

Géza Jeszenszky:

### **The After-Life of the 1920 Hungarian Peace**

The name “Trianon”, two palaces at Versailles, once the favourite residence of the kings of France, became a household word in Hungary, as the venue where, at the end of the First World War, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary. It has been widely held, and not only by Hungarians, that it was a most unfair settlement (far more punitive than the Versailles *Diktat* forced upon Germany), as it broke up the thousand-year-old Kingdom of Hungary between the neighbouring countries, reducing its territory from 325,000 square kilometres to 93,000, and attaching 3.5 million Hungarians, against their will, to countries where they became victims of discrimination, expulsion, sometimes even murder. I reviewed the newest account of the making of that treaty not long ago,<sup>1</sup> since then several works were published about the impact of Trianon and its literature on Hungarian politics and thinking. The explanation, the popularity of the subject goes beyond the fact that Trianon was the most drastic reduction of a country in history, apart from the partition and temporary obliteration from the map of Poland in 1795. Immediately after the treaty was signed books and articles were written, in several countries and languages, pointing out how unfair it was, and calling for its revision. The beneficiaries of Trianon, Hungary’s neighbours, answered by their own propaganda, vindicating the provisions. Finally, between, 1938 and 1941, Hungary regained some of the lost territories, with most of the detached Hungarians. That was accomplished in the form of a German (and Italian) arbitration, or a *Diktat*, an imposed settlement, which it clearly was, but was in line with the wishes of the majority of the populations concerned. The consequence was subordination to Germany in foreign policy, leading eventually to participation in the war, tremendous losses in lives and assets, and blackening the reputation of Hungary. Following World War II the Trianon borders were re-imposed, causing tremendous physical and mental suffering to the Hungarians affected. Since this time the territorial decisions were due mainly to Stalin’s favouritism, even the mentioning

---

<sup>1</sup> Romsics, Ignác: *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: the Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Reviewed by Géza Jeszenszky, The Genesis of a Lasting Quarrel in Central Europe, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, [VOLUME XLIII \\* No. 172 \\* Winter 2003](#)

of the theme of the borders was practically banned in Hungary during the first decades of communism, while in its later, more open phase it was restricted to scholarly writings. With the change of the political system all restraints were gone, but – surprisingly - hardly anybody in Hungary demanded the return of any territory to Hungary. Most people were sensible enough to concentrate on the fair treatment of the Hungarians in the seven states neighbouring Hungary, in line with a statement made by István Bibó, the most widely respected Hungarian political thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Hungary will faithfully respect and carry out the peace treaty, once it is signed. It would be insincere to pretend that she has become an enthusiastic adherent of the grave dispositions of the treaty. But Hungary will not create an ideology or organize political campaigns for changing the borders, and will not pursue a policy which speculates in international crises or catastrophes, so that her territorial grievances could be remedied. Hungary will comply with the conditions created by the peace treaty without any reservations, except one: she cannot give up her political interest in the fate of the Hungarian minorities [living in the states surrounding Hungary].”<sup>2</sup> Having regained sovereignty, and in accordance with such realism, Hungary between 1991 and 1996 signed bilateral treaties with her neighbours, which included substantial provisions on the rights of national minorities, while explicitly renouncing any territorial claims.<sup>3</sup>

If Hungary today seeks no change in borders, and endeavours to have friendly relations with all her neighbours, what is the reason that in recent years so many writings appeared on the issue of Trianon? The answer is quite simple: the problem, the unfair treatment of the Hungarian minorities, the unwillingness of the governments of their “host states” to meet the demands of the Hungarians for genuine local democracy, for autonomy based on collective rights, persists, just as those very demands. After decades of silence even many citizens of Hungary are surprised to find that people coming from neighbouring states, sometimes living hundreds of miles away from the border of Hungary, speak Hungarian, and often know more about Hungarian history and culture than most people in the “mother country.” So the curiosity about this phenomenon and its causes is natural.

