In contrast to the dynastic orientation of diplomacy in early modern Europe, treaties during the second half of the nineteenth century began to reflect the self-interest of nations as defined by their governments. This pursuit of self-interest transcended concern over certain tangible sources of power, such as military preparedness and economic strength. Nations were increasingly perceived as giant-sized personalities capable of projecting human emotions, and the growing tendency to anthropomorphize emphasized the importance of the drive to dominate weaker nations or minorities which, in turn, sought protection.

The complicated responses of politically active Magyars to the 1879 Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary stemmed from Hungary's anomalous situation. During the period of Austro-Hungarian Dualism, Hungary maintained Magyar supremacy over the ethnic minorities within its borders and asserted its strength and influence within the monarchy, but it simultaneously sought external guarantees for preserving that very domination, strength, and influence. This tension between the drive to dominate and the search for protection produced conflicting Magyar attitudes toward the Dual Alliance. While some accepted dependence on Germany as the natural price that the Magyars had to pay for perpetuating their small nation's prominence, the apparent incongruity between that prominence and dependence bred resentment in others, prompting a subsequent search for other solutions. These conflicting attitudes, sometimes overlapping and fluctuating in the same persons, determined the Magyars' response to the Dual Alliance.

Although Hungarian government policy and public opinion did not change a single comma in the text of the treaty, they did have an impact upon its potential effectiveness and long-range prospects. Consequently, tracing the most essential features of the Magyar response may test in retrospect the degree of solidity that the Dual Alliance possessed at its easternmost flank.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Hungary—subordinate to Austria—had lacked an independent foreign policy. But a rapidly developing Hungarian national consciousness did produce concerns that grew into a definite set of axioms, potentially significant in influencing the direction of the empire's future foreign policy.

The Magyars constituted slightly less than half of Hungary's total population during the middle of the nineteenth century, and they were apprehensive
about maintaining their social, political, and economic leadership against the
threat that they perceived from non-Magyars. Among the latter, the Slavs were
singled out, not only because they were the largest group, albeit divided among
Croats, Serbs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians, but also because it was widely believed
that Russia, the country most feared by the Central European non-Slavs, was
insidiously fomenting a “Pan-Slav conspiracy” in order to overrun them.

The Magyars were also aware of a German threat, derived from long-stand-
ing Austrian domination, a dynastic scheme but German in its external manifes-
tations. “We Magyars have no relatives in Europe,” Móricz Szentkirályi, a liber-
al deputy to the National Diet of 1843-44, exclaimed, “and we are squeezed be-
tween the huge numbers of Germans and Slavs.”¹ However, these two giant
groups did not carry equal weight in the Magyar calculus of apprehensions.
After all, Magyar nationalism was rather successfully confronting a defensive
and vacillating Austrian administration in both local political and cultural
matters by the 1840s. In addition, the politically conscious Magyar public uni-
versally shared the conviction of another liberal nobleman, Baron Miklós Wesse-
lényi, who maintained that Magyars and Germans were bound together by
their joint fear of Slavs. Wesselényi hyperbolically claimed that Hungary could
become the bastion defending Germany and the entire European continent
against Russian power.² Finally, Magyar liberals were well aware of liberal
stirrings in the various German states, and the synchrony of the 1848 revolu-
tion in Hungary with the convocation of the Frankfurt Assembly reinforced
this feeling of solidarity. “Against absolutism and for liberty,” the liberal pol-
itician István Goróve asserted in the summer of 1848, “Magyars and Germans
will carry together the torch of European civilization in the East.”³

After the defeat of the Hungarian “War of Liberation” against the combined
forces of Austria and Russia in 1849 and the ensuing period of centralistic
absolutism, political controls were relaxed during the early 1860s, and the
Hungarian liberal old guard was allowed to come forward and present its pro-
gram. Mindful of the 1849 debacle and Hungary’s vulnerability, nearly all
Magyars took the necessity of continued association with Austria for granted.
This aspect of great power protection for the renewal of Hungarian statehood
was a key element and a major incentive in Magyar efforts to rebuild the
bridges between Pest and Vienna. When in February, 1866, Ferenc Deák, the
acknowledged leader of the Hungarian political revival, omitted mentioning
Austria’s great power status in a proposed address to the Throne, all his trusted

¹. Ferenc Kovács, ed., Az 1843-44-ik évi Magyar Országyügyés: Alsó Tábla Kerületi
Üléseinek Naplója (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1894), III, 75.
². Báró Miklós Wesselényi, Szózat. A Magyar és Szláv Nemzetiség Ügyében (Leipzig: