

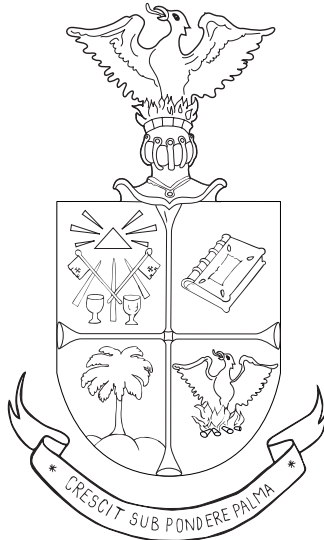
**Szerkesztették:**

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**A KÖZÉP-EURÓPAI ORSZÁGOK  
EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉSE: 1920-2020**

**Central-European Co-operation: 1920-2020**



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## **A SENSITIVE ANNIVERSARY – THE CENTENARY OF TRIANON IN HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA AND ROMANIA**

### **Abstract**

The centenary of the Treaty of Trianon was commemorated in three separate ways in the three countries of the Carpathian Basin for which Trianon has a crucial historical role, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. While Hungary obviously focused on the loss and emphasized the need for strong regional cooperation to overcome historical grievances, in Slovakia important segments of the academic sphere showed an openness to understand the Hungarian position on the treaty, and the Slovak prime minister even publicly declared that he can accept the fact that Trianon is painful for Hungarians. Romania, on the contrary, showed no such openness at all from either the academic, or the politic sphere; and alongside propagating nationalistic messages, a law was also adopted by the Parliament declaring June 4, the day of Trianon, a national remembrance day, projecting thus another embarrassment for Romanian-Hungarian relations, both within Romania and on a bilateral level. The conclusion of the article coincides with some messages on the centenary: Trianon could only become a relic of the past if, by creating self-governance, the legal equality of the Hungarian communities in the respective states can be ensured.

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The Treaty of Trianon, signed on 4 June 1920, ended WWI for Hungary. A century has passed since then, yet the word ‘Trianon’ is still part of everyday life, not only in Hungary, but also in some of the neighbouring countries. Although the word ‘Trianon’ historically refers to the borders created and the injustices Hungary suffered a century ago,<sup>2</sup> today it reflects more on the situation of the Hungarian communities living in the neighbouring countries. The treaty not only separated minority populated areas from Hungary, but for strategic reasons, resulted in the creation of Hungarian minorities millions-strong. These Hungarian communities still exist in the neighbouring communities, mostly forming a regional majority where they reside, and do not enjoy the collective rights they feel are necessary to provide the appropriate framework for preserving and developing their communities.

This is why Trianon is still sensitive, not only for Hungary, but for several successor states as well, and why Trianon is not only a relic of the past. In this article, we will not examine the legal situation or the endeavours of the Hungarian communities, nor the position of the neighbouring states or Hungary in relation to these demands; our goal is to present how the centenary was remembered in Hungary, and the homes of the two most numerous Hungarian communities, Romania and Slovakia. Although it would be very interesting to study the contemporary evaluation of Trianon in Romanian and Slovakian historiography,<sup>3</sup> since they create the milieu for political discourse in

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2 Despite aiming at the ‘liberation’ of national minorities, the newly created Hungarian minorities’ wishes were not taken into account and the borders of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia after 1929) were determined according to geopolitical principles, to weaken Hungary and to provide as many strategic positions and as much infrastructure to these countries as possible.

3 In connection to the centenary, such research has brought the first fruits, yet only in Hungarian: ZAHORÁN, Csaba, *Trianon párhuzamos emlékezetei – a történelmi Magyarország felbomlása a rendszerváltás utáni szlovák és román történetírásban* (Parallel Memories of Trianon – The Breakdown of Historical Hungary in Slovak and Romanian Historiography after 1989), *Magyar Tudomány* 181(2020)6, 774–785, [https://mersz.hu/mod/object.php?objazonosito=-matud202006\\_f42752\\_i1](https://mersz.hu/mod/object.php?objazonosito=-matud202006_f42752_i1), BAJCSI, Ildikó, *Szlovák történészek Trianon értelmezései*

the respective state, we will not go into detail, and will only focus on the political events connected with the centenary in these countries.

What is to be stressed here, is that while ‘Trianon’ has been the most important date for Hungarians and Hungary, it has traditionally had a smaller role in the historical consciousness of the majority populations of the neighbouring states. They praise other events higher; most of all the respective day in 1918 when their leaders announced their intention to secede from Hungary or incorporate those parts of it where they were the majority society. In some states, especially in Romania, that day has an important role as being the most important national holiday, while in other states, like in Slovakia, it has no special importance. June 4, however, is a day of grief for Hungarians wherever they live in the Carpathian Basin. Thus, as we will see below, any attempts to erect monuments or to adopt a law praising Trianon is not for the members of the majority nation, but against the Hungarians, showing how respective state regards the Hungarian community forming part of its citizenry.

### **Commemorations in Hungary**

In Hungary, Act XLV of 2010 declared 4 June the day of National Belonging, giving a rather positive meaning to one of the most traumatic days of Hungarian history. In 2020, Hungary was the only country commemorating the anniversary of the treaty in a state-organised way, despite even the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant there was no single mass commemoration, but several events and publications, many being planned and compiled after years of research. Obviously, the pandemic rewrote the plans and the commemoration in general was more modest. There were two significant events connected to the centenary of Trianon to be presented here: Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at Sátoraljaújhely, and the unveiling of the National Cohesion Memorial (Nemzeti Összetartozás Emlékhelye) in Kossuth Lajos square, Budapest.

The Prime Minister’s speech took place on 6 June at the Hungarian Calvary, built in 1936, a historical monument remembering the lost

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– historiográfiai áttekintés (1989–2019), *CLIO Műhelytanulmányok* 2020/4. [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/198ec4\\_7e28d8bc49a845a6944def9724085a6e.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/198ec4_7e28d8bc49a845a6944def9724085a6e.pdf)

towns of Greater Hungary, accompanied with the unveiling of 9-metre-tall statue of a Turul, a mythological bird of prey, a national symbol of the Hungarians, built from public donations. In his speech, the Prime Minister pointed out that the Hungarians had been the only Eurasian nomadic people who managed to settle in Europe and survive the waves of history encircled by Latin, German and Slavic peoples. He attributed the fall of Greater Hungary in 1918 and 1919 to “a conspiracy in Budapest,” which gave the territory of the state to its enemies and the government to the Bolsheviks. He emphasized that “the West” left the Hungarians isolated in 1919 and 1920 by redrawing the borders of Central Europe, as they did in Africa and the Middle East, and in 1945 the whole region was left to the Communists. He pointed up that although there is no longer any French or British Empire that committed these acts, and there is no Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia or Soviet Union, Hungary still exists, as do the Hungarian communities on their ancestral land. He called for strong Central European cooperation based on mutual understanding and respect. He stressed that the era of Hungary’s hundred years of solitude had ended since Hungary has allies and good neighbours.<sup>4</sup>

The other main event, the inauguration of the National Cohesion Memorial, or Trianon Memorial, was also led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, on 20 August 2020, the national day of Hungary. In that speech, he declared that, after the fall of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Hungary had become the most populous state in the Carpathian Basin, and it also possessed the biggest economy there. He talked about a Hungary “*breaking free of the 100-year-long captivity of Trianon, finding the taste and path of old greatness, and leaving the miserable habits of defeatism and subservience*”, and expressed his government’s will to cooperate with the Central European states for a better future. According to him, the unveiled Memorial symbolises that Hungarians are the heirs to everything the Hungarian ancestors have built in the Carpathian Basin and all the contribution Hungarians have given to humanity in culture, science, the economy, and sport.<sup>5</sup>

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4 The text of the speech is accessible at *Orbán Viktor ünnepi beszéde 2020. június 6. Sátoraljújibely*, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-4/>

5 *Orbán Viktor beszéde az Összetartozás emlékhely avatásán, 2020. augusztus 20.*

The Trianon Memorial is not an ordinary monument; it is a 100-meter-long, 4-meter-wide ramp sloping down from Kossuth Square, the nation's main square. On the two side walls of the promenade, some 12,500 cities and villages of Greater Hungary were engraved on individual granite bricks, where the three different brick sizes reflect the population of the settlements. At the centre of the hard granite Monument of National Solidarity is an eternal flame.<sup>6</sup>

The main criticism concerning the memorial is connected with place names carved into the bricks on the wall, since many of them were artificially created during the era of Magyarization at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The unification of the place names of Greater Hungary was ordered by Act IV of 1898, which ordered every settlement to have only one official name determined by a special committee. The work of the committee resulted in creating exclusively Hungarian official denominations for remote villages lacking ethnic Hungarian inhabitants and thus no previous Hungarian name either. Obviously, the minorities felt that to be intrusive.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, after 1919, the successor states started to apply this very same policy and still use it: today, in all the neighbouring countries (with the exception of Slovenia), each settlement has only one official name, often an artificially created Slovakian or Romanian name for villages and towns with only a Hungarian population or where Hungarians form a majority.<sup>8</sup>

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*Budapest*, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-az-osszetartozas-emlekhely-avatasan/>

- 6 Monument of National Solidarity Budapest - Trianon Memorial, <https://bookinbudapest.com/trianon-memorial-budapest>
- 7 The 'unification' was stopped by prime minister István Tisza in 1913; by then the place names of 59 counties were magyarized, with the exception of the completely Slovak and Romanian-inhabited counties of Árva (Orava), Liptó (Liptov), and Fogaras (Făgăraș) and Hunyad (Hunedoara), and the counties of Croatia that were also part of the Hungarian Kingdom at that time.
- 8 For instance, even such towns like Bratislava, Timișoara, Satu Mare and Târgu Mureș took their current official names in Slovak and Romanian only after 1919. Furthermore, many towns and villages with Hungarian majority even today, such as Csíkszereda (today Miercurea Ciuc, Romania) and Párkány (today Štúrovo, Slovakia), had no Slovakian or Romanian name

From the practical point of view, the solution of using the place-names of 1913 is optimal: the law intended to cease uncertainties arising from several settlements having different names, not only in different languages, but sometimes also in Hungarian, or caused by numerous settlements using the same name without a distinctive, for instance regional or ethnic marker.

However, the Trianon Memorial in its current shape creates the false impression that historical Hungary was the exclusive nation-state of the Hungarian people, where every remote village had an apparently Hungarian name. This is why the place names used have been criticized as projecting a false vision of the Hungarian nation being dominant in every corner of the Carpathian Basin since the foundation of the respective settlements,<sup>9</sup> being a monument to a multilingual state imagined to be monolingual.<sup>10</sup>

It is also to be added, that, between 1939 and 1944, when today's Transcarpathia (Ukraine) formed part of Hungary and enjoyed a special bilingual administrative status, the Hungarian government not only did not reinstate the magyarized place names there, but also required the parallel Latin-Cyrillic use of the Rusyn<sup>11</sup>-type place names.<sup>12</sup> There would have been a possibility, at least for these settlements, to return to the names used during that period, yet the Memorial uses the magyarized names, which is a clear set-back in this regard.

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before 1919 at all, and they were 'named' by the successor states in a similar manner to what happened in Hungary between 1898 and 1913.

