

The Treaty of Trianon Imposed Upon Hungary

Objectives and Considerations From the Hungarian Perspective

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Abstract

Historians outside of Hungary often emphasize that the post-World War I peace conference did not erase the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from the map. The Peace Conference merely confirmed the decision previously made by the peoples of Central Europe over the Monarchy. But is it really true that the issue of nationality and the self-determination of the peoples were the forces that tore the Monarchy apart? And was the Hungarian national tragedy of the newly drawn borders due to the irresponsible policies of Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi and the reckless policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic? In the following paper I express the view that the fate of the Monarchy was primarily determined by the (fundamentally) changed role of the Monarchy in the European status quo, and contend that the issue pertaining to the establishment of Hungary's new frontiers was determined by the overwhelming military might of the opposing forces.

Keywords: Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, World War I, 1920, Hungarian Peace Delegation, Trianon Peace Treaty.

“Who would doubt that the establishment of the Hungarian border was somewhat arbitrary? Suffice to look at a map, to follow this boundary, which is not at all definitive, one can immediately see that it does not serve justice in any way. We are faced here with experimental solutions. It has to be decided whether they are based on fairness enough to satisfy them.”¹

1. On the Nationality Issue

For centuries, Central and Eastern Europe was the cradle of multinational empires (Turkish, Russian and Habsburg empires), and during Turkish rule, Hungarians did not have an independent state either. The idea of the ‘big states of small nations’ was not new in the 20th century, since the demands of Greater Romania and Greater Serbia were formulated in Wallachia and Serbia already in

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1 Speech by French Prime Minister Aristide Briand in the House of Commons. Cited by Andrea Zsoffai, ‘Trianon francia szemmel’, in Károly Kiss & Krisztina Lovas (eds.), *Történelem és nemzet. Tanulmánykötet Galántai József professzor tiszteletére*, ELTE Eötvös, Budapest, 1996, p. 368.

the first half of the 19th century. Negotiating with Lajos Kossuth, the iconic personality of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848/49, Nicolae Bălcescu could only envisage the 'United States of the Danube' if Transylvania became part of Romania. Thus, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Österreichisch-Ungarischer Ausgleich*, 1867) was considered by the Hungarian side to be a smaller sacrifice than the sacrifice Hungarians would have been obliged to make by agreeing with other nations.

While the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his Belvedere-group called for a federal transformation of the Monarchy, upon his assassination (Sarajevo, 28 June 1914), these ideas became obsolete. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš from the Czech side were already seeking the support of the Western powers to establish independent states instead of preserving the Monarchy. The prerequisite for this approach was that Western Europe and the US embrace nationality claims. However, until the spring of 1918, the radical transformation of Central Europe was not an official policy of any Western state.

The above is well illustrated by the fact that during the first two years of World War I, Great Britain and France only allowed the nationality principle (drawing borders along ethnic lines) to prevail where it was a concrete advantage for them in changing power relations during the war.² Not unlike for Hitler during World War II, the nationality issue in Central Europe was merely a (political) tool in the hands of the *Entente*. *E.g.* Romania would not have entered the war or even commit herself to the opposite side without receiving territorial pledges in advance. Thus, in the secret treaty of Bucharest of 1916, Transylvania was promised to Romania on the strict condition that there would be no separate peace between the latter and the Central Powers.³ (The separate peace was concluded by the Central Powers with Romania in May 1918.)

So, in my view, Trianon's main question is the following: why was the *Entente* receptive to nationality claims in 1918? Why did the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy become obsolete in Central Europe? Below, I will outline the process leading to the dismantling of the Monarchy.

2. The Image of Austria-Hungary Was Changing

It is a remarkable element in the history of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848/49 that Josip Jelačić, Ban of Croatia, who embodied Croatian national aspirations against the Hungarians, appeared on the side of the Habsburgs and the Romanian rebellion in Transylvania resulting in a *de facto* internal civil war situation. However, the nationalities did not receive external military assistance from the great powers, but the Tsarist armies intervened on the side of the

2 Stated by Ignác Romsics, *A trianoni békeszerződés*, Osiris, Budapest, 2001, p. 54.

3 See the Treaty between the Entente Powers and Romania entering Romania into War (Bucharest, 17 August 1916), in Miklós Zeidler (ed.), *Trianon*, Osiris, Budapest, 2008, pp. 17-18. See also other sources in the collection, such as the Belgrade Military Convention (3 November 1918), pp. 31-32.