---

<sup>2</sup> István Bibó: A magyar békeszerződés [The Hungarian Peace Treaty]. [Válasz, 1946] Közli Válogatott tanulmányok, Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1986. Vol. ii., 294-295.

<sup>3</sup> Géza Jeszenszky: "Hungary's Bilateral Treaties with the Neighbours," *Ethnos-Nation*, (Köln) 1996. [1997] Nr. 1-2. 123-128.

Miklós Zeidler, one of the best younger historians, a few years ago wrote a masterful summary of the pre-war efforts to revise the territorial clauses of that treaty,<sup>4</sup> and his publisher must be congratulated for including the theme in the impressive series of documentary collections *Nemzet és emlékezet* (Nation and memory).<sup>5</sup> This bulky volume contains 132 pieces of documents under three categories: primary sources, political essays and commentaries, and scholarly writings. Some of them were never published or long forgotten. In order to illustrate the richness of the collection I'll describe some of the most interesting but little known ones. In November 1918, following a largely peaceful revolution, Count Mihály Károlyi formed a government composed of leftist liberal and radical politicians. On 12 November 1918 he sent a well-argued cable responding to U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing pledging support for the Romanian claims to Transylvania. There are several documents pertaining to the new "Ministry for Nationalities" headed by Oszkár Jászi, later a distinguished professor at Oberlin College, Ohio. The plan was transforming Hungary into autonomous regions, based on ethnic/linguistic lines, so that the country would become a sort of "Eastern Switzerland." That it was meant sincerely is shown by the text of the "People's Laws" which created autonomous territories or legal bodies for the Rusyns (Ruthenians), the Germans and the Slovaks. The future of those national groups, however, was not left to the people concerned, but was decided by the armies of the neighbouring states, as the victorious Great Powers gave authorization for them to occupy the territories claimed by their representatives in Paris, at the "Preliminary Peace Conference" of the victors. While Károlyi and his government hoped that the non-Hungarian nationalities would opt for retaining the unity of the historic Kingdom, the succeeding Hungarian Soviet Republic ("Republic of Councils") made up of Bolsheviks and left-wing Social Democrats, and led by Béla Kun, officially renounced the territorial integrity of Hungary. Kun hoped to see (or rather to create) similar Bolshevik republics established around Hungary, in alliance with the latter – just like it happened in Russia. When, prompted by Paris, Romania and Czechoslovakia attacked Kun's Hungary, the Hungarian counter-attack was successful and in the eastern half of what is today Slovakia a "Slovak Republic of Councils" was proclaimed, Georges Clemenceau, the Chairman of the Peace

---

<sup>4</sup> Zeidler Miklós: *A revíziós gondolat* [The idea of revising the treaty of Trianon]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Trianon*. Ed. by Miklós Zeidler. Budapest: Osiris, 2003. 932 p.

Conference, prevailed upon Kun to stop fighting and evacuate the territories occupied. That decision contributed to the fall of the Hungarian Bolsheviks, who were eventually replaced by a conservative-leaning national government, which was eventually summoned to Paris to be presented with the terms of peace in January, 1920. Despite an eminently eloquent speech by Count Albert Apponyi, the Head of the Hungarian peace delegation, in defence of the territorial integrity of the ancient Kingdom, the new borders reduced Hungary to one third of its former territory and population, ceding not only the territories predominantly inhabited by Slavs and Romanians, but also three and a half million Hungarians to the new or greatly enlarged neighbours – including Austria, the former partner in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In order to sweeten the bitter pill, Hungary was given a vague promise that the new borders may be revised upon the recommendation of the Committees for the Delimitation of the Border, and that the interests of the Hungarian minorities assigned to Hungary's neighbours would be safeguarded by special treaties for the protection of minorities, signed by all those neighbours. All that can be followed from the documents printed here.

