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## Wounds caused by Trianon

### Abstract

*As the battle at Mohács in 1526 had defined the fate of the once prosperous Hungarian kingdom, Trianon has similar effects on Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. Its consequences has still been felt both in the anti-Hungarian passion of the neighbouring states and in the frustration of the Hungarian national consciousness. Reparation has still remained topical as well as difficult: curative intents were frequently mishandled by politics. Could the Hungarian and European cultural background be helpful in finding a remedy to heal the gangrenous wounds cut by Trianon?*

It is a decade less than hundred years that in the Great Trianon Palace near Versailles Ágoston Bernárd minister of labour and national welfare and Lázár Alfréd Drasche envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, as the representatives of the Hungarian government, signed the peace treaty between Hungary and the Allied Powers (British Empire, France, Italy, the United states Of America, Japan, China, several smaller countries, e.g. Greece, Portugal, Panama, Nicaragua, as well as the neighbouring countries: Romania, Czechoslovakia and the Serbian-Croatian Kingdom) that usually is referred to as the Trianon Treaty in history and became the most tragic event of the Hungarian history in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. The treaty closed the thousand-year-old development of Hungarian history and definitely closed the developments of the last two hundred years after the liberation from the Turkish occupation that brought the re-unification of the country torn into three parts.

In those two hundred years Hungary was not entirely independent (a fact influencing the events of World War I. too). It was part of the Habsburg empire consisting of several territories of historical statehood; was an acknowledged member of the community of European

nations and up to the outbreak of WW1 enjoyed the advantages offered by the power of the empire especially the thus provided 'common market'; internal independence that made possible the development toward the nation state, too. It is a fact that the then leading politicians did not use the possibility to create a national strategy suitable to defend the historical territory of the country in case of world crises (e.g. a lost war).

The Hungarian leading political groups had fifty years given from history from the compromise of 1867 to the end of WW1 to consolidate the advantages gained in the dualistic state system; instead they conserved the anachronistic establishment of society and power that did not correspond at all to the social and political norms of (western) Europe; it did not correspond to those developed west of the River Leita in Austria and Bohemia either. They were unable to give any kind of answers to the problems raised by the multi national composition of the country.

The first challenge would have required consistent social and political reforms, i.e. some reformation of the system of latifundia, if not in its radical form as happened after WW2, but realized as a sober national policy that would have asserted the concept of social justice for the sake of the strengthening of the state itself. History would have required the involvement of the peasantry and the working masses into the governing of the state, i.e. the extension of suffrage, the progressive development of the system of local autonomies and finally the creation a state form similar to that of Switzerland in order to gain the solidarity of the non-Hungarian national population (46% with the exclusion of Croatia) and to develop a feeling of 'Hungarus' patriotism. The 'Hungarus' idea was not unfamiliar among the Germans, Transcarpathian Ruthenes, Slovaks of the Upland and assimilated Jews living in Hungary; it were mainly the Serbians and Romanians who opposed the special identity the creation and strengthening of which could have been a vital strategic aim. The idea of 'Hungarus' patriotism was not merely the idea of the leftist intelligentsia (bourgeois radicals grouped around the periodical *Huszadik Század* [Twentieth Century]) it would have corresponded to the political tradition of Old Hungary too that through the system of *voivode* and *banate* was able to successfully represent regional interests.

Entering WW1 was least in the historical interests of the Hungarians, as the clearest thinking brains of the country Endre Ady and Mihály Babits saw and expressed already in 1914; it was the German Empire and the military circles gathered around Franz Ferdinand, the murdered heir apparent (hostile toward the Hungarians) in the Viennese court who forced István Tisza Hungarian prime minister into accepting the idea of war in spite of the fact that in 1914 Hungary was not prepared for it either militarily or economically or politically, and neither was the Monarchy to wage war on several fronts. The Austrian – Hungarian armed forces had not been able to overcome the considerably weaker Serbia, and could win over the Romanian perfidiously attacking Transylvania in 1916 only with German help. The leadership of the Monarchy made many strategic mistakes, e.g. could not achieve the neutrality of its former ally, Italy, the renouncing of Triest and Trentino could have provided basis for a compromise as the population was fast completely Italian there, and the area would have been considerably smaller than what was taken away from Austria and annexed to Italy at the end.

