

Illiberalism and the Trianon Syndrome The Orbán Regime and the Support of Ethnic Parallelism in Transylvania

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The signing of the peace with Hungary.
A group lead by the Hungarian Ágost Bénárd
passes in front of an honor guard at Versailles.
SOURCE: wikipedia/commons/2/25/V3.jpg.

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ON 20 August 2020 Hungary unveiled, in an atmosphere of national mourning, a National Cohesion Memorial that joined an already existing monument, thus changing the architectural landscape of Alkotmány Street (i.e. Constitution St.), a street connected to Szabadság Square (i.e. Freedom Square), found near the US Embassy and Kossuth Square, which lies in the immediate vicinity of the Hungarian Parliament. There, on a randomly arranged, 100 meter long platform, the names of over 12,000 localities are inscribed, namely, the ones that made up *Magna Hungaria* in the 1913 Index. Even if the project has been criticized by opponents of the Budapest regime as a return to revisionism or because it encourages a pointless nostalgia, this theme is the foundation of the entire political discourse of Fidesz, the party that leads Hungary today, which politically legitimizes itself by using historical memory.

The “Trianon syndrome” is the best motivation for a so-called patriotism

that is meant to bring all Hungarians together, even if this reunion in historical memory is a less glorious one, being rather a wound that Hungarian politicians and intellectuals left bleeding for the last 100 years. Fidesz thus managed to monopolize the nation and the national feelings, but also to demonize the treacherous opposition that does not care about the people and does not understand its great historical trauma.

I. The Politics of Memory and the Trianon Syndrome

WHEN WE look at politics in Central and Eastern Europe, we cannot help but notice that “history matters.” Especially in the case of Hungary, which is the object of our study, we are talking about a defensive national identity that has its origins in the controversial national (and state building) history seen as an unfinished process interrupted just before the EU accession, portrayed as a constant struggle for freedom against oppressive foreign powers. Most concepts of modernity—Europeanization or Westernization—must be analyzed against the background of this historical trajectory. Attila Ágh, a Hungarian writer, political scientist and philosopher, notes that the modern nations that emerged in Central Europe in the nineteenth century survived in more or less secularized forms; he gives as an example the Hungarian National Anthem, which is a prayer to God that constantly refers to “the loser-nation syndrome.”

The late 1980s reopened the search for identities, primarily for the national identity suppressed by communism. After the return to liberal democracy, the “Return to Europe” scenario was a successful one in the Central and Eastern European countries, driven by discourses on Europeanization and modernization, but it also came in the context of messages related to the exceptionalism of some countries such as Hungary or Poland.

These trends created very high expectations in the population. The dream of rapid Europeanization in the semi-periphery of Europe was based on the conceptual framework of the “Western Fault,” according to which the rapid development experienced by Western Europe after World War II¹ could be repeated. Yet the approach proved rather naïve and, at the same time, counterproductive, because it led to increased apathy and to the dissatisfaction of the population, especially in the 2000s. On top of all this came the 2008 economic crisis. In the new situation, the public discourse was divided between two dominant trends: modernization centered on EU membership and nation-centered traditionalism. Due to the crisis, the traditionalist trend has gained ground, proving to be the

best argument to justify the rhetoric of those who promoted the need to fight the dependence on Brussels.

The discourse of the struggle for freedom proved to be a “successful political myth” and went through three phases: the “diffusion” phase, the “ritual” phase and the “sacredness” phase.² In the third phase, the discourse was taken over by governments as an “official mythology”³ for “discursive opportunities,” being disseminated by them through all public media. The refusal to promote it was categorized by the power elite as “high treason” against the national interests.

Abby Innes identified two types of political developments in Central and Eastern Europe: the “party-captured state” and the “corporation-captured state.” In the first type, political motivation is dominant for the new elite that transforms the state according to its own values and expectations. This has happened in Poland and Hungary, which is why “the EU’s leverage is necessarily limited.”⁴ Against the background of a deeper and earlier crisis, Hungary is the most negative example of velvet dictatorship.⁵

Fidesz, the Hungarian populist national party, relied on a traditional historical discourse built on the “glorious past that never existed,” i.e., the Greater Hungary defending the whole of (Christian) Europe for centuries, but later becoming a victim of the invasion of the Great Powers. The struggle for freedom against foreign powers has always been one of the main topics of the political discourse in Hungary, so it was easy for Fidesz to outline the historical Vienna–Moscow–Brussels dependence as a basis for its political discourse. To this were added the trauma of the “dismemberment” of Hungary after Trianon and its “betrayal” by Western Powers at Yalta after World War II.

This ideological construction was the core of the political discourse of Fidesz, which was promoted by key leaders and especially by Viktor Orbán in several speeches, especially on national holidays, as “the Hungarian journey back in time.”⁶ According to the Fidesz nationalist-populist discourse, Hungary lost its sovereignty in 1944 following the German occupation and regained it in 2010, when the second Orbán government drafted the new Constitution (adopted in 2011) and restored historical continuity. This ideological construction is in line with the “populism from above” trend and uses historical memory to legitimize the authoritarian political regime.⁷

The Orbán model of velvet dictatorship poses a real threat to all Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and raises some legitimate questions: (1) why have these CEE countries been so vulnerable to the global crisis of the late 2000s?; (2) which are the factors responsible for the negative reactions to the internal crisis in 2010?; (3) how is it possible to claim that there is a need to strengthen the policies of velvet dictatorships in order to protect countries from “new invasions” in the event of a refugee crisis?

