| Chapter 2 |

Great Theorists of Central European Integration in Hungary

László PALLAI

ABSTRACT

In Hungary, too, the idea of Central European cooperation has constantly been on the agenda. The reasons for this interest are similar to those in Austria: with the emergence of the idea of the nation-state, existing political structures steadily lost their stability. Integrationist ideas have always been an alternative to the current power relations. Although these plans have remained present in the Hungarian political world, they have never had the chance to be realised: they have received minimal support from the great powers and society, and the peoples and governments of the region have not acted as partners for real cooperation. Miklós Wesselényi was one of the first to formulate a programme for the transformation of the Habsburg Empire and the need for reconciliation with various nationalities. Kossuth was the most prestigious figure of the Hungarian emigration after 1849, which is why the plan for the Danubian Confederation is mainly associated with him, though his fellow politicians formulated similar ideas. Oszkár Jászi's plan for the reorganisation of the Monarchy was born too late, as its fate had been decided prior to its publication in 1918. Between the two World Wars, Gusztáv Gratz and Elemér Hantos were the most active organisers, publicists, and experts in the field of Central European cooperation.

KEYWORDS

Hungarian history, history of ideas, history of politics, history of integration, history of the Reform Era, history of dualism, history of Hungarian emigration, history of the dissolution of the Monarchy, revolutions of 1918-19, Hungary between the two World Wars, Central European plans, Pan-European Movement, Miklós Wesselényi, Lajos Kossuth, Oszkár Jászi, Gusztáv Gratz, Elemér Hantos.

Introduction

From the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries to the present day, various federation and confederation plans, including various concepts about Central Europe, have remained present in the political world of the region between Germany and Russia, including Hungary. All of these plans have major ideological and historical significance: they highlight the fundamental problems of the region, the great power relations, and the challenges of the time. In Hungary in particular, these ideas have

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taken a variety of forms and been constantly reformulated, even if real political conditions did not give them the chance to be realised.

From the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars onwards, modern nationalism and the idea of nation states were the dominant political concepts in the Central European region. Hungary was part of a multinational empire led by Austrians despite the majority of other nationalities. However, regardless of the imperial framework, around 1800, in the so-called historical Hungary, the Hungarians, who played the leading political role, were already in a minority compared to the different nationalities. Without Croatia and Slavonia, the proportion of Hungarians was only at 44%. Comparing this ethnic proportion with the nationalities' political aspirations independence, it is clear that throughout the 19th century, the sustainability of the territorial integrity of historic Hungary became a fundamental issue in domestic politics. The fear of territorial dissolution dominated Hungarian political thought. These concerns led to the acceptance of the 1867 Compromise, which stabilised Austro-Hungarian relations for decades. Many Hungarian politicians hoped to preserve the territorial unity of historic Hungary by implementing some sort of integration. The first of these, and first in the Empire, was Miklós Wesselényi's concept. However, in historical literature and public discourse, the best known is Kossuth's plan, which was formulated in emigration.

The fate of the Hungarian integration plans was also determined by the failures of the various plans for Central European cooperation. There was a lack of support from the great powers: the agents of power influencing the countries of the region supported stability and predictability, which they found to be more desirable than some kind of precarious integration concept, which was not supported by public opinion. Further, the potential participating parties did not consider each other to be adequate partners in the formation of a new Central European order.

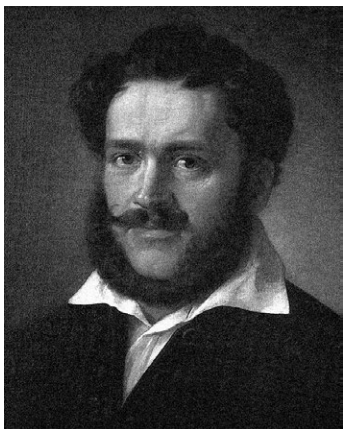
Even the Hungarian representatives of the integration concepts were not active, leading politicians; they had no decision-making power and influence. Miklós Wesselényi was a politician of the opposition, while Kossuth Lajos' plan was formulated in exile. Although Oszkár Jászi was appointed minister in November 1918, he had no chance either to save historical Hungary in any form or to implement his own integration plan. The aforementioned support of the great powers and the willingness of the neighbouring nations to cooperate were also lacking.

Elemér Hantos, the liveliest supporter of economic cooperation in Central Europe between the two World Wars, put forward his proposals as a private citizen. Economic phenomena and political intentions worked against Central European cooperation. Although Gusztáv Gratz had a great deal of political experience and was highly respected both at home and abroad, official Hungarian foreign policy did not see Central European cooperation as a framework for the realisation of national policy aspirations.

Therefore, Hungarian representatives' plans regarding Central European cooperation remained at the level of proposals and alternatives, never becoming a political reality. They have retained their value in terms of intellectual history,

and they can also be evaluated as a kind of specific contemporary idea. History, however, always offers us alternatives, and nothing is necessarily predestined.

1. Miklós Wesselényi (1796–1850)[1]



Miklós Wesselényi, one of the most influential politicians of the Hungarian Reform Era, was born on 30 December 1796 in Zsibó, in what is now Romania, to a reformed aristocratic family.[2] His ancestors were committed to public affairs and were active in supporting culture and education, which determined the development of Wesselényi's political views. He inherited an outstanding physical endowment and fitness from his father, which made him a legend in his time. Endre Ady called him the Hungarian 'Hercules'.[3] Following the habits of many other young aristocrats of the time, in 1821–22 he went on a Western European tour with his friend[4] István Széchenyi, a leading figure of the Reform Era, which not only broadened his world view, but also enabled him to see Hungarian conditions in a European context. His political views were fundamentally determined by this journey. Again, following contemporary habits, he wrote a diary of his journey.[5]

He was not allowed to participate in the Diet of 1825, which had reconvened after a thirteen-year break, as he was a Transylvanian aristocrat, and the unification of Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary, one of the defining Hungarian grievances of the time, had still not been achieved after the expulsion of the Turks. Having bought property in Szatmár county, which belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, he became an aristocrat of the country, and was thus entitled to participate in the Diet of the Estates, which met in Bratislava. Wesselényi subsequently became a leading figure in the reformist opposition in Hungary. He took a firm and hard line against the Habsburg government for its failure to carry out the necessary reforms. In 1831, he wrote his strongly worded '*Balítéletekről*' *(On Prejudice)*,

1 Miklós Wesselényi, Hungarian politician, painting of Miklós Barabás, public domain, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wessel%C3%A9nyi_Mikl%C3%B3s_(politikus,_1796%E2%80%931850)#/media/F%C3%A1jl:Wessel%C3%A9nyi_Mikl%C3%B3s_Barab%C3%A1s.jpg.

2 For the biography of Wesselényi see Trócsányi, 1965; Csetri, 2003.

3 Csetri, 1997, p. 3.

4 Velkey, 1996, pp. 79–106.

5 See the travel diary: Báró Wesselényi Miklós Útinaplója 1821–1822 [Online]. Available at: https://mek.oszk.hu/09200/09257/09257.htm (Accessed: 12 June 2023).

which was not published abroad until two years later due to the censorship that still existed at the time. His work is one of the most important writings of the political thinking of the Hungarian Reform Era, '*the basic work of the main line of Hungarian liberalism, the liberal and nationalist tendencies of Wesselényi, Deák, Kossuth*'.[6]

Like his contemporaries, he understood that the most important problem of the reform era was the question of serfs, which was not a purely legal problem, but had economic, social, and organisational aspects. As a Transylvanian aristocrat, he was personally aware of the dangers of the unresolved question, having learned from the memory of the Romanian peasant uprising of 1784 of Horea.[7] At the Diet of 1832–36, where the most important issue was the status of serfdom, he supported the declaration of the voluntary redemption of serfs (i.e., the possibility of abolishing serfdom through a mutual and voluntary agreement between the serf and the landlord). In the 1840s, he advocated for the idea of compulsory redemption with state compensation for the nobility.[8] His programme, like that of other reformist politicians, inextricably linked the question of freedom and material advancement, which was one of the main motivations for serf redemption. As he said, '*The more free members with rights a nation has, the more powerful it is*'.[9] The issue of serf redemption, in his view, was not merely a problem of the peasant and his landlord, but the key to the future and success of the whole nation. For the Hungarian reformist politicians of the time, the tragic lesson of the Polish liberation struggles was a negative example and there was a constant fear that the unsettled state of the peasant question could be used as a tool by reactionary and foreign powers to suppress national aspirations. Thus, the reformist opposition in Hungary followed the Polish events of the time with particular interest.

As the debates of the reform era unfolded, the difference between the two former friends Wesselényi and Széchenyi became more and more pronounced. One of the cornerstones of the dispute was the question of their attitudes to government.

> Széchenyi appealed to the goodwill of the government and considered cooperation important for stability. Wesselényi, on the other hand, organised a political movement. It was obvious to him that the nature and direction of the imperial government forced the idea of progress, of the nation, of constitutionalism, into opposition.[10]

In addition to politics in parliament, Wesselényi was active in public life, science, and culture. He participated in the foundation of the Casino initiated by Széchenyi, supported the cause of Hungarian-language drama, and was elected an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1831. Through his practical work,

6 Baron Wesselényi, 1992, p. 5.
7 See in details: Egyed, 1996, pp. 51–64.
8 Csetri, 1998–1999, pp. 26–35.
9 Lukácsy, 1996, p. 9.
10 Velkey, 1996, p. 87.

he sought to expand and renew the agricultural knowledge of rural peasant society, for example by encouraging the spread of silkworm breeding. Like his friend István Széchenyi, he supported the introduction of horse breeding in Hungary and wrote a book about the subject.[11] He was a popular politician of his time, particularly in Transylvania. '*Miklós Wesselényi became the most popular politician in Szeklerland: "the hero of the Szeklers", whose image had already pushed the glazed earthenware pot off the walls of many homes*', wrote a contemporary.[12]

This reputation was further enhanced by his efforts to save lives and property during the 1838 floods in Pest. In the early spring, 153 people, most of whom were from Pest, died as a result of the so-called 'blockage flood', and over 3,000 houses were completely destroyed or severely damaged. As one of the organisers of the rescue work, Wesselényi was named 'Boatman of the Flood' after the title of a poem commemorating the rescue written by the most famous poet of the time, Mihály Vörösmarty. Although the entirety of Wesselényi's diary remains unpublished, the diary entries concerning events following the flood of 13 March 1838 have been published. These entries describe the devastating natural disaster and Wesselényi's organisational work to save human lives and property in great detail.[13]

In 1835, the Hungarian monarch, Francis I, was succeeded by the less-fit-to-rule Ferdinand V. The narrow group in the imperial court, the camarilla, which effectively governed in his place, saw the time as right to stifle reform efforts in Hungary and intimidate its leaders with political lawsuits. In addition to Miklós Wesselényi, who was the best known and most respected figure among those on trial, they prosecuted the then little-known Lajos Kossuth and László Lovassy. Lovasasy was the leading figure of the so-called 'parliamentary youth', who were law students completing their compulsory internships in the Diets of the Estates. On 9 September 1834, Wesselényi gave a speech at a meeting of the Szatmár County, in which he openly exposed the disingenuous Viennese policy on the serf question. He was prosecuted for treason for this speech but was defended by Ferenc Kölcsey, the author of the lyrics of the Hungarian anthem. Finally, in 1839, Wesselényi, who was held in public esteem, was sentenced to three years in prison, which he began serving in Buda Castle. His health was not suitable to endure the conditions of the dungeon, as his pre-existing eye disease deteriorated significantly and he lost a substantial part of his sight. This had a lasting psychological impact on him for the rest of his life.[14] After seven months of imprisonment, he was allowed to retire to a sanatorium in Moravia for treatment, where he stayed until 1843.[15] The Diet of 1839–40, which was the most successful of the Reform Era, freed the political prisoners who were still held, and Wesselényi was officially pardoned on 29 April 1840.

11 Baron Wesselényi, 1829.
12 Miskolczy, 1983, p. 1067.
13 Baron Wesselényi, 1938.
14 Trócsányi, 1960, pp. 794–811.
15 Kárpáti, 2019, pp. 563–584.

Upon his return to Transylvania, Wesselényi was primarily involved in local politics, becoming Viscount of Kolozs (Cluj) county. His last and most significant public role was at the Transylvanian Diet convened in the spring of 1848, where he played a decisive role in the adoption of the unification of Transylvania and Hungary into law on 30 May 1848. This marked his last political engagement; his health deteriorated and he died in Pest on 21 April 1850.

Wesselényi's practical and theoretical work covered a wide range of areas. He attached importance to the idea of education and the enlightenment of society. He organised a nursery school in his estate, in Zsibó.[16]

Apart from *On Prejudice*, Wesselényi's best-known and most resonant work is *An Appeal in the Hungarian and Slav Nationality Matter* (*Appeal* hereinafter), which was published in 1843 in Hungarian and later in German. The circumstances of the writing of the two works and Wesselényi's general health and mental state show a radical difference. At the time of writing *On Prejudice,* Wesselényi was still in a state of glowing health and mental balance. In fact, at this time, the Reform Era in Hungary was beginning to unfold alongside the national and county debates that gave the era its specific character. There was great hope and the defining political personalities of one of the most cited periods in Hungarian history, the Reform Era, were emerging. By the early 1840s, Wesselényi had become a physically and mentally tired and sickly man who had suffered many disappointments in political struggles. He describes himself in his book as 'a bourgeois dead man', 'rising from the depths of his grave'.

