

Ferenc Glatz

EUROPE'S GREAT WAR AND THE FORMING OF A NEW  
WORLD ORDER

(Questions to spark discussion; historiographical comments)

*Self-criticism is not only  
recommended for the losers,  
but also for the winners.*

We are launching a discussion on Europe's Great War, in fact, a planned six-year series of discussions. I shall submit three theses for your consideration. These three theses are as follows.

First thesis: I speak about Europe's hundred-year war, as I see the history of the First, then the Second World War, the Cold War, up until the creation of the European Union and its enlargement in the Western Balkans (2013). The "causes" of the war in 1914 – the process of the creation of the European nation-states and the battle over spheres of influence in territories outside of Europe – have been with us continuously since 1918 as well. And the causes have had their effect among the same powers. They have led to ever newer flare-ups and are perhaps only ceasing to do so today. (This is why I refer to Europe's hundred-year war and why I use the term Europe's Great War in the title.) The first phase of the war lasted from 1914 to 1919 and was waged explicitly to establish control over territory and spheres of influence. This was closed by the Versailles "system of peace" of 1919–1920, which broke up Europe's three supranational empires into nation-states: Austria–Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. (I consider this system of peace a ceasefire.) The second phase of the Great War spanned the years 1939–1945. Its initial goal was to correct the Versailles system of nation-states of 1920 and the state borders and later to institute the national socialist New Europe programme. In the end, the 1920 European system of states was largely restored. (During this period, the war widened into a world war from the beginning and took on an ideological character beyond the acquisition of territory: it was thus a clash between national socialist, communist and liberal ideologies.) The third phase took place between 1947 and 1989. (I use the common term Cold War for this period, which was ideological in nature from the outset – a clash between liberal

capitalism and communism – but widened to a global stage.) The fourth phase lasted from 1990 to 2013. (This was again an armed conflict for acquiring territory with the order of the 1919–1920 peace treaties falling apart further as of 1991. This process was completed in Europe with the end of the development of the nation-state system, the creation of the European Union (1992) and its later expansion into north-eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin (2004) and into the Western Balkans (2007 and 2013) – that is, into the former western territories of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian Empires. In the Middle East, however, the war continues to this day.)

Second thesis: In the wake of Europe's Great War, we saw the formation of a new "world order" creating a regulating "world governance". (Its structural development was the product of the first phase of the war and has been expanded continuously since then. In my view, it is still the number one project in world politics today. This is why I link the Great War to the creation of the "new world order" in the title.)

Third thesis: Europe's Great War can only be understood through four key European (global) factors in the period between 1850 and 2013 and can only be assessed by taking them into account. These four factors of the age: (1) The nearly 200-year history of the development of the European nation-states; (2) The unfolding of the Industrial (Scientific) Revolution in Europe and its later planetary expansion; (3) The emancipation of the eastern and southern continents (that is the world not inhabited by white people) and the unfolding of a global symbiosis of human culture; and (4) The change in the Earth (Gaia) as a habitat in the past 170 years: the change in the perception of the position of the Earth in space, measurable evidence of climate change and the fear that the Earth's natural resources (energy sources, land, water and air) will be depleted. (I might just as well have listed this last factor first.)

At this point, I will demonstrate the continuity of the war and draw some potential conclusions from re-assessing particular phases and events based on my understanding of the hundred years as one single entity. The specific example submitted for discussion in this case is the history of Central Eastern Europe, the Carpathian Basin and Hungary.

*1914–1918: Hungary and the role of the Balkans in the outbreak  
of the Great War*

Let us therefore begin the discussion of the Great European War. Here in Hungary.

It was a good idea to launch the conference series in Budapest. I like this in particular as a Hungarian. Why is that? Because the Hungarian state, the Kingdom of Hungary at the time, played a role in causing the outbreak of the war. (Now I do not accept the conventional understanding that identifies a political decision made by the German-Austro-Hungarian power bloc as the single cause of the war in 1914. Like the author of the latest successful monograph, Christopher Clark, I too divide the historical responsibility for the war among each of the players in 1914. And not only among the great powers, but also among the smaller states that had a hand in causing the outbreak, for example, Serbia as well.)