Following the signing of the peace treaty on 4 June 1920, there appeared a vast literature for and against revising that treaty. A few really telling ones are presented by Zeidler. Extracts from the various party programs and platforms show the remarkable unity Hungarian society demonstrated towards border change. Even the outlawed party of the Hungarian Communists called for “the revolutionary crushing of Trianon” – at least before Stalin's change of course in the mid-1930s. It is also worth noting that quite a few authors were ready to admit the mistakes committed by Hungarians in the past, which contributed to the eventual downfall of the country, but few went so far to say like Ede Ormos, that Hungary deserved to be punished like that. Jászi, in self-imposed exile, maintained that the Károlyi-government followed the right course, and blamed the victors for unfairly treating it. Others, like József Körmendi Horváth, put all the blame on Károlyi and allied propaganda. But neither István Bethlen (Prime Minister between 1921 and 1931), nor Jászi, or the renowned writer László Németh, or the radical politician Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky believed that the Trianon borders would be lasting. Reacting to the British press magnate Lord Rothermere's campaign for more just borders for Hungary, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party pointed out that only a changed and genuinely democratic Hungary

has a chance to receive support for revision. Those affected by the new borders most seriously, the Hungarians cut off by the borders, for whom Hungary became a foreign country, adapted to the new situation better than those in what was then called "Rump-Hungary." Instead of waiting for a miracle, a "Deus ex machina," a beneficial outside intervention, they revised their thinking, life-style, their ideals. They understood that the Hungarian minorities had to rely on themselves, on hard work, for creating the basic condition for their future existence: political autonomy within their new countries. Their writers, artists, and priests proposed better programmes than their politicians – the texts provide ample proofs.

Plans for border change were abundant, many people could not overcome the notion how perfect a geographical and economic unit the Carpathian Basin, the historic kingdom was. Various federative, cantonal arrangements were drawn up for its restoration, László Ottlik's "New Hungaria" standing out. The more realistic schemes were based on ethnic realities, claimed only territories inhabited predominantly by Hungarians. The return of some of those territories to Hungary between 1938 and 1941 caused tremendous joy both in Hungary and among the returned population - documents showing that are presented in the book. The circumstances of the long hoped for change of borders were, however, most unfortunate. Hungary became more dependent on Germany (exactly that was Hitler's aim), relations with the neighbouring nations deteriorated further, and Hungary's claims for more fair borders became compromised in the eyes of the anti-Nazi alliance. Those affected most closely, the returned Hungarians, did not realize how questionable the future of the new arrangement was, and how high a price they were to pay for the few happy years.

At the end of the war the gains of Hungary were annulled. Czechoslovakia attempted to expel the 0.7 million Hungarians, to make the restored country ethnically "clean." In Transylvania and in the Vojvodina serious atrocities were committed against innocent Hungarians, Tito's Yugoslav partisans massacred between thirty and forty thousand of them. The post-war political climate in Hungary put all the blame for "the second Trianon" on the policies of the era named after Regent Horthy, understandably not mentioning Stalin, who turned down the American proposals for slight border rectifications in favour of Hungary. In view of all the above it is quite remarkable that

both during the short-lived democratic period (1945-47) and the revolution of 1956 there were no calls for border changes, the Hungarian body politic expressed the hope for new, genuinely friendly relations with the neighbours, often referring to earlier plans for a “Danubian Confederation.”

Even the worsening situation of the Hungarian minorities was taboo during the thirty years named after János Kádár, the Soviet Quisling imposed upon Hungary. A reaction was inevitable. In typical Central European fashion it was the writers, “the intellectuals” who challenged the ban on speaking out – not for border change but for the ill-treated Hungarians beyond the borders. The unofficial poet laureate, Gyula Illyés, broke the ground (but not with the essay printed here), and István Bibó, released from the prison but close to the grave, offered guidance for the younger generation in a letter to Pál Szalai, along the lines he wrote thirty years earlier: “very likely the price of substantial improvement in the situation of the Hungarian minorities beyond the borders will be giving up [the hope for] any change of territory [...] but one can think about that only against guarantees for very serious improvement.” By and large this attitude has prevailed since 1990, the restoration of freedom of speech (and writing) in Hungary. From all the programs and other statements made by the parties elected to Parliament, there is only one, Mr. Csurka’s Hungarian Justice and Life Party (no longer having seats), which calls for the peaceful, negotiated return of those border zones of Hungary’s neighbours, where the majority of the population remained Hungarian, despite decades of expulsions, intimidation and colonization.

