

Slovak and Hungarian history - the subject of common views and confrontations of historians

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If we look at Slovak and Hungarian history in the 20th century, today a subject of mutual polemics (sometimes confrontation), Trianon, respectively the Treaty of Trianon, appears to us as a milestone and the key word “nation-state” and the emergence of successor states, as a legacy of the defunct Habsburg Empire. Its consequences affect the perception of historical events in the 20th century and then changes in political development affect the interpretation of these historical events.

In my contribution I will outline some controversial questions of interpretation of common or “collateral” (flowing next to each other) and interacting history (we began to use this “definition” with László Szarka for the concept of common textbooks in Slovak and Hungarian history). In this short article I will outline some problems of interpretation of this history.

On a long-term basis Slovak historiography disavowed itself from Hungarian history. Thus, Slovak political and partly academic elites considered Hungarian and later common Czechoslovak (Czech) history as extraneous. They abandoned history, historical reference, results, the successes and failures of these countries, including symbology (coat of arms, flags, symbols), in which the population (descendants) of today's Slovakia was significantly involved. As

an example I will use the opinion of Ľudovít Holotík, a prominent Slovak historian, former director of the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1965. The statement was given during the negotiations between Czechoslovak and Hungarian delegations on 15th and 16th November, 1965. These negotiations were a part of longer talks in 1964-1965 and were connected to the obligations related to the return of historical objects to Slovakia under the Treaty of Peace in 1947 and the Additional Protocol, signed in July 1949 in Štrbské Pleso. The statement indicated that: *“Any acceptance of the Hungarian thesis of common Slovak-Hungarian history ... would be in total contradiction with all our previous Marxist concepts of Czechoslovak history. This would mean that the legitimacy of views on certain cultural unity in the past is allowed, but inevitably has its impact and validity in the presence...”*

*Once we abandon our principles based on scientific analysis of the mentioned problems, it would be a retreat on our side and by this way we would agree with the Hungarian partner, and there - I would not hesitate to say it – with the widespread nationalist and neo-nationalist views, which are very ambitious regarding Slovakia.”*¹

This opinion refused to admit any possibility of common Slovak and Hungarian history for three reasons. From the ideological point of view, it was not in accordance with Marxism-Leninism, while beyond this cliché could have been hidden anything in the sixties, without any justification what did not comply with the ideas of the representatives of the regime. The second reason resulted from a fear of Hungarian nationalism, or neo-nationalism and persistent fear of revision of the state borders. The third reason emerged from the concept of Czechoslovak Marxist-Leninist historiography, relying on a new form of internationalist Czechoslovakism, forming an “eternal” and permanent concept of Czechoslovak history. In the post-communist era ideological and Czechoslovak reasons became obsolete (outdated),

1 National Archives of the Czech Republic (NACR), File: Komunistická strana Československa-predsednictvo 02, box 136/ 145_4.

but caution in the acceptance of the existence of a common history remains on both sides of the border.

Without arguing with historical interpretation of the earlier periods, we focus our attention on the 20th century and the present, on the above-mentioned principle of “nation-state” and the instrumentalization and experience of Trianon in Slovak and Hungarian society today. The starting point of this view is the division of Austria-Hungary. Successor states seized the nation-state with such intensity that the ethnic map of Central Europe changed significantly during a century.² Some states were working on the “unification” of ethnicity of the population more successfully (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic), and others despite enormous effort, less successfully (e.g. Romania, Slovakia). They tried it in various ways. They tried to assimilate ethnically inappropriate populations, to expel them from the country or revise “pactitious” borders to integrate “relatives” into their nation-state. This is a simple characterization of what happened in the 20th century in Central Europe in terms of ethnic and national principle, and which still affects our life.

Terminological differences are the direct consequences of different perceptions of history. Those differences are many (Vienna Award, post-war arrangements, forms of assimilation, the perception of Horthy’s and Tiso’s regimes...). For the purpose of our discussion, I choose one significant case of the interpretation of Slovak and Hungarian history.