9 Valló, Andor, „Ezernyi szegényfolt”: tényleg történelemhamisítást idéző Trianon-emlékművet lepleznek le augusztus 20-án (14 August 2020) <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2020/08/14/trianon-emlekmu-alkotmany-utca-helynevek-kritika/>

10 Szarka, László, *Soknyelvű ország – egynyelvű álmom és emlékmű* (31 May 2020) <https://uj szo.com/panorama/soknyelvu-oroszag-egynyelvu-alom-es-emlekmu>

11 The autochthonous Slavic population of Transcarpathia, recognized today as a minority in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, but not in Ukraine where they are considered to be Ukrainians.

12 MIKÓ, Imre: *Nemzetiségi jog és nemzetiségi politika*, Minerva, Kolozsvár 1944, 393.

## A wind of change in Bratislava?

Until recently, the question of Trianon was not an important issue for Slovak society or the political elite. The main date has been 30 October 1918, when the declaration of independence and union with Czechoslovakia was adopted in the then northern Hungarian town of Túrócszentmárton (today Martin, Slovakia). However, Trianon's centenary brought some change: the Slovak state made a call for research and events to be organized, and a research group was created at the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in partnership with Hungarian and Polish universities to examine the question of Trianon. Books from Slovak authors, reaching far beyond former stereotypes, were also published about Trianon and public debates were held in the country presenting both the Slovak and the Hungarian interpretations.<sup>13</sup> It was also 2020 when the National Council of the Slovak Republic declared 28 October, day of proclaiming Czechoslovakia's independence, a remembrance day, yet not a public holiday.

This was, however, not always the case. Ten years ago, on 3 June 2010, the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS), then a member of the government, unveiled a plaque commemorating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty in the name of the 'grateful Slovak nation', while the then party leader Ján Slota argued that the continued fulfilment of the treaty provides the best tool for Slovakia's existence.<sup>14</sup> The event took place in an over-heated political atmosphere, when Slovak-Hungarian bilateral relations were extremely cold due to the Slovak government's harsh approach towards the country's Hungarian minority, accounting for 10 percent of the population, and the political campaign before the Slovakian parliamentary elections on 12 June 2010.

The next day, on 4 June 2010, the SNS leadership unveiled an illegal monument in the ethnic Hungarian-majority border town of Komárno/Észak-Komárom, too. The town was then the site of a symbolic struggle

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13 Szeghy-Gayer, Veronika: *Szlovák Trianon-újdonságok* (15 October 2020) <https://trianon100.hu/blog-cikk/szlovak-trianon-ujdotsagok>

14 *Pamätnú tabuľu Trianonu odhalil Slota spoločne s Hlinom* (2010. június 3.) <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/166426-pamaetnu-tabulu-trianonu-odhalil-sloata-spolocne-s-hlinom/>

between the local Hungarian majority and Slovak nationalists from elsewhere, who were trying to transform Komárno/Észak-Komárom into a visually Slovak town. In May 2010, the statue of the Christian missionaries Cyril and Methodius, symbolizing their crossing over the Danube to the Slavic lands, was inaugurated, followed by a commemorative column for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Trianon on 4 June.

The two monuments were deliberate insults to both the local Hungarian majority population and Hungary on the other side of the Danube, and intended to contribute to Slovak nation-building in the most populous town in Slovakia with an ethnic Hungarian majority.<sup>15</sup> The unveiling of the column in 2010 was organized together with a conference on Trianon for a Slovak audience transported to Komárno/Észak-Komárom from other parts of Slovakia. To highlight this, the local Hungarians protesting against the event showed banners with the inscription of “Slovak tourists, welcome in our town”.<sup>16</sup> Since the Hungarian community considered the column a serious offence and not even the local Slovak minority supported it, it was vandalized twice during the years it stood, despite placing it by a road with constant international traffic; the first event happened just 8 days after the inauguration.

The centenary in 2020 had a very different scenario. On 16 April 2020, on the orders of the Slovak Road Administration (SCC), the Trianon column was quietly removed by road workers constructing roundabouts. At that time, the SCC was under the control of the Ministry of Transport led by a member of the Slovak-Hungarian Most-Híd (Bridge) party, while in 2010 the minister belonged to the SNS.<sup>17</sup>

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15 On parallel nation-building processes connected to the 90th anniversary of Trianon in Komárno/Észak-Komárom see BERTA, Erika, Párhuzamos nemzetépítés Révkomáromban, *Valóság* Vol. 60, No. 2, (January 2017) 92–99. On the parallel nation-building in Komárno/Észak-Komárom in general, see MANNOVÁ, Elena, Nemzeti hősoktól az Európa térig – A kollektív emlékezet jelenetei Komáromban, a szlovák–magyar határon. *Regio* Vol. 13, No. 3, (2002), 26–45.

16 Így néz ki a komáromi Trianon-emlékoszlop *ma* (2010. július 6.) <https://felvidek.ma/2010/07/igy-nez-ki-a-komaromi-trianon-emlekoszlop-ma/>

17 *Eltűnt Slotáék komoly indulatokat kiváltó, komáromi Trianon-emlékoszlop, és nem is helyezik vissza* (2020. április 17.) <https://ma7.sk/tajaink/eltunt-slotaeak-komoly-indulatokat-kivalto-komaromi-trianon-emle->

The most important event related to Trianon in Slovakia in 2020 was held by Slovak prime minister Igor Matovič. On 2 June 2020, he hosted an event at Bratislava Castle, a renovated museum and a former seat of the Hungarian kings. The Prime Minister's Office invited 100 representatives of the Hungarian community of Slovakia, representing political parties, educational institutions, churches, cultural organizations, and the media, among others, to the event. The reception itself was unique in Slovakian history, but there were previous occasions when Slovak public dignitaries openly talked about injustices committed against the Hungarians of Slovakia: in 2003 Pavol Hrušovský and in 2005 František Mikloško, then acting speakers of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, apologized for the injustices committed against the Hungarians during the lawless years between 1945 and 1948. However, Igor Matovič became the first Slovakian prime minister to talk in openly about Trianon.

