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## The border triplex of Hungary, Romania, and Serbia – a one-metre-wide stripe of the Yugoslav state and its representation in the border maps

*Keywords:* border maps, Treaty of Trianon, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia

*Summary:* The triple boundary point of Hungary, Romania, and Serbia was initially placed in the terrain by the Treaties of Trianon and Sèvres, giving the borderline between Hungary, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS State; later called Yugoslavia) and Romania. As the Yugoslavs and Romanian agreed to make some minor modifications on their common frontier, according to the Belgrade Protocol of 24 Nov, 1923, it meant a move of the triple boundary point to some 13 kilometres to SW, as Romania gained two villages at the Hungarian border from Serbia.

Romania and the SHS State, to avoid involving Hungary in this agreement, agreed to sign an interesting treaty, lending a one-meter-wide stripe of territory to SHS State between the old and new triplexes. The lending agreement was signed for 99 years. This way, in this 13-kilometre-long section, Hungary was legally bordered to Yugoslavia. The cc. 1:5000 scale maps of the Yugoslav-Hungarian borders, the Yugoslav section lasts till Kiszombor as the eastern extreme; however, the real triplex is 13 km SW from this, near Kübekháza. Accordingly, 'Section A', the first section of the Romanian-Hungarian border, also drawn in 1:5000 scale maps, starts from Kiszombor.

The legal situation was maintained till afterward WWII when the legal situation was resolved Hungary approved the position of the real triplex. With Romania, a new 'section N' was set up and mapped in 1950. The triplex confinium was set up near Kübekháza, where it is nowadays. However, when a new agreement was signed by Hungary, Romania, and the successor of former Yugoslavia in Novi Sad 19 Apr 2006, it occurred that the lending agreement is (supposedly) still valid, so it was closed by Serbia and Romania, and this was the real legal end of this unique story.

### Introduction

The borders of Hungary with Serbia and Romania were established by the Treaty of Trianon which was signed on 4 June 1920 and entered into force in July 1921. The treaty described the border only in broad outlines, on a 1:1000000 scale map appendix. In practice, this delineation left some 1-3 kilometres of "play" in the actual delimitation of the border by boundary marks. This work was carried out by the boundary demarcation commissions, specified in the text of the peace treaty between 1921 and 1925. The result of their work was not only the demarcation of the boundary itself but also its detailed documentation in the form of boundary descriptions and - what we are really interested in here - large-scale maps (Timár, 2020).

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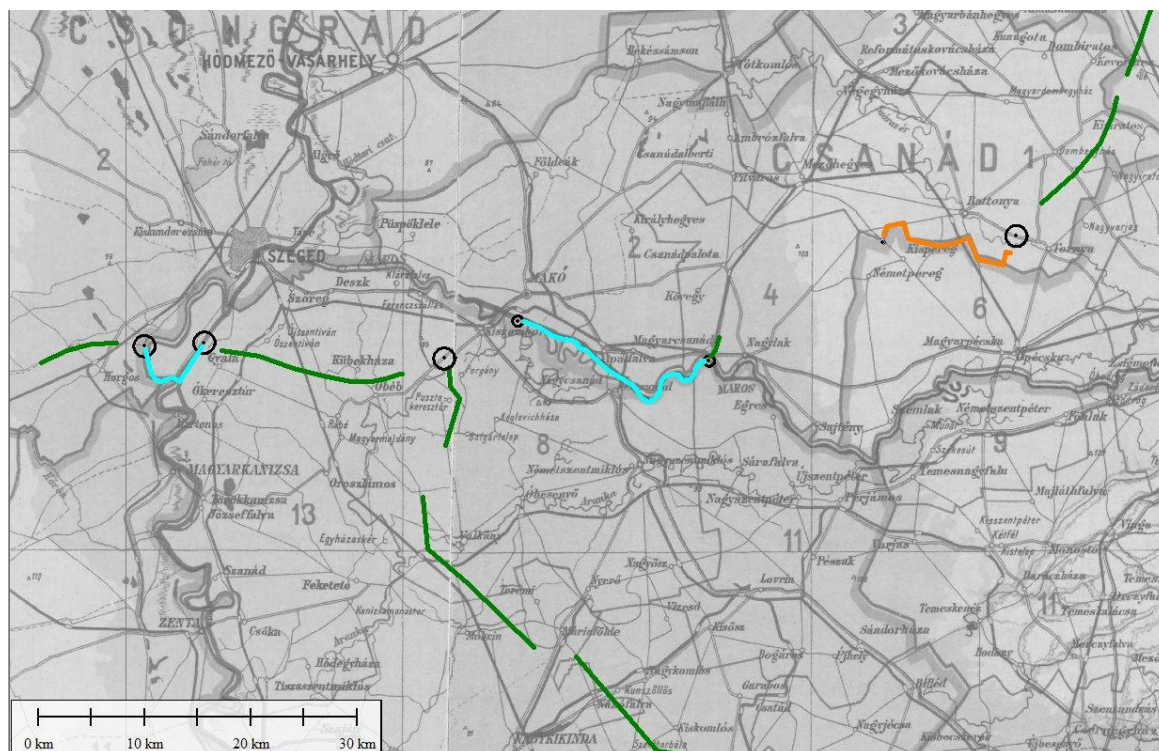


Figure 1: The final boundaries had to be delimited on the basis of such a rough description. The picture is based on the text of the Treaties of Trianon and Sèvres, with the "point to be delimited on the spot" marked by black circles and the "line to be delimited on the spot" by green lines, background is the administrative map of Hungary by 1914.

