

**MILAN HODŽA IN THE OFFICE OF
CZECHOSLOVAK FOREIGN MINISTER**

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Presidential election of 18 December 1935 ceased the disputes among political parties over Masaryk's successor. The new president appointed Milan Hodža the Prime Minister and entrusted him with the post of the Foreign Minister at the same time. This fulfilled Hodža's forepassed ambition of entering the Černín palace. He was the second after Beneš in the history of the Czechoslovak Republic to perform both these demanding functions simultaneously. But administering the Foreign Office and the government at the same time was possible only for a limited period of time. This was because political power was cumulating in hands of one person and in case of Hodža in hands of a member of agrarian party where there was a threat of being flooded with both internal and external problems.

Hodža considered himself as the only competent Czechoslovak politician having the right of the Foreign Office. His experience from Hungarian politics and mainly his negotiations with Frantz Ferdinand d'Este just contributed to that. In Hungarian parliament he pushed forward the interests of Slovak peasants but he didn't own any land himself and he came from the environment of Slovak conscious educated class. He called himself "grandseigneur in a smock". After the establishment of the republic he brought into the Czech environment, which unlike the Slovak one kept its peculiarity within the monarchy, "the spirit of Hungarian aristocratic gentrism manners, parlour and vigorous, bon vivant and frivolous with high-society style though with Byzantine-Balkans

patina”.¹ Among the Slovak politicians he occupied the top position and so he demanded an appropriate office in the government. These circumstances influenced his struggle for the position of the Foreign Minister that he was allowed to perform for a limited period of time only after E. Beneš had been elected the president of Czechoslovak Republic.²

On account of both his functions Hodža strived for realization of the Central European plan connected with his name. The initial concept of Hodža’s plan appeared only after World War I and associated 11 European countries, “where 73 of 111 million inhabitants came under agriculture”.³ Corporate organization of CSR, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, and three Baltic countries, required, for diversity of their interests, longer and more detailed preparation. Shorter, and from Central European point of view more important, Hodža saw economic and political co-operation of the Danubian countries divided into two blocs: the countries of the Little Entente and countries of the so called Roman protocols. Their different external orientation in the thirties was the reason why economic and business collaboration was supposed to precede political agreement. In the economic area of the plan Hodža aimed for placement of the surplus of cereal of the Danubian countries onto the markets of Western Europe and mainly England. This was “not only because the whole west European capital has its claims in the Danubian countries, that can be paid mainly and above all by cereal, livestock and oils, and thus there is an interest in their solvency; just London can be interested in consumption of these items because it wants Central Europe to keep on being the consumer of English industry and to eliminate its existing troubles on our market.”⁴ Because of bigger consumption of cereal from the Danubian countries Hodža demanded that Europe should lower the import from overseas, mainly from Canada. This step would increase purchase power and solvency of the Danubian countries, from which west European financial interests would benefit. For sale of agricultural products Hodža came up with establishment of central agrarian office in Vienna that would simplify the sale of cereal overflows.

¹ Klimek A., *Boj o Hrad*, Praha 1996, page 367.

² Hodža knew that it was out of the question that he could become the Foreign Minister during the presidency of T. G. Masaryk. Archive of T. G. Masaryk and E. Beneš, Mnichov, cat. no. 259, Prof. Eisenmann’s inscription with minister Hodža, 28 January 1928

³ Archive of the Foreign Office, Krofta’s archive, cat. no. 5, file: Business and political matters.

⁴ Mareček K., *Šťastnější střední Evropa v Hodžově plánu*, Praha 1938, page. 22.

