



TRIANON: TRAGEDY, DISSOLUTION AND REMEDY

Frank Koszorus, Jr., American Hungarian Federation, June 4, 2007



The Treaty of Trianon following the First World War was arguably the most severe of all the post-World War I settlements.

Ostensibly in the name of national self-determination, the Treaty dismembered the thousand-year-old Kingdom of Hungary, a self-contained, geographically and economically coherent and durable formation in the Carpathian Basin and boasting the longest lasting historical borders in Europe. It was imposed on Hungary without any negotiation by vengeful leaders who were ignorant or ignored the region's history, and mercilessly tore that country apart.* By drawing artificial borders in

gross violation of the ethnic principle, it also transferred over three million indigenous ethnic Hungarians and over 70% of the country's territory to foreign rule. Following the war to make the "world safe for democracy," the Treaty even denied the affected populations the right to choose under whose sovereignty they would live. Only the city of Sopron in western Hungary was allowed a plebiscite to decide its future, and it opted by a large margin to remain in Hungary. Although the peacemakers included provisions for the protection of minorities in various international instruments they insisted the successor states sign, the latter generally ignored their promises and the individual and minority rights of ethnic Hungarians were violated.

Below are selected statements relating to some of these issues that shed light on the context, attitudes and practices that affected Hungarians eighty-seven years ago and which still impact and to some extent poison the region, as evidenced by the Successor States' refusal to grant their Hungarian historical communities the right to autonomy. The last excerpt is another solution for a tragedy that affected the entire region.

- **Woodrow Wilson, the January 8, 1918 Fourteen Points Speech:** "The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by; so is also the day of secret covenants entered into in the interest of particular governments and likely at some unlooked-for moment to upset the peace of the world..."

"Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."

"The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development."

February 11 speech to Congress defining American war aims as a peace of "no annexations, no contributions, no punitive damages."

Statement in New York City on September 27 asserting that "The impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice that plays no favorites and knows no standard but the equal rights of the several peoples concerned . . ."

May 31, 1919 statement at the Peace Conference: "Nothing...is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to the minorities."

*As a consequence of Hungarian Defense Minister Bela Linder's declaration that "he did not want to see any more soldiers," President Michael Karolyi's pacifist policies and his blind pro-French attitude, Hungary was virtually defenseless before the Paris Peace Conference. Karolyi's disastrous policies and limitations contributed to the extent of Hungary's dismemberment.

- **Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge**, Report on Mission to Hungary, January 19, 1919: “Thanks to this diversity in the character of its different regions, Hungary has been from the earliest times a singularly self-sufficing state.”
- **Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge** on transferring three and three quarter million Hungarians to foreign rule: “To compel what has been since a thousand years a unified country to accept such an arrangement as permanent would be only to condemn it to a future hatred and strife with every probability of violent outbreak before many years have elapsed.”
- **Robert Lansing**, Secretary of State, and **Andre Tardieu**, member of the French delegation, Council of Foreign Ministers proceeding on the future Hungarian-Romanian frontier:

“Mr. Lansing asked why a more accurate ethnic line could not be followed.

Mr. Tardieu explained that it would cut the railway line and suppress continuous communication.

Mr. Lansing asked if anywhere west of the line there could be found a predominately Romanian population.

Mr. Tardieu said that this might occur in certain isolated places.

In reply to further questions, M. Tardieu said that some 600,000 Hungarians would remain under Romanian rule, while 25,000 Romanians would remain within Hungary.

Mr. Lansing expressed the view that this distribution did not appear very just; in every case, the decision seemed to have been against the Hungarians.

M. Tardieu said that *any other adjustment would have all in favor of the Hungarians and correspondingly to the detriment of the Romanians.*” (Emphasis added.)

