

HUNGARY'S RECOGNITION OF CROATIA'S SELF-DETERMINATION IN 1848 AND ITS IMMEDIATE ANTECEDENTS

by

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On August 27, 1848, the Hungarian Council of Ministers approved, as is known, a proposal for revising the constitutional status of Croatia vis à vis Hungary. The Council agreed, furthermore, that should this "fail to lead to a settlement, it was willing to agree to *secession*, and to accept a purely federal tie".¹

The motion was passed in the hope of preventing the long latent—and of late ever more overt—series of conflicts between Croatia's and Hungary's political leadership from turning into open hostility.

Croatia had been ruled by the Kings of Hungary ever since 1102; since 1526, the Habsburgs ruled over it in their capacity of wearers of the Hungarian Crown. The feudal constitution of Hungary defined it as a *corpus separatum*, with limited self-government. The *Sabor*, Croatia's provincial assembly—which had the right to pass *statuta* (rulings that did not infringe on the laws of the realm) and vote taxes—sent two delegates to the Lower House and one delegate to the Upper House of the Hungarian Diet, whose legislative decisions were binding on Croatia as well. The Ban of Croatia—who was appointed by the King, and headed Croatia's judiciary and limited local government—was also a member of the Hungarian Upper House (when neither the Palatine nor the Chief Justice were present, it was his right to preside over it). The prelates and aristocrats of Croatia, too, had the right to sit in the Upper House, while the free cities and chapters sent delegates to the Lower House. With some simplification, we might say that the Croatian delegates had too little power to have a sense of self-government, but enough to have a good chance of obstructing whatever the Magyar delegates might try to change or even simply to clarify the rather nubulous legal situation inherited from feudal times. It was a complicated, and in many respects unclear constitutional tie and thus one bound to give rise to conflicts, conflicts which, by the 19th century, were further aggravated by two familiar circumstances. The first of these was objective: the socio-economic development that led to national awakening, to the unfolding of national movements in both Hungary and Croatia. The second of these was the "divide and conquer" policy pursued by the

Habsburgs practically constantly since the end of the 18th century, though with varying consistency.²

This being so, it would have been vital to the avoiding of conflict for the two simultaneously unfolding national movements to recognize one another's right to national renewal through reform, as well as one another's right to self-determination. It would have been necessary, moreover, for them to join forces against the Habsburgs. (Vienna's policy was to keep both dependent with a view to centralization, and, therefore, to frustrate all attempts at domestic reform.) We know, however, that Croatia-Magyar relations developed quite differently; what did happen was perhaps understandable under the circumstances, but certainly mutually short-sighted. The fact that the two national movements strained one against the other both made reform and renewal more difficult, and directly played into the hands of the Habsburgs and their supporters, whose divisive policy had a centralized Empire as its ultimate end.

By 1848, the differences had grown so acute as to threaten overt conflict; the Hungarian government sought to come to an agreement, and indicated its willingness to guarantee Croatia's self-determination in a last-minute attempt to ward off confrontation. It is the antecedents of this stand—unique in the history of the multi-national countries of the time—that we shall be dealing with in what is to follow, tracing them from the age of reform to the most immediate causes. Yet, in emphasizing its uniqueness, we by no means mean to imply that this stand was somehow anti-nationalist. It, too, was a product of the age of national movements, but it was a stand that was prepared to see a partial surrender of power in the national interest. In this, it was truly exceptional in its time. However, right at the outset we need to note that all the steps that Hungary's political leaders were willing to take to guarantee the *de facto* self-determination of the Croations of Croatia (whom the Magyar reformers considered a historic nation, and who had traditionally at least a truncated body politic) were taken in light of the consideration that Croatia's peaceful secession would tend to facilitate the achievement of the Magyars' hegemony over Hungary's mixed population.

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The differences that had been festering for some time erupted at the Diet of 1832—1836. There were a number of hotly debated issues. The Croations opposed the Magyar reformers' attempts to introduce Hungarian instead of Latin as the country's official language, and thus the language of Hungary's official communication with Croatia; they declared Croatia unwilling to support the reformers in recognizing Protestants as equal before the law (as yet Protestants could neither own land nor hold public office), and unwilling to grant Jews the right of settlement. The Magyars, in turn, were unwilling to accept the disproportionately small share Croatia was to pay of the country's taxes. All in all, the debates ended in a stalemate; and Antal Szombathelyi, the delegate from Békés County, an outstanding—though not leading—reformer, had this to say at the closing session on April 23, 1836: "If all the use we have of being united with Croatia is

that our taxpayers pay taxes instead of her, that our Protestant countrymen are disowned in one part of our common homeland, and that our development as a nation meets with Croatia's hostility, I say: let there be an end to all close ties". The passionate address met with "noisy" approval. H. Bušan, the Croatian delegate, made indignant reply: he considered Szombathelyi's motion "incompatible with the moderation (the Diet's) solemnity required", and though he was not empowered to reply to "the proposed rupture", he had no doubt that his electors "would answer as befit the glory of their ancestors", and was convinced that most of the Magyar delegates "knew the common interest of the two countries better than to share the views of the delegate from Békés". Szombathelyi wanted to reply in his turn, but was dissuaded by "a number of delegates" from doing so.

All the above we know from Kossuth's *Parliamentary Reports*, (No. 342), a manuscript journal passing from one reader to the next throughout the country, which by that time—thanks to the diligence of Kossuth's enthusiastic young admirers—was appearing in close to 150 hand-written copies.

After noting that Szombathelyi made no retort, Kossuth concluded his account on the following note: "The word, however, has been said, and as such, will live on."³ We do not know, and probably will never know whether Kossuth and Szombathelyi, who became good friends, had ever discussed the matter before; we do know, however, that Kossuth, who was just beginning his political career, did not forget the latter's words. But it took six years—half of which Kossuth was to spend in jail—for the idea to find expression in political action.