The Hungarian nation had no hostile feelings towards the Italians who counted as friendly nations before on account of Lajos Kossuth getting asylum there and the Hungarians fighting on Garibaldi's side. It was only at the Italian front that the army of the Monarchy was defeated: Serbia and Romania were already defeated; Russia quit the war due to the Bolshevik take-over and the ensuing civil wars. Had the Hungarian troops not perished at the Rivers Isonzo and Piave, there would have remained enough military strength to fight for the protection of the country. During the last month of the war there were almost one million soldiers at fight at the southern borders of the country consisting mainly of Hungarians who could have been mobilized to defend the territory of the country. The French, British and American government would not have been ready to shed blood for Romania and the new Czechoslovak state assisting them in their gaining territory in the Hungarian inhabited regions.

It was also a strategic mistake that Charles IV's 1917 attempts at separate peace were let to fail in 1917. The fiasco was not mainly the result of the aggressive intervention of the German ally; the majority of the political and military leaders of the Monarchy had received the initiative with misunderstanding and suspicion, and the only result

of the separate peace attempt was the king's loss of authority (and he would have badly needed that authority at the end of the war). At the time of Charles IV's attempt the carving up of Hungary was not yet on the agenda of the entente powers, both the British and American government declared being in favour of preserving the Danube power: London looked at it as the traditional means to keep the European balance; Washington was of the opinion that a central European federation (the idea propagated by President Wilson) would have been more creditable for the maintenance of peace than small countries suffering from minority grieves always competing with each other. History has justified the British and American reserves; it is a great pity that neither of them had stuck to their original strategy, maybe Central-European history would have taken a different turn; who knows, may be that of Europe too.

By the end of the war the earlier world political considerations and the plans for consolidation developed in Hungarian politics lost their importance. It is well known that the US delegation got into a difficult position in spite of the fact that without the military and economic assistance of the USA the entente would have been defeated, and hardly participated in the discussion of the resolutions of peace debates and returned earlier to Washington disillusioned, without signing the Trianon papers. The British government made vent of its dissatisfaction with the peace system, Italy was even less satisfied because in spite of earlier promises it had to renounce Dalmatia, that used to be an Italian territory, for benefit of the new southern Slavic state. Thus the new arrangement of peace reflects French political decisions that was heated by the anti-German revanchist policy since 1871 and thus was lenient toward the new states – Czechoslovakia, Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom as well as Romania that were to be created aggressively ambitious for gaining territory from the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. If the war was a 'German' matter as it was mainly forced by the German Empire, the peace became 'French' and the French peace-makers were lacking reason and sobriety very much the opposite of what the Vienna Peace Conference displayed (mostly under the influence of the Austrian Prince Metternich) when it restored the borders of France and Alsace and Lorraine were not given back to Germany.

When construing the peace conditions French politics gave up its earlier reasonableness and soberness in the hope that the successor states would be better able to maintain balance against the German and Russian expansive policy as well as Bolshevism than a Central European federation built on compromise. As it has become clear by now Paris was badly mistaken and the French political leaders, more recently President Mitterand and ex-minister president Balladur had to admit that the Trianon arrangement caused severe injury and has not achieved the required results.