We know from Wesselényi's diary entries that he was working on a text in the summer of 1842, the manuscript of which was completed in January 1843 and published in Leipzig by Otto Wigand. He had planned to publish a series of articles in the *Pesti Hírlap* to promote his book and his ideas, as if to provoke discussion, but censorship prevented its publication.[17] In 1844, the book was published in German. The censors watched Wesselényi's work with increased interest, as its ideas were fundamental to the future and structure of the Habsburg Empire, as well as to its basic foreign policy orientation. Kossuth would have liked to publish an excerpted version of the book in the form of an article, but repeated interference by censors meant that it could only be published under a pseudonym, stripped of its essential ideas and problems. Its hoped-for impact was thus lost.[18]

The basic idea presented in the work is concern for all of the dangers that threaten Hungary and its people: '*A word of warning about the danger threatening Hungary and its nationality*'.[19] Wesselényi recognised that the spirit of the times, nationhood, the national awakening, and the idea of the nation-state not only brought radical changes in Hungarian society, unleashed new energies, and formulated new aspirations, but that this phenomenon also applied to the nationalities of Hungary.

16 Kárpáti, 2020, pp. 5–17.
17 Deák, 1996, p. 17.
18 Varga, 1982, p. 108.
19 Baron Wesselényi, 1992, p. 14.

> And our present age – even though many other traces of the past remain, and many progress and revolution that originated and began in the past – has the most genuine and outstanding character of all: the striving for the development of nationalities and national independence.[20]

He was aware of the mobilising and social-forming power of the national idea, which was also evident during the French Revolution and the unity movements in Italy. He was also aware that the energies brought to the surface by the birth of nationalism could be used by the great powers for selfish and aggressive ends. It is no coincidence that he quotes an extract from a speech made by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I in Warsaw, which caused great concern in Hungarian political life and was later referenced in many cases when the warning of the Russian and pan-Slavic threat was pronounced.

> You are no longer Poles, but Slavs, brothers of the Russians. I will speak to you as the Tsar of all the Russians, and soon I will speak to your other Slavic kinsmen as the lord of all our original possessions. Know the true direction of Russia's glory and mine! My empire bears within itself the seeds of future greatness.[21]

From the 1830s and 40s onwards, Russophobia, the fear of Russian aggression, became a constant element of Hungarian political thinking and national policy strategies, which was further intensified by the Russian intervention of 1849. These events and experiences had a fundamental influence on and motivated a number of major political decisions taken by the Hungarian political elite, such as the acceptance of the 1867 Compromise. Wesselényi also understood that pan-Slavic propaganda could use one more effective element for its political ends, namely the Orthodox religion. He stated that '*the power of Muscovy*[22]*, greater than its cannons, its vast armies, and perhaps even its treacherous diplomacy, lies in the Greek religion*'.[23] He also saw a real danger in the fact that the great powers, for their own political ends, also wanted to limit the potential of national movements by inciting contradictory ideas. The lessons of 1848–49, when the Habsburg reaction used the nationalities of Hungary against the Hungarian independence movement, confirmed Wesselényi's concerns. He was convinced, however, that the situation of the Slavic nationalities in Hungary was not a purely Hungarian problem, since aggressive Russian foreign policy and the pan-Slavic idea threatened the stability and peace of the whole of Europe.

According to Wesselényi, the effective solution to the threats and dangers outlined above, and thus the tasks of Hungarian politics, was '*to meet the reasonable*

20 Ibid. p. 30.
21 Ibid. p. 51.
22 i.e. Russia.
23 Baron Wesselényi, 1992, p. 72.

demands of the Slavs'.[24] He believed that it was important to build political trust between Hungarians and non-Hungarians:

> We must strive to convince all our fellow Slav citizens of the following: that we neither hate nor despise the Slavs, but wish to embrace them as brothers and sisters, that we have no intention of depriving them of their languages, and that the hope of a constitutional national existence for Croatia and Slovakia can certainly only exist as a result of the close ties between Hungary and Hungary and the stability of its constitution...[25]

To achieve this goal, Wesselényi proposed that a number of changes must be introduced for Hungarians, which were also the basic demands of the reform era: the extension of rights, equal civil rights, civil property, cultivation of the Hungarian language, and improvement of the state of education and literacy.

One hundred years after its first publication, Wesselényi's *Appeal* was published in 1944 in Cluj Napoca. The historical situation for Hungarians and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe seemed as ominous as it had been a hundred years earlier. The outcome of the Second World War was already clear, as was the tragic outcome of the great power relations for the small nations of the region, regardless of their side during the war. This was concisely summarised in Transylvanian historian Zoltán I. Tóth's review on the occasion of the book's publication:

> A real need has been fulfilled, by the republication of his largely forgotten and, despite its merit, little appreciated *Appeal*. Two great questions of Hungarian fate are at its heart: the expansion of Russian power in foreign policy, and the question of nationality in domestic policy.[26]

Tóth considers Wesselényi's work to be 'pioneering and visionary', the value of which is not diminished by the fact that it also contained a number of naive ideas. Further, certain elements of the work remain modern and relevant today. Wesselényi '*was the first to clearly perceive the close connection between education and the pursuit of constitutionalism on the one hand, and nationalism on the other*'.[27] In numerous other ways, Wesselényi's work was also pioneering internationally:

> Wesselényi was the first Hungarian to recognize the need for national propaganda abroad and among the first to voice confederation plans in the Danube region. He was also the first Hungarian to recognise the great role of Polish emigration in the political plans and movements of the time.[28]

24 Ibid. p. 195.
25 Ibid. p. 220.
26 I. Tóth, 1944, p. 520.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. p. 521.

Iván Zoltán Dénes, who wrote the foreword to the latest Hungarian edition of the *Appeal*, evaluates it in an international context:

> It is a fundamental work, which is outstanding and remarkable in comparison with the intellectual and political achievements of the contemporary liberalisms and nationalisms of Northern and Southern Europe (Irish, Norwegian, Finnish, Italian and Greek), and especially with the synthesis of liberalism and nationalism, freedom and nation, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe (German, Austrian, Hungarian, Czech and Polish).[29]

A more modern interpretation of Wesselényi's work highlights his efforts to reform the Habsburg Empire and elements of a move towards trialistic ideas. Other scholars have also tried to interpret these efforts in Western European terms: '*in his evaluation of the international situation, Wesselényi fully shares the position of the German liberals on the role of Russia, the possible French alliance, and the threats to Austria-Germany*'.[30] Wesselényi's concept raised several questions, especially regarding his proposals, which were far from the general public opinion in the Reform Era. This may explain the somewhat modest response the work received after its publication, as mentioned earlier. According to a historian's assessment,

> Wesselényi's proposal in his *Appeal* for the transformation of the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole is unique in the period because it went against the dogma of the Hungarian political elite that Hungary's internal affairs were to be decided by the Hungarian king and political elite, in return for which the Hungarian Estates would not formulate a right to influence the affairs of other provinces (i.e. foreign countries).[31]

According to one of today's most prominent scholars of Central and Eastern European who has a particular focus on Hungarian, integrationist ideas, Wesselényi's appeal ranks first in the plans for the federalisation of the Habsburg Empire and is the foremost of its kind. In his opinion, however,

> Wesselényi's reform proposal deserves attention not only because he was the first to raise the need for the federalisation of the Monarchy, but also because, for all its excellence, it accurately reflected the downsides of 19th century Hungarian national and national-political thought.[32]

29 Baron Wesselényi, 1992, pp. 5–6.
30 Deák, 1996, p. 31.
31 Varga, 2020, p. 1195.
32 Romsics, 1997, p. 27.

2. Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894)[33]

Lajos Kossuth, one of the best-known politicians and statesmen of 19th-century Hungary, was born on 19 September 1802 in Monok, Zemplén County, in a Lutheran noble family.[34] His ancestors received education in law and held office at the county level. Kossuth's family had no estates, so like other young men of similar noble birth, he studied law. Lajos Kossuth attended schools in Sátoraljaújhely, Eperjes, and Sárospatak. He graduated as a lawyer in 1823 and returned to his homeland, settling in Zemplén County. He served first as a county judge then a prosecutor in Sátoraljaújhely.

In 1831, cholera spread to northern Hungary from Galicia, causing a peasant uprising in the region. As public health official, Kossuth was responsible for preventing the spread of the epidemic and addressing the conflicts caused by the peasant uprising.[35] His experience of the epidemic and the resulting peasant uprising had a major influence on the development of his political views. He realised that the most important problem facing contemporary Hungary was the unresolved serf question, which presented enormous socio-political dangers. One of the reformist opposition's strong beliefs and fears at the time was that the serf question would divide Hungarian society. The Viennese government could then use this division for its own ends, as it had done on several occasions in Poland. The fear of a possible new peasant conflict forced the Hungarian reformers to implement changes. Kossuth became increasingly sensitive to social and political issues.

He participated as an envoy of absentee aristocrats (ablegatus absentium) in the Diet of 1825–27, which, despite the enactment of several progressive laws, failed to make progress on the most important issues, such as voluntary serf redemption and equality before the law. The most important aim of the 1832–36 Diet was again the enactment of voluntary redemption, but this also failed in a great disappointment to the reformist opposition. Once again, Kossuth attended this assembly as an envoy of the absent lords and he began to write reports on the proceedings of the Diet. As a result, the young lawyer from Zemplén, who was until then completely unknown,

33 Lajos Kossuth, Hungarian politician, August Prinzhofer – Johann Rauh: colored lithograph, public domain, source of the picture: https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:234082/.
34 Pajkossy, 1998; Szabad, 1977; Deák, 1983; Kosáry, 2002.
35 Szállási, 1972, pp. 313–315.

began to attract more and more attention. Kossuth's aim was to bypass censorship and to inform the country's public about what was happening in Bratislava, since those not present could not learn about the debates in the Diet and the state of the reform process. Thus, Kossuth edited the Parliamentary Reports, a manuscript journal published in 345 issues.[36] As it was distributed from hand to hand, largely in secret, in manuscript copies, it may have reached a wider readership than the actual number of copies that were published. With the end of the Diet, the institutional framework for politics was transferred to the counties. Kossuth then edited the Municipal Reports, which aimed to inform the public about the reform debates in the counties. The government also became increasingly aware of the previously unknown Kossuth. The Municipal Reports were banned, but Kossuth nonetheless continued to publish them despite the repeated warnings he received. In May 1837, he was arrested along with other reformist politicians. He was sentenced to three and then four years in prison.

While the physical and mental health of the political prisoners who had been arrested at the same time – Miklós Wesselényi and László Lovassy – was severely affected by imprisonment, Kossuth was careful to maintain his mental health. He read books on economics and mathematics and studied English. A legend claims that Kossutg learned English with the help of a dictionary and a volume of Shakespeare, but in reality he used these tools to improve upon the knowledge he already held:

> We know that during his years in prison Kossuth read many English and American authors in the original, so it would be a mistake to accept the view that Shakespeare was the sole source of Kossuth's considerable English knowledge. During his long years in prison, Kossuth read many books that would later help him to develop his oratory skills in English.[37]

We can assume that Kossuth did not turn to English by accident, since one of the models for the reformers of his time in Hungary was England. The English constitutional monarchy was considered an example, and civilisation in England was the result of organic developments and not of revolution, as in France, where the old nobility had suffered considerable losses. The Diet of 1839–40, one of the most successful of the Reform Era in terms of its results, freed political prisoners. Before his years in prison, Kossuth was a hardly known political novice with a 'dubious' past in the counties,[38] but after his release, he became a martyred politician of great stature.

Upon his release from prison, the government invited him to serve as editor of the Pesti Hírlap, a post he held from 1841 to 1844. Metternich's move was a surprise

36 Pajkossy, 1998, p. 10.
37 Frank, 2002, p. 869.
38 Pajkossy, 1998, p. 8.

to the imprisoned Kossuth, and his reasons are unclear: '*according to one account, Chancellor Metternich saw the censors as a means of restraining the martyr of press freedom, while another says he expected the editor's radicalism to alienate more moderate liberals*'.[39] Kossuth played a major role in the development of political journalism in Hungary. His editorials in the journal generated a great stir, and the Pesti Hírlap became one of the most important forums for the debates of the Reform Era. The so-called Kossuth-Széchenyi debate unfolded in these forums.[40] Kossuth's 214 editorials played a particularly important role and established the genre in Hungary.[41] Both Kossuth and Széchenyi agreed on the need for reform. Their differences of opinion were more related to the relationship with the government, the schedule, the social base, the methods, and the pace of the reform process. There was also a conflict between their political habitus and their emotional attitudes. They were both considered to be highly influential and distinctive personalities of the reform era, of which they were well aware.

By the mid-1840s, the situation of Hungarian industry had become the most important issue for Kossuth. On 1 January 1834, the German customs union, the Zollverein, which was under Prussian leadership and had become successful thanks to the theoretical and active organisation of Friedrich List, was launched. The Habsburg provinces were not part of this union. With the Zollverein, the process of the economic unification of the German territories slowly began. Viennese politicians were certain that being left out of the economic integration of the German territories would have a fundamental impact on the form of German unity. Therefore, in the mid-1840s, they firmly expressed the necessity that they join the Zollverein. In Hungary, national industry still existed in a nascent form. There was a danger that if the Habsburgs joined the Zollverein, Hungarian national industry would not be able to develop. Kossuth and his contemporaries watched these events with concern, as the dilemma rightly arose concerning the prospect of a Hungarian civil transition without a weak Hungarian citizenry and an independent national industry. The situation and future of national industry became at the same time a concern of the future of the whole Hungarian civil transition. The steps Kossuth took in support of industry (e.g., the Védegylet (Industrial Support Association) and the first industrial exhibition) did not make any significant progress in solving the problem, since it was hardly possible to discuss Hungarian industry, but he did make Hungarian society aware of the problem.

At the end of the 1840s, factionalism emerged in Hungarian political life. Politicians committed to reform were organised in the Opposition Party, the programme of which was largely written by Kossuth. In 1847, the last Diet of the Estates was convened, in which Kossuth participated as one of the envoys of Pest County. The revolutionary wave that unfolded across Europe in the spring of 1848 accelerated

39 Ibid. p. 11.
40 Fónagy and Dobszay, 2003.
41 Pajkossy, 1998, p. 11.

the course of political change in Hungary. In response to the news of the Paris Revolution, he proposed a constitution for Hungary and other parts of the Habsburg Empire. He became Minister of Finance in the first responsible government under Lajos Batthyány, which was established after the Revolution of March in Pest. He played a major role in the creation of an independent Hungarian currency, which has been called the 'Kossuth-bankó' ever since.

