



Canadian Slavonic Papers

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Source: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 3 (1958), pp. 59-75

Published by: [Canadian Association of Slavists](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40866032>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 21:04

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The Ukrainian Problem in International Politics, October 1938 to March 1939

BOHDAN B. BUDUROWYCZ

BY THE END OF 1938, the Ukrainian problem was on its way towards becoming one of the most urgent and potentially explosive issues in European politics. High expectations among Ukrainian nationalists appeared to have a solid foundation since for the first time after the controversial campaign of 1920 some tangible results had been achieved in the liberation of Ukrainian soil from foreign rule. The attitude of the Western democracies toward the idea of Ukrainian independence was non-committal, but not openly hostile, and some friendly gestures made by Berlin seemed to indicate that the nascent Ukrainian State could count on the support of the German Reich. After the fateful "summit conference" at Munich, it had been widely assumed that Chamberlain and Daladier had purchased peace from Hitler by giving him complete freedom of action in Eastern Europe. According to unconfirmed but persistent rumours, the Führer would now direct all his efforts towards securing the control of the Ukraine, that "fairyland of German expansionist dreams."¹ The idea of the conquest of the Ukraine had appealed to at least two generations of Germans as the "surest road to a more abundant German life,"² and now, it seemed, the Nazi leaders had at last a splendid opportunity to realize their plans. The weakening of Czechoslovakia and her increased dependence on the benevolence of Berlin enabled Hitler to force her into obedience and to make her serve his ambitious schemes. The Republic of Masaryk and Beneš, once erected as a formidable anti-German bastion, was now to be used "as a battering-ram against the gates of the East."³ A look at the map showed that Czechoslovakia, and especially her easternmost province, the Carpatho-Ukraine, was a convenient jumping-off point for any campaign against

¹"A European Survey," *Slavonic and East European Review*, XVIII, no. 52, July 1939, p. 47.

²J. Joesten, "Hitler's Fiasco in the Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, XXI, Jan. 1943, p. 331.

³Quoted after L.B. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude, 1938-1939*, London, 1948, p. 37.

the Soviet Union or Poland, and thus would give Hitler one more chance of keeping the world guessing where he was going to strike next. Moreover, the threat of German aggression from the south and the spectre of an independent Ukraine could also be used as a very persuasive argument in bargaining with Poland for Danzig and the "Corridor."

As early as October 7, 1938, the Director of the Political Department of the *Auswärtiges Amt* prepared a memorandum for the Führer, in which he observed that an independent Carpatho-Ukraine was hardly viable without support from outside, but that the establishment of a nucleus for a Greater Ukraine was definitely advantageous to Germany. The memorandum stressed the opposition of the Foreign Ministry and of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht to the annexation of the Carpatho-Ukraine by Hungary since this solution "would facilitate the formation of an anti-German bloc."⁴ It added that autonomy for the Carpatho-Ukraine "under the slogan of self-determination" should be demanded, and stated that a self-governing Carpatho-Ukraine, oriented to Slovakia or Czechoslovakia, was the best solution since it "left other possibilities open for a later date."⁵ The memorandum noted further that preparations were being made to "influence" leading personalities in Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine in favour of this solution.

The ideas expressed by the Political Department found, however, little support from the makers of official German foreign policy. Hitler himself was of the opinion that Germany should interfere as little as possible with the Carpatho-Ukrainian question, and hoped that the whole issue would "develop along the right lines" even without Berlin's intervention.⁶ On October 10, State Secretary Weizsäcker informed German missions abroad that the Reich "maintained reserve in the Carpatho-Ukraine question."⁷ At the same time, however, Germany refused to support a common Hungarian-Polish frontier, in spite of the assurances from Budapest that this solution would "prolong the anti-Bolshevist front" and create a strong "bulwark" against the Russians in the Carpathians.⁸

The internal situation in the Carpatho-Ukraine developed meanwhile according to Hitler's expectations. On October 26, its govern-

⁴Germany, *Auswärtiges Amt, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Washington, 1951, Series D, vol. IV, p. 48.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 66.