Habsburgs to suppress the Hungarian War of Independence. It is clear that the Habsburg Empire was still part of the European *status quo* at that time.

That German unity would not be established by the Habsburgs became apparent because of the weakness of the Habsburg empire (Battle of Königgrätz, 1866). Prussia's success resulted in establishing the German Empire in 1871, with King William I of Prussia crowned German as Emperor in the mirror room of the Versailles Castle. At the time, for a few years the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy may have seemed as the likely Eastern counterweight for the young German empire. However, contrary to the above expectations the Monarchy entered into an initially anti-Russian military alliance with Germany in 1879 (*Zweibund*).

By the 20th century, the image of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had changed unfavorably in Western Europe owing to her relations with the German Empire. Nevertheless, the assumption that the Monarchy was an indispensable element of the European equilibrium saved her from disappearing from the map in 1849.⁴ Yet few believed in the Monarchy by the beginning of the new century.

As Germany was falling behind in the Race for Africa (1881-1914) – with only Togo, Cameroon, German-South-West Africa and German-East Africa becoming its colonies – its aspirations for European expansion gradually increased. The *Mitteuropa* plan declared by Germany from 1915 ('*Drang nach Osten*' policy), that is, the German-Austrian-Hungarian control from the Rhine to the Dnieper and the Black Sea, has led to uncertainty and fear. A draft was already prepared in the British Foreign Office in 1916, which called for the transformation of Central Europe into national states.⁵

So what was the mission of politicians of the nationalities living in the Monarchy? It was to continually reinforce and maintain this fear in Western Europe. Masaryk asserted that the Habsburg Empire had become obsolete, for after the fall of the Turks, it became a vassal of Berlin. This way, its role of preserving the continental balance not only diminished, but in fact, had the opposite effect.⁶

The final straw was when Soviet Russia withdrew from the war (Brest-Litovsk peace, 3 March 1918). There was no empire in the East anymore that could act as a counterweight to German pressure. The demon of the German Empire, which stretched to the Dnieper, seemed to be taking shape, which sooner or later would have led to Europe being placed under German control. (It is true that the US entered the war on the side of the *Entente* so that the victors would be able to repay the war debt. However, given its geographical location, the US could not replace Russia.)

4 Romsics 2001, p. 32.

5 Cited by Romsics 2001, p. 55.

6 See also Edvard Beneš, *Détruisez l'Autriche-Hongrie! Le Martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques*, Delagrave, Paris, 1916. – Hungarian edition: JATE, Szeged, 1995.

In light of the above, the *Entente* powers decided to eliminate the Monarchy at the end of May and the beginning of June 1918,⁷ hoping that the zone of small nations would be strong enough to absorb German pressure and sufficiently nationalistic to keep *Bolshevik* ideas from spreading. Therefore, the reason for the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – and also for the Trianon Peace Treaty – was unrelated to the question of nationality, but instead linked to imperialism which migrated from Africa to Europe. The latter development – including the *Leninist* idea of the region's Sovietization – finally culminated in small empires built of small nations (Greater Romania, Greater Serbia, Czechoslovakia with German, Hungarian and Ruthenian territories). Meanwhile, the actual borders of the newly created independent ("Trianon") Hungary remained undefined at that point.

3. The Issue of Military Resistance

3.1. Need for Resistance

Although the Monarchy ended its participation in World War I by signing the Padua Armistice (3 November 1918, the latter did not affect Hungary's borders) the war did not end for Hungary.⁸ Troops under the command of French general Franchet d'Espèrey, commander-in-chief of the Eastern Allied armies, crossed the river Száva, the southern border of the country the following day. The Austro-Hungarian regiment facing them had almost completely dissolved by then, with especially the non-Hungarian soldiers left the army: they simply went home. Thus, the disintegration of historic Hungary began at the worst place from a military point of view namely: in an area exclusively populated by ethnic minorities. The situation was described by General Hermann Kövess, commander of the army which had seven divisions, but only on paper, as follows:

“There are two and a half infantry divisions with a total of 10,000 weapons. Whether the Sava line can be sustained depends solely on Serbian behavior, because no serious resistance can be contemplated with these troops away from their country and heavily used in previous battles and retreats, and especially as a result of the Croatian escape.”⁹