On April 15, 1840, at the next Diet, Ferenc Deák the leader of the reforming opposition at the time, referred to Croatia's secession in the debate on the more equitable taxation of this part of the country as a possibility that had, for the sake of both parties, to be avoided at all cost. He expatiated on a point of Hungarian constitutional law much quoted at the time, that "Croatia is not an associated state but an annexed country". The consequences of this, he insisted, must be borne by both parties. If, however, the Croats "think it a sacrilege to bear their part of the tax burden in even the same proportion as Hungary, the desire would involuntarily be kindled in his breast that the tie should cease to be, though this would hardly be to the advantage of either Croatia or Hungary". Deák—as concerned about it as most of the reformers—aimed at isolating the Illyrian movement, considered to be under Czarist influence. He proposed instead that the Croats insist not on obsolete prerogatives and the dead Latin tongue, but rather on the realization of their national interests—which he considered to be compatible with those the Magyars—and on the use of the Croatian vernacular in their own local government. Under the circumstances, the reference to a possible split was obviously meant to indicate that Hungarian public opinion was running out of patience with the Croats.⁴

As the 1840s wore on, the fear of "panslavism" reflected in Deák's address became an ever stronger feature of the Hungarian reforming opposition's attitude to the Illyrian movement.⁵

The tension was aggravated, among other things, by the fact that by the bill of 1840 Hungarian came partly to replace Latin as the official language to be used by the Hungarian authorities in their contacts with the Croatian;⁶ and also by the fact that the Illyrian movement became ever more overtly active. At the beginning of 1842, for instance, Deák's home county of Zala sent a circular to all the other counties asking them—as was the custom—to support the memorandum they had sent to the King, requesting the removal of the commander of the predominantly Magyar 48th infantry regiment. They were acting on report—later confirmed—sent to Deák: the commander had had the regiment's band play a favourite anti-Magyar ditty of the Illyrian movement right on the Zagreb main square.⁷ When the Pest County assembly met in early June of 1842 among others to discuss Zala County's letter of protest the atmosphere was tense indeed. Feelings ran high at the news of the violence surrounding the local elections held in Zagreb County: the pro-Hungarian Croatian lesser nobility had been prevented from voting so that the candidates supported by the Illyrian movement might get elected to the chief county offices.⁸ Under such circumstances, the issue of support for Zala's memorandum led to debate on the whole question of Croatian-Magyar relations. It was in the course of this debate that a motion made by Kossuth was adopted by the assembly in the following form:⁹ "... Since it has not been the aim of legislation, nor can it be anyone's aim to forcefully divest any nation—however small its population and size—of its national character, and since the movement started on the pretext of their nation's oppression by the leaders of the Illyrian party against the Magyar language after the Diet raised it to the status of diplomatic language is unfounded, replacing as it does in administration and legislation not the Illyrian, but the dead Roman language, foreign to the Illyrians as well, and since, in addition to all this, it is not in Hungary's, but in Croatia's interest to be the complement of the former in matters of administration and legislation, the representatives of this county are convinced—since no one, neither individual nor nation can be compelled against his conviction to do even what is good, and in order that this friction with the Illyrian party might come to an end once and for all—that it will be more conducive to the peaceful development of Hungary and the Hungarian nation if Croatia is separated from Hungary in respect of administration and legislation, though not from the Hungarian Holy Crown." The motion having been adopted, "they instructed their delegates to the Diet to propose this separation,¹⁰ and decided to send a circular calling on all the country's municipalities to support their initiative". The account of the motion ends on a note of caution: "But first, so that the subject might be completely exhausted as befits its importance, they instructed the delegates in charge of matters pertaining to the Diet to examine all the circumstances surrounding the separation already accepted in principle, and to present their findings and proposals to the general assembly at its next meeting".¹¹

Kossuth reported on the matter in the *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest Journal) with some of the first reactions already in mind, and with comments that

invited a rethinking of the matter. He related that the motion had been accepted "without an opinion to the contrary, unanimously", but presented the matter as if the thought of secession had been but proposed for consideration, as something "perhaps more to the point" than the existing situation. Then, declaring that he by no means wanted to pronounce on the matter before the appointed committee had worked out the details of secession, he assured the Croats that if they stood firm against the aggressions of Illyrianism, they could rest assured that "the Magyar nation would clasp with constant fraternal love the fraternal hand of its loyal Croatian brothers, holding them inseparably to itself, and thereby to liberty, civilization, and constitutionalism". On the other hand, if the Illyrian movement came to dominate in Croatia, the nations lawmakers would need to find the means of protecting the Hungarians' interests.¹² In proposing secession, therefore Kossuth probably had a twofold purpose: the one, to try to arrest the Illyrian movement in its aggressive bid to take over Croatia's local government; the other, to put a radical end to the Croatian-Magyar antagonism and thus both forestall Vienna's attempts to divide and conquer, and prevent what the reformers saw as a Czarist-oriented panslavism from becoming a leading force in Hungary. Also, he obviously thought that if the Magyar national movement were rid of its most powerful rival—at the price of Croatia's secession, if need be—it would have a better chance of acquiring the leading role in a Hungary whose territorial integrity was otherwise to be restored to what it had been before 1526, before the Turkish conquest, and Habsburg rule.¹³

Soon it became apparent that Kossuth's motion of secession would receive the support he was expecting not even from the leading reformers. Even the bitter letter of support sent by Miklós Wesselényi—Kossuth's model and patron, whose growing blindness and illness pushed him ever farther to the back of the political stage—was not without reservation: "Pest (County's) motion on Croatia is very important. For my own part, I've long seen the sad necessity and inevitability of a step of this sort; but I was surprised by its being moved and decided on by a municipality so soon. I fear we are starting our vigil too late;¹⁴ and that we are locking the barn door when it is already empty."¹⁵ We know from the reports secret agents sent to Vienna that Kossuth's motion did win the support of one leading reformer, József Eötvös (minister of religious and cultural affairs in both 1848 and 1867),¹⁶ but most of his fellow reformers were far from approving of it. "Even my best friends were taken aback at the idea", recalled Kossuth at the Sept. 2, 1848 sitting of the House of Representatives.¹⁷ And in 1850, when Kossuth, interned in Turkey, replied to Count László Teleki—formerly the Hungarian Revolutionary Government's Ambassador to Paris who had urged reconciliation with the country's other national groups—he reminded him that neither he, nor Deák, nor Count Lajos Batthyány (the head of the first Hungarian Government in 1848) had supported his earlier motion for "the independence of Croatia".¹⁸ But it was a question of more than just lack of support; in fact, Kossuth and his motion came in for some strong criticism.

