



## **The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – ‘The Prison of Folks’?**

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**Abstract:** Some of the Middle-Danube-Valley politicians, who were yearning for their independent state, called the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the ‘the prison of folks’. Despite this, the contemporary sociologist Oszkár Jászi saw a real chance in the current historical realities for it to become the ‘Switzerland of the East’. The author drafts the history of this region in the era of dualism, with special attention to the historical self-view, to the national identity-consciousness, and to the stereotyped view on neighborhood.

The different legal status and the regional differences in development between the Monarchy’s dozen nationalities became resources for many conflicts. (See Musil’s novel: *The man without attributes*.)

The leading position of the ruling German policy in the Empire was declining in the 1870s and after the failure of the Czech trialist experiment the Empire had to face a continuous fight with the Slavic majority over the Leitha and with Italian irredentism. (The quasi autonomy given in Galicia to get the Polish political support is a unique situation, which led to the Ukrainian majority’s oppression in the above mentioned region.) It was not a solution to extend the language law, nor were the election rights given for men in 1907, nor the concept of personal autonomy planned by Karl Renner (see the Moravian agreement in 1905, and later in Bukovina), nor the many federalist views (for example that of the Czech F. Palacký, the Romanian A. Popovici, the Croatian S. Radić, the Slovak M. Hodža). It was too late in 1918 to put into practice this latter one.

During the heroic freedom fights in 1848/49, the Hungarians were opposed by the other nationalities living on the territory of Hungary, which nationalities mainly became tools in the hands of Vienna. The mutual discontent couldn’t be healed by the law of equality nor by the wide religious and cultural autonomies or by the uniquely liberal law of

nationalities of 1868. The Croatians – enjoying wide political autonomy – were following federal/separatist goals. The Romanians’ growth in number, who became the majority in Transylvania, became a basic argument in the struggle for the new Romanian state; the same happened in Serbia, the inhabitants of which were living close to the southern borders of the Empire. The Hungarian fears of the pan-Slavic ambitions were fed by the czarist Russia’s intervention in Hungary in 1849. These circumstances did not serve the possibility of a political compromise. Certain actions (media trials, change of names and place names into Hungarian, and the so called Lex Apponyi, devised to support the official language in elementary schools) made to slow down the nationalities’ propaganda were actually fuelling the resistance of nationalities. Forcing the official language brought a catastrophic result: 20% of the nationalities were able to understand Hungarian.

The 5% Israelite minority was in a very specific position: they stepped on the road of full assimilation after the emancipation acts of 1849 and 1895. Catalysing the modernisation procedures they became the biggest winners of the capitalist circumstances and with this the moral scapegoat as well. See the anti-Semitism of the Austrian G. Schönerer and Lueger, of the Hungarian Istóczy and of the rural mob of the nationalities.

Having in mind all of the above, it is interesting that in the neighbouring states were watching Saint Stephen’s nation as a ‘Jewish plutocrat’ Hungary.

Nevertheless, it is without doubt that the nationalist tensions reached an extreme peak during the period between the World Wars, and the region became a buffer zone for the major powers after the brutal dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Monarchy successfully fulfilled the role of integration in the fields of economy and culture (the GDP was quadrupled over half a century); and it offers an example to follow in cooperation among nations despite the differing interest and preconceptions. Based on this, it is not an overstatement to see the Monarchy as a miniaturised prefiguration of the European Union.

**Keywords:** Habsburg Empire, loyalty, pan-Slavism, magyarisation.

The revolutions in 1848 damaged spectacularly the immovable authority of the Habsburg Empire. The defeat by the Hungarian ‘Honvéd’ Army, which was defending the constitutional law, in the spring of 1849 was especially painful. This pain fell into oblivion just with the ‘friendly help’ (military intervention) of Russia. Ten years later, the Empire had to retreat from the French-Piedmont alliance. Finally, in 1866 – after a very quick and ignominious defeat – it was pushed out from the German Alliance by Prussia. With these, the Habsburgs were moved from the Western European centre of power to the Eastern European periphery.

