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### WHY SHOULD TRIANON BIND ONLY HUNGARIANS?

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June 4, 2006

Montenegro's declaration of independence from Serbia on June 3, 2006, is but the latest nail in the coffin of the long-crumbling, outdated and superseded post-World War I peacemaking, including the Treaty of Trianon. Arguably the most severe of all the post-World War I settlements,<sup>1</sup> one is struck by how ephemeral the artificial progeny of the ill-conceived Treaty of Trianon really was. Two of the new states cobbled together by the victorious Entente "peacemakers" at Versailles ceased to exist years ago, and even part (Moldova) of the third successor state succeeded to gain its independence it never had before. Ironically, the winds of change that swept through the region and rearranged the old Cordon Stalinaire after 1989, left untouched the very people who have suffered the most under a punitive treaty – the thousand plus year old indigenous Hungarian communities living under the rule of states that are mostly different from those stipulated at Trianon 86 years ago.

To be sure, the Treaty of Trianon, better described as a diktat, solved nothing, as problems surfaced even before the ink had dried. The newly minted states of Czecho-Slovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), and a greatly enlarged Rumania acquired large numbers of national minorities that quite naturally resented the harsh treatment that was meted out to them. Conflict also quickly developed between the victorious parties.

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<sup>1</sup>Ostensibly in the name of national self-determination, the Treaty of Trianon dismembered the thousand-year-old Kingdom of Hungary, a self-contained, geographically and economically coherent and durable formation in the Carpathian Basin and boasting the longest lasting historical borders in Europe. It was imposed on Hungary without any negotiation by vengeful leaders who were ignorant or ignored the region's history, and mercilessly tore that country apart. By drawing artificial borders in gross violation of the ethnic principle, it also transferred over three million indigenous ethnic Hungarians and over 70% of the country's territory to foreign rule. Following the war to make the "world safe for democracy," the Treaty even denied the affected populations the right to choose under whose sovereignty they would live. Only the city of Sopron in western Hungary was allowed a plebiscite to decide its future, and it opted by a large margin to remain in Hungary. Although the peacemakers included provisions for the protection of minorities in various international instruments they insisted the successor states sign, the latter generally ignored their promises.

The Slovaks complained of discrimination by Prague, while the Croats resented Belgrade's domination. Stjepan Radic of the Croatian Peasant Party was interned for petitioning the peace conference for Croatian autonomy and was later shot in parliament.

The new European order imposed in 1920 and then re-imposed in the 1947 Paris peace treaty (by which truncated Hungary had to cede further territory to Czechoslovakia), collapsed almost within months at the end of the Cold War. One ethnic group after another throughout the region unceremoniously ignored the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon by seizing the opportunity to realize their own objectives to exercise external self-determination, even as they denied internal self-determination to their Hungarian co-nationals. Although not without some accompaniment of horrendous ethnic cleansing and Western objections against secession, Slovenians, Croatians, Macedonians, and Albanians escaped Belgrade's stranglehold. Finally, the Montenegrins have now also embarked on the path to independence. Kosovo, too, appears headed toward achieving either full autonomy or independence. Slovaks broke out of Trianon and Prague's perceived dominance in the peaceful divorce of 1993 – cavalierly ignoring (at best) the status of the compact Hungarian community living north of the Danube in southern Slovakia.

Ironically, none of these peoples can point to a historically better grounded basis for their aspirations than the indigenous Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin. Although these other peoples were allowed to successfully exercise the right of self-determination and in so doing drastically change the map of Central and Eastern Europe, the partitioned Hungarians stand alone still “bound” by the grossly unfair Treaty of Trianon.<sup>2</sup>

The Hungarian historical communities continue to chafe as minorities in the newly divided post-Trianon successor states. The primary issue is that they are still living with the stifling Trianon *status quo* that threatens their very identity, as they are denied a range of minority and collective rights, including cultural or territorial autonomy. Even the current post-communist Rumanian government, for example, refuses to restore the Hungarian language university in Kolozsvar (Cluj) that had been forcibly eliminated by Ceausescu. Meanwhile,

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<sup>2</sup> Czechoslovakia unilaterally changed its border with Hungary (as drawn at Trianon) when it diverted the Danube in the 1990's.

Hungarians of Vojvodina, that had historically never been part of Serbia, face mounting pressure from extremist Serbs, and there seems to be little hope for the restoration of the province's autonomy that Milosevic had eliminated even before he destroyed Kosovo's autonomy. To make matters worse, some 15 years after the sea change following the collapse of the USSR, the number of Hungarians languishing as minorities throughout the region continue to dwindle due to the inhospitable environment that is below European standards.

Despite these circumstances, the current Hungarian government has yet to articulate its vision for a creative diplomatic initiative that would protect the historic Hungarian communities in countries neighboring Hungary. Other than scant generalizations, the government's program presented to the Parliament last week is remarkably silent about concrete foreign policy proposals, such as a strategy to support the Hungarian minorities. Even as Montenegro declares its independence and Kosovo's status remains on the front burner, Budapest appears content to sit on the sidelines and conspicuously refrains from espousing the democratically expressed aspirations of autochthonous Hungarian minorities for autonomy in Vojvodina, Transylvania, Slovakia and Karpatalja (Ruthenia).

As much as they would prefer, Hungary's ruling political elite can neither escape Hungary's history nor the consequences of that history. Clearly, the minorities require both the protection from discrimination and intolerance, as well as positive rights, *i.e.*, cultural, territorial and/or personal autonomy. Defusing tensions by promoting enlightened minority policies would advance both genuine democracy and regional stability, desirable objectives that would serve the interests not only of the Republic of Hungary, but also that of the region, the EU, the US and NATO. Budapest can and should play a pivotal role in advancing these interests by stepping forth without hesitation and apology and providing effective support in multilateral and bilateral fora for the legitimate aspirations of their Hungarian kin for autonomy – a precondition for their survival.

Setting out these laudable goals would be a fitting contribution of Budapest to the burial of an inherently unjust diktat whose shackles bind no one by now but the Hungarians.