

HUNGARY IN THE VIEWS OF POLISH CONSERVATIVES IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD¹

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Abstract

In this study, I would like to present the views of Polish conservatives on the Hungarian state in the interwar period. In the interwar period, there were few positive premises for cooperation between Poland and Hungary. The Polish-Hungarian policy was characterized by passivity, despite many previous years of friendship, no alliance between Warsaw and Budapest was concluded. Of course, ad hoc political considerations related to the plans to revise the borders, especially the border with Czechoslovakia, and territorial interests with regard to Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, as well as Romania in the future, brought both countries closer from time to time. In this study, the views of the National Democracy will be presented, which, in the interwar period, was one of the largest and most influential political parties in Poland, although it never created independent governments in the Second Polish Republic. I hereby present especially the views of Roman Dmowski, the leader of the national camp. While the Hungarian delegation left Versailles in mourning moods, it was R. Dmowski, who was the chairman of the Polish National Committee and the signatory of the Versailles Treaty, together with other representatives of national democracy (S. Kozickiego, K. S. Frycza, R. Piestrzyńskiego and Z. Berezowskiego).

Key words

Hungary, Poland, national democracy, political relations, National Democracy

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1. Introduction

The dispute over the genesis of independent Poland, which regained its sovereignty after 123 years of partitions, is still quite vital in the doctrine of Polish law. There is no doubt, however, that one of the most important factors which guaranteed this independence was the so-called “Versailles order”. In turn, at the Versailles peace conference, Hungary was recognized as the successor of the defeated Austria-Hungary in World War I. Under the treaty, the Kingdom of Hungary lost over 70 percent of its territory. Węgrów was outside the territory of the Hungarian state. As a result of all this, in the interwar period, there were few positive premises for cooperation between Poland and Hungary. The Polish-Hungarian policy was characterized by passivity, despite many previous years of friendship, no alliance between Warsaw and Budapest was concluded. Of course, ad hoc political considerations related to the plans to revise the borders, especially the border with Czechoslovakia, and territorial interests with regard to Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, as well as Romania in the future, brought both countries closer from time to time.

In this study, I would like to present the views of Polish conservatives on the Hungarian state in the interwar period. Of course, I will focus on the views of the National Democracy, which was one of the largest and most influential political parties in Poland in the interwar period, although it never formed independent governments in the Second Polish Republic. I will present especially the views of Roman Dmowski, the leader of the national camp.² While the Hungarian delegation was leaving Versailles in

2 Roman Stanisław Dmowski (born August 9, 1864 in Kamionek, died January 2, 1939 in Drozdów) – Polish politician, political journalist, minister of foreign affairs, member of the Legislative Sejm of the Second Polish Republic, deputy of the Second and Third State Duma of the Russian Empire. Co-founder of the National Democracy (National Democracy, national movement), the main ideologist of Polish nationalism. Polish independence activist, who in the first stage proposed the unification of all Polish lands and gaining autonomy within the Russian Empire, and then regaining independence based on an alliance with Russia and the Entente, and in opposition to the central states (in particular Germany). Associated with the neo-Slavic movement. At the end of World War I, he headed the Polish National Committee, which was recognized by the Entente states as a substitute for the Polish government in exile and a representative of Poland’s interests. Polish delegate to the Paris conference in 1919 and signatory to the Versailles peace treaty. A staunch political opponent of Józef Piłsudski and his project of creating a federal state – a multireligious and multinational vision of Poland, the creator of the

mourning moods, R. Dmowski, who was the chairman of the Polish National Committee and a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, could be pleased with himself.³ In addition, I will present the views of other representatives of national democracy on the Hungarian issue.