ment was dismissed by Prague, and its Premier, Andrew Brody, was charged with treason because of his pro-Magyar sympathies. He was succeeded by Dr. Augustine Voloshyn, a Greek Catholic priest and a spokesman of Ukrainian nationalist group. This appointment signified that the federal government had decided at last to share the power in the province with that part of the local population which favoured the idea of a Greater Ukraine. This news was, of course, badly received by Hungary and Poland, who had clamoured since September for the return of the Carpatho-Ukraine under the rule of Budapest. While the Hungarians were interested in recovering their historical province which had been associated with St. Stephen's Crown for a millennium, the Poles felt that a German base south of their Carpathian frontier could become a permanent menace to their security. They were even less inclined to tolerate its becoming a centre for a Ukrainian irredentist movement from which a crusade for the liberation of all Ukrainian ethnic territories could be launched. All available diplomatic documents as well as the memoirs of Josef Beck, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his Under-Secretary, Count Szembek prove beyond any doubt that the liquidation of the Carpatho-Ukraine was the most important objective of Polish foreign policy from the annexation of the Teschen district until the final establishment of a common frontier with Hungary. On October 8, 1938, Count Csáky, the *chef de cabinet* of the Hungarian Foreign Minister, had two conferences with Beck, who promised him the moral support of Poland "to the fullest extent."⁹ Moltke, German Ambassador to Warsaw, stressed in his report to Berlin on October 19 that Polish political circles regarded the creation of a new "centre of crystallization" of the Ukrainian nationalist movement as extremely dangerous and predicted that the Warsaw government would "leave nothing undone" to eliminate this potential source of trouble.¹⁰

Anti-Hungarian demonstrations organized in Lwow by Ukrainian political parties and cultural associations proved that the existence of an autonomous "Ukraine" was bound to lead to a serious increase of tension in Eastern Galicia and perhaps also in Volynia. Radical steps had to be taken to nip this danger in the bud, and three weeks after the settlement of Munich arrangements were made for Beck to meet Rumanian King Carol at Galati. The obvious purpose of this visit was to enlist Rumania's support for the annexation of the Carpatho-Ukraine by Hungary. This was certainly a difficult task for,

⁹*Ibid.*, vol. 5, Washington, 1953, p. 90.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 99.

although Bucharest felt some uneasiness because of irredentist Ukrainian propaganda emanating from the eastern province of Czechoslovakia, it was at the same time even more anxious not to encourage any territorial claims of the Hungarians who, for the past two decades, had been demanding a rectification of the "injustices" of Trianon. The potential danger represented by an autonomous or even independent Carpatho-Ukraine, as Rumania saw it, was remote; on the other hand, the peril of a militant Hungarian revisionism had every chance of becoming a very real factor in the post-Munich Europe. Under these circumstances, the policy of supporting the *status quo* was certainly the only reasonable course, and the Rumanian press was unanimous in its declarations that, while Rumania respected Poland's wishes and recognized the importance of Polish friendship, she was not willing to change her stand for the maintenance of her own common frontier with Czechoslovakia. In spite of this discouraging reception, Beck did his best to convince Carol that the elimination of the hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism would "serve European peace and have a stabilizing effect on the Southeastern Danubian valley,"¹¹ and also tried to tempt the Rumanians by promising them a strip of territory in eastern Carpatho-Ukraine as far as the railroad Jasenie (Körösmező)-Sighet. However, Poland could not go so far as to guarantee that the Transylvanian question would not be raised at some future date by the Hungarians although she was ready to mediate in the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Rumania and Hungary. All attempts to make Carol yield remained unsuccessful chiefly because of the stubborn attitude of Nicolai Petresco-Comnène (Petrescu-Comnen), Rumanian Foreign Minister, whom the irritated Beck described, somewhat undiplomatically, as a "perfect imbecile."¹² According to Beck's account, his Rumanian colleague answered his plea with a "torrent of senseless phrases" about the "sacred rights of the Little Entente."¹³ He also pointed out that, if Hungary acquired the Carpatho-Ukraine, Rumania would have to build 100 kilometres of new fortifications on the lengthened frontier with her dangerous neighbour, and insisted that the railroad Chust-Csap-Kassa (Košice), which was important for supplying Rumania with military equipment from the Skoda works in Pilsen, should remain under the Czech control. Thus Beck's dramatic mission ended in complete failure, and the Rumanian press added insult to injury by criticizing both Poland and Hungary for their arbitrary attitude and lack of consideration for the rights of other peoples.

¹¹*New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1938, p. 1.

¹²J. Beck, *Dernier rapport*, Neuchâtel, 1951, p. 173.

¹³*Ibid.*

Immediately after Beck's return from Galati, the Hungarian government decided to make a determined effort toward regaining at least some of the territories lost to Czechoslovakia. On October 24 it demanded a plebiscite in the disputed areas or an arbitration by Italy, Germany, and Poland. The situation became increasingly dangerous because of the activities of Hungarian irregulars in the Carpatho-Ukraine, who attempted to foment an anti-Czech revolt and engaged in all kinds of sabotage and terrorism. After an unsuccessful recourse to delaying tactics, the Prague government was finally forced to accept the Hungarian demands with a slight modification, for Poland was excluded from the proposed board of arbiters. Ribbentrop and Ciano were delegated by their respective governments to settle the whole problem and met on November 2 at Vienna with the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak delegations. According to the account given by Ciano in his *Hidden Diary*, the Germans tried to sponsor the cause of the Slovaks and the Ukrainians, but were "most inadequately" prepared for the discussions, and this enabled him to "assign to Hungary pieces of territory which might easily have given rise to much controversial discussion."¹⁴ As a result, about 700 square miles of Carpatho-Ukrainian territory with a population of some 200,000 were returned to Hungary. The province was deprived of all its southern agricultural land; it lost its capital, Ungvár (Užhorod), and the only railroad connection it had with the rest of Czechoslovakia.

