

THE TRIANON TREATY AND REVISIONIST POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY. TRADITIONAL AND RECENT APPROACHES

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze the phenomenon of the Trianon Treaty (1920) from the perspective of its use as a subject of political mythology. The research is chronologically structured, the epistemic object being the identification of functions and dynamics of the political myth. The main hypothesis of the author is that the revisionist mythology created around the Trianon Treaty had the essential function of preserving the social status quo in interwar Hungary, and respectively to offer an ideological legitimacy to an authoritarian government after 2010. In order to prove this hypothesis, the author first analyses whether the conduct of the Paris Peace Conference justifies the accusation of “diktat,” which is the basis of the political myth. Then, the research presents the main elements of revisionist political mythology and how they were used by the Miklos Horthy regime. In the last part of the study the dynamics of revisionist mythology are presented, from the Cold War period to the time of the government of Viktor Orban. The conclusion of the research is that revisionist mythology has endangered peace and stability in Central Europe and produced countless tragedies, and therefore relationships based on realities, rather than on the ghosts of the past, are needed.

Keywords: revisionism, Treaty of Trianon, Romania, Hungary, historiography, ethnic minorities.

The term “Trianon” has special meanings in Central and Eastern Europe, because from a simple toponym it turned into a polarizing political symbol, with essentially positive connotations for Croatians, Romanians, Serbs or Slovaks and negative for the Hungarians. “Trianon” usually means the Peace Treaty signed on 4 June 1920 by the Allied Powers and Hungary, by which the latter’s borders were established after the end of the First World War. The historical event itself, as a result of its implications, witnessed a quick mythologizing process, whereby the truth was combined with distortions of reality; a political narrative ensued, which justified both the past and present, but which also provides motivation for future

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actions. The historical phenomenon of mythologizing historical facts is nothing new, but the “Trianon case” is remarkable by the intensity and sustainability of its manifestations, being present within the political field for over a century.

The purpose of this study is to analyze a section of revisionist political mythology created by defeated countries of the Great War, mainly the one generated around the Trianon Treaty.¹ Our research is structured around two axes: the chronological one and the functional one (content, structure, functions and dynamic of the political myth). As a result of the phenomenon’s complexity, of the huge amount of information accumulated during the last century and which can be subsumed to this topic, our historiographical undertaking is assumed to be limited, only defining key moments, without including details specific to monographic approaches.

The hypothesis upon which we are constructing the study is that revisionist mythology was produced in interwar Hungary in order to preserve the political and social status quo; then, it was used in various historical contexts, as an instrument of authoritarian leadership over Hungarian society. The functioning of the myth was based on a spiral of internal and international actions, each dimension having the role of legitimizing and energizing political mythology. If we exclude the communist totalitarian period (until the 1970s), the period of maximum freedom and democracy in Hungary (1990–2010) coincided with the stage in which Trianon’s mythology had a secondary/marginal political role. During all other periods of Hungarian history, the Trianon mythology was the main driving force behind the deep mechanisms of the Hungarian political system.

The New European Order and Revisionism

The traumatic and often useless ferocity of the military confrontation between the Entente and the Central Powers had a major effect over the psychological environment in which relations between winners and losers were conceived. Critical observers of the manner in which the ensuing peace was conceived, such as John Maynard Keynes², had no voice during the Peace Conference, as the leaders of the main winning powers (the British Empire, France, the United States of America and Italy, considered to be “general interests” countries), gathered in the Supreme Council, were animated not only by the desire

¹ See Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 121–140; Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (London, Routledge, 2002), 13–44.

² British economist John Maynard Keynes, member of his country’s delegation to the peace Conference, published at the end of 1919 his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan & Co.), in which he criticized the “Carthaginian peace” imposed to defeated countries, mainly to Germany. Keynes did not agree to huge compensations and trade and economic limitations imposed to defeated countries, which affected their recovery and acceptance of the peace.

for a “fair peace,” but also by selfishness and immediate political interests.³ Additionally, the public opinion from countries in which bloody combat took place (France, Italy) or which suffered important human losses (the British Empire) expected an intransigent attitude towards the losers, also wishing to receive important material compensations from the latter.

The new European political order, created by the limited and not entirely consistent acceptance of the nations’ self-determination principle, also known as the “Versailles system,” was met with disapproval, both immediately and during the entire interwar period; diluted forms of this phenomenon can also be witnessed today. The dissolution of European empires among losing countries, simultaneously with the emergence of new states or the extension of existing ones, was the main ingredient for the birth of transnational revisionism. The latter mainly developed in Germany and Hungary, but also in the Soviet Union, fascist Italy or Bulgaria. The objectives of revisionist policy were the changes of the new borders and the escape from under the peace conditions imposed to the defeated countries (most of all, the possibility to re-arm). During the interwar period, at the peak of the revisionist policy, state objectives were always accompanied by a huge desire for revenge from the side of a significant part of the losing countries’ population. More recent revisionism aims at creating mechanisms by which situations of *de facto* or *de jure* co-sovereignty be accepted, in which “mother-countries” acquire a right to decide on the political organization of “host-countries” (for example, the support offered by political forces from Hungary for the creation of autonomous administrative-political structures within Romania, the so-called “Szekler Land”).

Revisionism developed as a transnational political movement, with several dimensions: *ideological*, being one of the main ingredients of interwar fascism; *geopolitical*, challenging the collective security system led by the League of Nations; *actions to undermine* successor states or those who gained territories. For example, Romania was threatened by the Soviet Union and Hungary; Czechoslovakia by Germany, Hungary and Poland; Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union. The use of ethno-confessional minorities for pursuing a geopolitical agenda determined the emergence of a feeling that minorities are a sort of “fifth column,” which hampered the integration into civic nations.

Hungarian revisionism of the interwar period had certain origins concerning internal politics. Emphasizing the theme of “national catastrophe,” the Miklos Horthy regime (1920–1944) preserved the political and economic supremacy of a small number of people (oligarchy); the transition towards parliamentary democracy was blocked and irredentism became an essential component of the personality cult around the state leader.

³ See Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003).

The core of revisionist policy was irredentism (claims of a state to the territories of another state). With a long tradition in European politics, interwar irredentism eroded the Versailles system, being one of the determining causes of the Second World War.⁴ The most active countries with irredentist policies were Germany (the very existence of Austria as a state was disputed; there were also claims to the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, over the sovereignty upon the Ruhr and Saar against France, Memel with Lithuania, Danzig and the Sea Corridor with Poland) and Hungary (Budapest sought to get Burgenland from Austria, Transylvania from Romania, Banat from Yugoslavia, and parts of Slovakia, Ruthenia and Sub-Carpathia from Czechoslovakia). Therefore, the permanent tension among states created the perception of a 30 years' war in Europe, between 1914 and 1945.⁵

At the roots of irredentism was the aspiration towards homogeneous ethnic states, mainly the desire to gather within a single nation-state all the population belonging to the same ethno-cultural group. Such an objective is, however, impossible to achieve in Europe, as the fundamental operational thesis of the Paris Conference stated. At the end of the Second World War there were deportations of Germanic population in Europe, but finding "definitive solutions" by way of population transfers/territorial changes at the level of the whole Europe, in order to create compact ethno-confessional groups, was neither feasible nor desirable. In spite of the partial reconfirmation of the "Versailles system" at the end of the second world conflagration, then by the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the ghost of irredentism did not vanish from Europe, being fuelled, after the end of the Cold War, by political forces which want a return to the past.

The Trianon Treaty, a Dictate?

Among the losing countries after the Great War, the Versailles peace treaty (understood as the sum of legal documents signed between the Allied Powers and the defeated countries) was considered illegitimate, as it had not been negotiated, but rather imposed.⁶ The Trianon Treaty was and is contested because it is allegedly a "Great Powers' dictate"; this is the central piece of the Hungarian revisionist mythology, around which the rest of political myth subthemes are organized.

⁴ Markus Kornprobst, *Irredentism in European Politics. Argumentation, Compromise and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 240–244.

⁵ Jay Winter (ed.), *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years on* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 124.

⁶ For example, during the Weimer Republic, German nationalists called the Versailles Treaty an "infamous treaty," Woodrow Wilson being blamed that, although he had promised "a peace without victory," he imposed, together with the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and British Prime Minister Lloyd George, a treaty by which they humiliated Germany. See Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, Elisabeth Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 603–604.

The challenge against the Versailles system by the war losers is not a surprise. What is more interesting are critical historiographical researches⁷ regarding the Paris peace treaty, which claim, more or less, that “Hitler was born in Versailles.” The aim of revisionist historiography was, starting with the 1920s, to support the idea that the international system was non-functional, as it was allegedly built upon an illegitimate foundation, “the Versailles Diktat.”

It is true that the feeling of humiliation among losing countries was used by fascists in their path towards power and the huge economic compensations hindered the recovery of European economies. But to say that the rise of Nazi Germany and especially the Second World War are the direct consequence of the Versailles Treaty involves the use in historiography of a post-factual determinism, which falsifies history. Victorious national-socialism was the consequence of the economic crisis (which was not determined by the peace conditions imposed by the victors⁸) and of a complex mix of political and cultural factors,⁹ rather than of the Versailles Treaty. The revisionist teleology, having as its cornerstone the “diktat” thesis, does not take into account the fact that the Versailles Treaty was not entirely implemented, as the issue of war compensations was subject to negotiations, and that until the Great Depression also hit Europe the collective security system was functional in keeping with its fundamental guidelines (the League of Nations). The Versailles Treaty could categorically have been gentler with the losing powers, at least in what concerns economic reparations, but this does not mean it was illegitimate; its consequences concerning the borders could only immorally be removed by an “irredentist revolution.”

What Hungarians call “the greatest national tragedy,” the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary, can be understood from the perspective of state and population size: from 325,411 square kilometers the surface was reduced to 92,833 square kilometers, and the population from 20.8 million to 7.9 million inhabitants.¹⁰ What is not mentioned in the mythologized narration of the Trianon

⁷ See, for example, Norman A. Graebner, Edward M. Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy. The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Howard Elcock, *Could the Versailles System Have Worked?* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁸ See Patricia Calvin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929–1939* (New York: Martin’s Press, 2000), passim.

⁹ See Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler’s Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2018), passim.

