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GENSCHER'S VISIT TO PRAGUE

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Summary: Amid considerable domestic controversy, West German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher visited Czechoslovakia from December 18 to 20 for talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs Bohuslav Chnoupek, Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal, and President Gustav Husak. Although part of routine exchanges, several factors turned this visit into one of Genscher's most precarious diplomatic missions of 1984. Internationally, the talks in Prague assumed special political importance in anticipation of the US-Soviet exploratory arms talks in Geneva on January 7 and 8. Domestically, the visit marked a revival of the Bonn government's Eastern policy, following a series of spectacular setbacks earlier this year which have put the government under pressure from the opposition, on the one hand, and right-wing circles within Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democrats, on the other. These points were clearly overshadowed, however, by the three-month-old refugee drama in Bonn's Embassy in Prague, where 40 of the almost 70 would-be emigrants had started a hunger strike to press their demand for exit visas to the FRG.

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Although repeatedly stressing the routine nature of Genscher's trip, the West German government clearly saw the visit as marking a reactivation of its dialogue with Eastern Europe after a series of setbacks. Following an initial blossoming of its Eastern ties, especially those with the GDR, despite the deep freeze in superpower relations, Bonn's Eastern policy suffered a major blow in September with the postponement of the long-planned

visits of SED leader Erich Honecker and Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov. This was followed by the last-minute postponement of Genscher's visit to Warsaw on November 21 after the Polish authorities had sought to limit his program.

Under increasing pressure from the Social Democratic opposition party, the Kohl government did everything to avoid another debacle in the case of the Prague visit. For its part, Czechoslovakia, underlining its own interest in the talks, also made concessionary gestures and did not object to Genscher's visit to a German war grave (Warsaw's objection to such a visit was one of the reasons cited for Genscher's cancellation) as well as his talks with Czech Primate Frantisek Cardinal Tomasek.¹ Skillfully avoiding another issue that had been at the center of the friction with Warsaw: the barring of *Die Welt* Central European correspondent Carl-Gustav Stroehm, Genscher flew to Prague in a private jet that allegedly had no room for journalists. This maneuver drew open criticism from *Die Welt*² (whose correspondent was subsequently refused an entry visa), which, however, was only symptomatic of deeper opposition to the Genscher trip within West German conservative circles. On the one hand, several conservative newspapers criticized the timing of the Prague visit as inopportune, mainly because of the impasse over the refugee drama in the West German Embassy. At a deeper level, however, politicians within chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) called for a general hardening of the FRG's policy toward the East. Arguing that very little real progress could be expected in Bonn's *Ostpolitik* in the present climate, these voices, notably conservatives such as Edward Lintner, official parliamentary spokesman on inner-German policy, and Gerhard Reddeman, current CDU chairman of the Bundestag's inner-German committee, openly called for a tougher line toward the East, despite objections from their Free Democratic coalition partners.³

Revanchism Revisited

Prague, of course, did little to conciliate the West German conservatives in that it continued with its barrage of "revanchism" charges almost until the day of Genscher's arrival. Even as late as December 12 *Rude Pravo* published an interview with Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Stefan Olszowski in which he accused the Bonn government of increasingly adopting "revanchist elements" in its policies. This was followed by charges of "growing revanchism" and "militarization" in the FRG in a joint communique at the end of a visit by Polish Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski to Prague.⁴ Even during his talks with Genscher, Chnoupek, although avoiding any direct attacks on the Bonn government, expressed concern about the "rising activity of revanchist forces."⁵ In his official luncheon toast, however, Genscher reaffirmed Bonn's respect for the common desire of all Europeans to have secure borders. Expressly mentioning contributions from refugees and those expelled from the Eastern

territories, he noted that the FRG had used the historical turning point of 1945 as a chance for a new start as a democracy whose highest values were now peace, freedom, and human rights.⁶

The Talks

Apart from this by now almost routine exchange on revanchism, however, both sides left no doubt that the broader objective of their talks, described as "open and constructive," was to contribute to an improvement in the East-West dialogue. In his toast Genscher stressed the continued importance of negotiations between the smaller European countries. The choice of Prague as a forum for reaffirming the role of "small states" in the East-West dialogue, was, of course, of special significance as it was *Rude Pravo* that had aired a wider interbloc dispute on precisely this issue earlier this year by criticizing "independent" foreign policy initiatives within the communist community. In an article on 30 March 1984, the party daily had openly attacked the notion of a "special role" of "small states" aspiring to facilitate compromise between the superpowers. In a variation on the same theme, however, Chnoupek also described Genscher's visit as a step toward a revival of detente, and the CETEKA news agency added that both sides agreed that the political dialogue between "countries of different social orders" could contribute to improving the international climate.⁷ Despite this broad agreement on dialogue and detente, however, unresolved differences remained as Genscher reaffirmed Bonn's commitment to NATO's arms plans and rejected the idea of a moratorium on missile deployment in Europe.

