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The East-Central European background of the Trianon peace treaty from the perspective of the French foreign policy

Abstract

In 1917-18 France was more active in initiations about the region than its British allies who usually were much slower in e.g. acknowledging the emigree organisations and cooperating with them. The more vigorous activity of the French foreign policy was probably due to the fact that France had suffered the greatest losses of life during the war and after the Russian allies had stepped out they had directly to face the growing German menace. After the failure of the separate peace with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the French influence increased within the Entente and considerably influenced its partners' policy about Austria-Hungary too.

During World War I. the French international policy underwent important changes. Earlier it considered the interests of Russia, its ally; in order to keep the European balance it did not support the movements of independence of the nationalities living in the Austrian – Hungarian Monarchy. Since 1916 the French government became more interested especially in Czechs and Poles. It was not because of the activity of experts of the Slavic matters in France or the insistence of the French public but because of the new challenges of the military developments. The fact that the Central Powers exploited the nationality problem using it as a military instrument and the constantly diminishing number of the French army raised the question of mobilizing the Czech prisoners of war and Polish refugees and set them into action. Their potentials in the war had strengthened the political situation of the Polish and Czech emigration in France and they had internationally well known and well received organizations. However, the greatest event influencing the East Central European policy of France was that its ally, Russia, withdrew from

the war because of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Paris had to find another counterweight at the back of Germany to replace Russia. The solution seemed to be offered by the strengthening of a zone of Francophile nation-states created by the withdrawal or collapse of the empires, thus the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy offered itself as a logical program.

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After World War 1 the strategic-security policy remained an important feature of the East Central European policy of France. The Authorities in Paris reckoned with two danger sources: Germany notwithstanding its defeat still remaining dangerous and Russia coming under Bolshevist rule. The countries of the region and their people changed by the war were considered by the French foreign policy according to their possible military ability in averting the German and Russian menace. Consequently the most important country became Poland that re-united could raise the largest military force and thus was intended to step up against Soviet-Russia and to be the bastion against Germany too.

In order that Poland could be able to carry out the tasks meant for it in the French strategy the French government provided Warsaw with all the necessary military and diplomatic aid. The resoluteness of the French foreign policy is proved by the fact that though on the 10th of November 1918 the Polish regent council raised Józef Klemens Piłsudski to power, who earlier was supported by the Central Powers, instead of the Polish National Committee that was accepted by France and the allies, Paris received the delegates of the

¹ Ádám Magda, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1981, p.19. [The Little Entente]

new Polish leadership, and even was ready to assist with military and financial aid when the Social Democratic Polish government got into difficulties due to the Red Army's approach. On Polish request the 80 000 strong Haller-army equipped in France was transported to Poland by the beginning of 1919. On the 15th of January there was a French – Polish agreement signed about 2000 French officers to help organizing and training the Polish army. Later there was a special French mission in aid of the Polish general staff. On the 23rd of April there was an agreement about a loan of 4,6 million Francs with the promise of further credit. During the peace conference beginning the 18th January 1919 the French diplomacy firmly stood up for the Polish territorial claims for Poznań, Upper Silesia, the corridor to the sea and - as the realization of the Polish – Romanian border - also for Galicia's eastern part, Lithuania and Belarus. During the Versaille discussions the French foreign policy treated the strengthening of Poland as its most important issue second only to the Rhine-question.² The peace reaty with Germany accepted the independence of Poland and created the so-called corridor to the sea and Danzig. Upper Silesia and Marienwarden became part of Germany through referendum. In spite of French support Poland could not annex Lithuania either.³ Concerning the situation of the country's

² Majoros István, „A lengyel kérdés az első világháború idején a francia külpolitikában” [The Polish question during WW1 in the French politics.g, *A Kárpát-medence vonzásában. Tanulmányok Polányi Imre emlékére*, szerk. Fischer Ferenc, Hegedűs Katalin, Majoros István, Vonyó József, Pécs, University Press, 2001, pp. 300–301. Vö. Kalervo Hovi, *Cordon sanitaire or barrière de l'Est? The Emergence of the New French Eastern European Alliance Policy 1917-1919*, Turku, Annales Universitatis Turkuensis tom. 135, 1975, p. 174; Ghislain Castelbajac, „La France et la question polonaise, 1914-1918”, *Recherches sur la France et le problème des nationalités pendant la première guerre mondiale (Pologne, Ukraine, Lithuanie)*, sous la direction de Georges-Henri Soutou, Paris, Presse de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995, pp. 96–99; Pierre Renouvin, *Le traité de Versailles*, Paris, Flammarion, 1969, p. 53.