In the heat of the battles of 1848, not much before Jelačić's attack on the country, Kossuth mentioned in a letter with no little bitterness that after his motion for Croatia's secession at the Pest County assembly had been accepted, "the whole country cried me down for it, and yet how much wiser it would have been to see it through".¹⁹ But while the reformers were reserved, the conservative press attacked the motion in tones calculated to flame the spirit of nationalism, calling it destructive both of Magyar interests in Croatia, and of the Croatian feudal constitution.²⁰ Count István Széchenyi, the great pioneer of reform, who, by then, was moving politically ever farther from the reforming opposition and closer to cooperation with the government, saw Kossuth's motion as an excellent opportunity to renew his attacks on what he saw as his excessive radicalism. He wrote a second book criticizing Kossuth, *Garat* (Hopper) which, for various reasons, he did not publish; the burden of the book, however, he repeated in a number of political forums. He spoke of "charlatans" in commenting on Kossuth's motion, charlatans, "who for every pain on the body politic, . . . recommended amputation without further ado, even if it meant amputating an entire country, as, for instance, Croatia; and if they but had as much power as they have well-wishers!²¹ they would carry it out, too".²² At the beginning of 1843, when Széchenyi was putting the blame for the growing violence of the confrontation between the country's national movements on the reformers, and especially Wesselényi and Kossuth, he dubbed the latter's initiative "souverainment. (or rather pitoyablement) ridicule". He called it an "Anglo-Magyar, or rather an Irish-Magyar motion", referring to Daniel O'Connell's²³ "Repeal of the Union" of 1830; and to emphasize its "destructive" nature the more, he added: "Except there, it's not the mother country that wants the Repeal, though the "branch-country" is, at times, inconvenient enough to her, but the "branch-country" yearns for the Repeal".²⁴ But more influential, perhaps, in the stand finally taken by Pest County's leading politicians than Széchenyi's repeated public jibes²⁵ and the clandestine schemings of the conservatives²⁶ were the facts that the leading reformers refused to side with the motion, and that it seems to have caused consternation among the pro-Hungarian faction in Croatia,²⁷ and finally, the circumstance that Vienna, determined to consolidate the position of the conservatives in Croatia, too, turned—at least for the time—against the Illyrian movement.²⁸

It was a year after passing Kossuth's motion that the Pest county general assembly adopted a stand that was quite to the contrary. The occasion was the much-debated language issue just then preoccupying the newly assembled Diet. The attempt to make Hungarian the official language was supported not only by Széchenyi and Eötvös, who were present, and Kossuth and Deák, who were not, as well as a great many liberals, but also by most of the Magyar Conservatives, all of which made Croatian-Magyar relations more strained than before. The two opposition delegates sent by Pest county, Count Gedeon Ráday and Móric Szenkirályi, reporting to the county assembly on the complexities of the political struggle going on, had this to say in connection with the language issue:

"As Hungary is one, so the government²⁹ of Hungary and its annexed parts is also one, and more precisely, Hungarian. If, therefore, fairness requires that the Croatian nation remain untouched in respect of its domestic affairs, strict justice demands that Croatia as a joint country use the national language of the mother country and its government³⁰ in its dealings with the government and the mother country; the contrary would be *de facto* to recognize that the government of Croatia is not one with the Hungarian government, something that cannot be recognized." The county assembly approved this report of its delegates to the Diet, a report which emphasized Croatia's traditional dependence on Hungary as something to be sustained. With this, the assembly was, in fact, nullifying its acceptance of Kossuth's motion of secession³¹. So ended this episode in the history of the Croatian-Magyar conflicts of the 1840s. We might find it paradoxical that Kossuth, who had proposed secession in 1842, and then tried, in 1845, to promote the alliance of the two national movements³² (something the Palatine had supposed he might do for years) ended up finding it necessary, as a reformer, to turn against the Illyrian movement, which was ever more prone to use the conservatives' help and court influence to try to realize its goals. We might find it paradoxical, but it was logical enough; in any case, it was tragic.

Yet, though both sides were growing increasingly suspicious and more and more touchy, there were efforts being made to find a peaceful solution. On the very eve of the revolution, on January 28, 1848, Kossuth, speaking at the Diet as the leader of the reforming opposition, made this declaration of principle: "As for the unfortunate Croatian-Illyrian issue, I, for my part, have always and will always be of the mind that whatever steps need to be taken in this matter should always be led by the desire not so much to rub salt into old wounds to take revenge, but rather to make up for these in the future."³³ On March, 28, 1848, as a member of the first Hungarian cabinet responsible to the parliament, he expressed his belief that, the Hungarian revolution having done away with feudalism, "the guarantee of Croatia's liberty is closely tied to Hungary's". "When liberty is shared, it often appeases the enmity of one nation for the other", he went on, more by way of encouragement to the fact than with faith in its being so in this case; yet he felt "it was a grave duty incumbent on the Magyar nation . . . to reassure the people of Croatia that Hungary respects their nationhood". To this end, he found it necessary to issue a proclamation which — in the words of his draft — was meant to reassure the "nations united under the Hungarian Crown" that the government would see that the measures passed to rid them of feudalism and absolutism take effect, and that "rights and duties would be shared equally"; Hungary and Croatia were to be tied "by their common liberty, common parliament, common government and common king", with Hungarian being the official language of their dealings with one another, but with Croatian being the language and nationality that was to dominate within Croatia "as the inalienable right of the Croatian citizens".³⁴

We have not, and cannot try here to give as much as a cursory overview of the developments in Croatian-Magyar relations at this time. We must be content to recall that the laws reshaping Hungary's constitutional system the spring of 1848 brought little direct change in the constitutional ties binding Croatia and Hungary. The Sabor in Zagreb was given a proportionately greater collective representation in the Hungarian parliament (which had been moved from Pozsony to Pest); and the Sabor—or rather, the Ban—was, temporarily, to oversee the elections to be held in the Military Border which the Hungarian politicians wanted to see directly represented in parliament.³⁵ Furthermore, the paragraph of the bill dealing with the counties, which declared Hungarian to be the official language of the county assemblies, was declared not to apply to the “annexed parts”, thus not to Croatia either.³⁶ All this indicates that Hungary's political leaders wanted to keep Croatia's constitutional ties to Hungary much as it had been, though they were willing enough to see it updated. The modernization, they hoped, would go some way toward relaxing the tension that had built up. (We must note, however, that the decision to give the Military Border direct representation in parliament in fact had just the opposite effect.)