The Ukrainians in the Carpatho-Ukraine and Poland were bitterly disappointed by the Vienna decision which, as the *New York Times* commented editorially on November 3, "demonstrated the ascendancy of the totalitarian states and their principles over the European democracies."¹⁵ Some Polish extremist groups, encouraged by this development, intensified their attacks on Ukrainian institutions and business enterprises. The Polish Army began "pacification" manoeuvres in Eastern Galicia, and many prominent Ukrainians were imprisoned. Ukrainian organizations in America sent messages to the governments of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, asking them to use their good offices to persuade Poland to stop "a new wave of terror," and the Ukrainian government in exile demanded in its memorandum to the Great Powers the establishment of an independent Ukraine, including the Ukrainian minorities in Poland and the Soviet Union.¹⁶

If the Ukrainians had imagined that the award of Vienna had

¹⁴G. Ciano, *Hidden Diary*, New York, 1953, p. 189.

¹⁵*New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁶"World Opinion," *The Nineteenth Century and After*, CXXXV, Jan. 1939, p. 128.

satisfied the demand of Hungary and that the Carpatho-Ukraine would be now left in peace, they were badly mistaken. The evacuation of the ceded areas by Czechoslovak troops and their occupation by the Hungarians ended on November 10. On the very next day Villani, the Hungarian Minister in Rome, hinted in his talks with Ciano at the "possibility of disorders in Ruthenia, such as to necessitate its union with Hungary,"¹⁷ but was advised against this course of action. Ciano urged the Hungarians to observe more strictly the terms of arbitration, and told Villani that Hitler "had been heard to say that henceforth he regards the Ruthenian question as 'his question.'"¹⁸ This warning, however, proved of little value, for a week later the Hungarian Military Attaché in Rome assured Mussolini that the Germans were indifferent to the Carpatho-Ukrainian problem, upon which the Duce "authorized the commencement of operations in Ruthenia."¹⁹ The Hungarians were ready to strike, but Ciano was able to learn in time that the German position was unchanged and that Mussolini had been deliberately deceived. This was too much even for the Italian protectors of Hungary, and a joint *démarche* of the Axis Powers was made in Budapest. Finally, on November 25, Villani informed Ciano that Hungary had "stopped her preparations to invade Ruthenia."²⁰ Meanwhile the ties that bound the Carpatho-Ukraine to Prague were strengthened by the constitutional law of November 22, 1938, which transformed Czechoslovakia into a federated state of the Czechs, Slovaks, and "Subcarpathian Ruthenians." The government of the province was to consist of three ministers appointed by the President on the nomination of the Presidium of the Diet of Carpatho-Ukraine, who automatically became members of the Central Council of the Republic. This law, as one of its co-authors points out, "offered a solid base for the further development of the legislation of the federated Carpatho-Ukraine and its legal relations with Czechoslovakia."²¹

During the crisis in November, the Polish and the Hungarian press continued to clamour that there could be no final solution nor could any frontiers be guaranteed as long as the Carpatho-Ukrainian problem had not been decided "in the interest of the Carpatho-Ruthenian people itself."²² This campaign grew so violent that UNDO, the

¹⁷Ciano, *Hidden Diary*, p. 193.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 196.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 199.

²¹V. Shandor, "Carpatho-Ukraine in the International Bargaining of 1918-1939," *Ukrainian Quarterly*, X, no. 3, Summer, 1954, p. 238.