2. Hungary in the political views of Roman Dmowski

The Hungarian state did not play a major role in the foreign policy plans of the National Democracy. This was due to several reasons, including the fact that after 1918 it did not directly border on Poland and could not be a supporter of Polish politics. Secondly, it was in conflict with the Little Entente states, with which, according to the National Democratic Party, Poland should cooperate. Finally, the foreign policy of Hungary, seeking to regain lost territory, was contrary to the core curricula of the national democrats, who guarded the inviolability of Poland's borders.⁴ It was the revisionism that was, in the opinion of the National Democrats, one of the main reasons that disqualified Hungary as a state that could become a close ally of the Republic of Poland.⁵

incorporation concept of the nation state, assuming the polonization of the non-Polish population. One of the fathers of independent Poland – NIKLEWICZ, Konrad (red): *Roman Dmowski 1864-1939; w pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci*. Londyn, Instytut Romana Dmowskiego, 1989, 1-80; WAPIŃSKI, Roman: *Roman Dmowski*. Lublin, Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1988, 1-392.; KAWAŁEC, Krzysztof: *Roman Dmowski (1864-1939)*. Wrocław, 1997.; DOBRACZYŃSKI, Jan: *Spadające liście, powieść historyczna o Romanie Dmowskim*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Prasy Lokalnej, 2010, 1-251.; WŁODYKA, Wojciech: *Drugie życie Dmowskiego, Polityka*. 2012, 47, 58-61.; KAWAŁEC, Krzysztof: *Roman Dmowski*. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, Ossolineum, 2002, 1-36.; JACKOWSKI, Stefan: *Roman Dmowski i jego droga do Niepodległości*. Londyn, Poldom, 1980, 1-40.; KUŁAKOWSKI, Mariusz: *Roman Dmowski w świetle listów i wspomnień*. Dębogóra, 2014, 1-34.; GIERTYCH, Jędrzej: *Rola dziejowa Dmowskiego*. Chicago, Nakł. Komitetu Wydawniczego, 1968, 1-812.

- 3 DMOWSKI, Roman: *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*. 1. połowa, *Przed wojną, wojna do r. 1917*, Częstochowa, Antoni Gmachowski i S-ka, 1937, 1-386.; DMOWSKI, Roman: *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*. 2. połowa, *Wojna od r. 1917. Pokój*, Częstochowa, Antoni Gmachowski i S-ka, 1937, 1-400.; DMOWSKI, Roman: *Świat powojenny i Polska*. Częstochowa, 1937 1-336; DMOWSKI, Roman: *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska*. Częstochowa, 1938, Antoni Gmachowski i s-ka, 1-253.; *Program Stronnictwa Demokratyczno-Narodowego w zaborze rosyjskim*. Kraków, Przegląd Wszepolski, 1903, 1-59.
- 4 SNOPEK, Jerzy: *Węgry. Zarys dziejów i kultury*. Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2002, 255-256.
- 5 KOZIEŁO, Tomasz: *Trudne sąsiedztwo. Stosunki Polski z państwami ościennymi w myśli*

The direction of national democrats' thoughts on Polish foreign policy, including the foreign policy related to the Hungarian state, was given by R. Dmowski in the publication entitled: *"Polish politics and the rebuilding of the state"*⁶. According to R. Dmowski, it was necessary to strive for an alliance with Czechoslovakia and Romania, the interest of which was also to defend the Versailles order. Thus, the main ideologist of the national camp could not call for the strengthening of Hungary, as he considered it a state that had common interests with Germany.

According to R. Dmowski, before the First World War, it was not in the interest of the Hungarians to rebuild Poland. They believed that a strong Germany would protect them against the aspirations of national minorities in Central Europe and in the Balkans, so the alliance between Vienna and Berlin was in their interest. The Hungarians were afraid that the collapse of Germany would also cause the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the reduction of the lands subordinate to Hungary to ethnographic territories, which, of course, was contrary to the interests of Poland. He blamed both Germany and Hungary for participating in the war and was an opponent of the vision of rebuilding Poland alongside Germany and Austria.⁷ He accused Hungarians that at the time of the Austro-Hungarian uprising, the Magyars stopped supporting the freedom-making efforts of the Slavs, including Poland. Despite the fact that R. Dmowski appreciated the Polish-Hungarian friendship, for example during the "Spring of Nations", he believed that one should strive to weaken Hungary on the international arena and reduce its territory only to ethnically Hungarian lands.⁸ Roman Dmowski assumed that the main threat to independent Poland in the interwar period was a strong Germany, and he treated Hungary as a potential ally of Germany, not Poland.⁹

It is difficult to present Roman Dmowski's views on Polish-Hungarian relations without referring to the issue of relations with Czechoslovakia and Ro-

politycznej Narodowej Demokracji (1918-1939). Rzeszów, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2008, 199.