First, the prime minister expressed his gratitude for accepting his invitation on the occasion of both the centenary of the signing of the treaty and the Day of [Hungarian] National Belonging (Összetartozás Napja).<sup>18</sup> This latter, as mentioned earlier, has been introduced by the Hungarian Parliament by Act XLV of 2010 to give a new meaning to the day of June 4, and has been criticized by majority politicians in the neighbouring countries. Matovič's speech is therefore a milestone, recognizing the legitimacy of the interpretation introduced by the Hungarian Parliament, and shared by the members of the Hungarian nation.

Mr Matovič emphasized that his role as a prime minister was not to analyze history but to strive for a common vision for a better Slovakia, a stronger V4<sup>19</sup> and Europe. He reiterated his willingness to build a corruption-free, just, and successful Slovakia, respecting its richness provided, among

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18 Igor Matovič's speech is accessible (in Hungarian) at *Igor Matovič trianoni beszéde – Előszőr magyar fordításban a Körképben* (3 June 2020) <https://korkep.sk/cikkek/szemle/igor-matovic-trianoni-beszede-eloszor-magyar-forditasban-a-korkepen/>

19 Visegrad 4, the regional cooperation of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

others, by the existence of the Hungarian community and to act together with the Hungarian community to resolve matters of common interest. After praising common history, he stated that the “*Hungarian state*<sup>20</sup> *before Trianon was ours (i.e. Slovaks’) as well*”, “*in which you, Hungarians formed the majority, and we, Slovaks, a minority*”. Mr. Matovič also expressed his will to discuss sensitive matters related to historical traumas or harms caused by unsolved issues, to find common ground and a resulting and mutually acceptable solution. He stressed that Slovakia is the home of all and it does not regard Hungarians as second-class citizens.

He praised the Hungarian language, culture and gastronomy, all which enrich Slovakia without entering into another country and called for the preservation and development of these values. He expressly accentuated his will “*to allow mothers to teach their children their mother tongues without fear*”. He also stated that a solution must be found for the enhancement of the instruction of the Slovak language in schools with a Hungarian language of instruction to provide pupils with better chances in the labour markets of Slovakia, Hungary and even Czechia – due to the closeness of the Slovakian and Czech languages. He called for infrastructural developments in Southern Slovakia and the creation of a more enterprise-friendly environment to upgrade living standards in the regions populated by Hungarians, Slovaks, Roma and others.

From the side of the Hungarian community, József Berényi, the former chairman of the Hungarian ethnic party of SMK (currently Party of the Hungarian Community), Mr Matovič’s advisor on Hungarian issues and the vice-chairman of the Trnava self-governing region of Slovakia answered. He emphasized the symbolic importance of such an event and praised the openness of the prime minister to debate sensitive issues of common interest.<sup>21</sup> He called for the strengthening of the legal, institutional and economic positions of the Hungarian

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20 In Slovakian, there are two denominations for Hungary, Uhorsko, before 1920, and Maďarsko after Trianon. The first reflects the multi-ethnic state of the common country, while the latter describes the predominantly ethnic Hungarian state within its present borders.

21 *Matovič: Éppítsük közösen Szlovákiát* (3 June 2020) <https://uj szo.com/kozelet/matovic-epitsuk-kozosen-szlovakiat>

community to decrease and reverse the tendencies of assimilation and exodus, and to settle the unsolved issue of collective guilt.<sup>22</sup> Berényi also expressed the importance of a Slovakian prime minister declaring that “*he understands that Trianon is painful for the Hungarians,*” since that was the first time ever it happened.<sup>23</sup>

The gesture of the Slovakian prime minister was exceptional, yet it also allowed ethnic Hungarian politicians from Slovakia to list some issues they find it essential to resolve to create a better understanding within Slovakia. One such example was the interim leadership of the SMK’s handing a Memorandum,<sup>24</sup> without the knowledge of the Mr Berényi, to Mr Matovič. Yet, the prime minister handed the document without reading it to József Berényi asking him to refer to him on its content. Later Mr Matovič made

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22 The Beneš Decrees, adopted after WWII, declared the collective responsibility of ethnic German and Hungarian Czechoslovak citizens for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1938-1939. The decrees deprived them of their citizenship, fundamental rights and property. Since her independence, Slovakia has been arguing that the Beneš Decrees are obsolete, and they no longer create legal relationships. However, the 19 May 2020 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the *Bosits v. Slovakia* case (Application no. 75041/17) showed that this argument is false. Furthermore, during the spring of 2020, Slovakian state institutions officially insisted on the application of the Beneš Decrees to confiscate lands by the D4 highway under construction to minimize expenses.

23 *Igor Matovič vendégeként* (3 June 2020) <https://felvidek.ma/2020/06/igor-matovic-vendegekent/>

24 The document resembled the Memorandum of 1861, in which the leaders of the Slovak minority advocated for, among others, the recognition of the Slovak political nation within Hungary (at that time Slovakia belonged to Hungary under Habsburg rule) and its language as an official language, the creation of an ethnic Slovak-majority region in Upper Hungary, and the establishment of a Slovakian cultural institution. The Memorandum handed over by the interim leadership of the SMK asked for, among others, an administrative reorganization respecting geographical regions, a legal framework providing self-governance for the Hungarian community, co-official status for the Hungarian in the bilingual area, the free use of national symbols, the abolition of the Beneš Decrees and the modification of the law on citizenship to allow obtaining foreign citizenship without losing the Slovak one.

clear his disapproval, saying that “*he intended to give a hand while he was almost spat upon*”.<sup>25</sup> The memorandum itself became a disputed issue in the ethnic Hungarian political sphere of Slovakia, not because of its content, but because many argued that the timing was extremely poor. However, the organizers argued that after words there was a need for action, and that they wanted to provide guidelines to that for the prime minister.