- 7 However, as Tibor Hajdu points out, although Great Britain and France did not really aim to dissolve the Monarchy at the end of 1914, they needed Tsarist Russia for the hoped-for quick victory, thus, they accepted its territorial demands; in the light of this the sustainability of the Habsburg Empire had already been called into question. Tibor Hajdu, 'Trianon Alternatívája', *Magyar Tudomány*, 2014/11, at www.matud.iif.hu/2014/11/03.htm.
- 8 See among others Dávid Ligeti, 'Mackensen az I. Világháborúban', in Krisztina Boa (ed.), *Memini Initii*, Eötvös Collegium, Budapest, 2012, pp. 200-201.
- 9 Vilmos Böhm, *Két forradalom tüzeiben. Októberi forradalom, proletárdiktatúra, ellenforradalom*, Bécsi Magyar Kiadó, Wien, 1923, p. 66, reprint: Gondolat, Budapest, 1990.

The Károlyi government therefore decided to sign an additional treaty in Belgrade (13 November 1918).¹⁰ This obligated the Hungarian government to evacuate areas to the east of the upper reaches of the river Samos and south of the river Maros line, as well as the areas south of the Szeged-Baja-Pécs-Varazdin line. However, the treaty of Belgrade did not establish a demarcation line in other parts of the state.

In the meantime, one part of the Allied Eastern Army had been sent to Romania to allow it to reopen the war. The Romanian government formally declared war on Germany in November, and its army took up position in the Carpathian Straits on the day the Belgrade Convention was signed. Thus, the rapid deterioration of Hungarian defense capabilities became apparent within a short period of time: the preservation of historic Hungary would have required Hungary to have tenacious soldiers on two fronts.

When the Romanian troops marched into Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), the capital of Transylvania, on 24 December 1918, the Károlyi government first considered the idea of armed resistance. However, Colonel Károly Kratochvil, commander of Kolozsvár district, described the situation as follows:

“Military personnel stay in the barracks only when the mercenary wages are paid and meals are served, otherwise they gather, walk and drink in the city. [...] They are not willing to serve against an enemy on any terms. [...] Shooting with sharp ammunition continues all day, all night, [...] people are talking to officers with their cigar in their mouths, their hands in their pockets.”¹¹

Kratochvil informed Hungarian government agents that the ill-equipped and undisciplined units could not hold the front line for 24 hours. However, the Romanian government sought to impose *faits accomplis* by military force before the decision of the peace conference was rendered.¹²

The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that in the meantime a temporary border line was drawn, arranged by Prague politicians with French assistance; this border largely corresponded to the later Trianon border in the North. The Hungarian government did not even try armed resistance in the hope of achieving a more favorable decision at the Peace Conference. In addition, the usefulness of military resistance was called into question by the fact that some of the troops, commanded to the area, left their assigned post and withdrew after a

10 See László Gulyás, ‘A belgrádi katonai konvenció és a Délvidék szerb megszállása’, in László Gulyás, *Trianonról közérthetően. 12 előadás a nemzeti polgári konzervatív történetírás jegyében*, Szegedi Egyetemi & Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó, Szeged, 2019, pp. 55-72.

11 Károly Kratochvil, ‘Emlékezés a székely hadosztályról’, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 1929, p. 357.

12 Transylvanian Saxons were also under constant pressure by the Romanian occupation forces for this purpose. For the Saxon behavior see László Orosz, ‘Adalékok a két világháború közötti erdélyi szász politikai gondolkodáshoz’, in László Anka et al. (eds.), *Historia est lux veritatis. Szakály Sándor köszöntése 60. születésnapján*, Magyar Napló & VERITAS Történetkutató Intézet, Budapest, 2016, Vol. 2, pp. 123-137.

few days. Moreover, some troops, such as the Heltai Marine Detachment, began to paint the town red in a drunken stupor.¹³

Thus, the military situation in Hungary, which had foreshadowed the territorial decisions of the Peace Conference, largely became irreversible in the beginning of 1919. By then there was barely any chance of waging a successful patriotic war. Nonetheless, the following question arises: why was the Hungarian army was incapable of exercising long-lasting resistance and what was the reason for the breakup of military discipline? I will address this issue below.

