

# WHAT IS TO BE EXPECTED IN THE DANUBE VALLEY?

by

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In recent months the public opinion of the world and the international press have repeatedly established the fact that the storm centre which a bare year ago lowered over the Valley of the Danube has since the aggravation of the conflict between Abyssinia and Italy been shifted to the Mediterranean. As a consequence the sadly disintegrated Valley of the Danube has obtained a respite; and in particular there has ensued an improvement in the situation in Austria, which during 1934 more than once threatened to lead to a grave conflict. The improvement is however only an apparent one; the relief is probably only a temporary one and will cease unless the interval is utilised for the purpose of constructively re-adjusting the chaos ruling in the Danube Valley.

Not only has international interest been diverted in recent months to Africa and the Mediterranean; in the policy of the German Empire too there has undoubtedly ensued a more moderate attitude respecting the treatment of the Austrian question. Today Germany is arming, openly and confessedly, in order to make up for the fifteen years of inactivity forced upon her by the Treaty of Versailles. These military preparations are absorbing the whole of Germany's material and financial resources, besides monopolising all her capacity in the field of international politics. The German Empire needs 2—3 years of tranquillity to enable it to realise its systematic military programme; and during that period we must not expect Germany to take the initiative in the Austrian question. But what are we to expect will happen then, if these years too are allowed to pass without anything being done in the Valley of the Danube?

Even without attributing to the German Empire any thoughts of aggression we cannot but feel anxious when we think of that day. The shifting in the balance of forces involved by the military preparedness of the German Empire will certainly make its effect felt automatically not only in the military situation but also economically and in the field of international politics — and even in the internal situation in Austria. It will hasten the consequences of the spell inevitably exercised on

a poor neighbouring people struggling to maintain its subsistence by a mighty kindred nation of sixty-five millions. The law of gravitation will act a thousandfold — indeed, with irresistible force — upon the Austria which has been deprived of the foundations of her existence. And even if this preponderance were not sufficient in itself, there can be no doubt that Austria is being driven into the arms of Germany and compelled to accept the pan-German idea by the pressure of the Little Entente, which, apart from excluding Austria from her natural sphere, the Danube Valley, and hindering her occupying her proper position in that valley, leaves her no possibility of thriving except by union with the German Empire. Unless the Danube Valley is re-organised while the present calmer atmosphere lasts, the union ("Anschluss") between Austria and Germany must inevitably ensue the moment the military preparedness of the German Empire enables that country to bring its increased force most effectively to bear on the balance of power in Europe. Today the Danube Valley problem is reduced to the question whether in the 2—3 years still available for the purpose it will be possible to organise an independent Danube Valley or not? Should we succeed in re-organising the Danube Valley in a manner leading to the development of an economically virile structure with political aims of its own and able to stand on its own feet which will endeavour consciously to defend its independence against all attempts at expansion, the balance of power in Europe will be saved and it will be possible to preserve the peace of the world. Should that not be the case, our restless Continent will be plunged into a path from which there is no return.

So it will be of interest to inquire into the forces which are calculated to further the rational re-organisation of the Danube Valley, and to try to discover what it is that hinders such a solution? The forces in operation during the past fifteen years are well known; and it is an easy matter to determine the mistakes so far committed. It is indubitable that for nearly fifteen years the Western European Powers have failed to agree at all in their policy towards Austria; and the differences

of opinion and the clash of interests dividing the Great Powers among themselves have more than once been reflected most strikingly in their attitude towards Austria, plunging the small Austrian Republic into serious conflicts. More than once in the past Austria has been the object rather than the subject of international policy, being utilised as a tool for the furtherance of various political ambitions of the Great Powers. Italy, the Franco-Czech political union and the German Empire — each of these factors has had its own armed forces in Austria; and the conflicts between these forces serving each a particular political object rendered the life of Austria almost intolerable.

