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**THESES OF DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION**  
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**THE FRAGMENTED HISTORY OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING  
SECRET PARAMILITARY FORMATIONS IN THE FIRST YEARS OF  
THE HORTHY ERA, 1919–1925**

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## Introduction

The first years of the Horthy Era were one of those turbulent periods in Hungarian history that abounded in secret social associations, societies and alliances – mainly organised along right-wing, irredentist lines – which also had a certain influence on political life. These secret organisations sometimes had a legal front organisation (legally registered associations were not allowed to engage in party political activity under the laws of the time) in the form of a social association, but sometimes they carried out their activities informally, based only on verbal discussions and instructions between members. As Miklós Mester, a historian, member of parliament and cultural politician, one of the great historical witnesses of the Horthy Era, who himself was a member of several such secret organisations, writes vividly in his memoirs:

*‘There existed a dozen secret, half-secret and very exclusive societies with exclusive memberships, in whose circles it was essentially decided who would fill the leading positions, how the governing party would be put together, who could run for parliament, who would be the lords, deputies, slave magistrates, gendarme commanders, who would be included in the narrow circle of advisers to the governor.’*

The operation of the large number of secret and semi-secret irredentist organisations and the right-wing paramilitary formations that were active in the 1920s and closely overlapping with each other can best be understood in their complexity and intricacy through concrete examples and events that can be linked to them, i.e. through micro-historical case studies. Paramilitary activities and organisations, which were present in almost all European states in the years after the First World War with varying degrees of intensity, are generally defined in the international literature on the subject as military or quasi-military organisations and actions that complemented or replaced conventional military formations. In some cases, this was made possible by the temporary or even permanent disintegration of the state, in others by the state itself, and in others by paramilitary formations acting against the existing state.

The aim of my doctoral thesis is to examine and present the complex and contradictory relationship between the (paramilitary) functioning of the early Hungarian radical right and the (armed) far-right organisations and the State/Government, as well as the wider socio-political context of these phenomena. My dissertation aims to discuss the history of early paramilitary far-right movements in Hungary along three major thematic units, which can best be understood along the lines of the *militiamen–putschists–terrorists* thematic trinity.

Under the subtitle *Militiamen*, we will attempt to uncover the history of the Hungarian militia movement of the first years of the Horthy era, which can only be reconstructed in fragments, by presenting the history of the specific clandestine military formation called the Double Cross Blood Union, which operated as a state, or at least quasi-state organisation, and by presenting certain micro-historical case studies related to it.

The radical right and the various paramilitary circles were associated with a number of coup plans in the period. Most of them seemed to be ridiculous, but the coup plot of 1923 by Ferenc Ulain, a radical right-wing, so-called Race-defending member of the parliament who had left the governing party, and his associates, which was to be carried out in conjunction with the German National Socialist movement at the same time as the Bavarian beer coup,

deserves the most attention under the heading of *Putschists*. However, in addition to the ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’, we also describe two even more frivolous pub-table coup plans of 1923, the so-called *Három Kapás – Three Hoemen* coup plan and the so-called *Csocsó Bácsi – Uncle Csocsó* conspiracy.

Closely linked to all this, of course, are the *Terrorists*, or as they were often called in the press of the time, ‘terror boys’, since the radical right was associated with a number of terrorist acts that attempted to shake up and undermine the consolidation achieved by the Government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen. The majority of these attacks originated from the paramilitary wing of the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete – Association of Awakening Hungarians*, the influential and increasingly violent radical right-wing organisation of the time. Among these acts, the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, which killed eight people, the anti-Semitic assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő, which was also planned in 1922, but luckily was not finally carried out, or the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923 in which 3 people were killed stood out. Under the heading of *Terrorists*, we will try to describe these three incidents, their protagonists and the criminal proceedings that followed, with special emphasis on the highly publicised bomb outrage in Erzsébetváros, and to explore the conclusions that can be drawn about the relationship of the early paramilitary radical right-wing organisations to the Government and the Hungarian Army.

