
CONCERTATIO

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Trianon



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TRIANON IS a palace within the complex of Versailles, where a Peace Treaty was signed between the Allied and Associated Powers—Czechoslovakia, Romania, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—and Hungary, on 4 June 1920, at the end of a process which had begun, for the Romanians, on 17 August 1916, when a Treaty of Alliance had been signed between Romania and the Entente—France, Great Britain, Russia and Italy.¹ This 1916 treaty, consisting of a political and a military convention, stipulated that at the end of the war Romania would annex large territories of Austria-Hungary (Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Maramureş and North Bukovina) and would be considered a great victor at the Peace Conference, equal in status to the Great Allies.

There was still another article in the 1916 treaty which specified that no signatory was entitled to make a separate peace; this was only to be concluded at the end of the war “conjointement and concomitamment” (together and simultaneously).² This clause was to cause much damage to the international position of Romania in the rela-

tions with the Allied and Associated Powers, as her government, forced by necessity, after the complete collapse of the Russian front, and being completely surrounded by the armies of the Central Powers (after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 3 March 1918) signed a separate peace with the Germans.³ Consequently, the 17 August 1916 Alliance Treaty was declared null and void by France, Great Britain, the USA, and Italy. Romania was no longer their ally.

This very much frustrated the Romanian authorities, who even accused the Western Powers of having failed to honor the obligations they had assumed under the 1916 treaty, in several ways, criticizing especially the inertia of the Franco-British expeditionary corps stationed in Greece (Salonika). According to the 1916 treaty, these Allied armed forces were supposed to attack the Bulgarian-German troops, preventing them from crossing the Danube,⁴ but they did not budge.

The new commander of the Allied armies in the East, general Louis Franchet d'Espérey, launched a lightning attack in September 1918, obliging Bulgaria (26 September) and Turkey (30 October) to capitulate. In November 1918, Franchet d'Espérey was in Belgrade. Several units, called "the army of the Danube," were placed under the command of General Henri Mathias Berthelot. At the beginning of November they were approaching the Danube.⁵ General Berthelot launched a call to the Romanians to take up arms and re-enter the war.⁶ That night, the Romanian authorities addressed an ultimatum to the commander of the German forces in Romania to leave the country and on 10 November the government declared war on Germany. No one knew at that time that on 11 November Germany would demand an armistice.

On 3 November 1918, the Austro-Hungarian armies signed an armistice at Padua (Villa Giusti) with the Allied and Associated Powers. At the end of October, Hungary had declared independence and tried to dissociate herself from the Austro-Hungarian heritage, looking for ways to be recognized in the international arena as a new state. Consequently, on 13 November 1918, the representatives of the Hungarian government led by Count Mihály Károlyi got in touch with General Louis Franchet d'Espérey, with whom they signed a military convention, considering it to be an armistice, which it was not. In fact, it was a simple military convention, as the French understood it, destined to ensure the implementation on Hungarian territory of the armistice of Padua.

According to the Convention of Belgrade, the Allied Armies were free to move across Hungarian territory and to occupy strategically important points, the administration remaining Hungarian. In Transylvania, a demarcation line crossing the province from the northeast to the southwest was meant to separate the Hungarian armies from the Romanian army, which was considered, ipso

facto, cobelligerent. The Romanian army entered Transylvania during the second half of November. But Romania was still not yet an allied country.⁷

There was a discussion among the Great Victors, owing especially to the help of France (Berthelot, le Comte de Saint-Aulaire, minister of France in Romania, Stephen Pichon, French minister of Foreign Affairs, and Georges Clemenceau). Clemenceau, the French prime minister, wrote to General Berthelot on 15 January 1919 that: “Les Alliés sont d’accord pour considérer la Roumanie comme redevenue Puissance Alliée . . .”⁸ But the treaty of 1916 remained null and void, Romania was no longer considered a Great Victor and would participate in the Peace Conference as a small power, with limited interests and competences, alongside Belgium, Serbia,⁹ and Greece. In 1916, when the situation was bad on the front (the battle of Verdun was raging), the Entente Powers had made generous promises, but now it was more difficult to deliver. The Serbians, who never signed a peace treaty with the Central Powers, claimed a part of Banat, which had been promised to the Romanians in 1916.

In Transylvania there were frequent skirmishes along the demarcation line, which several times was pushed westwards with the agreement of the French commanders. One of these movements had a tragic end. On 14 January 1919, in a village near Zaláu (northern Transylvania), units of the Romanian army fell into an ambush set by Hungarian troops, which had been supposed to leave the locality two hours before the advance of the Romanians, as agreed by the local commanders. There were dead and wounded. Consequently, the Romanians arrested the commissar of the Hungarian Government for East Hungary, Professor István Apáthy, who was afterwards debriefed by Romanian and French officers.¹⁰ One of the results was the decision of the Peace Conference of 25 February 1919 to create a neutral zone in Western Transylvania, which would separate the Romanian and Hungarian armies. The Hungarians were to retreat up to the western limit of the neutral zone and the Romanians were bound to refrain from crossing westwards of the eastern limit. It was decided that French troops would occupy that neutral zone.

