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Relations between Hungary and countries of the Central and Eastern European region: collapse and reorganisation, 1918–1925¹

Introduction

In the period of the imperialism's rise (1870–1914) interests internal European and non-European and were parallelly present in the policies of all major powers. In some situations, non-European interests have become a priority for one or other superpower, but the real and determining interest of all European powers has been to secure their own position within Europe. The „Great War” (1914–1918) was about re-organising power relations in Europe, and as a result the redistribution of colonial territories was expected. Finally, the „the civil war of Europeans” was decided by the US' entry into the war.

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (AHM) including the Kingdom of Hungary has never become a real colonial power. Due to its complex internal constitutional, political, territorial, and ethnical structures and partially to the territorial ambitions of its neighbourhood it finally landed in a „checkmate” position. Hungary's only power attempt was intended towards the Balkan Peninsula.

The transformation of the ethnic principle into a state shaping idea and policy (manifesting in the German and Italian unity) was a fundamental challenge to the multi-ethnic AHM. From among the neighbouring countries Italy, Romania, and Serbia equally sought for uniting their own ethnic groups in a single nation-state (and therefore they claimed significant territories of the AHM), while the nationalities having no external motherland (like the Czechs or Yugoslavs) tried to unite within the territory of the Monarchy. The Polish settled areas divided between three empires found themselves in the most complicated situation.

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The world war fundamentally reorganized Europe's power relations, as well as the territory and population of the defeated states. Already during the war Russia had to suffer massive (the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk), Romania minor territorial losses (the Treaty of Bucharest). Both treaties launched complex processes, which were evaluated contrary by those concerned. At the end of the war the Monarchy was dissolved, and the Treaties of Paris severely mutilated the territories of the defeated countries.

During the war, several macro-regional territorial concepts were elaborated aimed at the delimitation of Europe's new internal boundaries. Concerning our region, the most known was Friedrich Neumann's „Mitteleuropa" (Central-Europe) Concept which has been the subject to wide-ranging political debates throughout Europe and Hungary. The Czechs formulated the „New Europe" Concept also during the war including the political target by Edward Benes according to which: „Austria-Hungary must be destroyed".

In the period between autumn 1918 and spring 1919, the territorial annihilation of the Kingdom of Hungary took place de facto, so that the Treaty of Trianon „merely" laid down the consequences in an act of international law. The defeated new Hungary found itself in a hostile environment and had to rethink its relations with its neighbourhood and Europe under fundamentally new conditions. Concluding the Treaty of Trianon was practically the admission into the neighbourhood and the new European order.

The new Hungary – apart from Austria – had to establish its interstate relationships in a hostile neighbourhood (Little Entente). It had no independent power-military option to enforce the territorial revision and yet called for it by national consensus. Hungary has never ever terminated the treaty internationally (in opposite to Soviet-Russia, having denounced the forced Treaty of Brest-Litovsk) but rather looked for powerful patrons to fulfil the territorial revision. This absurd situation almost automatically led the Hungarian foreign policy to a forced orbit. In September of 1922 admission of Hungary to the League of Nations was the first step for entering to the New European Order.

The aim of the study is to briefly present the processes during World War I, but basically focuses on the territorial consequences of peace treaties, especially Trianon Peace Treaty, 1920. The study analysing Hungary's new state neighbourhood. Hungary voiced its needs for territorial revision, was looking for the relations of great powers in a hostile neighbourhood environment, through which it could achieve its goal.

Defeat in World War I and the collapse

The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was not comparable with the three great colonial powers (England, France, and Russia) and played a rather minor role in the global colonization processes. Unlike Germany – the Monarchy did not become

a challenger to the old power and territorial order, nor did it announce or wish to fulfil any intentions of „redistributing the world”². The Monarchy’s foreign policy aspirations and steps were fundamentally determined by its European interests, especially its goals in the Balkans. (It annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908.) The Monarchy was not a global actor or power³, much more of European determination, – and although it had a sea exit and therefore it was not land-locked, yet a rather continental-embedded formation.

The Monarchy’s political-geographical respectively – from the aspect of politicians – „real political” and „practical geopolitical” interests and issues⁴ in European terms were trigeminal in 1910:

- non-neighbouring European empires (England, France),
- neighbouring European empires (Russia, Germany, Italy, Turkey),
- and the southeast adjacent small states (Romania, Serbia) with great-state ambitions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Neighbourhood of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1914



Edited by Z. Hajdú, *Changes in the Politico-Geographical Position of Hungary in the 20th Century*, „Discussion Papers”, no. 22, Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Pécs 1998.

