The Options for a Negotiated Peace in the Danube Region: Hungary and Neighbouring Countries after the 1918 Aster Revolution

László Szarka

The Death Throes of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Collapse of Multinational Hungary

Count Ottokar Czernin (1872-1932), who served as imperial and royal foreign minister for the Habsburg monarchy from December 1916 to April 1918, wrote self-deprecatingly in his memoirs about the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: 'It is of course not possible to say how the collapse of the monarchy would have played out if the war had been avoided [...]. We had to die. We were able to choose the manner of our death, and we chose the worst possible option.'[1]

The Hungarian prime minister Count István Tisza (1861-1918), who was a powerful and symbolic figure in Hungary during the war years, also devoted much thought to the causes of the fateful demise of the Dual Monarchy. In a letter to the Foreign Minister Stephan Burián von Rajecz (1851-1922) on 16 December 1917, he wrote a very critical assessment of what he had learnt of President Woodrow Wilson's (1856-1924) first message of peace: 'We have received official notification of the war of extermination; as long as our enemies insist that this is their purpose in this war, then our very existence is under threat and we must strain every sinew to defend ourselves. Our opponents must make big changes in their approach before we can agree to the kind of peace President Wilson is suggesting.'[2] A year later, on 18 October 1918, he acknowledged the defeat of the Monarchy in the Hungarian parliament and commented that its most important consequence would be the end of Austrian/Hungarian dualism, giving way to a monarchy of personal union and the need for peace negotiations on the basis of President Wilson's principles.[3] In spite of deep divisions among the Hungarian political elites, both the government and the opposition were equally convinced by the end of the war that the opposing parties would reach a peace compromise within the framework of the peace negotiations.[4]

Fig. 1: Count István Tisza, Prime Minister of Hungary 1903-1905 and 1913-1917. He was assassinated during the Aster Revolution on 31 October 1918.

Wilson's peace initiative, drafted between 1916 and 1917, included some extremely daring statements on national self-determination; the important point was, in Wilson's somewhat flowery language, an aspiration to a negotiated peace. Point 10 of his

Fig. 2: Map of the ethnic demography and urban population of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1910, designed by the Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities, 2020.

first peace plan still gives rise to different interpretations. 'We wish to see the place that the peoples of Austria-Hungary hold among the nations protected and secured; they should be allowed the freest opportunity for autonomous development.'[5] There were repeated efforts in Hungary to interpret this statement literally. The opposition parties sympathetic to the Entente and those who supported the peace, and the Social Democrats – not represented in parliament – took it to mean that reform was needed that would lead to internal national autonomy. It is known, however, that Wilson and his Secretary of State Robert Lansing (1864-1928) were constantly altering their plans, until in June 1918 they decided that the solution to the monarchy question was the establishment of independent states.[6]

The political elites in Austria and Hungary did not fully appreciate this until October 1918. Rather than hastily engaging in negotiations with non-Hungarian national groups or trying to create an internal federation, Sándor Wekerle (1848-1924), the last Hungarian Prime Minister for the Dual Monarchy, rejected the federalistic declaration announced by the young king and Emperor Karl (1887-1922) in the manifesto he published on 18 October 1918.[7] In the last few decades, the established consensus has continued to be that there was a wide range of reasons for the demise of the multi-ethnic dynastic empires and the

emergence of multi-ethnic national states in East and Central Europe, and that the momentum and trajectory of the crises were determined both by internal and external political reasons, as well as by social, regional and national factors.[8]

This essay addresses the late Hungarian approach to the ending of the war and the preparations for the negotiated peace; these were designed to consolidate the post-war situation in the hope of giving a positive impetus to inter-ethnic relations within the Hungarian multi-ethnic state. During the war's final stages, an alliance of opposition parties confronted the war policies of Count Tisza and the government of Sándor Wekerle in the Hungarian National Assembly. The king's appointment of János Hadik (1863-1933) as the new prime minister on 27 October did nothing to appease the dissatisfied and radicalised masses. Returning soldiers staged massive demonstrations, riots and strikes, and the so-called Chrysanthemum Revolution then broke out on 28 October. In the midst of the chaotic military and political situation at the end of the war, the Hungarian National Assembly had three principal objectives: an immediate end to the war; the democratic transformation of the country; and a new cooperation between the ethnic nationalities in an independent Hungary in order to achieve a just peace settlement at an international peace conference.[9]

At the end of October, following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, the Kingdom of Hungary's outlook was in many respects complicated, possibly even hopeless. The Hungarian coalition government, which lacked its own army and diplomatic corps and had no international profile on its own account, was facing an especially difficult task both domestically and internationally. The victorious nations made almost weekly territorial claims on the Hungarian People's Republic, established on 16 November.[10]

The Southern Slav nations declared their independence at the end of October and the beginning of November, closely followed by the Czecho-Slovaks and then the Romanians. In the course of preparing for the peace conference, the government of the Hungarian People's Republic suggested a provisional solution in order to prevent a descent into anarchy and possible civil war. The challenge presented by the regional nature of multi-ethnicity in Hungary threatened to cause national disintegration; establishing a federation and autonomy for ethnic groups might have offered a solution. Few politicians could see any other options; the social democrat minister in the Károlyi government, Zsigmond Kunfi (1879-1929), explained that one of the consequences of losing the war was the surrender of the country's non-Hungarian regions. Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi (1875-1955) and the majority of his government hoped that a radical transformation of the country into a kind of 'eastern Switzerland' would satisfy the non-Magyar ethnic groups.[11]

Fig. 3: The Hungarian conservative politician Sándor Wekerle, Prime Minister of Hungary 1892-1895, 1906-1910, 1917-1918, portrait by Gyula Benczúr, 1911.