Fidesz consistently practices a double discourse: one for the international public that simulates a pro-EU behavior, and a completely opposed discourse when addressing its domestic public. It is known, however, that velvet dictatorships do not aim at convincing the majority, but rather at mobilizing the active, stubborn minority and silencing the majority by forming a permissive consensus around the dominant discourse.

The recourse to memory, as an essential dimension for the political legitimacy of Fidesz, appeared already in one of the first public speeches of the Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán, delivered on 16 June 1989, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. In this speech, which was considered a significant moment of his political career, Orbán called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and for the end of the “communist dictatorship.”⁸

Overall, in Fidesz’s speech, Hungarians are portrayed as a nation that has long suffered under the yoke of external oppression—the Ottomans, the Habsburgs, the Soviets and, finally, the Europeans. Key moments of their suffering are evoked in order to generate the feeling of belonging and a sense of national pride: the Treaty of Trianon (1920), the Nazi occupation (1944–1945) and the socialist period (1948–1990). History is used by Fidesz as an *instrumentum regni* to outline and spread the idea that, for the Hungarian nation, independence is important because it has been repeatedly violated, and now Fidesz wants to restore and protect it.

As the recourse to memory is used in the current electoral competition in Hungary,⁹ its legitimation makes it possible for this type of policy to be used both for internal political disputes at the level of one society and for inter-state disputations. However (and this is only a topical distinction), analyzing the internal and external dimensions (as two distinct layers that are affected by the politics of memory) allows us to identify different declinations of this type of politics. Both dimensions fall within the scope of the abovementioned global political project carried out by Fidesz.¹⁰

In the first phase of its political life, between its establishment in 1988 and Hungary’s accession to the EU in 2004, Fidesz always pursued a pragmatic policy, showing a high degree of adaptability. Perceived at first as a liberal and moderate right-wing party, it gradually advanced more conservative views, only to later doctrinally take the place of the former Hungarian Democratic Forum.¹¹

Fidesz proved to be very good at capitalizing on the passivity of its political opponents, and this ability was also confirmed in the politics of memory. When a pluralistic democracy was restored in Hungary, Fidesz’s main opponents, the social democrats and the liberals, did little to outline their own global vision of history and rather embraced the rhetoric of Central European states that were

reorienting towards Europe, a vision best illustrated by Milan Kundera in the concept of “a kidnapped West.”¹² In the case of Central European states, however, another reason stood behind their similar approach to history. Political calculation was the main reason behind the reluctant post-communist approach to history: at a historical moment, when this social system was portrayed as a dictatorship that had oppressed its citizens for half a century, detachment from the communist legacy was politically convenient in order to avoid any reference to the sensitive past. For liberals, however, it was more a matter of ideological values, according to which history should be analyzed only by professional historians, and politics should refrain from manipulating history (as it had happened, for example, during communism). As a result, in the 14 years of the pre-EU accession period, neither the post-communists nor the liberals committed themselves to developing a coherent narrative that would incorporate the Hungarian transition and its aftermath into a broader and more engaging historical perspective.

Fidesz often complained about the lack of satisfactory pluralism among Hungarian historians, arguing that key topics and events in Hungarian history—such as the Treaty of Trianon, the interwar period and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956—were described only from one perspective and that Hungarian historiography should be subjected to a rebalancing process, giving voice and public relevance to opinions that were marginalized especially during communism. Thus, the Veritas Institute was established on 2 January 2014, an institution that can be considered the quintessence of Fidesz’s memory-based politics. The institute’s presentation site clearly mentions the need to establish historical truth and explains the reason for its creation: the government founded this institute with “the explicit purpose of studying and re-evaluating historical research done in the last one hundred and fifty years of Hungary, especially the study of those historical events which have generated much debate, but which have never reached a consensus” and with the aim of “bringing the nation back to its true destiny, pointing it to the true historical direction.”¹³

The Veritas Institute focused its attention on three main topics: 1) post-Compromise Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon, identified as “the greatest tragedy of Hungary in the twentieth century, whose wounds remain open even today”; 2) the interwar era; 3) the postwar era, trying to assess “whether the Hungarian people passively accepted the situation (i.e., communism) without protest or whether there was any resistance.”

Last but not least, political analysts¹⁴ talk about Fidesz’s strategy to equate Nazi dictatorship with communism. The action that most eloquently exemplified this idea was the establishment of the House of Terror Museum (*Terror Háza Múzeum*), located on Andrassy Boulevard in Budapest in a building

that once also hosted the Hungarian National Socialist Party headquarters, and which later became the main office of the State Protection Authority (the secret police of the communist regime, between 1948 and 1956, which tortured and killed many of the regime's opponents). According to the official website (www.terrorhaza.hu), in order to regain "freedom and independence" through the sacrifice of freedom fighters, Hungary had to fight against "two systems, the most cruel ones of the twentieth century," Nazism and Socialism. Because of her work in promoting a revisionist interpretation of World War II and the Holocaust, the museum's director, historian Mária Schmidt, is considered to be "the main ideologue of the current government's highly controversial views on history."¹⁵

The second fundamental historical event that continues to play a role in Hungary's foreign policy—the Treaty of Trianon (1920)—is more deeply rooted in Fidesz's ideological and historiographical background. Labeled as a "defeated state" at the end of World War I, Hungary was "dismembered," losing almost two-thirds of the territory it had had under the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Consequently, a considerable part of its population is now found in some of the states that were later formed (especially in Slovakia and Romania). Since the signing of the treaty, the issue of the Hungarian minorities living abroad has been perceived as a burning and fundamental question, which deserves full interest; this is demonstrated by the very strong role played by the Deputy Prime Minister for Hungarian Communities Abroad.

