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## The Treaty of Trianon – Different Views

Celebrations, anniversaries and commemorations are part of civilized peoples' everyday life. We have in mind both defeats and victories, from time to time we bring them back to our memory because they all are a source from which we can learn. There are political regimes and peoples which emphasize tragedies, and there are others that glorify fulfilments. Romanians have never thought insistently of their historical failures – and there have been quite enough over the course of time! – preferring to remember victories, sometimes too vividly. On the contrary, our Serbian neighbours, for instance, turned the tragic battle of Kossovopolje in 1389 (after which the Turks took the lead in the region) into a moment of reference for their national identity and a symbol of their sacrifice for faith. Our Hungarian neighbours chose to turn certain defeats in their history into important events or even national holidays: for instance, in the history of Hungary the Modern Epoch begins in 1526, when the “disaster” of Mohács took place; 15 March 1848 (when, among other things, the “union of Transylvania with Hungary” was decided) marks the glory of a lost revolution; 23 October 1956 is the date of another violently stifled revolution, this time by the Soviet tanks; 4 June 1920 is the day considered the “catastrophe” of Trianon, etc.

Lately we keep hearing of the name Trianon, connected with signing a peace treaty a century ago. At the end of World War II all winning powers together concluded a treaty separately with every single defeated state. That is why, between 1919-1920, in Paris and nearby, five documents were signed to officially put an end to the war. The Treaty of Trianon is the last in the series of five. It is called so after the name of the palace The Grand Trianon near the sumptuous Palace of Versailles. If this treaty had not been signed there by the allied and associated powers and Hungary, few Romanians would have probably heard of Trianon. The document settled all the problems between the winners and Hungary, which, when the war started, had not been a subject of international law. Actually, for the first time after about half a millennium (1541–1920), Hungary became again an officially recognized independent country owing to this very document. The treaty enshrined, among many other things, detaching from the territory of historical Hungary (“Hungary during the Crown of Saint Stephen”) of all the territories (counties, provinces) in which Hungarians were a minority from the demographic point of view. These territories were mainly Croatia and Vojvodina, Slovakia and Transylvania, which were recognized as belonging to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Czechoslovakia and, respectively, Romania. By these decisions (as well as by those of the Treaty of Saint Germain) “Historical Hungary” lost about two thirds of its territory in favour of the majority populations, which had decided their destiny in 1918. This document, whose provisions are generally valid nowadays too, is presented by the Hungarian propaganda as “the greatest historical injustice done by the great western powers to eternal Hungary, the Carpathian Basin ruler”. This is why many Hungarians consider the Treaty of Trianon as the moment of disintegration of Hungary, after the great powers “grabbed” “its historical provinces”, namely Transylvania, Slovakia, Croatia, a.s.o.



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What is the reality? Many say today, in full relativism, that truth is whatever everyone considers (“the significant truth”), which is obviously lacking logical consistency. When we speak of the new architecture of Central and South-Eastern Europe after World War I, it is imperative to make the distinction between factual and legal realities. Actually, the entire old order of the region collapsed in the year 1918, when four empires fell (German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman) and new states were formed, or others were completed according to ethnic and national criteria. The cause of this huge change was, undoubtedly, the peoples’ fight for national emancipation, initiated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and culminating in the “century of nationalities” and in the 1900’s. The occasion of the imminent change was, no doubt, the world war, “the Great War”, which favoured fulfilment of peoples’ wish while the great powers in the area were defeated. Rightfully, the new order was accepted at international level in the years 1919-1920, thanks to the already mentioned treaties of peace.

For the Romanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, etc., the culmination of the changes was the autumn of the year 1918. The Treaty of Trianon means for these peoples only the consummation of the process, by international consecration of a pre-existing reality. In these peoples’ vision, reunification of Romania, Slovakia (forming Czechoslovakia) and Croatia (in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) was not done by the great powers, but by the peoples themselves, through their elites, as a result of the national emancipation movements. It is crystal clear for anyone that it was not Trianon that decided disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but the nations that no longer wanted to live in the “prison of nations”.

For the Romanians, the Treaty of Trianon cannot be considered the document that accomplished the unification of Transylvania and Romania, as it only made an older reality official at international level. The unification of the Romanian provinces, Transylvania included, with Romania was not the consequence of the treaties concluded by the winners with the defeated states (and Trianon is no exception); it was due to the national emancipation movements culminating with the decisions made at Chișinău, Chernovtsy, and Alba Iulia. The Treaty of Trianon did not decide the unification of Transylvania with Romania, it only recognized, at international level, the deed achieved by the Romanians in 1918. The Reunified Borders of Romania were recognized not only at Trianon, but also at Saint-Germain (Romania’s north-eastern border with Poland), at Neuilly-sur-Seine (the south-eastern border with Bulgaria); for the Romanians Trianon is therefore only a juridical episode connected to the western border of Romania (very important, no doubt) in the Great Union epic.

Consequently, the actions organized by Romania on the occasion of over one hundred years since the Treaty of Trianon was signed, are generally correlated with those of the countries and peoples liberated at 1918 from under the Austro-Hungarian domination. All these actions refer to the international recognition of the decisions made by the peoples, to the new European architecture after the Great War, which was not the decision of the Great Powers; all the great powers did was to recognize the deeds of the liberated peoples.