3.2. *Conditions of Military Resistance*

Following the collapse of the Monarchy's Southern Army in the Third Battle of Piave (24 October 1918), soldiers denied obedience *en masse* after the horrors of the Four-Year War. They set off for home, so the army had completely disintegrated by the end of October and by early November.¹⁴ What could have been done in this situation? Follow the French example, who 'shot hundreds of fugitives in 1917?'¹⁵

The Károlyi government feared an armed crowd that could easily get out of control – and possibly come under communist control – so along with the disarmament of these soldiers. The government was contemplating setting up a new Hungarian army. About 1.2 million soldiers had been released from the army by mid-December, but at the same time the discharge decree of November also provided for the retention and the conscription of the five youngest age ranges, years 18 to 22. However, the majority of young people did not obey the draft call while the territory of the historic Hungary was shrinking drastically: the government had lost a great deal of time dealing with the failed realignment attempt.

The military did not attract the youth any more, even though a decree in December withdrew the commanders' disciplinary power and vested these powers in officers and crew juries. All the above further loosened discipline in the army; suffice to recall Colonel Kratochvil's words quoted above.

When the Hungarian Soviet Republic was formed (21 March 1919) and the Romanian army began another offensive – far beyond the ceasefire line established in Belgrade –, the Hungarian army was still made up of only 55-60,000 soldiers. I will touch on the Red Army's campaign in the Highlands below, but as already mentioned earlier, it was also difficult to recruit: troops who did not want to fight to protect the borders simply boarded the train and went home.

Therefore, while one cannot claim that the military policy of the Károlyi government was correct, it is also important to take into consideration the general mood of time. People were tired of the four-year long, senseless war. Perhaps the Hungarian troops of the Monarchy's army could only have been held

13 László Fogarassy, 'Az őszirózsás forradalom Pozsonyban', *Irodalmi Szemle*, 1968/9, pp. 812-813.

14 See Tamás Révész, *Nem akartak katonát látni? A magyar állam és hadserege 1918-1919-ben*, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Budapest, 2019.

15 János Molnár, *Trianon okai és következményei*, Hollósy, Budapest, 1937, pp. 51-52.

together by a powerful ruler temporarily assuming power under a military dictatorship. However, while “Charles IV was a charitable, sympathetic man, he lacked the power of a ruler.”¹⁶

Archduke Joseph Habsburg replaced Charles IV as *‘homo regius’* in Hungary in the critical days of October 1918 with a view to preventing the takeover of the revolution by military force. Charles IV did not agree with this move,¹⁷ hence Archduke Joseph appointed Károlyi as Prime Minister (31 October 1918). It was undoubtedly not the time for Hungary to experiment with different social systems and forms of government.

3.3. Possible Result of Resistance

Out of the many ‘What if ...?’ questions surrounding Trianon, perhaps this is the most difficult to answer, since none of the following two major Hungarian military steps can be considered to have been worth taking. One of these steps was the military campaign in the Highlands in the spring of 1919: paradoxically, the Hungarian Soviet Republic as an internationalist power attempted to carry out armed defense in Hungary.

Soviet Russia demanded the evacuation of Bessarabia and Bukovina from Romania, and after the ultimatum expired the Ukrainian Red Army attacked Romania along the Dniester river. This was the reason why the Romanian army, which was approaching Budapest, had to stop its progress at the Tisza river. General Aurel Stromfeld rightly thought that the Hungarian Red Army could join forces with the Ukrainian Red Army in the Carpathian region. However, the advance towards the Carpathians was prevented by the unexpected rebellion of the military division of Grigoryev Cossan Hetman and Denikin. Stromfeld therefore gradually changed his original war plan to liberate the Highlands.

During the events leading up to Trianon, the delegation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was invited for the first time to participate at the peace talks held in May 1919. Meanwhile, the invitation letters were withheld by the Vienna *entente*-mission because it was believed that the invitation would irreparably strengthen the position of the Communists in Hungary. Ormos adds that Paris would not have wanted to bargain with the *Bolshevik* government: they were just about to intervene against it. Despite Béla Kun’s notes addressed to the Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav Governments on 30 April 1919, Kun had stated earlier that the Hungarian Soviet Republic was not committed to the principle of territorial integrity, unreservedly recognizing ‘all territorial and national demands’ of the three states.¹⁸

Another bold military action was carried out in Burgenland. The Bethlen government made it possible for irregulars (free troops led by Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas and others) to enter and occupy the area left by the outgoing Hungarian army during the evacuation of Burgenland. Pál Prónay organized a ‘constitutional

16 *Id.* pp. 46-47.