Zeidler’s impressive volume gives credit to the Hungarian scholars, mainly to historians, who were able to present the sad story of Trianon’s antecedents and consequences in a detached, dispassionate way, though not devoid of sentiment. The only difference between those who wrote before 1944 (László Buday, Jenő Horváth, István Kertész, Gyula Szekfű, Gusztáv Gratz, Imre Mikó and István Bibó) and those from the late 1970s on is that the former could still see a realistic chance for partial, ethnic-based border change, while the latter no longer cherished such hopes. Long extracts from present-day prominent Hungarian historians (Magda Ádám, Géza Herczegh, Mária Ormos, László Szarka, Ignác Romsics, Zsuzsa L. Nagy, József Galántai, István Diószegi provide detailed accounts of what happened in Central Europe in the most critical 1918-1921 period, and how the Great Powers

decided over the fate of the Hungarians and their neighbours. Pál Pritz gives a summary of how Hungarian foreign policy tried to help the cause of treaty revision in the inter-war period. In the last section one can read analyses by Ferenc Glatz, Zs. L. Nagy, Ignác Romsics, Peter Pastor, Balázs Ablonczy and others on how earlier historians or the contemporary Hungarian public thought about the treaty and its rectification. They show that in line with “proletarian internationalism,” extremely partisan and distorted attitude prevailed between 1948 and the late 1960s, characterized by total silence about the nationalist excesses in the neighbouring states. In contrast, increasingly realistic presentations have been coming out since the 1970s.

Practically simultaneously with Zeidler’s collection a sociologist, Archimédész Szidiropulosz (as his name suggests, the son of a Greek refugee of the civil war of the 1940s), published three volumes on Trianon.<sup>6</sup> The first one is a select bibliography of books and other non-periodical writings on the subject, all together 2183 titles and 172 maps. This volume is divided according to the date of appearance: before 1947, 1948-1988 (communist period), 1989-2000, and under a separate heading, works published outside the Carpathian Basin, mainly in western Europe and America. Each chapter is sub-divided into scholarly (history, ethnography, demography, law, economics etc.) and analytical political works; sources and documents; information, propaganda and pamphlet literature; fiction, poetry and essays. In addition to the relatively well-known publications the bibliography includes little-known or forgotten but important items, too, but it has two serious shortcomings: only writings in Hungarian are listed, and there are no annotations. Given the international character of the subject and the great controversy about the interpretation of the treaty, this is a serious flaw. But even Hungarian speakers would have needed guidance on the contents and value of many items. Some polemical works are very one-sided, but that may not be evident from the title. On the other hand a title often does not indicate why and how it is relevant to the subject. Fortunately there is a remedy: Zeidler’s collection, since that contains a large, annotated bibliography, in fact it is rather a bibliographical essay, which contains almost all the important, serious writings in the major languages, in a

---

<sup>6</sup> Szidiropulosz Archimédész: *Trianon utóélete*, I-III. [The After-Life of Trianon]. Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2002, 260 p ; 2003, 372 p; Kairosz n.d., 453 p.

logical order. Both bibliographies include maps, which often reveal more than printed words can; strangely the noted geographer Károly Kocsis' recent ethnographic maps and his *Ethnic Geography of the Carpathian Basin* (written together with Eszter Kocsis-Hodosi), published by the Hungarians Academy of Sciences in 1998, are not listed in either.

