

WORLD WAR I AND THE FORMATION OF A NEW EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

The East Central Europe of the end of the 19th century could be called "established" neither in the socio-economic nor in the political sense of the word. Political modernization — including the formation of modern states — had left several serious problems unsolved, and Turkey's occupation of part of the Balkan peninsula continued, a reminder that the process of its reorganization was by no means complete. The peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy felt "their" country to be a prison, and longed for their own independent national state or for union with the mother country. Unfortunate Poland was still partitioned, and ruled by the three Great Powers.

World War I, however, gave considerable impetus to the completion of the process. In fact, it marked the end of the period of 19th-century development, and the opening of a new era. The war, as is well known, was the manifestation of the controversies among the Great Powers, and of their sharply conflicting interests. It was the continuation of the imperialistic struggle for colonies and spheres of interest. It was a great confrontation of newcomers and latecomers, offering smaller nations the rare possibility of satisfying a variety of "small", partial interests, through joining one or other of the combatant camps. It was for this reason that most East European countries entered the war.

The war actually started in October 1912, when the Balkan Alliance, a joint force of about 630,000 soldiers from Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro attacked Turkey (which had already been defeated by Italy in 1911) and achieved a great victory. After the Treaty of London in May 1913, all the territories west of the Enos-Midia line were liberated, including Albania, Macedonia and the Aegean Islands. The victorious allies, however, could not come to an agreement, and in June 1913, the Second Balkan War started between Bulgaria and the joint Serb, Greek, Roumanian, Montenegrin and Turkish forces. After a very short fight, Bulgaria was defeated and the Bucharest Treaty gave the greater part of Macedonia to Serbia, whose territory thus almost doubled. Roumania gained Dobruja, and the Greeks most of the Aegean coastline. The Turks retook Adrianople, and an independent Albania was established.

This, however, did not mark the end of the large-scale alterations of the map of the area. On July 28, 1914 the First World War began. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy attacked Serbia, and Bulgaria joined the Quadruple Alliance in September 1915. Roumania, although she had been member of the Triple Alliance since 1883, joined the Entente, and attacked Transylvania and Dobruja in the summer of 1916.

However, Serbia and Roumania were overrun, and the latter, after a serious attack by the Monarchy in the summer of 1917 and the collapse of the Russian front, made a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers in May 1918.

The Polish territories were the arena of the most serious fighting during the war. Throughout August of 1914, the Monarchy's army waged bitter campaigns against Russia, but the latter's Eighth Army, led by General Brusilov, brilliantly repulsed these. The years that followed were ones of heavy fighting along the Eastern front. The Polish forces were divided, some of them (the nationalist faction under R. Dmowski) supporting Russia in the hope of thus achieving autonomy for their nation. Pilsudski, on the other hand, formed a Polish Legion and fought, for a while, on the German side against Russia. Thus, a great part of East Central Europe — the Polish territories, Roumania and Serbia — became a battle field: they were occupied, and partially devastated. In the final analysis, it was the balance of power and of military strength in Eastern Europe which determined the outcome of the long war. For Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Bulgaria and Turkey were defeated by the Allies. The first step to this was the collapse of Bulgaria under the great Allied offensive of September 1918. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy suffered great losses, and practical military annihilation in the battle of Vittorio Veneto in October 1918. In early November, Roumania again entered the war against the Monarchy and Germany.

On November 11, the war of almost four and a half years came to an end. In the patriotic and heroic atmosphere of the bloody summer of 1914, none could foresee that after several years of bitterness, pain and misery, a profoundly different Europe and a radically transformed East Central Europe would emerge. Although the countries of East Central Europe belonged to opposing military blocks — thus, some of them among the conquerors, others among the defeated — their situation in 1917 and 1918 was uniformly critical. Their economies were disorganized and exhausted. There was a serious lack of fuel, raw materials and food. Discontent was rife as a result of rationing and the extreme poverty of the masses. In some places, this feeling rose to a revolutionary pitch; elsewhere, it culminated in mass demonstrations and local skirmishes. But only in Russia did revolution produce a permanent and radical change in the existing political, social and economic structure. Here, the proletarian revolution led by the Bolsheviks and Lenin destroyed the Tsarist régime. It also put an end to bourgeois Russian society, with all its feudal and traditional elements, and established the first socialist state. After World War I, Soviet Russia alone began building a new socio-economic system. The sharp military attacks with which the Great Powers met this effort forced Russia into complete economic and political isolation.