²²"World Opinion," p. 128.

leading Ukrainian party in Poland, sent a special memorandum to Premier Sławoj-Składkowski, asking him to use his influence to silence anti-Ukrainian attacks in the Polish press and to express his support for the formation of an autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine. Germany was also irritated by the uncompromising attitude of the Poles and obviously resented the publication of an article by General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, Polish Minister of War, which envisaged the creation of a "Third Europe," a bloc of nations including Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and the Baltic States and opposed to the domination of any Great Power in that part of the Continent. While official German circles continued to refrain from direct comments on the Ukrainian question, some of the semi-official publications were openly friendly toward the aspirations of Ukrainian nationalists. "The idea of Greater Ukraine is alive," the *Geopolitik* observed in its November issue. "In common justice it must be admitted that the great nation of Ukrainians . . . has as good a right to its national state as any other nation."²³ Similar opinions were voiced in the *Europäische Revue*, which stressed the importance of the Carpatho-Ukraine in connection with the entire Ukrainian problem and expressed its conviction that the Ukrainian idea was becoming a "powerful factor" in European politics.²⁴

Warsaw's answer to the new developments south of the Carpathians and to the veiled threats in the German press was prompt, but not entirely unexpected. The Soviet-Polish declaration of November 26, 1938, formally merely "reaffirmed the determination" of the two countries to base their mutual relations on the existing agreements, but at the same time it also marked an important stage in the development of the Ukrainian question as an international issue. The Moscow *communiqué* was widely interpreted as a turn by Poland away from Germany and towards Russia and as an attempt to curb the German drive to the East. As *The (London) Times* commented on November 29, Poland obviously had a common interest with Russia in preventing the Carpatho-Ukraine from expanding into a large Ukrainian State at the expense of herself and the Soviet Union. Count Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, gave an apt appraisal of the reasons behind the declaration in his report to Berlin, dated December 3, 1938. "The Carpatho-Ukraine under German influence," he wrote, "appears a major threat to the Soviet Union as a crystallizing point for a Ukrainian independence movement. On this issue . . . the Soviet Union believes she has the same interest as Poland."²⁵ His British

²³*Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁵Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, V, p. 139.

colleague expressed similar views in a letter to Viscount Halifax. "Strategically," he observed, "it would seem that Poland could not tolerate a Soviet Ukraine under German influence, since Poland would then be open to German pressure on three fronts. Assuming, therefore, that Poland is not willing to co-operate with Germany in the invasion of the Soviet Ukraine . . . it would seem that [she] would be forced into active support of the Soviet Union in resisting such an invasion."²⁶

While the leading Ukrainian newspapers in Poland attacked the Polish-Soviet declaration, the Polish press welcomed the agreement and hailed it as a "timely and absolutely urgent warning to Berlin" that "any further German activity would only strengthen Polish-Russian co-operation." As the popular *Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny* put it, "the way from Warsaw to Moscow is across Ruthenia."²⁷ This attempt at a *rapprochement* between Poland and Russia was undoubtedly the strongest possible measure of protection against the Greater Ukraine propaganda, and all shades of Polish public opinion supported it without any hesitation. According to an American observer, "even the young radicals who not long ago were advocates of anti-Soviet crusades to free all subject nations of the USSR . . . now admit openly that Poland and Russia have a common interest in the Ukrainian issue. Poland would have to pay a heavy price—Eastern Galicia and Volynia—for the breaking-up of Russia and the weakening of the Communist State."²⁸

Meanwhile, the internal Ukrainian problem in Poland was becoming even more acute. After a protest against Polish reprisals in Eastern Galicia, signed by three Greek Catholic bishops and a score of other prominent Ukrainians and submitted to the Polish Government on November 19, had remained unanswered, the Ukrainian representatives in the Sejm presented on December 9 to the Speaker of the Diet a bill providing for the establishment of an autonomous "Galician-Volynian Land," enjoying full rights of self-government except in foreign policy and in military and financial matters. It was to have its own legislature and a government whose premier and leading ministers were to become members of the Polish Cabinet. Both Polish and Ukrainian were to be recognized as official languages of this territory which, with some 40,000 square miles and a population of nine million, comprised approximately one-fourth of the whole

²⁶Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, London, 1950, 3d series, vol. III, p. 577.

²⁷"World Opinion," p. 127.

²⁸*New York Times*, January 1, 1939, IV, p. 4.

area of the Polish Republic. The bill was roughly modelled on the home-rule law granted by the Czechoslovak Parliament to Slovakia and the Carpatho-Ukraine. A part of the German press lent the Ukrainian demands its unqualified support. "The time has now come," the *Schlesische Zeitung* wrote on December 15, "when the problem of the Ukrainian nation, more than at any time during the last twenty years, is moving toward the centre of European interest. This problem must be solved now."²⁹ This view was supported by the *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, which mentioned with sympathy the "battle for the liberation of the Ukrainian territories," fought "with the greatest passion" in Poland.³⁰ The French press commented that an atmosphere similar to that which had reigned in the Sudeten areas during the September crisis was being created in the Polish Ukraine. This journalistic battle over the Ukrainian proposal was finally joined by the Polish press, which stressed that the ethnic factor alone was not sufficient to create a state and maintained that the Ukrainians lacked a tradition of statehood.

