

The Attitude of Budapest to the Election of the President of the Republic in Czechoslovakia in December 1935

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On 14 December 1935, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk who had been the head of the First Czechoslovak Republic for long seventeen years, resigned for health reasons. The new President of the Republic was to be elected at the joint meeting of both chambers of the National Assembly, to be held in the Vladislav Hall of the Prague Castle, on 18 December. Masaryk had publicly recommended Edvard Beneš, the Foreign Minister, to be his successor. However, in the end, the governmental Agrarian Party posted an opposite candidate, Bohumil Němec, a university professor, former deputy and senator on behalf of the National Democracy. He agreed to his candidacy for the President of the Republic on 6 December and it was officially declared within the governmental coalition on 7 December. In view of the distribution of the political forces in the National Assembly of that time, the chances of both candidates to the presidential office were balanced and Beneš' election did not by far seem as certain as originally expected. Therefore, logically, the subsequent almost two weeks before the presidential election were characterized by intensive and difficult political negotiations. In view of that fact, each potential vote in the Parliament had political weight, and therefore the political importance of the 14 mandates held by the legislators from the Land Christian-Socialist Party (*Országos Keresztény Szocialista Párt*; OKSZP) and from the Hungarian National Party (*Magyar Nemzeti Párt*; MNP) as from the parliamentary election of May 1935 rose considerably.¹

As the Hungarian minority political representation were in close contact with the Hungarian governmental circles since its involvement in the political system, its top representatives examined also the attitude of Budapest to the upcoming presidential election, or to the specific form of participation of both Hungarian political parties in the presidential election, respectively. But it must be added and stressed that the contacts of the Hungarian minority national opposition political representation with the official circles of Budapest took place rather at informative-consultation level. The influence of Budapest on the Hungarian minority political scene in Czechoslovakia not

1 F. KAHÁNEK, *Zákulisi presidentské volby Dr. Beneše*, Praha 1939, pp. 32–33; *Před historickým rozhodnutím*, in: *Lidové noviny*, Vol. 43, Is. 625, 1935, 14 December (morning issue), front page; *Jednání o nástupce — Rozvržení sil v Národním shromáždění*, in: *Ibidem*, Is. 627, 1935, 15 December (morning issue), p. 5.



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always corresponded to its expectations. In the course of time, the Hungarian minority political representation had built its own political platform and defended that domain partially against Budapest. The main interest of Budapest consisted primarily in unity of the Hungarian minority opposition political scene, or in unified and common actions at nationwide political scene, respectively. But it took very long to Budapest to direct both political parties, OKSzP and MNP, to a common political path. That path started only in 1929 when both parties created a joint list of candidates for the first time, for the third parliamentary election and, upon the pressure from Budapest and after difficult negotiations, also joint parliament clubs. Thanks to a relatively certain autonomy of the Hungarian minority political parties, OKSzP and MNP were merged into one common political subject only after a long time (21 June 1936). But Budapest did not devote too much of its energy to the Hungarian minority political parties either.

Budapest had been informed about the upcoming early presidential election in Czechoslovakia already. János Wettstein, the Hungarian Envoy to Prague, reported to Budapest by wire on 27 November 1935 that Beneš, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, had told the German diplomatic representative, that Masaryk would resign in the subsequent week and that the presidential election would take place in the same year, with Edvard Beneš, the head of the Czechoslovak diplomacy, as the only candidate. The first consultations between the top representative of the Hungarian minority political scene in Czechoslovakia and Budapest, related to the presidential election, took place just before the Agrarian Party members announced officially, on 7 December 1935, within coalition political negotiations kept secret for that time, that the party would post Bohumil Němec as candidate. In connection with the presidential election in Czechoslovakia, Géza Szüllő, the president of the joint deputy club approached Budapest. He used the following words: *“We need a decision with respect to whom we should elect President of the Republic.”* Nevertheless, Szüllő did not know about Bohumil Němec’s candidacy at that time and expected that the opposite candidate posted by the Agrarian Party members would be Milan Hodža, the Prime Minister. The former president of the Hungarian Christian Socialists suggested at that time already, in spite of his restrained attitude both to Beneš and to the Agrarian Party, that the Hungarian parties should support Edvard Beneš, the Foreign Minister, in the presidential election. Szüllő communicated to Budapest his personal opinion that, he considered it more beneficial to the interests of the Hungarian minority that Beneš and not the agrarian candidate would be elected the new President of the Republic. Szüllő’s message was passed to the Hungarian Foreign Minister by Wettstein, the Hungarian envoy to Czechoslovakia, on 7 December.²

