



## **Structural and administrative implications of the Trianon Peace Treaty, 1920\***

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World War I re-organised European power and territorial relations. The victors (Entente member countries) emerged from the war with significant territorial gains, while the losers (Central Powers) suffered considerable losses and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was dissolved. The political-territorial power structure of the Monarchy was extremely complex. The aim of this study is to present how state and territorial administrations were reorganized in the newly independent Hungary. The dissolution of the Monarchy led to the dismantling of the multi-ethnic and quasi-federal state of historical Hungary. While the Hungarian government recognised the secession of Croatia-Slavonia, it firmly opposed the detachment of other territories; notwithstanding, by the end of December 1918, various nationalities (Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs) had formed quasi-blocks in Hungary and proclaimed their secession. Hungary became a sovereign state after losing the majority of the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (71.4%) and 63.5% of its population. Defeat in the war was the major factor behind the country's disintegration that neither the civil democratic revolution and transformation nor the bloody internal proletarian dictatorship were able to reverse. The Trianon Peace Treaty simply sanctioned the changes that had already taken place through international treaties and international law. The territorial administrative division of the new Hungary was completely distorted due to the truncated cross-border counties. The 1923 territorial correction was no more than an attempt to merge the truncated counties and county fragments. This study is based primarily on cartographic analysis.

**Keywords:**

World War I,  
Austro-Hungarian Monarchy,  
Kingdom of Hungary,  
territorial disintegration,  
multi-ethnic successor states,  
Trianon Peace Treaty,  
public administration in  
the Kingdom of Hungary,  
distorted territorial division

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## Introduction

The effects of the global and European political and territorial transformations triggered by the Great War (1914–1918) sent shockwaves through the entire continent, with the most dire consequences for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (AHM) and historical Hungary (Kingdom of Hungary, or Hungarian Empire as referred to by statistical press or official documents). Due to mounting internal national and ethnic pressure and the decisions of external victorious powers, the AHM was rapidly dismantled in October 1918. Similar processes triggered the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The defeated countries were not invited to participate in the discussions and decisions on the most crucial territorial issues during the Paris Peace Conference taking place on 18 January 1919. The conditions of the peace treaty presented to a defeated Hungary in March 1919 were rejected by the pro-Entente government of Mihály Károlyi, which transferred power to the social democrats. The latter, in collaboration with the imprisoned communists concluded an agreement on the joint government on 21 March 1919.

The powers behind the brutal internal proletarian dictatorship were not willing to negotiate with the leaders of the peace conference with weapons at their feet or hands held up, instead seizing weapons to defend the territory of the country (and cement the proletarian dictatorship). Despite partial victories, they were ultimately defeated by the Entente-backed armies of the successor states led by Entente officers. On 1st August 1919, the leaders of the dictatorship robbed the country of significant wealth and fled to Vienna.

Most of the country (including Budapest) came under Romanian military occupation. The Entente powers, as a sign of their condemnation of the systematic robbing of the country, ordered the evacuation of Romanian troops from Budapest and subsequently, the entire country. After the arrival of Miklós Horthy in Budapest, the special interim government did not receive diplomatic recognition by the Entente and the Peace Conferences, which were only willing to recognise a government that implemented their directly and indirectly formulated demands. The Peace Treaty octroyed upon Hungary was eventually signed on 4 June 1920, and enshrined into the constitution in 1921.

The Peace Treaty contained extremely harsh provisions in territorial, population, economic, and military terms. A veritable tragedy, it was nonetheless recognised as the condition of the integration of a defeated Hungary into the new European political and territorial order.

The events after the autumn of 1918 led to the dissolution of both the AHM and historical Hungary. The primary event that sealed the fate of the AHM was the war defeat. (Generally, victorious states are not subject to dissolution or truncation.) Trianon was not the cause for the partition of the major part of the country or the

‘circumcision’ of the former state corpus (the new state border did not overlap the old state border along any of its sections), it simply granted international legal recognition to changes that had already taken place.

The changes ‘recognised’ by the Peace Treaty thoroughly transformed existing relations in a wide array of sectors and subsystems prevalent in pre-1918 Kingdom of Hungary. However, the focus of this paper is limited to a review of state and administrative restructuring and its underlying causes.

### **Territorial administrative division of Hungary and statistics**

Throughout the development of Hungary, akin to other states, the statistical monitoring of the constitutional organisation of the state and the changes of state territory have been inextricably linked to the history of the state and public administration. This connection and its obvious consequences were already visible in the era of ‘private statistics’ and became increasingly evident and transparent with the setting up of a state statistical office.

The AHM's particular constitutional structure ruled out the possibility of a unified imperial system of statistics; the partner countries compiled statistical surveys and censuses relevant to their respective territories. Since the 1867 Compromise, HCSO has rigorously kept track of how the country's ‘constitutional territorial structure’ was changing (Havas 1869). Within the field of statistics, new statistical notions describing territorial entities and divisions were elaborated which nonetheless respected the existing public-law (constitutional) ‘components’ and the administrative nomenclature. Settlements, districts, and municipalities were treated as the natural frameworks for the assembly, processing, and publication of statistical data (Edelényi Szabó 1928).