The border demarcation commissions operated between countries: there were Hungarian-SHS (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which for the sake of simplicity will be referred to here as Yugoslavia, as it was official from 1929) and Hungarian-Romanian border demarcation commissions. Both commissions had 6-6 members: in addition to the border states concerned, the victorious Entente powers, the French, the British, the Italians, and the Japanese each delegated one member, whereas the United States withdrew from the peace process at the end of 1920. The Hungarian-Yugoslavian Boundary Commission was chaired by the British delegate and the Romanian-Hungarian one by the French delegate; in case of a tie, their votes were decisive (Suba, no date). The committees, partly in order to avoid too much work and, partly, to disrupt local communities as little as possible, made the cadastral boundaries between settlements at the state border, yet sometimes deviated from this basic rule for topological or local economic reasons.

In practice, the large scale of the boundary maps (in the study area: 1:5000) meant a cadastral map scale, so cadastral databases were also used for the geodetic preparation of the work. For this reason, the map projections used for the cadastral mapping of the area were naturally used: the Hungarian-Romanian border maps were produced in the Budapest-centred (Gellérthegey) stereographic projection, whereas the Southern zonal cylindric system was used for the relevant section of the Yugoslav-Romanian border. Due to the sensitive nature of the border, the use of national map projections had been changed in the last century, in all the countries concerned, border documents are still available in these obsolete projections. These large-scale border maps were usual for new boundaries, e.g. the ones of the Free State of Fiume are published by Klein (2020).

The border between Romania and Yugoslavia was first fixed in one of the last treaties signed in the Paris peace system: The Convention of Sèvres signed on 10 August 1920 (not to be confused neither with the Turkish peace treaty signed at the same time and place nor with the Greek treaty for the pro-

tection of minorities). Like Trianon and the other treaties concluded at the time, its spatial precision was within a few kilometres: it was, in practice, a matter of assigning settlements to countries. During the process of demarcating the Romanian-Yugoslav border, the two states involved also agreed to exchange roughly identical territories, as described in the agreement signed in Belgrade on 24 November 1923. As a result, the position of the Hungarian-Romanian-Yugoslav border “triplex confinium” would have shifted circa 13 kilometres in a south-westerly direction due to the Romanian territorial gains along the border. However, this did not happen, resulting in an unprecedented legal situation and leaving us with an interesting cartographic legacy.

### The debate about the boundary triplex

The Treaty of Trianon and the Treaty of Sèvres delimited the triple border point in accordance with each other, approximately 4 kilometres southwest of the settlement of Kiszombor. This did not coincide with the cadastral boundary between the municipalities, and a dispute arose as to the actual delimitation. Initially, it was chaired by the French chairman of the Hungarian-Romanian committee, who collected the committee members' ideas on the location of the triple border point. The situation was complicated by the Hungarian settlement of Porgány (Romanian: Pordeanu), which was located not far to the East of the principle point and was therefore indirectly in the future territory of Romania. The situation was complicated even more by the fact that the delimitation of the triple border was not only the responsibility of the Hungarian-Romanian border commission, but also of the Hungarian-Yugoslavian border commission (and in fact it was part of the Romanian-Yugoslavian negotiations which were independent of the Trianon Treaty, therefore, independent of Hungary). A further complication was that the Sèvres Agreement assigned Porgány to Romania. At Hungary's request, the committee appealed to the Council of Ambassadors of the Entente in Paris, which acted as a supervisory body and which eventually gave the committee a free hand in the Hungarian-Romanian dispute over Porgány (Suba, 2015).