The autonomy bill was rejected on December 21 by the Speaker of the Sejm on the ground that it entailed a change in the Polish Constitution, but this setback did not stop the Ukrainian deputies in their struggle for self-determination. "Only the granting of absolute independence to the Ukrainian nation within the framework of the Polish State can solve our problem," the UNDO party declared in a resolution made public in Lwow on January 4, 1939, and one of the Ukrainian representatives in the Diet warned the Poles that the Ukrainians were "a nation with great dynamic force" with which it was impossible to experiment.³¹

This tense situation offered Germany a chance to step up its "war of nerves" against Poland. Both European and American newspapers were full of reports about German agents and Ukrainian *émigrés* from Poland and the Soviet Union arriving in the Carpatho-Ukraine. Dr. Hoffmann, the Secretary of the German Legation in Prague, called unexpectedly on Premier Voloshyn, and his visit was followed by rumours that a mission of the *Wehrmacht* was to be sent to Chust, the new capital of the province after the loss of Ungvár. "German-inspired campaign to 'liberate' Ukrainians opens with threats of war," *The New York Times* reported from Prague on December 10. "Storm signals affecting the Ukraine are steadily increasing." French Am-

²⁹"World Opinion," Feb. 1939, p. 249.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹H. Ripka, *Munich: Before and After*, London, 1939, p. 328.

bassador Coulondre telegraphed five days later from Berlin that the "whole staff" of the Nazi party and the Intelligence Service of the German Army were working on the Ukrainian problem.³² Czech newspapers began to elaborate on the "deadly serious problem of the creation of a great Ukraine" and were indiscreet enough to mention that "Ukrainian couriers" to Poland and the Soviet Union were being dispatched from Prague. These reports brought a sharp protest of M. Aleksandrovsky, Soviet Minister to Czechoslovakia, who declared that his government would regard any campaign in favour of a "Greater Ukraine" as a hostile action. For some reason Moscow seemed to be especially perturbed by the activities of Grand Duke Vladimir, pretender to the Russian imperial crown, in spite of his repeated statements that he was "not interested" in any offer of a throne in the Ukraine. On December 18, the Polish Legation in Prague followed the Soviet lead by demanding that the Czechoslovak government take immediate energetic steps to stop the incessant flow of anti-Polish propaganda spread by Ukrainian *émigrés* and encouraged by some Czech officials. The Poles declared they would not tolerate "Ukrainian plotting" in Czechoslovakia which threatened to jeopardize good-neighbour relations between Prague and Warsaw. Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky assured the Poles that their charges would be fully investigated and showed a genuine concern over the situation which appeared to be beyond his control. As an American journalist put it, "Czechoslovakia found herself between the devil of Germany and the two deep seas of Poland and Hungary."³³ The clamour about the coming "liberation of the Ukraine" was ignored by the Prague government, but it apparently could do little to assert its authority in its own house. The Czechs did their best to deny wildly exaggerated reports about Carpatho-Ukraine being "overrun with German agents," but they could not possibly prevent German correspondents and business men from displaying a legitimate interest in the province.

The anti-Polish propaganda emanating from both Germany and Czechoslovakia did not in the least weaken Warsaw's determination to resist all forms of pressure. The conversations which Ambassador Moltke had with the Polish officials as well as the frequent representations made by Ambassador Lipski to the Wilhelmstrasse only served to convince the Nazi leaders that, as a news report put it, "the

³²France, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *The French Yellow Book: Diplomatic Documents, 1938-1939*, New York, 1940, p. 43.

³³*New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1938, IV, p. 5.

Germans would never reach the Ukraine except over the dead body of the last Pole.”³⁴ Thus, for example, Beck told Moltke quite frankly that Polish public opinion was blaming Germany for supporting a centre of subversive activities in the Carpatho-Ukraine. When asked whether Poland would resort to arms to achieve a settlement of the Carpatho-Ukrainian question, Beck replied evasively, but without giving a direct denial. Moltke himself was in doubt as to the real plans of his government with regard to Poland and urged Berlin to inform him “how matters really stood.”³⁵ He also advised his superiors to show more restraint and moderation in dealing with the Ukrainian issue and to stop or limit radio broadcasts in the Ukrainian language from Vienna, Graz, and Leipzig, which fomented anti-Polish sentiments among the Ukrainians and thus “pricked the vital nerve of the Polish State at its most sensitive spot.”³⁶