17 Mihály Nánay, *Habsburg József Főherceg. A katona és a politikus: 1914-1924*, Unicus, Budapest, 2018, pp. 184, 189, 191, and 193.

18 Cited by Romsics 2001, p. 138.

assembly' in Felsőőr, which declared the territory's independence under the name 'Lajtabánság'. Bethlen went to the Venice conciliation talks arguing that in case of an agreement he would dismantle the 'gangs' but otherwise "the proclamation of the autonomous Burgenland is the matter of the local populace and rebels."¹⁹ He also indirectly informed the Great Powers of his standpoint.

Therefore, the decision adopted in Venice that is, holding a referendum in and around Sopron city was the result of the tactical cooperation between Bethlen and the free (irregular) troops. Mere diplomacy would not have sufficed to reach such a result.²⁰ However, from the point of view of military defense this case cannot be considered a model, since Austria and Hungary were both losing states and therefore, the victorious great powers were not fully committed to addressing Austro-Hungarian bilateral border issues.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the military factor as described above, also contributed to the decision of Hungary to sign the peace dictate itself. Although Pál Teleki justified its signing by saying that "we signed and ratified the Trianon Peace Dictate because we had no Asian desert like the Turks, from behind which, as they did with the Sèvres Dictate, we could have rejected it";²¹ but in my view there were simpler reasons underlying it. Ormos is correct in stating that there was no alternative to the peace treaty imposed on Hungary because Hungary did not have a considerable, organized army, she was surrounded by states seeking territorial gain – including Austria – and she could not rely on the help of any great power.²²

4. 'Principles' Relied on in the Drawing of Borders

This issue must be discussed in a separate chapter to highlight the factors that determined the outcome of the decision made at the Peace Conference, and to outline how these factors such as the military situation described above, led to the Hungarian national tragedy.

Mihály Károlyi thought that the principle of national self-determination proclaimed in January 1918 by US President Woodrow Wilson, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, would not contradict the (territorial) integrity of historic Hungary.²³ Károlyi was not only wrong about this, but also entertained false hopes when he expected that the decisions at the peace conference would be based on the Wilson principles.

Nevertheless, it is true that Károlyi had no opportunity to express his views. None of the Great Powers was willing to recognize the Károlyi government.

19 Minutes of the Council of Ministers on 7 October 1921 (in Hungarian), National Archives of Hungary (NAH) K27.

20 Stated by Romsics 2001, pp. 224-225.

21 Balázs Ablonczy (ed.), *Teleki Pál: Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek*, Osiris, Budapest, 2000, p. 179.

22 Ormos 2005, p. 12.

23 Cf. the Point 10 of the President: "The people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development."

Therefore, the question is not primarily why the Hungarian government delegation went to conclude a ceasefire agreement in Belgrade, but rather why they were received by the French commander-in-chief of the Balkans. Prime Minister Clemenceau himself hinted to General Franchet d'Espèrey on 1 December 1918, that it was a mistake to negotiate and conclude a ceasefire with Károlyi.²⁴ Consequently, the Hungarians' expectations were deceived: no one outside of Hungary was seriously committed to observing the ceasefire agreement.

Notwithstanding the fact that the political orientation of Károlyi's government was in no way extremist, it is important to note that the Western powers refused to recognize it. Nor were the union government of Gyula Peidl (1-6 August 1919) taking office after the dissolution of the Soviet Republic, Archduke Joseph (*Reichsverweser*, 7-23 August 1919) positioned on the other side of the political spectrum, or István Friedrich's government (15 August-24 November 1919) recognized. The Peace Conference recognized Károly Huszár's 'national unity' government only on 25 November 1919, after the Clerk mission (led by George Russel Clerk, British diplomat) was accomplished, with the obvious intention to lay the groundwork for the signing of the peace document. In addition if we take into account that there was no Hungarian subcommittee at the Peace Conference – given that the issue of the Hungarian borderlines was discussed by the Czechoslovak and Romanian-Yugoslav territorial committees – the question arises: to what extent can Hungary be considered an existing state between October 1918 and 4 June 1920, when signing the Trianon Peace Treaty?