Slovak historiography writes about the Kingdom of Hungary, where Hungarians, Germans, Croats, Romanians, Slovaks, Ruthenians and other ethnic groups lived and perceived Hungary as the national, successor state since 1918 in various forms. Hungarian historiography uses the term Magyarország (Hungary), which is understood for all historical forms of Hungary (Mađarské kráľovstvo – Magyar királyság – The Kingdom of Hungary, Mađarská republika – Magyar

² See maps what prepared GLATZ, F. *Minorities in East-Central Europe. Historical Analysis and a Policy Proposal*. Budapest : Europa Institut, 1993.

Köztársaság – Hungarian Republic). Between current Hungary and historical Hungary (the Kingdom of Hungary) one does not mark any linguistic difference, or exceptionally writes about Historical Hungary (történelmi Magyarország) or use the term Hungary before 1918 (Magyarország 1918-ig).

What counts is the content of the concept. According to a few Slovak historians the Kingdom of Hungary was destroyed, and on its ruins new successor states emerged, such as Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and others.³ How does one explain from the Slovak perspective to the “others” that Hungary achieved a new sovereignty, like Czechoslovakia, if in other languages the same term is used for the pre-Trianon and post-Trianon state formation?⁴ Recently the problem has manifested itself most apparently in English language scientific literature.

Uniform use of the terms Hungary / Hungarian to express both terms in the Slovak language means to integrate synchronous and diachronic dimensions of a historically evolving term into one expression, with a clear predominance of synchrony. Other solutions can be found in the lexicographical work of K. Hais and B. Hodek,⁵ where we can find the term Ugrian for the meaning of “Hungarian” and “the Kingdom of Hungary”. The Encyclopaedia Britannica uses different approaches in a similar vein. In Slovakia, there is still no comparable lexicographical work.⁶ While earlier volumes reported commonly this difference, today it is considered an anachronism. Its content is linked to the earliest periods of Hungarian history and

3 HRONSKÝ, M. *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon 1918-1920*. Bratislava : Národné literárne centrum, 1998.

4 French - la Hongrie, English - Hungary, German - das Ungarn, Russian – Vengrija, Italian – Ungheria, Spanish – Hungría, Portuguese – Hungria, Polish – Węgry.

5 HAIS, Karel – HODEK, Břetislav. *Velký anglicko-český slovník I., II*. Praha : Leda, Academia, 1997.

6 MAJTÁN, M. Zo slovenskej etnonymie. Slová Uhor a Maďar v staršej slovenčine. In Žigo, P. – Majtán, M.: *Vlastné meno v komunikácii*. Bratislava : Veda, 2003, p. 137-144.

not to the latest stage of the formation of modern nations with the ambition of constitutional basis. Using older expressions, which have lost their real content for the new phenomena, however, is common in the language and could be one possible solution of the problem through consistent analysis, reasoning and redefining. More recent historical works are synchronic with the language and use only the terms Hungary - Hungarian, some of them use the term Magyar to underline historical (ethnic) category.

In the current trend in English written literature is a serious argument, but at the same time it should be mentioned, that there are historical stereotypes as well as linguistic ones. These include using of the terms “the Kingdom of Hungary – Hungarian” translated to “Hungary – Hungarian”, even though the English language itself has adequate linguistic instruments. It could be hardly expected that English literature (coming from a different linguistic environment) will search for other terms and disrupt common stereotypes in this field, because it is not significant or substantial. Slovak historiography, however, has a serious reason for distinguishing between the terms Hungary and The Kingdom of Hungary even when writing about this subject in English or other languages. These are partly similar principles to those which we met when using the terms Czechoslovak and Slovak, respectively Czech and Slovak (Masaryk’s concept of Independent Bohemia) but of course, in a different context and within other historical relations. With the consistent selection and by differentiating between these terms the acceptance of the difference in this area was gradually achieved. A similar path is a solution if we would like to show differences when talking about the Kingdom of Hungary or Hungary.