Of course, there were revolutions and revolutionary movements in other East Central European countries as well. The most serious revolutionary situation existed in the defeated countries, in Hungary and Bulgaria, where traditional and unsolved social problems complicated the tragic scene of warweariness and postwar confusion.

In Hungary, in the last days of October 1918, a National Council enjoying widespread mass support came into being. With the help of the Budapest garrison and the backing of workers and soldiers, a successful bourgeois democratic revolution took place on 30 October, 1918 under the leadership of Count M. Károlyi, an aristocrat and opposition politician. Károlyi was an honest democrat, with strong Entente sympathies and good connections. The new government wanted to terminate the war and the old social order, introduce fundamental democratic rights, establish a Hungarian Republic, and pass basic reforms, including a land reform. (Károlyi personally initiated this by handing over his own estate of 50,000 acres to the peasants; this, however, was practically all that he was able to achieve in this field.) The Károlyi government also hoped to reestablish good relations between the Magyar and non-Magyar nationalities.

In the critical postwar situation, however, most of these efforts failed. The government could not cope with all the accumulated difficulties, and, last but not least, could not gain the real confidence and help of the victorious Great Powers. On 20 March 1919, Colonel Vyx passed on to the government the Entente's ultimatum demanding the retreat of the Hungarian forces to the newly prescribed frontiers, frontiers which left Hungary with less than one third of her prewar territory. This was the last straw. Károlyi resigned in favour of the Hungarian proletariat.

On 21 March, the united Social Democratic and Communist Party (the latter was founded in November 1918) assumed power. The Hungarian Republic of Councils came into being without a drop of blood shed. Béla Kun and other Communist leaders who came back from Soviet Russia — where, as prisoners of war, they had taken part in the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War along with about 100,000 other Hungarian soldiers — introduced the system of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Councils. In the economic field, the Council Government immediately implemented the measures of "war communism", including the socialization of enterprises employing more than 25 workers. Important social and welfare legislation was passed and implemented, and the educational system reorganized. The land and some other political questions, however, were poorly handled. Although all the land belonging to the great estates was socialized, the government ignored the traditionally strong land hunger of the peasantry, and, instead of a radical land redistribution, initiated the establishment of cooperatives, which, in practice, operated as state farms. The peasantry, almost 60 per cent of the population, was bitterly disappointed. This was a crucial mistake, and one which weakened the Hungarian Republic of Councils in an already very difficult domestic and international situation.

For the Great Powers were, in fact, making every effort to isolate Soviet Russia and to kill revolutions all over East Central Europe. The spring of 1919 saw foreign military intervention in Hungary, intervention backed by the Great Powers. The Roumanian Army marched toward the River Tisza, while the Czechoslovak Army attacked from the North. The new Hungarian Red Army of enthusiastic workers and patriotic officers overran a large part of Slovakia. The Council Government,

however, yielded to the French demand that Hungary withdraw from Slovakia, but did not get back the territories occupied by the Roumanian Army. Moreover, a new Roumanian invasion was also successful, and at the end of July, Roumanian troops were marching toward Budapest. On 1 August, after but 133 days in power, the Hungarian Republic of Councils was defeated. The government resigned and most of its leaders left the country. The Hungarian counterrevolutionary forces, organized in Vienna and Szeged (a southern Hungarian town occupied by the French Army) started to occupy the other parts of the country. Admiral Horthy, commander of the so-called National Army, moved through the Great Hungarian Plain and crossed into Transdanubia. Thousands of workers and peasants were killed, anti-Semitic pogroms and outrages rocked the country. Between 1919 and 1921, white terror raged throughout Hungary. Real power was in the hands of Horthy and his gentry-military clique (*különítményesek*) and Horthy was elected regent of Hungary. From the very first days, all social legislations and revolutionary measures were rescinded. All the socialist and democratic forces, including the liberals, were pushed into the background, and the Communist Party became illegal. The period of consolidation started in the spring of 1921, when Count Bethlen was appointed Prime Minister. Official policy and ideology, however, continued to be characterized by strong anti-liberalism and anti-socialism. Revisionism — the determination to redress the grievances sustained from the Trianon Treaty — became official foreign policy.