Granting Hungarian citizenship to Hungarians living abroad, who have Hungarian ancestors born before 1920 or between 1938 and 1945, was a strategy of Fidesz that was part of a larger project of political legitimation by recourse to memory.

From the perspective of some Hungarian historians, however, the way in which Fidesz makes use of the Treaty of Trianon in its rhetoric is a permanent political strategy, not one necessarily based on historiography. According to Gábor Egry, director of the Institute of Political History in Budapest, despite the wishes of Hungarian nationalists to portray this event as a national trauma, there is no solid basis for interpreting Trianon as a traumatic experience, but it is rather

*a concept of cultural trauma that postulates that trauma could develop through a conscious effort mediated by public actors who, through repeated efforts . . . , can in fact instill in the population the idea that there was something that has been traumatic to them.*¹⁶

The memory of the Treaty of Trianon as a narrative of common suffering could only be created and disseminated at a time when no living witness to the event would have questioned the widely accepted assertion that the splitting of the

country was immediately and exclusively perceived as a tragedy by the population. Such an interpretation offers to the government in Budapest the opportunity to exploit symbolic meanings in order to carry out its regional foreign policy and divert the public's attention from internal issues by playing the nationalist card. However, political analysts note that while Fidesz now attaches major importance to the commemoration of the Treaty of Trianon, presenting it as a national catastrophe whose disastrous consequences still haunt Hungarians today, the attitude of the party in regards to this historic event was not always consistent.

When, in 1990, the President of the Parliament, György Szabád, asked the National Assembly to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon, the Fidesz members left the hall in protest.¹⁷ Therefore, we can see Fidesz's "pragmatic" attitude towards collective memory in the very issue of the Treaty of Trianon. Fidesz has constantly adapted its discourse on collective memory to different audiences and contexts, allowing it to be shaped by different interests, depending on transient priorities in domestic and foreign policy. Thus, given the population's disappointment with democracy and with the neoliberal model, from which people had high expectations after 1990, Fidesz capitalized on it by offering the population an alternative version of history.¹⁸

Various actions such as erecting monuments, renaming streets, setting up an educational policy with an emphasis on textbook selection, the organization of public events and commemorations, along with an explicit political discourse, demonstrate Fidesz's policy to propagate specific views on Hungarian history. These include equating Nazism and communism under the banner of "totalitarianism," the self-victimization of the Hungarian nation, an ideal homogenization of the nation that conceals subnational conflicts, the annihilation of the historical left by erasing its legitimacy, the rehabilitation of the interwar period and of the Hungarian personalities associated with the effacing of the Hungarian state's responsibility for the anti-Jewish policies implemented before and during World War II.¹⁹

II. Hungary, from the Politics of Memory to the Protection of Minorities

THE EUROPEAN Union noticed, especially after the end of the East-West conflict, that there are conflicting memory policies in Europe that prevent the construction of a united Europe founded upon common values and a shared identity, and based upon civic citizenship. These are the so-called "memorial regimes," as Johann Michel calls them.²⁰ European policies have tried to inhibit these contradicting memories through various forms of collaboration

in which the actors have been forced to position themselves non-conflictually or collaboratively, as in the case of cross-border funds through which neighbors undertake joint projects, in which they are forced to work together in order to receive European funding. The main topic of this kind was the “Trianon issue,” because this massive loss of Hungarian territory created a policy of conflicting memory, which was masked and somewhat inhibited only during the communist period in the name of proletarian internationalism. In 2001, by its Statute Law, Hungary ignited tensions with the neighboring countries by granting dual citizenship, while justifying this in Brussels with the discriminatory treatment of minorities, in spite of the fact that all countries in question actually met all EU criteria in this regard.

In the midst of the nascent conflict, Hungary managed to put quite a bit of pressure on the European agenda, introducing the issue of Budapest’s relations with the minorities and even making a certain shift from a topic presented in the domestic discourse as “reunification of the Hungarian nation” to a topic of civic resonance: “defending the rights of national minorities,”²¹ as it was presented in Brussels. The EU’s diplomatic negotiations were rather ineffective, and the consistent and noisy mobilization of politicians in Budapest led to the inclusion of the “national minorities” category in the EU treaties.

As early as 1990, the Treaty of Trianon and the trauma it created became the most important mobilization topics in the Hungarian political space. Budapest links the Treaty of Trianon, seen as a blow to the heart of the Hungarian nation, to the principle of responsibility of the Hungarian government towards Hungarians in neighboring countries, especially those in Transylvania; this is based on two directions that coexist in defining the nation: a political or civic one, which defines the population living within the national borders, and an ethno-nationalist one, which encompasses all territories where Hungarians have a significant presence.

In fact, in 1989, one of the first amendments to the Hungarian Constitution was this statement: “The Republic of Hungary bears a sense of responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living outside its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary” (art. 6, para. 3). Between 1990 and 1998, the “Antal doctrine” strengthened a triptych consisting of: assuming the diplomatic protection of national minorities, creating a Central European model for the treatment of minorities, and the principle of consultation of minorities.