It is not entirely clear whether Moltke’s report produced a change of mind in Berlin; at any rate, Ribbentrop seems to have come to the conclusion that the Poles might still be persuaded to agree to a peaceful settlement of their differences with the Reich. From now on, the principle of self-determination was no longer mentioned with regard to Ukrainian ethnic territories, the assurances that Germany had really no plans for a conquest of the Ukraine began to multiply, and official spokesmen of the Auswärtiges Amt disclaimed any concern over the ultimate fate of the Carpatho-Ukraine. This “new look” was especially apparent during the conversations between Hitler and Beck on January 5, when the Führer mentioned the rumours spread by the press in connection with the alleged Ukrainian plans of the Reich, and then declared emphatically that Poland “did not have the slightest thing to fear from Germany in this respect” since “Germany had no interests beyond the Carpathians and it was a matter of indifference to her what the countries interested in those areas did there.”³⁷ Ribbentrop was even more outspoken in his attempt to drive a bargain with the Poles and went so far as to promise Beck that Germany would regard the Ukrainian question as “covered by a special Polish prerogative” and would “support Poland in every way in dealing with this question” if a “general and genuine” settlement of all outstanding problems between Warsaw and Berlin was reached.³⁸ While Hitler took a “negative attitude” towards the creation of an

³⁴*New York Times*, March 13, 1939, p. 16.

³⁵Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, V, p. 108.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 160.

independent Ukraine, he was, in Ribbentrop's words, ready to co-operate with the Poles in finding an acceptable "solution" of the Ukrainian question.

This was obviously an attempt to revive the old abortive project of an anti-Soviet crusade with the participation of Poland, and the Germans tried again to make the offer more attractive by tempting the Poles with a promise of territorial gains in the Ukraine. While Beck did not reject the German proposals, his evasive reply did not satisfy the Nazi leaders, who insisted that Poland take a more pronounced anti-Russian attitude and abandon her "policy of balance." This was, of course, out of the question, and Ribbentrop's last visit to Warsaw on January 26, 1939, finally convinced the Germans that they might as well give up all hopes for enlisting Poland's support in their eastern adventure. According to a memorandum drafted by Ribbentrop on February 1, Beck affirmed Poland's aspirations "directed toward the Soviet Ukraine and a connection with the Black Sea,"³⁹ but at the same time pointed out that a German-Polish alliance directed against Russia would be a risky step jeopardizing the whole future of Poland.

Having failed to reach an agreement with Poland, the Germans were forced to modify their plans, and a *détente* between Berlin and Moscow seemed to be one of the most promising possibilities. Soviet official attitude toward pan-Ukrainian propaganda had been so far quite restrained, and it was only on December 27, 1938, that *Journal de Moscou*, a newspaper appearing in French and closely connected with the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, published an article minimizing the danger of a German attack against the Ukraine and stating that the Soviet Union remained "absolutely indifferent to the noise made outside its frontiers over the so-called Ukrainian question."⁴⁰ This semi-official utterance of the Soviet government prompted some of the Western diplomats in Moscow to reappraise the situation and to assume a rather skeptical attitude with regard to Hitler's alleged Ukrainian plans. "The so-called Ukrainian question . . . is being exaggerated," a counsellor of the British Embassy reported on December 28. "There seem to be so many difficulties in the way of Germany achieving the objective with which she is credited . . . that I cannot believe that any action can be contemplated."⁴¹

It is true, the speculations that the Nazis were preparing an attack

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁰Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, V, p. 542.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 579.

against the Soviet Union still continued to appear in the international press, and the *Manchester Guardian* informed its readers on January 24 that the Germans were busy building a radio station in Chust, that a certain Dr. Enrico Insabato was to become Italian consul there, and that emissaries and special observers of several other powers, including a Japanese agent, were active in the Carpatho-Ukraine. However, the big propaganda drive for the creation of a "Greater Ukraine" was definitely losing its original momentum. Premier Voloshyn, when asked by a French journalist about the prospects of establishing an independent Ukrainian State, declared that the Carpatho-Ukraine was too small to play an active part in any such project and that, being a member of the Czechoslovak Federation, it had to conform to the foreign policy of Prague. Nevertheless the outside world did not entirely lose its interest in what was going on in Chust, and at the beginning of January George F. Kennan, the first secretary of the American Legation in Prague, made a tour of inspection of the Carpatho-Ukraine. On January 17, a Polish consulate was established in the Carpatho-Ukrainian capital, but it was not until March 9 that Dr. Hamilkar Hoffmann was sent to Chust as Germany's consular representative. Eastern Galicia also attracted the attention of foreign diplomats. "During the past few weeks," Anne McCormick reported to the *New York Times* from Lwow on March 12, "there have arrived here the consuls from Germany, Italy and Japan, countries never before represented in this hitherto unimportant provincial city. . . . But when they appeared on the scene they found Great Britain also has decided to be represented in Lwow."⁴² However, even in Galicia, that hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism, the feverish excitement was dying down and the unbearable tension that had gripped both the Ukrainian and the Polish population only a few months before began to show some signs of relaxation. When an Opposition Member of Parliament asked in the British House of Commons what action the government proposed to take to "assist in preserving peace in Eastern Europe, in view of the agitation taking place in connection with the Ukraine," he was informed by a spokesman of the Foreign Office that no "abnormal development" in either the Polish or the Soviet Ukraine indicated that peace was threatened there.⁴³ The Poles also began to play down the significance of the Carpatho-Ukraine and Beck, that most ardent champion of the common Polish-Hungarian frontier, stated in an interview that the

⁴²*New York Times*, March 13, 1939, p. 16.