Hungary as an 'Eastern Switzerland'

In November 1918, the Hungarian Minister of Nationalities Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957), during negotiations with non-Magyar politicians, attempted to formulate a procedure to define a Swiss model for Hungary on the basis of a constitutional proposal. The Károlyi

Fig. 4: 'A Death Song of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy' with reference to the Hungarian Soviet Republic in the form of a man with the Jacobean cap, 1919. The book written by Karl Kraus. The cover illustrated by Mihály Bíró.

government's new 'integrity concept' could, it seemed, be achieved as a federation of autonomous regions on the Swiss model. Jászi promoted this rather than Wilson's self-determination model, which would have led to a compromise granting Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs and Croats self-determination outside the state. Autonomy for the Hungarian nationality groups, the Károlyi government believed, could help consolidation and encourage dialogue with the national assemblies of the non-Magyar nations. Moreover, Jászi was keen to present the ideas as initial proposals to the negotiations at the international peace conference in Paris.

Meanwhile, the country's international position remained a source of tension, as the Entente had not yet recognised the Hungarian People's Republic. This meant, among other things, that '[u]ntil such time as the general peace conference gathers, we wish to establish any institutions and guarantees that will secure the peaceful co-existence of the nationalities of Hungary, without prejudicing future decisions on boundaries.'[12] As minister, Jászi was keenly aware of the national revolutions that had shaken the monarchy, and judged that national autonomy was the only remaining peaceful option to keep the country from disintegration. He saw this system of internal autonomous states as a kind of nationally agreed temporary measure, and made it the central feature of his policy as minister for 'Preparing for the Self-Determination of the Hungarian Nationalities' in the Károlyi government.[13]

In advance of the negotiations in Arad on 13 and 14 November 1918 with the Romanian National Assembly of Transylvania and of the east Hungarian Romanians, the concept of national autonomous nations within a federated state had become generally accepted among members of the Károlyi government and other Hungarian national leaders, regardless of other differences in their political positions, as the last possible option for maintaining internal state cohesion.[14]

The autonomous ethnic regions ('cantons') that Jászi wanted to establish in accordance with the ethnic majority principle in the disputed regions had earlier been considered the principal aim for nationalities within Hungary. By early December, given the country's deepening isolation and increasing military threats, no one on the Hungarian side expected to achieve more than the establishment of a clear

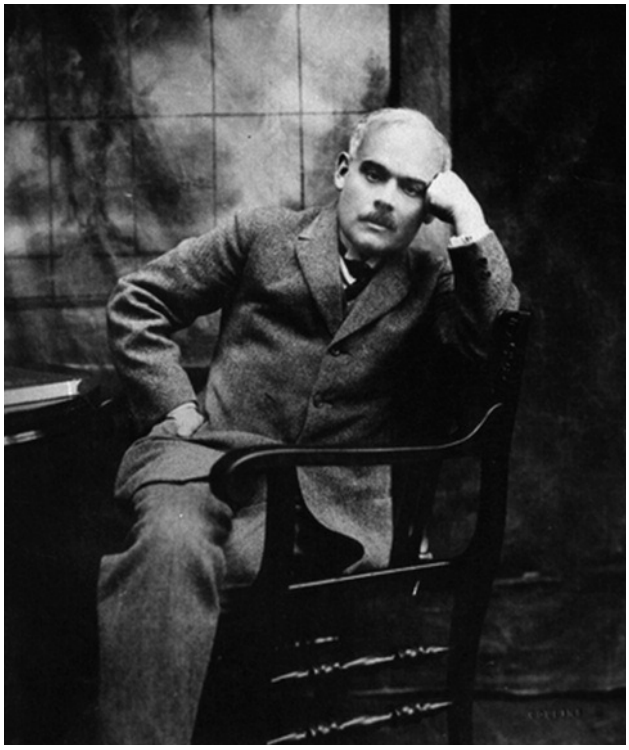

Fig. 5: The social scientist Oszkár Jászi, Hungarian Minister of Nationalities 1918/19.

alternative to the country's division. Alongside this, they also entertained fond hopes for the implications of the principle of national self-determination: 'The government of the Hungarian People's Republic accepts its responsibility as determined by such a decision to grant the right to Romanians, Serbs and Ruthenians living in this country to determine, by plebiscite, which region they wish to attach themselves to.'[15] It is important here to bear in mind the Hungarian preparations for peace at the Nationalities Ministry and the newly established Foreign Ministry in Budapest, which included, as a memo of 8 December makes clear, a proposal that national self-defence should be organised on the basis of individual ethnic regions only.[16]

Jászi's 'temporary measure policy', designed to last until the peace conference met and implemented its decisions, offered each ethnic nation living in Hungary an opportunity to establish appropriate differentiation, as confirmed by opposition parties in the various national regions. The governments in Prague and Bucharest were making every effort to

shape the undertakings of the Entente nations to their own advantage before the peace conference even started; this could only be achieved by presenting a *fait accompli* – in other words, by effecting a military occupation.