Starting with 1998, things changed a lot, because the political program of Fidesz-MPP (Magyar Polgári Párt) (the alliance led by Fidesz) put at the core of their policy the will to “promote the national interest, i.e., the interests of all Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin and the rest of the world”; it also spoke for the first time of the “inter-Hungarian relations,” intended to provide full support to

the Hungarian population in neighboring states. The idea was that, in this way, Hungary could use European integration and its rules to overcome the trauma caused by Trianon so that the “Motherland” could bring home her children who were stranded abroad.

On a political level, the European standard aimed primarily at legitimizing a “national policy,” which in neighboring countries was perceived as implicitly irredentist, while Western Europe saw it as a potential source of conflict. The Hungarian leaders presented the national minorities as a vector of cross-border cooperation and regional stability by making use of notions promoted by European organizations, such as “regionalism,” “subsidiarity” or “decentralization.” In the following years, Hungarian officials continuously pressed Brussels and Washington to acknowledge them as guardians of minority rights in Europe, trying to impose related criteria in the assessment of candidate countries.

After having joined the Council of Europe in November 1990, Hungary tried to sign bilateral treaties containing clauses for the protection of national minorities with Romania and Slovakia, and because of their refusal, Hungary did everything possible to block their accession. These actions were always accompanied by an attempt to impose on the agenda of most European organizations legal norms that would state the responsibility of states in regards to minority rights and that would justify demands for autonomy. Although these demands exceeded the legal framework of integration and many Western politicians saw them as dangerous to their own states, two specific conventions were adopted after 1990: the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994). These texts were not ratified by most European countries, but were an important reason for propaganda and for stirring the minorities in Romania and Slovakia, especially during electoral periods.

The Hungarian governments achieved some success, such as the Final Declaration of the Stability Pact in Europe, adopted in 1995, which stated that the settlement of bilateral disputes should be a necessary condition for accession, inviting the concerned states to “deepen their good neighborly relations in all aspects including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.” Although some standards were stated, they were neither clear nor universally valid, and Community requirements for the protection of national minorities varied from one candidate country to another in accordance with political or legal criteria.²²

It is probably because of this that the Community treaties ignored the rights of national minorities; compliance with these was an obligation imposed only on the candidate countries. Even when the Treaty on European Union was revised in Amsterdam in 1997 and in Nice in 2001, the Community *acquis* did not mention the rights of national minorities despite pressure from Hungary.

After having thus tested the waters, Hungary built the most important tool when it comes to using the memory of Trianon for the purpose of political legitimation and identity reconstruction: the Statute Law. Presented in Brussels as a non-conflict instrument aimed at protecting the identity of Hungarians abroad, the Statute Law was accompanied by a political body through which it was promoted (the “Permanent Inter-Hungarian Conference”), a body created in 1992 and which, according to a then minister, embodies the Hungarian nation with its 15 million members. The law also included the issuing of a document that had the value of a passport: a kind of Hungarian nationality certificate. Viktor Orbán presented this law, which was already met with disapproval in neighboring countries, as a great contribution given by Hungary to the future of the continent, recalling that Europe is not a union of states or regions but a Europe of communities.

From this perspective, if all of Hungary’s neighboring states joined the EU, the Hungarian nation, although separated by different state borders, would be united in a single supranational entity. Naturally, all of Hungary’s neighboring countries noticed and objected to the Statute Law considering it an implicit attack on the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon. But the Venice Commission’s Report, while criticizing some issues, such as the extraterritoriality of the law or other discriminatory issues, rather legitimized the protection of minorities abroad. The Venice Commission Report did not seek to mediate between the countries in dispute and remained a fairly general and consensual document. Because of this, Dutch parliamentarian Erik Jürgens later categorized it as too general and inapplicable, even too favorable, requesting its abandonment. Jürgens spoke about “pro-Hungarian proselytism” and the implicit intention to annihilate the Treaty of Trianon.

After 2003, Hungary negotiated with Romania and Slovakia a substantially changed text, which would expire after three years once the two countries were to become full members of the EU. But the Statute Law had already produced its effects: it had revived the Hungarian “nation” everywhere and it had managed to give a legal justification and a political legitimacy to an illiberalism that Viktor Orbán had managed to put into practice perfectly and without suffering too many international sanctions. The “virtual reunification” of the Hungarian nation was already taking place and with it came a deterioration of the interethnic climate in the neighboring countries, as well as an important pool of voters for Viktor Orbán.

One can note here that the politics of memory reveal the current interplay of interests in the European Union; the lack of precise decision-making tools and of legislative frameworks allowed Hungarian political actors to influence the European agenda and even impose a progressive codification of a category invented especially for Hungary and neighboring countries, the category of “national minority,” which is not being applied in other countries and to other European reali-

ties. According to the opinion of politicians in Budapest, this allowed Hungary to get rid of the accusations of irredentism and of border-changing intentions. Although it failed to build a new foundation for the concept of nation, the Statute Law was followed by many initiatives of subsequent Hungarian governments, all of which succeeded in consolidating “the injustice of Trianon” in the collective mind, managing even to put it on the European agenda. Finally, as L. Neumayer writes, a careful case study of the Statute Law shows us the limits of the Europeanization of memory-related problems: despite the resolution of the 2001–2003 conflict and the strengthening of legal standards allowed by the Lisbon Treaty for the protection of national minorities, the persistence of antagonistic regimes in national memory articulated upon deep-rooted conceptions of nationhood might reignite bilateral tensions between EU member states.

