

The White International

Sources of Counter-Revolutionary Thinking about a New Central European Order around 1920*

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Abstract. This paper reconstructs the political worldview and transnational practices of the “White International,” the loose network of counterrevolutionary paramilitary actors operating across Munich, Vienna, and Budapest after 1919. It argues that the Central European upheavals of 1919–1923 constituted a diachronic, ideology-driven civil war in which both left- and right-wing movements perceived the Other as an ontological threat. Drawing on cases from the three capitals, the study shows how a civil-war habitus, shared myths of defeat, and the spectre of Bolshevism produced a reactionary, conspiratorial internationalism on the radical right. These networks envisioned coordinated action, regime change in Vienna, and even broader geopolitical reordering. By analysing their strategies and foreign-policy imaginations, the paper highlights how counterrevolutionary actors mirrored the transnational logic of their revolutionary enemies.

Keywords: Central European civil war, counterrevolutionary networks, paramilitarism, transnational radical right, White International

The Central European civil war

1919 marked the beginning of an ideology-driven transnational civil war in Central Europe that lasted for several years.¹ While this war did not encompass the entirety of what is usually referred to as Central Europe or *Mitteleuropa*, one of its main

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1 Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, esp. chapter 2; Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, 70–90; Read, *The World on Fire*, esp. 25–50 and 149–70; as well as Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, passim and with regard to the concepts used in this paper, see especially Newman, “Revolution and Counterrevolution,” 96–120; Gerwarth and Horne, “Bolshevism as Fantasy,” 40–51 and Gerwarth, “Fighting the Red Beast,” 52–71.

zones extended along the southern east–west axis of the region, linking Munich, Vienna, Budapest, with many related episodes occurring from the Ruhr to the Crimea. Apart from being a transnational phenomenon, another unusual characteristic of this civil war was its diachronic nature. The most brutal phase, which affected the entire region, took place between 1919 and 1923, but it was not continuous: the ‘hot’ periods were interspersed with “cold” periods of confrontation.² While these conflicts never produced World War I levels of mobilisation, given that tens of thousands of people saw action with further hundreds of thousands massed in paramilitary organisations (counting only Bavarian, Austrian, and Hungarian right-wing militia, around 1921 the number would come to about one million), the academic convention of referring to this period as a civil war-type constellation appears justified. Another aspect of this conflict, which in some cases complicates analysis, is that it was embedded in and repeatedly intertwined with the broader spectrum of hostilities following World War I, which were primarily aimed at changing the territorial arrangements of the Versailles peace system.³ After a brief conceptual introduction, this paper will focus primarily on the first element of this conceptual triangle (transnational, diachronic violence fitting into the post-World War I conflict field) and analyses the civil war habitus fuelled by a sense of mutual threat, which quickly became characteristic of both left-wing and right-wing movements, and how this can be used to interpret the international political imaginations of white counter-revolutionaries in Central Europe.

The central dimension of World War I was the struggle between states. On the Western European front, nation states fought each other, while in the east and south, groups striving to create their idea of an optimal state and facing multi-ethnic empires often articulated their war aims in the name of their nation-building movements.⁴ The nature of the war did not change significantly during the four years, but parallel with the war, processes unfolded, primarily from 1917 onwards, which, after the formal end of the global conflict, increasingly influenced the new international system. This new system, contrary to the intentions of the leaders of 1914, was not shaped solely by the will of the nations that had taken up arms. The challenge was at least twofold. Wilsonian (liberal) internationalism and related peace movements saw peace as an opportunity to eliminate the source of conflict represented by rival (nation) states, and made the “soft” institutional transformation of international politics its programme.⁵ While it also envisioned an order based on nation states, it

2 Murber, “Die Staatswerdung Österreichs und Ungarns,” 197–210.

3 Böhler, “The Central European Civil War,” 97–106, esp. 100–02.

4 Soutou, “War Aims.” For a focused discussion about the region and the antecedents of power bloc thinking during the war years cp. Vermeiren, *The First World War*, 145–82.

5 Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 51–63, 125–34.

was very different from the vision of the 1914 European statesmen, who would have balked at the idea of an international institution limiting their freedom of action and discretion in matters of foreign policy. The other challenge was posed by the cosmopolitan-revolutionary stream, which gained dominance within the Bolshevik branch of Marxism (and gained strength in all Marxist movements). Adherents saw the global and especially the European crisis as an opportunity for even more fundamental change: the overthrow of the capitalist order to take a decisive step towards a just society of workers. Together, these “western” (liberal) and “eastern” (Marxist-revolutionary) challengers posed an even greater threat to the international order established by the governments of the states in the Westphalian sense and, naturally, provoked a negative reaction from those who sought to preserve the old order or wanted to create a new system based on the nationalism fuelled by the momentum of war.⁶

After the war, the challenges of economic crisis management and reconstruction were inextricably linked to the question of politically reorganising Europe and the world. At the time, few thought that the former could be addressed without the appropriate reshaping of the international order. The advocates of Wilsonism sought free trade and stability so that capitalist economies could prosper again, but their ‘right-wing’ social democratic allies also expected such transparent international relations to lead to a shift towards a new transnational democratic order that would break the power of finance capital and pave the way to slow transformations to socialism.⁷ The conservatives may have wanted only a return to the economic systems that had been in place before 1914, but their radical nationalist allies continued to advocate the economics of power blocs, combining the ideas of Friedrich List and Friedrich Naumann (and anticipating Nazism and Carl Schmitt’s theory of the *Grossraum*).⁸ Communists and radical socialists, on the other hand, rejected any notion of reviving the old order and would have moved towards a global regime beyond classes and states in the traditional sense through an “intermediate” phase of large regional federations.⁹

The conflicting views about domestic and international political orders and economic development were sufficient—not mentioning the cultural factors not analysed here due to lack of space—to maintain a permanent field of conflict in which radical political communities saw in the radicals of the other side the synecdochical representations of the entire “right” and “left,” and construed these artificial entities as representing an existential “Other” to their own communities. This meant

6 Newman, “Revolution and Counterrevolution.”

7 Costa, “The Comintern,” 223–42.

8 Vermeiren, *The First World War*, 145–82.

9 Imlay, “Socialist Internationalism,” 213–42; Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 16–40.

that especially the committed adherents of the two radical poles were inclined to view their opponents as an ontological threat, i.e., as a hostile political movement denying them the legitimacy of their very existence as a group (as “nationalists,” as “workers,” etc.). This mutual sense of threat logically ruled out deliberative politics and turned their interactions into a zero-sum game.¹⁰ This was the field of civil war, the Central European variant of which, analysed below, bore marked transnational characteristics. Surprisingly at first glance, these characteristics became a constitutive part not only of the cosmopolitan left, but also of the politics of right-wing radicals who professed communitarian ideas and saw themselves as rescuers of the idea of the strong national state.

The transnational thought patterns and action characteristic of left-wing movements require little explanation. The thinking of Soviet revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Bukharin, as well as that of radical left-wing leaders in Central Europe, was permeated by a logic that predicted the westward transcontinental spread of the revolutionary wave. Since the enemy was weakened and vulnerable as a result of the imperialist war, while at the same time striving with all its might to consolidate itself, the war waged against them had to unfold in all potentially revolutionary areas.¹¹ According to this logic, the capitalist reaction sought to act directly—with Western troops—and indirectly, through local allies, against the forces of revolution across national borders. To give one example: the Hungarian Soviet Republic was naturally linked to the Russian Revolution, but also to the hoped-for uprisings in Vienna, Prague, Munich, and Berlin—the Russian and Hungarian Soviet leaders were just as aware of this as the participants in the peace conference in Versailles.¹² Even if they did not admit it, they assessed the challenge posed by the revolutionary left in the same way. Tactically, Paris negotiators might have hoped that the weak Hungarian council state could be temporarily pacified, or Budapest communists could surmise that the great powers preoccupied with the German question would not launch a war of intervention for a while. At the same, both sides saw the peaceful overtures of the other as only buying time to consolidate and go on the offensive—meaning that neither party had incentives to genuinely prepare for a future based on co-existence.¹³ This logic all but prescribed permanent transnational activism for the Bolshevik leaders and any ideological allies.

10 For a discussion of the Other as an ontological threat to the self, following the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas cp. Sims, “Absolute Adversity,” 223–52.

11 Haslam, *The Spectre of War*, 14–57; Albert, “International Solidarity,” 33–50, esp. 36–43.

12 Borsányi, *Kun Béla*, 141–49.

13 Low, *The Soviet Hungarian Republic*, 44–48; Hatos, *Roszfűk világforradalma*, 128–29; Egedy, “Nagy-Britannia,” 125–46, esp. 139–43.