The Hungarian Foreign Ministry answered to the president of the joint Hungarian deputy club on 9 December 1935, through mediation of the Hungarian Envoy to

2 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (State archive of the Hungarian National Archive; hereinafter referred to only MNL-OL), K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 835/res. pol./1935. The fact that Szüllő was the author of the document (it was neither signed by anybody nor exactly dated) asking Budapest for instructions in connection with the presidential election is documented by the summary report of József Wettstein, the Hungarian Envoy to Prague, to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry from 19 December 1935. Cf. *Ibidem*, 252/pol./1935. Szüllő is mentioned under the code name of “Éva”.

Prague. The first instruction of Budapest stated the following: 1) if a civil bloc was constituted, the Hungarian legislators should support its candidate to the presidential election, no matter who it was; 2) if finally no civil bloc emerged, the legislators of the Hungarian parties should cast empty votes in the presidential election.³

Géza Szüllő communicated the instructions of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry on 10 December 1935 at the meeting of legislators from both Hungarian Parties.⁴ However, Szüllő allegedly presented the instructions from Budapest, extended with another, third point. According to that point, the Hungarians, if they saw that Beneš's candidacy was "very strongly supported", they should join that majority. Nevertheless, the preserved archive sources of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry of that time with regard to the presidential election in Czechoslovakia in 1935 do not document on what base Szüllő could extend the Hungarian instructions by the above stated third point. But it is interesting that Szüllő submitted the original instruction from Budapest, extended by this third point that had not been included in the original instructing telegraphic message from Budapest, in his *aide mémoire* for the Hungarian Foreign Ministry in which he summarized for Budapest the history of the attitude of the Hungarian minority parties to the presidential election, confirming that the instruction from Budapest had been accepted in that form by the legislators from both parties. So we can only speculate about the base on which the chief of deputies of both Hungarian parliamentary parties had extended the instruction of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. The answer to the question whether Szüllő had complemented the original two-point instruction of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry by himself or based on possible additional consultations with Budapest, e.g. by phone, or whether an additional specifying instruction could arrive from Budapest before the above stated meeting of the Hungarian legislators held on 10 December cannot be documented.⁵

Count János Esterházy, the then president of OKSZP, was another actor of the political representation of both Hungarian minority political parties represented in the Czechoslovak National Assembly who approached Budapest asking for instructions. On 14 December 1935, Esterházy personally asked in Budapest for permission to meet Jan Jiří Růckl, the main backstage negotiator of support to Beneš's candidacy in the political lobby. The common meeting related with the upcoming presidential election was initiated by Růckl. Esterházy related in Budapest to have got the impression in Prague on 12 December that the civil bloc led by the Agrarian Party members

3 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 835/res. pol./1935. We can see from the instructions of the Hungarian Foreign Minister that the issue of the presidential election in Czechoslovakia was consulted, based on Szüllő's message, also with Tibor Pataky, the State Secretary at the Ministerial Presidium. (Cf. *Ibidem*).

4 Both the archive documents and the newspapers quoted in connection with the topic of this study, when speaking about meetings of the Hungarian legislators, always speak of a meeting of the joint parliament club of the Hungarian legislators. The facts show that both joint parliament clubs of both Hungarian parties, i.e. both the club of deputies and the club of senators met at the same time, usually under the leadership of Szüllő, the chief of the Hungarian deputies.

5 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 869/res. pol./1935.

“strongly endangered Beneš’s presidency”, and therefore believed that Rückl wanted to talk to him based on Beneš’s authorization, in order to get support for the Foreign Minister’s candidacy also from the Hungarian legislators.⁶

At the same time, Esterházy asked the “relevant officials” in Budapest for instruction as for what form his potential participation in the meeting should have, i.e. whether his presence in it should be only passive, to merely listen the counterparty, or whether he should submit specific requirements at it, based on which the Hungarian legislator could support Beneš in the presidential election. The request for consent with the meeting with a person from Beneš’s camp was logical, on the background of the instruction of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry from 9 December 1935, as under the given circumstances, the most probable thing was that the first point of the original instruction from Budapest, i.e. support to Beneš’s opposing candidate would be determinative to the Hungarian deputies and senators. The second point was not relevant for the time being, similarly to point three whose origin is unclear. A more specific attitude of Budapest to Esterházy’s meeting with Rückl is not known, but it probably gave the thumbs-up to it, because on 15 December 1935, Esterházy really met Rückl, and not only Rückl but, surprisingly, also Edvard Beneš, the presidential candidate. However, the above stated *aide mémoire* by Géza Szüllő, passed to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry on 28 December 1935, shows that in Budapest, Esterházy was also given suggestions to involve other top political representatives of the Hungarian minority political scene in the negotiations with the representatives of Beneš’s camp.⁷