² P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, New York 1989.

³ H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York 1994.

⁴ R. Sieger, *Die geographischen Grundlagen der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie und ihrer Aussenpolitik*, Wien 1915.

With non-neighbouring empires (England, France) the AHM had no territorial (colonial, intra-European) disputes. Both great powers considered the Monarchy in terms of the power balance in Europe. From the moment on when AHM became the „barge-satellite-power” of Germany, England and France changed their attitude towards the monarchy. First, they promised the „demanding neighbours” important territories of the Monarchy in secret treaties, until finally, in the final phase of the war, they decided to abolish the Monarchy, which they accomplished.

The neighbouring empires played varying roles in the relationships. Russia first became an ally (the League of Three Emperors) in 1873, then gradually alienated itself from this alliance and finally became hostile at the turn of the century. Italy followed a similar track. It was initially an ally, then „neutral” at the outbreak of the First World War and finally enemy and adversary. The secret territorial promises of the Entente played a decisive role in this frequent change of position.

The position of Turkey has fundamentally changed. As a result of the territorial changes following the Balkan wars of 1912–13, the Monarchy and Turkey were no longer direct neighbours. This turn was of great importance for both countries, since a centuries-old, conflicting competition, a common co- and side by side existence came to an end in this way⁵. Although the Monarchy was by no means the driving force behind the expulsion of the Turkish Empire from Europe, the influence of national movements of great weight and scope may have been a warning sign for it.

As regards the small-state neighbourhood the two south-eastern countries (Romania and Serbia) took different positions. From an ally, Romania turned into an enemy under the influence of the Entente’s promises and attacked Hungary. From its independence Serbia regarded the monarchy as its enemy and established close relations with Russia.

In the process of European reorganisation, the preservation of its territorial integrity has increasingly become the Monarchy’s foreign policy programme. The possibilities of the multi-ethnic state were severely limited by its internal reactions to the independence aspirations and separatist movements of its national minorities. Indeed, the Monarchy was a political formation based not on a national but on a dynastic foundation. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 VI 1914, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, who was fully prepared for the reign, also led to a succession crisis.

In terms of ethnicity, the Monarchy was the most structured, truly multi-ethnic historical empire (with 11 major nationalities). According to the 1910 census held separately, the two „naming nations” of the Monarchy together did not account for half of the total population (51 390 223 people) (11,9 million Germans – 24,2%, 10,0 million Hungarians – 20,3%). The national minorities lived within

⁵ W. J. Wagner, *Geschichte Österreichs. (Daten, Fakten, Karten)*, St. Pölten – Wien – Graz 2002.

the state formation partially in a mosaic-like mixture and partially in local-territorial majority. From our point of view, it is important that all national minorities and nationalities had contact with their mother nation (or an equivalent nation) across the borders, with the exception of Croats, Slovenes, Austrians, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks. The Polish nation was in a special situation since its settlement area was divided between three empires.

The military power relations of the time had many components (economy, population, social cohesion, infrastructure, etc.). The political elite apparently reckoned that in 1913, according to the simplest public statistics, the Entente federal system – including the colonial territories – covered about 70 million km² (almost half of the total surface) of the earth and about 7 million km² of the European continent, which accounts for about 70% of the total territory (only considering the European territories of Russia). In terms of population, the Entente had similarly oppressive dimensions both globally and in Europe. These territorial, but above all population-related data are extremely relevant in a protracted war.

According to some contemporary observers and analysts as well as the vast majority of those who are „in the position of later knowledge” the then political, economic, social, etc., processes logically edged toward the world war conflict. The key question in this situation was whether the contemporary political elites and the dominant countries of the various federal systems had taken full account of the realities of the then world.

A modern summary of the relations and implications between empires and their geography⁶ through the analysis of the 19th century and especially the period of imperialism (1871–1914) presented a real international „panorama” in terms of territorial ambitions, claims and conquests. Before and during World War I, the geography and geographers in all empires engaged in the „service of national objectives”. This was entailed with acquiring complex knowledge of the enemy (the holistic collection of statistical materials and maps has been launched previously), and the manipulation of facts, and even forgery was allowed in the hostile propaganda war⁷.