The Most-Híd Slovak-Hungarian inter-ethnic party, which lost its place in Parliament after the February 2020 election, called for the revision of the preamble to the Constitution—replacing the current term of “We, the Slovak nation” with the “We, the citizens of the Slovak Republic” to base the self-identification of the state on a civic and not an ethnic foundation—and the modification of the law on citizenship that prohibits plural citizenship. They also asked for the adoption of a comprehensive law on minority communities and the development of the ethnically mixed regions of Slovakia.<sup>26</sup> Party leader László Sólymos disapproved of how the Slovak prime minister had been vague about the event toward the Slovak language media and society, and argued that Matovič targeted the Hungarian-speaking electorate instead of intending to resolve sensitive issues.<sup>27</sup> He was not alone in stating this; many argued that the intent of the prime minister was not honest and that Mr Matovič thinks, as does the overwhelming majority of Slovakian society, that the state of the Hungary community’s minority rights is well above the European average.<sup>28</sup>

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25 *Trianon: ahogy azt Igor Matovič látja* (4 June 2020) [https://patria.rtvv.sk/clanky/koz-ugy-vec-verejna/226461/trianon-ahogy-azt-igor-matovic-lat-ja?fbclid=IwAR3JZQ9rH\\_VWIXPSHnrzi54jx-DIs4eMzBr1EG5-OAy-FGSrwVcqIUKf9hZ4](https://patria.rtvv.sk/clanky/koz-ugy-vec-verejna/226461/trianon-ahogy-azt-igor-matovic-lat-ja?fbclid=IwAR3JZQ9rH_VWIXPSHnrzi54jx-DIs4eMzBr1EG5-OAy-FGSrwVcqIUKf9hZ4)

26 *A Híd és a Magyar Fórum az alkotmány preambulúmanak módosítását szorgalmazza* (3 June 2020) <https://ujso.com/kozelet/a-hid-es-az-magyar-forum-az-alkotmany-preambulumanak-modositasat-szorgalmazza>

27 “*Sikerült belepisilni a memorandummal a homokozóba*” – Öry-Sólymos-Mózes-vita a Pátriában (6 June 2020) <https://korkep.sk/cikkek/belfold/2020/06/06/sikerult-belepisilni-a-memorandummal-a-homokozoba-ory-solymos-mozes-vita-a-patriaban/>

28 *Miért akadt ki a baráti jobbot nyújtó szlovák kormányfő a magyar kéréseket tartalmazó memorandumon?* (5 June 2020) [https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20200605\\_miert-akadt-ki-szlovak-kormanyfo-az-mkp-magyar-etnikai-kereseket-tar](https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20200605_miert-akadt-ki-szlovak-kormanyfo-az-mkp-magyar-etnikai-kereseket-tar)

Nevertheless, the gesture of the Slovak prime minister received a warm welcome in Hungary, and contributed to the warming of the climate of the high-level meetings in early June 2020. On 5 June, at the Városszabadi-Medvedov/Medve border station, Igor Matovič and Hungarian deputy-prime minister Zsolt Semjén officially reopened the border after significantly reducing its permeability earlier in 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Mr Semjén honoured Matovič's words at Bratislava Castle, arguing that his gesture helps the two governments to build a common future.<sup>29</sup>

The event at Bratislava also positively influenced the prime ministers' meeting on 12 June in Budapest, where Mr Matovič again reiterated his firm will to create a fearless atmosphere for Hungarians to use their language in Slovakia.<sup>30</sup> Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán also expressed his determination to leave the past behind and build a future, while asking his counterpart to further support Hungarian-Slovak ties and maintain his good intentions towards the Hungarian community in Slovakia.<sup>31</sup>

Other Slovak politicians mostly remained silent, yet some openly disapproved of the SMK memorandum and argued against the 'reopening' of the question of Trianon. The content of the memorandum gives a clear clarification why such argumentation is false: discussing unresolved sensitive issues is not 'the reopening of the question of Trianon' but an intention to turn Trianon into a real relic of history by creating a proper legal and socio-economic framework for the communities of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Other events of local interest were organized by the nationalist organization of Matica slovenská to

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talmazo-memorandumán

- 29 *Matovič és Semjén pénteken reggel 8.00 órától feloldotta a korlátozásokat a szlovák–magyar határon* (5 June 2020) <https://korkep.sk/cikkek/belfold/2020/06/05/matovic-es-semjen-penteken-reggel-8-00-oratol-feloldotta-a-korlatozasokat-a-szlovak-magyar-hataron/>
- 30 *EU representatives saddened by the Vrutky attack, Matovič visits Budapest* (12 June 2020) <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22424963/eu-representatives-saddened-by-the-vrutky-attack-matovic-visits-budapest-news-digest.html>
- 31 *PM Orbán after Talks with PM Matovič: Hungary and Slovakia Seeking Success Together* (12 June 2020) <https://hungarytoday.hu/pm-orban-after-talks-with-pm-matovic-hungary-and-slovakia-seeking-success-together/>

celebrate 4 June, for instance in the half-Hungarian populated town of Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat, yet the declaration of the organization's national presidency on that occasion, despite its historical and factual 'mistakes', called for mutual understanding and respect and taking the wishes of the Hungarians living in Southern Slovakia into consideration as well, showing a clear step forward from former statements.<sup>32</sup>

### **Nothing improves in Bucharest?**

The question of Trianon is always present in Romania, since it is strongly connected to the envisaged, but – according to our evaluation – only fictional nation-stateness of the country.<sup>33</sup> The attempts of the Hungarian-speaking majority in the Székely Lands, a territory more or less definable by the counties of Covasna/Kovászna, Harghita/Hargita, and Mureş/Maros, to obtain an autonomous status within Romania have long caused political turbulences, since they call that nation-stateness into question. This is why, in Romania, Trianon has not become a historical event, but remained a hotly debated political issue. However, there is an enormous lack of knowledge on the Romanian side, which repeats false nationalist myths on nation-stateness or historical justice when the question of Trianon arises, creating thus a fertile ground for ethnic tensions and even Russian disinformation activity.<sup>34</sup>