Szidiropulosz hit upon an excellent idea when in his second volume he asked present-day authors, mainly young historians, to write reviews of books and memoirs pertaining to the causes and the making of the Trianon Treaty, which were published many years or even decades ago, therefore today's public barely knows them. Apponyi, Andrásy, Pál Teleki, Masaryk, Nitti, the official interpreter Mantoux, Henri Pozzi, Gratz, Endre Koreh, Sándor Pethő, Jenő Horváth watched the events very closely (regrettably Eduard Benes' memoirs were omitted), while modern historians: Gerő, Romsics, Tőkéczki, Litván, Ormos, Galántai, Juhász and Raffay are undoubtedly among the best authorities on the making of that peace. All the more disappointing it is to find that most of the reviewers did little more than wrote summaries of the books in question, often also expressing their indignation over the unfair treatment meted out to Hungary, or on the false statements made by the Czechoslovak and Romanian politicians.

Even questionable statements like Apponyi saying that if the centre had shifted to Hungary the Monarchy would have survived, receive no comment. The reviewers – of whom we learn nothing from the book – apparently accepted almost all the traditional illusions, even the discarded or refuted ones. E.g. the notion that the decisions on the border were based mainly on the false statistical figures provided by the Czechs and the Romanians, is left unchallenged, although what really mattered was that the military occupation by the successor states, and the ethnic, economic and strategic arguments were simply applied as a cover. There are two traditional arguments which should have been by all means discussed. J. Horváth, a distinguished diplomatic historian of the inter-war years, showed that the military occupation and administrative takeover of large parts of historical Hungary after mid-November, 1918, ran contrary to the terms of the armistice signed in Padova on 3 November, so from a legal point of view they were all invalid. Does that mean that the Peace Treaty is not valid, is there any authority who could rule that? It is unfortunate to give new



lease to such old illusions, but that is what Szidorupolosz (or some of his authors) do with their otherwise notable efforts. Another typical illusion is that the so-called covering letter signed by the President of the Peace Conference, Millerand, held out the hope – or even promised - that if later some decisions would be found to be unjust the Council of the League of Nations would offer its good offices for revising the territorial stipulations of the Treaty. A careful reading of the document in question shows that the statement referred only to the commissions charged with the delineation of the actual border on the spot, but in fact they were not expected to divert substantially from the line drawn in Paris. These commissions were not impressed by the protests or pleading of the local Hungarian population, who were transferred to countries they loathed and which already showed prejudice and dislike towards them. Even when the border commission did recommend minor rectifications in favour of Hungary, they were usually turned down by the Council of the League. The Hungarian government had no alternative but signing the Treaty, but they were not duped to do so by Millerand or his note.

The merit of this second volume is drawing attention to works which contain little-known but important details or proofs of unfair treatment. Based on the memoirs of Paul Mantoux, the interpreter of the discussions of „the Big Four” or the Council of Ten, the reviewer (László Lator) acknowledges that the Americans and some of the British (particularly Prime Minister David Lloyd George) aimed at concluding fair treaties – nevertheless he speaks about „the overall hate the Allied felt towards the Hungarians.” Another author, Zoltán Major makes an unsubstantiated and over-generalized statement: „Official Hungarian historiography stands on the basis of the *Diktat* of Trianon” (p. 218). While no serious person can contest the validity of the treaty I know of no Hungarian historian who would not call its terms grossly unfair. András Kocsis reviewed the first serious irredentist analysis, a collection published in 1928 in several languages, entitled „Justice for Hungary.” In that Jenő Horváth showed how Russia had worked prior to 1914 to undermine the Monarchy by encouraging Serbia and Romania and inciting the national minorities of Hungary. György Lukács (not related to the Marxist philosopher) summarized the ill-treatment of the Hungarian minorities, Olivér Eöttevényi revealed the many actions to destroy the cultural heritage of Hungary by the successor states, and Béla Földes pointed out the dire economic repercussions of Trianon – most are valid today, too. There is one

writing in this volume which feeds foolish illusions. Ernő Raffay, a well-known historian, who in 1990-92 was the deputy of the minister of defence, in a book written in 1995 maintained that in the early 1990s Hungary missed the opportunity for a peaceful change in its borders. Such nonsense should have been refuted rather than supported by the author of the review, Béla Kosaras. Szidiropulosz' own contribution presents the 1941 edition of the collected speeches of Prime Minister Teleki. While he rightly emphasizes the moderation and exemplary intentions of Teleki (e.g. self-government for the minorities who were returned to Hungary, and the words of encouragement to the Jewish citizens), he does not explain why so little of those noble intentions were carried out.

