

## **Le passé qui ne passe pas. The treaty of Trianon and its repercussions**

<https://erdelyikronika.net/2020/06/03/the-treaty-of-trianon-and-its-repercussions/>

*Author: Ignác Romsics, Historian, Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Professor of Modern Hungarian History at the Eszterházy Károly University, Eger*

Every society experiences traumatic events in its history. In modern Hungarian history the Trianon peace treaty of 1920 represents such a case, one that has continued to occupy Hungarian society from the time of its signature up until the present. Sociological surveys conducted in the 1980s showed that the majority of the Hungarians intellectuals (64% in 1983 and 84% in 1989) considered the partition of historic Hungary among Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia at the end of the Great War a wrong and unjust decision. 35% (1983), or 16% (1989) thought that it was a fundamentally sound decision to sanction the dissolution of the historical kingdom, but that it was poorly carried out. Only one percent of the respondents approved the ruling without any reservation. To the question of what could happen in the future regarding the “Trianon” borders of Hungary determined in 1920, 63% stated that they are final and irrevocable. But 34% did not exclude the possibility of revision in favor of Hungary.<sup>[1]</sup> The results of a more recent research (2001-2006) representative of the entire population show a similar picture. 34% of the respondents believed that the borders determined in 1920 should be considered final. But 18% thought that they can never be accepted. The others hoped that mutually acceptable solutions can be reached by the spiritualization of the frontiers and other peaceful techniques within the European Union.<sup>[2]</sup> These outcomes clearly indicate that Hungarian society has not come to terms with the dismantling of Greater Hungary and that the complex problem embodied in the Trianon settlement is still with us. In this article I deal with three basic aspects of this phenomenon. First, I try to identify the causes that led to the Treaty of Trianon. Then I present the territorial stipulations and economic consequences of the peace treaty itself. And finally, I describe its perception in three time periods: the interwar period, the Soviet era and the epoch of the new Republic of Hungary established in 1989-1990.

## **The road to Trianon: The nationality question**

As a consequence of the largescale population resettlements after the eviction of Ottoman Turks at the end of the 17th century, Hungary, then a part of the Habsburg Empire, became a multiethnic state. Reasonable estimates show that of the 8 million inhabitants of the Hungarian Kingdom, Croatia and Slavonia around 1800, only 42 percent spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue. In the then separate Transylvanian Principality, ethnic Hungarians had an even smaller share of the population. They accounted for 36 percent, while Romanians possessed a majority of 53 percent, and German Saxons accounted for 9 percent. Counting all the provinces of historic Hungary, Magyars made up 39 percent of the population, and even if we disregard Croatia and the marches, that figure only rises to 48 percent.<sup>[3]</sup> Travelers and educated men were fully aware of the linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity of Hungarian society. Márton Schwartner, the first notable representative of political arithmetics in Hungary, wrote in 1798 that *“In keinem Lande der Welt, sind vielleicht mehrere Sprachen – und eben deswegen auch so viele Nationen – einheimisch, als in Ungern”*.<sup>[4]</sup>

The daring, albeit logical conclusion from the above observation could have been the federalization of the Hungarian state. This idea first appeared in Ignác Martinovics’s reform plans of 1793-1794. “As by the word Hungarian we mean all peoples of varied nationality inhabiting the provinces that are part of Hungary – he wrote -- every nationality must form a separate province, possess a separate political constitution, and ally with each other within the state. Hungary must therefore be changed into a federal republic, in which every nationality lives according to its customs, speaking its own language and freely practicing its religion.” The leader of the Hungarian Jacobins envisioned four federated units: Magyarland, Slovakia, a southern Slav Illyria and Walachia, to be formed of parts of Transylvania and the Banat. Each federal state would have held the right to choose its official language, only in the federal parliament and regarding affairs of concern to all provinces did he propose the mandatory use of Hungarian. <sup>[5]</sup>

The federalization of Hungary based on ethnicity, however, never gained currency. The far greater part of the intellectual and political elite underestimated the significance of linguistic and ethnic differences. It was widely held, that, as in France, seen as the model for the nation state, non-Magyars have to accept, and will in fact accept assimilation, and in a matter of mere decades will become Magyars, not only in their language, but also in their sentiments. This attitude was characteristic of Samuel Decsy, author of the first coherent and inclusive program of national renewal. “If we take pleasure in being called Magyars, and enjoy the fruits of Magyar freedom, let us take pleasure in learning the Magyar language, as well” -- he wrote in his famous book of 1790. One need but send “Magyar priests to every parish, Magyar schoolmasters to every German, Slovak and Russian school to unnoticeably Magyarize all inhabitants of our

homeland. In a year or two, or at most in three years, every German or Slovak youth can learn perfect Hungarian” -- he theorized.[\[6\]](#)

The events after the March revolution of 1848 quickly dispersed the hopes of the Hungarian elite. The efforts to establish an independent Hungarian nation state provoked not only the resistance of Vienna, but also urged the non-Magyars of Hungary to articulate their own national goals. Serbian, Romanian and partially Slovak leaders demanded the federalization of Hungary according to linguistic divides. Their initiatives, however, were categorically refused by the Magyar politicians, which led to widespread guerilla fighting in the South and in Transylvania, and some minor skirmishes in Northern Hungary. Meanwhile, the Croats had even more ambitious designs than territorial and political autonomy. In their national congress of 25 March 1848, they demanded from Magyar leaders everything that latter had demanded from Vienna: the unification of national territory, a national army, a government responsible to a Croat parliament, national bank, etc. Facing these demands the Hungarian revolutionaries rethought their concept on Hungarian state. This led, by the summer of 1849, to peace negotiations being opened up with Serb and Romanian leaders. As a result of these, the House of Representatives passed a resolution on 28 July, 1849 which promised free use of any language in religious, municipal and county life, as well as in education.

Only very few people were willing to go beyond these concessions. Count László Teleki, minister of the revolutionary government to Paris was one of them. He wrote on 14 May 1849 to Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolution and war of independence: “Let us show generosity in meting out rights to our nationalities. It is not only Austria that has died, but also Saint Stephen’s Hungary. [...] *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* do not suffice. Peoples desire to live national lives. We ought to construct a system which makes up for the lack of national unity by harmonizing and acknowledging both individual and national rights.”[\[7\]](#) In practice this would have meant the full autonomy of Croats, Serbs and Romanians, who -- much in the spirit of Ignác Martinovics -- would have been linked to the country of Magyars only within the framework of a federation. Slovaks and Germans were to receive a more limited form of territorial autonomy.

After the defeat suffered in the war of independence the dominant part of the country’s intellectual and political elite, oblivious of the lesson they should have learned in the war of independence, returned to the notion of a centralized nation state. This meant that they wished to preserve the Hungarian character of legislation, state and county-level administration. Consequently, a nationalities law was enacted after the Hungarian elite and Vienna agreed on the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 which included the reunification of the parts of historic Hungary as well as delegating the question of the nationalities to the sphere of Hungarian domestic affairs. This 1868 act of Parliament contained the stipulation according

to which “In accordance with the basic principles of the Constitution, all citizens of Hungary form one single political nation, the indivisible and unitary Hungarian nation, of which every citizen, whatever his ethnic affiliation, is a member with equal rights” and since “By virtue of the political unity of the nation – the law went –, the state language of Hungary being Hungarian, the sole language of debate and administration in the Hungarian Parliament shall continue henceforth to be Hungarian”.[\[8\]](#)

One cannot fail to emphasize, however, that the nationalities law of 1868 was not at all oppressive in character, but in fact possessed many liberal features. On the municipal level, as in administration as in the judiciary, in education and religious life it provided several privileges for non-Magyars. The most important of these was the right to use the mother tongue in these spheres. Still, the fiction of the indivisible political nation, which was a modernized version of the old *natio hungarica* and did not recognize the nationalities as nations except for Croats, proved unacceptable for ethnically conscious non-Magyars. They hoped to be recognized as co-nationals and desired the federalization or cantonization of Hungary in 1867 and after.