The peace treaty signed by two insignificant Hungarian politicians (soon to disappear from the Hungarian public life) became one of the world's cruellest interstate treaty that completely sacrificed Hungary to the territory gaining wishes of its old and new neighbours. The historical Hungarian state (that had been legally preserved even during the 150 years of Turkish occupation) with the exclusion of Croatia (which was not part of the Hungarian state, only one of the countries of St. Stephen's crown, a co-state of Hungary), was 283 000 square km large, of which 93 000 square km were left; the 18,2 million inhabitants was reduced to 7.6 million, thus only 30% of the territory and 42% of the population remained under Hungarian sovereignty. Romania was given 102 000 square km territory (more than what was left to Hungary) with 5,2 million inhabitants, of which 1,66 million (1,8 million according to the last Austro-Hungarian estimates in 1918) were Hungarians. Czechoslovakia received 63 000 square km with 3,5 million inhabitants of which 1,1 million were Hungarians, Yugoslavia (Croatia excluded) 21 000 square km 1,6 million inhabitants among them 292 000 Hungarians, Austria 4000 square km with 292 000 inhabitants of which 26 000 were Hungarians. Poland also got two smaller areas in the Tatra district, and Italy got Fiume (present day Rijeka) though it was also on the wish list of Yugoslavia, nevertheless the majority of the inhabitants were Italians.

More than 3,5 million Hungarians, one third of the total population were distributed in foreign and moreover hostile countries, whose governments were intent to destroy Hungarian identity. In addition there was a considerable German population (Saxons, Swabs, Zipsers) in Hungary, an accommodated part of the Hungarian society who were forced into new states, too, and their number also exceeded one million. Thus there was a population of 4,5 million, i.e.

43% of that of the distributed areas that were ethnically and culturally foreign in the newly created nation-states.

Considering that the population of historic Hungary (without Croatia) was 54% Hungarian and only 46% non-Hungarian, it has to be stated that the solution in the Trianon treaty has not fulfilled its reasons and the division of the area has not brought the justifiable solutions that could have been accepted by the Hungarian populace on the long term, as has been proved by the events of the last twenty years. It could not show any permanent results in consolidation of the region either: of the newly formed states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania) two fell apart after the fall of the Communist system. The last two hundred years of European history has no other example of loss of population comparable to that of Hungary that even exceeded the losses of Germany that was primarily held responsible for the outbreak of the war.

Every peace system has a kind of 'ideological' and 'legal' basis. The arrangements following the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 was based on continuity of rights and legitimacy, and France could keep the territories it had before the 1789 revolution and before the Napoleonic wars (during the reign of the Bourbons). The peace arrangements following WW1 had naturally had legal foundation but it is a great mistake to believe that 'self determination of people' was the only criterion, as was constantly referred to by Czechoslovakian, Yugoslavian and Romanian politics.

The decision made at Trianon that put 70% of the historic territory of Hungary under the rule of the neighbouring countries together with the 1/3 of its population was based on three arguments: 1. the ethnic principle that started out from the ethnic composition of the population; this was not used in favour of Hungary, and thus Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania were given areas with large Hungarian population along the the Trianon borders: Partium, Transcarpathia, Upland and along the River Tisza in Voivodina. 2. the historic principle that considered the earlier situation defined by political law; Hungary was given no relief according to this principle either ( there were 3,5 million Germans annexed to Czechoslovakia under the pretext that the region they lived used to belong to the historic Czech kingdom). 3. and finally the principle of economy, transport and strategy; it was again applied against Hungary, e.g.

by the annexation of the areas north of the River Danube where the Czechoslovakian interests were considered, or when the Arad-Nagyvárad-Szatmárnémeti-Máramarossziget area was given to Romania with the justification that - a region populated by Hungarians - the Romanians needed the railroad crossing it to reach Bukarest. In the case of Hungary all the criteria of ethnic, historic and economic strategy had not been considered and all the regional debates were solved at the expense of Hungary; the country practically was treated as a bounty to be given away to anybody reaching a hand for it.

