Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 650
28 April 1957

General policy of the Council of Europe

Report
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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1. INTRODUCTION

1. It was M. Spaak who, in 1953, introduced the first debate on the general policy of the Council of Europe ever held in this Assembly. Since then such debates have taken place regularly. Their ultimate aim has been the shaping of a common European policy.

2. Right from the beginning, the central theme of our debates has been the policy of the Soviet Union. The statement issued by M. Spaak on behalf of the Committee on General Affairs on 14th September 1953 opened with the words : " The cause of the recent changes in the world situation is to be found in the new policy adopted by the Soviet Union. "

3. This sentence might, with varying degrees of justification, have been used to preface every report on " the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation " submitted to our Assembly ever since.

4. In his report, M. Spaak pointed out that because of the special nature of the Soviet Union, " our opinions must therefore inevitably be based on certain unproven hypotheses... which means that there will be an inevitable margin of error ". M. Spaak considered that we had to choose between two completely different hypotheses, and it may be useful to recall what he said at the time : " The first, which is somewhat unlikely, and which is at present not supported by any concrete facts, is that the Soviet Union, rejecting the doctrine and teaching of its leaders, has abandoned its deep-rooted hostility towards the West and has accepted the idea of " co-existence ", not as a temporary compromise for reasons of expediency but as a permanent basis of its policy. The second, which is far more probable, is that the slackening of tension in recent months is merely a change of tactics, due either to the fact that the Russians have come to realise that the trials of strength, which took place in Greece, Berlin, or Korea, far from weakening the West have encouraged it to organise itself, or to the fact that the U. S. S. R. is obliged for domestic reasons to slow down the efforts required of it (as of all countries) to maintain its all-out rearmament policy, or again to the fact that in order to obtain its first immediate objective—a rupture between the United States and Europe and disunion between the European countries themselves— it appears wiser to seduce them one by one rather than threaten them en bloc. "

5. M. Spaak inferred from this that the will of the Western countries would remain paralysed so long as they could not make up their minds as to the real aims of the Soviet Union. He therefore proposed the convening of a Four-Power Conference to sound the Russians' intentions.

6. It is now almost four years since we had that first debate, and much has happened in the interval. But our problems, anxieties and discussions are still to a great extent dominated by the existence and the policy of the Soviet Union. After the many hopes and disappointments experienced during this period, we are no longer so much in the dark about the real aims of the Soviet Union. Even now, however, we are reduced, on many points, to suppositions, and time alone will reveal whether they are right or wrong.

7. On this occasion your Committee has felt it desirable to be selective and to deal only with a limited number of topics. Its object was not in any way to try and limit the scope of the debate but rather to infuse a greater sense of purpose into it, so that in the end it may be easier to come to a practical conclusion as to our general feelings on certain spocific subjects.

2.

Soviet policy and recent developments

8. In his report of 1st October 1956 (Doc. 539), M. Benvenuti came to the following conclusion : " The apparent changes in Soviet foreign policy, like those in its internal policy, have made no difference to its final aim, which is the victory of the Communist camp. It is the means to this end that have changed. The U. S. S. R. is striking at the Western Powers in their most vulnerable quarter : their relations with former colonial territories. Setting itself up as a model for the economic development of these areas, it endeavours to penetrate them with its economic and thence political doctrines. " The majority of the Assembly agreed with this analysis.

9. Four months ago, in January, our Assembly held a debate on the international situation. At that time, interest was concentrated on events in Hungary and the Middle East. The Soviet Union played a decisive part in both these events, which had occurred almost at the same time.

10. In this connection, the Assembly adopted Recommendations 132 and 133. It took the opportunity afforded by this crisis to make a new appeal for political unity in Europe and to urge the adoption of a specific common foreign policy for Europe,

11. During the past four months there have been no substantial changes in the situation we discussed at the beginning of January.

12. The Soviet Union is defending the status quo in Central and Eastern Europe, after the setbacks suffered by its policy in those areas during the past year,

Hungary

13. In Hungary attempts at liberalisation are still being moroilossly suppressed, by means of arrests, indictments, death sentences, a campaign against the Churches, the dissolution of the Hungarian Society of Authors and so on. Kadar's puppet Government has proved to be a useful tool for its Soviet masters.

14. It was possible for this state of affairs to come about, in spite of protests from the greater part of the free world, because no one could take on the risk of a new war by resorting to armed intervention. The United Nations, to whom the National Government of M. Imre Nagy had appealed for protection, was powerless to enforce the resolutions passed by the General Assembly calling on the Soviet Union to withdraw its military forces from Hungary and to stop interfering in the internal affairs of Hungary. The only positive step which it was found possible to take was the setting up of an ad hoc committee, which has collected evidence to establish an authoritative and detailed record of events in Hungary.