The development of the modern Hungarian state created a pressing demand for the harmonisation of historical concepts with those of the dualist era. The concept and territorial unit of the ‘Hungarian Empire’ already emerged in a monograph of János Hunfalvy (1863), a period when the Hungarian political elite rejected the unconstitutional status of the territorially dismembered country. (Trained as a lawyer, Hunfalvy also gave statistical lectures and is known for the institutionalisation of modern Hungarian geography.) In the post-Compromise era, the ‘Hungarian Empire’ became a highly delicate spatial concept, statistically speaking. Despite not gaining official recognition, it was a frequently used term in the statistical discipline and cartography.

The 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the subsequent Hungarian-Croatian Settlement of 1868, the Rijeka Agreement, and the preservation of a Military Borderland created a complex, multi-level political construction with significant territorial statistical implications. The then CSO took the text of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise Law as a basic point of departure in the treatment of the

‘Croatian-Slavonic-Dalmatian countries’ as a single statistical unit at the time of publication of the 1870 Census and the compilation of the place-nomenclature from the 1870s.

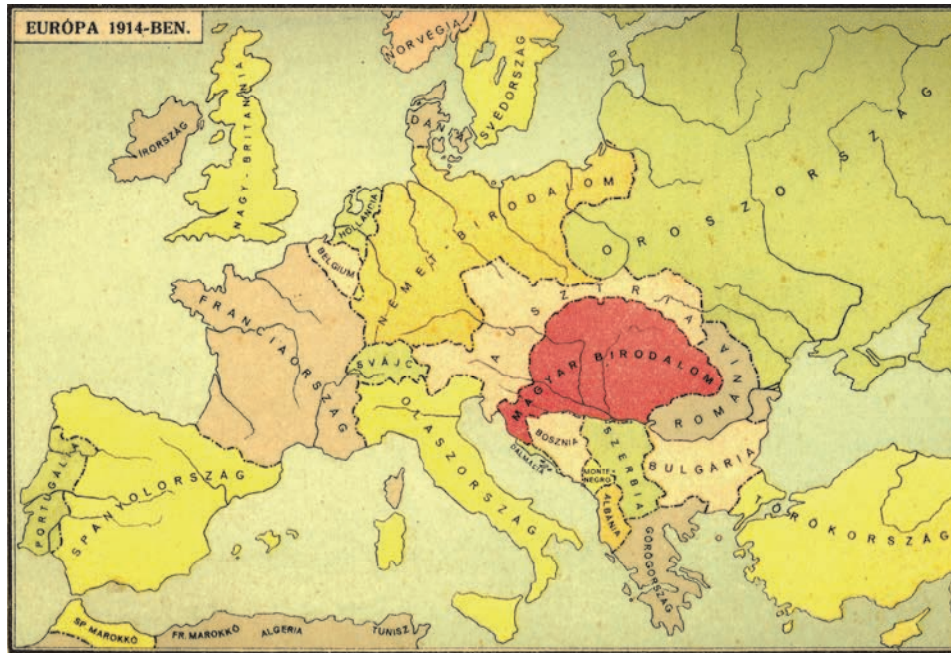
The occupation (1878), and especially, the annexation (1908) of Bosnia and Herzegovina further complicated political-power relations and their territorial dimensions (Szabó 2008). Bosnia, not being annexed to either party, was brought under the control and administration of the Joint Minister for Finance. Debates between the Austrian and Hungarian governments on the status of Bosnia were launched in the course of World War I. This had ecclesiastical and religious implications, leading to the recognition of the Islamic religion as a historical denomination in 1916.

Contributions to Hungarian state geography and ‘state statistical geography’ (see Kogutowicz–Hermann (1913) had already emerged in the pre-World War I era. The objective of these works relying on contemporary (English, French, German) state statistical literature was to adapt the existing analyses on Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Hungary in the Hungarian context. (The cited studies treat the three components as autonomous ‘countries’ and contain no synthesizing statements at the level of the AHM.) Contemporary Hungarian geography and politics were particularly keen to emphasise the European grandeur of the country by pointing out that if Hungary was a fully independent state (the analyses of the Hungarian State Statistics and the Hungarian Institute of Geography covered 24 European countries in 1914) and thus a subject of international law, it would rank 6th in terms of its territory and 7th in terms of its population, among the European countries.

### **Imperial Europe and the AHM**

The territorial structure of Europe in 1914 was dominated by empires and macro-states (Figure 1). Given the multi-ethnic character of contemporary imperial structures, what distinguishes the AHM from fellow empires is not multiethnicity, but the highly complex nature of its public law relations and the lack of any significant colonies.

Figure 1

**Imperial Europe and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Europe, 1914**

Source: Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség (1943).

Evaluations of the public law (constitutional) status of the AHM and Hungary – with its various territories enjoying full autonomy – by the contemporary society of lawyers (see Balogh 1901, Beksics 1896, Concha 1895) and later historical analyses (Beér–Csizmadia 1966, Gratz 1934, Molnár 1929) are by no means uniform. Characterisations range from a ‘simple personal union’ through ‘federal state’ to ‘de facto real union’. Despite its recognition as a constitutional monarchy, the effective role and influence of the Austrian Emperor and the Hungarian Monarch Joseph Franz extended well beyond the confines of a ‘normal’ constitutional monarchy.