But it is also a good idea to launch the planned six-year international conference series right here because we Hungarians must also consider the circumstances of the collapse of the thousand-year-old Hungarian state. Indeed, it was entry into and loss of this war that caused the most recent disintegration (in 1918) of the Hungarian state (it had happened before in 1541). It is therefore important for us to ponder the possibilities of political error among decision makers. Even if the top politician in Austria–Hungary hesitated in giving his consent, the decision still turned out to be a mistake. (No matter how many explanations we come up with among colleagues – indeed, as historians, we must be able to explain everything – it does not mean that the decision has been proved right. It is all too common to confuse the elements of explanation and evaluation in history writing and in everyday thinking...)

It would also be timely, not only for us Hungarians, but also for politicians and intellectuals among neighbouring peoples to ponder the socio-economic consequences that the territorial disintegration of the historical state of Hungary (1919–1920) had on the entirety of the Carpathian Basin region, which had developed as an economic and settlement region for centuries, accommodating to its natural resources, its strengths and its weaknesses, and which had just seen development right at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the decades prior to the Great War: a modernisation of its road and transport corridors and their infrastructure as well as of its system of settlement and nature management. All the benefits of the Industrial Revolution that was

emerging in Central Europe, that is in Germany and the Habsburg Empire, had reached even the most far-flung corners of the Carpathian Basin as well: urban public transport was being developed; a network of state-maintained roads was being built throughout the region as was a system of railway branch lines to supplement the main lines; health care was being modernised; points of sale were being established nationally (open-air markets, market halls and department stores), thus improving the supply of everyday goods to an unprecedented extent; housing was being supplied with plumbing, heating and electricity, and so on (changes which resulted in an improvement in quality of life that was largely unknown east of the borders of the Habsburg Empire – and thus the historical state of Hungary.) After the collapse of the state of Hungary, this major economic and nature management region that was the Carpathian Basin was sliced up from one year to the next by six nation-state borders through the peace treaty of 1920 (with varying systems of protectionist customs duties, various legal systems and divergent systems of public administration and transport.) All the well-known shortcomings of the state formations that I call “old-style nation-states” – first and foremost,

Map 1



autarky with regard to both the market and intellectual endeavour – were brought to fruition.

I will present a map and a series of figures – just as a reminder – of the nation-states that were created on the territory of the Empire and the ethnic composition of their populations: Austria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – if the latter three state formations can even be called nation-states. Romania was now raised to the status of a medium power, having been created from the Ottoman Empire in 1859 and with the annexation of Transylvania, which had been carved out of the Kingdom of Hungary, and of Bessarabia, which had been taken from the Russian Empire. In addition, please note these maps that illustrate the dissolution of the German Empire, which affected the formation of the successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (Map 1: The Breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1918–1921. Map 1A: Germany, 1918–1921.)

Map 1A



It was in the very decades that this “cluster of micro-markets” arose that the Industrial Revolution was seeking large markets that spread out over large territories for mass goods produced in series. In this region after 1920, according to calculations made by economic historians, investment saw an extraordinary drop in both production and distribution. This is another reason why we have noted for decades that if Austria–Hungary brought misery to its nationalities, then the system of small states after 1918 certainly brought them **socio-economic misery**. (I would add that my position on the causes of our misery that stems from the chopping up of the system of public administration applies to the situation today as well with regard to the misery of Hungarians, Slovaks, Croatians, Serbs and Romanians.) Add to this socio-economic misery of ours the fact that the new system of nation-states institutionalised the antipathies that had festered in the peoples living here for centuries and turned them into interstate hostilities as of 1920. Antagonism has characterised the period from 1914 to the present day. (There had certainly been antipathies earlier as well. We know that this stemmed from the fact that the Carpathian Basin has been Europe’s most diverse ethnic region for a millennium.)

*Russia and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1920*

I will present another map for comparison: the first phase of the Great War created these nation-states on the territories of the other two supranational empires, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. (Map 2: The Breakup of the European part of the Russian Empire, 1917–1918. Map 2A: The Near East.) Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania broke away from Russia, maintaining their independence until 1940; Ukraine was annexed by the Soviet Union through war after three years of independence; the Ottoman Empire was torn apart to form (aside from certain parts of Yugoslavia) independent Turkey, Syria (independent between 1918 and 1920, then falling under a French mandate), Iraq (independent between 1918 and 1920, then existing under a British mandate), Palestine (maintained as a British mandate between 1920 and 1947, then divided into Israel and Palestine), Jordan (administered by Britain between 1920 and 1922, later to become an independent kingdom), Lebanon (administered by France from 1918 to 1926 then independent) – and one could also list Libya here (which, although wrested from the Ottoman Empire by Italy in a 1912 war, fell under Franco-British administration during the next war and gained independence in 1951).

