

Transformation of the Hungarian spatial views concerning the Danube Region in the period of the end of World War II and the start of the rearrangement, 1944-1948

1. Introduction

The frequent changes of state territories and state borders, and the often disputed existing state borders are among the historical, economic and social characteristics of Central Europe, including the Carpathian Basin, and this issue is also one of the – usually hidden – political problems for certain social groups in several countries.

State borders allow separation, segregation/closing in but can also improve multilateral inter-state, inter-regional and cross-border inter-municipal cooperation. The security, political and economic objectives and interests determined during history which elements and forces of the potential “supply” were reinforced.

The changes of the state border in history and in the 20th century reflected the given over positions and territorial objectives of the states existing next to each other. Borders were carriers of many elements (economic, military and political) and also synthesised the correlations of these elements, in accordance with the conditions and values.

This basic situation means that in Central Europe each territory is historically, emotionally and politically attached to several states or peoples. It has become evident in the course of history for the nations living here that the repeated violent spatial rearrangements never solved the most fundamental problems of either the respective nations or the population in the border regions.

Between the two world wars the borders of Hungary were given new content, different in each section. Before and during World War II it was only the Hungarian-Austrian border section that remained unchanged (the integration of Austria into Germany resulted in a major change but did not entail the change of the state border), all other state borders changed. The repeated defeat of Hungary in the war led to the loss of the “territorial gains”, and the Paris Peace Treaty concluding World War II (in 1947) restored the border drawn in the Trianon Peace Treaty, in addition to the detachment of the three villages of the “Bratislava bridgehead”.

After the war the complete area was under Soviet military occupation. Within the newly born and later further developing (both internally and its external relations) socialist camp, the functions of the borders went through significant transitions. The most important change was the excommunication of Yugoslavia in the summer of 1948.

Development after World War II resulted in a new, formerly unknown function for the Hungarian–Austrian border that gradually became a border “separating world systems”, with all of its consequences that were changing at times but remained basically negative all the time.

The Hungarian society, and also the Hungarian academic and political elite was looking for the possibilities of creating a new spatial community (communities) of small states, both in the final phase of the war (when the defeat of Germany and its allies was certain) and right after the war (when it was not clear yet that the zone occupied by the Soviets would be integrated into the power space of the Soviet Union). In this process historical and political elements were dominant, geographical features only had a secondary role, while the influence of the will of the newly made “peoples coexisting or living next to each other” was of tertiary importance. Historians, geographers, economists etc. did not think in the long term development strategies, concepts, programmes etc. in the first place (although these elements also appeared for the

improvement of the transport networks and conditions) but the exploration of the possibilities of how to “get ahead together”.

The past determined the efforts of the authors of different scientific disciplines inasmuch as they all attributed a selected role in the shaping of the spatial community frameworks to Hungary, a country in central location.

2. Definition of different spatial categories and assessment of co-existence possibilities in Hungary in 1944-1948

The history of Hungary in the first half of the 20th century is actually a story of war conflicts and peace treaties closing them, and the concomitant spatial arrangements and rearrangements. The state territory almost pulsed from 1920 to 1947 (Figure 1).

At the end of 1944 nearly all members of the Hungarian political elites with a realistic thinking knew that Hungary would lose a war again, and sought the way out in cooperation and not in the generation of conflicts. Several spatial categories (Central Danube Basin, Carpathian Basin, Danube Region, Balkans, Inner Europe, East-Central Europe, and Central Europe) were contemplated when assessing the new possibilities of co-existence. In our essay we analyse firsts of all the “Danube-related” approaches.

2.1 Central Danube Basin

From a chronological point of view, the starting point was the book published by Lajos Jócsik in 1944 (JÓCSIK, L. 1944). Lajos Jócsik (1910-1980), an economist and left-wing politician, in the almost certain knowledge of the defeat of Germany started to reconsider the situation of Hungary and the spatial positions of the country. In his words, “Plans proliferate now like mushrooms after rain, plans just for the new arrangement of the future of our region, the Central Danube Basin” (JÓCSIK, 1944 p. 6.). The Hungarian nation must be very active in the assessment of the affairs and development possibilities of the Central Danube Basin, just for the sake of their own interests and for the promotion of co-operations.

The Central Danube Basin designated by Jócsik (Figure 2) did not fully coincide with the historical Hungary functioning before 1918, but it was associated to that during the analysis in most respects, and that was considered a kind of framework for the co-existence, in fact, for development.

A dominant historical feature of the Central Danube Basin is that almost all through its historical development it was a structural conflict zone between “eastern and western imperialisms”. The large power actors changed, but the Central Danube Basin failed to strengthen its position among them. As a result of the historical processes: “The fate of this region was the fate of a ball that is passed from one external power to another one” (JÓCSIK, 1944, p. 415.)

From 1933 the Central Danube Basin and then gradually the whole of the Danube Valley was under German influence. The whole region was subordinated to the “growing impact of Germany”. Western relations nearly completely ceased to exist, “western imperialisms were pushed out of the region”. Hungary and the whole of the region were integrated to Germany, in accordance with the political, military and consumption demands of Germany. At the end of the war Germany wanted and was only able to secure its position by the presence of its armed forces, in fact, by direct occupation.

