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RUMANIAN DEMANDS AT HELSINKI PREPARATORY CONFERENCE DELAY ADOPTION OF PROCEDURAL RULES

Summary: During the first week of the talks in Helsinki on European security and co-operation, the Rumanian delegation tenaciously insisted upon certain changes in the procedural rules which were not acceptable to the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. Opposition to the Rumanian stand at the conference was voiced by the East European states, led by Poland, while the Soviet Union maintained a low profile. Discussion of the differences in the East European news media, including the Rumanian, was also low key. The final compromise solution appears to favor the Rumanian position. This step, which is consistent with Rumania's view on European security, appears to be aimed at deriving advantage from the Soviet unwillingness to make any threatening move against Rumania, in order to ensure the holding of the security conference, which it has long desired.

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The Rumanian delegation to the preliminary consultations on a European Conference on Security and Co-operation made its presence felt on the very first day, November 22, in Helsinki. During the first week of the talks in Helsinki Rumania

was cast in the role of an enfant terrible, tenaciously maintaining its point of view in the face of obvious Soviet and East European opposition and perhaps less than enthusiastic support from the other states present.

During the opening ceremonies, at which Finnish Foreign Ministry official Richard Totterman was selected as chairman of the conference, the Rumanian delegation unsuccessfully sought recognition from the chairman as he adjourned the session. The Rumanians protested this step, and at the following session, received an apology from Totterman. The Rumanians reportedly wanted to see the the chairmanship rotated among the participating states, but acceded to the desire of the other delegations for a permanent Finnish chairman.

This little skirmish, however, was only a prelude to the more involved problem of setting up precedural rules to govern deliberations during the preparatory conference. The chairman drew up a list of 10 rules, which were the outcome of discussion by the various delegations during the first few days of the conference. The Rumanians were insistent that decisions reached at the conference be based on consensus, and that no system of majority rule should be employed; this was also advocated by a number of other delegations to the conference. Hence a provision was included in the draft rules stating that decisions would be made on the basis of consensus, which was defined as the absence of objection by any delegation to a decision being taken.

The question of the vice-chairmanship, however, did produce differences. The original proposal was that the vice-chairman or "an acting chairman" would be selected if the chairman could not preside at any session. The Rumanians, having failed in their initial bid to have the chairmanship rotated among the participating states, now insisted that the vice-chairmanship should rotate. The Rumanians also insisted that the chairmanships of any working groups which might be established to deal with particular problems also be made on the basis of rotation. This proposal was not particularly welcomed by many of the delegations, who felt that rotating chairmen for the working

groups would lead to inefficiency and would slow down the progress of the consultations. The Rumanians, however, were adamant in insisting upon their position.

The major point of disagreement which the Rumanians raised was related to the first point of the procedural rules. In its draft form, that point states: "All states attending shall participate on the basis of complete equality and independence." (1) While insisting upon the equality, sovereignty, and independence of all participating states, the Rumanians wanted this procedural point to go one step further, and to specify that participation would be "irrespective of countries' membership in any military alliance." It was this Rumanian demand that provoked the greatest opposition.

The Soviet delegation stated that it could not see the legal significance of the Rumanian wording, and the Polish delegation voiced a similar objection. When the general sessions opened on Monday (November 27), the Soviet Union remained silent, but the Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, East German, Hungarian, and Polish delegations expressed the opinion that there was no reason to include the Rumanian wording. The Soviet Union, despite its objection to the Rumanian proposal, apparently felt it wisest to let its Warsaw Pact allies lead the attack on the Rumanian position, in order to avoid criticism of great power domination of the conference. In contrast to the strong opposition of the Warsaw Pact states, most of the West European states and Yugoslavia were apparently willing to go along with the Rumanian wording in order to achieve consensus on the procedural regulations.

Despite the universal opposition of the Warsaw Pact states to the Rumanian proposals at Helsinki, the differences were played down in the Rumanian news media. Although the media did not openly refer to the differences, they did reiterate Rumania's interest in, and concern about, the Helsinki talks, as well as Rumania's stand

(1) The text of these draft rules was released by Reuter on 24 November 1972.

that the talks in Helsinki "must, in no way and in no form, proceed from bloc-to-bloc positions." (2) Beyond a repetition of the principles which Rumania has consistently maintained must be established by any European security arrangement, nothing was said relating to the actual negotiations in Helsinki.

The news media of the Soviet Union also generally ignored the differences with Rumania, probably in order to avoid escalating the confrontation and creating the appearance of Soviet insistence upon conformity among its client states in Eastern Europe. In a Radio Moscow report in Rumanian on the talks in Helsinki, it was noted that the delegates "aim to find co-ordinated solutions, in spite of certain attempts to create difficulties in achieving progress." (3) Stronger criticism of the Rumanian position in domestic news media, as well as at Helsinki, came from the East European states. However, the criticism was generally mild and Rumania was not singled out by name. Among these criticisms, a Hungarian commentary on the Helsinki talks noted that the majority of countries feel that "negotiations can be successful only when the details are not unveiled," however, "this is not maintained by all, and there are countries which would like to achieve a certain degree of publicity for themselves and their standpoints." The reason for this, according to the Hungarian report, was to be sought in the domestic policy of these countries: "They would like to present their standpoints and the importance of their governments before public opinion at home as though they were the most important ones." (4) The Polish media also mildly criticized the Rumanians. For example, Zycie Warszawy (5) noted that "the constructive approach of the majority of the delegations has created a rather difficult situation for those who would like to take advantage of the talks on organizational and procedural matters in order

(2) Scanteia, 24 November 1972.