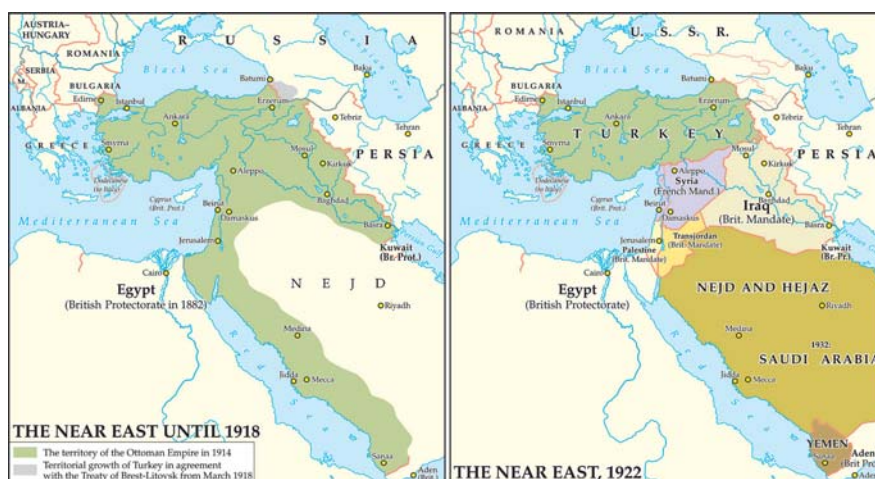
Map 2



1919-1920: The experiment of nation-states in the place of empires

That is, nation-states were “created” where empires had once existed, naturally at the cost of wars – and naturally increasing the sphere of influence of Britain and France, winners in the first phase of the

Map 2A



war. And naturally a series of armed ethnic, tribal and later religious conflicts ensued everywhere as the successor states to both the Russian and Ottoman Empires came into being. (But if we wish to play with the chronology, it can be demonstrated that the formation of nation-states has always been accompanied by wars even in Western Europe, in the case of the French nation-state [1792], just as with the Greek, Italian, German and other nation-states. One might even note that in Europe, where we have never seen a perfect match between the territory inhabited by a particular nation and its state borders, there was only one way for that nation-state to be formed: neighbouring territories had to be snatched from somebody else to unify that nation. And war was an accepted means of acquiring territory in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One might add that the new territories obtained, however, were, as a rule, inhabited by other nationalities. The denationalisation of these minorities represented one of the great “European political programmes” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And not only in Eastern Europe. Further, this was the case until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the experience of minority national identity became a human right...)



*The concept of the “old-style” and “modern nation-state” and suggestions for discussion*

Well, yes. The advantages and disadvantages of the nation-state must also be discussed. Its advantages: it develops and maintains the native-language culture, the school system and general education; it provides society access to modern services; and it aids in upward mobility. Its disadvantages: it not only creates economic autarky using the instruments of the state, neither promoting nor inhibiting the free flow of intellectual and material goods, but it also places national minorities at a socio-economic disadvantage because it fails to ensure native language use for them at all levels. (This illustrates the old-style “one state, one language” principle. This is why I refer to the “old-style” and “modern” nation-state. The latter ensures collective rights and full use of the native language for its minority citizens. We must also analyse the fact that there were collective rules designed to protect minorities – indeed, rules that were modern for their time – that supplemented the 1919–1920 system of peace, but the new states mostly failed to implement them. Why were these rules not put into practice? Answers to this question may lead to an understanding of the duties of a “modern nation-state” in future discussions among historians and political scientists. I would submit for discussion the thesis that the term “modern nation-state” expresses the socio-economic and cultural interests of the population on its territory, it represents them in regional (European) and global integration, and it establishes harmony between local and global interests.)

However, having made these comparisons and engaged in initial discussions on a new understanding of the duties of the “nation-state”, let us now return to this region. And let us begin our current discussion on it.

