

WEAPONIZATION OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA NARRATIVES IN HUNGARY, RUSSIA AND TURKIYE, AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract: *In this paper we point out the significant impact that historical trauma narratives may have on the current international security environment, especially in our area. To this end, we will analyze the impact of historical trauma narratives spread by the elites and governments of Hungary, Russia and Turkiye, which are meant to justify and fuel policies, attitudes and strategies that have a potential negative impact on regional security. This exact same type of narrative has fuelled the justification for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and are also fuelling aggressive and revisionist foreign policies from Ankara and Budapest, creating a climate of tension and security risks in our region. While there are definitely various real historical traumas and suffering that need to be properly addressed and reconciled with throughout the world, there are also cynical weaponizations of these traumas, manipulated by politicians and academics alike, for personal, political, and geopolitical benefits.*

Keywords: *historical trauma; narratives; manipulation; Russia; Hungary; Turkiye.*

Introduction

In the beginning of our paper, we will discuss historical trauma from a theoretical perspective, and after that we will show the vast extent of historical trauma narratives and beliefs in Hungarian, Turkish and Russian societies. Afterwards, we will show how the elites of these countries have spread and are spreading, manipulating and benefiting from these historical trauma narratives inflicted upon their own societies, and how such processes pose a significant long-term threat on regional security. The war in Ukraine is just one such example.

A rather obvious observation is that today war can no longer be waged regardless of everybody else, as a strictly personal, arbitrary decision of a despot. Not even in the Russian Federation, not in Turkiye, the United States or China, probably not even in North Korea. Today, in the age of globalized mass media, in the age of digitization and instant worldwide news, public opinion and opinion polls, there is a need for narratives that prepare the public for war and violence, that make them acceptable if not desirable and, above all, that justify them for internal and external audiences. And no other narrative serves this purpose better than narratives of historical trauma, of real or perceived injustices of the past that purportedly demand action and resolution today, even if that means aggression against neighbours and war. This weaponization has a clear potential negative impact on wider international security, especially because of the long-term societal impact these narratives have in certain societies.

1. Which are the historical traumas for the analyzed societies?

In the Russian Federation, the historical trauma was decided to be the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, as it was stated from the highest level by Vladimir Putin in 2005 (NBC News 2005). In Hungary, the historical trauma is called the Trianon Trauma, and in Turkiye

the name of the historical trauma is The Sèvres Syndrome. All three traumas mourn the dismemberment of empires and aspire to rebuild them, one way or another, which implies serious security problems for the entire region, as the war in Ukraine is already showing it.

1.1. What is historical trauma and how does the concept relate to Hungary, Turkiye and Russia

One of the first researchers to investigate the notion of historical trauma as such was Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. Starting in the 1980s, she published a number of papers on this issue which basically brought it into the academic and public consciousness. Another important researcher in the field of historical trauma is Michelle Sotero, with the work called *A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research*. The model of research and definition of historical trauma proposed by this researcher claims that “*historical trauma originates with the subjugation of a population by a dominant group. Successful subjugation requires at least four elements: (1) overwhelming physical and psychological violence, (2) segregation and/or displacement, (3) economic deprivation, and (4) cultural dispossession.*” (Sotero 2006, 99)

Michelle Sotero summarizes the theory of historical trauma in four distinct points: “*(1) mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a subjugating, dominant population; (2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time; (3) traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma; and (4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persists across generations.*” (Sotero 2006, 94-95).

- However, applying these observations of Michelle Sotero on the Trianon Trauma, on the Sèvres Syndrome and on the trauma of the dissolution of the USSR, we can note that, as regarding point 1 mentioned above, it is more than arguable that someone, a dominant population from outside the borders (the “West” or “foreigners”, as some Hungarians, Turks or Russians would say), had a strategy and wanted to deliberately and systematically traumatize the Hungarian, Russian and Turkish populations (despite individual and rare unfair excesses of some military occupation forces in Hungary and Turkiye, inherent in any war, but non-existent in the case of the collapse of the USSR). On the contrary, it was their own dominant elites who wanted to traumatize their own populations and created narratives in this sense to preserve certain advantages in society and to hide mistakes, as we will show below.

