

Trianon Not Comprehended

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In the issue of *Élet és Irodalom* published on 1 October 2010, Éva Kovács offers her criticism of the memory of Trianon. [...] Her main argument is that its memory is no longer maintained by primary experiences, is not part of our communicative memory and thus is only a neurosis.

It is indubitably true that Hungarian inner politics has sinfully instrumentalized the Trianon phenomenon from 1920 until today. It is also true that the discourse about Trianon is generally nationalistic and one-sided in Hungary - as it is in the neighboring states. But it is not "solely" a neurosis. The mistake Éva Kovács commits is exactly the same that she criticized others for: in spite of her title, she speaks of Trianon as if its post-1920 context would not be basic to it. It could seem that Trianon is part of some epoch long gone and only manipulative politicians would still try to force it back into the present.

The examples supposed to support her main argument are also unconvincing [...] She does not mention that in the countries neighboring Austria there no longer are any significant German minorities who speak their mother tongue. Given this, their cultural rights are not restricted, they are not called second class citizens and no one wants them pushed across the border (since the Czechoslovak leadership has fully achieved this after 1945). No monuments are erected to provoke them (and when such are built as was the case in South Tyrol decades ago, local and Austrian responses follow), nor are they humiliated on the various forums of secondary and tertiary education through the discrimination of their mother tongue. Nor are there lowly language laws in place against them. The objects of their cultural memory are not intentionally destroyed. Can we relate all these back to Trianon merely emotionally, are they not also part of the factual context? Would they not make the phenomena at least partly understandable that Éva Kovács otherwise rightly condemns?

[...]

It is not an emotional but a practical question whether the situation of the Hungarians (*magyar népcsoport - FL*) in neighboring states is solved. The answer to this question is obvious. It should also be obvious that the key to its solution is not in the hands of Hungary. It is clear that the leadership of Hungary can significantly damage or improve the situation, but only the neighboring states can be held politically and morally

responsible for having the right of their citizens fully respected. This also means that they are primarily responsible for the trauma of Trianon since they maintain those conditions that explain why the mourning has lasted until today.

The irresolvable conflict arising out of this situation is that, on the one hand, the memory culture inclusive of all Hungarians cannot mourn "Trianon" or, more precisely, the destruction of Hungarian culture across the border that takes place in the frame of forced assimilation. On the other, this means that no positive or future-oriented messages can be formulated. [...]

Éva Kovács uses the idea of the plurality of identities which would undo the "false ethnic topoi" about "the Hungarian" and "the Slovak". I do not understand what she thereby means to say. [...]

According to Éva Kovács, historical accounts have until now not presented the direct experience of "annexing away". [...] I do not see what she means. This is the topic of various published accounts. Let it suffice here to mention the recent article of Elemér Sebestyén in *Századok* and Péter Szabó's treatment of the military administration of Northern Transylvania. Not to speak of dozens of documentary films. It is hard to react to the absurd view that the Hungarian populations torn away in 1920 were disappointed in the politics of Hungary and in the Hungarian state(!). I am not saying that this might not be true or correct in some sense, but it is clearly senseless in the given context. It is namely much more true that the emotions of the Hungarian populations from the torn territories were influenced by the new Romanian, Slovak and Yugoslav states that took away their basic rights and partly also their property - and not Hungary that could hardly exert any influence on their lives.

[...] No matter how different Hungarians from the *Felvidék* or Transylvania are, in all likelihood they think similarly about questions of mother tongue and historical memory. It is no accident that in spite of all their "otherness" the period between 1940 and 1944 lives in the language of the villagers of Northern Transylvania as the "Hungarian world". Not as "Horthy era" and not as the period of "reannexation". This is due to the fact that the Hungarian population could feel at home in this period more than in others - in spite of all the difficulties. If there is any basically positive social experience related to the whole complex of Trianon, then it is the return of parts of *Felvidék* and Transylvania. By trying to question this Éva Kovács only makes the neurosis connected to Trianon even deeper.

Éva Kovács recommends that historians from Hungary and the neighboring countries should create the bases of shared cultural memory and overwrite the Trianon-neurosis through combining the texts on Trianon (*összeolvasásával - FL*). I agree; but at least it ought to be

mentioned that not even a half of this combining can be accomplished by "us" (meaning Hungarians from Hungary) if the other side misjudges its own interests and is unready to do this, thereby creating a dead-end for the minority Hungarians it holds captive [...] It goes without saying that coming to agreements with them would be sensible but on the short term such agreements can impact neither the constitutions that define them as nation states, nor the language law and education, i.e. the partly explicit, partly hidden forced assimilating. Hungarians across the borders are exposed to being treated as a foreign body and the exertion of their rights are violently hindered. Representing these rights is therefore and by necessity our task in the same manner that Austria reserved this right earlier in relation to South Tyrol.

Cultural memory can only become shared when it is shared by official state politics on the other side of the border. Nationalist historical discourse is strongly present in Hungary, but members of the Slovak and Romanian Academy of Sciences are explicitly captives of nationalist thinking. As long as their ethnocentric narrative does not change, there is no chance to reach the point where memories would be shared. Independently of this it remains our task to honestly confront our own past and questions of Hungarian responsibility.