The fact that the drafts of the peace treaties were not discussed in substance with the losers of World War I severely damaged the Hungarian interest. The Hungarian statistics of 1910 were falsely presented by the representatives of the neighboring peoples. *E.g.* they claimed that 15% of Hungarians lived in Transylvania and the adjoining counties, forgetting about the Hungarian-speaking Szeklers who were treated as a separate ethnic group. Romania stated that they would renounce their claim to the city of Debrecen, despite the fact that there were some Romanian (*sic*) villages around it. Beneš also contended that half of the population of Csallóköz (now: Žitný ostrov) was German and Slovak, and accordingly only 50% of the population was Hungarian.

As a consequence, the new borderlines of Hungary were not determined by the nationality principle, but instead by economic, transport and defense considerations that underpinned the establishment of the new states. *E.g.* the Northern Hungarian Highlands had an industrial character, thus, agricultural land – the Csallóköz – was needed to supply the cities of Bratislava and Komárom. (In exchange, however, the hills of Börzsöny remained in the 'Dismembered Hungary'.) Another example is that Romania acquired the Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare)-Nagykároly (Carei)-Nagyvárad (Oradea)-Arad railway, because the peace conference adopted the principle foreseeing that regardless of whether a strategically important (railway) line crossed an area inhabited by foreigners, the line in question must pertain to the same country. Accordingly, Romania did not

24 Romsics 2001, p. 97.

get the Békéscsaba railway junction and the Nagykaroly-Mátészalka-Vásárosnamény-Csap railway, because only Hungarians lived in the triangle.

There were ‘ethnographic difficulties’ that seemed insurmountable during the drawing of the borderlines. These were particularly salient in respect of the territories which were obtained by Romania, after all the principle was that the peace conference would support the former ally rather than the enemy. From a Hungarian perspective, the use of the principle of nationality to the advantage of allies was further exacerbated by the hatred expressed towards Hungarians, which was generally prevalent at the Peace Conference. The above sentiment was faithfully recorded in the words of a 33-year-old British diplomat:

“My feelings towards Hungary were less detached. I confess that I regarded, and still regard, that Turanian tribe with acute distaste. Like their cousins the Turks, they had destroyed much and created nothing... For centuries the *Magyars* had oppressed their subject nationalities. The hour of liberation and of retribution was at hand.”²⁵

In addition to the economic and transport considerations, military-strategic objectives also played a role in the drawing of the boundaries, as Pál Teleki, the first prime minister of Hungary after Trianon, also points out:

“There is nothing in the peace draft that can justify the boundaries that had been imposed upon us: entire homogenous areas with Hungarian population connected with the Hungarians of the Great Plain were torn from us, for example, Pozsony (Bratislava), Komárom (Komárno), Kassa (Košice), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szabadka (Subotica), Arad. These boundaries are purely strategic boundaries that leave us completely unprotected.”²⁶

Finally, and only in a broader context of our subject, it is worth mentioning that the possibility of the later (territorial) revision was not included in the text of the peace treaty, but was instead communicated to the Hungarian party in a separate cover letter (the so-called ‘Millerand cover letter’). One believes that the Millerand cover letter had a detrimental effect on Hungary, as it facilitated the signing of the peace document by the Hungarian side and also promoted its ratification in the British and French Parliaments.

5. Evaluation of the Activities of the Hungarian Peace Delegation

Although I am convinced that the failure of the Hungarian Peace Delegation played only a marginal role in the history of Trianon, I would be remiss if I did not

25 Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1965, pp. 33-34. Cited by Romsics 2001, p. 127.

26 Magda Ádám *et al.* (eds.), *Trianon. A magyar békeküldöttség tevékenysége 1920-ban*, Lucidus, Budapest, 2000, p. 356; “Not a treaty, but a peace order.” See Imre H. Sziráky, *Trianon okai, körülményei és következményei: az ifjúság számára*, Merkúr, Nyíregyháza, 1938, p. 5.

touch on the question to what extent the Hungarian Peace Delegation can be blamed for failing to achieve more favorable peace conditions.