When Count Károlyi was presented with the decisions of the Conference, he rejected them and resigned, and a communist-dominated new government took over in Budapest, on 21 March 1919. On 15 April 1919, the Hungarian communist army attacked the Romanian army, which counterattacked and in a few months reached the Tisza River. There, the Hungarian communists attacked again on 20 July, and the Romanian counteroffensive ended with the occupation of Budapest on 3 August 1919.¹¹

At the Peace Conference

THE ROMANIAN delegation, led by Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu, arrived in Paris in the middle of January 1919. The second in command was Nicolae Mișu. The members of the delegation were close collaborators of Brătianu.

The arguments of Brătianu were:

- the treaty of 17 August 1916, which he still considered valid;
- the vote of the assemblies of Cernăuți (Czernowitz), Chișinău and Alba Iulia;
- the participation of Romania in the war;
- Romania's re-entry into the war (10 November 1918);
- the Romanian majority inhabiting all these regions—Transylvania, Banat, Bessarabia, Bukovina;
- the presence of the Romanian army in Hungary and the communist danger in the East and West.

The first confrontation occurred as the Serbians demanded a part of the Banat, which had been promised to Romania (1916) in its entirety.¹²

Coming from Greece with the Allied Armies in the East, the Serbians had occupied Banat up to the Mureș River, plundering some parts of the region,¹³ trying to prevent the Romanians from Banat from going to the Assembly of Alba Iulia (1 December 1918) which decided the union of Transylvania, Banat and Maramureș with Romania, and then seeking to hamper the return of those who had nevertheless managed to make the trip. The Ruling Council of Transylvania, created on 2 December 1918 at Alba Iulia, was prevented from introducing the Romanian administration into the province. There was the real danger of a clash between the armies of two allied countries.

The French found the solution: they created the zone of French military occupation in Banat (15 March 1919), the Serbian troops were obliged (on orders from General d'Espérey) to evacuate the region, and in July General Charles de Tournadre (the area commander) handed over the administration to the Romanians.¹⁴

At the Peace Conference, Brătianu adamantly insisted that the 17 August 1916 Alliance Treaty was still valid, pointing out that the King Ferdinand I and the Parliament of Romania had not ratified the Peace Treaty signed by Romania with the Central Powers on 7 May 1918. Speaking vehemently during the hearings with the Big Four, representing the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference, he demanded that Romania's frontier with Hungary be on the Tisza River, as promised in 1916, also invoking the validity of the decision

of the Assemblies of Bukovina and Bessarabia for union with Romania, and the right to self-determination.

This ran counter to the opinion of the Big Four who considered the Treaty of 1916 null and void, accusing Brătianu of exaggerated claims, pursuing excessive territorial accretion.¹⁵

In fact, even if the 1916 treaty had been still valid, the territory between the Tisza River and the real frontier decided upon by the Commission of the Conference would not have been annexed by Romania, as it was inhabited by a Hungarian majority.

In order to solve the very difficult problem of the frontiers, the Peace Conference set up territorial commissions, having as their head the French politician André Tardieu. The Commission for the Romanian frontiers included the famous French geographer Professor Emmanuel de Martonne, a member of the French delegation to the Conference.¹⁶

Ion I. C. Brătianu refused to sign the Peace Treaty with Austria, which was accompanied by a Treaty on minorities which he considered to be interference in the internal affairs of Romania. On 4 July 1919 he left the conference and went home, where he resigned. The following government was led by General Arthur Văitoianu, and then in November 1919 the parliamentary elections brought to power the Romanian National Party of Transylvania. Iuliu Maniu, its president, refused to form a new government and in December Alexandru Vaida Voevod's cabinet took over. In December, the Romanian government signed the treaties with Austria, Bulgaria and the Treaty on minorities. The Treaty of Trianon with Hungary was signed on 4 June 1920 by the Alexandru Averescu government. After the Peace Treaty with Hungary was signed, the Council of the ambassadors confirmed the union of Bessarabia and North Bukovina with Romania. The Italian government ratified the union of Bessarabia and Bukovina with Romania in 1927 and the American government only in 1933.

