

THE WESTERN CHOICE IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

Editorial Foreword

The apparently imminent Soviet-Western discussion on a possible non-aggression pact or pledge between the NATO and Warsaw Pact powers will inevitably include the question of East-Central European status. It is, therefore, highly relevant and urgent to reconsider Western policy alternatives in East-Central Europe and the possible effect of the aforesaid discussion on the status of the captive peoples. In March of 1963 the Assembly of Captive European Nations adopted a Memorandum which attempts to evaluate and suggest policy choices in East-Central Europe. The Memorandum presents a well-argued Western policy alternative to the current US tendency of augmenting evolutionary forces toward more freedom and economic well-being in the Soviet bloc. The alternative to this "take-it-easy", "don't-push-too-hard" policy, suggested in the ACEN Memorandum, might be called a policy of active encouragement and maintenance of the forces of self-determination and freedom among the nations in the Soviet orbit. On the one hand, this policy is designed to maintain the potential of freedom

in East-Central Europe through constant insistence on free self-determination by the captive peoples; on the other hand, the suggested policy would tend to discourage critical actions on the part of the Soviet Union by maintaining potential disintegrative forces among the captive nations and thus introducing an element of risk into the total policy calculations of the Soviet Union. Thus, the interests of both the captive peoples and of the Western world would be served. The memorandum merits careful attention as a well-argued alternative to the evolutionism of current US policies, which is of questionable meaning and effect. The ACEN Memorandum "The Western Choice in East-Central Europe" follows in a slightly condensed form.

I

Fairness commands that the examination of Western views on and policies toward East-Central Europe be prefaced by the statement that it is in the legislative bodies of the Western nations, the United States Congress above all, and in such international parliamentary assemblies as the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference, that the issue of the freedom of the captive nations receives nowadays the greatest attention and the most outspoken support. It is in such bodies that the purpose of an East-Central Europe—free from outside domination and living under institutions and governments freely chosen by the respective peoples—is most consistently upheld. It is in these respected bodies that practical policies incompatible with the proclaimed purpose find few advocates or supporters.

In the absence of a common policy in the framework of NATO, there is, in the West, on the executive governmental level, a wide range of positions in regard to East-Central Europe. Three major trends deserve examination.

The first, as set forth in authoritative United States statements,* correctly notes that despite changes in the direction of more internal autonomy, "Soviet military power remains the ultimate force that sustains the power and authority of the Communist minorities, guarantees the continued existence of the regimes, and prevents any national defection from the Soviet bloc." In line with this basic assessment of the situation, the United States objective is defined as "to see in Eastern Europe fully independent nations enjoying internal freedom and normal relations with all countries." The expectations are, however, very sober. Because of Soviet domination "any far-reaching change, involving a rollback of Soviet control, is unlikely at an early date," and, except in the event of unforeseen developments, "progress toward the United States long-term objective" in Eastern Europe "appears realizable only by gradual means." Extension of United States and Western influences "by maintaining and developing more normal and active relations with the Eastern European governments of the Soviet bloc"—is declared to be the practical policy. This is to be pursued to the extent possible to do so without, at the same time, sacrificing basic American principles, "without endorsing the internal and foreign policies of the governments,

or accepting or implying that we (i.e. the United States Government) accept in any way the status quo of Soviet domination as a satisfactory or permanent condition of affairs in that area."

This neatly balanced definition of goals and means, and sober assessment of future outlook presents one basic flaw. Experience indicates, indeed, that any progress on the road to more active relations with the Eastern European governments is likely to be paid by silence on the ultimate goal ("silence is consent" is an old saying the Russians like to quote when it serves their purpose); by the elimination from the agenda of the United Nations of the one fragment of East European subjugation with which the World Organization is concerned, the Question of Hungary which might be an "irritant" to the Soviet rulers but is a stimulant to the captive peoples; by subdued information programs; in short, by actions of commission or omission conveying to the people most concerned the depressing message of the acceptance of the status quo.