The transnational logic characteristic of right-wing radical movements is more difficult to interpret. It is a common idea in historiography that, aware of the “Red Menace,” they themselves were forced to apply similar considerations in their strategic plans.¹⁴ This is certainly true—and several examples are given below—but it is not sufficient to explain the depth and naturalness with which they developed and then applied their various transnational strategies, which were primarily conspiratorial in nature and were intended to form a united front against the communist threat. At least in Central Europe, the transnational mode of operation of the latter was facilitated not only by the common perception of the red menace, but also by a culture of defeat, a sense of shared destiny reinforced by comradeship in arms and the myth of a war almost won from an underdog position.¹⁵ The two were often linked: the overthrow of the Versailles order and joint action against communism formed a unity of thought whose two great pillars legitimised each other and, according to plan, would have helped each other along. Wolfgang Schivelbusch observes that defeat also gave rise to innovation. In this case it was the nationalist paramilitary elites who accepted that in the new world it was necessary to create larger, ideologically related blocs, especially in the face of the liberal-cosmopolitan or Bolshevik-cosmopolitan challenge. Their programme, therefore, did not aim to restore the shaken Westphalian order, but to create a counterpole to cosmopolitan forces, one held together by a reactionary ideology in a newly arrived era of ideological confrontation.

It follows from this dynamic that the confrontation became permanent and morphed into a civil war mentality, being based on the sense of an ontological threat posed by the political Other. It did not disappear later either, and erupted from time to time, as in Austria in 1927. It persisted even when various right-wing formations came to power (in Hungary from 1919, in Austria and Germany from 1932–1933) and were able to assert their political will, essentially eliminating or forcing underground the radical—and eventually also the non-radical—left-wing forces. Also, at least up to 1923, there was a real chance that the conflict would quickly and decisively “heat up.” During this period, the forces interested in consolidation in Germany and Austria—the political “centre”—did not fully align themselves with either pole, but they were not strong enough to pacify or marginalise the radicals on either side.¹⁶ Hungary was an exception in this respect: from the moment the

14 Gerwarth, “Fighting the Red Beast,” 55–57; Gerwarth and Horne, “Bolshevism as Fantasy,” 43–45.

15 For the canonical discussions of the concepts, cp. Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, and Horne, “Defeat and Memory,” 11–29. For a perspective on the experience of defeat of the Central Powers and the post-World War I Central European context see Gerwarth, “Fighting the Red Beast,” 53, and Gerwarth and Horne, “Paramilitarism,” 11–29, esp. 13–15.

16 Gerwarth and Horne, “Vectors of Violence,” 489–512, esp. 498–503; Kučera, “Exploiting Victory,” 827–56, esp. 854–55.

counter-revolutionary regime came to power, there was no chance of the civil war escalating. However, neither can we say that it was brought to an end by unilateral (white) political violence. Instead, the white radicals continued their “parallel” politics of violence and transnational conspiracies, having access to—if not control over—the branches of government.¹⁷

The third factor—border uncertainty—also influenced the events in the region up to around 1923. The Polish occupation of Vilnius/Wilno marked the final act of territorial changes in the wider region, but it was around this time that plans involving direct and rapid territorial changes were marginalised. This fed into the relevance of radical movements, as seen *inter alia* in the example of paramilitaries migrating from Bavaria to the Silesian conflict zone in 1921.¹⁸ Only after 1923 did the more “responsible” part of the radical movements and their allies drift towards the political centre. A paradigmatic example of this shift was the distancing of Bavarian Prime Minister and later Government Commissioner Gustav von Kahr from the paramilitary formations and his earlier cooperation with Hitler, which, at the decisive moment, culminated in his actions on the side of the Weimar state—surprising not only the participants in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.¹⁹

A reconstruction of no more than the main elements of this civil war would require a monographic undertaking. For this reason, the next sections present only three characteristic episodes from the political dynamics of three Central European cities involved in the conflict and considered key by all parties. These episodes reveal the transnational nature of the conflict as well as the fundamental characteristics of the participants’ thinking about it. In the spring and summer of 1919, Munich and Budapest were the scenes of real, “hot” civil war actions, as well as the sites of the communist takeover, carried out in cooperation with elements from the social democrats in tow. The communist leaders of both cities attached great importance to the events taking place in the other, and Budapest sought to support the Munich Soviet government with propaganda and other means. This dynamic did not change later: at the turn of 1919–1920, both regional metropolises were counter-revolutionary strongholds, and both the Kahr government and National Army Commander Miklós Horthy’s entourage, as well as the paramilitary organisations of both states considered the *de facto* alliance with the other of paramount importance.²⁰

The situation in Vienna was even more special, if possible. Although Béla Kun, acting in coordination with the Third International, tried on two occasions to

17 Lorman, *Counter-Revolutionary Hungary*, 3–12, 21–40.

18 Fenske, *Konservatismus und Rechtsradikalismus*, 52–53.

19 Koepp, “Gustav von Kahr,” 740–63, esp. 752–62.

20 G. Soós, “Magyar–bajor–osztrák titkos tárgyalások,” 1–44, esp. 12–17.

provoke a mass uprising of the working class, this did not happen in the end, despite the huge sums of money smuggled into Vienna from Hungary, then partly spent, and partly stolen from the embassy.²¹ However, the white takeover also failed after 1919, despite influential Bavarian and Hungarian paramilitary circles having repeatedly proposed feverish plans in this regard. In Vienna, it was the moderate parties—the Social Democrats and the Christian Socialists—that proved to be stronger and resisted, at least for now, being chain-ganged by the radicals into a course of action that would have rendered large-scale armed conflict all but unavoidable. The major parties were distrustful of each other, but they also resisted the radicals' coup plans, despite personal connections between radical organisations and party leaderships.²²

This thinking also turned Vienna into a target. The Austrian capital developed into an element in the radicals' thinking on both sides, the control of which became a *sine qua non* condition for the implementation of their plans. From a communist perspective, many thought that a truly red, Bolshevik Vienna would have virtually guaranteed the spread of the world revolutionary wave.²³ From the point of view of the "whites," the Austrian capital was a similarly indispensable prerequisite for the birth of the desired Central European reactionary bloc.²⁴ The opponents agreed that Vienna's shift to the left in 1919 or the rise to power of a reactionary regime after 1920 could easily have proved to be a decisive step for the respective side towards bringing the Central European civil war to a triumphant conclusion.

The dynamics of the confrontation outlined above can also be clearly seen in the polemics taking place in the various regional capitals. The civil war began with the Munich alliance between the independent (radical) German Social Democrats and Communists, the strong left-wing Social Democratic movement in Vienna (with

21 Szabó, *A kommunizmus büvöletében*, 13–15. On the Bankgasse theft, the best reconstructions are still the ones offered by the Vienna police of the time. See: OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 723, fasc. I/9 Vienna Police Directorate to Foreign Ministry, 3–7 May 1919. I-3526, I-3606 and I-3611, 1136–40. [Austrian ministries often changed their official appellations in the post-war years. In this paper, I simply refer to the two relevant ministries by their short, commonly used, but unofficial names.]

22 Cp. Edmondson, "Early Heimwehr," 105–47.

23 "Bolsevizmus és világbéke [Bolshevism and World Peace]." *Vörös Ujság*, 1 June 1919, 1.; also cp. Borsányi, *Kun Béla*, 179.

24 The diary of Eleonóra Zichy, the wife of the last joint foreign minister of Austria–Hungary, count Julius Andrássy Jr. provides the perhaps most illustrative anecdote, with the Regent of Hungary, Miklós Horthy proposing "to put an end to socialist rule in Vienna with the Bavarians" and establish a white power centre in Central Europe. See her report on a conference convened by PM Pál Teleki around 9 August 1920. Andrássy, *Napló*, 262–64. A memorandum handed to a Hungarian envoy around the same time by Bavarian prime minister von Kahr echoed similar sentiments about the importance of "flipping" Vienna. MNL OL K64 fasc. 20 (1922), no. 207res. Annex to a report by Count Olivér Woracziczky, 9 July 1920 – 7 August 1920.

their leader Julius Deutsch holding the important portfolio of State Secretary for Defence, i.e., Minister of War), and the coalition formed between the social democrats and communists in Budapest. These seemed to confirm the fears of the right wing that had been developing in all three as yet unrecognised states since the war defeat in late autumn 1918. The mere existence and reform plans of the Bavarian council government led by Kurt Eisner, the rapid militarisation of detachments of Austrian social democratic workers and their potential transformation into a revolutionary armed force under Deutsch's supervision, as well as the external wars and internal dictatorship of the Hungarian Soviet Republic made the fears of the spread of Bolshevism a tangible reality—even though none of the above represented genuine or purely communist enterprises.²⁵ In all three countries, these fears quickly led to the formation of various right-wing militias and the outbreak of a struggle for control of the army. In Hungary, this struggle was quickly resolved after the fall of the Soviet, while in Bavaria and Austria, after a few heated or tense episodes, there followed prolonged periods of cold war.²⁶ During these periods, the decisive question was always the same: would the moderate parties, or a significant portion of them, be willing to join the radicals, thereby emptying the political centre, or would they continue to be essentially supportive of the existing order and reject violent action?