Against the backdrop of a dominant imperial structure, the creation of various alliances between macro-states and great powers had already commenced with the intent to redraw European power relations. The AHM joined the Europe-wide battle as a member of the German-led Federation of Central Powers. (The chief objective of the Great War was the redistribution of power and territory in Europe. Their global redistribution would have been a natural outcome of the German victory.)

## The Kingdom of Hungary in the Monarchy

According to the most widespread view in contemporary Hungary, the Kingdom of Hungary was a sovereign country within the Monarchy linked to Austria – besides the personal union – through ‘common affairs’ (foreign, military affairs, and the underpinning finances). The Hungarian-Croatian Compromise of 1868 settled the internal power and political status of the ‘fellow country’, granting it almost full internal autonomy.

Fundamental decisions on internal administration were made in the early and mid-1870s. The liberal Hungarian government abolished feudal territorial autonomies, and following the organisation of counties in the Military Border Region, the county system was generally adopted across the territory of Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia (Figure 2).

Figure 2

### Administrative division in the Kingdom of Hungary, 1918



Source: Takács (1939).

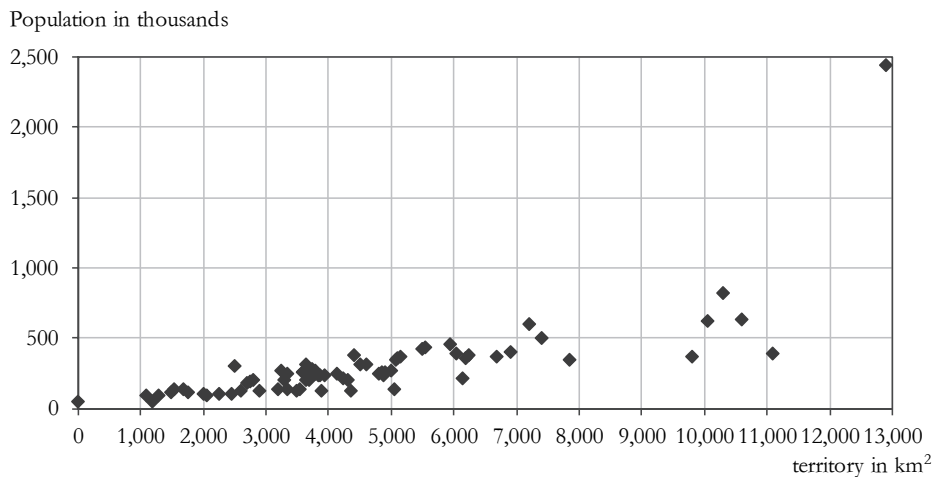
According to the Hungarian Statistical Yearbooks (1916, 1917, 1918), Hungary in 1918 was comprised of two public law entities (Hungary, the city of Rijeka, and its district), with Croatia-Slavonia forming an autonomous constitutional entity. Hungary's internal territory was divided into 63 counties, Fiume and its districts, 27 municipalities, 112 corporate towns, 443 districts, 2,701 district notaries, 2,176 large villages, and 10,196 small villages. The statistically recorded number of heathlands, yards, and other inhabited areas was 17,083.

Croatia-Slavonia was divided into 8 counties, 4 municipalities, 13 other towns, and 70 districts. The organisation of its municipal administration was considerably different from that of Hungary due to its subdivision into political municipalities. A portion of the political municipalities (156) formed a single tax district, while the rest (389) were organised into several tax districts. The total number of recorder units was 7,189.

Counties were characterised by huge disparities in terms of territory, population, (Figure 2) number of settlements, etc. A county's position was determined by its administrative functions and not by the size of its territory or population. The county system in 1918 was explained by historical factors on one hand and reform measures of Dualist era liberal Hungarian governments on the other (with an eye on the Great Plain area under Turkish rule throughout 150 years in particular.) In terms of their size, the smallest counties of Upper Hungary (comprising of small basins) were no larger than the districts of the large counties of the Great Plain. Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County (a de facto historical conglomeration of counties) constituted a unique structure in the central part of the country according to 1910 data in terms of the size of its area (12,034 km<sup>2</sup>), population (1,029,246 persons), and the structure of internal distances (the distance of the southern settlements from Budapest, the county seat, was irrationally large, evoked as an alarming example by almost every contemporary administrative reform proposal). In my work, I use the 'calliper method' to illustrate this peculiar role of distance (Hajdú 2001), that is, by drawing a circle with Budapest at the centre from the outermost part of the county and supposing that this distance is still deemed acceptable or functional by the public administration; this alone would have enabled the administration of the entire country from a single county seat.

Figure 3

**Differences in the territorial and population size of the counties  
(including municipal towns), 1918**



Source: Hajdú (2001).

The distinct treatment of counties and municipal towns in terms of municipal administration is a unique feature of the administrative division of both parts of the Hungarian Empire. In 1910, the vast majority (318,297 km<sup>2</sup>) of the 325,411 km<sup>2</sup> territory of the Hungarian Empire belonged to counties, and only 7,114 km<sup>2</sup> to municipal towns. The distribution of the population shows a more balanced picture, with 18.5 million people residing in counties and 2.3 million in municipal towns.

