

György Barcza – Hungarian Diplomat in an Era of Change: György Barcza’s Foreign Service in Northern Europe between 1916 and 1922

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The aim of the study is to provide a contextualised analysis of the work of Hungarian diplomat, György Barcza, between 1916 and 1922, offering a unique insight into the complexities of an age of intense conflict and manifold social and geopolitical transition. György Barcza became a diplomat in the last decade of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and from the transitional period following the First World War he became a defining figure of the emerging Hungarian diplomacy. He was part of the efforts to establish an independent Hungarian Foreign Service in the period after the First World War up until the conclusion of the Treaty of Trianon, a time of isolation for Hungary. Based on his previous experience and network of contacts, György Barcza actively participated in the building of Hungary’s international relations. His retrospective memoirs provide an insight into the background of the historical processes of the time, and into the development of Hungarian diplomacy, which was laden with difficulties. Thus, Barcza’s memoirs cast a light on the diplomatic traditions of the monarchy as well as on the functioning of the independent Hungarian Foreign Service. Emblematic of diplomacy in his era, György Barcza’s career included building ties with the families of the nobility and integration into the traditions of imperial officials. From his memoirs, we can also learn how the countries where he served as a diplomat viewed Austria-Hungary and, later, Hungary. These soft factors may contribute supplementary information for the interpretation of the international relations that constituted the context of the Treaty of Trianon.

[György Barcza; Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; Kingdom of Hungary; Northern Europe; Neutrality; International Legitimacy]

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Introduction

The lives and experiences of historical personalities who held important offices can provide valuable windows onto the past. From among the papers published in the *West Bohemian Historical Review*, such is the approach embraced by Oleh Strelko and Oleh Pylypchuk who, in their study titled *Apollon Konstantinovich Krivoshein: the last Railway Minister of the Russian Empire in the Era of Emperor Alexander III* examined the exceedingly complex duties of the minister who played a decisive role in the construction of the Great Siberian Railway.³ Their study also draws attention to the features of contemporary society, by showing that Krivoshein's professional career required more than talent and professional expertise, as his family ties and the relations within the court of the Czar also contributed to his eligibility for promotion.

Similarly daunting complexity characterizes the professional life of a diplomat serving the foreign office of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early 20th century. The institution itself is complex, as it shaped the policies of a multi-ethnic empire. Then came the re-structuring of Central Europe in the wake of the Great War. The Habsburg Empire, which had been one of the leading European powers, and which had, until then, played a decisive role in shaping the history of Central Europe and the Balkans,⁴ was dismantled. After the world war, but before the conclusion of the peace agreement, the creation of the foreign affairs establishment for the newly independent Hungary was a particularly challenging task. Hungarian leaders viewed foreign relations as crucial for ensuring the inclusion of Hungary in the shaping of the conditions of the peace agreement. The analysis of the Treaty of Trianon is not within the scope of the present study. It does, however, seek to provide additional insight into why Hungary's Foreign Service was severely isolated after 1918.

At the end of the First World War, in 1918, the Hungarian Foreign Service had rather limited room for manoeuvre. László Tamás Vizi describes this period from Hungary's perspective as an era without international allies and a very complex situation from the Hungarian foreign policy's point of view:⁵

³ O. STRELKO – O. PYLYPCHUK, *Apollon Konstantinovich Krivoshein: the last Railway Minister of the Russian Empire in the Era of Emperor Alexander III*, in: *West Bohemian Historical Review*, XI, 1, 2021, pp. 1–23.

⁴ S. UKSHINI, *Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Independence of Albania*, in: *West Bohemian Historical Review*, XI, 2, 2021, pp. 167–208.

⁵ L. T. VIZI, *The Ideas of Hungarian Politics on Revision in the First Half of the 1920s*, in: *West Bohemian Historical Review*, XI, 1, 2021, pp. 25–47.

*“In the first half of the 1920s, the Hungarian political elite had to handle the situation created by the Trianon Treaty, although the Hungarian foreign politics had very little room for manoeuvres against the Little Entente and for the revision of the Trianon Treaty.”*⁶

Indeed, this was a period when international allies would have been needed, to help minimise the losses imposed as conditions of the peace treaty and their effect on the country’s economy and society. At that time, Hungary did not yet have a ministry of foreign affairs: the joint Austro-Hungarian administration had ceased, and the independent institution had to be set up after the war. The era was also characterized by the disintegration of the previous international order and domestic political chaos after the war.

As the independent state of Hungary was in the process of being formed, Hungary’s independent ministry of foreign affairs had yet to be created. Hungarian officials who had served in the diplomatic corps of Austria-Hungary, among them György Barcza, were tasked with the establishment of Hungary’s bilateral relations. For György Barcza, this meant building Hungary’s relations in Northern Europe, with states with which Hungary had had scant direct contact in previous centuries.⁷

The First World War and the Treaty of Trianon, which concluded it in the case of Hungary, is a much-studied issue in Hungarian literature. However, the practical operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomacy is a topic that has been given unduly little attention. The transformation of foreign affairs from a joint Austro-Hungarian institution into an independent Hungarian one became a key issue in the era. Éva Somogyi, who was a researcher at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for decades, stands out in this research field. She examined in detail the operation of the Government system in the Monarchy. The period after 1914 was outside the scope of her research. Nevertheless, her work provided valuable input for our quest. Another author whose work we have relied on is William D. Godsey, research fellow at History of the Habsburg Monarchy. Godsey examines the Habsburg Monarchy in an international context and also researches the operation of governing bodies, with particular regard to the foreign office on the eve of the First World War. We were able to utilize these works as a starting point for our

⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷ V. NÉMETH, Skandinávia a geopolitika térképén, in: *Geopolitikai Szemle*, 1, 3, 2019, pp. 85–104.

research. At the same time, György Barcza's own notes provided the deepest insight into the operation of the Hungarian foreign mission, as they were based on his own daily experiences. We have reviewed the theoretical literature, primarily the theory of international relations, and the international assessment of the Hungarian situation at the end of the 1910s and beginning of 1920s, to establish the theoretical and historical context.