¹⁰ These numbers represent a maximal version which also includes Croatia-Slovenia, the latter having an insignificant Hungarian population. According to historical sources, Hungary’s surface varies, but the size ratio is the same. By the Trianon Treaty, on the basis of articles 27–35, Hungary’s surface was reduced from 282,870 square kilometers to 92,952 square kilometers, and the population from 18,264,533 to 7,615,117 people. The territories whose loss reduced the size of the former Kingdom of Hungary were attributed to: Romania – 102,813 sq km; Czechoslovakia – 61,646 sq km; Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – 20,829 sq km; Austria – 4,020 sq km. The Hungarian population acquiring the statute of ethnic minority within the successor states amounted to

Treaty is that the so-called “lost territories” were part of the Kingdom of Hungary not due to democratic elective processes but only as a consequence of historical circumstances dating back to the Middle Ages. For example, in Burgenland (surrendered to Austria through the Saint Germain Treaty) the Hungarian population amounted only to 9%. Within the territories “lost” to Slovakia or Serbia (Vojvodina), the Hungarian ethnic group did not exceed 30%, according to the census held by Budapest itself in 1910. In what concerns Transylvania (the former Great Principality of Transylvania, with its 15 counties), data from the official census shows the effects of the Magyarization policy: in 1869, there were 1,428,299 (59.7%) Romanians and 735,085 (30.7%) Hungarians, and in 1910, there were 1,608,108 (55.3%) Romanians and 1,005,526 (34.6%) Hungarians.¹¹ Even within the extended territories claimed by Romania during the Peace Conference, based upon the Political Convention between Romania and the Entente of August 1916, Romanians were the ethnic majority, according to the results of the 1910 census.¹²

In the mythological construction of the “Trianon catastrophe” within Hungarian politics, the term “dictate” is not used by accident; on the contrary, it has the role of delegitimizing it, as the core element of a conspiracy-type narrative structure. After the signing of the Trianon treaty, this was allegedly rejected by all Hungarians, an attitude synthesized by the slogan “*Nem, Nem, Soha!*” (“No, no, never!”), which became the symbol of revisionism.¹³ Delegitimizing an act considered to be immoral is doubled by an urge to resist and act in order to undo the “injustice.” Hungary is described as an innocent victim of Great Powers’ cruelty and, according to the implicit logic of mythological narrative, irredentism was the only legitimate option.

Were the decisions of the Peace Conference concerning Hungary absurd, immoral and lacking any ground, being the fruit of a despotic act of punishment? Was Hungary prevented from expressing its own interests and was the Trianon

approximately 3.3 million people. See Zsolt Horbulák, “The Image of the Treaty of Trianon in Slovak Historiography,” *Res Historica*, 42 (2016), 266.

¹¹ Ioan Bolovan, Elena Crinela Holom, Marius Eppel, “Ethnicity and Politics: Censuses in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Case Study: Transylvania, 1869-1910),” *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, X, 2 (2016), 150.

¹² In 1910, 4.845 million people lived in the territory claimed by Romania, of which 2.34 million (48.3%) were Romanians, 1.54 million Hungarians (31.8%), 0.5 million Szeklers (10.3%), 0.295 Germans (6.1%). These numbers of the Hungarian census were challenged by Romanian experts, as some of the Jews and Romanians were registered as Hungarians (nationality was derived from the spoken language by those included in the census, and it was not freely chosen by citizens, but “the language that the questioned one speaks better and with greatest pleasure”). According to the Romanian position during the Peace Conference, Romanians accounted for 52% of the population, Hungarians for 24.9% and Szeklers for 9.5%, in *La Roumanie devant le Congrès de la paix. Documents officiels du gouvernement roumain (1919)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2018), 161–164.

¹³ Conny Mithander, Maria Holmgren Troy, John Sundholm (eds.), *Collective Traumas Memories of War and Conflict in 20th-Century Europe* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007), 86.

Treaty signed under the threat of the destruction of its statehood, so that we could really speak about a “dictate”? Was the Kingdom of Hungary an “innocent victim” or was the creation of successor states the viable solution for solving the nationality issue of Austria-Hungary?

Even during the war, US President Woodrow Wilson, starting from the Fourteen Points presented in January 1918, followed by the explicit commitment to the nations’ self-determination principle, stated his vision in regard to the peace conference: solutions had to be found concerning collective security and the oppressed nations under the defeated empire had to be liberated.¹⁴ Even if the solution of accepting Austria-Hungary’s demise was regarded with reserves in the beginning by the Wilson administration, at the end of 1918 it became the obvious decision, not only for military strategic reasons or out of “idealism,” understood as naiveté, but mainly in order to eliminate the risks of a new military confrontation.¹⁵

Acknowledging that the United States would be the new and progressive force that would impose the postwar order, the oppressed nations of Austria-Hungary manifested their will for self-determination. On 28 October 1918, the Czechs proclaimed their breakup with Vienna and, two days later, the Slovaks, through the Martin Declaration, declared their independence from Austria-Hungary and their desire to create Czechoslovakia. In their turn, the Romanians from Hungary created, on 27 October/9 November, the Romanian National Council of Budapest for the administration of the territories inhabited by Romanians. The National Assembly of Alba Iulia (1 December 1918) and especially the referendum process finalized with the adoption of the Resolution to Unite with the Kingdom of Romania, indicated the popular desire to live in a country based on the principle of self-determination. In the south, in the Balkans, Croats manifested their will to break up with Hungary and the Serbs from Vojvodina joined Belgrade, in a broader political movement, together with Croats and Slovenes, in order to create the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, also proclaimed on 1 December 1918.¹⁶ Movements of national self-determination from the dying Dual Monarchy indicated to the winning Great Powers that a scenario involving a return to the 1914 borders could not be taken into account. The American and British leaders could not have justified their involvement in the war if the losers preserved their force unchanged for new possible confrontations. For American, British or French peace planners it was obvious that ethnically homogeneous countries could not be

¹⁴ Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51–64; Georg Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution (1917–1921)* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 117–126.

¹⁵ The subject was approached in several historiographical debates. For an introduction to this issue, see Václav Horčíčka, “The Relationship between Austria-Hungary and the United States in 1918,” *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 1 (2015), 57–92.

¹⁶ Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia’s Great War, 1914–1918* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 278–325.

established in Central Europe, but the new borders were to include as few ethno-cultural groups different from the majority as possible; the new state constructions should have been politically, economically and militarily viable, in order to resist both the pressure of Bolshevism and possible threats from Germany.

The Paris Peace Conference, which officially began on 18 January 1919, was devised not as a simple gathering of the leaders of the winning countries, which would take abrupt decisions concerning the defeated countries, but was prepared to pass resolutions starting from the recommendations of expert groups. In the concrete case of Romania's borders, it must be mentioned that, following the presentation of the point of view by the delegation leader, Prime Minister Ion I.C. Brătianu (31 January – 1 February 1919), on 3 February 1919, a study committee was appointed by the Supreme Council, made up of eight experts (French, English, Americans and Italians).¹⁷ A similar procedure was also employed in the case of Czechoslovakia's borders.¹⁸ During the works of the territorial commission charged with analyzing Romania's demands, the idea of population and territorial changes in order to create ethnically homogeneous areas was rejected. As such, the principles also agreed in the case of Romania were those of self-determination, military security and economic efficiency. Among the proposals discussed within the expert committee, the most remote from the Romanian demands was the American one, which left to Hungary the towns of Satu Mare, Oradea, Carei and Arad, according to the ethnic argument. It is true that within these towns the Romanian population represented a minority, but in the nearby rural areas the ethnic Romanians were in the majority. Thus, an important role in the inclusion of these towns into Romania was played by France's and Britain's desire to economically and militarily consolidate the Romanian state (also by the inclusion of the railway connecting these towns), which, in the vision of Paris and London, had to become a counterweight, together with Poland, to Germany and the Bolshevik menace. In June 1919, the Supreme Council agreed to follow the recommendations of the study committee concerning Romania's borders with Hungary and with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in spite of the discontent of the Bucharest government, led Ion I.C. Brătianu.¹⁹ One must also

¹⁷ For Romania's demands at the Peace Conference, see Lucian Leuștean, *România, Ungaria și Tratatul de la Trianon (1918–1920)* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 51–59.

¹⁸ Sherman David Spector, *România și Conferința de Pace de la Paris: diplomația lui Ion I. C. Brătianu* (Iași: Institutul European, 1995), 125–138; Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination. Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 122–131.

¹⁹ Brătianu was against the proposal that the Minorities Treaty should include provisions giving to the Great Powers the right to intervene in the affairs of the Kingdom of Romania, considering that minorities had already been granted rights "regarding language, education and the practice of their religion." Brătianu's opposition was justified by the fear of revisionism, as there was the risk that some minorities "would look for protection outside borders." It is important to mention that Romanian decision-makers felt humiliated by the treatment they were submitted to by the

mention, in this context, that the Peace Conference did not accept Romania's maximal demands. Also, the intention of the Supreme Council to impose a supranational mechanism of minority protection was not accepted by Bratianu, the reason for which he first left the conference (July 1919) and then resigned as the head of the government (September 1919). In what concerns the Romanian–Serbian border, the strategic interests of the Great Powers were aimed at politically and militarily strengthening Belgrade, which is why a significant part of Banat was attributed to Serbia, including the Romanians from the Timok Valley (the region on the right bank of the Danube, in the south-western neighborhood of Romania). Experts and political decision makers were conscious that important communities of Hungarians, Germans or Jews remained on the territory of Romania, but special clauses for the protection of minorities were included in the Trianon Treaty (articles 54–60). Also, Romania signed, on 9 December 1919, a Minorities' Treaty in which it committed to respect their rights, “without any discrimination resulting from birth, nationality, language, race or religion” (article 2).²⁰ The same principle of balance was followed by experts in establishing the borders between Romania and Czechoslovakia: the part of Maramureş on the right bank of Tisa River was left to Prague, while the border was set on the Tisa River, considered to be an appropriate natural border. The solutions found during the Peace Conference were not absolutely satisfactory for any side, but they represented a compromise the Supreme Council considered fair.

Neither Romania, nor Hungary were represented within the expert committees which analyzed the issue of the border between the two countries. Both the Bucharest²¹ and the Budapest governments attempted to influence the decisions of the Peace Conference, not only by using the less visible instruments of lobbying, but also by sending written points of view, meant to influence the final decisions. In contradiction with the “dictate” thesis, Hungary presented its position through no less than 38 diplomatic notes, offering a vast documentary material by which it hoped to influence the conference's decisions.²²

Supreme Council, accusing the attitude of defying smaller states, see Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, *Scrisori de la Conferința de Pace: Paris-Versailles, 1919–1920* (Cluj-Napoca: Multi Press International, 2003), passim.

²⁰ Romania's success at the Peace Conference was also helped by the attitude of the Bucharest government which offered guarantees that ethnic minorities' rights will be respected. An important element was the Decree-law of 22 May 1919 which solved the issue of granting citizenship to Jews, thus closing a vulnerable issue for Romania.

²¹ See, to this end, some brochures published by Romania: *La Roumanie devant le Congrès de la paix. Ses revendications territoriales. La Transylvanie et les territoires Roumains de Hongrie: renseignements statistiques et ethniques avec une carte ethnographique* (Paris: Dubois et Bauer, 1919); *La Roumanie devant le Congrès de la paix: le Banat de Temeshvar* (Paris: Dubois et Bauer, 1919).

²² See *Les négociations de la paix hongroise: compte-rendu sur les travaux de la délégation de paix de Hongrie à Neuilly sur Seine de janvier à mars 1920*, 4 volumes (Budapest: Impr. V. Hornyánszky, 1920–1921). A part of these documents were also published in Romanian:

It is important to mention that the Peace Treaty with Hungary was only finalized once Romania, which had occupied Budapest in August 1919, accepted the request to withdraw (7 November 1919). Until 28 March 1920, the Romanian Army withdrew from the territory of Hungary (east of River Tisa), according to the agreement with the Supreme Council.