Creating Cantons – Hungary as a 'Composite State'

The Károlyi government sought to find a peacefully negotiated solution to the military operations conducted by the Southern Slav, Romanian and Czechoslovakian forces. The troops were aiming to establish a so-called national delimitation by clearly identifying the borders of the regions with a Hungarian majority in Transylvania, and in Southern and Northern Hungary. The Romanian National Assembly in Arad published an ultimatum on 9 November demanding that 26 counties in Transylvania and Eastern Hungary be immediately handed over to Romanian control. The ministry led by Jászi quickly developed its concept of an 'Eastern Switzerland' that would properly and accurately reflect the ethnic reality.

In the negotiations between Hungarians and Romanians on 13 and 14 November 1918, Jászi suggested instituting a temporary measure, valid until the peace conference, and the division of Transylvania into cantons. These measures were to be determined according to the statistics on the different national groups. The Romanian National Assembly in Hungary and Transylvania presented a memorandum to the Hungarian government on 9 November. '[A]ccording to the right to self-determination of national groups and in the interest of our nation (the Romanians in Hungary) and of the minorities who live in the same region to defend public order, their property and their personal safety', it gave the Hungarian government three days to provide an answer. The Romanian

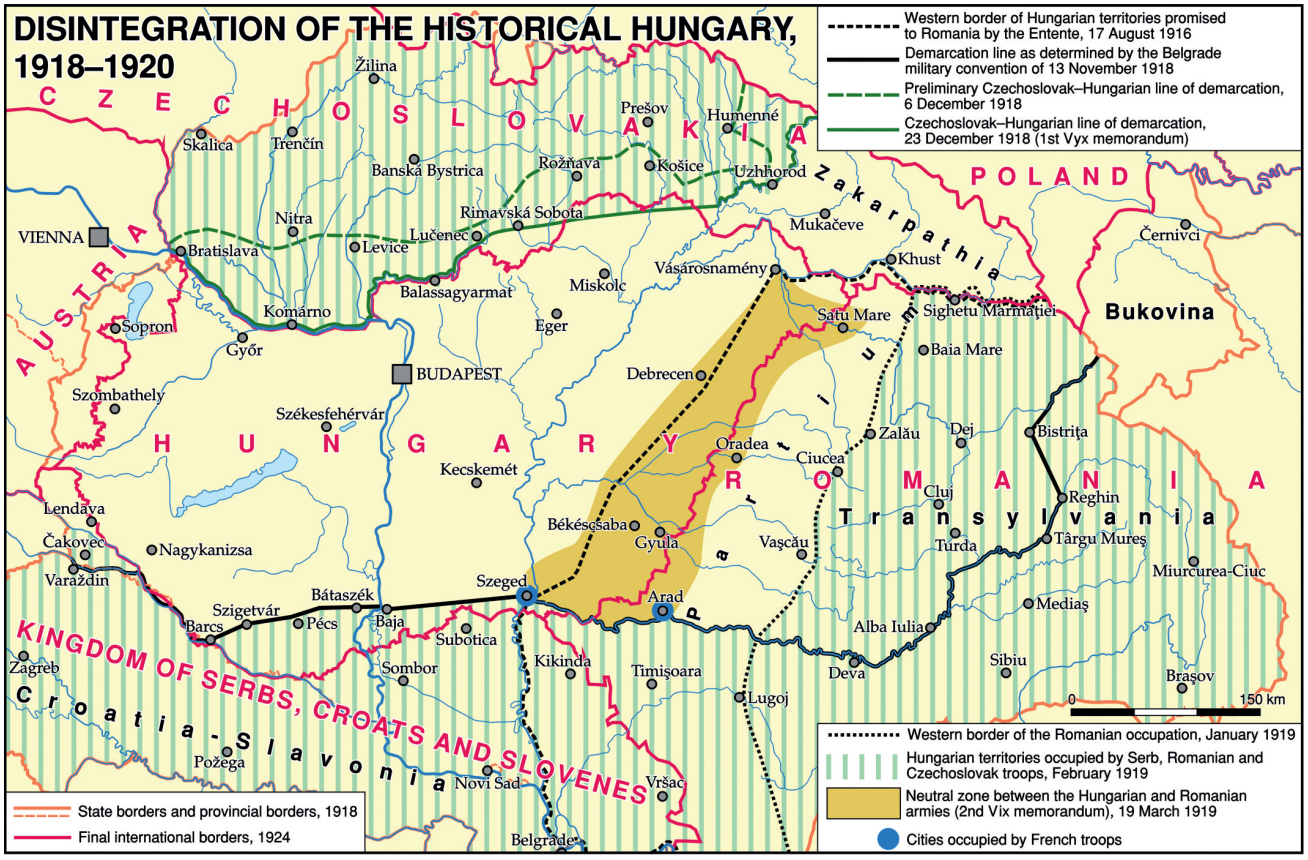

Fig. 6: Map of the disintegration of the historical Hungary, 1918-1920, designed by the Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities, 2020.