For all that, the disposition to accommodate and modernize was evident enough to cause consternation among those who saw conflict among its rival forces as the best guarantee of the system's—and the Empire's—integrity. Count Kolowrat, for instance, urged the Emperor in his letter of March 20, 1848, to name Baron Jelačić Ban of Croatia without further delay because he feared that Count Lajos Batthyány, the proposed Prime Minister of Hungary, and Kossuth “locken die kroatisch-slavonischen Länder durch Zusagen der Anerkennung ihrer Munizipalrechte, Sprache etc. an sich”.³⁷ Jelačić's nomination took place with the help of those pro-Vienna Hungarian conservatives who felt that as Ban of Croatia, he would exploit “their military organization and hurt national pride in the service of the crown”, and, by implication, use it to frustrate the presumed aims of the Hungarian reformers.³⁸

And that, indeed, is how it turned out to be. The new Hungarian government, which hoped—rather naively—to get the newly convened Parliament to approve the provisional law that had been framed in the hopes of reconciling the two sides came up against the intransigence of Jelačić, whose amassed army gave his words no small weight. Jelačić proved unwilling as much as to take part in the direct negotiations proposed by the Hungarian government not long after its taking office, heedless of the declaration of the Council of Ministers that “it would do everything that the law, justice, and fairness required to strengthen the faith Hungary and Croatia mutually had in one another”.³⁹

The day after the Council of Ministers called on the Ban of Croatia to negotiate, on April 20, 1848, Miklós Wesselényi sent a letter to Prime Minister Batthyány. Wesselényi, as we have already noted, had been bitterly approving in 1842 of Kossuth's motion at the Pest County assembly; his book of 1843,⁴⁰ however, discussed secession as undesirable, and disadvan-

tageous to the Croats, too. Now, Wesselényi expressed his fear that the court was planning to reverse the gains that had been made, with Jelačić being the instrument that was to see the matter through. And he went on: "In view of all this, I think that we must avoid everything that might serve the Ban and his Croats as an excuse to openly declare their secession and carry it through. We cannot keep Croatia for our own; let's give up all efforts to do so, which can bring no benefit, but can do harm. Let's make an agreement with the Croats, one that recognizes them, and guarantees their independence, but guarantees also our trade and gives us joint ownership of a piece of coastline." Wesselényi made it quite clear that he wanted the two countries to separate constitutionally with the approval of parliament, but he felt it most urgent that the Hungarian government let the Croats know as soon as possible that it was willing to take such a step: "If we give them hope of its coming to pass, I think that they will rest assured until the parliament can deal with the matter." At the same time, Wesselényi urged the government to be prepared for an armed defence; and this he repeated publicly, too, at a meeting of the Pest radicals.⁴¹ Wesselényi's proposal was, in fact, the renewal and development of Kossuth's motion of 1842, but there is no indication that any of the Hungarian ministers turned against the tide of a public opinion exasperated by the threats coming from Zagreb, and acted on Wesselényi's farsighted words at that time.

At the same time, we know that right up to Jelačić's armed attack on the country, the Hungarian government repeatedly expressed its readiness to reach a negotiated settlement, and in a variety of ways at that. It did so in spite of the fact that Jelačić broke off all relations with the Hungarian government, defying the orders even of the viceroy, the Palatine Stephen, and, assuming absolute power, declared martial law in Croatia, ordered conscription, convened the Sabor without the ruler's consent, and was (on the Hungarian government's initiative) suspended from his office of Ban by the ruler on June 10, 1848.⁴² Still the Batthyány government was willing to negotiate with him, for it wanted peace, and *de facto* power remained in Jelačić's hands, since the court took no steps to actually divest him of power; on the contrary, there was every indication that Jelačić's loss of favour (and he continued to enjoy the Minister of War Count Latour's patronage) was but temporary.

Jelačić himself could have no doubt that the Hungarian government wanted a peaceful solution. On June 29 he wrote to the Archduke John, who had taken on the task of mediating, that he knew quite well that there was no threat of a Hungarian attack on Croatia.⁴³ In this he was not mistaken. It is only fair to emphasize that the entire Batthyány government was for a settlement through negotiation, was even for making concessions. This is quite clear from the memorandum — probably drafted by Kossuth — that the government sent the Palatine in which, outlining the basis of its Croatian policy, it declared: ". . . We shall remain ready to defend ourselves against the Croats, until we are either attacked, or are compelled to give up the hope of a peaceful settlement". The memorandum admitted that "the Croats have a number of grievances still awaiting redress from times

past"; but these it declared to be "the unfortunate legacy of (the earlier) system of government", and added that the attempts of the government which took office in April of 1848 to redress them were frustrated by Jelačić who put an end to "every contact with physical violence". The government also declared its readiness to support the demands put forward by the Croatian Sabor in 1845. This is of special interest from our point of view because the demands made⁴⁴—the most important among them that Croatia get its own organ of central government independent of the *Consilium regium locumtenentiale Hungaricum*—were steps if not toward secession, at least toward a much greater independence. However, the memorandum, while emphasizing the Hungarian government's willingness to negotiate, left no doubt that the government would not "stand by and watch. . . the violent secession of the annexed parts". The most important parts of the memorandum were quoted practically verbatim by Kossuth in his famous address of July 11; on July 20 he read the complete memorandum to the House of Representatives, and had it published by the press.⁴⁵

On July 22, 1848, László Teleki — who, as we know from Kossuth's later reproach, had opposed his proposal of Croatia's secession in 1842 — had this to say in the House of Representatives in reply to an interruption of his speech urging support for Italian independence: "If Croatia sees its interest as a nation in seceding from Hungary, I shall respect its wishes". But he added immediately that he considered Jelačić to be "a supporter of reaction", one whose ambitions did not express the will of "the Croatian people".⁴⁶