After prosperous solving of the economic part of the plan political combinations shaped up among countries of the Little Entente and countries of the Roman Protocols by means of concluding bilateral agreements on non-aggression and non-interfering in internal affairs of other countries. On the grounds of middle-European agreement these countries were to approach negotiations with Germany in the form of a bloc. Hodža saw facilitation of this idea in the actual organization of Central Europe, which for him represented a formation “with its own constitutive history, similar, sometimes even the same directives of social development with the same problems of national reunification and national minorities and with the same civilizational function between the West and the East ...”, which must prepare for every possible development of Russia, not to fetch up one day between Germany and Russia “just as between two grinding millstones.”⁵

For probing in the way of enforcement of his plan within individual countries of Central Europe, Hodža took advantage of a journey of the Austrian chancellor to Prague on 17 January 1936. Negotiations with Schuschnigg had only been prepared by dr. Beneš as the Foreign minister in September 1935 in Geneva, in connection with negotiation of the Danubian pact. Collective negotiations were to concern the conclusion of the agreements on mutual support and matters of liquidation of military clauses within the peace treaties with Hungary and Austria. The Foreign Office stated in this issue: “it was about facing unilateral convergence of Austria and Italy as well as facing all attempts of the Hapsburgs’ comeback. No particular negotiations are being prepared. There are to be only talks that should prepare ground for negotiating both our business agreement and Austrian closer approach to the Little Entente in the spirit of Bled resolutions.”⁶ Schuschnigg’s journey was delayed because of the election of the new Czechoslovak president and thus it took place in the exact time when Hodža began probing the conditions of putting through his plan within the countries of the Little Entente and countries of the Roman bloc.

According to the official communiqué Schuschnigg came to Prague invited by a Club of German industrialists to the lecture on economic-political topic but as he later admitted “the lecture was only a cover for very special, more far-reaching purpose”.⁷ The Czechoslovak side showed its

⁵ Hodža M., Články, řeči, štúdie, IV, Praha 1931, page 405.

⁶ Archive of the Foreign Office, Telegrams sent 1936, no. 7+8/36.

⁷ Schuschnigg von K., Requiem v červeno-bílo-červené, Praha 1947, page. 289.

willingness not only to economic but also to political co-operation with the country of Roman bloc. The first phase of Central European plan was to begin with clearing some of the disputable points between both countries. Hodža suggested the Austrian chancellor that “the political and economic problems should be negotiated *pari passu*”.⁸ Both sides agreed on extension of the arbitral agreement of 1926, on extending it with the agreement that would emphasize friendly relations between both countries and on concluding cultural convention. In political matters it was spoken about collective security when Hodža highlighted that “he looks upon organization of any cooperation with Austria from the point of view of the countries of the Little Entente”.⁹ On the other hand Schuschnigg dissociated from Hungarian revisionism and offered himself as a negotiator between Prague and Budapest expecting Prague’s offer to improve the relations between Vienna and Belgrade. “In Prague they were determined and ready to perform completely realistic politics. They would have gladly used good services of Vienna to relieve the tension towards Hungary and on the other hand they were pliable to mediate between Vienna and Belgrad.”¹⁰ Negotiations with Austrian chancellor concerned, except for these topics, also the problem of the restoration of the Hapsburgs, which was, from the point of view of the countries of the Little Entente, a priority for Czechoslovak representatives. Schuschnigg cautiously stated that this was not topical at the time but strongly excluded another point from the negotiations, which was Starhemberg’s regency. The following topics of the negotiations concerned protection of Austrian economic interests and Austrian emigration into Czechoslovak Republic.

Within the negotiations with the Prime Minister and the President, Schuschnigg concentrated on economic problems and avoided political questions. He showed that Austria was not interested in anti-German block and even Hodža’s assuring that he was “far from doing anything that was to be arrayed against Germany”¹¹ didn’t help. The Austrian chancellor also pointed out his obligations to the countries of the Roman bloc. Conflicts appeared among individual members of this bloc as well as in the

⁸ Archive of the Foreign Office, safe files d.II/1 1936, cat. no. 18, no. 8889.

⁹ The same location.

¹⁰ Schuschnigg von K., *Requiem ...*, page 291–292.

¹¹ Jančík D., *Německo a Malá dohoda, Hospodářské pronikání Německa do Jugoslávie a Rumunska v první polovině třicátých let*, Praha 1990, page 76.