It is painful to explain how the political leaders of the successor states by what mendacious propaganda and cynical manipulation had prepared all the wrongful decision at Trianon. Without doubt Eduárd Beneš, the prime minister of Czechoslovakia and Ion Brătianu, prime minister of Romania had the leading role in the creation of the system of propaganda and manipulation; both politicians are greatly responsible for the crises the nations in the Central European region has had to suffer. That the nations of the region have not been able to find the road to a more efficient political, economic and cultural cooperation on spite of the fact that time and again there were political and especially cultural movements, groups that suggested feasible ways of cooperation.

It causes pain to mention some elements of the 1919 Paris peace talks but it is important to through light on the circumstance the peace system came into being. On the 1st. of February 1919 meeting of the Council of Ten, the chief body responsible for the decisions, the Romanian prime minister declared that "Hungary had created an area together with Banat that could be called Erdély (Transylvania) because Transylvania had always been of central importance in the region. In order avoid repetition in naming the various parts of the region let be enough to mention that in the concept of Erdély, the regions from the Galician Carpathians to the line of the River Tisza, belong as part of the later Hungarian Kingdom." When Orlando Italian prime minister asked how many Hungarians were living in the area claimed by Romania the answer was that "If there were exact estimates about the distribution of nations, may be there were 2 900 000 Romanians (72%) and 687 000 (15%) Hungarians. The proportion of Romanian city dwellers would be 23%, in the rural

areas 72%, while Hungarians are 40% in the towns and merely 13% in rural areas. The Hungarians mainly are civil servants and soldiers, and ethnically over-represent the ethnic they belong to. The Hungarians are an elite living among the Romanian population.”

The reality was entirely different. The last Austrian-Hungarian census of 1910 in the territory of Erdély (south eastern Hungary) in the wider sense there were 2,8 million Rumanians, as Brătianu mentioned, but they represented only 53,4% of the population and not 72% as Brătianu stated as there were 1 658 000 Hungarians living in the region, i.e. 31,7%; in addition there were 556 000 (10,6%) Germans too. The majority of the inhabitants of the towns were Hungarians, 62,7% Hungarian and 28,9% Romanian in the forty-nine towns; even the 1930 census found that the 39% of the population was Hungarian and only 31% Romanian (the rest were Germans, Jewish and other nationalities; the category of Jewish was introduced by the Romanian since the majority of persons of Jewish religion or origin claimed to be Hungarians.) The statement too, that the Hungarians were mainly bureaucrats and soldiers draining the blood of the Romanian population was an outright lie.

Brătianu, with diplomatic finesse, showed readiness to leave Debrecen and its neighbourhood to Hungary saying that there was only one area, Debrecen, though it was surrounded by villages with Romanian ethnics, the Romanians were ready to renounce it in order to keep their claims on the basis of ethnic ground blameless. If he found necessary he did not shrunk back from statements that were aggressively opposing basic human rights (i.e. the conditions of national self-determination which were supposed to be the principle of the Trianon peace treaty). When David Lloyd George British prime minister asked whether the Transylvanian Hungarians too declared their opinion about the affiliation of their country, the Romanian prime minister was hurt and said that Romania joined the war to carry out its will over the Hungarian minority. Probably the Hungarians would have voted ‘nay’ but the situation had been solved by the results of the war and thus there was no need for elections and the area had to return to Romania. It has to be noted that Transylvania had never belonged to Romania, thus there was no historical question of ‘returning’.

Brătianu was a true Balkan politician where political lies did not count morally objectionable. Prime minister Beneš on the other hand appeared as the representative of a western type bourgeois nation and in this guise kept telling lies when the legal situation of Upland was the topic of discussion. He claimed that Slovakia had belonged to Czechoslovakia till the Hungarians occupied the area in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. they were not successful in Magyarizing the population; the people there felt like Czech and wished to belong to the new state; that there never were separatist movements in Slovakia, that the language was the same, the religion too; moreover the Slovaks were always motivated by anti-Hungarian emotions.