ultimatum demanded 'full powers of government' in the 26 Transylvanian and East Hungarian counties.[17] Following a decision by the Hungarian council of ministers on 10 November, Jászi traveled with a delegation to Arad in order to conduct negotiations with members of the Romanian National Assembly to explore solutions to the situation in the light of the ultimatum.[18]

The Hungarian delegation presented two different options in the Arad negotiations. On the first day, Jászi suggested that autonomous Romanian cantons should be established wherever there was a Romanian majority in the region that included the 26 counties claimed by the Romanian National Assembly, whilst also guaranteeing rights of autonomy to the smaller Hungarian-speaking areas. Jászi made a similar suggestion for the Transylvanian and East Hungarian counties that had Hungarian majorities.[19] On the second day of the negotiations, the Romanian delegation turned down the Hungarian suggestion on the grounds that establishing the cantons would be too complicated and would exacerbate the conflicts between national groups. Vasile Goldiş (1862-1934) announced that Jászi's proposal denied the rights of the Romanian people to independence.[20] Jászi maintained that until there was a decision from the peace conference, domestic peace should be secured by means of a temporary agreement. 'If we wish to have peace, then it is unthinkable that we should create a merely temporary situation that will bring harm to Hungarians, Germans, Serbs and Saxons [...].'[21]

Jászi then offered an 11-point statement for shared governance. It proposed that Transylvania and Eastern Hungary should be divided into districts and towns according to ethnic majority, to be under Romanian and Hungarian administration. A joint government commission was to establish the new system of administration.[22] Both Jászi's suggestions were turned down in the Romanian National Assembly. On the second day of the conference, Iuliu Maniu explained that the National Assembly had refused the Hungarian interpretation of the 'Wilsonian principles' because they would give to those in Hungarian enclaves within so-called closed Romanian districts, for example in Transylvania, rights that the Romanians thought appropriate only when given to whole nationality groups and closed national regions.

After the fiasco in Arad, Jászi gave a significantly more realistic assessment of the resolution to the Slovakian question, taking account of the establishment of the Czechoslovakian state: 'As a result of the Czech efforts, it is clear that the Slovakian question too can only be settled at a national peace conference.'[23] At the negotiations in Budapest with Milan Hodža (1878-1944), the delegate of the Czecho-Slovak government, and the delegation from the Slovakian National Assembly, agreement was reached on the likely demarcation line, which would follow the language boundary between Hungarian and Slovak. Following vigorous discussions in the council of Hungarian ministers, Jászi established a plan for a so-called 'Slovak empire'. In essence, this encompassed the five northern counties with an almost exclusively Slovak population, and the majority Slovak districts of the other ten counties in Upper Hungary – 67 districts altogether – which would be placed under Slovakian administration.[24] On 1 December, the Prague government blocked the Budapest negotiations. Three

Fig. 7: The Czech politican Milan Hodža, Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia 1935-1938.

Fig. 8: Symbolical image about the territorial losses of Hungary after the treaty of Trianon, 4 June 1920, contemporary postcard.

agreements on nationalities were already – or nearly – completed and due to be enshrined in law: Ruthenian autonomy in Carpathian Ukraine, Slovenian autonomy of the region Prekmurje and the right of self-determination of the Hungarian Germans. However, given the hopeless political isolation of the Hungarian People's Republic, the prospect of these ever being realised were becoming increasingly dependent on the military situation in the country and the intentions of neighbouring countries.[25]

The Jászi ministry's main aim can be roughly defined as an attempt by Budapest to mitigate the policies of the Western great powers by means of agreements with neighbouring states. Yet Jászi was aware that his Swiss-inspired plan to create cantons would not promote homogeneous language groups or the establishment of an independent state, and that consequently it was unlikely to succeed.[26]

Jászi's aims may not have met with success during the negotiations, but it is important to remember that the ministry had managed within less than a month to elaborate propositions that, had they been carried out in the decades before the outbreak of WWII, would have been acclaimed and declared a revolutionary new solution to Hungary's nationalities question.

Jászi maintained that the provisional Hungarian nationalities policy, which for a brief interim period was to be based on an agreement between national groups, would seek to satisfy three claims. In order to realise the generally respected right to self-determination as defined by Wilson, the offer of cultural and regional autonomy would undoubtedly, by late summer of 1918, have given rise to a revolutionary basis for negotiations. With a settlement that would ensure domestic peace, and a joint plan between then nationalities to ensure public provisioning, there was hope that cooperation between the autonomous elements might become a practical reality. The application of the 'Swiss' model to the state also laid the foundations for the creation of a national pattern of cantons. Enshrining these in law would have given the temporary measures some stability and could have led to the development of self-determination and maintaining the principle of territorial integrity until the peace conference had reached its final decisions. Without either support from the great powers or adoption by the Romanians, the Slovaks, the Serbs or the Transylvanian Saxons, the establishment of an 'eastern Switzerland', even if only for a short interim period, was simply a further example of historic ideas that came too late. The proposed reshaping of Hungary along the lines of a multi-faceted 'composite state' structure suggests that a settlement along ethnic and territorial lines might have been a possible outcome of two-way negotiations at the end of the war. With the advantage of hindsight, it seems that had a definition of borders according to ethnic majorities – the most challenging task in solving the conflicts between nationalities – been carried out in conjunction with 'Swiss autonomies' for minorities, this might have made just as significant a contribution to a negotiated peace as the much-disputed imposition of new borders following a plebiscite. At the end of the war, what counted in terms of politics was not primarily the quality of the recommendations but rather the way in which states, groups and indi-

viduals were able to influence and gain trust at the Paris Peace Conference. As a defeated nation, and as a part of the much maligned Dual Monarchy, Hungary was not likely to benefit from much sympathy, let alone understanding, from either large or small victor nations of WWI.