The concept of the unitary nation and state as embodied in the nationality law of 1868 was staunchly defended by the subsequent generations, and any idea about the federalization of the country was viewed as inadmissible. The cultural tolerance codified in the act, on the other hand, was observed to an ever lesser extent. Instead of support for non-Magyar schools, the government concentrated on expanding Magyar-language education, and realized a program of Magyarization through them. The narrowing of the autonomy of municipalities and the judiciary, the growing influence of the central administration together with the undemocratic character of the electoral system all possessed an aspect that could be seen as serving the cause of Magyarization. “Let us not talk of liberty and equality, it is the rule of the Magyar race that has to be created. The nation state and national society have to be subservient to this purpose” – declared Mihály Réz, one of the closest advisors of Prime Minister István Tisza in a quasimanifesto during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.[\[9\]](#) Those who carried on the liberal and tolerant legacy of the great predecessors were rare exceptions. One of these few, Lajos Mocsáry was called “the white raven” with good reason.

The policy of homogenization introduced after 1867 managed to produce some results. The network of non-Magyar schools was ruptured after 1880, and the share of Magyars – not counting Croatia – rose from 46 to 54 percent between 1880 and 1910. Given another thirtyfour years, the share of Magyars would have likely risen further. At the same time, to dream of 30 million Magyars and an ethnically homogenous Hungary, as Jenő Rákosi or Gusztáv Beksics and so many of their contemporaries did, must be considered instances of utopian thinking.

Besides the resistance of the national minorities, the Magyar assimilationist effort was also constrained by the irredentist politics of the new Serbian and Romanian states which consolidated their position by the last decades of the 19th century. Sensing the support of their co-nationals, the leaders of the Hungarian Serbs, Romanians, as well as Slovaks took an open stand against the concept of a nationally homogenous Hungary. They declared, at their joint congress in 1895, that “Hungary cannot have the character of a nation state, because the character of Hungary as a state is conferred unto it by the totality of the peoples which constitute the state. The nature of the Hungarian state does not authorize a people who do not even form a majority of the inhabitants to claim that it constitutes the state in itself. Only the sum of Hungary’s peoples has the right to equate themselves with the state.” In conclusion, these leaders asked for “complete liberty for the non-Magyar peoples of Hungary, in accordance with the linguistic boundaries, by granting the autonomous regions, be they counties or municipalities, the right to use their language in public administration and judiciary, ensuring the ethnic character of the given region.”[\[10\]](#)

Shortly before World War I, the strong man of Hungarian politics, then Prime Minister István Tisza attempted one last time to find a *modus vivendi* with the national minorities, first and foremost with the Romanians. His efforts, however, produced no results whatsoever. The leaders of Transylvania’s Romanians found his offer which included linguistic and administrative concessions as well as the revision of suffrage and the educational system far too limited. They held on to their demand of territorial and political autonomy. On the other hand, Hungarian nationalists considered Tisza’s action to have been “clandestine high treason.”

This antagonism did not recede during the years of World War I. In fact, it deepened as the war dragged on. When in autumn 1918, Oszkár Jászi, minister in charge of Hungary’s nationalities of the new revolutionary government, offered granting an extensive territorial and political autonomy to the minority leaders, those were already preparing for secession. They were doing so not only with the support and sanction of their co-nationals living in their nationstates, but also with that of the victorious great powers who considered the Dual Monarchy unable to fulfill anymore the role of contributing to the maintenance of a balance of power in the continent.

### **Towards Trianon: the attitude of the victors**

World War I was fought for territories. The Serbian government, whose conflict with Austria-Hungary had sparked the war, was well aware of what was at stake: either it would end up under some form of tutelage by its powerful neighbor or, by acquiring the Monarchy’s South Slav territories, it could realize its national objectives. Hence, already on 4 September 1914 the

Serbian government declared that victorious Entente must “create out of Serbia a powerful southern western Slavic state; all the Serbs, all the Croats and all the Slovenes would enter its composition”.[\[11\]](#)

Among the Monarchy’s neighbors, Italy and Romania also presented with extensive territorial demands. In addition to North Africa and the coast of Asia Minor, Italy asserted its right to incorporate southern provinces of Austria, partly inhabited by Italians. In the secret treaty signed in London on 26 Aprils 1915, Italy, turning against its former allies, promised to enter the war on the side of the Entente, and was given guarantees primarily regarding the lands along the Adriatic, as well as South Tirol; Valona (in Albania), Istria and the islands in the Kvarner Bay, Trieste and its surroundings, and northern Dalmatia to Cape Planka, i.e. Spalato (Split). These demands were justified on ethnic and linguistic grounds, but even more with reference to strategic necessity. The Allies rejected only the award of southern Dalmatia to Italy, for they intended to cede this stretch of the coast to Serbia.[\[12\]](#)

In August 1916, after protracted negotiations, Romania also sided with the Entente. In exchange, the small kingdom was promised all of Transylvania, Máramaros (Maramureş) in the north and the eastern fringes of Hungary known as the Partium, the Banat, as well as Bukovina (Bucovina) as far as the river Prut. Apart from Bessarabia, which Russia naturally refused to discuss, this would have met maximal Romanian aims, at the expense not only of Hungary, but of Russia in Bukovina and Serbia in the Banat. Trusting in the victory of the Entente and hoping for the acquisition of the abovementioned territories, the Romanian army launched an offensive into Transylvania on 17 August 1916.[\[13\]](#)

In addition to the irredentist nation-states neighboring Austria-Hungary, the nations without a kin state also outlined their postwar aspirations. The aim of the Poles, regardless of which side they were fighting on, was the reunification and independence of the country. Representatives of the Czechs in the Austrian Parliament (*Reichsrat*) declared in May 1917 that “The transformation of the Habsburg Monarchy into a federal state consisting of free and equal nation-states is necessary.” One of these units would have come about as a result “of the unification of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation”, including, of course, “the Slovak branch which forms a close historical unity with Czech lands”.[\[14\]](#) Other Czech politicians, among them Edvard Beneš and Tomáš G. Masaryk, however, advocated separatism since the beginning of the war. The entire Czech nation was yearning for independence -- Masaryk informed Robert Seton-Watson in Rotterdam, as early as October 1914. The “proper procedure would be”, he said, “to restore historical Bohemia-Moravia-Silesia, and to add to this the Slovak districts of Hungary (Slovensko)”. As the “*nec plus ultra* of Czech and Serbo-Croatian dreams” he raised the possibility of a geographical bridge between the two new states, the “Slav corridor” connecting Prague and Zagreb.[\[15\]](#)

Masaryk justified this radical reorganization of the Austro-Hungarian territories with references to the principle of national self-determination and British security concerns. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, he argued, the Habsburg empire had lost its *raison d'être*; moreover, since 1866 it has been a German vassal. It had not merely stopped to fulfill its traditional role in the European balance of power, but had in fact assumed a new one, diametrically opposed to its old function. Since the forming of the Triple Alliance, Austria-Hungary has ceased to act as an obstacle to the German *Drang nach Osten*. To the contrary, it has effectively become an agent of German expansionism. Dismantling the empire, creating two Slavic states on its northern and southern sides, and establishing a corridor between the two would constitute a barrier to German expansion in the direction of Constantinople and Baghdad, would prevent Germany from colonizing the Balkans and Asia Minor, and the Magyars from acting as the obedient vanguard for Berlin. [\[16\]](#)

At the beginning of the war the Entente powers were not committed to creating nation-states in East Central Europe. Russia was against any such transformation and most of the decision makers in France and Great Britain still believed that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had to be part of the balance of power system, in spite of its alliance with Germany and its manifest weakness. In the first two years the three great powers gave no support to Polish or Czech separatists and made concessions to the national principle only when and where such acknowledgement promised tangible military advantages by convincing revisionist states to join the war on their side. This was the case with Serbia, Italy and Romania.