Hungary was invited to present its own position at the Peace Conference, being received “coldly, but fairly” by the French hosts.²³ The leader of the Hungarian delegation, Count Apponyi, which embodied aristocratic and conservative Hungary, spoke before the Supreme Council in January 1920, exactly as the first leader of the Romanian delegation, Ion I.C. Bratianu, had done a year before. No verbal negotiations took place, but the Hungarian delegation was allowed to submit written documents supporting its position. Starting from the status of country accountable for the beginning of the war, a status established even before the Peace Conference, Hungary had to convince the Council of the fact that it understood the new realities and that oppression of minorities had to stop for good. On the contrary, Count Apponyi, defiant towards the emancipated nationalities of Austria-Hungary, claimed the racial inferiority of the Romanians, for example. In the new situation, created by the attitude of the Hungarian delegation in Paris, on 24 February 1920 the Supreme Council received a joint letter of the delegations of Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in which it was warned that any change of the already convened border would mean a “betrayal.”

Budapest tried an action of last resort. Count Apponyi refused to sign the Peace Treaty and secret negotiations with France began; the Hungarian government tried to get support from Paris in order to change the borders, in exchange of some advantages for French businessmen (for example, the Schneider-Creusot companies).²⁴ Budapest’s pro-French turn did not have any chances of success, as Paris would have had to offer explanations for its change of attitude, both to the Anglo-Americans and to its allies in Eastern Europe. Therefore, Paris abandoned the opportunistic gambles and Hungary could no longer delay the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, signed at Trianon, on 4 June

Cristina Tineghe (ed.), *Problema transilvană reflectată în notele prezentate de delegația maghiară la Conferința de pace de la Paris (1920)* (Bucharest: Centrul de Studii pentru Resurse Românești, 2008). The documents presented during the Peace Conference became, afterwards, the main source of ideas for Hungarian irredentism. Such an example is Albert Apponyi, Albert Berzeviczy, Oliver Eöttevényi, *Justice for Hungary: Review and Criticism of the Effect of the Treaty of Trianon* (London: Longmans, Green, 1928).

²³ MacMillan, 268.

²⁴ István Polgár, *Tratatul de la Trianon-impactul asupra istoriografiei române și maghiare (1920–2010)* (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2011), 141–143. In the secret negotiations with the French, the Budapest government demanded to receive a good part of Upper Hungary’s (Slovakia) territories, areas from Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, while the Transylvanian Hungarians and Saxons had to enjoy territorial autonomy.

1920. In front of a truly historical failure, the Hungarian political elite avoided to assume responsibility and fervently supported the conspiracy theory of the “diktat.”

Hungarian Irredentism: from Trianon to the Cold War

While in the successor states and in countries which extended their ethnic borders, such as Romania, the spirit of the new era meant a consolidation of democracy, Hungary, reduced to its core ethnic homogeneity, plunged into a reborn medieval age. After the removal of the Bolshevik regime led by Bela Kun and the withdrawal of the Romanian army from Hungary, a conservative regime was established in Budapest, meant to protect the interests of the aristocracy and the great landowners.²⁵ Unlike Austria, which developed a democratic regime within a constitutional republic, Hungary became a *sui generis* monarchy, as the Habsburg restoration, in the person of Charles IV, was not in fact desired. Miklos Horthy had taken over the power in November 1919 as Governor of Hungary, also called regent (as the king was absent), but opposed the three attempts of Charles IV (October 1920–October 1921), supported by a part of the Hungarian aristocracy, to become monarch. In November 1921 the legal union between Hungary and the Habsburgs was dissolved.²⁶ The crown could be subject, in principle, to a new elective action, but this never happened. Therefore, Hungary was a kingdom without a king, led by the last admiral of the newly landlocked country, Miklos Horthy. Nostalgia for imperial Hungary was a constituent part of the new state’s identity. The regime’s ideology was a sort of conservatism, defined as “Christian nationalism,” with strong anti-Semitic overtones (starting from an older anti-Semitism, Jews were twice blamed, for having brought communism to Hungary – Bela Kun was a Jew – but also Western liberalism, which was considered a source of national emancipation movements).²⁷

The Trianon Treaty was quickly submitted to a mythologizing process, becoming Hungary’s founding traumatic event. Its fundamental function was to preserve the political, social and economic status quo, while the Hungarian elites’ claims of leading a “great power” proved illusory. Land reform was refused, although only 745 magnates owned one third of the land and 1.2 million peasants

²⁵ For the history of interwar Hungary, see Mária Ormos, *Hungary in the Age of the Two World Wars 1914–1945* (Boulder: Eastern European Monographs, 2007); Norman Stone, *Hungary: A Short History* (London: Profile Books, 2019); Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*, (Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001); Catherine Horel, *L’amiral Horthy, le régent de Hongrie* (Paris: Perrin, 2014).

²⁶ Bryan Cartledge, *The Will to Survive: A History of Hungary* (New York: Hurst & Company, 2011), 336.

²⁷ Attila Pók, *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe. Scapegoating in Twentieth Century Hungary History and Historiography* (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2009), 131–132.

had none whatsoever. The Hungarian society did not experience an internal democratization process, but preserved a rudimentary parliamentary regime, refusing universal male suffrage, which had been adopted by all of Hungary's neighbors. Prime Minister Istvan Bethlen (1921–1931) said that secret ballot “was not compatible with the open character of the Hungarian nation.”²⁸ On the contrary, Hungarian society, having the advantage of a relative ethnic homogeneity (about 90% were ethnic Hungarians), was in a state of permanent mobilization and tension for the chimeric restoration of Saint Stephen's Kingdom. The Trianon Treaty mythology was an essential part of the revisionist policy by which Hungary hoped to regain the territories it had under the Dual Monarchy, or at least part of them, by making alliances with revisionist states such as Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany.

Trianon's mythology was created during the dramatic events following Austria-Hungary's surrender (Padua, 3 November 1918; Belgrade, 13 November 1918), but was built upon a ground already existing in 19th century Hungarian political culture. The fundamental thesis presented by the Hungarian delegation at the Peace Conference, apart from the technical arguments concerning ethnic distribution, for which the Great Powers were supposed to preserve Greater Hungary, was the pretended civilizational superiority of Hungarians related to the other peoples.²⁹ The functions of this Hungarian civilizational superiority, manifested within Austria-Hungary,³⁰ were to preserve the status quo: between Hungarians/Austrians and the rest of nationalities, which had to accept domination on the basis of this supposed superiority, and also within Hungarian society. The aristocracy reinvented its role as guarantor of the preservation of national superiority, and therefore the peasants, the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie had to accept an unchanging social pyramid.

The ideational substance of Trianon's mythology aggregated during the Peace Conference, being subsequently diversified, amplified and reinterpreted according to the historical contexts of the last century.

In the ideational constellation of the revisionist mythology the legal arguments (which should have priority in an international legal confrontation, which also covers the case of the Trianon Treaty) have a marginal importance. The simple challenge against the legal validity of the Peace Treaty with Hungary, invoked in the Hungarian public space as a consequence of the “dictate,” did not develop as an important theme, because the Hungarian government did not participate in the Peace Conference and the legal text was only signed by official delegates of Hungary, acquiring validity by ratification in the series of League of Nations treaties (1921).

²⁸ Cartledge, 339.

²⁹ Leonard V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 98–99.

³⁰ Marius Turda, *Ideea de superioritate națională în Imperiul Austro-Ungar (1880–1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2016), passim.

Another legalist argument is that of applying the peoples' self-determination principle. With visible discontent and trying to diminish its impact, the Hungarian government recognized the validity of this principle at the Peace Conference. It could not do otherwise, as this principle was not only the basis of existence of the Hungarian state, but it also manifested itself in relation to Romania. After the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest (7 May 1918), which consecrated Bucharest's military defeat, the Central Powers (including Hungary), pledged not to oppose the union of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania, a decision resulting following the application of the principle of nationalities.

The revisionist mythology seeks to erode the force of the national self-determination principle by relativizing it. It is true that the principle did not have universal value at time of the Paris Peace Conference; it was not applied in the colonies of the winning powers until after the Second World War and the most eloquent case of inconsistency was the blocking of the unification of Austria with Germany, for reasons concerning European security, as it was defined at the crossroads of British and French interests.

Hungary did not recognize the decision of Transylvania's union with Romania, taken in Alba Iulia, demanding the organization of a new referendum. The Supreme Council rejected Count Apponyi's demand, considering it pointless, although he had vowed to respect the decision resulting from a new popular consultation, "whatever the outcome." Revisionist mythology exaggerates the consequences of the Sopron referendum (western Hungary), which had been initially awarded to Austria, but after a plebiscitary process in 1921 it returned to Hungary. After decades of oppression, hostility against Hungarians was so widespread that it was unimaginable for Romanians, Slovaks or Serbs to desire a return under Budapest's rule, only because the latter claimed its civilizational/racial superiority. On the contrary, the contempt shown to nationalities in Austria-Hungary left a lingering trauma within the successor states.

In the case of Transylvania, in the event of a referendum, the only area with a non-Romanian ethnic predominance is in the south-east of the province, the so-called "Szekler region." The issue was known to the territorial committee experts, but while the hypothesis of population transfer was not taken into account, the subsequent hypothesis of creating a separate state entity of the Szekler population was also dismissed. It was obvious that a "Szekler state" of only a few hundred thousand people was totally unviable. As it was surrounded by an overwhelmingly Romanian population, it would have become a source of ethnic tensions and its economic collapse would have been immediate. Therefore, even if a plebiscite of the Hungarian population in Transylvania had been organized, its decision would not have been representative for the whole territory of Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana and Banat (the Wilsonian principle of national

self-determination functioned at the level of a territory which had a relative ethnic homogeneity and functional unity).³¹ In Transylvania's case, one should also mention that in January 1919 the German population (Saxons) and most of the Jews endorsed the decision to unite with the Kingdom of Romania, so that there was a strong unionist majority. Afterwards, the German population of Banat (Swabians) expressed their adhesion to the unionist project (in August 1919), and so did the Roma community.

