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9 February 1967

RUMANIA FAVORS EVEN MORE LIMITED COMECON COUNCIL

Summary: Fresh Rumanian limits on Comecon Council prerogatives threaten to narrow Comecon's effectiveness in furthering specialization and cooperation. Extra-Comecon institutions have been established to circumvent this source of limitation on the powers of the Comecon Council.

The February 7 Radio Warsaw commentary by Jan Cierpikowski reveals a further difference in view among Comecon members, this time on the question of the right of an individual member to "veto" the placing of objectionable items on the Comecon Council agenda. The commentator singles out the Rumanians as the source of the "different point of view."

The current difference goes beyond the "interest" doctrine first forced on the Council by the Rumanians at the July 1963 session where Khrushchev capitulated to the Rumanian demand. Since the acceptance of the Rumanian "interest" doctrine under which each country has the right to opt out of participation a number of bilateral and multilateral arrangements to carry out specific economic policies for which a unanimous interest was lacking, have been discussed. A few of these have been consummated. The bearing and ferrous metallurgy agreements represent activities with a very broad participation, just short of complete participation of all members. Rumania and Mongolia (and, of course, Albania about whose continuing Comecon membership there is a difference of opinion) have not joined. Frequently, when reference is made to the bearing joint cooperation group or to Intermetal, these two organizational arrangements are considered not to be a part of the Comecon organizational structure.¹

The Rumanians have always encouraged the position favoring the participation in any trade or production cooperation arrangement involving Comecon members only on the basis of interest and, hence, on a voluntary basis. The new objection raised by the Rumanians, alluded to in Radio Warsaw commentary, goes beyond this.

1) See Jogtudományi Kozlony, May 1966, pp 270-272. "Intermetal is not an organ of Comecon. However, it wishes to function in close relationship with Comecon organs."

Apparently what triggered the dispute involving the competence of the Comecon Council and the right of "veto," was the issue of joint investments in specialized ferrous metallurgical installations. In the past the Rumanians have been willing to accede to joint investment projects on a multilateral or bilateral basis. In fact, Rumania was a beneficiary of such an agreement involving the development of a paper mill factory based on Rumanian reeds as a raw material source. However, this was undertaken outside the auspices of Comecon and was arranged on a multilateral basis.

In the ferrous metallurgical case, it seems the Rumanians were arguing that the joint investment program could be discussed within Intermetal or on any other bilateral or multilateral arrangement based on "interest." Apparently the Rumanians, however, objected to having the program sanctioned by the Comecon Council. In effect, the Rumanians were calling for the application of the unanimity principle. A logical extension of this principle would give Rumania or any other member the right to "veto" any item on the Comecon Council's agenda.

Jan Cierpikowski, the Polish commentator, argues that the Council is not limited in its action in "any way" by the "introduction into Comecon of the interest principle of the member countries." He views the Rumanian efforts as the result of "an arbitrary interpretation of the statute" and as "an attempt to slow down the cooperation of the socialist countries." As a consolation prize for Rumanians, Radio Warsaw suggests that after all the Rumanians or any other member may, at some appropriate future date, want to take advantage of the opportunity "to join in the cooperation of some defined question despite not having showed its interest previously." Cierpikowski assumes this issue has been settled when he adds that "a clear formulation of this principle (the right of the Council to take action in the face of a member's opposition) during the recent meeting within the Comecon framework gives an answer to those who attempt to slow down the cooperation of the socialist countries by an arbitrary interpretation of the statute." If this conclusion is true, then there has been a serious breach of an even more fundamental doctrine, the "unanimity principle" to which all members subscribed when they approved the Comecon statute.

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