Trianon: 101 Years Later

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Abstract: This keynote address on Trianon was to be presented at the treaty's 100th anniversary in 2020 at the Pécs Conference of AHEA. Because of Covid 19 the conference was not held. It was organized a year later in 2021 via virtual internet presentations. Thus, the new title for the keynote became "Trianon: 101 Years Later." The address focuses on the historical background of this event and on the demographic, cultural, economic and political consequences for Hungarians and East-Central Europe. The analysis begins with the punitive nature of this dictated and imposed treaty and sets out to look at the causes which made this a lasting decision. Without attempting to blame solely the major powers or the immediate neighbors of Hungary, which became the successor states, the analysis also focuses on the major blunders of Hungarian leaders on the Left and on the Right. The devastating consequences for all the peoples of the region, but particularly for the Hungarians who became minorities in their own homelands in the successor states, requires a look at exit strategies from this quagmire. During the past 101 years nationalists, communists, fascists and liberal capitalists have all proposed solutions but to this day the problems remain. Although the root causes of the problem have been described by such outstanding scholars as Pál Teleki, Zsombor Szász, C.A. Macartney, and more recently Nándor Bárdi, Balázs Ablonczy, László Szarka, Zoltán Kántor and many others, the political will to work for solutions has not been present. The intent of this keynote is not to rehash the past but to provoke a re-thinking about the entire region's interests and future.

Keywords: Treaty of Trianon, Trianon Diktat, Hungary, Hungarian minorities, successor states, entente policy, István Tisza, Mihály Károlyi, Georges Clemenceau, Béla Kún, Woodrow Wilson, Albert Apponyi

Biography: András (Andrew) Ludányi is Emeritus Professor of Politics and History at Ohio Northern University. He graduated from Elmhurst College (Illinois) with a History major and a Political Science minor in 1963. He earned his M.A. (1966) and Ph.D. (1971) in Political Studies at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He joined the faculty of Ohio Northern University (Ada) in 1968 as a member of the History and Political Science Department, wherein his specialty sub-fields were Comparative Politics and International Relations. His research has focused on inter-ethnic and inter-nationality relations with particular attention on developments in Transylvania and Voivodina. He has published numerous articles and reviews and co-authored and edited five books in his research area. He received an IREX grant for research at the Gorky Library in Budapest (1982-83) and was visiting Fulbright Professor at Kossuth Lajos University from Fall, 1992 to Winter, 1993. He was also co-organizer of the Summer Hungarian Studies Program at Portland State University (1974-79) and at ONU (1980-85). He also organized five conferences and ten Human Rights Workshops (1982-2006) related to ethnic minorities. In recognition of his work at ONU he received the Wilfred E. Binkley Chair for three years and the Kernan Robson Chair for ten years. For his organizational work the Bethlen Gábor Allapítvány awarded him with the Teleki Pál



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Medal and the Hungarian Government gave him the Köztársasági Érdemrend Kiskeresztje in 1992 and the Magyar Érdemrend Lovagkeresztje in 2019. Finally, he was co-founder of the Hungarian Communion of Friends (MBK/ITT-OTT) and associate editor of its journal and yearbook from 1967 to the present. a-ludanyi@onu.edu

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

My reflections on Trianon have a slightly changed title from what appears in the program. It has become, "Trianon: 101 Years Later." Last year, just as we were preparing for our AHEA Conference here in Pécs, an article appeared in *The Economist* from the pen of Vendeline von Bredow with the lamentable title: "Ah Trianon, a Hungarian Lament." More lamentable than the title was the thesis of the article. Von Bredow maintained that the Hungarian 100-year remembrances were the sorrowful reflections caused by the "phantom pains" of the country's territorial losses! She contended that the Hungarians were feeling pain for amputated body parts that were no longer able to cause pain, because they were no longer connected to Hungary. As my good physician friend Dr. Péter Kovalszki pointed out in his response to The Economist article, the difference between body parts discarded after an amputation and the territories "amputated"/ripped from the thousand year body politic of historic Hungary, is that the latter are still connected by culture, family ties, church and community relations to their former homeland. Furthermore, that the new masters of the body parts try to weaken or destroy these ties. Thus, even after 100 years the pain is real and the salt is rubbed into the wounds not by the remembrance ceremonies, but by the efforts of the successor states to deny the past, nay even to re-write the past.