When on 1 December 1919 Clemenceau, President of the Peace Conference, called on the Hungarian government to send his delegation, the Hungarian preparations for peace, including the French translations of the relevant documents, were already done. The work already started at the initiative of Pál Teleki at the beginning of October 1918, and despite its suspension during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, work resumed in August 1919 at the request of Joseph Habsburg, who declared himself interim head of state.

The Hungarian Peace Delegation was headed by Albert Apponyi,²⁷ who was received with great aversion by French politicians. *E.g.* a high-ranking official at the French Foreign Ministry, Philippe Berthelot, deemed Apponyi “always a berserk pro-German and a convinced devotee of the oppression of the small nationalities.”²⁸ Meanwhile, I think the appointment of Apponyi as Head of the Hungarian delegation hardly influenced the issues that had been decided long before. It was felt by the entire Hungarian delegation that they were not considered an equal partner, since *e.g.* they could only travel to the city of Paris with a special permission and with police escort.²⁹ When György Ottlik (a well-known journalist and diplomat of that era) travelled to Paris by tram one night to meet the Paris correspondent of the newspaper ‘The Times’, the French immediately put him on a train and sent him home.³⁰ His presence was no longer considered desirable.

Apponyi – who was not at all optimistic as he realistically understood that the ability to enforce Hungarian interests was quite limited – summarized the position of the Hungarian delegation in the session of the Council of Ministers on 29 December 1919 as follows:

“The note exchanges with the *entente* powers will be based on our commitment to our territorial integrity. We will explain that we have the right to insist on this principle under both historical law and the law of nature, but we are willing to reiterate the view of the nations of the world, which developed during the war, and according to which nations should have control over their destiny and thus we offer the conducting of a referendum based on these Wilson principles.”³¹

27 On his appointment as the President of the Peace Delegation see László Anka, ‘Apponyi Albert békedelegációs elnökségnek előzményei’, *Emlékeztető*, 2017/1-2, pp. 8-15.

28 György Litván (ed.), *Trianon felé. A győztes nagyhatalmak tárgyalásai Magyarországról (Paul Mantoux tolmáctiszt feljegyzései)*, MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Budapest, 1998, p. 229.

29 Jenő Benda, *A béke-kálvária útján. Egy újságíró naplója a párizsi békekonferenciáról*, Légrády Testvérek, Budapest, 1920, reprint: Méry Ratio & Kisebbségéért-Pro Minoritate Alapítvány, Somorja & Budapest, 2013, pp. 29-30.

30 Miklós Zeidler (ed.), *A magyar békeküldöttség naplója. Neuilly-Versailles-Budapest (1920)*, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, Budapest, 2017, p. 25.

31 Minutes of the Council of Ministers on 29 December 1919 (in Hungarian), NAH K27.

Note that Wilson's principles not only determined the thinking of Mihály Károlyi, but also inspired Apponyi's argumentation.

Following the arguments set out in the first lines of the above quotation, the preliminary notes of the Hungarian delegation, before receiving the terms of peace, sought to emphasize the geographical and economic unity of the country. They warned that nationality should not be considered as the most important factor in the formation of a state, since "a judgment on the basis of 'language borders' in Hungary is, even approximately, impossible to pass". Furthermore, the so-called 'assemblies on the separation' were not representative, since none of these had legitimacy. *E.g.* the Gyulafehérvár decision was also "essentially prompted by the military intervention of Romania".³²

Apponyi's speech at the Peace Conference was guided by the protection of territorial integrity just as it was described in the preliminary notes. British Prime Minister Lloyd George asked for the floor after Apponyi's speech. He was particularly interested in learning about where the Hungarian ethnic group was located, which groups were deemed to be breaking away: whether they were located along the borderline or formed a linguistic unit far from the newly established Hungarian State? This was when Apponyi presented the ethnographic map on which the Hungarian population was marked in red (Teleki's 'red map').

Romsics believes that Lloyd George sought to guide Apponyi with his question, to redirect his attention to another possible line of arguments.³³ At any rate, Lloyd George pointed out in his *memoirs* in the 1930s that Apponyi might have succeeded if he had only claimed the border areas populated by a Hungarian-majority. But (unfortunately) Apponyi questioned fundamentally and in its entirety the whole territorial reorganization concept presented at the Peace Conference. In view of the above, Romsics came to the conclusion that criticizing the peace conditions from the outset with a clear emphasis on the principle of nationality would have generated greater sympathy.³⁴ Therefore, Apponyi made the mistake of demanding the referendum only in general terms and, in particular, by referring to the historical rights and the principle geographical-economic unity. However, it is not correct to blame Apponyi for his argumentation, since giving up *a priori* on the 3.3 million Hungarians living beyond the Trianon borders or, *e.g.* abandoning the entire Hungarian Szeklerland would have been morally unacceptable from a Hungarian perspective.