In Bulgaria, in August 1919 the party of the dynamic peasant leader, Stamboliski, who had won great popularity through opposing the war against Russia and being arrested for it, received a relative majority. Stamboliski was appointed Prime Minister. During the four years of his rule, several radical reforms were passed in keeping with his equalitarian revolutionary ideals. The Communist Party, even though its relations with Stamboliski were not harmonious, became the second most powerful force. It had received 25 per cent of the votes in the 1919 elections, and enjoyed great freedom.

The years of revolutionary democracy did not suit everyone. Immediately after Stamboliski again won the April 1923 elections, a military conservative plot was organized to overthrow him. Stamboliski and his weak peasant army were defeated; thousands of peasants and Stamboliski himself were killed. The Communist Party first took the doctrinaire stand of declaring itself neutral; in September, it organized an already belated uprising, but was also defeated. Workers and peasants were killed and imprisoned by the thousands.

From bloody white terror, the "consolidated" reactionary regime of the Tsankov government and its successors was born and freedom became license, the prerogative of the Macedonian terrorists who dominated the country.

Thus, as the period of revolutions and of revolutionary-democratic governments gave way to white terror and reactionary governments, ultranationalist and revisionist regimes took over and remained in power.

In the other countries of the area, however, there was no such extreme confrontation. The wave of revolutionary enthusiasm was sublimated to serve



Francis Joseph and his consort, Elisabeth, dressed for their coronation as King and Queen of Hungary.



Count Gyula Andrassy, the first Prime Minister of Hungary after the Compromise, then the Monarchy's Minister of Foreign Affairs.



Budapest - 1945.

nationalistic goals, or was relatively easily nipped in the bud. This was the case in Poland, Yugoslavia and Roumania.

At the end of the war, social discontent and the spirit of revolution among the workers and peasants was the fertile ground in which Polish socialism flowered. The majority of the socialists were organized in the Polish Socialist Party headed by Pilsudski. The party's main effort, however, was directed at the establishment of an independent national state. Very soon, the patriotic revolutionary character of this movement became unambiguously nationalistic, especially during and after the war of 1919-21 against Soviet Russia. The other revolutionary forces - including the left wing of the Social Democrats originally led by Rosa Luxemburg - either became isolated, because they believed the achievement of social revolution to have primacy over the attainment of national independence, or were pushed into illegality, although, as the newly formed Polish Communist Party, they did find a way to reconcile social revolutionary and national aims along the Leninist line.

In some other countries, through there were revolutionary movements and demonstrations, these forces were not strong enough to fight directly for a takeover.

In Roumania there were several local workers' and peasants' uprisings such as, for instance, those in January 1919 in Vulcan, and in four regions of Bessarabia. In June and July, a general railroad strike, and then a strike of solidarity with the Hungarian Republic of Councils both indicated the strength of the revolutionary forces. However, the general strike of October 1920 was quelled, and at the great workers' demonstration in Bucharest the same year the crowd was fired into; and thus, the country was pacified.

Several mass demonstrations and strikes swept over Yugoslavia from the end of 1918 throughout 1919 and 1920.

The revolutionary forces within the 1921 Assembly were so strong that the Communist Party was the third largest group there. This party consisted of the majority of the Serbian Social Democrats. After the assassination of the Minister of the Interior in 1921, the Communist Party was declared illegal. Practically the entire left was thus forced underground and excluded from political life.

National aims, on the other hand, enjoyed great popularity and mass support during the last years of the war and in the years just after it. In July, 1917, on Korfu, the Serbs demanded an independent South Slav state incorporating also all the Southern Slav peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. On 29 October, 1918, in Zagreb, the peoples' *vetshe* declared all the Southern Slav territories independent of the Monarchy, and proclaimed the union of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in one united state.

On the same day, a Committee was founded in Cracow declaring the country's independence of the Monarchy, and on 18 November, 1918, Pilsudski formed the first government of Poland.

In Alba Julia (Gyulafehérvár) the Transylvanian Roumanians founded their Roumanian National Council, and declared the unification of Transylvania and Roumania on 1 December, 1918.