Little Entente. The reasons were economic disputes resulting from the forced Austrian consumption of Hungarian agricultural crops.

January negotiation with Austrian chancellor presented the first earnest try to break through to Roman bloc. Hodža's project of collaboration in the Danube basin could meet its purpose only in case that western powers, France and Great Britain, would be politically interested. That was the reason of Hodža's trip to Paris 9–14 February 1936. His presence at Masaryk's celebration at Sorbonne, organized by the Committee for European Co-operation was taken for the reason of the visit. His journey to France was planned in the most opportune time. Exactly on the turn of January and February 1936 some of the participants of the funeral of the British king George V occurred in Paris: Romanian king Carol with Foreign Minister Titulescu, Bulgarian king Boris, prince Pavel Litvinov, duke Starhemberg and Turkish Foreign Minister Rustu Aras. Therefore Hodža could immediately meet Titulescu on 9 February at function at the Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris. Only on the following days Hodža visited the representatives of the French government and informed them about his project of the Central European plan. After the talks with Foreign Minister Flandin he reported to the press: "I am happy to be able to state complete unity of opinions on political situation in Central Europe concerning also the most delicate details." Flandin himself expressed his opinion of the dialogue quite briefly: "I had an hour's dialogue with Mr. Hodža and Mr. Osuský. We were talking mainly about my last week's dialogues and about organization of collective security in Central Europe."¹² In this interview Flandin insinuated that France took advantage of the presence of Romanian king and Titulescu to discuss, shortly after completion of French-Romanian business agreement, the question of restoration of the Hapsburgs, organization of collective security in Europe and economic co-operation in the Danube basin. The negotiations of the French president and members of the cabinet with the Czechoslovak Prime Minister also concerned these topics. He expressed his opinion of his Paris journey: "In Paris I got the approbation to the negotiations about the economic and customs agreement in Central Europe based on the following preconditions: organic rapprochement of the systems of the Little Entente with the Roman bloc, no increase in customs duties and/or pro-

¹² Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Paris 1936, no. 107.

portional arrangement of the preferences and the quotes, possibly relieves in payment contact.”¹³

Despite all his enthusiastic words addressing the press Hodža couldn't be satisfied with the results of his visit to France. He considered France and Great Britain as a linchpin of his plan and he suddenly recognized that none of the states is already prepared for wide-ranging purchase of the cereal surplus of the Danubian countries. On one hand Great Britain reflected well to Hodža's visit to France but on the other it was more sceptical and pessimistic about his visit to Belgrade. Great Britain didn't believe that Hodža would succeed in getting the approval of the Yugoslavian representatives to his plan. In the same way as Yugoslavia England also had an interest in co-operation with Germany and for its foreign markets trading with Germany was more important than with the Danubian countries. It was proven by Frank T. A. Asthon-Gwatkin's memorandum of 1 January 1936 in which it was emphasized that the region of Central Europe has got little importance for the British trade “whilst the trade with prospering Germany is of great importance to us”¹⁴.

For Yugoslavia and Romania it was also favourable to trade with Germany that took advantage of the oppressive situation of both countries in the period of anti-Italian sanctions and increased its export into these countries.¹⁵ The Third Reich took away their agrarian surplus and supplied the countries with industrial commodities and military material. The threat of closure of the German market influenced the attitude of Yugoslavian and Romanian governments to questions of external politics. The report of the Czechoslovak ambassador in Belgrade according to whom Schacht threatened the governor of the Yugoslavian National Bank Radosavljevič gives the evidence of German economic extortion of Yugoslavia: “If you don't give the construction of Zenice to German firms we won't

¹³ Archive of the Foreign Office, Telegrams sent 1936, no. 100–134. Krofta's archive, cat. no. 13, undated.

¹⁴ Jančík D., *Německo a Malá dohoda*, page 78.