Nevertheless, Hungarian objections did have an impact, as the French government resisted any further changes to Lloyd George, but also the Italian Prime Minister Nitti, were in favor of considering Hungarian arguments. Yet Curzon, leader of the British foreign affairs office, did not support his prime minister, but sided with the French instead. According to Ormos, the Anglo-French oil dispute in the Middle East may have been the reason behind the

32 Ádám *et al.* (eds.) 2000, pp. 49-69 and 116-139, and, in particular, p. 126.

33 Romsics 2001, pp. 175-177.

34 *Id.* p. 182.

French and British positions outlined above, as the French government made a significant concession to the British during the oil dispute.³⁵

I must also note that Hungary had made attempts to change peace conditions using other channels. The aim of France was to create economic hegemony in the Central and Eastern European region and in March 1920 Maurice Paléologue, head of the ‘general secretariat’ of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received businessman Károly Halmos and landowner Andor Semsey. Hungary unsuccessfully offered France numerous economic advantages in return for territorial compensation at the above negotiations. *E.g.* Hungary offered France shares in the Hungarian Credit Bank, which controlled the largest industrial companies (Bethlen-Csáky’s memorandum).

6. Trianon From a Bird’s Eye View

I begin my closing train of thoughts with the question whether French politics achieved its purpose in the Central European region or not. Inasmuch as their politicians acted for the safety of their nation they could hardly be blamed, because, in their place, when necessary to defend the Hungarian nation – in a relatively remote area away from the homeland and in the wake of a victorious war – we would probably have done the same.

As the result of newly established Trianon borderline most of our industrial raw material resources were transferred to the neighboring countries. On the other hand, the processing industry remained in Budapest and its surroundings. The split (would have) offered a good opportunity for France to extend its economic sphere of influence to the whole region. A French analysis concluded at the time that

“The comprehensive commercial and banking structure in Budapest is too big for present-day Hungary, but it would be a suitable size for a new Danube-Balkan Europe. All we have to do is to move in there [...]”³⁶

What materialized from this? The whole region became and remained dependent on the umbilical cord of the German economy from the mid-1930s.

The new small states were also unable to forestall German military expansion and prevent the *Stalinist* Soviet Union from taking control of their region at the end of World War II. The Little *Entente* Alliance between Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia (1920-21) provided protection only against Hungary. The fears of the former *Entente* Alliance came true with the outbreak of World War II: Germans occupied France in 1940 and Hitler (unsuccessfully) attacked the UK in the same year. Subsequently in 1941, the German army marched towards the Soviet Union unimpeded through an area which was carved earlier up by the Trianon peace dictate.

35 Ormos 2005, p. 12.

36 Cited by Magda Ádám from a note of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Magda Ádám, ‘Dunai Konföderáció vagy Kisantant’, *Történelmi Szemle*, 1977/3-4, p. 449.

And what about the nationality issue? The new small states, with the exception of Austria and Hungary, resembled the former Habsburg Empire but on a large scale. While 35.6 percent of the population of the former Austrian Empire was German speaking and the 54.5 percent (with the Croatian-Slavonic territories only 48.1 percent) of the population of the Kingdom of Hungary had Hungarian as its mother tongue, 51 percent of the newly established Czechoslovakia was Czech and the new Kingdom of Serbs-Croats-Slovens had only 50 percent (relative) Serbian majority. However, the former Austria-Hungary did not declare itself a nation-state, unlike the small countries created after World War I. The newly created states sought to assimilate nationalities in accordance with the pre-war imperial tradition and consequently the ethnic issues were not disposed of in the erstwhile Habsburg empire and at the end of the day, only the borders of the countries had changed.

In view of the economic self-sufficiency and prosperity of East Central Europe I believe that the absence of the multinational empire, which had existed for centuries, is still strongly felt in the region even today. An empire, respecting the rights of its people, is better placed to effectively enforce its interests, *vis-à-vis* the West and the East.