Thereby we opened another complex problem, continuity and discontinuity of the Hungarian State. The Kingdom of Hungary was divided and for the new states, including Hungary, new boundaries have been determined. According to a few Slovak historians the new Hungary didn’t lose any territory or population. Hungarian historiography and legal historians are traditionally based on legal,

national and political continuity of the Kingdom of Hungary and later state formations in this territory and on preserving the integrity of Hungary. Also the new Hungarian constitution of 2012 defines today's Hungary as successor of Hungary of Saint Stephen, with uninterrupted continuity.

We are reaching the point of defining “the very beginning of our dispute” milestone “Trianon” and differences in the perception in the Slovak and Hungarian society, historiography and politics. Slovak historian Milan Zemko wrote exaggeratedly at first sight that Slovak-Hungarian coexistence can be divided into two major periods - before Trianon and after Trianon. Trianon is present in all Slovak-Hungarian confrontations and moreover is a part of the events that happened before it.⁷ Primarily, we perceive Trianon as a turning point – one step in the evolution of Europe which made a new order of Europe together with other treaties. Despite disruption by another war and with all the problems that it caused, Trianon created an order in Europe, which became, confirmed by the Paris Peace Treaties of 10th February, 1947 the basis of peaceful coexistence for the new generation for almost 70 years.

The same historical event is interpreted differently by official historiographies, taught in the schools and perceived by the population. Trianon becomes a rewarding topic in politics, if it's necessary to mobilize citizens (voters) against “enemies” at home or abroad, regardless of whether it is going about Hungary or Slovakia. In the Hungarian historical memory, it is stored in the form of a cultural code that has been well-kept in Hungarian society and all post-Trianon generations, including the present day generation. Emotions were a part of the presentation of injustice of Trianon, creating conditions for dealing with Trianon through the form of social resistance. Important part of that line was a vision that the future will change this unfavorable situation and bring the possibility

7 ZEMKO, M. Slovensko-maďarské konfrontácie – skutočnosť, či fikcia. In. Simon, A. (ed.) *Mýty a predsudky v dejinách*. Šamorín – Dunajská Streda : Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín – Lilium Aurum, 2005, p. 52-53

of a better life and social changes. Everything was focused on the primary value category, on the nation, as the most important value structure in Hungarian society in the 20th century and recently also.

On the Slovak side Trianon never became a national symbol of victory. Trianon didn't become a subject of commemoration or celebration except 2010 when the national-populist groups began to build Trianon celebrating monuments. Trianon was not defined as a nation binding historical event and in politics and journalism has become rather a symbol of the threat of Slovak statehood, because of the effort of its revision. At the time of the adoption of the Treaty of Trianon Czechoslovakia was functioning already with its state machinery and political system,⁸ while the Hungarian society still expected "significant" changes. In Slovak collective memory Trianon figures negatively as well as for Hungarians, despite other reasons. And both feel shivers down their spine when they hear the expression "Trianon". For some it's a cultivated sense of threat, for others it's a long cultivated sense of national slur. In the Slovak historical memory Trianon is connected to words such as irredentism and revisionism. It is associated with feelings of threat, used in Slovak-Hungarian bilateral relations and in the national minority policy to dramatize the political situation (elections of any kind, building bridges on rivers Ipel' and Danube as the bridges for Hungarian tanks, the Carpathian Euroregion is an effort to gradually absorb the east part of Slovakia by Hungary, requirements for municipal management of culture and education are precursors of the autonomy, scaring people by discussing the separation of southern Slovakia ...).

Slovak trauma of Trianon is manifested by the fact that Slovaks suspect the Hungarian political authorities of making efforts to change borders, annex the southern part of Slovakia or even trying to reestablish Historical Hungary. For today's Slovak political elites any attempts of Hungary or Hungarians who live in Slovakia to

⁸ HRONSKÝ, M. *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon 1918-1920*. Bratislava : Národné literárne centrum, 1998.

change status, competencies or status of Hungarians in Slovakia are associated with suspecting of revision of Trianon (Vienna Award). In Slovak politics it mobilizes even moderate patriots and lukewarm nationalists to be distrustful toward Hungarians.

