

The Cancer of Central Europe: Trianon

by Lipták Béla

"Every nation's homeland is sacred. If you destroy one, you mutilate the entire human race." - Father R. P. Grady

"Ancient poets and theologians could not imagine such suffering, which Trianon brought to the innocent. In their eyes, that was for the damned in Hell." - Sir Winston Churchill.

Field Marshall Ian Smith: "A plebiscite refused is a plebiscite taken."

Tacitus: "We Hate Whom We Hurt"

"The proposal to dismember Hungary is absurd" - President Wilson

On the 4th of June, 2007 is the 87th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon, the peace treaty which in 1920 mutilated and dismembered an ancient European nation: the kingdom of Hungary. At Trianon Hungary was Deprived 72% of her territory and 64% of her inhabitants, 13 million out of her 21 million inhabitants.

This essay has three parts: First it will discuss the history of Hungary until the end of World War One, culminating in the Treaty of Trianon.

Next it will describe the Treaty, its architects, goals and consequences.

After that, it will discuss "Hungary's guilt" and the events of the last 87 years, to show, that just as Nazism was not born in Germany but in Versailles, so the tragedy of Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, the fragmentation of Central Europe and the still contemplated Russian expansion into Europe can all be traced back to Trianon.

I will conclude the article by suggesting a plan to construct a healthy entity from the disintegrated remains of Trianon, to reconstitute the unity of Central Europe and the stability of the European Union.

Pre-Trianon Hungary

For a thousand years, Hungary occupied an oval shaped central plane surrounded by the protective bulwark of the Carpathian Mountains in the heart of Europe. Like the crust on a loaf of bread, the mountains encased the lowlands in a majestic arch from which all waterways converged toward the center. This perfect geographic unity was matched by complete self-sufficiency, until this harmonious

symbiosis of the great central plain and its surrounding mountains was destroyed at Trianon.

For a millennium, Hungary was the eastern bastion of European civilization, a balancing and stabilizing power between Slavic and Germanic nations. Hungary's first king, Saint Stephen, wrote to his son, Saint Emeric, in 1036: "Make the strangers welcome in this land, let them keep their languages and customs, for weak and fragile is the realm which is based on a single language or on a single set of customs" (*unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecille et fragile est.*)

Stephen's advice was respected and obeyed during the coming centuries:

Hungary gave asylum to the Ruthenians in the north, the Wallachians (Romanians) and Saxons in the east, the Swabians and Serbs in the south. Eventually the kingdom of 21 million, possessed 14 national minorities, of which the Magyars were only one. In order not to hurt the feelings of any of the minorities, Latin remained the sole official language of the kingdom until 1844.

Hungary became a constitutional monarchy in 1222 and her constitution, the Golden Bull is junior to the Magna Carta by only 7 years. This constitutional monarchy was almost completely annihilated by the Mongol invasion of 1240-41, but through her enormous struggle, it succeeded in protecting Europe and her civilization. In 1456, the Hungarian armies defeated the Turkish forces and in gratitude, the Pope ordered the ringing of the bells at noon time in all Catholic churches.

Toward the end of the XVth century, during the reign of the renaissance king Matthias Corvinus, Hungary's population reached that of England, the court in Buda became one of the finest cultural centers of Europe, and the Corvinus Library in Buda was Europe's finest.

In 1526, Hungary was once again annihilated by a Turkish invasion, which cut her population in half and the kingdom in three. During the 150 years of Ottoman occupation, the western part of the kingdom was occupied by Austria, the center by the Ottoman invaders and Hungarian culture survived only in the east, in Transylvania.

Even today, Transylvania is the land where the purest Hungarian is spoken, where Hungarian popular art has found its most exalted, most perfect expression, and where Béla Bartók collected his Hungarian folk tunes. Transylvania is also the place where the Hungarian Diet at Torda, in 1557, - for the first time in the world -, declared the freedom of all religions. Transylvania was also the birthplace of the Unitarian and Sabbatarian religions.