- The second point made by Michelle Sotero, which states that “*(2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time*”, is also fully valid in the case of the Trianon Trauma, for the Sèvres Syndrome, and in the case of the Russian society (which can be said that it has been living from one trauma to another starting from the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War, the worst traumas being those inflicted by its own leaders). In the respective traumatic narratives from Hungary and Turkiye, there were included all the suffering and defeats of the First World War (many of which were common to the whole of Europe, including the Romanians and Slovaks, the French and the Germans – the death of loved ones, poverty, hunger, material and spiritual destruction, etc.), all the suffering that followed it, namely the economic crisis in Hungary and the traumatic, abrupt reform in Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Turkiye. These emerging narratives also included the induction of a sense of collective national humiliation (which calls for revenge, doesn't it?) based on the loss the status of great empires, narratives skillfully led by their own elites and exploited by them.

But the main issue on this point is that, although the sufferings were spread over a longer period of time, they were not caused by the same events, by the same actors, and the trauma

itself was named after a political act (i.e., The Treaty of Trianon, the Treaty of Sèvres or the dissolution of the USSR), not after any massacres suffered by their own populations. Again, this is an indication of the intentional constructed nature of the narratives of these traumas, and not an indication of a natural development of the narrative construction of the traumas and their names, as they are, for example, for the Armenian Genocide, the Holodomor (Death by Starvation), the Holocaust (roughly translated as Burnt Sacrifice), the Genocide of Rwanda, the Khmer Rouge Genocide, The Potato Famine or The Great Famine (Irish Great Famine), The Stolen Generation in the case of the Australian Aborigines, even the Century of Humiliation for China and others. None of these, which are perhaps some of the world's best known historical traumas, were named after a peace treaty or the demise of an empire. However, in the case of the Russian Federation the historical trauma was determined to be the dissolution of the Soviet empire, and in the case of Hungary and Turkiye the trauma was built around the dissolution of their own empires and the peace treaties of Trianon and Sèvres (whose provisions were not even ultimately implemented).

- The third point made by Michelle Sotero states “(3) *traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma;*”, which is again valid for Hungary, Turkiye or Russia. But it was the narratives of their own elites which made sure that Trianon and Sèvres would represent a traumatic culmination of the entire Hungarian and Turkish society, and the dissolution of the USSR because of the “West” embodied all the past, present or future sufferings and traumas of Russian society. We analyze further below.

1.2. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Hungary

As explicit testimonies, there are two analyses by Hungarian researchers who even talk about a *traumatic national identity* in the case of Hungarians. A Hungarian ethnic from the USA, interviewed by one of the researchers, explicitly said that: “*no discussion of Hungarian depression is complete without mentioning Trianon.*” (Gombocz 2016, 26). The second Hungarian researcher highlights the construction of *traumatic identity*, and how the historical trauma of Trianon was and is being constructed within Hungarian children (Szőnyi 2017).

Further proof in this direction is our analysis of depression among the Hungarian population in Hungary or even in Romania, where we found out that, according to official statistical data of the National Institute of Legal Medicine “Mina Minovici”, the highest annual suicide rate in each of the last years reported (2017-2019) is in counties with a majority (Harghita, Covasna) or a large percentage (Satu Mare, Mureş) of Hungarian/Magyar population (INML 2017-2019). Another analysis shows the situation was the same also between 1999-2012 for these counties with a large proportion of Hungarian/Magyar ethnics, which ranked first in Romania regarding suicide rates (Rădulescu 2014, 9-10).

The fact that there is a link between depression, suicide and certain cultural causes for them among the ethnic Hungarian population (the narratives of the historical trauma of Trianon are cultural elements) is also supported by the Hungarian researcher Katarina Gombocz, who states that: “While the high suicide rate among Hungarians has dropped in the last few decades, it remains one of the highest in the European Union (Székely et al. 2013). Depression, which has been linked to suicide in Hungary, remains high as well (Szanto 2007). It is important to consider lay beliefs of causes of depression as well as historical and cultural contexts among Hungarians to add to the clinical knowledge if such a problem is to be remediated, particularly in the context of Hungarian immigrants and 2nd and 3rd generation Hungarians in the United States.” (Gombocz 2016, 74). She also states in the same paper that: “Depression and suicide rates have been and continue to be high in Hungary relative to other European countries. An investigation of cultural and social circumstances in Hungary that might exacerbate these rates needs to be undertaken to elucidate potential risk factors for these rates.” (Gombocz 2016, iv).

As regarding the expansion of these narratives about the Trianon Trauma in Hungary, we only give the example of a survey from the year 2020 (Trianon 100 MTA-Lendület 2020) which showed that 70-78% of the population believed that the Treaty of Trianon was a result of the geopolitical aspirations of the Great Powers and the expansionist ambitions of Hungary's neighbors, plus the defeat in World War I. 94% of the Hungarians being interviewed believed the Treaty of Trianon was fundamentally unjust and exaggerated for Hungarians, 85% believed Trianon was Hungary's biggest tragedy, and 77% believed that Hungary had not yet recovered from the Trianon Trauma.

Of course, this does not mean that all of those 70-90% of Hungarians interviewed above suffer from Trianon Trauma, but it does mean that they are very susceptible to its narratives and related manipulation. In this regard, Katarina Gombocz stresses in her research the need to investigate how ethnic identity and cultural aspects (like our Trianon narrative) have an impact on individual identity and mental health: "Research in the relationship between cultural contexts, especially ethnic identification and mental health, enriches the knowledge of the field and can further illuminate the ways in which ethnic identity interacts with depression." (Gombocz 2016, 4). The same researcher, starting from a definition of ethnicity by Milton Yinger, who considered ethnicity to be "a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (Milton Yinger apud Gombocz 2016, 10), comments on how some Hungarians come to share and adopt at a personal level the narratives, the "culture" and even the trauma and the depression of their common identity group: "The "common origin" refers in this thesis to Hungarian ancestry—whether participants are first- or second-generation or Hungarian immigrants—and their self-ascribed Hungarian identification, which per Yinger's definition is how they distinguish themselves from the people of the larger society in which they live. Interviews will elicit their shared "important segments of a common culture" (1976: 200), which includes also their shared family histories of depression as well as their Hungarian history with its traumatic events. Their "shared activities" (200) are the narrative processes by which they understand depression by making references to a common, traumatic past. The common origin of Hungarian ancestry and common culture of family history of depression and shared collective traumas are the "significant ingredients" (200) in the shared activity of narrative processes." (Gombocz 2016: 10-11)

The results of the above-mentioned poll were probably viewed as a real success by Viktor Orban's government, but it may very well be success built on the real suffering, caused from within, of its own citizens, with dramatic effects among them, as I have shown above, and with potential negative effects for the regional security environment.

1.3. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Turkiye

According to surveys regarding the prevalence of Sèvres Syndrome narratives in Turkiye, some results were overwhelming. For example, 62.4% of Turks believed in 2022 that „*European countries are willing to divide and disintegrate Turkiye just like they did to the Ottoman Empire in the past*”, and we also have a very large percentage of Turks who still compare, 1,000 years on, the attitude of "the West" to the crusades (52.2% in 2022) (GMF 2022: 24). And many more such narratives are being overwhelmingly embraced by the Turkish society, for example 46.6% believed that "*The reforms demanded from Turkey by the EU are similar to the ones mentioned in the Sevres Treaty in the past*" (GMF 2022: 24).

The percentage of social distrust among members of one's own society is also overwhelming, in 2022 social distrust was close to 90% (Saleh 2023: 5). Thus, the spread of these Sèvres Syndrome narratives is very large in Turkish society, and with a particularly high potential for external insecurity.

1.4. The spread and effect of historical trauma narratives in Russia

We can learn about the construction of traumatic narratives in the Russian Federation, and about the manipulation of history, from Cupcea's volume *"Professor Putin". Identity Politics and Curriculum in Post-Soviet Russia*. The reconstruction of the narratives regarding the history of Russia was started by Vladimir Putin in 2001 with a decree called *"Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation in 2001-2005"* (Cupcea 2023: 82).

So, when the same Vladimir Putin talks about history in 2005, and he states that the dismantling of the USSR empire *"was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century"* and *"for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy"* (NBC News 2005), then things are very obvious for most of the Russian society about where they have to look for reasons for their suffering, trauma, frustration or poverty.

