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Aliaksandr Piahanau, "'Each Wagon of Coal Should Be Paid for with Territorial Concessions.' Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Coal Shortage in 1918–21," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 34:1 (March 2023): 86-116, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2023.2188795

- Author's Response: "Energy & Peace-Making after World War I"

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Review by Gábor Egry, Institute of Political History, Budapest

Was the territory of Slovakia paid for with coal delivered to Hungary by Czechoslovakia in 1918? That seems to be the slightly bombastic claim in Aliaksandr Piahanau's article, which has a twofold aim: integrating the history of energy supply and security into the history of the post-World War I peace settlements and to propose a new interpretation of the territorial arrangements between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Despite excessive territorial claims from all the successor states, the end of the post-World War I armed conflicts in most parts of Central and Eastern Europe in 1919 was less the result of diplomatic efforts to restore peace than the consequence of the absence of resources, mainly the lack of energy. Due to the new political geography of the region, energy acquisition was henceforth only possible through transnational cooperation and trade (87-88). It was the realization of this necessity, and not misguided diplomacy, military weakness, or ethnic tensions that finally created the Trianon boundaries, which deprived Hungary of two-thirds of its territory and 60 percent of its population (94-95.) However, while these claims are clearly interrelated, Piahanau also makes clear that the second one, that Hungary accepted territorial losses in exchange for coal, is the more important point in this article. (100).[1]

To make this argument, Piahanau starts with a brief outline of the energy situation at the wake of the First World War in Central Europe. Coal was not only the main energy source, but it was allocated very unevenly in this geographic space and often far from the main industrial centers of Vienna and Budapest, making its control an important leverage point. Since the end of the war, Czechoslovakia had benefited most from this reality due to its successful acquisition of the coal mines in the Bohemian Lands and Teschen. Czechoslovak politicians did not refrain from using this weapon, first with Austria, where especially Vienna was in dire need of energy, not only for its industry, but also for the freezing and hungry population of the capital. Thus, the Czechoslovak government conditioned coal deliveries on acceptance of territorial alignments (the renouncing of Austrian claims on the German-inhabited areas of the Bohemian Lands) and even later the Czechoslovak government readily interrupted the flow of coal as needed. As Czechoslovakia itself faced shortages during

[1] He writes: "This section underlines the connections between Hungarian-Czechoslovakian coal and territorial talks. It argues that in the face of the post-war coal crisis, the main rescue plan for Budapest was to restore the previous intensive trade networks, namely supply chains linking Hungary to the Silesian mines. To achieve this goal, an accord with Czechoslovakia, located between these mines and Hungary, was indispensable. But there was a price. As one key figure in the events of 1918–9 later evoked, each coal waggon from Bohemia was to be paid for with Hungarian territory. This assertion constitutes the chief assumption of this third section and of the entire piece," 100.

the first month of the postwar period, its leaders could use it as an effective argument for annexing the Teschen mines too, making the country the critical hub in Central Europe: the source of most of the locally mined coal and the transit crossroads for German coal exports. The allies thus inserted coal provisions in the Treaty of Saint Germain, obliging Czechoslovakia to make coal deliveries to Austria.

Hungary faced a precarious energy situation similar to that of Austria. Its leaders sought a means of securing coal for its population and industrial base from the very first days of its revolution, which brought about the abolition of the monarchy under the leadership of Count Mihály Károlyi. It sent delegates to Prague and set up a Coal Center there, while the Károlyi-government's missives to President Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau of France and David Lloyd George of Great Britain between November and February repeatedly called attention to the importance of coal. It argued that its absence would lead to economic collapse and Bolshevism, and that the fragmentation of the former Habsburg monarchy due to customs boundaries therefore had to be preempted and free trade and intense economic relations restored, if possible through some form of a Danubian political cooperation—confederation or federation. These efforts met with sympathy among many of the Allied experts, including the British William Henry Beveridge and the American Alonzo E. Taylor, a high ranking leader of the American Relief Administration, who struggled to grapple with what was happening in Central Europe and whose starting point was the necessity of a similar configuration for strong economic cooperation,.

Bargaining with coal and territories was strikingly simultaneous, Piahanau argues. For example, Serbia committed to resuming coal delivers from the occupied southern Hungarian city of Pécs to Budapest just a day before Colonel Vix, the Entente representative in Budapest, handed over a note to interim President Mihály Károlyi demanding the withdrawal of Hungarian troops from the line they occupied on the border of Transylvania to the Great Plaines, leaving most of Eastern Hungary for Romanian occupation. The Hungarian Soviet Republic, which was declared as the result of resistance to the Vix-note and collapsed on 1 August 1919, faced economic blockade from the Entente despite its efforts to acquire coal, while the restoration of the coal supply was a primary aim of the subsequent counter-revolutionary governments.

But Piahanau argues that Hungary was invested even more into coal diplomacy than these simultaneities suggest. From the very beginning, Hungarians had parallel talks with Czechoslovakia in which the plan of exchanging coal for territory figured prominently. In November 1918 Czechoslovakia refused to recognize Hungarian territorial integrity in exchange for food as the Hungarian government proposed. At the start of December, Hungary accepted a demarcation line to the north that ceded most of Slovakia, while the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest, Milan Hodža, publicly hinted in an interview at the possibility of coal deliveries. From now on, it was the Czechoslovak Republic, which was in possession of most of the territories it wanted, that floated the possibility of a coal for territory agreement already before the signing of the peace treaty but facing Hungarian resistance. The roles were swapped during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, when Béla Kun's regime made overtures about territorial concessions in exchange for coal deliveries. After its fall the Entente used coal as a leverage to coax Hungary into shedding a radical rightist government in November 1919 for a government of national unity, and eventually to sign the peace treaty.