The third volume has a very promising title: „The Image of Trianon in Present-Day Hungarian Society.” Instead of a detached analysis of contemporary public opinion based on questionnaires, polls and surveys, we have interviews (made by the editor himself) with 21 people: politicians, historians, scholars, artists, writers, teachers, journalists, and a summary of the findings by the editor. Most of the people asked are prominent, but are not representative of a Hungary where the average citizen does not know much about Trianon and cares even less about its repercussions. It would be unfair to the interviewed to try to summarize their thoughts, which show usually a mixture of sadness, nostalgia about pre-war Hungary, exasperation and indignation over what took place since the end of 1918, worry over the fate of the Hungarian minorities, and comments on how their lot might be improved, how the legacy of Trianon might be overcome. While this survey is not representative, the views expressed show that the change from dictatorship to freedom removed the restrictions which for almost forty years prevented learning and talking about Trianon. It was only after the political transformation that many younger people discovered that millions of Hungarians lived outside the borders, and the question was logical: why? When the unity of the Germans was restored, and, soon after, three multinational federations, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia fell apart, mainly along national lines, the latter two being the creation of the 1919/20 peace settlement, quite a few Hungarians (especially those living in the successor states) hoped that the unity of the Hungarian nation could also be restored. What even many educated Hungarians did not realize was that the European borders did not really change, only the status of some borders changed: internal ones became

international, or the border between the two Germanies became an internal one. Quite a few interviewed persons think that it was the fault (or the merit) of the Antall-government that Hungary did not come forward with territorial claims, and most of them deplores the treaties Hungary concluded with its neighbours, in which territorial claims were mutually renounced. Few realize why a policy advocating border change would have been senseless, leading to dire consequences. It is the fault of the editor that he did not confront his partners with such a reality, neither did he point that out in his summary remarks.

All the people questioned gave honest answers to how they and their families were effected by Trianon, how they witnessed the unfair treatment of Hungarians in the successor states, how they divide responsibility for that between the Great Powers and Hungary's neighbours, and what solutions they envisage for „the Hungarian question” which continues to exist even more than eight decades after the 1920 decisions. No one thinks that force should have been used, and only a few believe that the solution lies in changing the borders. But all, including Ferenc Fejtő, the renowned Hungarian-French author, agree that there is an urgent need to induce Hungary's neighbours to grant self-government, a form of autonomy for their Hungarians. Only one, a retired colonel (Iván Ugrai) believes that Hungary should not raise this issue. The reader learns telling details (in the form of personal accounts by Csaba Skultéty, István Garai, Endre Sipos, Attila Csáji) about what happened since 1918, and particularly in the dramatic 1940s, in the territories inhabited mainly by Hungarians but detached from Hungary. Talking about how strong, how deeply embedded is a type of blind hatred towards the Hungarians in the mentality of so many people among the nations around Hungary, the responsibility of the distorted, falsified version of history is rightly emphasized. Far less harmful, but also deplorable is the „little knowledge” some of the interviewed persons show about the West, about the role Western Europe and the United States played in the 1920 and 1947 peace treaties, and in the Sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe. The most typical example is Kornél Döbrentei, an acclaimed, but controversial poet, who thinks that „the West” (and its unpatriotic Hungarian agents) are directly responsible for all the following: the break-up of Hungary, the imposition of communism, the present political, economic and military weakness as well as for the deplorable mental setup of the country. There is more justification for the criticism about the failure of this very

West since 1990 to promote the protection of the rights of the Hungarian and other national minorities, and particularly the demand for autonomy. If all the post-communist Hungarian governments had been consistent in explaining how much autonomy, a satisfied national minority contributes to stability, we might have less tension under the surface and more genuine friendship between the countries of Central Europe.