This indifference to the principle of national self-determination began to dissipate from 1916 onwards, and gave way, by 1918, to a strong commitment to it. What had prompted the change? The initial impetus came from the fear engendered by the German plans for *Mitteuropa*, that is, the outline of a German-Austrian-Hungarian sphere of influence from the Rhine to the Dnieper and the Black Sea. This was viewed by Masaryk and other exiled Czech, South Slav and Polish politicians and their British and French sympathizers as proof of the German ambition for an unlimited continental hegemony. The congress of Freemasons, which met in Paris in June 1917, shared the same views. André Lebey, the keynote speaker at the congress, summed up their most important war aims in four points, as follows:

- the return of Alsace-Lorraine
- the restoration of the unity and independence of Poland
- the independence of Bohemia
- the liberation of the oppressed nationalities of the Habsburg empire or their unification in states to be created by plebiscite. [\[17\]](#)

In late 1917 and in the first half of 1918 three further events influenced the western powers to give green light to the “nation-state project.” The first one was the second Russian revolution and the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk concluded in March 1918. With this, the western Allies lost their most important eastern partner and at the same time, they came face to face with what seemed an initial incarnation of the future *Mitteleuropa*. The core element of EastCentral and South-Eastern Europe’s *neue Ordnung* codified in Brest-Litovsk was the Russian abdication of Western territories acquired by the Russian Empire since Peter the Great and the creation of nation-states in these territories under German control or supervision. The second new development was the scandalous termination of the separate peace talks with the new ruler of the dual Monarchy on 12 April 1918. The publication, by the French government, of an earlier peace offer according to which Austria would have been ready to recognize the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France put Charles IV into an impossible situation that delivered him to Berlin’s ambitions. The third event was the signing of a treaty of long-term political, military and economic cooperation between the German Reich and the Monarchy on 14–15 May 1918. London, Paris and Washington equally interpreted it as a sign that the Monarchy had irrevocably become a satellite of Germany, and that it would no longer be able to fulfil the balancing role that many still assigned to it in 1916-1917. The preservation of Austria-Hungary ceased to be an undecided question. Taking its place was the problem of how to draw the borders of the envisioned nation-states springing up in its former territories.[\[18\]](#)

The new position of the western Allies was reflected in the support given to the organization of the Congress of “Oppressed Nationalities” of the Monarchy which convened in Rome in April 1918. The event ended with the approval of a closing declaration, which called for the national and political unity of the various ethnic groups and their complete economic and political independence.[\[19\]](#)

Accordingly, on 3 June 1918 the Allies issued a joint declaration endorsing the independence of Poland. In spring and summer 1918 France urged its allies to issue a joint declaration recognizing the independence of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as well besides that of Poland. Due to British delay and Italy’s rigid opposition (it suspected a rival in the would-be SouthSlav state), France could not achieve this goal till summer 1918. Thus, on 29 June France was the only belligerent to recognize the Paris-based Czechoslovakian National Council headed by Masaryk and Beneš as the official representative of the Czech and Slovak nations and the basis of the government of the future Czechoslovak state. This act was repeated by the United Kingdom only on 9 August and by the United States on 3 September. Due to Italy’s protests, Yugoslavia was not recognized in this manner until the end of the war. However, that did not change the fact that the creation of a large South-Slav state (alongside Poland, Czechoslovakia and Greater Romania) was an integral part of the war aims of the Allies. The details were partly

decided in Paris during the peace conference and partly by the outcome of the local wars between the stakeholders. [\[20\]](#)

### **The Peace Treaty**

The Treaty of Trianon that was elaborated in the first half of 1919 by the Paris Peace Conference can be considered a compromise between the extreme claims of the affected nations of the Danube region and the somewhat more moderate wishes of the victorious Great Powers. The idea of a Slav corridor connecting the enlarged South Slave state and Czechoslovakia and some other ethnically unjustifiable demands were rejected. In some cases, however, the ethnic principle was overwritten by economic and strategic considerations, as well as by the idea of *vae victis*.

As a result of all these factors, the area of Hungary was reduced from 329,000 square kilometers or, discounting Croatia, from 282,000 square kilometers to 93,000 square kilometers; its population dropped from 20,8 million (or 18.2 million) to 7.9 million. From a mid-size European state it was turned into a small country of East Central Europe; Poland was over four times, Romania over three times, Yugoslavia almost three times, and Czechoslovakia one and a half times its size. The largest portion of the formerly Hungarian lands – some 103,000 square kilometers -- went to Romania, followed by Czechoslovakia with 61,000, Yugoslavia (not counting Croatia) with 20,000 and Austria with 4,300 square kilometers. As regards population, Romania received over 5 million people, Czechoslovakia 3,5 million, Yugoslavia 1,5 million and Austria almost 300.000. Moreover, Poland and Italy also inherited some Hungarian lands: Poland received a small area north of the Tatra mountains – 598 square kilometers with 24.000 inhabitants – while Italy acquired Fiume (Rijeka) in 1924 (at first declared a free city), that is 21 square kilometers and 50.000 inhabitants. Out of a total of 10.6 million people in the detached lands, 3.2 million, that is 30.2%, were ethnic Hungarians (Magyars). Of these, 1,6 million found themselves in Transylvania and other areas awarded to Romania, 1 million in Slovakia and Ruthenia, almost half a million in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Hungarians in the Burgenland awarded to Austria were no more than 25 to 26,000, those in Fiume only 6 to 7,000, and, in the area transferred to Poland, only 250.

Thus, the new territorial arrangement took account of the principle of nationality and ethnicity in a very selective way, in spite of the statistics available to decision makers. Two of the successor states – The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Czechoslovakia – were but a smaller version of the multinational Habsburg Empire. Among a dozen or so ethnic groups in Yugoslavia the Serbians made up about 39%, the Croatians 23%, the Slovenes 8%, the Bosnians 6%, the Macedonians 5% of the total. In addition to these South Slavs there were

about half a million Germans, Albanians, Romanians, Italians and, of course, Hungarians in the territories of the new state. The only essential difference between Yugoslavia and the Habsburg Empire was that the Serbians with the Montenegrans were closer to being an absolute majority (42-43%) than the Germans in the Monarchy had been (24%). But the ratio of Hungarians in pre-Trianon Hungary (48% with and 54% without Croatia) had been significantly higher. The proportion of Czechs in Czechoslovakia was 51%, that is little more than the ratio of Hungarian in the Hungarian Kingdom, whereas the ratio of Slovaks was around 15%. The minority groups totaled 34%, including 3.3 million Germans, almost half as many as Czechs and outnumbering the Slovaks by far. Unlike these states, Poland and Romania can undoubtedly be considered nation-states, although they too ruled over minority populations of 31% and 28% respectively. As these figures show, the latter states were not at all homogenous, either. The only quasi-homogenous nation-states were the two countries bearing the odium of defeat, Austria and Hungary. The percentage of minority ethnic groups in Hungary, 46% in the census of 1910, sank to 10% in 1920. The only significant minorities remaining within the new borders were the Germans (550,000 or 7%) and the Slovaks (140,000 or 2%).[\[21\]](#)