Finally, coal became an important factor of late peacemaking, with Hungary receiving its peace conditions in January 1920. As opposed to the traditional narrative the French-Hungarian negotiations in the spring of 1920, Piahanau argues, Hungarian politicians did not expect territorial concessions for signing the peace

treaty.[2] Instead of territorial concessions, energy security and finally a promise of advantageous coal deliveries inserted into the peace treaty were the main reason that Hungarian leaders accepted the treaty, whose terms they otherwise publicly condemned as the death warrant of the country.

The article is certainly laudable for connecting energy issues with the process of peace making in Central Europe. Also important is how it highlights the fact that besides Great Power diplomacy and the efforts of the successor states to influence their decisions, from the first moment of the cessation of hostilities, those states had bilateral relations and they used them to address more than just practical matters. Issues of the peace with a broader salience were on the table at these talks, and the participants often looked for alternatives for the emerging new order. Even though these issues are already part of the historiography to a larger extent than the uninitiated reader might think, they are certainly not at the forefront.[3]

As for Piahanau's argument regarding its main claim of Hungary's acceptance of territorial concessions for coal and tighter economic relations, regardless of the importance of highlighting the bilateral connections, the management of a post-war settlement in Central and Eastern Europe was a multi-level effort in which the transnational was at least as important as the bilateral, often directly affecting the latter. Humanitarian relief, which relied upon an enormous logistical, financial and economic effort, was tightly linked with restoring economic ties, but—even more importantly for Piahanau's argument—with restoring transportation and production infrastructure and energy security. The respective transnational bodies like the coal commission surveyed capacities in minute detail, paying attention, for instance, to how much steel wire individual mines in Teschen or Silesia needed for running on full capacity, and how many valves the locomotives needed to run uninterrupted.[4] The bilateral was one aspect of this larger effort that was just as fraught with tensions and conflicts as the transnational level was, but any account remains one-sided without bringing together the two.

From this larger perspective of reorganization, coal was not the only energy resource, Romanian (and to a lesser extent Galician) oil was just as significant, while diplomacy around it was strikingly similar to that of coal. The food-for-energy scheme was at the core of these efforts, which were also a means of resuscitating trade. Foreign currency that was accumulated from energy export transactions within Central and Eastern Europe was key to importing goods from the West, to reconstructing infrastructure, and to bringing the region's economy on its feet.[5] The bilateral efforts in this regard, which are in the forefront of Piahanau's account, certainly demonstrate the existing solid economic grounds for transnational efforts rooted in the complementary nature of the regional economies, but the transnational management of this reorganization also shows that the bilateral efforts were not detached from the broader ones, at least not to the extent that the article asserts.

In treating Hungarian diplomacy between November 1918 and June 1920 as something that was uniform—despite the many regime changes it also details, the article also misinterprets the series of Czechoslovak-Hungarian bilateral exchanges. The expectations of these successive regimes regarding the shape of the new European order were very different and this difference influenced how they set their foreign policy goals.

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[2] Mária Ormos, "Francia–magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban," *Századok* 109:5-6 (1975): 904-52.; Miklós Zeidler, "A Daniélou-misszió," *Századok* 154:4 (2020): 675-724.

[3] The classic account of Hungarian peace treaty is Ignác Romsics, *Dismantling of Historic Hungary. The Pecae Treaty of Trianon*, (Wayne (NJ): Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc. 2002).

[4] Franz Adelgasser, *American Individualism Abroad. Herbert Hoover, die American Relief Administration und Österreich, 1919–1923*, (Wien: VWGÖ 1993) 265-25.

[5] Doina Anca Creţu, "'Humanitarian Aid in the Bulwark against Bolshevism,' The American Relief Administration and the Quest for Sovereignty in Post-World War I Romania," *Journal of Romanian Studies*, 1:2 (2019): 65-88.

Károlyi's government believed in the Wilsonianism and national self-determination and interpreted the latter as the guarantee of Hungary's territorial integrity. The Hungarian Republic of Soviets and its leader, Béla Kun, envisaged world revolution and a federation of Soviet Republics that would make national distinctions obsolete. Finally, the counterrevolutionary regime not only faced the Romanian occupation of most of the rump country, but was also confronted with the reality of the new borders that were made public this time. After the signing of the Versailles, Saint Germain, and Neuilly treaties, they could not have had any illusions about how much these proposed boundaries would change throughout the negotiations with the Hungarian delegation.