After the Turkish occupation, Austria attempted to take over all of Hungary. This resulted in a series of uprisings. The War of Independence of 1703-1711 was

led by Francis II Rákóczy whose insurgent fighters were mostly Slovak and Ruthenian peasants, who proudly declared themselves to be Hungarians (as distinct from the racial term Magyar).

The next fight for national independence came in 1848. It was led by Louis Kossuth. Once again, the Ruthenian and Slovak nationalities contributed masses of recruits for the Hungarian revolutionary army, which, while defeated by the combined forces of Austria and Czarist Russia, forced the Hapsburgs to accept the formation of an Austro-Hungarian duality in 1867.

The leader of the 1848 war of independence, Kossuth was the second foreigner (second only to Lafayette) to be ever invited to address the United States Congress in January, 1852. It was also Kossuth who in 1862 proposed to convert the Austro-Hungarian Empire's 24 million Slavs, 12 million Germans and 12 million Hungarians - a population which at that TIME WAS larger than that of France - into a Danubean Confederation.

He wrote at the time: "Unity and fraternity among Hungarians, Slavs and Romanians! This is my dream and my most honest advice! Let the future smile on this land and all of her people! Unite!"

From Sarajevo to Trianon

At the beginning of this century, Russia sponsored intensive Pan-slavic agitation in Central Europe. Archduke Francis Ferdinand, - heir apparent of Emperor Francis Joseph-, was the main opponent of that expansion and also of the creation of a Greater Serbia. Because of that, Russia engineered his murder on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist.

The only member of the Council of Ministers of the Dual Monarchy who opposed the war of retaliation against Serbia was the Hungarian Premier, Count Stephen Tisza. When he was voted down, Hungary occupied Serbia and by 1915 would have considered the war over, if Russia did not have scores to settle with the Ottoman Empire, if France did not have similar scores to settle with Germany, Italy with Austria, and so forth. Therefore the First World War broke out and went on.

The main reason for WW1 was the fear of France, England and Russia, that Germany will become the leading power in Europe. Simultaneously, Germany and Austria-Hungary were afraid of the military and economic domination of Europe by the Triple Entente. Initially, the plans of the Entente did not include the dismemberment of Hungary, although in secret, they did offer Eastern Hungary to Romania in 1916, if she joined the Triple Alliance.

During the war, the Czech allies of Serbia, Eduard Benes and professor Thomas Masaryk, transformed themselves from consultants into architects of allied policy for Central Europe. They had a difficult task, because the English and the Americans were against the "balkanization" of Central Europe into small nation states. The Czechs emigrants organized a deceitful propaganda campaign for the dismemberment of Hungary and in their efforts succeeded in obtaining the support of two criminally ignorant French politicians, Georges Clémenceau and Raymond Poincaré. In spite of all that, in 1917, - when Emperor Charles I came to power -, the Entente offered a separate peace treaty to Austria-Hungary, which would have guaranteed all her borders.

Later, the propaganda of the Czech emigrants exploited the fact that Lenin came to power in Russia in 1917. They also exploited the nationalistic desires of the Czech and Slav soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army and bombarded them with some 150,000 leaflets, which showed the map of the proposed of their new nation states. Still later, when Hungary temporarily fell under Communism in 1919, the Czech emigrants argued that the dismemberment of Hungary will help saving Europe from Communism.

President Wilson refused to cooperate in this conspiracy. He wanted Europe's new borders to correspond to her ethnographic boundaries and he wanted the principle of self-determination to prevail. When in October, 1918 the Austro-Hungarian army capitulated, it did that under the assumption that President Wilson's Principles will prevail, but his views were later disregarded by the French. Hungary's borders were not defined by the armistice she signed on the 3rd of November, 1918 in Padua, but by the Czech and French armies entering from the North and South. The Hungarian government of Michael Károlyi did not resist the occupation.

Similarly to the Czechs and the French, five days after signing her armistice, Romania too "reentered" the war, and occupied Transylvania without resistance.