III. The Perception of Hungary and Hungarians in Romania

IN AN opinion poll conducted in 2013²³ by IRES (the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy), Romania’s relations with Hungary were seen as good by 56% of the interviewees, and very good by an additional 1%. The same relationships were seen as bad or very bad by 31% and, respectively, 8% of the interviewees. Women tend to rate these relationships more positively than men, as do people under 50, compared to those past this age. When it comes to Romania’s relations with other European Union countries, they are seen as good by 83% of respondents, while 6% see them as very good; at the same time, 9% rate them as bad and 1% as very bad. There are no significant differences in the perception of participants depending on their socio-demographic characteristics or the type or area of residence.

The country that most Romanians consider as a friend of Romania is Spain (88%), followed by the Republic of Moldova (85%), Italy (84%), Austria (82%), and the USA (80%). Those who are seen as less friendly towards Romania are France (which is considered rather an enemy by 13%, although 78% see it as a friend), Great Britain (11% enemy vs. 75% friend), Russia (27% enemy vs. 50% friend) and Hungary (41% enemy vs. 43% friend). The older or less educated the respondents, the less they tend to consider Russia as an enemy of Romania; when it comes to relations with Hungary, on the other hand, the younger the respondents, the more positively they evaluate them, while the distribution according to the education level remains valid. Respondents in Transylvania and Banat tend to see the relations with Hungary in a more positive light than those in the south of the country and those in Moldavia.

The Image of Interethnic Relations in Romania

REGARDING THE relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania in recent years, the analysis reveals that 58% consider they were good, while 6% consider that they were very good; cumulatively, 34% of respondents would say that they were rather bad or very bad. The more educated the respondents, the more positive the answer to this question. Respondents from Transylvania and Banat are the ones who assess to the highest extent the relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania as very good or good (72%), while those from the Romanian region of Moldavia assess it to the lowest extent (56%). The relations between Romanians and the ethnic Germans living in this country are seen as good or very good by the majority of respondents (89%). Only 6% of them tend to consider them rather bad or very bad.

The IRES study reveals a very good opinion of the Romanian inhabitants about the Hungarians. Thus, 73% of those who participated in the opinion poll state that they have a good or very good opinion about this ethnic group. A bad opinion about Hungarians is present to a greater extent among the people with basic education (27.8%), to a lesser extent among graduates of secondary education (16.3%), and to an even lesser degree among those with higher education (8.1%).

Transylvanians in general (69.7%) say to a greater extent than the inhabitants of the southern area (59.6%) and of Moldavia (60.6%) that they have a good opinion about the Hungarian ethnics. A significant proportion of study participants, 57%, say they have visited the counties Harghita or Covasna for various reasons: vacation (25%), visits to friends and relatives (12%), business (7%), merely passing through (25%). In this context, the subjects (82%) declare themselves very interested in visiting the two counties for tourism purposes. Again, young people show a more open attitude, 91% of those between 18 and 35 years old being interested in visiting Harghita or Covasna, unlike other age groups, where this interest is less manifest: 36–50 years (85.4%), 51–65 years (81%), over 65 years (64.6%). The desire to visit the two counties with a majority Hungarian population also increases proportionally with the increase in the level of education. In the same empirical study, the relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania are seen as better than before 1989 by 32% of respondents, and as worse by 38% of the study participants. Many more young people (between 18 and 35 years old) consider that the relations between the two ethnic groups are better now than the people over 65 years of age (26.5%).

Visiting Hungary and the Opinion about the Neighboring Country

MOST ROMANIANS (51%) have never visited Hungary. Men, in a greater proportion than women, visited Romania's neighboring country several times (25.3% vs. 11.9%). Also, as the level of education increases, the proportion of those who declare that they have repeatedly visited Hungary increases (no schooling or primary education: 5.7%, secondary education: 17.7%, higher education: 26.5%). Not surprisingly, most likely due to their physical proximity to Hungary, the inhabitants of Transylvania and Banat declare to a greater extent than the other inhabitants of the country that they have been to the neighboring country several times.

In general, the opinion of Romanians about Hungary is rather positive. According to the data, 28% of respondents say they have a very good opinion of this country, while 63% have a good opinion. Education intervenes in shaping the opinion about the neighboring country: thus, only 14.3% of the respondents with a low degree of education say that they have a very good opinion, while more people with secondary education (29.3%) or higher education (27.2%) share this opinion.

Statute Law and Dual Citizenship

THE MAJORITY of Romanians (52%) see the acquisition of dual citizenship by Hungarians positively; however a significant proportion of participants in the study disapprove of the initiative of the Orbán government (bad opinion and very bad: 41%). Positive opinions about the possibility to obtain dual citizenship by Hungarians in Romania are more present among young people (18–35 years: 57.6%), decreasing proportionally with the increase in the respondent's age (36–50 years: 42.8%, 51–65 years: 41.2%, over 65 years: 35.4%). The region where the respondents live also seems to influence their opinion regarding the possession of dual citizenship by Hungarians in Romania. Thus, higher proportions of respondents from the south and Dobruja (33%), respectively Moldavia (34.3%), state that they have a bad opinion on this issue, compared to those from Transylvanians and Banat (24.4%). Also, the gesture of some presidents of County Councils in Transylvania (that is, officials of the Romanian state) to apply for Hungarian citizenship is strongly disapproved of by Romanians (70%). Moreover, the majority of respondents (56%) believe that people will change their attitude towards Romania after obtaining Hungarian citizenship.