It was obvious that the Hungarian minority political parties were facing the unique opportunity to factual and direct talks with an influential member of the Government and probable future President of the Republic that could realistically bring some concessions to the Hungarian minority if they expressed the readiness to support Beneš in the presidential election. Therefore the president of the OKSzP subsequently visited the president of the joint deputy club of the Hungarian parties, to inform him about the meeting with Beneš and to ask him to visit the Hungarian Foreign Ministry together with him. Their joint informative meeting with responsible officials in Budapest took place on 16 December 1935. However, it is noteworthy that still nobody from the top political representatives of the second Hungarian minority parties, MNP, had been invited to further Budapest consultations.⁸

6 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. doc. marked “ad 840”/res. pol./1935.

7 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. doc. marked “ad 840”/res. pol./1935; *ibidem*, 869/res. pol./1935; Masarykův ústav a Archiv Akademie věd České republiky, v. v. i. (Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic; hereinafter referred to only as MÚA AV ČR), Archiv Ústavu Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka (Archive of Institute of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk; hereinafter referred to only as ÚTGM), fond Edvard Beneš, Oddělení I (Edvard Beneš fund, Department I; hereinafter referred to only as f. EB I), file No. 45, inv. No. R/1340/136, Slovakia — Photocopies — 1930–1938 (hereinafter referred to only as SK-FTK/’30–’38), photocopy of two-page letter typed by Rückl to Přemysl Šámal, the chancellor of the President of the Republic, from 16 December 1935 from the Office of the President of the Republic (T. 1002/35 — signature of the Presidential Office).

8 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs., 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 869/res. pol./1935.

The top representatives of the Hungarian Christian Socialists, Szüllő and Esterházy, first held preliminary talks in Budapest with Baron György Bakach-Bessenyey, the head of the political Department in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, and then, in presence of State Secretary Dénes Pataky who led the Department for Matters of Foreign Hungarians, directly with Kálmán Kánya, the Foreign Minister. The meeting with the minister was attended also by László Bartók, the Hungarian consul to Bratislava. The political situation around the presidential election in Czechoslovakia was chaotic for the Hungarian Foreign Minister, and that is why he refused to give a concrete instruction to both Hungarian minority politicians, letting the decision upon themselves. Kánya substantiated his attitude by stating that the given situation and the resulting advantages could be assessed in relevant manner, based on the political development, only on the last day before the very presidential election.⁹

As the Hungarian Foreign Minister allegedly did not bind the Hungarian minority politicians in the issue related to the presidential election, Szüllő declared at the meeting with Minister Kánya that he, in view of the permanently weakening position of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, supported an honest agreement with Beneš, taking responsibility for such attitude. Both State Secretary Pataky and Foreign Minister Kánya, as well as president of OKSzP Esterházy allegedly agreed to the attitude of the president of the joint club of the deputies of the Hungarian parties.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the summarizing report by Wettstein, the Hungarian Envoy to Czechoslovakia, related to the attitude of the Hungarian minority parties to the presidential election from 19 December 1935, refers about the Budapest consultations of Esterházy and Szüllő, held on 16 December, in another manner. According to it, the Hungarian Foreign Minister agreed to Esterházy's attitude presented to Beneš on 15 December, i.e. that the Hungarian legislator could support Beneš's election under certain conditions. In that context, Kánya allegedly instructed Esterházy that the Hungarian parties should support Beneš's candidacy in the presidential election as a reward for the corresponding Beneš's promise guaranteeing the requirements submitted by them. Although Wettstein's report on the consultations of the representatives of OKSzP in Budapest is formulated in a different manner, the result of the talks held by János Esterházy and Géza Szüllő in Budapest on 16 December is clear: the Hungarian legislators could support Foreign Minister Beneš in the upcoming presidential election.¹¹