So, most of Hungary was already occupied on January 18, 1919, at the beginning of the Paris Peace Conference. On January 24, 1919, President Wilson protested the illegal Serb and Romanian occupation of parts of Hungary and on March 31, 1919, he called the proposed dismemberment of Hungary absurd.

After Count Michael Károlyi's government resigned in 1919, Béla Kun established a Communist dictatorship, raised a Red Army and overran Slovakia. In response to the Red dictatorship, a counterrevolution broke out and its leader, Nicholas Horthy invited the Romanian army into Hungary to overthrow it. President Wilson objected to the Serb and Romanian occupation of Hungary, but he was overruled by the French, who argued that this occupation will prevent the spread of Communism.

The Treaty of Trianon

On the 4th of June, 1920, one of the cruelest treaties of human history was signed. Never before had a peace, imposed by violence, been more brutal in its bias, madder in its destructiveness, more forgetful of the lessons of history and better calculated to create future upheavals. The treaty cut mercilessly into the flesh of compact Hungarian populations. Hundreds of towns were separated from their suburbs; villages were split in two; communities were deprived of their parish churches or cemeteries; townships were cut off from their railroad stations and their water supplies. A 1000-year-old European country was made into an invalid as its territory was reduced by 72%. In the process, some 35% of all Hungarians were turned into foreigners without moving from the towns, which their fathers built, as the borders were redrawn around them. In this way, the Hungarians became and still are one of Europe's largest minorities.

In comparison, the leader of the central powers: Germany lost only 9.5% of her territory. The outrage of this mockery of justice is illustrated by the fact that even Austria lined up at the carcass and received some parts of the dismembered Hungarian Kingdom.

From the fragments of Hungary, the contrived Successor States of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and greater Romania were created. These artificial entities forced Croats to live with Serbs and Czechs to live with Slovaks, demonstrating both the arrogance and the ignorance of Trianon's architects. These Successor States were not only geographic monstrosities but also economic absurdities and therefore their self-destruction was just a matter of time. As we know, two of the three successor states have already disintegrated.

The French goal was to establish dominance over the whole of Europe by the creation of insecure client states out of the carcass of Austria-Hungary, in the back of Germany. France was successful in turning the nations of Central Europe, -which in the past lived in peace-, against each other and, because of the nationalist governments of these client states felt endangered by their large minorities, the whole of Europe was destabilized.

The plunder obtained by the Successor States was too large to digest. It was for this reason, why democracy could not evolve in these multinational states. They were afraid that they could not survive, if they provided the basic democratic rights to their minorities. Being afraid to give autonomy to their minorities, deformed the evolution of these states and also distorted the mentality of their populations.

All the United States Congress could do at the time, was to refuse to approve the Treaty of Trianon. So, this product of Neronian insanity, this plan, unjust in substance and tragic in consequence, was implemented anyway.

Self-Determination Through Plebiscites

The very foundation of the 14 Wilsonian Principles was that people have an unalienable right to determine their own destiny. Yet in drawing the new borders at Trianon, self-determination and the use of plebiscites was totally disregarded. Although Field Marshall Ian Smith recommended to the Peace Conference to hold plebiscites in Transylvania, Slovakia, Ruthenia, Croatia and Slavonia, his advice was rejected. Therefore, he was correct in declaring: "A plebiscite refused is a plebiscite taken."

By not allowing plebiscites, the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the redistribution of her 48 million citizens resulted in the creation of 16 million oppressed ethnic minorities. These minorities were not emigrants who voluntarily left their country, but people who never moved from the towns their fathers built and became foreigners, just because Clémenceau and Benes decided to redraw the borders around them.

When the Wends and Slovenes of the Muraköz protested their separation from Hungary, when the Ruthenians expressed their desire to remain in the kingdom, - which they shared for a thousand years -, when the Swabians of the Banat protested their annexation into Romania and Yugoslavia (Vojvodina), the answer was always the same: no! There was only one exception, only a single case where President Wilson's principle of self-determination prevailed: It was in the case of the city of Sopron, which held a plebiscite and voted by a majority of 65% to remain part of Hungary and not to join Austria.