In spring 2020, in the unprecedented situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Romanian political class lost ground and, in need of finding a topic to prove their ability to 'defend' the country, they

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32 *Sté výročie Trianonu je príležitosťou na vzájomné pochopenie* (4 June 2020), <https://matica.sk/ste-vyrocie-trianonu-je-prilezitostou-na-vzajomne-pochopenie/>

33 On the issue see Manzinger, Krisztián, *Nation-stateness Carved in the Constitution—The Question of Székely Land's Territorial Autonomy in Romania* in: Osztovits, András (ed.), *Károli Mundus I*, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar, Budapest 2021, 131-153.

34 On popular perceptions and the consequences rooted in disinformation see ZAMFIR, Rufin and IAVIȚĂ, Vlad, *The Great Unification and Disinformation, Revealing Russian disinformation networks and active measures fuelling secessionism and border revisionism in Romania*, Political Capital, 2020, <https://www.global-focus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Revisionism-Report.pdf>

turned to anti-Hungarian sentiment. The opportunity came on 23 April 2020, with the tacit approval<sup>35</sup> of a draft on the territorial autonomy of the Székely Land in the Chamber of Deputies. The scandal arose in a very complicated situation, when the Romanian elite was not only hopelessly struggling with the pandemic but also receiving criticism on sensitive issues: circles from the then Moldavian President attacked Romania for its ineffective help in fighting the pandemic, pointing out that Hungary's help had been far more useful.<sup>36</sup> At the same period, the Minority SafePack Initiative, aiming at the creation of an EU national minority protection framework – seen as a threat by Romania<sup>37</sup> – was submitted to the European Commission; and Hungary was also preparing for the commemoration of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon.

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- 35 When the Chamber of Deputies is the first house to approve a draft, it has 45 days to do that – 60 days for complex drafts and 30 days for drafts in an urgent procedure. If the Chamber fails to decide within the term, the drafts is considered adopted and transferred to the Senate for final approval. *Organizarea și funcționarea Camerei Deputaților – Procedura legislativă*, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?den=introcd1-i> (9 June 2020)
- 36 *Batjocura unui deputat din R. Moldova la adresa României, după ce Bucureștiul a oferit un ajutor umanitar: Au trimis două lăzi cu măști când se termină carantina și după ce ne-a ajutat Ungaria* (1 May 2020) [https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/batjocura-unui-deputat-r-moldova-adresa-romaniei-bucurestiul-oferit-ajutor-umanitar-trimis-doua-lazi-masti-termina-carantina-ne-a-ajutat-ungaria-1\\_5eabf4d05163ec427151547e/index.html?utm\\_source=widget&utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_campaign=topdesktop](https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/batjocura-unui-deputat-r-moldova-adresa-romaniei-bucurestiul-oferit-ajutor-umanitar-trimis-doua-lazi-masti-termina-carantina-ne-a-ajutat-ungaria-1_5eabf4d05163ec427151547e/index.html?utm_source=widget&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=topdesktop) (9 June 2020), and *Nou atac la adresa României din partea oamenilor lui Dodon: Nu aveți nici măcar potențialul Ungariei. Ajutoarele să le păstrați pentru spitalele din București* (1 May 2020) [https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/nou-atac-adresa-romanici-partea-oamenilor-dodon-nu-macar-potentialul-ungarici-ajutoarele-pastrati-spitalele-bucuresti-1\\_5eac37b15163ec42715380a7/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/nou-atac-adresa-romanici-partea-oamenilor-dodon-nu-macar-potentialul-ungarici-ajutoarele-pastrati-spitalele-bucuresti-1_5eac37b15163ec42715380a7/index.html) (9 June 2020)
- 37 The organisers of the Minority SafePack submitted a textual draft to the European Council in January 2020. In 2017, after the General Court had ruled that the European Commission must re-examine the European Citizens' Initiative Minority SafePack, Romania attacked the decision; however, it lost the case in 2019. Case T-391/17 (ECLI:EU:T:2019:672). Romania appealed the decision and the case is ongoing.

The leading role in the scandal of April 2020 was played by the Saxon – ethnic German –Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, who has already started to build a political future for after his second and last presidential term ends in 2024. He blamed his political opponents, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), possessing then the greatest number of seats in Parliament, for helping the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) to “*provide autonomy with broad competences for the Székely Land while the [Romanian] government and other authorities are fighting for Romanian lives*” and for “*giving Transylvania to Hungary*”.<sup>38</sup> His words were so harsh that it was internationally described as a “strong nationalist message”,<sup>39</sup> and even the German press, always favourable towards Iohannis, criticised him for using language not heard since the collapse of the national-communist regime of Ceaușescu in 1989.<sup>40</sup>

For Romanian politicians, another spark was Viktor Orbán’s message to the graduating high school students in Hungary before their history exam in early May, in which the Hungarian prime minister posted a picture of a globe from his office showing Europe in 1862, with the clear contours of Greater Hungary within the Habsburg Empire. The opportunity was used by the then Romanian prime minister, Ludovic Orban, born to an ethnic Hungarian father, who criticized the image, raising the issue at bilateral level in an already overheated political climate.<sup>41</sup>

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38 *Declarația de presă susținută de Președintele României, domnul Klaus Iohannis* (29 April 2020) <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratia-de-presa-sustinuta-de-presedintele-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis1588152968>