Budapest

From late autumn 1919, Budapest had been ruled by a counter-revolutionary regime that sought to integrate both traditional and radical right-wing platforms with anti-communist slogans and nationalist-revisionist ones. Nevertheless, the civil war mentality persisted in the Hungarian capital. In the last days of 1919, Hungarian newspapers reported as a real press sensation that communists arriving from Vienna were plotting an assassination attempt against the commander-in-chief of the National Army Miklós Horthy (allegedly, they wanted to kill him with a poisoned needle) and would have destabilised the country's internal order with further bombings.²⁷ At that time and thereafter, Vienna appeared as the centre of the red threat, infecting

25 On the Budapest–Vienna–Munich axis envisioned by Béla Kun and other foreign policy decision-makers of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and prefiguring the White International's plans for a structurally similar, but ideologically of course diametrically opposed geopolitical constellation, see Romsics, *Összeomlás és útkeresés*, 262–63.

26 Edmondson, "Heimwehren," 274–88; Nußer, *Konservative Wehrverbände*, vol 1. 145–76.

27 "Merényletet terveztek Horthy fővezér ellen [An assassination Plan against Commander in Chief Horthy]." *Az Ujság*, 27 December 1919, 2; "Borzalmas bolsevista merényletterr [Despicable Bolshevik assassination plot]." *Délmagyarország*, 27 December 1919, 5; The same day, in a rare interview given to Austrian print media (!), Horthy emphatically denied any interventionist designs against Vienna or Czechoslovakia: "A politika eseményei [Political Events]." *Pesti Hírlap*, 27 December 1919, 2.

the entire region and preventing right-wing cooperation (the forces of order) in Danubian Central Europe. Not only was this reported in the radical right-wing press, but the reports also found their way into the columns of respected newspapers such as the *Pester Lloyd*, despite being a direct expression of the worldview of the secret organisations led by counter-revolutionary officers and the military high command.²⁸

The obsession with plots that threatened to turn the region “red” was also evident in military intelligence reports. The assessments of the so-called S-Group operating in Vienna—a network of undercover intelligence agents and informants—repeatedly framed the “red menace” in such exaggerated terms that they seemed like unintentional caricatures.²⁹ These rumours and news served as a myth legitimising the counter-revolutionary order, but all sources indicate that the perception of this threat was not simply created for its own sake and in a cynical manner. Many genuinely believed—from the violent detachment leaders to the head of intelligence unit of the chief of staff—that Central European Bolshevism was still seeking to revolutionise the region (where they may have been right), and that it had extraordinary resources at its disposal to do so (where they were wrong).³⁰

In this environment—where there was no real danger of a communist coup, and at most only the infiltration of communist agents could be proven—the news of the planned assassination attempt against Horthy, made public after Christmas, had the effect of a bombshell. To demonstrate the threat, it was sufficient to cite the statements of certain secret sources and the confessions of arrested “persons involved,” which were effective precisely because the idea of a red Vienna had already become canonical, lending credibility to these assumptions.³¹ Between 1919 and 1923, there were constant reports of propaganda, money, weapons, and people flowing from Vienna; thus, news of the assassination attempt fitted into this pre-existing context.

The pro-government press, including radical right-wing newspapers, also reported countless times that communist *émigrés* were moving about freely in Vienna

28 “Zum geplanten Kommunistenputsch.” *Pester Lloyd*, Abendblatt, 27 December, 1919, 2.

29 HL VKF Box 156, no. 2677, document no. 77. Letter from Vice-Admiral Horthy to the prime minister, the foreign minister and the council of the allied military mission. Annex: Reports on the conspiracy. 31 December 1919. esp. 15–20.

30 For the general context of Hungarian officers’ entanglements in Vienna, cp. Árokay, “A rejtett magyar katonai attasé szolgálata,” 356–81; For reports of the communist threat, a representative, longer summary piece is the intelligence report prepared for the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference: HL VKF Box 160, no. 2942 and 2943, document no. 209_401/ált. Study prepared for the Paris Peace Conference by Section 2 on Bolshevism, 10 February, 1920. 373–90.

31 “Kommunista merénylet készült Horthy és a kormány ellen [Communist Assassination Attempt Planned Against Horthy and the Government].” *Uj Nemzedék*, 28 December 1919, 5; “Lenin és a bécsi kommunisták összeesküdtek Európa ellen [Lenin and the Viennese Communists Conspired Against Europe].” *Kis Ujság*, 30 January 1920, 3.

and plotting against Hungary. These reports at times found support in documents leaked by the military intelligence services, which continued to produce threat assessments, blowing the communist threat out of proportion. A report on the imminent threat of terrorist acts concluded that “the present Austrian government or some of its members are actively and passively aiding the communists currently in Austria, which renders illusory the efforts to eliminate the threat they represent, the most dangerous outlaws threatening the entire civilised world.”³² Importantly, the claim was not true, as communist leaders were placed in particularly strict detention camps, while other communists were under milder control, but still held outside Vienna, with their movements under surveillance.³³ Only social democratic centrists and moderates, as well as members of the progressive left-wing intellectual circles supporting the progressive revolutionary leader Mihály Károlyi could move freely in Vienna and carry out high-profile press work. However, in Hungarian right-wing thinking and press, these groups were uniformly presented as part of the red emigration. Even the terrorist plot against Horthy was suggested to have been orchestrated by Mihály Károlyi and set in motion with the support of social democrats.³⁴ By concealing the differences—and specifically the Social Democrats’ anti-communist campaign—it was possible to maintain both the public image of communist Vienna and the civil war mentality of separating not just Hungary, but all of the Danubian region into two opposed camps, pitting “us” against “them.”

It was no coincidence that news of the assassination attempt came to light at the end of 1919. A little less than a month earlier, Hungarian agents had entered Austria, where the signs seem to indicate that they were trying to track down the interned communist leaders. It is unlikely that the plan was to kill them; kidnapping seems more likely.³⁵ Whatever the plan may have been, it did not come to fruition, as the Austrian intelligence services, which were already focusing heavily on

32 HL VKF Box 156, no. 2689, document no. 10005 Situation report of the High Command of the National Army, 1 January 1920. The sitrep includes the report by Captain Elemér Novák, document no. 20/37, 28 December 1919.

33 OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 723, fasc. I/3 no. I-5583, Letter from the Provincial Administration of Lower Austria to the Foreign Ministry of German Austria on preventive measures concerning the Drosendorf camp for Hungarian communists, 14 July 1919, 102–04. The letter specifically noted a second high security camp near Rottmühle restricting the movement of communist leaders held there, exempting from the restrictions only women, children, social democrats, and other progressives.

34 “Kommunista merénylet készült Horthy és a kormány ellen.” *Uj Nemzedék*, 28 December 1919, 5; “Lenin és a bécsi kommunisták összeesküdtek Európa ellen.” *Kis Ujság*, 30 January 1920, 3.

35 For an initial report on the illegal crossing of a convoy of cars and their progress to Vienna see OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 723, fasc. I/3, no. I-7110, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry, 28 November 1919, 111–12.

Hungarian nationals, were able to take effective action, and this was followed by an intensive anti-Hungarian campaign in both the Hungarian language and the workers' press in Vienna.³⁶ For this reason, the assassination plan and the elimination of known communist cells in Hungary appears to have been primarily an attempt to justify, at least domestically, the accusations levelled against the Hungarian regime and its paramilitary supporters for their troublemaking in Austria, and perhaps to force the departure of social democrats from the coalition government forced on the Hungarian right by the entente's special representative Sir George Clerk in exchange for international recognition only a month and a half prior.

The Hungarian side also informed the Austrian government of the assassination plans. However, the Austrian police found no evidence of any preparations of this nature in Vienna or elsewhere, even though action was not taken by a social democratic-led body, but by the central police administration under the leadership of Johannes Schober, a right-wing figure with links to paramilitary organisations.³⁷ The power of right-wing networks is well illustrated by the fact that the incursion into Austria appears to have been carried out independently of the Hungarian government and even of the intelligence services of the national army's general staff, as there is no trace in the relevant files of such an operation being prepared or carried out, nor is there any mention of it in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (At the same time, a large contingent of Hungarian intelligence officers and detectives was operating in Vienna—very much with government approval.)