In its hopeless situation the dynasty made a compromise in 1867 with the Hungarian noble elite, which had been passively countering the power of the Monarchy under the decades long retaliation and autocracy (thus offering an example for the later established Irish Sinn Féin). In a critical moment it proved tactical and moderate, because it did not take advantage of its position. So, the Austro-Hungarian

Empire was established, and as its foreign minister said: “...the German and Hungarian elements jointed against the Pan-Slavism” (Vadász 1998: 233).

Naturally, not everyone was happy with this result of the long talks. In 1866, the participants of the Slavic conference in Vienna supported the idea of a federal state made up of five components. The unsuccessful representatives of the imperial centralism were overshadowed, but the supporters of federalism became dissatisfied as well because, led by the resigned prime minister Belcredi, they wanted to build the empire’s future on the conservative, religious and respectful Slavic majority.

While the new public law system represented the power relations at that moment, it proved to be a complex and rigid structure. There were 2 parliaments, one in Vienna and one in Budapest, the ministries with strategic importance, such as the ministry of foreign affairs, the ministry of war and the ministry of finance (which financed the first two) came under a common government. However these offices were not held accountable to a superior imperial parliament but only to delegations comprising 60-60 people, which meant that actually they were overseen by the ruler himself. This structure bore several dysfunctions. These appear in the ironic work of Robert Musil, ‘The Man Without Qualities’. In this novel he refers to Austria-Hungary as Kakanian (derived from the German abbreviation K und K – kaiserlich und königlich), which country, although constitutional, is virtually controlled by the emperor by ‘manual override’. Although it features a parliamentary system, its parliament is closed most of the time (at least the one in Vienna) due to the obstruction of the opposition. At first glance the ethnic conglomerate of the Danube Valley did not constitute an economic and political unity, and it could be described as having loose internal cohesion. It was held together by the loyalty to the ruler dynasty, by the large military, the aristocracy, the clergy and by bureaucracy. The fear of an imperial Germany and an expansive Russia served as a cohesive force as well.

The challenges of modernisation for regions with dissimilar level of development resulted in an unequal competition, which meant unevenly proportioned shares from the collective achievements. It is without doubt that behind the criticism formulated by gentilitarian politicians – which pertains to the dualist system, to the democratic forms of separation of powers, to social justice – lay the demand for positional and economic benefits. It follows that the biggest problem of the dualist Monarchy was nationalism, which invigorated the Western nation states, but acted as a destructive force all along in the case of Austria-Hungary.

This is the reason why I choose the relations between the different nations living on the territory of the empire, the history of cohabitation and conflicts as the guide-lines of my reasoning. And I cite – with some polarised intention – those South Slavic and Czech politicians, who with the purpose of building an

independent state and of convincing the Western public opinion called the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the 'prison of folks'. But was it really?

The conflicts and feelings of dislike had had without doubt a wide historical background, and unless we remember these, our question can not be answered. For this reason we have to look back on the tragic battle of Mohács, in 1526. As a result of that, the country broke into three parts. (These were the Ottoman occupation zone, the Transylvanian Principality, led in those times by the Hungarian majority, and the remaining Kingdom in North-West.) One group of the Hungarian nobles offered the throne of Saint Steven to the Habsburgs, who were relatives of the Árpád-dynasty on the female line. This was supposed to give a bigger chance to repel the Ottoman army. But during the two-hundred years long war against the Ottoman Empire the remaining parts of Hungary was kept as a theatre of war, or the peaceful territories as pillage. However, in this struggle the Hungarians, who lived mainly on the lowlands, had to bring a tremendous blood sacrifice, and became minority in their own country. The earlier not really numerous minorities were able to survive the permanent war in the more secure mountain areas on the peripheries. The Viennese government tried to strengthen the defence forces by resettlements, which was supposed to increase the treasury incomes as well on this abandoned territory. Consequently, the Hungarians were disadvantaged for about a half a century compared to the Catholic Germans and Orthodox Serbs. Moreover, the so called 'frontier/border guard' was organised from the privileged Serbs, Croatians, Romanians and Albanians, to supervise them. So, this *divide et impera* policy was very effective against the Hungarians, who were rebelling for their constitutional law and religious-political rights.