39 *Romanian president causes diplomatic spat with Hungary* (4 May 2020) [https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/short\\_news/romanian-president-causes-diplomatic-spat-with-hungary/?fbclid=IwAR1xWCf5FuoI5voi3B-ZYULHN-ZYzU71E707avwc4joV7e\\_ZXDT60fgty4TE](https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/short_news/romanian-president-causes-diplomatic-spat-with-hungary/?fbclid=IwAR1xWCf5FuoI5voi3B-ZYULHN-ZYzU71E707avwc4joV7e_ZXDT60fgty4TE)

40 *Rumäniens Präsident Klaus Iohannis – Ein Hetzer als Karlspreisträger* (4 May 2020) [https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/rumaenien-praesident-klaus-johannis-ein-hetzer-als-karlspreistraeger-a-de417ba1-64aa-4c44-ba42-21a687f88154?fbclid=IwAR2Uy0BbxXpP\\_m3ZhZYRdQMqsA5N91o-aXhnUxqwcKF0-BErQnD-wtsHoc40](https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/rumaenien-praesident-klaus-johannis-ein-hetzer-als-karlspreistraeger-a-de417ba1-64aa-4c44-ba42-21a687f88154?fbclid=IwAR2Uy0BbxXpP_m3ZhZYRdQMqsA5N91o-aXhnUxqwcKF0-BErQnD-wtsHoc40)

41 *Orban, despre harta postată de premierul ungar: Vrăbia mălai visează* (6 May 2020) <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2020/05/06/video-orban-despre-harta-postata-de-premierul-ungar-vrabia-malai-viseaza--500427>

June 4, the day of the Treaty of Trianon, has a strong connection with the above-mentioned autonomy aspirations, and so it plays a sensitive political role. In 2015, there were two drafts aiming to declare that date a national remembrance day; the first one was withdrawn by the initiators,<sup>42</sup> while the second one was rejected by the Houses.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, during the turbulences in the spring of 2020, a third draft was adopted by the Romanian Parliament.<sup>44</sup> One of the initiators was the former minister of foreign affairs, senator Titus Corlăţean, long known for his willingness to gain popular support by promoting an anti-Hungarian approach. The adoption of the law and thus declaring June 4 a national remembrance day was condemned by the leaders of the Hungarian community, arguing that Romania should acknowledge that, by signing the Treaty of Trianon, it not only received territory but also more than a million ethnic Hungarians toward whom Romania has unfulfilled obligations.<sup>45</sup>

After the Romanian Parliament adopted the law, instead of promulgating it, President Iohannis sent the law to the Constitutional Court (CCR) for examination in order not to worsen the prospects of the upcoming visit of Hungarian minister of foreign affairs and trade, Péter Sziijártó. The CCR, in its decision of 15 July 2020, by a majority vote, declared the law constitutional.<sup>46</sup> The most examined questions during

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42 L253/2015 *Propunere legislativă pentru declararea zilei de 4 iunie Ziua Tratatului de la Trianon*, [https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr\\_cls=L253&an\\_cls=2015](https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr_cls=L253&an_cls=2015) (9 June 2020)

43 L480/2015 *Propunere legislativă privind declararea Zilei de 4 Iunie Ziua Trăncăriei și a luptei împotriva asupririi maghiare*, [https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr\\_cls=L480&an\\_cls=2015](https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr_cls=L480&an_cls=2015) (9 June 2020)

44 L459/2019 *Propunere legislativă pentru declararea zilei de 4 iunie Ziua Tratatului de la Trianon*, [https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr\\_cls=L459&an\\_cls=2019](https://senat.ro/legis/lista.aspx?nr_cls=L459&an_cls=2019) (9 June 2020)

45 *Magyarország sértegetése közepette szavazta meg a román parlament a Trianon-törvényt, ünnepnap lebet a diktátum évfordulója* (13 May 2020), [https://kronikaonline.ro/belfold/kelemen-a-trianon-torvenyrol-buntudat-nelkuli-tobbseg-soha-nem-fitogtatja-a-hatalmat?fbclid=IwAR3jK6M0JouUVtn7xkG5hb4Dw7Hl2ZFH\\_PoOLgByD2OOI1ZN93sdK2MPsdl](https://kronikaonline.ro/belfold/kelemen-a-trianon-torvenyrol-buntudat-nelkuli-tobbseg-soha-nem-fitogtatja-a-hatalmat?fbclid=IwAR3jK6M0JouUVtn7xkG5hb4Dw7Hl2ZFH_PoOLgByD2OOI1ZN93sdK2MPsdl) (9 June 2020)

46 CCR Decision 592/2020, Official Monitor No 824 of 8 September 2020,

the revision were if the law was adopted in a legally correct manner and whether its content was clear enough for implementation.

However, due to its symbolic importance, in our inquiry we focus on the law's meaning and its possible consequences. In its decision, the CCR outlined that the Treaty of Trianon is an important event (point 29), and the Romanian Parliament intended to contribute to presenting its role for the Romanian people (31). At the same section, they even called it a positive obligation to cultivate respect for the nation's history. The CCR also pointed out that the Parliament had adopted several laws marking important dates for national (i.e. Romanian) identity, or for national or ethnic minorities, geographic regions, etc., showing Romania's commitment to promote and defend fundamental rights and freedoms, democratic values, the rule of law, and Romanian historical traditions (33). In terms of the role of Romanian Television (TVR) and Radio (SRR), the CCR argued that the obligation set in the law to transmit local events on 4 June is in line with the TVR's and SRR's responsibility regulated in law 41/1994 to inform in an impartial way on socio-political events, and to promote, among other matters, the values of national minorities (39).

Although the CCR tried to present itself as impartial, they did not examine the very possible consequences of the law. It would probably, not have been their duty either but, knowing Romania, it is presumable that the law will be used again to force the Romanian nationalist interpretation of Trianon on the Hungarian minority, countering the arguments listed by the judges in their opinions. Referring back to the words of the Slovak prime minister, this Romanian Trianon law clearly shows how Romania is still denying and struggling with the recognition of the existence of other interpretations of history and contemporary issues. After the CCR's decision, the Romanian Parliament again adopted the law and it was promulgated in November 2020.