However, on the day before the presidential election, on 17 December, tension emerged between both Hungarian minority political parties, with imminent disagreement with respect to their attitude to the presidential election. The thing is that the MNP legislators allegedly frowned upon the fact that they had not known about

9 Ibidem.

10 Ibidem.

11 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 252/pol./1935. The top political representatives of both Hungarian minority political parties who were the main actors in shaping the position of both parties to the presidential election are given code names in the Envoy's report: Esterházy — "Asztalos", Szüllő — "Éva" (as stated above), József Szent-Ivány, the political leader of MNP — "Ádám" and Andor Jaross, the Vice-president of MNP — "Pál" (for the latter persons, see the main text below).

the Budapest consultations of chief of the OKSzP Esterházy and the president of the joint deputy club of both parties, also Christian Socialist, Szüllő, and therefore faced with displeasure the change of instructions from Budapest, according to which the Hungarian deputies and senators should give their vote in the presidential election to Edvard Beneš. József Szent-Ivány, the political leader of MNP and Vice-president of the deputy club of both Hungarian minority political parties, was the main actor of that disagreement. Szent-Ivány allegedly informed also Wettstein, the Hungarian Envoy, about the disunion emerged between both Hungarian political subjects, and asked him to exact a new instruction from the Hungarian Foreign Minister in connection with the presidential election. Colder relation of MNP to Beneš's support in his presidential candidacy is documented also by the participation of Andora Jaross, the president of MNP, together with Esterházy and Szüllő at the factual meeting with Edvard Beneš held in the afternoon. Jaross allegedly took part in the meeting only as observer, which he specially stressed to Beneš.¹²

Although after the subsequent meeting of legislators of both Hungarian minority political parties, held in late afternoon, a joint communiqué of OKSzP and MNP was issued to confirm their unique support to Beneš's presidential candidacy and to inform the voters of both parties that their decision to support Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš in the presidential candidacy did not change the opposition political line of the Land Christian-Socialist Party and of the Hungarian National Party, Vice-president of the joint deputy club of both political parties Szent-Ivány kept refusing to support Beneš and waiting for the answer of the Budapest Foreign Ministry to his appeal for a new instruction, releasing both Hungarian parties from the obligation of joint support to Beneš in the presidential election to be held on the subsequent day. Wettstein informed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry about Szent-Ivány's opinion that the instructions of Budapest were based only on a unilateral information of the OKSzP representatives, given to the Hungarian officials without having asked the Hungarian National Party. On the eve of the presidential election, Kánya was also informed by Wettstein that Beneš's election was not only against the conscience of the MNP deputies, including the deputies of the affiliated party of Zipser Germans, Zipser Deutsche Partei, but that it was impossible also for material reasons. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile remarking that the deputy's telegraphic message was sent to Budapest at a time when the joint meeting of the legislators from both Hungarian minority political parties was being held after Esterházy's, Szüllő's and Jaross's meeting with Beneš with regard to their position in the presidential election, at which the above mentioned communiqué had been adopted. The above stated telegraphic message of the Hungarian Envoy to Czechoslovakia, sent to the head of the Hungarian diplomacy in late afternoon of 17 December 1935 also documents that the president of the deputies of the Hungarian parties, Szüllő, had presented support to Beneš in the presidential election at the meetings of the Hungarian legislators in the course of the pre-election day as Budapest's wish.¹³

12 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 869/res. pol./1935 and 252/pol./1935.

13 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, 6147 — encoded telegraphic message of József Wettstein, Hungarian Envoy to Prague, No. 43, sent to Hungarian For-

Budapest answered the Envoy's urgent telegraphic message, initiated by president of MNP József Szent-Ivány, after two and a half hours, at half past eight, or at quarter past nine, respectively.¹⁴ The head of the Hungarian diplomacy confirmed to Prague that “*an indispensable precondition of the wish [of the responsible officials in Budapest — A. T.] was the agreement of the Hungarian parties and completely unified joint steps*”, adding that he could never agree that each party makes separate steps. In view of that basic framework of Budapest wish, the Hungarian Foreign Minister emphasized to the Hungarian Envoy that he kept insisting on joint steps of the Hungarian parties. Kánya informed Wettstein in this context that if the “pressure exerted” by him in Prague “in this direction” remains unsuccessful, he should ask both political parties to abstain from voting in the presidential election.¹⁵