To defend the achievements of the Revolution of March, it was turned into a fight for freedom. On 15 September 1848, the National Defence Committee was established on his proposal, and soon took over governmental functions with Kossuth as its president. Due to the Austrian military successes, the legislature and the government moved to Debrecen in early January 1849 under Kossuth's leadership. Here, Kossuth was given the epithet 'Moses of the Hungarians'.[42] In March 1849, the Habsburgs made it clear that they did not consider the April Laws, to which the Emperor Ferdinand V had himself sworn, legitimising the achievements of the Revolution of March, to be binding. Partly as a result of this, the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty was proclaimed in Debrecen on 14 April. Since this step did not make Hungary a republic, and the republican institution was considered an undesirable radical idea by the majority of the political elite, Kossuth became Governor-President, partly following the Hungarian historical tradition. After the publication of the Declaration of Independence, the fight for freedom developed into a war of independence, and Kossuth was a decisive figure in the events. His major recruiting speeches in the Great Plain in the autumn of 1848 laid the foundations for his future cult in the popular narrative.[43] However, Russia sent an interventionist army to Hungary in the spirit of Holy Alliance solidarity, and by August, the Hungarian army had been outnumbered and had laid down its arms. Kossuth and many others, rightly fearing reprisals, chose emigration.

Kossuth first emigrated to Turkey and then, in 1851, to England on an American steamship. In the spring of 1851, in Kütahya, Turkey, he drafted his constitution, which was amended in 1859. The idea of universal suffrage and self-government was then considered very progressive.

> The most modern constitutions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are no more specific than Kossuth's in stating that individual rights (freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of association) 'may neither be modified nor abolished by legislation'. In the spirit of the French Constitution of 1789, he declares that the limit of individual liberties is 'the inviolability of the liberty of others alone'. But he was equally conscious of the principle of the supremacy of the people, for he considered 'the university of the citizens' to be the source and depository of all rights.[44]

42 Bényei, 2019; Zakar, 2003, pp. 87–108.
43 Hermann, 2002.
44 Orosz, 2002, p. 557.

In 1851 and 1852, Kossuth made a tour of the United States, where the impact of his journey is still marked by numerous statues and memorials. Although the tour had no political impact on Hungarian emigration, its afterlife was of greater importance. A kind of cult of Kossuth developed, which gained momentum during the Cold War period, partly due to Hungarian emigration.[45] He lived in Italy from 1861 until his death. Hungarian emigration became increasingly constrained. Western public opinion had a certain remorse for the Hungarian events of 1848–49, but it did not affect their basic foreign policy interests. Therefore, the emigrants were embraced by foreigners, which often led them to overestimate their hopes and to formulate unfounded hopes for themselves. They were sympathetic to Hungarian ideas and thoughts during the War of Independence but were forced by their own great power motives to tolerate – or in the words of a contemporary, 'silently observe' – Russian intervention.

Thus, Hungarian emigration in the 1850s and 60s did not achieve any real results and the great powers only temporarily supported Kossuth and his circle, continuing to prioritise their own interests. This also applied to the emigrant movements of other failed freedom fights, such as that of the Poles, which was the most prestigious emigrant movement in the 19th century. The Polish War of Independence of 1830–31, its fall, and the subsequent Polish emigration were followed with great interest by onlookers throughout Europe, including the Hungarian liberal reformist opposition. Prince Czartoryski, one of the leaders of the War of Independence, became the leader of the conservative group of the Polish emigration in Paris. He was also very active as a public writer and organiser. He maintained constant contact with other emigrant organisations and national movements through his extensive correspondence and his mandates, and his plans for the Central and Eastern European region had a great influence on his contemporaries, including László Teleki and other Hungarian emigrants. Given the history of integrationist ideas, this does not seem at all surprising, as every plan built on existing proposals and was often seen as a further development of an earlier idea.

With the Compromise of 1867, the opportunities for Hungarian emigration were drastically reduced. The majority of emigrants had already returned home. Lajos Kossuth firmly rejected the system of the Compromise because he feared for the future of historic Hungary in its full integration with the Habsburg Empire.[46] He chose further emigration to preserve his political prestige. Since 1861, he had been living in a unifying Italy. In 1865, he settled near Turin and became the 'hermit of Turin'. The adoption of the Compromise stabilised relations between the Habsburg Empire and Hungary for a long period, which for Kossuth meant a reduction of political space and increasing isolation. In the meantime, his cult had slowly begun to develop in Hungary. He died on 20 March 1894 and his remains were brought to Hungary at the end of the month. His funeral became a national day of mourning,

45 Várdy, 1998, pp. 331–339.
46 Niederhauser, 1995.

although state employees and army officers were not allowed to attend by order of the emperor. The eulogy was delivered by Mór Jókai, the greatest writer of the era.

> Those of us who believe in the immortality of the soul must believe that we have brought the ashes of Kossuth to Hungary along with his soul. The soul does not leave those whom it loves, and it has so much to love here.[47]

Kossuth's confederation plan, published in 1862, is not unprecedented, but part of the process of the intense emergence of supranational ideas of integration with different contents in the emigration movements in the first two thirds of the 19th century. The political life of the period was characterised by many failed revolutions, liberation struggles, and uprisings, which led to widespread emigrant movements in many European cities. This was particularly true of Paris, London, and Geneva. The very existence of opposition and emigration in politics encouraged the spread of federalist and confederalist ideas as alternatives to existing power structures. Kossuth's emigration policy and his ideas about integration fit into this process. However, Kossuth was not the only Hungarian emigrant to turn to the project of uniting the peoples of the Danube region – László Teleki and György Klapka, among others, should also be mentioned.[48] A kind of rivalry even developed between them on this issue.

Kossuth had already outlined his idea of confederation in several forms in the early 1850s during his emigration in Turkey.[49] Although the revolutions and struggles for freedom of 1848–49 had failed, everyone knew that lasting stability had not been achieved in Central and South-eastern Europe. The weakness of the Habsburg Empire had become apparent, and it could only stabilise its position in Hungary with the help of the Tsar's intervention, which was a major loss of prestige in foreign policy. Kossuth was convinced that nationalist movements, the aspiration to statehood, would tear apart the multi-ethnic framework of the Habsburg Empire, and that if Hungarian politics could not offer an alternative to nationalist movements, it would lead to the loss of the integrity of historic Hungary. The irreversibly declining Ottoman Empire was also under pressure from the aspirations of the great powers and the independence and national unity movements in the Balkans.

First, the Crimean war made clear the fragility of the existing power situation in the region and again placed the inevitability of change on the agenda. In 1855, Klapka proposed the restoration of an independent Polish state and a Hungarian-South Slav-Romanian confederation.[50] In 1862, Klapka drafted a 30-point plan entitled 'Programme for a Danubian Confederation'[51] at the instigation of the

47 Pajkossy, 1998, p. 216.
48 Mérei, 1965, pp. 58–72.
49 Pajkossy, 2002, p. 938.
50 Ibid. p. 938.
51 Ibid. pp. 944–946.

Italian government. Kossuth, however, was the most authoritative leader of the Hungarian emigration movement. The Italian government's representative Canini also held talks with Kossuth, and the Italian side drew up a memorandum, which Kossuth signed.[52] Originally, the discussions and the memo were to be treated with the utmost discretion and were not intended to be made public. Kossuth shared the draft with Ignacy Helfy, the editor of the journal *L'Alleanza*, purely for information purposes, but he published it on 18 May under the title *Danubian Confederation* as Kossuth's proposal. Kossuth later commented on the incident: '*I presented it to Helfy as an idea in case he wanted to discuss the nationality question in his paper. Oh, the unfortunate man! he trumpeted it as my work, and it wasn't!*'[53]

The proposal and its publication caused a storm. Relations between Kossuth and Klapka deteriorated, which further worsened the already unstable situation of the Hungarian emigration. A certain rivalry seems to have unfolded regarding who should be the first Hungarian to formulate the idea of the Danubian Confederation, in contrast to Kossuth's earlier statement. The states concerned also distanced themselves from the plan, as it became clear that the necessary partnership was lacking. However, Kossuth still supported the plan and even wrote a detailed explanation of the proposal entitled *Clarifications on the Danubian Confederation* Plan. Subsequently, Kossuth and the idea of the Danubian Confederation became inextricably linked, even though, as he said, it had not originally been his idea.[54] In international literature, Kossuth's name is also the most frequently mentioned among the Hungarian emigration's plans for confederation.[55]

Until recently, Hungarian historiography did not know much about the content of the draft and the history of its origins. Only generalisations were spread in public opinion.

> One of the most famous documents of modern Hungarian history of ideas and politics, Canini's memo, originally written in French, is still unpublished; the Italian version published in L'Alleanza can be classified as archival material in Hungary; the text has been published in Hungarian on several occasions, but always in the same inaccurate translation, with errors that give rise to false conclusions, and, moreover, research has not even been aware of this until recently.[56]

The memo that Kossuth signed and annotated contains the following draft, which later became known as the Confederation Plan.[57] The Danubian Confederation would include Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia with its associated parts,

52 Ibid. pp. 946–956.
53 Ibid. p. 957.
54 Gergely, 1985.
55 Kühl, 1958, pp. 16–30; Wierer, 1960, pp. 58–60.
56 Pajkossy, 2002, p. 939.
57 Romsics, 2005.

and other Balkan countries that might become independent, in addition to Serbia. The most sensitive issue was the status of Transylvania, where the Romanian population had been in absolute majority since the early 19th century. According to Kossuth, even if the election in Transylvania were to decide in favour of independent statehood, there would still be a personal union between the two countries. The treaty of union would be adopted by the legislature, the main principles of which are as follows. Defence, foreign representation, foreign trade, customs policy, and a uniform system of weights and measures would be under common jurisdiction. The question of the legislature was still open as to whether the Danubian Confederation should have a unicameral or bicameral parliament. Should there be a bicameral parliament, the member states would send an equal number of members to the senate, regardless of their size, to ensure effective representation of the interests of the smaller states. The question of a common language would be decided by the federal assembly. The institutions of the Confederation would have their headquarters alternately in Pest, Bucharest, Zagreb, and then Belgrade. The head of the federal council would be the head of state of the member state in which the federal bodies met. Fundamental rights of religion, nationality, assembly, and language would be respected everywhere.

In his notes,[58] Kossuth wrote that he showed Canini the draft constitution drawn up in 1850 in Kütahya, mainly regarding nationality rights, which he copied in points. Kossuth strongly supported the independence of Serbia and Romania, but in order to stop Russian expansion, he asserted that it was necessary to maintain the Ottoman Empire. However, the smaller nations in this region could only secure their independent statehood if they were united in a larger political formation, or a confederation. It would also be necessary to secure the independence of Poland.

From the moment of its formulation, Kossuth's idea already bore the hallmarks of failure.[59] Neither the great powers nor the smaller states of the region supported it. It caused dissension and deep personal conflicts within the Hungarian emigrant movement. The Hungarian public did not see its ability to stabilise the historical situation of Hungary, let alone settle Austro-Hungarian relations.

> The plan of the Danubian Confederation was an idea of a handful of Hungarian emigrants, who were increasingly losing their hopes and sense of reality, which went so far as to abandon the integrity of the historic Hungarian state in the area of concessions, and which was considered too little in Bucharest and Belgrade, and too much in Budapest, and therefore was not taken seriously anywhere.[60]

58 Pajkossy, 2002, pp. 956–957.
59 Lendvai, 1995.
60 Romsics, 1997, p. 46.

3. Oszkár Jászi (1875–1957)[61]

Oszkár Jászi, social scientist, publicist, and politician, was born on 2 March 1875 in Nagykároly, in what is now Romania, to a family of Jewish intellectuals who later converted to the Reformed religion.[62] One of his brothers later became a teacher at the Reformed College in Debrecen. The ethnic and religious diversity of his hometown and its surroundings was a decisive factor in shaping his world view, as was the slowly unfolding crisis of late-nineteenth-century Hungary and the whole system of dualism. He completed his secondary school education in his hometown and then studied law in Budapest, graduating in 1896. He forst took a state job with the support of his relatives, but the atmosphere of the workplace, the bureaucracy of the ministry, and the monotonous 'filing work' did not satisfy him.[63] Later, he devoted himself to social science research, newspaper editing, and public and political affairs.

He joined the bourgeois radical intellectual group that was emerging at the turn of the century.[64] In 1900, the social science journal *Huszadik Század* (*Twentieth Century*) was launched, and he participated in its work from the beginning, as editor from 1906 until its closure in 1919. *Huszadik Század* was considered the highest quality social science journal of the period. In 1901, the Social Science Society was organised, in the work of which he participated from the outset until its dissolution in 1919. Among other works, Jászi launched the Society's publication series entitled Social Science Library. The intellectuals belonging to this academic environment criticised the economic and social conditions of contemporary Hungary and the backwardness and anti-democratic nature of its political institutions with scientific arguments and thoroughness. They strongly criticised the intolerance and sometimes violent 'Magyarisation' efforts of official policy towards nationalist movements at the beginning of the century. They supported the electoral reform, which was one of the most important domestic political debates of the period and became the main platform of several opposition parties, such as the Social Democrats. Jászi and the bourgeois radicals called for a universal and secret ballot, regularly

61 Oszkár Jászi, Hungarian social scientist, publicist, and politician, unknown photographer, in: Lazarus.elte.hu, public domain, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%A1szi_Oszk%C3%A1r#/media/F%C3%A1jl:J%C3%A1sziOszk%C3%A1r.jpg.
62 Hanák, 1985; Litván, 2003; Borsody, 1987, pp. 1–16.
63 Hanák, 1985, p. 14.
64 Pók, 1990.

referring to Western European models. This was one of the most frequently formulated Western criticisms of contemporary Hungary. Hungarian suffrage, which was still based essentially on the laws of April 1848, had by the turn of the century become significantly outdated, backward, and undemocratic. The Hungarian electoral law did not follow the changes that had already taken place in Western Europe from the last third of the 19th century onwards, including the significant expansion of the electorate and the spread of the secret nature of the electoral system. From the end of the 19th century, the land question was back on the agenda in a new way, facing new challenges. This question raised many problems, including ownership and social, organisational, and economic management. The need for land reform played a key role in the programme of Jászi and the bourgeois radicals.