The Foreign Ministry of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

To construct the context for the analysis of György Barcza's life and achievements we need to summarize the key features of the Foreign Ministry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Among these, we consider the definition of the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in state administration to be the most important, which also serves as the starting point of our research. Understanding the operation of the institution, the role of its officials as well as the composition of its staff is also relevant as context for interpreting György Barcza's work and his recollections thereof. In this phase of the research, we were able to rely heavily on studies of Éva Somogyi and William D. Godsey.

Hungarian historian Éva Somogyi,⁸ a renowned researcher of the Austro-Hungarian government apparatus analyses the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the bureaucracy in Vienna as follows: "*Ballhausplatz*⁹ was the casual reference to the iconic institution that implied the centre of the Monarchy from where the politics of a European great power was coordinated, as was that of the Empire itself."¹⁰

Austria-Hungary being one of the great powers at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries,¹¹ foreign affairs enjoyed an elevated status within its government. This prominent role was also embodied in the fact that from among all ministers, solely the minister of foreign affairs had direct access to the emperor and was also the closest to the emperor in rank. This intimacy was necessary as the responsibilities of the ministry of foreign affairs included the marital and hereditary matters of the ruling Habsburg family. This meant that the foreign minister, who had an in-depth understanding of international political conditions, and whose office had the

⁸ É. SOMOGYI, *Magyarok a bécsi hivatalnokvilágban: a közös külügyminisztérium magyar tisztviselői, 1867–1914*, Budapest 2017.

⁹ Ballhausplatz is a metonym for the ministry, and a reference to its location.

¹⁰ SOMOGYI, p. 31.

¹¹ P. KENNEDY, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, New York 1987; H. KISSINGER, *Diplomacy*, New York 1994.

direct and confidential relationship with the emperor could, and indeed, was depended upon to orient the royal family's marriage aspirations., the Foreign Ministry was, indeed, one of the centres of the empire.¹²

The composition of the apparatus of the ministry played an important role in its operation. The social status and provenance of the officials working at the ministry was key to how and with what efficacy the ministry built and handled relations with foreign states. The institution's researchers, among them Somogyi and Godsey, emphasize that the organisation's main goal was professionalism, in the achievement of which the social background of the officials became a determining issue. This did not mean that in the first decades of the twentieth century, its officials were chosen from the aristocratic elite. As the bourgeoisie gained ground in society, a growing number of officials and military officers from bourgeois descent were appointed to higher ranks. As shown in research by Josef Redlich on Franz Joseph I, referenced by Éva Somogyi (2017), rivalry emerged between the aristocracy of the court, and the officials of bourgeois descent. While the immense prestige of the ministry extended to the officials who worked there, holding high office was not synonymous with having personal political influence.

Similarly to the tradition pursued at other government institutions, at the Foreign Ministry, too, only people with a doctoral degree in law obtained at one of the universities of the Monarchy could hold an office. After 1869, a special examination in diplomacy was introduced as part of the curriculum.¹³ The introduction of these requirements served the emergence of professionalism and helped prepare the integration of new officials into the organisation of the prestigious institution. The fact that requirements were standardised for all candidates with the requirement of preliminary studies, and the very strict rules of operation at the ministry erased the relevance of the ethnic origin of officials.¹⁴ It became a general practice for all officials to have to climb the institutional hierarchy, with newly hired officials starting in entry level positions and gradually ascending the ladder in their careers. This served to strengthen the expertise of the officials, as well as to boost their integration into the institutional system of the ministry.

¹² S. E. GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt: The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office on the Eve of the First World War*, West Lafayette 1998; SOMOGYI, p. 31.

¹³ GODSEY, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.; SOMOGYI, pp. 46–47.

Employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to work in several areas. Officials serving at the central institution, diplomats, and later consulates all uniformly belonged under the Foreign Ministry. Those serving in the central apparatus, i.e. the ministry officials who actually served at Ballhausplatz, could gain political influence, while the diplomats working in the Foreign Service, i.e. embassy staff, enjoyed greater prestige. This meant that those working at Ballhausplatz were in direct contact with the heads of the ministry's organisation, and they were present in the operation of the organisation daily. Meanwhile, diplomats were physically absent from the ministry's day-to-day affairs, but were nonetheless held in high esteem. This differential status entailed differential benefits in terms of prestige and political influence.

An Overview of György Barcza's Life

Éva Somogyi and William D. Godsey's research on the diplomatic career of the time provided a good basis for analysing the data in Barcza's biography, including his career path and influence on Hungarian foreign policy. Beyond his academic formation and professional career, György Barcza's life experience and his personal traits also played a role in how he represented his country as a diplomat. Directly relevant to our quest, these factors also determined how he looked back upon his service in Northern Europe between 1916–1922 when writing his retrospective memoirs.