The unified steps of the legislators from both Hungarian political parties in the presidential election, requested by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, was to be accomplished by unified support to Edvard Beneš, i.e. all voters from OKSzP and MNP were to cast their vote to Beneš in the presidential election on the subsequent day, based on the instruction of the Hungarian Foreign Minister. It is documented in more transparent manner by the typed draft of the telegraphic message of Hungarian Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya, modified additionally by the text parts rewritten by hand into the form in which the message was passed by phone to Envoy Wettstein to Prague. The final wording of the Minister's message to Prague was finally more strict than that of its draft. While the draft of Minister's telegraphic message spoke about the desirable unified steps of the legislators from OKSzP and MNP only for the case of clear chances to Beneš's election to president, its sent-off version asked for unified steps of the legislators from both Hungarian parties or abstention from voting, i.e. alternative voting for another candidate virtually was not allowed. The verbatim wording of Kánya's answer to Wettstein read: “*An indispensable precondition of the wish was the agreement of the Hungarian parties and completely unified steps. I could never agree to separate actions of both parties and I insist on unified steps. If the pressure exerted by His Prestigiousness in this direction remains without success, the parties must be instructed to abstain from voting.*” The draft of the telegraphic message read: “*Be so kind to tell the persons concerned that I can never agree to separate actions of both Hungarian parties and that I insist on unified steps. Be so kind to exert pressure on them in this direction, to have*

eign Minister Kálmán Kánya on 17 December 1935, 18 o'clock (the message was decoded in Budapest at 18:30 o'clock). Szent-Ivány is referred to in the Envoy's message under the code name of “Ádám” and Andor Nitsch, the president of the Party of the Zipser Germans, under the code name of “Frigyes”. The joint meeting of the legislators from OKSzP and MNP on their position in the presidential election was opened in late afternoon, at half past five. Cf. here MNL-OL, *ibidem*, 869/res. pol./1935.

14 The telegram was sent at 21:15 o'clock. Compare MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 840/res. pol./1935, resp. 6042 — telegraphic answer of Hungarian Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya No. 61 from 17 December 1935 to Hungarian Envoy to Prague József Wettstein.

15 *Ibidem*. Finally, the telegraphic message was not telegraphed to Prague, but communicated more quickly, i.e. by phone, based on a request written by hand on the telegram draft. (Cf. *Ibidem*).

them agree a joint platform. I observe that if Beneš's election seems uncertain even with support of Hungarian votes, I consider my wish groundless."¹⁶

The main task of the Hungarian Envoy to Prague consisted in doing his best to have Szent-Ivány to support Beneš's candidacy, based on the Minister's instructions from Bratislava. Wettstein admitted to the political head of MNP that he also doubted that Beneš would be able to achieve what he had promised to the Hungarians. Nevertheless, the Envoy tried to convince Szent-Ivány that the Hungarian minority parties could count with Beneš's good intentions rather in case they supported his election than in case they did not, as Beneš would certainly remind that the Hungarians had let him down in the presidential election. At the same time, the Hungarian Envoy tried to convince Szent-Ivány about the importance of unified steps of both Hungarian parties also in view of their position in the political scene, as, according to the Envoy, their separate position in the presidential election would endanger even the small "political force" represented by both political parties in the political arena. The result of the long night negotiations of Wettstein and Szent-Ivány and the subsequent allegedly separate night negotiation of Szent-Ivány with the heads of the Hungarian minority political scene (probably with Jaross and Esterházy, or with only one of them) in the hotel where the Hungarian legislators were accommodated at that time, should consist in the following accord: if it became obvious that nobody would be elected in the first round of the presidential election, each legislator from both Hungarian parties would handle his vote at his own discretion; failing that, or in the second round of the presidential election, all deputies and senators would cast their votes to Edvard Beneš. Szent-Ivány assured the Hungarian Envoy vigorously that both parties would unconditionally adapt to the given instructions from Budapest. However, at the same time, Szent-Ivány allegedly invited Wettstein again to communicate to the Hungarian Foreign Minister that the Hungarian National Party was "*very unpleasantly offended by the fact that its brother party [i.e. OKSzP] had addressed His Prestigiousness without having asked it and obtained its consent*".¹⁷