Jócsik paid a large part of his attention to the issue of Slovakia. In order to understand this we have to know that he was born in Hungary, before the Treaty of Trianon (in Érsekújvár, the

now Nové Zámky) in 1910, and he became a citizen of Czechoslovakia in 1920. He passed his school leaving exams in Czechoslovakia, was a recruited soldier of the Czechoslovakian army and as a citizen of Czechoslovakia he finished law school in Paris, then further trained himself in Prague where he became a doctor of legal sciences. In addition to the legal and political studies he also expanded his skills with training in economics. He became a Hungarian and Czechoslovak left-wing politician with a wide intellectual European horizon and open-minded international outlook.

In the autumn of 1938, Érsekújvár was annexed to Hungary, and Lajos Jócsik himself became a citizen of Hungary again. Because of his left-wing political activity in Czechoslovakia, after the state border changes because of the First Vienna Decision in Hungary he was under police supervision first and then he was arrested.

As regards the relationship to the Danube, the most important chapter of the book is the one called “A balance sheet and perspective” (pp. 413–416). The author saw two forces working in the life of the Central Danube Basin: – a) the basin was atomised from the aspect of political spatial division, b) the political atomisation also atomised the territory of the basin – against one another.

He accepted the political atomisation as a necessity (both large and small nations have their right for a sovereign national existence) but at the same time thought that the economic atomisation was not necessary: a cooperation could maintain the unity of the basin. If the confederation of small nations cannot be seen as a necessity, the possibilities of federalisation must be kept. On the joint intention of the peoples co-existing “... a unit could be born in the valley of the Danube River that could always counterbalance the blocks of the large powers” (JÓCSIK, 1944, p. 415.). The author was very optimistic when he wrote just before the final defeat of the Germans that “... if the Danubian peoples wanted, they could solve the greatest issue: the purification of the region from the large power conflicts so that they could develop on their own and in freedom” (JÓCSIK, 1944, p. 416.).

The author did not mention the name of the Soviet Union in his analyses of the future (the book was published in 1944!), but it is clear that all his statements refer to the increasing influence of the Soviet power. Jócsik was a member of the European left wing movements, and was not a supporter of the Soviet dictatorship.

Preparing for the peace talks after the world war, he wrote and published in Budapest his study called “German Economic Influences in the Danube Valley” (JÓCSIK, L. 1946). Even after the war he tried to be correct in the analyses, keeping his style built on arguments and not instigating hatred.

2.2 Carpathian Basin

The book called “Geography of the Carpathian Basin”, written by Bulla, B. and Mendöl, T. (both of whom were born in the present Hungary after the turn of the century, before the Trianon Peace Treaty, so they had no direct experience of the “loss of motherland”; they experienced the loss of the larger part of the historical state territory similarly to the majority of the Hungarian society) was completed in parts before the end of the world war, as it was supposed to be published in 1944. However, the book only came out in 1947, and the authors had to explain why they had written the geography of the Carpathian Basin instead of Hungary or Central Europe. In their opinion, the Carpathian Basin (Figure 3) was the smallest territorial unit within the frameworks of which it was possible to analyse the issues of the Hungarian nation and the coexisting neighbouring peoples. (The fact that the maps of the book featured a Carpathian Basin of

different sizes was partly due to the findings of former researches and because of the uncertainties.)

Both Béla Bulla (author of the chapters on physical geography) and Tibor Mendöl (who wrote the parts on social and economic geography) saw and illustrated that within the basin it was the Hungarians who were in charge, because of their historical role, of the organisation of the peaceful way of co-existence.

The approach of the two authors, both being university professors and geographers, was of course a fundamentally geographical approach, but they made it clear that the future processes of the region would not only, in fact, maybe not primarily influenced by geographical factors.

2.3 Central Europe

The notion of Central Europe was not universally acknowledged in either Hungarian geography or Hungarian society between the two world wars. Gyula Prinz (1882-1973), with German mother language and to a large part of German academic education, considered this new concept as a “greenhouse product” of the German science and considered its application inappropriate in Hungary, and even more so for Hungary.

Others, including the Transylvanian born András Rónai (1906-1991) – who was a disciple, colleague and follower of Pál Teleki, the faithful keeper of Teleki’s memory after 1941 and the continuer of a large part of Teleki’s work – believed that the Central Europe concept was suitable for grabbing the real geographical characteristics, including the analysis of the situation and environment of Hungary.

Rónai, a researcher and university professor, did not become part of the war propaganda during the world war. His works made during the war years were not “written for moment”, he was a long-term thinker. He was able to analyse the situation of Transylvania in a way that he looked further than North Transylvania returning to Hungary in 1940, but he did not become a supporter of any political instigation of hatred. Besides serving the nation, it was important for him to keep his own personality and autonomy.

The results of the two decades of work done in the institute led by him, the Institute of Political Sciences, were summarised in the Atlas of Central Europe (RÓNAI A. ed. 1945/a). It is not accidental that Rónai considered, even in the war conditions, the completion of the work, the publication of the atlas necessary. (Even on fleeing from the surrounded Budapest to Balatonfüred, Rónai and his co-workers continued the editing works of the atlas.) The large-scale atlas was actually made as part of the preparation for the peace talks concluding the war.

The Atlas of Central Europe, with correct data processing and maps of political geography (we have to emphasise the map showing the stability of the borders in Central Europe, done in several versions – Figure 4 – and the one demonstrating the spatial processes of the European empires changing in time), is a monument to the professional achievements and political correctness of Rónai.