That was why Austria welcomed the development of the Stresa front as a blessing; for the three Western Great Powers at least succeeded in harmonising their various attitudes towards Austria and undertook the united defence of Austria's independence. At any rate the situation was cleared. The Stresa front showed a union of forces against the "Anschluss" policy of the German Empire. However, the unity of the Stresa front was last year shaken by the Abyssinian conflict. At the present moment that front is crumbling to pieces, although there has been no change in the attitudes of the three Western Great Powers towards the Austrian question. And perhaps this latter circumstance entitles us to hope that in the Austrian question at least the united front of Stresa will be restored, unless the Italian-Abyssinian conflict degenerates into war. In the latter case, however, the Abyssinian question will not be the only problem to be settled by an appeal to arms; that is how numerous other questions — probably the future destiny of Austria too — will have to be decided. But the present situation denotes a change indubitably unfavourable to the interests of Austria; for the political and military power of Italy, which Great Power has been most active in defending Austria's independence, is very seriously employed elsewhere. As a consequence, the co-operation which might be expected to result from the Great Powers showing a united front in favour of the re-organisation of Austria and the Danube Valley, hardly looks at present likely to be realised; time is passing, but there is no sign yet of united action on the part of the Great Powers: and for that very reason the conflict between Italy and Abyssinia involves a loss of time excessively detrimental to the future of the whole Danube Valley.

Now we are beginning to see clearly the anxious character of the Little Entente alliance and the danger to the peace of Europe latent in that alliance. The Little Entente was brought into being for the purpose of maintaining by force of arms the subjection of Dismembered Hungary and of the Austria which has been deprived of her vitality, its professed object being to maintain the present *status quo* unchanged. The more patent the unfeasibility of that endeavour became, the closer the grip became of the ring in which, basing its policy upon the provisions of the treaties of peace, the Little Entente alliance is keeping Aus-

tria and Hungary in confinement. So, instead of following reason and adjusting itself to the changing circumstances, the Little Entente has aggravated the antagonism dividing the Danube Valley into incoherent fragments, has broken up the economic interdependence existing previously, and has deprived the Danube Valley of its vitality and of its ability to defend itself, splitting up into its components that territory, formerly united both politically and economically, and leaving it at the mercy of the political ambitions of every Great Power desiring to make its way into the Valley of the Danube. The incapacity to develop of the Danube Valley has been perpetuated by the Little Entente alliance, — a fact which became manifest the moment the *status quo* created by the treaties of peace was assailed, not only by the demands of Austria and Hungary, but also by the German Empire of today — the Germany of the National Socialists — beginning to knock at the half-open gate of the Danube Valley.

At the very outset it was seen that the Little Entente offers but little protection against the expansion endeavours of Germany. Yugoslavia, for instance, makes practically no secret of her conviction that the presence of the armed forces of the German Empire on the Brenner would offer Yugoslavia a far more effective security against Italy than the present state of things. Rumania is very careful not to betray too much interest in the Austro-German "Anschluss" problem: her interests are not directly endangered or even affected. Only Czecho-Slovakia opposes these endeavours, which veritably threaten her existence; but the danger is too great — Czecho-Slovakia is too completely at the mercy of Germany — for the Republic to venture to offer any resistance in the event of any real danger. The Czecho-Russian alliance is an open acknowledgment of this fact. The Little Entente is no longer able to ensure the existence of Czecho-Slovakia in the event of an attack by Germany; and the Czechs were compelled to apply for protection to that Russian Empire the appearance of which in the Danube Valley would involve the extinction of the idea of the existence of that region as an independent unit and would degrade Central Europe to the state of the pre-War Balkans, seeing that other States would sooner or later be driven to enter into alliance with the German Empire to counter-balance the alliance between Russia and Czecho-Slovakia. In that event the Danube Valley would be converted into the diplomatic — and possibly also military — battlefield of the pan-German and pan-Slav forces. The Czecho-Russian alliance is a grave defect of structure in the organisation of Europe; for it is an obstacle to the only possible peace policy — a policy which would ensure an equilibrium by excluding the pan-German and the pan-Slav forces and organising an independent federation of States in the Danube Valley. It is already urgently necessary that the Little Entente should be replaced by a new Danubian organisation binding more closely together the Danubian States and at the same time separating them from the German Empire, from

Russia and from the Balkans too. Once this re-organisation of the Danube Valley is successfully realised, that Valley will be in a position to treat on equal terms with the German Empire, with Russia and with the Balkans and will be able to adjust all its economic and political problems in a spirit of neighbourliness and peace. In the present situation, however, the appearance in the Danube Valley of the influence — or more particularly of the predominance — of any Great Power or group of Powers in the shape of an alliance like that between Russia and Czecho-Slovakia, naturally does not improve matters, and in fact only serves to aggravate the situation, and may indeed bring in its train new antagonism of an irreparable character.