Meanwhile, arrests were taking place in Budapest, and the anti-communist sentiment that had reached its peak during the winter period was evident in the press, as well as in the capital's police reports and the materials of the military counterintelligence service.³⁸ Thus, the diversionary operation, necessitated by the failure

36 For the arrests made in late November and in mid-December, see esp. OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 723, fasc. I/20, Reports of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry nos. I-7113, I-7363, I-7364, 28 November and 20 December 1919, 196–201.

37 OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 724, fasc. I/19. Pr.Z-2210. Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry. Communist plot against the Hungarian government and Admiral Horthy, 17 February, 1920, 155–8. The report dismantles the Hungarian claim that the anarchist Arthur Weiler could have been selected as the terrorist to murder Horthy, and lays bare how Hungarian reports regarding terrorist conspiracies involving social democrats such as Vilmos Böhm had no merit to them. Importantly, the source of this document is the central intelligence office at the Vienna police commissariat, police chief and soon to be chancellor Johannes Schober's brainchild and favourite project which employed detectives and agents who harboured no leftist sympathies—as evident from other reports.

38 The reports were all over the Hungarian press as László, the brother of former communist terror leader Tibor Szamuely, was apprehended and sentenced to death within a month, with the sentence to be carried out only days after the trial—all suggesting the desire to create a clean and

of a covert, presumably non-state sponsored paramilitary action itself, proved a powerful fuel for the red scare.

This danger—as the assassination plot would have proven—was assumed to be transnational in nature from the outset. A global ideology and its centre, Moscow, were symbolically responsible, but the actual risk was interpretable in the Central European constellation, in which the mere existence of red Vienna posed an existential threat to white Hungary. In the dynamics of the manufactured crisis, this logic clearly had a configurative force, even in retrospect: it not only explained the plan for the assassination (how could such a plan have been devised?), but also interpreted it, concluding that this threat could only be overcome if a counter-revolutionary turn took place in Vienna, integrating the Austrian capital into the axis of white Central Europe stretching from Munich to Budapest. The self-perception of the white reactionaries was concisely captured in an assessment by the military intelligence service that affirmed:

“the main nest of Bolshevik propaganda in Europe is doubtlessly Vienna [...] Hungary is the biggest thorn under the fingernail [of the communist plotters].”³⁹

White counterrevolutionaries in Hungary at around this time also realised the need for efficient foreign partners. From at least September 1919 onwards, an anti-Bolshevik reactionary coalition in East Central Europe was taking shape as an idea in Hungary, serving, *inter alia*, as a better vehicle for facing down the Bolshevik enemy than unilateral incursions in foreign territory.⁴⁰

Vienna

In early 1921, the Austrian Foreign Ministry received alarming news from the embassy in Berlin. A well-meaning French diplomat sent a signal that France would not only tolerate but even support the occupation of Vienna by Hungarian troops if circumstance dictated. The warning was that if there was a radical left-wing shift in Vienna, containing Bolshevism would take precedence over all other considerations in the plans of the victorious great powers.⁴¹ Although this warning referred to an

rapid closure to the sensational case. For a representative example, see: “A bécsi közép-európai bolsevista közép-pont terve [The Plans of the Central European Bolshevik Centre in Vienna].” *Budapesti Hírlap*, 30 January 1920, 5. For the broader context of anti-Bolshevik propaganda, cp. Csunderlik, *A „vörös farsangtól” a „vörös tatárjárásig,”* esp. 175–81. and 321–28.

39 HL VKF Box 161, no. 3041, document no. 22227/ált. The file contains two memoranda titled “Situation report on Russo-bolshevism” and “Situation report on bolshevism in Hungary,” both dated 5 September 1920, 118–23.

40 Romsics, *Összeomlás és útkeresés*, 484–85.

41 OeSta AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 721, fasc. I/II no. 576. Telegram of the Austrian envoy to Berlin to the Foreign Ministry, 31 January 1921, 160.

extreme case scenario, given the tense situation, the parties involved did not necessarily perceive it as such. In Hungary, preparations had long been underway for a possible 'reversal' of Vienna with the help of Bavarian and Austrian paramilitary organisations, and these preparations did indeed intensify in 1921. Although the Hungarian government stipulated that it would only participate in such an action in the event of a Bolshevik coup, Hungarian paramilitary forces, in agreement with Colonel Max Bauer, who represented the Bavarian far right in Austria, and the leaders of a number of Heimwehr formations (notably from some of the Vienna, Lower Austria, and Styria branches) had more ambitious plans.⁴²

Occasionally reported in the Austrian press, these plans also served to mobilise the social democratic base. Under Mayor Jakob Reumann, Vienna sought to position itself as an almost independent social democratic republic, and the more formal organisation of the left-wing paramilitary *Schutzbund* began, while the weak Mayr cabinet fought a stalemate with its own capital.⁴³ In this situation, it was not inconceivable for many workers that their own right-wing government would, if necessary, accept a Hungarian-backed "law and order" action, thereby attempting to organise a right-wing Austria. The increasingly demonstrative exercises and the organisation of workers' battalions were also intended to show that Vienna could not be easily occupied by white interventionists.⁴⁴

This mobilisation was coupled with suspicion about Hungarian intentions. From the spring of 1919 onwards, there was a succession of reports of actions carried out by counter-revolutionary Hungarian organisations in Austria or with Austrian connections. Following the previously discussed occupation and robbery of the Hungarian embassy in Bankgasse by white officers, members of the same cadre were clearly visible throughout the entire period of the Soviet Republic, especially in Vienna and Graz. In the autumn, there were reports of detachments

42 Cp. the documents published in Kántás, *Diverzió*, notably "Memorandum by Staff Lt. Colonel József Schitler on the secret negotiations between the Hungarian government and Austrian and Bavarian nationalist organisations, May 11, 1921 and Memorandum by Ervin Morlin, departmental councillor on secret negotiations between the Hungarian government, and secret Bavarian and Austrian nationalist paramilitary organisations »Orka« and »Orgesch«," 100–15, as well as Soós, *Burgenland*, 30–32. Also see MNL OL K64 Bundle 6, fasc. 20. (1922) no. 1921/197res. Joint memorandum by Rudolf Kanzler and [special envoy of the Hungarian government] Gedeon Ráday, 4–5 February 1921, 2–6.

43 Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 13–43, and specifically in the context of the paramilitaries: Blasi, "Der bedrohte Staat," 86–97.

44 OeSta AdRBMLV AR Abteilung 2, Karton 929, no. 16/17 Report of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Defence Ministry, 2 September 1921. Field exercises of the Simmering Workers Defence (*Arbeiterwehr Simmering*) and no. 16/24. Report of the Burgenland Brigade Headquarters to Defence Ministry, 4 October 1921, on exercises in the vicinity of Wiener Neustadt.

travelling to Vienna; news of police detectives and informants arrested for searching for Hungarian communist *émigrés* reinforced this impression at the end of 1919.⁴⁵ During the Fürstenfeld arms robbery at the end of July 1920, Hungarian paramilitary units simply entered Austrian territory and, with the cooperation of Austrian soldiers, robbed the border weapons depot. From a left-wing Austrian perspective, the Austrian aspect of the robbery was just as disturbing as the fact that Hungarian units simply crossed the border and then left essentially unhindered after completing their task.⁴⁶ From the autumn onwards, the left-wing press was preoccupied with the recurring question of why the Austrian government was allowing Budapest to station more than a hundred officers in Vienna in connection with the liquidation of the joint army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when the same work was done by far fewer people on the Austrian side, and it was clear that most Hungarian officers were engaged in intelligence and other covert activities.⁴⁷

The outlines of the opposing Austrian parties' perceptions of political dangers and the underlying logic that shaped their thinking can be clearly seen in connection with the revelation in 1920 that an Austrian Legion had been recruited for intervention purposes. As an increasing amount of information was leaked out about the Hungarian assembly camp for the White Guards recruited (also) in Vienna, the Hungarian government also wanted to take action, as the small number of troops caused more diplomatic embarrassment than the benefits they may have brought.⁴⁸ However, Hungarian and Austrian radicals saw the situation differently: for them, this unit, which legitimised their existence and their relationship, was important. The radical segment of the Austrian right wing, which was most open to Bavarian-Hungarian cooperation, especially sought to maintain the transnational scheme of harbouring Austrian veterans and even some former German *Freikorps*-men under arms in Hungary. Prince Johannes von Liechtenstein, a former naval officer who

45 OeStA AdR Liasse Ungarn, NPA Karton 723 I/20 i-7378. Report of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry, titled Hungarian Police Officers in Vienna, 21 December 1919, 202–04.