For my virtual presentation I have only three illustrations, only three maps, which summarize the losses historical Hungary suffered, and which were "legalized" in this dictated treaty. The first map is the famous Teleki "red map" based on the 1910 census, which was shared with representatives of the Entente powers in Paris.



Source: (C.A. Macartney, Hungary and Her Successors, 1937.)



Source: Source: https://bit.ly/3Lxv71R



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The dictated Trianon amputations by the Entente powers on June 4th, 1920 were the severest punitive damages imposed on any of the peoples who were part of the Central Powers. It left historical Hungary with only 28.6 percent of her territories. The enlarged Romania received 31.6 percent of the historic territories including Transylvania, two-thirds of the Banat and the Partium strip. The newly created South Slav state (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later re-named Yugoslavia) received 19.6 percent (including Croatia-Slavonia, Bácska, the Dráva and Mura triangles and one-third of the Banat). The newly created Czecho-Slovak state received 18.9 percent, mainly Upper Hungary and Subcarpathia. Austria as an afterthought received 1.2 percent, the region of Burgenland. Italy received 0.04 percent, the Adriatic port of Fiume and even Poland received a 0.02 percent of the High Tátra region, the Orava and Spis section. All together Hungary lost 71.4 percent of its territory and 60 percent of its population.

This loss of population was the "body part," to continue the analogy, that hurt the most. It included three and a half million ethnic Hungarians, who constituted the majority of the urban population in each of the amputated territories. They had provided the cultural, economic and political leadership on these territories. They now faced a grim future because they became the underdogs in states driven by the unrestrained and intolerant nationalisms that became characteristic of newly created states. Their options were few, in most instances loss of status, loss of properties or livelihoods, uncertainty, insecurity, discrimination and incremental ethnic cleansing. To avoid this, the other option was to leave their homes behind and become refugees in truncated Hungary. About 350,000 chose this latter option, creating a double burden for a defeated, impoverished, and devastated remnant of the historical Kingdom of Hungary. For those who remained behind, they now also faced the aggressive de-nationalization of their host state. The magyarization of pre-World War I Hungary was a pale shadow of the policies of romanianization, serbianization, slovakization and austrianization which replaced it in the interwar period!

How did Hungarians get into this quandry? Why were they punished the most severely by the Entente? We should examine these questions objectively, rather than spilling additional tears and blaming everyone else except considering perhaps our own culpability. Many excellent studies have been written on this dictated, devastating and totally unjust treaty, examined from every possible angle. These studies could fill many shelves in a respectable research library devoted to the fate of the Carpathian Basin and East-Central Europe. For my own observations I have gone back to the eye-witness accounts of the Great War and the treaty making that followed it. (Note: I have also read many of the subsequent analyses by Balázs Ablonczy, Ignác Romsics, Ernő Raffay, Géza Jeszenszky, Tibor Glant and many others, but have attempted to keep my analysis informed but independent of the different schools that explain why Trianon happened.) Indeed, there are many explanations: the decadence of Hungary's ruling class, the magvarization policies of the late 19th century, the failure of Hungarian public relations in Paris and London, the success of Tomas G. Masaryk and Eduard Benes in spreading their anti-Hungarian propaganda, the conspiratorial anti-Hungarian activity of the Free Mason Lodges in the pre-war era, the cameleon international policies of Romania and Romanians, the visceral Hungarianhatred of Robert W. Seton-Watson, Henry Wickham Steed or Harold Nicolson influencing the peace-makers at Versailles, the total political incompetence of Mihály Károlyi and Oszkár Jászi, the timing of the Béla Kun Bolshevik take-over, French geo-political interests, the abandonment of Wilson's self-determination of nations formula for borders, and the list goes on.

While none of these explanations can be ignored completely, they all conveniently ignore that Hungarian leadership failed to prepare for the consequences of a lost war. There was no contingency planning that could at least have mitigated the worst consequences that were

