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THE MEETING OF ECONOMICS SECRETARIES IN SOFIA

by Vladimir Sobell

"Restructuring" has reached the CMEA. The CMEA countries' Central Committee Secretaries responsible for economic matters met in Sofia on 1 and 2 September 1987 to discuss the "restructuring" of the CMEA's cooperation mechanism, the progress of integration processes (such as the promotion of direct links between enterprises), and the program for the "international socialist division of labor" for the period from 1991 to 2005.¹

The meeting is another indication that the Kremlin plans to carry out "restructuring" changes in the CMEA and that an agreement to that effect may be concluded at the forthcoming 43rd Session of the CMEA Council.² The head of the Czechoslovak delegation in Sofia, Milos Jakes, said that

All comrades support this concept [of reform], so that the purpose [of the meeting] was to harmonize views in preparation for the 43rd Session of the council with the objective of ensuring that [the council agrees on] a solid document that would create the necessary conditions for restructuring.³

The communique of the meeting revealed very little about what kind of reforms are contemplated, making only vague statements such as "It is deemed necessary to enhance the CMEA's organizational role, to improve the structure of the council's bodies, and to concentrate its work on deciding matters of the strategy for cooperation" or "Attention was called to the instruments of planning and the relationship between commodities and money [and] that between money and credit."

Judging from Mikhail Gorbachev's strategy so far, the CMEA's "restructuring" is likely to consist of creating better conditions for direct links between enterprises and a commitment to attain at least partial currency convertibility in the long run (there has been a lot of publicity about the need for convertibility in recent months).

The announcement of the preparation of the "collective concept of the international socialist division of labor" for the period from 1991 to 2005, which is supposed to "determine areas for a further improvement in cooperation" suggests that a document reminiscent of the Complex Program of Integration of 1971 may be in the offing. Such a program may, however, amount to no more than a sign of the Kremlin's determination to keep the CMEA well under control in the years of "restructuring."

The meeting of CC Secretaries for economic matters is in itself an innovation. The first such meeting was convened in Moscow in May 1985, soon after Gorbachev became General Secretary. In February 1987 there was a meeting (also in Moscow) of CC Secretaries responsible for agriculture. Gatherings of this kind are clearly designed to ensure that the Kremlin and its allies harmonize their strategies.

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- 1 BTA (in English), 2 September 1987; and an interview with Czechoslovak delegate Milos Jakes, Radio Prague, 2 September 1987, 6:30 P.M.
- 2 The 43rd session of the council (consisting of the Prime Ministers of the CMEA countries) should take place this fall. The date and venue have not yet been announced. In May 1987, however, Radio Prague hinted that a draft document on "restructuring" the CMEA, to be adopted by an extraordinary session of the council, was in preparation. Extraordinary sessions are normally held in Moscow (Radio Prague, 28 May 1987, 5:00 P.M.).
- 3 Radio Prague, 2 September 1987, 6:30 P.M.

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