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**Guest Editorial** 

## On Great Hungary and the importance of minor geopolitical traditions

It's Monday morning of a hot summer day in Budapest. A well-dressed, old lady climbs the stairs of Trolley Bus 75, in the centre of Pest. She sits besides another woman, also well-dressed, in her early forties. A polite conversation starts about the hot weather and the catastrophes that it causes. When the younger lady observes that Hungary, in general, has very favourable climate conditions, her interlocutor abruptly replies:

"Yes, this is why so many nations envy us!"

"Why, is it because we recovered from so many tragedies and catastrophes?"

"No, I mean Hungary has always been attacked because our forefather Árpád had a perfect choice with this country. This is why Hungary fought through so many centuries, and this is why many people died and Hungary got divided. This beautiful huge country, just imagine how beautiful it was! [and then] Trianon came"

"Mmmmm, mmmm"

"And this country is a total disaster since then! They took away what they could [...]"

More than ninety years have passed since the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which left Hungary with less than a third of its original territory and about 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries of then Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Yet, Trianon and the idea of Great Hungary are far from being relics of the past. They can commonly surface in daily conversations, enter the political debate, or even find expressions in artistic installations, like the controversial giant carpet inaugurated in January 2011, in Brussels, to mark Hungary's EU rotating presidency, featuring among others a map of Great Hungary.

Trianon is still present in Hungarian collective consciousness because since then – the argument simplistically goes – the borders of the country no longer match the borders of the nation. This certainly is not a unique case in the world. Yet, we contend that to pay attention to the ways in which the notion of Great Hungary is discursively constructed allows for a perspective on geopolitics different from the one traditionally encountered in the Anglo-American geopolitical traditions. In the case of Hungary, geopolitics – and, in particular, its environmental determinist variant – was not deployed as a tool of imperialism and territorial expansionism, but as a discourse legitimizing the existing borders of the state. In other words, it was not outward, but inward oriented, resembling in some aspects the ways it featured in another minor geopolitical

tradition (Hepple, 1986). Here below we shall briefly look into the Hungarian geopolitical tradition to substantiate this point.

On the eve of the Trianon peace talks, a group of Hungarian academics published an appeal to the negotiators for preserving the territorial unity of Great Hungary (Polner, Kováts, Hodinka, Prinz, & Lukinich, 1918). Their main argument was "the so-called principle of geopolitics (*geopolitika*)", according to which stable states' formation relies on areas which belong together geographically and thus are interconnected economically. Only states based on permanent natural circumstances can survive throughout history, whereas "national belonging" (i.e. the principle of nationality) can only provide an "intellectual connection" which will never be permanent. Thus, on the table of the peace conference – the authors claimed – "we should not lay the map of nationalities, but the oro- and hydrographic map" (Polner et al., 1918: 10, 14–15).

The construction of Great Hungary as a geographical unity defined by the natural borders of the Carpathian basin had already come to the fore in the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks in particular to the work of János Hunfalvy (1863-1865), the father of Hungarian geographical science and founder of the Hungarian Geographical Society (1872). Yet, in the years before and after Trianon, Hungarian geographers gave further substance to this idea as a way to defend first and to reclaim later the territorial unity of the country. According to one of the main experts on the history of Hungarian geography, it was indeed during the preparation for the peace process at Versailles that modern Hungarian geography developed (Hajdú, 2000, 2001). Relying on the organicism of Carl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel, eclectically mixed with ideas from Paul Vidal de la Blache, Elisée Reclus, Jean Brunhes, Eduard Suess, and William Morris Davis - all used to justify the importance of natural factors in shaping socio-economic life -Hungarian geographers produced a vast scholarship aimed at one single aim: to demonstrate the natural, organic unity of Great Hungary. Attempts were also made to convince foreign readers of such a unity, like the edited book by one of the most influential Hungarian geographers of the time, Lajos Lóczy (1918), translated into German and Croatian (English, French and Italian editions were also planned, but in the end could not be published) (Hajdú, 2000). The Hungarian Geographical Society (1918) also published an appeal to "the geographical societies of the world", and in particular to the ones of the victorious powers of World War I, defending once again the indivisibility of Great Hungary on the basis of the organic unity which people form with their natural habitat, irrespective of their ethnic and linguistic differences. To capture this organic unity, the notion of Lebensraum was at times also used, like in the case of the works of two of the most prominent

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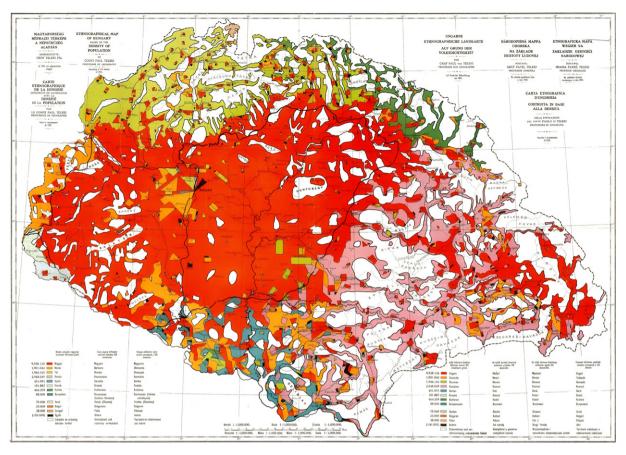


Fig. 1. Pál Teleki's ethnography map (also known as 'Red Map'). Source: Teleki, P. (1920). Magyarország néprajzi térképe a népsűrűség alapján. Budapest: Klösz György és Fia Térképészeti Műintézet.

Hungarian geographers of the interwar period – Gyula Prinz and Pál Teleki (the latter became Prime Minister twice, in 1920–1921 and in 1939–1941). Yet, this notion was adopted in relation to the internal space of the country, without any reference to the state's territorial growth – Great Hungary indeed as "a separate *Lebensraum*" (Prinz & Teleki, 1937: 30). While in the neighbouring countries, the notion of race was also increasingly used to support geopolitical discourses (Bassin, 1987), it did not play a significant role in Hungarian geopolitics. Although there were clear references

to the existence of a Hungarian race (Lóczy, 1918: 137–147) and the need for its protection (Kalmár, 1942: 15–18), overall Great Hungary was not constructed in ethno-racial terms (Bartucz, 1938). This would have obviously questioned the unity of the country, although in 1920 Pál Teleki published for the peace talks in Versailles his ethnography map (Fig. 1), showing the impossibility of drawing clear ethno-cultural borders within Great Hungary. Rather than race, it was instead the notion of a unified orographic and hydrographic basin which constantly featured in the geopolitical



Fig. 2. Remembering Great Hungary, (Photo by Marco Antonsich).



Fig. 3. Remembering Great Hungary, (Photo by Marco Antonsich).

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