The atlas was made within tragic historical conditions, but the authors refused to discuss daily political issues with a journalist’s ambitions. Their goal was to create a work featuring a correct database which all of the co-existing nations were able to successfully use.

After the “categorisations” following the war he was unjustly accused, although his reservations against Hitler’s Germany and especially its ideology were evident already after the spring of 1941. He did not become a member of a political movement ut openly declared in his academic works that he had a different opinion in the most important issues. The most

comprehensive description of his political attitude may be the “national conservative”. Thinking in long range historical continuity was more important for him than adaptation to the new ideas. Until 1948 he could keep his position as a university professor and head of department, but he was not favoured by the new power.

He participated in the preparation of the peace talks after the world war, but did not become a dominant person in these works. Rónai joined the activity of the “Danube Region Working Community”. As the editor of the books called “Dunatáj” (Danube Region), Elemér Radisics emphasises in his forewords that “András Rónai contributed to the supplementation of our work with his geographical essays and data ...” (RADISICS (ed.) 1946, Vol. I. p. IV.), but if we look at the details of the three books, we can see that the role of Rónai was very important in this venture: a great deal of the maps were from the Atlas of Central Europe and he was also the editor of several new maps showing the region. After the world war, the previous spatial categories “became delicate issues”, which Rónai sensed as a political geographer. He clearly saw that within the given circumstances Central Europe could not be an “official” category for Hungary. The concept and spatial content of the “Danube Region” showed up in a partly new way for Rónai.

His participation in the Danube Region Working Community was important because it clearly proved Rónai’s ability to do correct academic analyses also within the new circumstances and also his ability to cooperate with people of different political world views.

In early 1947 Rónai was a nominated member of the Hungarian Peace Delegation in Paris but could not become a real expert of the Hungarian peace talk delegation, as the issues of the peace treaty had already been settled by then. Rónai was offered and asked to stay in Paris (he was invited for Sorbonne University) but he was neither able nor willing to leave Hungary. With his own walk of life he showed an example for accepting possible difficulties.

In 1947 he summarised the political geographical and spatial problems of the changing and transforming Central Europe (RÓNAI A. 1947). The major point of this brief paper was his ability to keep the correct analysing attitude even in these tense political circumstances.

He clearly stated the political spatial development disparities between “East” and “West”. In the West too the “fight for the borders” was frequent in history, but it was even more fundamental in the eastern territories.

His analysis and map featuring the historical territorial changes (the farthest extension of the German, Russian and Ottoman empires in the territory of Eastern Europe, until the beginning of the 20th century) was an indication that the smaller nations of the region had to continuously face challenges that were the same in many respects.

He stated as a basic historical and political geographical issue that “The natural geographical frameworks and the disharmony of the ethnic relations lead to the Czech–German, the Hungarian–Slovak and the Hungarian–Romanian problem” (RÓNAI A. 1947, p. 69.).

In his analyses of the respective countries and ethnic groups try to be correct and quantifiable; the study is void of any offensive remark. His maps featuring the common problems of the region (e.g. the map demonstrating the peripheral situation of the capital cities of the small states) indicate that not one community or state is able to solve their problems on their own, without cooperation with the others.

2.4 The Danube Region

The “Danube Region Working Community” was founded right after the world war, with the objective of contribution to the solution of the tragedies created during and after the war, and joining in the formation of the Hungarian standpoint for the coming peace talks. The engine of

the Working Community was Elemér Radisics (1884-1973), a lawyer, political thinker, journalist, newspaper publisher and editor, an analyst of foreign politics. From 1931 to 1940 he worked at the department of public information of the general secretariat of League of Nations in Geneva; he actually made a link between the League of Nations and the Hungarian government. After 1943 he was an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was allowed to keep his job in the ministry in 1945-1947; he worked as a staff of the archives and scientific division..

The huge work published in his edition under the title Danube Region, consisting of three volumes (RADISICS, E, ed. 1946 I-III) was made during his activity in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as such does not appear in the books. (It is possible, however, that the authors were given a considerable assistance by the data of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the preparation for the peace talks was underway.)

The authors of the books include the outstanding Hungarian historians, geographers, economist, sociologists, statistical experts etc. of the time. The authors of the respective chapters are not specified by their names, because the book did not publish individual opinions but the joint viewpoint of the “Danube Region Working Community”.

The authors leave us in no doubt as regards the designation of the research area. “The middle of the European continent is the Danube Region, i.e. the Carpathian Basin and its environment” (RADISICS (ed.) 1946 I. p.1.). The Carpathian Basin is not featured in isolation but as part of “Inner Europe” which, in its historical development, culture and economy have many common features. The Carpathian Basin and its environment are almost exactly the geometrical centre of Inner Europe.

Inner Europe shows transitory features, it is a mixture, a place of mutual impacts in almost all respects (density of population, settlement system and network, languages, ethnicities, religions, educational level, the level of agriculture, the grade of industrialisation etc.) between the Western European and the Eastern European areas and also between Northern Europe and Southern Europe.

The biggest concern of the authors is as follows: “The most recent geographical and political literature still does not use for this area the specification Central Europe; instead, specifications like East-Central Europe, Southeast Europe and others are applied.” A very frequently used phrase in the book goes like this: “the Danube Region, i.e. the Carpathian Basin and its environment ...” (Figure 5).