The Czechoslovak National Council had been founded in Paris as early as 1916 by Masaryk and Beneš. On 14 October, 1918, a general strike demonstrated for an independent republic in Bohemia and Moravia, and two weeks later, the National Committee at Prague declared its independence. The Slovak National Council declared itself in favour of union with the Czechoslovak Republic on 30 October, and on 14 November, the Czechoslovak National Assembly elected its first government.

To sum up: The socio-political problems of the East Central European countries were rather similar to those of Russia. But their revolutions either failed within a short time, or facilitated the creation of a new national state rather than of a new social and political order. Although the redrawing of maps and the tracing of new frontiers had already commenced during the war, their actual realization and their legal sanctioning would hardly have happened without the active aid of mass movements. Both power politics, and the circumstances of further economic development for the peoples of the region had been fundamentally altered by the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the emergence of its successor states (an independent Austria and Hungary, and a newly created Czechoslovakia) by the annexations of important territories to several other countries (Roumania and Serbia), and by the rebirth of new, independent Poland from the parts that had been ruled by the Russian, German and Habsburg empires.

The theoretical basis of this territorial reorganization was the ethnic principle proclaimed by the leading statesmen of the victorious Great Powers. However, the treaties of St. Germain (10 September, 1919), Trianon (4 June, 1920), and Neuilly (27 November, 1919) with Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria respectively were dictated by the strategical-political aims of the victorious powers, and even, in part, by the traditional principle of *divide et impera*. Certainly, the new frontiers drawn by the peace treaties followed ethnic divisions more closely than had any previous boundaries in East Central Europe. Nevertheless, the ethnic principle was violated all too greatly, as the following few examples illustrate. Northern and Western Bohemia, inhabited mainly by Germans, was given to Czechoslovakia on historical grounds. Eastern Galicia, despite its Ukrainian population, was given to Poland for political reasons. The Kosovo region, with its Albanian population, went to Yugoslavia. The northern part of the Great Hungarian Plain with its overwhelmingly Hungarian population was given to Czechoslovakia on the basis of economic considerations. The plains west of Transylvania, and the Subotica and Baranya regions inhabited mostly by Hungarians, were given to Roumania and Yugoslavia, respectively, partly for strategic reasons.

In consequence, millions of Ukrainians, Germans, Hungarians and other nationalities remained on the "other" side of the new frontiers, huge, almost homogeneous masses living in the direct neighbourhood of the mother countries. The problem, however, was even more complex. For besides the frontier zones, there were some regions with completely mixed population, areas such as Transylvania, Macedonia, Bessarabia, Dobruja or the Banat. The ethnic principle could

not be applied in these territories. Thus, the new reorganization could not, in fact, follow the ethnic principle. And thus, with a few exceptions, not nation-states, but new multinational states took the place of the old multinational empires.

Three independent states were formed within the borders of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: the Austrian Republic, consisting of the Austrian provinces alone; the Czechoslovak Republic, incorporating the former Bohemian and Moravian provinces, as well as the northern Highlands of the former Hungarian Kingdom, and inhabited mostly by Slovaks; and the Hungarian Kingdom, reduced to less than one third of its old territory and roughly to 40 per cent of its previous population. Of the former Austrian provinces, Dalmatia, Slovenia, and the annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina came under the rule of the new Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian (later Yugoslav) Kingdom. Croatia, which had previously belonged to Hungary, as well as some southern regions (the Voivodina), and later some districts of Bulgaria were also integrated into Yugoslavia. The former Roumanian Kingdom was allotted a part of Bukovina from the Austrian provinces, Transylvania and the border districts of the Partium from what was formerly Hungary, and Bessarabia from Russia. The new Polish Kingdom consisted of parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and most of Galicia and Bukovina, its nucleus being the old territory regained from Germany and Russia.