The Czech intellectuals and opposition politicians Edvard Benes and Thomas Masaryk already had a critical attitude towards the monarchy when they lived within (at home) and later during their emigration when they were organizing an emigrant government⁸. Starting from the ambition to reform of the Monarchy along the Czech interests (they called for trialism or federalism instead of dualism) in the emigration, they came to the idea and organising of the complete

⁶ *Geography and empire*, eds. A. Godlewska, N. Smith, Oxford, etc. 1994.

⁷ K. B. E. Sir Campbell Stuart, *Secrets of Crew House. (The Story of a Famous Campaign)*, London, etc. 1921.

⁸ F. Fodor, *The geographical Impossibility of the Czech State*, „East European Problems” 1920, no. 4.

elimination of the entire state formation and advocating the necessity of creating the independent Czechoslovak state⁹.

By the autumn of 1918, the AHM was about collapsing in all respects (military, economic, political, social). The military defeat showed the depth of the crisis. On 16 X, the Emperor proclaimed the federal reorganization of Austria with the aim of preserving the Monarchy, but this did not apply to the Kingdom of Hungary. The crisis could no longer be dealt with this way, revolutionary and separatist protest erupted. The imperial power literally collapsed in Vienna on the 24 X, the independent Czechoslovakia was announced in Prague on the 28 X, Galicia declared its accession to the new Polish state, and the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian state was proclaimed in Zagreb. The legitimate Hungarian Government (led by Sándor Wekerle) still in office officially denounced dualism on the 30 X.

After having officially „recognised” the military defeat (the Armistice of Villa Giusti in Padua on the 3 XI 1918), the state formation (without foreign troops having yet entered its territory) eliminated itself. On the 11 XI, the Austrian Emperor was forcedly resigned („he renounced participation” in the affairs of state) and the following day, the 12 XI, the Republic of German-Austria was proclaimed. Austria essentially „withdrew” from the Monarchy and Hungary followed a similar path by proclaiming the People’s Republic.

A historical empire, created over hundreds of years and restructured in 1867, collapsed and in many respects dissolved itself in an incredibly short time. No one came up to defend the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Figure 2).

Revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, territorial division of the Kingdom of Hungary

From the 24 X 1918, the country was in the state of revolutionary transformation and chaos. Count Mihály Károlyi insisted on „constitutionality” even under these circumstances, namely that the king shall lawfully appoint him as prime minister, which the king did. The period between 31 X 1918 and 20 III 1919 is the „Károlyi era” in the Hungarian history (he was first Prime Minister, then President of the Republic). Although Károlyi was an Entente-friendly politician already during the war, the victors refused to recognize his government diplomatically. The new country had no Ministry of Foreign Affairs (it was established first on 13 XII)

⁹ Marasyk and the English line of Czechoslovak state formation were elaborated in detail in the 1961 study by H. Hanak, then in the 1981 volume by H. Seaton-Watson, and more recently in a 2016 analysis by B. Bari. He reviews the attitude of the whole of English geography: R. Györi, Ch. J. Withers, *Trianon and its aftermath: British geography and the 'dismemberment' of Hungary, c. 1915–c. 1922*, „Scottish Geographical Journal” 2019, reviewed the issues of the transformation of Central Europe in a broader context.

and only few of the diplomats of the former common foreign affairs entered their duties. The government was able to achieve constant diplomatic recognition in Vienna, Bern, and the Vatican. The fourth embassy was set up in Berlin. (Relations with the new Poland were established on 22 XI 1919, after the collapse of the revolutionary government.)

Figure 2. The division of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the successor states



Key: 1 – boundaries of the Monarchy, 1918, 2 – boundaries of the Hungarian Kingdom, 1918, 3 – state boundaries 1920, 4 – territories to Poland, 5 – territories to Romania, 6 – territories to Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, 7 – territories to Italy.

Edited by Z. Hajdú, *op.cit.*

The government wanted to protect the territorial integrity of the country while implementing internal socio-economic reforms and complying with the obligations of the Belgrade military agreement signed with the Entente powers on 13 XI 1918, which imposed the almost complete disarmament of the Hungarian army. Károlyi almost immediately recognized the Slovenian-Serbian-Croatian state's newly proclaimed right to independence and sent an ambassador to Zagreb. (Gyula Gömbös, Captain of the General Staff, later Prime Minister, was appointed military attaché). Not only Mihály Károlyi, but also Pál Teleki recognized this state formation, which is why the „Red Map” did not even include its processing¹⁰.