It followed from the territorial changes that the economic consequences of the peace were similarly drastic for Hungary. The overwhelming majority of the natural resources that had been dynamically exploited were located in the detached territories. Not a single one of the salt mines which produced 2.5 million tons of salt per year before the war, remained under Hungarian control. With the loss of Nagybánya (Baia Mare), Körmöcbánya (Kremnica) and Selmecebánya (Banská Štavnica) there was no longer any mining of gold, silver, copper, mercury or manganese. The oil wells of Nyitra, Transylvania and the Mura Valley also fell into foreign hands. At the same time, the processing plants, largely concentrated around Budapest, remained in Hungary. Thus, a major gap was opened between the amount of national resources and the capacity of various branches of industry. The milling industry, for instance, had the capacity of processing sixty-five million tons of grain, whereas the arable lands of the new country – without the rich soil of the Bácska, the Banat and the Csallóköz – could produce no more than twenty to twenty-eight million tons of grain at best. Only 31% of iron foundries, and 11% of the production of iron ore remained. The country suffered its greatest losses in rural industry and forestry. Only 32% of oak forests, 13% of the beech and other deciduous trees, and 2.8% of the pine and fir forests remained within Hungary. Most of the pastures, especially the valuable mountain pastures were likewise lost. All things considered, Hungary retained 38% of its prewar national wealth.[\[22\]](#)

The treaty set out Hungary's obligations to its neighbors and other European states, as well. According to these the country could not renounce its independence (or in other words re-unify with Austria) without the League of Nation's consent. Another chapter dealt with restrictions

on military forces, shipping and aviation. Hungary could maintain a standing army of no more than 35.000 volunteers (i.e. professional soldiers); general army conscription was banned. The country was not permitted to manufacture or purchase armored vehicles, tanks, destroyers, fighter aircraft and other armaments that were by the essential to modern warfare. The treaty also obliged Hungary to make compensation payments for the following 30 years, starting in 1921, as restitution for the war damages that it had caused.[\[23\]](#)

Having listened to the counter arguments of the Hungarian Peace Delegation arriving to Paris in January 1920 some leaders of the Great Powers realized the dangerous situation they created in East Central Europe. Especially British Prime Minister, Lloyd George argued that they would not want “the Hungarians to become eternal enemies, which is exactly what would happen if the Allies were to leave [...] one third of the total Magyar population” under foreign rule. Although Francesco Nitti, Italian Prime minister, backed Lloyd George and advocated for the reconsideration of the new Hungarian frontiers, the French representatives and the delegates of the small Allies firmly rejected any modification.[\[24\]](#) The treaty was signed on 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1920 in the Grand Trianon pavilion located in the garden of the former French royal residence in Versailles.

### **Revisionism in Thought and Action**

It is quite understandable that Hungarian society considered this arrangement unjust and unacceptable. The prevailing, embittered nationalism had, however, several modalities. The conservative ruling elite of the Horthy era considered Trianon and the loss of two thirds of the country's territory and one third of the Magyar people a historic accident and an unprecedented injustice or crime committed against Hungarians. The typical answer of these groups was a total rejection to acknowledge these territorial changes. From this standpoint the political platform of integral revision logically followed. If Trianon is totally unacceptable, if it is a crime, historic Hungary should be restored in its entirety. This platform was supported by a variety of arguments. Some historians presented the thesis of the Hungarian's priority in the Carpathian Basin. As János Karácsonyi, a catholic priest and Professor of church history at the University of Budapest before the war stressed in his essays published in the early 1920's, Hungarians and only they held full historical rights to the territory of Greater Hungary, because when they captured the Carpathian Basin in the ninth century, the area was basically a no man's land. Historical thinking jumped from this observation to the conclusion that the Hungarian nation held an exclusive right to all territories between the Carpathians and the Adriatic.[\[25\]](#) Albert Apponyi, both as leader of the Hungarian peace delegation in 1920 and as author of the opening essay in the famous propaganda book *Justice for Hungary*, published in 1928, emphasized the cultural superiority and extraordinary political gift of Hungarians, which made them fit to

function as a civilizing force in the region and as a protector of the Christian West at the same time.[\[26\]](#)

A third characteristic argument stressed the unusual geographical and economic unity of historic Hungary. The unity was characterized as being singular in Europe and it was claimed that the forced dismemberment of this unity could not be upheld for a longer period of time. According to this view, the reintegration of the detached parts of historic Hungary was an economic necessity without which all of the peoples living in the region would experience disaster, famine, and a general decline. This view was also accepted and popularized by a number of eminent scholars and politicians, including Paul Teleki. “Geography”, he emphasized for instance in his university lectures given in the United States in the early 1920s, “is the most important nation building factor,” and the Paris Peace Conference had been seriously mistaken when, instead of geography and economy, it had based its decisions basically on linguistic differences.[\[27\]](#)

A further historic argument was based on the allegedly always tolerant Hungarian policies towards the nationalities, beginning with Saint Stephen, the first King of Hungary. This theory, called the „Stephanian State Concept”, emphasized the peaceful coexistence of the various ethnic groups within Hungary through centuries and projected the reestablishment of this idealized coexistence in the form of a federation in which Hungarians would have enjoyed a status of *primus inter pares*. This solution, as the representatives of this interpretation emphasized, was desired not only by the Hungarians but by the former nationalities as well. Thus, the rebirth of historic Hungary was only a question of time. Among others, Gyula Szekfű, an eminent historian of the time, popularized this deeply unhistorical and unrealistic approach. It should be noted that the Arrowcross leader Ferenc Szálasi also subscribed to this theory, proving how popular and widespread it was in Hungarian society and politics.[\[28\]](#)

The above approach was detailed in a 1928 essay by László Ottlik. The young jurist, who was a close associate of Prime Minister István Bethlen, envisioned a new Hungary within its old frontiers but providing different types of autonomy for non-Magyars depending on their supposed self-governing capacity. Considering that Croatia formed a separate geographical unit with homogeneous population and reached quite a high level of political and cultural niveau he offered to Zagreb an equal status within the future Hungarian Kingdom to Hungary proper. Slovakia would enjoy an extended political and territorial autonomy providing the same status both for Slovaks and local Magyars modeled on the constitutional arrangement in South-Africa where the two white communities and their languages, British and Africans, were put on the equal footing. The autonomous Transylvania should be based on the cooperation of Romanians, Magyars and Germans following the Swiss model, while in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia the Ruthenes would be given full-fledged self-governing rights similar to Slovakia.

Contrary to ethnicity-based nationalisms which prevailed in Eastern Europe after the war this state concept emphasized the common history and the mutual economic and political interests of the related peoples.[\[29\]](#) In the time of Ignác Martinovics or Lajos Kossuth this proposal would have been perhaps successful. In its own time, in the heyday of statebuilding projects of the neighboring peoples, however, it was a mere utopia without any practical relevance.