Endnotes

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19. Szarka, *Iratok*, 153.
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21. Szarka, *Iratok*, 148-149
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The Dynamic of Post-War Political Structures in Multi-Ethnic Regions: Transylvania at the End of 1918

Andreea Dăncilă

Even though we are now reaching the centenary of the events concluding the Great War, the historical narrative of how a 'borderline region'[1] such as Transylvania emerged from the uproar of 1914-1918 is not yet fully established. Particularly within the framework of Romanian historiography, the issue has remained somewhat overshadowed by the grander narrative of the events that enabled this formerly imperial province to unite with the Romanian Kingdom on 1 December 1918.[2]

Fig. 1: Map of the ethnical distribution in Austria-Hungary, 1911.

Fig. 2: The Romanian politician Alexandru Vaida Voevod.

The run-up to December 1918 nevertheless featured a spectacular succession of highly politically effervescent events, wherein multiple scenarios were considered, and various competing national projects violently intersected. In a multi-ethnic region such as Transylvania,[3] these changes involved a series of inherent crises in terms of political positioning and re-positioning in a context that was still particularly unstable, both externally and internally.

Transylvania was an ethnic palette overlaid with a series of confessional adherences, which made it an ideological melting pot from the war's end onwards. It is therefore extremely challenging to analyse how national options crystallised against the backdrop of the unsettled atmosphere of the final months of 1918.

Starting from these premises, I will be studying what could be called Transylvania's first transfer of power, which occurred between 30 October and 1 December 1918. On 30 October the first novel power structures emerged in this region, and it was on 1 December that a national assembly decided to unite Transylvania with Romania, and it marked the start of a political pathway allowing for unitary coordination.

From Budapest to the Regional Hubs: The Symbolic Geography of the New Political Centres

After Hungary's political leaders publicly admitted that they had lost the war, the emblematic Romanian politician from Transylvania, Alexandru Vaida Voevod (1872-1950), spoke during the parliamentary meeting of 18 October 1918 in Budapest to argue that, according to the principle of self-determination, Romanians from Hungary no longer recognised the authority of the Hungarian Parliament. Only the executive committee of the Romanian National Party,[4] he claimed, now represented the current political interests of the Romanian nation. He added: 'We are no longer nationalities, but nations!'[5]

That October, most ethnic groups under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy constituted themselves into national councils, organs that could be considered as political patterns functioning across the empire by the end of 1918.[6] These structures represent intermediate forms of power management in the transition from imperial to national administration,[7] as well as signs that the central state institutions' authority was weakening. Budapest remained the acknowledged political centre of Transylvania after the war, hosting the headquarters of the Hungarian National Council, the Romanian National Council, and the Saxon Parliamentary Club from late October onwards; Hungary's German National Council would later also be established here.

Early November witnessed a movement of key bodies from the centre, including the Romanian National Council's transfer to Arad (the political centre of the Romanian National Party in Transylvania) and the establishment of a German-Saxon Executive Committee in Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt (the home of the Transylvanian Evangelical-Lutheran Church's episcopal residence and the historical Transylvanian Saxon political centre). The movement had an obvious symbolism: the capital, Budapest, no longer served as the political focus for non-Hungarian groups in Transylvania.

Despite these shifts inside Transylvania, which aimed to establish better control of the area and to safeguard authority, a group of Saxons continued to be active in the heart of Hungarian politics until December 1918[8] – an understandable strategy, since this group was best equipped to negotiate a favourable minority status with all political partners.

Even the Hungarian National Council in Budapest operated a policy of regional centralisation through the establishment of a Transylvanian Committee drawn from its own ranks, and located in the central Transylvanian city of Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, the same city in which the provincial parliament (diet) had voted in 1867 to unite Transylvania and Hungary. Thus, in early November, the majority of the politically representative structures for the most significant ethnic groups in Transylvania were transferred from Budapest to centres in this region.

Alongside the Romanian, Hungarian, and German Councils, which can be regarded as the truly political bodies in the area, various guard-like military organisations affiliated to these councils also emerged. Any power clusters outside this council-guard tandem were increasingly devoid of legitimacy, leading to a true inflation of authority structures, e.g. paramilitary guards, civil guards, and councils of students, soldiers, workers, etc in this period.

The existence of these hybrid structures is symptomatic of the crisis of the central authority and the consequent legitimacy problems. Despite this internal clustering of power structures in Transylvania, we should not overlook the role that the two competing political forces of the Hungarian government in Budapest and its Romanian counterpart in Iaşi[9] continued to play. Through official or less official channels, the two power poles tried to influence and coordinate the Transylvanian scenario playing out at the end of the war.