- 6 DMOWSKI, Roman: *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*. Warszawa, Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1989, 1-2.
- 7 STUDNICKI, Władysław: *Przebudowa Europy Środkowej przez współczesną wojnę. Sprawa polska i jej międzynarodowe znaczenie*. Wiedeń, 1915, 16.
- 8 Warto tu jednak zaznaczyć, że po Traktacie w Trianon spora część terytorium etnicznego pozostawał poza granicami Węgier. BATOWSKI, Henryk: *Rozpad Austro – Węgier 1914-1918*. Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982, 286-300.
- 9 KOWALCZYK, Michał: Węgry W publicystyce Romana Dmowskiego (napodstawie „Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa”). *Saeculum Christianum*, 2015, 22, 222-228.

mania. R. Dmowski differed in his attitude towards Prague from many leading politicians of interwar Poland. In interwar Poland, Czechoslovakia was accused of a generally unfavourable attitude towards Poland. As, for example, during the Polish-Bolshevik war, it was believed that Czechoslovakia sympathized with the Bolsheviks. Moreover, the occupation of Zaolzie by Czechoslovakia aroused negative emotions among Poles. The Czechoslovak Republic was attacked most by conservatives who considered it a state under the influence of freemasonry, being anti-clerical and artificially separating Poland and Hungary. On the other hand, the leader of the National Democrats positively assessed the existence of Czechoslovakia as being in line with Polish interests. He marginalized the role of the Slovaks in it, arguing, rightly so, that the state is controlled almost exclusively by the Czechs, hence he used the terms "Czechoslovakia" and "Czech Republic" interchangeably in his publications. According to Roman Dmowski¹⁰, the revival of the Czech state made it possible to rebuild Poland within such borders and not within other borders in the west of the country. He noted that, of course, Prague was not interested in building good relations with Warsaw, but argued that Poles should not pursue an aggressive policy, but strive to improve Polish-Czech relations, as it was necessary to prevent Germany's expansion to Eastern Europe. Therefore, he considered the attempts to come closer to Budapest and supporting the ambitions of Hungarians towards Slovakia as desirable actions for Germany, and therefore against Polish interests.¹¹

R. Dmowski was also very positive towards Romania, claiming that there were basically no disputes between Warsaw and Bucharest. Therefore, he saw Romania as Poland's natural ally. While Czechoslovakia was to prevent the expansion of Germany to Eastern Europe, Romania and Poland were to constitute a protective wall against the Soviets. Therefore, it was in the Polish interest to strengthen Romania, although he was aware that not everyone in Poland understood this.¹²

3. Hungary in the views of other representatives of National Democracy:

Another representative of the National Democratic Party who referred to the issue of Polish-Hungarian relations in his statements was Stanisław

10 DMOWSKI op. cit. 293-294.

11 KOWALCZYK op. cit. 226.

12 DMOWSKI op. cit. 290.

Kozicki, a Polish politician and publicist of the national movement, colleague of Roman Dmowski. Kozicki wrote that Hungary wanted to revise its borders and the territory that was lost as a result of the war, granted to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, and therefore would not want to belong to the alliance that defended the territorial system of the time. In his opinion, the victory in the 1935 elections of Gyula Gömbös's party exacerbated the already existing revisionist tendencies on the Hungarian side. He considered the trends aimed at border revision as dangerous for the whole of Europe, because the rejection of the Treaty of Trianon and the return to the pre-war borders threatened to politically destabilize the entire region.¹³

Similar views were presented by another representative of national democracy, i.e. Ryszard Piestrzyński, who was a journalist, politician, and a member of the Sejm of the 3rd term in the Second Polish Republic on behalf of the National Party. To confirm the expansionist aspirations of the Hungarian state, he cited, among others, Hungarian Prime Minister Istvan Bethlen's speech at the League of Nations in 1929 regarding the need to change the existing borders.¹⁴

