

The Meaning of Boundaries. The Making of Romano-Hungarian Frontier after the First World War

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1. *Introduction. The European Settlement after World War I*

The concepts of «boundary» and «boundary-making» include an activity of delimitation and demarcation that is neither the result of geography nor of historical processes and has instead a definite political aspect. Boundaries, considered as imaginary lines dividing two pieces of land from one another, do not always coincide with frontiers, but have to be observed through an interdisciplinary approach, as processes, symbols and social institutions (Oye Cukwurah, 1967; Tambassi, 2018).

At the same time, the meaning of borders changes and becomes mobile. Even in a unified Europe, borders

are a part of everyday life for more people than even before. Today as well as in the past, borders are both territorial markings of the ambit of State sovereignty or other rule, and an object and a result of continuing social processes as well as the cause of specific social processes (Boesen, 2017, pp. 1-3).

Political boundaries are normally defined by way of diplomatic agreements, often following a phase of conflict, for example the Napoleonic Wars or the First World War. After World War I, in particular, the collapse of the multinational Empires gave way to a complex re-definition of the European boundaries, especially in Central-Eastern Europe, where many existing States were enlarged with new territories (Romania, Serbia, Greece), while others gained their independence according to the principle of national self-determination (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia).

But the transformation was not simply a geopolitical one. As remarked by Isaiah Bowman, a profound change took place in the spiritual and mental attitudes of the people that composed this new world.

There came into being a critical spirit of inquiry into causes, of challenge to a world inherited from the past, of profound distrust of many

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existing institutions. The effects of the war were so far-reaching that it was indeed a new world in which men found themselves. In some countries the whole structure of social and political life was altered. People everywhere had to create or adopt new ideas and make new material arrangements. Men were moved to inquire so intensely about the causes of the war and about just modes of settlement that they went on to look deeply into the social, political, and economic systems from which war had sprung... It is not the position of the line alone, whether on this side or that of a mountain range or stream, that is important; it is a whole group of economic, racial, ethnic, and religious factors that relate themselves to boundary location (Bowman, 1928, 31).

The treaties of Versailles, Saint Germain, Neuilly, Trianon and Sèvres were the result of a strange combination of American idealism and European pragmatism, of national self-determination, ethnicity, accomplished facts, distinctions between victorious and vanquished powers. The new *status quo* generated a whole of different controversies and clashes in many contested regions, including some local conflicts that exacerbated the relationships among the States and the ethnic groups of Central-Eastern Europe¹.

In the difficult context of 1919-1920, the role of the army proved to be essential. Military representatives played an outstanding peace-keeping role, accurately informed the conference about the conditions of many problematic zones, and their presence assured stability in some regions that were dangerously subjected to angry disputes between the new authorities and the local communities. Military commissions were engaged in the control of the military (the army, the navy and the aviation forces) in the vanquished countries, and were called to intervene in the concrete and detailed definition of the new frontiers, as happened after the Congress of Berlin (1878). The peace treaties provided only the general indications about the layout of the boundaries, which had to be further implemented in the following phase. The treaty of Trianon, for example, defined the frontier with Romania in art. 27, while article 29 was dedicated to the establishment of the Boundary Commission, whose composition was to be fixed by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and the interested States.

Considering the traditional role that geographical analysis had always played within the military structure, and the consolidated cooperation that many geographical societies had established with the different armies, the allies thought convenient to entrust to military personnel also the activity of boundary delimitation. Military commissions, thus, continued the work that had begun during the conflict with the creation of special scientific consultive units, such as the American Peace Bureau Inquiry or the *Comité d'études*. The contribution of French geographers, in particular, has been extensively analysed by Taline Ter Minassian, Jacques Bariety, and Emmanuelle Boulineau: these authors focused attention on the work of the *Comité d'études*, and Ter

¹ For example, the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Eastern Galicia, the conflict between Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary, the Russo-Polish War, the Polish occupation of Vilnius, the uprisings in Silesia, the Greco-Turkish war.

Minassian, in particular on the new boundaries in the Balkans, which reflected the strategic and political conceptions of that context, while Boulineau fully described the work of the geographer Emmanuelle De Martonne in the case of Romanian boundaries. In this context, «territory met geography and geography intersected with the geopolitics of nations states, geographers limped along 1918-19 as frustrated border crossers and treaty arbiters in motion» (Seegel, 2018, p. 6).

Except for the rich literature existing in Hungarian language, on the contrary, the role of the boundary commissions has rarely been analysed, nor did the socio-economic consequences of the new settlement have been fully studied in order to understand the post-1919 political scenario, and the complex reality of many European regions. The findings of the boundary commissions in East-Central Europe seemed to be not very attractive, especially when compared to the attention that scholarship devoted to many other boundaries outside Europe, as in the case of the American-Mexican frontier, which has been exhaustively studied and debated in the «*American Journal of International Law*»². Similarly, the activities of the different boundary commissions in Africa and in South America have been investigated in many studies, for example by Ronald Bruce St. John, but also by geographers who were interested in areas that were still unknown and mysterious to the eyes of Western observers (Parodi, 2002; Bruce St. John, 1994; *id.*, 1999). It is worth reminding, however, that many Eastern European regions were not less mysterious to the international public, for example under the ethnographic point of view, as it was correctly realized by the American president Woodrow Wilson, who created the well-known Peace Bureau Inquiry just to ascertain the ethnic conditions in this part of Europe.