The "Guilt" Of Hungary

The real reason for dismembering Hungary was the desire of the Western European powers to eliminate the state which could compete with their influence and thereby bring a power balance to the continent. The excuse used by the French was that Hungary's dismemberment would prevent the spread of Communism. But the real reason why Hungary was dismembered was the French desire for domination and because Hungary could not defend herself and because her greedy neighbors decided to help themselves to the unprotected carcass.

Naturally, the architects of Trianon could not admit this and therefore invented the theory of Hungary's Guilt, claiming that she started the First World War,

was a historical German ally and a destabilizing force in Europe. None of these reasons were true.

As to the claim of starting WW1, it was the Serb para-governmental organization, Narodna Obrana, which, with the encouragement of Russia and with the goal of the creation of a Greater Serbia, assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914 and it was the Premier of Hungary, who alone in the Austro-Hungarian Council of Ministers, voted against a war of retaliation against Serbia.

As to the claim of being a natural German ally, history proves just the opposite. Whenever Hungary was independent, she acted as a keystone of balance between the Germanic and Slavic peoples and prevented the attempts of both Pan-Germanic and Pan-Slavic expansions. In the first 500 years of her existence, starting with the Battle of Lechfeld in 955, Hungary fought to block the spread of German influence towards the East and created stability by filling the power vacuum in the region. When under Germanic (Austrian) occupation between 1688 and 1867, she twice rose against the Hapsburgs and eventually gained independence from them.

Tacitus: "We Hate Whom We Hurt"

In any society, the acid test of civilization is the respect for minority rights. The Great Powers' attempted to guarantee these rights by making the Successor States sign minority treaties, which outlined the language, religious, cultural and property rights of the minorities. For example, the minority treaty signed with Romania on the 9th of December, 1919 in Paris, - guaranteed by the United States, Britain, France, Italy and Japan -, stated the following:

Article 8: No restriction shall be imposed on the free use of any language.

Article 9: Equal rights to establish, manage and control religious institutions, schools and other educational establishments.

In Article 11: Roumania agrees to accord to the communities of the Szecklers (Hungarian Székelys) and Saxons in Transylvania local autonomy in regard to scholastic and religious matters.

Article 12: Roumania agrees that the stipulations in the foregoing Articles, constitute obligations of international concern.

Similar treaties were signed with the other Successor States, but none were ever enforced. In fact, the Great Powers turned the other way while the Successor States attempted to "solve" their minority problems, first through denationalization, then by ethnic cleansing through deportations, expulsions, transfers, dispersions and other forms of uprooting. Hungarians had to choose between their nationality and their property. Because of the savage oppression, intimidation and coercion, 350,000 Hungarians decided to leave all their possessions behind and flee to rump Hungary.

The institutions and possessions of Hungarian communities were also targeted. In Transylvania alone, the Hungarian community lost 1,665 of her schools, including the world famous János Bolyai University, named after Einstein's predecessor, the inventor of the new (non-Euclidean) geometry.

The Paris Peace Treaty

On February 10, 1947, the Great Powers had another opportunity to enforce the until- then-disregarded minority treaties. This was expected because on August 14, 1941, the Atlantic Charter was signed, and it too (like the

earlier Wilsonian principles) emphasized the right to self-determination and to plebiscites. Yet, not a single plebiscite was allowed. In fact, rump Hungary was further violated by the transfer of additional land to Slovakia. This transfer, later, made it possible to build the monstrous Gabčíkovo dam project, which unilaterally and illegally transferred the Danube, Hungary's border river, onto Slovak territory (in 1992), thereby destroying Europe's oldest wetland region.