The micro-historical case studies that are necessarily fragmented, but perhaps still coherent and fit into a narrative, are based on archival sources. Since the history of the early Hungarian radical right paramilitary movements can – ironically – researched the best through the archival sources of criminal proceedings initiated as a result of serious atrocities committed by individual members, a very large part of the documents published are criminal proceedings, produced by judicial bodies – police, prosecution or courts. The majority of the sources interpreted in the dissertation are held in the custody of the Budapest City Archives and come from the fonds of judicial bodies.

At the same time, since the early Hungarian radical right-wing paramilitary movements, whose leaders included a very large proportion of military officers, were keen to establish foreign relations, with the knowledge and consent of the Government for a time, I have also examined some interesting sources from the relevant documents, most of which can be found in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, mainly among the records of the Political Department of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Although our thesis was intended to be primarily as a scholarly work, it was also intended as a summary of a series of archival source publications previously published electronically, which admittedly contained many overlaps, perhaps driven by a kind of the researcher’s force of repetition and the need to learn as much detail as possible, which is mainly aimed at a professional audience, we also believe that the story which it attempts to tell and restore may also be of interest to a wider readership who are receptive to the turbulent Hungarian history of the 20th century, providing less known information about the history of the years of the Bethlen Government’s consolidation policy...

**(MILITIAMEN) – The Double Cross Blood Union, a peculiar secret military formation in the 1920s**

The emergence of paramilitarism after World War One was a natural phenomenon in the defeated states, including Hungary, which at the same time became independent from Austria, and its fighters were still primarily active or demobilised soldiers, or possibly members of other armed organisations. Such formations were closely intertwined with the new, independent Hungarian State and its right-wing Government, as well as with the Army which operated within very narrow limits as a result of the restrictions of armament imposed on the defeated states, and was (re)organised partly from former paramilitary formations and free corps. The Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union is prominent among such organizations, because it is not just a kind of self-organising movement, a kind of comrade association, but rather a secretly operating state, or at least quasi-state organisation, which was established by the Government and the military leadership partly for the purpose of carrying out military operations that did not fit into the framework of traditional warfare in the Hungarian territories annexed under the Peace Treaty of Trianon.

Although the organisation was very much present in the public consciousness in the first half of the 1920s, and many illegalities (e.g. political and simple robbery murders, assassinations, coup attempts, etc.) were attributed to it in the press and other sources of the time, it did not produce much in the way of documentation, so we know little about its workings. However, this little is still much more than nothing. DCBU was, to simplify matters somewhat, nothing more than the military or paramilitary wing of the secret political organisation known as the *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, although it may have been active in its own right. Despite its secrecy and secretiveness, relatively little is known about the Union of Etelköz, the political secret society of the period with extensive influence, formed in opposition to Freemasonry and functioning as a nationalist version of it, and which was a politicising secret society, mainly from the memoirs of one of its founders, Military Bishop General István Zadravec. The *Union of Etelköz*, as a pro-government political organisation, indirectly controlled most of the Hungarian irredentist, race-defending legal and illegal associations, and can therefore be considered their umbrella organisation. It was probably founded in Szeged in November 1919, with the participation of politicians of the right-wing Counter-revolutionary Government and officers of the National Army, its armed forces. It should also be mentioned that, although the literature often refers to the Union of Etelköz far-right/radical, the organisation itself was politically very heterogeneous. Although its objectives did indeed include radical right-wing elements, it cannot be treated simply as the peak body of early Hungarian right-wing radicalism, since its members included representatives of the moderate right wing of the governing party and the radical right as well as the legitimists and the those who wanted to freely elect a king, united by the idea of restoring the territorial integrity of a country that had suffered collapse, civil war and then severe territorial annexation. It would be an exaggeration to describe for example, István Bethlen, Pál Teleki or Miklós Bánffy as right-wing or radical right-wing, as they were prominent conservative politicians of the period who played a fundamentally positive role in Hungarian history and were also members of the Union of Etelköz. At the same time, the association was also led by radical right-wing politicians such as Tibor Eckhardt, who from December 1923 also served as president of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the most influential nationalist mass organisation of the era, and was gradually taken over by Gyula Gömbös, later prime minister, who left the governing United Party in 1923 and was a