The platforms mentioned above did admittedly not remain unchallenged in the political thinking of the interwar period. Besides the concept of integral revision there were other visions and plans including the program of ethnic revision, based on ethnicity and ethnographical characteristics. Viewed from this perspective, the dissolution of the multiethnic Hungarian state was not as much a result of an arbitrary great power decision, nor of some fatal mistake on the part of the revolutionary governments, but, rather, an organic or natural consequence of historical development. As László Németh, a novelist and essayist put it: “The Habsburg-Monarchy broke up due to the final consequence of nationalism, the principle of ethnic self-determination. As soon as our nationalities had been swayed by this nineteenth century principle, Hungary had no chance to survive unchanged, tolerance would have caused its break-up just as much as intolerance did.”[\[30\]](#)

This ethnic or linguistic approach was also characteristic of various liberal and democratic forces of the period that formed the leftist opposition of the Horthy regime. In the name of the radical-democrats Ruzstem Vámbéry declared in 1928: „We do not aim at anything else than the completion of the country following the ethnographic pattern and the effective protection of the Hungarian minorities”. A less radical but still liberal personality, Miksa Fenyő wrote in 1935: „The revision must be nothing else than the re-annexation of the ethnically exclusively or predominantly Hungarian regions along the frontiers.”[\[31\]](#)

Some intellectuals, such as the exiled Oszkár Jászi, a radical democrat, or the populist writer and essayist Dezső Szabó went even further. They rejected not only the concept of integral revision, but the idea of a territorial solution at all. „The question, Oszkár Jászi argued, is unfit for a territorial solution. The problem is one of racial autonomy in language and culture, and the racial organization of populations within the common territory”. As a promising solution he proposed the establishment of the confederation of the Danubian peoples.[\[32\]](#) Dezső Szabó imagined an even larger cooperation: the confederation of all peoples living between the Germans in the West and Russians in the East. Hungary and its neighbors, he wrote, „have two nightmares: Germany and Russia” and they can only escape from that if they establish the Confederation of the East European States.[\[33\]](#)

A characteristic product of the rethinking of the Hungarian concept of state and nation was Transylvaniam. The maximalist program of Transylvaniam did not stop at demanding an autonomous province, but actually desired to have an independent Transylvania or have the

principality rejoin Hungary. Moderates, however, would have been satisfied by being granted territorial, political, cultural and religious autonomy within Romania. Due to its peculiar character, Transylvaniam had contacts with revisionist ideologies and confederationist, "Danubian" initiatives as well.[\[34\]](#)

The break with the idea of Saint Stephen's empire, historical boundaries and the various grand revisionist schemes, as well as the understanding of the consequences of the cultural-linguistic concept of the nation received its most theoretical formulation in István Bibó's essays written during World War II but published only after the end of hostilities. In his long essay titled *Distress of East European Small States* he observed, that "the stability of international demarcation in this region is to be sought not along historical borders (as in Western Europe) but along linguistic borders. All Western attempts to use historical unity for inculcating unified national consciousness into peoples speaking different languages, such as the primary examples of the Polish, the Hungarian, or the Bohemian experiments, failed irreversibly and by now their failures are more or less acknowledged. [...] All other purported views – those using arguments of geography, economics, strategy, the rounding off of borders, ease of transportations, and God knows what else – [...] are, in fact, completely meaningless. Using them on a large scale can lead to grave problems."[\[35\]](#)

We must not underestimate the effect of Németh, Jászi, Szabó, Bibó, and others. The way of thinking of the younger generations of the interwar period developed under their influence. Their own generation, however, could hardly be influenced by such ideas. As for the ruling elite and circles of the government, they entirely rejected these approaches, and the state propaganda was based exclusively on the concept of integral revision. A typical example of this was supplied by Rothermere's first proposal of 1927. The English lord had an ethnic readjustment of the frontiers in mind, but his initiative was "corrected" by the writer Ferenc Herczeg, president of the Hungarian Revisionist League by a reminder, that "the so-called Rothermere-line is not a Hungarian proposal [...], the Hungarian nation does not surrender its right to the thousand year old territories."[\[36\]](#) The same attitude characterized Endre BajcsyZsilinszky, a leading anti-German figure as well, who even in 1943 wrote that "Transylvania must be restored as a whole – as an integral unit – to the jurisdiction of the Holy Crown."[\[37\]](#) Even one of the most European-minded Hungarian writers of these years, Sándor Márai, shared the very same expectations. Repeating many stereotypes of the ruling elite's self-image he believed that „Magyars were entitled to a leading role in the Carpathian basin”. He even supposed that in post-war Europe only two nations would be given an „exceptionally important role”: “the Magyar in South-Eastern Europe and the French in West”.[\[38\]](#)

Although border revision was always considered as a top priority of the interwar Hungarian foreign policy, the Versailles settlement, including the post-Trianon status quo, could not be

seriously challenged until the mid-1930s. By this time, however, European diplomacy had entered a new phase. The reshaping of Europe initiated by Hitler and Mussolini opened the possibility for the realization of Hungarian revisionism. Between 1938 and 1941 Hungary recovered in four stages more than one third (more than half, if we discount Croatia) of the territories and more than five million people that it had lost.

The first step was taken in 1938 in the aftermath of the Munich agreement. Although the Munich conference did not deal directly with the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, a declaration attached to the main agreement urged the Hungarian and Czech governments to come to an understanding on the matters that were in dispute. Talks between Hungarian and Slovak delegations commenced at Komárom on 9<sup>th</sup> October. However, they proved to be unable to reach an agreement. Therefore, German and Italian arbitration provided a ruling in the matter. The decision was announced in Vienna on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1938 (the First Vienna Award). With this, Hungary had won back almost 12,000 square kilometers of land and 1,050,000 inhabitants. According to the next Hungarian census (1941) its population was 84 percent Hungarian by language, as compared with 57 percent shown in the Czechoslovak 1930 census. It was, however, beyond doubt that the absolute majority of the population consisted of ethnic Hungarians.[\[39\]](#)

The second step took place in March 1939 in connection with the total disintegration of Czechoslovakia. Although Hitler still insisted on the creation of a Slovak puppet state under German protection, he dropped his encouragement of the separatist ambitions of Ruthene nationalists and ceded the territory to Hungary. A further chunk of around 12,000 square kilometers of land, with almost 700,000 inhabitants, was now back in Hungarian hands. In contrast to the territorial gains the previous autumn, however, this time the bulk of the population in question – some 70-75 percent of them – identified themselves as Ruthenians. The proportion of Hungarians was somewhere between 5 percent (according to the Czechoslovakian 1931 census) and 10 percent (the 1941 Hungarian data).[\[40\]](#)

In the summer of 1940, the activity of the Soviet Union created a new situation. A Soviet ultimatum demanding the return of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from Romania was handed over on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1940. Simultaneously, the Hungarian government was informed that Stalin was considering a joint Soviet-Hungarian attack on Romania. To avoid it Hitler made an offer of joint German-Italian arbitration which was accepted by both cabinets. The known as the Second Vienna Award was announced on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1940, declaring the return to Hungary of 43,000 square kilometers of territory, with 2, 5 million inhabitants. According to the Hungarian census of 1941, 52 percent of the inhabitants were Hungarian, 38 percent Romanian, and 10 percent German. Romanian statistics from 1930 indicated 38 percent

Hungarians, 49 percent Romanians and 13 percent Germans. This suggests that there probably was a relative majority of Hungarians in this population, but even so more than one million Romanians had thus become Hungarian citizens and there were still around 400,000 Hungarians of southern Transylvania who had been left in Romania.[\[41\]](#)

After an anti-German political turn in Belgrade at the end of March 1941, Hitler decided to launch an assault on the country and demanded assistance from Hungary, as well as Italy and Bulgaria. After serious hesitations, Hungary decided for participation in the war. In return for its military assistance, Hungary won back a territory of 11,500 square kilometers. Of the total of 1 million inhabitants living in the re-annexed territories, 39 percent were Hungarian, 19 percent German and 16 percent Serb according to Hungarian sources. On the other hand, the Yugoslavs claimed the proportion of Hungarians to make up for only 30 percent, while the various Slav nationalities together comprised over 43 percent.[\[42\]](#)

