

Foreword



The system of links between Hungary, the countries of South Eastern Europe and the interest the Hungarians have cherished towards this region reach back to the time the Magyars settled

in the Carpathian Basin. During the Middle Ages, the aspirations of the Hungarian state and nation were initially motivated by purposes of expansion, and later by defence requirements. These endeavours were revived during the decades prior to World War I, represented by Austro–Hungarian imperial efforts and encouraged by Germany. The political and economic interests of Hungary post Trianon initially vanished, (although eventually succeeded in regaining some of the territories ceded to its neighbours in the Trianon Peace Treaty), but then turned into a desire for territorial revision and finding allies in order to accomplish it.

Following World War II, during the Socialist era, relations between Hungary and the Balkan states were repositioned again for political reasons; at that time even academic research receded considerably. After the change of regime in Hungary, with the advent of the 1990s it was the explosion of the "Balkan powder-barrel", i.e. the stoking of ethnic and religious tensions, suppressed for several decades, into regional conflicts and warfare that renewed the Hungarian public's traditional interest towards South Eastern Europe.

More recently, the role of Hungary (as located in the vicinity of the Balkans; a region notorious for its political instability for many centuries) has been upgraded with respect to South Eastern Europe, in regards of efforts to mitigate its political, economic and military conflicts, and seek solutions for them. This role was filled first as an associate and since May 2004 as a member state of the European Union. As a consequence, scientific studies on specific Balkan problems (a region relegated to oblivion for half a century or so) could not be facilitated by textbooks and periodicals exclusively. A necessity has emerged to publish an atlas in the form of a book, or perhaps a book combined with an atlas, in which a large number of attractive thematic maps and textual analyses (political, economic, ethnic, religious, settlement and population, transport and tourism), provide explanations for the up-to-date societal and economic issues of South Eastern Europe along with the most characteristic segments of the region's development in the 20th century.

The present publication produced by the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) serves as a brief account for public and scientific readers and political decision makers. With regard to its contents and form, it is comparable to *New Central Europe in Economical Maps* compiled by A. Halász (1928) and *Atlas of Central Europe* edited by A. Rónai (1945).

E. SYLVESTER VIZI
PRESIDENT of the HAS