

A short history of the Treaty of Trianon
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Diplomatic background to Trianon during the war 1914 - 1918

With regard to the territorial question of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Entente, comprised of Britain, France and Russia, had drafted several different plans and ideas. The Russian government formulated its war aims against the Monarchy immediately after the outbreak of the war: to demand east Galicia for itself, Bosnia and Dalmatia for the Serbs, as well as the Romanian populated areas of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy -- by which they meant all of Transylvania -- for Romania, with whom they signed an agreement in 1914, under which Russia guaranteed Romania's demands. The stance of British foreign policy, *vis-à-vis* the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was defined by two opposing factors. On the one hand, during the early years of the war, the so-called Palmerston axiom, born in 1848-49, was very strong. During the revolutions of 1848-49, it was Palmerston's opinion that "the Austrian Empire is a thing which is worth saving: its preservation is in the fundamental European interest but to other country as to England." It meant that British foreign policy was traditionally Monarchy-friendly. On the other hand, there was a viewpoint among the creators of British foreign policy that, to wage a successful war, one needs as many, and as committed, allies as possible. From this view, it followed that the British Foreign Office was willing to accept, and guarantee, the Russian, Italian, Romanian and Serb territorial demands, meaning that significant chunks of Austro-Hungarian territory were promised to them. Similar to the British, the creators of French foreign policy saw the territory of the Monarchy as a potential reward, urging the Russians to fight and the neutrals (Italy, Romania) to join on the side of the Entente. This is evident by France supporting Russia's territorial claims against the Monarchy -- Galicia.

Of the abovementioned standpoints of the Entente allies, the following common policy emerged: the secret agreement (Treaty of London), signed on April 26, 1915, the Triple Entente promised Italy -- if it entered the war on their side -- South Tyrol, Trieste and environs, Gorozia and Gradisca, Istria and islands (but not Fiume / Rijeka), and northern Dalmatia down to Zara / Zadar from Monarchy territory. The secret agreement signed in Bucharest (Treaty of Bucharest) on August 17, 1916, the Triple Entente promised Romania -- again for entering the war -- Bukovina, Transylvania, the Banat and all Hungarian territory up to the left bank of the Tisza / Theiss River. These two secret agreements fit into traditional diplomatic proceedings, both in form and content. In practice, they meant nothing more than attempts to snare allies at the expense of territorial loss to an enemy power. The secret agreements of London and Bucharest dangled the prospect of significant territorial rewards before Italy and Romania but, interestingly, did not mandate the carving up of the Monarchy.

Here, we must make a detour to the ideas of the United States of America, joining on the side of the Entente and deciding the outcome of the war. Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, had a group created in September of 1917, 'The Inquiry,' tasked with the preparations for the peace negotiations. The group consisted of 150 experts, who wrote 2,000 reports and documents, and drew at least 1,500 maps. The head of the Austro-Hungarian section was Charles Seymour, 32, assistant university professor, who, previously, studied the nationalities problems of the Monarchy. Seymour was initially the spokesman for the transformation of the Monarchy into a federative union, still working on federative plans in April of 1918. In his proposal, he proposed to reorganize the Monarchy into a country with six federated states: Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Transylvania, Bohemia (Czechs) and Polish-Ukraine. Naturally, within the six units, minorities were going to be found but minority rights were going to be ensured for them. Seymour's federated scenario was a non-starter. The main reason was that the Entente was unable to separate the Monarchy from Germany and conclude a separate peace.

