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COMMUNIST AREA

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- EAST GERMANY: Foreign Relations
Warsaw Pact

3 February 1967

THE GDR BETWEEN RUMANIA AND THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC

Summary: For the first time in over ten years, East Germany has overtly and directly criticized a fraternal country, namely Rumania, for its foreign political course by accusing that country of not having sufficiently safeguarded the interests of the GDR during the recent negotiations which led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and Rumania. This paper reviews past divergences between the GDR and others of the socialist countries, pointing out the similarities and the differences between the past and the present. While past East German objections concerned economic, Comecon, or ideological-cultural matters and were generally of an esoteric nature, the current onslaught is in the political realm and is overtly directed at Rumania. Concurrent with the present East German fear of isolation from the rest of Eastern Europe, there is a noticeable hardening of the GDR's policy towards West Germany expressed not only by painting a frightening picture of the Federal Republic's allegedly neo-Nazi, militaristic and revanchist aims, but also by attempts to sever any common ties with the West German state and people. The more fearful East Germany becomes of losing the support of the other Communist countries, the more it seems to wish to isolate itself from the West.

After two days of fumbling uncertainty and embarrassment in its reaction to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bonn and Bucharest, the East German regime has now reacted with unprecedentedly direct sharpness to the event. According to the ADN commentary of 1 February

...the Rumanian representatives evidently did not insist

that the Federal government should forego any manifestation of its revanchist presumption of sole representation during the negotiations on the opening of diplomatic relations.

In a radio commentary on the following day, East Berlin even more pointedly attacked the Rumanian Foreign Minister personally:

...If the Foreign Minister of the Socialist Republic of Rumania was not willing to reject the presumptuous claim to sole representation and to state definitely that under the conditions of the presumptuous claim to sole representation and other revanchist demands the preconditions for diplomatic relations did not yet exist, - this is regrettable.*

[Emphasis supplied]

Beyond noting the escalation of the above two attacks (from "did not insist" to "was not willing to reject"), this is the first time in over ten years that the GDR has criticized, actually attacked, a fraternal country by name concerning any aspect of foreign policy. It is true that in the past, the unsatisfactory relations between East Germany and various East European countries in such sectors as economic cooperation or Comecon policy and cultural-ideological developments have been reflected in official GDR media, but there had not been an overt, specific interference in the foreign policy of another communist country.

Past Differences

For the sake of comparison, it might be useful to recall some of the previous East German outbursts, the most striking of which was probably the attack on Czechoslovak cultural liberalization during the Fifth SED-CC Plenum in February of 1964. At that time, the Politburo reporter Horst Sindermann strongly objected to "revisionist theories which are pushing their way towards us from Prague" and refused to accept that "rotten eggs be placed in the nest" [of the East German Party],¹ these "rotten eggs" being "theories of falsification of Marxism."

East Germany's polemics with Rumania on the latter's increasing trade with the West and its independent industrial development have pursued a zig-zag course which followed a pattern first of accusation, and then of withdrawal by the GDR. After Ulbricht's

1) Neues Deutschland, 13 February 1964.

* The same formulation was featured in a front-page editorial declaration in Neues Deutschland, 3 February 1967.

attack on Georghiu-Dej during the Third SED-CC Plenum (29 to 30 July 1963), the East German economic monthly Wirtschaft, 7 October 1963, repudiated an earlier polemic against Rumanian economic policies which had appeared in the April issue of Wirtschaftswissenschaft.² The November 1963 issue of Wirtschaftswissenschaft apologized abjectly for having published "un-marxist" articles previously.³ By June 1964, Viata Economica once more felt it necessary to reject East German views on Comecon policy published in a book under the auspices of the East German Academy of Sciences.⁴

Most reminiscent of the present East German outcry, however, were the GDR's remonstrances against the establishment of West German trade missions in the capitals of Eastern Europe. Now as then, Ulbricht's efforts to attain international recognition not only of the two-state but even of the three-state theory encountered a serious obstacle in the course of increasing East-West contacts. Following a few preliminary expressions of East German apprehension about the West German trade missions, which pursued the line that the Federal Republic was following "aims which have nothing to do with trade",⁵ a warning was directed specifically at Rumania on 24 November 1963 when Neues Deutschland proclaimed alleged "full confidence in the Rumanian Workers' Party that they will develop their relations with West Germany in the interests of peace and socialism." At that time, the most violent East German objection was voiced by candidate Politburo member Horst Sindermann during the same Fifth Plenum when he attacked Czechoslovakia:

It must never be forgotten that the inclusion of West Berlin in the West German policy of revenge and atomic re-armament endangers the peace of Europe. In any agreement with the West German Federal Republic, no sovereign state can therefore be requested to recognize Bonn's aggressive demand for the inclusion of West Berlin in the Federal Republic. This holds especially true for the European People's Democracies. Every step in this direction is furthering Bonn's revanchist policy which is misusing West Berlin as a bridgehead for its extensive and aggressive plans against the socialist states. That is the reason why the GDR, on whose territory West Berlin is located, must decidedly object to any form of inclusion of this part

- 2) See RFE Research report, "Rumania Scores an Economic Point," 23 October 1963.
- 3) See RFE Research report, "East Germany Apologizes for Un-marxist Economic Views," 5 December 1963, by d.m.
- 4) See RFE Research report, "Rumanian-East German Polemics over Comecon Policy Continue," 16 June 1964.
- 5) Neues Deutschland, 15 November 1963, by the then Acting Prime Minister Willi Stoph.

of a city under an occupation regime into treaties of other states with the government of the West German Federal Republic.