legitimized by the Trianon Diktat. Of course, other human errors and blunders also set the stage for this tragedy. Most of these were the responsibility of Mihály Károlyi, but not all. What were these major blunders? First, becoming embroiled in the Great War. It is true that Prime Minister István Tisza initially opposed the Monarchy's declaration of war on Serbia, but eventually went along with this flawed decision because of the German threat to give support to the Romanian claims to Transylvania. If a war did not sweep through the region, would it really have been in the interest of the Germans to support the Romanian rather than the Hungarian claims, particularly since the Hungarians controlled the region and only military force could have altered that control? On the Conservative side another major blunder was Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle's and the Dual Monarchy's Ambassador to Romania and Imperial Foreign Minister Ottokar Czernin's failure to have the Romanian army disarmed after they signed the separate Bucharest treaty with the Central powers in May 1918. (It should be remembered that Romania had earlier signed a secret treaty in London to enter the war on the side of the Entente in 1916. This it did on August 27th of that year and briefly but successfully occupied the southern part of Transylvania. But under the leadership of General Mackensen the German military defeated them and even captured Bucharest where the 1918 treaty was later signed!) A third blunder was that there were less than 70,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Transylvania at the time of the Romanian invasion with 369,000 men, because most of the Dual Monarchy's forces were in the North Eastern Carpathians or Galicia fighting the Russians. After the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1917 ended the war on the Eastern front they would be transferred to the Italian front, again far from Transylvania! Although István Tisza had warned that an inadequately defended Transylvania invited Romanian aggrandizement, there was no follow-up to his warning.

The blundering on the left by Károlyi, Jászi, Linder, and their followers came after hostilities ceased on the Italian front with the signing of the Padua cease fire/armistice on November 3rd, 1918. This armistice stipulated only that Hungary could retain 20 armed divisions and that the Entente would have access to any part of its territory. At this time Hungary was still without foreign troops on its territory and its military units were still intact as they crossed the borders on their way home. This created great unease in the newly established Károlyi government which had come to power on October 31st in 1918. They were more concerned about disarming their own military than limiting the territorial encroachments of the Romanians, Serbs and Czechs which began at this time with French support. The attitude that dominated the Károlyi administration and its fuzzy-minded pacifism was reflected in his Defense Minister, Béla Linder's statement that he did not want to see another Hungarian soldier again. To this end, they began to disarm them as soon as they crossed the border home to Hungary and agitators carried out an anti-military propaganda campaign which set out to undermine the morale of the soldiers. But Károlyi went one step further, just a few days later he traveled to Belgrade on November 7th to sign a second armistice, less favorable than the Padua agreement. Why?

The most obvious reason was Károlyi's fears of the Hungarian military, that they could carry out a counter-revolution and overthrow his government. This was reinforced by his ideological pacifism which was mirrored by his appointment of Béla Linder as his Minister of Defense. In addition, he wanted to demonstrate that he was in charge of Hungarian affairs and not the military commanders who had signed the Padua Armistice. He thus opened the door to the French version of the Entente occupational objectives. These were reflected in the perspectives and actions of Franchet d'Esperey, Fernand Vix and Henri Berthelot, all committed to the Georges Clemenceau desire to outflank German power on the continent and to provide a

cordon sanitaire barrier against the expansion of Soviet power. Ironically, the French support of Romanian expansion to the Tisza River via military demarcation lines that pushed the Hungarians further and further back and set the stage for Romanian control of Transylvania as well as large sections of the Partium, also led to the resignation of Mihály Károlyi and the power seizure of the Communists under Béla Kun on March 21st, 1919. In other words, the French effort to build barriers to communism provoked a regime change in Hungary that brought Béla Kun and his supporters to power there. (True: Only for 133 days, but it hardened the attitude of the Entente against Hungary even more!) Furthermore, the hardened position enabled the French to prevail over the other powers regarding the borders of Hungary.

What were the concerns of the other powers that they so easily gave way to the French position? The role of Italy was the least significant in the destruction of historic Hungary. It simply went along with the decision of the other powers, as long as Italian interests were incorporated in the final Versailles agreements. They followed their near-sighted nationalism and this overruled their affinity to the Hungarians via the Kossuth and Garibaldi-Cavour legacy. They went in the direction of short-term gain. The bloody battles at Isonzo and Caporetto were more vivid in their memories in 1918-1920 than the solidarity of the late nineteenth century. And they were fighting the Dual Monarchy for what they considered to be Italia Irredenta. For the Italians the payoff was acquiring southern Tyrol and as much of the Adriatic Coast as possible, including the port cities of Trieste and Fiume, and influence over Albania. They felt they had this coming on the basis of the secret wartime promise they received in London in 1915 for joining the Entente war effort and dividing the military forces of the Central Powers. The rest interested them very little, and they went along with what the other major powers put on the table. (Only later did they contradict the overall trajectory of Entente "will" when they made it possible for a plebiscite vote in Sopron to enable Hungary to retain that one city and its immediate neighborhood!)

