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BOOK REVIEW: THE LIVE OF THE NATION IS ETERNAL. ONE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE TRIANON 1920 – 2020.

Peter Ondria*

GÁBOR, J. – VRÁBEL, F. 2020. *The Live of the Nation is eternal. One hundred years since Trianon 1920 – 2020. [Život národa je večný. Sto rokov od Trianonu 1920 – 2020]*. Bratislava: Perfekt. 221 p. ISBN 978-80-8226-007-9.

During the “Covid period”, among other things, I got in my hands a remarkable publication entitled “*The life of a nation is eternal. One hundred years since Trianon 1920 – 2020*”, which I would like to mention in the following review, or few pages. The foreword to the book was written by the chairman of the *National Council of the Slovak Republic*, **Boris Kollár**. The publication was published thanks to the financial support of the *Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic* and the *Fund of the tragically deceased family of Anton Hrnko*, who died in the plane crash.

Professional literature in the field of political science says that the level of political culture is determined and influenced by many variables (**P. Kulašik**, **D. Cevárová**, **G. Almond** and others). In its very structuring, one component represents an integral part, which we call political experience, or historical experience, maybe also the experience of humanity. It is this, along with political consciousness and the political action resulting from it, that closes the imaginary cycle of the existence of the human individual in the public, i.e., power environment.

The Slovak Republic, which was established in 1993 as a result of the political processes of the division of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, will next year celebrate three decades of its own existence. If we consider the fact that Czechoslovakia itself (1918), as the predecessor of the Slovak Republic, has a very short history compared to other countries, we can nevertheless admit with a

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certain amount of self-confidence that our country has gone through relatively hectic political events in almost one century and moments.

In the very beginnings, it is worth mentioning the year 1920, when the *Trianon Peace Treaty* was signed in Versailles, France, on June 4th. Trianon Peace Treaty resolved a number of important political matters, of which the most significant for Slovakia was the definitive establishment of state borders with Hungary, as a result of the defeat of Austria-Hungary Empire in the First World War, as well as the declared opposition of all minorities living in Hungary to the policy pursued until then towards nationalities.

The presented publication offers the reader an objectified view of its authors **Ján Gábor** and **Ferdinand Vrábel** on the phenomenon of the *Trianon Peace Treaty* and very systematically and appropriately approaches the central moments related to it. For anyone who is not indifferent to own history, the publication provides a very logical and sophisticated argumentation by authors who turn their attention to concrete events with practical historical analogies. As is usual with publications of this type, it does not necessarily focus solely on events that were directly related to the signing and acceptance of the peace treaty, but in a broader context, it analyses relatively in detail important historical events related to the existence of minorities in Austria-Hungary Empire and their daily struggle for self-determination and autonomy.

The prominent and famous Slovak diplomat **Štefan Osuský**, who was a direct participant in the given processes and took part in these events in a fundamental way (with his signature), also issued his own opinion, which is the opening quote on the front cover of the book. Ultimately, the authors themselves dedicate the publication to his personality. In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the publication consists of six mutually connected and complementary parts, which also have a chronological connection. The last part is a general summary in English. I firmly hope that it will be published in English language soon.

In the very first chapter entitled "*Slovaks in the wake of the First World War*" authors discuss the general political situation that arose with the beginning of the First World War and the position of Slovakia in it. The detailed documentation of key moments and political conditions in Slovakia, but also abroad, which directly affected the situation at home, should be appreciated. All mediated and authentic events are underlined by referring to concrete material and formal legal and historical sources.

"Peace conference in Paris with special reference to the treaty with Hungary"

is the content of the second chapter. This part provides a detailed account of the events related to the signing of the first peace treaty from Versailles, where the responsibility for starting the First World War was officially assigned to Germany, and it was an official document that ended the war between the Central Powers and the Entente's states. Germany was forced to accept responsibility for war damages and pay reparations at the same time. The authors, with appropriate commentary, bring attention to the so-called *The Versailles peace system*, established after the First World War. Of course, they also touch on his own pitfalls, which ultimately created the conditions for the emergence of an even bigger and more devastating conflict in the form of the Second World War.

A remarkable and especially emotionally hectic part of the book is the third chapter entitled "*Speech of Count Albert Apponyi – originally Oponický from Velké Oponice in Paris*" and his eminent effort in a personal speech to defend the previous territorial arrangement in Central and Southern Europe before the First World War and therefore above all to keep the nationalities within the borders of Hungary. The authors point out that one of the main demands of the Hungarian delegation was to implement the plebiscites – local referenda. However, this was fundamentally rejected by the affected nationalities of Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs and Croats. Despite the signing of the Trianon Treaty by Hungary, the meaning and argumentative reminiscences were highly negative. The Hungarian delegation was represented by **Apponyi**, whose person is described in a brief autobiography in the opening part of the given chapter. He is given the primacy of one of the most ardent followers of the Magyarization of non-Hungarian nationalities in Hungary through a targeted policy in many areas, among which the school reforms of 1907 are worth mentioning. Chapter number three closes with the commemorative speech of Apponyi's speech in the building of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was given that day at 4:23 p.m. and lasted almost one and a quarter hour and left a generally negative impression. The content shows a controlled and conscious antagonism, acting not in the spirit of a new peaceful arrangement, respecting different geopolitical conditions and the relations resulting from them, but an expression lined with lies and contempt for others, especially smaller nations.