leading politician of the radical right. Until the end of 1944, the Union which later numbered around 5,000 members, was run by the 7–12-strong Council of Leaders in close cooperation with the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), which mostly comprised former and active soldiers, and held its meetings in its headquarters in Budapest. The Union of Etelköz sought to resemble the Freemasonry which it hated in its rites and appearance, ironically even setting up its headquarters in the Podmaniczky Street headquarters of the banned Hungarian Symbolic Grand Lodge, confiscated for the MOVE, with the *Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület – Hungarian Scientific Association of Race Defence* as its front organisation. Through its network of contacts, the organisation had a significant influence on political life, as its members included important political and military leaders of the time. However, the head of the state Regent Governor Admiral Miklós Horthy, contrary to popular legends, was a pragmatic, somewhat down-to-earth politician and probably not a member of any secret societies, but since many of his confidants were members, he was able to impose his will in these organisations. Those who were invited to join the Union of Etelköz took a life and death pledge to serve irredentist and nationalist causes in a ritual designed for the purpose. The Council of Leaders discussed important issues affecting the fate of the country, though it may not have taken decisions directly on national matters. During the Second World War, Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, an influential background politician of the time and the chief administrator and chairman of the organisation eventually came to support the Arrow Cross movement and gradually took control of the organisation, which by then had become less influential. The house at 45 Podmaniczky Street suffered considerable damage during the siege of Budapest in 1944–1945, so it is possible that the lack of resources relating to the association's activity is due not only to its clandestine operation but also, to a very large extent, to the wartime destruction of documents.

That is, much is known, albeit sporadically, about the Union of Etelköz, but the situation is worse for the Double Cross Blood Union, its military wing. The organisation was in all likelihood also set up in the autumn of 1919 to defend the counter-revolution against communist and other left-wing political forces. After the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, it also included irredentism and the restoration of the territorial integrity of the mutilated country among its aims as well. Its commander was Colonel (later General) Tihamér Siménfalvy, a hero of the first World War I hero and former Chief of Staff of the Transylvanian *Székely Division*, who also maintained close links with far-right organisations abroad, especially the Austrian and German nationalist paramilitary movements. Furthermore, the leaders of the organisation also included notorious figures of the White Terror, such as paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay. Iván Héjjas was also deputy commander of the organisation in the 1920s, and other leaders may have included the later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, László Endre, Military Bishop István Zadravecz, Colonel (later General) Károly Csörgy and Colonel György Görgey, commander of the Regent Governor's Bodyguards. The members of its militarily organised units were bound by a very strict oath, and its front organisation for a time was *the Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – Our National Past Cultural Association*, which was formed much later than the secret military organisation itself, its constitution being approved only in 1922. According to some sources, the secret meetings of the DCBU which overlapped closely with the various officer detachments (such as the military unit at the Hotel Britannia during

1920) were held in the Nádor Barracks, closely overlapping the by Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay's detachment. The members of the DCBU were mainly gendarmerie and military officers, as well as landowners and administrative officials with military past. In addition to the Budapest headquarters, sub-organisations operated in every major city, and its members were active in the state apparatus, primarily in the surveillance of individuals with communist leanings and the mapping of left-wing organisations. The name of the DCBU was also there behind such highly publicised crimes as the anti-Semitic motivated bomb attack on the Democratic Circle in Erzsébetváros in 1922, which claimed eight lives, the bomb attack in Csongrád in 1923, which killed three people, and the allegedly irredentist Hungarian assassination attempt on the Romanian Royal Couple in 1923. The documents of the 1922 Erzsébetváros bombing trial are also a very important source for the history of the DCBU, since according to the testimony of the Minister of Defence General Károly Csáky, the organisation was really established around 1919–1920 as a paramilitary umbrella body under the control of the Army with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations in the capital and the countryside under unified military control and of creating anti-communist law enforcement troops after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary. In this sense, it was indeed a secret military formation, a state organisation, even if some of its members committed serious illegal acts on their own initiative.