So, on that note, in a 2020 multiple choice poll (Levada-Center 2021, 29) indicating events with both negative and positive connotations for Russian citizens, when asked which event of the 20th century they would consider the most significant for their country, 37% of Russians interviewed believed that this was the collapse of the USSR. This was the most important *negative* event of the 20th century for them (far more important than other negative events like the collectivization, the Civil War or the Stalinist Repression in the 1930s), and it was outranked in answers by only 2 *positive* events in the opinion of the respondents, that is, the "Great Patriotic War" which ended in victory for USSR and the flight of Yuri Gagarin into space, another important victory. Highlighting the negative connotation of the fall of USSR for Russian citizens, in the same survey, when asked which event in Russian history of the 20th century would make them feel *ashamed or sad*, most answered that it was *"the destruction of the USSR"*, with 49% (Levada-Center 2021: 31). It is clear, then, that the largest percentage of Russians resonates with the establishment of historical "trauma" in the "destruction of the USSR", as leader Vladimir Putin indicated they should. Other traumas, such as repression, terror, persecution of the church, deportations of entire populations, ranked much lower at this perception of *shame and sadness* in Russia.

The percentage of Russians who declare themselves ashamed of dramatic episodes in their history is constantly decreasing, as a result of the official narratives transposed in school curricula and in propaganda, especially through films - 34% were ashamed in 1999 of the purges and forced deportations of 1920-1950, but in less than 20 years the percentage had dropped to 21%, and the communist persecution of the Orthodox Church made only 16% of Russians feel ashamed (Cupcea 2023: 126). As regarding education and history in Russia, the author notices that *"Heroes are constantly resurrected, myths just the same, Stalin is almost rehabilitated, Yeltsin and Gorbachev almost forgotten, deportations and repressions are rarely mentioned, conflicts with neighbors are supported in the name of Russia, and Vladimir Putin is considered the savior of the nation."* (Cupcea 2023: 151) Stalinist traumas, civil war and Bolshevik massacres, deportations, purges, repressions are all deliberately forgotten by official narratives, as an analysis by a Russian journalist, Mikhail Zygar, explicitly testifies (Van der Jan 2017). In the Russian society, room is made only for the official version of *"the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century"*, the dissolution of the USSR.

However, there are still some Russian citizens who have sought to find out the true traumas within, and found it in the horrific communist repressions and gulags. They named such a documentary in a highly symbolic manner, *Kolyma – Birthplace of Our Fear* (Dud 2019). This is a must watch documentary for anyone who wants to understand certain reflexes in Russian society. Needless to say, the author of that documentary was heavily criticized in the Russian Federation, which is in full process of rehabilitating Stalin.

- As regarding point number 4 noticed by Michelle Sotero, which is that *"(4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical*

course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persists across generations”, this is true in its first part only in the sense in which the trajectory of the population was diverted by the fact that three empires ended, and in these empires the Russian, Hungarian and Turkish nations had had a dominant role, and the narratives of their own elites do not let the societies get over this political fact.

Otherwise, from an economic point of view, the society in Hungary is very prosperous, the one in Turkiye is also in a fulminant development, and the one in the Russian Federation also experiences a relative increase in well-being. Actually, according to the Human Development Index (UNDP 2021), they are all doing much better than in 1990, and, for comparison, even slightly better than Romania. Anyway, in none of the respective three societies can we speak of any economical subjugation by someone from abroad. So, there is no question of physical, psychological, economic or social disparities due to foreign forces in these three societies which, on the contrary, were dominant in the broken empires and often still behave with a complex of imperial superiority towards their neighbors.

However, from another point of view, regarding the second part of the statement of point 4 from above, it is correct in relation to our current research from a psychological point of view, meaning that trauma narratives do have repercussions on the physical state of health of individuals, especially for Hungarians, because of their *traumatic national identity*, as it was called by Hungarian researchers. I have shown above the overwhelming impact of the narratives of own elites in Hungarian and Turkish societies - unfortunately, fear, depression, even suicide, mistrust, the sense of loss, self-victimization present in huge percentages leave traces in the psychological, physical and societal relations in Hungary and Turkiye.