Among the leaders of the Entente, an anti-Monarchy focus began to gain the upper hand, which argued for a dismemberment of the Monarchy. In England, the publication *The New Europe*, disseminated the anti-Monarchy direction. The group's defining members were two reporters, Robert Seton-Watson (1879-1951) and Henry Wickham Steed (1871-1956). They both arrived in Vienna in the early years of the 20th century as reporters and left it just before the outbreak of hostilities as sworn enemies of the Monarchy. In 1914, they filled important positions in their country. Steed was the editor of the foreign affairs section of the most influential and widely read British paper, *The Times*, while Seton-Watson was an advisor in the Foreign Office. In their opinion, the Monarchy had to be carved up, to be replaced by nation states. This idea was propounded in numerous articles in their journal, *The New Europe*, *The Times* and other British papers, as well as in a dozen books. A significant portion of the staff of the British Foreign Office accepted the reasoning of *The New Europe* and attempted to influence the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister accordingly. France also had its own anti-Monarchy tendency. Its central character was Ernest Denis (1849-1921), professor of Slavic studies at the Sorbonne - who spent much time in Bohemia in his youth - who stated in his pre-war writings that the Czech people are to be seen as the main shield at the gate of East-Central Europe against a pan-German wave. During the war, he wrote a book in which he stated: "There remains but one solution, to create a string of nation states to replace the Dual Monarchy, primarily the Serb-Croat kingdom and the Czech state, which would stretch to the river's left bank [meaning the Danube - L.G.]"

The French anti-Monarchy momentum, similar to its British counterpart, also tried to influence the French Foreign Ministry to its way of thinking. This was successful as shortly the French Foreign Ministry was governed by an anti-Monarchy focus. This is best illustrated by the Ministry's important decision of December 16, 1917, when permission was granted for the Benes-led émigrés to begin to organize a Czechoslovak army in France. According to Ferenc (Frank)

Fejto, French Freemasons played a significant role in the eventual success of the anti-Monarchy direction. They are thought to have played a leading role in transforming the world war into an ideological war with the aim of altering Europe into a republican mold; into a republican Europe gathered around the League of Nations, after the hydra-heads of clericalism and military monarchism were cut off. They thought that, if the pillar of the Vatican and monarchism, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismembered, they would be contributing to the completion of a sacred mission, assigned by Providence to the people of the revolution, the French, and preparing for a bright future. Fejto also points out that the Freemasons made their infrastructure and influence available to the propaganda efforts of the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and other émigré committees, that they provided assistance all through the war to the Masaryk-Benes and other anti-Monarchy groups.

During the war, the so-called small nations also formulated their war goals. We have already touched on the Romanian concept, encapsulated in the secret Bucharest Treaty. On July 20, 1917, the South Slavs made theirs in the Corfu Declaration, stating that the Serbs, Slovenes and Croats want the creation of an independent nation state, whose form of government will be a monarchy ruled by the Karageorgevich dynasty. The Masaryk-Benes Czechoslovak émigré program was built on the slogan: “Smash Austria-Hungary,” meaning that the Monarchy was to be dismembered, to be replaced by new, independent countries. Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia were to form Czechoslovakia; in the East, Transylvania was to be given to Romania; in the South, a Yugoslavia was to be created from Serbia and the other Serb, Croat and Slovene territories.

In the spring of 1918, the foreign policies of the Entente Powers were irreversibly tipped in favor of the anti-Monarchy tide. The Entente accepted the war goals of the small nations. As a result, the Entente governments ‘recognized’ a string of governments-in-exile as the legitimate government of those small nations, thereby lending assurance to their territorial ambitions. The most important milestones in this process were:

1. June 3, 1918. The Entente Powers make a common declaration in which they make common cause with the nations and nationalities of Central Europe.
2. June 13, 1918. The declaration by the Entente Powers in support of an independent Poland.
3. June 24, 1918. The United States recognizes the right of the South Slavs to create an independent country.
4. June 29, 1918. France recognizes the Masaryk-Benes émigré government-in-exile, the Czechoslovak National Council.
5. August 9, 1918. Britain recognizes the Czechoslovak National Council.
6. September 2, 1918, The United States of America recognizes the Czechoslovak National Council.

Of this series of events, it was most crucial that the Czechoslovak National Council be recognized as the *de facto* government of Czechoslovakia,

since that recognition meant the dissolution and dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It must be noted here that a unified Poland could be reconstituted, that the most extreme - and sometime conflicting - Italian, Yugoslav and Romanian demands could be satisfied and still leave a strong German-Magyar-Czech central core. With the creation of a new Czechoslovakia, it was this central core that was demolished. The death sentence of the Monarchy was not sealed by the secret agreements signed in London and Bucharest but by the recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council between June and September of 1918. After the summer of 1918, the discussions in Entente circles were not about whether the Monarchy would stay or go but rather where the borders of the new countries that will replace it were to run.