All of this closely coincides with the notes written in 1948 by General István Ujszászy, later head of the Hungarian military secret service, while in the custody of the communist State Protection Authority. According to these documents, in the 1920s, a group of officers led by Colonel Tihámér Siménfalvy was working secretly within the frameworks of the army, but with the knowledge and consent of the Government and the Regent Governor, to plan and carry out sabotage and subversive actions abroad, mainly for irredentist reasons. The Siménfalvy Group was based in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Buda Castle, and its activities were directed at the Little Entente States (Romania, Czechoslovakia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), preparing in the medium term for the possible military reconquest of Hungarian-inhabited territories. The unit was later called the Press and Propaganda Department of the General Staff, and contrary to its name, it did not only serve the propaganda purposes of the Home Army, but also prepared and carried out sabotage and sabotage operations in the Little Entente states in close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Siménfalvy Group, later the called Papp Group under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Dezső Pa which later evolved into the 5th Department of the Hungarian Defence Staff undoubtedly existed, and from their activities and from General Siménfalvy's activities as a leader and organiser we can infer either a close overlap with the DCBU or, with some simplification, a partial or complete identity of the two organisations. The DCBU bears strong similarities to the German 'Schwarze Reichswehr' ('Black Army'), whose various free corps – closely linked to radical right-wing movements, including Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party – were also treated by the German Government as semi-official reserve units of the restricted army.

As for the otherwise not very abundant historiography of the early Hungarian radical right-wing secret organisations, ideologically biased Marxist historiography in the Kádár Regime tried to magnify and emphasise the importance and activities of the right-wing social associations and secret societies of the Horthy Era, which had real influence, and the

paramilitary formations associated with them, sometimes even portraying them as a kind of shadow government; This is no different in the case of the DCBU. For example, in his monograph on the right-wing counter-revolution, the Marxist party historian Dezső Nemes writes that the DCBU was one of the most significant secret organisations of the first period of the Horthy era, founded in July 1919 by the so-called Szeged Captains, the first detachment commanders of the National Army. The organisation was said to be under the control of the army, and its medium-term aim was indeed to create tension and rebellion in the Hungarian-populated areas annexed to neighbouring states after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon treaty, especially in the Hungarian Highlands, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia and where, following the outbreak of unrest, the regular Hungarian Army would have marched in to restore order and recapture the territories. In addition, the DCBU was also engaged in counter-espionage activities and the execution of government-consented domestic terrorist acts, and Dezső Nemes, citing the memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, also claims that the organisation had been established before the formation of the Union of Etelköz, even though it was later somehow under its control because of the significant overlaps and the ‘shadow government’/‘cabinet noir’ character of the UoE – with some simplification, the Union of Etelköz was the secret government of the country and the DCBU was the secret army. Nemes makes some rather strong claims about the DCBU, but he cites few sources, so his statements have some truth to them, but they should be treated with careful and considered criticism.

The source base of the DCBU is scattered, and the information available to researchers on the functioning of the organisation is contradictory and vague. However, the fact that in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Horthy era, following the civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Republic, there were a number of shockingly serious and sometimes fatal crimes, both secret and less secret, linked to the radical right-wing associations and paramilitary formations of the era, which received a great deal of publicity. From time to time, the DCBU was understandably associated with these in public discourse, in the press and in parliament. The most notable of these were the anti-Semitic motivated murders of Iván Héjas’s paramilitary unit, the so-called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain*, the murders of social-democrat journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó, and the crimes committed by the detachment that settled in Hotel Britannia after the National Army invaded Budapest in 1919.

Meanwhile, in the spirit of political consolidation, the right-wing paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain led by Iván Héjjas and the armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians (ÉME) were gradually regularised and partially disarmed after 1921–1922. In parallel, the *Nemzeti Munkavédelmi Hivatal – National Labour Protection*, an auxiliary police organisation under the control of the Ministry of the Interior was established, primarily to suppress strikes and labour movement conspiracies and to provide security for the factory, which, somewhat anachronistically, could be described as a kind of white workers’ guard, and into which the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain, the national defence militias of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and other militias were absorbed – so under much tighter government control, but the organisations and their members could retain their paramilitary character and in fact continue to operate. The DCBU also continued to exist

within the National Labour Protection, and there is an archival source of this integration: a confidential circular of the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 forbidding members of the National Labour Protection to refer to the new strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the Double Cross Blood Union even among themselves, as it had been a body with a rather bad reputation. In this way, even though the Double Cross Blood Union officially ceased to exist in 1923, its members could continue to work in some form, presumably partly still in the public service, for purposes that they considered to be patriotic.