1.5. We have the symptoms of historical traumas, but not the triggering causes

So, here too we have the symptoms of historical traumas clearly present, but, again we emphasize, these are produced by the narratives of their own elites much more than massacres, genocides, discriminations or persecution suffered by the members of the respective communities on behalf of other dominant communities. In support of these statements comes another paragraph by Michelle Sotero, who states about the dominant group that traumatizes another society that it *„enforces subjugation through various means including military force, bio-warfare, national policies of genocide, ethnic cleansing, incarceration, enslavement, and/or laws that prohibit freedom of movement, economic development, and cultural expression.”* (Sotero 2006: 99) But it cannot be stated under any circumstances that any dominant group subjugated the Hungarian, Turkish or Russian population in the case of the historical traumas invoked by their elites. We cannot speak of genocide against them, or ethnic cleansing (although the mutual massacres during the Greco-Turkish wars did come close to this, but they were mutual matters and later mutual exchanges of populations), no one inflicted ethnic cleansing against the Hungarians after Trianon or against the Russians after the dissolution of the USSR. We cannot talk about mass incarcerations, slavery, prohibition of freedom of movement or of economic or cultural development (although this aspect, interestingly enough, is one of Vladimir Putin's favorite narratives by which he wants to justify the invasion of Ukraine).

So, as clearly as possible, we have shown how we encounter symptoms of the historical trauma that the societies of Hungary, Turkiye or the Russian Federation are experiencing, but for which their own elites and the narratives and policies implemented by them are responsible more than concrete historical events which would have caused them.

2. The weaponization and construction of historical trauma narratives by their own elites in Hungary, Turkiye, and the Russian Federation

Viktor Orban, in his “*State of The Nation*” speech in 2020, when Hungary commemorated 100 years from the Treaty of Trianon, explicitly stated that: “*Not only did this diktat (n.r. The Treaty of Trianon) end the First World War, it also ended the era of Hungarian history leading up to it. (...) The verdict was obviously a death sentence. History has not recorded a nation that could survive such a loss of blood.*”, and then he cites Count Apponyi, a xenophobe and somewhat racist member of the Hungarian elite of 1920, who “*was right to say that Hungary’s grave had been dug. The loss was devastating in itself, but even more traumatic – if that were possible – was the fact that state formations such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were being constructed around us.*” (About Hungary 2020) We must notice the keywords that were used in this communication: “*traumatic*”, but also “*ended*”, “*death sentence*”, “*grave*”, and “*devastating*”. The same has been done by Recep Erdogan in Turkiye on numerous occasions when he talked about Lausanne or Sèvres (Tharoor 2020) (Republic of Turkiye 2016), the same has been done by Vladimir Putin when he talked about the dissolution or the “*destruction*” of the USSR, as we showed earlier. How could an ordinary citizen ignore such powerful messages to the nation coming from the highest level? It is almost impossible, which is exactly why the manipulation of historical trauma and related suffering is so powerful when it occurs, and this is exactly why the majority of the said societies is engulfed by beliefs deriving from these narratives.

2.1. Hungary

Éva Kovács, a Hungarian researcher, writes about the weaponization of the Trianon Trauma starting from the very first days after 1920, after the Treaty of Trianon: “*The old-new Hungarian political elite, by receiving state sovereignty, could have tried to reintegrate post-war society by democratic and inclusive politics –but it did not happen that way. The Trianon myth temporarily helped to restore the pre-war power structure, and to stabilize the shattered social order, at least within the upper and middle classes.*” (Kovács 2016: 530) So, this is how the construction of the Trianon Trauma narrative was a political decision of the “*old-new*” Hungarian elites, i.e. the same ones who could have chosen to build the Hungarian society after the First World War differently. But they chose not to.