15. Meanwhile, 190,000 Hungarian refugees have been admitted to other countries. Your Committee feels that our thanks are due to all those countries, and especially to Austria. A flood of refugees suddenly poured into that small country, which accommodated them until other countries took them over; it is still, however, giving asylum to nearly 40,000 refugees.

Other satellite countries

16. In the other satellite countries—Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany—Russian influence has been maintained and strengthened. Revisionist deviations of an ideological and national character have been suppressed as soon as they appeared. There can be no doubt that in all these countries the majority of the population is hostile to the regime imposed upon it, though conditions are not everywhere the same. Rut the brutal suppression of the Hungarian uprising— as of the East German rising before it—and the powerlessness of the Western world to help served to warn the resistance movement to

exercise caution. Despite the de-Stalinisation campaign, the Soviet Union had given proof that it was prepared to defend its position of power by every available means, and there can be no doubt that in similar cases it would do so again with the same success.

Poland

17. This Avould undoubtedly also apply with regard to Poland if a crisis arose. In that country, it is true, M. Gomullca's policy of national communism, supported by the non-communist Opposition among the Polish people, has held its own, above all in the parliamentary elections. It is certain that owing to the heavy damage already suffered by their prestige, the Soviets would only unwillingly decide to embark upon the same repressive measures in Poland as in Hungary, and would do so only in extreme circumstances. M. Gomulka is taking advantage of this. There is, however, no mistaking the fact that Soviet Russia has succeeded in keeping developments in Poland to some extent under control. M. Gomulka was obliged to accept the Soviet claim to leadership, and Soviet armed forces remain in the country. Within the Soviet bloc, Poland is encircled and isolated by the U. S. S. R. and the submissive Governments of Prague and Pankow. Moreover, as guarantor of the Oder-Neisse frontier, established by its own unilateral decision, the Soviet Union is able to exert continuous pressure on the Polish Government.

18. Despite this, however, the moral and political atmosphere in Poland today is very different from that of any other Communist-governed country. Much more personal freedom, public criticism and religious activity are permitted. The Soviet leaders and orthodox Communists elsewhere are perhaps hoping that in the course of a long and stubborn struggle, of which there are many signs, this process can be reversed less dramatically than in Hungary. But it is very doubtful whether that will be possible after all that has already happened.

19. The outcome of this struggle, which will also be influenced by the as yet uncertain developments in Soviet Russia itself, will have a decisive influence on the course of events in the other satellite countries, and perhaps on the relationship between East and West as a whole.

20. There is no doubt that Poland is anxious for Western aid to strengthen her autonomy. There is at present a Polish economic mission in the United States which is trying to negotiate loans, and there has been a Polish offer to develop coal resources in Upper Silesia. Your Committee has come to the conclusion that it might be unwise to cold-shoulder the Poles who wish to renew contacts with the West after more than ten years in isolation, on the ground that their regime does not conform to our democratic standards. We could not help the Hungarian revolution because it meant military intervention. But we can help Poland to strengthen her autonomy and to make it less dependent on the Soviet world. If we do not respond to Poland's call, she may be driven to ask for Soviet assistance. We therefore consider that the Western Powers, while realising the difficulties, should give such economic assistance as they can to Poland.

Yugoslavia

21. Events in Yugoslavia, too, have taken a different course from that expected by the Soviet leaders. Immediately after Marshal Tito's visit to the U. S. S. R. relations between the two countries again deteriorated, even to the point of open hostility, For the time being, the attempt to bring Yugoslavia back into the Communist bloc has failed. True, the Soviet leaders have probably still not given up hope, and it is possible that Marshal Tito, too, is keeping the door open in case developments in the satellite countries and in Soviet Russia should take a turn favourable to his interests and views and to his desire for independence.

German reunification

22. It is now nearly four years since the population of the Russian-occupied zone of Germany rose against the puppet Government which had been forced upon it, The uprising was suppressed by Soviet troops. Since then the system has not gained in popularity, The people demand free elections and union with the Federal Republic.

23. Since the events in Hungary and Poland, the satellite Government in Pankow has been particularly fanatical in its support of the Soviet Union, upon which it is wholly dependent. It condemned the Hungarian uprising, criticised the " revisionist " movement in Poland, and crushed attempts at revion-ist" developments in its own territory (the Harich trial). As to the reunification of Germany, Ulbricht recently declared that this would be possible only when the necessary conditions for the establishment of a communist society had been created in West Germany. Officials of the East German regime objected to the rearmament of the Federal Republic on the ground that it would be no longer possible to seize power by " peaceful" means if the bourgeoisie had military resources at their disposal.