There are significant disparities also among the countries of the Danube Region (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania); nevertheless they can be considered as a territorial group, in fact, as a spatial unit.

The basis of the Danube Region, chosen because of its objectivity, is geography in the first place (András Rónai’s Atlas of Central Europe is the dominant academic background, although the authors of the book created original maps themselves, too).

The starting point of the analysis is demography. The book gives us an overview of population and population movements (pp. 1–90) and a comparative analysis of the fundamental structures. The processing of the demographic issues includes the description of the junctions of the population (settlements) as well. The demographic features show significant disparities by countries, spatial and national characteristics. Cities and villages develop in accordance with the development of the respective country. The proportion of urban population is very much varied across the countries: Austria and Czechoslovakia have outstanding positions in this respect.

The maps and tables analyse six countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia) but some of them also feature Albania as a country of the Danube Region, so seven countries are examined in certain respects. The group of the six countries is not only

called the category “Danube Region” but also as a common name of the “Danubian countries”. (Which also entails that the authors of the book consciously omitted the defeated Germany, under the occupation of the large powers, from among the Danubian states. They do not think, either, that the Soviet Union could be a Danubian state.)

One of the most important complexes of historical but also recent issues is the “linguistic nature of the Danube Region” (pp. 91–114). During the examination and analysis of the national language issues those elements that were formerly the ground of conflicts are avoided.

The chapter called “Development of the literature of the Danube Region” (pp. 115–157) was written to illustrate the mutual impacts of the literatures of the co-existing nations on each other, on the one hand, and although not explicitly, the issue of the “Danube regional identity” is raised through literature. The Danube River has an outstanding position not only in the literature of all nations concerned but also in their overall folk culture.

The chapter called “The Hungarian ethnic issue in the light of acts and regulations (1790-1918)” does not seem to organically fit into the book (pp.158–320). This rather long part would have better served the preparation for the peace talks, as the authors did not deal in depth with the regulations of this kind of the other nations.

The part called “Ethnic statistics” (pp. 321–330) might be the most delicate common issue of the countries. As regards the number of population, the largest nation in the Danube Valley are the Romanians (14 million people), followed by the Hungarians (12.7 million people). Yugoslavia had approximately 12 million people, with 7 million Serbs, 3.5 million Croats and 1.3 million Slovenes. The number of the Czech nation was 7 million, of the Slovaks 2.6 million, so together they approached 10 million people. (These calculations did not deal with the German minorities.)

The introduction to the “Party formations” (pp. 331–339) gives the reader an overview of the common processes and elements in the field of political organisations that are born on the basis of social, economic etc. characteristics and similarities. There was no full similarity, but each people was able to comprehend the structures of parties in other countries in this respect too.

The description of “Agricultural production” is precise on the basis of the common problems but is relatively short compared to its significance (pp. 340–386). The region is large enough for agriculture to have physical geographical factors as impacts on production, in addition to historical correlations and socio-economic elements.

The chapter on “Mining and metallurgy” is a decent work built on precise statistical data (pp. 387–415). In this chapter the reader comes across several times the expression “west to east industrialisation slope”, i.e. that the Czechoslovakia and Austria are much more industrialised than the rest of the countries.

The elaboration of the chapters called “Energy” (pp. 416–424), “Industrial policy” (pp. 425–429) and “Industry” (pp. 430–460) is done with classic economic geographical methods. In the respective chapters the authors suggest the “natural interdependence” and actually propose the conscious organisation and deepening of cooperation in the future.

If we look at Volume I For the examination of spatial processes and above all for economic and state political aspects, Volume II (p. 280) is of outstanding significance. In addition to discussing financial issues (development of the international credit affairs of the countries, finances, insurance) this book also deals with foreign trade.

The authors defined in a peculiar way the content of the chapter on the “power and credit policy community” of the countries in the Danube Region. Both world wars of the 20th century are a common tragedy of all these countries, irrespective of whether they actually finished them

on the side of the winners of the losers. “In the worldwide conflict of the forties they finally all suffered from the methods of the German imperialism, they all had to face exploitation, the German attack destroyed the lives and assets of all of them, and they all became war fields and supply areas during the Soviet Russian military action sweeping away the German attack” (RADISICS (ed.) 1946 II. p. 1.).

Among the sub-systems of infrastructure, a special attention is given by the authors to transportation. The frequent changes of the state territories almost continuously reassessed the transport networks. The opportunity of closer cooperation can be created by the integration of the transport networks. In this relationship, especially in cargo traffic, a special role is played by the Danube River.

It may be surprising that right after the war the analysis and introduction of tourism processes can be read in the book. The analysis of the tourism sector start with a peculiar territorial statement: “As regard the endowments of tourism, Southeast Europe is an especially good area.” (RADISICS (ed.) 1946, II. p. 134.) The significance of tourism was growing in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary in the years between the two world wars.

A logical break is made in the structure of the book by the chapter summarising the history of the “periodical press” (pp. 142–196). The detailed analysis is acceptable inasmuch as the appearance of periodical press coincided with the establishment of a large number of printing houses and press also played a role in the spread of innovations.