The Small Social Distance between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania

OVERALL, FIGURES do not show hostile attitudes towards Hungarians, as most Romanians are happy to have Hungarian co-workers (85%), Hungarian neighbors (78%), Hungarian friends (80%) and even Hungarian family members (71%). Romanians are more reluctant, however, when it comes to political representation by Hungarian leaders (51% would not agree to have citizens of Hungarian origin as political representatives).

The degree of acceptance of Hungarian colleagues increases proportionally with the level of education, as follows: no schooling or primary school: 69%, secondary education: 84.9%, higher education: 96.5%. Also, the tendency of accepting colleagues of Hungarian ethnicity is stronger among urban dwellers and among the inhabitants of the Transylvania region. More women than men and more people with higher education than those with a lower level of education state that they would agree to have Hungarian political representatives.

The degree of acceptance of Hungarian neighbors is higher among the people with higher education (91.9%), among those living in cities (84%) and among those living in Transylvania and Banat (89.6%).

Friendship with ethnic Hungarians is more widely accepted by respondents with higher education, by urban dwellers and by the inhabitants of Transylvania and Banat.

50% of the participants in the study consider that the role of the Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania in Romanian politics is a negative one and only 39% view it as positive. 41.6% of young people up to the age of 35 state that the role of the Democratic Union of the Hungarians in Romania is positive, while much smaller proportions of older people share this opinion.

The Raising of the Szekler Flag

DISPLAYING THE flag of Székely Land (or Szeklerland), which was promoted by Hungary as a symbolic sign of autonomy, has in many cases been the subject of political and media scandals. At the time of conducting the aforementioned research, 8 out of 10 study participants stated that they had heard of the various scandals regarding the raising of the Szekler flag in various contexts.

Most of the interviewees consider that justice is on the side of those who oppose the use of this flag (68%), while 17% agree with those who support

its use, and 14% either do not know or do not want to answer this question. 77% of respondents say they have heard of the involvement of the Hungarian authorities in this scandal, by expressing support for the use of the Szekler flag, while 79% of respondents believe that the Hungarian authorities should not get involved (although they did).

A high proportion of respondents believe that such a gesture by the Hungarian authorities can affect relations between Romanians and Hungarians: 57% believe it certainly will, and 25% believe it probably will. Two-thirds (74%) of those who participated in this study believe, at the same time, that such a gesture can affect relationships between Romania and Hungary.

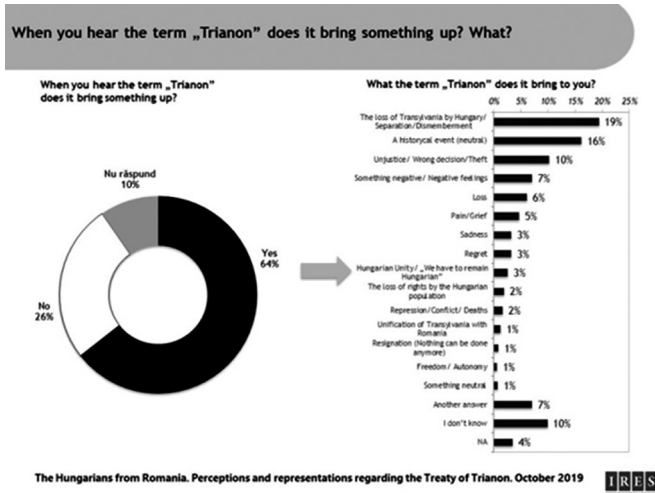
IV. Orbán's Illiberalism and its Echoes in Transylvania

IN AN empirical study, using the opinion poll method, we tried to see if the continuous pressure exerted by Hungary, especially in recent years, on the Hungarian population in Transylvania, in regards of Trianon, has had any effect upon the Hungarian public's opinion in this area of Romania. We started from the fact that the upcoming Trianon Centenary produced a higher frequency of related topics in the Hungarian press, provoking reactions also in the Romanian press, especially since at that time the Centenary of the Romanian national state was in the attention of journalists. The research was conducted with the support of the IRES team²⁴ which interviewed 659 Hungarian subjects living in counties of Harghita and Covasna, where ethnic Hungarians constitute the majority, a region continuously targeted by the messages and actions of the Budapest administration.

The interviewers were Hungarian speakers, and therefore we believe that the results gained a lot in terms of reliability. In addition, more than half of the sample consisted of Hungarians with dual citizenship, close to their proportion in the real population, where out of 1,227,623 ethnic Hungarians, 515,000 had dual citizenship (in 2016).

Our paper does not seek to compare the attitude of Hungarians towards Trianon with their position in regards to other issues pertaining to the interethnic climate, because some studies conducted in recent decades by the author of this article or other sociologists are relevant for those topics; instead, we wanted to test the adherence or non-adherence to certain important "theses" of the "Trianon issue," such as: knowledge of the topic, the attitude towards the future of Transylvania's affiliation to Romania or Hungary, the discussion of the collective imaginary related to Trianon, the intensity and the ways in which this

“drama” was being lived, and which were the socializing agents related to this topic. In brief, we intended to examine the specific ways in which the topic of the Trianon “drama” acts within the collective memory of the Hungarians living in Transylvania.



