On 14 April 1849, the Hungarian Diet, having left the besieged Pest and now sitting in Debrecen instead, proclaimed the independence of Hungary. The Committee of National Defense was dissolved, and Kossuth was elected Governor of Hungary. Like the Romanians and the Poles, the Hungarians, too, entertained the illusion that help would eventually come from the great powers. In the meantime, in Constantinople and Pest, the historian and forty-eighth Nicolae Bălcescu had been pursuing his relentless, but ultimately frustrating, attempts at reaching an understanding between Romanians and Hungarians. He found General Bem, whom he met in Transylvania in May 1849, very open to the idea of coordinated military action by Hungarians, Poles and Romanians against Russia. In a letter to Kossuth, László Teleki, a liberal member of the Transylvanian Diet, voiced his fears that the forces of nationalism had become so powerful that not only Austria as an empire, but also the historic Hungary of Saint Stephen, were doomed. “The peoples are no longer satisfied only with liberty, equality and brotherhood. They want to live their own national lives”, Teleki wrote. On 18–19 May, he co-hosted with Prince Adam Czartoryski a meeting of East-Central European émigrés at the Prince’s Parisian residence at the Hotel Lambert. In attendance were Ferenc Pulszky, a member of Kossuth’s cabinet, Szarvadi Frigyes, the secretary of the Hungarian legation in Paris, Frantisek L. Rieger, a Czech deputy in Austria’s last general diet, as well as South-Slav and Romanian observers. At a time when the Austrian Empire’s implosion seemed imminent, its likely successor, in the eyes of the participants, was a Danubian Confederation comprising a Hungary which would renounce its hegemonic self-assumed role, alongside Moldo-Wallachia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia, a liberated Poland, and possibly Bohemia and Moravia. Hungary’s territorial integrity was to be maintained, but its constituent ethnic communities would gain autonomy while maintaining confederative links with the Hungarian kingdom with respect mainly to a common navy, infrastructure and trade. The precise frontiers remained

to be discussed. In the new set-up, the Slovaks and Germans, who did not occupy a compact territory, would have had their own locally governed communes or administrative zones. Both Kossuth and the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Kázmér (Casimir) Batthiány, although in principle declaring themselves ready to make concessions to the nationalities, rejected the Hotel Lambert project, which would have led to the fragmentation of historic Hungary. In spite of this, and given that the alternative project of an Austrian-led confederation had failed to materialize, the Romanian émigrés in Paris decided to remain on the side of the Hungarians. Ion Ghica notably urged the leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians to cease military operations against the Magyars, offering for their consideration the prospect of a future, democratic Hungarian Diet in which the Slav and Romanian deputies would outnumber the Hungarians. Both Ion Ghica and Nicolae Bălcescu emerged from the tribulations of the early months of 1849 – which took place against the backdrop of a continuing Romanian insurgency in Transylvania – as the strongest proponents of an alliance with Hungary against Austria and Russia. They were in collusion with Transylvanian leaders such as Simion Bărnuțiu, who still supported an alliance with the Austrians. There was some progress: in a meeting with Bălcescu on 29 May, Kossuth officially authorized the creation of a Romanian legion to be led by Generals Magheru and Tell, a plan which had General Bem’s support. The Hungarian leader declared himself ready to recognize the political, linguistic and confessional autonomy of the nationalities, maintaining the Magyar language only for diplomacy within an undivided historic Hungary. Bălcescu was enthusiastic: Kossuth was an “enlightened man, a very special man, un homme de bien”, he wrote.

However, more often than not, the blueprints for future ethnic and political re-configurations in the area hung on vague promises made viva voce by exiled and harassed politicians and negotiators, under the menace of Austrian, Russian or Turkish arms, and as such they remained largely theoretical. Messages from both sides were mixed. At one time, the Hungarian Prime Minister Lajos Batthyáni even

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153 Ibid., 117.
154 Nicolae Bălcescu, Opere, ed. G. Zane and E. Zane, 4 vols. (Bucharest, 1974–1990), 4: 176. Similar arrangements were being negotiated by the South Slavs, notably by the Serbian leader Ilija Garašanin, in talks with General Mór Perczel and Count Gyula Andrássy, the Hungarian envoy in Constantinople.