In the detailed regional analysis we find the “introduction to the countries neighbour” to Hungary (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania). The authors of the book did not consider the Soviet Union as a neighbour of Hungary in 1946 yet. They were of the opinion that the territorial belonging of Transcarpathia was not finally settled yet. (In the first map of the book the Soviet Union is already featured as a neighbour state of Hungary.)

The appendix of maps is extremely rich both as regards historical and recent processes.

The statistical database of the book actually analysed the period between the two world wars, more of the historical structure than the years after World War II. Nevertheless both the process analysis and the illustrating figures describe the characteristics of the Danube Region in a very diverse way. (As regards the administrative division of Hungary, the map was “cartographically up-to-date” as it featured the situation of the beginning of 1946.)

Modern transportation (aviation) did not depreciate but actually appreciated the central role of the Danube Region in Europe (Figure 6). The map of air accessibility with Budapest in the centre (if we accept that the cut-out of the map is correct) suggested that new possibilities would be available after the war.

Volume III (p. 626) is the description of the countries of the region (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Serbia and Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Romania (Romanians of Transylvania) and a lookout to the world history, with comprehensive chronological tables. (A newcomer in the circle of the countries is Poland, whose changes were organically linked to the processes of the countries of the Danube Region.)

Volume IV was also completed, as was indicated in the list of references of Volume III. It processed the history of diplomacy in the region, Hungarian and foreign plans for the cooperation of the Danubian peoples, efforts in the field of arts, social political development, the chronology of cultural development and the biographies of the intellectual elite of the neighbour states, also, it contained an overall bibliography and indices. The book could not be published, for financial and political reasons.

3. Summary

In the final period of World War II and right after that the diplomats were mostly engaged with the creation of the new territorial structure (the division of Europe into two political systems). A great deal of “official” analyses was made for the peace talks, including ones dealing with territorial issues as well.

Hungarian geography, history, economics, sociology, law etc. could only look with the methods of science at the situation and the historical processes of the macro-regions and the countries of the Central Danube Basin, the Carpathian Basin, Central Europe and the Danube Region, their economic processes between the two world wars and their basic features right after the war. They could do so partly on their own initiative and partly as part of the preparation works of the peace talks. It was not large-scale development policy strategies and concepts that were made but analyses allowing the nations to get to know each other.

The representatives of science did not calculate with the situation that the contemporary Hungary would be on the side of the losers at the end of the war and also that Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia were already “on the way to socialism” when the books were published while Hungary was belated compared to the others in this process.

If we look at the content of the decisive processes of the time, not one of the frameworks of co-existence and common values and interests specified by the representatives of Hungarian science were “topical”. Despite this fact, the work that had been done was not in vain and irrelevant. Later on idea of every of territorial formation was raised – at different times –, and not only within Hungary.

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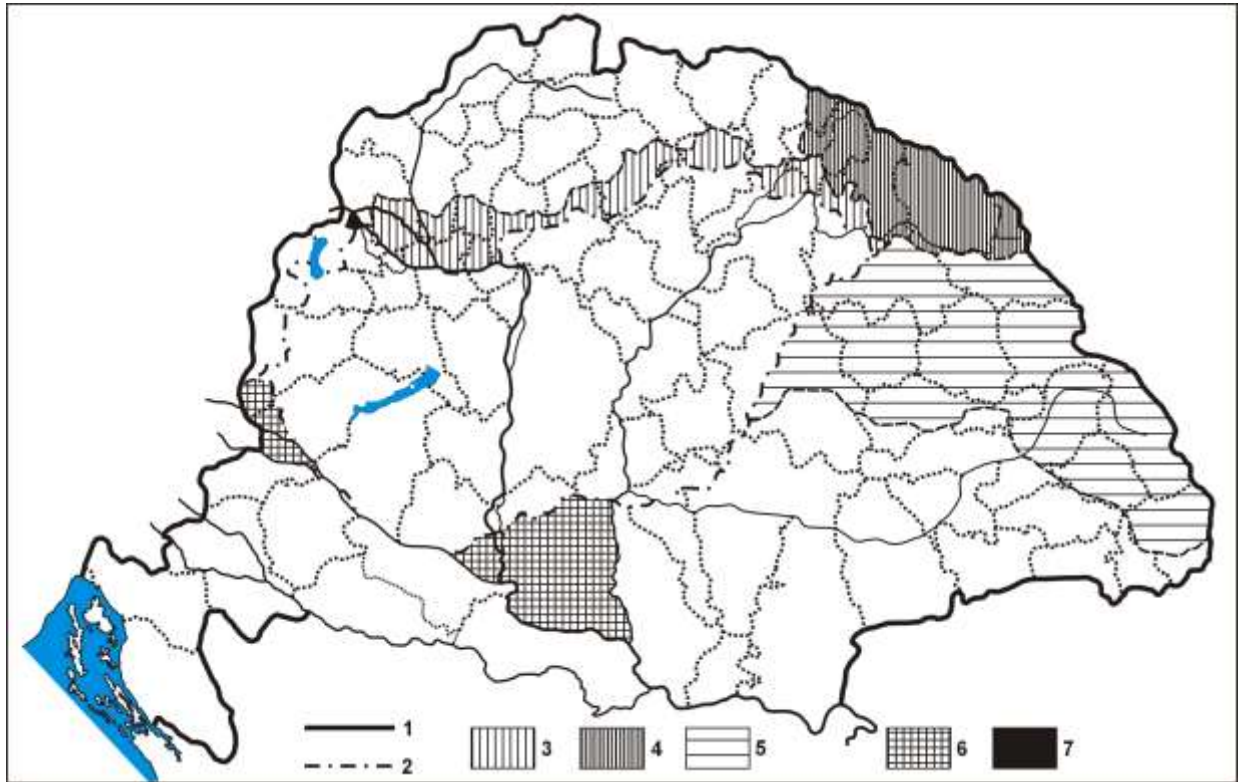
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Figure 1: Changes of the state territory of Hungary in 1918-1947