64% of the sampled Hungarians who heard the term “Trianon” said that it evoked something; from these a greater proportion were men than women, more were urban than rural, and more were older rather than young.

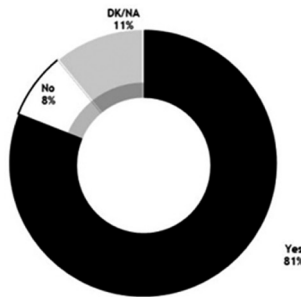
TABLE 1. TRIANON: COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION (%)

When you hear the word “Trianon,” does it bring anything up?	Sex		Age				Education			Area of residence	
	M	F	18–35	36–50	51–65	65+	Low	Medium	High	Urban	Rural
Yes	68	60	64	59	65	72	53	68	84	71	59
No	21	31	32	24	24	22	34	23	12	26	26
Declined to answer	11	8	4	18	11	6	13	9	4	4	14

Regarding the content of evoked images, most correspond to the traumatizing identity transmitted through the official propaganda of the Orbán government: the loss of Transylvania by Hungary, separation, the dismemberment of Greater Hungary, loss, mourning, sadness, regret, resignation and the loss of Hungarian rights. It is labeled as a historical event, so it gets a neutral definition only with 16% of the sample.

In fact, to the question “Do you think that Hungary was wronged by the Treaty of Trianon, which caused it to lose several territories, including Transylvania?” the sampled population answers affirmatively in a proportion of 81% and only 8% gave a negative answer.

Do you think that Hungary was wronged by the Treaty of Trianon, which brought it to lose several territories, including Transylvania?



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Analyzing the sources of information regarding the loss of Transylvania by Hungary, we note that family and school are the most important: 65% have heard of this in their family, 54% in school, 45% in everyday life, and 41% in the media.

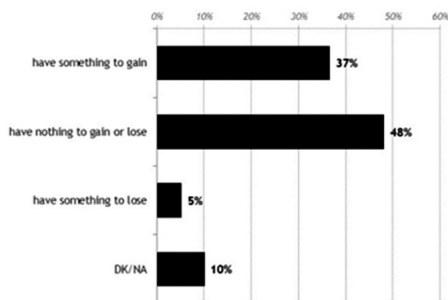
TABLE 2. SOURCES REGARDING HUNGARY’S LOSS OF TRANSYLVANIA (%)

Where did you hear about Hungary losing Transylvania?		Sex		Age				Education			Area of residence	
		M	F	18–35	36–50	51–65	65+	Low	Medium	High	Urban	Rural
In school	No	44	48	20	52	46	78	51	44	41	47	45
	Yes	56	52	80	48	54	22	49	56	59	53	55
In everyday life	No	56	55	55	54	50	65	69	47	51	53	57
	Yes	44	45	45	46	50	35	31	53	49	47	43
In my family	No	48	39	53	42	36	42	50	42	30	42	45
	Yes	52	61	47	58	64	58	50	58	70	58	55
In the media	No	59	58	62	53	59	60	61	58	56	60	58
	Yes	41	42	38	47	41	40	39	42	44	40	42
From books	No	95	93	96	95	98	83	91	95	96	95	93
	Yes	5	7	4	5	2	17	9	5	4	5	7

Hope regarding the likelihood of Hungary regaining Transylvania (an idea present in the extremist speeches of some Hungarian politicians from both Romania and Hungary), was tested by the question “Do you think that in the future it would be possible for Hungary to regain Transylvania?” Only a third (32%) of Hungarians in Harghita and Covasna are optimistic about this possibility, 55% no longer believe this would be possible, and 14% do not know or do not answer. Hope is more present (53%) among those aged between 18 and 35 who live in urban areas.

Testing the hypothetical situation of Transylvania’s return to Hungary, most of the respondents (48%) stated that they would neither gain nor lose anything, but there is also a significant proportion (37%) who consider that they would have something to gain; 5% think they would only lose by this.

If Hungary would regain Transylvania, would you ...?



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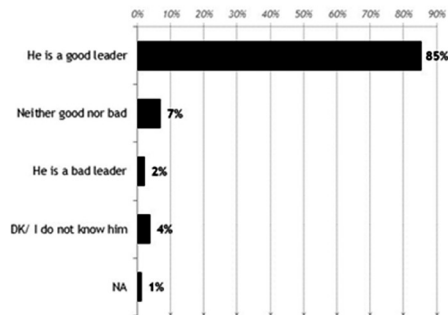
Most Hungarians in Transylvania do not see Hungary as a land of promise; only about 20% would be tempted to move to the neighboring country if they had a good opportunity to do so.

The last aim of the study was to evaluate Orbán as a leader (good or bad): only two percent of the ethnic Hungarian population in the sample disapprove of his leadership.