As regards Hungary, currently two concepts of reply of Hungarian society to the “Trianon-issue” are at stake:⁹ *Cross-border vision of the unity of the Hungarian nation (transfrontal revision)* is currently being implemented in Hungary through the gradual penetration of national policy across the borders and by institutional connection of Hungarians in the new Hungary and abroad. Integrity of the Kingdom of Hungary (Historical Hungary) was replaced by the integrity of Hungarians, what gives the “right” to the political representation of Hungary to intervene in all matters relating to Hungarians abroad. Politics of the cross-border vision of the unity of the Hungarian nation is supplemented by the concept of creating institutional connections between motherland and minorities who live beyond the borders of today’s Hungary.

Basically this is a new view of Trianon. This factor can be evaluated as a fundamental advance in the perception of the effects of dividing Hungarians by Treaty of Trianon to several countries and its basis is not a direct territorial revision, but the change of relations. It calculates with the Hungarian world “without borders” and considers the Hungarian Government as the government of 15 million ethnic Hungarians. It should not be the policy toward minorities abroad but policy toward its citizens abroad what was confirmed by the Act on Hungarian Citizenship.

A possible alternative would be the *Vision of European Integration - through European Schengen Policy*, a replacement of existing concepts dealing with the effects of Trianon. Apparently, in spite of the formally declared Europositive approach, it didn’t find a sufficient

9 ŠUTAJ, Š. Variace stop Trianonu v politické paměti. In Dejmek, J. – Loužek, M. (eds.). *Trianonská smlouva. Devadesát let poté*. Praha : Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku, 2010, 69-97; ŠUTAJ, Š. Trianon a szlovákiai történelmi emlékezetben. In *Limes*, XXIV/ 89, 2011.1, p.71-86.

response in current Hungarian politics. The adoption of the idea of European Citizenship as a principle that should unify all Hungarians in Central Europe to the one entity, relying on their cultural, not civil or political unity, didn't become the basis of Hungarian policy toward Hungarians abroad.

The third, always latently existing answer in the form of ethnic revision, is defined as the regularly commemorated thesis of the "spiritualization" of borders as István Bibó was writing about it.¹⁰ The basis of this thesis are boundaries which are real, even unjust, but have to be tolerated and if favorable conditions occur, may be changed.

Trianon had its continuance. It was the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, but this refused to be connected to Trianon. The Peace Treaty signed in February 1947 declared the nullity of the Vienna Award and confirmed or "lightly" modified Trianon borders.¹¹

Modern history has seen many wars and many peace conferences but all participants, including representatives of the former hostile countries which were not regular participants of the conference, believed that this conference was different from the previous ones, that this conference was better, more humane, more fair. Even the Czechoslovak representatives justified their action against the Germans and Hungarians primarily with the words that they have to do this for future generations not to let them face the same problems.¹² Today's boundaries, however, are functioning as a stable system that can be changed only by strong impulse and usually by weapons, not diplomacy. Also, changes of the state borders after the fall of

10 BIBÓ, I. *Bieda východoeurópskych malých štátov*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 1996.

11 See for example ROMSICS, I. *Parížska mierová zmluva z roku 1947*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2008; ŠUTAJ, Š. *Rokovania o mieri s Maďarskom a ich vplyv na postavenie maďarskej menšiny na Slovensku*. In *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Iuridica*, 1, 2013, p. 277-299.

12 Šutaj, Š. et al. *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History (A View of Slovak Historians)*. Prešov : Universum, 2011.

communist regimes in Central and Southeastern Europe took place only inside the peace conference defined borders. This meant the creation of new states, but did not affect the territorial integrity of the territory defined by peace treaties.

Therefore conflict in Ukraine in 2014 cannot be seen only as a civil war, as some of the leading Slovak politicians think. Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Europe is one of the first precedents that it's possible to change the borders guaranteed by peace treaties without the consent of the state and by intervention in foreign territory. Intervention in Crimea plowed into European stability new "inspirational" furrow. It is a dangerous threat of the stability of boundaries of European countries, including Central Europe.