*1938–1945: The corrective experiment and new border modifications*

The states and nations of the Carpathian Basin also survived a great many vicissitudes in the follow-up to the first phase of the war between 1914 and 1918. Two-thirds of the territory and citizens of the state of Hungary ended up behind the borders of another country with one-third of its national (ethnic) Hungarian population (3.1 million people) now becoming an ethnic minority. As will be familiar, this was accompanied by a general “ethnically-based” socio-economic decline with the majority of officials, magistrates and teachers losing their positions and property. (This was

naturally not set down in the peace treaties, but, at the same time, the decision makers had no particularly serious idea whatsoever of what the social and personal consequences of the border changes would be. It was this “change of imperium”, as it was known among its citizens at the time, which struck a sizeable part of the educated, middle-class with community-preserving functions. It was these people who then flooded into what remained of Hungary’s territory, leading to irreconcilable social conflicts and social rivalry with the country’s domestic middle strata. And so on, and so forth.... Well, this became one of the socio-political sources of a strengthened open anti-Semitism in Hungary. (I repeat: an explanation is no exoneration, nor does it serve the purpose of historical justification.) Between 1938 and 1941, when we saw a correction of the “peace treaty” – and the state of Hungary “regained” portions of its lost territories – this is when a new shock was felt and a new migration followed to the territories that had been ceded back. And of course this is when the non-Hungarian population there either fled or were driven out.

We saw new collective hostility between neighbouring communities of peoples. The continuity of the system of 1919–1920 also comes into play in this case: the peace-making “allied” powers of the time – with the exception of the United States – agreed to the corrective decisions. And thus the small nations of southern and eastern Europe – the Romanians, Southern Slavs, Slovaks and Hungarians alike – fell prey to national socialist Germany’s effort to “build Europe” in the 1930s.

I wish to show you another map and more figures, which will be familiar to experts and are merely meant as a reminder. (Map 3: The Corrective Experiment, 1938–1941.) While it was previously the allied Entente Powers that had divided the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1919, now it was the onetime Central Powers – primarily Germany – that were re-dividing them. Once again in the spirit of the principle of the nation-state, Austria was annexed to the Third Reich, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were dissolved, a Czech Protectorate was created on the basis of the “national principle” on Czechoslovak territory (and incorporated into the Reich), and an independent Slovakia was established. In what had been Yugoslavia, we see the creation of an independent Croatian nation-state, and the Banat region, situated in a corner formed by the Danube and the Tisza, was placed under German administration on the grounds of the German minority living there. Their allies – Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary – were granted lands. Southern Slovakia (once known as Upper Hungary among Hungarians) was



returned to Hungary from Czechoslovakia with its Hungarian majority, just as the Bácska (Bačka) region in Vajdaság (Voivodina) on Yugoslav territory with its Hungarian majority. From Romania, it regained contiguous territories with Hungarian majorities along the border, as well as within the country. For the fourth time in history, Germany, newly allied with the Soviet Union, partitioned Poland, which had just won its independence in 1918. (The western part of the country was administered by the Germans, and the eastern part by the Soviets.) The Soviet Union occupied the small Baltic states, of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and forced Romania to return Bessarabia, which it had seized in 1918. It “rounded out” White Russia, which had been integrated into the Soviet Union, out of Polish territory that had been shifted eastward in 1918.

We will certainly re-assess the corrective measures taken in this period of the war in the course of the discussion, and there will certainly be discussions on the corrective measures taken by the former Entente states. I also think we should not rule out a re-thinking of the policy of appeasement (that is, of the justifications for accepting the corrections made.)

And there will also be discussions about the fact that in the region to date, in respect of the mutual relationship between the national settlement area and the state borders, these measures have created a greater match between the two kinds of borders, the ethnic and the administrative. And the foreign and minority policies of the new Polish state between 1920 and 1939 will form a special subject of discussion. Conversely, there will certainly be no need to discuss what the Allies “came to understand” – not coincidentally – with the dissolution of Poland (since this is taken as a matter of course): it was not a simple matter of correcting the peace treaties of 1920 – which even the leaders of these dispossessed states accepted, though they certainly did not agree with it; it was rather a matter of the aggressive building of a new national socialist world power. And clearly discussions will begin on whether or not our argument is right: after the territorial re-organisation of 1919–1920, the corrections between 1938 and 1941 also demonstrated that the settlement area and the state borders in this region could not be accommodated to one another. What is more, the percentage of national minorities after the borders had been “adjusted” remained above “critical” percentages. But on the “other side” this time. Any attempt to change this will lead to aggression and war, as indeed happened. This gives us pause to think in our current situation as well.

*1945–1947: Expulsions*

But let us move on in the chronology.