In the first half of the 20th century, György Barcza emerged as a defining figure of Hungarian foreign policy. During his career, he climbed the steps of the institutional hierarchy described by Éva Somogyi (2017). First, he obtained his degree at the faculty of law in Budapest, after which he went on to study at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, where took his examination in diplomacy. He started his career as a junior member of the central apparatus at Ballhausplatz and went on to become a diplomat serving first in Greece, then in Denmark, until the dissolution of the monarchy in 1918. He rose rapidly in rank and became a broad-minded and experienced diplomat at a young age. He maintained good relations with several important public figures of his day. He was on close terms with Hungarian statesman István Bethlen¹⁵ and politician and novelist Miklós

¹⁵ István Bethlen (1874–1946) was the prime minister of Hungary between 1921 and 1931. His contemporaries referred to him as “the great consolidator” for his economic recovery policy in the country burdened by the Treaty of Trianon.

Bánffy,¹⁶ both of aristocratic extraction. When serving abroad, Barcza was quick to integrate and established good relations with important personalities including the Greek royal couple,¹⁷ Winston Churchill and Pope Pius XII.

His personal traits proved to be more important for building relationships and moving up the ranks than his family background, i.e. aristocratic descent. This phenomenon coincides with the trend described by Somogyi and Godsey, that is, the professionalisation of the organisation came to the fore, as opposed to gentility. Coming from a middle noble family in Transdanubia, György Barcza himself was not part of the aristocratic elite but did have kinship ties to it. He built his diplomat career on professionalism, rather than his own social status. His autobiographic oeuvre clearly reflects the fact that the Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Academy as well as the diplomatic corps itself was highly regarded not only within the region, but internationally, too. In this sense the life of György Barcza shows similarities as well as contrasts with that of Apollon Konstantinovich Krivoshein, based on Oleh Strelko and Oleh Pylypchuk's paper.¹⁸ While at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, personal abilities and professional background had become important in the Russian Empire, personal contacts and kinship remained crucial. By contrast, in the Austrian apparatus of the early 20th century, the official's career and professionalism was decisive. In her collection of Viennese officials Éva Somogyi (2017) also describes how more and more ministers were emerging from an institutional career, and aristocratic extraction was losing its relevance in appointments. This facilitated the establishing of relations with foreign diplomats, politicians, and important personalities, ranging – as in Barcza's case – from Winston Churchill through the pope to the royal family of Greece.

While his service as a member of the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic corps was the foundation of his career, he went on to important foreign missions under the independent Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Highlights of his career during this period included being the Hungarian ambassador to the Vatican from 1927 until 1938, and to London, from

¹⁶ Miklós Bánffy (1873–1950) writer, politician, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary between 1921 and 1922, later Transylvanian Hungarian writer and politician.

¹⁷ Constantin I (Athens, 1868 – Palermo, 1923) and Sophia (Potsdam, 1870 – Frankfurt, 1932), younger sister of Wilhelm II., German Emperor.

¹⁸ Footnote 3.

1938 until 1941. He also played a significant role in creating Hungary's foreign affairs, as the head of the political department of the ministry. Later, from 1943 onwards, he represented the Hungarian endeavours to gain independence in Switzerland and conducted negotiations with British and American parties. He did not return to Hungary after World War II but spent the rest of his life in emigration. He settled in Sydney in 1952, where he died in 1961.

For the purposes of the present study, Barcza's personal ties to Northern Europe also demand attention, as this is where he was fulfilling his diplomatic missions in the period examined, that is between 1916 and 1922. He was attracted to Scandinavia by more than his duties as a diplomat. In 1911, after completing his university studies, but before starting his career as a diplomat, he went on a private trip to the region. Traveling through Denmark and Norway to the Barents Sea, he made an excursion to the waters from where forty years prior, the Austro-Hungarian expedition set out to discover what was to be named Franz Josef Land.¹⁹ He published an account of his adventure in a book that same year, titled *Útjegyzetek: egy jegestengeri vadászkirándulásról*.²⁰ His diplomatic mission to Denmark started five years later, in 1916. In his memoirs, he wrote with enthusiasm about his experiences in Scandinavian countries, their democratic spirit, their way of life and the beauty of their natural scenery. During his stay, he learned to speak Danish, and acquainted himself with the Swedish language.

György Barcza's memoirs were published in two volumes, in 1994, as edited by Ferenc Glatz, Péter Sipos and László Antal. More than one thousand pages long in total, the two volumes contain the longest, edited copy of Barcza's retrospective memoir written in 1946, during his emigration to Switzerland, discussing the period from 1911 to 1945. The manuscript fills twelve large boxes at the Eckhardt section of the Hoover Institution. Selected parts were published in Hungarian journals, in the 1980s. The edited copy of his full manuscript was published in 1994, with the title *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945 I– II. – Magyarország volt vatikáni és londoni követének emlékirataiból* [My Diplomatic Memories 1911–1945 I–II. From – the memoirs of Hungary's former ambassador to the Vatican and London]. The owner of the copyright, Mrs Maya Cranitch, György Barcza's

¹⁹ Gy. BARCZA, *Útjegyzetek: egy jegestengeri vadászkirándulásról*, Budapest 1911.

²⁰ The title of the book translated into English: Travel Notes from a Hunting Expedition to the Arctic Sea.

granddaughter living in Australia gave the editors and the publisher the authorization.²¹ The memoirs have since proven to be a valuable source to historians studying the epoch and diplomatic history.