¹⁰ It was „customary” to insult Mihály Károlyi and his government, but it should be noted that there was a period when the three later Hungarian prime ministers (Count Pál Teleki, Count István Bethlen and Gyula Gömbös) were all in the service of the government they considered legitimate.

The secession was not supported and attempts were made to establish territorial autonomies, to create a kind of „Eastern Switzerland” led by Oszkár Jászi, the Minister of Nationalities, but the nationalities rejected this ambition, their desire and aspiration to unite with the motherland became irreversible. By December 1918, the liquidation of the territorial unity of the Kingdom of Hungary had been completed „at the level of declarations” and partially also de facto. Basically, it was not the declarations of secession by the ethnic population that were decisive (in many cases these were only points of reference), but the mother countries and the major powers behind the nationalities and the interests of these countries respectively.

On the 21 III 1919 because of further territorial decisions by the great powers, Mihály Károlyi resigned and handed over the government to the social democrats. However, the social democrats were not prepared to govern on their own, they agreed with the communists arrested and imprisoned under the Károlyi government, and therefore the new government was from the very beginning communist and introduced the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Regarding foreign policy relations, the change was fundamental in several respects:

- While the declared Entente-friendly Károlyi regime and government was not invited to the Paris Peace Conference, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was, although the official invitation was „stuck” in Vienna.
- The new government wanted to build a close relationship with Soviet Russia, considering it as an ally.
- In the liberated areas of northern Hungary, the Slovak Soviet Republic was founded as an independent state (16 VI 1919–7 VII 1919), in fact a marionette state, with the centre in Prešov.
- They sought to establish close relations with Austria (not least because of the possibility of escaping, which took place on 1 VIII 1919).

With the fall of the Soviet Republic a significant part of the country including Budapest came under Romanian occupation. The victorious powers could not or did not want to restrict the unbridled activities of the Romanian army. The Romanians finally withdrew from Hungary at the behest of the Peace Conference, and the French.

After the fall of the proletarian regime and the flight of most Communist leaders to Vienna, the Social Democrats recovered the government, but the Entente did not recognize the interim governments diplomatically and only maintained military-consultative interactions with those. Nevertheless, the „concentration/coalition government of Károly Huszár” created by the Entente was recognized, and Hungary was invited to the peace conference on 2 XII 1919.

The Treaty of Trianon and the „entry” into international affairs

The processes of Hungarian state history were brutally interrupted by a series of tragedies that took place after the defeat in World War I. Between October 1918 and March 1919, the division of the historic state territory was completed. And these territorial changes that had already taken place were less regulated but legitimized by the peace treaty signed on 4 VI 1920. In 1921 the Hungarian legislator ratified the peace treaty and so made it part of the internal legal order (with the Act XXXIII of 1921), but its rejection and refusal remained constant in both the political and social context.

„Trianon” has played and continues to play a decisive role in Hungarian historical and economic research, but at the same time relatively less attention has been paid to the successor states, the neighbourhood of the „circumcised” country (the new state borders did not coincide with the old ones at a single point).

In our brief outlook, we describe the „initial state” of the new neighbourhood, and within, how the detached parts were connected to the new state bodies. Both the Hungarians who remained in the mother country and those who found themselves in the successor states had to face elementary new challenges. And in both cases, it was difficult to accept the necessities arising from the new situation. The initial state of the Balkanizing region was marked by hostility, the protection of the acquired „prey” at all costs. Between the two world wars, István Bibó described the base case situation in the region as „the misery of small states”.

Table 1. The division of the Kingdom of Hungary among successor states as set in the Trianon Treaty (data according to the 1910 census)

Country	Territory		Population	
	km ²	percent	capita	percent
Romania	102 813	31,6	5 237 911	25,1
Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom	63 370	19,5	4 149 840	19,9
Czechoslovakia	61 646	18,9	3 516 815	16,8
Austria	4 020	1,2	292 631	1,4
Poland	589	0,2	24 880	0,1
Italy	21	0,0008	49 806	0,2
Severed Territories total	232 459	71,4	13 271 353	63,5
Remaining in Hungary	92 952	28,6	7 615 134	36,5
Original territory, population of the Kingdom of Hungary	325 411	100,0	20 886 487	100,0

Source: *Census of 1920., part VI.: Summary of results*, Budapest 1929.