In 1944-1945 the front lines reached the Carpathian Basin. The civilian populations of the small states here – the Romanians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Southern Slavs and Germans – were destroyed, and so too were the historical monuments, the technical infrastructure of the region and people's property. (By comparison, this occurred in the largest percentage in Hungary – again due to poor political decisions.) And the new peace treaties? Except for the large-scale expansion of the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 and Poland's shift westward to the Germans' detriment, the "order" of 1920 was completely restored with regard to state borders. (Once again the dogma was restored: there was a European order, a "peace", which had not been corrected. Those who attempted to right it committed aggression – as it was later called. A recognition of "continuity" would be tantamount to the recognition that the correction was justified.) However, one difference was that the peace-makers did not shift the state borders first and foremost; they re-settled the populations that had lived as minorities in 1920. Studies put the number of those expelled and systematically displaced between 1944 and 1947 within a swath of land that stretched between the North Sea and the Mediterranean at 9-10 million. This was perhaps the harshest manifestation of the principle of the nation-state. An assessment will hopefully not become stuck at the level and in the arguments found in politics today, including the fear that the issue of "who still deserves compensation?" among the descendants of those affected will be placed on the agenda. Meanwhile, the successors to the perpetrators still see it as a matter of national pride to maintain a fretful insistence on the arbitrary acts and laws that led to expulsion or on statues that commemorate their framers and implementers. (Map 4: Population Movement in Central Europe.)

*Sharing responsibility for the strengthening of national and social radicalism*

But I say this as a researcher of European history, not as one of the region's history: Other nations in Europe are also beset with the fragmentations of the legacy of the so-called Great War that began in 1914. The losers, first and foremost, but the winners as well. We can observe continuity in this as well. No matter that the political middle classes among the



sure...) However, in the decades before the resurgence of the Ukrainian conflict or the Balkan one after 1990 to be discussed later, historians living in Central Europe in particular said – and this is not intended as a self-excuse – that one cannot understand the national radicalism in the losing states after 1920 without a knowledge of the local effects of the systems of peace of 1919–1920. Neither in Germany nor in Eastern Europe. After all, the systems of peace brought about unmanageable economic, social and emotional conflicts among the losers, aggravated further by reparations burdens and redrawn borders. To control these with an election-based liberal democratic system, where the state leadership is at the mercy of the voters, is nearly impossible. (And this is once again a lesson today for politicians who believe in the absolute power of political intervention by the state. As did the generation of the creators of the “systems of peace” as well.) These tensions provided a mass base for national and social radical movements, and their leaders rose to power after the Great Depression. In fact, they did so through an instrument of parliamentary democracy: elections. (Mutual effects come into play in human history just as they do in the history of natural forces. The direction in which it will continue comes from a number of conflicting factors. Individual previous factors are not reinforced without the involvement of particular forces; indeed, they may even die out. This applies to the history of national and social radicalism as well, which would certainly not have been strengthened in this region without the peace-makers. Whether then or now.)

Thus, what followed the armed conflicts of 1914–1918 in 1919–1920 was not peace but only a ceasefire and a period of Cold War. (By the code of conduct accepted in Europe, peace is something based on conditions that can be fulfilled by both parties. Otherwise, it is only the last battle of a war, a victory over an enemy that is unarmed and already beaten on the battlefield.) Among other things, the policy of “woe to the vanquished” in the post-war years of 1918–1920 aided communist groups in snatching power from the democratic forces in Hungary. Let us recall the fact – one lending itself to various interpretations – that it was the communists who took it upon themselves to put up armed resistance against the victorious Entente forces and their local allies and made an effort to protect Hungary’s historical borders. Reasoning along similar lines, we are able to explain, though not condone, the national socialist dictatorship and a series of racial and political pogroms after 1933. (Historians like to tell each other that the Franco-British “peace-makers”

must share the blame for Central European racial pogroms much in the same way as Britain, France, Serbia and Russia must share responsibility for the war with Austria–Hungary, Germany and Turkey.) I repeat, this is by no means to exonerate our Central European compatriots but to provide an explanation. This being the job and duty of a historian.)

Let us return to our own region. After all, most of our guests hail from this part of the world. At least, that is what the invitation suggests.