24. A memorandum issued by the Federal Government on 7th September 1956 initiated an exchange of views with the Soviet Government which is still continuing. In the course of this exchange of views, the Soviet Government expressed the wish for a " decisive improvement " in its relations with the Federal Republic, especially in the spheres of trade, cultural exchanges and scientific co-operation.

25. There was, however, no change in the Soviet attitude towards reunification. The Soviet Government, while proposing that consideration should be given to that part of the Eden plan which relates to limited and balanced military forces on both sides of the dividing line in Germany, refuses to allow free elections in the Eastern Zone, Instead, it suggests negotiations between the Federal Republic and the satellite Government in Pankow, but with the aim of maintaining that Government in any event.

26. The Soviet theory of the existence of two " independent German States " which should be responsible for bringing about the reunification of Germany, is unacceptable. This is true, at any rate, so long as there is no freely elected, independent Government in the Eastern Zone. Furthermore, your Committee holds that the joint responsibility of the occupying Powers for reunification should be firmly maintained.

27. Tension cannot be permanently reduced or peace securely established in Europe until the division of Germany has been brought to an end. This view has always been held by the Assembly; the Committee considers that it should once again emphatically declare that the reunification of Germany in freedom is a sine qua non for a lasting improvement of relations between Europe and the U. S. S. R.

28. Representatives of the three Western Powers who have special responsibilities with regard to questions relating to Germany as a whole have been meeting in Washington in a working party together with representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany to review the problem of German reunification. The basis for their talks is the Western proposals at the Four Power meetings at Geneva in November 1955, considered in the light of subsequent developments. These talks are to be continued.

29. There are many reasons for Soviet Russia's interest in retaining its hold over the so-called German Democratic Republic. Ideological, economic, military and political motives are interwoven here, and must all be taken into account in any new attempt to solve the German question. This means that the solution must be sought as part of a general detente in relations between West and East, in which questions of security, disarmament and economic relations will be particularly important.

The Middle East

30. Nowhere is it more urgent to come to an agreed policy than on the Middle East. The Western countries are faced there with a form of nationalism which may appear extravagant, but they must be very careful in dealing with it not to drive it into the arms of Communism. Our vital economic interests in the oil resources of these countries will remain for a long time to come. The Middle East countries depend for their livelihood on their Western customers. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that both sides will strive to find a way out of the present difficulties which will give stability and confidence all round. Your Committee earnestly hopes that the Member States are getting together so that they can agree on certain principles to handle the situation.

31. The specific issues of Gaza, Akaha and the Suez Canal are still difficult. Since we last discussed this problem Israeli troops have withdrawn from Gaza and the Sinai peninsula under United Nations pressure, following the evacuation of British and French troops from Egypt. The situation between Israel and Egypt remains, however, extremely tense. So long as this is so the United Nations Emergency Force must remain in the area while a permanent solution is attempted. The creation of demilitarised zones on both sides of the armistice line patrolled by the United Nations forces might lead to a certain cooling-off, and after a time the good offices of neutral Powers might be offered.

32. The Suez Canal has now been reopened to shipping, but Egypt considers that it has the sole right of administration, insists on payment to itself of canal dues in full, and refuses to allow Israeli ships to pass through the Canal. M. Nasser is unwilling to comply with the six principles unanimously adopted by the Security Council on 14th October 1956. Meanwhile the Security Council has met at the instance of the United States to resume its discussion of the Suez dispute. The Security Council has adjourned after examining the Egyptian memorandum of 24th April 1957. It is greatly to be hoped that a final solution acceptable to all concerned will be found and that at the same time Israel's right of free passage through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran will be placed beyond all doubt and respected.

33. The Soviet Union has also played a decisive part in events in the Middle East. It has stirred up nationalist and anti-colonial passions in this area, particularly in the poorer Arab States. It poses as the protector of national independence against the Western Powers in order to extend its influence in the Middle East and prepare the way for Communism.

34. One may argue about the scope and significance of armaments deliveries to Egypt from the Communist bloc and about the seriousness of the Soviet threat to intervene in the Egyptian conflict by sending " volunteers ". One thing is certain, however, and it is that events in the Middle East would have taken a different course had Egypt not relied upon Soviet support.