⁴³*The Times*, Feb. 2, 1939, p. 7.

"Ruthenian question" was not of great importance to Poland. "I do not consider this small segment of mountainous, undeveloped country as of great strategic value to any one," he declared. "In relation to the Ukraine it is neither an entrance nor a wall. In fact I do not even regard it as related to the larger Ukrainian question, with which it has been associated."⁴⁴

When making these remarks, Beck probably had some advance information that the status of the Carpatho-Ukraine would soon be settled in accordance with Poland's wishes; he also had the assurances of Grigore Gafencu, new Rumanian Foreign Minister, that his country would not oppose Polish-Hungarian plans "if and when circumstances permitted a change" in the Czechoslovak frontiers.⁴⁵ Things were certainly beginning to move faster as the fateful Ides of March approached. At the very time when Beck was dismissing the whole Ukrainian question with a disdainful gesture, the attention of the world was focused on Moscow, where Joseph Stalin was addressing the 18th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party. While the Soviet dictator also displayed a nonchalant attitude toward the Carpatho-Ukrainian problem, it was striking that he devoted so much space in his speech to this, as he put it, "absurd and foolish" issue. His remarks were meant to be witty, but their humour was rather strained. Stalin suggested that Britain and France used Czechoslovakia as a bait to lure Germany in the direction of the Ukraine, and accused them of trying to "poison the atmosphere" and to provoke a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union "without any visible grounds." While he ridiculed "madmen" who dreamt of "annexing the elephant, that is, the Soviet Ukraine, to the gnat, namely, the so-called Carpatho-Ukraine," he clearly indicated that he would be willing to make a deal with "normal" people in Germany who were ready to discuss matters in a reasonable way.⁴⁶

Hitler's reply to these suggestions was prompt and convincing, although the moves he was about to make had been certainly planned beforehand, possibly as early as the beginning of January. On March 13, Herr Erdmannsdorff, German Minister to Budapest, called on Regent Horthy and Prime Minister T    ki and informed them that Germany agreed to a Hungarian occupation of the Carpatho-Ukraine, provided that the Hungarian Army acted at once and thus co-ordinated its operations with those to be undertaken by the German troops in

⁴⁴*New York Times*, March 12, 1939, p. 35.

⁴⁵*New York Times*, March 7, 1939, p. 13.

⁴⁶*Documents on International Affairs, 1939-1946*, Oxford, 1951, I, p. 367.

Bohemia and Moravia. Horthy expressed his "heartfelt thanks" in a personal letter to the Führer and proceeded to issue all the necessary orders. On March 14, Budapest sent an ultimatum to Prague demanding an immediate withdrawal of the Czech Army from the Carpatho-Ukrainian territory. On the same day the government of the Carpatho-Ukraine issued a declaration of independence, which was ratified on March 15 by the Provincial Diet. The embassies and legations of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Rumania in Prague were notified of this development, and the Government of the Reich was asked to protect the new state and to intervene in Budapest to stop the advance of the Hungarian troops which had already crossed the border. In reply Berlin ordered its representative at Chust to inform the Carpatho-Ukrainian government orally that the German government advised it to offer no resistance to the Hungarians, and that the Reich was "not in a position to assume the protectorate."⁴⁷ Further appeals made by Voloshyn to Berlin, Rome, and Warsaw remained unanswered, Ukrainian irregulars were overwhelmed after a brief, though valiant, resistance, and the Polish-Hungarian common frontier was re-established for what turned out to be a period of only six months.

The question which naturally arises is what reasons could have induced Hitler to change his attitude so suddenly and to throw the Carpatho-Ukraine to the wolves. Some observers have pointed out that the occupation of Bohemia, Moravia and, partly, also Slovakia, gave Germany a favourable strategic position which enabled her to control the southern approaches to Poland more effectively than before, and that the Nazis appeased the Hungarians and secured their loyalty and gratitude without really sacrificing any important advantage. The Führer himself discussed the whole matter in his Reichstag address of April 28, 1939, in which he declared that "it could not be Germany's task to oppose the development or actually to fight for the maintenance of a state of affairs for which we could never have made ourselves responsible," and that therefore he "had no intention of any longer incurring the reprobation of opposing the common wishes of Poland and Hungary as regards their frontiers simply in order to keep an open road of approach for Germany to Rumania."⁴⁸ Hitler's words were certainly well chosen to disguise the real significance of the fall of the Carpatho-Ukraine, which formed a "graceful prelude to the conversations which were already being undertaken between the

⁴⁷Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, IV, p. 276.