The experts of the Inquiry worked together with the analogous teams such as the Comité d'études of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry and benefited from the expertise of multidisciplinary scholars such as Paul Vidal de la Blache, Emmanuelle de Martonne, Jovan Cvijić, Charles Seymour, Douglas Johnson, J.E. Pichon (Kitsikis, 1972; Foucher, 1984). The negotiators wished to give peace treaties a scientific approach and consequently history, geography and ethnography played an important role during the peace negotiations at Versailles (Dell'Agnese, 2016, p. 112). But at the same time, it was inevitable that particular political interests were destined to prevail: scientific findings, as mentioned before, were used and «re-adapted» by the various delegations struggling for the annexation of some regions that were considered as an integral part of their historical, ethnic and cultural space.

These contested regions engaged international diplomacy in long and complex negotiations, which were strongly conditioned by the political interests of the different delegations. From this perspective, the documents of the boundary commissions can represent a further source of study and research to overcome the «national» point of view prevailing in diplomatic documents and to prove the evident cleavage between the political decisions and the local conditions of many East-Central European regions. While the negotiations of

² See for example Rebert, 2001.

the peace-conference were inevitably influenced by their political implications or by military strategies, the reports of the boundary commissions gave a first-hand account of the most troubled areas, and focused on the material conditions of the different zones, their social, economic and ethnic structure. As a consequence these documents indirectly emphasized the distance existing between the proclamation of the national self-determination principle in the treaties, and its implementation on the ground. Many regions of East-Central Europe such as Transylvania were far from representing solid blocs of national communities, each with their own well-defined identity, habits, traditions and language. From this perspective, the purpose of this article is not only to shed new light on a rather well-researched region, but it is also to take some further steps towards overcoming the persistent nationalist conceptualization of boundaries, analysing Transylvania beyond the simplistic perspective of Romano-Hungarian controversies.

2. *The Boundary Commissions*

The activity of the boundary commissions attracted a certain interest in the years after WWI, when the border problems were still alive and could represent a factor of instability in a fragile political scenario. A special attention, for example, was devoted to the situation of German boundaries by A. R. H. in some articles in the *Geographical Journal* in 1919-1921. The importance of the Balkan region was underlined by Frank L. Giles' article and by the debates at the Geographical Society on January 15, 1923, with the participation of D. P. Subotić and D. Cree (member and president of the Yugoslav-Hungarian Boundary Commission).

As underlined on that occasion by colonel H.S.L. Winterbotham – the author of *A Key to Maps* –, the difficulties a boundary commission suffered under were manifold (Subotić, Winterbotham, 1925, pp. 110-112). In many cases, as argued by Colonel Frank Giles after his Balkan experience, no boundary mark of a permanent nature had ever existed prior to the arrival of the international boundary commissions, which were called to trace the new frontiers indicated by the treaties and had the power, not only of indicating «a line to be fixed on the ground», but also of revising the portions already defined by the former administrative boundaries (Giles, 1930, p. 303). This opportunity was given to the commissions only where a request to that effect was made by one of the States concerned, and the commission considered desirable to do so.

In their activity, the commissions had to take in account, as far as possible, administrative boundaries and local economic interests, and could count on the cooperation of the national authorities. According to the treaties, the latter had to provide the commissions with all the documents required (art. 31, c. 1, treaty of Trianon); they had to offer the services of local functionaries and every kind of assistance (arts. 31-32), and finally had to respect and implement the decisions of the commissions (arts. 33-34).

Furthermore, the activity of the boundary commissions was regulated by the instructions of the peace conference (October 6, 1919); the *additif* attached on May 1, 1920; the instructions approved by the conference of ambassadors

on July 7, 1920; the *Instructions relatives aux commissions de délimitation* of July 22, 1920³. According to these documents, each commission was formed by titular members, technic and auxiliary assistants (topographers, secretaries, interpreters). The States interested in the dispute were represented by a delegate, who could be accompanied by technic assistants, an interpreter and a secretary. All the commissioners, «dans un but d'économie générale», could simultaneously take part to more than one commission.

These bodies had to be composed exclusively by military officers representing the Powers of the conference. Only assistants and consultants (*petit personnel*) could be recruited among the local expertise. The commissioners were to be chosen among first grade officers, while the technic personnel could be selected among junior officers. The sub-officers and the soldiers (*homme de troupe ou assimilés*) could be appointed only as secretaries and assistant topographers. All the members of the commissions were called to wear the military uniform only in exceptional cases, in order to avoid any incident with the local population.

The activity of the commissions started with a preliminary geographic and topographic study, which was followed by the first contacts with the local authorities, providing all the documents and studies about the local administrative, social and economic conditions. In this phase, the delegates of the interested States could advance their respective requests and activate a first step of mediation, arranging an agreement or a compromise.

The final goal of the commissions consisted in settling the frontier-line and fixing it through signs, milestones and *bornes*. In order to integrate these results and make them rational and effective, the commissions were called to arrange some protocols and agreements for all the juridical questions concerning the delimitation of the border.

