

**Book review: András Hory, “*A Dead Post*”: *Memoirs and Correspondence of the Kingdom of Hungary Envoy in Warsaw 1935–1939*. Foreword by Pál Pritz, afterword by Marek Kornat, Warsaw; The Institute of National Remembrance. Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, The Hungarian Institute for Culture in Warsaw, 2017, 384 pp. + photos**

The publication of the Polish translation of the documents in Hungarian produced by a Hungarian envoy in Warsaw, András Hory, during his stay in Warsaw, deserves to be welcomed with a great interest. The collection, comprising various written forms, an aftermath of Hory’s diplomatic service in the years 1935–1939, superbly shows the meanders of the complex European politics before the outbreak of the Second World War. What contributes to its value is the fact that it was written by an expert diplomat who had held the office of a Hungarian envoy in Bucharest, Belgrade and Rome, and eventually of a deputy minister for foreign affairs – therefore being able to get a deeper insight into what was happening in European diplomacy at the time.

The book has a pretty logical and clear structure. The sources themselves are preceded by the *Foreword* by Pál Pritz and *Editor’s note*. The main body of the publication is divided into two parts: the memoirs and the documents. *Memoirs* by András Hory, written in 1959, comprise the years of his diplomatic mission in Warsaw and the German invasion in September 1939, as well as *Diary. Finis Poloniae 1939*. The documents include reports, telegrams and notes (111 in all) Hory sent between 1935 and 1939 to Budapest, chronologically arranged. *Afterword – András Hory (1883–1971) and his Warsaw mission (1935–1939)* by Marek Kornat concludes the publication, followed by *Index* of persons and photographs.

In his excellent *Foreword*, Pál Pritz introduces the reader into the problems faced by the Kingdom of Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon. It was a state isolated within the international arena, which had lost about two-thirds of its territories, nearly two-thirds of the people, including native inhabitants, and was conflicted with the neighbouring Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia to boot. No wonder then that while Poland was eager to maintain the agreements of the treaties concluding the First World War, Hungary was looking for allies who would seek to undermine or cancel them. Professor Pritz also explains other problems that Hungarians faced. Among them were: manoeuvring between the French-English and the German options, and the discrepancies in perceiving the superpowers by the major Hungarian politicians, i.e. István Bethlen, Kálmán Kánya, Gyula Gömbös, István Csáky and András Hory. Not without significance was also the change of German politics towards the region (shifting its focus from Hungary to the Balkans).

Professor Pritz's observations on the differences of opinion between Hory and Kánya (the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and the envoy's superior) as regards the priorities of Hungarian foreign policy can be best understood while reading the first part of the source selection. Hory makes it clear that he wanted the "dead post," as Warsaw was perceived in Budapest, to finally start to bring notable benefits to Hungary. Therefore, he took up a lot of initiatives which were, however, not always appreciated by Kánya. For instance, Hory saw the visit of the regent Miklós Horthy in Poland as a missed opportunity to strengthen the mutual relations.

Part One of the *Memoirs*, called *The circumstances preceding the outbreak of the German-Polish war in 1939* (pp. 35–66) is an attempt to outline the major issues of international policy of the interwar period, with particular attention paid to the roles of Germany, Poland and Hungary. This perspective is easily understandable; maintaining good relations with Germany and Poland was crucial for Hungary, however, not so easy, due to growing discrepancies between those two countries in the second half of the 1930s. Moreover, in a text written *ex post*, Hory makes it clear that the weakness of the League of Nations and also of France and Great Britain paved the way for the ascent of Hitler, who "was able to unite the Germans and make them fanatic" (p. 36). In his memoirs Hory devotes a lot of space to K. Kánya, whose skills he can appreciate but who arouses his reserve or even aversion. Obviously, at the same time, the leitmotif of the text is his effort to improve and revive Polish-Hungarian relations. He provides interesting descriptions and evaluation of the Polish politicians responsible for foreign policy, first of all Józef Beck. As Professor Kornat rightly observes in the *Afterword*, the text does not offer any revelations, however, it is an attempt to look at the world of Warsaw diplomacy from a Hungarian point of view. Hory says that after a few years spent in Poland he felt very well there, found friends and understood the Polish *raison d'État* very well. This is particularly visible in the detailed descriptions of the Carpathian Rus' (Zakarpattia). The Polish side supported Hungarian claims to that area but could not understand the difficulties they had to take it. Striving for the common border was one of the crucial common points of Polish-Hungarian relations, no wonder then that Hory devotes so much place to this issue, explaining also Hitler's attitude towards the idea.