Both sides pledged closer cooperation on economic and environmental issues, although no details of any agreement were given. Pollution in the Krusnehor (Erzgebirge) and Krknose (Riesengebirge) Mountains having reached crisis proportions and Prague having insisted that the West is responsible for two-thirds of the damage, it is believed that the Czechs tried to strike a bargain for West German antipollution equipment either at a relatively low price or in exchange for other goods. Another issue was resolved when Prague agreed to consider the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal as an international waterway for the transportation of goods. Furthermore, Prague, in a gesture of good will, also released three West German citizens held in Czech prisons just before Genscher's arrival. Genscher, who expressly referred to the "respect for human rights and the solution of humanitarian problems" in his toast, was also believed to have discussed the fate of some 1,000 ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia who wished to emigrate.

The Refugee Drama

Another humanitarian drama, although not part of the official program, overshadowed Genscher's talks: the occupation of the West German Embassy in Prague by 69 East Germans seeking exit visas to the FRG. Although a strictly inter-German affair involving neither the Czechoslovak regime nor the West German Foreign

Ministry, Genscher raised the issue during his talks with Czechoslovak leaders and also met the refugees after winding up his official agenda.

During the inter-German rapprochement earlier this year, East Berlin had agreed to a diplomatic settlement in a series of similar cases. In the latest case, however, the SED leadership, apparently seeking to set a firm precedent and to close the loophole provided by East-bloc embassies, only pledged not to prosecute refugees (who were joined by smaller groups in other East-bloc capitals) and refused to make any concessions on the exit visas. Over half of the 170 East Germans originally holed up in the embassy had already returned home; 40 of the remaining asylum-seekers, however, rejected East Berlin's guarantee of impunity and began a hunger strike on December 14 to press their demands for a binding promise of emigration permits. No early solution appeared in sight even after East German lawyer Wolfgang Vogel, East Berlin's liaison agent with the FRG for humanitarian negotiations involving those seeking asylum in the West, and the State Secretary of Bonn's Inter-German Ministry Ludwig Rehlinger met with the refugees in order to persuade them to return home. Upon his return, Rehlinger said that he could not exclude the possibility of a stalemate like the one that had kept Hungarian Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty in the American legation in Budapest for 15 years.⁸ During Genscher's visit, West German Minister for Inner-German Relations Heinrich Windelen also issued an appeal from Bonn to the refugees saying that, although East Berlin was still refusing to make a binding promise, the refugees would probably be allowed to emigrate after they had all returned home.

During his meeting with the refugees, which he described as "relaxed and friendly," Genscher could only confirm that diplomatic efforts to win their freedom had failed and reaffirm the Kohl government's advice for them to return home. Although some 20 refugees left the embassy shortly afterwards (but another 2 climbed into the compound on December 22), nearly 60 East Germans spent Christmas and New Year's Eve in the mission (they did, however, abandon their hunger strike). Only after Czechoslovak police increased security around the compound and barred further contacts between West German journalists and the refugees and following warnings by Vogel and unofficial sources in East Berlin that time was running short for the refugees to accept the East German offer, groups of East Germans started to leave the embassy after New Year's Day.⁹ By January 8, only six refugees, described as a "hard core" by West German officials, were still holding out in the embassy for firmer promises from the East German authorities.¹⁰ With no prospects for a more flexible solution in sight, they appeared to be left with the choice of following their former fellow refugees in leaving the embassy or becoming, as Rehlinger had warned, East German Mindszenty's with little hope for an early passage to the West.

Conclusion

One concrete outcome of the talks was the confirmation that Kohl had accepted an invitation to visit Czechoslovakia next year. It was made clear that the visit could take place only in the second half of 1985, which indicates that Bonn's contacts with the Warsaw Pact will remain in the background until after the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany on 8 May 1985. Prior to this anniversary, which Moscow will no doubt use to display bloc unity, it appears likely that Bonn will not be at the top of the Warsaw Pact's list of negotiating partners. While it was Bonn's *Ostpolitik* that flourished during the deep US-Soviet freeze earlier this year, it looks as if it may now be Bonn's Eastern ties that will go into cold storage as talks between Moscow and Washington slowly get under way.

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- 1 For details, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 December 1984.
- 2 17 December 1984.
- 3 For newspaper commentaries, see *Die Welt*, 15, 17, and 20 December 1984; and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 December 1984. For CDU politicians, see *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18 December 1984; and RFE Correspondent's Report (Bonn), 19 December 1984.
- 4 *Rude Pravo*, 14 December 1984.
- 5 AFP, 18 December 1984.
- 6 See RFE Correspondent's Report (Bonn), 18 December 1984.
- 7 AFP, 18 December 1984.
- 8 UPI, 15 December 1984; and *The New York Times*, 16 December 1984.
- 9 UPI, 24 December 1984; dpa and AFP, 28 December 1984.
- 10 AP and dpa, 8 January 1985.

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