In the case of the Hungarian frontiers, the general instructions were further integrated by a covering letter (*lettre d'envoi*), which was sent to the Hungarian government by the president of the conference of ambassadors, Aristide Briand. This letter became one of the main points of discussion during the works of the Romanian-Hungarian boundary commission, as it admitted that Hungary could propose some modifications of the frontier without altering its general line⁴. This document regarded exclusively the frontiers of former Hungary (Slovakia, Vojvodina, Transylvania) and was naturally interpreted by the Hungarian delegation as the source of possible changes repairing the injustice of the peace-treaties⁵.

In fact, the commissions had the power of modifying the provisions of the treaty under certain conditions. These modifications should regard only less

³ The instructions were finally approved by the conference of ambassadors on July 22, 1920. The French version of the instructions is simply resumed in this article, which is based on the original instructions guarded in the archive of Italian Army's General Staff. Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (Aussme). Rome. Catalogue F3, box 320, file 1.

⁴ Report no. 2 on the work of the commission drafted by Lt. T. Paolotti (Oradeamare, September 17, 1921). Aussme, E8, 75, 5.

⁵ In order to: «realizzare le promesse contenute nella lettera del 6 maggio 1920 cioè la riparazione di tutte le ingiustizie commesse verso l'Ungheria e la Ungheria sola» Paolotti's Report no. 3 (Oradeamare, September 30, 1921). Aussme, E8, 75, 5.

important changes; they had to be approved with the unanimous vote of the members and could not be justified by ethno-national motivations (*à l'exclusion de toute raison nationale, linguistique ou religieuse*). This limit was necessary not to re-open the Pandora's box of national claims that characterized many troublesome regions of Central-Eastern Europe, where the clashes amongst local communities reflected the controversy existing between the respective States (Silesia, Eastern Prussia, Sudetenland, Carinthia, Banat, Ruthenia, Transylvania). The ordinary procedure of the commissions included a first meeting in Paris, where the president and the secretary were elected, and special sub-commissions were created, fixing the number of supplementary assistants, preparing the journey and the technical instruments, examining the geographical maps and planning the work «sur le terrain». Only after this preliminary meeting, the commissions could begin the work on the ground and visit the regions, where they usually received many appeals, petitions and protests issued by the authorities or by the population in order to convince them about the soundness of the respective claims.

In several occasions, the commissions met with the opposition of local communities. The arrival of the boundary commission in the region of Opava (Silesia), for example, was not exactly welcomed. In 1920, the international delegates recorded a series of incidents and the resistance of the population who was led by the political authorities, as in the case of Klein Peterwitz's mayor. While the first stones that were placed to indicate the new frontier were often removed or launched in the water (Birkenwald, Owshütz), in some cases the commissioners were targeted by local population with aggressive tones, and at Hař a resistance force was organized by the police and by the citizens to resist against the cession to Czechoslovakia⁶.

This more or less violent opposition was the symptom of the hostility that characterized these multi-ethnic regions, where a deep interpenetration of values, habits, languages and traditions had been converted by the conflict into a bitter ethnic confrontation.

3. *The Romanian-Hungarian Frontier in Transylvania. Ethnic Aspects*

The complexity of many Eastern European regions was well represented by the case of Transylvania. Transylvania had hosted for many centuries a more or less peaceful coexistence among different languages, cultures and religions, and the inter-ethnic conflicts that increased during the Nineteenth century became clear at the end of 1918: the Romanians claimed the union of Transylvania with the declaration of Alba Iulia (December 1, 1918), while the Magyars tried to resist against such a loss, even fighting against Romanian troops in spring-summer 1919, during the short-lived experience of Béla Kun's soviet republic⁷.

⁶ Documents sent by the boundary commission on March 18, June 15 and 30, 1920, Aussme, E16, 15, 1.

⁷ The Soviet Republic lasted 133 days between March and August 3, 1919, when Romanian troops occupied Budapest.

In 1910, Transylvania was inhabited by 2,819,467 Romanians (54%), 1,658,045 Hungarians (31.7%) and 550,964 Germans (10.5%). In 1930, the region hosted 2,673,300 Romanians (55.2%), 1,324,200 Magyars (26.7%), 518,900 Germans (10.5%), 157,600 Jews, 47,500 Serbs, 29,700 Slovaks, 17,800 Ukrainians and 105,800 members of other nationalities. Under the religious point of view, the 1900 data recorded 1,696,000 Orthodox believers (35%), 1,137,700 Greek-Catholics (23.5%), 908,200 Roman Catholics, 625,300 Reformed Evangelical Calvinists, 249,000 Lutherans, 157,600 Jews. «No other regional population in all of Central-Eastern Europe was as highly differentiated with regard to religion» (Eberhardt, 2003, pp. 279-302).

https://www.academia.edu/31904465/Ethnicity_and_Politics_Censuses_in_the_Austro-Hungarian_Empire_Case_Study_Transylvania_1869-1910The difficult definition on the ground of the new frontier in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious region was carried out by the Romanian-Hungarian boundary commission, which was created in Paris in August 1921. The commission was headed by General R. Meunier, and composed by the British, Japanese and Italian members, A.V.F. Russell, M. Sano and lieutenant Teodoro Paolotti, and by Romanian and Hungarian delegates, D. Toma and G. De Dormandy.

The activity of this commission is described in detail in the final report of its Italian delegate, which undoubtedly represents an important historical contribution on the perception of local Transylvanian conditions, and could be very helpful to integrate and complete the diplomatic notes and letters of the peace-conference with details and first-hand impressions that rarely were present in the wide documentation of Versailles negotiations.