In this context, it is interesting to take a look at the articles of the Peace Treaty with Hungary in 1947. Are these articles valid still? No other document changed them directly. Some have become obsolete (they have been exceeded or replaced by other international-legal documents or bilateral agreements). Others by way regained actuality after the years. However, actual condition or today's reality we do not know. At this point I will mention several problem areas based on the Peace Treaty of 1947.

In today's Act on Hungarian Citizenship historical continuity of Hungary is accepted and not just regarding Hungary (Historical Hungary), but also as regards citizenship, when southern Slovakia became a part of Hungary by Vienna Award. This is despite the fact that the Vienna Award was nullified by the Armistice Agreement with Hungary in January 1945 and by the Treaty of Peace with Hungary signed in Paris in February 1947.¹³ Such a solution, which was presented by the Act on Hungarian Citizenship we find in the world hardly.

After 1948 communist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia

13 Treaty of Peace with Hungary, signed at Paris, on 10 February, 1947: Part 1, article 1, point 4 "The decision of the Vienna Award of November 2, 1938 are declared null and void." <http://antifa-hungary.blogspot.sk/2011/10/paris-peace-treaty-1947.html>

tried to freeze problems not solved in the previous period because of the future cooperation with friendly pro-Soviet regimes. In this situation there was signed a Friendship Contract between Czechoslovakia and Hungary in April 1949 and later in July 1949 they signed the Strba Protocol, the final settlement of some unsolved financial and economic issues, when both parties came to a solution through the zero option.¹⁴ For example it concerned the consequences of the Agreement of Czechoslovakia and Hungary on exchange of inhabitants signed on 2nd February, 1946, some archival and administrative documents, agricultural land that became a part of the other country, but also articles no. 11, respectively no. 24 of the Treaty of Peace. As both governments agreed the Strba Protocol has not been published, it had to be implemented administratively. It entered into force on 23rd August, 1949. According to the XIII. article of the Secret Annex of Strba Protocol, signatory parties annulled mutual claims and cultural heritage issues had to be solved by upcoming cultural agreement between the two countries. It was going about cultural monuments from the different periods and of different nature which were built during the period of the Kingdom of Hungary, but also in the years 1938-1945, ergo, after the Vienna Award. In the Hungarian archives and museums remained documents and artistic monuments incurred during the Ottoman era in the 16th-17th centuries during the Josephinian reforms, when centers of the Hungarian state and church institutions were on the territory of today's Slovakia, and also archives of liquidated monasteries and artistic treasures moved to Hungary on the occasion of the Millennium celebrations at the end of the 19th century.¹⁵

14 ČIERNA-LANTAYOVÁ, D. *Tradicia a dejiny. Vybrané otázky slovensko-maďarských a slovensko-ruských vzťahov 1934-1949*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2009, p. 196-197.

15 Minimal attention was paid to the issue of cultural heritage in (Czecho) Slovak historiography. ŠAMBERGER, Z. Slovensko a archivní restituice s Budapeští po roce 1918. In *Slovenská archivistika*, XXV/2, 1990, p. 21-42; CUILISOVÁ, I. *Osudy pamiatok Slovenska 1919-1949*. Bratislava 1994.

On 24th October, 1950 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared for the meeting of government guidelines for the national implementation of the Strba Protocol. According to the Explanatory Report the Strba Protocol had an international effect, but it was also necessary to ensure its national implementation.¹⁶ However, the Strba Protocol did not solve mutual problems. Regarding cultural heritage issues a list of 12 “subjects” was compiled, mentioned as the substantive resolution no. 13 of secret Additional Protocol¹⁷ and was never implemented.

Attention should be paid to some essential facts, at least. The Treaty of Peace with Hungary, this international legal document has been modified by the agreement of two countries. The Strba Protocol was never published, and different tactics were used when it was spoken about its existence in the press and publicly available sources. Agreement was not submitted to the national parliaments and had not been ratified. The Strba Protocol was based on the new political situation and was dealing with the idea of compromise on the basis of ignoring the “bourgeois” past and building new relations between friendly socialist countries. For “incriminated” period it considered only the period after the Vienna Award of 1938.