The confrontation started to ease when the Germanist policy of the ongoing absolute monarchy pushed the inner nationalities to ask for the alliance of the Hungarians. But the nationalism that appeared in civilian movements polarised the clashes. The Hungarian gentry – based on their political experience gained in public administration – started a legal struggle in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the modernisation and democratisation of the country. This period, also called as the 'Reform era', achieved spectacular results. These could be attributed mainly to their programme of common burden sharing, in which they gave up voluntarily their privileges. This period is also the era of the 'national awakening' of the different nations of the Empire, who were looking in quite an ambivalent way at the reformer Hungarians: as examples to follow, but they used them to form an image of the enemy to shape their national characteristics as well.

The forming national consciousness of the Croatians, Slovaks and Serbs was largely influenced by their place of origin. They started to mention the Hungarians, who entered the Carpathian basin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as a kind of barbarian horde which pulled apart the peaceful Slavic people into three parts. It is not accidental that many (re)unification and independence plans started to form in this period;

these considered the Russian Empire as the only sovereign from the point of view of leadership or support.

The pan-Slavic doctrines advertised by Jan Kollár and others were inspiring for the domestic nationalities and threatening for the Hungarians, who were able to gain some experience of the ‘Pax Russica’ when the freedom fights in 1849 were put down with Russian help. (The Hungarian literature of this period was enslaved to the vision of the death of the nation.)

The nationalities’ intellectuals bolstered the equality with the Hungarians not just with the demographic power of the Slavic people but – in the spirit of romanticism – with their aristocratic origin. Opposite to the Hungarians’ Hunnish-Turk origins, the Slovaks clung onto the idea of the Big Moravian Empire created by the Franks; the Croats used the conception of a Roman-Illyrian pool; the Romanians connected themselves with the militant Dacians. (This last nation did not pass to identify themselves as the successors of the Roman culture in Eastern Europe.)

In a little while, however, they applied some pragmatic political programs: parallel with the Daco-Roman-Romanian continuity theory worked out by Greek-Catholic priests the so called ‘Great Romania’ unification programme was created in 1838 in Walachia, which was under Turkish and Russian control and which counted on the break-away of Transylvania.

The Serbian Minister of Interior, Ilija Garašanin, wrote very tactically in 1844 that the Hungarian efforts for independence had to be supported because without the Austrians it would be easier to take away those border areas which were partly populated by Serbs. (To support this approach, the linguist Vuk Karadžić wrote some basic ideology, namely the ‘svi i svuda’, which means ‘everybody, anywhere’, meaning that every soil is Serbian if even just one Serb lives there.)

At the same time when Garašanin’s plans emerged, in 1844, the Hungarian parliament accepted the law introducing the Hungarian as official language, exchanging the earlier used Latin. This decision caused a huge outcry among the nationalities. We quote István Széchenyi, the ‘greatest Hungarian’, who talking about the assimilation warned that showing a good example would attract other nationalities and induce them to join Hungary voluntarily. (A good example for this is the Galician Jews’ rapid integration and existential and legal advancement.)

Despite the above mentioned difficulties it is hard to explain why the domestic nationalities decided to turn against the first responsible Hungarian government’s democratic decisions – confirmed by the king – in 1848. (For example the autonomous Banat – Croatian – government didn’t announce the law of March: it introduced its provisions with great celebrations in Croatia.)