The difference between the policies of the successive governments is clear in Piahanau's narrative in the form of the changing attitudes of these governments to the idea of a coal for territory agreement. Károlyi, as Piahanau notes, refused these Czechoslovak openings after late 1918, and placed his hopes in the Allies for the restoration of coal deliveries, despite the serious social and economic consequences of not accepting Czechoslovak proposals. Contrarily, Béla Kun was ready to acknowledge the boundaries set out by the peace conference because in his vision they were not significant in the larger matter of the revolution's success, and because the Republic of Soviets imagined a state like Soviet Russia replacing Hungary. Finally, the counter-revolutionary government did not seek border changes directly from Czechoslovakia, instead linking the economy with territorial concessions to Hungary in their negotiations with France. Since in this case they were bargaining over a matter that was settled, they did not have too much leverage vis-á-vis Czechoslovakia.

The only case in which there seems to be relatively strong proof for Piahanau's argument is the so-called Hodža-negotiations at the end of November and early December 1918. Milan Hodža, a former MP in the Hungarian parliament who represented the Slovak National Council and by proxy the Czechoslovak government, engaged in talks with the Hungarian government about the status of Slovakia. The sources Piahanau cites, but does not analyze in detail, show a very different picture. The Hungarian government was in fact not ready to give up Upper Hungary to Czechoslovakia. Instead it used these talks to divide Slovak politics from Czech ones. The offer they made to the Slovak National Council was based upon a kind of dualism that involved a Slovak legislative body that would settle common matters with the Hungarian parliament through delegations, and a common Hungarian state framework that retained economic matters—including customs—within the jurisdiction of the Hungarian government. Instead of a territorial concession to Czechoslovakia, they proposed autonomy for Slovaks, and the Hungarian government hoped (maybe even believed) that it would serve as a precedent. A solution that was tempting enough for the other nationalities (even for Romanians whom they saw the most stubborn opponents of similar plans) to accept a similar arrangement within a democratic Hungary whose borders would not change. Furthermore, in this case it was not a bilateral agreement that led to the cession of territories, but an external intervention (at the behest of the Czechoslovak government which disavowed Hodža), a note handed over by Colonel Vix that demanded the military evacuation of Northern Hungary.[6] Even the texts cited by Piahanau in support of his argument (like the article cited from the 29 November 1918 issue of *Népszava*) confirms this classic reading of the events and not a preparation of the public for concessions. They always make clear that the territorial delineations were reserved to the peace conference and that any territorial or administrative arrangements before were only temporary and did not represent the cession of territorial claims from the Hungarian side. Similarly problematic is the other case Piahanau highlights, the alleged junction between coal deliveries from Serbian-occupied Pécs to Budapest and the evacuation of the territory east of the river Tisza by Romanians in 1920. They again resulted from an external intervention that did not link the two, mostly because the

[6] Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára K27 Minisztertanácsi Jegyzőkönyvek, November 28, 1918. Agendas 1 and 4.. Noevmber 29, 1918, agenda 1, December 1, 1918, agenda 6. Online accessible: https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/minisztertanacsi-jegyzokonyvek-1867-1944/hierarchia.

evacuation was the result of the complicated Hungarian-Romanian relations, which vexed the peace conference for a very long time.[7]

The last phase of the argument in this article, on how and why Hungary signed the treaty, is not tied into the larger transnational context again. Piahanau devotes significant space to the French-Hungarian negotiations from late 1919 to the summer of 1920. They involved the contemplation of, and concessions for, possible French investment in strategic sectors in Hungary—leasing the state railways for 90 years, building a Danube port, a hydroelectric plant, buying majority share of the Hungarian General Credit Bank, an affiliated bank of the Creditanstalt, etc. Piahanau argues that contrary to the claim of the historiography,[8] Hungarian politicians did not really hope for territorial concessions in exchange for permission for these investments. Instead, they wished that French presence in Hungary's key sectors would lead to the reestablishing of the economic zone of the erstwhile monarchy, and it was their main motive to sign the peace treaty. It is true that the economic side of these negotiations were hardly about territory, but Piahanau's narrative does not clarify the relationship between the economic talks (initiated by Hungarian businessman Károly Halmos) and the political ones. Halmos's initiative was initially rather apolitical, part of a broad retrenchment effort of Austro-Hungarian businesses which sought to salvage their assets with the help of "our French and Belgian friends."[9] It coincided with the effort of French businesses, among them the Schneider-Creuzot group, Paribas, and the Banque de l'Union Parisienne, to acquire strategic assets—but it was not driven by French politics.[10]

In both countries politics followed business, and politicians tried to build on the economic retrenchment efforts for their own purposes.[11] Energy and electricity were part of this broader European rearrangement, as is visibly shown by the case of the Constantinople Electricity and Tramways, a company in which the Hungarian General Creditbank, the target of French investment, together with French and Belgian businesses, had a major stake from before the First World War, and they continued its operation together after the end the hostilities and not as part of the political package. It is not a coincidence that after the Hungarian government realized that it could not expect territorial concessions from France, those parts of the deal which were political (most importantly leasing the state railways) fell through, while the business elements (investment in the Hungarian General Creditbank) became the foundation of strong interwar business cooperation. In the meantime, the Hungarian government still hoped to achieve some concessions during the border delineation process,[12] based on a *lettre d'envoi* from French Prime Minister Alexandre Millerand that was attached to the final draft of the peace treaty. Originally it was dispatched as part of the political negotiations and promised that border delineation commissions could propose border rectifications. While Millerand was already gone as prime minister when the border commissions started their work, the Hungarian government's local agents worked hard to mobilize the inhabitants of the villages around the

[7] Lucian Leuștean: *România, Ungaria și tratatul de la Trianon*, (Iași: Polirom 2002)

[8] Romsics, *Dismantling*; Mária Ormos: *Padovától Trianonig*, (Budapest: Kossuth, 1984); Magda Ádám, A *Kisantant és Európa 1920–1929*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989).