Paolotti described Transylvania very carefully and left a meaningful survey of his work, concentrating on some specific issues such as language, religion, and economy. The ethnic situation was perfectly described in all its complexity: ethnicity, according to Paolotti, was not a well-defined concept in postwar Transylvania, as the different communities did not always have a clear perception of their national identity. Only some general considerations could define the limits and the distinctions among the various groups: the most evident regarded Magyars and Romanians. The Romanians had been the most radical opponents of the former regime, and kept alive a strong aversion against their rulers, the Magyar «Magnates», functionaries, officials.

According to Paolotti, Hungarians and Magyarized groups could be distinguished from Romanians for their life style and their aspect: while the former usually lived in the cities or in the villages, the latter resided in the countryside. Paolotti underlined that the Romanians had kept their individuality jealously and had struggled against the Magyarization process of the previous decades. Only recently, these measures had obtained some success, for example in the scholastic field, but even after so many efforts, the Romanians preserved their religion and their social habits and traditions, representing the most active opponents of Magyar hegemony⁸.

This resistance has been frequently interpreted under the lens of urban/

⁸ The process of Magyarization had been carried out in the previous decades with measures such as the replacement of functionaries and the scholastic reforms.

rural dichotomy. The village represented the symbol of Romanian cohesion and values, of the will of keeping the national character and roots intact. The cities showed a lively multiculturalism and the presence of Magyars and Germans in urban activities and professions endangered the persistence of Romanian identity: «The fact that the Romanian peasants didn't leave their children to go to town and learn a trade, out of the fear of their moral and ethnic estrangement, almost became an axiom» (Bolovan-Bolovan, 2003, pp. 189-190). Other nationalities had been more flexible and absorbed Magyar policies of de-nationalization, finding a *modus vivendi* with Budapest, exactly as they did with Bucharest after 1918.

The German Swabs had settled in the Magyar plains and in the Banat during the XVIII century, especially in the uncultivated and marshy territories, which were converted into productive land. These communities succeeded in creating strong economic centers but lost their particular identity and were greatly influenced by the process of Magyarization, especially through the influence of local churches⁹. The local Slovak colonies were equally affected, and were easily integrated with the Magyar groups. Populations devoted to the Roman Catholic Church were in close relationships with the Magyar hierarchy: their clerks, for instance, had been gradually replaced by Hungarian or Magyarized ones. Since school and religion were reciprocally inter-related, also the German and Slovak educational institutes had been constantly decreasing: the result of this process was that Swabian and Slovak youth commonly knew and usually spoke Magyar language.

According to Paolotti, the relations between Magyars and Romanians could not be simply described as a clash between different ethnic groups, since the political passions were as strong as the religious sentiments¹⁰. Every ethnic group had different religious affiliations and, consequently, different social and cultural attitudes. The Roman-Catholic religion was practised by a great part of Magyars, the Slovaks and the Swabs. The Romanians were either members of the Orthodox church, or of the Greek-Catholic church that had been established at the end of the XVII century. Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans could be assembled since their culture and life-style greatly differed from those of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic believers, who were generally placed at a lower social position¹¹. At the same time, the relations between Romanian Orthodoxy and the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy were not so good: on the contrary, the religious struggle within the Romanian community gave birth to hostility, rivalry, and political controversies. Paolotti mentioned an episode that generated harsh and polemic debates between the Romanian churches: during the parliamentary discussions for the draft of the

⁹ «E poiché scuola e religione presso quelle popolazioni è tutt'una cosa, così le scuole tedesche e slovacche furono a poco a poco sostituite» con il risultato che «in questi ultimi tempi la gioventù sveva e slovacca non parla altro che la lingua ungherese».

¹⁰ «Le passioni politiche fra le varie razze sono tanto più profonde e divergenti quanto più grande è la differenza delle religioni alle quali appartengono i fedeli».

¹¹ Paolotti pragmatically considered that Magyars could be easily distinguished by Romanians as the latter normally showed a lower level of civilization: «L'ungherese o il magiarizzato si distingue in massima dal romeno, sia per il suo tenore di vita sia per il suo aspetto fiero ed intelligente».

Constitution, the Greek-Catholic and the Orthodox metropolitans violently quarrelled and their dispute strongly impressed public opinion. The press, for example, polemically reminded that during the coronation of the king at Alba Iulia, in October 1922, the Greek-Catholic clergy did not maintain an adequate behaviour. Priests and clerks were also engaged in the confessional schools as teachers, and played a central role in the education of their respective communities. They monitored the peaceful coexistence of their followers, influenced them in ordinary life and prohibited them to convert to another creed¹². Clergy was very active in promoting the spirit of national belonging, the persistence of traditions and language, and in cementing the identity of the different ethnic groups.

Religion was strictly connected to culture and especially to language, which could be distinguished according to its sphere of application. Every group used a frequent language in the family and daily life, and sometimes this language was different from the one adopted in the economic and professional activities, and different too from the one used in religious expressions.

In conclusions, the documents of the boundary commission succeeded in defining a more sophisticated analysis of the multicultural and multi-religious life of Transylvanian communities: ethnicity was the doctrine international diplomacy was looking for but did not represent the only instrument to understand local dynamics. As argued by Volker Prott, the mechanism of ethnification pervaded peace-planning efforts and negotiations and reduced subjective political or national identities to the objective external traits of groups, serving as a simplifying tool for resolving political issues (Prott, 2016, p. 241). Reading Paolotti's report, however, it is possible to discover varying patterns of ethnification, opening new fields of historical research and completing the notion of ethnic-conflict that was central in diplomatic documents and was even more complex in the local dimension.