One of Jászi's most influential articles was published in the journal *Huszadik Század* in 1907, entitled *Towards a New Hungary*. It can also be seen as a sort of programme of the progressive-minded politicians of the turn of the century in Hungary, a large proportion of whom were intellectuals or of the bourgeois radical political movement.[65] Jászi was harshly critical of the politicians of his time, of the political conditions of the state, and of the backward, feudal nature of the government. In his opinion, a new political leadership was needed, like that of Kossuth's generation in 1848. According to him, '*there is no one among the Kurucs of today's gentry parliament who would realise that an independent Hungary can only be created from today's colonial Hungary by the material and moral resources of millions of the Hungarian people*'.[66] One of the key ideas of the article is the need to organise a radical party, which would make social reform and the democratisation of political life its main political programme. An important role is assigned to the enlightenment of society and to familiarising it with modern, progressive ideas. The article asserts that a new type of independence is needed, as the existing one has been compromised in previous decades. The negative legacy in the history of Hungarian and Central European ideas is that the national-independence tradition has often been confronted with the ideal of modernity and progress.

> Under these circumstances, it will be the duty of the new radical party – a difficult, grave duty, but one worthy of the greatest effort – to lead the unscientific, demagogic, agrarian-feudal idea of independence back to its true sources, and at the same time to mark out its means and path in the present in the spirit of modern science.[67]

Economic independence from Austria and an independent customs policy was also highlighted as a necessity. Reforms were called for in public administration, the

65 Jászi, 1907, pp. 1–15.
66 Ibid. p. 3.
67 Ibid. p. 9.

judiciary, education, healthcare, and labour rights. However, all this would require detailed exploratory studies, research and, finally, programme delivery.

> I would imagine that each person would work out the part of the programme that is closest to his or her studies or interests. For example: the tasks of Hungarian radicalism in the field of nationality, public education, warfare, etc. From these essays we could develop the complete ideological content of the radical party, which could then be offered to a wider public.[68]

As a result of the methods formulated, social science research in Hungary boomed, and the foundations for laid for sociology and sociological methods. However, the organisation of the radical party Jászi proposed had to wait. He did not see an organisational framework for its development in the existing opposition parties. His problem with social democracy, which embraced social sensibility and ideas, was that it did not recognise the importance of the national idea and its mobilising, socially cohesive, community-building power. As he wrote,

'*National feeling is a tremendous dynamic resource into which, if possible, without harming our ideals, the battleship of socialism must be fitted*'.[69] The great contradiction of the era was that '*the whole idea was stillborn: it was to blend democratic Hungarian nationalism and radicalised bourgeois liberalism with socialism in the heyday of the orthodox Marxist socialism of the Second International*'.[70]

In 1908, the Galilei Circle was organised, comprising a group of radical-minded university students who considered themselves openly atheist and free-thinking. Lectures and meetings were organised on the socio-political issues of Hungary at the time, with the frequent participation of Oszkár Jászi, among others. Many of its members and leaders joined the Communist Party at the end of 1918 and played a leading role in the Hungarian Soviet Republic. It is therefore not surprising that it was banned in 1919 and its reputation was extremely negative in inter-war Hungary. However, the party had to wait to be founded. Among the representatives of progressive ideas and bourgeois radicalism in Hungary, there was a high proportion of Freemasons, including Jászi. For years, there was an organisational debate as to whether Freemasons could form a party. The Civic Radical Party was founded on 6 June 1914, in the days before the outbreak of the First World War, under Jászi's leadership, but much later than he had hoped. In national politics, they did not play a particularly significant role because of their narrow social base and their entrenched position. This situation was changed by the so-called 'Aster Revolution'. Mihály Károlyi, who thus came to power, invited into his government bourgeois radicals who had no previous experience in government and who, due to the political conditions and electoral law of dualism, had no realistic hope of

68 Ibid. p. 15.
69 Hanák, 1985, p. 26.
70 Ibid. p. 27.

coming to power, as well as other former opposition politicians, such as social democrats. Three and later four ministerial positions were given to the bourgeois radicals as coalition partners. Oszkár Jászi was appointed minister without portfolio for nationality issues.[71] He saw the task of his ministry as follows: '*during the transitional period until the convening of the general peace conference, we want to create all the institutions and safeguards that can ensure the peaceful coexistence of the nationalities of Hungary without prejudice to future borders*'.[72]

On 13 November 1918, he took part in the signing of the so-called Armistice of Belgrade, which the Hungarian government concluded with the Entente military leaders. Jászi and his circle hoped that this agreement would lead to the formal recognition of the Károlyi government by the Entente and to the country's accession to more favourable territorial conditions. However, neither of these hopes materialised. Even after this, the Entente did not officially recognise the Karolyi government – it was considered a product of the revolution, and thus illegitimate. It did not manage to obtain a more favourable position on territorial issues. This not only subsequently sealed the fate of the Károlyi government, it foreshadowed its imminent downfall in the absence of official recognition, but also laid the foundations for its extremely negative perception between the two World Wars, largely blaming them for the territorial losses.

Jászi constantly negotiated with national minority politicians in order to maintain the most favourable territorial relations possible in historical Hungary. He promised broad national minority rights and territorial autonomy. In November 1918, in Arad, he led the negotiations with the leaders of the Romanian Nationality Council on behalf of the Hungarian government.[73] However, he could not achieve any results. Jászi later saw the situation more realistically:

> Even before the negotiations it was clear that the Romanians could not be won over to any compromise on the basis of the unity of the old Hungarian state territory. Not only the mentality of the Transylvanian Romanians was already then unsuitable for such a plan, but the power relations were also completely to our detriment.[74]

Attempts to reach an agreement with the Slovaks on similar lines were also unsuccessful.

It was not only the official recognition of the Entente that was lacking in success, the members of the different nationalities did not see their future in maintaining the old Hungary; all strove for independence. The retention of certain areas of Transylvania was made impossible by the decisions of 1 December 1918

71 Szarka, 1990, pp. 49–65.
72 Ibid. p. 52.
73 Bárdi and Zahorán, 2014, pp. 67–78.
74 Ibid. p. 74.

in Gyulafehérvár, which made the whole of Transylvania part of Romania. Seeing his inertia and failure, Jászi resigned as minister in January 1919. He remained as foreign affairs adviser to Mihály Károlyi and president of the Foreign Affairs Council.

He did not support the Soviet Republic that came to power and had a very negative opinion of it. He explicitly condemned the use of terror, fearing its consequences. Even though the leaders of the Communist Party included several people Jászi had known very well in the past, such as the members of the Galilei Circle and other bourgeois radical events and organisations, he chose to emigrate during the Soviet Republic. On 30 April, he left first for Vienna and then, in 1925, for the United States, where he worked as a university professor.[75] This was a radical decision, as he was not only leaving his country but the continent. He explained his decision with the following words:

> I consider the situation in Europe hopeless for a long time to come. [...] Instead of a dying Vienna, I longed for the atmosphere of a vast world culture, where all the problems of my work up to then would be given a new perspective. [...] I can also benefit the Hungarian cause more from a centre of the Anglo-Saxon world than from Vienna.[76]

Jászi's emigration was certainly understandable. Between the two World Wars, the official ideology and propaganda in Hungary took a very negative view of bourgeois radicals and Jászi, who were largely blamed for the revolutions and the 'loss of the country' at Trianon. He visited Hungary once more in 1947 but was greatly disappointed by the conditions in the country and the failure of the idea of federation, which he had constantly promoted as a means of bringing the Danube peoples closer together and reconciling them. He expressed his disappointment with the situation in Central and Eastern Europe in a letter to Mihály Károlyi in which he denied '*the possibility of realising democracy and human freedom on the basis of the Bolshevik objective and the Bolshevik morality. On the contrary, they only drive us further away from it*'.[77] He died in the United States on 13 February 1957 and his ashes were brought back to Hungary in 1991.

Oszkár Jászi was very active in publishing.[78] His sociological and social science writings before the First World War described the social conditions of contemporary Hungary; the undemocratic features of the political institutional system, which he often described as 'feudal'; and the need for change. In 1912, he published his large-scale work *The Formation of Nation-States and the Nationality Question*,

75 L. Nagy, 1973, pp. 198–211.
76 Jászi, 1983, p. 5.
77 Borbándi, 1992, p. 372.
78 Oszkár Jászi Society for Foreign Policy: Jászi Oszkár műveinek válogatott bibliográfiája [Online]. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20140201132544/http://www.jaszitarsasag.hu/Jaszi_bibliografia.pdf (Accessed: 14 July 2023), Gyurgyák and Litván, 1991.

which showed Jászi's particular sensitivity to the historical and national problems of Central and Eastern Europe. He acknowledged the power of national movements and at the same time strongly condemned forced assimilation. From 1905 onwards, Jászi turned increasingly towards research into the national-nationality question. He was motivated by his personal political experience and his good relations with several nationalist politicians. Of all the progressive intellectuals of the time, he was perhaps the most realistic in recognising not only the topicality but also the real weight of the issue. The most quoted passage in the work is the following: '*this is why I claim that the nationality question is the Archimedean point of Hungarian democracy and state independence*'.[79] In his introduction to the book, Endre Ady, one of the most influential poets of the time, praised Jászi, with whom he was good friends: '*now this latest, gloriously brave and magnificent book is almost the heroic feat of a general who stands up for his army in a battle against the multitudes of his enemies*'.[80]

He saw the creation of the United States of Europe as a necessary historical trend, which seemed particularly prescient at the time of the book's publication in 1912. Jászi understood integration economically and historically as an objective, organic process. He made constant reference to this in almost all of his works. He also recognised that the question of nationality, on which the future of Hungary depended, was not by chance the fundamental issue of his time. Historical experience had shown on several occasions that:

> Hungary will be unable to act with any serious weight and force against Austria, not only in its fidgeting quarrels, but also in its serious economic interests, until Vienna can rightly claim that behind the Hungarian demands there is only a closed class rule, which can be easily broken down by mobilising the deprived nationalities.[81]

During the First World War, the Mitteleuropa plan, with its long historical antecedents, became an official German war aim. Books, studies, and drafts of the concept have been published in abundance. The most influential and controversial of these was Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, published in 1915. The text had a vivid echo in Hungary, as the country's entire intellectual and political class was aware that whatever the outcome of the war, it would radically transform their life conditions and their international environment:[82] '*one of the cornerstones of the ideology of the bourgeois radicals was that the unification of nations, supranational integration, would promote the cause of progress in the economic, social and political spheres of intellectual life*'.[83] However, this does not imply an unconditional acceptance of German expansionist aspirations. Many accused Jászi of being a Germanophile and did not

79 Jászi, 1912, p. 519.
80 Ady, 1912, p. 835.
81 Jászi, 1912, p. 519.
82 Irinyi, 1973.
83 Ibid. p. 166.

understand how he could simultaneously be committed to democratisation and social reform and support German ambitions for great power. To understand this, it should be noted that the Mitteleuropa idea was not only supported in German conservative circles, but had many followers in liberal big capitalist groups: '*the bourgeois radicals are only enthusiastic about a Central Europe that doubles the economic productivity of Central Europe and gives its people more rights, more culture, more freedom and more prosperity*'.[84] According to Jászi, '*if, therefore, our alliance with Austria has been a very significant factor in cultural and democratic progress in Hungary, we may justly hope that the extension of the alliance to Germany will give an even greater impetus to the same development*.'[85]

As the debates surrounding the Naumann proposal died down, from the end of 1916, Jászi's attention was increasingly focused on current Central European issues and the possible rapprochement of the small nations of the region. When Károlyi and Jászi held talks with British politicians in Bern in November 1917, Károlyi saw the future of the Danube question in a reorganisation similar to Kossuth's federation plan.[86] In the spring of 1918, however, the Monarchy's situation and international perception took an unfavourable turn. The failure of the separate peace not only worsened the Monarchy's relations with the Entente, it also increased Germany's suspicions. When representatives of Germany and the Monarchy signed an agreement to start negotiations for the establishment of a customs union in May 1918, it not only meant that Austria-Hungary was completely subordinated to Germany, but also that the Entente states – especially France and England – were faced with the dilemma of whether to opt for moderate mutilation or radical dismemberment in the future of the Monarchy. This is confirmed by the fact that from April 1918, the Entente recognised the emigrant national councils of the Monarchy's nationalities as equal belligerents. According to Kossuth's prediction of 1887, the fate of the Monarchy was finally decided for the historical Hungary. What Hungarian political and intellectual life had feared continuously since the beginning of the 19th century would apparently come to pass in a few months' time.

No one was able to offer a realistic and feasible alternative to the imminent total disintegration of historic Hungary. By April 1918, Jászi had prepared a draft entitled *The Future of Hungary and the Danubian United States,* but it remained unpublished until October 1918, when two editions were made available. In the foreword to the first edition, he explained the delay: '*various reasons have prevented its publication so far: partly the immaturity of the conditions, partly technical circumstances. Now, in the rapid pace of events, it is perhaps too late: practice is beginning to overtake theory*'.[87] He was well aware of the inevitability of territorial change, at least as far as the

84 Ibid.
85 Jászi, 1916, p. 451.
86 Hanák, 1985, p. 68.
87 Jászi, 1918, p. 5.

structure of the present Monarchy was concerned. Indeed, one of his chapters is entitled '*The Monarchy cannot be balanced within its present framework*'.

