

RECONSTRUCTION IN THE DANUBE VALLEY ?

BY

ANDREW BAJCSY-ZSILINSZKY

It would be a mistake to ignore the fact that the Munich Four-Power Agreement has not brought about an easing of the tension in European and international politics in a measure calculated to reassure the civilized world. We Hungarians, for instance, would find it difficult to contradict the statement contained in the leading article of "Le Temps" on 16th January which said that, although Hungarian public opinion rejoiced over the restoration of a million Hungarians in Upper Hungary, it was depressed by the refusal to grant the right of self-determination to Ruthenia and Slovakia and by the discrimination against the principle of the Holy Crown in favour of the ethnic principle.

We must state our case clearly to Europe. More than once in the course of history the Hungarians were wellnigh exterminated, here, in the heart of Europe, by overwhelmingly superior forces inspired by hostile intent. In defending ourselves we were also defending Europe, but Europe usually took no notice of us, or in the best case came to our aid when it was too late or, as in the case of the retaking of Buda from the Turks, when we had, of our own strength and at a terrible price, first broken the power of an Empire bent on the destruction of Christian civilization. But however hopeless the situation was, however critical the time, we have never relinquished St. Stephen's idea, and we will not be disloyal to it in the future either. On the other hand, it has been stated times without number by all our politicians of

importance, who are scrupulously conscious of their responsibility, that we do not wish to enforce our historical rights by means of fresh conquests, but that we are willing to leave the question of the territories beyond the Hungarian ethnographic borders to the self-determination of the non-Magyar races which for centuries lived under the shadow of the Sacred Crown, and that we are content to accept their decision. Therefore though we insist on our historical rights, we leave their enforcement to the Wilsonian principle of self-determination. Why, then, are the Ruthenians not allowed to exercise that natural right of self-determination which has so often been preached and which at the time of the Sudeten German crisis was so loudly proclaimed?

This is one of the questions that, we frankly admit, are very distressing to Hungarian national public opinion and which hold out but little hope that a new and better order in general will be established in Central Europe and that the internal peace of that region will be ensured. But we have also another reason for grave anxiety.

With bated breath we follow events in Europe and America, and read with great interest and excitement the news of the journeys to and fro of the world's diplomats and the results of their pourparlers. Count Ciano's visit to Budapest, Mr. Chamberlain's negotiations in Rome, Colonel Beck's conversations with Herr Hitler, Count Ciano's shooting party at Bélye and his stay in Belgrade, the trip to Germany of the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Csáky, and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia's recent talks with King Carol of Rumania — all these occurrences show that the responsible statesmen of both "axes" are conscientiously labouring to find the means of a general European appeasement. Events in the Far East play their role in affairs, just as do the developments in the Spanish civil war and the increased interest displayed by the U. S. A. in European matters, an eloquent proof of which was the reception accorded in America to Mr. Eden. But may we Hungarians be allowed to say something frankly? May we be allowed to quote the good old proverb about too many cooks spoiling the broth? Something like that appears to threaten. And the broth that we would like to

enjoy is the reconstruction of Central Europe, in particular of the Danube Valley, with a better order of things and real peace. We even dare to say that of all the broths being cooked at present by diplomacy none is of such great importance as this. We know that we are not the only people in the world, and that within the framework of their own Empires and spheres of interest the Great Powers of Europe have problems enough to solve. But the European Great Powers must not be allowed to think that with the Munich Four-Power Pact everything in Central Europe has been settled, or even that the problems are on the way to settling themselves.

This Central Europe east of the German Reich, this Central Europe where it has not been possible to establish the common Polish-Hungarian frontier so important to universal European interests, is today in a state of almost as great insecurity and confusion as it was some years ago. And even though, with the territorial and political curtailment of a perfidious and suicidally ambitious Czecho-Slovakia, the iron ring of the Little Entente round poor Dismembered Hungary has been broken, it does not mean that the innumerable and senseless antagonisms dividing the diverse peoples of the Danube countries have been bridged over. Our historical conceptions are not limited to the St. Stephen idea; they extend to wider spheres. The drafters of the Paris Peace Treaties, under the influence of war psychosis, threw aside the teachings of history when they created a new and artificial order in Central Europe, an order for which they themselves have already paid dearly. It is to be feared that they are once more about to ignore the lessons of centuries — of a thousand years — of European history. To take one instance, they refuse to recognize the need for a sound and close co-operation between Poland and Hungary. Or again, they are making no effort to set Central Europe on its own feet, and do not expend enough energy on the task of eliminating the differences dividing the nations of the Danube Valley. True, there are reassuring and comforting symptoms. Count Ciano's visit to Belgrade will obviously make it easier for Hungary and Yugoslavia to find a path leading to understanding.

Signs are also in evidence showing that the alliance between Poland and Rumania and Poland's historical friendship with Hungary, which has become an important political factor, will exercise a certain beneficial influence towards inducing a rapprochement between Hungary and Rumania. Naturally Hungary's minimum claims must be recognized. A Hungaro-Yugoslav rapprochement is likely to improve the relations between Hungary and Rumania. Also, in point of fact, as regards the question of a common Polish-Hungarian frontier, just because of the complete confusion and civil warfare reigning in Ruthenia, a certain inclination begins to spread through Europe to consider with greater favour the possibilities of facilitating closer co-operation between Poland and Hungary.

The situation, then, is not quite hopeless, and we Hungarians are not a people to lose heart easily. About 1050 years ago, before the Hungarians took possession of Hungary, it was written by Leo the Wise, Emperor of Byzantium, that the Hungarians were not like the rest of the nations who confessed themselves conquered after a single defeat.

Europe must learn that a hundred defeats cannot break the spirit of the Hungarian race. Viewed from a historical perspective and weighed in the balance of history, this nation shows the attributes of the fabulous dragon on whose shoulders ten new heads grew the moment one was cut off.

— y —