### **PUTSCHISTS – The ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’ of radical right-wing MP Dr. Ferenc Ulain and similar coup plans**

The early years of the Horthy era, as we have seen above, were characterised by a social and economic situation that favoured political extremism. The various radical nationalist political groups, dissatisfied with the work of the Bethlen Government in consolidating the country’s foreign and domestic policies, and some of the paramilitary groups associated with them, even toyed with the idea of attempting a coup and taking power by force. Such an adventurous and essentially frivolous coup plan, which nevertheless attracted a great deal of political and press attention, was the one proposed by Dr. Béla Szemere, hospital director, the commander of the auxiliary police militia called *Állambiztonsági Megbízottak Szervezete – Organisation of State Security Agents* (ÁBM) (by then also under the control of the National Labour Protection Service), originally under the control of the Budapest Police Headquarters, the Hungarian-born, American architect Titusz Bobula, and Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a lawyer and race-defending member of the parliament who had left the ruling United Party and was a well-known far-right politician of the time, were planned in the autumn of 1923. Given that the three men planned to remove the Bethlen Government, which they believed to be excessively liberal and pro-Entente and pro-Jewish, by force, with the armed support of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led German National Socialist movement, their plan of coup d’état to be carried out at about the same time as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch and dependent on its success, is perhaps most aptly termed as the ‘Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch’.

We can also infer the involvement of the Double Cross Blood Union (the involvement of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, which was closely connected and overlapping with it, can be proven), since it was the commander of the DCBU, Colonel Siménfalvy, who was in close contact with the German and Austrian radical right-wing paramilitary movements with the support of the Hungarian political leadership. Preparations for the coup plan must have begun sometime in early August 1923, when a young German man named Friedrich ‘Fritz’ Döhmel appeared in Budapest, claiming to be a representative of the Bavarian National Socialist movement led by Ludendorff and Hitler, and, with letters of recommendation that appeared to be credible, contacted a number of Hungarian far-right organisations and public figures. One of Döhmel’s first trips in Budapest was to the headquarters of the Awakening Hungarians which had previously had links with Bavarian nationalists, where he wanted to meet members of the organisation's leadership. He got to one of the association’s leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but he gave little credence to the German young man’s claims. Döhmel, however, did not give up, and soon contacted Titusz Bobula, the wealthy Hungarian-born architect who had returned from the United States of America with confuse radical right-wing principles in his mind, and his friend, Dr. Béla



Szemere, a hospital director. Szemere, as the de facto commander of the State Security Agents which continued to operate with some intensity, and Bobula, who provided financial support to the Hungarian far right, had been thinking for some time about how to remove the Bethlen Government, but their activities were limited to planning. The Hungarian parties believed that Döhmel was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisation, who was visiting Hungary to make concrete cooperation agreements with similar Hungarian far-right formations. The negotiations were conducted in German, with Bobula translating what Döhmel was saying for Szemere, who did not speak German. Döhmel asked how many people Szemere, as the former commander of the ÁBM, could call to arms in the event of a takeover attempt, to which Szemere replied that although the ÁBM had not previously been set up for the purpose of conspiring against the state at all, but rather to defend the state, there would certainly be people willing to support the cause. What is certain is that Szemere was not backed by a serious armed force, but soon afterwards the racist member of the National Assembly Ferenc Ulain, who had long been associated with Bavarian nationalist organisations and knew Hitler personally very well, was brought into the organisation. On Döhmel's initiative, the parties also drew up a German-language agreement on how the Bavarian State (which was to be created as an independent state) and the Hungarian State (which would be led by a new, radical right-wing government after the removal of the Bethlen Government) could cooperate in pursuing their irredentist and anti-Semitic goals. The document was drafted by Döhmel in German, and its essence was that the newly created Bavarian state would recognise the newly created Hungarian state with its borders of 1914, before the First World War and the entry into force of the Peace Treaty of Trianon. The contracting states would also try to help each other militarily in every possible way – in particular, they will join forces against the Little Entente Czechoslovakia and provide each other with military assistance if it attacks either Bavaria or Hungary. The treaty was signed by Szemere, Bobula and Ulain on 5 November 1923, and was scheduled to be signed by General Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler in Munich on the German side. Ferenc Ulain left by train, but never made it to Munich and was unable to meet the Bavarian nationalist politicians who were preparing for the Munich Beer Hall Putsch at the time. Namely, at Hegyeshalom, on the Austro–Hungarian border, he was detained by the police, told that the authorities had been aware of the plot and had the parcel addressed to Hitler confiscated. Soon afterwards, all three conspirators were captured by the police.