¹⁵ While in 1934 the value of German export into the Danubian was 378 mil. RM (former German currency) in 1935 it was 402 mil. RM and in 1936 it was already 512 mil. RM. On the other hand the French export to Austria, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia decreased from 553 mil. Fr. in 1934 to 457,7 mil. Fr. in 1935. Owing to devaluation of the currency in 1936 the export slightly increased to 565 mil. Fr., but even this value couldn't hide French economic loss in this area. The numbers are taken from Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, cat. no. 163, statistical data about foreign trade of the Danubian countries.

pay the debts and will stop consuming your agricultural products.”¹⁶ This is how Yugoslavia was tied down, at first economically and gradually also politically, with the interests of the Third Reich. Germany thus slowly pushed a wedge into the allied system of the three Danubian countries under the protection of France. Belgrade’s worry of Beneš’s and Titulescu’s “pro-Soviet” orientation and the discrepancies between Yugoslavian Prime Minister and Romanian Foreign Minister, that were interpreted abroad as a disunity in the external politics of the Little Entente and its incipient disintegration contributed to that. Titulescu complained about Stojadinovič that “during his reign it is impossible to perform the Little Entente politics with Yugoslavia because he is sold out to Germany”¹⁷ and on the contrary Stojadinovič lamented, how difficult it was to collaborate with Titulescu who “holds talks in London on his own on behalf of the Little and the Balkan Entente without regarding it as a need to even consult with Stojadinovič on the telephone”.¹⁸ Mutual grudge between both representatives of the Little Entente played into hand of German aspirations for subordinating besides the economy also the politics of the countries.

German influence on Yugoslavia affected also Hodža’s journey to Belgrade. The Secretary of State in Reich’s Foreign Office von Bülow gave on 13 February 1936 to the German embassy the instructions to intervene at Stojadinovič against accepting Hodža’s plan. He quickly understood the diplomatically chosen words and two days later his reassurance came to Berlin that “he does not want to do anything Germany wouldn’t like”, and that his government strived to secure mutual economic contacts even more.¹⁹ Thus Germany secured in advance Yugoslavian access to Hodža’s plan whose realization was to begin with Czechoslovak-Austrian convergence. Schuschnigg’s journey to Prague provoked objections in Belgrade relating to the change of Czechoslovak foreign politics which, when negotiating with Austria, didn’t take Yugoslavian interests into account. The attitude of Belgrade was confirmed by the report of the Czechoslovak ambassador in Yugoslavia: “... in Yugoslavian governmental and economical circles is still, despite explanations, mistrust in the possible co-

¹⁶ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Belgrade 1936, no. 173.

¹⁷ Archive of T. G. Masaryk and E. Beneš, The Little Entente 202, cat. no. 4. The record of a meeting of Genevan representatives of the Little and Balkan Entente at minister Titulescu, 11 March 1936.

¹⁸ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Belgrade 1936, no. 534.

¹⁹ Jančík D., Německo a Malá dohoda, cat. no. 116.

operation with Austria ...The opinion prevails that it is not the point of interest of Yugoslavia to help Austria to get out of its stifling situation into which it got because of its previous politics with Italy.”²⁰ The restoration of the Hapsburgs was imminent danger for Yugoslavia from the Austrian side and without solving this problem they were not willing to approach mutual understanding. That’s why they also looked with suspicion to Hodža’s initiative in the Danube basin. Hodža’s party membership also caused doubts. Many political and economic officials preferred him as one of the leading representatives of the Czechoslovak agrarian party that was in Yugoslavia taken for the main obstacle to unlimited Yugoslavian export of agricultural production into Czechoslovakia. In a private interview on 10 February 1936, the Yugoslavian ambassador in Paris Purič expressed himself sceptically about accepting Hodža’s plan by his government: “He cannot manage anything with his Central European plan because he belongs to the agrarians who have so far spoiled by their protectionism all commercial exchange in Central Europe.”²¹ He also showed disapproving attitude to establishing the Central-European Cereal Institute and saw a difficulty in the impossibility of selling the agricultural surplus stores. Despite the fact that he expressed only his own opinion he represented a certain group of Yugoslavian governmental circles which knew why Hodža couldn’t find any support for his plan in Belgrade.