Éva Kovács goes on to show what role the Trianon narrative played in the vision of post-war Hungarian elites: “*To sum up, the complex made up of all pains, wounds and mourning of First World War was sublimated and therefore minimised and repressed with the help of the Trianon metaphor.*” (Kovács 2016: 531)

Another Hungarian researcher, just as well, plainly states that: “*Balogh further argues that this conservation (n.r. of the feeling of loss and grievance generated by Trianon) was based on the duality that those in control of the discourse were (and still are) not the affected Hungarian minorities across the border but the the politicians of the ‘small’ Hungary, whose interest is not necessarily to resolve the social conflicts and strong emotional reactions but the instrumentalization of those emotions for their political goals.*” (Szönyi 2017: 22)

In other words, the main goals of the Trianon Trauma narratives were from the beginning the preservation of the own status, and the power of the Hungarian elites from before the First World War, but also to hide their own mistakes, to shift attention from the suffering and the wounds of the

First World War in a metaphor of the Trauma of Trianon and in revisionism. It was much more convenient to spread narratives according to which only the “foreigners”, “Westerners”, “Romanians”, etc., were responsible for everything, and not their own elites, who were so responsible for the outbreak of the First World War in the first place, as well as for the deeply oppressive treatment applied to minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the outbreak of the war.

2.2. Turkiye

In Turkiye, about the manipulation and weaponization of societal fears associated with Sèvres Syndrome, Dorothee Schmid, a researcher of the phenomenon, states that: „*The exploitation of the syndrome for tactical purposes has become so commonplace a practice in Turkiye that it can be talked about as a political tradition.*” (Schmid 2015: 16)

Concerning the use of the fear inflicted by trauma, for internal and external self-interests, for the consolidation of power, just like in Hungary and the Russian Federation, another author states that: „*This «fear was fixed» thanks to the continuous presentation by the Turkish military-political authorities which was giving an opportunity to keep the threat of dismemberment and elimination of the Turkish state viable, with it making the social consciousness more oriented, ensure necessary consolidation. With it, it was becoming easier to ensure the public orientation in the necessary inner-political and foreign political processes through the formation of collective character of external enemy.*” (Hovsepyan 2012: 66)

In a previous research, we identified *fear, invasion by foreigners, betrayal by Christian minorities, and betrayal by Ottoman elites* as the main characteristics for the manifestation of Sèvres Syndrome narratives in Turkish society. (Blănaru 2023b: 118)

The way trauma is transmitted is similar to that in Hungary and the Russian Federation: through educational policies, through religious discourse, through political discourse, and through pseudo-academic and pseudo-scientific products. (Blănaru 2023b: 129) In addition, the Kemalist elites, at first, later the neo-Ottoman ones, adjusted the trauma narratives to better serve their purposes. For example, we showed in our research mentioned earlier how in the beginning the narratives and behaviors of the so-called Sèvres Syndrome had almost nothing anti-Western about them (Blănaru 2023b: 121-23). Even during the English occupation of parts of the former Ottoman Empire, the behavior of the Ottoman population was entirely devoid of anti-Westernism. Over time, things changed dramatically, to the striking anti-Westernism of today in much of Turkish society, a direct result of the narratives disseminated by their own elites, of which the most vocal and energetic anti-Western discourse comes from none other than president Erdogan.

2.3. Russia

About the manipulation and weaponization of history in the Russian Federation, which intricately concerns historical traumas, a Russian historian, Nikita Sokolov, explicitly stated that Russian history was commonly used for two purposes: first, to justify the repressive policy of the elites, and secondly as a fight against civic activism (Cupcea 2023: 157). Civic activism that could have threatened the authority of the same elites in power. We add a third goal, perhaps the most important for the present analysis which focuses on security threats, namely revisionism and the justification for external aggression and the invasion of neighbors, such as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

Regarding the manipulation and the purposes of history in Russia, James C. Pearce, who wrote a volume specifically on the issue of the “use” of history in Russia, argued that:

“Istoricheskaya politika can be a reliable legitimization force because it is malleable to suit the state’s interests and play on the emotions of the population.” (Pearce 2021: 69), which is exactly what we have been arguing about the manipulation of historical trauma, the most sensitive of all historical issues. The same author says that *“the Russian state uses its history for the purpose of state consolidation, modernization and reviving Russia’s national consciousness”* (Pearce 2021: xiii). What we have to understand here is that *“state consolidation”* in Russia means consolidation of power for Vladimir Putin (*“State power is symbolic to the idea of ‘Russia’ (...); Putin is its current face.”* (Pearce 2021: 41)), and for the elite faithful to him, and *“reviving Russia’s national consciousness”* means reviving *Imperial Russia’s* consciousness, just as Vladimir Putin’s arguments that deny the statehood of Ukraine have been proving. This underlines again what we stated earlier, that the main reasons behind manipulation of history and trauma in Russia are *consolidation of power for the elites* and *revisionism or imperialism*.