The fourth chapter of the book moves the story directly to the "*Analysis of the Trianon Peace Treaty and Hungary's approach to it*". The authors try to capture in detail both the concrete historical, political and legal contexts, as well as Budapest's attitude towards the treaty up to the present day, respectively an attempt to forecast further developments in a tangle of different geopolitical

conditions. In a relatively large space, approximately 68 pages which are dedicated to this chapter, Budapest's tactical position, the reprehensible position of the international environment towards Magyarization political-legal steps within Hungary, the detailed content of the *Trianon Peace Treaty*, Hungarian revisionism and especially the third part of the chapter, which offers a prediction of the next development. The offer of three variants of future development, which may occur soon, and which are discussed in detail on page 124, is particularly interesting. The result of these few lines, but especially of the fourth chapter, is clearly an indisputable argument that the development of the nations of Central Europe began a new era of own history with the signing of the treaty at the *Trianon Palace* in Versailles, without the reach of the previous monarchist establishment.

The fifth part of the book offers, through comparison, the importance of the Trianon and the memorable moments of its 100th anniversary from the point of view of both parties involved, including with relevant photographic documentation. On June 4th of 2020, directly a century passed since the signing of the contract, which both sides commemorated in diametrically different ways. Even though the bilateral relations between Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary have taken on a significantly better quality over the past three decades, Hungary's attitude towards the peace treaty is still not clear and done, as is witnessed by many national and international actions. Budapest refuses to accept the fact that the national policy towards minorities has never been in any way favourable and comfortable to these nationalities, even its leading political representatives are not willing to accept another substantial argument, that hundreds of thousands of Slovaks, Romanians, Croats and Germans remained in a difficult existence.

The last, the sixth chapter, which is entitled "*Atoning for Trianon's wrongdoing in the Hungarian/revisionist way – integration of the Hungarian nation in the Carpathian area*" in a predicative and prognostic way points to the steps of the current political and social elites towards their own success and future existence within the new geopolitical environment. After the transformation processes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe, in connection with the changes of the existing totalitarian regimes to democratic ones, new conditions arose for an attempt to revise the previous events and at the same time the space to realize and fulfil new achievements. This chapter consists of several parts.

In the first one, the authors address the phenomenon of the expatriate law, which was adopted by the legislature of the Republic of Hungary on June 19th of 2001. This normative legal act fundamentally favoured Hungarians living abroad

on the part of their government over the existing population, which was contrary to the *European Charter of Regional and Minority languages*. The problem was that the Hungarian state created direct institutional ties with the citizens of neighbouring countries on an ethnic basis and thereby actually paralyzed the emerging bilateral minority cooperation. Many European institutions, like the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Union also spoke out against these nationalist steps. One of the visible examples was the attitude of the *Venice Commission* – an advisory body of the Council of Europe, which was requested by the Prime Minister of Romania, **A. Nastase**, for an opinion and to examine the compatibility of the law with European standards and principles of international law. In its analysis, council concluded that the responsibility for the protection of minorities lies primarily with the domestic states. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also gave a very critical opinion. The Hungarian expatriate law attracted not only representatives of European diplomatic and political elites, but also the academic environment, which characterized it as a new form of policy of kinship states in Central and Eastern Europe towards national minorities in other states.

The second part of selected chapter discusses the situation surrounding the institute of citizenship, which was another attempt at controlled integration, but one decade later, precisely in the year 2010. By adopting the law on the ethnic method of granting Hungarian citizenship to other nationals, Hungary increased the intensity of the integration process according to its wishes. The authors devote relatively detailed space to this other problem on the following pages. In their opinion, through this step, Budapest achieved “*the highest degree of integration of the Hungarian nation in the Carpathian area*”.

The third part of the last chapter, which is dedicated to the vision of the Hungarian political elites about the mutual ethnic arrangement in the Carpathian area, also plays a very important role within the given issue. The authors deal in detail with these ideas, which are presented most visibly by the current Prime Minister **V. Orbán**. In this context, his two speeches did not escape their attention either. He addressed and placed several topics, which he connected with each other in a very inventive way. They are quite critical to the speeches of **V. Orbán**, who, according to them, omitted several historical events. A very striking feature is the fact that in those speeches historical Austria-Hungarian Empire is identified with today's Hungary, which in certain concrete moments is replaced by the term Carpathian area. The result of the offered analysis is on page 197, which summarizes the approach and offers four common results for the mentioned

speeches.

Attachments and photos complement the conveyed information very functionally and especially illustratively.

The presented publication is the result and mainly a reaction to the different perceptions and interpretations of Trianon Treaty from the point of view of the interested parties in Slovakia and Hungary, which are directly affected by it. However, it should be added in the spirit of the argumentation of its authors that the ambition of the publication is not to present and properly comment on all mutual bilateral relations between Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary over the last hundred years. However, it is extremely important to show young people – today's generation in particular – that without Trianon we would not have created our own existence today and would no longer have the power to make decisions about ourselves, respecting the principles and building principles of liberal democracy.