Lacking unbeatable legal and demographic arguments, during the Peace Conference the Hungarian delegation presented emotional arguments, which were afterwards incorporated into the Trianon mythology. Count Apponyi's team sought to stir the empathy of the Supreme Council's members by presenting a geopolitical argument dressed in a historicist garb: Saint Stephen's Kingdom should not have been dissolved as, even during Middle Ages, together with the Poles, it represented a "shield" of Christianity against the Mongolian and Turkish threats. Subsequent to this idea of "gratitude" that the West should exhibit towards Hungary was the idea of the Hungarians' racial superiority. The Romanians were considered to be an inferior population, because they were a young nation, unlike "Millenary Hungary." The thesis concerning the racial and civilizational inferiority of Transylvanian Romanians, which was used at the end of interwar period to bring together Hungarian irredentism and national-socialism, was intended to be "demonstrated" by obsolete historical theories. The Hungarians tried to justify their rights over Transylvania with the thesis of their historical pre-eminence in the region, especially by claiming the right of conquest. To this end, the theory of Austrian historian Robert Rösler (published in 1871) was resurrected, according to which Romanians came to Transylvania in the 14th and 15th centuries, as the Latinophone population would have disappeared after the Roman withdrawal in the 3rd century. This historical thesis, embraced by the Hungarian government, found

³¹ Derived from the challenges to the nations' self-determination principle are two other sub-themes of revisionist mythology. First, the democratic representation of Transylvania's referendum process finalized in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918 is denied. Of course there was no question of universal voting by Romanians, impossible to be put into practice in the concrete conditions of the end of the war. In reality, the 1,228 delegates present in Alba Iulia represented not only a slim stratum of the elite, but were also empowered by the communities (through the so-called "credentials") from where they came. In this context, it is important to mention that the Transylvanians' will was freely expressed, as the Romanian army was present in territories that did not send representatives in Alba Iulia (around the town of Targu Mures and in the Szekler areas). Second, the thesis that Romanians would have preferred to remain within Hungary, with an autonomous status, is a historical fiction. The Hungarian "offer" to this end, presented by the Hungarian government during talks with the Romanian National Council of Arad (13–14 November 1918), was not a real negotiation point, being immediately rejected by the Romanian leaders. Also, related to the Transylvanian referendum process, one must be said that it was achieved during the Spanish flu epidemics, but national effervescence among Transylvanian Romanians was so strong that any contamination risks were ignored.

afterwards several echoes in the Hungarian historiography, which wanted to prove at any price the primacy of Hungarians in Transylvania, ignoring or challenging not only the Hungarian sources which confirmed the presence of a neo-Latin population in Transylvania during early Middle Ages, but also the archaeological evidence of the same population's continuity in Transylvania.³² But, as mythological narratives do not necessitate an internal coherence of arguments but only a capacity of emotional seduction, the Hungarian delegation at the Peace Conference stated that Transylvania was "100 years more advanced than the Kingdom of Romania" (although the Transylvanian Romanians were considered an inferior race!), thus setting the basis of the theory of Transylvanianism. The Romanians were accused of not being grateful to the "Hungarian leaders" who had magnanimously civilized them, "generously" offering to them schools and political institutions. Count Apponyi, the author of the ethnic assimilation policy within Austria-Hungary, denied during the Peace Conference the existence of any oppressive policy in the Dual Monarchy. With such an ideational arsenal, while the situation of the minority assimilation policies in Austria-Hungary was known in detail to the western diplomats, the Supreme Council members found it easy to reject any Hungarian territorial claims. The real Hungarian tragedy at the peace conference was, in fact, the lack of realism of the Hungarian conservative elites, which turned their own failure in managing a multinational empire into a huge propaganda theme, eluding reality in order to preserve their privileged status.

The rich documentary material submitted by the Hungarian delegation at the Peace Conference also includes other arguments that were then developed into themes of revisionist mythology. Hungary submitted its own perspective on ethnographic realities, documents achieved under the coordination of Pal Teleki,³³ but the real situation in Transylvania was not easy to distort, as the territorial committee included the famous French expert Emmanuel de Martonne, who knew in detail the situation in the territories inhabited by Romanians. Another theme which Hungarian experts promoted, but which had no impact over the decision of the Peace Conference, was that of the "Carpathian Basin," a presumed economic and civilizational space "naturally" dominated by Hungarians, which should have been preserved in order to ensure Hungary's economic coherence. Of course, Hungary denied any accountability for unleashing the First World War, placing the whole guilt upon Vienna's shoulders, but this attitude rather irritated the Supreme Council and did not raise any sympathy towards the Hungarian territorial claims.

³² The issue of the Dacian-Roman continuity on Transylvania's territory produced a huge quantity of historiographical pieces, so we consider redundant a new discussion upon this subject. For a succinct introduction to the issue, see Ioan-Aurel Pop, *Românii și maghiarii în secolele IX–XIV. Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tribuna, 2003).

³³ Nicolas Ginsburger, "L'expertise territoriale et cartographique des vaincus austro-hongrois. Robert Sieger, Pál Teleki et les traités de Saint-Germain et de Trianon," *Cartes & Géomatique*, 228 (2016), 115–132.

When, on 13 November 1920, the Hungarian Parliament ratified the Trianon Treaty, in spite of the fact that “it was based on false information, was unjust and contrary to interests of humanity,” the Great War really ended for Hungary and the revisionist policy was officially launched. Trianon’s mythology did not remain a product of political and intellectual elites but followed a policy of political introspection of the historical facts, defined in terms of an incommensurable drama inserted in the smallest interstices of Hungarian political culture.³⁴ One of the gestures with the highest political relevance was declaring in 1921 the day of 13 November, the date when the Trianon Treaty was ratified, a day of national mourning.

Hungary’s peace treaty was integrated, in the terms of historicist mystique, in the category of major national traumas, called the “Hungarian Golgotha”: the Battle of Muhi (1241), when Hungarians were defeated by the Mongols; the Battle of Mohacs (1526), lost against the Ottoman Empire and resulting in the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary; the defeat of the aspirations for independence by the coordinated action of Austria and Russia in 1848–49. The political message, becoming a commonplace of collective memory, was that after a disastrous defeat the nation would recover, provided that it was willing to fight. Within interwar Hungarian schools, the beginning of each day was marked by reciting the Hungarian Credo (*Hiszekegy*): “I believe in one God, I believe in one country, I believe in the divine Truth, I believe in Hungary’s rebirth, Amen!”³⁵ Revisionism was veiled in a mystical cloth, as it became commonplace to think that Hungary’s reunification was a divine will which had to be fulfilled by the true believers. After Hungary went along *Via Dolorosa*, resurrection was to follow.

In interwar Hungary, state irredentism combined with society-generated irredentism. School education (language and literature, history, geography, economy) in its entirety was in the service of revisionist objectives. History schoolbooks not only constructed the image of a glorious historical Hungary, but also sent irredentist messages in explicit forms, as the Hungarian state was presented as a “victim.” Simultaneously, the idea of the Hungarians’ “divine mission” to subdue the Slavs and Romanians (pejoratively called “Olahs”) was stated, as the latter were considered weak and uncivilized “invaders of the Hungarian land” (the idea of civilizational/racial inferiority is a staple of Hungarian irredentism). The political message, emphasized in 1936 by the increasing dynamic of public irredentist policy, was to encourage action for cancelling the “cruel Trianon” and the “victim” condition had to be turned into a “winner” status.³⁶

³⁴ See Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920–1945* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2007); Ignác Romsics (ed.), *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás, 1920–1953* (*Trianon and the Hungarian political thought, 1920–1953*) (Budapest: Osiris, 1998).

³⁵ Cartledge, 359.

³⁶ Róbert Balogh, “Nightmares of the Little Mermaid. Indoctrination and Representation of the Trianon Treaty in Hungarian History Textbooks 192–1980,” in Harald Gröller, Harald Heppner (eds.), *Die Pariser Vororte-Verträge im Spiegel der Öffentlichkeit* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 147–163.

Memory politics in interwar Hungary, meant to keep Hungarian society prisoner to a mythologized national history, were applied in synergy with historical literature. From 1922, the Hungarian state offered important funds to historical research; Hungarian historiography was centralized in order to better serve the political objectives of the Miklos Horthy regime. The result was the publication of the so-called “Trianon books.”³⁷ Published mostly in Hungarian, the role of ideologically biased historiography was to offer support to the state’s political objectives. From a thematic point of view, historiography had the purpose of “scientifically strengthening” the arguments presented during the Peace Conference. Covering a diversity of issues, the historical literature produced in Hungary triggered a chain of counter-reactions within the successor states, each wanting to produce its own arguments in response to the revisionist theses.³⁸

Not only Hungarian historiography was instrumentalized in the service of the “Great Cause,” but also geography. Physical geography had to prove the sacredness of the Hungarian kingdom in its medieval borders, and human geography tried to convince students of the perfect unity between Hungarian civilization and the physical space. One of the myths created a narrative about the “blessing” of having a “perfect” physical and civilizational space, which overlapped the millenary area of Saint Stephen’s Kingdom. The Trianon Treaty created an “unstable and unfair” reality: as the geographic myth stated, Hungarian culture was precisely situated in a space created by old cosmic forces. An important supporter of mythological geography is Gyula Prinz, who tried to prove the thesis of a “Mesopotamian Hungary,” according to which the Danube-Tisza geographical structure is similar to the Tigris-Euphrates structure, and this cultural core irradiated towards the other ethnic groups living in the Carpathian Basin. According to the Hungarian geographer, Hungary was a “cultural power” which was thus entitled to be a great Central European power.

Geographical mythology also extended to the level of school education. In an atlas frequently used in the Hungarian education system (authored by Mano Kogutovitz), Transylvania (*Erdely*) was presented as an independent entity and Romania was featured in its 1914 borders. In a 1927 schoolbook there is an illustration of the First World War in which the Hungarians’ fight against the Romanian neighbors is described. During the attack, Hungarians shout “Cut him down, Hungarian, cut him down! So help us God!”³⁹

³⁷ Polgár, 23–27.

³⁸ In Romania, the most important historians (Nicolae Iorga, Gheorghe Bratianu, Silviu Dragomir etc.) felt compelled to produce historical works dismantling the theses of Hungarian revisionist historiography. Then, in the context of celebrating the Centenary of the Great War and the Great Union (2014–2018) a broad program of re-publishing hundreds of historical works dedicated to national history or counteracting Hungarian revisionist history was put in place. A relevant example is the series I.A. Pop, Ioan Bolovan et al. (coord.), *Construind Unirea cea Mare*, 8 volumes (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018–2019).

³⁹ Aurel Gociman, *România și revizionismul maghiar* (Bucharest: Universul, 1934), 144–146.

Actions of mythologizing Hungary's past were multiplied at the micro-social scale through literary texts and monuments to commemorate Trianon.⁴⁰ In 1921, over 80,000 people witnessed the inauguration of a statuary assembly (four romantic statues representing the territories "lost" to successor states) dedicated to the Trianon Treaty in Freedom Square of Budapest.⁴¹ Several memorials dedicated to Trianon were created, the most significant being the one in Zebegeny, near Budapest. In 1928, on the occasion of Saint Stephen's day (20 August), one of the monuments dedicated to Trianon received two inscriptions, meant to symbolize the international recognition of the Hungarian drama: "*I trattati non sono eterni!*" ("Treaties are not eternal!" Benito Mussolini) and "Hungary's place is under the sun" (the name of an article published by Lord Rothermere).