Particularities of the new neighbourhood policy

The World War defeat abolished the German „Central Europe” („Mitteleuropa”) concept of F. Neumann’s idea from 1915 was removed from the agenda, and Germany was temporarily excluded from the Danube region in terms of power policy. Russia, falling into an internal crisis and a maze of communism, also fell out of its former role. Russia, plunging into an internal crisis and the maze of communism, also fell out of its former role. France has become the main political factor influencing relations between the region and the individual countries. French diplomacy played a key role in building the network of relationships of relations between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, in the formation of the Little Entente in 1921 and its anti-Hungarian operation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Little Entente around Hungary, 1922



Edited by Z. Hajdú, *op.cit.*

The inventory of the new neighbourhood began with the signing of the peace treaty, then after minor corrections (return of Sopron and its surroundings from Austria to Hungary), taking into account international summaries¹¹, the geopoliti-

¹¹ I. Bowman, *The New World*, New York 1921; A. Dix, *Politische Geographie (Weltpolitishes Handbuch)*, München-Berlin 1922.

and economic-statistical compilation by Gyula Szende published in 1922 described both the basic geographical structure and the basic economic characteristics of the „new neighbours” and the population of the detached territories (Table 2).

Table 2. Hungary and its neighbours, 1922

Country	Territory (km ²)	Population (million capita)	Density (capita/km ²)	Number of Hungarians (corrected, capita)
Hungary	93 010	8,5	92	7 147 000
Austria	83 833	6,5	78	25 000
Czechoslovakia	140 394	13,6	97	702 000
Romania	294 967	16,2	55	1 481 000
Yougoslavia	248 987	11,9	48	457 000

Source: Gy. Szende, *Földrajz-politikai és gazdaság-statisztikai adatok a Föld összes államairól*, Budapest 1922.

Hungarian aspirations were determined by the territorial revision as a general goal and the protection of the rights of the Hungarian minority. Both diplomatic relations and bilateral trade relations have been shaped accordingly.

In the new situation, all countries concerned were essentially faced with a common major challenge or even danger: the internal stabilisation of the newly created state. However, question marks had different emphasis among the winners and defeated, both in terms international and national affairs. Each of the new successor states, except for Austria and Hungary, became a multi-ethnic state with small „AHM” structures.

Austria – the co-losing neighbour

Austria, too, ended the First World War as a loser, and the terms of the peace treaty concluded with it were no less lenient than the Hungarian peace in Trianon. According to the Austrian census of 31 I 1920, 79 883 km² and 6 131 445 persons were under Austrian rule. (About 28% of the territory of the former Austrian Empire was preserved, the population in the new state decreased similarly drastically.) The Austrian peace treaty attached Western Hungary (later Burgenland) to Austria, but in 1920 it was still under Hungarian rule and administration and the census was also conducted by the Hungarians.

Following the signing of the peace treaties, the affairs of the western Hungarian territories bordering on Austria have been elevated to the level of international

politics. Due to the complicated conditions in the region (a part of the Hungarian aristocracy and the „Ragged Guard” wanted to create an independent state – called Lajtabánság) the takeover of the area was problematic. The Czechoslovak and Serbian governments promised Austria armed support for the takeover of western Hungary, but the Austrian leadership did not accept it. In the end the „handover” was resolved without major conflicts. Due to these circumstances (and to the referendum held in Sopron on 14 X 1921, as the result of which the city and its surroundings remained within the framework of Hungary), relations between the two countries developed under difficult and sometimes contradictory conditions. The perception of Austria in the Hungarian political, scientific, and national press varied to an extreme degree, from „the only open gate” to „Austria is a thief”.

However, from 1922, relations between the two countries gradually improved as a sense of interdependence gradually developed in both small countries. This was especially important for Hungary, because – in the grip of a hostile neighbourhood – Austria was the only free exit to the west.

Within Austria, Burgenland became the poorest and most agricultural province. Development gradually began with the territorial consolidation, but the backwardness within the country did not decrease.

The length of the newly established common borders was initially estimated to be „approximately” 356,5 km of the then Hungarian borders the total length of which was estimated 2241,6 km. After the Treaty of Trianon, the Austrian border has become the most permeable border section in every respect.

Austro-Hungarian diplomatic relations were established almost from the moment of the AHM’s collapse (Ferenc Harrer, later Foreign Minister, established the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna) and were even maintained during the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Indeed, the all-embracing questions of state succession had to be resolved.