³ Ibid p. 302. Cf. Ormos Mária – Majoros István, *Európa a nemzetközi küzdőterén. Felemelkedés és hanyatlás, 1814–1945*, [Europe in the international arena. Rise and decline] Budapest–Pécs, Osiris–Janus, 1998, pp. 258, 278; Halmosy Dénes, *Nemzetközi szerződések, 1918–1945. A két világháború közötti korszak és a második világháború legfontosabb külpolitikai szerződéséi*, [International treaties 1918-1945. the most important treaties of the period between the two wars and WW2], Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1983 (Második átdolgozott és bővített kiadás), pp. 59–63. Paris supported the annexation of Lithuania for security poli-

eastern borders, the French government assisted its Polish ally with arms, ammunition and officers even during the Polish Russian war between April and October 1920, though tried to moderate some of its excessive territorial claims. It was the French general Maxime Weygand who directed the 14th – 17th August 1920 battle at Warsaw ending with Polish victory. The important French involvement was the result of the fear that an eventual Soviet victory would threaten the balance of the European peace system created after WW1. The armistice and preliminary treaty signed in Riga on the 12th of October and also 18th of March 1921 peace treaty delineated Poland's eastern borders further east than the Curzon-line suggested earlier, thus annexing West Ukraine and West Belarus too. How much the French politics subordinated its Polish policy to its – frequently shifting – security political interests is shown by the fact that in 1919 there was no French assistance offered to the eastern politics of the Piłsudski government as Paris and London had still hoped for the victory of General Anton Gennikin's white army fighting against the reds, and for a non-Bolshevik Russia.⁴

Strategic considerations were the motive behind the French attitude toward Czechoslovakia, too, in the period following WW1. In Czechoslovakia with President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and foreign minister Eduard Beneš at the head of the country had excellent French connections and to Quai d'Orsay the inhabitants, too, seemed especially Francophile, therefore well suited to become a decisive anti-German power in the region of the River Danube. The French diplomats supported almost all the Czechoslovakian territorial claims thus they could annex the Sudeten, Csallóköz and Transcarpathia too. The Anglo-Saxons did not hinder France in strengthening its potential eastern allies in offsetting the concessions made in the German question, even that it meant the sacrificing of the ethnic principle.⁵ The close Czechoslovakian – French connections were proved by the

tical reasons because thus the German region of Königsberg and Memel would have been enclosed.

⁴ Majoros, „A lengyel – szovjet háború. Wrangel és a francia külpolitika 1920-ban” [The Polish – Russian war. Wrangel and the French foreign policy], *Századok*, 2001. (135. évf.) 3. sz. pp. 533–568. Halmosy, i. m. pp. 173–178.

⁵ Halmosy, *Op.cit.* pp. 79–83; Jean Doise – Maurice Vaïsse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire 1871-1991*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale – Seuil, 1992, p. 333.

fact that on the 13th February 1919 General Maurice Pellé, the head of the French mission, arrived to Prague and was not only a military advisor but on the 4th of July was appointed to commander-in-chief of the Czechoslovakian army.⁶

Romania had its place according to the need to take action against Soviet-Russia in the French foreign politics. The French authorities reckoned with Romania with its 18 million inhabitants as the number first power in the Danube region and especially after December 1917 provided with extensive military and diplomatic assistance. It happened in spite of the fact that Romania made armistice with the central powers on the 9th of December 1917 and peace treaty on the 7th of May 1918; the most important leaders of France, President Georges Clemenceau and foreign minister Stéphen Pichon did not regard Bucharest a militant ally and considered the 1916 treaty promising territory to Romania ineffective. There was later certain détente in the French attitude, partly because of the favourable American statements, thus Paris urged to get in touch with the Romanians, the national council of the Romanian union was accepted as the representative of the country, King Ferdinand was encouraged to re enter the war against the central powers – the great turn around was in aid of the preparation for the French intervention in the south of Russia. It started with the embarkation at Odessa on the 15th of December 1918 with the aim to cut the Bolsheviks from the south Russian economic background and Romania proved to be necessary as a deployment rout toward Russia or as the frontier of a Europe under French leadership. France expected Romania to provide with the missing military force, especially live force. For this reason, on the 28th of December 1918, two months after Romania had re-entered the war, Pichon French foreign minister already expressed his opinion in a telegram that Romania should be given the status of an