Although Wettstein allegedly moved Szent-Ivány to accept the Hungarian instructions, i.e. to take unified steps of the legislators of both Hungarian minority political parties, or to support unanimously Edvard Beneš in presidential election, respectively, the Hungarian Envoy was not completely sure whether Szent-Ivány's submission to the Budapest instruction had the persuasive character of a credible guarantee that the Hungarian deputies and senators would actually support Beneš together in the presidential election. The Envoy had also doubts about Szent-Ivány's hotel meeting with Esterház and Szüllő, which he had wanted to attend too. The meeting originally had to take place in the Envoy's car near the hotel. The Hungarian Envoy informed Kánya in that context that he did not know whether Szent-Ivány "*really could not or did not want to*" effectuate the joint meeting with Szüllő and Esterházy in his presence, or whether Szent-Ivány met the above mentioned politicians at least alone, respectively. Wettstein admitted to Budapest that he was not able to confirm

16 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 840/res. pol./1935, resp. 6042 — telegraphic answer of Hungarian Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya No. 61 from 17 December 1935 to Hungarian Envoy to Prague József Wettstein, including its draft.

17 MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 252/pol./1935.

whether Szent-Ivány had informed him truly, or whether he had kept his promise given on behalf of his party, respectively.¹⁸

Although in the night from 17 to 18 December, Bohumil Němec withdrew his candidacy to the presidential office, Beneš's interest in the votes of the legislators from OKSžP and MNP persisted; the head of the Czechoslovak diplomacy communicated it to them through Jan Jiří Rückl before the actual opening of the joint meeting of the deputies and senators of the National Assembly, held in the Prague Castle in the morning of 18 December 1935.¹⁹

The new President of the First Czechoslovak Republic was elected in the first round, as could be expected. Out of the 440 valid votes cast, 340 contained the name of Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš. Although Bohumil Němec had given up the candidacy, 24 legislators cast their votes for him. 76 empty votes were cast, and one vote was marked as invalid. Out of the total number of 450 legislators of the National Assembly, 441 deputies and senators, i.e. 98% took part in the presidential election.²⁰

Thus Edvard Beneš was the second Czechoslovak president, elected by overwhelming majority of the legislators of the National Assembly. Beneš was supported in the presidential election by the legislators from all Czechoslovak parties, i.e. from the Agrarian Party, Social Democracy, National Socialist Party, People's Party, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, the Traders Party and the Communists. The deputies and senators from the German activist parties, i.e. from the German Social Democracy, the German Christian-Socialist Party and the German Agrarian Party voted in favour of Beneš in the presidential election too. For the first time, the election of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic experienced also the activist attitude of the legislators from the opposition Hungarian minority political parties who showed their negativistic attitude to the constitutional foundations of the Czechoslovak state at the previous presidential elections by abstaining from voting, i.e. by casting empty votes. Their attitude at the presidential election should be unified, as was subsequently declared by their representatives towards the public. The unified negativistic attitude was taken in the presidential election only by the legislators from Henlein's Sudeten German Party and Gajda's National Fascist Community who cast empty votes. The constructive approach of OKSžP and MNP in the presidential election was appreciated immediately after the election by the newly elected President of the Republic, Edvard Beneš. Through his personal secretary, he thanked the Hungarian parties for their "*knightly behaviour, sincerity and forthright attitude before and during the presiden-*

18 Ibidem.

19 MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, f. EB I, file No. 45, inv. No. R/124/2 (R 94), VPZ-VP 1935, Copy of Rückl's letter from 18 December 1935, *For president E s t e r h á z y; Náhlý obrat v situaci... Prof. Dr. Bohumil Němec se vzdal kandidatury*, in: *Národní listy*, Vol. 75, Is. 346, 1935, 18 December, front cover.

20 Stenographic messages of the meetings of the Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic (hereinafter referred to only as TZ PS NS), IVth term of office (IV. VO), 1st-2nd session, Meeting 1-30, Stenographic message of the meeting of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate (hereinafter referred to only as TZ sch. PS a S) 18 December 1935, pp. 5-6.

tial election". Beneš's secretary allegedly communicated the President's message to the parliamentary club of the Hungarian parties by phone in afternoon hours.²¹

