

of life, Hungary constantly stated that she insisted on her rights but did not wish to achieve these by aggressive means. The moment had passed.¹⁹ The Hungarian offer nevertheless impressed Hitler sufficiently to move him to agree to mediate, with Italy, on the Hungarian–Czechoslovak dispute; after three weeks of intensive diplomatic activity in Rome, Prague, Budapest and Berlin, Ribbentrop and Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, meeting in the Belvedere, Vienna, announced on 2 November 1938 what became known as the First Vienna Award. The Czechoslovak government had been bullied into agreeing to the transfer to Hungary of 11,927 sq. km of Slovakian territory, with a population of between 860,000 and a million people of whom between 57 per cent (the Czech figure) and 86 per cent (the Hungarian figure) were Magyar. Hungary regained the towns of Kassa (Košice), Ungvár and Munkács; Horthy, mounted on his white horse, led a triumphal procession of the entire Hungarian Parliament into Kassa. National jubilation was tempered, however, by intense disappointment that the Czechoslovaks had been allowed to retain Bratislava (Pozsony, the Hungarian Parliament's ancient seat) and Nyitra. Crucially, that part of Ruthenia (eastern Slovakia) that would have given Hungary a common frontier with Poland, remained in Czechoslovak hands; it at once became Hungary's next target for revision.

Ruthenia had only a small Magyar population – minuscule after the transfer of Ungvár and Munkács to Hungary; before the transfer, even Hungarian demographers could not produce a figure higher than 10 per cent. The irresistible attraction to Hungary of this eastern appendage to Czechoslovakia lay in its frontier with Poland: acquisition of this frontier through the absorption of Ruthenia would open up the possibility of a new geopolitical axis, running from Warsaw through Budapest and Belgrade to Rome, which would split the Little Entente and balance, without conflicting with, the north–south axis of Berlin–Vienna–Rome. In November 1938, therefore, Hungary prepared and began to canvass support for the annexation of Ruthenia by force. The project immediately encountered major obstacles, including strong German opposition: Hitler, already contemplating the eventual subjugation of Poland, wished to use Ruthenia, with its large Ukrainian population, as a base from which to promote the cause of Ukrainian independence from Soviet Russia. Poland, for her part, rejected a Hungarian proposal for a joint invasion of Ruthenia, offering only participation by irregulars; and Rome obediently joined Berlin in warning Budapest that action against Ruthenia would put the First Vienna Award in jeopardy. Hungary backed down and demobilised but did not give up. Imrédy now concentrated on impressing Hitler with Hungary's good behaviour: the Swabian minority was given permission to form its own political party, the pro-Nazi *Volksbund*, and Kálmán Kánya, *bête noire* of the Germans, was eased out of the Foreign Ministry to make way for the more emollient and pro-German Count István Csáky. When the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, visited Budapest in December, Csáky informed him, for German as much as for Italian ears, that Hungary would accept an invitation to accede to the Anti-Comintern Pact and would subsequently quit the League of Nations. Both undertakings were fulfilled in 1939, in February and April