46 See the collections of evidence and reports under OeStA AdR BMLV AR Abteilung 2, Karton 929, fasc. 17/1 on the Fürstenfeld robbery from August 1920, as well as the collection of documents under Liasse Ungarn, Karton 724, fasc. I/22 dedicated to the same affair. See also Kerekes, *Von St. Germain bis Genf*, 201; Bodó, *The White Terror*, 75–76.

47 The issue dragged on through 1920–1922 and became sufficiently uncomfortable for the Austrian government to merit a long memorandum in preparation for the planned meeting between Chancellor Ignaz Seipel and Hungarian PM István Bethlen, noting the difficulties with the social democratic press and the general unease of Viennese citizens about Hungarian military presence. OeStA AdR NPA Liasse Ungarn, Karton 721, fasc. I/III, no. 3559. Memorandum titled “Budapest Visit”, 5 November 1922, 207–10.

48 See the collection of documents and press reports from the summer and autumn of 1920 under OeStA AdR BMLV AR Abteilung 2, Karton 634, fasc. 38/1.

was most prominently involved in the matter on the part of the Austrian paramilitaries, had already established close ties with Hungarian (and Croatian) reactionary officers in Graz in 1919, and later, alongside the leading Carlist figure Albin von Schager, he also managed Hungarian financial support for paramilitary organisations in Vienna, Lower Austria, and Styria. These regional groups were the least supportive of the *Anschluss* to Weimar Germany and the friendliest to Catholic-legitimist ideology, in contrast to the *Heimwehr* networks in other provinces. This aligned well with Bavarian preferences, as in Munich many sought to form a counter-revolutionary bloc also against the perceived “socialism” and antipatriotic policies of the Berlin government.⁴⁹

From an Austrian paramilitary point of view, red Vienna posed a similar threat to that seen from Budapest—only even closer and more immediate. Ever since the Ministry of Defence, long headed by Deutsch, began (or would have begun) disarming the *Heimwehr* associations in 1920, a significant segment of the right wing had been living in fear of an armed opponent and a possible left-wing coup forced upon their own defenceless side. At the same time, the right-wing press and politicians demanded the disarmament of the workers’ militias, and the feuding parties mutually inspected the arms depots in Vienna. Control of weapons was the paramount concern, as neither side placed particularly high value on the regular military units, which were indeed very weak and had unreliable morale and loyalties.⁵⁰

Both the Hungarian government and the paramilitaries had a vested interest in fuelling the confrontation, while the large number of Hungarian officers sent to Vienna also formed a bridge between official foreign relations and paramilitary networks. Both the Hungarian and Austrian members of the latter wanted the plan for possible Hungarian “help” to take shape, while as the liaison between the Bavarian organisations, Bauer was particularly keen to promote this.⁵¹ The white organisations naturally saw

49 On the decision of the Hungarian government to downscale the operation MNL OL K64 Bundle 6, fasc. 20 (1922), no. 1922/155res Note by Colonel [Tihamér] Siménfalvy [head of covert operations at the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs], undated, and the correspondence with Johannes von Liechtenstein, *ibid*, 28 February 1921.

50 Botz, “Political Violence,” 133–59, esp. 139–42; McLoughlin, “Heimwehr und Schutzbund,” 46–53. A good discussion on how the logic of legitimising one’s own organisation and creating an image of the opponent as an ontologically threatening Other is found in Edmondson, “Heimwehren,” 261–76.

51 HL VKF Box 161, no. 3050–3051. Document no. 1920/23130/ált. Report by Lt. Col. Béla Janky [Regent Horthy’s secret envoy to Bavaria] on the situation in Germany, 30 August 1920, 458–65; no. 1920/23152/ált. Report by Lt. Col. Béla Janky Béla on his discussions with General Erich Ludendorff, 10 September 1920. 467–72; and under no. 3055. Document no. 1920/23880/ált. Report by Col. Lehóczky Béla [military attaché in Vienna] on his discussions with Lt. [Josef] Field Marshall Metzger, 23 September 1920.

themselves as a transnational network, just like their opponents, with communists and social democrats seen as two sides of the same coin. Such perceptions were also canonised and disseminated by the considerable right-wing press portfolio of pro-Heimwehr outlets supported by the Hungarian government. (The portfolio was especially strong with regard to regional newspapers, especially Styria and rural Lower Austria, natural sites of right-wing mobilisation.)⁵² They defined themselves as part of a struggle whose global outcome depended in no small part on the development of the struggle in Central Europe. In this, Vienna continued to be the key element, representing both the greatest threat (as the centre of a new communist wave and a base feeding communist/social democratic movements) and the main goal (as key to a geographically congruent Central European reactionary alliance).

Munich

The Bavarian capital was, as is well known, one of the most successful areas for left-wing revolutionary government in the months following World War I. There were several changes of power, but essentially revolutionary ideologies, if not equally revolutionary programmes, were embraced by subsequent regimes from late 1918 until May 1919.⁵³ This led to a comparable level of hostile mobilisation in conservative rural areas—very high even by German standards—and led to the establishment of the paramilitaries commonly referred to as the *Einwohnwehren* (citizen defence associations). The Bavarian paramilitary networks that emerged from these, *Freikorps* formations such as the Epp brigade and officers arriving from the north after the failure of the Kapp Putsch in the spring of 1920, found themselves closer to power after the Bavarian People's Party, representing many shades of the right wing, came to power in a situation reminiscent of counter-revolutionary Hungary.⁵⁴ In contrast to Hungary, however, there was still an independent left wing that was difficult to force into compromises against its will. In 1920, social democrats even regained control of municipal politics in Munich, although for mayor Eduard Schmid, it was never possible to start building a left-wing hinterland similar to that in Vienna.⁵⁵

Unlike in Vienna, in Bavaria the remaining stockpiles of weapons, the most significant issue of contention in the cold phase of the civil war, were disproportionately

52 MNL OL K58 Box 47 (1921) 171res. Report by outgoing foreign minister, Gusztáv Gratz, 9 May 1921.

53 Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*.

54 Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, 176–210; Large, *The Politics of Law*, 5–14, and 31–43. On Epp and the Freikorps, see Jones, *Hitler's Heralds*, 140–44.

55 Angermair, "Eduard Schmid," 89–102.

distributed: the majority were in the possession of paramilitary groups.⁵⁶ The Bavarian case is therefore instructive: fears of the Austrian right-wing movements were repeated in their press and leaflets, even though there was no strong leftist movement in Munich similar to that in Vienna, armed and undefeated in battle. This suggests that a pre-existing martial mindset, a logic of war that was an integral part of the worldview, was at work here, maintaining the twin notions of enemy and threat even when these threat perceptions were difficult to substantiate. Most victims of the Bavarian *Feme* murders (punitive assassinations carried out by clandestine right wing organisations) were unreliable members of right-wing militias and others who would have sold information about weapons caches to the authorities. However, the most famous left-wing victim, Carl Gareis, was assassinated by right-wing circles precisely because he had strongly spoken out for complying with the disarmament order issued by the Allied Control Commission, which at the time was threatening sanctions against Germany.⁵⁷ The murder was framed by right-wing outlets as revenge on a politician who had betrayed his own people, while the same newspapers also brought reports from the session of the Bavarian state parliament, where Prime Minister von Kahr argued that it was red radicalism that had brought forth right-wing nationalist radicalism—implying that the Left was responsible for the violent situation it had created.⁵⁸

At other times, even less was enough to mobilise the radical press and paramilitary organisations. As a wave of rumours about an imminent communist takeover in Vienna reached Munich, it provoked a strong reaction when Friedrich Adler, the Viennese Social Democratic leader associated with the party's leftist platform, who had assassinated the Austrian Chancellor Stürgkh in 1916, travelled to Bavaria to give a speech. The right wing saw this trip as an attempt to export the (expected) revolution and protested vehemently, while Adler apparently left Bavaria prematurely, having received news of the paramilitaries readying to move against him. The right-wing reaction, as in the case of the Hungarian stories about a plot against Admiral Horthy, may also have served the purpose of deflecting attention from an inconvenient situation—in this case, the failed Kapp putsch in Berlin, which had been met with considerable support from Bavarian hard-right circles.⁵⁹

56 Koepp, *The Einwohnerwehr*, 150–55.

57 Hofmann, "Der Tod von Karl Gareis," 229–47.

58 "Der Fall Gareis im Landtag" vol. I–II. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 22 and 23 June 1921, 4 and 5; "Die Politik der bayerischen Regierung, Der Fall Gareis im Landtag – Rede des Ministerpräsidenten v. Kahr." *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 23 June 1921, 1, where von Kahr was quoted as saying "Gäbe es keinen links gerichteten antinationalen Radikalismus, so gäbe es auch keinen rechtsgerichteten nationalistischen."

