case in the British press was received with strong disapproval in British circles. Certainly, there is no simple answer to Kállay's disposition in this case, and we cannot doubt that his underlying goal was to improve relations with the West. However, as we will witness, new documents about the Szent-Györgyi mission explain Kállay's motives, and prove that his actions against the opposition were fuelled by his aim to lock left-wingers out of talks with the Western Allies, which he aimed to control himself.

After the clampdown, the opposition's room for manoeuvre reduced significantly, and hopes for removing the Horthy elite from power and making peace were mostly tied to international developments. Finally, the turn of the tide in the war in late 1942 was seen to bring in new hope. Hungarian democrats were more willing than ever before to seek British goodwill. In this, again, they had found a willing collaborator in Pálóczi-Horváth, who finally managed to convince his social democrat, liberal and peasant party comrades to appoint a figurehead and "come out of Hungary" for talks. While initially liberal leader Károly Rassay was considered, the choice was finally fixed on Albert Szent-Györgyi, a non-partisan, widely respected Nobel laureate biologist.[61] Until now very little was known about Pálóczi's role in the Szent-Györgyi mission. His main contribution lies in providing the link between Hungarians and the SOE at a juncture when both parties were keen to build stronger connections. He persuaded the politically very heterogeneous Hungarian opposition that the British would

60 This letter was delivered to Szakasits in very odd circumstances. The wife of Hungarian diplomat Jenő Miske-Gerstenberger (Mary Allison Walters) handed it to him, and a response was asked from Szakasits on the spot; see: Balogh et al 2006, 97–100. Hungarian law (1930. III. 59 §) punished contacts with the enemy, and provided advantage to it, with 10–15 years of imprisonment.

61 According to Pálóczi, most Hungarian oppositional figures were anxious to play a more active political role, but were keeping a low profile until the war was over. Pálóczi fiercely critiqued them for their lack of courage (HS 4/115, A/H6's report on 'Y' [András Frey – foreign editor of the Hungarian daily paper, *Magyar Nemzet*], and 'W' [Ferenc Váli – Hungarian lawyer] mission, 24 February 1943).

welcome an appointed leader, and, in the SOE, he and Davidson managed to sway opinion about the capability of their network. Thus, when news was received that Szent-Györgyi wished to discuss Hungary's future in the war, the SOE received him with open arms.

On 7 February 1943, Szent-Györgyi finally arrived in Istanbul in great secrecy for talks with the British. On paper, he came with a mandate from a politically very broad coalition, including liberals, social democrats, legitimists, smallholders and the National Peasant Party to discuss Hungary's role in the war with the Allies. These otherwise very divided political groups pledged to fully support any action Szent-Györgyi may undertake in agreement with the British, and accepted him as the future prime minister of a coalition government. To the SOE, Szent-Györgyi conveyed his and Hungary's collective desire for social, political and economic reform, and, once in office, he promised to clear the Hungarian General Staff of any pro-German and Nazi elements, and offered military help to the Allies in the war. What is more, in response to SOE requests, he expressed his willingness to authorise the destruction of major bridges and other transportation hubs to impede the German war effort.[62]

In theory, Szent-Györgyi, an internationally respected scientist, and as the non-partisan figurehead of the opposition, was a key element in Hungarian plans to present a fresh face to the British. However, the decision to entrust Hungary's exit from the war to a person lacking any significant experience in political intrigue and espionage proved to be a fatal mistake. Immediately after his arrival in Istanbul, before ever uttering a word with the agents of the SOE, Szent-Györgyi, completely unaware of the German counterintelligence monitoring his every move, revealed the intimate details of his mission to a German spy masquerading as a British military officer. Thus, the peace efforts of the opposition were compromised from the outset, which later had very serious consequences for the entire country.[63]

62 Szent-Györgyi came to Istanbul to lecture at the university as a cover (TNA, HS 4/109, Istanbul to London, 9 February 1943; London to Madrid, 12 February 1943).