4. *The Economic Dimension*

Apart from the cultural aspects, the boundary commissions focused on different matters such as economy, which played an important role in the reconstruction of the postwar period, when the former economic unity of the Habsburg Empire was partitioned and subjected to different governments.

The reconstruction of Central-Eastern Europe had to preserve the rights of persons in separated territories who were previously included in schemes of social and state insurance, and therefore it was necessary to protect freedom of transit and equitable treatment for commerce in other nations. These problems were further emphasized by the fact that in their constitutions, national States regarded their borders as inviolable spaces, and self-assumed a new role in order to reorganize their industrial and economic system according to the

¹² «I sacerdoti hanno su queste semplici popolazioni un'influenza straordinaria. E sono essi che mantengono nella popolazione elevato il sentimento della rivalità prima e del patriottismo poi...Chi teneva e tiene tuttora desto lo spirito di conservazione della propria lingua sono le religioni ed i loro sacerdoti».

needs of their communities, and especially of the dominant nations (Headlam-Morley, 1928, p. 264).

Under this perspective, the new frontiers inevitably cut off regions that in the past had forged a cohesive and well-structured economic space. It happened, for example, that the frontier divided the already existing properties of an individual or of a firm, as in the case of the Pannonia hemp and linen factory at Nagylak¹³. The principal building of this industry was to remain in Romania, but was greatly damaged by the fact that it could not have a direct access to its natural resources, which instead had to be imported from Hungarian territory. The activity of this industry was strictly connected to the railways and to the water canal *Mezőhegyesi élőviz*, which therefore could not be divided without prejudicing the production of Pannonia, whose properties had to be inevitably partitioned: the commission considered that it was impossible to find a stable solution without separating the central building of the factory from part of its properties, where hemp and linen were cultivated. A similar situation could be noticed at Szeged, where a factory working with hemp had its properties partitioned by the boundary, which separated the cultivated land from the machinery and the tanks.

Generally, the delimitation of the frontier could appear simple when it had to deal with small land-estates, while it created more problems for the great properties that were normally owned by Magyars. On the one side, all the so-called «magnates» requested their properties to be assigned to Hungary, where they had a consolidated elite position in relation to political and economic centers of power. On the other, small owners requested their lands to be on the same side of their houses. They showed no sentimentalism or nationalism but simply wished to retain the source of their income next to their residence, no matter if it was in Romania or in Hungary.

As in any other part of the world, Transylvanian peasants had a very deep link with their lands: the proximity of important centers conditioned their economic activity, their daily life and the whole organization of a village¹⁴. The localities where markets were held represented a very important benchmark for many small villages, and influenced the entire economic space of the region. It was thus necessary to consider the economic relations between city and countryside, and between villages and cities, in order not to hurdle the commercial activity of the region and to safeguard the traffic of goods and commodities. This aspect was especially important in the case of Romano-Hungarian border zone, as the main cities were awarded to Romania while huge rural areas were cut off from their traditional centers of gravity, thus becoming peripheries in the new Hungarian economic framework.

A special chapter of Paolotti's report concerned the agrarian reform of Romania, which greatly damaged the Hungarian landowners, who violently attacked Romanian authorities protesting against the confiscations of their

¹³ Report no. 10 (Oradea, March 1, 1922). *Aussme*, E8, 75, 2.

¹⁴ «I contadini sono qui come in tutti i paesi del mondo legati alla propria terra...talvolta la prossimità di centri importanti può influire sulla vita e sulla organizzazione di ogni villaggio... soprattutto per quanto riguarda la vita quotidiana».

estates. The agrarian reform had important implications both for the relationships between majority and minorities, and for its consequences on the production: while it undoubtedly represented a benefit for the lower social classes, the Romanians who benefited from the redistribution of land, at the same time, it hurdled the process towards a solid economic development, as it meant a decrease of the production and of technology in the agricultural field. Some properties that had been fully and efficiently organized were gradually dismantled and assigned to small landowners, who did not possess the same capitals and the same instruments to work the land. Steam ploughs, cattle, agricultural and industrial machines were common in the Hungarian lowlands but could not be redistributed together with land.

Another obstacle on the way of reconverting and rebuilding postwar economy was represented by the division of infrastructures. Railways, roads and canals were all important since they conditioned not only the development of cities and villages, but also the economic activities and the distribution of capitals. Furthermore, the presence of industrial factories attracted labour from the surrounding zones and a frontier could also mean its separation from the traditional places where this labour was to be found. The railways, in particular, were one of the key-points of discussion during the peace negotiations, as Hungary awarded to the control of railway lines a special importance for the economic survival of the country, which needed to maintain its role as the hub of East European junctions in order to preserve sufficient economic standards in the new geopolitical framework.