We know two reasons of that. The first one was the personal rights which were offered in the framework of liberalism freely and independently from mother tongue or religion. However, the Serbs, Romanians and Slovaks claimed collective

rights, which were unacceptable in the unfavourable demographic position of the Hungarians and in the midst of the theoretical/realistic threat of Pan-Slavism. The other reason without doubt was the cynical politics of Vienna. The nationality leaders were probably pressurised to stand up against the Hungarians, and shortly, with their help the violent busting of the legitimate Hungarian government started. One of the contemporaries, Karl Marx rated the situation too, saying that the nationalities opposing the democrat Hungarians became a comfortable tool in the hands of the Viennese reaction. Indeed, a heroic struggle started formally with the attack of the Serb-Croatian border guard regiments, in which fight the Hungarian defence forces defeated the world's strongest army. But there were some very painful scenes, for example the Serb and Romanian free troops' terror activities turned into genocide. (Such were the atrocities of the guerrillas in Old-Serbia against the Hungarian inhabitants of Szenttamás, Tiszaföldvár and Zenta, or the massacre committed by Romanian insurgents in Zalatna. These and some other very similar actions naturalised the terms 'wild rác' and 'wild oláh' in Hungarian language, which were strengthened by the chronicles of the past massacres in Yugoslavia.) We do not claim that there were no sanctions from the Hungarian side, but we have to qualify the statements of A. J. P. Taylor, who wrote the monograph about the Monarchy, as very hostile; he pronounced that the overheated nationalist Hungarians led by Kossuth "convinced the Hungarian soldiers that they were able to defend the country in just one way: by killing everyone who doesn't speak their language" (Taylor 1998: 96). We deny this too, because the Germans living in the country were on the side of the Hungarians (except for those who lived in Transylvania), as was the crucial majority of Jews and Slovaks. Excellent Serb, Croatian, Romanian and Austrian officers were serving in the general staff. Besides this, in 1849 Kossuth was able to bind a peace agreement with the Romanian representatives. In the decades of the emigration he promoted the concept of a Danubian Confederation, which was offered by him as the opposite of the dualist solution.

The bothersome remembrance of 1848 and 1849 was shadowing the relations between Hungarians and non-Hungarians. However, the national movements earned reward with the same actions which brought punishment to the Hungarians: some leaders of the nationalities were honoured and the territorial unit called 'Vajdaság' was established in Serbia.

Military administration and an informer system was introduced and the usage of the German language was enforced in public administration. (The newly formed province, where the Serbians gave just one quarter of the inhabitants, was standing only for eleven years and it was practically governed from Vienna.)

The officers of the Hungarian noble administration who acted against the new absolutism were replaced mostly by ones brought from the 'eternal provinces'. (The mainly Czech and Slovenian 'Bach hussars', who were dressed up in

Hungarian style clothes, gained their nickname from the fearful Minister of Interior.)

If we consider unfair the comments of the Austrian historian, Erik Zöllner, about the compromise talks, namely that in his opinion “it was not possible to keep up with and satisfy the Hungarians”, it has to be stated that the Hungarian political elite, which found a berth in 1867, judged its opportunities wrongly in long term.

Against the liberal political experiments it adhered – based on the western nation states’ example – to the model of the ‘Hungarian political nation’. So, based on the eight hundred years of ‘commonwealth’ it accepted only the Croatian nation’s political equality and provided for them wide autonomy, secured by the Hungarian-Croatian compromise in 1868. This agreement meant the maximum of concessions for Hungarians but at the same time the minimum for the Croatian partner. Against the nations which were called by Otto Bauer as ‘nations without history’, the Hungarians emphasised their own capability of state organisation and the blood sacrifice they brought defending their sovereignty in the past.