Hungary organized, starting with 1921, revisionist actions coordinated by the so-called "Teleki Office" within the Hungarian Socio-graphical Institute, which belonged to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.⁴² A certain "red map," created by Pal Teleki for the Peace Conference, was very popular. On the basis of the language spoken by the population of Hungary during the 1910 census, it showed the Hungarian ethnic predominance in territories belonging, according to the Trianon Treaty, to Romania, Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia. The "red map" image, symbolizing "Greater Hungary," was used in postcards, posters, news bulletins, press articles etc. The purpose of creating "memory places" was not only a psychological therapy for a national drama, but also had the role of preparing future border change actions.

Along the line of transferring accountability for Greater Hungary's dissolution to other factors than the Hungarian conservative political and intellectual elite, the theme of "Western ignorance" was launched, concerning Hungarian realities, chiefly the consequences of the Trianon Treaty. Prominent Hungarians politicians were involved in the activity of "enlightening" the West, as books were published in French, English or German.⁴³ The thesis of the "misinformed" West, which are used even today, is an offshoot of the Hungarian superiority complex: while the Slavs and Romanians had to be submitted to "civilizing" (Magyarization) actions, Western public opinion had to be "enlightened," as it was assumed to be too lazy and shallow to learn about the realities of Central Europe.

⁴⁰ Anna Menyhért, "The Image of the 'Maimed Hungary' in 20th-Century Cultural Memory and the 21st Century Consequences of an Unresolved Collective Trauma: The Impact of the Treaty of Trianon," *Environment, Space, Place*, 8, 2 (2016), 69–97.

⁴¹ Juliet Kinchin, "Caught in the Ferris-Wheel of History": Trianon Memorials in Hungary," in Matthew Rampley (ed.), *Heritage, Ideology, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 21–40.

⁴² Ginsburger, 15–16.

⁴³ See, for example, Paul Teleki, *The Evolution of Hungary and its Place in European History* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1923); Steven Bethlen, *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1934).

The most important Hungarian propaganda success in the interwar period was the publication of two articles signed by British mogul Lord Rothermere in the *Daily Mail* newspaper (June and August 1927), in which the issue of ethnic Hungarians was raised, proposing the return to Hungary of some territories belonging to Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for the “people’s safety.” Concretely, the British mogul proposed the reintegration of at least two million Hungarians into Hungary. Lord Rothermere established the “Hungarian Revisionist League” (with *The Danubian Review* as its media organ) which aimed to support throughout the West the thesis according to which Hungary could become a real barrier against the spread of Bolshevism.⁴⁴ For the support received from Lord Rothermere, the Hungarian Parliament adopted in 1928 a resolution of gratitude and the University of Szeged awarded him the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa*,⁴⁵ and at popular level a campaign of gratitude signatures was organized, gathering no less than 1.2 million names.⁴⁶

The Rothermere case marks a substantial change in the functions of Trianon’s mythology, scaling down the justifications and bringing about a rapid increase in concrete demands. Hungarian propaganda even circulated false ethnic maps, most of them based on the 1910 census, and the new theme which was introduced concerned the failure of the Trianon Treaty in regard to respecting minority rights within successor states. The former ambitions concerning ethnic homogenization supported during the Austro-Hungarian period were forgotten, being replaced by a supposed right to intervene in order to forestall the “oppression” against Hungarian minorities. This new thematic line was strengthened and supported until the dawn of the Cold War, being one of the main reasons for the association with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The issue of minorities was increasingly inserted as a most important subject of revisionism, being considered an alternative form of changing the provisions of the Trianon Treaty, while the Budapest government noticed that simple state propaganda cannot get enough support for changing the borders.

The ideological standard-bearer of irredentist revisionism was the periodical *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review), which was issued between 1927 and 1944.⁴⁷ The irredentist theses were strongly asserted in the pages of this magazine, being presented as a *uchronia*: the restoration of Saint Stephen’s Kingdom, of a multinational empire, led by the Hungarian aristocracy, a project emphatically called “New Hungary.” Also, Hungary published periodical magazines in French

⁴⁴ Cartledge, 343–344.

⁴⁵ Jim Wilson, *Nazi Princess: Hitler, Lord Rothermere, and Princess Stephanie Von Hohenlohe* (Gloucestershire: History Press, 2011), 18–30. Probably, the conversion of Lord Rothermere to revisionist actions was the result of young Austrian Stefánia Hohenloé’s persuasion.

⁴⁶ Miklós Horthy, Andrew L. Simon, *Admiral Nicholas Horthy: Memoirs* (Safety Harbor: Simon Publications, 2000), 161.

⁴⁷ Matthew Caples, “Et in Hungaria Ego: Trianon, Revisionism and the Journal *Magyar Szemle* (1927–1944),” *Hungarian Studies*, 19, 1 (2005), 51–104.

(*La Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, 1932–1944) and English (*The Hungarian Quarterly*, 1936–1944), for the purpose of influencing international public opinion.

The dynamic of the Hungarian irredentist political myth was ensured by several activities carried out directly by the Hungarian state or by people animated by revisionist ideas. The written press and radio broadcasting in interwar Hungary had the strategic objective of promoting revisionist messages by presenting internal or international events, while at the same time amplifying the discontent of ethnic Hungarians living in the successor states. Irredentism manifested itself as a type of behavior inserted in the daily practices of the Hungarian population from the successor states, which lost their statute of leading elite, including the associated political and economic privileges, being forced to adapt to new realities. There was also the issue of collaboration with the authorities of the state whose citizens they became: should they participate in political life or refuse any form of collaboration, hoping for a removal of the Trianon Treaty consequences?⁴⁸ The activities of the Hungarian Revisionist League, which published over 200 books, magazines and newspapers in German, Italian, French, English, Spanish, Finnish, Portuguese and Hungarian from 1927 to 1940 (of which 124 were related to the “Transylvanian issue”) were followed closely not only by the diplomatic services or the police and intelligence structures of successor states, but were often presented in national publications from those countries.⁴⁹ Conveyance of Trianon mythology by movies, theatre plays, and folklore maintained irredentist hope alive at all Hungarian community levels. At the same time, the fear of subversion by ethnic Hungarians, relatively diffuse at the beginning of the 1920s, became increasingly powerful as long as Hungary was increasingly active and revisionist countries became more powerful. If the description of the Trianon Treaty in terms of a “trauma” within Hungarian society was supported with irrefutable historical proofs, irredentist activity determined mobilization reactions for defending the borders created by peace treaties; we can even speak about collective “traumas” related to the dissolution of successor states.⁵⁰ In Romania, in December 1933, the Romanian

⁴⁸ See Rogers Brubaker, *Politică naționalistă și etnicitate cotidiană într-un oraș transilvănean* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2010), 80–81; Lucian Nastașă, Levente Salat (eds.), *Maghiarii din România și etica minoritară (1920–1940)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura CRDE, 2003), passim.

⁴⁹ For more examples of Hungarian revisionist actions, see: Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu, *România și Ungaria de la Trianon la Paris (1920–1947). Bătălia diplomatică pentru Transilvania* (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 1996); Augustin Deac, *Reviționismul ungar, permanent factor destabilizator în Europa (1920–1938)* (Bucharest: Bravo Press, 1996); Lucian Leuștean, *România și Ungaria în cadrul “Noii Europe”: (1920–1923)* (Iași: Polirom, 2003); Milan Olejník, “Criticism of revisionistic policies of Hungary in contemporary Czechoslovak press during third decennium of twentieth century” in *Človek a spoločnosť*, 15, 4 (2012), 50–64.

⁵⁰ For the Slovak-Hungarian relations see Miroslav Michela, László Vörö (eds.), *Rozpad Uhorska a Trianonská mierová zmluva. K politikám pamäti na Slovensku a v Maďarsku (The Disintegration of Historical Hungary and the Trianon Peace Treaty. Politics of Memory in Slovakia and Hungary)* (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2013), passim.

Antirevisionist League was created, bringing together important personalities of political and cultural life (Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida Voievod, Patriarch Miron Cristea etc.), and in Transylvania hundreds of local committees were created to fight irredentism.⁵¹

Prophecies concerning the abolition of the Trianon Treaty pervaded the mythological area once Hitler seemed increasingly determined to conquer Europe and governments in London and Paris lived with the appeasement illusion. Immediately after Austria's annexation by Germany (*Anschluss*, 12 March 1938), the Hungarian government started pressuring Czechoslovakia, demanding the whole of Slovakia, with political autonomy for ethnic Slovaks. Budapest's request was obviously rejected, but the situation changed after the Munich Conference, when Germany, with the acceptance of the French and British governments, received the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, the Prague government not being invited to the event (30 September 1938). Sensing the huge opportunity created, Hungary insisted with its revisionist allies, Hitler and Mussolini, to support it. As a consequence, on 2 November 1938 an "award" was decided in Vienna, by the foreign affairs ministers of Germany (Joachim von Ribbentrop) and Italy (Galeazzo Ciano), by which a territory of 10,390 square kilometres with 854,218 inhabitants of Slovakia was awarded to Hungary. This territory had a certain ethnic Hungarian majority, as the 1930 census indicated a 57% share of ethnic Hungarians, which less credibly increased to 84% speakers of Hungarian at the Hungarian 1941 census.⁵² The Vienna decision was received with sympathy in Hungary, and Miklos Horthy, riding a white horse entered Kosice on 11 November 1938. It seemed the fulfillment of a divine promise, but it was only the consequence of the Nazi policy of force, which did not outlast the war. Hungary's promise of respecting the Slovaks' rights was immediately forgotten, as they were submitted to a process of indoctrination with irredentist mythology, aimed at ethnic assimilation.⁵³

As, according to a popular proverb "you get hungrier while eating," the Hungarian leadership believed the restoration of Saint Stephen's Kingdom was getting closer. Czechia's occupation by the German army (14 March 1939) and its annexation to the Reich (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) was an opportunity for Hungary to annex territories from Sub-Carpathia (Ruthenia) which belonged to Prague. Within the approximately 12,000 square kilometers acquired through military occupation, the number of Hungarian speakers was no more than 10% of

⁵¹ See Liviu Lazăr, *Mișcarea antirevizionistă din Transilvania în perioada interbelică* (Deva: Călăuza, 2003), 231–367. From a rich recent Romanian bibliography dedicated to revisionism, often from an ethnocentric perspective, see Petre Țurlea, *Români și unguri*, Vol. I (1918–1940), Vol. II (1940–1945), Vol. III (1945–2018), (Ploiești: Editura Kartha Grafic, 2018); Ioan Bojan, *Bătălia pentru Ardeal* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Napoca Star, 2015).

⁵² Marina Cattaruzza (ed.), *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War: Goals, Expectations, Practices*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 96.

⁵³ Leslie M. Waters. "Learning and Unlearning Nationality: Hungarian National Education in Reannexed Felvidék, 1938–1944," *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2, 3 (2013), 538–565.

population (even according to the Hungarian statistics of 1941). This no longer concerned the implementation of an ethnic principle, but was a territory offered as reward for Hungary's fealty to the revisionist cause⁵⁴.