At the end of the Second World War, the worst crime of legalistic hypocrisy occurred. Eduard Benes, with the scandalous connivance of the Western Allies, invented the concept of "collective responsibility" and used it to confiscate the properties of the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and later, and to deport them in cattle cars. To understand the hypocrisy of this Benes Decree of "Collective Guilt", one must realize that wartime Slovakia under Tiso was a protectorate of Nazi Germany. It was the representative of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak parliament, János Esterházy, who cast the only dissenting vote against the Jewish laws, which were passed by that body. Yet, after the war, Esterházy died in a Czechoslovakian jail and the Hungarian minorities he represented were collectively sentenced as war criminals. Thereby, when the Jewish Hungarians, deported by the Nazis returned from the German death camps, they found their properties confiscated and were deported again, because of their collective guilt as Hungarians.

The Last Decades

By the late 1940s, the only protection of the Hungarian minorities, were their churches. In 1948, 600 Hungarian Catholic priests and all six of their bishops

were arrested in Transylvania. As the Romanians belong to the Eastern Orthodox faith, Rome later agreed to gerrymander the Catholic sees and to appoint Romanian bishops to lead the all-Hungarian church. As of this day, over 2000 Hungarian church properties in Romania have not been returned. This reprehensible outrage caused the United States Congress in 2005 to pass its House Resolution HR191, demanding the return of the church properties.

In the other Successor States, the fate of the Hungarian Catholics was similar. In 1949, in Ruthenia, the bishop of the 500,000 Catholics was murdered and the parishioners were forced to merge into the Orthodox Church. In Slovakia, in April, 1950, the bishop of 320,000 Catholics was arrested and his parishioners were also forced into the Orthodox Church.

In 1956, 2,700 Hungarians died in fighting 2000 Soviet tanks (a number larger than what Hitler used to occupy France) and later 289 were hanged and some 300,000 escaped, yet the rulers of the Successor States used the uprising as a pretext to speed the forced assimilation of their Hungarian minorities. It was after the Hungarian Revolution that the remaining autonomous Hungarian regions: Transylvania in Romania and Vojvodina in Yugoslavia were abolished. Today, the 2-3 million Hungarians have no autonomy at all, although that autonomy been guaranteed by the Great Powers in 1920, again in 1946 and once more by the European Parliament in 1993, in Article 11 of Recommendation 1201.

It would be the responsibility of the international community to insist upon the upholding of its own principles and earlier decisions, which were expressed and signed by the member states on the 1st of August in the final declaration of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration. These same community of values on human and minority rights were repeated in 1990 (Copenhagen), in the Charta of Paris and by several European Union Conventions.

After 1989, there was a short period of hope, when for example the Hungarian bishop, László Tőkés, was temporarily heralded as an all-Romanian national hero, for leading the successful revolution against Ceaucescu, or when Miklós Duray, the Hungarian leader of Charter 77, was released from jail in Slovakia. Unfortunately, this did not last. By 1991, the formerly Communist, but basically nationalist leaders of the Successor States Milosevic in Yugoslavia, Iliescu in Romania, Mechiar in Slovakia) once again started to use nationalistic and anti-Hungarian propaganda to distract public attention from the pressing economic problems of their nations.

Today, these three demagogues are gone from the political scene. Yet conditions have not changed much and the restoration of cultural autonomy has still not occurred. In the former Yugoslavia, Montenegro and Kosovo are progressing towards self-determination, yet in Vojvodina, Serb refugees from Krajina and Kosovo are "ethnically cleansing" the native Hungarian population and anti-Hungarian violence is common. Since 1989, some half million Hungarian minorities have left the towns and villages of their ancestors and the Hungarian church and higher education properties have still not been returned.

One wonders if there is a limit to the patience of the second largest minority of Europe (second only to the Russians), and what will happen when that limit is reached?

The Lesson

It takes time for historic events to reveal their consequences. It took three generations for the unnatural creations of Trianon: Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, to self-destruct. It seems that even 86 years has not been enough for some to realize that it is the legacy of Trianon, which is destabilizing and "balkanizing" Central Europe. We know that Trianon did not eliminate the causes of the 1914 murder in Sarajevo (Russian and French expansion) and that no unjust "solution" can stand the erosion of time.