- **Woodrow Wilson**: “Nominally we are friends of the Hungarians and even better friends of the Rumanians.”
- **Georges Clemenceau**: “The Hungarians are not our friends but our enemies.”
- **Resolution of the (Romanian) Assembly at Gyulafehervar/Alba Iulia**, December 1, 1918: “Complete national freedom for the peoples jointly inhabiting. All peoples have the right to their own education and government in their own language, with their own administration, and by individuals chosen from among themselves.”
- **Sir George Clerk, Report to the Supreme Council on His Mission to Hungary**, November 29, 1919: “. . .it seems unnecessary and uncivilized, and, I think, illegal, for the Roumanians to call for an oath of allegiance from university professors whose town and University have not yet been definitely handed over to them. But this is what the Roumanians did in the University of Kolozsvar in May last. The professors very rightly said that they were still Hungarian subjects and could not consider themselves released from their duties as such until the Peace Treaty had definitely allocated Kolozsvar to Roumania. The Roumanian answer was to turn the professors out of their posts, out of their houses, and to force them to work as labourers, to keep body and soul together. One distinguished Professor of Geography, who has a world wide reputation, was forced to hoe potatoes for a living and he gave his lectures to four pupils who hoed the rows on each side of him. He was then arrested, put in prison and made to clean latrines. He was finally allowed to leave with his family in a cattle truck, but at the sacrifice of his personal possessions and the fruits of his whole scientific life. . . .I can only say that. . . the neighboring States, our present Allies, need firm supervision and guidance to make them fit to enjoy the inheritance which has fallen to them through our sacrifice and effort.”
- **Memorandum, American Representatives on the Organization Committee of the Reparations Committee on the Hungarian Situation and the Effect of Rumania’s Appropriation of Values and Property in Hungary on the Other Allied and Associated Powers**, September 23, 1919: “Roumania is reported to have stripped Hungary of all its seed grain, live stock, agricultural machinery, etc., with

the result that the supplying of the minimum needs of the Hungarian population will shortly have to be borne by Roumania's Allies at considerable sacrifice and financial cost to their respective Governments and peoples."

- **Queen Marie** on extensive looting by Romanian troops occupying Hungary: "You may call it stealing if you want to, or any other name. I feel we are perfectly entitled to do what we want to."
- **Major General Harry Hill Bandholtz**, American Member of the Inter-Allied Military Mission to Hungary, Budapest, November 13, 1919: "Judging from the Roumanian occupation of Hungary, our little Latin Allies have the refined loot appetite of a Mississippi River catfish, the chivalrous instincts of a young cuckoo, and the same hankering for truth that a seasick passenger has for pork and beans."
- **Count Apponyi**, president of Hungary's peace delegation, address to the Supreme Council, January 16, 1920: "In the name of the great principle so happily phrased by President Wilson, namely that no group of people, no population, may be transferred from one State to another without being first consulted,- as though they were a herd of cattle with no will of their own,- in the name of this great principle, an axiom of good sense and public morals, we request, we demand a plebiscite on those parts of Hungary that are now on the point of being severed from us. I declare we are willing to bow to the decision of a plebiscite whatever it should be. Of course we demand it should be held in conditions ensuring the freedom of the vote."
- **Robert Lansing**, May 1, 1919: "The feeling is that the principles, which the President laid down in the 'Fourteen Points' and in his speeches, have been destroyed by compromises and concessions, that a victor's peace rather than a just peace is being sought, and the cupidity backed by threats of refusal to sign the Covenant [League of Nations] controls the situation."
- **Georges Clemenceau**: "I cannot say for how many years, perhaps I should say for how many centuries the crisis which has begun will continue. . . ."Yes, this treaty [Versailles] will bring us burdens, troubles, miseries, difficulties, and that will continue for long years."
- **Geza Jeszenszky**: ". . . it is easy to see that the federal solution to the problems of Central Europe was an alternative which all the peoples of the region can only regret not to have been realized."
- **Richard Holbrooke**: "As our American negotiating team shuttled around the Balkans in the fall of 1995 trying to end the war in Bosnia, the Versailles treaty was not far from my mind. Reading excerpts from Harold Nicolson's *Peacemaking 1919*, we joked that our goal was to undo Woodrow Wilson's legacy. . . .We were, in effect, burying another part of Versailles."
- **Ferenc Koszorus, Col.**, Royal Hungarian Army, 1970 (Posthumously Promoted General by the Antall government following the collapse of Communism): "Clemenceau's foreign policy during 1918-20 tried to create security by force, but it definitely upset the balance of power, with the result that the climate of world politics became more uncertain during the following fifteen years than it was anytime before. Many small ultranationalist states fabricated upon the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – for some centuries a traditional pivot of the balance of power in Central Europe – were unable to exert an influence toward keeping the balance and promoting security. These new small states with their conflicting interests were too weak and offered an inviting challenge to the powerful aggressors, Hitler and Stalin. The Western Powers, on the other hand, could not permanently nurse the small states, and such a policy would have meant world war within the shortest space of time. Without adequate assistance, these small states proved unable to defend themselves."

In our time, evolution points to the formation of large economic and political units. And it is evident, that after the birth of the idea of the federation of West European states, it would be imperative to unite many small nations in East Central Europe to form a powerful political, economic and military unit within the framework of a European United States. Such a Federation would guarantee peaceful symbiosis, freedom, economic prosperity in countries which in past decades had been fighting each other; it would be able to defend itself, and by so doing it would contribute to the maintenance of world peace."