Therefore, we have the same two main goals found in the Russian Federation, in Hungary or Turkiye behind the manipulation of history and of the traumatic narratives concerning their own populations: on the interior, it is safeguarding the power and status of their own elites, and on the exterior it is pursuing the aggressive and revisionist ideology of the imperialist type, which is a real threat for the whole region.

3. Consequences in terms of regional security due to narratives of historical trauma

It is dramatic what we have shown above, but these are the results of the implementation of traumatic narratives by their own elites in Hungary, Turkiye and the Russian Federation, with a potentially high negative impact on regional security.

And this is no longer just about some populist or revisionist statements made by Viktor Orban, it is no longer just about some neo-Ottomanist statements from Recep Erdogan or imperialist statements from Vladimir Putin, this is about *three whole societies where the impact of these narratives is quite high*, as the surveys above have shown. In Hungary, we have a whole traumatic national identity and self-victimization built around Trianon, with revisionist accents. In Turkiye, we have more than half of the population who still believe in the actuality of the Crusades, and even more who believe that the Europeans want to dismember Turkiye as they must have done with the Ottoman Empire, in a defensive-aggressive way, with revisionist accents there, too. In Russia, the official trauma is designated the collapse of the USSR, for which the Westerners are also to blame, Stalin is rehabilitated, and Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and even the Baltic States are considered part of the Russian world, whether they want it or not, of course, in a revisionist manner.

All of the above is what the respective populations mostly believe about us Europeans, and they will continue to believe these things for a long time to come. The elites of these societies ensured this through education, through propaganda, through symbolism, through partisan so-called “academic” research, through statements, through the establishment of so-called institutions and magazines purportedly “academic”, through the establishment of memorial days, special classes for students, museums dedicated to these traumas (Szónyi 2017: 17-21), in short, by building whole narratives, which we analyze here.

This is the greatest danger to the regional security and even to Romania, not the statements of some political leaders *per se*, whomever they are. Their statements are only part of the puzzle, they are only part of the narrative that has engulfed these societies, they are only the tip of the iceberg. And an additional problem with these narratives is that, in certain internal and external conditions, which can even be stimulated by their own leaders, they can explode, they can encompass violently the whole society.

Of course, in addition to these societal aspects, which we consider the greatest danger to regional security in the medium and long term, and complementary to them, we have several concrete processes that are underway in our region.

In this regard, we notice the narrative preparation of the Russian Federation that materialized in the outbreak of the concrete war in Ukraine. This is the most abrupt proof of narrative preparations, and the use of historical trauma narratives in order to justify an invasion in Ukraine, the most concrete of threats.

We also notice the narrative preparation of Turkiye that materialized in its armed interventions in Syria, Libya, Iraq, for the aid given to terrorist organizations like Hamas, ISIS, al-Qaeda, threats made against the sovereignty of Greece (Stamouli 2022), Syria, Iraq, or against Armenia in the province of Zangezur (Syunik), together with Azerbaijan (Kucera 2021). We notice the realization of a new aggressive doctrine, the *Blue Homeland*, we notice the continuous and rapid militarization of Turkiye (Blănaru 2023a), we notice the nuclear, expansionist ambitions, on which we did a more extensive research in a recent collective volume we co-edited, *Turkiye at the Centenary. Quo Vadis? Geopolitics, economy, internal and external challenges*. Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, initiator of the *Blue Homeland* doctrine, explicitly stated what Turkiye will do, at the same time making use of the recurrent narrative of the collective blame on the “West”: “*Turkiye is in the process of being excluded from the Mediterranean Sea by Greece, with the help of Western countries, and no Turkish government, whichever it might be, will be able to accept that.*” (Arefi 2020) And we notice intensive hinterland building in Central Asia and the Balkans and expanding military bases abroad.