To sum up, between 1938 and 1941, Hungary's territory expanded from 93,000 to 172,000 square kilometers and its population from 9 to almost 15 million. Around one-half of the nearly five million "new" inhabitants were Hungarian, the others belonged to non-Hungarian communities. It meant that Hungary once more became a country with a sizeable non-Hungarian mix of minority groups, making up around 21 percent of the total population.[\[43\]](#)

### **From “proletarian internationalism” to the protection of Hungarians living abroad**

The territorial changes carried out between 1938 and 1941 lasted only as long as the power of the main challengers to the Versailles settlements, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Although the Western Allies, especially the United States supported slight modifications of the Hungarian-Romanian border in favor of Hungary, the territorial terms of the peace treaty signed with Hungary in Paris in 1947 were the same as they had been at Trianon. Hungarians began to acknowledge only at this point that not only integral revision was unimaginable, but even a compromise solution, i.e. revision based on ethnic principles. István Bibó, the outstanding political thinker of the last century, took the position that in accepting the Trianon borders “both physically and spiritually” Hungarians had only two options: avoiding “the maelstrom of mutual and bottomless hatred” they could strive for loyalty and moderation behooving small nations” and yet feel responsible for “the fate of the Hungarians beyond the borders”.[\[44\]](#) Others, such as Gyula Szekfű, the noted historian and ideologue of the period between the wars, took a similar position. “We must give up the struggle and propaganda for revisionism once and for all”, he wrote in 1947, and we can have “only one wish” with regard to the neighboring states: “honorable observance of the civil rights of Hungarians living in their

midst and their humane treatment”.[\[45\]](#) This new approach was, of course, a foreign political necessity, as well. The Trianon borders were restored by the active assistance of the Soviet Union which strictly controlled and often determined Hungarian politics between 1945 and 1989.

The communist takeover at the end of the 1940’s created, again, a totally new situation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian history. Nationalism, no matter which type of it, was considered a harmful relic of the bourgeois past for which there was no room in the socialist society. According to the basic beliefs of Marxism-Leninism in the new socialist societies national identity would disappear and its place was to be taken by a new non-national identity, usually called proletarian internationalism. In other words, as Marx and Engels predicted in the Communist manifesto, the common interests of the entire proletariat would prove stronger than national loyalties. National differences and antagonisms between peoples would fade gradually. Accordingly, national sentiments and differences were allowed to be expressed only in politically harmless cultural activities like folk dances, dress, music, etc.

As a consequence of the above, the question of the Hungarian minorities living in the neighboring states did not surface in public. National oppression was interpreted as a special sub-case of the bourgeois system of exploitation, and party propagandists emphasized therefore that “Hungary as well as its neighbors must combat, first and foremost, the reactionaries and chauvinists. After they have been eliminated, the obstacles in the way to an understanding among our peoples will disappear, as well.” [\[46\]](#)

Of course, nationalism and patriotism did not disappear from thinking and sentiment of the people. Paradoxically, suppression even strengthened it and produced a negative coalition of all of the anti-Stalinist forces, including representatives of the previous authoritariannationalist regime, liberals, social democrats, populist writers and even reform communists. The limited political solidarity of the various groups reached the level of joint political action in 1956.

The two weeks of the 1956 revolution were too brief for any coherent concept to emerge about the nation and the minority question. Its national character, however, was evident. The published programs of the various political parties and other organizations all demanded the restoration of the country’s independence. The peculiar, politically divided character of the nation was also on people’s minds. On 29 October the revolutionary committee of the county of Veszprém demanded that the government devote more attention to the needs of Hungarians living outside of Hungary. The same communiqué also addressed what was seen as the necessity of a Danubian confederation.[\[47\]](#)

It was quite natural, therefore, that the new communist leadership after 1956 considered nationalism the greatest ideological and political threat. As a 1959 party resolution titled *On Bourgeois Nationalism and Socialist Patriotism* put it, nationalism "was one of the chief weapons of the counterrevolution of 1956." The "nationalist counterrevolutionary ideology", this very same resolution states, often focuses on "the question of borders". This attitude, goes the reasoning in the document, falsifies the historical and ethnographical facts that have led to the formation of these borders. "Nationalists deceive the public by equating Versailles and Paris, the peace treaties after the two world wars. Trianon was an imperialist peace dictate, which caused strife amongst the Danubian peoples, and it contributed to the consolidation of the interwar fascist regime. The Paris Peace Treaty is a democratic charter aimed at establishing peace in the Danubian basin, promoting the cooperation of its peoples and preventing fascism from raising its head once again in the region."

The document is rounded out by a discussion of the conditions of the Hungarian minorities and concludes by stating that there can be no complaints as far as their fate is concerned. "After the working classes assume power, national feuds are replaced by the common cause of building socialism. Mistrust nourished by centuries of strife is replaced by trust and the establishment of friendly relationships. The party and the government have these principles in mind, the most basic needs of our people, the building of socialism and the protection of peace, when it declares that it considers the question of the national borders to be settled. In the development of socialist societies, boundaries lose their significance and function. In the socialist world order, political boundaries melt away with the triumph of communism." [\[48\]](#)

Kádár and his fellow leaders delivered this message to both the Czechoslovak and Romanian leaders, as well as representatives of the Hungarian minority living in those countries. This proved to be an incentive for these states to continue on the road of national homogenization, which -- the same way as Magyarization before 1918 -- did not recognize the concept of conationality but considered members of minorities to belong to culturally and linguistically different subgroups of the otherwise unitary nation. The only exception at this time was Yugoslavia, where the federal principle was given some room to develop. It has to be mentioned, however, that the Hungarian government also attempted to assimilate its own minority groups: the remaining historic nationalities and the rapidly growing Roma population.

Proletarian internationalism and its corollary, antinationalism and neglect of the minority question both within and outside of Hungary was replaced at the end of the sixties by a new doctrine. It acknowledged the nation as a lasting cultural and political entity and in practice promoted the establishment of bonds between Hungarians in the world. This shift in stance,

just as the concurrent domestic economic reforms and a degree of cultural liberalism, can be regarded as reflections of the pragmatism that characterized János Kádár.

The new approach was heralded in 1974 by a new party document. Noteworthy in this study is the implicit distinction between cultural and political nation, and its support of plural identities which it acknowledges as natural. “The nationalities -- goes the memorandum -- will identify with their leaders and with socialism all the more, if they feel their culture, their language and educational rights and their right to cooperate with their co-nationals is ensured.” [49]

After the publication of this document, a series of newspaper articles and government decrees demonstrated that Hungary had really broken with the old-fashioned internationalism. It soon became obvious that the new Hungarian policy was to focus on the refusal of assimilation and on the support for the Hungarian minorities in the struggle to preserve their identity. Kádárism experimented with what essentially István Bibó and others were promoting in 1947, and what reappeared through a mini renaissance of the national idea under the influence of writers like Gyula Illyés and Sándor Csoóri from the end of the sixties. The mother tongue movement (*anyanyelvi mozgalom*) launched in 1970 was just one visible sign.

As the Hungarian minorities were being viewed in a whole new way, the Hungarian domestic policy was also modified accordingly. The aforementioned assimilation techniques called “automatism” were replaced by positive discrimination for minority cultures around 1970s. In 1972, the constitution was revised, so as to permit acknowledging minorities as collective bodies. This reform was in all likelihood propelled by the hope for reciprocal minority policies from the neighboring countries.