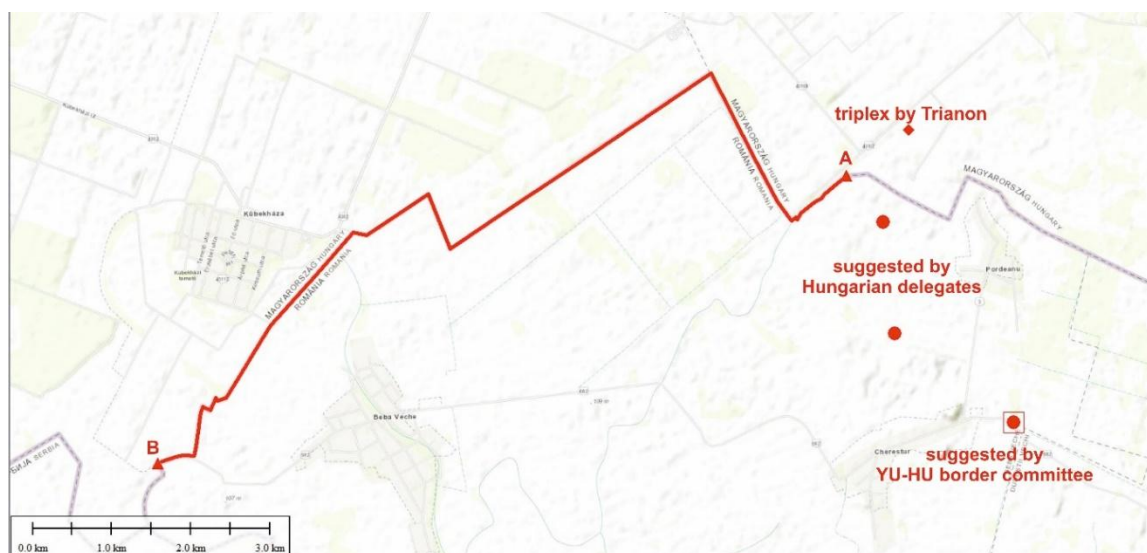


Figure 2: The location of the triplex suggestions and with the ‘original’ triplex (according to Suba, 2015), set up in 1921 (A) and the real triplex, legally used from 1950 (B). The ‘one-metre-wide strip is between them, indicated by the red line.

At the end of a rather bad-tempered and protracted debate, a decision was reached which was unfavourable to Hungary but also resulted in a slightly eastern (e.g., to Romania) borderline shifted from



the originally delineated boundary point and the cadastral boundaries. It was followed by the Serbian-Romanian land swap that made the whole dispute somewhat redundant in retrospect. However, the mood on the issue deteriorated to such an extent that the Hungarian delegate vetoed the movement of the Hungarian-Romanian-Yugoslav triple border 13 kilometres south-westwards. Interestingly, the Hungarian delegate did not object to a similar shift of the Hungarian-Romanian-Czechoslovakian border (Alenei, 2006; Suba, 2009), which is now the Hungarian-Romanian-Ukrainian triplex.

### A 13 kilometres long, 1-metre-wide part of Yugoslavia

There was, however, a topological solution. The Romanian and Yugoslav parties, not wanting to re-open a potentially even more acrimonious dispute, agreed to lease to Yugoslavia for 99 years a 13-kilometre-long and 1-meter-wide strip of land between the border points agreed with the Hungarians and moved by the Romanians and Yugoslavs. It was obviously expected that at the time the wounds would heal and the situation could be settled normally (which in the end, with the complication of another world war, took only 27 years). Legally, therefore, Hungary was still bordering Yugoslavia along this stretch, but in case someone had crossed the border here, they would have walked another metre into Romania. It is also worth noting that although most of Hungary's borders were temporarily changed during World War II, there was no change in the region during this period either, 'only' that Yugoslavia was occupied by the Germans from April 1941 until the arrival of the Eastern Front in September-October 1944.



Figure 3: The map sketches of the Hungarian-Yugoslav border, between the old and the real triplexes. Here the bordering state with Hungary is really Romania in the MAPIRE portal.



Figure 4: Location of the old triplex at the 1950 maps of the Romanian-Hungarian border (sign N17/A1) with the modern topography of the World Imagery.

### Cartographic consequences

As a result of the above, the Hungarian-Yugoslav border maps under the Treaty of Trianon were drawn up to the original triple border point and the 'F-section' of the Hungarian-Yugoslav border, as designated by the Boundary Commission, extended from Rösztke to this point (Figure 3). Naturally, the map did not show the other state border on the other side of the border, as it only was intended to show the Hungarian-Yugoslav border; and it would not have been possible to do so to scale anyway. The 'A-section' of the Romanian-Hungarian border 'numbered' from the South, also started from the old triplex (Fig. 4), and the border maps were drawn accordingly (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The 'section N' of the Romanian-Hungarian border in maps of 1950.



In the frame of the post-World War II settlement, although, the borders in this area remained practically unchanged, the triple border point mark was moved to its actual location in 1950, and is still there today (Figure 6 & 7). The Hungarian-Yugoslav 'F-section' was shortened by this much, but it was not cartographically drawn until the border was re-surveyed in 1978 when the actual section was drawn. At the same time, the Hungarian-Romanian border was given a new 'N-section', which stretches between the old and the new real triplexes, as a kind of memento of a very unique situation.



Fig 6. The actual triplex in the 1950 Hungarian-Romanian map.

### Epilogue

The situation of the Romanian-Hungarian-Serbian triplex was last discussed between the states in Novi Sad in 2006. It was then that it was discovered that the 99-year lease was (or had been) still in force! And even though the triplex has been in its real place since 1950, the end of the lease period until 2022 was "waived" by Romania and Serbia before its expiration date.

The triplex, as well as the majority of the Trianon borders of Hungary, can be seen in the MAPIRE portal since 2020, the centenary of the peace treaty.



Figure 7: The actual column of the triplex confinium as seen from Hungary.

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