The International Status of North European States

While the present paper cannot undertake the analysis of the role Denmark and Sweden played during World War I, it is necessary to examine some aspects thereof, to provide insight into the nature of the tasks of the diplomats of Austria-Hungary delegated to these countries. The mission to Northern Europe was unlike any other, because during World War I, Denmark and Sweden declared themselves neutral, hence no combat took place on their territories. As a part of their neutral status, they were important sources of imports and materiel for both sides of the conflict.²² Both countries were equally significant hubs for intelligence services.²³ In his memoirs, György Barcza remembered the special status of the Northern countries during World War I as follows: “*Small neutral states became important places of observation [...] From an economic point of view, neutral ones became particularly important as sources of procurements.*”²⁴

Indeed, through Denmark, Entente states (i.e. United Kingdom, France, and Russia) gained visibility primarily into Germany, while Central Powers (i.e. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) into Britain and Russia.²⁵

In connection with the role of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Service, György Barcza emphatically noted the clear distinction between the work of intelligence services and the work of the embassy. Diplomats had no insight into espionage activities, as these were separated from the roles of professional diplomats. Thus, Barcza wrote exclusively about the operation of the diplomatic corps, not about espionage.

²¹ J. LUKÁCS, Barcza György írott hagyatéka, in: Gy. BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, Budapest 1994; P. PRITZ, Emlékirat és napló, avagy emlékirat a naplóban, in: M. BARÁTH – A. MOLNÁR (eds.), *A történettudomány szolgálatában: Tanulmányok a 70 éves Gecsényi Lajos tiszteletére*, Budapest 2012.

²² A. COTTEY, European Neutrality in Historical Perspective, in: A. COTTEY, (ed.), *The European Neutrals and NATO: Non-alignment, Partnership, Membership?*, London 2018, pp. 23–24.

²³ K. BRUHN: Intelligence and Espionage (Denmark), 1914–1918, in: U. DANIEL – P. GATRELL – O. JANZ et al. (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, Berlin 2018.

²⁴ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 96.

²⁵ K. GRAM-SKJOLDAGER, Denmark during the First World War: Neutral policy, economy and culture, in: *Journal of Modern European History*, 17, 2, 2019, p. 237.

From the point of view of Hungarian diplomacy, the significance of neutral states stood out in the exchange of prisoners of war between the two opposing blocks. As the war progressed, the roles of neutral northern countries broadened, to include the exchange of prisoners of war between the two blocs. It also gave the Hungarian diplomatic apparatus the most tasks, as Barcza recollected it in his memoir: “Denmark was our protective power in Russia.”²⁶ “With the mediation of the Danish Red Cross, some fifteen thousand disabled Austro-Hungarian officers and foot soldiers were brought to Denmark...”²⁷

On the other, Danish side, too, prisoners of war played a prominent role in bilateral affairs. In the Danish Foreign Ministry, a department was created to deal specifically with the affairs of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. In line with the 1907 Hague Conventions,²⁸ a camp was established for the prisoners received, where adequate living conditions were provided for those emerging from combat during their temporary stay in Denmark. The Embassy in Copenhagen served as the point of contact between the Danish Foreign Ministry and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.²⁹

However, Barcza’s duties in Denmark were not limited to this single issue. In the following, we analyse the activities of the diplomat in Denmark.

The Analysis of György Barcza’s Diplomatic Services between 1916 and 1922

The Work of the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in Denmark

Of the four Scandinavian countries, György Barcza spent the most time in Denmark, and this is where he gained the most significant experiences. His memoir describes in detail the role small neutral states play in wartime. This transpires both through the presentation of the activities of the embassy, and through his description of local living conditions. In the following, we present the general atmosphere experienced by György Barcza, the operations of the Austro-Hungarian Embassy, its dissolution, and the attitude of Danish people toward Hungary. The development of bilateral relations is affected by factors beyond

²⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

²⁸ COTTEY, pp. 23–24.

²⁹ R. NACHTIGAL, The Repatriation and Reception of Returning Prisoners of War, 1918–22, in: *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26 1–2, 2008, pp. 157–184; BARCZA, *Diplomata-emlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 105.

government-to-government communication. How one nation relates to another on a peoples-to-peoples level also matters. Equally important is the general stance a country takes to the key international events of the day, which in case of Denmark in the early 1900s was neutrality. All these needs considering to gauge the atmosphere surrounding the operation of Hungarian diplomacy in the Nordic countries, in the 1916–1922 period.

Its support for Germany earned Austria-Hungary dislike by the Danish people. This was not the first occasion that it sided with Prussia. The negative attitude of Danes to the Austro-Hungarian support for Germany had its roots in the 1864 war waged by Prussia and Austria against Denmark, where Denmark lost its territories in Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia. The ensuing misgivings were ratcheted up by the shortages of supplies in Denmark, caused by the submarine warfare during the First World War.³⁰ The general population was becoming increasingly hostile to Central Powers and any deliveries to them.

Nevertheless, in his memoirs, György Barcza expressed his appreciation and respect for Danish society, political culture as well as foreign policy. He considered the neutrality of Scandinavia as a positive example because it was suitable for maintaining welfare and economic prosperity. This behaviour in international relations made a great impression on him, and during his later career he considered it exemplary for Hungary. In his view, neutrality was key to prosperity. On the other hand, he saw a potential ally for Hungary in the Nordic countries. He concluded his experiences as follows: “*Absolutely everything was different in Denmark [...] different, more pleasant, nicer, better [...] a full picture of peace, one we have not seen since 1914. [...] it was pleasing to witness that here there still are nations that live in prosperity, that is, in peace.*”³¹

It is also worth noting to understand Barcza’s perspective, that his praise of Denmark can also be seen as veiled criticism of conditions in his homeland. Barcza was fascinated by the practical functioning of the constitutional monarchy. According to his accounts, the Danish king fully submitted himself to all written and unwritten laws of the land, did not abuse his royal privileges, and lived a bourgeois way of life.