While some of the interviewed persons show a lot of common sense in addressing so difficult and controversial issues (I'd single out Skultéty, Lajos Borda and Attila Csáji), the two Socialist politicians (Iván Vitányi and László Donáth, who is also a Lutheran pastor) downplay the relevance of Trianon for today. The editor's final essay is a fair summary of the views expressed, and his conclusions are largely logical, like the importance of discussing the past and knowing its repercussions. I also agree that there is a lot of exaggeration in the fears about Hungarians being „too much” interested in their past, in their culture, being proud in their achievements. Such an attitude is unforgivable folly. It's a pity, however, that Szidirapulosz himself nurtures some false ideas about how and why Hungary was meted out such a severe treatment in 1920, and why the Hungarian minorities have not received more understanding for their grievances.

Hungarians often deplore how little is known about them and their rightful complaints by the western public. Better informed Hungarians often see definite ill-will towards them and see one of the main culprit for that, for a prejudiced view of Hungary's history and especially of the relationship between Hungarians and their neighbours, in the person and activities of the British political writer turned historian, R.W. Seton-Watson, still remembered in Central Europe by his pen-name, Scotus Viator.<sup>7</sup> Somewhat less famous is his younger colleague and rival, C.A. Macartney, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the foremost British authority on Hungary and its neighbours, who between 1939 and 1943 regularly addressed the Hungarian public in Hungarian on the waves of the BBC. A comparative analysis of the two persons and their writings, much of which also focus on Trianon and the revision of its territorial clauses, has been

---

<sup>7</sup> The best account of Seton-Watson's role in the history of Central Europe was written by his two sons: Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen, 1981). For an earlier summary of his activities related to Hungary see G. Jeszenszky, "The Hungarian reception of Scotus Viator", *Hungarian Studies*, 5/2 (1989): 147-165.

successfully and impartially accomplished by a young Hungarian historian, Ágnes Beretzky.<sup>8</sup>

Those familiar with Seton-Watson know him as the indefatigable champion of the Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians and Serbs. Few are aware that at the outset of his career he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Hungarians, and of the '48-er Party of Independence for that. It was due to the short-sighted policy of the Hungarians towards the non-Hungarian minorities which turned Seton-Watson into a harsh (and often a partisan) critic of pre-1918 Hungary and of the policies of practically all the governments the country had. While Seton-Watson's activities until 1920 have received a lot of attention by historians, Beretzky breaks fresh ground by giving a critical assessment of his mainly scholarly activities in the 1920s and 30s. She is right, and not a biased Hungarian, when pointing out such weaknesses that although Seton-Watson was disappointed in the policies of Romania and Serbia, showed no qualms over Czechoslovakia not giving autonomy to the Slovaks and the Rusyns, and opposed even minor border rectifications in favour of Hungary, and his *History of the Roumanians* was strangely uncritical to the nationalist distortions common in Romanian historiography. His very negative view of Horthy and his governments never changed, although he did show some understanding to the complaints of the Hungarian minorities. (That aspect might have been given more emphasis by Beretzky.) During the Second World War Seton-Watson worked for the Political Intelligence Department and gave full support to the short-sighted policies of Benes. When his old "friend and ally", Oszkár Jászi in November 1945 asked him to stand up against the ongoing atrocious policy of Czechoslovakia against the Hungarian minority, apparently Seton-Watson remained silent. He had to live to see how the Soviet Union destroyed independent Central Europe, to which Seton-Watson sacrificed so much of his time, talent and wealth.

From Arnold Toynbee to many experts on Central Europe there is a wide-spread belief that C.A. Macartney was the counterpart of Seton-Watson, a somewhat biased pro-Hungarian author. Beretzky brings convincing evidence that it was not so, that Macartney was right telling to the author of this article: "The difference between

---

<sup>8</sup> Ágnes Beretzky: *Scotus Viator és Macartney Elemér: Magyarország-kép változó előjelekkel*. [Scotus Viator and Elemér Macartney: *Images of Hungary with with variable indicators*], Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005.