1. – state border in 1918, 2 – state border in 1923, 3 – territorial increasing in 1938, 4 – territorial increasing in 1919, 5 – territorial increasing in 1940, 6 – territorial increasing in 1941, 7 – territorial decreasing in 1947

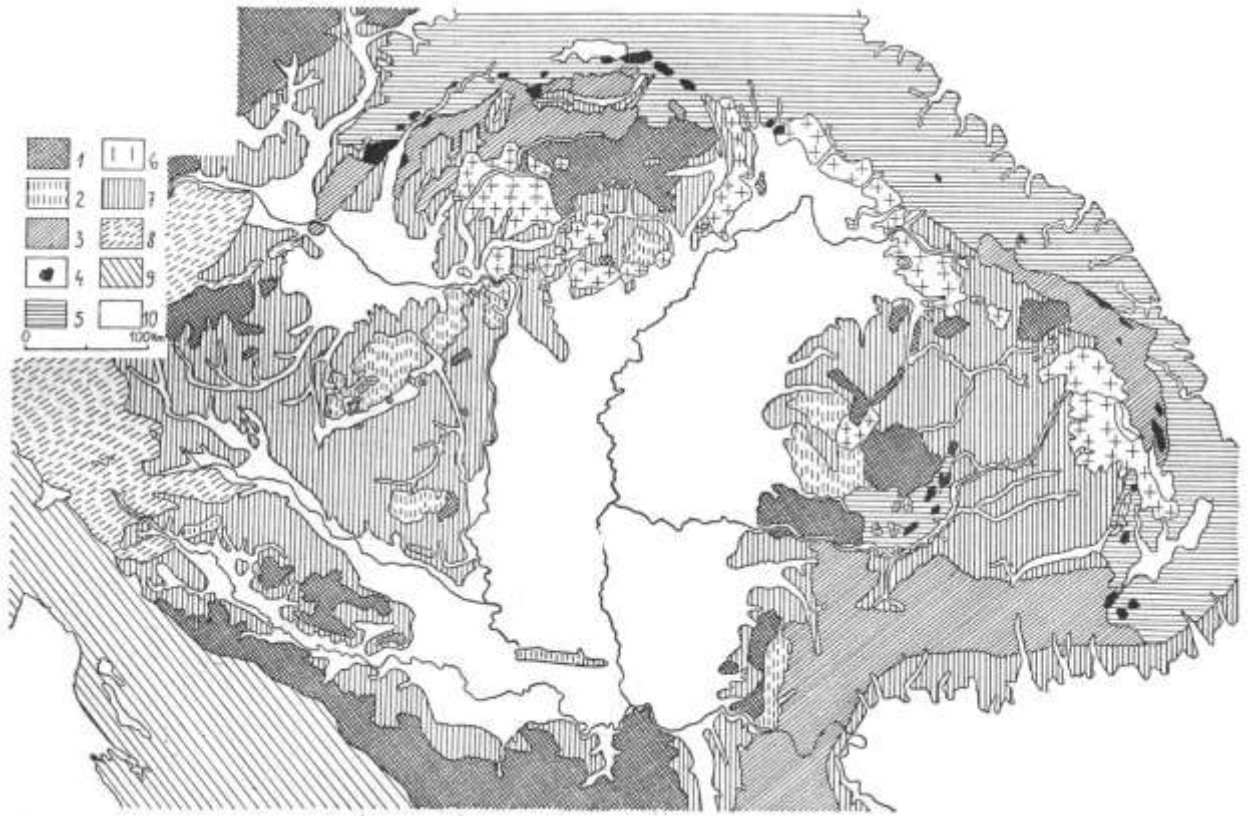
Source: Edited by Hajdú Z.

