

## THE TREATY OF TRIANON BETWEEN LEGEND AND REALITY

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**Abstract.** The Paris Peace Conference introduced a new international juridical concept as a decisive factor in their decisions: the right of all nations to self-determination. The Treaty of Trianon from June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920 was not a bilateral one (Hungary-Romania) as it was signed by Hungary along 22 other states from all the continents. The Treaty does not contain the word Transylvania, and the border between Hungary and Romania was established based on the will of the majority. The Treaty came into effect on July 26<sup>th</sup> 1921 after its ratification by Romania and Hungary along the other signatory states.

**Keywords:** *Conference, Paris, drafting, peace treaty, Trianon, provisions, ratification.*

Thousands of books have been written on the Treaty of Trianon, some of which offered an objective perspective (based on historical documents) while others offered a biased, partisan view. Various legends about it were spread at the time and some are still in circulation, more than 100 years later after its signing<sup>1</sup>. Those who cultivate such legends view the Paris Peace Conference as an attempt to *punish* Hungary and a decision to mutilate it.

The reality is completely different, though. The comparative analysis of the peace congresses (conferences) that have taken place throughout history leads to a major conclusion: until 1919, decisions were made in small forums, with the victors dividing the conquered territories according to their own will, without taking into consideration the desires of the respective nations.

The Peace Conference after the First World War introduced a new international legal concept, i.e. the right of all nations to self-determination as a decisive factor in the decision-making processes. In other words, the nation and the free expression of the people's will come first<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See a detailed study, Ioan Scurtu, *Trianon ... Trianon. 4 iunie 1920 - victoria principiului naționalităților. Argumente pro și contra*, Iași, Editura Tipo Moldova, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Ion M. Anghel, *Tratatetele de la Trianon și Paris din 1920. Documentele prin care s-a consfințit înfăptuirea ROMÂNIEI MARI*, București, Editura Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România, 2018

In Paris the Magyar delegation pleaded for the integrity of the “millennial” Hungary to be maintained. On May 6<sup>th</sup> 1920, Alexandre Millerand, chairman of the Peace Conference, replied as follows: “*The will of the people was clearly expressed all throughout October and November 1918, when the double monarchy was collapsing and the nations that had been long suppressed united with their Italian, Romanian, Yugoslavian or Czech-Slovakian brothers*”. Therefore, The Treaty of Trianon was based on “*the will of the people*” as it was expressed “*all throughout October and November 1918*”.

The Paris Peace Conference was the amplest international reunion organized throughout history up until that moment. The decisions were made after thorough analysis as proven by the 1,646 meetings that took place during the conference<sup>1</sup>. The peace treaties were drafted by experts (specialists), who sought to solve all the problems of the humanity. The interested parties could express their points of view and present documents to support and plead their causes. As a result of treaties - including the Treaty of Trianon - it was not possible to create “*pure*” states from an ethnic point of view, as throughout history different peoples living together in the same territory created a mix of ethnicities. As a consequence, all the newly formed states as well as the reunited ones included national minorities. At the same time, a significant number of members of the same ethnic group remained outside the national state, thus becoming national minorities in the neighboring countries. Another legend sustained the idea that The Treaty of Trianon from June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920 was a *bilateral* one, between Romania and Hungary regarding Transylvania. Despite the lack of documents to support this theory, it has been in circulation for over 100 years.

In fact, the treaty was signed by 22 states representing the Allied Powers (The United States of America, The United Kingdom of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, The South-African Union, India, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, China, Cuba, Greece, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, The Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian State, Siam, Czechoslovakia) on one hand, and Hungary on the other hand<sup>2</sup>. Legend spreaders initiated the theory according to which this treaty separated *Transylvania* from the Kingdom of Hungary and was conceded to Romania.

In reality, a careful analysis of the content of the Treaty of Trianon reveals no mention of the word Transylvania. The phrase used in the document is: “the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy”.

The Treaty has XIV Parts, 35 Sections and 364 articles. Part I includes *The Pact of the Society of Nations*, whose appendix mentions its “*original members*”,

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<sup>1</sup> Constantin Vlad, *Diplomația secolului XX*, București, Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2006, p. 56

<sup>2</sup> Ion Calafeteanu and Gheorghe Sbârnă (coordinators), *Tratatetele de Pace ale României. 1919 - 1920*, București, Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, 2017

among which Romania. The provisions as such begin in Part II, where Hungary is acknowledged as an independent national state, subject to international law.