59 OeSta AdR BK Staatskanzlei – Bundeskanzleramt alt, Konsulat München, Politische Korrespondenz 1919–1930, fasc. 1, Pol. Berichte 1919–1930, no. 1225/8. Report of the Austrian

From the perspective of the Bavarian radical right, Vienna represented the same transnational risk factor as it did from the perspective of Budapest. Even the “insufficiently German” Austrian consul was subjected to threats in Munich—seen as a representative of the “red” government, when he hosted the French consul on the occasion of a charitable action to help Austrian society. The intrusion into the consular building happened despite the fact that the right wing Mayr government in Austria had been in power for some time.⁶⁰ Behind the persistent linking of the red menace and the Austrian capital, as in the Hungarian example, it is reasonable to assume both a perception of reality distorted by reflexive civil war thinking and the efforts of far-right leaders to justify the existence of their own organisations.

Munich also had other ties to Austria. While in Hungary, despite enticing promises, it was barely possible to simultaneously train more than a hundred “legionnaires” in the Csót, then in the Zalaegerszeg camps, in Bavaria, several thousand veterans had served with the Bavarian mountain troops on the Italian front, in close comradeship with the Austrian *Jäger*s, and many of them later joined the volunteer formations fighting in the border defence battles in Carinthia. Together with radicals who had “fled” from Austria, this group, consisting mainly of veterans, maintained numerous associations, which in some cases even defied the will of Prime Minister von Kahr. They engaged in intensive Bavarian–Tyrolean propaganda in favour of a “mini-*Anschluss*” of Tyrol to Bavaria. They energetically supported with weapons and other resources the Heimwehr units organised by Richard Steidle in Tyrol and, in and beyond, especially in Carinthia.⁶¹ Although these were precisely the associations with a Greater German spirit that the Hungarian government and the “professional” Bavarian paramilitary leaders seeking French goodwill tended to avoid, they represented additional layers of Bavarian–Austrian interdependence.

The foreign policy horizons of the White International

The red menace ultimately justified why Bavarian paramilitary organisations could legitimately take up arms in Austria if necessary. While Hungarian units would have sailed up the Danube, Bavarian volunteers would have travelled down from Passau

consulate in Nuremberg to the Chancellor’s Office, 10 April 1920. See also the newspaper report, very much in the spirit of the radical right, “Wo stehen wir heute?” *Der Bürgerrat* (Munich), 19 March 1920, 1.

60 “Ein Bubenstück.” *Münchener Zeitung*, 14 January 1921, 5.

61 For a systematic review of the Austrian entanglements of Bavarian veterans, see OeSta AdR BK Staatskanzlei – Bundeskanzleramt alt, Konsulat München, Politische Korrespondenz 1919–1930 fasc. 1. Pol. Berichte 1919–1930 no. 3/pol. Report of the Consul General [Günther] to the Chancellor’s Office on the Deutsch-Österreichischer Volksbund, Tiroler-Club and the Leibregimentsvereinigung, 3 March 1926.

to reach the Austrian capital.⁶² These Bavarian volunteers were to be provided for by the Organisation Escherich (*Orgesch*), the semi-covert network established to preserve the more organised segments of the civic militias (*Einwohnerwehren*) consolidated under the leadership of Georg Escherich, a representative of the governing Bavarian People's Party. It integrated the Organisation Kanzler (*Orka*), headed by the veteran officer Rudolf Kanzler, which was responsible for any planned Austrian operations. The fact that the idea of a joint invasion remained on the agenda for a long time (even when Prime Minister Kahr had already begun to distance himself from the networks more or less brought together under the umbrella of the Escherich organisation) clearly demonstrates the Central European regional mindset, which was perhaps most markedly present in the worldview of these leaders, even more so than in Hungary.⁶³ Orka, which gradually integrated with Orgesch, did not prove to be much more durable than the umbrella organisation. Yet in 1920–21, it efficiently promoted the idea of cooperation between the defeated Central European peoples, for which the Munich–Vienna–Budapest axis would have been “only” the basis.⁶⁴ The final goal, in addition to supplementing Central European satellites, would have been to reconquer Russia, which was envisioned with various white or renegade Bolshevik leaders.⁶⁵ Although the Russian dimension regularly proved to be

62 Memorandum by Staff Lt. Colonel József Schitler on the secret negotiations between the Hungarian government and Austrian and Bavarian nationalist organisations, 11 May 1921 and the Memorandum by Ervin Morlin, departmental councillor on secret negotiations between the Hungarian government, and secret Bavarian and Austrian nationalist paramilitary organisations “Orka” and “Orgesch,” in: Kántás, *Diverzió*, 100–15; HL VKF Box 161, no. 3077, Document no. 1920/25905/ált. Report of the Vienna mission about the dealings of Baron Imre Biedermann, 29 October 1920, 649–50.

63 The fact that von Kahr had reservations vis-a-vis the radical faction of the paramilitaries was noted by Hungarian special envoy Count Olivér Woracziczky as early as summer 1920, due to Escherich's and Kanzler's obvious dealings for private profit and using von Kahr's name without permission to gain access to Hungarian leaders. MNL OL K64 fasc. 20, no. 1922/207res. containing the original report dated 3 August 1920 and in a different context by the Hungarian consul in Munich, Zsolt Denghy soon after: MLN OL K64 fasc. 20, 1920/337res. Report by Consul Zsolt Denghy to Prime Minister Pál Teleki, 6 September 1920, 1–4.

64 This appears in the summary compiled by the international con artist Ignác (Lincoln-)Trebitsch and also in a *pro memoria* on the discussions between Kanzler and Bauer in person representing Orka and Gyula Gömbös and Tibor Eckhardt representing both the Hungarian paramilitaries and the Regent's inner circle. Both are preserved among the papers of the head of Hungary's news agency, Miklós Kozma, himself a “white” officer of Horthy's National Army. MNL OL, K429 Bundle 1, Compilations, 8–11, and 16–20. No date is given on these documents, but it is clear that the Trebitsch piece dates from late 1920 or early 1921, while the *pro memoria* was written in June or July 1920.

65 Letter from Field Marshall Erich Ludendorff to Miklós Horthy, 19 August 1920, published in Szinai and Szűcs, eds, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, 33–39.

a money-making scheme for swindlers, as in the the white Russian émigré leaders Komaroff and Vasily Biskupsky,⁶⁶ its persistence indicates that, in its most radical form, the idea of a Central European reactionary alliance was indeed a mirror image of Bolshevik expansionist ideology and sought (or would have sought) to turn the wheel of history in the opposite direction on a similar scale.

Several traces of this thinking have survived; taken together they allow for the reconstruction of the foreign policy horizons of the organisations involved in radical paramilitary cooperation. They date from 1920 and, in contrast to the anti-communist propaganda that was naturally conducted in public, they mainly contain secret plans. These include the Budapest meeting between Kanzler and his confidant Bauer with the leader of the largest Hungarian paramilitary organisation, the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), Gyula Gömbös, and Tibor Eckhardt, who headed the press department of the foreign ministry at the time, but was also known as a radical former officer. In the same context, the well-known letter they “delivered” from General Ludendorff to Miklós Horthy remains especially relevant.⁶⁷ A further document, written in early autumn 1920, was handed over by Prime Minister von Kahr to Horthy’s personal envoy. It bore the title *Gedanken über ein Zusammengehen der infolge des Krieges unterdrückten Völker Europas*. Its authorship is unknown, because Kahr himself requested that the text be anonymised, and the Hungarian side unfortunately complied with the request. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this text, which contains the most concrete and at the same time general ideas, originated from the confluence of Bavarian government branches and paramilitary circles.⁶⁸

At the same time, the value of documents originating from the circle of the Russian émigré leader Vasily Biskupsky, who understandably pursued his own goals and sought to secure Bavarian and Hungarian state resources, such as the document entitled *Memorandum über die geschichtliche Entwicklung* should be viewed as articulating ideas not necessarily shared by the core elements of the Munich–Vienna–Budapest axis. Biskupsky was an energetic leader and an important organiser of the émigré circles in Germany, who built up perhaps the largest network of far-right

66 MNL OL K64 fasc. 2 (1919–1920). Unnumbered document to be forwarded the prime minister’s office and the ministry for foreign affairs: “Memorandum über die geschichtliche Entwicklung,” 25 September 1920. In this document signed “B”—very likely Biskupsky himself—the Hungarian government is reminded of the financial commitments it made over the course of the summer, while also outlining an ambitious plan that makes German–Russian cooperation the key element of bringing about a new white Central Europe.