For representatives of national democracy, the goals of Hungarian foreign policy, including border revision, were not in themselves dangerous, but the Endeks were well aware that the Hungarians were too weak to achieve these goals and needed strong allies. Such a natural ally was the Germans, who also considered themselves wronged by the provisions of the Versailles agreements and sought change. Therefore, almost throughout the entire interwar period, representatives of Polish conservatives denounced Hungarian-German cooperation and saw it as a threat to peace and the inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Poland. It was believed that Hungary and Germany had a common political goal, which was to regain pre-war borders and pre-war position in the world. Therefore, they strongly criticized, among others, the meeting of the Hungarian Prime Minister István Bethlen with the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Julius Curtius in Berlin in 1930, as well as the visit to Germany by Gömbös after the victory of Adolf Hitler.¹⁵ For the cooperation of Hungary with Germany, which was recognized by the representatives of national democracy as the

13 KOZICKI, Stanisław: Sprawy węgierskie. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1920/42, 1.; KOZICKI, Stanisław: Węgry i traktaty. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1928/353, 3.; KOZICKI, Stanisław: Jasne Stanowisko. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1930/158, 3.

14 PIESTRZYŃSKI, Ryszard: Polityka Zagraniczna. *Awangarda*, 1929/7–8, 168.

15 KOZIEŁŁO op. cit. 199-200.

main enemy of Poland and the political balance in Europe, made any political alliance between Poland and the Hungarian state impossible.

The second reason that hindered closer relations with Hungary was their cooperation with Austria, which, according to the National Democratic Party, also wanted to revise the borders. The greatest concern in this regard was presented by Stanisław Kozicki, who commented on Prime Minister Bethlen's visit to Vienna in 1931, saying that the main goal of both of these countries was to rebuild the great Austro-Hungary. To achieve this goal, both countries had to work closely with Germany, which, according to Stanisław Kozicki, was the only one capable of abolishing the existing borders.¹⁶ A few years later, he presented the consequences of the possible restoration of the Habsburg dynasty in Budapest and Vienna, of course related to the re-establishment of the Austro-Hungarian federation and joint actions regarding the change of borders, including also the borders with the Polish state.¹⁷

Accordingly, the Democrats were afraid that the possible cooperation of Hungary and Austria, based on the alliance with Germany, would create a very strong alliance in Central Europe, directly threatening, among others, the security of Poland. In 1926, an article appeared in the Warsaw morning newspaper, in which it was written: „*it is more than doubtful that we would have survived a similar upheaval in the system of political equilibrium without our dependence on Germany*”.¹⁸

Thus, the National Democracy negated any Polish-Hungarian agreement as one which was a threat to good relations with Czechoslovakia and Romania and the building of a possible alliance with these countries and which would consequently lead to the isolation of the Polish state in the region. Moreover, through Hungary, Germany could have an influence on the Polish foreign policy. On the one hand, such an alliance would in some way facilitate entering into friendly relations with Germany, but Poland could pay for it with Pomerania, Poznań and Upper Silesia. The Endeks also saw negative effects with regard to the relations with the Soviet Union, as such an alliance would be directed against the communists. Such views were expressed not only by Stanisław Kozicki and Ryszard Piestrzyński, but also by Joachim Bartoszewicz (a Polish politician from the National Democratic Party, columnist, indepen-

16 KOZICKI, Stanisław: Węgry i Austria. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1931/39, 3.

17 KOZICKI, Stanisław: Habsburgowie. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1934/243, 2.

18 KOZIĘŁO op. cit. 201. (Sugestie. *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 1926/209.)

dence activist, lawyer, doctor) and Karol Stojanowski (Polish anthropologist and political activist, scoutmaster, professor, he was the author of a number of works on history and anthropology, mainly political, social and historical anthropology, one of the most active eugenicists in Poland). As an argument for a negative assessment of a possible close Polish-Hungarian cooperation, the same argument was always made that Hungary and Poland were and would always be in opposing camps on territorial issues, and therefore a deeper political cooperation between them was impossible. The Polish-Hungarian alliance, according to the National Democratic Party, was simply dangerous for Poland, especially due to the German efforts for territorial changes.¹⁹