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Hungary's main arguments against the Trianon treaty were based, in 1920, on the historical law, on the law of the sword, on the "civilizing mission of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin." In fact, in certain documents orchestrated by official circles of Budapest, it is repeated even today the racist idea that, in 1920, the Great Western Powers gave Transylvania, the "pearl of the Kingdom of Hungary" in the hands of "uncivilized Balkan Romania". The arguments of Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, etc. focus on the ethnicity of the majority of the population, on the decision of the majority of the population, on the right of peoples to decide their own destiny (the right of peoples to self-determination, supported and imposed by the United States President Woodrow Wilson). Therefore, these are two completely different visions. In the international law, neither in 1919-1920 nor now, Hungary's arguments were not and are not valid, they do not belong to the arsenal of democracy and were not recognized by the international community. Hungary's position is unique, isolated, while Romania's position is shared by several actors in the international configuration. Europe's new political and territorial order is in place since 1918, validated by historical practice, and even if the decision-makers who participated in the Trianon conference of June 1920 had wanted to change that order, they would not have been able to change it.

The decisions to recognize the new states and the ones unified in 1918 were revalidated (largely) after World War II, then at the Helsinki Conference (1975) and then after the fall of the Iron Curtain. For us, for Romanians, it is painful that the consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (concluded on August 23, 1939) remained in force; although it was denounced, the pact still produces effects. But this serious fact has nothing to do with Trianon. Romania's western border with Hungary, with the exception of the 1940-1944 episode (that took place during a totalitarian fascist regime, condemned by all international courts), has remained unchanged for a century, being considered the expression of democratic relations and international principles of peaceful coexistence.

The unification of Transylvania with Romania was not the act of an elite (although the elite voted for it), but a democratic act with a plebiscite character: 1228 delegates, elected and appointed by the administrative-territorial units, political parties, churches, professional associations, women, students etc., voted on December 1, 1918 not only in their name, as individual votes, but also in the name of millions of Romanians who delegated their right to vote, through entrustment documents, called "credentials" (recently published in the eight volumes of the monumental paper entitled "Building the Great Union", elaborated by the "Babeș-Bolyai" University). Therefore, the vote cast in Alba Iulia was the vote of tens and hundreds of Romanians, and all the 1228 votes represent, in fact, the position of all the Transylvanian Romanians. According to the Austro-Hungarian censuses, the Romanians represented the absolute majority of Transylvania (with Banat, Crișana and Maramureș).

After any war, anywhere and anytime in the world, there were defeated and victorious. The losers were always punished, and the winners decided the fate of the countries



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in their area of action. But for the first time in history, the winners of the First World War were forced to take into account, overwhelmingly, the will of the peoples involved. The losers, as always, had their frustrations and sufferings, but, in the special case of the Hungarian people, a part of the elite (that of noble extraction) cultivated the mentality of a victim forced to take revenge. This frustration of the Hungarian people is real and painful, but its endless cultivation deepens tensions in the area. Consequently, every action of Romania in relation with the centennial of Trianon must be detached from the contingent, should be treated without bitterness and be placed in the general context of recognition of the new architecture of Europe through the treaties of Paris (Versailles, Saint Germain, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Trianon and Sèvres) of 1919-1920. Romania, since 1918, legitimized itself in the world, and, since then, the legitimation was declared by the international courts and was always repeated by those who followed, until today.

History is interpreted differently by different peoples. Romanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and many other Europeans celebrate the peace treaties of Paris precisely because they accepted the decisions of the peoples to form new national and federal states, on the ruins of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires. It is true that these new realities were accepted by the allied and associated powers, who were victorious in the First World War. But that's what has happened ever since the world began. A century ago and until today, other decisions with international legal force have confirmed – broadly – the treaties of 1919-1920 and the existence of national states in the region. Therefore, any nostalgic discussion about old empires and multinational states becomes obsolete. Especially that today, the states and the peoples of the former communist “Eastern Europe” militate for the fullest possible integration into the European Union. Or, more precisely, in Romania's vision, they should do so.

There is a difference in accent between the official positions of Hungary and Romania, but the accent is serious. Romania sees the new political-territorial chessboard of Central Europe as part of a process carried out by the peoples (1918) and legitimized by the Great Powers (1919-1920), while Hungary sees only the legitimation and only the 1920 moment, completely neglecting the role of the peoples.

Obviously, the Treaty of Trianon has its international and national importance which is difficult to estimate and impossible to minimize: it legitimized the right will of the Romanian people and strengthened an expensive legacy at international level. The peoples to whom the historical justice was recognized by the Treaty of Trianon have a word to defend and uphold its justice, since all the international treaties that followed confirmed it. In other words, with the exception of the Russian Empire (which was always rebuilt in various forms), all the other empires torn apart by peoples in 1918 remained only a historical memory. Instead, the states of the Poles, Romanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, etc., created, recreated, unified or reborn after the First World War, lasted and still exist today.

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