67 See footnote 64 and 65.

68 MNL OL K64 Bundle 2., fasc. 41, no. 1920/453res. Report No. 8 by Lt. Col. Janky [about his Munich mission]. Annex: “Gedanken über ein Zusammengehen der infolge des Krieges unterdrückten Völker Europas,” 18 October 1920, 7–8.

contacts of all white Russians in the country—ending up as a supporter of Hitler by 1923 at the latest. However, the documents bearing his imprint differ from the bulk of surviving plans only in that they emphasise the importance of the creation of a white “Grossrussland” regaining its imperial character and engage in unrealistic speculation about the possibility of overthrowing the Bolshevik regime.⁶⁹ At the same time, the Russian dimension remained of particular importance to Bavarian–German circles; ultimately, establishing a close alliance with a rejuvenated Russia was very much the foreign policy goal of the Bavarian radical establishment. Unlike that of the Hungarian and Austrian sides, Munich’s strategic horizon extended far beyond Central Europe in the strict sense.

Unfortunately, no document has been identified in which an Austrian leader open to cooperation and accepted by the Hungarian and Bavarian sides laid out similar far-reaching plans, including General Josef Metzger, loyal to the emperor and seeking to unite the paramilitaries, his Greater German rival General Alfred Krauss, the legitimist leader Friedrich von Wiesner, the Styrian provincial chief Anton Rintelen, or any other comparable figure.⁷⁰ However, it is clear from the surviving meeting protocols and 1920–21 post-meeting reports that Austrian thinking was similar to that of the Hungarian parties in that it remained more Central European in scope. Austrian leaders probably also considered that the plans should have some appeal at least to conservative French military and political circles, a demand shared by the Austrian Christian Social (conservative) government circles to whom they had connections. The latter would have been ensured by the fact that a South German–Austrian–Hungarian Catholic bloc could have found understanding in the anti-Prussian French capital, especially within the general staff. This also explains why the ‘Alpine’ network of Austrian paramilitary organisations was left out of the conspiracy: in those provinces, the Greater German sentiment was clearly dominant, and, with the exception of Salzburg, the *Anschluss* was taken to mean assimilation into a large and unified German empire.⁷¹

69 See footnote 66.

70 Perhaps the proposal by Field Marshall Metzger came closest to a programme. It considered the cooperation between reactionary organisations and an eventual Bavarian–Hungarian intervention in Austria, without major novelties anywhere among its six points. MNL OL K64 fasc. 20. (1922), 1921/90res “Proposal for the case of a change of course in Austria,” the file contains the document titled Military Agreement between the Hungarian Government and the Commander of Austrian Heimwehr forces in Vienna and Lower Austria, Lt. Field Marschall Metzger, 2 March 1921.

71 This is evident from the “Memorandum” by Staff Lt. Colonel József Schitler on the secret negotiations between the Hungarian government and Austrian and Bavarian nationalist organisations, 11 May 1921, and the “Memorandum” by Ervin Morlin, departmental councillor, on secret negotiations between the Hungarian government, and Bavarian and Austrian nationalist

The Hungarian positions remained unequivocal. As early as autumn 1920, Horthy sent word to von Kahr that the Russian dimension was irrelevant for Budapest. As the response to the memorandum about the alliance of oppressed peoples stated, “the Russian question is for us a crucial, but for now also quite distant problem. [...] The next agreed-upon task has to remain the creation of a secure connection between Bavaria and Hungary.”⁷² This focus is made all the more understandable when seen through the prism of Hungarian westward foreign policy. During the very same period, the head of the Regent’s military office was on a mission in France to secure the goodwill of French military leaders and conservative circles for a Bavarian–Austrian–Hungarian alliance, officially to join forces against communists.⁷³

Looking at the surviving documents with the above caveats in mind, the paramilitary political logic is shown to have developed in response to Bolshevism, the *par excellence* transnational threat, but also carrying other ideological legacies. The interpretation of the international system—if you like, the foreign policy worldview of the White International—reveals the fundamental conceptual tension that Stefano Guzzini describes as the conservative dilemma. Guzzini highlights the conceptual conundrum that arises when a movement with a reactionary worldview seeking to restore the sovereignty of states has to fight against the revolutionary ideologies that threaten the state-centric way of doing politics, but in the process becomes ideological itself and comes to resemble the image of the enemy it has created.⁷⁴ This was also the case with the White International, whose spokespeople set the restoration of humiliated states and of their own sovereignty as an explicit goal in foreign policy, but at the same time deviated from this principle in two ways. On the one hand, they recommended to decision-makers explicitly transnational practices, and on the other hand, they envisioned a strongly bloc-like “great space” as their ultimate goal, in which the independence of individual states, especially

paramilitary organisations “Orka” and “Orgesch,” in: Kántás, *Diverzió*, 100–15. The Hungarian side made it clear as early as autumn 1920 that it was not interested in Russian adventures (see footnote 64).

72 MNL OL K64 fasc. 20. (1922), 1921/244res containing the original document 1920/384res. Response in the matter of the alliance of oppressed peoples, to be delivered by Lt. Col. Janky, 9 October 1920.

73 MNL OL K64 Bundle 1, fasc. 11 (1920), 1920/403res. Memorandum by Staff Col. Boldizsár Láng, 20 October, 386–89. Láng had stated already in August that personalities of the French Chiefs of Staffs, notably the acting head General Henri Desticker were inclined to support “a South German–Austrian corridor that would establish a direct path from France to Hungary and Romania. Especially in the Bavarian conservatives they are placing great trust.” MLN OL K64 Bundle 2, fasc. 41. (1920), Telegram no. 344. from the Paris mission to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, containing Láng’s report, 19 August 1920, 13.

74 Guzzini, “The Enduring Dilemmas,” 533–68.

smaller ones, would have been at least uncertain. This may partly explain why the Austrian and Hungarian parties, familiar with the German-centred *Mitteleuropa* plans during World War I, sought to plan on a smaller scale: a Munich–Vienna–Budapest axis would have posed less of a threat to their foreign policy autonomy than the new, radical right-wing versions of Germany’s World War I victory plans laid out in the ambitious concept of a league of “oppressed peoples.”⁷⁵

However, there was no disagreement between the parties that, from the outset, the Central European/Danube region was to be seen as a single entity, where the borderless threat of Bolshevism was both a risk and an opportunity. They conceptualised communism as a danger that, if victorious, would wipe out the very foundations of the region’s nation states, but since it also posed a threat to the victorious Western powers, in their anti-Bolshevik plans, they hoped for a certain degree of generosity from London and Paris. The position of the Hungarian and, to some extent, Austrian state and provincial leaders therefore made it a *conditio sine qua non* for joint action that a ‘red’ shift should occur or riots should break out in Vienna, and only then would intervention in Austria take place.⁷⁶ The paramilitary leaders on the other hand adopted the radical position of Orgesch and its Austrian branch Orka in Vienna, Graz, and Budapest alike. For them, whether Orka’s Bauer or the Hungarian Pál Prónay and Iván Héjjas, Vienna was sufficiently threatening and ‘red’ to merit intervention even in the absence of further upheavals. As Ludendorff’s memorandum and the other documents cited from Orgesch circles reveal, they expected passive approval from the Entente and considered that swift action creating a *fait accompli* was sufficient for this. The same argument is found in a petition to the Hungarian government on behalf of the largest Hungarian paramilitary organisation, the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), which was signed by Gyula Gömbös, who played a central role in the officer networks.⁷⁷ Austrian and Hungarian government circles first sought to secure French goodwill, and as the case of the French diplomat who warned his Austrian colleague of the danger of Hungarian intervention seems to prove, they achieved at least partial success.

A further universally accepted element foresaw a larger international paramilitary concentration in Hungary, following the example of the Austrian (and Croatian)

75 MNL OL K64 Bundle 2., fasc. 41. no. 1920/453res. Report No. 8 by Lt. Col. Janky, Annex: “Gedanken über ein Zusammengehen der infolge des Kriegs unterdrückten Völker Europas,” 18 October 1920, 7–8.

76 HL VKF Box 165. no. 3340. “Case Right” military plans [to occupy the regions east of Vienna] by Lt. Colonel Vilmos Röder, head of the operational planning group of the Chief of Staff, and Opinion on “Case Right” by the Foreign Ministry of Hungary, 22 January 1921, 695–702.