There seem to be some misconceptions at the root of this attempt to reconcile ends and means which in practice, if not in theory, are mutually exclusive. One is the belief that direct contacts—personal, cultural, economic, through governmental channels are the sine qua non of Western influence with both regimes and peoples. The fact that contacts are but minor means of carrying influence is overlooked. In a situation like the one prevailing in Eastern Europe, the choice of the carrier itself would preclude any positive influence upon peoples profoundly, if mostly silently, hostile to the regimes. As to the ruling groups, it would be self-deceptive to expect that regimes perfectly aware of their utter dependence on Soviet power could be tempted to help engineer their own doom. The main point is that influence is not a function of contacts but rather of the message the West can give to the captive peoples. To the extent to which it succeeds in projecting itself as strong, determined and winning, and to the extent it also cares to identify itself with the goal of the captive peoples, it exercises a stimulating influence on the people and a restraining influence on their unchosen rulers. Conversely, eagerness to develop official contacts is viewed as a sign of weakness. It breeds contempt among the ruling groups and discouragement among the broad masses of the people.

It follows that the pursuit of contact and gradual ameliorations can only be reconciled with the proclaimed goal of freedom and independence, if this goal is never drowned in silence but, on the contrary, is frequently and authoritatively voiced and pursued by meaningful, if not immediately effective, political actions. Past experience would indicate, however, that such efforts at reconciliation are fraught with so many practical difficulties that the prospects of accomplishing them successfully for any length of time appear very dim.

The second trend, quite widespread in Europe, is to regard the issue of Soviet imperialism at the expense of the captive nations as a convenient point of rebuttal whenever Soviet "anti-colonialism" displays an excessively cynical form in international assemblies. In this view, the issue of the freedom of the Eastern half of Europe is a long-range moral problem; it has ceased to belong to practical politics. The Communist regimes and the status quo of the captive nations' subordination to Moscow are accepted as "realities" which neither the peoples concerned nor the West is prepared or able to change fundamentally. Contacts and trading with these regimes are viewed as matters of expediency and national interest, and are all the more welcomed as they are deemed to contribute to the evolution of the Communist regimes toward more humane and rational ways.

Lastly, a third trend averts a direct confrontation with the problem of the captive nations by holding out the more far-reaching prospect of a continental system stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals. It rests on a rather sanguine conception of the power of Communist China and the threat it would represent for the Soviet Union.

In spite of being so different, the aforementioned trends rest on a number of closely related, if not common, premises, assumptions and judgments. They bear a closer review.

1. "The situation in Europe is stabilized and can only be changed at the prohibitive price of war"—is more often than not the fundamental premise of the opponents of an active East-Central European policy.

This proposition fails to pass any closer scrutiny. The Soviet Union is as intent as ever to gain further ground in Europe and its rulers believe that they could succeed in this without war, by intimidation and a crisis strategy.

For more than three years they have been pursuing this strategy by stirring up the Berlin crisis on the calculation that sooner or later, when faced with a clear-cut choice between risking all or accepting Soviet terms—the West will yield. This, Moscow expects, would undermine the credibility of the American guarantee and induce a gradual break-down of the Western alliances. The fact that a halt was called to this offensive, following the Cuban miscalculation, might only indicate that, before forbidding again or pushing to a showdown, Moscow wants to complete the build-up of its military potential and certain specific armament programs, bring some order in the Communist house, and in the process, sow confusion and complacency among its opponents.

A Western policy which would not aim beyond stabilization would prompt a bolder Soviet bid for the mastery of Europe, for the simple reason that it would suppress one of the deterrents to a reckless policy of intimidation: the spirit of resistance in East-Central Europe. Paradoxically enough then, to achieve stability, the West must aim beyond stability to a Europe united in its natural confines.

2. By denouncing the coexistence policy of Khrushchev—one often hears —Communist China has certified the genuineness of this policy.

In fact, Khrushchev himself has called coexistence a form of struggle for the achievement of the ultimate Communist goal. The program adopted at the XXII Party Congress leaves no doubt that for Moscow peaceful coexistence is—in the words of an American authority on Soviet affairs—a prolonged contest in which it must exert its full strength and will in order to make decisive gains by all means short of nuclear war."

3. Since liberation of East-Central Europe is only possible by some kind of military action, it is said, and since the United States and its allies do not contemplate any such action—it would be irresponsible to represent freedom and independence for the captive nations as an objective of American or Western policy.

Commitment to a purpose is in itself a political action productive of far-reaching effects. The Communists have always recognized and acted upon this truth. Their strength lies precisely in their ability to bring about change in their favor by means short of all-out war. To accept the theory that an area or a people once taken over by communism are beyond recovery by similar means is to admit defeat in advance.

4. It is claimed that Eastern Europe is in the midst of a process of relaxation of terror and gradual liberalization. The process would be disturbed by a Western insistence of maximal goals. It could be, on the contrary, furthered by Western aid and an expanded Western program of contacts, trade and cultural exchanges.

