

# *Preface*

## *General Remarks about the Peace Treaty of Trianon*

Huge changes were brought about by the collapse of the Central Powers and the armistice agreements that followed it in the national borderlines in Europe, which consequently also led to the birth of a few new states. The victorious countries dictated the terms of the peace treaties which were based mainly on the principle of War Guilt. Answering the question "who should be responsible for the outbreak of the war", the winners put the burden of all responsibility on the shoulders of the defeated countries. However, this conclusion was misleading and generalising. It does not live up to the high standards of objective judgement. It is entirely driven by the logic of the rule that history is written by the victors. In fact, the real reasons behind the outbreak of the war must be viewed in the context of a complicated and interdependent network of problems with many shades and layers. For example: The aggressive imperialist vision of Greater Serbia, the domestic weaknesses of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the nationalistic expansion of Romania, Russia's long held desire to expand along a Pan-Slavic route, the shrinking French influence since the loss of Franco-Prussian war and their hopes that a new war might restore it, the British Empire's worries about Germany's growing hegemony on the continent and naval power on the seas, and the German fears about total isolation in a crisis. All these considerations reduced the chances for a peaceful outcome and any attempts that had been made to reach one, had already been too late and had remained ineffective due to the quick mobilisation of the armies.

Despite the above observations, punitive peace treaties were made and justified by the idea that the state alone is responsible for the war and for its consequences (the War Guilt Clause). This applied to all defeated countries but not in equal terms. The greatest loss that Austria had to endure as one of the successor countries of the Dual Monarchy (10th September, 1919, Treaty of Saint-Germain) was to give South Tyrol, Trieste and Istria to Italy and to let Dalmatia become part of the new South Slavic state. The terms of the Treaty signed by Hungary (4th June 1920, Treaty of Trianon), another successor country of the Dual Monarchy, therefore, a guilty one, forced her to endure the loss of 2/3 of her territory and 1/3 of her Hungarian population. She was so harshly punished that the body of the country was effectively chopped up.

The way the losers were treated after the war was also shaped by the victor's desire to consolidate the bourgeois establishment in Europe. They wanted to save the world from the dangers of Bolshevism and wanted to redraw the political map of Europe. These two goals had a common point because the best

possible way to deal with revolutionary Russia, it seemed, was to block her by a quarantine made out of anti-communist countries (Cordon Sanitaire). Since most lands to make these new countries were taken from Russia, their anti-Moscow sentiment was guaranteed. The list of these countries in a north-to-south order comprises Finland, previously an autonomous land, whose independence was guaranteed by Lenin, the three small Baltic countries, who did not have any historical predecessor, Poland, who managed to gain her independence back after a period of 120 years of foreign rule, and Romania, who grew twice as big as her original state at an astounding speed mainly through annexing the land torn off from Hungary plus ex-Russian Bessarabia. Besides, the Cordon Sanitaire included other states like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The European map had to be redrawn for the purposes of containing Germany, too, and for the enabling the Allied Powers to meet their obligations they had made towards Romania, Serbia, and the Czechs in their mutual secret treaties. The collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had left a vast geographical vacuum behind in Europe and the Middle East, which needed to be filled up quickly to serve the best interests of the new order. This new situation mainly favoured the various nationalistic movements, which were all going to pose as the heirs to these vacated lands, even more so because they had the backing of the main powers who had supported them in the hope of finishing the war in a quicker and a more successful manner by the military help they could offer in return. This allowed them to be more economical with their war effort, which protected their human and material resources, and as a bonus these new countries were, by their nature, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-German.

The idea of creating pure nation states along ethnic and language boundaries was one of the original principles behind the redrawing of the borders. President Wilson was the main protagonist of this idea. Unfortunately, this is exactly where the biggest failure had occurred in the "Peace" terms. It is even more intriguing to see that in the whole of human history it had hardly ever happened that a defeated country identified so much with the principles of the victors as Hungary did with Wilson's Principles. The main argument for not having invited the losers to the negotiations was their preliminary nature. It was simply too early, they had argued, for them to come along, and as a reassurance of their goodwill they had promised a place at the final stages of the talks. The reality, however, was different: the land-grabbing peace terms that would eventually lead to the "Treaty of Trianon" were exclusively discussed among the victors. These peace terms heavily limited Hungary's options to function as a normal country, and her opportunities were damaged to a massive extent. It was the sanctioning of the terms of this land-grabbing peace treaty which made it particularly hard for the losers to accept it, and so it hurt their sense of justice and diminished their trust in the rule of law.

Austria and Hungary were reduced to their pure German and Hungarian constituents. Serbia grew bigger to be known as Yugoslavia (which was, in fact, Greater Serbia). It included ex-Austrian Slovenia, ex-Hungarian Vojvodina and

Croatia, and the formerly independent Montenegro. The new state of Czechoslovakia was created from the Dual Monarchy's industrial centrum, the Czech Lands, joined together with rural Slovakia and the Rusyns' land, i.e., former Upper Hungary. Romania's nationalistic expansion was crowned by turning into a multinational conglomerate. Neither historical precedent nor logic could explain the formation of the Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, and Romanian states. They were the embodiment of the nationalistic ideology which believed in the power of shared ethnicity and in the idea that too small nation states were undesirable. Now, both South and Western Slavs formed multinational states, and most of the Romanian speaking areas were grouped together into one state. However, this desired outcome could not have been achieved voluntarily; they were often forced and therefore did not stand the test of time. Furthermore, the ratio of ethnic minorities in the post-war countries became greater than it had been in Hungary before the war.