*1914–1920: Small nation elites in big nation power games*

The six-year period of intellectual exchange ahead will present an opportunity for us, historians, Central European academics, to do more than write a “Tale of Woe” of our tribulations in the period under review. We need to explore what role, and when and why and on whose side, the leading intellectuals and politicians of the small nations in this region played in the power games of the big nations, i.e. the Germans and the Russo-Soviets, between 1914 and 1990. How they coped with the challenge of soberly taking stock of the post-1867 geopolitical situation, filling or perhaps expanding the manoeuvring space allotted to the losers in 1920, as well as preserving the population, the state apparatus and national cultures even under such conditions... And all that coupled with the odium of defeat (or victory) in the first and second wars born by whoever was at the helm of the country... Hungarians bearing the odium of loss in terms of population and territory and a long-desired independent statehood gained in 1918, and the victors, the odium of the economic and administrative disorder that ensued from the war. And the sense of threat. The public figures of the age: were they victims or heroes? And accomplices who accepted public offices in times of occupation: did they do so in order to preserve their communities – after all, local communities, which sustain national customs and the social web, must survive periods of occupation, or were they serving the occupying forces, thereby contributing to the erosion of national resistance? These are issues and questions we hope to include in our discussions... Finding answers to these questions may stir debates on the political culture of small states and small nations. Making policy to preserve the nation in the shadows of the great powers in the hostile stare of neighbours that were merely rivals before 1920. This is no easy task. Such debates may even hold lessons for political leaders of the present and the future. (Drawing lessons is, after all, one of the public benefits of historians.)



Now that we are discussing this one-hundred-year at full length as a continuum, we may well be expected to evaluate the performance of the intellectuals and political elite of small Central Eastern European countries in 1989–1990, the closing years of the Cold War. The period of peaceful transition, with an emphasis on “peaceful”. Because among contemporaries – regardless of societal affiliation – there had been preserved memories of the 1953 East German and the 1956 Hungarian uprisings and the memory of being left alone in the war. The political and intellectual elites in Poland and Hungary passed their performance tests with flying colours in 1989–1990, also the Czech and Slovak reformists of what was then Czechoslovakia earning a good track record in the years of the “Velvet Revolution”, i.e. the programme of peaceful transition. Even the brief civil war that broke out in Romania was a success story.

We look forward to attending European fora where we will apply European standards to measure the role and performance of the Hungarian state in ending the Cold War. In September 1989, the Hungarian state broke new ground in endeavouring to solve the German issue by offering free passage across the western borders of the country to East Germans who had fled to and were stranded in Hungary. (“It’s about time we ended the war,” we used to say.) The prime minister and his team made a good decision and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had done a good job in laying the diplomatic foundations for that decision. Now we know that in the course of the negotiations the great powers had agreed to put an end to the division of Germany. This triggered the “German avalanche”, which was to put an end to the Western European phase of the war within a year. (A personal memory: a preliminary dispute over one of the key lectures, a study by György Ránki of the world war and its economic implications, delivered at the 1985 world congress of historians. Driven by the radicalism of my generation – at least, that is how I see it today – I noted, “There will be no peace as long as the German nation lives divided between the two Germanies, as long as Soviet political occupation prevails in the Eastern European region.” My senior colleagues, including the speaker, did not think this was a realistic assumption and dismissed the remark as irrelevant for academic discussion on history. Their view was understandable at the time. But today? ... Food for thought on the nature and transitory character of value judgements in historiography.) Then, on 10 November 1989, the German-German border was opened, which led us to the

final act, German reunification, on 3 November 1990. Today, we are engaged in factual discussions, as contemporary eye-witnesses we merely formulated out hypothetical views on the international political reactions to German unity and the newly-forged consensus that there was an urgent need to establish a European Union and to “box” united Germany in both a military alliance (NATO) and a political and security system (EU). (As late as 1989–1990, historians and politicians shared the view – one that I am not prepared to accept – that Germany and its allies bore sole responsibility for the hot wars of Europe. And they regarded the prospect of an ever-stronger re-united Germany as a source of yet another potential armed conflict, a “danger to world peace”.) The memories of 1914, and then of 1938–1941, left their mark on the 1945 Yalta-Potsdam system of peace, i.e. the division of Germany, as much as they influenced political public thinking. We sensed it and felt it as members of a European war generation, but we also sensed it in the fears of European and American friends, politicians and other intellectuals, at the time German reunification became a reality in 1989–1990. At any rate, the international prestige lost in 1914 was regained by the Hungarian nation in 1956, and by the Hungarian state in 1989...)

The political turmoil following the Cold War in 1990 led to the break-up of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, two state formations established in 1920 and then dissolved by Hitler (in 1938–1941), even though there had been no intervention, whether military or diplomatic, by any great power. Czechoslovakia divided itself into a Czech and a Slovak nation-state through peaceful compromise. (Naturally, the Slovak areas with a Hungarian majority would not be returned to Hungary in 1992, as was the case in the “territorial correction” of 1938). Yugoslavia also fell apart, though far from peacefully: I will soon return to the bloody wars that accompanied that country’s break-up.