Seton-Watson and myself was that he saw through the Hungarians, while I saw through all the peoples of Central Europe.” Beretzky show how close Macartney’s views were to Seton-Watson’s until the mid-thirties, and how critical he, too, was to the social and political conditions of inter-war Hungary. That notwithstanding, extensive studies and travels led Macartney to advocate the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, by making the borders correspond to ethnic realities. That led to a dramatic break between the two experts in October, 1938. Macartney, like most contemporary politicians and experts in Western Europe and in the U.S., welcomed also the re-annexation of Subcarpathia (today’s Carpathian Ukraine) by Hungary in March, 1939, but disapproved the Second Vienna Award, returning Northern Transylvania to Hungary, mainly as it strengthened Hungary’s indebtedness to the Axis, but also because Macartney thought that the only equitable solution for the problem of Transylvania was its independent statehood. Macartney worked for the British government until May, 1946, writing 143 memoranda and 186 talks on the BBC on current issues in Central Europe, and particularly on Hungary. Naturally he was highly critical of Hungary’s involvement in the war, but was aware how strong the “Anglophile” sentiment was among educated Hungarians, and tried to build upon that. That’s why in July, 1943 his radio talks were suspended, mainly due to the representations of Benes and the latter’s British supporters, but Mihály Károlyi also shares the responsibility for that. To the very end of the war, and right until the territorial decisions about the borders of Hungary were made, Macartney worked for a fair and just peace settlement, and against the new phase of appeasement, surrendering the eastern half of Europe to the Soviet Union. Faced with the failure of his efforts he resigned and returned to scholarly life in All Souls at Oxford. His two most important books, *October Fifteenth, A History of Hungary, 1929-1945* (Edinburgh, 1957) and *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (Oxford, 1968) are the best tributes to his talents and impartiality. Although communist Hungary deprived him of his membership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1949, at least in his last years, in the 1970s he was welcomed back by the leading historians of Hungary and the shameful decision of the Academy was rescinded.

While the problems of Central Europe no longer form a subject for heated debates in Britain, the tensions created by the Treaty of Trianon and particularly by the intolerant policies of the “successor states” of historical Hungary towards their Hungarians

persist. In Hungary one political camp continues to feel very strongly about those issues, while their opponents call that irresponsible and dangerous. Zeidler's introduction points out that while today professional historians tend to engage in minor details about the 1918/20 period, politicians and the interested public tend to politicize the discussions, not interested in historical accuracy.<sup>9</sup> The present writer can only agree with Zeidler that "the divergence of political borders and ethnic dividing lines in Central Europe gives ground to grave political problems. That is an indication of the fact that neither the Trianon peace treaty, nor the various political efforts that transpire have been able to find a satisfactory solution to those problems, although that is a common interest and a common task. That's why Trianon could not find its final and exclusive place in historical tradition, but continues to remain unquestionably a part of politics. This state is likely to endure until state borders continue to have high significance, until policies initiated by the national majority continue to discriminate against the national minorities, and until all the nations concerned overcome the chronic social-psychological trauma of hoping for or fearing of territorial changes."<sup>10</sup>

Genuine reconciliation and friendship between the peoples who live in and around the Carpathian Basin is highly desirable, and Hungary is sincerely committed to it. It is to be hoped that the high principles guiding the European Union, and membership in it both by Hungary and all her neighbours, will eventually overcome passions and prejudices, and the Hungarians living around the State of Hungary will be able to live in peace and prosperity in the coming centuries in the land of their ancestors. Local self-government, autonomies on the model of South Tyrol would lay the issue of the Trianon Peace to rest.

---

<sup>9</sup> A typical case is the „documentary” film „Trianon” by Gábor Koltay, which drew crowds, despite of, or rather because of the many mistaken interpretations in its presentation of history.

<sup>10</sup> Zeidler: Trianon, p. 11.