⁶ Majoros, „Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia felbomlása és a francia törekvések a dunai régióban”, *Magyarország a (nagy)hatalmak erőterében. Tanulmányok Ormos Mária 70. születésnapjára*, [The disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and the French efforts in the Danube region. In: Hungary in the field of great powers] szerk. Fischer Ferenc, Majoros István és Vonyó József, Pécs, University Press, 2000, pp. 433–434. Vö.: Antoine Marès, „La faillite des relations franco-tchécoslovaques. La mission militaire française à Prague, 1926-1938”, *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, 111. sz./1978, pp. 46–47.

ally at the peace conference as it had participated in the fight against the central powers. The change of attitude towards Romania was the result of the change in the strategic reevaluation by its participation in the Russian war that was further strengthened by the attack of the Red Army in east Galicia in March and the proclamation of the Soviet Republic in Hungary. The victorious great powers strongly counted on the Romanian active participation in solving these problems. The Romanian military was enforced and during the peace discussions diplomatically supported; the Romanian army received food, clothing and equipment. To enforce the eastern military operations a neutral zone was created between Romania and Hungary. On the 25th of March meeting of the Supreme council of the Paris peace conference Clemenceau suggested to send supplies to the Romanian army enough to provide for 100 000 soldiers that originally was intended for Gennikin. Following the failure of the south Russian action the French leadership elaborated the so-called *cordon sanitaire*, i.e. zone of protection composed of small countries to separate Soviet-Russia, with Poland and Romania as the major pillars. In connection to the Hungarian Soviet Republic Marshall Ferdinand Foch called upon the Romanian representatives to intervene in Hungary together with Czechoslovakia. It was also openly declared that the allied powers were completely exhausted in the war thus the military problems of the region had to be solved by the local allies themselves. It meant that the peace conference accepted all the Romanian territorial claims with French diplomatic help. Thus Romania could annex Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania; Romania more than doubled its territory thanks to the acute anti-Bolshevik attitude of the French foreign politics. Though the local representatives of the French Government drew attention to the latent economic and political possibilities during the time following the end of WW1 the military aspect was more important.⁷

⁷ Ibid. pp. 436–441. Vö.: Ádám Magda, *A Kisantant és Európa 1920–1929* [Little Entente and Europe], Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989, p. 17; Catherine Durandin, *A román nép története*, [The history of Romanian] Budapest, Maecenas, 1998, pp. 213–214, 220, 222, 242–243; Georges Castellán, *Histoire de la Roumanie*, Paris, PUF, 1984 (série: Que sais-je?) pp. 66–67; Hovi, i. m. 76; *Documents diplomatiques français sur l'histoire du bassin des Carpates 1918–1932* (henceforth DDFHBC), volume I. octobre 1918 – août 1919. Rédacteur en chef de la série: Magda Ádám.

In the relationship between Paris and the newly created Yugoslav state created the strategic aspects were of prior importance in the political decisions; since it had no borders with Germany neither with Soviet-Russia it could not be used directly in military matters and thus received much less support from France than Poland, Czechoslovakia or Romania; moreover the Serbian government was not ready to participate in the intervention organized by France and Italy against the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Yugoslavia received much less assistance in spite of the fact that it was an ally since the beginning of the war and did not seek a separate peace following the collapse of its military forces from the central powers. France supported the Italian demands in Dalmatia against Yugoslavia. On the 5th of November Clemenceau declared that no Yugoslav state would be accepted before the armistice. The acceptance was delayed, too, because the French foreign Ministry believed a country with Serbian leadership could not assure peace in the region. Finally the 4th June 1919 was the date of the acceptance of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. Though the military aid requested from France was not granted, France could still regard the Yugoslav state as its potential ally.⁸