On the other hand, we notice Hungary's very energetic narrative preparations aimed at different types of concrete aggression against the sovereignty of its neighbors, out of which stand out the attitudes, the statements - for example, Viktor Orban's unacceptable statement that he has not recognized Transylvania as being a part of Romania (Costea and Kiss 2023), provocative photos or videos posted by the president of Hungary in Romania (Onea 2023), etc. -, and the programmes concerning Romania - for example, monopolizing the Hungarian-language media in Romania by pro-government entities from Budapest (Sipos 2021), or breaching the sovereignty of Romania by the Kos Karoly program (Dungaciu 2020) -, or a statement about ports allegedly “stolen” from Hungary, which angered Croatia (Radosavljevic 2022), statements and attitudes regarding Ukraine, Slovakia or even Slovenia, drawing a negative reaction from the President of Slovenia (STA 2020).

Another example, we see China's narrative preparations targeting Taiwan, preparing internal and external public opinion for whatever will happen there, preparing and inoculating *a priori* justification by using China's historical trauma from the *Century of Humiliation*.

All these leaders are telling us explicitly what they want to do. Narratives of historical trauma are used in all these societies as justification for revisionist actions and undoubtedly have an acute negative impact on international security and stability. Self-victimization from Hungary, Turkiye or the Russian Federation seeks to justify *a priori*, for internal and external

public opinion, a potential aggression on their part against their neighbors. Such aggression has already militarily begun from the Russian Federation in Ukraine, it has already begun from Turkiye in Syria and Iraq, even in the Eastern Mediterranean, in various forms.

4. Long-term impact on regional security

These narratives of historical trauma will have a long-lasting impact on security. First, all the leaders now directly responsible for implementing these narratives of historical trauma in Hungary, Turkiye, and the Russia, namely Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan, and Vladimir Putin, do not seem to have any real domestic problems that could obstruct the implementation of these narratives both in their society, and internationally, in the short or medium term.

Secondly, these narratives are already very well implemented in society, which adheres to them, as we have showed above in point 2.1., and as evidenced by the fact that in the recent elections Viktor Orban, and Recep Erdogan, and their parties won the elections in which they were involved. Not to mention the fact that Turkiye's main opposition party, the Kemalist CHP, has a very similar ideology to Recep Erdogan regarding "foreigners" or "Westerners" or "Armenians", etc. This party, CHP, has been the main responsible for managing and transmitting the historical trauma of Sèvres Syndrome for many years, until around year 2,000, when AKP, Erdogan's party, took it over. At the same time, the war in Ukraine, despite the huge costs on multiple dimensions, doesn't seem to be domestically causing any particular problems for Vladimir Putin.

All the policies, narratives, propaganda, textbooks and school curriculum overseen by Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan and Vladimir Putin have ensured that the historical trauma narratives that they want are well disseminated at home, which will have a long-term impact on their respective societies and, implicitly, on regional security, because of their vindictive, self-victimizing and imperialist content. And these preparatory narratives try to make war or aggression seem justifiable for internal and external public opinion (for example, like Hamas and far-left groups are doing right now), or, if possible, even make it seem that there is no other choice. Herein lies the huge importance of narrative for contemporary war or terrorism.

Conclusions

No matter how populist and apparently unrealistic, apparently ridiculous, some speeches coming from individuals like Viktor Orban, Recep Erdogan, Vladimir Putin are, they still do tell us explicitly what they are going to do from now on. Some could argue that maybe we do not want to see it, because the emerging reality does not correspond to the imagined one. Even though a definitive analysis which would assert the exact probability of these actions would require more parameters, we have to consider that these might be quite real geopolitical projections of these leaders.

In the end, we stress the main three ideas presented in our paper: 1. the societies in Hungary, Turkiye and the Russian Federation are being engulfed by beliefs induced by historical trauma narratives; 2. these historical trauma narratives have been purposefully constructed by their own elites over time; 3. we have to take into account the possibility that their elites might do at some point exactly what they have been telling us that they would, which is impact the current security environment in our area, and attempt to change borders and the internationally recognized order by any means. And their narratives, especially on historical trauma, have been making sure that their own societies would back them up.

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