Despite these prevailing views negatively regarding the political alliance between Hungary and Poland, there were also some publications by representatives of the National Democracy that pointed out to some positive aspects of such an alliance. The aforementioned Stanisław Kozicki, who was generally negative about close Polish-Hungarian ties, emphasized, however, a positive attitude towards the Hungarian nation and attachment to cooperation between both nations in the past.²⁰ Karol Stefan Frycz, a lawyer and national activist, also wrote about the common features of both nations, such as: Roman civilization, noble culture, the tradition of fighting Muslims or the cooperation of both nations in the past, as well as the need for “eternal friendship” between Poland and Hungary.²¹

However, in their views, the National Democrats made it clear that, despite common traditions, political rapprochement and Polish-Hungarian cooperation would only be possible after the revisionist plans of Hungary had been abandoned. According to Tomasz Kozięło²², the Endeks believed that the Polish state should show political confidence only in those states that guaranteed the present state borders and the territorial structure of Europe after the First World War. On the other hand, representatives of conservatives clearly indicated that if the Hungarians, instead of the revisionist policy pursued in cooperation with Germany, came closer to the countries of the Little Entente, Poland should tighten its political cooperation with the Hungarian state. Of course, Hungary would have to give up its retaliation

19 KOZIĘŁO op. cit. 199-205.; (Szerzej Stosunki Polski z Węgrami w oparciu o w myśl polityczną Narodowej Demokracji w latach 1918-1939 przedstawia).

20 KOZICKI, Stanisław: Polska i Węgry. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1934/314, 2.

21 FRYCZ, Karol Stefan: Polska i Węgry. *Myśl Narodowa*, 1934/47, 685-686.; FRYCZ, Karol Stefan: Węgry a Polska. *Myśl Narodowa*, 1938/48, 734.

22 KOZIĘŁO op. cit. 202-203.

plans, but as indicated by the alliance with Germany, it could be dangerous for them, because they might regain part of the territory, but they would become a state dependent on Germany. On the other hand, cooperation with the countries of Central Europe would allow Hungary to maintain full sovereignty and political independence.²³

Some further changes in the views of Polish conservatives towards the Hungarian state took place in the 1930s, when, according to the Democrats, there was a chance for Hungary to abandon its revisionist policy. Assessing the meeting of Prime Minister Gömbös with Benito Mussolini, which took place in 1933 in Rome, among others Stanisław Kozicki claimed that it was aimed at bringing Hungary closer to the Little Entente, thanks to which the Magyars ceased to be a threat to the region.²⁴ A similar reference was made to the non-aggression pact concluded in 1938 between Hungary and the Little Entente states. According to representatives of national democracy, this pact guaranteed the inviolability of borders.²⁵

This was especially important after the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany. The new geopolitical situation in Europe forced the representatives of the National Democracy to modify their views on the political system in the countries of the Central European region. Moreover, it was hoped that Hungary, threatened by German expansion, would be forced to conclude a defense agreement with Poland and Romania. Among others, Zygmunt Berezowski, Karol Frycz and Marian Seyda (Polish politician and journalist associated with the national movement, in the 2nd Polish Republic, a member of the Legislative and 1st term Sejm, senator of the 2nd and 3rd term, member of the Committee of Ministers for National Affairs on behalf of the National Party from November 8, 1939) presented views on the necessity of concluding a trilateral Polish-Hungarian-Romanian alliance, which would prevent Germany from further territorial expansion. According to them, the Polish-Hungarian border was to be created by incorporating the Subcarpathian Ruthenia into the Hungarian state. The created border junction of three countries (Poland, Hungary, Romania) was to play an important role in the political system of this part of Europe.²⁶

The above postulates of the representatives of the National Democracy regarding cooperation with Hungary were only an episode in the overall