Documents recueillis par Magda Ádám, György Litván, Mária Ormos. La préparation de ce volume fût établie en collaboration avec Zoltán Dercze, Katalin Litván et István Majoros, sous la direction de Magda Ádám, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993: dok. 4, 73, 118, 121, 128, 135, 136, 267; Traian Sandu, *La Grande Roumanie alliée de la France. Une péripétie diplomatique des Années Folles? (1919-1933)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999, Dok. 1, 4, 7, 8, 18; Ormos Mária, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918–1920* [From Padova to Trianon], Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983, pp. 72, 79, 80, 164, 189, 215–217; Général Jean Bernachot, *Les Armées française en Orient après l'armistice de 1918. II. L'Armée du Danube. L'Armée française d'Orient, 28 octobre 1918 – 25 janvier 1920*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1970, pp. 69–71; Philippe Masson, *La marine française et la mer Noire, 1918-1919*, Paris, Publication de la Sorbonne 20, 1982, Annexe VI; Juhász Gyula, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919–1945*, [The Hungarian foreign politics], Budapest, Kossuth, 1988, p. 22; Maxime Mourin, *Les relations franco-soviétiques 1917-1967*, Paris, Payot, 1967, pp. 104–105. Majoros István, „Francia intervenció Dél-Oroszországban (1918–1919)” [French intervention in South Russia], *Századok*, 1998 (132. évf.). 6. sz. pp. 1323–1342; Majoros, *Párizs és Oroszország (1917–1919)* [Paris and Russia], op. cit.; Ormos Mária, „Az ukrajnai francia intervencióról és hatásairól Közép-Európában, 1918. október–1919. április” [On the French intervention in Ukraine and its influence in Central Europe], *Történelmi Szemle*, 1977 (20. évf.) 3–4. sz. pp. 404–405.

⁸ Op.cit. pp. 434–436. Cf. Paul Gradwohl, *Genèse et mise en oeuvre du contrôle militaire interallié en Hongrie: exemple de politique militaire française au centre de l'Eu-*

The French polity concerning Hungary – that led to the Trianon peace – should be considered in this security-political strategy of France. Between 1905 and 1908 the French government directed its attention to the economic claims raised by the Hungarian coalition government that stressed its wish for independence, in the hope to use it to weaken the association between the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and Germany. But since the Hungarian leaders did not protest against the 1908 annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they did not come up to expectations. That was the end of the short-lived Hungarian-French approach. The French developed a negative image of the Hungarians, that they were the friends of Germany, suppressed the Slavs and archaism and the feudal character clashing with the French republican values were cast up, too. All that, however, should not count as an explanation for the foreign policy of France concerning Hungary after WW1. Both Poland under Piłsudski and after the Romanian separate peace Ion I.C. Brătianu too collaborated with the Germans and the oppression of nationalities was characteristic of almost every state of eastern Central Europe; the Hungarian society was probably not more retrograde than the Polish or the Romanian ones. Clemenceau's alleged anti-Hungarian feelings is no clue to the problem either, as he did not sympathize with the demands of 'tiger' Romania either.⁹ In order to be able to understand the attitude of the French foreign polity toward Hungary the French security-political interest will be revisited.

The bloc to be led by France to replace the Russian ally at the back of Germany was intended to fight against Bolshevism to isolate it became the first priority of the French foreign polity. The concept

rope en 1918–1927 Ph.D. dissertation, Paris, Sorbonne, 1999, p. 783; DDFHBC, vol. I. dok. 30, 316, 320, 341; *Francia diplomáciai iratok a Kárpát-medence történetéről 1918–1919*, [French diplomatic papers on the history of Carpathian Basin 1918-1919], szerk. Ádám Magda és Ormos Mária, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999. dok. 6; *Témoignages français sur les Serbes et la Serbie 1912-1918*, choix de textes, notes de présentation, traduction et commentaires par Mihailo Pavlović, Beograd, Narodna Knjiga, 1988, pp. 82, 144–145; Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918–1920*, [From Padova to Trianon] pp. 222–227; Hovi, op.cit. 203.

⁹ Cf. Ablonczy, Balázs, „Távol Párizstól. A magyar–francia kapcsolatok 1920 és 1944 közötti történetéhez” [Far from Paris. To the history of the Hungarian-French connections between 1920 and 1944], *Magyarország helye a 20. századi Európában. Tanulmányok*, Ed.. Sípos Balázs, Zeidler Miklós and Pritz Pál, Budapest, Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2002, pp. 65–68.