The future Central-European power structure would consist of an alliance of five states: Hungary, Croatia without Slavonia, Austria, the Czech provinces, Poland, and the Croatian-led state of Illyria. As the resulting states would remain multi-ethnic, a key issue would be to guarantee the rights of national minorities. Jászi would grant them broad territorial and cultural autonomies in line with the so-called Austro-Marxist concept of contemporary Austrian social democrats such as Karl Renner. Jászi feared a radical dismemberment of the Monarchy for several reasons. He was aware of the disastrous long-term consequences this would have for Austrian and Hungarian political relations. On the one hand, it would create an unstable situation, and on the other hand, he considered it historically necessary to strengthen and, where necessary, maintain the integration framework on a theoretical basis, stating that '*the greatest forces of development in the 20th century are opposed to all efforts to achieve economic and political isolation in the face of the great momentum of integration*'.[88] He considered Kossuth's project to form the basis of his work, which he knew had already been surpassed by time in many elements, but believed that '*its basic idea and basis [were] still solid*'.[89] He refered several times to Kossuth's 1862 draft and to Kossuth's later statements. According to Jászi:

> The basic idea of Lajos Kossuth's Danube confederation plan was precisely that without the liberation of the states racially related to the Hungarian nationalities and without alliance with them, Hungarian independent statehood was inconceivable. It would be unthinkable even if a fortunate turn of foreign policy could formally restore the independence of the Hungarian state.[90]

Jászi was obviously not fully aware of the plans of their smaller allies in the Entente and Central Europe, nor of their commitment to the radical partition of Hungary, since even in October 1918 he was still assuming Hungary's territorial integrity. It is a peculiarity of Hungarian political and intellectual life that before Trianon, all political tendencies and politicians – as we have seen from the example of Jászi – considered the inviolability of the territorial integrity of historical Hungary as a fundamental basis and requirement for any Central European reorganisation. No one dared to express the idea that the territorial unity of Hungary could not be maintained in its entirety, not even implicitly. Hungarian political society and public opinion were apparently unaware of the power needs and changes that had been present in Central Europe for decades or did not take their dangers seriously. In autumn 1918, in his negotiations with the leaders of the various nationalist

88 Hanák, 1985, p. 70.
89 Jászi, 1918, p. 7.
90 Ibid. p. 46.

movements, Jászi also took as his starting point the principle of self-determination that Wilson had supported in January. It was no accident that he was a reference point for the losers in the settlement of territorial issues. Either because they did not see clearly or because they did not have sufficient information, by the end of 1918 this concept had completely failed: no Entente power supported it, and the Americans were slowly backing out.

Jászi and the Ministry of Nationalities he chaired kept the federation drafts and the so-called 'Eastern Switzerland' concepts on the agenda. The structure of Switzerland, its linguistic-ethnic diversity, and the cantonal system were repeatedly used as a reference for plans to restructure the Habsburg Empire.[91] There is a surviving draft, which was probably handwritten by Bódog Somló, a member of the Transylvanian Hungarian National Council, of a plan to settle the Transylvanian question. The draft, also signed by Oszkár Jászi and János Hock, the president of the Hungarian National Council, would divide Hungary into fourteen territorial units, cantons.[92] This would have probably been insufficient for the nationalities to gain statehood, especially when the draft proposed the following on the issue of language:

> Within a district, the language of the majority of the respective district would be official. With any other district or with the government, the language of communication would be Hungarian. [...] Only those who can speak Hungarian perfectly well shall be public employees, in any district.[93]

Jászi adhered to his federalist ideas until the end of his life. In the US, he said:

> A Danube federation would have solved the overwhelming dilemma of the left: it could have assumed German defeat, won the sympathy of the Western democracies, paved the way for a European confederation of the people under their leadership, and maintained the framework of the Monarchy despite defeat.[94]

In 1953, he wrote a paper on the failure of his federalist plans. With the perspective given by the passage of time, and with a better understanding of the interests of the Western powers, he had a more realistic view of his options: '*it was obvious that a shattered Hungary was the last possible base for a viable federation. The surrounding triumphant small states were not thinking of federation, but of squeezing every possible advantage, of increasing their military, economic and prestige positions*'.[95]

91 Kovács, 2008, pp. 52–64.
92 Bárdi and Zahorán, 2014, pp. 61–63.
93 Ibid. p. 62.
94 Jászi, 1983, p. 27.
95 Jászi, 1953, p. 15.

Upon his emigration to the US, the idea of writing a thorough analysis of the causes of the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy occurred to him. The extensive work was published in the US in 1929 and in Hungary in 1983. Internationally, it is still Jászi's best-known work and is considered by scholars to be a representative documentation of the history of the Habsburg state.[96] It examines the Monarchy in its complexity, lists and analyses the cohesive and divisive forces, and details the aspirations of the national minority movements. However, it places less emphasis on the international context of the disintegration of the Monarchy and the consequences of its defeat in the war.

Although Jászi's ideas of federation often contained a certain naivety, an insufficiently realistic assessment of power relations, the problem of the common fate of the Danube people is an objective given and should not be subordinated to the interests of the great powers, but it contains a great deal of truth: '*the great problem of the Danube peoples would therefore be to reconcile the unimpaired independence of their state and national existence with the economic and cultural interests of the Danube community of fate*'.[97] He considers it necessary to develop a sense of regional community, a 'Danube patriotism', which would overcome the spread of 'self-serving nationalism' and create the possibility of real historical reconciliation and friendship.[98]

4. Gusztáv Gratz (1875–1946)[99]

Gusztáv Gratz was born on 30 March 1875 in Gölnicbánya, in what is now Slovakia.[100] He had an extensive practical and intellectual career. He was a national politician, a member of parliament, a minister of several ministries, and a German nationalist politician. He was a renowned publicist, historian, economic writer, and editor of numerous national and international journals and publications. His family moved to Hungary in the 18th century, presumably because of the religious persecution of Protestants, and settled in the Felvidék. His father was a Lutheran pastor. He received his higher education in Cluj and Budapest. He

96 Jászi, 1983, pp. 42–43.
97 Hanák, 1985, p. 99.
98 Hanák, 1990, p. 232.
99 Gusztáv Gratz, Hungarian politician, minister, unknown photographer, in: Vasárnapi Ujság, 1917. 25. sz., public domain, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gratz_Guszt%C3%A1v#/media/F%C3%A1jl:Gratz_Guszt%C3%A1v.JPEG.
100 Paál, 2018; Gratz, 2007; Schödl, 1986.

soon became acquainted with journalism, and in 1896 he became a correspondent for the German-language journal Pester Lloyd, which was founded in 1854. The journal's main aim audience was the German community in Hungary, including the urban middle classes. Simultaneously, he wrote reports for other foreign periodicals (Kölnische Zeitung, Die Zeit in Vienna).

Gratz was receptive to socio-political issues and was aware of the problems of the dualist era in Hungary. These insights and his liberal stance led him towards the progressive trends that were emerging in Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century. He was one of the founders of the renowned social science journal Huszadik Század (Twentieth Century) and served as its editor-in-chief from its founding in 1900 until 1903.[101] He also helped to organise the Social Science Society in 1901. The journal and the Society became the most important gathering places for reform-minded and progressive intellectuals at the turn of the century. However, political differences within the group soon emerged and led to a split. Gratz feared the spread of the idea of liberalism against the ideal of socialism. In his view, '*socialism, by giving the state the power to regulate our daily lives, would be so seriously intrusive on our individual freedom that we would find no more assurance of our personal well-being in it than in any other system of tyrannical meddling in our private affairs*'.[102] Those who disagreed with the increasingly radical trend, such as Gratz, were gradually removed from the ranks of both the editors of the Huszadik Század (1901) and the leaders of the Social Science Society (1906). The separation of liberals and radicals fundamentally determined the future possibilities of progressive thought and the direction of its political development.

Between 1906 and 1917, Gratz was a Member of Parliament. He had already acquired a profound knowledge of parliamentary work during his journalistic career.[103] He won a seat in the ethnically diverse electoral district of Újegyháza in Transylvania, populated by Hungarians, Saxons, and Romanians. During his parliamentary career, he was active in the Transylvanian Saxon parliamentary group. He became acquainted with the situation and problems of the Hungarian economy, including the manufacturing industry, and the debates on economic policy and economic development. In 1912, he became the executive director of the Confederation of National Industrialists. From the point of view of economic policy, he held liberal views, which considered international economic cooperation, various forms of integration, and their deepening to be historically necessary and justified. He supported closer economic links between the Monarchy and Germany, which had been the subject of lively debate in Hungary during the First World War through Friedrich Naumann's book *Mitteleuropa* (1915), and considered it a necessary economic process.[104]

101 Pók, 1990.
102 Cited by Paál, 2018, p. 79.
103 Paál, 2018, p. 57.
104 Irinyi, 1973.

At the beginning of 1917, on the proposal of the Hungarian government, he was appointed head of the Trade Policy Department of the Common Foreign Ministry. The same year, he was appointed Minister of Finance in the Esterházy government, and later Head of the Trade Policy Department of the Common Foreign Ministry. In this capacity, he represented the Monarchy in economic matters at the peace negotiations with Russia at Brest-Litovsk in 1918 and with Romania at the Treaty of Bucharest. These proved to be very useful for his political future, as it was through these negotiations that he gained international recognition, which he was later able to put to good use: '*Gustáv Gratz's role in the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations is the highlight of his political activities during the dualist era, as he was directly involved in shaping world politics*'.[105] From the spring of 1918, the Monarchy became increasingly economically subordinate to Germany. This was illustrated by the signing of an agreement on 12 May at the German headquarters in Spa by the two sides' commissioners to begin negotiations on the establishment of a customs union. This caused great concern among the Entente Powers, particularly the part of the draft that stated that the customs union would be open to other applicant states. This was seen by Western public opinion as a step towards the realisation of one of the main German war aims, the creation of a German-led Mitteleuropa.[106] Economic negotiations for its creation were launched in Salzburg on 9 July 1918. Gratz was present in the Monarchy's delegation. However, the imminent defeat in the war put a halt to all efforts in this direction.

In a strange twist of history, at the end of October 1918, people came to power – for example, Oszkár Jászi and his circle – with whom Gratz had briefly shared a common ideological conviction at the beginning of the century. The separation, the differences in political paths and the radical differences in ideas and ideological convictions became even clearer at this time. Gratz remained a liberal, but

> already as a young man he was convinced that radical change in the social, economic and political spheres rarely makes people happy, and that a viable state and society must therefore assert the principle of order against all movements towards violent upheaval.[107]

After the break-up of the Monarchy and historic Hungary, Gratz fled the revolutions and moved to Vienna, where he joined the Anti-Bolshevik Committee organised by István Bethlen in April 1919. From November 1919 to January 1921, he was head of the Hungarian embassy in Vienna.

Between January and April 1921, he became Foreign Minister in the first government of Pál Teleki. In the early twenties, Hungarian foreign policy envisaged a revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty and the possibility of achieving a more

105 Paál, 2018, p. 154.
106 Pallai, 2019, pp. 27–36.
107 Paál, 2018, p. 187.

favourable territorial status through bilateral negotiations with neighbouring countries. Gratz held direct talks with Czechoslovakian envoys in Bruck an der Lejtha, Austria, in March.[108] However, they were unsuccessful, with the negotiators showing neither a minimum willingness to compromise with the other side, nor any serious consideration for the small concessions offered.

During these years, one of the most important problems of Hungarian domestic politics was the so-called king question, which deeply divided Hungarian political life, but the possible return of the Habsburg monarch also brought with it major foreign policy concerns.[109] Gratz shared legitimist views (i.e., he supported the return of Charles IV) and even played a major role in the second attempt at his return.[110] The monarch offered him the post of Finance Minister in the government he was to form. After the failure of Charles IV's two attempts to return to power, Gratz was politically compromised as a legitimist. Along with other supporters of the Habsburg Restoration, he was arrested on charges of sedition and spent ten months in prison. As he continued to hold royalist views and expressed them in several lectures,[111] he was not given much room for manoeuvres in politics and could not hold a direct governmental position. He played an active role in economic governance and held senior positions on the boards of banks and large companies. The Foreign Office allowed him to retire on 30 June 1922 at his own request.[112]

Although he had no direct governmental functions, his relationship with Bethlen, which was highly controversial, remained intact.[113] Evidence of this is the fact that he was a member of the editorial boards of the Magyar Szemle (Hungarian Review) and the Foreign Affairs Review, both of which were aligned with the government. He was a frequent critic of official Hungarian foreign policy and called for a return to reality; his criticism of Hungarian revisionist propaganda adequately summarises this:

> Hungarian society has fallen into the old mistake of regarding the first ray of sunshine as summer, when the harvest can begin, whereas in reality the work of sowing has hardly been finished. In the broader society, everyone hoped for the imminent triumph of the idea of revisionism and indulged in uncritically rose-tinted illusions. Rothermere's article [...] was regarded as England's resolution.[114]

Starting in 1925, he edited the Ungarisches Wirtschafts-Jahrbuch, the most important regular publication on Hungarian economic conditions in German.

108 Juhász, 1988, pp. 77–78.
109 Kardos, 1998.
110 Paál, 2018, pp. 261–279.
111 Ibid. p. 282.
112 Ibid. p. 287.
113 Pritz, 2005, pp. 195–210.
114 Gratz, 2001, p. 221.

