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RUMANIA - MAVERICK OF THE COMECON FREIGHT CAR POOL

MUNICH, 2 September 1963 (Bloc Economy: Harry Trend)

Rumania once more appears as the maverick of Comecon - this time by not participating in the newly formed railroad freight car pool, according to an analysis of recent articles and dispatches from Czechoslovakia.

In view of the location of the Railroad Freight Car Dispatching Center in Prague, the Czechoslovak press has indicated great interest in the development and details of the freight car pool. A Prague Ceteka dispatch of 26 August indicated that only five European communist countries and the Soviet Union are contributing to the freight car pool which is to go into operation on 1 January 1964. This is the most recent indication that one of the six European participants of Comecon is not contributing freight cars to the joint pool. Though the Ceteka dispatch does not specifically exclude Rumania by name as one of the parties in the pool, a recently received issue of the Czechoslovak Sloboda of 18 August does exclude Rumania in its country-by-country listing of those taking part. Prior to this Sloboda report, Miroslav Pitch in a radio commentary from Prague in Slovak to Europe on 8 August also omitted the name of Rumania from those contributing freight cars to the pool. As in the Sloboda news report only the five other European members and the Soviet Union were specifically enumerated. A news item in the London Financial Times of 20 August also suggested that Rumania would not join this Comecon railroad grouping. All this evidence supports the conclusion that Rumania will not contribute freight cars to the forthcoming Comecon joint freight car pool.

In order to determine when Rumania first may have abandoned the Comecon freight car pool, one should refer to the last Czechoslovak sources which named her as a participant. The last inclusion of Rumania can be noted in the 9 August issue of Hospodarske Noviny in an article by an engineer of the Ministry of Transport, Neklan Ropek. It may be assumed that this article was written prior to the Prague radio commentary of Miroslav Pitch on the 8th of August in which we find the first specific

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exclusion of Rumania from an enumeration of participants. It can be recalled that the Rumanians took part in the 12th Session of the Comecon Permanent Transportation Commission in Warsaw during 25 June to 3 July at which the freight car pool statute was adopted and where details for the establishment of the railroad scheme were worked out. In view of a Radio Bucharest's 6 July report that this session passed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, brotherly friendship, and collaboration, one could conclude that Rumania considered itself a participant in the formation of the railroad pool at this time. This radio report from Bucharest together with the Czechoslovak radio commentary by Miroslav Pitch on 8 August would place the withdrawal of Rumania from the pool sometime between the 6th of July and the 8th of August.

The motivation underlying Rumania's non-participation in the freight car pool is not discussed in any of the dispatches. A quick look at the map of Eastern Europe and a recognition that the great bulk of freight moves between the Soviet Union and the countries directly to the West of it would support a conclusion that the chief beneficiary of a freight car pool would be Poland, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Hungary. The Rumanians, being on a "spur line" of the general traffic flow, probably concluded that they can find better use at home for the freight cars they would be asked to contribute.

Regardless of the underlying reason for Rumania's action, assuming the Czechoslovak sources are correct, it seems that once again the Rumanians have chosen an independent path within Comecon and have shown the other European members that a country may exercise sovereign power within Comecon in its own interest without being compelled by its "big brother," the Soviet Union, to follow a road contrary to its own interests and choice.

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