Part Two, *The German invasion. Diary Finis Poloniae 1939* starts with the problems Hory expected to appear with the outbreak of the German-Polish war and its possible effects. Hory writes a lot about the difficult diplomatic situation of Hungary (officially an ally of Germany) and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Csáky (who had held the post since December 10, 1938) found themselves in. However, for the most part he describes the problems he faced on returning from Budapest to Warsaw at the end of August 1939. There is a multitude of memoirs on the last moments of the Second Polish Republic, although Hory's account, very accurate and very emotional, is written from the point of view of a foreign diplomat whose mission and whole career ended with the *finis* of interwar Poland. This is an interesting perspective, showing that the invasion of Germany on Poland was also a considerable logistic challenge for the diplomatic posts in Warsaw. Some diplomats, who, like Hory, had been carrying out their mission for a few years, the moment they decided

to leave the capital following the Polish government, had to leave in the bombed city a lot of valuable pieces of art and family heirlooms. It seems quite obvious that in the tragic days of September 1939 an envoy of the Kingdom of Hungary was a privileged person, yet the war seen with his eyes is atrocious. Hory, as a representative of a country remaining in good relations with the Third Reich, on the one hand was treated with distrust by the diplomatic staff of other countries, though paradoxically (which he complained about), for over a fortnight he had not been getting any answer from his government about what he should do. On the other hand, he did not conceal his pro-Polish attitude and he describes a lot of evidence of his popularity among fellow diplomats and many Poles, who were evacuated from Warsaw along with the Polish government. The accounts of individual days render in detail what the diplomats faced in Nałęczów, Krzemieniec and Zaleszczyki. The situation of the Polish government and the fighting Poland seen from the perspective of a friendly Hungarian, seems even more dramatic as Hory gives voice to his indignation at the Germans bombing towns and villages of no military significance; at the same time he speaks very highly of Polish officials, who tried at all cost to keep calm during those days. The culminating point is the description of what the members of diplomatic corps found on the Romanian side, in Chernivtsi. It turned out that Romania, allied to Poland, had interned the Polish government and did not allow its members to get in touch with the diplomats accredited to it. But also the reaction of his own superior, Minister of Foreign Affairs Csáky, whom Hory reached on September 20 in Budapest, was a surprise to him. Csáky treated the Polish question as closed and non-existent. It was only the meeting with Prime Minister Pál Teleki and his deep interest in Hory's experience in Poland that reassured him that the Hungarians after all cared very much about the fate of Poles who they felt close to, and that for many it was a harbinger of what awaited the whole continent soon.

While Hory's memories read very well, also the part called *The Documents* proves that apparently dry accounts can be an interesting read too. It contains the most important, in the authors' opinion, reports and telegrams sent by Hory to Budapest. Some of them, quite extensive, prove his enormous powers of observation and insight into the meanders of European politics. His descriptions of particular politicians and comments on contemporary events are basically accurate. Although, on account of the post held, the Hungarian envoy was not the best-informed person in Warsaw, the documents prove he had a very good intuition estimating different phenomena. Trying to present his stand, Hory did not hesitate to make comparisons with the situation of and human and financial resources of the representatives of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, i.e. states playing a similar to Hungary role in politics of the second half of the 1930s, even if the comparison was often to Hungary's disadvantage. It is obvious though that such actions made sense: Hory was eager to see the Polish-Hungarian cooperation strengthened (and his own position, too). To that end he needed more support from Budapest, which had long underestimated Warsaw as a potential partner in Hungarian politics. That lack of understanding of the changing situation of Poland was for Hory a frequent reason for frustration; still, he expressed it in a very roundabout way. After all, he wrote reports to his superiors. Apart from

providing accounts of contemporary situation, Hory would also take the liberty of questioning Hungarian politics of the time. Especially his comments from 1939 are very interesting. Hory describes Polish society's devotion to the idea of maintaining the state's independence while also writing straightforwardly about his doubts. The latter concerned the issue whether Hungary, so dependent on Germany in its politics, would manage to remain neutral in case war broke out. He points out that for many Poles potential Polish-Hungarian fighting would be a painful option (pp. 324–325).

In the *Afterword* Professor Marek Kornat emphasizes the significance of publishing this book as not many Polish historians speak the Hungarian language. One cannot but agree with this observation. His text is an excellent introduction to the history of Central Europe in the interwar period from the perspective of Poland. It therefore corresponds very well with the *Foreword* by Prof. Pritz, who presents this topic from the Hungarian point of view. Kornat writes a lot about Hungary in Polish politics, attempts of the two states to get closer together, for years unsuccessful, and the role of individual diplomatic representatives of the Kingdom of Hungary in Warsaw.

It should be stressed that the publication has been very well prepared from the editorial point of view. The footnotes concerning particular phenomena and people featuring in the text are meticulously prepared and do not overburden the reader with irrelevant information. They allow for a better understanding of the context of Hory's memoirs and as such, fulfil their role very well. It would have been better for some footnotes to include references to at least basic literature on the subject; there seem to be definitely too few of them. However, this oversight does not lessen the value of the publication as a whole.

The Polish-speaking reader has been provided with an excellent selection of sources, differing in form but complementing each other beautifully. András Hory emerges from his writings as a perceptive observer of the world and above all, an advocate of the Hungarian-Polish rapprochement. He did realize that neither Poland in Hungarian politics nor Hungary in Polish politics were priorities, however, in the difficult years of growing fascism, Nazism and Communism, the declarations about mutual Polish-Hungarian sympathies needed to be turned into more sustainable co-operation. It is also worth emphasizing that Hory did not overestimate the role of either Hungary or Poland in the distribution of power at the time in Europe, hence his assessment of what was happening on the “diplomatic chessboard” is more interesting. There is one more factor enhancing the value of this publication, which was noticed by Pál Pritz: “. . . the juxtaposition of an active diplomat sending reports to his country and an ex-diplomat writing his memoirs” (p. 21). Despite the differences in perceiving and evaluating certain phenomena (“as things were” and *ex post facto*), the two narrations complement each other, providing a fuller picture of the past.

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