The location of the power centres in Transylvania at the end of 1918 not only illustrates the political options and developments available both to the Hungarian and non-Hungarian ethnic groups at this period, but also exemplifies the dilution of Hungarian authority in the regions and the emergence of political islands with national legitimacy.

Arad, Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg or Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt were not randomly chosen places for these new Transylvanian power structures, but rather sites of memory *(lieux de mémoire)* that were highly significant for the communities they represented. They were valuable strategic points on the Romanian, Hungarian, and German map of collective emotions, capable of reviving legacies of the past.

The Dialogue Between the Transylvanian Power Structures

Although the front's collapse fermented revolution among all ethnic groups within the Empire, the soldiers and of the former POWs returning from Russia became further radicalised when they encountered the shortcomings and trauma their families had experienced at home. The struggle for survival, while famine was everywhere, as well as the strong feeling that the war's costs had not been equitably distributed, pushed many unruly soldiers and other rebel elements to resort to thefts, violence, and destructiveness. This further illustrates the transition from state violence to paramilitary violence that was so intense within the ex-Austro-Hungarian Empire.[10]

The Romanian, Hungarian, and Saxon national councils operating in Romania were frightened by the violence of these movements, which had become unstoppable by late October or early November, and their main concern was restoring calm and soothing spirits. They issued documents that clearly reflect the spontaneous uncontrolled nature of these rebel movements, scattered throughout the area and reaching unexpected dimensions.[11]

In a highly flammable social context, these councils of various ethnicities settled on cooperation as the best solution. On 1 November 1918, the representatives of the Romanian National Council (Teodor Mihali, 1855-1934), the Hungarian National Council (János Hock, 1859-1936), and the Saxons (Wilhelm Melzer, 1858-1929) signed a common appeal, urging people to defend domestic law and join forces.[12]

From the end of the war, the Hungarian authorities were interested in creating in Transylvania structures similar to ethnically mixed councils and guards, organised according to supra-national criteria. Political and military organs of this nature thus emerged in early November – and even in the localities in which the Romanian, Hungarian, and German National Councils were already operating, a common

Fig. 3: Romanian troops marching in Cluj, Transylvania, 1918.

committee constituted by delegates from each military-political council was established. Within a few days, however, Romanian-Hungarian relations shifted from cooperation to segregation, and Romanian leaders abandoned the idea of ethnically mixed control institutions. An increasing number of community leaders had reservations about the initial plan; they requested an ethnic organisation and not 'hermaphrodite' solutions, as one leader of the Romanian National Council described these mixed committees.[13]

It should be noted that the first fault lines in these joint organs appeared during discussions about which authority should be the object of an oath of loyalty.[14] The Romanians refused to recognise the central Hungarian authorities' primacy. The matter reveals the heated pitch the issue of ethnic and national identification had reached at the end of the war. The multi-ethnic guards experiment involved a process of ideological and political clarification within the central leadership of the Romanian National Council. For the Hungarian authorities, the consolidation of power structures based on ethnic criteria represented a critical vulnerable point. Lajos Varjassy (1852-1934), the government commissioner for Arad, commented, 'Hungarian society viewed the setting up of the Romanian guards with great disapproval as it was convinced that they served not only the maintenance of law and order, but were secretly preparing for the takeover of the empire.'[15]

In such a restless context, the Saxon element found it more difficult to assume a public position. At the end of the war, the leaders of this community had three options: neutrality, supporting the Hungarian revolution or joining the cause of the Transylvanian Romanians, who would reportedly soon be incor-

porated within the borders of the Romanian Kingdom. The Saxon elite therefore chose to establish contacts with the two sides interested in its support, the Romanians and the Hungarians, both in Budapest, where the German National Council operated, and in Sibiu/Hermannstadt, through the German Saxon National Committee.[16]

Amid the disorganisation present in all levels of Transylvanian society, the power structures that emerged during this period took on political, military, economic, and administrative privileges. In order to formally take over the Romanian administration in Transylvania, the Romanian leaders initiated a series of negotiations with the representatives of the Hungarian government. The ultimatum tone of these negotiations and the maximalist agenda circulating at the time were relevant to the new authority status acquired by the Romanian National Council. The assurances of the Romanian state and the Romanian army located on the Transylvanian border, waiting for a sign from the Entente to intervene in the area, obviously heavily contributed to this position of strength and security. From mid-November, after negotiations between Romanian and Hungarian leaders had failed, the process of Transylvania breaking away from Hungary was accelerated, despite the promises made by the newly proclaimed People's Republic of Hungary. A propaganda war accompanied this power transfer from the Hungarian to the Romanian authorities, each side trying to internationalise their cause by stressing the destabilising Bolshevik threat. Political projects attempting to resist the transfer of power included the notion of a Transylvanian Szekely Republic, envisioned in December 1918.[17]

The Leadership of the Transylvanian Power Structures

The war, and especially its denouement, created a social space of contestation, which functioned as an incubator for political leaders. The Romanian middle class became politically active during October and November,[18] in a region in which, significantly, the Romanian National Party had been allowed to send only ten representatives to the Parliament in Budapest before the war, and where the typology of the politician in the modern sense of the term barely