Poland's occupation by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, corroborated with France's military defeat (22 June 1940) and the German attacks against Britain proved that the entire collective security system created by the Paris Treaty had crumbled. The revisionist storm was unleashed against Romania in the summer of 1940, along three vectors: Soviet, Hungarian and Bulgarian.

The great trophy of the Hungarian irredentist policy pursued by the Horthy regime had to be Transylvania, as it hosted not only an important Hungarian community but also represented the "core" of Hungarian statehood after Central Hungary became a Turkish pashalik (1541–1699).⁵⁵ Romania was not easy to quell, as King Carol II had already opportunistically oriented the country's foreign policy towards Nazi Germany and Hitler found Romania's resources important for future military confrontations. In the context of Soviet pressures following which Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were annexed by the USSR, according to secret clauses of the Hitler–Stalin agreement of 23 August 1939 (which did not include Bukovina), Hungary tested the hypothesis of an attack against Romania. Molotov's answer to the demand of the Hungarian ambassador in Moscow was ambiguous: he did not oppose the Hungarian claims, but he did not support the idea of a political and military action against Romania. Applying the same strategy as in Czechoslovakia's case, the Hungarian government demanded from Romania a territory of 69,000 square kilometers, with a population of 3.9 million inhabitants, of which only 1.2 million were Hungarians. This official demand was considered by the Hungarian government a "sacrifice," "discriminatory in its prejudice," for the purpose of getting a "faithful compromise."⁵⁶ Romanian decision-makers rejected such a demand. The hypothesis of a military confrontation with Hungary became increasingly likely, the more so as Romania had given up Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina without military resistance against the Soviet aggression. In this context, Hitler took the initiative and, given the Hungarian persistence and keeping in mind his hostility towards Romania's elites, decided to impose a convenient solution to the Transylvanian issue. After the Second Vienna Award (30 August 1940), Romania was forced to cede to Hungary 43,492 square kilometers, with a population of 2.66 million inhabitants, of which 50.1% were ethnic Romanians, 37.1% Hungarians and 2.7% Germans. Obviously, this was not

⁵⁴ Immediately after Hungary acquired territories with Nazi assistance, it was noticed that the national issue had not been solved; on the contrary, Romanians, Slovaks or Serbs began to fight for liberation. See Rustem Vambéry, *The Hungarian Problem* (New York: The Nation, 1942), 27.

⁵⁵ Upon this subject, see also László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland. Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), passim.

⁵⁶ Aurică Simion, *Dictatul de la Viena* (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1996), 264. For a Hungarian perspective over the event, see Béni L. Balogh, *The Second Vienna Award and the Hungarian–Romanian Relations 1940–1944* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2011).

a “historical compensation” in keeping with the ethnic principle, as even in the dubious census made by Hungary in 1941 (in a territory under military jurisdiction) there were no more than 52% Hungarian speakers. The decision to divide Transylvania was not grounded on ethnic or economic reasons, but on geo-strategic ones, weakening both Romania and Hungary while nevertheless increasing German influence in the region.⁵⁷ The revisionist mythology was suddenly rewritten, as the ceded territory was not ethnically dominated by Hungarians but by Romanians. But the often mentioned principles no longer mattered: on 15 September 1940 Miklos Horthy showed up in downtown Cluj-Napoca riding a white horse with golden horseshoes. The belief that history was on Hungary’s side was predominant among Hungarian elites and the irrational enthusiasm at “reversing history” was strongly stimulated by Horthyst propaganda. There was one more country which should have ceded territories: Yugoslavia.

In December 1940, Yugoslavia and Hungary signed a bilateral treaty in which “eternal friendly and peaceful relations” were declared between the two countries. But Hitler’s invasion of Yugoslavia offered Hungary the possibility of annexing new territories. On 1 April 1941, Budapest gained other 11,500 square kilometers with a million inhabitants, of which only a third were ethnic Hungarians. Thus, Budapest war spoils, from November 1938 until April 1941, received following its association with Hitler and Mussolini, reached almost 80,000 square kilometers and over 5 million inhabitants, of which less than 40% were ethnic Hungarians. This fact included Hungary in the ranks of the major war beneficiaries. Indeed, the Trianon Treaty was dismantled, but not in order to fix an injustice, but only to secure the right of conquest. As a consequence, Hungary was not granted by the democratic world recognition of the territories gained by association with Nazi Germany. Not even the deportation Jews from territories occupied by Budapest to death camps was useful. On the contrary, it provided the United Nations with a moral dimension for not recognizing any territorial conquest, even if significant Hungarian communities lived there. At the end of the Second World War, Hungary returned to the borders established by the Trianon Treaty, although Budapest desperately tried to get other territories. Irredentism as a solution to ethnic diversity in Eastern Europe was rejected, at least in Hungary’s case.

But irredentist reflexes were hard to disappear from Hungarian elites’ attitude, even after the military defeat in the Second World War. Although the Romanian administration was restored in Transylvania on 9 March 1945, the province’s situation was not fully reconfirmed by a new peace treaty. The Truce Convention signed by Romania with the United Nations in Moscow, after renouncing war on the side of the Axis Powers (23 August 1944) stipulated:

⁵⁷ Vasile Pușcaș, *Phillip E. Mosely despre Transilvania și Basarabia* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2017), 74.

“19. Allied Governments consider the decision of the Vienna Award concerning Transylvania null and void and agree that Transylvania (or most of it) to be restored to Romania under the condition of confirmation by the Peace Treaty; the Soviet Government agrees that Soviet forces take part, to this end, to military operations together with Romania, against Germany and Hungary.” Budapest continued its lobbying on the Transylvanian issue with the Anglo-Americans during the war, trying to win Soviet support. The latter sent the Hungarians to direct discussions with Romania, which in the spring of 1946 refused to reopen this subject. During the negotiations for the signing of the peace treaty with Romania, the Budapest government demanded to receive at least 22,000 square kilometers of Transylvania’s territory, simultaneously with an eventual population exchange, on the basis of the ethnic principle. Budapest demanded the towns of Satu Mare, Oradea and Arad, within a territory stretching from Maramureş to Banat. In September 1946 the situation was clarified, following the rejection of any demands from the Hungarian government, and the Paris Peace Treaty (February 1947) reconfirmed the Trianon Treaty.⁵⁸

To sum up this section, we notice that in the interwar period the revisionist political trick succeeded, in relation to the objectives of the Hungarian nationalist-conservative political group. Liberalism and social democracy were annihilated as political options in the Hungarian political body, but irredentist mythology was the necessary ideological fuel for the fascist current represented by Gyula Gombos (National Unity Party) and then by Ferenc Szalasi (Arrow Cross Party), leaders of totalitarian and anti-Semitic political formations. At international level, there was a real Cold War between Hungary and the successor states, marked by only a few détente episodes. The eloquent example of revisionism’s failure is the Romanian-Hungarian relation. Budapest re-conquered a part of Transylvania’s territory in 1940, but Hungary and Romania both fell victims to Hitler’s trap, becoming prisoners of Nazi Germany. Romanians and Hungarians alike died on the Russian front and in the end the post-Trianon situation was restored, not because it was perfect, but because it offered the greatest stability, being based upon solid ethnic realities. The two interwar decades were lost for the consolidation of democratic regimes in Central Europe, as revisionist mythology gave birth to authoritarian counter-mythologies, defending the territorial status-quo created after the Great War. Democracy gradually collapsed in all successor states. The failure to consolidate democratic regimes in Central Europe had, of course, more complex causes, but revisionism is undoubtedly an important element, as the authoritarian leaders created the alibi of not being able to defend their countries against the revisionist danger unless they eliminated the “weaknesses” of parliamentarianism.

⁵⁸ Marcela Sălăgean, *Transilvania în jocul de interese al Marilor Puteri (1940–1947)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2013), 115–137.

Perspectives on the Trianon Treaty: from Matyas Rakosi to Viktor Orban

The Sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe brought with it a forced amnesia concerning the Trianon Treaty. From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the Versailles system was a creation of the “imperialist Great Powers” and the national issue was considered to be “false,” related to the nationalist ideology. Therefore, in Soviet-occupied Europe national issues were no longer discussed in the traditional confrontational manner.⁵⁹ The Hungarian official political discourse from the beginning of the Cold War lacked references to Trianon, and the Romanian one the references to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Moreover, wishing to offer an “example” of solving ethnic minorities’ issues, Stalin created a special status administrative-territorial entity, the Mureș Hungarian Autonomous Region in Romania, which included territories inhabited by a Szekler majority.⁶⁰ In the official Hungarian, Romanian or Czechoslovakian policies, any reference to the Trianon Treaty remained taboo until the 1970s, when they timidly re-emerged, mostly in historiography, at the same time with the replacement of the phrase “chauvinist nationalism” with the term “patriotism.”

The mythology of Trianon was not fully removed from history, but resurfaced with increasing vigor among Hungarian emigrants, especially in North America. Anticommunism naturally combined with revisionism, the most visible field being historiography.⁶¹ The functions of revisionist mythology changed, in the context in which they were no longer assumed at official level. The political myth conveyed through historiography had to “keep awake” national conscience but also to prepare a new historical moment, in an uncertain future, in which communism would fall and the discussion concerning the borders could re-emerge in Europe. The theses of integral revisionism were hard to support in the West, as they were associated with national-socialism, so in the literature they were presented as a “moderate” alternative: the formation of a Transylvanian state, or, at least, the creation of broad territorial autonomies within Romania.

Under the apparent calm of the Cold War and “fraternal” relations within the Soviet bloc, deeper moves were taking place. During the Stalinist years, the Trianon theme was still in the Hungarian collective memory, much like the subject of Greater Romania was hidden in the collective memory privately expressed by Romanians. Hungarian or Romanian political leaders, starting with Matyas Rakosi and Gheorghiu-Dej, considered themselves “patriotic Marxist-Leninists,” who

⁵⁹ See Cristina Petrescu, “Who Was the First in Transylvania On the Origins of the Romanian-Hungarian Controversy over Minority Rights,” *Romanian Political Science Review*, III, 4, (2003), 1119–1148.

⁶⁰ Stefano Bottoni, *Stalin’s Legacy in Romania. The Hungarian Autonomous Region, 1952–1960* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), passim.

⁶¹ Polgár, 106–120.

rejected they bourgeois nationalism labeled “chauvinism.” In reality, both in Budapest and in Bucharest, the subject of Transylvania was closely followed, but in great secret, to prevent communist leaders from being accused of “chauvinistic” attitudes.⁶² In the political mythology of the communist regime, the issue of representing working class interests was accompanied by the defense of national interests.⁶³ That is why it is not surprising that the Janos Kadar’s regime in Hungary conceived a reconciliation with the Hungarian society after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution not only by relaxing economic policies and a less rigid ideological dogmatism, but also by prudently restoring the national theme. From the 1970s, the neutral approach in Hungary’s relations with Romania and Czechoslovakia was abandoned (official discussions about national minorities were missing); in the new Hungarian approach, Romanians or Slovaks were considered “bridges” between sovereign and independent countries. Nicolae Ceaușescu, who acted at international level for a policy of autonomy from the Soviet Union, was cautious towards any “involvement in internal affairs,” especially from Hungary. The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, during which the Helsinki Final Act (1975) was signed, marks not only a new commitment to the inviolability of borders (implicitly a new legal confirmation of borders established through the Trianon treaty by Hungary), but also the opening of an internationalization line concerning minority issues, this time viewed through the human rights doctrine. Therefore, Janos Kadar’s declaration about “the injustice inflicted by the Trianon Treaty upon Hungary” made at the signing of the Helsinki Final Act⁶⁴ not only sent a message to the Hungarian society, but was also a signal that a new theme with old roots had been introduced into the Hungarian political field.

