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Report : Entry of the Southeastern European Countries into the Three-Power Pact.

To the surprise of the German Foreign Office, shortly after the conclusion of the Three-Power Pact the Hungarian government approached the German government for permission to enter the Three-Power Pact. After close inspection of the matter, the answer given to the Hungarian Ambassador was that only a union of the great power had been contemplated originally, but Germany had no objections to the entry of Hungary into the pact, if Italy and Japan also agreed to it. The officials in Berlin hoped that this might make possible the bringing of still other countries into the camp of the Tripartite Powers as formal allies, forming a coalition of European and Far Eastern nations. Therefore, Hungary was ceremoniously admitted to the Three-Power Pact in Vienna on 20 November 1940. Three days later Rumania joined at Vienna in the same manner.

The main reason behind Hungary's desire to join in the pact was doubtless its anxiety regarding Russia, which one sensed very strongly in Budapest, after the Russian seizure of eastern Poland and eastern Galicia. The consequent creation of a common Russo-Hungarian border was felt to be a serious source of danger by the Hungarian government which feared further Russian expansion into Carpatho-Ukraine. Against such a danger in 1940, Hungary had no contractual protection of the sort represented by the German guarantee to Rumania. This weak point in their position was to be strengthened by entry into the Three-Power Pact. The probable motivation behind the subsequent hasty entry of Rumania into the Three-Power Pact was her unwillingness to defer to her hated Hungarian neighbor in currying the good-will of the axis powers.

By invoking the Three-Power Pact in December 1941, Germany and Italy compelled Hungary and Rumania to declare war on England and the United States. There then appeared clearly the discrepancy between the motives which had led Hungary to enter the pact and the motives which had led Berlin to accede to Hungarian wishes. A state of war with England and the United States was the last thing desired by Hungary. She had only Russia in mind, whereas Ribbentrop conceived the Three-Power Pact as primarily a coalition against the United States. Even the Rumanians came to regard their war with England and the United States as a grave danger to their political stability.

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- Consequently they took steps just as the Hungarians did later, to convince the United States and England through intermediaries that as far as they were concerned the war existed only on paper.

The admission of Hungary and Rumania into the Three-Power Pact was followed shortly by that of Slovakia and a few months later in March 1941, by Bulgaria, and finally of Yugoslavia. The signature of Yugoslavia was of course the most difficult to obtain, for Yugoslavia did not feel threatened either by Russia or by the United States, and consequently had no reason for relinquishing her neutral position. Nevertheless, Hitler was determined to bring Yugoslavia into the camp of the Tripartite Powers in order to assure that Mussolini's war against Greece would be confined to the southern part of the Balkan peninsula, and not be complicated by the entry of Yugoslavia into the war on the side of Greece. A larger conflict could greatly endanger the success of the attack which Hitler planned against Russia from the southern flank. Hitler and Ribbentrop took great pains therefore, to convince Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Cvetkovich, and Foreign Minister Cincar Markovich that Yugoslavia would only gain from her entry into the Three-Power Pact. They finally agreed to grant the Yugoslav government two special additional conditions, one of which released Yugoslavia from practically every obligation to take part in acts of war, while the other promised Yugoslavia an eventual outlet to the Aegean Sea by the prospective acquisition of Salonika. Bulgaria had received a similar promise of an outlet to the Aegean between the mouths of the Struma and the Maritza. In spite of these concessions, the negotiations dragged on with the cabinet at Belgrad, where there was strong opposition to joining the pact. The Yugoslav government asked permission to publish the terms of the special conditions, so as to quiet the protests of the opposition. Hitler and Ribbentrop refused, believing that secrecy was essential, lest every other party to the pact demand a similar release from obligation to take part in a German war. Then came the dramatic denouement. On 25 March, the Yugoslav government signed the agreement in Vienna; on 27 March, that government in Belgrad fell under the coup d'etat of General Simovich, Prince Regent Paul was arrested, and Crown Prince Peter was proclaimed King. The sudden turn of events forced Hitler's hand. His campaign in the Balkans was launched only ten days later.

The succession of the southeastern European countries which joined the pact was completed by the entry of newly-founded Croatia at Venice at the end of May or the beginning of June 1941. The site of the ceremony emphasized the particularly close connection which this country was to have with Italy.

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