23 KOZICKI Stanisław: Jasne stanowisko. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1930/158, 3.

24 KOZICKI, Stanisław: Po rozmowach rzymskich. *Gazeta Warszawska*, 1933/236, 3.

25 KOZIEŁŁO op. cit. 203.

26 BEREZOWSKI, Zygmunt: Rozbiór Czechosłowacji. *Polityka Narodowa*, 1938/7, 426.

development of the political thought of Polish conservatives in the interwar period. The *Endeks* very quickly noticed that the Hungarians did not intend to form any anti-German bloc in Europe. For this reason, the publications pointed to the dependence of Hungary's foreign policy on German interests. One of the latest statements by representatives of the National Democratic Party on Hungary's foreign policy was the assessment of the statements by the Hungarian Foreign Minister Imre Csáky about the need for friendship and cooperation between Hungary and Germany. It was pointed out that in the event of a war, Hungary would find itself in the German camp, and the borders with Hungary were to be treated as Polish-German borders.²⁷

4. Summary

Briefly summarizing the views of Polish conservatives on the Hungarian state in the interwar period, it can be stated that the position of the National Democracy towards Hungary was twofold. On the one hand, the National Democrats emphasized the cultural, historical and civilization community between the Hungarian state and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The similarities in the historical, social and political development of both nations certainly facilitated their rapprochement and the representatives of the National Democratic Party could not fail to emphasize this in their views. In addition, a certain belief in the proximity of the two countries, as well as xenophobia, inherent in the conservatives of the time (one could also say the same for modern nationalism of the interwar period), could also contribute to a political rapprochement between the two countries. Moreover, possible close cooperation was favoured by the lack of a common border between Hungary and Poland and, of course, the conflicts related to it.

On the other hand, the attitude of the National Democracy towards Hungary was determined by political considerations which militated against close relations between the two countries. National democrats believed that one should not cooperate and form an alliance with a state the goals of which were contrary to the political interests of the Second Polish Republic. After the First World War, the most important political division in Europe was the division into the revision states, including Hungary, and the anti-revision states, of which Poland was a part. For this reason, despite their efforts, there was no broader cooperation between the two countries

27 KOZIEŁŁO op. cit. 204.

in international politics. Also for the National Democrats, the issues related to the revision of the borders and rapprochement with Germany disqualified Hungary as a political partner of the Polish state. The Endeks rightly believed that it should be in Poland's political interest to maintain the inviolability of the treaties, and thus of the borders. Of course, Hungary did not threaten Poland directly, but the great danger, according to the representatives of the National Democratic Party, was the support of a country that pursued a retaliatory policy. In their opinion, the territory of the Second Polish Republic would be threatened then, because Germany, taking advantage of Poland's consent to revise its borders through Hungary, could also file claims for the return of its eastern borders to the state before the First World War. Poland, which was more exposed to danger due to its geopolitical position, should, according to the National Democratic Party, seek to defend the status quo by creating a new political configuration in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, closer cooperation with the Hungarian state could lead to a tightening of relations with the countries considered to be the basis of the political system, i.e. Czechoslovakia and Romania. In addition, closer political contacts with Hungary would also result in closer cooperation with Germany, which was an ally of the Magyars. According to the representatives of the National Democracy, this could have led to the subordination of Polish foreign policy to German ingress. Therefore, representatives of national democracy showed political realism in Polish-Hungarian relations, ruling out permanent and strong political rapprochement as a threat to destabilize the European order and violate Poland's security.

Finally, it should be noted that Polish-Hungarian political relations in the interwar period were very much influenced (apart from revision and anti-revision considerations, of course) by national problems and the combination of international politics with the policy towards national minorities, common in the interwar period. This led to a short-term Polish-Hungarian rapprochement in the 1930s through the participation of both countries in the partition of Czechoslovakia. However, this did not bring any major benefits, except maybe that Hungary did not agree to help the Third Reich in 1939 in its aggression against Poland.

The assessment of the international situation by the representatives of national democracy, including relations with Hungary, was generally correct. Although the suggested steps to ensure Poland's security, as time has shown, were not entirely effective.