From the mid-1970s, bilateral Romanian–Hungarian relations became increasingly cold, in spite of the fake smiles displayed during Warsaw Treaty or COMECON meetings. Secret services from both countries received missions to monitor national-issue movements and, as much as possible, attempt to influence them. In an internal publication of the Securitate from 1986, it was openly stated that the human rights issue was used for irredentist activities, several organizations being identified as “subversive,” whose existence and activity was supposed to be related to the neighboring country.⁶⁵ In fact, from 1986, Romanian–Hungarian

⁶² For example, in 1954–1955 a documentary study carried out at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest was monitoring “nationalist behaviors” in Hungary. See Alexandru Ghisa, “România și Ungaria – doi vecini apropiați geografic. Relațiile româno-ungare între 1918–2018,” *Pulsul Geostrategic*, 279 (March – April, 2020), 71.

⁶³ Balázs Apór, *The Invisible Shining. The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945–1956* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2017), 127–130.

⁶⁴ Roger Gough, *A Good Comrade: Janos Kádár, Communism and Hungary* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2006), 203.

⁶⁵ *Securitatea*, 3, 75 (1986), 5–11, http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/periodicul_securitatea/Securitatea%201986-3-75.pdf (accessed on 20 August 2019).

relations entered a downward spiral, as under the aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences three volumes of the History of Transylvania (from the origins to 1919) were published, under the coordination of Bela Kopeczi (acting Minister of Culture), in which most of the revisionist historiography theses were resumed. The book, which was published not only in Hungarian, but also had syntheses in English, French and German, produced outright irritation in Bucharest, for the Ceaușescu came was under international pressure, being accused of not respecting minority rights in Romania. Bilateral tensions escalated and in 1988 a protest action took place in front of the Romanian Embassy from Budapest, Ceaușescu's reaction being the closing of the Hungarian Consulate of Cluj-Napoca (the Romanian Consulate of Debrecen had been closed in 1984, as it did not have a significant activity).⁶⁶

The fall of communism represented a real turning point in the political instrumentalization of the Trianon Treaty. From the perspective of democratic regimes, the 1989 revolutions were a proper moment for national revival, but the international obligations of states remained unchanged. In Romania, for example, in the context of Soviet Union's dissolution, a political rhetoric of restoring "Greater Romania" developed, concerning the union of Bessarabia and, eventually Northern Bukovina, with the country. In Hungary, part of the public opinion and the political elites wished to assume a more aggressive ethnic policy. The Trianon 1920 moment remained in the background of all discussions regarding the Hungarian nation, but the full irredentism of the interwar period was quickly substituted with a formula by which border stability was not denied in itself, but Budapest assumed, beyond the principle of state sovereignty, a right to intervene for "minority protection." During the 1990 commemoration of the Trianon Treaty, Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall declared: "Legally, I want to become Prime Minister of each Hungarian citizen from this country of ten million people and, in spirit and feeling, also for the fifteen million Hungarians." He offered a statement of the conservative-nationalist options in Hungary.⁶⁷ The phrase "Trianon is a permanent trauma" became a political mantra for conservatives and extremist radicals in post-communist Hungary.

The situation was not as simple as the political forces wishing for a revision of the Trianon Treaty or the restoration of Greater Romania claimed,⁶⁸ as state interests and geopolitical realities came first. For all countries liberated from under Soviet hegemony, it was essential to find solutions insuring security and prosperity and these could only be found within NATO and the European Union. Identity politics,

⁶⁶ Marius Avram, "Războiul rece dintre România și Ungaria," *Sinteza*, 3 (March-April, 2014), 137–143.

⁶⁷ Szabolcs Pogonyi, *Extra-Territorial Ethnic Politics, Discourses and Identities in Hungary* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 83.

⁶⁸ Florin Abraham, "Proiectul 'României Mari' după 1989: nostalgii, realități, perspective," *Arhivele totalitarismului*, 3–4 (2018), 187–209.

which had deep roots in Central Europe, was subordinated to these objectives. A great symbolic value was attributed to the meeting held in the Visegrad fortress (February 1991), where the leaders of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland vowed to mutually support each other in order to definitively get out of the Soviet influence, simultaneously with a common action towards Western countries, for accession to NATO and the European Economic Community. The creation and preservation of the Visegrad Group implicitly meant totally abandoning the revisionism related to Slovakia, with a special emphasis upon minority rights. It could not be otherwise, as no country could become member of NATO and the European Union with an irredentist policy. Hungary confirmed, at bilateral level, the borders established at Trianon by signing basic political treaties with Slovakia (1995) and Romania (1996). Budapest insisted and received from Bratislava and Bucharest their acceptance of the Council of Europe's Resolution no. 1201 of 1993, which included the principle of international protection of national minorities' rights. Therefore, for strategic reasons, Trianon's mythology was used until 2010 by conservative-nationalist political forces at internal political level, as an identity theme, without initiating broad political actions for changing the status-quo.

From the perspective of Trianon's political myth, no radical changes took place. Roessler's historiographical theses were not totally abandoned, but they occupied a more marginal place, as their force of persuasion was minimal. However, other inter-connected sub-themes acquired a prominent place. The first concerned the removal from international political use of references to Saint Stephen's Kingdom and their replacement with the apparently neutral phrase "Carpathian Basin."⁶⁹ As we have shown, the concept itself is not new, but was widely used for creating the perception of Hungarian ethno-cultural homogeneity and majority outside state borders. Within the so-called "Carpathian Basin," having at the center the Pannonian Plain, are also integrated Transylvania, Western Ukraine, Slovakia, Croatia and Serbia. This territory is based on homogeneity elements identified with apparently scientific tools, but without a real ethno-political concept.⁷⁰ The second sub-theme, with older roots, concerns civilizational differences between the Catholic and Protestant West, whose borders stop at the Carpathians and the Orthodox space. This ideological thesis covers Transylvania and Vojvodina, but omits the fact that, for example, the dominant confession in Transylvania is also the Orthodox one.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Jussi Laine, Ilkka Liikanen, James W. Scott (eds.), *Post-Cold War Borders. Reframing Political Space in Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018), 218–225.

⁷⁰ See examples of using literature with scientific airs concerning mythological concepts: Károly Kocsis, "Historical predecessors and current geographical possibilities of ethnic based territorial autonomies in the Carpathian Basin," *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, 62, 1 (2013), 3–46; István Szilágyi, "National minorities and the question of the autonomy in the Carpathian Basin," *Historia Actual Online*, 34 (2014), 89–103.

⁷¹ See the "clash of civilizations" thesis, launched by Samuel P. Huntington in 1993 in an article from *Foreign Affairs*, resumed and expanded afterwards in *The Clash of Civilizations and the*

The political myth extracts its vital force from the emotion it can cause. The irredentist language rejects the notion of “union,” which is used for designating the process of building Greater Romania or the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, using instead the term of annexation, “Anschluss” in German, in order to send the message of a lack of legitimacy in the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While postwar revisionist ambitions are built upon the idea of getting the attention of the international public opinion, words such as “victim,” “trauma” and “crime” are attached to the Trianon Treaty. Out of the wish to connect with the psychology of sufferance promoted by Hollywood productions, political mythology aims at the empathy that can be stirred by “suffering,” “martyrdom” and “heroism of the Hungarian nation.”

Much like during the interwar period, the interconnected issue of Greater Hungary/Trianon had a strong representation at the level of daily life. Hungary was again full of public monuments with a revisionist message (for example, the one in Nograd, in 1996). In June 2000 the Zebegey Memorial was re-inaugurated as the “Trianon Memorial.”⁷² In 2004 a new Trianon Museum was opened in Varpalota. During the same year a documentary movie was released, produced by director Gabor Koltai. Shirts, flags and other promotional objects with various representations of “Greater Hungary” are regularly used by Hungarian tourism. With the digital era, the Trianon mythology has spread on the Internet,⁷³ the main strategy being to offer to the public a literature in widely-spoken languages, available for free. The emphasis is placed upon the popularization of revisionist issues, taking advantage of the lack of critical filters in the virtual space.

An authentic restoration of revisionist mythology took place in Hungary starting with 2010. During that year, the day of 4 June was proclaimed the “National Unity Day,” leaving aside all inhibitions concerning nationalism.⁷⁴ If such a gesture had been undertaken during the mid-1990s Hungary would have become a pariah at international level, and NATO and EU accession would not have taken place. But, as Hungary was already part of the Euro-Atlantic group, Prime Minister Viktor Orban assumed that it would be hard for the country to be excluded, so he conceived a mechanism of authoritarian power concentration, in which historical mythology has an essential role.

Step by step, after 2010 revisionism became a state policy in Hungary under the Orban regime. It was integrated into the broader conceptual assembly of redefining Hungary’s international role, by the so-called “regaining sovereignty” and defending the “Hungarian nation” against “Neo-Marxist globalism.” The

Remaking of World Order (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), according to which Transylvania would belong to the Western world, while the rest of Romania would belong to Eastern civilization.

⁷² Kinchin, 35.

⁷³ Menyhért, 82–87.

⁷⁴ Michael Shafir, “Conceptualizing Hungarian Negationism in Comparative Perspective: Deflection and Obfuscation,” *Cahiers d’Études Hongroises et Finlandaises*, 20 (2014), 275.

political rehabilitation of the regime led by Horthy, now seen as a hero/patriot, not a dictator, but a “strong man,” was achieved both at symbolic level (erecting statues, renaming public places in his honor etc.) and in functional terms. Just like Horthy during the interwar period, Viktor Orbán and the conservative-nationalist party governing Hungary beginning with 2010 (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union) strongly instrumentalized the past in order to create and preserve a massive voting base. Sensitivity towards “Trianon’s perpetual trauma” is stronger in rural areas and the small towns of Hungary, and this is cynically used by Fidesz, whose political actions fuelled the psychology of national danger.⁷⁵ The purpose of memory politics developed by the Orbán regime was to build a pillar of ideological support in order to create an autocratic regime, by which an oligarchic group associated to Fidesz took control of the Hungarian state institutions, leading to the formation of a “state mafia.”⁷⁶ This no longer concerns the preservation of some privileges for the aristocracy, as was the case during the interwar period, but involves redirecting public resources towards a group of Viktor Orbán’s political and financial friends.