63 TNA, HS 4/109, Istanbul to London, 9 February 1943.

Until now, the historiography has approached the Szent-Györgyi mission based on assumptions about its unique oppositional background.[64] However, the exact circumstances of his appointment as figurehead, and the instructions he received from the parties he represented have been mostly unknown. SOE documents reveal that Anglophile groups in the government had an influential role in appointing him, and, more importantly, in formulating the messages he conveyed to the British. To the SOE, Szent-Györgyi openly admitted conferring with Prime Minister Kállay before leaving for Istanbul, who had given him clear and detailed advice about how to whitewash Hungary and his own policies.[65] Furthermore, Szent-Györgyi revealed that the key official standing behind his mission was no other than Hungarian press chief Antal Ullein-Reviczky. Szent-Györgyi claimed that the press chief organised meetings between himself and many other high profile Anglophiles, such as Interior Minister Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, First Deputy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jenő Ghyczy, and former Prime Minister István Bethlen before his departure, and Ullein-Reviczky fully instructed him on Hungarian foreign and domestic policies, as well as offered to facilitate secret courier service (and wireless communication) between the SOE and Budapest.[66] Furthermore, British documents also confirm that Hungarian liberal leader Károly Rassay (one of the key backers of Szent-Györgyi's travel to Turkey) was in direct and regular contact with Kállay about how to handle peace talks with the Western Allies.[67]

Besides, a lot of indirect evidence similarly suggests Ullein-Reviczky's influence over Szent-Györgyi. For instance, the ways Szent-Györgyi argued to the British about Hungary's difficult position in the war, the righteousness of Hungary's territorial expansion between 1938 and 1941, and the political future he imagined for the country were completely identical (down to the

64 Juhász 1978, 33-34. Such interpretations clearly originated from Foreign Office documents, which unanimously confirm that Szent-Györgyi represented the opposition, and worked against the regime. In contrast to this, the very detailed records of the SOE of the interview of Szent-Györgyi paint a very different picture about the mission's background, and admit that the professor represented the opposition, as well as Anglophile elements in the government.

65 TNA, HS 4/109, London cipher to Madrid, 12 Feb 1943.

66 TNA, HS 4/109, London to Madrid, 24 February 1943.

67 TNA, HS 4/109, Istanbul to London, 9 February 1943; HS 4/115.

exact words used) with the points made earlier by the diplomatic missions organised by Ullein-Reviczky.[68] If we consider the fact that in Istanbul Szent-Györgyi was introduced to the SOE by Hungarian journalist András Frey, an emissary openly claiming to represent Ullein-Reviczky, we have little doubt that Anglophiles in the Hungarian government were successful in controlling Szent-Györgyi's foreign activities.[69] Still, we have no reason to doubt that Szent-Györgyi also represented the opposition's agenda, but his contacts with Kállay and Ullein put the purely oppositional character of his mission in context. While the evidence is rather limited, it can also be suggested that Ullein-Reviczky, in response to the British rejections of the Gellért and Demaitre proposals, had attempted to use Szent-Györgyi, and his more extensive oppositional background to gain London's acceptance.

Thus far, the historiography has not treated the Szent-Györgyi – SOE talks in much detail, and analysis rarely ventured beyond the repetition of the professor's arguably far-reaching promises about committing to the Allied war effort and democratising Hungary. It is more problematic that previous narratives have falsely evaluated British reactions to be overly positive, and, without examining the SOE's own documents of the interview, failed to unveil the existence of some serious contentions during the talks. First, from the British standpoint, Szent-Györgyi's attitude resembled that of the Hungarian government's earlier delaying tactics, to which the British were long accustomed. Szent-Györgyi asked for full confidence in what he would say publicly as premier, for he admitted that courting Berlin would be inevitable for his government to survive and to avoid German occupation.[70] But, perhaps most revealing of all was his admission that in order to offer military collaboration to the Allies he would have to cooperate with the Kállay government. In essence, Szent-Györgyi offered the questionable collaboration of Hungarian Anglophiles and democrats, but proposed delaying political and military action until the moment of German military collapse.

68 See particularly: HS 4/109, Istanbul to London, 855, 9 Feb 43; Istanbul cypher to London, 858, 9 Feb 1943.

69 On Frey; see: HS 4/109, Istanbul to London, 851, 9 Feb 43.

70 TNA, HS 4/97, D/H13's interview with 'X', 13 February 1943.

Undoubtedly, this is not what the British wanted to hear. Such delaying tactics had long been disapproved of in London and were judged as signs of dishonesty and second thoughts.[71] Regardless, documents reveal that the SOE was profoundly impressed with Szent-Györgyi's offer of cooperation in subversive operations, and for this reason his mission was distinguished from other Hungarian approaches, which previously had all shied away from making such commitments. For them, the Szent-Györgyi talks offered unexpected tactical and subversive opportunities in Hungary, and his arrival was assessed as "a major turn in Hungarian policy".[72] It is this positive reaction that historians generalised as "British sympathy", but existing accounts have failed to resolve the contradictions between the SOE's very positive and the Foreign Office's rather lukewarm reception of Hungarians.

Opinions in London as to handling Hungarian peace attempts differed substantially. At this point, the SOE's objective was twofold. First, it hoped to gain operational benefits from Hungarian offers of military cooperation, and second, on the broader strategic level, much aware of its own significance in holding a line of direct communications to Hungary, it aimed to cement its dominance as a negotiator. In this context, for the SOE, concerns about Szent-Györgyi's political background and motivation, as well as the difficulties arising during the talks mattered little. But, the SOE's purely operational perspective has to be separated from the very different approach of the Foreign Office, where the arrival of an oppositional figurehead received a mixed reaction. While hopes were expressed about positive changes in the Hungarian approach, influential figures settled on a "wait and see" attitude, based on previously unfulfilled hopes attached to

71 Similarly, however, the Hungarian side was also far from content with the way the British handled the talks. For instance, Szent-Györgyi (and all consequent Hungarian emissaries) strongly disapproved of Pálóczi's far-left sympathies, and thus his prominent role in the negotiations was viewed with suspicion. More importantly, the professor disliked that he was in contact with saboteurs only, and was deeply frustrated that the SOE repeatedly declined to recognise him as a future prime minister, and refused him access to official British government circles: TNA, HS 4/95, A/H6's (Pálóczi) memorandum on conversations with 'X' (Szent-Györgyi), 24 February 1943; TNA, HS 4/97, D/H13's interview with 'X', 13 February 1943.

72 TNA, HS 4/109, Cairo to London, 15 February 1943. For this purpose, the somewhat puzzled biology professor was hastily trained in wireless communication and coding to be able to receive instructions later in Budapest.

Hungarian peace attempts.[73] In sum, until concrete evidence for Hungarian commitments was lacking, the Foreign Office refrained from encouraging these efforts because of their risk of raising suspicions in Czechoslovak and Soviet circles about Britain talking to the enemy.

The Szent-Györgyi – SOE talks resulted in no formal agreement. After Szent-Györgyi departed Istanbul, the SOE waited with anticipation for him to make contact from Budapest, and to take the steps he promised against the Germans and Hungarian Nazis. However, prospects for future collaboration were questionable, since it depended on the cooperation of a very fragmented Hungarian opposition, and on the personal abilities of Szent-Györgyi (and some other key figures) to coordinate Hungary's change of sides. Of course, the SOE was little aware that Szent-Györgyi had been uncovered by the Abwehr in Istanbul, and only narrowly escaped the Gestapo after returning to Budapest. The professor (and many of his conspirators) went into hiding in early 1943, and thus any hope for a separate agreement with the British seemed to disappear with them.

CONCLUSION

This early period of Hungarian peace feeler attempts is an under-researched segment of Hungarian history, but its significance also lies in its wider ramifications beyond its immediate object of study. By mid-1943, Hungarian diplomatic machinations unleashed forces in London and Berlin that fundamentally transformed perceptions about Hungary. First of all, they immediately became a sore point of the German-Hungarian relationship. The case of Szent-Györgyi, and, more importantly, the roles Kállay and Ullein-Reviczky played in these secret contacts appalled and outraged Hitler, contributing to his eagerness for decisive steps against his unwilling satellite. Conflict between Berlin and Budapest had been brewing since Horthy appointed the Anglophile Kállay as premier in March 1942, and now, Kállay's secret diplomacy was used by Hitler to blackmail Horthy,

73 Juhász 1978, 36; doc: 7, 9, 11, 12b, 13b.

and to tighten political, economic and military pressure and demands on Hungary, reducing even further Kállay's already very narrow room for manoeuvre. What is more, Hungarian historians agree that the uncovering of Hungarian conspiracy contributed to the eventual German occupation of Hungary on 19 March 1944.[74]