Trianon

THE TERRITORIAL Commission for Romania's frontiers with Hungary established the boundary on 12 May 1919.¹⁷ As said before, Brătianu stubbornly claimed the frontier promised in 1916. He did not get it and went home. The Peace Treaty with Hungary was signed on 4 June 1920 in the palace of Trianon, after Romania had signed the treaties with Bulgaria, Austria and the Treaty on minorities. On that occasion, Hungary's boundaries with Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

were confirmed. Hungary was losing two thirds of her former territory, but these territories were inhabited by majorities of Slovaks, Romanians, Serbians, Croats, and German-speaking people in the Burgenland. The settlement decided upon in Paris could not be perfect, but if the Hungarian minorities found it unjust to live under foreign governments, it would have been much more unjust for the Romanian, Serbian, Croat, Slovak majorities in those territories to live under Hungarian rule. The Trianon Treaty provoked shock and despair in Hungary. The Hungarian delegation at the Peace Conference forwarded a memorandum to the Supreme Council of the Conference, asking for the preservation of Hungary's territorial integrity.¹⁸ Their arguments were the following:

- the unity of Hungary was the result of natural geographic conditions;
- separating certain regions from the Hungarian state ran counter the principle (the right) of nationalities;
- the new frontiers separated the production centers from their sources of raw materials;
- historical right—the centuries-long existence of the Hungarian state; the Hungarian elites had developed a eugenic conception and mentality, considering the Magyar ethnic element to be racially and culturally superior to their neighbors, hence their scornful attitude¹⁹;
- Hungary's unity was necessary to European peace;
- the new frontiers cut across social cohesion²⁰;
- “le remaniement décidé est un transfert de l'inévitable hégémonie nationale à des races de culture inférieure, donc une déchéance qu'il faut éviter” (in French in the original).²¹

The Romanian delegation protested to the Supreme Council of the Conference against the scornful attitude of the Hungarian delegation, but did not accept that the problem of the frontiers be re-discussed.²²

Article 45 of the Trianon Peace Treaty stated as follows:

*La Hongrie renonce, en ce qui la concerne, en faveur de la Roumanie à tous droits et titres sur les territoires de l'ancienne monarchie austro-hongroise, situés au-delà des frontières de la Hongrie, telles qu'elles sont fixées à l'article 27, partie IV (Frontières de la Hongrie) et reconnus par le présent traité ou par tous les autres traités conclus en vue de régler les affaires actuelles, comme faisant partie de la Roumanie.*²³

What happened at Trianon was not a gift; it was the international ratification of the decisions taken by the Romanian National Assembly on 1 December 1918, in Alba Iulia.

After Trianon

THE FRONTIERS and the new position and status of a new country, Greater Romania, in the international relations were confirmed. The union of all Romanians was completed. Romania almost doubled her territory and population, inheriting at the same time difficulties issued from the diversity (ethnic and religious) of the population in the new provinces, hence a host of new and difficult problems.

Nevertheless, new prospects regarding development and modernization opened to the country. Old “wounds” had to be healed, and new ones could appear.

In 1923 a new, very modern Constitution was adopted, guaranteeing all civic rights for everybody: universal suffrage for men, complete religious freedom, the naturalization of the Jews, education in the native language (the state created and financed schools in Hungarian, German, Serbian and other languages). A radical land reform was also implemented. Peasants of all nationalities received land.

The economic activities of the minorities were not hampered.²⁴ The political rights of the minorities were respected. The Hungarian and Jewish parties participated in the elections, local and general, and sent to the Romanian Parliament deputies and senators. Jewish organizations entered electoral coalitions with the National Peasant Party (1928) and with the National Liberal Party (1927).²⁵ The culture of the minorities developed. There were more Hungarian publications in Transylvania than before the war.²⁶ Here is the opinion of the historian C. A. Macartney:

Instead, therefore, of seeking to Romanianize them, Romania has adopted the wiser, and certainly more successful policy encouraging their own national cultures, since the gains they may record are solely at the expense of the Magyars. Her purely cultural policy towards these nationalities has been very liberal.²⁷

There were still problems to be solved, but the envoys of the League of Nations reported that the Romanian government was making serious efforts to improve the condition of minorities (especially in education). Pablo de Azcárate and Erik Colban—the envoys of the League of Nations—crossed the country several times. Concerning the education, Lord Robert Cecil, the president of the Committee of the League of Nations, who examined the complaints of the minorities, declared to the Romanian government in 18 March 1926:

Mes collègues du Comité du Conseil, qui a examiné la question de la Roumanie sur l'enseignement privé, m'ont prié d'exprimer en leur nom leur appréciation de l'utile concours qui a été apporté par le représentant de la Roumanie, M. Commène.