We also analyzed the differentiated behavior of Hungarians having only Romanian citizenship and of Hungarians with dual citizenship (Romanian and Hungarian), who have benefited from the Statute Law. Regarding the collective imaginary related to Trianon, the population with dual citizenship is much more connected to this topic, the term leads to much richer evocations and in

a higher proportion than in the Hungarian population that only has Romanian citizenship. The conflict-related imaginary is more present among Hungarians with dual citizenship, while the spontaneous evocation of neutral images is more present in the population that only has Romanian citizenship. Regarding other indicators, such as the hope that Transylvania will return to Hungary, those with dual citizenship are much more ideologized and active and believe to a greater extent in the more or less hidden revisionist imperatives of the Budapest governments.

Do you believe Viktor Orbán is a good leader or a bad one?



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Conclusions

THE RESEARCH presented above has clearly shown that the Statute Law and the propaganda of the Budapest governments have succeeded in creating, at least in the counties of Harghita and Covasna, communities that resonate with Budapest's projects. If some Hungarian researchers talk about a weaker influence on young pupils or students in Hungary, the policy of "Nem! Nem! Soha!" ("No! No! Never!" in Hungarian) massively influences the communities of Hungarians beyond the borders, through the propagation of the Trianon trauma and even through a rather manifest revisionism. Viktor Orbán's illiberalism also influences the diplomatic and the imagological relations with the neighboring countries, Hungary being at the top of the list of "enemies" in the Romanian public perception. Illiberalism is openly assumed by Viktor

Orbán, who said that Fidesz aims at building an illiberal state, a non-liberal state that does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism, such as freedom, but does not make this ideology a central element of state organization, promoting instead a different and special national approach.

In Transylvania, the Viktor Orbán government spends large sums of money to support ethnic parallelism. There is a press that is supported from dedicated funds of the Budapest government; schools or kindergartens, stadiums and gyms are built so that the Hungarians in Transylvania can live “as in Hungary, not as in Romania,” a Hungarian official declared. Promising the “virtual reunification” of the nation, Hungary spent over 145 million euros in Transylvania in 2017 and a similar amount in 2018. Also, in 2019, Hungary launched the Pro Economica foundation, through which it promised to pay 312 million euros in the form of small funds for the development of agriculture.²⁵ However, we do not know the final destination of these amounts or the total expenditure, because the Orbán government does not make these data public, not even at the request of the press. As a result, the already great social distance increases even more and leads to a true ethnic parallelism, which is necessary for the Orbán government to obtain the half a million votes from those who have dual citizenship.

In a longitudinal study in which a number of “ideal types” of identity manifestations in the Transylvanian space were delineated based on secondary analyses, the sociologist Marius Lazăr outlined a “portrait” of the Szekler Hungarians where he noted that, in the case of the population of Transylvania, we are talking about subjects whose self-identification is done in ethnic terms, through references such as “Hungarian” and “Transylvanian Hungarian.” Hungarian families are almost entirely homogamous, with a spouse of the same nationality. Favorite interactions are intra-Hungarian, at all levels, including family and friendships, Romanians and other ethnic groups remaining at the level of visual contact (“I know them by sight”). The closedown/keeping the distance, in this case, is associated with poor territorial mobility: “subjects interact preferentially with other Hungarians and always speak Hungarian among friends and never Romanian, even if they have completed the school year in both Romanian and Hungarian.” The sociologist also noted a self-pity cultivating identity, expressed by the fact that moderate agreement with the statement “Being born Hungarian makes my life harder” is combined with the pride of being Hungarian and with the total disapproval of people of other ethnicities (Romanians or Roma), who in no case “would contribute to creating a better world.” Finally, this form of ethnic skepticism is combined with a rather firm distancing from the status given by the Romanian citizenship, which is somewhat stigmatizing, and with the withdrawal of unconditional moral support for such a state.²⁶

The recent case in Ditrău (Harghita County), where the local community (composed almost entirely of Hungarian ethnics) revolted against the hiring of two Sri Lankan workers at the local bakery and expressed concern that this could set a dangerous precedent in terms of safeguarding the local security and their traditions, further proves that Hungarian minorities in other territories are a much better sounding board than the Hungarian society in Hungary proper for the separatist policies stimulating ethnic parallelism promoted by Budapest under the illiberal regime of Viktor Orbán. Hungarians in the Szeklerland are held captive in the ethnic cage, and the Orbán regime is quite successful in preventing their integration as citizens of the Romanian state. □

Notes

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Abstract**Illiberalism and the Trianon Syndrome: The Orbán Regime and the Support of Ethnic Parallelism in Transylvania**

Contemporary Hungary has been defined by a defensive national identity that has its origins in the controversial national history seen as an unfinished and constant struggle for freedom against oppressive foreign powers. Fidesz, the party that leads Hungary today, politically legitimizes itself by using historical memory. According to the Fidesz nationalist-populist discourse, Hungary lost its sovereignty in 1944 following the German occupation and regained it in 2010, when the second Orbán government drafted the new Constitution (adopted in 2011) and restored historical continuity. Budapest links the Treaty of Trianon to the principle of responsibility of the Hungarian government towards Hungarians in neighboring countries, especially those in Transylvania. This paper discusses the results of an empirical study intended to determine whether the continuous pressure exerted by Hungary on the Hungarian population in Transylvania, in regards to Trianon, has had any effect upon the Hungarian public opinion in this area of Romania. The results clearly show that the Statute Law and the propaganda of the Budapest governments have succeeded in creating, at least in the counties of Harghita and Covasna, communities that resonate with Budapest's projects.

Keywords

Hungary, Treaty of Trianon, historical memory, revisionism, Hungarian minority, Transylvania