The period of *fait accompli* October 1918 to January 1919

In the fall of 1918, the Monarchy fell apart: on October 28 the Republic of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in Prague. Two days later, the Slovaks proclaimed in Túrócszentmárton / Turčiansky svätý Martin their separation from the Kingdom of Hungary and their union with the Czech state. On October 29, the Sabor (parliament of Croatia) announced the creation of the Zagreb National Council and Croatia's separation from the Monarchy. At almost the same time, the Serb government set its army in motion against the southern border of Hungary. The Royal Romanian Army began the occupation of Transylvania on November 9. The National Assembly of Transylvanian Romanians declared the union of Transylvania with Romania. On December 1, the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom was proclaimed.

The government of count Mihaly (Michael) Karolyi (1875-1955), taking office on October 31, 1918, made several attempts during the months of November and December to stop the negative series of events. Oscar Jaszi, as Minister of Minorities, held talks with the Slovaks and the Transylvanian Romanians but without results. On top of it all, Karolyi signed the Military Convention of Belgrade on November 13 instead of the Padua armistice. The Convention allowed Serb and Romanian troops to occupy significant portions of Hungarian territory. In a further blow to Hungary's defensive position, the Minister of War for the Karolyi government, Bela Linder, ordered the disarming of the Hungarian soldiers returning from the front, instead of reorganizing the armed forces. As a result, between October of 1918 and January 1919 -when the peace conference convened - Czechoslovak, South Slav and Romanian troops occupied the territories to which they had laid claim. That is to say, even before the peace conference gathered in Paris, they were in possession of territory they demanded, presenting a diplomatic and military *fait accompli* to the peace conference. Karolyi and his government only mounted diplomatic responses to the Czech, Romanian and South Slav objectives, not military resistance. Thus, the peace conference beginning in January had 'merely' to ratify the newly formed borders. In our opinion, if the Karolyi government had presented an organized military response on behalf of the country, Hungary would have been

able to wrest more favourable borders in Paris. Karolyi, unfortunately, made no attempt in this direction, an unpardonable offense.

Drawing the Trianon borders 1919 – 1920

The Versailles peace conference was ceremoniously opened on January 18, 1919. The participants had not made it clear whether this conference was the preliminary meeting of the victors to harmonize various diverse views, to be followed by a congress that would involve neutral and defeated countries, or, if this was to be the peace conference whose decisions were final and irreversible. The conference began as the former and, during its progress, transformed into the latter. Thus, representatives of the defeated countries were not part of the proceedings, the losers were only summoned after the decisions were made to accept the terms. The core body of the conference was the Council of Ten, otherwise known as the Supreme Council. It was made up of the delegates of the five major powers (the American president, the prime ministers of Britain, France, Italy and Japan) and their foreign ministers. But, as it was rather cumbersome, at the end of March, 1919, Wilson suggested the creation of the Council of Four. Its membership consisted of Woodrow Wilson (US President), David Lloyd George (British PM), Georges Clemenceau (French PM) and Vittorio Orlando (Italian PM).

The method of dealing with territorial matters was defined by the fact that it focused on the demands presented by those present, with no chance of input by the losers or, as they were referred to, the 'guilty parties.' No time was wasted on matters concerning Austria or Hungary, rather all attention was focused on Czechoslovak, Polish, Romanian and Yugoslavian demands. As a result, the Hungarian-Yugoslavian and Hungarian-Romanian borders were determined by the 'Romania-Yugoslavia Committee,' while the matter of the Hungarian-Czechoslovakian border was defined by the 'Czechoslovak Committee.' [Not exactly impartial participants-*ed.*] The Romania-Yugoslavia Committee first convened on February 8, 1919 and, after lengthy arguments - particularly with regard to possession of the Banat, which both countries claimed - made its recommendation on March 18 with regard to the two sections of Hungary's southern border. The Czechoslovak Committee first met on February 5, 1919 and, after many meetings, came up with a boundary proposal on March 12. The Council of Foreign Ministers accepted the proposed Hungary-Yugoslavia and Hungary-Czechoslovakia border definition on May 8. The Council of Four took only a few minutes on May 12 to endorse the decision made by the foreign ministers. Thus, the post-WWI borders of Hungary were essentially decided in March of 1919 by the appointed committees and those decisions were sanctioned by mid-May.