of the eastern security zone was the generally accepted idea among the French political elite. There were two directions for its realization struggling with one another and that influenced the politics towards Hungary too.¹⁰ The nationalist group led by Raymond Poincaré and Clemenceau and Pichon – which earlier supported the dividing of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy - believed to achieve their aim through strict peace conditions, by the weakening of Germany and through the military and territorial strengthening of the East Central European countries selected as allies. With Clemenceau as minister president and Pichon foreign minister that became the winning policy, as the example of Poland and Czechoslovakia exemplified, after November 1917. In 1918-1919 there was no detailed French program or schedule for the remodelling of the region,¹¹ giving wide field for *ad hoc* solutions. There was no well-defined policy concerning Hungary either.¹² However, Hungary was a determinant state of the defeated Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, whose western assessment was aggravated by the confusing domestic situation and especially by the declaration of the Soviet Republic. It seemed, therefore, obvious for France to support its new allies in their territorial demands for parts of Hungary and their actions for the delineation of the new borders during the peace conference. The ethnic and economic aspects were completely pushed out of consideration by security-political interests. Thus it could happen that areas wholly populated by Hungarians as the Csallóköz and Northern Bácska were taken away from Hungary.¹³

¹⁰ Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, pp. 45–46.

¹¹ Paul Gradwohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja” [The French military policy and Hungary], *Történelmi Szemle*, 2002 (44.) No.1–2. p. 157.

¹² Uő, „Aspects interalliés de la politique hongroise de la France, 1918-1922” [Franciaország magyarpolitikájának szövetségesközi aspektusai], *Specimina Nova. A Pécsi Janus Pannonius Tudományegyetem Történelmi Tanszékeinek Évkönyve*, szerk. Majoros István, Pécs, 1999, p. 56.

Uő, „Aspects interalliés de la politique hongroise de la France, 1918-1922”, *Specimina Nova. A Pécsi Janus Pannonius Tudományegyetem Történelmi Tanszékeinek Évkönyve*, szerk. Majoros István, Pécs, 1999, p. 56.

¹³ Romsics Ignác, „Détruire ou reconstruire l’Autriche-Hongrie? Franciaország dunai politikájának dilemmája a XX. század elején” [The dilemma of the French Danube-polity at the beginning of the 20th c.], *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1996, p. 29. Vö.: Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference. The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon*, New York, Columbia

There was another group besides the Poincaré-Clemenceau-Pichon trend too, that was of the opinion that a conception that was concentrating on a couple of chosen successor states would have strengthened the political and economic division of Eastern Central Europe and it would not be able to create a adequately important system of allies to counter-balance Germany and the Soviet Union. That second policy preferred the integration of the small states – winners and losers, deemed incapable of surviving alone - under French leadership. In January 1920 Paul Dechanel became president, Alexandre Millerand prime minister and minister of foreign affairs and Maurice Paléologue the secretary general of Quai d’Orsay that offered possibility to try to realise the latter idea. The politicians who had not sympathised with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had two scenarios for the solution. The first was the creation of a Danube confederation with a maximal version with the participation of Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania or a minimal version with Hungary, Poland and Romania. The other possibility would have been the Habsburg restoration. After the failure of the first solution they attempted at the realization of the second.¹⁴

The peace conference had delineated the new borders for Hungary during the Clemenceau-Pichon era already by May 1919.¹⁵ The so-called Trianon peace treaty –lacking of a legitimate Hungarian government - was signed much later, on the 4th of June 1920. All the long time the severe peace conditions were in force. The question arises whether the January 1920 changes in the French foreign policy had any influence upon the development of the French – Hungarian relationship? From the spring 1920 there was an intensive rapprochement between the French and Hungarian governments for a couple of months widely covered by Hungarian and foreign political-historical literature.¹⁶ According to the experts Paléologue who

University Press, 1942; Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918–1920*, i. m.; Romsics Ignác, *A trianoni békeszerződés* [The Trianon peace treaty], Budapest, Osiris, 2004.

¹⁴ Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁵ Fülöp Mihály–Sipos Péter, *Magyarország külpolitikája a XX. Században* [The Hungarian foreign policy in the 20th c.] Budapest, Aula, 1998, p. 63.