*1990–2013: Further conflicts between nation-states in the region  
of the former Russian and Ottoman empires*

For comparison, let us now take a brief look at the successor states to the former Russian and Ottoman empires.

Along the borders of Russia, we find three countries in 1991, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which now regain the independence they had once acquired in 1918–1919 (though not as a result of the peace treaties); what is more, Moldova, another newly independent country

which has left Soviet Russia, establishes itself (in the place of what was once Bessarabia). Also, Belarus and Ukraine regain their status as independent nation-states. Credit for all these peaceful developments must go to the reform communist leadership (Yeltsin) of a Russia on the road to democracy and to the political elites of the small nations involved whose wise and co-operative attitudes had been matured under the Soviet regime. Twenty years on, it is quite probable that this political wisdom and co-operative attitude will fail to prevail when the old conflicts flare up again. (The latter two countries, if only because their combined area is a quarter of that of the EU and both possess substantial natural resources, are certainly worthy of our attention, especially if we bear in mind the future of the European Union and the Central Eastern European region. And we hereby send a message to Western European politicians and fellow historians: they would be well-advised to keep an eye on the eastern and south-eastern flanks of Europe...

Before returning to our own next region under discussion, i.e. south-eastern Europe or the Balkans, let us cast a glance at what was left of Turkey partitioned in 1919 in the Middle East in the first period of the war (1914–1918). The map reminds us that this region has seen an endless string of local wars even after “settlements” in 1918–1922 and after 1945 within and between countries, civil, tribal, ethnic and religious wars. Even the young generation of our day can recall the “Gulf Wars” (first between Iraq and Iran between 1980 and 1988, then the US-led war of 1991, then the war of the US and its “allies” on Iraq in 2003–2006, not to speak of a series of wars in the Palestine-Israel region since 1966 and the civilian strife palpable even today or the civil wars in the most recently formed North African nation-states on the territory of the former Ottoman Empire). The legacy of the war begun in 1914 will provide us with ample food for discussion for the coming six years and even for the next generation. (Map 5: The Breakup of the Soviet Union and the Near East, 1980–2010.)

*1989–2013: The role of Hungary and the Balkans in the final phase of the Great War*

Finally, let us take a look at the role the political and intellectual elites of our region played in closing the final act of the Great War between 1989 and 2013, the term I use to describe the chapter involving eastern and south-eastern Europe, that is the Balkans. In other words, let us discuss

Map 5



their role in a yet-again hot war and in the political peace process and consolidation in the Balkans. (Allow me a few words in parentheses: firstly, I am inclined to attribute the outbreak of the First World War to the 1912–1914 conflicts in the Balkans, with the 1912–1913 Balkan wars as the immediate antecedents, rather than to Franco-German and German-British rivalry. I am of the opinion that even though we have met with a number of outstanding and oft-read classic researchers of the history of the Balkans over the past one hundred years, the true significance of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century history of the Balkans has still not been recognized by academics and politicians. (Even though, some outstanding monographs are available by both the previous generation of scholars, such as Georges Castellan or Georg Stadtmüller, and by the present one, including Edgar Hösch and Norman Stone, who is very knowledgeable about Turkey and is set to present a paper at this conference. Secondly, something I have kept saying over the past quarter-century: until the European Union integrates (locks up) the national settlement area of each and every nation that contributed to the conflicts tied to the First World War, there will be no peace here, only an armistice. And here I refer not just to north-eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin, but also the Balkans. Thirdly, no-one anticipated in 1989–1990 that 1914 belligerence would re-surface and lead to armed conflicts in the Balkans. Yet it did happen: first, there was a shooting war between Croatia and Serbia (1991–1995), re-awakening memories in people who went through the war in 1914–1918: some sided with the Croats who had once fought alongside the Central Powers; others sympathised with the Serbs, who had teamed up with the Entente. Then came a series of clashes between minor states of ex-Yugoslavia and finally a civil war within Serbia (1995–1999), one that brought with it genocide of such proportions that no-one in Europe could have imagined after 1945. Fourthly, we, who received first-hand experience of it all and were experts on various international and European commissions, were not quite sure whether a new wave of hot war in the Balkans might not lead to another “world war”. (Would the “Balkan powder keg”, as the region had been called at the start of the century, not blow up again?) Many of us then thought: had a de-Sovietised Russia been less fatigued and chosen to intervene in the Balkans – as it had done a hundred years before – well, then ... And if the US had not volunteered to take the unpopular decision to move its troops in, there would have been no knowing how the series of wars that began in 1914 would have continued after 1992... Only few of us

were paying attention to the seriously ill President Mitterrand – others did not seem to understand – as he displayed the clarity of vision to notice the continuity between 1914 and 1992. While he had repeatedly warned Europe of German re-unification before, in the summer of 1992 Mitterrand regarded the Balkans as his main concern. Though shattered by disease, he travelled to Bosnia-Herzegovina to issue a warning on the first anniversary of the outbreak of the war: make sure the war of 1914 was not to break out again in the Balkans. (It did, and the decade that followed saw the third “hot” period of the hundred-year-long war.)