The British government officially did not think of the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy as a war aim until 1918. However, this stance was contradicted by the secret wartime promises to certain nations. As we have seen this was the case with promises to Italy for entering the war on the side of the Entente. Similar promises were made to the Serbian government and to Romania in the secret treaty of 1916, the latter was promised Transylvania, the Banat and Bukovina. However, the British government hoped for secret peace negotiations with the Dual Monarchy and did not make these clandestine agreements public until the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg revealed it after capturing power in Russia. By then the London government had no choice but to indicate that conditions had changed. For a while the British hope was that a "reformed" intact Dual Monarchy would remain an obstacle to both Russian expansion Westward and German *Drag nach Osten* expansion toward the Middle East. In return for French support in dividing up the Middle East, the British supported the French in East Central Europe. This meant that they too were primary formulators of the Trianon Diktat.

For the United States under Woodrow Wilson these policies in theory were contrary to the self-determination of peoples principle. Yet at the Paris conference this was not articulated effectively. Why? First, because the preparations of the United States were orchestrated through an organization called the "Inquiry," which was not adequately representative of the different peoples and interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Second, because the war aims were already defined by Wilson's Fourteen Points which had been proclaimed on January 8, 1918 before the Inquiry began its work. Therefore, the deck was already stacked against the Monarchy. Third, this bias was reinforced by the anti-Hungarian composition of the Inquiry, which included Robert J. Kerner (with strong Czech sympathies) and Max Handman (with

similarly strong Romanian sympathies), but no-one was present to balance their perspectives with Hungarian or Austrian perspectives. Fourth, at the actual committee negotiations defining the boundaries of Hungary, the American representatives became captives of the French and British representatives, who in turn were strongly influenced by R. W. Seton-Watson, Wickham Steed, Tomas Masaryk and Eduard Benes. Finally, the Americans were "paid-off"to abandon their commitment to self-determination of peoples, by having Wilson's "baby," the League of Nations and its Covenant, put in the forefront on all the treaty documents. This occurred while Wilson went back to the USA to sell the treaty on the home front. When he returned to Paris he was no longer interested in the rest of the treaty-making process. Of the major leaders, Wilson was the only one who was absent when Albert Apponyi presented the Hungarian case to the Entente representatives on January 16th, 1920.

Of course, by this time Hungary's fate was already sealed at the conference table. By this time the new neighbors had occupied the territories they coveted. And the American perspective of Secretary of State Robert Lansing did not make a difference. Lansing was a weak link with very little understanding of European history beyond the English Channel. His conclusion was that "we" do not have to worry about defining the borders of Austria or Hungary, we should focus on the borders of our friends, and whatever is left will be the borders of our former enemies. This sums up the prospects of the Hungarians according to the Trianon Diktat! These decisions of the major Entente powers were foreseeable on the basis of the pre-War propaganda activities of the Czechs, Serbs and other South Slavs, as well as the Romanians. Their leaders as well as sympathizers (like R.W. Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed) had been systematically lobbying in Paris, London, Rome, Washington and Berlin for years before the outbreak of hostilities. As Géza Jeszenszky points out in his study on these activities in London, there were no activities on the part of the Dual Monarchy or of the Hungarian ruling class to counter them. (Lost Prestige, 2020, pp.251-265) Surely the Monarchy's intelligence services were aware of this. In fact, the Hungarian leaders themselves knew that the Romanian government was involved in supporting secessionist tendencies in Transylvania and other parts of Hungary. As Ignác Romsics points out in one of his studies (Erdély elvesztése, 2018, p.64), concern over these Romanian activities were also aired in the Hungarian Parliament, but there was no effective follow-up. The Oszkár Jászi efforts did not have the support of most Hungarians in and out of Parliament, and most of his proposals came too late to make a difference.

After the disarming of the Hungarian military and the second Armistice agreed to at Belgrade, the French military leaders let their lesser allies loose to capture as much Hungarian territory as possible. This land-grab activity on the part of Czechs, Serbs and Romanians determined the borders that would be sanctified by the Trianon Diktat. This land-grab would not have been possible if the Hungarian government would have begun the consolidation of the 20 regiments that the Padua agreement allowed for internal order. No such activity took place! Károlyi waited for the promised Wilsonian principles to kick in, but as we have seen, these principes never had a chance either on the ground, or later at the conference table in the face of the French determination to re-draw the map of Central Europe according to their geo-political interests.