The extension of the county-scale analysis of size to municipal towns demonstrates that the most expansive towns of the Great Plain (Szabadka, 974 km<sup>2</sup>; Debrecen, 957 km<sup>2</sup>; Kecskemét, 940 km<sup>2</sup>; Szeged, 816 km<sup>2</sup>) constitute quasi-autonomous 'small worlds' with vast internal distances. (The 1,800 km<sup>2</sup>-large overlapping administrative territories of Szabadka and Szeged exceeded the territory of several counties.) Along with Hódmezővásárhely (761 km<sup>2</sup>) in the vicinity of Szeged, we gain the picture of a single, coherent urban area marked by the presence of extensive rural and homestead-dominated spaces.

While the Statistical Yearbook provides data on the size of the territory and population in the summary row titled 'Hungarian Empire', no data is available on public administration. This is probably due to the autonomous status of public administration within the domain of internal affairs in Hungary and Croatia-Slavonia, with all its implications on the administrative organisation of municipalities.

In Hungary, 8 statistical regions (the right bank of the Danube, the left bank of the Danube, the Danube-Tisza Interfluve region, the right bank of the Tisza, the left bank of the Tisza, the Tisza-Maros angle, Bucea, and the town and district of

Rijeka) provided the framework for the territorial classification of counties as well as for statistical analysis, with no apparent public or municipal administrative functions. Croatia-Slavonia formed a single statistical unit.

A much anticipated country study in the form of a multilingual monograph was published by Hungarian geographers in 1918 (Lóczy Lóczy 1918). The end of the war saw the release of a publication entitled 'The States of the Hungarian Holy Crown' on the historical constitutional state formation providing a 'final panoramic snapshot' before its cessation.

### **World War defeat, territorial re-organisation**

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914 launched the Great War, a tragic process that set Europe and, thanks to the European colonial empires, parts of the world ablaze. The Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza fiercely opposed the declaration of war and the war itself in the course of the sessions of the Joint Council of Ministers, considering the acquisition of further ethnic territories to be against the interest of the multinational AHM and Hungary in particular; he thus attached no special importance to an eventual victory or defeat. Tisza was aware of the fact that the AHM was investing all its resources in a war without anticipating any significant territorial gains. (If there was a country whose entry into the war should have been forbidden under all costs, it was the AHM. Nevertheless, the AHM claimed responsibility for committing the 'original sin' – the war declaration on Serbia – setting all of Europe ablaze.)

During the war, the Central Powers achieved 'partial victories' and forced the defeated Russian Empire (and its legal successor) into a humiliating, truly imperialist peace treaty in Brest-Litovsk inflicting significant territorial and population losses on it. Defeated Romania was subject to a similar procedure in the course of both the interim and the 'final' peace treaty in Bucharest. Unfortunately, the case of the Central Powers and particularly the AHM was a clear demonstration of 'the winner takes what it likes' in the imperialist era.

The Great War caused immense destruction in the warring countries, with the gravest implications for the more under-resourced Central Powers. By autumn of 1918, the prospect of an imminent internal collapse and catastrophic military defeat loomed on the horizon of the Central Powers. (Menaced by defeat, Emperor Karl of Austria proclaimed the Federal Republic of Austria on October 16. Despite not being directly impacted by the re-organisation, in the eyes of the last constitutional government of the Kingdom of Hungary led by Sándor Wekerle, it clearly signalled the end of dualism.)

In October 1918, revolutionary protests erupted in the major cities of the Monarchy. On October 21, the Temporary National Assembly in Vienna – set up in

the course of the revolutionary transformation – declared the secession of Austria from the AHM. Revolutionary protests erupted in Prague (28 October), Budapest (29–30 October), and Zagreb (29 October), bringing the respective countries to a major political watershed. (The independence of the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian state proclaimed in Zagreb on 29 October was recognised by the Károlyi government which opened an embassy in Zagreb in early November.) While each revolution produced its own vision of the unity of the state and the nation, their effective enforcement depended on strong international and military support.

On 3rd November 1918, a ceasefire agreement in Padua was signed by the AHM signalling the termination of the war. On 12 October, Austria proclaimed itself as a republic. On 13 November 1918, Hungary signed the Belgrade Military Convention (Ceasefire Convention) with the obligation of acknowledging the military demarcation line penetrating into its southernmost territories. On the same day, King Charles IV of Hungary renounced the title of King of Hungary. On 14 November, Masaryk was elected President of the Czechoslovak Republic in Prague. The Hungarian People's Republic was proclaimed on 16 November.

The Romanians of Transylvania declared the accession of Transylvania to Romania on 1 December in Gyulafehérvár. Naturally, the Hungarian residents of Transylvania were not asked to express their opinion on the decision. On the same day, Crown Prince Alexander of Serbia proclaimed the establishment of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom in Paris.

The brief review provided above indicates that the new neighbouring states of Hungary (Austria, Czechoslovakia, the new Romania, and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom) had sprung up by December 1918, and, with the exception of Austria, were each backed up by powerful armies and more importantly, enjoyed the support of the Great Powers. The permanent state boundaries were yet to be determined; however, the demarcation lines drawn by the Entente promised nothing good for Hungary.