Similarly, the boundary commission devoted great attention to the regime of rivers, canals and streams. In the past, the Hungarian government had supported the creation of an inclusive system of communication among these water resources (Danube, Drava, Sava, Tisza, Mureş and Someş), which had been connected into a well-organized basin in order to improve the economic exploitation of many lands that had been cultivated and developed. The division of this system, on the contrary, endangered the effectiveness of this complex infrastructure, which required a high level of cooperation between the plain and the mountains, in order to compensate the needs of the agricultural zones with the conditions of the mountains. The lack of such a cooperation would inevitably mean a great loss for the production and the development of agriculture, especially in the zones that were particularly subjected to floods and inundations. This eventuality was perfectly understood by the boundary commission, which expressed concern for the risk that this web would be inexorably destroyed by its fragmentation and by the controversies deriving from the management of water resources¹⁵.

In many cases, the commission argued that economy and infrastructures were destined to be greatly affected by the new boundary, owing to the evi-

¹⁵ The infrastructure system represented an important chapter in all those Trianon books that were published after 1918, together with other less scientific arguments such as the cultural and historical superiority of the Magyar people. C. de Tolnay, *Hungarian railways and territorial integrity*, Budapest, Hungarian Territorial Integrity League, 1919; J. Ajtay, B. Jancsó, A. Kovács, *The Transylvanian Question*, London-New York-Budapest, Low, Steiger, Pfeifer, 1921.

dent cleavage between military needs (clearly in favour of Romania through the concession of the Arad-Oradea-Satu Mare railway) and the perspective of maintaining the historical network of economic relations (Orde, 1980). At the same time, it was difficult to pin identities and aspirations on the territory: converting what the British diplomat Nicholson called «errant lines» into real frontiers was a disheartening job that unfortunately conditioned the material needs and the «happiness» of several thousands of people (Nicholson, 1933, p. 219).

5. Conclusions

After WWI, peacemaking and delimitation of boundaries involved serious interdisciplinary discussions among historians, geographers and anthropologists. Their suggestions were not always taken in consideration at the political level, but were equally useful to understand the complexity of many East-Central European territories. As the Serbian representative D. P. Subotić argued at the meeting of the Geographical Society, on January 15, 1923:

The Boundary Commissions established by the Treaty of Peace to draw, on the spot, frontier lines between various States bore, naturally, a pre-eminently political character. Their work, however, has been a very valuable contribution to knowledge, especially to the study of political geography. So many minute and delicate questions have been weighed one against the other by the most competent and impartial men, yet their final decisions have often hurt one or other, or both sides... To draw a perfect ethnographic boundary in this conglomerate of races was practically an impossible mission (Cree, 1925, p. 110).

Probably, the political conditions were not adequate to avail these scientific efforts, but the results of those studies had a great historical value and described a world that was soon to be radically changed in the age of Nation-States. In the case of the Romano-Hungarian frontier, the new boundary clearly reflected an «ancient tradition of French diplomacy» and the controversial nature of the new settlement was perfectly mirrored by the French geographer De Martonne's «*rhétorique de persuasion*» and «engagement intransigent» in favour of Romania (Boulineau, 2001, p. 366). De Martonne corrected the census figures, which he thought over-estimated the Magyar population, by interpreting 1910 statistics and selecting the category of the real Hungarians (*vrais Hongrois*). In doing this, he was in fact sacrificing statistical precision in order to create a distorted image of the various ethnic groups. He considered urban population separately, and also decided to represent minorities only if the dominant nationality was below 75 per cent of the population. As a consequence, the importance of the towns, with their predominantly German and Magyar populations, was considerably reduced on his map, where the whole administrative district was coloured according to the rural majority (Palsky, 2002, pp. 114-115). On the other side, Teleki's *Carte Rouge* depicting the apparent dominance of Hungarians in the Carpathian basin was another typical example of the subjective colouring of contemporary ethnic maps.

The situation, on the contrary, was really complex, as it has been underlined by Isaiah Bowman (the chief territorial adviser of the American Peace Commission) in his memoirs:

Each one of the Central European nationalities had its own bagful of statistical and cartographical tricks. When statistics failed, use was made of maps in color. It would take a huge monograph to contain an analysis of all the types of map forgeries that the war and the peace conference called forth. A new instrument was discovered: the map language. A map was as good as a brilliant poster, and just being a map made it respectable, authentic (Bowman, 1921, p. 142).

De Martonne's and Teleki's works could represent an example of what Bowman called the «perverted» use of maps. The idea that prevailed in those troubled years was that Europe, like a mosaic or a puzzle, could be divided into pieces, each corresponding to a nation, that is to say a population sharing the same history, language, religion, ethnicity, and thus the same future. But this vision implied that every piece could be separated from the other, an Europe of nations with certain borders among people and cultures (Fabietti, 2002). Unfortunately, as proved by Paolotti's report, the borders contained themselves the seeds of future conflicts and represented what T. Griffith Taylor defined as the sore spots of this discourse, the limits of a new system that only partially took in consideration the «externalities» of that geopolitical process (Taylor, 1946; Ter Minassian, 1997).

The case of Transylvania well exemplifies the distinction between cultural, political and geographical borders, as the only clear delimitation resulting from Paolotti's considerations could be found in the dichotomy city-countryside, which anyway was not sufficient to exhaustively define the boundary between Romanians and Hungarians. On the cultural point of view, boundaries were not as clear as political observers were induced to suppose when sitting at the table of peace. Transylvania included many micro-borders among different ethnic groups and religious communities; between social classes (aristocracy, urban professionals and merchants, functionaries, small landowners, peasants) and between geographic spaces (city-countryside, but also mountains, valleys and plains). All these distinctions were substantially ignored by political agents and were instead very important for the life of local population. From this perspective, Paolotti's report overturned the concepts of exclusionary identities that pre-exist the coming of the borders and made it evident that the peace negotiations were only trying to give borders a deep-seated historical genealogy even when this was a fictive exercise (Agnew, 2008).