Fig. 4: Romanian postcard 1918-1919 with the new territories, symbolic images and the Romanian King Ferdinand I (1865-1927), including the dedication 'In memory of the realization of the great ideal of unifying all Romanians'.

existed. Ever since the turn of the century, however, a Romanian intellectual elite had gained an increasingly significant profile in Transylvania and had become integrated into a broader framework of contestation against the empire.[19] The pre-war years familiarised Transylvania's Romanian public with a radicalised political discourse, used in a number of campaigns that the elite directed towards rural populations where the Romanian element density was also the highest. The capacity of the Romanian National Council in Arad to create command networks immediately after the war was indeed due to a remarkable mobilisation effort across the Romanian world. There were two notable types of elites within the structure of the new organs of power, the national councils and guards: a traditional elite, consisting on the one hand of priests and teachers (often a person was both), lawyers, and leaders of nationalist movement, and on the other hand of a new group of dynamic military men returned from the front and eager to use their military rank as political capital.

Many documents mention numerous delegates from the Central Romanian National Council, priests, students, intellectuals who travelled through Romanian villages and urban centres in order to establish local councils and guards. They transformed the socially motivated rebellions into a national revolution, with a national programme.

The Hungarian leadership registered a major failure at the end of the war when it attempted to induce

Fig. 5: Hungarian politician and zoologist István Apáty.

a novel concept of loyalty towards the Hungarian state among the elites of the national groups in Transleithania.[20] On 13 November 1918, minister Oszkár Jászi's proposed solution of a canton-organised Transylvania was no longer considered viable by Romanian elites, whose political expectations were directed towards complete separation from Budapest.

In the Hungarian case, although new leaders such as Mihály Károlyi (1875-1955) and Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957) rode in on a wave of revolutionary sympathy, they failed to impose their championed reforms on the old structures of a conservative elite keen on maintaining its status.[21] Although a regime change had occurred in Budapest, the Hungarian political elite who operated in the power structures of Transylvania was conservative, mired in the paradigm of the unitary Hungarian national state.

Precisely for these reasons, his Romanian counterparts refused to engage in discussion with István Apáty (1863-1922), the President of the Transylvanian Committee – part of the Hungarian National Council – and a former rector of the Ferenc József University in Cluj, as he was seen as a typical chauvinist intellectual of the Dualist Hungary era. Although the there were major changes in governmental staff following the October revolution, the entire state and county apparatus remained the same at the Transylvanian county level,[22] with few exceptions. The Hungarian leaders' image at this period was relevant for an elite lacking consensus, with an ever-contested legitimacy, fragmented by multiple political strategies. This explanation of the Hungarian political elite's vulnerability should not exclude the international context – the Great Powers' reaction to the issue of Hungary's territorial integrity, which strongly confused the entire Hungarian political class.[23]

While the Romanian political leadership's presented themselves as state builders, with a discourse heavily influenced by national messianism, the Hungarian elite posed as social reformers, following a script that reveals a desperate need to maintain the old state borders.[24]

In the case of the Saxons, the end of 1918 merely extended an older debate that had split their political elite into two camps: the representatives of the younger generation who were waiting for a new policy towards the Hungarian government (the so-called 'Greens') on the one hand, and those who favoured a policy of cooperation and appeasement with the Hungarian leaders ('the Blacks') on the other.

The period under analysis is one of profound debate among this community's elite, who, although apparently divided in terms of political strategies, managed to remain prudent and keep open communication channels with the Romanian and Hungarian sides alike, both interested in having Saxons involved in their projects.

To conclude, while the Romanian political leadership in Transylvania appeared to be a consensually united elite, the Hungarian leadership seems to have been out of tune with the contemporary circumstances, enmeshed in the legacy of its past and confused in its strategic thought. Caught between the Romanian and Hungarian national projects, the

Transylvanian Saxon political elite was questioning its future, faced with the need to analyse responsibly the competing offers of the Budapest government and the Romanian leaders from Transylvania and Romania. As it lacked the pressure of having its own national project, it was also the most open to negotiation.

Final Remarks

The period between October and December 1918 constituted an ex-lex interval for Transylvania, in which a series of 'multiple sovereignties'[25] functioned, constituting power structures that formulated coherent and simultaneously incompatible claims to either control the state or establish themselves in a state form. While confusion reigned in late October and early November about how they were supposed to organise themselves and operate in the field, the various councils functioning in Transylvania were clarified and strategically consolidated over time. The political structures therefore gained the capacity to grant a political-national sense to this entire transition. The national councils' authority also stemmed from the fact that these organs coordinated guard-like military structures, and therefore gained central control over violence in the region. By acting in accordance with the principle that authority belongs to those who impose change, and not to those who endure it,[26] the Romanian political elite in Transylvania acted as a proactive force, taking over the initiative to negotiate with the Hungarian authorities, setting the rhythm according to which events would unfold and compelling the Hungarian political leadership to assume a reactive stance.