The Cold War and the affiliation of Czechoslovakia and Hungary to the Soviet zone stopped anti-Hungarian regulations, but it meant also the stagnation of relationship, hibernation of the problems, including contemporary and currently unresolved “smoldering” questions, results of post-war legislation and fulfilling the articles of the Treaty of Peace with Hungary from 1947. By the fall of communist regimes in 1989 relations were thawed, but the limits of the old obligations were not defined, including Hungary's commitment not to allow on its territory to carry out activities of organizations

16 NA CR Praha, f. ÚPV, tajná spisovňa, Paper 501. Dôvodová správa k smerniciam o vnútroštátnej realizácii protokolu z 25. júla 1949.

17 Archív Slovenského národného múzea, f. Reštitúcie, Paper 3. Príloha k meritornému uznesení č. 13 podľa č. XIII., ods. 1 Štrbského protokolu.

promoting the idea of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹⁸

Another significant difference is the assessment of post-war Czechoslovak legislation in both historiographies and especially in contemporary society and politics. An example of the dispute is a resolution “regarding the inviolability of documents connected to denazification after World War II” with which the National Council of the Slovak Republic was dealing on 20th September, 2007. The resolution was signed by all Slovak parliamentary political parties except the Party of the Hungarian Coalition. 120 members voted for the resolution (from 150 members).

Absurdity of the resolution is documented most concisely by the fate of the best known President's Constitutional Decree No. 33/1945 Coll. concerning Czechoslovak citizenship. This was the basis for all further regulations against Germans and Hungarians of Czechoslovakia and its consequences became evident in many areas of life. It was revised by governmental regulations about Regaining of Czechoslovak citizenship of Germans and Hungarians of Czechoslovakia, no. 76/1948 Coll. on 13th April, 1948, and later by the Decree of the Ministry of Interior, no. 77/1948 dated on 16th April, 1948. These regulations allowed the regaining of Czechoslovak citizenship to persons of Hungarian nationality who were deported to the Czech Republic and were willing to stay there permanently. By Act no. 245/1948 Coll. in October 1948 inhabitants of Hungarian nationality acquired Czechoslovak citizenship if they fulfilled special conditions. The articles of the decree were modified by the adoption

18 Treaty of Peace with Hungary, signed at Paris, on 10 February, 1947: Part 2, article 4: “Hungary, which in accordance with the Armistice Agreement has taken measures for dissolving all organisations of a Fascist type on Hungarian territory, whether political, military or para-military, as well as other organisations conducting propaganda, including revisionist propaganda, hostile to the United Nations, shall not permit in future the existence and activities of organisations of that nature which have as their aim denial to the people of their democratic rights.” <http://antifa-hungary.blogspot.sk/2011/10/paris-peace-treaty-1947.html>

of the governmental decree on 29th November, 1949 and persons of German nationality regained Czechoslovak citizenship. Presidential decree was modified by the Act no. 34/1953 Coll. dated on 24th April, 1953 which allowed regaining of Czechoslovak citizenship to all persons of German nationality living in Czechoslovakia. From the “untouchable” Presidential Decree no. 33/1945 Coll. nothing left.¹⁹

Every decree or regulation of the Slovak National Council from the post-war period has its own separate “anamnesis --- medical history”. But it is a time to take down post-war nationalist-colored glasses in Slovak politics too. The fact that something happened “legally” does not mean that it was also just and human. Post-war legislation created conditions for persecution, deportation and confiscation of properties and land of the Hungarians who lived in Czechoslovakia. This is what is necessary to say, regardless of Horthy’s regime which acted similarly against Slovaks in Hungary after the Vienna Award. Post-war legislation is possible to explain and justify but it cannot be excused and defended and certainly is not a basis for relations between the government and the Hungarian minority.

The possibilities of cooperation between Slovak and Hungarian historians expanded after the year 1989. However, this does not mean that the view of common history and the history of both countries changed fundamentally. As this article suggests, different interpretations of the history of the 20th century persist and make a substantial part of mutual controversies and confrontations.

19 ŠUTAJ, Š. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v 20.storočí*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2012.