[9] Archiv der Bank Austria, Wiener Bankverein, Administrationsratsprotokolle March 9, 1920, Bericht an Der Administrationsrat über das erste Halbjahr 1921 (session September 30, 1921); Peter Eigner, "Bank-Industry networks: the Austrian experience, 1895–1940," in Philip L. Cottrell ed., *Rebuilidng the Finacial Sytsem of Central Europe*, (Routledge: London 1994) 114-140; Andreas Weigl, "Beggar-Thy-Neighbour vs. Danube Basin Strategy: Habsburg Economic Networks in Interwar Europe," *Religions* 7:11 (2016) DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7110129

[10] Philippe Marguerat, "Les investissements français dans le Bassin danubien durant Ventre-deux-guerres: pour une nouvelle interpretation," *Revue Historique*, 306:1 (2004):121-162.

[11] For the history of the talks see Mária Ormos, "Francia-magyar"; Miklós Zeidler, "A Daniélou-misszió." However, the starting point of these works is that it was politics that set the agenda of the negotiations.

[12] Peter Haslinger, "Dilemmas of Security: The State, Local Agency, and the Czechoslovak-Hungarian Boundary Commission, 1921–25." *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018): 187-206. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237818000152.

border who frequently demanded border changes from the commissions,[13] showing also how much Hungarian politicians focused on territory instead of the economy.

Finally, the article leaves undiscussed one very important element of the energy story—the continuous operation of these businesses throughout 1918–1920 under direction from Budapest despite the fragmentation of the space through demarcation lines. Management of the mines that were owned by Budapest businesses remained in these hands even after their occupation. In the Czechoslovak case, it meant that the general manager of the Rimamurányi Salgótarjáni Kőszénbánya Rt (Rima), Pál Bíró, who was retained as the company's general manager even during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, practically operated the company in that summer after crossing the demarcation line via correspondence with Budapest from Prague and Vienna. He could operate unhindered by any of the authorities. Rima was certainly not comparable to the large Silesian or Teschen mines, and this might explain why it was not brought under Czechoslovak state control.[14] Still, Bíró's mission in Central Europe is a telling episode of how another level of relations, the business one was instrumental in the final (re)distribution and (re)direction of energy resources.

Gábor Egry is a historian, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Director-General of the Institute of Political History, Budapest. Author of five volumes in Hungarian and several articles, among others in *European Review of History*, *Slavic Review*, *Hungarian Historical Review*, and *Südostforschungen*. He is the winner of the Mark Pittaway Article Prize in 2018 for "Unholy Alliances? Language Exams, Loyalty, and Identification in Interwar Romania," *Slavic Review* (76: 4 (2017): 959-982), His monograph, *Etnicitás, identitás, politika. Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* [Ethnicity, identity, politics. Hungarian Minorities between nationalism and regionalism in Romania and Czechoslovakia 1918–1944] (Budapest: Napvilág 2015) received an Honorable Mention for the Felczak-Wereszyczki Prize of the Polish Historical Association. Between 2018 and 2023 he has been the Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator project "Nepostrans—Negotiating post-imperial transitions: from remobilization to nation-state consolidation. A comparative study of local and regional transitions in post-Habsburg East and Central Europe."

[13] One fascinating case is Prekmurje, where—as Jernej Kosi demonstartes in article "'Yugoslavia Has Nothing. Yugoslavia Has No Bread. But Hungary Gives Us Bread': Access to Food and (Dis)Loyalty in a 'Redeemed' Yugoslav Borderland." (*Austrian History Yearbook*, 2024, 1-15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000055).—thousands of demonstrators spekaing the local Slavic vernacular broke through the pickets of gendarms to present their demands to the commission in September 1921. I'm grateful to Jernej Kosi for letting me read his manuscript before publication.

[14] György Péteri, "A társadalmasítás korlátai 1919-ben." *Történelmi Szemle* 20:3-4: (1977): 593-610., 605-6.

Author's Response: "Energy & Peace-Making after World War I"

17 September 2024

Response by Aliaksandr Piahanau, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

Despite a plethora of studies on the nexus between fossil fuels and geopolitics, the energy perspective is still largely missing in the historical accounts of World War I and its aftermath.[15] My article, which was published in the April 2023 issue of *Diplomacy and Statecraft,* tried to fill this gap by offering a study on the intricate dance between energy and peace-making in post-1918 Europe.[16] The article starts with the premise that the belligerent and neutral countries, especially in Central Europe, struggled with a profound energy crisis caused by increasingly disrupted coal supply since 1914. This crisis peaked between 1917 and 1919 and heavily influenced both the war and the peace-making efforts. As a result, fossil fuels were at the top of the agenda of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, which make it truly the first global energy summit.