It was here that it became clear to the conspirators that the coup plan had not escaped the attention of the police, and that the authorities had been monitoring the group's activities for weeks when Ulain departed to Munich. The details of Döhmel's stay in Budapest between August and October 1923 are unclear, but it is certain that he was not the only agent of the Bavarian National Socialists in Budapest at the time. In fact, in the autumn of 1923, the Hungarian State Police identified dozens of young German men in the Hungarian capital who, as agents of the Hitler–Ludendorff-organisation, had letters of recommendation addressed to the Association of Awakening Hungarians. Most of them were finally detained by the police and deported from Hungary.

Szemere, Bobula and Ulain were finally suspected and accused of forming a conspiracy to incite rebellion, and the case of the immunity of Ferenc Ulain was discussed by the Immunity Committee of the Hungarian Parliament in the last days of November 1923, and a

thorough investigation was carried out. The race-defending members of parliament tried to excuse Ulain and his associates, tried to play down the case and stressed that Ulain and his associates were victims of an agent provocateur hired by the police, and made accusations primarily against bourgeois liberal patriots, whose aim, they said, was to openly discredit radical right-wing politicians.

On 24 January 1924, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest pronounced the first instance verdict in the case, sentencing all the three defendants to one month and fourteen days in prison. The defendants were released on bail in December 1923, and their sentences were deemed to have been completed. They exercised their right of appeal and were acquitted by the Court of Appeal of Budapest shortly afterwards on the second instance, which was very typical of the prosecutions of radical right-wing perpetrators of the period and may lead to deeper conclusions about the links between the authoritarian conservative Government and radical right-wing paramilitary organisations closely interlinked with the state armed forces themselves.

Although the coup plan was undoubtedly frivolous, it is ironic and at the same time somewhat frightening that the representatives of the Hungarian far right sought to contact and expect help in implementing their political ideas from the very German politician who, less than twenty years later, would become the most notorious mass-murdering dictator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This preparation for a coup, which seemed frivolous then and there, seemed to have foreshadowed Hungary's political and military involvement in the 1940s and its commitment to National Socialist Germany's policy of aggression in the Second World War. Interestingly, at an individual, micro-historical level, the same can be told of the leader of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch conspiracy: in the 1940s, Dr. Ferenc Ulain eventually joined the pro-German Armed Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi, which, in the final months of the war, brought a pro-German puppet government to power through a real coup d'état coordinated by the occupying German military forces, causing incalculable losses to the country, which was in any case losing the war.

### **TERRORISTS – Anti-Semitic political terrorism in the first years of consolidation**

A series of events far more serious and frightening than the frivolous plan of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch, which could be linked to right-wing paramilitary organisations operating under secrecy, disrupted the 1922 parliamentary election campaign, and at the same time gave the Government a new opportunity to take stronger action against political extremism, although the investigating authorities were only able to solve the case by 1924. Despite the Government's measures to disband the various armed groups in several stages, the Association of Awakening Hungarians was still operating armed paramilitary units, which were virtually without effective state control and which functioned as a paramilitary wing of the Association, similar to German Free Corpses and Austrian Heimwehr militias of the era.

In the spring of 1922, the members of such an uncontrolled militia, the National Defence Department of District 9 of the Association of Awakening Hungarians to commit a bomb attack against the headquarters of the liberal political-social organisation Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, led by the liberal opposition MP Vilmos Vázsonyi, at 76 Dohány Street during a large-scale event, and thus kill several people whom they considered enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent trial of the alleged perpetrators were one

of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the ‘bombing trial’ or ‘Márffy trial’ after the name of the first accused, young paramilitary commander József Márffy. The bomb finally exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, killing eight people and seriously wounding twenty-three others. During this period, there were a number of attacks on Jews and on persons and institutions perceived to be pro-Entente, including the hand-grenade terrorist attack in Jászkarajenő planned in early 1922, but fortunately not carried out, and the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which killed three people. Behind each of these events, there was the emergence of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the politically most influential far-right social organisation of the time, and the paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who also acted as emerging, ambitious radical right-wing politicians.