⁴⁸A. Hitler, *My New Order*, New York, 1941, pp. 642-3.

representatives of the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.”⁴⁹ The Ukrainian issue became irrelevant to Hitler “from the moment he decided to liquidate Poland—if need be, with the co-operation of Soviet Russia,”⁵⁰ and the sacrifice of the Carpatho-Ukraine and of the greater Ukrainian project “laid open the way to the German-Russian *rapprochement* which was already in the air.”⁵¹ While the Hungarian invasion was officially criticized by Moscow as a “gross violation” of the “elementary rights” of the population of the Carpatho-Ukraine, the very fact that Budapest’s action was condoned and even encouraged by Berlin demonstrated to the Soviets in a most convincing way Germany’s lack of interest in any Ukrainian adventure.

It must be observed in this connection that the Germans never entertained seriously the idea of a partnership with Ukrainian nationalists or of concluding an “alliance” with the leaders of the Ukrainian liberation movement. They were willing to use the Ukrainian pawn in their chess game, but at the same time they were always ready to exchange or sacrifice it at any suitable moment. A German or German-Polish colony in the Ukraine fitted well into their plans, but they were not interested in acting as sponsors of an independent Ukrainian State. As Hitler himself put it bluntly in *Mein Kampf*, “as a Nationalist, estimating humanity by the principle of race, I cannot admit it is right to chain the fortunes of one’s nation to the so-called ‘oppressed nationalities,’ since I know how worthless they are racially.”⁵²

This attitude on the part of the Germans made any co-operation with them extremely difficult. Of course, it cannot be denied that Germany’s initial support of the principle of self-determination appealed to many Ukrainians, but this must be regarded as a natural phenomenon, since an oppressed national minority has not much choice in selecting its allies and, after all, Germany was “the only power which had either the will or the means”⁵³ to change the existing order of things. Any pro-German sympathies among the Ukrainians could have been easily dispelled by a “clear and unequivocal recognition by the democratic powers of their full right to self-determination in all their ethnographic territories”⁵⁴—a thing which

⁴⁹W. E. D. Allen, *The Ukraine: A History*, Cambridge, 1940, p. 386.

⁵⁰J. A. Lukacs, *The Great Powers & Eastern Europe*, New York, 1953, p. 199.

⁵¹M. Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929–1941*, London, 1947–9, II, p. 217.

⁵²A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Munich, 1935, p. 747.

⁵³J. A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism, 1939–1945*, New York, 1955, p. 42.

⁵⁴*New York Times*, December 25, 1938, p. 10 (a resolution adopted by the Executive Council of the United Ukrainian Organizations of the U.S.).

the Western democracies, as staunch supporters of the *status quo* in Europe, could obviously not do.

While some of the Ukrainian leaders were apparently prepared to go farther than the others in co-operating with the Germans, most of them refused to conform to the ideological tenets of National Socialism. The Carpatho-Ukrainian government obviously irritated the Nazis by its reluctance to adopt anti-Semitic legislation in that province,⁵⁵ and many prominent Ukrainians in Galicia openly urged their compatriots not to identify themselves with German schemes which would eventually transform their country into a "German Ethiopia."⁵⁶ It is no wonder, therefore, that the Nazis were, in the words of Beloff, "uncertain of their ability to direct Ukrainian nationalism precisely along the lines which suited them best, and that they had decided upon more direct methods of obtaining their expansionist aims."⁵⁷

Thus, having enjoyed a brief but spectacular prominence in world affairs, the Ukrainian problem as an international issue was temporarily shelved in March 1939, but its disappearance from the limelight of history was hardly an "important contribution to peace," as Ciano hopefully declared in his congratulatory telegram to Count Csáky. Rejoicing in Budapest was sincere, but the celebrations in Warsaw were tinged with bitterness and frustration, and Beck's triumph was marred by a foreboding of the coming disaster. For once he was right, for the fall of the Carpatho-Ukraine eventually proved to be merely the first step towards the fourth partition of Poland.

⁵⁵*New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1939, p. 16, and Jan. 17, 1939, p. 8.

⁵⁶*New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1939, IV, p. 4.

⁵⁷Beloff, *Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, II, p. 216.