More precisely, the article applies this energy perspective to the case of post-1918 Hungary. The article claims that the Entente-imposed blockade on Hungary and the subsequent energy shortage forced Budapest to accept territorial losses in exchange for guarantees of coal imports. Most of Hungary's foreign coal came from Czechoslovakia, which joined the Allied blockade in October 1918. The article explores in detail Budapest-Prague relations from October 1918 to the Peace Treaty of Trianon on 4 June 1920. The Treaty recognized the new Hungary's new borders as significantly reduced from its 1914 size and, among other territorial clauses, confirmed the union of Czechia with former Hungarian provinces of Slovakia and Ruthenia.

The Trianon peace has been a widely researched topic in Hungarian, Slovak, and European historiography.[17] The dominant version is that that the victorious Western powers and their regional allies forced these borders on Hungary by the use of military pressure. What is less known about the Trianon Treaty is that it brought back to Hungary the resumption of international trade and promised it coal supplies from Czechoslovakia and Poland. Overall, the article argues that the hunger for coal in Hungary, and the Entente's pledge to alleviate it with supplies from Czechia, were the main drivers for Budapest to cede Slovakia and Ruthenia to Prague's rule. While the article focuses on energy, one of the article's more revisionist premises is that Budapest actively negotiated the drafting of the so-called Trianon borders from 1918 to 1921.

After the article was published, I was thrilled to learn that H-Diplo had chosen it for review. Sadly, the commissioning editor, Thomas R. Maddux passed away some months later, but the review was eventually published in May 2024. The reviewer, Gábor Egry, expressed skepticism about the coal-for-territory argument. The following response reframes the main argument of the article in the light of this criticism.

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[15] The rare exceptions are: Walter Godfried Jensen, "The Importance of Energy in the First and Second World Wars," *The Historical Journal* 11:3 (1968): 538–554; Paul M. Kennedy, "The First World War and the International Power System," *International Security*," 9:1 (1984): 7–40; Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'or et le sang. Les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Fayard, 1989).

[16] Aliaksandr Piahanau, "'Each Wagon of Coal Should Be Paid for with Territorial Concessions.' Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Coal Shortage in 1918–21," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 34:1 (April 2023): 86–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2023.2188795.

[17] See, Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference. The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon* (New Columbia University Press, 1942); Mária Ormos, *From Padua to the Trianon, 1918–1920* (Akadémiai, 1990); Marián Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon* (Veda, 2001); Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary. The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920* (Columbia University Press, 2002); Miklós Zeidler, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920–1945* (Columbia University Press, 2008).

First, I offer my thanks to H-Diplo for commissioning and publishing the review and for allowing me to respond. Special thanks to Gábor Egry for his detailed 3,500-word review. I couldn't have asked for a more qualified reviewer. Egry, the director of the Institute of Political History in Budapest, is well-known for his work on Hungary and Romania between the world wars as well as on the transition of the Habsburg empire into national-states after 1918.[18] Egry's review, while mostly critical, acknowledges the importance of linking energy to peace-making in post-war Central Europe. It can be divided into two parts: a summary of the article (2 pages) and a discussion of its flaws (4 pages).

Egry suggests that the article claims that Czechoslovakia gave coal to Hungary in exchange for the Slovak territories in late 1918. This is not exact. The article aims to demonstrate that the coal (or trade)-for-territory payment, metaphorically speaking, came much later. So, while the article kicks off in 1918, the peace between Budapest and Prague (and the Western powers) was not an immediate deal. It was re-negotiated multiple times. Consider that there were almost 3 years between when Budapest ordered its military to evacuate the Hungarian Upper Lands (Slovakia in December 1918 and again in July 1919, and Ruthenia in April 1919), and when it finally recognized Czechoslovak sovereignty over these areas. In fact, Hungary started counting its legal secession from 26 July 1921, when the Treaty of Trianon came into effect. After that time, Czechoslovakia became Hungary´s main provider of fossil fuels (with Czech, Polish, and German coal) and, overall, its key trading partner in the 1920s.[19]

More importantly, Egry argues that the article overemphasizes the importance of coal, and suggests that Romanian and Galician oil were "just as significant." While it is true that comparing the "significance" of fuels is tricky, but in the early twentieth century, coal was king. In the 1910s and 1920s, coal energized most modern industry, transport, and urban heating, while oil's importance was limited to relatively rare motorcars, military ships, aviation and domestic lighting. The numbers speak for themselves. In 1910, coal provided 83.5 percent of Europe's primary energy consumption, while oil delivered only 0.8 percent. Oil surpassed coal only by the 1950s, when its share in primary energy exploded from 10 to over 50 percent.[20] Since Egry assumes that coal was not a major economic driver, he remains unconvinced that a coal shortage could cripple society. Many works of history ahistorically give too much weight to oil, and thus neglect King Coal at its height.[21]

Ergy's most serious critique is that the article lacks evidence and misinterprets the cited sources. The article has rather a wide source-base, however: most of its evidence consists of original documents in Hungarian, Czech, French and English (published or from the archives). Egry refers to one particular moment – the negotiations between the Czecho-Slovak politician Milan Hodža and the Mihály Károlyi government in Budapest in late 1918. Hodža indeed played the key role in building Budapest-Prague contacts: he who signed a convention with Hungarian War Minister Albert Bartha on 6 December 1918 which stipulated the limits of the Czechoslovak occupation zone in North Western Hungary (most of today Slovakia). The same day, Hodža told the local press that resolving the Slovak question would lead Prague to better supply Hungary with coal. This Hodža declaration about coal-territory nexus seems to be what Egry calls "the only case in which there seems to be relatively strong proof for Piahanau's argument" (4). But the article includes another good example, which appears in the title of the paper. This citation is borrowed from the memoirs of one

[18] Gábor Egry, "The Rise of Titans? Economic Transition and Local Elites in Post-1918 Banat and Transylvania," *European Review of History* 31:5 (2024); Gábor Egry, "Unholy Alliances? Language Exams, Loyalty, and Identification in Interwar Romania," *Slavic Review* 76:4 (2017): 959–982; Gábor Egry, *Etnicitás, identitás, politika. Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* (Napvilág 2015).