¹⁶ Pierre Renouvin, „Aux origines de la Petite Entente. Les hésitations de la politique française dans l’été 1920” , *Études européennes: Mélanges offerts à Victor-Lucien*

was held to have pro-Hungary feelings, considered the pacification and integration of Hungary into the new situation of Eastern Central Europe of prime importance. Especially since Hungary was at the geographic centre of the region and a logistical possibility for military and economy. The railway system, branching out in every direction from Budapest as its centre, had its especial appeal. The diplomatic interest was increased by the important French economic firms, e.g. the Schneider – Creusot Trust and the Bank de Paris et des Pays-Bas looking for investment potentials in the region and were interested in the Hungarian railway and port concessions. In exchange for the economic favours France promised Hungary political support in putting in order its conflicts with the neighbouring countries, especially with Romania. Some territorial concessions were also promised. During the French – Hungarian negotiations that started in March 1920 the Hungarian government tried to put the territorial claims into focus. It wanted to achieve to regain the areas surrounding the delineated borders populated mainly by Hungarians; that in Transylvanian the Hungarians, the Seklers and the Saxons get autonomy; that a referendum be organized in western Hungary and Transcarpathia. Soon it turned out that the French foreign policy was not prepared to side openly with the Hungarian claims even in questions of minor importance as the French control of keeping the agreement about minority protection or the withdrawing of the Yugoslavian and

Tapier, Paris, Publication de la Sorbonne 6, 1973, pp. 489–500; Jacques Bariéty, „L'«accord révisionniste» franco-hongrois de 1920 – Histoire d'un mythe”, *Les conséquences des traités de paix de 1919–1920 en Europe centrale et sud-orientale*, éd. par Pierre Aygoberry, Jean-Paul Bled, István Hunyadi, Strassbourg, Presses universitaires de Strassbourg, 1987, pp. 75–83; Ádám Magda, „Duna-konföderáció vagy Kisantant?” [Danube confederation or Little Entente?], *Történelmi Szemle*, 1977 (20. évf.) 3–4. sz. pp. 440–448; –, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, i. m. pp. 44–58; –, *A Kisantant és Európa 1920–1929* [The Little Entente and Europe], pp. 39–75; Anne Orde, „France and Hungary in 1920: Revisionisme and Railways”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1980 (15), pp. 475–492; Romsics, „Détruire ou reconstruire l'Autriche-Hongrie? Franciaország dunai politikájának dilemmája a XX. század elején”, *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében*, op.cit. pp. 30–32; Ormos Mária, „Francia–magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban” [French-Hungarian discussions in 1920], *Századok*, 1975 (109. évf.) 5–6. sz., pp. 904–949; Hovi, *Alliance de revers – Stabilization of France's Alliance policies in East Central Europe 1919-1921*, Turku, Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, ser. B., tom. 163, 1984, pp. 53–64, 85–89, 110–115.

Romanian army from the Trianon-delineated Hungarian territory.¹⁷ The negotiations came to a deadlock and its closing of was postponed when the offer of Hungarian aid for Poland in the Polish – Russian war was introduced; had it been realized it could have strategically upgraded Hungary. The Hungarian leadership aimed at the lessening of the military restrictions set by the Trianon peace. Peléologue did not turn it down immediately for strategic reasons It enabled him to urge the Prague government to cooperate with Poland and to defend the Carpathian line from the Soviets mentioning the possibility of the appearance of Hungarian troops. That is, Paris used Hungary as a tool to manipulate its reluctant ally.¹⁸ After the August 1920 victory of the Polish army at Warsaw made the Hungarian aid unnecessary. The French – Hungarian approach was ended due to the violent protest of the countries surrounding Hungary and of Great Britain and Italy joining them.¹⁹

In spite of the sign of a sincere approach it seems that Quai d’Orsay did not mean to change its earlier policy concerning Hungary. In March and April 1920 – i.e. well into the secret French – Hungarian negotiations - the Council of Ambassadors meeting in London considered once again the question of the Hungarian borders following the Hungarian action. The British and Italian representatives would have been open to accept changes in certain points of the peace treaty with Hungary but the French delegates were adamant in maintaining the earlier severe decisions. That is the French foreign policy led by Peléologue wanted Hungary’s integration within the framework defined in the Trianon peace treaty.²⁰

It can therefore be stated that the France had thrust into the background every other consideration and directed its Eastern Central

¹⁷ Fülöp–Sipos, op.cit. pp. 87–91; Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, pp. 46–48. Gradvohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja” [The French military polity and Hungary at the beginning of the 1920s: the illustration of an illusion], op.cit. pp. 149–150.

¹⁸ Majoros, „A lengyel–szovjet háború. Wrangel és a francia külpolitika 1920-ban” [The Polish – Soviet war. Wrangel and the French foreign policy], op.cit. pp. 551–552.

¹⁹ Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, pp. 49–58.