“[...] *the popularity King Christian enjoyed in Denmark was rivalled by few among their own peoples. [...] King Christian was the first citizen of his country,*

³⁰ L. MÜLLER, *Neutrality in World History*, New York 2019, pp. 127–128.

³¹ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 95.

nothing more. As ruler, he strictly followed the constitution, and did not interfere in any affair that pertained in the authority of the governments, while reducing the court protocol to the indispensable essentials."³²

*"[...] the king accepted the precepts without a word of complaint, [...] this fact is so characteristic of the Danes and their king. [...] The king sets an example by his respect for laws, his democratic principles and gentlemanly conduct that many could learn from [...]."*³³

During the examined period, the status of Denmark as well as of other Scandinavian states was revalued, not only from Barcza's perspective. The role of neutral states as intermediaries between the two blocs gained significance, not only on account of the exchange of prisoners of war, but also, for instance, for the procurement of supplies. Before the world war, the monarchy only had a representation staffed by two diplomats. As the number of tasks grew, embassy staff was significantly increased.

Managing procurements, the issues of prisoners of war and propaganda activities constituted the bulk of the work of the Austro-Hungarian Embassy. As Embassy Secretary, György Barcza paid multiple visits to camps of prisoners of war, and continually managed procurements. Barcza describes the famine and serious shortages that ravaged Germany and his homeland, compared to which the fall in living standards experienced by Danes due to the war seemed like prosperity.

The deterioration of the Danish standard of living also affected the perception of Germany and its allies. In Scandinavia, the fall in living standards was attributed to Germany, which launched the submarine warfare.³⁴ *"Morally and politically, the Central Powers – and Germany in particular – caused themselves immense harm,"*³⁵ Barcza noted, giving the following explanation: *"Since in their trade, Scandinavian countries rely practically entirely on transportation by sea, unlimited submarine warfare was having a severely negative impact upon their economy. [...] We have not opted for neutrality only to suffer for this, they said. When will this war that is causing hardships for the innocent finally end? The unpopularity of Germans, which until then, had been only political transformed into a general hatred and anger."*³⁶ This led to the

³² Ibid., p. 98.

³³ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁴ MÜLLER, p. 128 notes that the trade of neutral Nordic maritime states was also restricted by the British, who imposed blockades and considered any Scandinavian vessels bound for Germany as belonging to the enemy.

³⁵ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 107.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 106–108.

negative perception of Central Powers, including Hungary, resulting in the restriction of exports by Scandinavia.

The following example illustrates the differences in living standards and the situation in the Central Powers thrust into poverty because of the war. Barcza recounts a case when a Danish trader sold spoiled canned meat and fish to the Austro-Hungarian army. After the incident, the diplomat was unable to assert domestic interests. According to Barcza, the trader may easily have bribed the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, to evade the investigation of the case and the imposition of damages.

Sensing its own unpopularity, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy promptly moved to try to improve its reputation in the Nordic countries. The campaign implemented included a fashion show, an exhibition of artefacts by Austrian avantgarde artists, and the dissemination of colourful brochures. The embassy carried out the propaganda activity that had been devised by the Foreign Ministry. Barcza frequently criticised the principles underlying these activities, because they fitted neither the recipient culture, nor the political situation. At the time, the strictly rational Nordic audiences did not appreciate these genres, and the campaign backfired, as Barcza perceived it. These failed efforts were passed on to the successor states of Austria-Hungary. Thus, they started from an unfavourable status even as an independent state. Barcza remembers the events as follows: *“Nothing grandiose, nothing imposing or wild romantic either in nature or in the people. Denmark was the little country of an infinitely peaceful and rather materialistic people living in great wealth, which, amid the global conflagration, lived its usual life of abundance as if it were an enchanted paradise on Earth.”*³⁷

*“This exhibition was a rather sad failure. By then, everyone was aware that in the spring of 1917, the Central Powers were struggling with the gravest of difficulties. While the Danes hated the Germans more than ever, we were still enjoying some sympathy here and there. Now this sympathy completely evaporated.”*³⁸

The above illustrates the unfavourable perception that was inherited by the successor states, including Hungary. Later, Barcza remained in Denmark as a diplomat even after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This way he gained personal experience of the events of the ensuing period. His task was to establish Hungarian-Danish relations. In the following we discuss this period with the beginning of bilateral relations. It is also worth noting that after a short time Barcza’s

³⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

responsibilities were no longer limited to the Danish Embassy. The independent Hungarian state was represented by an ambassador in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

The Organisation of the Hungarian Embassy in Northern Europe

Denmark

From the point of view of the situation of Hungarian foreign affairs, it is important to state that at the end of World War I, in the autumn of 1918, Hungary came into being as an independent state.³⁹ As László Gulyás says, Charles I, emperor of Austria, the last ruler from the House of Habsburg-Lorraine, who also reigned as king Charles IV of Hungary, fully restricted the room for manoeuvre available to the Hungarian monarchy in its foreign relations and eliminated at the end of the first world war the possibility of a separate peace accord from that awaiting Germany.⁴⁰ As a result, the Embassy representing the Monarchy was dissolved, opening a rather lengthy transitory period. For lack of a formal, institutional representation, diplomacy and foreign relations activities were pursued by Hungarian aristocrats, whose individual efforts at propaganda sought to maintain the integrity of Hungary and lands inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. Miklós Bánffy visited the Nordic countries to win the support of neutral states for Hungary. For lack of appropriate contacts and common interests, his efforts failed.