Romania was mentioned only in a few articles:

Part II - *The Hungarian Borders*, article 27, mentions "*the borders*" of Hungary with Austria, The Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian State<sup>1</sup>, Romania and The Czech-Slovakia. The Treaty materialized the concept according to which borders had to correspond to the national structure and the will of the majority. The respective borders were clearly detailed for each country. In what concerns the border with Romania (paragraph 3) the treaty stated that the border began from the "*highest defined point, towards East-North-East*" and continued by mentioning dozens of details until South, towards the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian State. As a result, the territory where Romanians were the majority population became part of Romania, following the decision of the National Assembly of Alba Iulia on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918. The Treaty of Trianon also solved the situation of the Banat, by establishing the borders of Hungary with Romania and the Kingdom of the Serbians, the Croats and the Slovenians.

By analyzing the borderlines, it can be noticed that Romania received 18, 958 km<sup>2</sup>, the Kingdom of the Serbians, the Croats and the Slovenians – 9, 302 km<sup>2</sup>, Hungary - 271 km<sup>2</sup>.

Article 45: "*Hungary renounces in favour of Romania all rights and titles previously held over the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy which are situated beyond the Hungarian border, as stipulated in article 27, part II (The Borders of Hungary) and through the current treaty or any other treaty on this subject matter acknowledges these territories as being part of Romania*".

This was a practical as well as a legal statement.

Art. 46: "*O committee made up of seven members, five of whom will be appointed by the principal Allied and Associated Powers, one by Romania and one by Hungary, will be constituted during the 15 days following the ratification of the Treaty in order to mark the borderline on the spot as stipulated in article 27 - 30, Part II (The Borders of Hungary)*".

This committee suggested some minor changes to the borderline, which were accepted by the governments of the two countries in question.

Art. 74: "*Hungary declares that it will acknowledge and accept the borders of Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Romania, the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian State and the Czech-Slovakian State as they will be established by the principal Allied and Associated Powers*".

This sensible provision was to be disputed by the Magyar revisionists more and more vehemently after 1927.

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<sup>1</sup> As written in the original text.

Those who kept on spreading legends overlooked the *obligations* Hungary agreed upon by signing the Treaty alongside the other 22 signatory states, including Romania.

These obligations were actually established through several articles which included Romania. Art. 77: "*Hungary will submit without delay to the Allied or Associated Governments all the archives, registers, plans and documents belonging to the civil, military, financial and judicial administrations of the conceded territories. If any of these documents, archives, registers, titles and plans have been removed, Hungary will have to return them at the request of the Allied or Associated Governments*".

Art. 175: "*Hungary is also obliged to return to each of the Allied and Associated Powers all the acts, documents, antiques and art objects, as well as all the scientific and bibliographical materials confiscated from the respective invaded territories, which belonged to the state, the provincial or communal administrations, to charity organizations, religious administrations or other private public administrations*".

These provisions, both useful and necessary, remained for the most part only on paper. Hungary managed to elude them through stalling and contestations. 100 years later, Hungary has still not returned to Romania the Transylvanian Archives and the Gojdu Foundation goods.

Another legend circulates the idea that the Romanians received the *news* of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon with enthusiasm, considering it as an act of vindication against the Hungarians.

In fact, Romania received the news calmly, as an act of normality and historical justice. The "*Patria*" newspaper, the propaganda newspaper of the Romanian National Party, wrote: "*We shall not gloat gleefully, nor shall we toll the bells for the erection of the funerary stone at the tomb of historical Hungary, as the Hungarians did when the Peace of Bucharest was signed □□[April 1918]. We thank God, the Romanian Army, our great Allies, as well as the political men who fought for the Western border*". Nicolae Iorga wrote on the very same day of June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920: "*As a nation who carries in her heart the cult of kindness, and having experienced our own hardships for many centuries, we sympathize with the moral pain of Hungarians, now touched by the ultimate misfortune of defeat. [...] While we can appreciate the Hungarians' qualities as a race, we wholeheartedly pity them for the terrible misfortune that befell them as a result of their equally numerous flaws and their inability to self-govern in times of crisis. And, no matter how appropriate would have been for Bucharest to hold a demonstration for the triumph of our army, who had been through a lot and is our greatest pride and joy, it has never never our intention to offend those who suffer [...] We would also like this to be an inspiration for a revival of the Hungarian spirit, that would contribute to the common work of modern civilization with a reasonable Magyar*

*nation, with no trace of their former overwhelming imperialism which has excluded the Hungarians from any useful collaboration so far*"<sup>1</sup>.