Under this situation Hodža’s visit to Yugoslavia took place between 22 and 24 February 1936. The aim of his journey was to reduce the mistrust of Yugoslavian governmental circles in foreign politics of Czechoslovakia awakened by the January meeting of the Czechoslovak Prime Minister and the President with the Austrian chancellor. Despite officially proclaimed unity of Hodža’s and Stojadinovič’s opinions and despite the grandiose welcome of Hodža as a former member of Hungarian Congress for Kulpín electoral district, the journey didn’t meet its aim which was Belgrade’s accepting the plan. He reached admittedly the postponement of the Polish Foreign Minister Beck’s coming to Yugoslavia but that was little of his expected results. In the economic questions both sides only interchanged their views whereas in political evaluation of the internatio-

²⁰ Archive of the Foreign Office, Safe files dept II/1 1936, cat. no. 18, no. 23798, Yugoslavia – collaboration with Austria. Krofta’s archive cat. no. 13, the Belgrade embassy to the foreign ministry, 8 February 1936, Girska informes before Hodža’s visit to Yugoslavia, secret.

²¹ Archives of the Foreign Office, Krofta’s archive cat. no. 13, Paris 11 February 1936.

nal situation the opinions of both of the Little Entente partners completely differed. The Czechoslovak ambassador Girsá later defined it: "In all official external questions a unity prevails between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia but oral version of each of these questions adds some kind of "but" that characterizes suspicion."²² The German Ambassador in Belgrade von Heeren could thus, after Hodža's visit to Yugoslavia, report to Berlin that "the Czechoslovak Prime Minister did not succeed in winning his Yugoslavian colleagues over for such a dilettantish plan such as the idea of economic unification of the Danubian countries with the exclusion of Germany."²³

Hodža made his Yugoslavian journey shortly before the opening of the third session of the Economic board of the Little Entente, which took place at the beginning of March in Prague. He wanted to show his plan, officially ratified by the Yugoslavian government, to Yugoslavian and Romanian delegation of economists. This intent did not succeed and the Czechoslovak Prime Minister preferred solving the economic problems of the Central-European countries earlier. Both delegations, however, were not willing to separate the economic question from the political one and did not concern the year 1936 to be a reasonable time for developing the economic plan of collaboration between the Roman bloc and the Little Entente. The only possible solution of the collaboration of the Danubian countries was seen in creation of a preferential bloc led by Germany, "because only Germany provides the Balkan countries with really ideal preferential status based on scientific grounds equalizing, in the question of prices being the main one, the differences between the world price and the home price."²⁴

During these talks of the economic experts of the countries of the Little Entente it turned out that Romania had reservations about the economic co-operation of the countries of the Little Entente with the Roman bloc. Thus it changed its initial openness to Hodža's conception of the Central-European plan. Later Romanian turn and its restraint towards Hodža's Central-European proposal were influenced by German warning.

²² Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Belgrade 1936, no. 824.

²³ Jančík D., *Německo a Malá dohoda*, page 117.

²⁴ Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, R 4100, inv. no. 34, cat. no. 191, no. 27881 the economic collaboration of the Central-European countries, information for the Foreign minister by dr. Hanosek 6 March 1936.

Reich's Foreign Minister von Neurath indicated on 24 February to the Romanian ambassador that Hodža's plan aimed against German interests. Bucharest thus did not want to risk the breaking off economic contacts with the Third Reich and immediately assured Berlin that Romania would not accept any agreements about the Danube basin in which Germany would not be interested as well.²⁵

This was how Germany influenced the stance of two countries of the Little Entente to Hodža's plan in which Germany saw the assault on its conception of organization of Central Europe. German Foreign Minister von Neurath stated that "Germany will oppose any plan, where they wouldn't be admitted to the negotiations on the principles of full equality".²⁶ Germany also warned Romania and Yugoslavia that in case of their accepting Hodža's plan it would have to reconsider its economic relations to each of the Danubian countries.