To begin with, it would be much more correct to speak in terms of relaxation of repression than in terms of liberalization. The changes which have occurred in East-Central Europe since the death of Stalin represent essentially a lessening of irrational and unnecessary terror. They are not changes in the nature of the totalitarian dictatorships, or in the nature of the relationship with the Soviet Union.

These relaxations of repression, varying in degree from country to country, occurred in the past and are likely to appear again in three circumstances:

- a. Uncertainty in regard to the real source of ultimate authority in Moscow, with the ensuing caution and vacillation on all echelons of power. This was the case during the struggle for power in the Kremlin, following Stalin's death.
- b. Communist fear of a general uprising at a particularly inauspicious time. This was the case of Poland, in October 1956, and it caused a substantial tactical retreat on the part of the Communist regime.
- c. Confidence among the ruling groups deriving from international developments favorable to the Soviet Union and from a mood of dejection among their subjects.

The first two of these circumstances were certainly not products of Western aid, credits, contacts or good will. They were the result of a combination of internal and external pressures. As for the third circumstance in which some relaxation occurred in the past, discouragement among the ruled and confidence among the rulers, this certainly involved Western responsibilities. But these were not of a sort that warrant any satisfaction. For discouragement means more security for Soviet Russia and, hence, a bolder Soviet policy toward its main target: Western Europe.

Economic aid, it must be conceded, could at best help in preserving some of the gains secured by popular pressure in a country like Poland, providing, however, that the respective regime is kept aware that any further encroachment on the very limited liberties and rights the Polish people recovered in 1956 would bring about the termination of aid.

A recent report of the Special Study Mission of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States House of Representatives, rightly remarks, that "the Western European countries tend to look at the Soviet bloc mainly as a market for their exports—while the Communists regard the West primarily as a source of essential goods." "Western exports of capital goods enable the bloc—continues the report—to telescope technological progress in various fields." "The Soviet bloc derives greater benefit from this trade than do the countries of free Europe"—concluded the report. The Western Powers seem to be set to pursue such trade. If so, in the light of these findings, they should at least avail themselves of their powerful bargaining position. They do not have to help the expansion of the Communist war-making machine by credits. And they could use their position to induce an increase in the production of consumer goods. They could even avail themselves of their important economic bargaining power to wrest political concessions that would directly benefit the people in the captive lands. Then, indeed, they could lay claim to a real contribution to the welfare of these people.

II

The Western stake in East-Central Europe derives from the strategic location of the area, from the increment Soviet power is now drawing from the manpower and resources of the region, as well as from the historic incompatibility between Soviet aims and the interests and aspirations of its ancient nations.

East-Central Europe—half a million square miles and one hundred million people strong—lies between the Soviet Union proper and free Western Europe. It is the place where the very centers of power of the two contending camps stand in close, direct and decisive confrontation. Just beyond it lie prime strategic goals: westward—free Europe, the great concentration of skills and resources, which is, in the Communist strategy plan, a decisive way-station in their drive for world conquest: eastward—the very heart of the Soviet Union. Within this area live historic nations—hostile to the foreign rule and alien pattern of life foisted upon them, nations which yearn to live in freedom and have, therefore, strong reasons to obstruct the Soviets and help the West. From the point of view of manpower and production, East-Central Europe represents a 40 per cent increment to the economic power of the Soviet Union.

From the short-range point of view, East-Central Europe may play a decisive role in thwarting the present Soviet strategy of gradual expansion by political means, into the Western half of the old continent. Once this objective is achieved, East-Central Europe would become the area in which the West can accomplish the most significant strategic gains. It is the place where a United States-backed Western Europe can gradually expand eastward, by political means, the border of freedom. An East-Central Europe from which Soviet political control has been eliminated, would change the whole strategic picture. The Soviet Union would become a danger of manageable dimension, a danger which could largely be checked by local means alone, leaving American power free to look after its numerous global commitments. It would become itself a vulnerable target of Western political warfare aimed at transforming Soviet Russia into an open society by the Western-supported exertions of the peoples directly concerned.

The short-range stake of the West in East-Central Europe has increased and not diminished as a result of what, for want of a better name, is described as nuclear stalemate. As long, indeed, as the United States possessed overwhelming nuclear supremacy, the security of Western Europe was absolute. Strategically it mattered little whether the peoples of East-Central Europe were friendly or hostile to the Soviet Union. Once, however, the Soviet Union has acquired a significant strategic nuclear striking power, both nuclear powers are reluctant to resort to these frightening weapon systems. Unlike the West, however, the Soviet Union is systematically engaged in gaining ground by exploiting, on the one hand, its superior ground forces and, on the other, the fear and sense of responsibility of the West.