This process of ethnification of the identities of people was in competition with economic, geographic and historical arguments and was made possible only through the presumption that ethnic traits were congruent and representative of political allegiance and interests. Regional multilayered identities were encompassed by «ethnicity», which served as an umbrella term to cover all references to local population and justify the conceptions of borders as clear-cut lines separating different national spaces (Prott, 2016, pp. 129-131). The fallacy of this conception of borders as a zero-sum game was fully under-

stood by John Maynard Keynes (1920) and by those officials such as Paolotti, who had the opportunity of investigating local conditions on the ground. As both suggested, the new frontiers created discontent and controversies in the field of economic, ethnic and diplomatic relations.

National identity was to become a powerful political factor in the life of governments as well as in the experience of their citizens, and the new settlement greatly influenced future beliefs, cultures and behaviours. The new border played an important role in shaping Hungarian and Romanian national identities: it was respectively interpreted as a tragedy or as a historical victory by Magyars and Romanians, and consolidated their ethno-national awareness affecting the course of interaction or stance, which is inevitably destined to influence the insider or outsider status and to police category membership (Brubaker *et al.*, 2008). Borders enable a whole host of political, social and economic activities. They have real effects and limit the exercise of intellect, imagination and political will (Agnew, 2008).

Contemporary debates are rediscovering and interpreting the motives of diversity or localism, and are irremediably leading scholarship towards renewed reflections about the complexity of certain regions such as Transylvania, exactly as a group of military officers did almost a century ago. Lieutenant

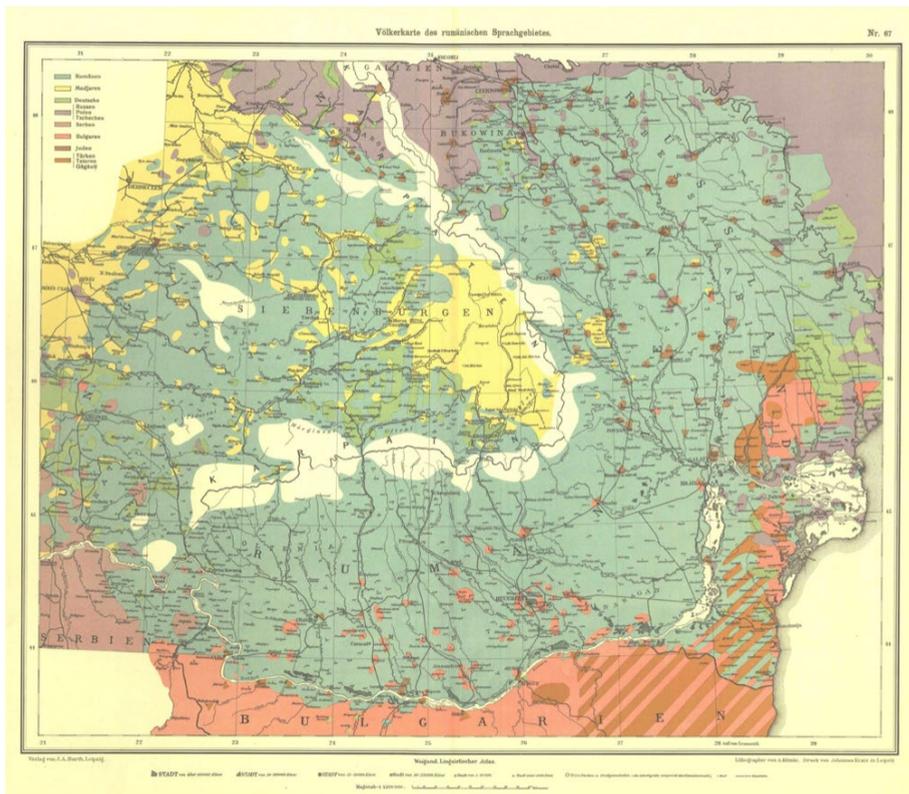


Fig. 1 – Weigand G., *Linguistischer Atlas des dacorumänischen Sprachgebietes herausgegeben auf Kosten der Rumänischen Academie in Bukarest*, Leipzig, Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1909, p. 67.