By 1925 the relations between Hungary and Austria were stabilized in nearly every respect. The awareness of interdependence strengthened, and Austria became a key partner of Hungary in business and foreign trade. Role of Austria in the total Hungarian foreign trade was very high in the years of 1923–1925 (ratio in the import 22,6 – 25,8%, in the export 33,5 – 43,6%).

Czechoslovakia

The 28 X 1918 is considered the date of the establishment of the Czechoslovak state. At first it was only proclaimed as a space of „hope and aspiration”, and soon was our new northern neighbour de facto created, mainly with military force and the support of the superpowers.

According to the Czechoslovak census held in 1921, the state territory covered 140 394 km² and the number of the population was 13 613 000. The area acquired from Hungary covered 61 633 km² (18,9% of the former territory of the Kingdom of Hungary), the population was about 3 517 000, representing about 16,8% of the population of the former Kingdom of Hungary. Thus the „Hungarian heritage” played a very important role within the country. In 1910, 1 084 000 Hungarians lived in the separated territory, and the 1921 Czechoslovakian census „found” only 745 000 Hungarians in the territory of the new state. The Hungarian minority accounted for about 5,5% of the population of Czechoslovakia. The eastern part of the new country – the then Slovakia – has emerged entirely from the bosom of the historical Hungary. The vast majority of the detached Hungarian population lived along the new state border. Apart from the Hungarians living blocks, there were only smaller Hungarian-speaking islands, mainly in the cities.

Within Czechoslovakia, in addition to the two state-forming nations, the Ruthenians, who also belong to the Slavic language community, demanded law and autonomy, and in the Czech territories the Germans and in the Slovakian part the Hungarians appeared to be big question marks. (Treatment of nationalities was somewhat fairer than in Romania but still could not meet the requirements of the peace treaties.)

Czechoslovakia „inherited” Czech industry and became, after Austria the most industrialized and most developed successor state. At the same time, it carried contradictions, not only in terms of nationalities, but also in terms of the enormous territorial differences within the country. The eastern parts of the country, especially the regions populated by Ruthenians, were agriculturally underdeveloped areas.

Almost from the very beginning, Czechoslovakia sought to change the ethnic composition of the population along the common border. Czech and Slovak settlement villages were established, and military fortification works were carried out on the more difficult parts of the border. These processes fitted into the long-term goal and processes of the integration of the new state territory.

After the signing of Trianon Treaty, during the work of fine-tuning the border demarcation, several local initiatives appeared on behalf of the municipalities suggesting staying part of Hungary or return to Hungary. Somoskőújfalu, for example, was awarded to Czechoslovakia by the peace treaty, but the local return initiative and movement proved to be successful. The 24th session Council of the League of Nations’ Council – which dealt with local border issues – reattached Somoskőújfalu and Somoskő villages and the surrounding mines to Hungary. On 15 II 1924 the settlements were returned to Hungary and the „relocation of the border barriers” was completed.

Relations between the two countries have developed more smoothly in terms of economy and trade (in import 24,1 – 25,2%, in export 11,7 – 24,1% in the years

of 1923–1925) and less smoothly in terms of transport and people-to-people relations. Czechoslovakia did not prevent the Hungarian population, especially intellectuals, from moving to Hungary. Communication between the two countries initially developed in military matters, and then institutions of diplomatic contacts gradually evolved.

Romania

After the World War, Romania became Hungary's largest (294 967 km²) and most populous (16,5 million people) neighbour. It received the largest area (103 093 km², which corresponds to 31,7% of the former Kingdom of Hungary) and the largest population (5 257 000 people, 25,2% of the former population).

According to the Hungarian census of 1910, 1,7 million Hungarians lived in the Hungarian territories annexed to Romania, partly in a large, almost homogeneous block (Szekler land), partly as a territorial majority, and a small part in territorial or settlement level dispersion. The great territorial and population winner Romania became a multi-ethnic state like the other successor states.

The common border was „about” 431,5 kilometres. Almost its entire length ran within the Hungarian accommodation and language area. Romania was not interested in maintaining the functionality of the previously established infrastructural links (roads, railways) across the new border. Barriers have been raised on roads and railways crossing the new borders and the number of border crossings were deliberately reduced to a minimum.