The boundaries determined by the major powers at the peace conference, it must be said, ignored the application of the principle of ethnicity, to be replaced by any number of other needs: strategic, alliance, economic, transportation, etc. In the clash between the principle of ethnicity and other interests, in almost

every case the other interests won out. The 'crucial economic needs' or 'strategic considerations' of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in every case overrode the principles of ethnicity. At one of the meetings of the Czechoslovak Committee, it was openly stated that, in opposition to considerations given to ethnic distribution, that "as few Magyars be transferred to the Czechoslovak state," it is far more important that the boundary to be drawn ensures all the existing railway connections and ensures the best geographic border for Czechoslovakia. As a result, in countless cases the 'peacemakers' carved deeply into areas populated by ethnic Magyars. Apart from territory populated by other ethnic groups, territories populated by a majority of Magyars were also condemned to annexation - many of which were now in a foreign country, yet contiguous with the linguistic and ethnic Magyar border of historical Hungary. Such places were: in the East, the area around Szatmárnémeti, Oradea/Nagyvárad and Arad; in the South, the area around Subotica/Szabadka; in the North, the Žitný ostrov/Csallóköz, and the region South of the line of Košice/Kassa - Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat. The numbers speak more plainly than any contention: as a result of the peace treaty, 3.2 million Magyars were thrust into a minority position in the surrounding countries [the largest group in Europe-*ed.*], 1.6 million in Romania, 1 million in Czechoslovakia, 500,000 in Yugoslavia and 70,000 in Austria.

Signing the Trianon Treaty (1920) and its consequences

As noted in the previous section, the peace conference ratified Hungary's final borders on May 12, 1919. The next step was make these terms known to Hungary and, of course, get the treaty document signed. The signing was delayed by the March 21 overthrow of government by a bolshevik party in Hungary, under the leadership of Bela Kun. Due to ideological and political reasons, the Entente powers were loath to invite the communist government of Kun to Versailles. Rather, they waited until the Red terror collapsed after 133 days on August 31, 1919.

During the fall of 1919, chaotic conditions ruled in Hungary. Budapest fell under Romanian occupation, while several politicians tried to wrest power. The chaos was ended by two events. One, on November 16, Nicholas Horthy entered Budapest at the head of the newly-organized National Army. Two, as a result of conferences held from September to November by British diplomat George Russel Clerk, a government was formed on November 24 - under Prime Minister Karoly (Charles) Huszar - which consolidated all the acceptable [to the Entente, that is] Hungarian political parties. Subsequently, the peace conference notified the Huszar government on December 1 to send its delegates to accept the peace terms.

The Hungarian delegation arrived in Paris on January 7, 1920 and were handed the terms of the treaty on January 15. In January and the following months, count Albert Apponyi, head of the Hungarian delegation, and Hungarian diplomacy made every effort to effect changes in the boundaries

drawn up by the peace conference. Alas, all efforts failed and Hungary was forced to sign the peace treaty on June 4, 1920 in the palace of Trianon.

This peace treaty is a source of deep and serious conflicts between Hungary and her neighbours to this day, especially due to the fact that the borders as they were defined in it thrust 3.2 million ethnic Magyars into minority status. It seems obvious to us that Trianon was not only a Hungarian tragedy but a tragedy for all of Central Europe. Several conflicts of the 20th century were spawned because of the large number of Magyar - and other - minorities who were annexed within the borders of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A more sane and just ethnic consideration while drawing the boundaries would have made the history of 20th century Central Europe far more peaceful and calm.

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