*The Countries of East Central Europe
Before and After World War I*

Countries	Area (in square kilometers)		Population (in thousands)	
	1914	1921	1914	1921
Austro-Hungarian Monarchy	676,443*		51,390*	
Austria		85,533		6,536
Hungary	(325,000)	92,000	(20,887)	7,800
Czechoslovakia		140,394		13,613
Bulgaria	111,800	103,146	4,753	4,910
Roumania	137,903	304,244	7,516	17,594
Serbia	87,300		4,548	
Yugoslavia		248,987		12,017
Poland		388,279		27,184

*with Bosnia-Herzegovina

Data based on national statistics

The radical territorial changes alone created completely new circumstances for postwar political development. We must stress here the crucial importance of the strengthening of national hatred and of the spirit of confrontation. Newly created Austria could hardly survive the first difficult years. It is worth mentioning that both the traditional Social Democrats and the proto-Nazi Austrian Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei, although they started from completely different points of view, simultaneously stressed the inevitability of the *Anschluss*. The Vorarlberg

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region wanted to join Switzerland, but similar problems emerged with south Tirol, Karinthia and Burgenland, partly because of the attitudes of neighbouring Italy, Yugoslavia and Hungary. The Trianon Treaty provided Hungarian nationalism with a lot of convincing arguments for revision. Nowhere was there an honest effort to solve the problems of the minorities, and the new multinational states had also to deal with the more serious confrontations among the major component nationalities. In all the new states, from the most democratic, Czechoslovakia, to dictatorial Roumania and Yugoslavia, instead of a federative system, Czech, Roumanian or Serbian domination prevailed, while Slovaks, Croats, and the minority nationalities were energetically suppressed. The situation was a hotbed of incessant political conflicts, and provided the Great Powers with excellent possibilities for augmenting their influence.

What is more, the fundamental changes that had taken place in the countries of the region rendered impossible the continuation of their prewar economies. Independent countries replaced powerful empires; politico-economic units had disappeared, were significantly truncated or enlarged; sections of countries at various levels of economic development were annexed to form new states: the face of East Central Europe had been radically altered.

Nevertheless, from the appalling economic chaos and sense of hopelessness of the postwar years there gradually emerged the recognizable outlines of the new situation. One of the most important features was the sudden importance of foreign trade. As we have seen in Part I, foreign trade had played a relatively subordinate role in the multilateral economy that had existed within the bounds of the big empires. The disintegration of the old economic unit left the successor states and the new countries with one-sided productive capacities. With the contraction of the national market, industrial exports in Czechoslovakia and Austria, and agricultural exports in Hungary became preconditions of the functioning of the economy. Conversely, Czechoslovakia and Austria had now to import agricultural products and much of their industrial raw material, while Hungary had to import most industrial raw materials and investment goods. The new Poland was just as dependent on foreign trade. In the less developed Balkan countries, foreign trade was not of such vital importance. The preponderance of agriculture, and the endurance of traditional economic conditions had hardly allowed the countries of this region to rise above agricultural self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, when the significance of foreign trade in the Balkans is viewed in a dynamic, rather than in a static sense, we must conclude that although it might not have been of primary importance for the traditional functioning of the economy, it was all the more vitally so for progress and development. In Roumania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, increased concentration on exports actually followed from the very backwardness of the economy, for exports offered the most certain way to the domestic accumulation of capital. With the particularly narrow home markets, it was, in fact, foreign markets which made capital accumulation possible, and were, thus, the principal source of the domestic investments promoting development.

In reality, therefore, foreign trade was a prerequisite of economic progress in all the countries of this region.

Another new and major problem was internal capital accumulation, and the role of foreign capital was to be permitted to play in an independent national economy. Most of the countries of the region had traditionally poor financial resources, and were highly dependent on foreign capital. Within the old framework of the huge political units of the prewar decades, a great part of the investment needs of the East European countries was provided by foreign sources, "foreign" often meaning the more developed part (country) of the same empire. The economic basis of national sovereignty, however, was financial self-sufficiency, which required an end to the determining role of foreign capital. The efforts to terminate it, however, conflicted with the given economic possibilities of these countries and with their real interest, which was to get as much foreign credit and investment as possible in order to achieve a faster rate of growth and a stronger national economy.

Adjusting to the new circumstances — including solving the problems of foreign trade and of capital accumulation — and becoming homogeneous economic entities were tasks which, in themselves, would seem to require a very long time, virtually an historical era. Their achievement, moreover, was a necessary step to development and to a steady economic growth. Before all this, however, the new states had first to solve their urgent postwar troubles, and to consolidate their economies.