The bomb attack in Erzsébetváros was finally not tried alone, but the indictment was eventually linked it to other anti-Semitic and anti-Entente crimes committed in Budapest. The charge of the bombing of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was thus merged with an attempted pogrom against the synagogue in Újpest, which was finally not carried out, a bomb attack attempted against the Koháry Street Courty Palace and the French Embassy, and a similar attack that was planned against the Czechoslovak Embassy, and it was only by luck that these bombs finally did not explode. Andor Miklós, a liberal journalist and newspaper owner, and Károly Rassay, a member of the parliament and well-known liberal opposition politician of the time, were furthermore sent packages containing hand-grenades that were set to explode, and it was also only by luck and the vigilance of those present that these packages did not explode. At the same time, the Budapest Commissioner of the Hungarian State Police, the Speaker of the Parliament and the French Embassy received a life-threatening letter signed by the senders as ‘Committee 101’. The Royal Prosecutor’s Office in Budapest accused the young militiamen of ‘deviating from the central national defence objectives, preparing anti-social attacks and making it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by means of so-called Jew-bashing and bombings.’

The political gravity of the bomb case is well illustrated by the fact that Minister of Defence Count General Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen were also examined as witnesses at the first instance trial. As General Csáky explained in his testimony on the Double Cross Blood Union mentioned above, in the civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the country had no unified regular army, but there were about fifty civilian militias in Budapest alone in addition to the National Army organised by Horthy and his military circle. Among these were the National Defence Departments of the Association of Awakening Hungarian which were indirectly under the control of the DCBU. The new right-wing Hungarian Government, which was consolidating in a chaotic situation, needed these irregular, armed paramilitary units to maintain an unstable order, and the Chief of the General Staff Béla Berzeviczy sought to bring these militias under the control of the Army in 1919–20. However, it was precisely because some of its members had committed serious crimes that the government had to formally dissolve the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. At the time of the bomb assassination Erzsébetváros, the national defence militia of District 9 of Budapest commanded by József Márffy was already operating without any serious state control or instruction, and what they did was of their own free will.

Prime Minister István Bethlen appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case than to clear himself as a private citizen, as József Márffy claimed that he had a personal acquaintance with the incumbent Prime Minister and his family, and that he often travelled in the Prime Minister's car. Bethlen, on the other hand, flatly denied in court that he or any of his family members knew Márffy even superficially.

The 'Márffy trial' was probably necessary primarily because of foreign pressure, in order for the Hungarian State to demonstrate to the Entente powers, especially to France that the revolutionary and civil war years following World War One were finally over, that political and social order had been restored, the Government had accepted the territorial losses recorded in the Peace Treaty of Trianon, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Although József Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his accomplices, who were also sentenced to death, were finally executed. The trial continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia (Supreme Court), and ended with much lighter sentences. The armed formations of the of the Awakening Hungarians were then however disarmed, the paramilitary wing of the association was clearly stripped of its vigilante-like authority, and the right-wing paramilitary formations, although they did not completely cease to exist, were brought under much closer state control and their activities were reduced.

The Bethlen Government finally succeeded, with great difficulty, in achieving relative consolidation in the social, economic and political spheres. On 21 January 1923, Hungary was finally admitted to the League of Nations, its rehabilitation in foreign political sense was essentially complete, and from then on the Association of Awakening Hungarians was merely a kind of loyal far-right opposition to the ruling party. Although it remained a social association until its dissolution in 1945, its political influence declined significantly with the emergence of new radical right-wing parties. Between 1924 and 1945, the emergence of various far-right, Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties mainly modelled on German, Austrian and Italian political movements, severely eroded the influence of the Awakening movement, and its membership declined, although there was still considerable overlap in terms of the membership between the radical right-wing parties of the 1920s and 1930s and the membership of the Association of Awakening Hungarians.

### **The Afterlife of Radical Right-Wing Hungarian Militias following 1925**

As there are many indications, one of the successors of the radical right-wing, partly paramilitary secret organisations of the 1920s was none other than the National Association of Hungarian Race Defenders, founded in 1938, and the *National Defence Association* (*Országos Nemzetvédelmi Szövetség*) which was formed from it in 1942. In addition to Héjjas, the organisation's board of directors included former paramilitary commanders Pál Prónay and Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, but also Tivadar Kováts, an emblematic member of the Kovács brothers' paramilitary organisation (at the time he held the position of executive director of the National Committee for National Defence), and retired General László Magasházy, the former aide-de-camp and confidant of the Regent Governor Miklós Horthy.