From a state historical perspective, the Hungarian Soviet Republic proclaimed on 21 March 1919 can be regarded as a desperate attempt at crisis management. The leadership of the proletarian dictatorship was no longer attached to the territorial integrity of the (by then) dismantled Kingdom of Hungary (which would have been wishful thinking), but it took up arms in an attempt to defend the largest possible territory of the mother country (and thus to secure its own existence). The state structural innovations of the brutal, bloody internal dictatorship (recognition of the federal state by a provisional and later a permanent constitution, and the public administration reform) hardly enhanced the chances of an armed struggle. On 1 August, the top leaders of the dictatorship fled to Vienna, robbing significant wealth from the country to secure the continuation of their political activities.

## Transformation of state (constitutional) structures

The collapse of the AHM and the dismantling of historical Hungary triggered a fundamental state restructuring. The state structure underpinning the Austro-Hungarian dualism was completely abolished in tandem with the Hungarian-Croatian state community.

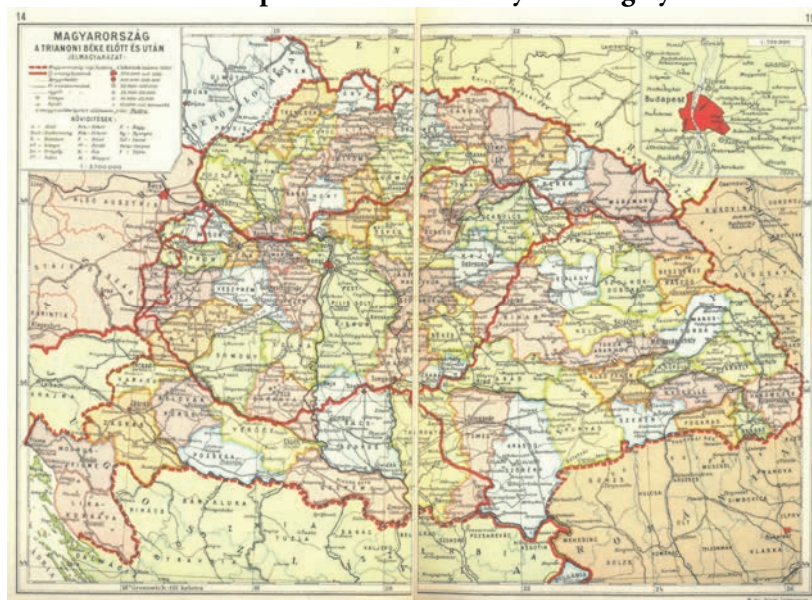
On 4 June 1920, Hungary signed the Trianon Peace Treaty that simply sanctioned the changes that had already taken place. Accordingly, the Treaty of Trianon is not the cause of the destruction of historical Hungary, but solely its legitimator. Hungary became a unitary state. Demands for restitution appealed to the principle of historical-legal continuity, albeit with a limited effect. In the framework of the unitary state, against all odds, a multi-party parliamentary democracy was implemented. The full sovereignty of the state necessitated the establishment of a Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and fundamental changes were introduced in the administration of defence as well.

## Transformation of state territory

It was not until the implementation of the provisions of the Peace Treaty and the cartographic visualisation of the state territorial losses that the gravity of the situation triggered by the war defeat and its termination by the Peace Treaty had become obvious to all (Figure 4, Table 1).

Figure 4

Pre-and post-Trianon territory of Hungary



Source: M. Kir. Állami Térképészeti Intézet (Hungarian State Institute of Cartography) (1933).

Table 1

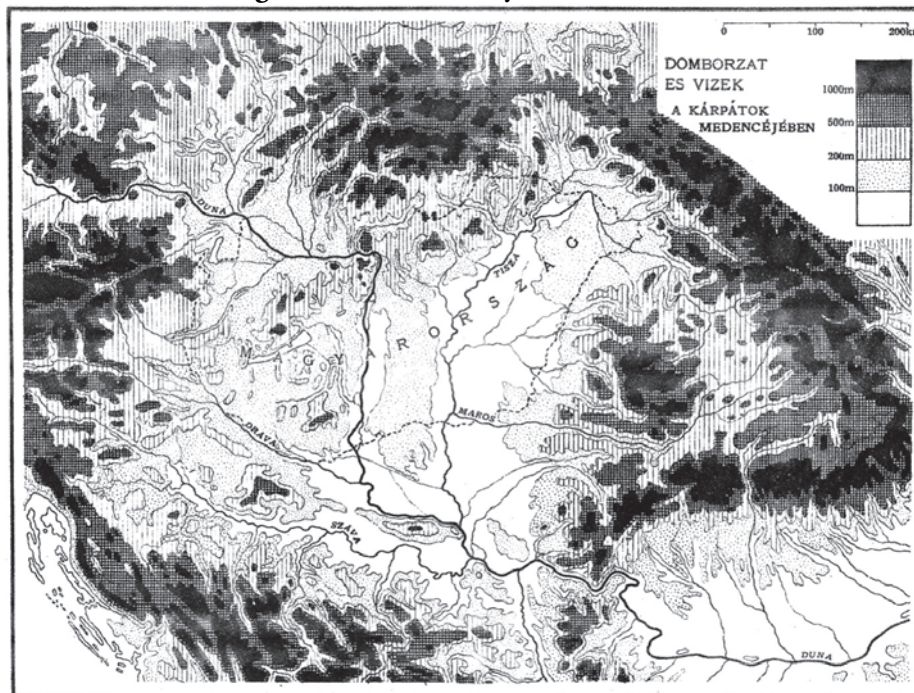
**Division of the Hungarian Empire among successor states,  
as fixed by the Trianon Peace Treaty**