This analysis of the dangers the West is still faced with in Western Europe seems to be largely confirmed by certain conclusions drawn by responsible quarters of the United States from the Cuban confrontation. It was stressed that the success of the confrontation on the withdrawal of Soviet missiles was primarily due to the strategic advantages enjoyed by the United States in the Caribbean area. It was furthermore underscored that because of the specific strategic conditions involved, the Cuban confrontation does not provide a valid indication of Soviet behavior in different circumstances. This could only mean that in Cuba the United States could impose its will without having to resort to a nuclear war, while the Soviets could only counter United States action by having recourse to its strategic nuclear arms. In Europe, the situation is exactly the opposite. Hence the crisis of confidence marked by attempts to build up independent nuclear forces in Europe. Hence also the American insistence to build up the conventional forces of NATO and thereby reduce the capability of Moscow to score gains by intimidation and blackmail.

In these conditions, every factor which weighs negatively in the calculus of risk of the Soviet Union acquires strategic significance. One of such factors is certainly the trouble-making capacity of the people of Eastern Europe. Whether or not the Soviet rulers must reckon in their calculations with a significant risk factor in the area lying between their borders and their Western targets may influence the degree of their recklessness. This would be particularly relevant in a situation like that in Berlin, in which the objective is precisely to make the West believe that the choice is confined to risking all-out nuclear war or making concessions that would discredit American reliability and induce in Western Europe "realistic" trends toward disengagement and neutrality.

It is within the power of the West to compel the Soviet rulers to reckon with an important risk factor in Eastern Europe. The risk factor is indeed in direct ratio with the intensity of the spirit of resistance of the people of East-Central Europe. And the latter hinges on the prevailing impression with regard to the will to win of the West and with regard to the Western commitment to the cause of their freedom and independence. These are the sources of hope on which the spirit of resistance feeds.

Until the Cuban events, the prevailing impression on both counts was negative. Hope in a better future and faith in the West, and with them the spirit of resistance, were at their lowest ebb. The Cuban confrontation has somewhat improved the assessment of Western will and power. Should the West, as it is hoped, appear henceforth consistently in the posture of the firm and winning side, the problem of keeping hope alive and thereby strengthening the East-Central European deterrent will have been largely solved. It remains however for the West to prove its concern for the people of East-Central Europe. This can only be accomplished by an early and clear identification of the West with the peoples of the captive countries and their goal to recover free choice in regard to their internal and international affairs.

Such a long-range objective is not unrealistic. Liberation without war, though not without protracted political struggle, is possible. The Soviet empire is obviously rent by serious internal contradictions. The difficulty of maintaining ideological unity and central direction, as illustrated by the Sino-Soviet discord; the inability of the Soviet Union to keep up the armament race without withdrawing some of the material improvements its people have gained in the last few years, and / or without diminishing their abnormally high investments in the heavy industry; the imbalanced nature of the Communist economy and the utter failure of collectivized agriculture; the increasing non-conformity of youth and the ferment among intellectuals; the unbridgeable gulf between the requirements of subordination and exploitation in the Soviet empire, and the national pride of the historic nations of East-Central Europe—these are but a few of the contradictions. If they have, as yet, not generated dramatic consequences, this is largely due to the demoralizing effect of the easy and unnecessary successes Western misjudgment, irresolution and weakness have afforded to the USSR. Ever since the end of the Second World War, the Soviets have been permitted to show, by their actions, that history was on their side; that changes invariably occur in their favor and that, accordingly, the victory of communism on a world-wide scale is only a matter of time. If the West were to act on the perfectly justified assumption that the Soviet empire has more reasons to fear any major war than the West, it could at least deny its adversary any further successes. The effect would be most far-reaching. The latent forces of disruption and opposition, no longer inhibited by a sentiment of futility, would be unleashed in Eastern

Europe. In favorable circumstances, which can be fostered by a purposeful Western policy, such as a struggle for supreme power or internal disturbances in the Soviet Union that would tie down the Soviet armed forces, the captive Nations could begin making good their escape.

III

In the view of the Assembly of Captive European Nations, the morale of the captive European peoples and their faith in the West would be bolstered, and the interest—short and long term — of both free and captive nations would be advanced should the United States and her principal allies adopt the specific measures listed under "What to do," while refraining from the action listed under "What not to do."