The National Defence Association was an important political and social backbone organisation during the Second World War period which played a prominent role in spreading propaganda in favour of the governor and was also key to the failed attempt to escape. The National Defence Association and its governing body, the National Defence Committee, which also awarded the National Defence Cross, the high state decoration for counter-revolutionary activities, functioned during this period as a quasi-state, secret-service-like body, similar to the former Double Cross Blood Association, and had the important task of counteracting the Hungarian National Socialist movements on the radical right, which were under strong German influence. In the fracture between the pro-government/anti-German and pro-German extreme right, this organisation was perhaps the most strongly pro-government and/or anti-German. Not surprisingly, the Association maintained very close links with the military national security services and the Order of the Vitézi, which also functioned as a quasi-state security agency, during the 1940s. The deeper details of the history of the National Defence League/Committee are still to be explored by historians. What is almost certain is that the political-paramilitary network of former counter-revolutionaries and detachment soldiers and its political movements can be traced primarily through the person of Iván Héjjas, who, if not the sole leader of this network in the period between the two world wars, remained a dominant figure throughout.

The extensive network and lobbying activities of the National National Defence League probably played a significant role in the organisation of the election of Miklós Horthy's son, István Horthy, as Deputy Regent Governor in 1942. However, the organisation and its members were ultimately defeated by the pro-German, National Socialist-style far-right, and the attempt to break away in 1944, as we know, failed. In any case, the contrast between the two tendencies is well illustrated by the fact that Iván Héjjas, for example, remained loyal to the governor throughout the 1920s, while Pál Prónay, although he did not become clearly National Socialist in ideological terms, offered his services to the Arrow Cross after the German occupation of Hungary. But in this sense the contrast is even clearer between, for example, Iván Héjjas and László Endre, the former of whom, as a believer in the old race-defending ideas, became one of the leaders of the anti-German wing of the Hungarian radical right, while the latter, as an official of the collaborationist Sztójay government and then of the now fully German-controlled Szálasi Government, became one of the main organisers of the extermination of Hungarian Jewry and thus one of the Hungarian servants of the Third Reich's mass murderous policy. What the two notorious Hungarian radical right-wing politicians had in common was their involvement as military officers in the counter-revolution after the collapse of the Soviet Republic and in the organisation of Hungarian irregular military units, partly to evade arms restrictions and to pursue irredentist aims in the defeated states. They were both leading members of the radical right-wing secret organisations of the 1920s, the Union of Etelköz and the Double Cross Blood Union, which were both politically influential, and of the Association of Awakening Hungarians (ÉME) and the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), which were partly openly active mass organisations during the period between the two world wars. They also received their titles of Vitéz at the same time, in 1929. In addition, both of them had relatively high public service careers Héjjas first as a member of parliament, then as a head of department in a ministry, and finally as a titular state secretary, Endre as a high-ranking county official, and later State

Secretary for Internal Affairs exercising the powers of the Ministry of the Interior, and finally as an Extraordinary Government Commissioner during the reign of the Arrow Cross Government in 1944–1945. Broadly speaking, they started out on the same footing in 1919–1920, their nationalist and anti-Semitic ideologies were very similar, they took leading roles in the same clandestine political and paramilitary organisations, yet towards the end of the Second World War they took different sides in their attitude to growing German political influence.

According to the conclusion of the dissertation, Hungarian government policy in the 1930s was gradually moving more and more in the direction of the spirit of the early radical right-wing armed secret societies of the first half of the 1920s and the paramilitary units associated with them, or the spirit of their representatives. Of course, like all summary statements, this is a necessary simplification of historical facts, but the revisionism and irredentism that fed on the national trauma of Trianon, the anti-Semitism that was closely linked to it, and the social conflicts arising from the unresolved, outdated economic and social structure did indeed lead to an accelerating drift to the right in Hungarian politics and society, and in parallel to the country's commitment to German and Italian policies of aggression.

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