Figure 2: Geographical designation of the Central Danube Basin



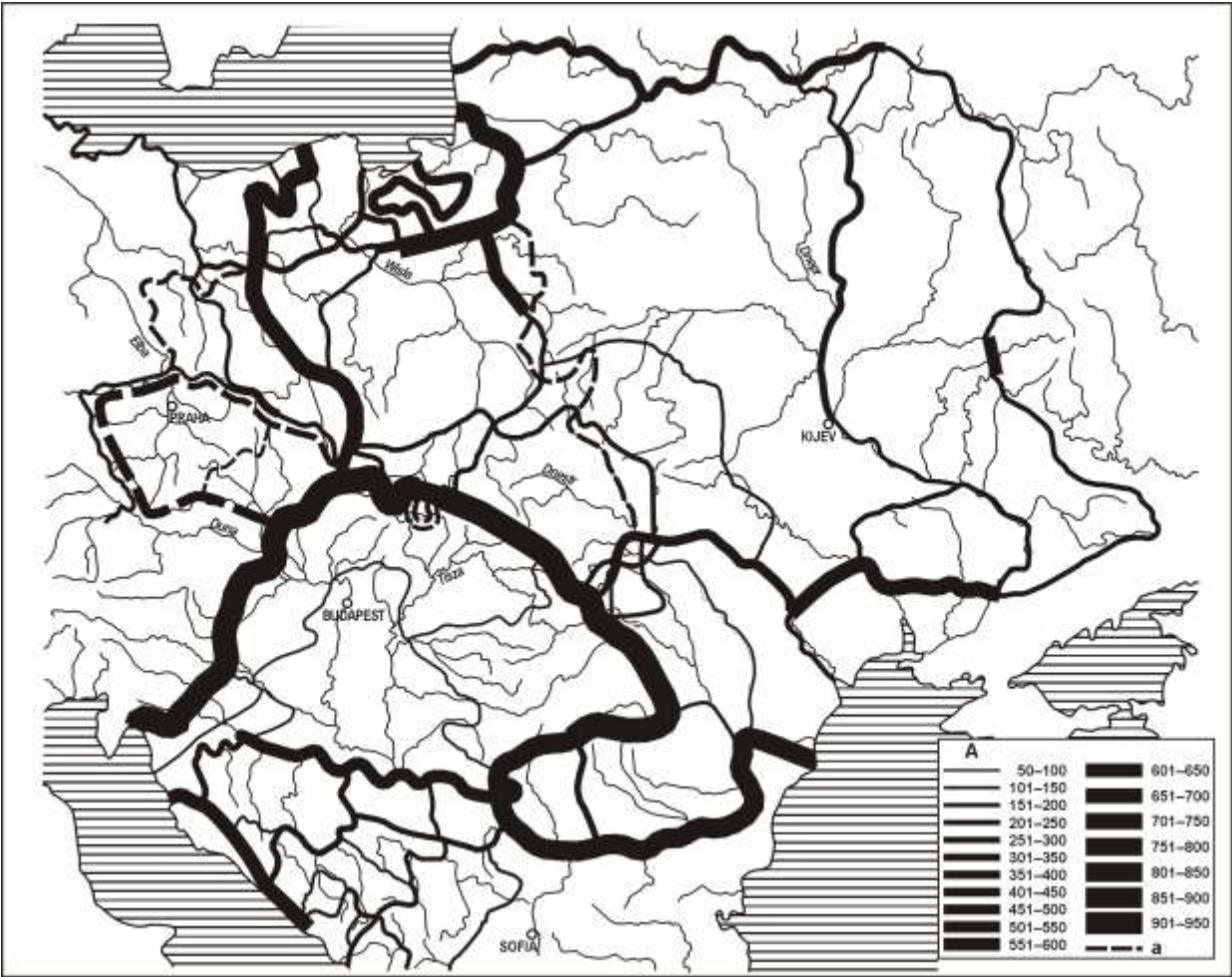
Source: Edited by Jócsik L. 1944

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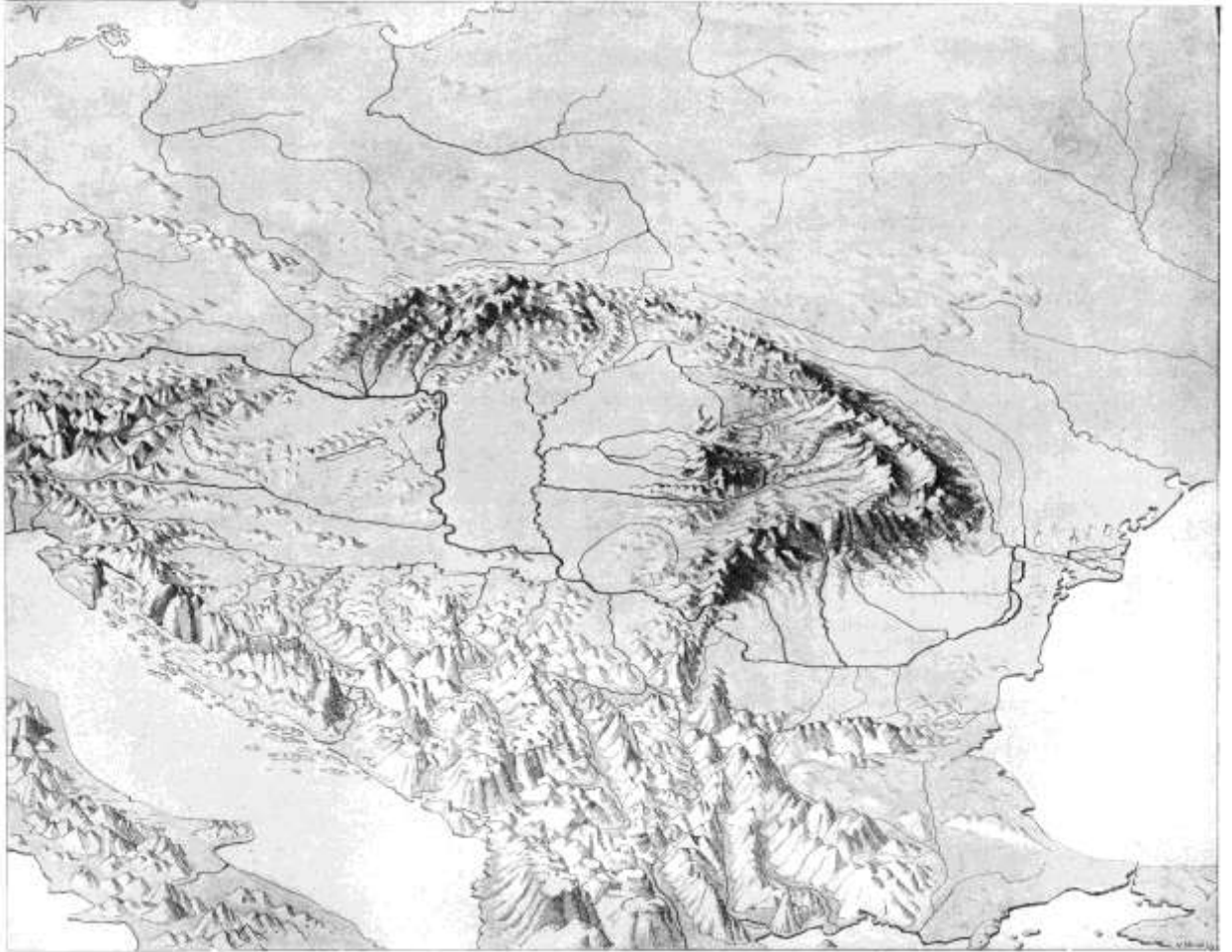