From the mid-twenties onwards, he was one of the leading nationalist German politicians in Hungary. In 1924, with Bethlen's support, he took over the presidency of the Folk Culture Association of Hungarian Germans, one of the most important Hungarian German organisations between the two World Wars. As a national minority politician, his ambitions included, on the one hand, the development and expansion of the native language and cultural rights and institutions of the German minority, and on the other hand the search for consensus with the government. The tensions between these two ambitions began to emerge in the late 1930s, when National Socialist German foreign policy saw Central and Eastern Europe, including Hungarian Germans, as a means of expansionist foreign policy.[115] Gratz clearly rejected this German ambition, and therefore also abandoned his work on national minority policy at the end of 1938. Prior to this, the German Interior Minister Frick had made clear to Ambassador Sztójay that Gratz was unfit to be a national minority leader.[116]

In 1926, he again became a Member of Parliament. He was elected in the district of Bonyhád, which at that time still had a significant German minority. He was represented in several international organisations. He was a permanent member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a member of the Council and Executive Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce. He joined the governing party before the 1931 elections but retained the right to express his own views on the government. In 1931–32, Gratz made several private trips to neighbouring countries, where he discussed the possibilities of economic rapprochement with Central Europe.[117] However, during the premiership of Gyula Gömbös, he gradually moved away from the group of government MPs, from which he eventually withdrew entirely, as the head of government forbade government MPs to participate in any kind of legitimist organisation. This was unacceptable to Gratz, who was known to be a legitimist. Gratz grew increasingly close to the Liberals led by Károly Rassay, and from 1936 he was a member of their parliamentary group. From 1939, he was editor-in-chief of the most important liberal daily newspaper, Pesti Napló (Journal of Pest). Both as a politician and as a journalist, he firmly rejected the increasing rightward shift in political, economic, and social life, and the German influence increasingly present in domestic politics. In the last years of the Second World War, he was involved in the work of a secret organisation led by István Bethlen among others, which was working to leave the war and prepare for the post-war period.

He firmly rejected anti-Semitism and the enactment of Jewish laws, which became more and more institutionalised at the end of the 1930s. On 10 March 1939, in the House of Parliament, he expressed himself clearly and firmly during the debate on the new Jewish law:

115 Tilkovszky, 1979, pp. 1–48.
116 Paál, 2018, p. 419.
117 Ibid. pp. 314–315.

> Contrary to those who regard the suppression of the Jews as a duty arising from the Christian conception of the world, I hold the view that those who distinguish between man and man, who do not respect human dignity equally in all, and who seek to ration equal rights in different proportions, not according to the merit of each man, but according to his outward affiliation, are in contradiction with the fundamental ideals of the Christianism. Contrary to those who consider the Jewish draft to be an important requirement of national policy, I for my part am convinced that the implementation of this draft will not be seen as progress, neither spiritually nor economically, in the eyes of the world and of Hungarian posterity, but as a strange and regrettable miscalculation. A Christian is one who loves his fellow man as himself.[118]

In 1942–43, he travelled to Switzerland on business several times, where he met anti-German politicians.[119] After the German invasion of the country on 19 March 1944, he was arrested[120] and taken to the Mauthausen concentration camp, from which he was released in July 1944 with the help of one of his German-born sons-in-law. According to the agreement, he was not allowed to return to Hungary and instead moved to his daughter's house near Vienna.[121] At the request of the Provisional National Government, he prepared economic studies in preparation for the Paris Peace Conference. He was interrogated as a witness in several trials at the People's Court (e.g., in the case of Béla Imrédy).

He also wrote several major works in the field of history. The most important of these are his works on dualism, published in 1934, and on the revolutions of 1918–19, published in 1935.[122] In recognition of his scientific work, he was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1941.

Between the two World Wars, he was a theoretical and practical supporter of economic rapprochement between the successor states of the Monarchy. He published many studies and articles drawing attention to the dangers of the nationalist economic policy, the policy of isolation, and the trade policy aimed at cutting off old economic ties, which, in his view, were in contradiction with the objective laws of integration.[123] The global financial crisis has radically altered the economic situation and international economic relations of the whole of Europe, especially of the successor states of the Monarchy. These processes had all taken a negative turn and changes seemed inevitable. Even France, which was at the heart of the political balance of power in Europe at the time, realised that the unfavourable economic developments were undermining the stability of the whole Versailles Peace Treaty. Alternative integrationist ideas and various attempts at unity, whether political or

118 Képviselőházi Napló XXII., p. 290.
119 Paál, 2018, p. 433.
120 Tilkovszky, 2000, pp. 371–391.
121 Paál, 2018, p. 436.
122 Gratz, 1934; Gratz, 1935.
123 Gratz, 1925, pp. 86–89.

economic, appeared with great intensity and in great variety during the crisis. With the 1929 proposal by French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, the concept of pan-Europeanism rose for the first time to the status of an official great power. Gratz was already familiar with the Pan-European movement, having attended its congresses in Vienna in 1926 and Basel in 1932. Although he identified with the ideal of integration and with the idea of pan-Europeanism and many of its representatives, he found the nature and atmosphere of the congresses alien and ineffective.[124]

Gratz and his like-minded contemporaries saw an opportunity to rebuild a base for ideas of economic convergence between the successor states in the face of the challenges of the recession. Institutional forms were also created to promote their ideas. The so-called 'Institutes of Central Europe' were established one after the other. In March 1929, the Vienna Institute, which dealt mainly with transport and currency issues, was established as was the Institute in Brno, which studied cooperation between different production sectors, in September 1929. In the winter of 1929–30, a similar institute was set up in Dresden, with no specific function. Then, in May 1930, the Hungarian Institute for Central Europe was set up under the chairmanship of Gusztáv Gratz, with agricultural issues as its focus. The most active organisational work was done by one of Gratz's closest colleagues, Elemér Hantos. The institutes tried to win public support for their cause through a series of debate events and publications.

> Gustáv Gratz, who collaborated with Hantos in the leadership of the Institute of Central Europe in Budapest, was a supporter of the supranational economic community of the peoples of Central Europe from a monarchic-conservative basis. Even after the failure of the legitimist attempts at restoration, he insisted on his stance that Hungarian foreign policy should above all promote cooperation with the Central European states, especially Austria and Czechoslovakia.[125]

The Budapest Chamber of Commerce provided the venue for what is now considered a rather virtual institute. According to its Charter, the institute's aim is '*to study and explore by scientific means and methods, free of any political motives, questions concerning the economic relations and contacts between Hungary and foreign states of importance for Hungarian economic interests, in the general interests of the Hungarian economy.*'[126]

In March 1931, the German and Austrian foreign ministers again raised the idea of a customs union between the two countries. The idea caused a great deal of concern and resonance both among the Western powers and the successor states. Not only was the possibility of Anschluβ interpreted, but the idea that the proposed customs union was open to other countries wishing to join also gave rise to fears of

124 Paál, 2018, p. 305.
125 Kövics, 1992, p. 120.
126 Quoted by Paál, 2018, p. 311.

a revival of the old German Mitteleuropa. Gratz perceived this danger, stating, '*the content of the treaty, especially the provisions for the admission of new states, reinforces the perception that the agreement was only intended as a starting point for a larger economic alliance*'.[127] The judgment of the International Court of Justice in The Hague and the unfolding credit crisis, which hit Germany particularly hard, took the plan off the agenda, but the basic problem remained. As Gartz put it,

> In the end, however, something will have to be done to remedy the economic situation in Central Europe, and this problem, the solution of which is entirely reserved for the future, will be a crucial one for the future, even if the German-Austrian customs union is finally implemented and even if it is replaced by some other form of union.[128]

French foreign policy was facing a major challenge, as the negative response to the German plan now prompted Paris to generate a new concept. Ahead of the French, the Czechs presented an integrationist idea. The idea of an Austro-German customs union was a matter of great concern to the Czechoslovak government. In this situation, Beneš proposed the idea of a Czechoslovak-Hungarian-Austrian customs union. However, this plan was destined to fail. On the one hand, Beneš did not explain his idea clearly, he made radically different statements on the same subject, and the Western powers did not think that such a scheme would be able to handle the agricultural surplus. Further, political goodwill was lacking. Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations had traditionally been tense, and the customs war, which broke out in 1930, only deepened this. The Austrian and Hungarian governments saw Beneš's plan as a politically questionable half-hearted economic solution. Among the proposed solutions, the Brocchi plan seemed to be realised when the Hungarian government signed the agreement with the Italians on 20 February 1932. Italy, however, was not a market for the agricultural states of the Danube.

The crisis also pushed Britain into action, and despite being the largest exporter of capital in the region, it had thus far been less vocal in solving the economic problems of the successor states. On 17 January 1932, the British government formally proposed the idea of a customs union of the six Danube states. Bulgaria was to be the sixth state. The British foreign policy was not only to counterbalance Germany's ambitions for economic unity, but also their traditional affinity for some form of Central European cooperation. However, the British had to drop their plans because of the opposition of the French, the Italians, and the Czech.

In 1932, a new government came to power in France, marking a turning point in foreign policy.[129] Tardieu wanted to settle Franco-British relations, but also to

127 Gratz, 1931, p. 280.
128 Ibid. pp. 286–287.
129 Concerning this great power ambition: Ránki, 1981; Pritz, 1997; Meyer, 1955; Elvert, 1999; Elekes, 1934.

take decisive steps to prevent Germany's ambitions to the East. On 2 March 1932, he announced his plan in the House of Parliament, which was sent officially to the governments concerned on 5 March. To resolve the market problem, Tardieu proposed the establishment of a preferential customs system for the five Danube states. Although the idea itself was not original, the fact that it was proposed by France attracted greater interest. Italian and German foreign policy also felt the impact and were concerned that their plans for Central Europe might fail. While Germany sought to block the Tardieu plan by reformulating its earlier preference offer, Italy accelerated the implementation of the Brocchi plan. The fate of the plan was decided in London. The British government convened a conference on 6 April 1932 to discuss the details. Italian and German opposition to the proposal quickly led to its defeat, helped by the reserved attitude of the British.

The Tardieu Plan and the relationship between Elemér Hantos and Gratz were particularly noteworthy. The French politician formulated a system of preferences for the five Danube states that was very similar to Hantos' concept, which was published in several French languages. Multiple German and French newspapers suggested that there was a close link between Hantos' earlier work and the idea put forward by Tardieu. One German newspaper even described Hantos as the 'real father' of the Tardieu Plan.

The Tardieu Plan was presented on 27 May 1932 at the Foreign Affairs budget debate. Gratz linked the economic plan to political rapprochement with the neighbours.

> As long as the tension with our neighbours does not give place to a more friendly atmosphere, this can hardly take place, so for this reason it is logical to strive for an easing of the tension with our neighbours. This is also necessary economically. Much of the trouble has come from our failure to retain neighbouring markets. There are many obstacles to a solution, but it does not seem impossible. Rapprochement is possible and should be attempted. With economic easing, perhaps the paths to political rapprochement will open.[130]

The last serious proposal for a Central European rapprochement was Milan Hodža's 1936 draft. He proposed the reduction of tariffs, preferential treaties, and the creation of an international grain centre in Vienna to channel the agricultural surpluses of the Danube states to Western Europe.[131] The plan had all the flaws of the economic bloc-building attempts: it lacked partnership or great power support, and the countries concerned were not reciprocal markets. Moreover, it was considerably delayed, since after 1934, Germany gradually opened its markets to the Danube agrarian states, but under certain conditions that played them off against

130 Pesti Napló (Journal of Pest) 28 May 1932, 83(116) p. 2.
131 Ránki, 1981, pp. 306–311.

each other. German economic expansion towards the successor states was once again under way.[132] According to Gratz, the situation of the Danube peoples, and with them the general situation in Europe, was extremely worrying:

> The peoples living here are also in a state of tension, which forces them to seek the support of certain great powers; France, Germany or Italy. The result is the situation that exists today: any conflict between the Danube Valley states can lead to a conflict between their various protecting powers, and any conflict between powers can also lead to a conflict between the Danube Valley states. From this situation, which is equally alarming for the peace of Europe and for the future of the Danube Valley states, [...][133]

Gratz did not merely foresee the dangers of the future, he correctly summarised the historical experience he had lived through on many occasions: that there would be no peace in Europe without a reassuring settlement of the relations in Central Europe.

5. Elemér Hantos (1881–1942)[134]

Elemér Hantos, economist, university professor, financial expert, and international economics writer, was born on 12 November 1881,[135] the son of Ignác Hantos, a prominent lawyer from Eisenstadt, Austria, in a middle-class Jewish family that had converted to the Reformed religion. His professional and political career was exemplary in turn-of-the-century Hungary. He completed his secondary education at the Lutheran Lyceum in Sopron. He attended university in Budapest, Vienna, Leipzig, and Paris. This not only gave him a broad knowledge of languages, but also an insight into the world and the development of a valuable network of connections. During his university years in Budapest, at the recommendation of the Rector, he was placed in the household of then-Minister of Culture, Gyula Wlassics,

132 Pritz, 1997.
133 Gratz, 1936, p. 114.
134 Elemér Hantos, Hungarian economist, state secretary, university professor, member of parliament, lawyer, unknown photographer, in: Pesti Napló Képes Melléklete, public domain, source of the picture: https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hantos_Elem%C3%A9r#/media/F%C3%A1jl:Hantos_Elem%C3%A9r.jpg.
135 T. Boros, 1929, pp. 151–152; Németh, 2009.

which allowed him to develop a familiarity with the higher political circles. After graduating with a law degree, he spent a year in England on a state scholarship, where he wrote a book on the historical parallels between English and Hungarian constitutional development.

Upon his return to Hungary, he joined a law firm. He was one of the most active participants in the financial reform movement at the beginning of the century. Alongside László Lukács and Kálmán Széll, he founded the National Association of Financial Institutions, the National Pension Fund Association of Financial Institutions, and the National Insurance Institute of Financial Institutions. He was also Executive Vice President of all three organisations. From 1904, he was the Executive Secretary, and later General Secretary, of the Rural Financial Institutions Association. From 1904 to 1910, he served as editor of the Finance Institute Review, and from 1910 of the Financial Review. In 1910, he was elected as a representative of Marosillye (Hunyad County, now Romania) on the platform of the National Workers' Party and remained so until 1918.

As a member of parliament, he was active as a member of the parliamentary committees on justice, economics, and the discharge procedure. He fought for the removal of barriers to trade and for better working conditions for commerce workers. He advocated the introduction of an audit institution in line with international rules and considered it necessary to regulate and control the financial institutions, which had been organised in large numbers before the turn of the century. Thanks to his activities in this area, he became vice-president of the Chamber of Hungarian Auditors. His activities contributed greatly to the start of auditor training. In 1912, he presented the bill on the new international law on exchange.