This way of thinking is visible in the law on nationalities of 1868. Half of the politicians who took part in the drafting of the law, which process took up a few years, were experts in matters related to nationalities. Despite of this, some of their suggestions – for example the proportional representation – did not come into force based on the above mentioned reasons. These would have caused, according to the Hungarian side a serious danger to the state’s territorial integrity. Altogether, we can say that this law served the reconciliation, and considering the contemporary Europe, it gave the nationalities cultural and linguistic rights to a uniquely great extent. Taylor wrote in his monograph, with the exaggerations typical to him, that “it is a great law and it is a pity that no points of it came to fruition” (Taylor 1998:160).

In imperial Austria, on the other side of the river Leitha, the inter-ethnic relations were characterised by more conflicts and at the same time by more compromises as well. Local nationalities, the more bourgeois and resolute Czechs, Poles and Italians had achieved those against the will of the German minority, which composed only one third of the population. Their movement’s legal ground was provided by the liberal 19<sup>th</sup> act of 1867, which guaranteed the preservation of national identity and culture for all ethnicities within the Empire.

At the beginning the forces were balanced. The German liberals, who formed the Constitutional Party were controlling state and economic positions, although with 62% of the population Slavs made up the majority in the ‘Hereditary Lands’ in 1910. Yet proportionally it was the Germans who paid the most tax and demanded political leadership with assertiveness of an imperial master. With the help of the election system (so called ‘curialis system’) they could maintain their majority of two thirds in the parliament. However, despite their privileged situation they were quickly supplanted from power. Their fall was brought by the economic

crisis of 1873, which questioned their economic and political competence at the very same time.

After temporary insecurity, the coalition of 'Iron ring' was formed, which remained in power for an unusually long period of fourteen years. The basis of the Taaffe-government (as it was often called) were the Catholic peasants, who were loyal to the dynasty. This basis consisted mainly of Czech, Polish, Slovenian and Croatian conservative parties, whose support was linked to political concessions. Because of the above this period's also called 'messing around' brought moral decline in politics. After the failure of the 'trialist' attempt in 1871, the approximately 6 million Czechs boycotted work in both the Prague based provincial and in the imperial parliament of Vienna. Following several street riots they received broad official language rights in the partially German populated Bohemian-Moravian Highlands and they returned to parliamentary work. A Czech language university was founded and with the help of central investments an advanced industry was also created, while living on western European living standards. On the top of these the so called young Czechs have consciously built their western diplomatic network.

For supporting the government the 5 million Poles were granted with the government of Galicia, where they achieved spectacular successes, among others the assimilation of Ukrainians and Jews, while at the same time provided many prime ministers and common (k.u.k.) ministers. Although the one million Italians in Istria and Dalmatia were preferred to the Slavic majority living in the mentioned areas, they consistently pursued unification with other Italian populated areas.

For the one million Slovenes, who were partially germanised anyway, less would have sufficed. Yet the cancellation on behalf of the local German population of the secondary school in Celje promised by the government turned them too against the government. Later they formed the so called 'South Slavic Club' with the Croatian representatives and with some outside support from the Czech.

The majority of the Germans loathed the central government of nationalities, and abandoning their liberalism supported Georg von Schönerer's anticlerical and anti-Semitic nationalists, and the pan-German idea.<sup>1</sup> The political antagonisms which broke the 'iron ring' brought frequent government crises. The emperor Franz Joseph I had some hard times finding the new supporters of dualism: the social democrats, who were using revolutionary phraseology yet were loyal to the dynasty, and the anti-Semitic Christian democrats.

This left leaning approach was supportive for a more flexible treatment of nationalities. Two respected party leaders, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer worked out their concept for mixed population areas, later to be known as personal autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that the programme was made by two Jewish party-members, Otto Bauer and Heinrich Friedjung, who were later removed from the party.