Another country that stood against Hodža's plan was Hungary. Although they became a member of the Roman bloc in 1934, they aimed their politics markedly at Germany. They believed that they would be able to break the French influence in Central Europe only with help of Germany and Italy, press revision of the peace agreements and gain a prominent position in the Danube basin. For those reasons Budapest manifested that the suggestion they could take into account "must rely on the principle of equality and must not contain anything that would for Hungary mean a change in pejus against the status based on the peace agreement which refers to: arranging the revision by peace means, protection of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries and exclusion of the commitment of mutual military help."²⁷ Cautions Budapest's access characterized by dual Hungarian politics was supplemented by the message from the Czechoslovak ambassador Kobr: "... in order for Hungary not to prove in the role of a peace disturber and an open objector against the new arrangement in the Danube basin, certain caution and purposeful allocation of tasks are needed between both representatives of this double-dealing politics Gömbös and Kánya. While the Prime Minister does not

²⁵ Archive of the Foreign Office, Telegrams received 1936, no. 93. Telegrams sent 1936 č. 100–134. Krofta's archive cat. no. 13, message from Paris, 11 February 1936.

²⁶ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news 1936, no. 302.

²⁷ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Budapest 1936, no. 249, periodic message of 12 March 1936.

hide his disapproving attitude to the negotiation on wider arrangement of the Danubian problem, mainly if political questions were concerned, his Foreign Minister resorts to what the deceased Stresemann called *fnas-siren*.²⁸ This, principally negative Budapest's attitude even intensified after Schuschnigg's visit in Prague. Hungary saw in it violation of the principles of the Roman Protocols and refused any Austrian mediation between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Foreign Minister Kánya coolly refused Schuschnigg's suggestion justifying that "for Hungary close political agreement with Czechoslovakia is not acceptable".²⁹ The negotiation of the Austrian chancellor in Prague raised dissatisfaction and disapproval in Hungary. Gömbös transferred his embitterment onto currently leaving Austrian ambassador in Budapest L. Hennes and branded him as "the instigator of all the troubles of the last days, which clouded friendly relationship between both countries".³⁰ Hungary began to put pressure on Austria to abandon bonding with allied countries of the French system in Central Europe and the Austrian chancellor with the Foreign Minister were during their visit to Budapest 13–14 March forced to give in and accept the obligation that they would not undertake any negotiations without their contractual partners of the Roman bloc. In this respect Hungary turned to Rome with a request for support.

The approval of Italy was an important precondition for realization of Hodža's plan. Hodža saw in Italy protection against Austrian-German collaboration and in his speeches at the time of negotiations with French representatives he declared that without Italian influence Austria would some time end up in the arms of Germany. Italian aggression in Abyssinia, however, changed the direction of Mussolini's foreign politics, which, for its engagement in Africa, lost opportunities of protection of Austrian independence and yielded this former sphere of interest to Germany. After the majority of the countries of the League of Nations, among them also Czechoslovakia, proclaimed economic and financial sanctions against Italy, Mussolini's orientation towards collaboration with Germany increased and the hope for accepting Hodža's plan from the Italian side decreased because Mussolini refused to negotiate about co-operation in the Danube basin

²⁸ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Budapest 1936, no. 193.

²⁹ Archive of the National Museum, Inheritance of M. Hodža, cat. no. 7, sl. 381, messages from Krofta for the Prime Minister of 25 March 1936.

³⁰ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political messages Budapest 1936, no. 125.