The creation Hungary's official institutionalised foreign affairs was a gradual process. Barcza recounts how this happened through his personal experience with the Embassy in Denmark and the Northern European states. He remembers the events as follows, emphasising the difficulties of the initial steps after the war. *"I was fine with the Danish government, I was there in Copenhagen as the envoy of Hungary, but I had no office, no secretary, no errand boy, and – last but not least – no official budget. So, I had to create an embassy out of thin air. [...] This is how the first Hungarian embassy was established in the Scandinavian states."*⁴¹

³⁹ A. TÓTH, Összehasonlítható-e az összehasonlíthatatlan? Az első világháború utáni Magyar Királyság és az első Csehszlovák Köztársaság politikai rendszerének kiemelt aspektusai, in: B. RESS – J. BALI – L. KULCSÁR et al. (eds.), *Ibolyától krizantémig 1867–1920*, Budapest 2021, pp. 85–92.

⁴⁰ L. GULYÁS, Adalékok a versailles-i békerendszer történetéhez. IV. Károly Nagy Háború alatti diplomáciája: a spai egyezmény és következményei, in: B. RESS – J. BALI – L. KULCSÁR et al. (eds.), *Ibolyától krizantémig 1867–1920*, Budapest 2021, pp. 231–236.

⁴¹ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, pp. 133–135.

Initially, the status of the new, independent Hungarian diplomatic mission was special. Because Hungary as an independent state had not conclusively been recognised. For this reason, foreign representation was possible only on the level of envoy, that is, the envoy was accredited to the government, and not to the head of state. Stockholm was chosen as the headquarters for the Hungarian diplomatic representation whose scope of responsibility encompassed all four Scandinavian countries, because Sweden and its capital carried the most political and economic clout in the region. “*Somehow Stockholm seemed more significant, it gave a grander impression, as did Sweden itself, which was huge compared to little Denmark.*”⁴² Other small states proceeded similarly and chose Stockholm as the centre for managing their affairs concerning the northern states. In the next part of the study, we will discuss his activities in Denmark. It is also worth noting that Barcza was later appointed ambassador to other Northern European countries, parallel to his duties in Denmark. As part of the expansion of the field of work, he moved to the new headquarters to Stockholm. Barcza’s activities in the other two Northern European countries, Sweden, and Finland, are discussed in the following sections.

Sweden

György Barcza was the Hungarian Envoy, who laid the foundations of the present-day Hungarian Embassies in Northern Europe, and who launched bilateral relations with these countries. His status was ambivalent, the favourable atmosphere of the past relationship between the two countries, and Barcza’s personal qualities are among the positives, meanwhile, the contemporary international perception of Hungary was unfavourable after the war.

Barcza emphasised in his memoir that for several reasons, he had significant advantage over the diplomats of the other new Central European states. Central European geography was little known in Scandinavia. Furthermore, the historic relations between Hungary and Sweden were not burdened with any tensions, and despite the geographic distance, there had been economic, cultural, and political cooperation between the two countries.⁴³ György Barcza’s personal advantage over the diplomats of other countries was his training and professional experience. This may have been an advantage in terms of Hungary’s diplomatic perception.

⁴² Ibid., p. 138.

⁴³ D. GUSTAFSSON, *Sverige och Ungern. Svédország és Magyarországnak*, Trelleborg 2004; NÉMETH, p. 95.

The Envoy as a person was unable to compensate for the reputation of Hungary. Based on Barcza's personal experience, the reputation of the Károlyi government was poor, and the excesses of both the far left and far right were viewed negatively among the Nordic peoples who appreciated restraint. The diplomat observed that internationally Károlyi's government was considered extremely weak and incapable of maintaining order. The following quote encapsulates how Barcza perceived the situation: "[...] *the Entente have no trust in the government. They do not trust it because it has neither the will or the power to reign in the left-wing elements that emerged and went on a rampage after the collapse, and it fails to take the necessary measures and restore order in the country. As long as the current Hungarian regime fails to prove its ability and determination to act, the Entente and neutral countries will be distrustful of it and will not consider its rule stable.*"⁴⁴

The rise to power of an extreme political trend and the chaotic operation of the government was unconscionable from the perspective of Sweden. This situation made it significantly more difficult to represent the Hungarian affairs abroad. In the period when Treaty of Trianon was concluded, part of the domestic political public agreed that it would have been particularly important for Hungary to gather allies abroad, including among neutral states during the war. (It is worth noting, that Barcza disagreed with the government in connection with its policy to seek the international recognition of Hungary). As Ambassador, György Barcza was committed to finding allies for Hungary, within the framework for which he was authorized. He saw an excellent opportunity in the neutral Northern European states. However, the advance of the extreme political trend in Hungary was a hindrance to his endeavours, as the government's international reputation deteriorated.⁴⁵

As the above quote shows, for Barcza, Sweden, like Denmark, was a model state. Personally, he was even more impressed by the social and political conditions, and the living standards there than in Denmark. His impressions reinforced his conviction that neutrality was the best option for a small or medium sized state. Ever since this time, the preference of neutrality has been a recurrent thought in Hungarian foreign policy. Several foreign policy experts have argued for it, even independently from one another. Barcza can certainly be seen as one of the forerunners of the idea of neutrality for Hungary.