Le Comité reconnaît que le gouvernement roumain n'a épargné aucun effort pour mettre à la disposition du Comité tous les renseignements nécessaires en vue d'une étude approfondie de la question et il désire en remercier le gouvernement roumain. Dans une question très difficile, le gouvernement roumain a manifesté le désir le plus sincère et le plus louable de satisfaire à ce que demandent la justice et l'Humanité.²⁸

There was, nevertheless, discontent on the part of different minorities (especially Hungarian) with their situation in Romania and the policy of the government. The Hungarians flooded the League of Nations with complaints. Erik Colban, head of the Section of minorities at the League of Nations (1924) wrote: "After analyzing the Hungarian petition alleging Romanian abuse, the League's Committee of Three concluded that many of them contained exaggerated claims and that some were simply false."²⁹ The Hungarian irredentism grew considerably during the interwar period, leading to the Vienna Award of 1940.

It would have been impossible to draw fairer boundary lines given the intricate situation of ethnic groups in East and Central Europe at the end of the First World War. Trianon nevertheless succeeded in removing former injustices. □

Notes

1. *1918 la români: Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român: Documente externe*, vol. 1, 1879–1916 (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983) (Convention politique and Convention militaire), 763–771.
2. *Ibid.*, Convention politique, art. V, 765.
3. George Cipăianu, *La răscruce (Toamna anului 1917–primăvara lui 1918): Marea Britanie și încheierea de către România a unei păci separate/At the Cross-Roads (Fall 1917–Spring 1918): Great Britain and Romania's Making of a Separate Peace* (Oradea: Cogito, 1993), passim.
4. *1918 la români*, Convention militaire, art. III, 768.
5. Gheorghe Iancu and George Cipăianu, eds., *La Consolidation de l'union de la Transylvanie et de la Roumanie (1918–1919): Témoignages français* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1990), 7–100.
6. See the call "Aux armes Roumains," in *ibid.*, Doc. 1, Annex 4, 113–114.
7. Iancu and Cipăianu, 22–26, 28.
8. *Ibid.*, Doc. XXIV, 156.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., Doc. XLIII, 195–198.
11. Sherman David Spector, *România și Conferința de Pace de la Paris: Diplomația lui Ion I. C. Brătianu*, trans. Sorin Pârnu (Iași: Institutul European, 1995), 127, 136.
12. Ibid., 104–108.
13. Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest, Microfilms, Franța, roll 304, frame 294.
14. Gheorghe Iancu, *The Ruling Council: The Integration of Transylvania into Romania 1918–1920*, trans. Magda Wächter (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Cultural Foundation, Center for Transylvanian Studies, 1995).
15. Spector, 300; Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempts to End War*, foreword by Richard Holbrooke (London: John Murray, 2001), 140.
16. Ibid., 339.
17. Ibid., 188.
18. *Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român: Recunoașterea ei internațională: 1918*, vol. 6 (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), Doc. 857, p. 9.
19. See Marius Turda, “Războiul sfânt al rasei”: *Eugenia și protecția națiunii în Ungaria 1900–1919*, foreword by Zsuzsa Bokor, trans. Răzvan Pârâianu and Attila Varga (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane; Fundația Transilvania Leaders; Școala Ardeleană, 2020), 11, 131, 213, 290, 299.
20. *Desăvârșirea unității național-statale a poporului român*, Doc. 857, 13.
21. Ibid., Doc. 863, 32.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., Doc. 890, 153.
24. Archive de la Société des Nations, Geneva, 41/30120, Report signed by Erik Colban, quoted in Gheorghe Iancu, *Le Problème des minorités de la Roumanie dans les documents de la Société des Nations (1923–1932)* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2002), 65–139.
25. Carol Iancu, “Evreii din România interbelică 1919–1940”, in *Trecutul prezent: Evreii din România: Istorie, memorie, reprezentare*, edited by Anca Filipovici and Attila Gidó (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2018), 68.
26. We are indebted for this information to Professor Virgiliu Țărău.
27. C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and Its Consequences 1919–1937* (London–New York–Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1937), 285–287, quoted in Larry Watts and Vladimir Ionaș, eds., *Romanian Minority Policy and the 1918 Alba Iulia Resolution: Romanian and Hungarian Perceptions* (Bucharest: Roundtable on Ethic Relations, 2019), 81.
28. Société des Nations, *Journal officiel*, 1926, 741–742, quoted in Silviu Dragomir, *La Transylvanie roumaine et ses minorités ethniques* (Bucharest: Imprimerie Nationale, 1934), 174 and 177.
29. Colban, quoted in Watts and Ionaș, p. 29 and note 25.

Abstract

Trianon

The Treaty of Trianon (1920) has been highly debated both in historiography and in the public arena, often in a tense atmosphere. This paper aims at an objective, non-partisan description of the events leading up to the Peace Conference and of the negotiations between the diplomatic delegations of the countries involved (Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Hungary, and Austria). We have looked at Romania's relationship with the Entente (France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States of America), its activity at the Peace Conference, its demands and gains, and the debates at Trianon. We considered it essential to present the arguments of both sides and the results of the Treaty of Trianon.

Keywords

Treaty of Trianon, Peace Conference, Entente, diplomatic delegation