What To Do:

1. To raise in all high-level conferences with the rulers of the Soviet Union the issue of the restoration of the right of self-determination to the peoples of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.
2. To counter Soviet demands on Berlin with the plan for an over-all peace settlement based on the right of self-determination and designed to solve all the unresolved consequences of the Second War in Europe.
3. To inscribe the question of the denial of self-determination to the nations of East-Central Europe on the agenda of the United Nations regardless of the prospect to secure the required majorities. To raise, in other words, the issue in the U.N. on its merits and not as a mere point of rebuttal.

The initial purpose of such action would be to assure the peoples concerned that their issue is an objective of Western policy, an open and not closed issue as claim the Soviet rulers. This would be accomplished if a group of Western Powers, backed by the United States, would take the initiative. For durable impact, such action would have to be renewed at every session on the pattern of the wearing-down tactics followed by the Soviet Union on the question of the Chinese representation in the United Nations. The Western Powers could easily pattern their draft resolution on one of the proposals introduced in the United Nations by the Soviet delegation on April 24, 1962, in the Special Committee on decolonization, is almost ideally suited for this purpose.

4. To keep the question of Hungary on the agenda of each United Nations General Assembly session and renew steadfastly the demand for compliance with past resolutions.
5. To give assurance to the people of Albania that the territorial integrity of their country and their right of self-determination will be safeguarded against any intervention on the part of their neighbors.
6. To maintain carefully the policy of non-recognition of the forcible incorporation of the Baltic States in the Soviet Union.
7. To insist that the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is of universal scope and validity and, accordingly, oppose the double standard gaining ground in the UN on self-determination, and to urge the Special Committee of 24 Nations, charged with the implementation of the above declaration, to extend its concern and investigation to the peoples and countries subjected to Soviet colonial rule.
8. To carry out in the United Nations and at all appropriate international gatherings a campaign of truth with respect to the denial of human rights and freedoms in the captive countries.
9. To give support in the United Nations to the proposal of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions for an investigation of the condition and status of political prisoners and for the elaboration and enactment of an international convention on the regime of the political prisoners.
10. To be always mindful, in their trading policies, of the fact that the interests of the welfare of the captive peoples and of the security of the West are both adversely affected by the preferential treatment given by the Communist regimes in East-Central Europe to the development of heavy and armament industries, at the expense of the needs of the people concerned. Similarly, to take advantage of trade negotiations in order to press for the suppression of existing prohibitive duties on individual food, medicine and clothing gift packages from the free world to individuals in the captive countries.
11. To develop, extend and invigorate broadcasts to the captive countries, and to consider the establishment, in the framework of NATO, of a General Staff for Political Warfare.
12. To warn all Western visitors to the captive countries against permitting their hosts to use them as tools of their political propaganda, as well as against fraternization with local Communist leaders.

What Not To Do:

1. Not to engage in actions or enter into agreements implying or suggesting that the Western Powers have reconciled themselves to the status quo and regard it as final. The oft-mentioned idea of a non-aggression pledge or pact between the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries would certainly be construed by the people of East-Central Europe as a Western

sell-out. Such pledges would give the Soviet Union or their puppets no guarantees of security that are not already embodied in the United Nations Charter. The only reason the Soviet rulers have consistently sought them was their awareness that they would create legal obstacles to any further Western concern with the fate of the captive peoples, and that, by generating discouragement and resignation, they will have consequences highly detrimental to Western security. Past commitments, declared principles and self-interest, therefore equally command to the Western Powers to stand firmly on the position that any and all security arrangements should follow, and not precede, an overall European settlement based on the right of self-determination.

2. Not to undertake actions and moves which give respectability to the satellite regimes and compound the damaging effects of past acts of recognition.

3. Not to grant aid, long or short term credits to the satellite regimes. Assistance in the special case of Poland can only be justified to the extent it helps preserve the gains the Polish people wrested in 1956. The helping countries should, therefore, make it clear that any aid would terminate if there is a return to forced collectivization, and/or if the rights of the church, the freedom of worship or any other rights or freedoms were further curtailed,

4. Not to place undue reliance on the political benefits to be drawn from exchange programs, and to insist on full reciprocity in such exchanges.

* Particularly in the most comprehensive recent statement of United States policy on the captive nations, the statement of the Honorable William R. Tyler, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Department of State, before the Subcommittee on Europe of the United States House of Representatives, on September 13, 1962.