⁴⁴ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Based on Barcza's description and the analysis of contemporary bilateral relations, the predisposition of Swedes towards Hungarians was much more favourable than the Danes'. One reason may have been that the bilateral relations between the two countries had a significantly longer history, and opportunities for contact between them had been more numerous. Despite the distance trade relations and military alliances also strengthened their cooperation. Its intensity fluctuated over time, nevertheless, it left its mark on the foreign policy as well as the public opinion of the country.⁴⁶

György Barcza played a decisive role in establishing official bilateral relations between the newly independent state of Hungary and Sweden. Full-fledged ambassadorial representation was not established until several decades later.

Finland

Relations between Hungary and Finland were special at the beginning of the 20th century, not least due to earlier findings of Finno-Ugric linguistic traits in the Hungarian language. Regardless of the perception of the war, bilateral relations, and the atmosphere between the two countries endured, as Barcza's memoirs attest. György Barcza himself was quite surprised by the positive reception he experienced in Finland. In the other two states, Denmark, and Sweden, he faced a significantly more distant environment than in Finland. Barcza recalled his experiences in Finland as follows. *"Wherever I went, the Finns welcomed me most cordially, even celebrated me, as a representative of a nation related to them. At times I felt as a rich and aristocratic relative visiting the poorer."*⁴⁷ By the beginning of the 20th century, Finno-Hungarian friendship had been well established. This also gained practical importance as a diplomatic asset: Finland was the only Nordic country to legally recognize Hungary as an independent state.

In addition to nurturing good cultural relations, the Finns also saw multiple similarities in the fate of the two peoples and did not view the political situation in Hungary as negatively as the other Nordic countries did. Like Hungary, Finland, too, had only recently gained its independence, after which it, too, underwent consecutive periods of red and then white terror. The situation was stabilized by general Mannerheim, who

⁴⁶ GUSTAFSSON, p. 2.

⁴⁷ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 143.

was comparable to governor Miklós Horthy, both in terms of personality and in terms of the political system he created.⁴⁸

Regarding Barcza's personal motives, it is worth noting, that Barcza disagreed with the new Hungarian government regarding its policy to seek the international recognition of the country. In his opinion, the international recognition of Austria as an independent state that had been a member of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy automatically and simultaneously implied the de facto recognition of Hungary. Barcza also disagreed with the signing of the Treaty of Trianon. While being anti-war, he advocated perseverance to the end. However, his personal convictions could not override the official framework to which his authority extended.

Barcza considered the sweeping reforms introduced in Finnish public administration, education, along with the development of the infrastructure, an example for Hungary to follow. "*Finland's first years are highly instructive from a Hungarian point of view [...]*."⁴⁹ This made Barcza one of the forerunners of those political figures, who have urged Hungary to follow Finland's example. Later, many political thinkers and decision-makers considered the Finnish model exemplary. Like the concept of neutrality, the adoption of the Finnish model has been a recurrent thought over the past one hundred years, shared by many Hungarian politicians and experts.

It is worth noting that Finno-Hungarian relations reached their climax in the 1920s, 1930s. While good relations between the two countries were palpable, they had their limits.⁵⁰ The reasons include the significant physical distance, the cultural differences, and most importantly, the lack of common interests that could have given friendly relations more depth. Despite the obvious parallels between the histories of the two countries, they often faced quite different challenges. Although both countries developed a positive perception of the other, they could not extend meaningful military assistance to one another. Their political cultures and social structures also differed, and trade relations could not

⁴⁸ B. DMYTRO, The dissolution of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and the revolutionary process (1917–1920): A comparative analysis, in: *Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice*, 15, 1–2, 2015, pp. 61–76; A. HALMESVIRTA, Magyarország és Finnország útja a XX. század elejétől napjainkig, in: J. SIEVERS (ed.), *Rokoni körben: A magyarországi finn képviselő története*, Budapest 2010, pp. 10–18.

⁴⁹ BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 146.

⁵⁰ HALMESVIRTA, p. 13.

develop either. Nevertheless, their communities played important roles in nurturing friendly people-to-people and cultural relations.⁵¹

The Perceptions of the Treaty of Trianon in the Nordic States

The perception of Hungary abroad is not only important, or because of how it affected the beginning of bilateral relations in the 1920s. The general unfavourable perception and atmosphere also contributed to the formulation of the Treaty of Trianon, the peace treaty that defined the creation of the independent Hungarian state.

The perceptions of the Trianon peace treaty by the Nordic countries can be viewed considering their attitudes towards Hungary. In the following, we review the perceptions of Hungary by the Northern European countries as a context for their attitudes to the Trianon Treaty, with particular regard to György Barcza's experiences as a diplomat.

As discussed in the above, the Danes condemned Hungary for siding with Germany in the war, and they maintained this opinion. Barcza's memoirs show that they were nevertheless more understanding of Hungary's territorial losses, as they had experienced the consequences of the war of 1864 in a similar way. Overall, Hungary being remote from Denmark, and due to Danish resentment over Hungary's cooperation with Germany, they did not show much sympathy. In Barcza's experience, this resentment clearly transpired through the positive personal relations he had built: *"To me, the Danes with whom I was on friendly terms demonstrated polite compassion and lamented the harsh conditions of the peace treaty but did not fail to point out that this is what happens to those who pick the wrong side in a war. We hope, in the next war, you, too, will be on the right side, they would add. The Czechs, Serbs and Romanians did not enjoy any sympathy at that time, nor were they well known [...]."*⁵²

Possibly due to its long-standing relations with Hungary, Sweden had a greater understanding of the Hungarian cause, but even this did not constitute sufficient ground for the country to stand up for Hungary on an international level.