[19] Marta Romportlová, *ČSR a Madarsko. 1918–1938. Bezprostřední vývojová báze a průběh obchodně politických vztáhů* (Univerzita J. A. Purkyně, 1986).

[20] Astrid Kander, Paolo Malanima, and Paul Warde. *Power to the People: Energy in Europe over the Last Five Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 133 and 256.

[21] Anand Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914 to 1945* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Martin Gibson, *Britain's Quest for Oil: The First World War and the Peace Conferences* (Helion Limited, 2017); Timothy C. Winegard, *The First World Oil War* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

close ally of Károlyi, Vilmos Böhm, who confessed that in 1918–1919 every wagon of Czech coal had be paid for with Hungarian territories.[22]

Egry argues that the article misses the mark by not mentioning the secret talks between Hodža and the Hungarian Minister of Nationalities, Oszkár Jászi. While the Slovak lands were still under Budapest's rule in late 1918, Hodža played a double game. Officially, he acted as Prague's envoy, pushing for Slovakia to join Czechia. Secretly, he tried to negotiate for an autonomous Slovakia within Hungary as a spokesperson of the Slovak National Council (SNC). For Hodža, these talks were about securing the SNC's rights in Slovakia in times of political uncertainty. Budapest, on the other hand, hoped that these talks would show Slovak indecision between Prague and Budapest.[23]

Egry suggests that Hodža should not be taken seriously as the Prague representative at Budapest. The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš, who had been exiled in Paris since 1915, criticized the appointment of a Czechoslovak envoy to Budapest because it confronted the Allied policy of collective negotiations with enemy countries. Similarly, Beneš did not approve of having a Czech envoy to Vienna (Vlastimil Tusar). Interestingly, the Prague government also played the coal card against Austria. By disrupting coal supplies from Silesia to Austria, Tusar pushed Vienna to recognize the independence of Czechoslovakia and to drop its claims over the territories of Bohemia with the German majority (section 1). All three (Beneš, Tusar and Hodža) had a huge influence in the Czechoslovak politics and led its governments later.

An important point to keep in mind is that the men in power in Prague ignored some of Beneš's opinions and kept Hodža as envoy to Budapest until December 1919.[24] But even if Hodža's double game might call into question the validity of his declarations as the Prague spokesman in Budapest, can it also lessen the claim of the Budapest's desperation to strike a deal with Prague? Many other channels were involved in building contacts between the two capitals. Beyond Hodža, Károlyi also negotiated with the Czechoslovak cabinet directly via its own emissary (Secretary of State for Commerce and Industry, Rezső Krejcsi, who was posted in Prague from November 1918 to August 1919) and the Hungarian Coal Office, which opened in Prague in November 1918. For all of them, restoration of bilateral trade was of the utmost priority.

Moreover, Egry asserts that Budapest ceded Slovakia to Prague not because of the Bartha-Hodža agreement, but due to an Allied request on 3 December 1918. I agree with this timeline, and mention the 3 December request in the article. As Egry notes, the peace-making was multilateral. Left unclear is how this contradicts the coal-for-territory argument. Since early November 1918, Budapest repeatedly asked the Allies to stop the Czech blockade, and the Allies responded by urging the Czechs to send coal (97-98). The Western great powers even approved a German-Hungarian coal convention on 14 December 1918, despite their own order for diplomatic break between former Central powers. Egry rightly mentions that the territorial adjustments in Upper Hungary required international treaties for confirmation. I agree again, but do not see how this

[22] Vilmos Böhm, *Két forradalom tüzében. Októberi forradalom. Proletárdiktatúra. Ellenforradalom* (Bécsi Magyar kiadó, 1923), 115.

[23] Minutes of the Council of Ministers of Hungary (hung. Minisztertanácsnak Jegyzőkönyve) of 28 November 1918 (§ 1), Fond Miniszterelnökség, k. 27, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Regional Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, Budapest).

[24] The Prague government not only rejected some of Beneš's demands, but also manipulated him with misleading information. In January 1919, Prague informed Beneš that Czech troops had occupied the Hungarian mining town of Salgótarján (which was not the case). The purpose of this communication was to gain the Allied approval of this action. Beneš, however, had to tell Prague to withdraw its military from Salgótarján immediately, because the Entente would deny this action. Discouraged, Prague did not attempt to take Salgótarján. See, Jindřich, Dejemek, ed. *Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky. Vol. A/2. Part 1 (listopad 1918 – červen 1919)* (Praha: Karolinum, 2001), 188; Dagmar Hájková, Vlasta Quagliatová, and Richard Vašek, eds. *Korrespondence. T.G. Masaryk – Edvard Beneš. 1918–1937* (Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR , 2013), 66.

observation counters the coal-for-territory exchange argument. One main point of the article is that peace-making was a long process, needing constant re-negotiation.

