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RSES-21



May 20, 1971

ECE/GDR: THE PRAGUE ENVIRONMENTAL SYMPOSIUM --
A SHORTLIVED COMPROMISE

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The May 3-10 Symposium in Prague of environmental experts from member countries of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), as the April 19-30 ECE Plenary Session beforehand, again produced sharp East-West divergences over the issue of East German (GDR) representation in international organizations. This paper reviews the nature of recent clashes on this subject and the prospects for their repetition in the near future.

ABSTRACT

The Soviets may now be more willing to obstruct any environmental or other multilateral conferences which they feel cannot be exploited to enhance the international status of East Germany or further their concept of a Conference on European Security (CES). Soviet/East European tactics at the 26th plenary session of the ECE in Geneva last month suggested that Prague, the host government, would cancel a scheduled environmental conference if the demands on GDR attendance were not met. In the end, a last-minute compromise downgraded the ministerial-level conference to that of a symposium of experts, allowing East German participation in the role of observers -- a formula utilized previously in various ECE symposia held in Eastern Europe. Although the Soviets

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PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 22, 2004

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again failed to achieve a breakthrough for the GDR at the ECE plenum in Geneva and at the Prague symposium, the GDR representation issue will remain a focal point in East-West confrontations.

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East-West Deadlocked Over GDR Attendance at Environmental Conference

The April 19-30 plenary session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in Geneva provided the stage for perhaps the most determined East-West confrontation thus far over the issue of the international status of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Soviets and their East European allies sought to obtain GDR participation in the ECE and, failing that, demanded that the GDR attend the ECE Conference on Environmental Problems, scheduled to begin in Prague on May 3, even though the GDR was not a member of either the UN or the ECE. The fact that the conference was to take place in an East European capital was obviously considered additional leverage in the communist nations' efforts to enhance the GDR's international status.

At the plenum, the question of GDR participation in the work of the ECE had been proposed by the Poles; this proposal was withdrawn on April 20 when it became clear it would be defeated. Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Winiewicz in Geneva called for GDR participation and also for the admission of both Germanies to UN membership.¹ The Poles were joined by other communist nations, with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in particular pressing the issue of GDR participation and, later, GDR attendance at the Prague conference. At the last moment, the Czechoslovaks threatened to withdraw as hosts for the conference unless their demands on GDR participation were met.

In an effort to save the meeting, the ministerial-level conference was reduced in rank on April 29 to a "symposium of experts". The compromise proposal to replace the conference by a symposium was introduced by ECE Executive Secretary Stanovnik, a Yugoslav. The GDR was to be invited by Czechoslovakia as a "guest" and would send observers, as had been permitted in other ECE symposia held in Eastern Europe.

East Germans at Prague Symposium

East German observers sat at a table apart from other ECE participants behind a sign stating they were from the GDR and were guests of the Czechoslovak Government; in contrast to the white identification cards

1. There have been other East European proposals for GDR-FRG membership. Although the FRG is not a member of the UN, it belongs to all special organizations in the UN and contributes to them financially. The GDR has been excluded from these special organizations, as well as from such subsidiary UN agencies as ECE and WHO (World Health Organization). At the end of April 1971, the GDR claimed diplomatic relations with 29 states, and consular and "other state" relations with 15 more. It also claimed to be a member of 250 international organizations and a participant in 500 international treaties and conventions.

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of the participants, the East Germans had pink cards. However, the placard identifying the East Germans omitted the representative institution and postal address; in earlier ECE symposia, the GDR representatives had been identified by institution, postal address, and national designation -- i.e., the GDR. The statement of the GDR participant, the GDR Deputy Minister for Science and Technology, was, according to a US Embassy Prague telegram, technical in content, neutral in tone, and similar to those of many other participants.

At the conclusion of the GDR statement, the Czechoslovak chairman of the symposium explained that the GDR and CSSR were neighbors and were cooperating in the field of environment, "where cooperation is essential". As a result, the Czechoslovak Government invited the GDR to the symposium and hoped that the GDR experience could be helpful to those countries which did not have relations with the GDR.

Earlier, in his formal acceptance speech as chairman of the symposium, the Czechoslovak made an oblique reference to countries attempting to block the efforts of other countries in worthwhile international cooperation. On the other hand, at least a few Czechoslovak participants at the symposium claimed privately to have attempted to downgrade the GDR "problem", even reviewing the GDR statement to make certain it contained nothing offensive.