In the name of the different nationalities, the once diversely populated lands of Austria and Hungary were divided into six new countries with equally mixed populations. It created tension that would lead to further conflicts which were then further aggravated by the fact that the arrangement of the new borders overlooked the general economic interests of the region. Not only did this political transformation completely ignore the national, geographical, and economic conditions of this area but it also lacked any understanding of local history. Therefore, along with the geographical peculiarities, they stood for a kind of intellectual and material energy that were quite independent from the facts and figures.

The new borders of 1919 did not solve the problems of nationalities. If anything, they made it worse. Out of the 40 million people in Europe who belonged to any of the ethnic minority groups, the most lived in Central Europe. Out of the twelve countries in the region, two became just like the Monarchy, only on a smaller scale: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and Czechoslovakia. Out of the many minorities of the South Slavic state, the Serbs only accounted for 40% of the entire population, the Croats for 23%, the Slovenes for 8%, Bosnians for 6% and the Macedonians for 5%. Furthermore, more than half a million Hungarians and the same number of Germans lived in the Kingdom, and there were also Italians, Romanians, and other Slavic minorities.

Not only did the Peace Treaty offer Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina up on a dish to Serbia but a significant part of South Hungary was offered to them as well, along with the Hungarian and German speaking majority who had already lived there. Serbia's total territorial gain was 143,000 square kilometres which increased the area of the Kingdom to 249,000 square kilometres. The Czechoslovak Republic was a brand-new country where seven million Czechs and two million Slovaks lived together with a further five million people as minorities.

In effect, the winners plainly restored the Austro-Hungarian Empire only in a much more pathetic form. Czechoslovakia's territorial gain was 140,000 square kilometres, which entirely came from the Dual Monarchy but the ratio

of the Czechs in the new state only reached 51%, and even the Slovak's share did not go any higher than 15%. (The Hungarians in 1910 made up 54.6% of the entire population). Neither does Romania meet the requirements to be described as a mono-ethnic nation state. They too ended up with having a large group of minorities, who accounted for 30% of the population. Romania got 113,200 square kilometres from the Dual Monarchy and consequently, with other territorial gains from Russia, the area of Romania grew from 137,903 square kilometres to 295,000 square kilometres and the pre-war population of 7.8 million people became 17.5 million by the 1930s.

We can see by looking at the figures that out of the 24 minority groups scattered across in Central and Southern Europe, seven had a nation state, while the three South Slavic nations, and the Czechs and Slovaks lived in two multinational states. Out of the 109 million people who lived in the region, 26 million, one quarter of the entire population, belonged to a minority group. Among them were the Hungarians, who formed the third biggest minority group of all. It's size, according to the statistics of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, almost reached three million. According to the Hungarian estimates, it even went over it by a few hundred thousands. Half of them lived right next to the borders and the other half were divided between the historical region of Transylvania where they were scattered across and which was also part of Romania by then, and Szekely Land, where they lived as one block of 600,000 Hungarians, the furthest point to the east of Hungary. As a former ruling nation, the Hungarians, just like the Germans in Poland and Czechoslovakia, regarded these events as a complete catastrophe and an unacceptable act of injustice. Most of these people thought about their situation as an interregnum, and the Germans were hoping to reunite with either Germany or Austria, while the Hungarians were trusting the idea of reuniting with Hungary.

The fact that the Hungarian peasantry did not benefit from the agrarian reform which allowed for the reallocation of the Hungarian middle-sized and large estates, contributed towards a growing sense of resentment among them.

The ethnic movements in the successor states were no longer about promoting language, cultural or political rights (as was the case in the Dual Monarchy) but they were involved in a serious struggle to survive, since being part of a minority group meant the loss of one's estates and employment, the elimination of career opportunities, personal harassment, and eviction from one's home. After World War I, a general agrarian reform was conducted across the newly established, strong states, the sole purpose of which was to get their hands on the estates of the previous landowner class on a nationalistic basis. Many of the ex-landowner class had found themselves in an underprivileged position. 15 million acres of land swapped ownership in Central Europe during the agrarian reform after 1918. In Czechoslovakia, the area of the confiscated land made up 29% of the total area of the country, while in Romania it was 20%. Mainly the Hungarian and German landowners fell victim to the agrarian reforms in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Hungary had lost a vast

proportion of her national wealth in such manner. The overall majority of the confiscated lands were allotted to Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians and Serbs.

In this study, by "observing the object itself", our focus was to understand what had really happened in the country during those crucial years after World War I, and at some of the areas and settlements near the frequented spots next to the borders. The wind of military collapse, revolution, and foreign occupation had swept through the country which was no longer able to resist in merit the very real threats posed by the winners' military and political power. This power was shaping the talks at the negotiating tables of the peace conference, where the country's fate would be decided upon.

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