Finland was much more overt in its support for Hungary, but being a new state, it had to take its own vulnerability into consideration. For this reason, their pro-Hungarian stance on international fora was restrained.

⁵¹ A. HALMESVIRTA, Hungary and Finland in interwar years: A Comparative Survey, in: R. BARTA – R. KEREPESZKI – K. KRZYSZTOF (eds.), *Trianon 1920-2020. Some Aspects of the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1920*, Debrecen 2021, pp. 31–44.

⁵² BARCZA, *Diplomataemlékeim 1911–1945*, p. 149.

The Norwegian stance is the least featured in György Barcza's memoir. In connection with the situation following the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, it only says that the Norwegians were unequivocally committed to the Entente's side. Their perception of Hungary's role in the war was purely negative, and they showed no compassion whatsoever over the serious conditions of the peace treaty. "*The Norwegian press, being completely Anglophile, approved of everything, the Swedes' stance was balanced, and in fact, some of their media took our side, while the Finns spoke carefully, but with warm compassion over our fate.*"⁵³

Vince Sulyok (2003) a researcher who lived and worked in Norway for decades, disagrees with Barcza's assessment. According to his experience, the Norwegians had great sympathies towards Hungary in connection with the Treaty of Trianon.⁵⁴ Given his more extensive experience in Norway, Vince Sulyok may have had better insight into Norwegian public opinion and media than did Barcza. At the same time, given the geographical remoteness and a lack of common interests, Norway, too, embraced an aloof attitude towards the Hungarian cause on the international level.

Overall, for the Northern European states, Hungary was a less important partner, and in many cases, Hungary even came under a negative assessment. So Nordic countries could not be partners in the effort to have Hungary overrule the peace treaty at international level, which entailed significant economic and social losses for it. Moreover, war involvement was also a negative starting point for the establishment of bilateral relations. At the same time, the situation was coloured by the fact that the country looked back on a longer-term history with the individual states in the field of bilateral relations.

Conclusions

During World War I, the small and neutral Nordic countries gained international significance, because of which their economies grew stronger. Nevertheless, the region suffered some decline in prosperity due to the war, but this regression was negligible compared to that experienced by countries at war. It was at this point in history that the economic and development gap between Central and Northern Europe deepened. While this was not the only factor that contributed to the significant difference

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 150–151.

⁵⁴ V. SÚLYOK, A norvégok és Magyarország, in: *Szépirodalmi figyelő*, 3, 2003, pp. 129–135.

between the development of the two regions that can be observed today, this was the time when the first signs of the tendencies appeared.

The role played by Scandinavian states during World War I was relevant to Hungary in multiple ways. The Nordic countries became sources of procurement, and their importance in intelligence was also amplified. In the 1916–1922 period, the Nordic, and in particular the Danish role in the exchanges of prisoners of war was the most tangible form of help from the Hungarian perspective. The topic has been quite neglected even though tens of thousands of people were able to return to their homeland after the war with Scandinavian mediation.

His experiences in the Nordic countries were defining for György Barcza, shaping his way of thinking for the rest of his life, all the more important due to his influence in founding the foreign affairs of the newly independent state of Hungary. Barcza was among the first figures to call for Hungary's neutrality, and to point to the Finnish development model as being highly instructive and worthy of following for Hungary.

The early 1920s were an important milestone for Hungary, as well as for the country's bilateral relations with the North European countries. György Barcza was the first Envoy to represent Hungary in Scandinavian countries. He laid the foundations of Hungary's present-day diplomatic representation in these countries, as well as of official bilateral relations.

Representing the post-World War I Hungarian cause and instilling sympathy toward it was a significant challenge for Hungarian diplomats. This was particularly so in the Nordic countries, which were at a great geographic distance from Hungary, and so had scant first-hand impressions about the country. The more intense historic relations with Sweden and Finland proved to be helpful in improving Hungary's reputation. In the case of Denmark and Norway, the lack of common interests contributed to the aloof or even negative attitudes towards it, particularly in the wake of Austria-Hungary's support for Germany in the war. These misgivings were amplified by the dire economic consequences of the German-initiated submarine warfare for the region that relied on transportation by sea for practically all its trade. Later, it was the weakness of the Károlyi government, particularly in the light of extremist movements in Hungary, that further eroded the country's reputation. Only Finland, having undergone similar historical processes, showed sympathy towards Hungary.

Based on Barcza's observations, it was clear that in its post-war isolation Hungary could look to Finland for positive, even friendly relations.

The Finno-Hungarian relations reached their zenith between the two world wars but were mostly limited to cultural cooperation.

György Barcza was an erudite, broad minded and experienced diplomat, whose memoirs remain a valuable source of insight. While he did not seek to register every single event that took place during his career, Barcza's recollections of his impressions and experiences provide a unique perspective for scholars on the relations between Hungary and Scandinavia in the 1916–1922 period.

The examined period as one of intense change for the world order, for Europe, and within them, for Hungary. The insights and experiences recorded in the retrospective memoirs of the erudite and experienced Hungarian diplomat György Barcza can help refine our understanding of the deeply interrelated processes of domestic politics, international relations, and global events, affecting recognition, legitimation, cooperation, and power on each level.