During the First World War, he wrote several books and studies in Hungarian and German on the financial and economic effects of the war and its consequences for the post-war period. He was awarded the Lévay Prize of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for his dissertation on *the financial military readiness, mobilisation, and warfare of the monarchy*, published in the first year of the war. The essential idea of the work is that

> the relationship between war and economics is also reciprocal. Success in arms gives a stronger impetus to economic life, but a healthy economy is an essential element of success in war. Despite this, when considering all the economic effects of war, its expected benefits and foreseeable devastation, the conclusion is that, apart from colonial wars with fortunate outcomes, peaceful development is incomparably more beneficial to economic life than any war.[136]

136 Hantos, 1914, p. 26.

He saw the economic and financial situation of the central powers as balanced at the beginning of the war but worried about the destructive effects of prolonged war: '*we must prepare for the transition of the war economy to normal conditions*'.[137]

In 1916, he became political secretary at the Ministry of Trade, where his political activities and character were well received. Ödön Fischer, president of the Hungarian Cobden Club, later recalled that Hantos was '*one of the few people who always discussed everything with the interest representatives before taking action and considered the working citizens of Hungarian economic life as his colleagues*'.[138] He was granted the title of State Secretary for life by King Charles IV in the spring of 1918 in recognition of his expertise and authority in financial matters. In 1917, he drafted a proposal for electoral reform, proposing a significant extension of the franchise by lowering the voting age and introducing women's suffrage. However, when the ruler appointed a new committee to reform the electoral law, Hantos and his close friend Béla Serényi left the party. He became a direct associate of the Prime Minister when the Wekerle government was appointed.

Alongside Sándor Wekerle, László Lukács, and Kálmán Széll, Elemér Hantos was one of the most distinguished financial experts of the Monarchy. In 1916, he became a private lecturer in finance at the University of Budapest's Faculty of Law. In 1918, he was appointed president of the Hungarian Postal Savings Bank, with the rank and powers of State Secretary. He was dismissed from his position during the Soviet Republic for refusing to issue Postal Savings Bank notes, though he was reinstated in August 1919. As he was in constant friction with the government commissioner appointed to his post, he resigned in 1921.

He attempted to return to politics as an MP twice. He ran as an independent candidate on a liberal platform, claiming that he did not agree with the economic and financial programme of any party.[139] In 1920, he ran in Budapest's District No. 12, where he came last, and in 1922 in Miskolc, where there was also a secret ballot, but he failed to achieve a result there either.

As a financial expert, he recognised the damage caused by the disintegration of the Monarchy and nationalist economic policies. His extensive academic and publishing work, as well as his practical organising work, covered credit policy and law, the world economy, and Central European economic issues.

Elemér Hantos, as a well-trained economist with an appreciation of the facts, was well aware of the unfavourable circumstances that constantly determined the conditions of economic life in the successor states between the two World Wars. The main problem for the region, apart from the deterioration in Europe's position in the world economy and with it that of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, was the contradiction of the peace treaties with economic processes and rationalities. The starting point of Hantos' analysis of the situation, both in the

137 Hantos, 1915, p. 26.
138 Hantos, 1922.
139 Hantos Elemér pályája (Career of Elemér Hantos), 1922.

1920s and 1930s, is a critique of the peace treaties from an economic point of view: '*the peace treaties not only dismembered the 'largest geographical unit' of Europe, but also one of the most perfectly centralised economic, financial, and commercial organisations*'.[140] He acknowledged and justified the Monarchy's nationalist aspirations, since the Habsburg state, '*as a political entity, could arouse the discontent of the nationalities living in its territory, but as an economic unit it was most perfect*'.[141] Hantos uncritically idealised the Monarchy as an economic unit. He failed to address the important fact that the Monarchy had inherently preserved the disadvantaged situation of the underdeveloped territories.

The peace treaties also redefined the geographical meaning of Central Europe: '*before the war, the political and geographical concept of Central Europe was defined by the triple alliance of the German Empire, the Monarchy and Italy*'.[142] In addition to the five Danube states, the new Central Europe also included Poland and Germany: '*today's Italy, although it is one of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, cannot be said to be a constituent part of the new Central Europe with its ambitions to reach the Mediterranean and acquire colonies*'.[143] This enlarged Central Europe, whose population had increased from 116.3 million in 1926 to 150.3 million and whose territorial extension had increased by 500,000 km, '*has not yet been a gain in strength in terms of geographical expansion, area and population*'.[144] Because of the peacekeeping systems and post-war economic policy, '*the economic map of Central Europe gives the impression of being incomplete. In contrast to the past, it looks like an old coat sewn together from pieces of cloth that fit together in a completely mismatched way*'.[145]

The peace treaties not only raised economic barriers, but also created mistrust, mutual fear and suspicion in the region, which made the usual forms of economic interaction impossible. The prevalence of nationalism created an unfavourable psychological climate which not only hindered the tasks of post-war consolidation, but also continued to poison the reconciliatory vision of the inter-war period: '*Trianon opened up a deep rift between us and our neighbours, a rift that may never be completely bridged, but which we must strive to bridge if we are to reach our old markets and the land of our old culture in a peaceful way*'.[146]

Hantos was a political realist. He was aware that in Central Europe there could be no return to the political and territorial conditions that existed before the war. He avoided expressing his opinion on political issues whenever he could, as he generally had a low opinion of politics itself. He blamed politics – rightly – for the crisis in the successor states. He clearly saw that: '*no sane man can think of restoring the*

140 Hantos, 1932, p. 5.
141 Hantos, 1922, p. 5.
142 Hantos, 1932, pp. 18–19.
143 Ibid. p. 22.
144 Hantos, 1927a, p. 51.
145 Hantos, 1925b, p. 142.
146 Hantos, 1932, p. 5.

old political system of Central Europe'.[147] He has repeatedly said that what politics has done wrong, the economy must make right: '*the economic disadvantages of the many new borders must be neutralised by trade, transport and currency agreements between the various political entities*'.[148]

Despite his criticisms of Trianon and the peace treaties from an economic point of view, he did not take a position on the question of revision. Nor could he have done so, because whether he spoke for or against it, he would have been immediately rejected by one of the partner states that had been selected for cooperation. However, his views and plans in Hungary were characterised from the outset by suspicion and mistrust.

Hantos envisages a missionary role for the economy. Mutuality, the recognition of similarities in economic problems, the search for common solutions, the hoped-for successes, make it possible to experience the unity that is meant to ease the tensions created by war and peace treaties. This is all the more necessary because:

> The most important task in the mental field is to put the possibility of a new war out of people's minds [...] A new war would be bloodier and more fatal than any that has ever existed, because it would take on the character of a civil war. The sick organism of Central Europe would not endure such a war.[149]

The basic economic problems of the 1920s in East-Central Europe were twofold. One was the financial question, the other was customs policy. Hantos's activities were mainly in these two areas. He came to international attention in 1920–21, when he published several works on the financial and monetary relations of the successor states.[150] Article 206 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain and Article 189 of the Treaty of Trianon stipulated that the successor states should overstamp the currencies issued by the Austro-Hungarian Bank and create new national currencies. This ended the monetary unity of the Monarchy, which had existed since 1816. Instead of the new national currencies, Hantos considered it necessary and possible to maintain the financial unity of the old Monarchy by creating common monetary policy measures.

> There is only one way open to Central Europe today: to tear down the senseless barricades erected in the monetary field and to switch to a new currency by abandoning the existing monetary systems, to start rebuilding the monetary system instead of futile efforts to repair it. We need to create good new money, not fix the old bad one.[151]

147 Hantos, 1927a, p. 47.
148 Hantos, 1925b, p. 136.
149 Ibid. p. 138.
150 Hantos, 1920, pp. 11–27; Hantos, 1921; Hantos, 1921b.
151 Hantos, 1922, p. 12.

The most serious post-war financial problems include the lack of a secure, stable currency, uncontrolled inflation, and large public deficits. Nothing illustrates the anarchic state of affairs better than the persistence of smuggling, racketeering and black-market trade in the region in the post-war years. Hantos also warns of the serious social consequences of impoverishment: *'the public needs to be made aware of the inextricable link between budget deficits and the cost of living and made aware that the need to put finances in order must precede the large-scale social reform policies that are being urged worldwide*'.[152]

Another major economic problem of the early twenties was the foreign trade policy of the successor states. In this area, instead of the nationalist economic policy of restoring or, to some extent, maintaining old economic relations based on rationality and mutual interest, the policy of cutting them off as much as possible prevailed. However, this did not fully achieve its aim, since, despite the decline in the share of trade between the successor states in the twenties, the main trading partners remained unchanged.

> Despite changes of a political and economic nature, the relationship between the territories producing agricultural surpluses and those in need of agricultural imports is still such as to allow for a regular exchange of goods, the well-established system of economic complementarity that used to be the rule.[153]

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The protectionist economic policy, which was a natural phenomenon during the war, was an unjustified restriction on foreign trade in peacetime: '*the legal foundations of Central European economic trade had been destroyed by the war, and the peace treaties reorganised it in such a way that there was no way of achieving 'close economic unification' of the older treaty areas*'.[155] Strict tariffs, prohibitive customs duties, bureaucratic licensing procedures, rigid administrative, and veterinary rules

152 Ibid. p. 9.
153 Hantos, 1929, p. 58.
154 Hantos, 1927a, p. 58.
155 Ibid. p. 52.

meant that there was less trade between the successor states than could have been made possible. As an immediate measure, Hantos considered it necessary to reduce customs tariffs by 25–50%.[156]

The major powers' desire for economic stability was reflected in the organisation of numerous international economic conferences. The 1927 World Economic Conference was preceded by great anticipation. In the spirit of preparation, numerous studies and proposals appeared that either analysed general world economic or pan-European problems or concentrated on a particular aspect of international economic relations. For Elemér Hantos, the preparatory work for the congress provided a good opportunity to draft a memorandum on the situation in Central Europe on behalf of the *Mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftstagung*[157] (hereinafter MWT) and to present it to the international public at the conference. The work was published in three languages.[158] For the first time, Hantos had the opportunity to explore the roots of the region's economic problems and to develop broad outlines of his concept in a programme-oriented manner. In addition to credit and trade policy issues, it also outlined the problems in other sectors of the economy, each of which could be addressed through cooperation. He was aware that the complexity of the economy meant that lasting improvements could only be achieved if each of its components was addressed in a coordinated manner. In all the conditions of economic life – such as trade, transport, and communications – it identified the damages and deficiencies that had occurred since the war and identified the need for rapprochement in each of these segments as the only way out. After the World Economic Forum, in the second half of the 1920s, he elaborated in more detail, in separate studies, on the desirable forms and areas of cooperation.

5.1. Trade policy rapprochement

After the war, the region's economy did not return to normal for a long time. Its role in the world economy declined not only because of a drop in production, but also because of a significant drop in foreign trade. Even in 1924, it was still 30% behind its 1913 level. In addition to the adverse effects of the war, the trade policy of the successor states played a part in this.[159] High tariffs and a system of prohibitive restrictions became commonplace. This was mainly used by the successor states among themselves in order to cut off as many of the old economic links as possible.

Before the war, the states in the region traded on a contractual basis, with moderate tariff protection. After 1919, however,

156 Hantos, 1925a, 108.
157 It was initiated by Austrian wholesaler Julius Meinl to promote economic cooperation in Central Europe.
158 Hantos, 1927a, pp. 47–73; Hantos, 1927b; Hantos, 1927c.
159 Hantos, 1927a, p. 48.

> the legal basis for economic exchange in Central Europe was destroyed by the war, and the peace treaties reorganised it in such a way that the possibility of 'close economic unification' of the older treaty areas was no longer open. The division of the Austro-Hungarian economic territory into seven parts was legally sanctioned by the peace treaties, without the appropriate conditions for maintaining the economic links between these territories being included in them.[160]

The authors of the peace treaty were themselves aware of the dangers of the rapid disappearance of the old economic units. In a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers of 8 March 1920, they criticised the newly formed states' policy of isolationism and demanded that the new borders should not interfere with the re-establishment of normal commercial relations. The Brussels Financial Conference of October 1920, the 1921 Portorose Conference, and the Genoa Conference of spring 1922 took similar general stances on this issue.

According to Hantos, the peace treaties themselves were a favourable starting point for trade policy rapprochement, as Article 222 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain and Article 205 of the Treaty of Trianon stated that Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary could conclude a tariff treaty for a period of five years, under which they would grant each other preferences. The problem with this, however, was that it imposed both time and territorial restrictions: '*the exclusion of Yugoslavia and Romania from the list of beneficiaries and the limitation of the treaties to 5 years contradict the principle of closer economic links*'.[161] However, the autarchic economic policy and trade restrictions should not have been seen as partial solutions or relief but could have been eliminated by getting to the root of the problem.

> Only the general dismantling of the customs barriers between the states living in the closest community can bring about a fundamental improvement in the situation, and therefore efforts must be made to establish a single customs and economic system for Central Europe, or at least for the successor states of the former Monarchy, so that any state can play a dominant role in such a customs union. There should also be less fear of jealousy between the customs allied states, since the differences in the successor states are far from being overwhelming, they are economically on the same level, their differences in production potential are complementary. The fear that one or other country, because of its economic preponderance, could seize the lead and assert a supremacy of power which would threaten the independence of the state, does not seem to be a reasonable one.[162]

160 Ibid. p. 52.
161 Ibid. p. 53.
162 Ibid. p. 58.

For the more underdeveloped areas, a secure market and predictable outlets create a favourable opportunity to raise their economic level in a protected environment. This would be helped by an increase in the number of cartels: '*in the area of the customs union, the facilitation of the proper adaptation of the various industries and the elimination of certain disproportions should be ensured by the extensive cartelisation of each industry*'.[163]

5.2. Transport policies rapprochement

New borders and nationalist economic policies created significant barriers to the movement of people and goods. Whereas the movement of goods and people was previously free without any administrative restrictions in a large economic area, it was now hampered by various restrictions and objective barriers.