12 out of the 14 legislators from OKSZP and MNP attended the joint meeting of the deputies and senators of the National Assembly. Both senators of MNP, the president of the party and of the joint club of the senators of OKSZP and MNP József Törköly and Kálmán Füssy excused themselves for the election meeting of the National Assembly. The motives of their absence and their actual absence is not reflected by any archive documents. However, in connection with Szent-Ivány's defiance to support Edvard Beneš in the presidential election, Budapest was alerted by the disseminated doubts of disunited voting of the legislators from MNP and OKSZP, based both on the summarizing press release for December 1935 by the press official of the Hungarian legation to Prague, Géza Motkó, and on alleged statements of top representatives of MNP in Budapest at the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. The doubts were instigated by the fact that all persons who had cast the 76 empty votes could not be identified. The Sudeten German Party claimed to have cast 67 empty votes, and the legislators from the National Fascist Community claimed to have cast 6. Two more empty votes were identifiable at official or backstage level, so that one remained unidentifiable, at least according to the statement of the president of the deputy club of OKSZP and MNP, without more detailed specification. Although Vice-president of MNP Andor Jaross subsequently confirmed to the Hungarian newspaper *Az Est* that both Hungarian parties had supported Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš in unified manner in the presidential election, Budapest still wanted to know to what level it could be possible that some of the legislators from the Hungarian minority political parties could have proceeded in manner different from the majority position. There were doubts about the political leader of MNP, Szent-Ivány, and Vice-president of MNP, Jaross.²²

However, the Hungarian Envoy, in his summarizing report on the attitude of the Hungarian minority political parties to the presidential election from 19 December only could emphasize the doubt with respect to Szent-Ivány's behaviour from the night from 17 to 18 December, when he, for unclear reasons, did not mediate the common meeting of the leaders of both parties as he had been asked for. The issue of the attitude of OKSZP and MNP was even commented in the summarizing report from late December, sent to the Hungarian Foreign Minister, by the president of the

21 Cf. *Aufschlußreiche Wahlziffern*, in: *Die Zeit*, Vol. 1, Is. 68, 1935, 19 December, the first, second or third issue, p. 3; *Ministr dr. Beneš zvolen prezidentem republiky — Národní obec fašistická odevzdala 6 prázdných lístků*, in: *Fašistické listy*, Vol. 5, Is. 36–37, 1935, 24 December, cover page; *Postup jenž musí být odsouzen: K presidentským volbám*, in: *Ibidem*, pp. 1–2; *Beneš köztársasági elnök... — Beneš elnök üzenete a választás után*, in: *Esti Újság*, Vol. 3, Is. 294, 1935, 20 December, pp. 1–2; *Prezident dr. Beneš a naši Maďari. Čo sa dialo v zákulisí pred voľbou*, in: *Slovák*, Vol. 17, Is. 288, 1935, 20 December, p. 2.

22 MNL-OL, K 66 — 274. cs. — 1935 — I-5 t., 1/pol./1936; *ibidem*, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 869/res. pol./1935; *Mit tárgyalt Beneš megválasztása előtt a magyar képviselőkkel? — Jaross képviselő elmondja a Benessel való tárgyalás történetét — „A függőkérdéseket nem tartom megoldhatatlannak“*, in: *Az Est*, Vol. 26, Is. 292, 1935, 20 December, pp. 1–2. For the list of legislators excused from common meeting of all legislators of the National Assembly see TZ PS NS, IV. VO, 1st–2nd session, Meeting 1–30, TZ sch. PS a S, 18 December 1935, pp. 4–5.

joint deputy club of OKSzP and MNP, Géza Szüllő. The ex-president of the Hungarian Christian Socialists stated in his report for Budapest, in view of the fact that only one empty vote had remained unidentifiable in the political lobby: “*But that proves two things: 1./ That the Hungarian National Party voted together with the Christian-Socialist party, i.e. the requested unity was in place, 2./ Second, it proves that either Jaross or Szent-Ivány could have cast that one empty vote, but it is sure that both of them did not cast the same vote.*” The Hungarian Foreign Minister Kánya, in response to the referred Szüllő’s report, sent a message to the head of the Hungarian deputies from OKSzP and MNP through the Hungarian consulate in Bratislava, that the assumptions that Jaross and Szent-Ivány had voted against Beneš could be based on a mere misunderstanding. But the Minister’s subsequent statement that “*both deputies answered evasively my question with respect to that*” is in some contradiction with the preceding statement and does not clarify the matter at all. Besides, Szüllő did not state in his report that Szent-Ivány and Jaross had voted against Beneš, but proved that if one of the two top representatives of MNP did not cast his vote to Beneš, than it could be only one of them and not both.²³