The review's next critique involves the article's take on the secret *pourparlers* between Budapest and Paris in 1920, which ran parallel to the Hungarian diplomatic exchanges with the Paris Peace Conference. Contrary to the common wisdom, the article suggests that Budapest did not believe in changing the territorial *status quo* during these talks, and, instead, focused on big economic projects. Egry does not dispute these claims, but he argues that the article misses the larger "transnational context" and lacks clarity in the relationship between political and economic issues. He wonders whether the negotiations over transport and coal supply were more a political or economic issue. According to this logic, one could ask whether when Hungary's Prime Minister Pál Teleki proclaimed in September 1920 that the French would push the Czechs to increase coal supplies (107), Teleki's expectations were more political or economic. The questions strikes me as not relevant to my argument.

Ergy writes, "Similarly problematic is the other case Piahanau highlights, the alleged junction between coal deliveries from Serbian-occupied Pécs to Budapest and the evacuation of the territory east of the river Tisza by Romanians in 1920" (4). In fact, the article does not mention Budapest exchanging Pécs for the left bank of the Tisza in 1920. The story of Pécs is nonetheless intriguing. This town supplied Hungary with the best black coal until it was occupied by the Serbs in November 1918. Hungary regained the town in August 1921 under the Trianon treaty. But this return was conditioned on the ceding of Western Hungary (Burgenland) from Hungary to Austria, which was another stipulation of the Trianon peace. This triangular exchange, briefly discussed in the article, is a prime example of multilateral peace-making and the coal-for-territory deal from the Hungarian perspective.

Finally, Egry criticizes the article for not discussing how regional commercial networks kept operating from Budapest despite the collapse of the Habsburg empire. Here, he refers to Pál Bíró, the director of the Rimamurány-Salgótarjáni Ironworks. That is certainly a sound suggestion and I regret missing the detailed study by Štefan Gaučík of Bíró´s activities that was published some years ago.[25] Gaučík's analysis supports the idea that pre-1918 economic connections drove the cooperation between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He shows in detail how Bíró, while defending the interests of his company, lobbied imports of Czechoslovak coal and iron ore to Hungary. Bíró's efforts were crowned by a Czechoslovak-Hungarian agreement in 1922 which gave the Rima industry special treatment despite the new borders. This agreement also underlined the continuity and vitality of old economic ties in a new political environment.

Overall, I would argue that reducing the whole story of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak reconciliation to December 1918 or to the spring 1920, as Egry's review does, overlooks other significant steps of Budapest towards peace. Post-1918 reconciliation involved continuous compromises, with coal being a crucial factor.

Consider, for example, how the events unfolded in the first half of 1919. On 11 February, the Czechoslovak envoy Hodža (and after him the Entente representative in Budapest Ferdinand Vix) informed the Hungarians that Prague would restore trade and coal supplies if Budapest recognised Czechoslovak "sovereignty" in Slovakia (103). This suggestion was echoed in Budapest in March, when its new Communist regime offered to recognize Czech territorial claims in Upper lands "in exchange" (!) for restoring trade and coal deliveries. The South African negotiator Jan Smuts, sent by the Allies, personally forwarded this proposal to the Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk. As a peace gesture, the Hungarian Red Army withdrew from

[25] Štefan Gaučík, "Problematika slovenských záujmových podnikov Rimamuránsko-šalgótarjánskej železiarskej úč. spol. a nové obchodno-politické stratégie (1918–1924)," *Montánna história* 5-6 (2012–2013): 162–211; Štefan Gaučík, *Podnik v osídlach štátu. Podnikateľské elity na príklade Rimamuránsko-šalgótarjánskej železiarskej spoločnosti* (VEDA, 2020).

Ruthenia for the Czechs, and the Communist leader Bela Kun went to Bratislava to restate this offer on 1 May 1919 (99, 103).

While Masaryk ignored Kun´s overture, the Czechs military moved in Ruthenia and attempted to seize Salgótarján, Hungary's last coal center from late April. Losing it was unacceptable to Budapest. In mid-May, the Red Army launched a counter-offensive against the Czechs. Rapidly, it gained a foothold in the Eastern Slovakia, where it proclaimed a Soviet republic. Nevertheless, Budapest returned to the peace table after the Allies delivered a note on 13 June 1919 in which they promised coal and ending the blockade if Slovakia and Ruthenia joined Czechia. In a couple of weeks, Budapest evacuated again its troops from Slovakia, invited Prague to negotiate coal supplies (99, 103) and, finally, removed Kun from power.

After the fall of the Soviet Republic in Budapest, Prague did not start supplying Hungary. In November 1919, the new Hungarian right-wing cabinet of Károly Huszár ordered the curbing of anti-Czech activities among Magyar radicals and promised to accept the new borders in hopes of securing peace and Czechoslovak coal (104). Huszár even designated a new envoy to Prague,[26] but the Czechs still hesitated to provide fuel for Hungary in absence of the peace treaty.