²⁰ Romsics, „Détruire ou reconstruire l’Autriche-Hongrie? Franciaország dunai politikájának dilemmája a XX. század elején”, *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében*, op.cit. pp. 31–32.

European policy according to its own security interests defined by Germany and Soviet Russia. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania had received every possible military and diplomatic aid: their army was strengthened, and their territorial claims fulfilled. Hungary was left to play the vanquished and defenceless adversary.

The eastern Central European aims of Quai d'Orsay was helped by the fact that France had the strongest land forces and was a great power determining the European politics. Its military force were present in the region since the battles of WW1. The Polish, Czech, Romanian and Serbian armies could thank their being or survival to French assistance.²¹ At the conference organized in Paris under the chairmanship of president Clmenceau the French government had the greatest influence on the creation of the peace treaty.²² Since the spring of 1918 it played an increasingly dominant role within the Entente. During the peace negotiations the great powers accepted the principle that by straightening the situation of a region that the great power had the last say which had a 'special interest' in the given area and where it was present with armed forces. At the given period it was France who was entitled to the privilege.²³

France's elbowroom in eastern Central Europe was considerably restricted by the fact that though having won the 'great war' it became economically and militarily exhausted. Its troops in the region were not strong enough for independent actions. The 7th October 1918 the French military leadership made a decision that changed the situation. The eastern army of the allied powers had been reorganized under the leadership of General Henri Mathias Berthelot and its area of action relocated. There was the separated Danube army consisting of four divisions, a cavalry regiment and an air service under the commandship of General Henri Mathias Berthelot for the French – Romanian attack against southern Russia. The army of Franchey d'Esperey – contrary to earlier plans – were

²¹ Gradvohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, op.cit. p. 151.

²² Fülöp–Sipos, op.cit. pp. 51–52. President Wilson could have queried Clemenceau's influence. However, the American president's international manoeuvring was greatly hampered his domestic situation, that his position was undermined by the defeat of the Democratic Party at the November 1918. elections for the Congress.

²³ Op.Cit. p. 46; Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918–1920*, pp. 7–8.

ordered not to advance toward Austria and Hungary. The decision deprived France of the means of direct pressure in Eastern Central Europe,²⁴ that had further consequences. The French units stationed there could not be supplemented not only because of the above-mentioned lack of recruits but because of logistic problems, too, that were impossible to be solved. Germany had prohibited any passing through its territory. During the Polish – Soviet war Czechoslovakia first put an embargo on the transport of war supplies to Poland, and later obstructed it. According to the decision of the peace conference dated on 11th of August 1919 no outside powers had the right to interfere in Austrian and Hungarian territories which annulled the relevant item of the Padova armistice. Even France could not have evaded the decision.²⁵ All these military, logistic and international legal aspects led to the inability of the French foreign policy to act decisively in the eastern Central European developments contrary to all appearances. It also had to take into account the standpoint of its allies, Great Britain and Italy. Though France accepted the ‘prior responsibility’ in the region, the decisions concerning Hungary were made by the allies between 1918 and 1922.²⁶ If an ally vetoed Paris was unable to carry out its plans. Thus e.g. the intervention of Lloyd George and Thomas Woodrow Wilson Clemenceau could not achieve the Polish annexation of Danzig; the American president vetoed the Polish annexation of Lithuania.²⁷ And the elbowroom of France was even more restricted by the attitude of its chosen allies in the region.

The countries of the region started out from the Wilsonian principles of self-determination and kept repeating them during the peace talks and expected of the great powers to count with them as independent factors. The retraction and collapse of the empires earlier

²⁴ Majoros, „Francia intervenció Dél-Oroszországban (1918–1919)” [French intervention in Southern Russia], p. 1330; Gradvohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején” [French military policy and Hungary] pp. 150–151. For major documents c.f.: DDFHBC, vol. I.

²⁵ Gradvohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, pp. 149, 155.

²⁶ Gradvohl, „Aspects interalliés de la politique hongroise de la France, 1918-1922”, p. 56.