So the result of voting of both Hungarian minority parliamentary parties in the presidential election on 18 December 1935 can be summarized as follows: if only one empty vote remained unidentifiable in the political lobby and one of the two top representatives of MNP, Szent-Ivány or Jaross actually cast an empty vote, Beneš was supported by 11 out of the 12 present legislators of the respective minority political parties; if, in view of the not completely clear Szüllő’s *aide mémoire* sent to the Hungarian Foreign Minister, two empty votes remained unidentifiable in the end and if they finally belonged to Szent-Ivány and Jaross, Beneš was elected by 10 out of the 12 present legislators from OKSzP and MNP; but it cannot be excluded that Beneš finally obtained votes from all the present voters from the Land Christian-Socialist Party and the Hungarian National Party, i.e. from all their present legislators, which would correspond both to the joint communiqué of the legislators from both parties from early evening of 17 December 1935, declaring unified support to Beneš’s candidacy, and to the subsequent statement of Vice-president of MNP Jaross for the Hungarian newspaper *Az Est*.

As could be seen, the main goal of Budapest was, also in case of the election of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic in December 1935, to achieve unified position of OKSzP and MNP representing the Hungarian minority in the Czechoslovak National Assembly. However, the initiative related to the presidential election did not arise from Budapest but from among the Hungarian minority politicians who had addressed the Hungarian Foreign Ministry with specific ideas about their position in the upcoming presidential election. That means that also in this case, the contacts of the Hungarian minority politicians with Budapest did not exceed rather informative and consultation framework. Budapest approached the presidential election

²³ MNL-OL, K 64 — 62. cs. — 1935 — 7. t. — 872/res. pol./1935, resp. 252/pol./1935, 869/res. pol./1935, 252/pol./1935 and 6059 — secret encoded telegraphic message of Hungarian Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya No. 63 from 31 December 1935, addressed to the Bratislava consulate (Szent-Ivány is referred under the code name of “Ádám” and Jaross under the code name of “Pál” in the telegram).

in Czechoslovakia rather half-heartedly and pragmatically, not refusing to support Beneš, but emphasizing the importance of unified steps of both political parties of the Hungarian minority in order to strengthen their political mandate at the Czechoslovak political scene. However, as could be seen, the instruction from Budapest with respect to the presidential election was not automatically respected by all political representatives. The instructions from Budapest were usually rather recommending instructions whose fulfilment was not exacted by threats of specific, e.g. financial sanctions from the Hungarian Government. The described character of contacts between Budapest and the Hungarian minority political scene is documented also by the “non-violent investigation” of the resulting position of the top representatives of MNP in the presidential election, in which even the neutral and evasive answer of the political leaders of MNP at the Hungarian foreign Ministry remained without any “impact”.

THE ATTITUDE OF BUDAPEST TO THE ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN DECEMBER 1935

ABSTRACT

The goal of the study is to describe the attitude of Budapest to the election of the President of the Republic in Czechoslovakia in December 1935, electing the successor to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic who had been in office long years. The election of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic in late 1935 was the first presidential election with active participation of the opposition and negativistic Hungarian minority legislators of the Czechoslovak National Assembly from both Hungarian minority parliamentary parties, the Land Christian-Socialist Party (OKSzP) and the Hungarian National Party (MNP) who had always cast empty votes in presidential elections until that time, to declare their negativistic attitude to the constitutional limits of the Czech Republic. In 1935, they even supported the presidential candidate Edvard Beneš, the Foreign Minister to whom the Hungarian minority political representation including the very Budapest had a very negative attitude as he had been one of the main architects of the Versailles rearrangement of Central Europe after World War I, refused by the Hungarians, as the Hungarian state had lost two thirds of its territory and about seven hundred and fifty thousand Hungarians landed in Czechoslovakia in position of national and non-state-constituting minority due to it. But in spite of that fact, the Hungarian minority legislators from OKSzP and MNP, with political support of Budapest, sided with Beneš's candidacy; thus the Hungarian minority was the only one out of the two large negativistic national minorities of the Czechoslovak Republic of that time, besides the minority Germans whose representatives in the Czechoslovak Parliament, on behalf of the opposition and negativistic OKSzP and MNP parties took an activist attitude, increasing the national-political and the foreign-political prestige of Edvard Beneš's presidential mandate.

KEYWORDS

History; 20th century; Politics; Czechoslovakia; Hungary; Presidential election; 1935; Edvard Beneš; János Esterházy; Géza Szűllő; Andor Jaross; Kálmán Kánya

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