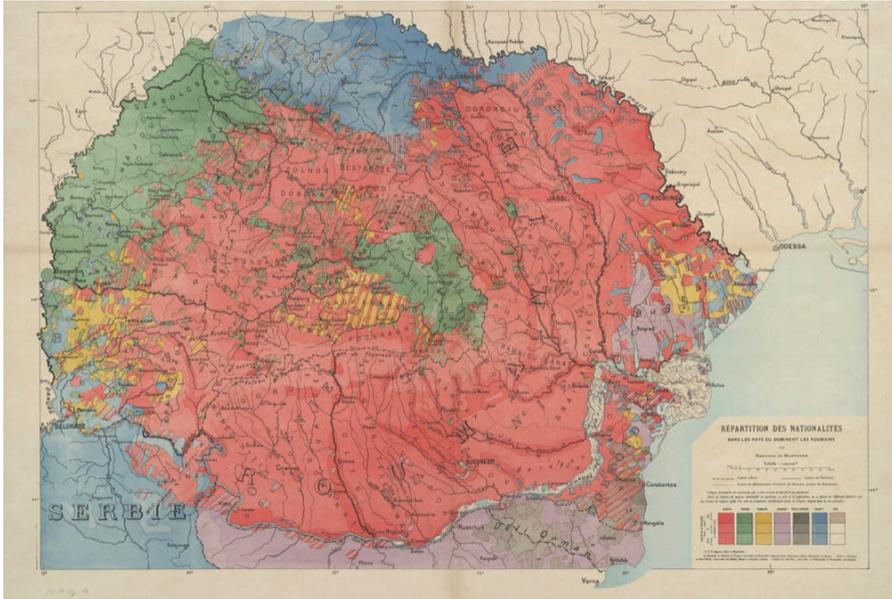


Fig. 2 – De Martonne E., «Essai de carte ethnographique des pays roumains», in *Annales de Géographie*, 158, 1920, pp. 81-98.

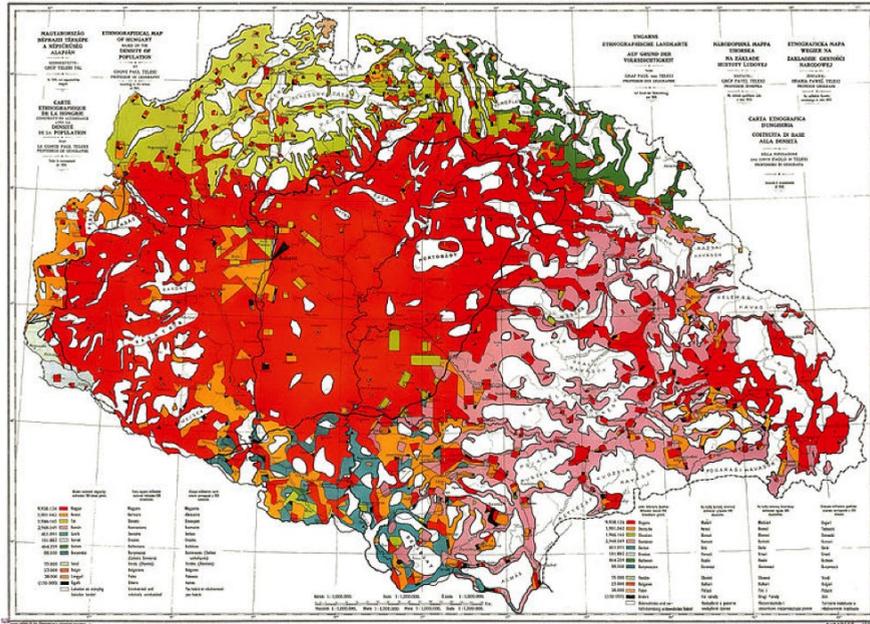


Fig. 3 – Segyey D. Z., «Carte Rouge 100. Teleki Pál vörös térképének hatástörténeti elemzése», in *Regio*, 4, 2018, p. 118.

Paolotti's final reports proved that the activity of his boundary commission went beyond the traditional ethno-national controversies and superseded the content of an overwhelming part of the diplomatic documents. The contra-

dictions between ethnic and political-administrative boundaries were not fully understood by international diplomacy, and the logic of nationalization of interests prevailed. International boundaries are not lines drawn on maps without identifying characteristics, they are not material or conceptual entities dividing lands and States, and their existence cannot be exclusively understood in reference to the central areas they encompass and define (Darques, 2017).

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Il senso dei confini. La frontiera romeno-ungherese dopo la prima guerra mondiale

Il contesto del primo dopoguerra portò a una generale ridefinizione geopolitica dell'area dell'Europa centro-orientale, dove i territori degli Imperi plurinazionali furono divisi fra numerosi Stati nazionali. In molte regioni dovettero essere tracciati nuovi confini che non rispondevano pienamente a criteri etnici, storici, economici o geografici. Il lavoro delle commissioni di delimitazione che furono chiamate sul campo a definire tali frontiere, come nel caso romeno-ungherese, risulta pertanto di grande importanza per comprendere l'impatto che i nuovi confini ebbero sulla realtà locale di molte regioni europee e sulle conseguenze per lo sviluppo futuro, tanto nei rapporti tra Stati quanto nelle relazioni sociali ed economiche fra gruppi etnici e comunità locali.

Le significat des limites. La frontière entre la Roumanie et l'Hongrie après la première guerre mondiale

Le contexte de la première période suivant la première guerre mondiale a conduit à une redéfinition géopolitique générale de la région de l'Europe centrale et orientale où les territoires des Empires multinationaux ont été partagés entre de nombreux États nationaux. Dans beaucoup de régions, on a dû établir de nouvelles frontières ne répondant pas pleinement aux critères ethniques, historiques, économiques ou géographiques. Le travail des commissions de délimitation convoquées dans ces territoires pour définir ces frontières – comme dans le cas de la Roumanie et de l'Hongrie – a par suite une très grande importance pour comprendre l'impact des nouvelles frontières sur la réalité locale de nombreuses régions européennes et ses conséquences pour le développement futur, soit dans les relations entre les États, soit dans les relations sociales et économiques entre groupes ethniques et communautés locales.