The Trianon peace in June 1920 did not immediately change the diplomatic atmosphere. Until the Treaty came into force in July 1921, the Allies and Hungary remained legally at war. But in March 1921 Prime Minister Teleki rushed to open first official inter-governmental negotiations with an enemy country: Czechoslovakia. This happened just after the Reparation Commission in Paris granted Hungary 70,000 tons of coal per month from Silesia, but the coal shipments needed to cross Czechoslovakia. Four months later, Teleki and Foreign Minister Miklós Bánffy headed to Czechia to meet Beneš. During these talks, both sides recognized the Trianon Treaty as the basis for their mutual relations, but discussions on other matters, such as properties and minorities, stretched on for years. There was, however, one issue where Budapest and Prague quickly found common ground: coal. On 2 July 1921, they signed a new compensational agreement to exchange black fuel for flour. But the aspirations didn't stop there. In their memoirs, Bánffy and his predecessor Gusztáv Gratz revealed that their goal was to create a unified bloc of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Austria.[27] It was an ambitious but unrealized aspiration.

Each of these events and motives highlights Hungary's efforts and compromises in its quest for stability. While this quest is largely ignored by historiography, an energy-focused analysis makes interwar Hungary less peculiar than many nationally minded historians would suggest. How was it possible, for example, that a French diplomat concluded that the Hungarian cabinet and public were "extremely happy" for the Treaty of Trianon to enter into force?[28] The focus on Hungary´s coal dependence shows that peace-making was a complex, multi-step process in which practical needs often shaped policy. This new reading of the post-1918 energy dependence may further underline the need to revisit the common trope about the unconditional revanchism of Hungary in the interwar period. It appears that between1918 and the onset of the Great Depression, the Hungarian economy was too closely tied to other former Habsburg lands to have pursued a hostile diplomacy.[29] Similarly, the historiographical overemphasis on the Magyar *irredenta* in the former

[26] Interestingly, this mission was trusted to Alfréd Drasche-Lázár, who later represented Hungary at signing the Trianon treaty on 4 June 1920. However, Prague did not approve agrémans of Drasche-Lázár. Aliaksandr Piahanau, *Policy of Hungary Towards Czechoslovakia in 1918–1936*. PhD diss. (Toulouse 2 University, 2018), 110.

[27] Piahanau, *Policy of Hungary*, 127–135.

[28] Maurice Fouchet to Aristide Briand, "La ratification du traité de Trianon," 3 May 1921, Budapest, Centre des Archives diplomatiques du ministère des Affaires étrangères (La Courneuve), fond Europe, 1918–29, vol. 61 (Hongrie).

[29] Tom Lorman, for example, argues that even under the leadership of the racist Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös in 1932-36, Hungary could venture attempts of reconciliation with Romania. See, Tom Lorman, "Missed Opportunities? Hungarian Policy Towards Romania, 1932–1936," *Slavonic and East European Review* (2005): 290–317.

Hungarian territories (and its support by Budapest) can be downplayed,[30] or contrasted with the attempts of local elites to re-establish commercial ties and prosper under different political regimes.[31]

This acknowledgment of the primacy of economic needs over abstract loyalties goes hand in hand with the recent discovery by historians of widespread national indifference in Europe in the early twentieth century.[32] While the paradigm of national indifference allows us to de-throne nationalism as the main ideological framework in the popular mindset of the First World War, the energy perspective (enlarged by material considerations) provides an alternative explanation of human drivers in times of scarcity and uncertainty.

I appreciate Egry's insights and the recognition of energy and business in peace-making after WW1 in his review. The focus on multilateralism is valuable too. His dismissal of the coal-for-territory argument is, however, unconvincing. Some of the review's critiques miss the mark, and others seem contradictory. While the lack of evidence he mentions is serious, readers will judge the merits of the article for themselves.[33]

Aliaksandr Piahanau is a researcher at KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Stockholm), where he studies conflict and cooperation around coal in interwar Europe. He holds a PhD from the University of Toulouse (2018) and an MA from the Belarusian State University (2010). In the field of diplomatic history, he has edited (with Bojan Aleksov), *Wars and Betweenness: Big Powers in Middle Europe, 1918–1945* (CEU Press, 2020) and *Great Power Policies Towards Central Europe, 1914–1945* (E-International Relations Publishing, 2019). He also researches and publishes on the history of violence: Aliaksandr Piahanau, "Losers of Modernisation. The Decay of the Burgher Shooting Societies in Dualist Hungary, 1867–1914," *Slavonic and East European Review* 101:1 (2023): 28–63; and Aliaksandr Piahanau, "Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie and Political Violence in 'Happy Peaceful Times,' 1881–1914," *Crime, History & Societies* 25:1 (2021): 85–110.

[30] In another study, I tried to show that Budapest backing of the Magyar opposition in Czechoslovakia correlated with the Czechs support for the Hungarian anti-Horthyists. See, Aliaksandr Piahanau, "Unrequited Love? The Hungarian Democrats' Relations with the Czechoslovak Authorities (1919–1932)," *Hungarian Studies Review* 45:1-2 (2018): 21–60.

[31] Máté Rigó, *Capitalism in Chaos: How the Business Elites of Europe Prospered in the Era of the Great War* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

[32] Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic review* 69:1 (2010): 93–119; Maarten Van Ginderachter, and Jon E. Fox, eds. *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019).

[33] The article is open access and is available here: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2023.2188795