This extremely one-sided approach is deeply rooted not only among politicians, but also academics and the population, providing a useful tool for Russian disinformation. National myths play a crucial role in Romania, and some Romanian historians and journalists have tra-

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[https://www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Decizie\\_592\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Decizie_592_2020.pdf)

ditionally been extremely attentive to Trianon. One such example is Ioan-Aurel Pop, the sitting president of the Romanian Academy, the former rector of the multilingual Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, a historian of the nationalist-communist type from the Ceauşescu era.<sup>47</sup> In 2017, he had already criticised the creation of the Hungarian Trianon100 research group and, on 4 June 2020, publicly oversimplified the question of Trianon as the international recognition of the ‘people’s voice expressed in 1918’,<sup>48</sup> failing to mention either that Transylvanian Hungarians fiercely objected the annexation of their homeland to Romania, and that Transylvanian Romanians promised autonomy for them at Gyulafehérvár (today Alba Iulia, Romania) when proclaiming the Union with Romania; a promise never respected by Bucharest.

Despite our intention not to focus on local events connected to Trianon, we shall make an exception with Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy, the ethnic Hungarian-majority capital city of Covasna/Kovászna county. For a longer period of time, the town has been the site of provocative, anti-Hungarian festivities; the situation was no different in 2020. On 4 June, the organization Centrul European de Studii Covasna-Harghita, functioning under the Romanian Academy, held a symposium in the town titled ‘*Trianon 100. A century since the international recognition of the Great Union*’ with the participation of Mr Pop, the President of the Romanian Academy.<sup>49</sup> The same day, another offensive Romanian event praising Trianon was held in the town, parallel with the ‘Hungarian’ commemoration organized by the

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47 *Ki támadja Romániából a Trianon-kutató csoportot?* (6 October 2017) <https://figyelo.hu/matrix/ki-tamadja-romaniabol-a-trianon-kutato-csoportot-4271/>

48 *Ioan-Aurel Pop, despre Trianon: Orice discuție nostalgică despre vechi imperii și state multinaționale devine caducă* (5 June 2020), <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura/2020/06/05/ioan-aurel-pop-despre-trianon-orice-discutie-nostalgica-despre-vechi-imperii-si-state-multinationale-devine-caduca--518112>

49 *Simpozion cu tema „Trianon 100. Un secol de la recunoașterea internațională a Marii Uniri”* (4 June 2020) <https://covasnamedia.ro/cultura-actualitate/simpozion-cu-tema-trianon-100.-un-secol-de-la-recunoasterea-internationala-a-marii-uniri>

city hall,<sup>50</sup> by the chauvinist association of Calea Neamului,<sup>51</sup> with the participation of some hundred Romanian nationalists brought in from other counties.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Peace treaties are always sensitive issues, especially if they still have an impact on everyday life. Despite being signed a century ago, the Treaty of Trianon still has an influence on the societies and the politics of the states within the Carpathian Basin. As such, the centenary in 2020 was a sensitive question in certain countries; among them, in this paper, we examined three; Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

In these states, the commemoration of the centenary was very different. While Hungary had generally inward-looking events and focused on the loss, her prime minister however also expressed his will to strengthen regional cooperation for a better Central Europe, the situation of the Slovakia and Romania were different, not only from Hungary, but when compared to each other. This is true, despite the fact that both countries were on the winning side after WWI and gained territory from Hungary with significant Hungarian communities that – due to the unresolved problems of social integration and communal equality (not addressed in this article) – still represent a ‘threat’ to the envisaged nation-stateness of Romania and Slovakia. However, Slovakia – due to the personal commitment of the prime minister – was, albeit only in words so far, mostly open to cross existing mental barriers and extend

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50 *Între dezbinare și armonie, după 100 de ani de la Trianon* (5 June 2020) <https://covasnamedia.ro/actualitate/zi-de-sarbatoare-si-de-doliu-la-sfantu-gheorghe>

51 For years, the association has been organizing open-air events with strong anti-Hungarian messages in Székely towns, mostly in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy. They also played an important role in the attacks on the military cemetery in Valea Uzului/Úzvölgye in 2019 and 2020.

52 *Jöttek, trianonoztak, elvonultak* (4 June 2020) <https://www.3szek.ro/load/cikk/133398/jottek-trianonoztak-elvonultak> *Visszafogottan sovinszta román Trianon-ünnepést tartottak Sepsiszentgyörgyön* (4 June 2020) <https://kronikaonline.ro/erdelyi-hirek/visszafogottan-sovinszta-roman-rendezveny-sepsiszentgyorgyon>

a hand to the Hungarian community. Romania, on the contrary, even in terms of legal regulation, continued insulting the Hungarian community and created a new legal tool to impose the official nationalist approach to Trianon on the Hungarian minority who see the treaty of 1920 in a completely different way.

This article notwithstanding focused on the celebration of the centenary without going into detail on the unresolved problems of the Hungarian communities; the challenge created by the existence of these communities is completely linked to the question of Trianon which, as we have seen, is not yet part of the history. The way for Trianon to become a relic would be to settle the unresolved problems and communal equality of the Hungarians living in these countries as minorities, and that would require institutional solutions, the creation of some kind of self-governance, autonomy, providing appropriate measures for the elected leaders of the community to preserve and develop their identity and create a prosperous life in their homeland. The description of the exact content of such an institutional framework is way beyond the limits of this article, yet such a change made by the neighbouring states, the countries where the Hungarian communities reside, seems to be unavoidable in order to overcome the traumas rooted in Trianon and to turn the peace treaty of 1920 into a true relic of history.