According to the 1910 census				
Country	Territory		Population	
	km <sup>2</sup>	%	capita	%
Romania	102,813	31.6	5,237,911	25.1
SCS Kingdom	63,370	19.5	4,149,840	19.9
Czechoslovakia	61,646	18.9	3,516,815	16.8
Austria	4,020	1.2	292,631	1.4
Poland	589	0.2	24,880	0.1
Italy	21	0.0008	49,806	0.2
Severed territories (total)	232,459	71.4	13,271,353	63.5
Remaining in Hungary	92,952	28.6	7,615,134	36.5
Hungarian Empire	325,411	100.0	20,886,487	100.0

*Source:* Census of 1920, Section VI, Summary of final results. Budapest, CSO, 1929.

Figure 5

**Orographic and hydro-geographic features of  
the new Hungarian state's territory in the bottom of the basin**



*Source:* Bátky-Kogutowicz (1921).

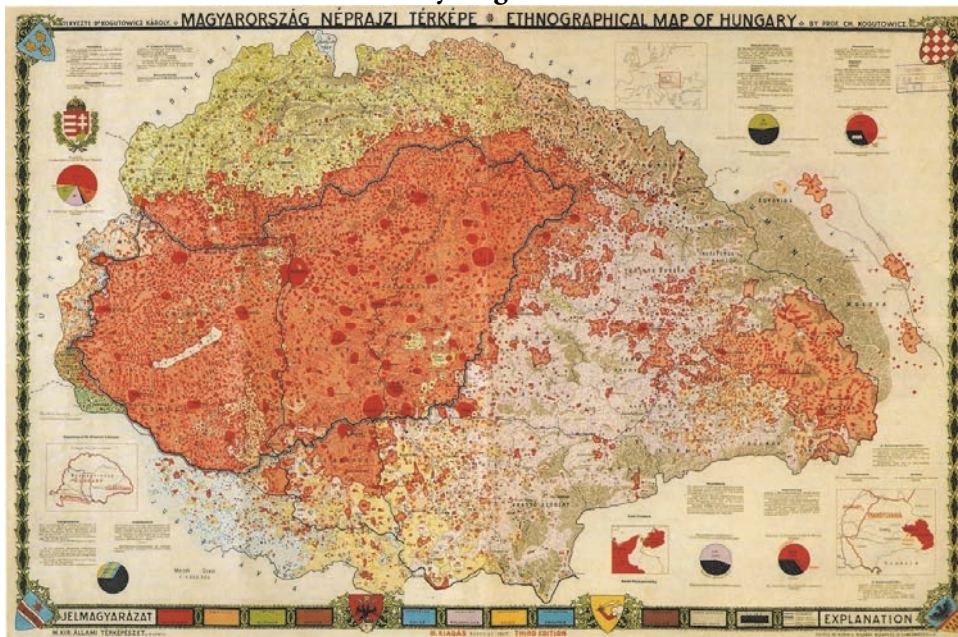
The new state boundaries determined by the peace treaty detached 71.4% of the territory of the Hungarian Empire of 1918 (Buday 1921, Cholnoky 1921, Edvi-Halász 1920). As a primary consequence of territorial losses, the new state was transformed from an almost single basin country to a country in the bottom of a basin (Figure 5).

### Transformation of the state's population structure

The transformation of multi-ethnic Hungary into the region's most homogeneous country in terms of population was effected through the transfer of one-third of the Hungarian ethnic population to the successor states. The new state borders were almost exclusively confined to the ethnic settlement area of the Hungarian nation (Figure 6).

Figure 6

#### Trianon borders and the settlement area of the Hungarian nation according to Károly Kogutowicz



Source: Kogutowicz (1927).

## Transformation of the local and territorial system of public administration

The provisions of the Belgrade Military Convention would have enabled the preservation of the Hungarian territorial and municipal administration; however, in Transylvania and Southern Hungary, the occupying victorious states (Romania and the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom) first disabled, and later, liquidated the Hungarian character of local and territorial public administration. The majority of the previous Hungarian state and local government officials were expelled from the occupied territories. (Taking oath of allegiance and acquisition of new citizenship were the basic criteria of public employment.) The territory of Upper Hungary was subject to similar procedures.

At the end of 1919, the country was subdivided into 34 counties, 11 municipalities, 36 corporate towns, 164 districts, 722 district notaries, 1,006 large villages, and 2,490 small villages. The number of heathlands, yards, and other inhabited areas was 9,086. An unprecedented scale of disparities in terms of territory, population, and administrative organisation came to characterise the counties due to the large number of truncated borderland counties and county fragments.