as long as the sanctions lasted: “...cancellation of the sanctions is *conditio sine qua non* of those harmonic contacts among the countries of the Roman triangle and the Little Entente.”³¹ Mussolini was ready to negotiate about the collaboration of the Danubian countries only after cancellation of the anti-Italian sanctions and the one who was to help him with it was the chair of the Assembly of the League of Nations and the Czechoslovak president at the same time dr. Beneš. According to the message of the Czechoslovak ambassador F. Chvalkovský Mussolini stated that “Mr. president Beneš, if he cares about restoration of amity with Italy, has now an opportunity to prove it. Owing to his position and prestige in Geneva he could, either himself or by force of one of the Foreign Ministers of the Little Entente, secure for himself great credits regarding the future of European peace.”³² In connection with this he reminded his knowledge of the history of Czech lands, which he got when studying for his treatise about Hus and he called for his support for Czech and Slovak tendencies to become independent during World War I. Similarly to Mussolini who appealed through F. Chvalkovský to president Beneš for Czechoslovakia to give the impulse for cancellation of the sanctions in the process of open claiming that he does not call for any help or any mediation, the Italian ambassador in Berlin Attolico affected V. Mastný. He tried to move him to force the Czechoslovak government to take the initiative of cancellation of the anti-Italian sanctions. At the same time he did not hide that dr. Beneš was to play the main part. Italy would then never forget it and “could be appreciative and not only in the terms of adaptation of the Central-European context but also in the development of the whole contemporary argument with Germany, while Czechoslovakia would also do good favours to France that has not wanted the sanctions for a long time”.³³

For Mussolini, Hodža’s plan thus became just a tool for acceleration of the Italian expansion in Abyssinia. In his private opinion he considered Czechoslovakia to be “unnatural country with impossibly set borders” that was exposed to German expansionism and “we have no reason to

³¹ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political messages Rome 1936, no. 61. Krofta’s archive, cat. no. 13, Czechoslovak embassy in Rome to the foreign, secret from 29 January 1936.

³² Archive of the Foreign Office, Safe files odd. II/1 1936, cat. no. 18, visit of ambassador Chvalkovský at Mussolini 28 January 1936. Telegrams received no. 49.

³³ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news Berlin 1936, no. 225.

protect them in that case”.³⁴ In this respect, Mussolini’s double politics is documented by Šeba, who was informed by the Belgian ambassador after his dialogue with the Italian attaché in Budapest: “Italy will without any problems continue to wage war because Europe will soon lose its interest in Abyssinia because of German attack against Czechoslovakia. Italy has a German guarantee that the Austrian border will stay intact.”³⁵

Refusal of Hodža’s plan from the Italian side was signalled in Mussolini’s speech of 3 March in Palazzo Viminale in which he pronounced the proposal of the Central-European project as, finished because it was aimed against Italian interests: “The attempt that took place recently in Paris, but not from the side of the French government, to solve the so called question of the Danubian region without Italy and thus against Italy, has already failed and it could not have been any other way. It is almost useless to repeat that “collective” adaptation of the Danube basin can ignore neither our presence nor our interests or the interests of the countries connected with Italy.”³⁶ These words showed the Italian waiting game for its indirect suggestions. The answer did not turn out and thus Italy sharply objected to the project, emphasizing its anti-Italian point.

In his speech Mussolini unambiguously rejected Hodža’s efforts to bring the Danubian countries closer together and assured the German ambassador in Italy that the new meeting of the countries of the Roman bloc would be aimed at creating a strong restraint against Austria entering the sphere of the Little Entente’s influence.³⁷ The conference of the countries of the Roman protocols of 21 March 1936 finally closed beginning Austrian-Czechoslovak political co-operation by means of its resolution. The second article of the so called Supplementary protocols bound each of the involved countries that they would not enter any important negotiations on the Danubian question with the government of the third country without the approval of other members of the Roman bloc. Besides Italy also Hungary expressed its satisfaction over this result, “because

³⁴ Schuschnigg von K., *Requiem ...*, page. 239.

³⁵ Archive of the Foreign Office, Telegrams received no. 109/B/1936. Italian ambassador in Romania (Sola) came back from Italy where he was seen by Mussolini and informed the Belgian ambassador in Bucharest.

³⁶ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news, Rome 1936, no. 145.