With French support both the Romanians and the Czechs sent in their military forces to gain control over Hungarian territory. The Serbs already were in control of Southern Hungary (Bácska, part of Bánát, most of Baranya including Pécs and the Dárda triangle). Both the Romanian and Czech invasions of historic Hungarian territories took place against a disarmed political system overwhelmed by the chaos in Budapest, the assassination of István Tisza and the incompetence of the Károlyi government. But both these invasions also demonstrate that the

results need not have been the total submission of the Hungarian state. In Transylvania, the Székely divisions under the leadership of Károly Kratochvil with a mere 12,000 men, inadequately armed and supplied, and generally outnumbered four to one, were able to hold up the Romanian military's advance for four months, from the middle of December 1918 to April 25, 1919. They surrendered only when the by then established Béla Kun Communist dictatorship threatened them from the rear. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the newly organized Red Army's innitial success against the invading Czech forces. The latter suffered defeat in numerous encounters and only the ultimatum from Clemenceau to Kun stopped their retreat. Kun's willingness to give in to the Entente ultimatum, broke the morale of the "Red" military forces. (It should be noted that the officers of these units were former officers of the Dual Monarchy's military, who joined the Red Army only for the defense of Hungarian territory for patriotic and not ideological reasons. When Kun sabotaged this by buckling under the Clemenceau ultimatum, he destroyed the fighting spirit of these units.)

Had the Károlyi government not disbanded but reorganized the Hungarian military forces in the 20 regiments allowed by the Padua armistice, the shameful occupation of Hungary North, East and South could not have happened *to the extent that it did*. But the most telling evidence came from the West, where the Hungarian military response worked to save the savable. There Masaryk and Benes had plans to link Czecho-Slovakia with the South Slavs via a corridor through Western Hungary. Instead, the Entente decided to give historic Hungary's border strip to the Austrians. This was a clever way to keep the two former enemies from uniting against the Entente encirclement. Furthermore, they justified this by pointing out that most of the inhabitants in this region were Germans rather than Hungarians or Croatians. However, in this instance the Hungarians organized a movement to regain control of the Őrség, now renamed the Burgenland by the newly designated masters.

The movement under the leadership of Iván Héjjas, Mihály Francia Kiss and Pál Pronay, joined by the Sopron students from the Forestry and Mining Engineers college led to a successful guerilla resistence in the fall of 1921, after the Trianon Diktat had already given the region to Austria. The activities of the *Rongyos Gárda* [lit. 'Ragged Guard;' Hungarian irregular partizan bands] made it impossible for the Austrians to assert their sovereignty over the region. The Entente authorities in the area refused to become militarily involved and suggested negotiations. The Venice negotiations led to a decision to hold a prebiscite in Sopron/Ogdenburg to determine which country would gain possession of the City. Even though the population was German by more than two to one, the plebiscite favored Hungary two to one. Thus, the Hungarian willingness to take a stand and fight for their territory, paid off and Hungary retained a beautiful part of the Őrség/Burgenland. Who is to say that such successful resistance in other parts of the Carpathian Basin would not have led to similar results? Considering that all the major powers were exhausted by the war, they were not in a position to impose their will on a credible force (e.g., Kemal Ataturk's Turkish Republic).

Of course, after a hundred years of consolidated stolen goods, it no longer is possible to resort to similar options in our time. Too many things have changed in the demography and the power relations between the peoples of this region. However, the Viktor Orbán administration has taken advantage of the current interests of the region, taking into consideration among other things the collapse of the Trianon order, including the fragmentation of the region. Now the common interests of Czechs, Poles, Slovaks and Hungarians have brought them together as the V-4. Hungary is also doing a good job building bridges to the Slovenes, Serbs and Croats via economic, cultural and political ties. At present transcending borders with the Romanians and Ukrainians is somewhat more difficult, but common security interests in relation to the virus

pandemic and the growing migration threat will open avenues of cooperation even with these neighbors. At any rate, Orbán has demonstrated a way of uniting Hungarians and other peoples which indicates both flexibility and imagination. Furthermore, Orbán has demonstrated that he is not averse to contingency planning, unlike the leaders of Hungary during and after World War I.

This, in fact is the great lesson of Trianon. A second great lesson is that we have survived. To make sure it never happens again, even in the midst of crises we must have contingency planning and policymakers must be open to consider all available realistic options! One of those present realistic options is that the formerly amputated body parts can now be reunited across existing national borders. Thus, the present Hungarian leaders have successfuly re-united the nation across existing state borders without changing international borders and June 4th has become a day of solidarity rather than a day of lamentation

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