But, considering the primary aim of the peace feelers, which was to draw British attention to Hungary, it seems that the frantic diplomatic efforts were not in vain. In response to "some satisfactory developments in the internal situation of Hungary", the wheels of the Foreign Office slowly turned, and ground towards a more flexible stance towards similar secret contacts.[75] The activism of the Hungarian democratic opposition, and the efforts of Anglophiles to distance themselves from the current government, as well as evidence for a general Hungarian desire for peace were viewed as "the new hope of Hungary" in the Foreign Office. From March 1943, this notion triggered new debates about whether the principle "Britain would not negotiate" should still be upheld. This signalled a departure from earlier fixed attitudes, which until then demanded an immediate *volte-face* from Hungary and other Axis satellites. Senior officials in Whitehall now openly argued that the refusal to listen to any Hungarian proposals was strategically irrational and counterproductive in the war, since they alienated more serious attempts, and failed "making trouble for our enemies [...] in the present critical conditions".[76] The debate in the Foreign Office resulted in a new line of policy, which somewhat modified standard responses to enemy feelers ("so long as Hungary continues to fight our allies, she can expect no sympathy or consideration") by adding the new formula: "Although Hungary will have to make adequate restitution to our Allies, His Majesty's Government have no desire to see Hungary torn to pieces, or to penalise the Hungarian people for the follies of their government. Our attitude, and that of our allies, will inevitably be influenced by practical steps taken by the

74 This article had no space to delve deeper into the complex reasons for the German occupation of Hungary. For links between Hungarian peace efforts and German occupation; see: Veress 1995; Cornelius 2011, 226–76.

75 TNA, FO 371/34504, C 1421/1421/21, Roberts' minute, 9 February 1943.

76 TNA, FO 371/34504, C 1421/1421/21, Cadogan's minute, 11 February 1943; Eden's minute, 12 February 1943. Cadogan here referred to the critical German strategic situation after the Battle of Stalingrad.

Hungarians themselves to free themselves from Axis domination."[77] This new policy formula aimed to reassure the Soviets and the Americans about Britain not making separate deals with the enemy, as well as to encourage more serious Hungarian resistance and overtures to emerge. It is this more flexible standpoint that allowed the continuation of secret talks with Hungarian emissaries in Istanbul and Stockholm throughout 1943–44.

Regarding the question why Hungarians secretly contacted the Western Allies in 1942, this research contextualises the standard historiographical interpretation, which, until now, mostly centred around the role of Prime Minister Kállay and the political elite's fundamentally authoritarian and pro-German character. The analysis of this initial period in Hungarian feeler attempts explains that the internal dynamics between Anglophiles, the government, and the opposition were much more complex, and the initiative to approach the Western Allies came from a variety of political and social groups, which often had very different goals in mind. By late 1942, Anglophiles seem to have reached the conclusion that unless they offer political and social reforms they would fall at the end of the war with the entire political system. Meanwhile, the only available policy for the government, considering its staunch anti-communism, was to put its trust in the efforts of Ullein-Reviczky, and its hopes in the Western Allies to reach Hungary before the Red Army. On the other hand, being exposed to constant surveillance and repression, the opposition had no option but to cooperate with the moderate elements in the government in order to improve Hungary's position. But, a number of preconditions, besides political and ideological disagreements, stood in the way of success. First, a basis of agreement on how and to what ends contacts with the West should be sought was lacking, and, what is more, visions of influential politicians regarding the methods of cease-fire, peace and the post-war era were somewhat disconnected from the realities of war in 1942-43. While Hungarians seemed to offer terms to the British, in London they were

77 TNA, FO 195/2478/254, 254/15/43G, Foreign Office to Moscow, 13 March 1943. In the first months of 1943, for Britain, the unusual Hungarian offers promised diplomatic and military advantages against Germany, but, at this point, provoking the German occupation of Hungary by demanding an immediate switch of sides in the war from Budapest, and tying down German troops this way, was not yet considered. This policy was later reconsidered; see: Borhi 2010, 27–31; Borhi 2016, 12–20.

mostly interested in Hungary's unconditional surrender, perhaps with minor political concessions if Hungary substantially contributed to the Allied cause until the end of the war.

This deep polarisation among the Hungarians, coupled with growing fears of German reprisals paralysed most from taking the responsibility to openly confront Germany, or to side with the Allies. However, these unique conditions helped the emergence of audacious individuals, whose personal courage and initiative helped push secret diplomacy beyond the confines of the current state of the Anglo–Hungarian relationship. Antal Ullein-Reviczky almost single-handedly (with the tacit approval of influential Anglophiles in the elite) helped to establish secret channels with the Western Allies in the war, which have contributed to a shift in British policy towards Hungary. The dominant role of Ullein-Reviczky in organising secret peace efforts is an overlooked subject, just as his influence over the Szent-Györgyi mission, which previously was falsely attributed to Hungarian democrats. What is more, Ullein's efforts to set up secret channels for discussions with the British were later utilised in 1943–44 by new Hungarian peace overtures, e.g. by the Veress-mission, which in September 1943 signed Hungary's preliminary surrender deal with Britain.

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