The same legends had as a main objective the *exoneration* of the Magyar governors between 1918-1920 from the civil responsibility they had in the face of history. For that purpose, it was reiterated that the Magyars felt humiliated and saw the Treaty as a blow from the Great Powers and as a punishment for the defeat Hungary suffered in the war<sup>2</sup>. It was for this reason that the Governors decided to proclaim June 4<sup>th</sup> a national day of mourning. The public institutions, as well as all the shops, were closed; services of divine prayers for the Magyar Nation were held in churches; the trams and the trains stopped running. The Parliament held a mourning session, where the President declared that all the injustices Hungary had to suffer "*shall be avenged. We are forced to let go of the territories that were grabbed from us, but things are not going to stay like this for ever.*"

In the evening, the members of the League for the Protection of the Territorial Integrity of Hungary organized in Budapest a demonstration against the government who had accepted "*the stabbing*" of their country.

The same legends about the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon are still in circulation. The Romanians are said to have "*gloated*" gleefully for the "*present*" they had received.

As a matter of fact, Romania received the news of the ratification of this treaty without too much fuss, with no public manifestations or festive meetings. The meetings that were held addressed both the positive as well as the negative provisions of the treaty. The law project initiated by the Averescu Government and signed by King Ferdinand was first submitted to the Senate, where the debates started on August 11<sup>th</sup> 1920 and ended on August 16<sup>th</sup>, after which it was sent to the Deputy Chamber, which discussed it until August 26<sup>th</sup>.

The speakers underlined the historic importance of the moment. Thus, Gheorghe Gh. Mironescu expressed "*a deep gratitude for the great voivods, boyards, scholars - chroniclers, historians, poets - the admirable members of the priesthood, the mighty peasantry, all those who had fought in whatever way possible throughout centuries - in wars or revolutions against their oppressors or through peaceful methods - to preserve our national ideal and to make this day possible*". In his turn, Iuliu Maniu declared: "*When we examine this treaty, we must not forget that the true source of the union of the Romanian nation is not really this treaty, but the living conscience of the Romanian nation and its unrelenting determination*", the treaty being "*only an international acknowledgement of the union*".

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<sup>1</sup> „*Neamul Românesc*”, June 5th 1920

<sup>2</sup> Petre Țurlea, *Români și unguri, vol. I. 1918 - 1940*, Ploiești, Editura Karta-Graphic, 2018, p. 70

Several aspects of the treaty were criticized. First of all, the border with Hungary did not correspond to the one the Entente had recognized in August 1916. Deputy D. Lascu pointed out that the 1916 Convention had established the railway Oradea-Arad 40 km west of Oradea, while the Treaty of Trianon now shortened that distance to only 4 km. The railway Oradea-Satu Mare had been 15 km long, and following the Treaty it got to 1 km and in some areas only 100 m. As a direct consequence of these new provisions, Romania no longer had a line of natural defence like the one on the Tisa and the Danube. The members of Parliament from the Banat were extremely unhappy with the decision to divide the Banat - region which had always been "*a Romanian one, never divided*" and expressed their "*energetic protest*" by not voting for the ratification of the treaty.

Deputy Gașpar Muth protested on behalf of the "*Swabians from the Banat*", minority which had been deeply affected by the concession of a certain part of the Banat to Serbia from an economical, political, moral and social viewpoint. The deputies from Maramureș were also displeased with the division of this historical Romanian territory. Deputy D. Secelea declared on behalf of the people of Maramureș that a "*historical injustice*" had been committed and they would not vote for the ratification of the treaty. Several deputies and senators criticized certain articles of the treaty that put Romania at a disadvantage. Among these was art. 191, whereby the Romanian state was forced to pay for the goods of the Hungarian state that had remained in Transylvania, although they had been acquired with the Romanians' contribution, through the taxes and fees they paid to the Government of Budapest.