35. During our Session in early January the Eisenhower Doctrine was made public. Your Committee welcomes this doctrine, which is based on the belief that a power-vacuum would be dangerous in that area because the countries are not strong enough to protect themselves. It is true that the doctrine will not solve all the troubles of the Middle East, but it shows a new and keener interest on the part of the United States to help those countries which wish to keep and strengthen their independence. Whether it is enough to warn the Soviet Union to keep out and provide funds for economic aid, in the belief that the threat of " indirect aggression " will subside, is another matter. There is still the possibility of a local eruption of Communism or indeed of a gradual process whereby Communism takes over from inside, and it is not clear whether that is covered by the operative paragraphs of the doctrine which refer to " employing the armed forces of the United States as the President deems necessary to secure and protect the territoriaTintegrity and political independence of any nation or group of nations requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism, provided that such employment shall be consonant with the treaty obligations of the United States and with the Charter of the United Nations ". To prevent a country from going Communist, economic aid is provided. Such aid is in line with steps advocated by the Assembly in the past and it is to be hoped that this policy will be successful. It will only be given a chance if the political intrigues in the area which go on quite apart from Soviet activities are brought under control within the terms of a general settlement in the Middle East area.

36. Meanwhile the Eisenhower Doctrine has been approved by the United States Congress and by most of the Moslem States. Egypt and Syria are opposing it. In Jordan there is grave unrest, and the United States has declared that, in its view, Jordan was threatened by international communism, a finding that might open the way to armed intervention under the Eisenhower Doctrine and that it regarded the independence and integrity of Jordan as vital.

37. The Soviet Union is conducting a violent propagnada campaing against the Eisenhower Doctrine. Your Committee thinks it necessary to reject the assertion in the recent Soviet Note that this doctrine constitutes a direct intervention in the affairs of the Arab States. The aid offered under the Eisenhower Doctrine will be available only to countries expressly applying for it. Its sole purpose is to prevent Near Eastern territories from being forced to succumb to Communist influence.

38. The United States has announced its willingness to join the Military Committee of the Baghdad Pact, which plays an important and valuable part of the defence of the free world in the Northern area of the Middle East.

39. The Middle East is in a dangerously explosive state, the situation being most critical for the time being in Jordan. It would be an almost incalculable catastrophe if this vast area, so important to Europe on account of its oil and the Suez Canal, were driven into the arms of Soviet Russia by continued disunity and ineptitude on the part of the West.

Co-ordination of foreign policies

40. In his report of 1st October 1956 M. Benvenuti pointed to the dangers which would arise from the absence of a common European foreign policy, duly co-ordinated with the foreign policy of our Atlantic partners, and proposed " that each member country of N. A. T. 0. should undertake, before taking irrevocable decisions, to consult the rest on all its major problems of foreign policy ".

41. A few weeks later came the intervention of Great Britain and France, in connection with the incursion of Israeli troops into Egypt. These events and the reactions of other NATO partners produced the most serious strain so far experienced by the Western community. Many people were already prophesying the downfall of N. A. T. 0.

42. The Western community is an alliance of free and independent States, all with their own distinctive traditions and problems. But if there are real differences between the European States, such differences are even more pronounced between these States and their transatlantic partners, above all the United States of America. In vital questions, and particularly that of the transformation and devolution of the colonial systems, there are fundamental differences of outlook which are mainly due to differences of historical development.

Such contrasts in attitude may result in a dangerous and permanent weakening of the Western community, if they are not reduced and finally overcome by a steady determination to attain mutual understanding and trust through patience and frank discussion.

43. The Assembly was fully alive to this danger. It pressed for greater co-ordination in the foreign policies of Member States and their Atlantic partners, in the belief that only in that way could we stop giving opportunities to the Soviet Union of exploiting such differences as there may be between us. It is clear that the enormous preponderance of power of the United States, on which Europe depends for its survival, makes it necessary that such co-ordination should normally take place within the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance. But if we ask the United States to co-ordinate its policy with our own, it is absolutely essential that we should begin by coming to an agreement or to a common attitude among ourselves. The Assembly addressed urgent recommendations to the Committee of Ministers in this sense both in October 1956 and in January 1957. The Committee of Ministers in its Resolution (56) 23 of 15th December 1956 invited Member Governments to take into consideration the principles set forth in Recommendation 105 with a view to elaborating a common policy and went on to recommend that certain principles should form the basis of the policy to be applied to certain of the most urgent tasks facing Europe.