Hungary does not — and cannot — pursue any other policy than that of stressing the necessity of an independent Danube Valley organisation. The failure of the Little Entente alliance must have fully convinced the world of the importance of Hungary, and of her being indispensable as a factor. Our central situation in the Danube Valley predestines our country — placed at the point of contact between the pan-German and the pan-Slav forces — to be the cornerstone of European peace and by defending our independence against the whole world to prevent the dislocation of the European equilibrium. This historical mission our nation fulfilled for ever a thousand years in the Danube Valley; and it was folly from the point of view of Europe generally that the Treaty of Trianon should have so seriously weakened us as to render us incapable of continuing to fulfil that mission unaided out of our own resources. Indeed, even co-operation with our neighbour Austria must fail to bring about the results so desirable from the European point of view so long as the disruptive policy of the Little Entente continues to divide the interdependent Danubian peoples into two hostile camps. The aims of the Franco-Little Entente policy, which endeavoured to drive Hungary into the mouse-trap of the Little Entente, after fifteen years of experiment has ended in a fiasco, because this country of ours has never been — and will never be — prepared to renounce its national ambitions or to commit economic suicide. The only attitude open to us to adopt as against the system — often one of terror — by which Hungary was disarmed as a military State and placed under an economic blockade, the minorities severed from our nation being ruthlessly subjected to a process of extermination, was one of passive resistance. The policy of the Little Entente has compelled Hungary, instead of seeking a rational co-operation with her neighbours, to play the role of political opposition towards the newly established international situation. Austria and Hungary were liberated from this *impasse* by the Rome Pact, which by establishing co-operation with Italy

counterbalanced the oppressive endeavours of the Little Entente and, fully appreciating the importance of the cultural, economic and military advantages latent in the central situation of Austria and Hungary, created the international basis the consistent outbuilding of which is the only possible means of removing the evils if the present situation in the Danube Valley.

For that reason we all welcome with the greatest pleasure the words spoken by the present Czecho-Slovak Premier, M. Hodža, at the meeting of the Prague Parliament held on December 5th last. M. Hodža declared that he proposed to make his first moves in the direction of Austria and Hungary, seeing that those two States were today partners of the Little Entente of decisive influence in Central Europe. The Czecho-Slovak Premier himself regards the 1934 Rome Protocols as presuming the Contracting States to be closely connected with the other parts and organisations of Central Europe, establishing the fact that this development was a proof of the attractive character of the Central European idea. At the same time he once more emphasised the readiness of Czecho-Slovakia to adhere to the Rome Pact. I am only too ready to admit on my part that by means of this statement and of others made since M. Hodža has adopted an attitude in principle which may serve as a basis for negotiation and allows of our hoping that by reciprocal moderation we shall be able to come to an agreement on that basis. The Hungarian attitude in the matter of principle has always been the endeavour to find a rational and mutual compromise as contrasted with the one-sided imperialistic policy of the Little Entente. Whether this policy of compromise will be limited or more extensive in its bearing, will depend upon whether the menacing pressure weighing upon Czecho-Slovakia has already brought that country to reason, — whether the new spirit which acknowledges international justice and fair play to be the lasting basis of sincere reconciliation and genuine peace has come fully in play. The extension of the compromise negotiations and agreements will depend upon how far this new spirit makes headway. In view of the innumerable unfavourable influences at work we cannot but welcome with pleasure the change in Czecho-Slovak policy — a change which will, we trust, prove to be a lasting one. For we really have not much time left; and in any case it is a question whether the short period still at our disposal will be sufficient to bring into being a new spirit and with the aid of that new spirit to bring into being the new independent Danube Valley organisation. It is not Hungary that is responsible for the delay and for the waste of precious years; and there can be no doubt that it will not be Hungary's fault if the desired results are not attained. We trust the encouraging words will be followed by deeds.