Figure 7

### Territorial re-organisation of public administration in the aftermath of the Trianon Peace Treaty



Source: Bátky–Kogutowicz (1921).

In the midst of growing uncertainty, the expelled or exiled county administration relaunched its activities in the not occupied territories of Hungary. The fleeing of the Baranya county administration from the occupied town of Pécs to Sásd (in January 1919) is a striking example. The jurisdiction of the ‘truncated county’ extended to 87 municipalities and about 50 thousand inhabitants. In 1919, the tiny subcounty was comprised of 2 districts, 18 district notaries, 85 small villages, and included 56 statistically registered heathlands, yards, and other inhabited areas.

Following the birth of the Soviet Republic, the county directorate of the dictatorship was also transferred to Sásd. The Baranya county administration moved back to Pécs shortly after the withdrawal of the Serbian troops at the end of August 1921.

An examination of the territorial and settlement data corresponding to the administrative changes demonstrates their extreme severity, as indicated by the scale of territorial fragmentation and uncertainties characterising the borderland areas of the new state, especially prior to the negotiation and implementation of the Peace Treaty.

The implementation of the 1920 Population Census encountered serious obstacles amidst growing uncertainties. No population census could be conducted in the territories under Serbian occupation, meanwhile, data assembly was completed in Western Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

To signal their ephemerality, the state and municipal administrative organs of the county seats to be severed were transferred to new temporary county seats (Bátky–Kogutowicz 1921, pp. 179–181.).

Abaúj-Torna county seat from Kassa to Szikszó,

Arad county seat from Arad to Elek,

Bács-Bodrog county seat from Zombor to Baja,

Bereg county seat from Beregszász to Tarpa,

Bihar county seat from Nagyvárad to Berettyóújfalu,

Gömör and Kishont from Rimaszombat to Putnok,

Hont county seat from Ipolyság to Hont, later partially to Nagymaros

Komárom county seat from Komárom to Újkomárom,

Szatmár county seat from Nagykároly to Mátészalka,

Torontál county seat from Nagybecskerek to Kiszombor,

Ung county seat from Ungvár to Záhony,

In case of the annexation of Sopron, Csorna was designated as a potential county seat.

<sup>1</sup> The unprecedented number of footnotes prepared by the CSO to complement the data published in statistical yearbooks, the 1920 Population Census, and place nomenclatures give us a clear indication of the scale of uncertainties characterising the period between 1919 and 1921.

The new county seats – as constrained solutions – were unable to substitute the former ones in most respects. This applies even to Baja, the most developed town among the new county seats.

### **Constrained correction of the county territorial administrative structure, 1923**

Prior to the correction, the territorial administrative division of the country was comprised of 34 counties, 12 municipalities, 38 corporate towns, 161 districts, 713 district notaries, 1,015 large villages, and 2,408 small villages. The Peace Treaty came into force with its enactment in 1921 and the exchange of ratification documents. The new situation had to be acknowledged by the political elite of the country, the county leaderships, and the citizens alike. From an administrative, economic and financial point of view, the unsustainability of severely truncated counties became increasingly apparent. Political and policy debate on the issues of truncated counties and county-level territorial reform were quite limited, with two notable exceptions (Benisch 1923a, 1923b and Prinz 1923).

As noted by Benisch, the truncation of the country and the annexation of minority-populated territories created an entirely new situation for administrative reforms. In the new context, ethnic issues no longer had to be taken into consideration, which was a greenlight for the rational re-organisation of public administration. Benisch suggested reducing the number of counties from 34 to 24. Assuming the permanence of the Trianon borders, he planned to extend the reform to counties unaffected by border changes (Hencz 1973).

Benisch fixed the optimal average population size of counties at 250,000 as a guiding principle of his reform proposals that were also attentive to transport modalities (primarily railway). He sought to gain credibility for his ideas on the introduction of the proposed 24 counties. The county-level reform was to be complemented with the settlement of the territorial delimitation of districts. Benisch, already notorious in administrative and political circles, provoked enormous outrage among the leaders of the counties to be truncated. Envisioning a 'county Trianon' triggered by the reform led to a wholesale rejection of Benisch's ideas by the county leaders.

Gyula Prinz studied the pre-reform position of the county-level administration and county seats in terms of transport geography. He designated the position of almost each county seat (excluding 'shadow county seats', such as Kiszombor). He prepared one- and two-hour isochrone maps for each county seat, and demonstrated the irrationality of the existing system of county seats and centres that took neither the size of the population nor the costs into account.

To determine the size of counties, Prinz sketched isochrones for one- or two-hour railway transit for each of the 24 new county seats that he designated. In his