³⁷ Kvaček R., *Boj o Rakousko v letech 1933–1938*, *Sborník historický*, 12, 1964, page. 264. Archive of the Foreign Office, political news Budapest 1936, no. 414, periodic news of 8 May 1936.

they managed to prevent Austria from too fast orientation towards the Little Entente.”³⁸

Hodža did not find too strong support for his plan even on his home political stage. The representatives of the Agrarian party refused extensive share of agricultural countries on Czechoslovak trade and effectively resisted to it by means of cereal monopole and export surplus, which worsened mutual economic and political relations with the countries of the Little Entente. On the other hand the other coalition parties complained about anarchy implied by constant absence of the Prime Minister. Social Democrats, National Socialists and the members of the People's Party expressed their worry that Hodža preferred his external-political conceptions to the internal matters. President dr. Beneš was also afraid of problems of a different character. In the beginning he gave Hodža in this respect a kind of free hand, but gradually the opinion prevailed with him that it was not possible to enforce collaboration of two different Central-European blocs over the protest of the main great powers. The document addressed to Hodža confirms this attitude: “How do you see the connection of interested powers to closer economic collaboration of the Danubian countries? It is known that the economic contacts between Germany and Italy in the Danube basin have much higher turnover than other Danubian countries. These powers will hardly accept the mutual preferences of the Danubian countries not to be applied to them. The question is, what would be the Danubian countries compensated by for losing those two largest markets in case of non-fulfilment of their will in this respect?”³⁹ Unlike these warning voices Hodža's foreign activity found support at German activist parties, mainly Christian Socialists because it reflected their foreign-political programme.

The overall failure of Hodža's Central-European plan needs to be seen in international context. The majority of the Danubian countries had built their economic contacts with Germany and Italy and couldn't sacrifice them to doubtful combinations, which counted with France as a great power in Central Europe. The position of France was significantly weakened after 7 March 1936 and Central- and South-European countries had some misgivings about the stability of French allied system. French passi-

³⁸ Archive of the Foreign Office, Political news, Rome 1936, no. 191. Baron Villani, Hungarian ambassador in Italy, stated that.

³⁹ Archive of the Foreign Office, Krofta's archive, cat. no. 13, undated.

vity raised doubts mainly among the states of the Little Entente, which, because of German pressure onto Yugoslavia and Romania, slowly began to disintegrate. First signs of this development already became evident at the meeting of the Standing council in Belgrade on 6–7 May 1936, where Yugoslavia did not hide its effort at further development of economic and political contacts with Germany and they culminated at the June meeting of the Little Entente representatives and the Foreign Ministers in which Stojadinovič refused to take part. Fading of the Romanian Little Entente-collaboration stood for removal of Titulescu from the newly constituted Tataresku's government of 29 August 1936.⁴⁰

The Czechoslovak Prime Minister was aware of the growing hegemony of Germany in Central-Europe and he was trying to reduce it just by means of his plan. He presumed that his new project would avert the danger of another world war because if there was a tight bloc of small countries in Central-Europe. Germany would stop being a threat and the balance of forces would be compensated. The realization of Hodža's plan would mainly do good to Czechoslovakia and Austria which felt most endangered from the side of their western neighbour. Hodža was afraid of expansion of German eastern borders from the point of view of the very existence of the Czechoslovak Republic. Other West-European powers, mainly Great Britain, were looking for the possibility of agreeing with Germany in compromises and concession. The economic and political approach of the two different blocs of Central-European countries was not possible without a distinct support of France and Great Britain and in consequences of German and Italian repulsion. The problems Hodža had while enforcing his plan were, besides the internal motives, the main reasons for his resigning from the seat of the Foreign Minister. Kamil Krofta, former Beneš's deputy at the Foreign Ministry, became Hodža's successor on 29 February 1936.

⁴⁰ Newly named Romanian Foreign minister Antonescu informed the Czechoslovak ambassador in Bucharest that he would perform the same politics as Titulescu, but not so noisily. He does not want to provoke either Poland or Italy like Titulescu did. He will be friendly with the USSR but not so opulently as Titulescu was. Archives of T. G. Masaryk and E. Beneš, Safe files II/1 year 1936, no. 17250, Bucharest ambassador's dispatch of 7 September 1936.