The Czech politician used the same misleading sophistry when giving information about the population of the region he wanted to be annexed to the new Czechoslovakia juggling with numbers of inhabitants, proportions of population and areas with doctored figures; and stressed the existence of aggressive instances of Magyarization and he too offered that those Slovaks living around Budapest could stay in Hungary as a way of compensation.

The peace treaties thus became the scene of a flea-market of distorted or untrue ethnic dates and since the representatives of the victorious entente simply couldnot imagine that heads of European states, their allies presented sheer lies in front of the peace conference, basically accepted the requests of the successor states. Though in order to verify the requests there were committees put up to analyse the situation, however, in the meantime the strategic potentials of Romania against Russia and that of Czechoslovakia against Germany grew with the result that strategic considerations were preferred to ethnic ones which then were sacrificed. There were just a couple of transgressions rejected thus the idea of a Czechoslovakian corridor leading down the western part of Hungary to the Yugoslav border to connect the two Slavic countries; some areas (Salgótarján, Miskolc and the wine-region of Tokaj) was denied the Czechoslovakians, Orosháza, Békéscsaba, Hódmezővásárhely the Romanians, and the city of Pécs the Yugoslavs; all in all one third of present day Hungary as was defined in Trianon.

The Trianon decree – a historic document not frequently referred to- was based on several political elements. 1. *Lost war* that was the result of a war which never served the interests of the Hungarian

nation but from its start on threatened to become national tragedy: in case of defeat becoming the pray of the neighbouring countries, in the case of victory, reform strategies would have changed the structure of the Monarchy. 2. *A completely incorrect earlier nationality policy* that instead of trying to win over at least part of the minorities (Ruthenes, Germans, Slovaks, Rusins) alienated them from the Hungarian state by needless and ineffective measures. 3. *Military failure*, the policy that disbanded the then still considerable Hungarian military force while the nationalities who wanted to secede were armed. The Romanian army defeated in 1918 was left in arm contrary to any examples, and that is why the Romanians could break into Transylvania and occupy it. 4. *No social reforms were realized* that made the peasantry indifferent in the defence of the country (in contrast to the 1848-49 war of independence when the abolition of serfdom was the largest political and moral resource.) 5. *The "red power" of Béla Kun* that turned the western European bourgeois governments against Hungary. It is true, there was the successful northern campaign led by Aurél Stromfeld earlier K.U.K colonel that was stopped by the commissars on entente requests. To stop a victorious army inevitably leads to defeat.

It has to be established that Albert Apponyi and the delegation he led tried everything – though without much result - to appease the harsh peace conditions. In the past decades Apponyi frequently was charged with fighting for the whole and integer Hungary and did not forced the suggestion of a referendum by the population. It is not true, according to the documents, both Apponyi and the Hungarian delegation wanted referendum. Apponyi himself considered the system of referendum as the only real basis for decisions over territories, saying that in order to establish reality the means of referendum was at their disposal that the Hungarian delegation required in reference to President Wilson's concept that no relationship of persons, no part of the population of states could be replaced without its consent, to be put like cattle under the rule of another state. In the name of to this concept the Hungarian delegation required the referendum in the regions which were to be detached from Hungary. He assured the conference that the results would be accepted however they turned out, provided the conditions would assure its freedom.

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But in 1920 at the Paris conference nobody was already interested in this freedom – the peace treaty signed in the Palace of Great Trianon sealed the doom of Hungary: the result of this and the March 1919 ‘suicide’ was the antidemocratic restoration in the 1920s, the commitment to Berlin in the 1930s, entering into WW2 – that is a whole series of Hungarian tragedies in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. As in 1526 Mohács meant the fate of the earlier successful Hungary, thus did Trianon of Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Its consequences has still been felt both in the anti-Hungarian passion of the neighbours and in the frustration of the Hungarian national identity. Reparation is still topical and still difficult: politics has frequently led astray the goodwill to cure. May be the balm for the necrotic wounds caused by Trianon should be sought in Hungarian and European culture.