Article 199 stipulated that the civil and military pensioners from the former Hungarian kingdom who were now Romanian citizens were to be considered Romanian pensioners, but the Hungarian state was under no obligation to return to Romania the sums these citizens had contributed to the pension houses in Hungary while they were working.

Several speakers expressed the hope that the relations between Romania and Hungary would normalize. Ion Nistor stated: "*we are ready to have the best of relations with our neighbours, the Hungarian people*". Iuliu Maniu insisted on the idea that: "*we do not hold a grudge against our neighbours whom fate placed in our vicinity*", while Take Ionescu declared: "*I am well acquainted with the pains of Hungary*", which from 20 million citizens now only had 8 million; 2,5 million Magyars were now outside the borders; the Hungarian state no longer had sea access and it was left with no petrol, coal and wood. Taking this reality into consideration, the foreign affairs minister was adamant that Hungary "*is a country that needs her neighbours*". Romania was open to an honest cooperation. "*Once the Treaty of Trianon is ratified, the relations between Hungary and our country will go back to being normal and, on our part, amicable*".

Based on the votes of the two Chambers - The Senate and the Deputy Chamber - on August 30<sup>th</sup> King Ferdinand signed the law authorizing the government “to ratify and implement the peace treaty” with Hungary on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920. The law was published in “*The Official Monitor*” no. 136 on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1920.

Hungary adopted a similar tactic to the one used when the Treaty of Trianon was signed: stalling. Neither the government, nor the parliament wanted to take the *responsibility* for the ratification of the Treaty. This made the Great Powers send an ultimatum to the Government of Budapest<sup>1</sup>, which forced the Magyar leaders to choose the date of November 15<sup>th</sup> for the ratification.

They resorted to a well thought out scenario that would free them of any responsibility and would open the path for the reunification of “*millennial*” Hungary. First, an agreement was made between all the parties represented in parliament for solidarity: “*The imposition of the peace ratification has filled each member of the Magyar National Assembly with sadness. The Magyar deputies will be in mourning by wearing black clothes and mourning bands to express the sorrow of the Parliament and the entire Hungarian State*”. It was stated that none of the members of parliament wanted to “*be held responsible in the face of history for the ratification of the treaty*”. As a result, it was decided that the Treaty of Trianon should not be discussed and should only be accepted “*as it was forced upon them*”. It was therefore agreed that 60 deputies, selected by a draw, would cast their votes so that “*none of the members of the Magyar National Assembly would be considered guilty or bear the responsibility for the ratification of the Treaty*”. It was also decided that the Hungarian flag would be displayed with a black ribbon as a sign of mourning.

On November 15<sup>th</sup> 1920, the Hungarian Parliament was shrouded in a bleak atmosphere. All the deputies wore black, as a sign of mourning. Only the 60 deputies chosen by draw were present in the room, while the other deputies, along with some other politicians, also in mourning clothes, were in the gallery. After the law was voted, everybody stood up and chanted: “*Nem! Nem ! Soha !*” (“*No! No! Never!*”). Then they swore in unison: “*I believe in God. I believe in my Country. I believe in the resurrection of Millennial Hungary.*” It is thus that revisionism became the “*creed*” of the political leaders of Budapest.

After a delay that lasted four months, on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1921, the government of Hungary submitted all the necessary documents to the Minister of Foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Petre Țurlea, *op.cit*, p. 71

Affairs in France. Ratified by all the signatory states, the Treaty of Trianon came into effect on July 26<sup>th</sup> 1921.

Beyond the legends circulated by some politicians, journalists, historians, etc. *the historical reality cannot be denied*: The Treaty of Trianon ended the century of nationalities, during which time two thirds of the national states of Europe had been constituted, and the borders established on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1920 have lasted throughout time. Hungary - which in 1938-1941 tried to return to the medieval borders from the times of the Kingdom ruled by Stephen the Saint by occupying territories in Romania and Yugoslavia - suffered a complete failure and had to accept the reconfirmation of the borders following the Peace Treaty of Paris on February 10<sup>th</sup> 1947.