The Hungarian example, however, was only reciprocated by the Yugoslav leaders. The situation turned extremely problematic in Romania, where Hungarians suffered evermore serious discrimination after Ceausescu’s rise to power in 1965. The Hungarian government attempted to intervene in the treatment of the Hungarian minority several times. These interventions, however, were not met with success. This failure explains in part why in the years before, during and after the collapse of communism the fate of the Hungarian minorities remained one of the most hotly debated issues. The first coherent program of these years appeared in 1982 and was authored by the editors of *Ellenpontok* or *Counterpoints*, an illegal Transylvanian periodical. The memorandum stated that “two ethnic groups can coexist only if they regard each other as equal partners.” Taking this as an axiom, Géza Szócs, László Tótkés and their fellow dissidents claimed autonomy for predominantly Hungarian territories and a “due share” in government. They went on to plead for recognizing Hungarian as an official language, equal to Romanian, in all areas of Transylvania where a Hungarian populace still lived.[50]

## **Unification without revision of the frontiers?**

The collapse of communism in 1989-1990 represented a new turning point in 20th century Hungarian history. While transformations of global political significance were unfolding, major regional upheavals were occurring just to the north and south of Hungary's frontiers. In 1993 Czechoslovakia split, without a shot being fired, into separate Czech and Slovak republics. Multiethnic Yugoslavia, by contrast, broke up in the course of a bitter and bloody series of wars between 1991 and 1995 into five (later six) independent states. The number of states neighboring Hungary increased thereby from five to seven.

These global and regional realignments fundamentally changed Hungary's position in European politics. The fall of the Iron Curtain opened the way for rapprochement to Western Europe and integration into the network of Euro-Atlantic alliance. At the same time new but historically conditioned tensions emerged between Hungary and its neighbors. These tensions have tended to coalesce around the position of Hungarian minorities living mostly in Slovakia, in Ukraine, in Romania and in Serbia. According to the latest censuses, the total of Hungarians living in these minority communities is around 2,5 million people.

Facing the new situation, the Hungarian foreign political doctrine elaborated in 1990-1991 had three main goals: (1) withdrawal from the Soviet alliance system and accession to the EuroAtlantic organizations; (2) participation in regional economic and political organizations free from Soviet influence; and (3) increased protection and support for the Hungarian minorities in the neighboring states. In connection with this, József Antall, the first prime minister after the regime change declared: "I consider myself, in spirit, the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians." [\[51\]](#)

Although Antall's statement caused serious diplomatic difficulties and repercussions, the successive Hungarian governments, especially the conservative-national ones led by Viktor Orbán have followed a similar approach and adopted a policy which sought to offer effective protection and support for Hungarian minorities. During the last 30 years several steps were taken in this direction. The most important ones include

- establishment of a new government office for minority policy, handling the questions of Hungarian communities abroad in 1990. This office, under different names, has continued to function until this day.
- setting up a new satellite-broadcast television channel to reach communities of the Hungarian minority in 1992.

- ratifying the Hungarian-Ukrainian basic treaty in 1993. In this agreement, Hungary recognized the frontiers of the new Ukrainian state while Ukraine promised to guarantee minority rights in cultural affairs and local government.
- Similar basic treaties were also signed with Slovakia and Romania in 1995 and 1996. The right to political and territorial autonomy, however, has been rejected by both states.
- setting up a new Foundation to support Hungarian language education in the neighboring countries, including a teacher training college in Ukraine and a new private university named *Partium* in Transylvania located in Nagyvárad (Oradea) in 1998
- establishing a consultative body (the so-called Hungarian Permanent Conference) composed of representatives of the political parties of Hungary and those of the Hungarian minority communities in 1999. It has since become the main forum for discussing the problems of Hungarian communities abroad.
- establishing a second private university in Romania (Sapientia) with campuses in three Transylvanian cities in 2001. The institution has been financed by the Hungarian government. In the same year a new law was adopted which granted financial support to Hungarians in all neighboring countries with the exception of Austria to promote the preservation of their ethnic identity. In practice, this support regime provides assistance to those who are travelling to and in Hungary, and whose children attend schools where the language of instruction is Hungarian. In order to qualify for this support a Hungarian Certificate is needed which is issued on application by Hungary's authorities. The number of people who have this certificate is about 800.000.
- In 2010, after a long and sharp public debate, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a law which grants citizenship to minority Hungarians. Most of the neighboring states have accepted the new policy, but Ukraine and Slovakia have raised obstacles. According to the law there is no difference between Hungarian citizens living in Hungary and abroad except that the latter do not pay taxes in Hungary. The number of those who have applied and have been granted citizenship reached one million in 2018.[\[52\]](#)

The policy of the new Hungarian republic towards the Hungarian minority communities in the last three decades has evolved from supporting the reproduction and development of the national identity of minority Hungarians towards the idea of unifying the divided Hungarian nation without altering frontiers. Although some Hungarian intellectuals, as well as fringe social and political organizations have periodically called for border changes, these voices do not represent the mainstream of contemporary attitudes in Hungary, nor do these enjoy government support. For the majority of Hungarians both within and outside Hungary, the

Trianon syndrome has become detached from the question of revising borders. The idea of ensuring minority rights has become increasingly central, taking the place of the former. The syndrome is sustained, however, by these rights not meeting the European standards consistently in every country and at all times.

The three dimensions of the Treaty in Trianon discussed in this paper reveal a long-lasting legacy of historical trauma. While centrifugal forces in the form of minority elites were apparent before World War I, the dissolution of the old Kingdom of Hungary, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century country also qualifies as a relatively successful multi-ethnic and at the same time nationalizing state. Its political collapse therefore represented an understandable shock to Hungarian elites who, by that time, had largely committed to the assimilationist idea of a single political nation incorporating all ethnic groups living in the country.

This shock was later exacerbated by the contradictions of the peace treaty. The Versailles system was conceived on the twin principles of ethnic self-determination (in the case of civilized, European nations) and democracy (ensuring equal rights for all, including minorities). Neither principle, despite some good-willed attempts by leaders at the peace conference, were translated into practice without serious shortcoming. As a result, Hungarian elites had to face the failure of the historical project of a nationalizing Greater Hungary and, immediately following upon the defeat already suffered, the injuries to the idea of ethnically just borders promised at the conference. The post-war years added to these experiences the apparent failure of the victorious powers and the League of Nations to construct an efficient minority rights protection system, and Hungarian minorities in successor states became the sufferers of nationalizing policies akin to the pre-WWI practices of the Hungarian state.

This multi-layered trauma found no easy resolution in Hungarian intellectual history. For decades, integral and partial revisionist platforms defined thinking about nation and nationality, with integral revisionism being the more popular option, and with progressives largely espousing views of ethnicity-based limited corrections to the Versailles peace system. It took the shock of World War II for a policy of reckoning to commence: after 1945, public thinking tended to focus on questions of solving long-standing issues of minority rights and regional cooperation, with revisionist ideas losing popularity. Not even 1989 and the return of nationalistic parties changed this pattern, due in part at least to the promise of European integration and the option of peaceful national reunification without border change. While the process is far from complete and both the historical trauma and the present condition of Hungarians living on the other side of the border continues to animate political discussion, option Europe has undoubtedly performed better than historical antecedents such as alignment with Nazi Germany and the myth of the socialist brotherhood of nations.