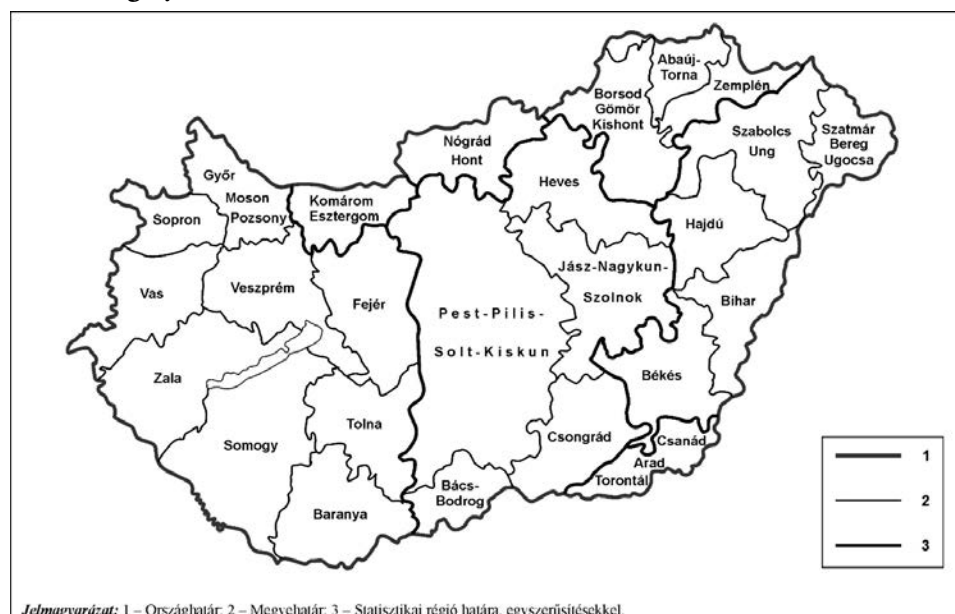
view, the new territorial division of counties and their centres was rational, and was capable of fulfilling the interests of the state, the counties, and the population in general. A greater proportionality in the territorial division of Transdanubia and the Great Plain was also among the objectives of his reform proposal.

In his regional administrative reform concept, in addition to Budapest functioning as the centre of a Central region extending from north to south, he identified Győr, Székesfehérvár, and Pécs in Transdanubia, and Szeged, Debrecen, and Miskolc in the Great Plain, as ideal macro-regional centres. Prinz, unlike Benisch, was unknown in administrative and political circles, thus his draft received no objection (Hajdú 2000).

Eventually, the governmental majority provided a temporary solution for counties torn asunder by the border, by silently merging the county fragments remaining in Hungary.

Figure 8

### Hungary's administrative division after the 1923 territorial correction

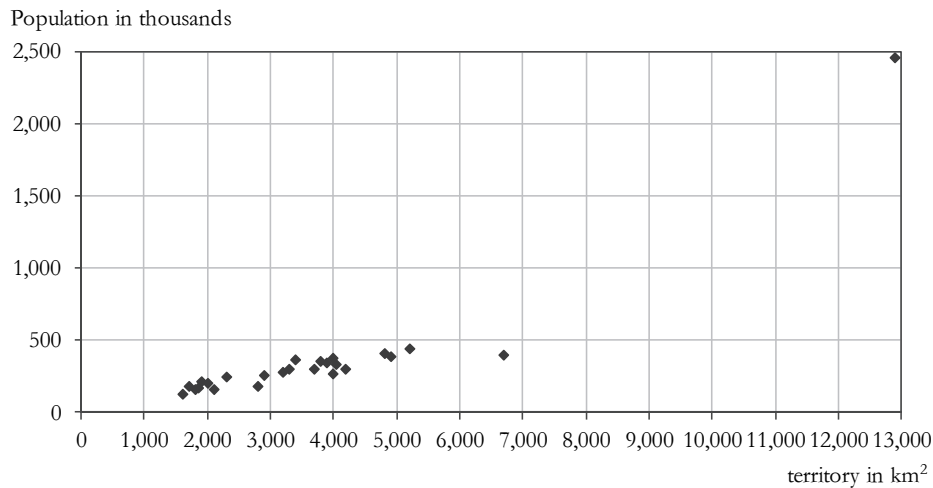


Source: Hajdú (2001).

A glimpse at the extent of territorial correction indicates that Trianon put a major obstacle for territorial administrative reform. Large and intact 'inner counties', in order to protest against their truncation, claimed that the Trianon tragedy of the country should not lead to the 'Trianon of the counties.'

Figure 9

**Differences in the territorial and population size of the counties  
(including municipal towns), 1923**



*Source:* Hajdú (2001).

By the end of 1923, the Hungarian Statistical Year Register had registered 12 municipalities, 41 corporate towns, 161 districts, 734 district notaries, 1,038 large villages, 2,376 small villages, and 9,161 statistically recorded heathlands, yards, and other inhabited areas.

## Conclusions

WW1 military defeat sealed the fate of the igniter, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the Trianon Peace Treaty changed the state of the country in every aspect.

The war led to the demise of historic Hungary. Hungary gained independence and sovereignty as a new nation-state, became unitary in terms of state structure and radically transformed its central state administration.

The ethnic composition of the state's population underwent a fundamental transformation, from a multi-ethnic country to one of the most homogenous states in the region.

The new state borders resulted in counties, districts, towns, and villages being split into two or more parts.

The settlement network also changed fundamentally and Budapest became more important than before.

Counties remained key stakeholders in the organisation of territorial administration. In 1923, the Hungarian political elite had neither the courage nor the will to undertake more than a temporary merging of the truncated counties and

county fragments, preferring not to tamper with the counties left intact by Trianon. This indicates an obvious connection between the transitional nature of the territorial administrative division and the outspoken claims for territorial revision.

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