When Batthyány met Jelačić in Vienna the last week of July for a series of talks he arrived fully prepared to make a great many concessions to Croatian national aspirations, and had his cabinet's full support in this. Széchenyi — terrified of the eruption of "the forces of plunder and anarchy" — veritably begged Batthyány to secure peace;⁴⁷ and Kossuth — having done everything to prepare Hungary to ward off the likely attack — hoped for a solution to the Croatian issue as a means of forestalling the chances of Habsburg reaction. It is possible that Kossuth had already got word of the element in the first round of talks that had taken Batthyány so much by surprise — namely, the fact that Jelačić had come to discuss not so much matters relating to Croatian national interests as the possibility of curtailing the jurisdiction of the Hungarian government in the name of the unity of the Empire⁴⁸ — when he made some comments in his paper of special interest from the point of view of our subject. In an article dated July 29 which appeared the following day, he had this to say: "We shall negotiate, if need be, with hell itself; we shall negotiate, if negotiate we must, on purely Croatian grounds, perhaps even with Jelačić; but we shall never negotiate with reactionaries who would curb Hungary's independence". Just what those "purely Croatian grounds" might have been we get an idea of from a later passage in the article where, speaking of the chances of changes in the structure of the Habsburg Empire, he notes that, with appropriate changes, "we might consider the idea of forming not a union with the Croats, but a confederation".⁴⁹ This might not prove much, but it does show that at the time of Batthyány and Jelačić's talks, an extraordinarily influential

member of the Hungarian government could see Croatia's separation as a possible way of settling the Croatian issue.

Batthyány returned from Vienna allegedly hopeful that they could come to an agreement with Jelačić;⁵⁰ and not even the rather contradictory news of the growing anti-Magyar sentiment and of the amassed troops in Croatia could quite persuade him of the contrary. It would be unjust on this account to accuse Hungary's leading politicians of naiveté; after all, though the statement Jelačić issued in Zagreb on August 8 on the Viennese talks used language was threatening enough and called the demands he had put to Batthyány his "last" peace proposal, none of his demands concerning Croatian-Magyar relations were impossible, nor was there any talk of secession. In fact, in speaking of the details yet to be worked out, he mentioned the Hungarian parliament as "common".⁵¹ We know, furthermore, that the Minister of War Count Latour tried to persuade the *Ministerrat* on Aug. 26, 1848 to vote financial support for Jelačić's troops with the consideration that it was the only way of keeping the Ban from attacking too soon, or — what is even more interesting for us — from "throwing himself into the Magyars' arms".⁵² In this ambivalent situation, and short of funds as it was, the Hungarian government could make but very haphazard preparations for defence, all the while repeating its readiness to negotiate.⁵³ The Council of Ministers decided on Aug. 25 "that a bill be presented in parliament, one regulating Croatia's and Hungary's relations in a way that might perhaps be able to soothe discontent there". The ministers of justice and of internal affairs were entrusted with working out the details.⁵⁴

Barely two days later, on Aug 27, the relatively detailed proposal (based in no small measure on earlier drafts) was ready for discussion. The council of ministers passed the bill presented by the Minister of Justice, Ferenc Deák, which left defence, foreign affairs, finance and trade in the hands of the Hungarian government, with provisions, however, for the participation of the respective Croatian under-secretaries, and a somewhat ill-defined stipulation that the Ban, too, had the right to a say in these matters. All other matters of government were to be in the hands of the minister of Croatian affairs, who was to reside in Pest or Zagreb, as the Croats wished. The laws were to be enacted either by the parliament in Pest, where the Croats were also represented, with the Sabor in Zagreb having power but to pass statutes; or by both the parliament and the Sabor, with areas of legislative competence divided up analogously to the executive. The proposal suggested that Croatian be recognized as the official language of Croatia, that a university be set up in Zagreb, and that Hungary and Croatia communicate with one another each in its own language, enclosing a translation of the text. There was a detailed passage on how the population of the Military Border was to enjoy the reforms⁵⁵ which had, for the most part, been promised by the Hungarian government some time earlier.⁵⁶

The Council of Ministers, as we know, went beyond declaring its preparedness to negotiate on the terms summarized above, and added that "if all this should fail to lead to a settlement, it was willing to agree to

secession, and to accept a purely federal tie, keeping possession of Fiume, Hungary's access to the sea, with guarantees of free access and free trade".⁵⁷

We have no information as to who it was of the members of the government sitting in Pest that initiated this alternative proposal. It could have been anyone except the Minister of War, Lázár Mészáros, who was not in Pest at that time. It was unlikely to have been Deák or Szemere, for we find no trace of the idea in the written proposal that they did submit. It is just as unlikely that Gábor Klauzál, who dealt mostly with questions of economic policy, should have initiated it. Either József Eötvös or István Széchenyi, committed as they were to keeping the peace, might have done so, though the latter would scarcely have failed to mention it in his diary if he had. There is a good chance that it was Batthyány who revived Wesselényi's⁵⁸ spring proposal now that the time was ripe for action. The text, in any case, was totally in keeping with what Wesselényi had suggested, including the proviso concerning access to Fiume, which was something that earlier laws had also stipulated as a prerequisite.⁵⁹ On the basis of some references Kossuth made in his above quoted article at the end of July, we can also conjecture that he, too, urged the matter once again; the conjecture will seem all the more well-grounded if we recall that Kossuth committed as he was to multilateral trade, was the prime exponent of using Fiume as a base for expanding Hungary's future markets.⁶⁰

But whoever initiated that noteworthy proposal of Aug. 27, 1848, we can have no doubt that Kossuth sincerely hoped that it would be well-received, although he could have had few illusions as to its chances of being so.⁶¹ His letter of Aug. 29 to his friend László Csányi, who was organizing the defences along the Croatian border,⁶² ends on the following note: "The Diet will vote to give Croatia all possible concessions in the next few days, even secession, if they want it. But our liberty we won't surrender."⁶³ Two days later, he sent Csányi a copy of Deák's bill which the council of ministers had approved, commenting: "In a few days it will be submitted to the House along with the alternative that if the Croats don't like it . . . they can secede, but Fiume is ours, that we'll give nobody". It was here that he noted what a pity it was that the proposal he'd made in 1842 had been poorly received. And he also added something to Deák's bill that deserves our attention. He declared himself ready to cede Slavonia⁶⁴ (which the Croatian nationalists wanted to unify with Croatia), with the exception of two, strategically important points: "Slavonia is the problem — but rather than endanger Hungary, we'll let that go, too, in any case keeping Pétervárad (Petrovaradin) and Eszék (Osijek)". He wrote all this to Csányi, who already had very wide discretionary powers, adding that "if he thought it a wise and good idea, he should get into contact with the Croats, and tell them that if they really are acting in the spirit of nationalism and not of reaction, if they don't want to be so foolish as to be the hand that reaction has take the chestnut out of the fire for it, then let them tell us what they want. We'll give Croatia everything, even secession; let them go, but let's be good friends . . . if they want to secede, they should go ahead, let them be free and happy, but let them not bring blood and misfortune

on the two countries for a foreign reactionary power."⁶⁵ The royal edict of Aug 31, 1848 (the day of Jelačić's first military action, the occupation of Fiume) left no doubt that the Habsburgs, encouraged by their victory in Italy, were determined to curtail the self-government Hungary had won with the royally sanctioned laws of the spring of 1848; Batthyány and Deák had to go to Vienna to negotiate. In their absence, but obviously with their consent, Kossuth presented the bill Deák had framed (and the Council of Ministers passed) for the House to consider without further delay. It was a closed session, and we can but suppose that the minister council's stand on the issue of Croatia's possible secession was also raised; we know that Kossuth spoke of the matter on two separate occasions at the time of presenting the bill. Referring in turn to the stand Pest county had taken in 1842 at his instigation, and then to László Teleki's proposal to the House on July 22, 1848, he urged that Croatia's secession be agreed to, should the provisions of the bill prove unacceptable to the Croats.⁶⁶ On Sept. 4, at Kossuth's suggestion, the House appointed 12 of its prominent members to draft a resolution on the Croatian issue. The resolution empowered László Csányi to convoke an independent "parliament" of the Croatian and Slavonian representatives, in order to be able to meet all the demands aiming "at the full guarantee of the nationhood, nation-wide rights and liberties of the Croatian and Slavonian people". The House had no time to pass the resolution; Jelačić, whom the ruler had officially reinstated as Ban of Croatia on September 4, launched his offensive. On the morrow of Jelačić crossing into Hungary, however, on Sept. 12, the government had the text of the resolution printed up on a placard.⁶⁷ It is hardly likely that a resolution passed by the House would have availed Csányi more in his attempt to secure peace. Csányi knew of all the latest concessions the government was prepared to make to Croatia; his letter of Sept. 5 to Kossuth, however, reports that Jelačić was adamant in his refusal to negotiate, a circumstance Csányi attributed to the fact that Croatia's absolute leader wanted war, not peace. On Sept. 8, Csányi sent his own foster son and another officer to Zagreb, all in vain.⁶⁸ Jelačić wanted to win a victory over the Hungarian government, not concessions from it.

The oft-repeated Magyar prophecy of the summer of 1848, that the Croats would become the tools of reaction, had been fulfilled. The defeat the Hungarian National Guard suffered a year later at the hands of the combined forces of the Austrian Emperor and the Russian Czar did not bring victory to the Croatian national movement. The Hungarians were defeated, the Croats were double-crossed by the victors, and for both there followed years of oppression, whence there could spring the hope that both had learned their lesson, and would seek allies not against, but in one another. It was this hope that informed from 1849 to 1867 the policy of that most consistent Hungarian opponent of compromise with the Habsburgs, the exiled Kossuth, a policy based on the unreserved recognition of Croatia-Slavonia's right to self-government. On this, much has already been written,⁶⁹ and to say any more here would take us well beyond the scope of the present paper.