## Notes

- [1] György Csepeli, *National Identity in Contemporary Hungary*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) pp. 194-197.
- [2] Mária Vásárhelyi, *Csalóka emlékezet. [Misleading Memory.]* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2007) pp. 82-84.
- [3] Kálmán Benda, „Népesség és társadalom a 18-19. század fordulóján” in *Magyarország története tíz kötetben, 5/1. köt. Magyarország története 1790-1848 [History of Hungary in Ten Volumes, Vol. 5/1. History of Hungary 1790-1848]* ed., Gyula Mérei, (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1980) pp. 425-441.
- [4] Martin Schwartner, *Statistik des Königreichs Ungern* (Pest: Matthias Trattner, 1798) p. 87.
- [5] Kálmán Benda, ed., *A magyar jakobinusok iratai [Papers of the Hungarian Jacobins]*, vol I. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1957) pp. 910. and 1010.
- [6] Samuel D. Decsy, *Pannóniai Féniksz avagy hamvából fel-támadott magyar nyelv [The Pannonian Phoenix or Hungarian Language Resurrected]* (Bécs: Trattner János, 1790) pp. 230-234.
- [7] *Teleki László Válogatott Munkái [Selected Writings of László Teleki]* vol. II. Ed. Gábor Kemény, G., (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1961) pp. 27-28.
- [8] *Magyar Törvénytár. 1836-1868. évi törvényczikkek. [Record of Hungarian Laws. Legislation for 1836-1868]* ed. Dezső Márkus. (Budapest: Franklin, 1896) p. 490. [9] Mihály Réz, *Nemzeti politika [National policy]* (Budapest: Pallas, 1907) p. 90.
- [10] Gábor Kemény, G., *A magyar nemzetiségi kérdés története [History of the nationality question in Hungary]*, Vol. I. (Budapest: Gergely R.T., 1946) p. 145.
- [11] Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 116.
- [12] René Albrect-Carrié, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1966) pp. 3-34.
- [13] Sherman David Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962) pp 21-39.
- [14] Zbynek A. B. Zeman, *The Break-up of the Habsburg Empire 1914-1918: A Study of National and Social Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 126.

- [15] Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office 371/1900. 67 456.
- [16] Ibid., 371/2241. 53 297.
- [17] Edit Marjanovic, *Die Habsburger Monarchie in Politik und öffentlicher Meinung Frankreichs 1918–1918* (Wien, Salzburg: 1984) p.p. 85– 86 .and Ferenc Fejtő, *Requiem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért. Ausztria-Magyarország szétrombolása [Requiem for a bygone empire. The destruction of Austria-Hungary* (Budapest: Minerva, Atlantisz, 1990), pp. 323– 326.
- [18] Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) pp. 39-51.
- [19] Ibid., 41-42.
- [20] Calervo Hovi, *Cordon Sanitaire or Barrière de l'Est? The Emergence of the New French East European Policy 1917–1919* (Turku: Akateeminen kirjakauppa, 1975) pp. 129– 131.
- [21] Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary*, op. cit. pp. 169-171.
- [22] Paul Jonas „The Economic Consequences of Trianon”. in *Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking, A Case Study on Trianon*. eds. Béla K. Király, Peter Pastor, and Ivan Sanders. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) pp.529-546.
- [23] Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary*, op. cit. pp. 124-125.
- [24] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, first series, ed. J. P. T. Bury and R. Butler (London: Her Majesty Stationery Office, 1958) vol. 7. pp. 249., 383-388. and 440-449.
- [25] János Karácsonyi, *Történelmi jogunk hazánk területi épségéhez [Our historic right to the territorial integrity of our country* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1921)
- [26] Albert Apponyi, „The Historic Mission of Hungary and of States Aggrandised to Her Detriment”, in *Justice for Hungary: Review and Criticism of the Effect of the Treaty of Trianon* (London: Longmans, 1928), pp. 3-20.
- [27] Paul Teleki, *The Evolution of Hungary and Its Place in European History* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 211-243. For background also see: Balázs Ablonczy, *Pál Teleki (1874-1941). The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 97-103.
- [28] Steven Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (New York, Guilford: Columbia University Press, 1976) pp. 62-94.; for Szálasi's ideas see Krisztián Ungváry, „Szálasi Ferenc,” in *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás, 1920-1953, [Trianon and the Hungarian*

*political thinking, 1920-1953*] eds. Ignác Romsics and Iván Bertényi. Jr. (Budapest: Osiris, 1998), pp.117-133.

[29] László Ottlik, „Új Hungária felé” [„Towards a New Hungary”] *Magyar Szemle*, 1928. IV. pp. 1-10.

[30] László Németh, „A magyar élet antinómiái,” [Antinomies of the Hungarian Life”] in László Németh, *Sorskérdések [Fundamental questions]* (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), p. 119.

[31] Cited by Zsuzsa Nagy, L., *Liberális pártmozgalmak 1931-1945 [Liberal party movements 1931-1945]* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1986), p. 79.

[32] Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1924), p. 234.

[33] Dezső Szabó, *Az egész látóhatár [The whole horizon] vol. I.* (Budapest: Magyar Élet, 1939), pp. 211-236.

[34] Zsolt Lengyel, K., *Auf der Suche nach dem Kompromiß. Ursprünge und Gestalten des frühen Transsilvanismus 1918-1928* (München: Ungarisches Institut, 1993) and Franz Sz. Horváth, *Zwischen Ablehnung und Anpassung. Politische Strategien der ungarischen Minderheitselite in Rumänien 1931-1940* (München: Ungarisches Institut, 2007), pp. 101-182.

[35] István Bibó, *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed., Károly Nagy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 61-62.

[36] *Budapesti Hírlap*, 28 July 1927. For more detailed treatment of the question see Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary 1920-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 103-144.

[37] Andrew Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, *Transylvania. Past and Future* (Geneva: Kundig, 1944), p. 152.

[38] Sándor Márai, *Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében [Tractate on the Education of the Nation]* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 1993), pp. 46-47, 72-75, 81-87.

[39] Jörg K. Hoensch, *Der ungarische Revisionismus und die Zerschlagung der Tschechoslowakei* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967), pp. 107-197.

[40] *Ibid.*, 216-289.

[41] Béni Balogh L., *The Second Vienna Award and the Hungarian-Romanian Relations 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) pp. 193-272.

[42] Enikő Sajti E., *Hungarians in the Voivodina 1918-1947* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 191-223.

- [43] Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), pp. 203-204.
- [44] István Bibó, „A békeszerződés és a magyar demokrácia” [The Peace Treaty and the Hungarian Democracy] in *István Bibó Összegyűjtött Munkái I. köt. [Collected Writings of István Bibó. vol. I.]* eds. István Kemény and Mátyás Sárközi (Bern: PMSZE,) 1981), 199.
- [45] Gyula Szekfű, *Forradalom után [After the Revolution]* (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1947), pp. 69 and 203.
- [46] Erzsébet Andics, *Hazafiak-e a kommunisták? [Are the Communists Patriots?]* (Budapest: Szikra, 1946), p. 40.
- [47] Ádám Szesztay, *Magyarország és a szomszéd országok nemzetiségpolitikája 1956-1962 [The Nationality Policy of Hungary and its Neighboring States 1956-1962]* (Budapest: Phd Dissertation at ELTE, 2000) pp. 10-15.
- [48] „A burzsoá nacionalizmusról és a szocialista hazafiságról (1959)” in. *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956-1962 [Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1956-1962]* eds. Henrik Vass and Ágnes Ságvári. (Budapest: Kossuth, 1973) pp. 369-372.
- [49] „A szocialista hazafiság és a proletár internacionalizmus időszerű kérdései” [Some actual questions of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism] *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1974/10. pp. 32-47.
- [50] *Beszélő*, 5-6 (1981-1984), pp. 255-259.
- [51] Ignác Romsics, *From Dictatorship to Democracy. The Birth of The Third Hungarian Republic 1988-2001* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) pp. 297-299. and 303.
- [52] Nándor Bárdi, „The Policy of Budapest Governments towards Hungarian Communities Abroad”. in Nándor Bárdi, Csilla Fedinec, László Szarka (eds.), *Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) pp. 456-467.