And now, without any further comment, I will show you a map with territorial and chronological data on the dissolution of Yugoslavia. (Map 6: The Breakup of Yugoslavia, 1991–2008.).

But... but research to come in years ahead may shed light on the role that politicians and intellectuals of the region played in restoring order to the Balkans after the “Balkan period” of the wars. They did so by means of diplomacy and by deploying peacekeeping forces after Dayton (1995). Minute details will keep surfacing, such as the activity of large numbers of civilian “armies” recruited under the banner of the UN (OSCE) from among intellectuals, entrepreneurs and soldiers, mostly Central Eastern Europeans, who were familiar with the region. They were assigned the duty of re-launching the political system in war-torn areas in 1997 to 2002. It is a small detail, but it is one that demonstrates the commitment of Central Eastern European nations to peace and to putting an end to the war.

A small but notable contribution to closing the Balkan stage of the Great War was made by Hungary’s political and intellectual elite. In 2005, a close-knit team of intellectuals adopted a new attitude towards the Balkans, which was raised to the level of Hungarian government policy in 2010 and set as one of its goals to assist in the accession of Croatia to the EU and, later, to aid in the preparation of the Western Balkan countries, Serbia in particular, for EU membership. (Additionally to our diplomatic endeavours a much-hoped-for Central European reconciliation process involving leading figures of Serbia’s political and intellectual life was launched.) On 25 June 2013, the eve of the announcement of Serbian EU candidacy, the heads of state of the two nations met in Belgrade, expressing mutual apologies for historic insults and genocides, and each paid tribute to the victims of the opposite nation. The event was to mark the beginning of social reconciliation between the two nations. After an “armed” peace treaty (Dayton 1995, then Kosovo 1999) political peace

Map 6



came at last on 25 June 2013, and it is now time to engage in spiritual reconciliation!

In the light of the all these developments I wish to share with you the view that our six-year series of Europe-wide discussions to be launched in 2014 should designate **spiritual reconciliation** as its programme for Central Eastern Europe. We should not point fingers at others but to ourselves alone: if we all were so eager to start the war a century ago, let us all be just as eager to end it. Armed peace (1999) and political peace (2013) should now be followed by a peace of souls (2014–2020). A hundred years, a hundred-and-sixteen years...

### *Epilogue*

So we are about to launch a two-day conference on the Great War of Europe here in Budapest. It is to be followed in the next six years by a series of fora where historians and the general public alike may discuss national and personal recollections, both painful and victorious. The goal we hope to attain – here and now – during these two days is to place certain conclusions on our agenda. At least, the recognition that the war – which has repeatedly flared up due to the corrective efforts of either the victors or the losers – shall now be put to an end. It shall end because its root causes may cease to exist in our days. Firstly, with the expansion of the EU to south-eastern Europe, the two-hundred-year long process of the formation of the European nation-states has come to an end, provided that the south-western regions of the Russian Empire and the Middle Eastern part of the Ottoman Empire find their own framework of integration. Furthermore, the old-style idea of one-state-one-language should be replaced by a model of the “modern nation-state”, one that abandons the idea of economic and spiritual autarky and espouses the objective of expanding the scope of human rights, including total cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities. Secondly, the other root cause of the war, i.e. politics based on spheres of interest, is also a thing of the past. (Considering the Middle East’s rich oil resources, this conclusion is naturally valid for the present but not necessarily for the future.) It may, however, have a stabilising effect even tomorrow: each and every square kilometre, whether inside or outside the Euro-Atlantic region, is “taken”; the sovereign statehood of local societies is beyond question, and any ambitions or efforts on the part of the great powers to acquire new territories will be held in check by world organisations and a strengthening plural-



istic political-military world order. It is our intention to add some new topics to the conclusions of this conference for further discussion: primarily, on the issue of how new world orders have changed since 1918 and how they may change in the future.

Now, this is the moment for me stop. Let us begin the discussion.