In addition to the narrowing of relations, the change in the ethnic characteristics of the border areas was also part of Romania's border policy, and the construction of a defence line (fortification system) along the border was started early. The Romanian population was lured with advantages to the border towns with Hungarian majority population.

In the relations between Hungary and Romania it was crucial that the Treaty of Trianon gave Romania the largest territory and population of the former Hungary, and that Romania accommodated the largest Hungarian minority group, some of which lived in one block. Thus, Romania became almost three times the size of the post-Trianon Hungary. Its population and economic performance have also increased significantly as compared to Hungary and in terms of military strength prevailed over Hungary. Romania essentially became a regional medium power in the period between the two world wars.

Romania accounted for about only 8% of Hungary's total foreign trade in 1924, clearly due to poor interstate relations and economic, social, and political restructuring within the country, which affected almost all of Transylvania.

Hungarian-Romanian economic relations were determined by political relations. Hungary's imports have always significantly exceeded exports and Hungarian exports to Romania showed the picture of a developed country.

The Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenes

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, (but also Yugoslavia, as it was generally known in the early 1920s, although it was not officially adopted until 1929) became the „common heir” in the southern neighbourhood, as it received significant territories from the former Austrian Empire and also from the Kingdom of Hungary. The territory of the new state was 248 987 km² and the population 12 million according to the first Yugoslav census of 1921.

63 092 km² of the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (19,4%) and about 4 131 000 persons (19,8% of the former state population) were transferred. The new Yugoslavia became a truly multi-ethnic country in which the transferred 472 000 Hungarians made up about 3,9% of the total population. Most of the Hungarian population lived in Serbia, in the Bácska and Bánát regions in the common border areas. In the Croatian and Slovenian part, there was a smaller „block” of Hungarians, which, however, only formed less important language islands.

According to then statistical calculations and measurements, the length of the new borderline between the two countries was „approximately” 680,6 km. The border policy of the new Yugoslav state included changing the ethnic composition of the population (establishment of colonial border guard settlements) and the gradual establishment of lines of defence at the most sensitive sections. Yugoslavia's share of Hungary's foreign trade turnover, which was considered the „mirror” of interstate relations, was only 3,5% in 1924.

During the precise delimitation of the new borderline, the question of Szomoróc reappeared, which had already become a „border issue” several times during the temporary turmoil of 1919. Following the decision of the border demarcation commission, Szomoróc was reattached to Hungary on 8 II 1922.

By and large, Hungary's foreign policy became neighbourhood-centred and shaped its international relations in terms of the territorial revision, in addition to the anticommunism that has evolved aftermath of the Hungarian proletarian dictatorship. As for its relations with the great powers, the Italian and then the German relations came to the fore (Hungary refused to accept the help of the Soviet Union, although it was pro territorial revision).

Conclusions

The Great War caused fundamental changes in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The victims of the most serious changes (territorial, population) became the countries of the defeated Central Powers, but also Russia, which abandoned the war in 1917, suffered heavy losses.

The biggest loser of the war was the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which started the war with its declaration of war, and which was abolished according to the internal aspirations of the nationalities and the interests of the great powers. The territorial entity of the Kingdom of Hungary was dissolved, and the new Hungary could retain only 28,6% of the former territory of the kingdom and 36,5% of its population. Basically, Hungary and Austria were the losers in the arrangement, but none of the winning successor states learned from the faulty nationality policy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The former state space was fragmented, new political and customs borders were raised, and new minority masses were disadvantaged and unable to accept their new status. It is no coincidence that as early as 1923 the situation in the region was described as one that did not create peace but sowed the „seeds” of a new war.

The League of Nations was planned to be an institute of collective European security organisation, but because of open and hidden conflicts between the former „winners” and „losers” its work was ineffective. Hungary found it difficult to fit into the new European order, and with its territorial efforts it was thinking in a special „friend – enemy” duality

Abstract

Zoltán Hajdú

Relations between Hungary and countries of the Central and Eastern European region: collapse and reorganisation, 1918–1925

The First World War caused very deep and fundamental changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The biggest loser of the war was the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Kingdom of Hungary as one of its parts was dissolved in the framework of Trianon Peace Treaty. The new Hungary could retain only 28,6% of the former territory and 36,5% of its former population. After 1920 the League of Nations was planned a new collective European security system.

Keywords: collapse of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, break up Kingdom of Hungary, new neighbours of Hungary, territorial consolidation, League of Nations

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