The strategic move in the field of historical mythology was the adoption of a new constitution, in force beginning with 1 January 2012, in which the thesis of Millenary Hungary is raised to the level of constitutional value, an ahistorical nation naturally dominating the so-called “Carpathian Basin”: “We pledge to promote and protect our heritage, our unique language, Hungarian culture, the languages and cultures of other nationalities living in Hungary, as well as all natural and man-created things from the Carpathian Basin. (...) We respect the achievements of our historical Constitution and the Holy Crown, which represents the constitutional continuity of Hungarian statehood and national unity.”⁷⁷ The Hungarian Cross became a sacred symbol in the ideology of Hungarian illiberal democracy and challenging it became a crime punished by law.

The operation of rewriting Hungary’s history, in a mystical-millenary key, was the ideological justification of pragmatic actions aiming at consolidating political power. From a psychological point of view, by using a manoeuvre specific to autocratic regimes, a mythological unification of the nation is being attempted and those challenging the official narrative are under the risk of exclusion.

⁷⁵ Paul Lendvai, *Orbán: Hungary’s Strongman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 35–37. For historiographical controversies triggered by Orbán regime’s memory politics, related to the instrumentalization of “Trianon trauma,” considered to be more important and more dramatic than the Holocaust, see Éva Kovács, “Overcoming History through Trauma. The Hungarian Historikerstreit,” *European Review*, 23, 4 (2016), 523–534.

⁷⁶ Bálint Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary* (Budapest, CEU Press, 2016), passim. The Hungarian author defines the political regime as “the privatized form of a parasitic state, an economic undertaking run by the family of the Godfather exploiting the political and public instruments of power.”

⁷⁷ *Codex constituțional: constituțiile statelor membre ale Uniunii Europene*, Volume II (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial R.A., 2015), 784.

According to the mythological narrative used by Fidesz, the whole Hungarian nation suffered (and continues to suffer!) due to the Trianon Treaty and its leader is the implicit continuator of a Great Leader of the Nation: Orbán is implicitly assumed as Horthy's heir, the one who rebuilt Greater Hungary.⁷⁸ Of course, for reasons related to international political correctness, Viktor Orbán does not explicitly and entirely assume Horthy's inheritance, but this is happening in the daily reality of Hungarian society, in which "patriotic" themes have become predominant, also within schoolbooks.⁷⁹

In 2010, a new citizenship law was issued (after the one of 2001), by which speakers of the Hungarian language from outside Hungary could demand double citizenship (extraterritorial citizenship). The target were the ethnic Hungarians of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine, which then became a faithful electoral base of Fidesz (90% of them voted for this party during the parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2018 and the elections for the European Parliament of 2014 and 2019). From an argumentative perspective, we are dealing with a form of revisionism without an explicit challenge against borders, but Budapest assumes a policy of rebuilding the "millenary Hungarian nation broken by the Trianon Treaty."⁸⁰ Fidesz presented a theory of the political nation that did not overlap with Hungary's territory, but which had to assume the role of "mother-state" for all ethnic Hungarians. The text of the 2012 Hungarian Constitution states: "Article D: Taking into account that there is a single Hungarian nation, which has to remain united, Hungary is responsible for the fate of Hungarian citizens living outside its borders..." Neither the Council of Europe's criticism, which indicated Hungary's responsibility for increasing tensions in the relations among states and also at interethnic level,⁸¹ nor the protests of Slovakia and Ukraine managed to stop Hungary's forceful policy. On the contrary, Bucharest's desire not to inflame political tensions was perceived not as an invitation to dialogue, but as a sign of weakness (another proof of the "Wallachians' ancestral inferiority"). Therefore, Hungary's extraterritorial actions in the so-called Carpathian Basin acquired a systematic character. Fidesz leaders, competing with the leaders of the Jobbik (Right Youth Alliance – Movement for a Better Hungary) extremist party, made several public statements concerning the territorial autonomy of the so-called "Szeklers' Land" in Romania. Fidesz *de facto* subordinated the political formations

⁷⁸ Michael Toomey, "History, Nationalism, and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary,'" *New Perspectives. Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations*, 26, 1 (2018), 87–108; Attila Antal, *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime* (Bingley: Emerald, 2019), 49–52.

⁷⁹ For the authoritarian instrumentalization of historical texts and symbols by Fidesz, see Karl Benziger, "The strong state and embedded dissonance: history education and populist politics in Hungary," *Yesterday & Today*, 18 (2017), 64–84.

⁸⁰ Pogonyi, 86–88.

⁸¹ Venice Commission, *Opinion on the New Constitution of Hungary*, Opinion no. 621/2011, Strasbourg, 20 June 2011.

of the ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia, successfully exporting Hungarian nationalism to neighboring countries. The Hungarian mass media reached out to the regions inhabited by important Hungarian communities and Hungarian state companies (MOL – in energy, OTP – in the banking system) are trying to create a unified economic space, beyond national borders. In the educational field, Sapientia University of Transylvania was created, self-defined as being built upon ethnic and ideological criteria (“Validation of Christian and universal human values”). The hegemonic attitude beyond the borders of Hungary’s neighboring states manifested itself when Hungarian diplomacy assumed as its strategic objective the support for the (political, cultural) autonomy of the Hungarian communities living on the territory of other countries. The Fidesz political strategy combined, in ambiguous forms, with a pragmatic state policy: Hungary was interested in maintaining cordial relations with Slovakia within the Visegrad Group and with Romania in order to attract it in the group of countries opposing the EU policy regarding the observance of the rule of law in Member States.

In 2011, the Fidesz government adopted the National Unity Strategy, by which it wanted to create an economic infrastructure in Hungary’s neighboring countries which it would control for political aims. In Transylvania, the operationalization of this strategy was achieved starting with 2017 by the so-called “Kos Karoly Plan” (he was a Hungarian architect born in Timișoara), by which preferential subsidies were granted to ethnic Hungarian Romanian citizens. In spite of the obvious discriminatory character in regard to the Romanian citizens and of the violation of the Romanian state’s sovereignty, the program unfolded with the connivance of Bucharest’s strongman of 2017–2019, Liviu Dragnea. He aspired, before being sentenced to jail for abuse of power, to establish an illiberal political regime in Romania, following the model of Viktor Orbán. In exchange for tacitly accepting the violation of the 1996 bilateral treaty and of international law norms, Liviu Dragnea hoped to get Hungary’s support against a predictable EU reaction, following his attempts to take control over the judicial system. A public attempt to clarify Hungary’s economic involvement in Transylvania was made by the Romanian government only in May 2020, but until the completion of this study no relevant conclusions were formulated.⁸²

As the secret to preserving the vitality of political myths is the permanent production of new forms that maintain the essence of the initial message, Hungary created in 2014 the Veritas Institute of Historical Research, having as its main objective the issue of Trianon. In 2016, a group of over 20 researchers called “Trianon 100” was created within the Hungarian Academy of Science, which

⁸² Sabina Fati, “7 capete de acuzare împotriva Ungariei pe care România le ignoră cu bună știință,” <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/capete-de-acuzare-impotriva-ungariei-pe-care-romania-le-ignora-cu-buna-stiinta/30635832.html> (accessed on 30 May 2020).

organizes conferences, seminars and edits historical sources. Hungary denied a political purpose behind the creation of this group, but its connection to state policy is obvious. The project was also presented in October 2017 in Bucharest, but a real dialogue was hampered by the perception that the undertaking was mostly propaganda-oriented, while about the Paris Peace Conference there is a huge historical bibliography and the “discoveries” of Hungarian historians cannot change essential facts of the international historical narrative. The culminating moment of Fidesz’s activity of historical mythology production was the inauguration of a Trianon monument in downtown Budapest,⁸³ listing the names of 12,000 settlements of historical Hungary (irrespective of their ethnic composition), protected by an “eternal flame,” in order to send the message that not only the “trauma” is permanent, but also the irredentist aspiration!

Conclusions

The Trianon Treaty was perceived and defined by Hungarian political and intellectual elites as a major crisis for both the state and the nation. The attempt to overcome this situation, self-defined as a “trauma,” was made by creating a political mythology having its ideological roots in 19th century Hungarian nationalism, in which the guilty parties were identified outside the Hungarian political body: the Great Powers, considered vengeful and merciless, on the one hand, and the supposedly inferior nations (Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs), which, lacking “gratitude” for being submitted to a civilizing process, “betrayed” millenary Hungary, as the Hungarian aristocrats explained during the interwar period, and no longer accepted Hungarian leadership in a political framework perpetuating the latter’s domination.⁸⁴ Trianon’s mythology was used in the interwar period by Hungarian elites in order to preserve a politically conservative, autocratic and nationalist regime, blocking the access to liberal and social democratic ideas; Hungary’s international policy had the single vector of restoring the old medieval state borders, thus defying ethnic realities.

During the Cold War the revisionist mythology was no longer publicly exhibited in communist Hungary, but remained deeply implanted in the collective memory, from where it was easily put into circulation after 1989. In order not to raise suspicions about Hungary’s democratization, in the context of the race for NATO and EU accession, the Trianon mythology was only cautiously used. After 2010, Viktor Orbán rediscovered the recipe of political management by using historical mythology. The theme of the malefic Great Powers was converted into

⁸³ For a summary of recent revisionist mythology see Viktor Orbán’s speech on the occasion of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon see: <http://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/primeminister-viktor-orbans-commemoration-speech-trianon/> (accessed on 10 June 2020).

⁸⁴ Tibor Glant, “The Myth and History of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points in Hungary,” *Eger Journal of American Studies*, XII, 1–2 (2010), 301–322.

the idea of the danger posed by multicultural globalization, personified by the Jewish-Hungarian billionaire George Soros. The anguish at the possible extinction of the Hungarian nation, created on the occasion of Hungary's transformation into a nation-state following the Trianon Treaty, is used in order to preserve the nation's "Christian purity," supposed to be affected by migration. The irredentist idea of abolishing borders was replaced with that of a Christian nation project which politically, culturally and economically unifies the entire Hungarian population of Central Europe, irrespective of the state in which it lives. Recent stylistic and thematic changes in the revisionist mythology do not change the functions of its grammar: it remains a tool of authoritarian domination over a society which is kept under permanent pressure by the threat of a supposed annihilation.

A century after the Paris Peace Treaty, we can clearly state that the existence of the Hungarian nation was never really endangered. The Trianon Treaty ended the utopia of imperial Hungary, bringing it to the condition of a nation-state. It is true that an important number of ethnic Hungarians remained outside Hungary's borders, but they were recognized as full members of their new countries. The dangers of assimilating ethnic minorities in Romania and Czechoslovakia was not imminent, for the simple reason that the Romanians, Czechs or Slovaks did not develop an ideology of imperial national superiority, and therefore the respect for other identities was established as a natural right, even if interethnic tensions also sporadically emerged.

There is no doubt that the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire produced a trauma among the Hungarian nation, and it is equally true that Hungarian irredentism also created other traumas within Hungary's neighboring nations, scared of an attack against their statehood. The moral of this secular situation is that an excessive consumption of historical mythology damages a nation's health!