²⁷ Majoros, „A lengyel kérdés az első világháború idején a francia külpolitikában”, *A Kárpát-medence vonzásában...*, [The Polish question in the French foreign policy during WW1], pp. 301–302.

ruling the region left behind a vacuum that the victors, Great Britain, France and Italy, could not fill by their own decision, because of their limited economic and military sources. That increased the potentials of the local governments in their international manoeuvring as they could themselves decide which of the great powers they would prefer. They were also aware of their own strategic importance in solving the crises of the region and tried to make most of it in their own interests. Thus Prime minister Bratiănu stressed at every possible forum the key position of Romania in checking Soviet Russia.²⁸ The so-called small allies of France accepted their role as clients and handed in the bill. Beneš asked foreign minister Pichon to involve Prague in any kind of intervention or war started by the allies of France, in the hope of securing the territories of Hungary to be annexed by Czechoslovakia.²⁹ As we could see above, that was also the Hungarian strategy in the Polish – Russian war. The independent army strengthened the confidence of the Polish, Czechoslovakian and Yugoslav leaders and gave the illusion of equality with the great powers,³⁰ that was increased by their local military success. Though the countries in question had received considerable help to create their own army, they did not remain dependent on it. Since there was not enough military equipment, the French leaders allowed their local allies a free hand to solve the military problems of the regions. As time passed France was left fewer and fewer trumps to keep a firm hand over its small allies: the acknowledging of the emigrant organization, the recognition of the governments, the acceptance of the territorial claims all were gradually introduced. Paris tried to deal with the supported states as subordinates, especially Romania that in certain papers of the French foreign affairs was referred to as a potential future colony. The proof is that France did not allow the ‘little victors’ to militarily control over the vanquished countries.³¹ However, the French leadership became more and more ambiguous. The small allies followed the request of their French protector only if it coincided their own interests. Thus, e.g. Beneš who enjoyed the confidence of the peace

²⁸ Fülöp–Sipos, op.cit. pp. 55, 64, 85–86.

²⁹ Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, i. m. p. 36.

³⁰ Gradwohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, p. 155.

³¹ op.cit. pp. 155–156.

conference,³² in 1920 flatly refused to cooperate with Poland that was threatened by Soviet Russian attacks because of the dispute over Teschen. Sometimes the countries allegedly of French orientation made especially adverse steps and asked the help of other great powers against France. The policy can be best illustrated when the Czechoslovakian, Romanian and Yugoslavian governments turned to Great Britain and Italy to stop the French – Hungarian secret negotiations in 1920. On the 14th of August 1920 the Czechoslovakian – Yugoslavian agreement was signed that formed the basis of the Little Entente. The organization later included Romania and it was created originally in opposition of the French aspirations.³³ Between the two wars therefore it was mere propaganda when Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania referred to France as their ‘nurturing mother’. This way they could successfully satisfy the need for spiritual appreciation of the French public and certain political elite. In reality those countries did not consider France as the fundament of their military strategy.³⁴ The public opinion in Hungary and the neighbouring countries have believed that France had an exclusive role in the development of the peace arrangements after WW1 and therefore must bear the whole responsibility; the belief shared by the scholarly literature too, however, does not correspond to the facts, as was revealed by the relevant French papers referring to the period in the 1980s.³⁵

Of the effectiveness of the new French East Central European policy – of which the treaty with Hungary signed in the Palace of Great Trianon was an integral part – it can be stated that

- it could not establish a system of allies that could have been effective economically and militarily against Germany and Soviet Russia;
- the Danube confederation could not be established because of the resistance of the countries involved

³² Romsics, „Détruire ou reconstruire l’Autriche-Hongrie? Franciaország dunai politikájának dilemmája a XX. század elején”, *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében*, p. 29.

³³ Ádám, *A Kisantant 1920–1938*, p. 49, 52–56.

³⁴ Gradwohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, p. 153.

³⁵ Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918–1920*, pp. 7–11; Gradwohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, pp. 145–146.

- the policy relying on the victorious small allies was just an illusion. They could not muster military power and economic potential comparable to a great power either separately or together. They could not have been able to stand up against an enemy comparable to Germany.³⁶
- They were not to be mobilized with any certainty to defend French interests and at the time there was no alliance concluded with them
- They had no true community of interest with France: it was only Poland that pursued real anti-German politics; Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia did not realized the Soviet menace
- All the antagonism between the countries has been preserved
- The instability of the region was increased by the creation of multinational states with nationalistic antagonisms.

At the beginning of the 1920s the contemporaries still had the impression that France was a strong great power able to domineer East Central Europe. The cracks in its eastern system of defence would come into sight only later.

³⁶ Gradwohl, „A francia katonapolitika és Magyarország az 1920-as évek elején: egy illúzió illusztrációja”, p. 155.