> The current situation of transport in Central Europe is a faithful reflection of the whole Central European economy. [...] The new system of frontiers, with its customs duties, bans and passports, prevents the free development of economic forces, the development of transit traffic by interrupting transport lines, and the profitable construction of new traffic routes.[164]

The provision of infrastructure is an essential element in the functioning of a modern economy. The region's inherited disadvantage in this respect was exacerbated by the multiplicity of small entities carved up by the new borders, which had also led to a significant loss of competitiveness of the successor states' products on the world market. The speed of transport slowed down as railway border crossings were established in settlements that were not transport hubs and stopping and waiting was not justified by the rationality of transport. As a result, the distance between Vienna and Kraków increased by 2 hours and the distance between London and Bucharest by 15 hours.[165]

Before the war, the Monarchy's railway network, together with the Dutch, Luxembourg, Romanian, and some Russian and Belgian lines, was part of the Union of German Railway Administrations, founded in 1846. This system, with a length of 101,500 km, was the largest transport system in Europe. After the war, however, several successor states withdrew from it, reducing its length to 73,098 km. On 1 December 1922, an international railway union was established in Paris, to which the main European railway companies were joined. Despite the continued existence of the German company, the division of the successor states into two railway companies defied rationality. Hantos proposed that the former association should be further developed and transformed into a Union of Central European Railway Administrations, which would best suit the geography of transport. The

163 Ibid. pp. 58–59.
164 Ibid. p. 59.
165 Hantos, 1929b, pp. 13–15.

new international association would also take over the equipment and facilities for reciprocal traffic that had been installed in the railways, '*converging technical systems, and in this way a certain degree of harmonisation could be achieved*'.[166] There was also a need for financial and formal standardisation of rates and tariffs with the following expected benefit:

> In addition to the formation of a Central European railway union and the creation of an international tariff system, economic considerations give us another means of remedying to some extent the fragmentation of what was once a single economic body, and that is a single operating structure, which is clearly the internationalisation of the main lines in Central Europe.[167]

In addition to inland traffic, international transport on the Danube faced similar disruptions. The Danube was not only the most important river route for the Monarchy, it was the imaginary axis of the empire's different economic structures. While the upper reaches of the Danube were mainly industrial areas (i.e., Austria and Bohemia), the southern stretches were agricultural regions and natural markets for industrialised regions. The Danube would thus play a key role in restoring the old economic links. The practical manifestation of this isolationist economic policy is clear in the Danube traffic statistics. In 1911, 6.9 million tonnes of goods passed between Regensburg and the estuary, but this figure fell to 3.7 million tonnes in 1924.[168] Significant shipping capacity remained unused. In fact, the unfavourable global economic trends and the general decline in European domestic trade played no small part in this reduction. However, the competitiveness of river transport was mainly undermined by administrative barriers and bureaucratic customs rules*: 'according to calculations by experts from the League of Nations, these artificial barriers result in a loss of 6,000 days' worth every year. Danube navigation tariffs, which are on average 20-30% cheaper than rail, cannot compensate for this loss of time*'.[169] The difficulty of accounting was not only caused by the lack of a uniform tariff system, but also by the fact that these were not fixed in a single currency. A total of eight currencies had to be harmonised, the exchange rates of which were highly volatile.

5.3. Postal rapprochement

New borders meant restrictions on both communications and postal services. The development and spread of communication is a measure of the quality of a modern economy. In this respect, the countries of the region were lagging far behind. The problems caused by this technical underdevelopment were compounded by various bureaucratic constraints. The postal union that had existed between the Monarchy

166 Hantos, 1927a, p. 61.
167 Ibid. p. 62.
168 Ibid. p. 63.
169 Ibid. p. 64.

and Germany since 1872 was abolished by the peace treaties.[170] On 23 November 1921, the five Danube States and Italy concluded an agreement in Portorose that was aimed at introducing postal concessions. They abolished the unreasonably high international postal rates, simplified the mail service system, and sought to improve the flow of information by establishing new telegraph and telephone lines. However, these formal improvements failed to address the root cause of the original problem. According to Hantos, a Central European Postal Union should also have been set up in the area. In the absence of such an initiative, efforts should continue to be made to reduce international rates, abolish transit charges, and facilitate international postal cheque traffic.[171]

5.4. Production policy rapprochement

Hantos asserted that it would be desirable to organise the various production sectors in order to eliminate the overproduction that weighed on the region. Cooperation in this area could also be facilitated because it would not require the active involvement of governments.

> Much progress has been made in this area in recent years. A whole range of industries in Central Europe have come together in carefully organised cartels, or at least simple market-sharing, to form a community of interests. It is true that the desired effect of this union in terms of commercial policy has not yet been felt. Cartelised industries have not given up on tariff protection.[172]

In the field of industry, this may be a solution, but in the field of agriculture, Hantos argued, cartel-like arrangements were unthinkable, even though most of the states in the region were essentially agricultural.

5.5. Currency policy rapprochement

When the idea of the 1927 World Economic Conference was raised, the successor states had already gone beyond the creation of their own national currencies. Thus, the question of currency policy was not on the conference agenda. Hantos saw this as highly regrettable, since despite the financial restructuring – new national currencies, the return to the gold basis, and the elimination of the note printing – many issues and problems remained unsolved.[173] He believed that various forms of cooperation between central banks should be developed including the mutual facilitation of foreign exchange transactions, smoothing out fluctuations in the

170 Hantos, 1929c, p. 16.
171 Hantos, 1927a, p. 63.
172 Ibid. p. 70.
173 Ibid. p. 66.

purchasing power of gold, conversion of new currencies to a common currency, and a common credit policy strategy.

The global economic crisis marked a turning point in the history of the unification efforts between the two World Wars, with economic and political reorganisations that significantly increased the scope for integrationist ideas compared to the 1920s. Given the integration plans, it is unsurprising that many of these ideas came to light at the turn of the 1930s. As an alternative, the idea of rapprochement was widely expressed as a crisis management technique. The most important novelty was the fact that French Prime Minister Briand's 1929 draft raised the concept of Pan-Europeanism to the status of an official great power.

Hantos was highly critical of Briand's draft. He considered the creation of a pan-Europe to be economically necessary, but only feasible in the process of the organic unification of smaller units, such as the new Central Europe.

> Briand's action in the League of Nations, in which he promoted a political alliance of European states, did more harm than good to the economic rapprochement of European states. As an ultimate goal, the customs union of the European states can never be ignored, but one must be aware that its realisation is not possible without intermediate stages. Therefore, it would be wrong to postpone cooperation between territories which are historically, geographically and economically linked and interdependent until the establishment of a Europe-wide economic union or even a customs truce.[174]

The formulation of the idea of European unity proved to be short-lived. It helped, albeit modestly, to create the political environment in which economic unity plans for Central and South-eastern Europe could develop with intensity. The European solution to the crisis was replaced by regional and bilateral visions. The decline of the idea of pan-Europeanism was not only marked by the new foreign policy of the great powers, but also by a change in personnel conditions. The death of Stresemann in 1929 and the fall of Briand in 1932 also marked a change in the way the great powers were politicising.

Two systems of thought emerged in the regional implementation of the market problem. One was the attempt to create an agrarian bloc, the other was the agreement between industrial and agricultural states. The years of depression created a practical framework for economic cooperation between the agricultural states of Central Europe. The agricultural conferences of the successor states in 1930–32 were a new phenomenon in the process of integration. In the 1920s, it was not possible to organise formal multilateral economic negotiations between the states of the region. The Central European Navigation Conference, organised by Elemér

174 Hantos, 1932, pp. 77–78.

Hantos in Budapest in May 1929 within the framework of the MWT, was the first event at which all the successor states were represented, although not formally.

Hantos welcomed the idea of agricultural conferences. His starting point was that previous isolated attempts to solve the problem of agricultural marketing, such as the boletta system in Hungary, had had little success*: 'isolated efforts must be replaced by understanding joint work, and bilateral treaties by multilateral international agreements, especially with neighbouring agricultural states*'.[175] The first conference, with the participation of Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania, took place in Bucharest in August 1930.[176] Proposals were made for the establishment of a preferential customs system for overseas grain. Like Hantos, they advocated the establishment of cartel-like arrangements in the agricultural sector. They also called for the lifting of trade restrictions and veterinary regulations. The creation of an international storage system was seen as a way of preventing price fluctuations.

French foreign policy was faced with a major challenge because the negative response to the German plan had now prompted Paris to generate a new concept.[177] Fortunately for them, the resurgence of the reparations issues temporarily reduced Germany's foreign economic activity. The Germans adopted a position of withdrawal. At a meeting of the German committee of the MWT on 19 May 1932, the following was said*: 'German policy must be set for the long term. For the official policy this means, above all, waiting. We will have the opportunity to intervene when France is no longer able to lend to the countries*'.[178] The Depression had also forced England to become active, although, despite being the largest exporter of capital in the region, it had thus far been less vocal in resolving the economic problems of the successor states. On 17 January 1932, the British government formally proposed the idea of a customs union of the six Danube states; Bulgaria was to be the sixth state. The British foreign policy was not only aimed at counterbalancing Germany's ambitions for economic unity, but also expressed Britain's traditional affinity for some form of Central European cooperation. However, the British had to abandon their plans because of opposition from France, Italy, and the Czech Republic.

The Tardieu Plan's relationship with Elemér Hantos was particularly notable. The French politician formulated a system of preferences for the five Danube states that was very similar to Hantos' concept, several of which were also published in French. Many German and French newspapers suggested that there was a close link between Hantos' earlier work and the idea proposed by Tardieu. One German newspaper even described Hantos as the 'real father' of the Tardieu Plan.[179] Hantos was modest on this point:

175 Ibid. p. 102.
176 Elekes, 1934, p. 130.
177 Balogh, 1933, pp. 211–218.
178 Ránki, 1981, p. 172.
179 Hantos, 1932, 86.

> The Tardieu Plan, however, is a microscopic part of my Central European Plan, both in scope and content, and deals only with one segment of it, that of trade policy, while it does not cover the agricultural, industrial, traffic and monetary policy aspects of the Central European problem.[180]

He also suspected that his two pamphlets, published in French, may have influenced the outcome of the plan, one for the League of Nations' European Committee at Briand's request, the other for the Lausanne Conference in defence of the Franca Plan. He agreed with the aspirations of the Tardieu plan but regarded the proposal itself as only a starting point.

> The Tardieu Plan is an attempt to build a bridge between us and our neighbours [...] The Tardieu Plan itself is merely a framework for achieving the goal of economic integration [...] What appears to be definitive in the Tardieu Plan is the geographical demarcation which is the underlying idea of the plan and which can be expressed by the phrase 'Five States, one river'. This territorial demarcation can be extended to another country, Bulgaria.[181]

He also understood that the fate of the whole plan depended on the attitude of the great powers. He rightly feared that a settlement plan proposed by a great power would be accompanied by the constant suspicion of others. At the Lausanne Conference in June 1932, Hantos took the view that the interests of Germany, Italy, and Poland would not be harmed if the five states did not increase their tariffs against them.

Following the plan's failure, France was no longer in a position to have a substantial influence on the fate of the region and was no longer able to control events. The fact that the crisis had even less impact at home made it possible for France to be active in Central European affairs in 1930–32. France's economic and financial situation seemed stable. The depression unfolded here later, from 1932 onwards, and severely limited its foreign policy options. Italy and Germany thus remained in the contest to determine the fate of the Central and Eastern European region.

Hantos was given no further room to manoeuvre. In Austria and Czechoslovakia, which were most threatened by German ambitions, there seemed to be some interest in his proposals, but it was no longer possible for him to influence the unfavourable developments. In his later works, he also raised the idea of a Danube bloc, although he himself was very sceptical about it.

> The allure of economic policy agreements based on political considerations seems to be spreading across Europe. The economic agreements of the

180 Ibid.
181 Ibid. pp. 86–87.

> Little Entente have also proved to be a powerful burden on political friendship. Regional cooperation has only had a salutary effect where the natural preconditions for economic agreements between neighbouring countries are in place. These preconditions are present in the relationship between Hungary and its neighbours, and Hungary could see the most benefit from Danube Valley cooperation. The result we can achieve in this area depends not only on our local energy, not only on our economic intelligence, but also on our political acumen. It is therefore with hope, but not without some unease, that we turn our gaze to the imminent re-development of the Danube Basin.[182]

After Elemér Hantos's prediction of collapse was realised, he rarely appeared in public. After the Berlin-Rome Axis, he proposed the creation of the so-called Danube Axis in a small paper, a formation that would be free of the influence of any great power, such as that of Italy or Germany.[183] Its creation was not only in the interest of Hungarian foreign policy, but also a fundamental national strategic goal.

> The reorganization of the Danube Basin, the organic harmonization of the Danube peoples of the same fate and destiny, the unification of the Danube countries, cultural and political against all other imperialist influences and foreign domination, this is the real task of Hungarian politics, this is the vital interest of the Hungarian nation.[184]

His hope was that politics would take the path of the future, recognising the realities of the economy*: 'finding a way of political agreement, promoting economic relations, these are the two tasks that will solve the Danube problem*'.[185] The rhetorical summary of his programme – 'Unite or Collapse!' – has become the motto of those who advocate rapprochement in Central Europe.

He died in 1942 and was buried in Budapest. His obituary in the *Economic Review* summarised the significance of Hantos' career, but also expresses his concern for the tragic great power ambitions of his time:

> Hantos, as all this shows, was a forerunner in the service of the great economic policy idea that later emerged and now dominates, through his relentless zeal for the economic unification of Central Europe. But he and his comrades wanted to create peacefully what today the dominant powers would rather unite by mobilising the whole world in war.[186]

182 Hantos, 1935, p. 21.
183 Hantos, 1937, pp. 3–4.
184 Ibid. p. 4.
185 Hantos, 1935, p. 166.
186 Navratil, 1942, p. 677.

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