77 MNL OL K64 Bundle 1, fasc. 11 (1920), unnumbered document, Memorandum by Gyula Gömbös, 28 July 1920, 396–97.

Legion, which had been founded in the autumn of 1919, using the military facilities in Csót, and later moved to Zalaegerszeg. In 1920–1921, plans for Russian and Ukrainian collection camps also emerged. However, from the perspective of the White International, it was of primary importance that additional German and Austrian veterans should be able to come and find accommodation in Hungary.⁷⁸ This was the only country where it could be assumed that such a move would not cause any press scandals during the build-up of forces. (It should be noted though that in Hungary too there were scandals, and from the spring of 1921, the Hungarian government's intention was to disband the Austrian Legion, not to deploy it.)⁷⁹

The initial phase of gathering strength would have been followed by the “reversal” of Vienna, in connection with which radical officer circles were already planning action by the autumn of 1920, but which most decisively came on the agenda in the spring of 1921. The parties agreed that if an uprising consisting of Bavarian and Austrian paramilitaries could achieve this (while Hungary sought to prevent any Czechoslovak intervention without risking war), the main obstacle would be removed. In this context, the Hungarian side would have been a main financier of the venture, in line with its previous practice of supporting reactionary movements from the end of 1919.⁸⁰

The reconstruction of the Danubian region along conservative revolutionary lines was to be followed by a revision of the Versailles Peace System. The moral capital gained in the fight against the communists would have been used primarily to “break up” Czechoslovakia without real intervention from the Entente. In reality, this would hardly have proved possible, but it is all the more instructive that paramilitary thinking bridged this contradiction. Like pulling rabbits out of a hat, authors presented the topos of the communist threat once again, arguing that if a new communist offensive were to be launched, Czechoslovakia would inevitably turn red, creating an opportunity for intervention.⁸¹ This “copying,” the application

78 Letter from Field Marshall Erich Ludendorff to Miklós Horthy, 19 August 1920, published in Szinai and Szűcs, eds, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, 33–39; MNL OL K64 fasc. 20. (1922) 1921/90res “Proposal for the case of a change of course in Austria,” containing [a proposal for a] Military Agreement between the Hungarian Government and the Commander of Austrian Heimwehr forces in Vienna and Lower Austria, Lt. Field Marshall [Josef] Metzger, 2 March 1921.

79 MNL OL K64 Bundle 6, fasc. 20 (1922), no. 1922/155res Note by Colonel [Tihamér] Siménfalvy (head of covert operations at the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs), undated.

80 MNL OL K64 Bundle 6, fasc. 20. (1922), no. 1921/197res. Joint memorandum by Rudolf Kanzler and [special envoy of the Hungarian government] Gedeon Ráday, 4–5 February 1921, 2–6.

81 This proposition circulated widely following Ludendorff's letter and the memorandum about the league of oppressed peoples and was discussed openly by personalities close to paramilitary circles. HL VKF Box 161, no. 3075, document no. 1920/25482/ált. Report of the Vienna mission, 21 October 1920 [pagination illegible].

to another but different situation of a cognitive schema that is not unrealistic in a given context is as natural a learning process in group thinking as it is far-fetched. The idea of the “Czechoslovak action” was not based on any real possibility; in the eyes of those sufficiently invested in the project, it merely ‘solved’ the theoretical problem of how to begin overturning the Paris Peace System. It is no coincidence that those who remained outside the ambit of paramilitary “groupthink,” such as Hungarian government politicians, did their best to nip these wild ideas in the bud.⁸²

The final step for the White International would have involved establishing large-scale regional cooperation. This would have made it possible to definitively defeat communism, but also to break with the victorious Western powers and, in particular, with the influence of liberalism. “The formation of a nationally conscious, socially sensitive, uniformly thinking, militarily organised national society”—that is, the preservation of the much-emphasised military spirit and the restoration of militaristic traditions—did not appear in paramilitary thinking merely as a condition for an effective fight against communism.⁸³ It was primarily an end in itself, and Bolshevism, with its similarly military spirit, was not posited as its alternative. Militarism was in fact directed against the pacifist ideas propagated by liberalism, the foreign ideology that was seen as threatening and seducing the German and Hungarian peoples from within, inspiring them to turn against the ideas that helped these nations survive the trials of history.⁸⁴

The idea of regional blocs organised by the great powers proved to be the point where the internal contradictions of far-right thinking were most clearly revealed. Within the “traditional” framework, the Eastern superpower Russia had always been seen as posing a threat to German Central Europe, not least because of the laws of geopolitics and the Russian *Drang* to the West. This was acknowledged countless times by the right-wing geopolitical thinkers who remained highly influential after World War I, including militant veterans and paramilitary organisations. (Even Ernst Jünger, who later saw the Soviet system as a new strong state, followed this line of thinking in the early 1920s, as a legacy of the World War years.) In the White International, true to its name, ideology resolved this contradiction: a shared world-view promised the possibility of peaceful cooperation against a common enemy, and thus the sovereigntists became reactionary internationalists. This idea was closely linked to one of the popular conceptual pairs of the conservative revolution, which

82 Prónay, *A határban...*, 209.

83 Vonyó, *Gömbös Gyula*, 98; Bodó, *The White Terror in Hungary*, 133–63; Bartha, *Törzsökösök*, 10–11; Bartha, *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Endre*, 106.

84 MNL OL K64 Bundle 2, fasc. 41, no. 1920/453res. Report No. 8 by Lt. Col. Janky, Annex: “Gedanken über ein Zusammengehen der infolge des Kriegs unterdrückten Völker Europas,” 18 October 1920, 7–8.

contrasted the domination of the old Western nations with the rise of the young Eastern nations, as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck did in his *The Third Reich*.⁸⁵ For veteran officer circles, who often admired the confident demeanour of Russian *émigré* soldiers, this idea was easy to incorporate into their own conspiratorial worldview. Armed with this idea of ideological kinship, the decisive moment in the fight against Bolshevism also became a promise of victory that would have enabled taking revenge on the enemy of World War I and create a new, reactionary Europe.

Conclusions

The White International's foreign policy worldview and the ideas about international politics of those involved in the Central European paramilitary conspiracies were based to a lesser extent on the experiences of World War I, fought between states. Instead, the chief source of inspiration was the grand myth built around the experiences of the "Red Menace." This intentionally vague term is very accurate and useful for historical analysis, as the right-wing paramilitary worldview was based in part on the thesis of a fundamental identity between the revolutionary and parliamentary left, subsumed under the heading of red movements. Although they feared a communist revolution, they defined agents of subversion in a more encompassing manner, assuming a deep organic interconnection between all left-wing currents and believing that, at the right moment, the supporters of social democracy would also fall in line behind the radicals of the left.

This was a *par excellence* civil war mentality, as it not only identified internal enemies, but also divided society itself into "us" and "them," an in-group facing down enemies that were trying to destroy it. This opposition could only be resolved by the victory of one side, with the other defined not as a political alternative but as a threat to the existence of the collective self. This element was much more prominent in the thinking of the radicals than it generally was on the right. The mainstream currents were linked to the far right by revisionism and the rejection of the peace treaties that ended World War I, but this was not sufficient to legitimise either the ideology of civil war or the far right's mode of operation and institutionalisation, which included both extra-legal and legal elements, and focused on clandestine organisations.

The conscious transnational self-image and operational code of the paramilitary milieu also differed from the truly state-centric thinking of the traditional right wing. Of course, radicals sought to win over friendly conservative governments and enjoyed the resources provided by ideological friendships, covering a wide range of activities from police cooperation to export-import transactions helping to build an economic hinterland for them. But they did not hesitate to negotiate in secret

85 Geyer, "Ostpolitik," esp. 51–53; Cp. Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich*, 91–92.

either—thus, Prime Minister von Kahr learned from the Hungarian secret emissary about the negotiations Kanzler and Bauer had conducted in Budapest a few months earlier.⁸⁶ In some cases, they even defied the express will of the government, for example when paramilitary leader Pál Prónay attempted to activate plans for action against Czechoslovakia by sending his saboteurs into Slovak territory.⁸⁷ More importantly, since they perceived their enemy as an omnipresent threat that reduced state borders to fiction, they often resorted to similarly ‘post-Westphalian’ attitudes in organising their own operations.

Taking the above considerations into account, it is understandable why the experiences of cold and hot conflicts approximating those found in a civil war in Munich, Vienna, and Budapest played such a significant role in determining the direction of paramilitary conspiracies in Central Europe. The experiences regarding the nature of the enemy were almost identical, and although the decisions regarding how to best combat the threat differed in their radicalism, they were consistent in their basic logic and civil war mentality. This mentality gave rise to a worldview that can be likened to the “conservative dilemma:” organisations acting in the name of nations and building a cult of the strong state themselves developed a supra-national or inter-national ethic of action. In this spirit, they built a network that, like the Holy Alliance of Europe a hundred years earlier, actually became more similar to its enemy than its members would have cared to admit. The White International, as an informal but contemporary appellation of their network, reflected this transformation and established a model for far-right movements that remained recognisable throughout the twentieth century in the thinking of the heirs to the radical counter-revolutionary movements before, during, and even after World War II.

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86 MNL OL K64 fasc. 20, no. 1922/207res. Report by Count Olivér Woracziczky, 3 August 1920.

87 Prónay, *A határban...*, 209.

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