

PROBLEMS OF DANUBIAN UNION

BY

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The New Commonwealth Institute set up a Committee on Central European Questions and issued a Questionnaire with a view to rallying general interest in this very important problem and in the hope of creating a starting-point for further studies.

We reproduce here the valuable observations of Sir Christopher Robinson on the idea of Danubian Federation.

The *New Commonwealth Institute's* initiative is of the greatest interest. The problems of *Central Europe* or as we use to say of *South Eastern Europe* are momentous factors of peace and war. We are at war for these very problems. And yet they are very superficially known in *Western Europe*. The immense complexity of the problem may excuse our ignorance.

The Questionnaire is divided in two parts. The first deals with historical conditions and the second with the idea of a Danubian Union. In my opinion there is an aspect of the problem that is overlooked in the Questionnaire: and that is its geographical importance. Now whatever political scheme may be devised for European blocs, for *Buffer states* or other defensive coalitions against aggression, it is obvious that the most important factor is the geographical one.

We know for example that the *Rhine* properly fortified is an impregnable barrier against an attacking army; we have had an example of the efficacy of the opening of the Dutch floodgates in the Low Countries and we are now witnessing the gallant Finns utilising their lakes, mountains and marshes to hold up the vast Bolshevik hordes.

But of all such natural defences, none are more formidable than the *Carpathian Mountains*, that giant

elliptical basin which in the hands of the *Hungarians* has for centuries been the mightiest stronghold of *Europe*. This factor, if neglected, may mislead the statesmen in their judgement and in their conclusion, while, well utilised, may help to rebuild what had been a cornerstone of European politics in the past, a solid block capable of stopping the advance of aggressive forces towards the *East* or the *West*.

The *Carpathian Basin* is not only a marvellous creation of nature, but its position is unique at the gates of the Balkans and on the central course of the Danube between the Russian steppes and the *German-inhabited Central Europe*.

Without the *Carpathian* power, there can be no stability in Central Europe. With the destruction of Hungary, the work of the peace treaties can be considered only as a means to facilitate the tendencies of expansion from West towards East or from East towards West, which are diametrically opposed to the centuries-old policy of the Western Powers. The Treaty between the Allies and Germany concluded in 1919 may be considered good or bad, but it is beyond comprehension why the dispositions of Versailles are maintained in the Carpathian basin which time has proved to have been of the utmost calamity to civilized Europe. The dismemberment of *Hungary* is a glaring example of diplomatic or political short-sightedness. Here was a nation of culture and good order which never attempted to dominate its neighbours, which did its utmost to avoid war in 1914 and which only reluctantly permitted itself to be dragged under the deadly threat of the *Russian* advance. Having come in, Hungary fought cleanly and her treatment of enemy aliens and prisoners of war during the 1914—1918 period is one of the bright spots in that murderous struggle. And yet she was singled out for treatment at the end of the war, which was not only a savage and purposeless injustice but which has also broken down the last barrier between the Western democracies and the totalitarian States.

Post-war experience amply proved that, without Hungary and without the defensive strength of the Carpathians, there is no stability and peace. What had been good for ten centuries must be rebuilt again.

The peoples around the Hungarians who live the central part of the *Carpathian* basin happen to be small nationalities, *Slovaks*, *Ruthenes*, *Valachs*, *Skoccats*, *Subians*, all of whom in favour of democracy and peaceable in intention. It is obvious that the restoration of the geographical strength of the Carpathians, manned by these peoples under the inspiration of the Hungarians, historical holders of that great natural fortress, would form a barrier to aggression which would successfully defy all onslaughts on it.

Not only would the reconstruction of the Danube Basin on these lines form such an obstacle, but it would constitute a tremendous moral force in that part of the Continent which would permit the rebuilding of Poland, stabilise and pacify *Central Europe*, and form a sentinel over the *Balkan States* and a buttress for their security.

A Carpathian Federation, somewhat on the American model of ten million nationalities with the largest possible independence led by another eleven million Hungarians, combined with the perfect economic entity of the Carpathian Basin, would form a block before which any aggressor would quail, chiefly when a reconstituted Poland would again understand the great moral and strategic force of such a neighbourhood. Why Western European statesman cannot perceive that — if indeed they cannot — passes all comprehension.

But to continue the present situation of a dismembered Hungary and a group of small States hopelessly divided among themselves, while powerful neighbours are getting bolder and bolder every day in their expansionist schemes, is a very dangerous policy. It is much to be hoped that the future resettlement of Europe will be based upon realities and geographical factors rather than on the wishful thinking and ineffectual visions of 1919, which have nothing more to commend them than the disenchantment of the past two decades and the utter failure of disarmament, minority protection and treaty revision. The years of unfulfilled promises must be followed by positive achievements.