On the pulpit of the Notre-Dame Cathedral, Father R. P. Gratry has put it this way: "Every nation's homeland is sacred. If you destroy one, you mutilate the entire human race."

Therefore, the main mistake of 1920 was that it attempted to satisfy the expansionist desires of the French, instead of attempting to apply just principles to solve the nationality problems of Central Europe. Unfortunately, this approach has not changed much during the last 86 years, but there is hope. As the influence of the European Union and the United States is growing in the region, there is hope that the ideals of self-determination, autonomy and collective human rights will also take roots. In addition to self-determination through plebiscites, greater unity among the Danubian nations is also needed. A Danubian or Central European Federation, - similar to that of the Baltic states, within the European Union -, is needed to better protect their collective interests.

The international community through the UN, EU and other forums should declare that all national minorities anywhere in the world, have the right to hold UN supervised plebiscites and to receive cultural and linguistic autonomy, if they so desire. It should make no difference how these minorities evolved, how long they lived in the particular area, or what their language or religion is. Regardless of all that, they all have the right to maintain their heritage and the right to determine their own cultural destiny. Once cultural autonomy is guaranteed, the main cause of tensions between Central European neighbors will also diminish.

This recipe for reconciliation is applicable not only in Central Europe, but also in the Caucasus region. Decentralization, self-government, autonomy and decision making at the lowest possible local level, are the keys to peace and

democracy. It is essential for peace and stability to recognize that all regions will be destabilized by the existence of oppressed minorities and that the solution is to guarantee their basic rights.

When the Hungarians enjoy the same autonomy in Romania as the Romanian minorities do in Hungary, when the Serb, Russian, Roma, Turkish, Albanian, German, or other minorities of the region, are also treated equally, the tensions will disappear and the rebuilding can start.

The Danubian or Visegrad Confederation

It is not enough for the Danubean nations to individually rush into the European Union. In addition to that, they should work for the establishment of an economically self-sufficient, politically stable and geographically large enough federation, which is able to fill the present power vacuum in the region. Within this 100 million or so federation, the importance of the borders of nation states should be minimized. The freedom of movement that exists in the Schengen area should be adopted and all minorities should have full cultural autonomy and representation in the Parliaments.

History teaches us, that the Balkans became unstable whenever a power vacuum evolved in the Carpathian Basin. The wise learn from history, instead of repeating it's errors: The tragedy of Trianon will not be corrected and justice and stability will not be returned, by maintaining the status quo. The interests of Romania, Hungary and the other states in the region are the same. The states of Central Europe are all traveling in the same boat on the sea of history. Russia is still an imperialist state.

She is now using the energy weapon to increase her influence. The Black

Sea is very close to the Carpathians. We know that during the Kosovo crisis, there was talk about Serbia becoming part of Russia. What we also

know is that the United States is a powerful potential ally of Central Europe, not only in keeping Russia at bay, but also in spreading democracy, self-determination and minority rights throughout the region and the World.

What is needed - once the minority problems are solved in Central Europe - is to build a federation like that of the Baltic states within the European Union. A strong Danubean Federation, one that can be crystallized around the nucleus of Hungary, Slovakia, Ruthenia, Slovenia and Croatia. A federation that would be larger than France and could include Romania, Serbia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and more. This entity, with its economic and political power, could rebalance and stabilize Europe by asserting and defending her self-interest against the excessive power of Western Europe.

History does not solve problems accidentally. Those who want a better future must first have a plan, a concept of that future. For the stability and

prosperity of Central Europe, that plan should start with the autonomy of all the minorities and should end with a voluntary federation. It would be fitting, if on the 87st anniversary of the dismemberment of the Hungarian Kingdom, - after the unnecessary and undeserved suffering of three generations of innocent ethnic minorities-, the process of rebuilding, not of an ancient nation state, but of the Federation of Central Europe would be started.