This concept was successfully introduced in 1905 in the Czech-German populated Moravia, followed by Ukrainian-Romanian populated Bukovina in 1910. This concept has somewhat eased ethnic tensions. As a result of increasing pressure exercised by nationalist and pro-governmental parties, general male suffrage was introduced in 1907. This step failed to bring sensible results as in Transleithania only two elections were held. As a result of the intensifying arms race, the aging Franz Joseph often resorted to his special authority: for example, following an opposition victory in Hungary he ordered the planning of a military occupation of the country. International relations worsened in the closer vicinity too. In the 1880s and around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Austria-Hungary fought a custom war with both Romania and Serbia, which pursued a ‘national unification’ strategy. As a result of the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Bosnia-Herzegovina was occupied by the Monarchy. Yet the annexation in 1908 was a serious mistake, which invoked the fury of not only the South Slavs, but the involved Turkey’s and Russia’s, the protector of the Slavs as well. Although both Italy and Romania had been members of the central powers since 1882 and 1883 respectively, both expressed their anger and increased nationalist activities. In the wake of these steps the commander in chief of the Austro-Hungarian army, Conrad von Hötzendorf, urged a preventive war on both precarious allies. In hindsight he had been right since in World War I both stabbed the Dual Monarchy in the back.

The dynastic occupation increased the inner national tensions as well. After failing to achieve a greater Croatian unification, Croatia turned towards Yugoslavism as a consequence; Hungarians resented the condominium status of Bosnia-Herzegovina since the annexation was carried out referring to medieval royal Hungarian legal precedent. Yet even at that time it was not the illogical annexation at stake, which further increased the number of minorities in the Dual Monarchy, but the very existence of the Empire. No matter how many plans were made by bureaucrats close to the heir-to-the-throne to restructure the Dual Monarchy into a federation, Charles IV was late. In 1918 it was way too late to reform the dualist structure. Austria-Hungary was washed away by the forces unleashed in 1914 following the assassination in Sarajevo.

The accomplished essayist Ferenc Fejtő wrote in his monograph: “... *the dual monarchy has not collapsed, but was decomposed intentionally*” (Fejtő 1997: 19) by the forces of French megalomania and Italian, Romanian, Serbian nationalism. It is symbolic that at the beginning of the epoch the leader of the ‘Old Czech’ party, the historian Palacký wrote that had the Dual Monarchy not existed, it would have to be invented in the own interest of smaller nations. His young compatriot Edvard Beneš, covering his real intentions with the Wilson’s principles issued the destructive directive on his western campaign: “Destroy Austria-Hungary!” The state which secured stability in Middle-Europe; where in half a century the GDP quadrupled, truth to be said not proportionally; the state with a free press; where

culture flourished; where a number of global innovations were patented; where contrary to the new states there was neither double oppression nor economical discrimination.<sup>2</sup> Where ‘magyarisation’ was so ‘strong’ that only 23% of the minorities spoke the state language. Where Alexandru Vaida-Voevod could call the Magyars “law defying scum from Asia”<sup>3</sup> in the Parliament of Budapest (of course) unpunished. Years later the very same person, as a leader of Greater Romania set his former fatherland’s democratic system as an example to his Trans-Carpathian Romanian brothers.<sup>4</sup> And maybe that is the point! All people lost something with the collapse of the Dual Monarchy, yet not all of them realised it at the moment of the breakup. And not only the Magyars feel this way, ripped to six pieces by the Treaty of Trianon. The Magyars, who were the most numerous minority in Europe until 1991 with 3 million compatriots living outside the fatherland, making Hungary the only country on the continent that is surrounded by itself.

Cooperation among people at different levels of development and mentality was not free of conflicts, yet living together for centuries created historical interdependence. Within the Empire cultural and economic interactions created stronger ties among different nationalities than those with their relatives living on the other side of the border, especially with those who were socialized in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Centuries old division of labour and a huge imperial market, protected by customs has also created a kind of material unity of interests. We do not agree with sociologist and Minister of National Minorities Oszkár Jászi, who called the coexistence of ethnicities within the Dual Monarchy simply a “vegetative symbiosis of nationalities”<sup>6</sup>. Truth to be said, the dual state indeed lacked the constructive dynamism of homogenous nation states’ nationalism.