(3) Radio Moscow in Rumanian, 28 November 1972.

(4) Radio Budapest, 25 November 1972.

(5) 26 November 1972.

to split hairs and prolong the negotiations." A commentary on Radio Warsaw (6) also noted that "one of the states" at Helsinki proposed "an additional political formulation" which "would weaken solidarity within the ideological groupings in Europe." It was observed that "exaggerated importance" and "formal stylistics" were being applied to nonessential details. It is interesting that the muted criticism of Rumania has thus come primarily from Hungary, which in the past has been the East European state most frequently selected to censure Rumania for its divergent policies, and Poland, which in recent months has been the most active East European advocate of Soviet foreign policy interests.

Despite the refusal of the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact states to accept its demand, Rumania remained adamant that the procedural rules must specify that participation was "irrespective of countries' membership in any military alliance." In an attempt to break the deadlock, the Polish delegation proposed that the procedural rules note that the talks were taking place outside "any category of blocs," but this was not accepted by the West European states, because it could be interpreted as precluding the Common Market states from speaking as a single group. Finally, the Rumanians themselves proposed a compromise formula, which would note that the consultations "will take place outside the framework of military alliances." The Soviet Union and other states accepted this formulation, and it was included in the final draft of the rules that was adopted. (7) The Rumanians also won acceptance of their demands on the question of rotating the vice-chairmanship of the general sessions among the participating states, and also rotating the chairmanships of any working groups that may be established.

The Rumanians appear to have emerged successfully from the first round of the Helsinki consultations. Their unyielding insistence that their demands be accepted was based on Rumania's view about the security conference, within the context of its

(6) 27 November 1972.

(7) The final form of the procedural rules was released by Reuter on 28 November 1972.

over-all foreign policy. (8) The Rumanians have repeatedly insisted that the conference must recognize the rights and role of small and medium-sized states in international relations, and must not become an occasion for great powers to decide the fate of smaller nations. From the very beginning of the talks, the Rumanian delegation has wanted to emphasize these principles, and it chose to do so through its demands on the procedural regulations. While certain of the small states of Western Europe were unwilling themselves to take such a stand, many nonetheless applauded the Rumanians for their assertion of the rights of small states.

The insistence upon the principle of rotating the vice-chairmanship and the chairmanships of the working groups appears to reflect Rumanian concern to establish this principle of rotation in the preparatory talks, so that it may more easily be adopted as the modus operandi for the future, full-scale conference on European security. Again this appears to reflect Rumanian concern that the chairmanship not be shared by the two great powers, but that the equality of all states, regardless of size, be fully accepted.

Rumania's demand that the procedural rules specify that the talks are taking place regardless of countries' membership in any military bloc is the first Rumanian move to prevent the talks from evolving into a Warsaw Pact-NATO confrontation, in which Rumania's interests would be submerged under those of the Warsaw Pact. The fact that the Rumanian delegation boldly stood its ground in the face of the evident opposition of the Soviet Union and the remainder of the Warsaw Pact states indicates that, in the balance of the preparatory talks, and at the full security conference as well, Rumania intends to pursue its own independent position and to use the conference as an occasion to win general acceptance of a country's right to sovereignty in its own affairs.

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- (8) For more information on the general Rumanian position on the European security question, see Rumanian Situation Report/42, Radio Free Europe Research (EERA), 23 November 1972, Item 7, and Robert R. King, "Rumania and European Security," Rumanian Background Report/13, RFER (EERA), 20 July 1972.

The pattern of Soviet response also seems to be favorable to Rumania. Since the Soviet Union has long been the principal advocate of a security conference, and since Moscow has been willing to make major concessions on the question of Berlin and in relations with the United States and Western Europe in order to secure Western participation in the conference, it is unlikely that the good will and progress achieved thus far will be forfeited by vigorous Soviet action against Rumania. In fact, the initial Soviet response to the Rumanian maneuvers during the first week of the preparatory talks seems to confirm this analysis. The Soviet rejection of the Rumanian demands was mild, and the bulk of the criticism of the Rumanian proposals was left to the East European members of the Warsaw Pact. The very low key treatment of the problem in the East European and Soviet news media also confirms Soviet interest in avoiding a confrontation with Rumania on this issue. How far Rumania can go without provoking a stronger Soviet response remains to be seen. Under the currently favorable conditions, however, the Rumanian David will probably push the Soviet Goliath to the limits of the permissible. Thus far at least, Bucharest seems to have come out victorious.

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