NOTES

- ¹ Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives, hereafter: OL.) H. 5. Szemere Bertalan belügyminiszter egykorú feljegyzése az 1848. aug. 27-i minisztertanács iratai közt. (Minister of the Interior Bertalan Szemere's memorandum of Aug. 27, 1848 among the ministerial council's documents of the same day.) — *Károlyi, Á.*: Németújvári gróf Batthyány Lajos első magyar miniszterelnök főbenjáró pöre. (The capital trial of Count Lajos Batthyány of Németújvár, Hungary's first Prime Minister), Budapest, 1932. II, pp. 628–629; Kossuth Lajos Összes művei XII. (Collected works of Lajos Kossuth; hereafter: KÖM), (ed. *Sinkovics I.*) Budapest, 1957, p. 805.
- ² For all this and what follows cf. among others: *Miskolcgy Gy.*: A horvát kérdés története és irományai a rendi állam korában. (The history and documents of the Croatian issue at the time of the feudal state), I–II. Budapest, 1927–1928. *Arató E.*: A nemzetiségi kérdés története Magyarországon 1790–1848. (The history of the nationality problem in Hungary), Budapest, 1960. — *Zwitter F.* — *Šidak J.* — *Bogdanov V.*: Les problèmes nationaux dans la monarchie des Habsbourg. Beograd, 1960. — *Jelavich Ch.*: The Croatian Problem in the Habsburg Empire in the Nineteenth Century. *Austrian History Yearbook*, III, 1967. — *Bauer E.*: Joseph Graf Jellachich... Banus von Kroatien. Wien — München, 1975. — *Kovács E.*: Szemben a történelemmel. A nemzetiségi kérdés a régi Magyarországon. (Face to face with history. The nationality problem in the Hungary of yore), Budapest, 1977.
- ³ *Kossuth Lajos*: Országgyűlési Tudósítások. (Parliamentary reports), KÖM. V. (ed. *Barta I.*), Budapest, 1961, pp. 652–653.
- ⁴ Deák Ferenc beszédei (The speeches of Ferenc Deák), (ed. *Kónyi M.*) 2nd ed., Bp. 1903. I, p. 477.
- ⁵ For a fine discussion and analysis of this and related political developments, see *Varga J.*: Helyét kereső Magyarország, (Hungary's search for an identity — now in press).
- ⁶ 1840. Law VI.
- ⁷ Pest Megye Levéltára. (Pest county archive; hereafter PmL.) Közgyűlési jegyzőkönyv. (Minutes of the meetings of the general assembly; hereafter: Kj.), 1842. June 10/2338. — Cf. *Pesti Hírlap* 1842. Jan. 23. For the whereabouts of the published letters of protest written by the counties, see: *Magyar Történeti Bibliográfia 1825–1867* (A bibliography of Hungarian history), IV. (eds. *Kemény, G. G.* and *Katus L.*) Bp. 1959, p. 197. The protests notwithstanding, Colonel Peter Moulholand kept his command until 1846; then, promoted to the rank of brigadier general, he became the commandant of the city of Kassa (Košice). Cf. *Magyarország és a hozzákapcsolt részek tiszti névtára 1847-dik évre.* (The officer's roster for Hungary and the annexed territories for 1847), Buda, (1846), p. 301. — Gróf Széchenyi István írói és hírlapi vitája Kossuth Lajossal (Count István Széchenyi's debate as writer and journalist with Lajos Kossuth), (ed. by *Viszota Gy.*; hereafter: SZIVKL) Budapest, 1927–1930. I, p. 30.
- ⁸ PmL. Kj. 1842. Aug. 31/4667. — Csengery Antal összegyűjtött munkái (Antal Csengery's collected works) Budapest, 1884. IV. pp. 195–198. — *Miskolcgy Gy.*: I. pp. 260–261. — *Arató E.*: II. pp. 80–81.
- ⁹ The exiled Kossuth was unable precisely to recall the text of the motion. Cf. *Kossuth Lajos*: Irataim az emigrációból. (My writings in exile), Budapest, 1880–1882. II. pp. 161–162, 200.
- ¹⁰ The instructions the counties gave their delegates were binding.
- ¹¹ PmL. Kj. 1842. June 10/2338.
- ¹² *Pesti Hírlap*, 1842. June 19. — SZIVKL. I. pp. 30–31.
- ¹³ *Szabad Gy.*: Kossuth politikai pályája. (Kossuth's political career), Budapest, 1977, pp. 71–73 ff.
- ¹⁴ The reference was to Kossuth's editorial of June 19, 1842, „Vírasszunk” (Let us keep watch), which dealt with the nationalities problem.
- ¹⁵ *Wesselényi Miklós*: (Freywaldau, 1842. June 26.) to Kossuth, OL. R. 90. I. 91.
- ¹⁶ *Miskolcgy Gy.* I. p. 265.
- ¹⁷ KÖM. XII. p. 871.
- ¹⁸ *Lajos Kossuth*: (Kútahya, 1850. June 15.) -to László Teleki, OL. R. 90. I. 797.
- ¹⁹ KÖM. XII. p. 854.

- ²⁰ *Miskolczy Gy.*: I. p. 265. — *Kosáry D.*: Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban. (Lajos Kossuth in the age of reform), Budapest, 1946. p. 218.
- ²¹ The two exclamation marks leave no doubt as to Széchenyi's irony.
- ²² SZIVKL. I. p. 43.
- ²³ It's worth noting how far Széchenyi's criticism of Kossuth's motion is reminiscent of the objections Charles Greville noted down in his diary in connection with O'Connell's motion in 1830. (Cf. Greville Memoirs. Ed. by Roger Fulford.) London Revised Edition, 1963. pp. 57–58.
- ²⁴ *Jelenkor*, (The Present), 1843. February 5. — SZIVKL. I. pp. 354–355.
- ²⁵ *Jelenkor*, 1843. April 27. — SZIVKL. I. p. 505.
- ²⁶ Cf. *Idem*. I. pp. 759–760. *Miskolczy Gy.*: II. p. 22.
- ²⁷ Antal Molnár (Zagreb, 1842. June 26.) — to Móric Szentkirályi, subprefect of Pest County OL. R. 109. II. P. 21.
- ²⁸ *Miskolczy Gy.*: I. 267–277, II. pp. 16–34.
- ²⁹ "The government" meant only the royal Hungarian *dicasteria*... which, formally, were responsible only to the ruler, but in fact were subordinate to the central imperial government agencies.
- ³⁰ In the end, the law making Hungarian the official language stipulated that the delegates sent by the Zagreb Sabor to the Hungarian Diet might speak Latin for 6 years more, that the Croatian authorities could continue to write to the Hungarian in Latin, but were obliged to honour the Hungarian correspondence addressed to them by the Hungarian authorities. Cf. 1844. Law II, §§. 3, 7.
- ³¹ PmL. Kj. 1843. June 10/3203.
- ³² *Miskolczy Gy.*: I. pp. 399–400, II. p. 448.
- ³³ KÖM. XI. (ed. by Barta I.), Budapest, 1951, p. 480.
- ³⁴ *Idem*. XI. pp. 696–699.
- ³⁵ 1848. Law V, §§ 5, 53–55.
- ³⁶ 1848. Law XVI, §2.
- ³⁷ *Károlyi, Á.*: I. pp. 377–381, II. pp. 610–611.
- ³⁸ Idősb. Szögyény–Marich László országbíró emlékiratai (The memoirs of Lord Chief Justice László Szögyény–Marich Sr.), Budapest, 1903–1918. I. p. 65. — *Károlyi, Á.*: I. pp. 380–381. — *Andics, E.*: 1848–1849. Budapest, 1968. pp. 85–86.
- ³⁹ OL. H. 5. Az 1848. április 19-i minisztertanács jegyzőkönyvének másolata. (A copy of the minutes of the April 19, 1848, sitting of the Council of Ministers) Cf. *Károlyi, Á.*: I. p. 373. — KÖM. XII. pp. 42–43.
- ⁴⁰ *Wesselényi, Miklós*: Szózat a magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében (An address on the issue of the Magyar and Slav nationalities), Lépese, 1843, p. 274.
- ⁴¹ *Kardos, S.*: Bárá Wesselényi Miklós élete és munkái. (The life and works of Baron Miklós Wesselényi), Budapest, 1905. pp. 207–209. — *Trócsányi, Zs.*: Wesselényi Miklós. Budapest, 1965. pp. 528–529. — Cf. *Pesti Hírlap*, 1848. April 30, May 3.
- ⁴² *Pejaković, St.*: Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der kroatisch-slawonischen Landtages und der nationalen Bewegung vom Jahre 1848. Wien, 1861, pp. 1–3, 8–24, 88–92. — *Pap, D.*: Okmánytár Magyarország függetlenségi harcának történetéhez 1848–1849. (Documents of the history of the Hungarian war of independence 1848–1849), Pest, 1868, pp. 51, 89–91, 112–115, 186–192. — *Károlyi, Á.*: I. pp. 131–153, II. pp. 611–625.
- ⁴³ *Károlyi, Á.*: I. p. 396.
- ⁴⁴ *Jelenkor*, 1845. October 16. — *Miskolczy, Gy.*: I. pp. 390–391, II. pp. 400–402.
- ⁴⁵ KÖM. XII. pp. 367, 372–373, 427–428, 590.
- ⁴⁶ *Pap, D.*: A magyar nemzetgyűlés Pesten 1848-ban (The Hungarian national assembly in Pest in 1848), 2nd ed., Budapest, 1881. I. pp. 259–260.
- ⁴⁷ *Széchenyi, István*: Napló (Diary), ed. by *Oltványi, A.* Budapest, 1978, pp. 1291–1292. — *Spira, Gy.*: 1848 Széchenyi és Széchenyi 1848-a (The Széchenyi of 1848 and Széchenyi's 1848) Budapest, 1964, p. 277.
- ⁴⁸ *Pesti Hírlap*, 1848. August 16. — *Pulszky, Ferenc* Életem és korom. (My life and times), (ed. by *Oltványi, A.*) Budapest, 1958. I. pp. 572–576. — *Károlyi, Á.* I. pp. 387–388.
- ⁴⁹ KÖM. XII. pp. 640–643.
- ⁵⁰ *Széchenyi, István* p. 1297.
- ⁵¹ *Pesti Hírlap*, 1848. August 16.
- ⁵² *Károlyi, Á.*: I. pp. 394–395, II. pp. 3–4.