The continuous change of Transylvanian political centres, difficult to follow by a historian unfamiliar with the realities of the area, was not a Brownian movement occasioned by the surrounding unrest, but a dynamic relevant for the way in which the

Fig. 6: The Great National Assembly that decided the Union of Transylvania with the Romanian Kingdom, Alba Julia,1 December 1918.

national groups of a multi-ethnic region chose to politically position themselves at the end of World War I. Nevertheless, a forum in which the three major ethnic groups in Transylvania – Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons – could voice their complaints was gradually built against this chaotic and unpredictable backdrop. Finally, the first stage of power transfer in Transylvania was a litmus test of national loyalty for all the ethnic groups living in the region.

Endnotes

1. For the particularities of these border regions in the context of World War I, see Mark Biondich's study 'Eastern Borderlands and Prospective Shatter Zones: Identity and Conflict in East Central and Southeastern Europe on the Eve of the First World War,' in *Legacies of Violence. Eastern Europe's First World War*, eds. Jochen Böhler, Włodzimierz Borodziej and Joachim von Puttkamer (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014), 25-50.
2. For an overview of how Romanian historiography has analysed the Great War over the years, see Florin Ţurcanu's study 'Une guerre oubliée: la Première Guerre mondiale,' Cités, 29, no. 1 (2007), 157-160. <https://www.cairn.info/load_pdf.php?ID_ARTICLE=CITE_029_0157> (accessed 15 April 2019).
3. According to the last pre-war official census, that of 1910, Transylvania had the following ethnic structure: 909,003 Hungarians (34.20%), 231,403 Germans (8.71%), 1,464,211 Romanians (55.08%), 2341 Slovaks (0.09%), 51,201 others (1.93%), total: 2.658.159. M. Stat. Közlemények. Új sorozat Vol. 64 (Budapest, 1920); Magyar Országos Levéltár (Budapest), F 551 apud. Zoltán Szász, 'Economy and Society in the Era of Capitalist Transformation,' in *History of Transylvania*, III, ed. Béla Köpeczi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 559.
4. For a detailed picture of this party activity, see Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania 1860/1914* (Bucharest: The Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1999).
5. This political mutation can be understood if we consider Oscar Jászi's definitions according to which nation means 'a fully mature nationality which has reached its complete independence as a state building organism', while nationality represents 'a struggling national entity which under the sway of a dominant nation has not yet reached its complete independence'. Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 26; Vaida's speech in *1918 la români. Desăvârşirea unităţii naţional-statale a poporului român. Documente externe 1916-1918*, ed. Augustin Deac, et al., VII (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1989), 40.
6. András Siklós, Revolution in *Hungary and the Dissolution of the Multinational State 1918* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), 10.
7. Nicolae Bocşan, *Marele Război în memoria bănăţeană 1914-1919* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012), 81.
8. Vasile Ciobanu, *Germanii din România în anii 1918-1919* (Sibiu: Honterus, 2013), 22-48.
9. In the autumn of 1916, German and Austro-Hungarian troops occupied two thirds of Romania's territory, including the capital, Bucharest; the Romanian authorities were forced to retreat to the north of the country, in Iaşi.
10. Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013). <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199654918.001.0001/acprof-9780199654918> (accessed 15 April 2019).
11. For an inventory of all these revolutionary manifestations see the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest, *Fond Consiliul Dirigent* (Directory Council) and the National Archives of Cluj-Napoca, *Fond Gărzile Naţionale* (National Guards), 1918.
12. Siklós, *Revolution in Hungary*, 110.
13. 1918 *la români...*, *vol.* VII, 540.
14. Peter Weber, *De la Kolozsvár la Cluj. Ultimul episod al regimului ungar în „capitala" transilvană*, <http://altera.adatbank.transindex.ro/pdf/11/008.pdf> (accessed 15 April 2019).
15. Siklós, *Revolution in Hungary*, 143.
16. Paul Şeulean, *Comunitatea germană din Cluj, Sibiu şi Timişoara 1918-1939: abordare comparativă*, I (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2012), 65-66.
17. Ivan T. Berend, Gyorgy Ranki, 'The Economic Problems of the Danube Region After the Breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy,' in *War and Society in East Central Europe*, eds. Bela Kiraly, Peter Pastor and Ivan Sanders, VI (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 89-106.
18. Szász, *History of Transylvania*, 764.
19. Szele Áron, *Nationalism, National Movements and the Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Case-Study: the Activity and Discourse of the Romanian National Party of Transylvania 1900-1914* (Budapest: Central European University, 2008), 5.
20. István I. Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I. The Uprooted: Hungarian Refugees and their Impact on Hungary's Domestic Politics 1918-1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 8.
21. William Batkay, 'Trianon: Cause or Effect-Hungarian Domestic Politics in the 1920's,' in *War and Society in East Central Europe*, eds. by Bela Kiraly, Peter Pastor, Ivan Sanders, VI (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 509-528.
22. Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I*, 8.
23. For a contextualization of the political and military commitments Hungary had to take at the end of 1918 and for the international dialogue with the Entente leaders see Peter Pastor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918-1919 and the Big Three* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), Mária Ormos, From Padua to the Trianon 1918-1920 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990).
24. Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I*, 8.
25. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).
26. Alexander Kojève, *Noţiunea de autoritate* (The Notion of Authority) (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2012), 35.