44. The least we can do in our dangerous situation is this : we do not need to set up new machinery or new procedures formally accepted and binding on the partners, but we should establish among the Member States of the Council of Europe the habit and practice of effective prior consultation on all major subjects which are likely to affect the partnership of European nations. That does not mean in any way that Member States would have to give up their right to differ. It is not intended that any solution or view should be imposed on anybody. We are only asking for consultation and in this connection we should like to point out that, if they are taken seriously especially by our Governments, the deliberations of our Assembly can be of the utmost assistance.

45. In the light of these considerations, your Committee welcomes the sentence in the communique issued after the Bermuda talks to the effect that the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain " recognise their responsibility to seek to coordinate their foreign policies in the interest of peace with justice ". It is greatly to be hoped that the Governments of Member States of the Council of Europe will be willing to go further than they did last December and undertake a similar commitment. Moreover, your Committee is glad to note that the communique acknowledges that the development of European unity within the Atlantic community is in the common interest.

46. If the Governments of the Member States of the Council of Europe accept that their relations should be put on such a basis of trust, sharing their anxieties and mapping out a common course, the question arises whether there ought not to be periodical meetings of the Prime Ministers themselves. No meeting of the Prime Ministers of Western European countries has taken place since the second world war, and your Committee strongly urges that this possibility should be explored. It might have the added advantage of helping towards the greater concentration of European bodies now being envisaged.

Prospects of an understanding with Soviet Russia

47. After the setbacks to its policy in the satellite countries, the Soviet Union has made an effort to consolidate its position in that area. Outside Europe it has attempted to gain influence in the Near East by influencing Arab nationalism.

48. At the same time it has tried to play off the Members of the Western community one against the other and thereby weaken their alliance. Altmost every European country has been warned in one way or another of alleged threats from other European countries, while Europe as a whole has been warned of so-called American imperialism. The Soviet Union tries to check at the outset every step towards Western integration. N. A. T. 0. is, as usual, attacked as an organisation with aggressive designs upon the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union has issued a series of warnings to individual European States against the construction or lease of bases for atomic weapons on their territory. Not content with this, the U. S. S. R. has made violent attacks against European economic unification in general, and the plans for a European Common Market and European Atomic Energy Community in particular.

49. In the field of disarmament, there have recently been some signs of progress in the discussions of the United Nations Sub-committee in London. Your Committee is of the opinion that the prospect of a general and gradual controlled reduction of armaments should be pursued with the utmost energy despite the many difficulties involved. Only in this way can mankind be released from anxiety about the uncertain but dreadful consequences of further experimental atomic explosions and from the dread of a future atomic war.

50. There are signs that, after the temporary dislocation of its policy as a result of the events in Hungary and Egypt, the Soviet Union will launch a new peace offensive on the lines of the resolutions of the 20th Party Congress. An article in Pravda on 23rd April 1957 followed up similar statements by M. Khrushchev by pointing to the possibility of a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe in the event of an American withdrawal from Western Europe. This suggestion is akin to proposals which have been entertained in certain Western circles. The American comment in this connection has been that United States withdrawal from Europe would seriously weaken the defences of Western Europe. The Russians would be withdrawing their troops only a few hundred miles, whereas the Americans would have to move back three thousand miles. The withdrawal of American armed forces would indeed leave Europe in a dangerously exposed position visa- vis a heavily armed Soviet Union, and in your Committee's opinion this will continue to be the case so long, at any rate, as there is no substantial reduction or removal of the threat by a corresponding adjustment in the balance of armaments between the Soviet Union and the Western European countries. It would be suicidal to leave the protection of Western Europe entirely to the deterrent provided by the atomic weapons of the North American continent.

51. In present circumstances there does not seem to be much prospect of agreement in the near future with the Soviet Union on the most vital questions. For the time being, therefore, there seems to. be no purpose in pressing for a new conference of the major Powers, since the probable failure of such a conference would cause great psychological and political damage. On the other hand, your Committee considers it essential that the members of the Western Community, and within this the Members of the Council of Europe, should put more energy than hitherto into working out a common foreign policy and a course of action. This would have to be a short-term course so far as present crises, such as the problems of the Near East, were concerned. Taking a longer view, however, the peoples of the West should hold further serious joint deliberations, based on the proposals of this Assembly, with a view to removing present world tensions and difficulties and achieving a lasting guarantee of freedom and peace. The outcome of these efforts could then form the basis for further negotiations with the Soviet Union.

52. Your Committee on General Affairs discussed the general lines of this report on 28th April 1957. The Committee agreed that the Rapporteur should present this report to the Assembly at the opening of the general discussion on the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation and that thereafter it might be referred back to the Committee so that, if it should think fit, the Committee might draft a resolution taking into account the views expressed during the debate.