- ⁵³ OL. II. 5. Az 1848. augusztusi 14-i minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyv egykorú másolata. (A contemporaneous copy of the minutes of the Aug 14, 1848 sitting of the Council of Ministers), KÖM. XII. pp. 721–722, 761–763. — *Pap, D.*: op. cit. I. pp. 371–372.
- ⁵⁴ OL. II. 5. Az 1848. aug. 25-i minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyv egykorú másolata (A contemporaneous copy of the minutes of the Aug. 25, 1848 sitting of the Council of Ministers) KÖM. XII. pp. 799–800. — *Széchenyi, István* p. 1315.
- ⁵⁵ OL. II. 5. Deák Ferenc igazságügyminiszter egykorú fogalmazványa az 1848. aug. 27-i minisztertanács iratai között (Justice Minister Ferenc Deák's contemporaneous memorandum, among the Aug. 27, 1848 papers of the Council of Ministers), *Károlyi, Á.*: II. pp. 626–628.
- ⁵⁶ See *Szabad, Gy.*: A magyar kormányzat reformtörekvései a határőrvidéken 1848/49-ben (The Hungarian governments attempts at reform on the Military Border 1848–49), in press.
- ⁵⁷ OL. II. 5. Szemere Bertalan belügyminiszter egykorú feljegyzése az 1848. augusztus 27-i minisztertanács iratai között. (Minister of the Interior Bertalan Szemere's contemporaneous notes, among the Aug. 27, 1848 papers of the Council of Ministers)—KÖM. XII. p. 805. — *Károlyi, Á.* II. pp. 628–629.
- ⁵⁸ It is worth noting that Wesselényi's article of July 24, "Miként eszközölhető beesületünkkel megegyezhető béke" (How we might win peace with honour) says nothing of separation, but rather urges armament and the winning of court support. *Kossuth Hírlapja* (Kossuth's News), July 26, 1848.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. 1807. Law IV. 1836. Laws XIX, XXV. — Cf. *Csengery, A.* IV. pp. 216–226.
- ⁶⁰ Cf. *Gergely, A.*: A fiumei vasút vitája az utolsó rendi országgyűlésen. (The Fiume railway debate at the last feudal Diet) in *Századok*, 1979. — It is possible that Kossuth, not wishing himself to repeat a suggestion that most leading reformers had refused to support, had instigated Wesselényi's proposal of April 1848. However, we have absolutely no evidence to support this hypothesis.
- ⁶¹ We think it important to make this point because István Deák, in his discussion of the Council of Minister's decision on the secession issue (he credits Deák with formulating the motion), adds this remark: „Kossuth supported the bill at the cabinet meeting — whether sincerely or only to prove that concessions would lead nowhere, is not known.” *Deák, I.*: The Lawful Revolution. Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849. New York, 1979. p. 157.
- ⁶² László Csányi (1790–1849) was one of the leaders of the reforming opposition, and was one of the people who worked most closely with Kossuth in 1848–49. He was Minister of Transport from May of 1849. At Oct. 10, 1849 he was court-martialed and executed.
- ⁶³ KÖM. XII. pp. 826–827.
- ⁶⁴ The predominantly South-Slav inhabited area bounded by Croatia, the Drava, the Danube and the Száva; even before 1848, its population had sent representatives not to the Sabor in Zagreb, but to the Hungarian Diet.
- ⁶⁵ KÖM. XII. pp. 853–855. — *Barta, I.*: Kossuth és Csányi, (Kossuth and Csányi) *Századok*, 1952, pp. 622–623.
- ⁶⁶ KÖM. XII. pp. 870–873.
- ⁶⁷ Az 1848/49 évi népképviseleti országgyűlés (The popular representative parliament of 1848–49), (ed. by *Beér, J. Csizmadia, A.* and *Gyulai, L.*) Bp. 1954, pp. 61, 214–216, 683–684. Cf. *Népelem* (The popular element), 1848, September 15.
- ⁶⁸ *Barta, J.* pp. 623–625.
- ⁶⁹ Cf. *Kovács, E.* pp. 369–437. — *Szabad, Gy.* 1977. pp. 170–195. — *Szabad, Gy.*: Hungarian Political Trends between the Revolution and the Compromise (1849–1867). (Translated by *Pálmai, É.*) Bp. 1977. pp. 57–62, 112–113, 125–131, 162–164.