But was it really a ‘prison of nations’? Self reflexion is needed since as we saw the Dual Monarchy was not perfect. Yet it is a typical example of Marxist internationalist and legalist tradition. The successor states, responsible for tearing

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the above, in the successor states only Hungarian and German lands were confiscated as part of land reforms, and they paid quadruple taxes in Yugoslavia. – Arday Lajos: *Magyarok a Délvidéken, Jugoszláviában.* – Budapest, 2002. BIP. – p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> See Bíró Sándor: *Kisebbségben és többségben: románok és magyarok (1867-1940).* – Bern, 1989. *Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem*, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> A similar situation happened to Stjepan Radić and to the Serb Svtozar Pribičević, who had burnt Hungarian flags as students, yet later felt more fellowship with the people of the deceased Dual Monarchy than with their own brethren from the former Ottoman Empire.

<sup>5</sup> It is not a coincidence that citizens of the Serb Kingdom suspiciously referred to their brethren living in Hungary as *prečani* meaning someone infected with a harmful dose of tolerance. After World War I, in the newly created Greater Romania it was the Romanian inhabitants of the annexed Erdély (Transylvania) who suffered setbacks even though they were more developed economically and more civilised than their Transcarpathian brethren of the motherland.

<sup>6</sup> The Prime Minister Jozef Redlich and Karl Renner, who were both experts in minorities had an opposing opinion, along with general Conrad von Hötzendorf.

the Empire apart are also uninterested in a dialectic approach. Even for legitimacy causes. (It is probably no coincidence that their neighbourhood policies are still based on the psychosis: “I hurt you therefore I am insulted”, with a not well disguised anti-magyarism.<sup>7</sup>)

Any objective bystander should come to the conclusion, especially after so many decades, that the peace created by the victorious Entente has not solved the problems of East-Central Europe, the region with mixed ethnicity. As a side note we have to add it has not even wanted to solve them! The similarly multi-ethnic successor states turned inside, their autocratic steps and rude homogenising efforts<sup>8</sup> caused ever worsening relations among the nations in the region. So the stage was set for German, later Soviet expansion. The collapse of the three really multi-ethnic successors in the region (Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) shows the disgraceful failure of the Parisian peace system.

Yet the patriarchal aura of the golden ages, the legendary link between East and West is still radiated by the buildings of that era: train terminals, theatres, administrative buildings, coffee houses, baths from Sarajevo to Lemberg (Lviv), from Brassó (Braşov, Kronstadt) to Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) and Trieste.

The dual monarchy with all its contradictions held the promise of an ‘Eastern Switzerland’ yet the selfishness of its political elites and the fear of dismemberment have kept it from becoming a federal democracy. Her ageing beauty can not be overshadowed even by the European Union, even though we hope that in the area of integration the EU reaches further than the one-time Austro-Hungarian Empire.

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<sup>7</sup> To quote Tacitus: “They hate whom they have offended.” Well after getting more than two thirds of Hungary, her neighbours are still afraid of any chance of autonomy, fearing the return of annexed territories. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to aggression. It is the rule of psychology.

<sup>8</sup> Their tools included confiscation of goods, limiting cultural and language rights, collective disfranchisement (see Beneš-decrees), forced relocation, moreover genocide. (In Yugoslavia, Tito’s partisans killed tens of thousands of Hungarian civilians in the winter of 1944/45). Currently even the completely Hungarian populated Csallóköz and Székelyföld (Seklerland) are banned from autonomy. All Slovakian and Romanian governments have resisted and still resist such ‘subversive’ intentions. Apart from these, some states were successful in homogenisation. After World War II, Poland and Czechoslovakia managed to evict almost 10 million Germans. Croatia chased away hundreds of thousands of Serbs with the complicity of the West in Operation Oluja (Storm). Even though after years of procrastination the leader of that, general Ante Gotovina was tried at the International Court in Hague, the result remains the same.

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