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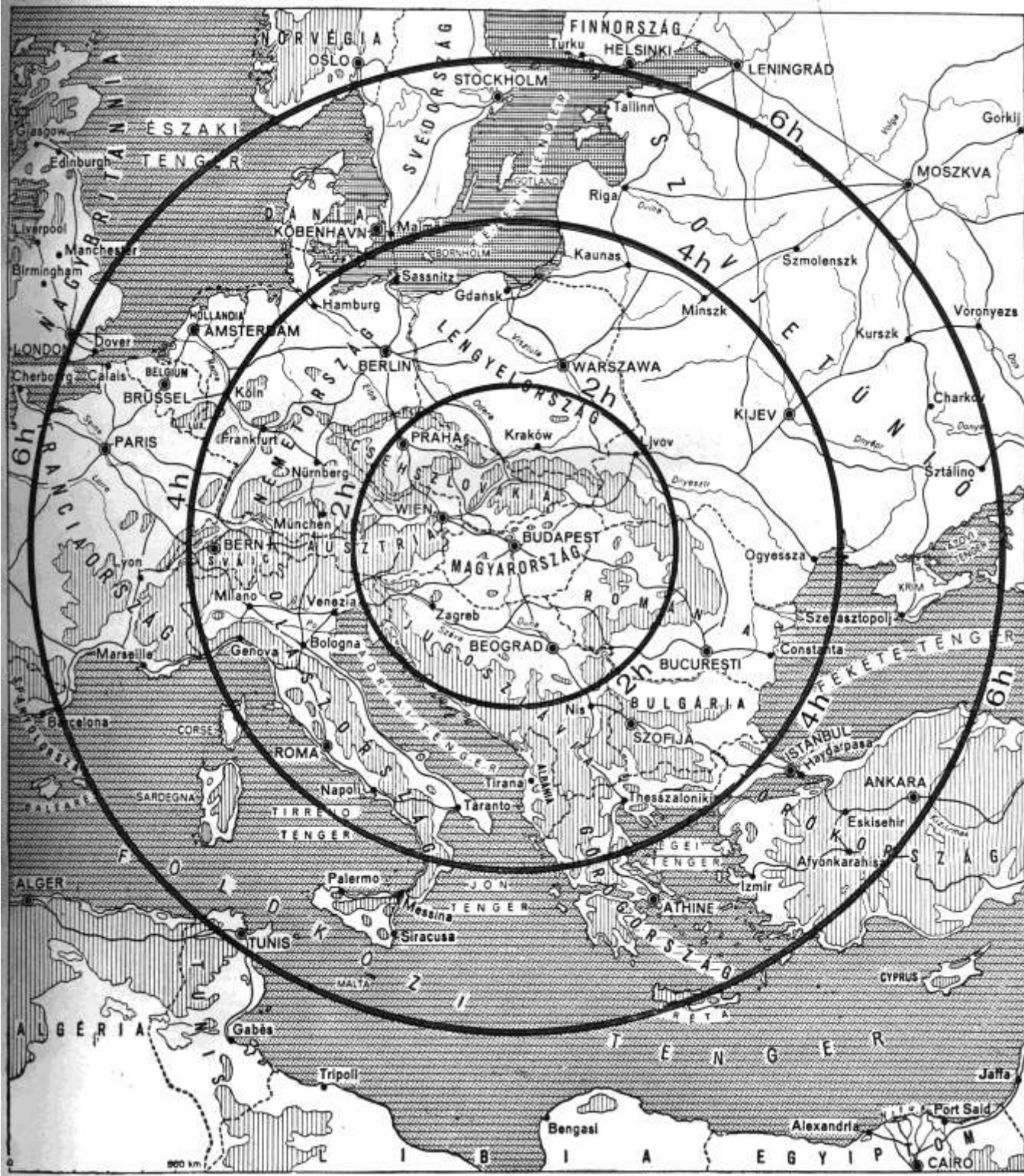
Source: Edited by Rónai A. 1945

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Source: Edited by: Radisics E. 1946 I.

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Source: Edited by: Radics E.. 1946, II.