Reported Atmosphere at Symposium

US Embassy Prague reported that the political atmosphere at the symposium, particularly towards the end (May 10), was relaxed. Initial tension reportedly reflecting the hard bargaining at the ECE plenum in Geneva, the visible presence of the GDR in the conference room, and the various maladroit introductory comments of the Czechoslovak hosts at the beginning of the symposium were said to have eventually given way to an easier East-West relationship, when the communist nations -- including the GDR participants -- made obvious efforts to improve the atmosphere.

During the discussions, the communists generally spoke on substantive matters. There were, however, political overtones in the statements of Polish, Soviet, and Bulgarian participants who noted the necessity of GDR participation if international arrangements in the environmental field were to be effective. The Soviets also mentioned looking forward to having the GDR as a full member at the UN-sponsored Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972.

Led by the Soviets, the East Europeans made a concerted effort to have the GDR mentioned in the report summarizing the discussions at the

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symposium. (The report was prepared by the Secretariat with the help of rapporteurs drawn from participants.) The communists focused on a summary of several East European statements in the general debate which had expressed approval of the GDR presence. After the US rapporteur for this item rejected the Soviet rapporteur's proposals, the communists then proposed a "compromise" in which expressions of thanks to the Czechoslovak Government for having invited the GDR would be reported. This was rejected by the Western caucus, whereupon the communists dropped the idea of including mention of the GDR.

The Role of the Czechoslovaks as Host Government

The Czechoslovak regime -- which first proposed Prague as the venue of the meeting in 1967 (i.e., before the beginning of the "Prague Spring") -- undoubtedly sought to gain a certain "political rehabilitation" by continuing as host for the meeting and by taking an active role in ECE activities. At the same time, the regime may have felt that political capital would accrue to it in the communist world if it achieved a breakthrough on the GDR representation issue (where other communist nations had failed to do so). In the final analysis, however, and despite the genuine interest of the regime in cooperation on environmental problems and in hosting the ECE meeting, Prague is wholly bound to the Soviet foreign policy line and accordingly followed Soviet dictates on all problems arising during the ECE plenum and on GDR participation. The East Germans could have been expected to bring heavy pressures upon the Soviets and, particularly, the hapless Czechoslovaks, to obtain some form of GDR representation at a meeting hosted in Prague.

Czechoslovak press commentary on the symposium was generally restrained. The strongest article appeared in the May 6 edition of Prace, the central trade union daily, which deplored the fact that the symposium did not begin in the most propitious atmosphere possible because some western nations had sharply protested against GDR participation. The

T. The Soviets have long made pro forma efforts to enhance the international status of the GDR by having them admitted as members or observers to UN organizations. The East Germans, however, undoubtedly have been dissatisfied with these efforts by the Soviets, as well as by other Warsaw Pact members, and there have been unconfirmed reports that, as a result of East German protests, Warsaw Pact members have agreed to press more vigorously the East German objectives of gaining recognition in the international community and membership in international organizations. There appears to have been little genuine enthusiasm among the Warsaw Pact to promote East German objectives, in large part because of the unpopularity of the "Prussian socialists" in Eastern Europe.

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article pointed to the valuable experience which the GDR could contribute and declared that the move to exclude the GDR was a remnant of the cold war, which must be eliminated.

Soviet Attitudes on Environmental and Other International Forums

Soviet tactics at the ECE plenum in Geneva indicate that Moscow may try similar tactics at selected international meetings in which the West is interested or which, in turn, have only marginal interest for Moscow, in order to enhance the international status of the GDR. This may be particularly true with respect to environmental affairs, since the Soviets reportedly have reservations about making any international commitments on the subject. During the ECE meeting in December 1970, Soviet sources indicated privately that their primary interest in environmental questions was to further their objective of convening a CES and, in the meantime, thwart any real effort to increase ECE competence in these questions. Perhaps Moscow's desire to have environmental matters on a CES agenda stems mainly from an attempt to make such a conference as attractive as possible to the West, which has shown greater interest in ecology. (It might be noted that Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania have shown interest in East-West cooperative efforts, particularly in the ECE, to solve pollution problems.)

The Soviet attitude toward the 1972 Stockholm environmental conference is likely to depend on the political climate obtaining at the time of conference preparations -- particularly on progress, or lack of it, on such vital European security issues as the CES, Berlin, the FRG-GDR dialogue, and ratification of FRG treaties with the USSR and Poland. The pressures which the East German leadership brings upon the Soviets to pursue the GDR representation issue must also be a considerable factor in this attitude. Even before Stockholm, however, this issue seems certain to be revived as a focal point of East-West confrontation in other international forums -- even though the Soviets failed to achieve a significant breakthrough for the GDR at the ECE plenum in Geneva or at the Prague symposium.

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