[Original emphasis]

Just as the current East German attack, the warning of February 1964 came too late, namely after Poland, Rumania and Hungary had signed contracts including forms of the controversial Berlin clause. Bulgaria signed a similar agreement with West Germany of 6 March 1964, thus also ignoring East German sensitivities on the subject.

The Present Round

It is at this point where the similarities between past and present East German reactions cease. Now as then, East German fears of East-West rapprochement were obvious. Now as then, East German objections were post factum. While in 1964 they were overtly directed at West Germany's "subversive" aims (though with clear undertones of warning to the communist East European states), the 1967 statement no longer hides behind esoteric warnings, but specifically names Rumania as having neglected the interests of the socialist camp.

The crescendo of the East German attacks can undoubtedly be explained by the increased seriousness of the problem faced. West German trade missions in Eastern Europe and the inclusion of a Berlin clause were one step toward a normalization of relations, but the establishment of full diplomatic relations without fulfilling the GDR's preconditions is certainly a giant step and an incomparably more serious blow to East German political prestige. This blow, however, could not have come unexpectedly for East Berlin since the regime, like the rest of the world, was aware of West German-Rumanian contacts and of Manescu's planned visit to Bonn. Yet, Pankow seems to have been so stunned by the rapidity of the developments that it took two days to counter the blow. Before ADN's retaliatory statement (published in Neues Deutschland on February 1967), there was in East Germany a nearly complete news black-out on this development. On the very day that Bonn and Bucharest published a communique announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Neues Deutschland for the first time revealed to its readers that, "according to West German press comments", an agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states will be reached during the Rumanian Foreign Minister's visit to West Germany. Besides being the first public East German mention of this imminent development, the ten-line news dispatch was featured on the penultimate page of the SED daily which, by quoting West

German press commentaries at this late stage, still attempted to obscure the issue by ascribing the speculations to unreliable (West German) sources.

In another dispatch of equal length and in an equally hidden position, Neues Deutschland of 1 February reported the establishment of Rumanian-West German relations as a fact and without comment. The reasons for East Germany's initial reticence and disarray are not hard to fathom. Despite all diplomatic demarches in the capitals of the fraternal countries, despite biased and selective reviews from the socialist press corroborating the GDR's point of view that West Germany is not a fit partner for negotiations not to mention diplomatic relations,⁷ the Rumanians, ignoring Ulbricht's pleas, warnings and threats, had blithely gone ahead with their plan to formalize contacts with the Federal Republic.

Secondary Maneuvers

In the meantime, East Germany has not abandoned its method of maligning the Federal Republic by accusing the government of hypocrisy, of supporting neo-Nazism etc. in an effort to project an image to the other socialist states which should serve as a deterrent to any further East-West rapprochement. These efforts take on almost a pathetic aspect when, for example, Neues Deutschland polemicizes editorially against Willy Brandt's signing as "German Foreign Minister" (i.e. as the sole German representative) "a communique issued on the occasion of the Rumanian Foreign Minister's visit to Bonn." There was not one word in the editorial on the significance of the communique, namely that it announced the establishment of diplomatic relations. And yet the editorial was published in the same issue of the paper which briefly announced this event in the back pages.

Concomitant with the flux of East-West relations, there is a noticeable hardening of the GDR's attitude toward West Germany. This stiffening is not only expressed by East Berlin's increasingly strident indictments of the West German government and of West German politicians (which is undoubtedly addressed to the attention of fraternal countries in the first place), but it is also reflected by a general and total negation of any common characteristics between East and West Germany. At local Party meetings during the past week where various SED and state dignitaries spoke to the masses "in preparation for the Seventh Party Congress", the recurrent themes were: 1) The impossibility of unification with capitalist West Germany; 2) The appeal to the West German workers to fight for their rights; and 3) The necessity for the East German population to defeat "the West German neo-Nazi danger" by economic accomplishments.

7) See RFE Research report, "Eastern Europe and the Kiesinger Offensive", 31 January 1967, p. 12 ff, by J.F. Brown.

Cultural Minister Klaus Gysi denied the existence of one German culture; while the director of a District Hospital in Gera provided an example of the extremes of East Germany's self-imposed isolation by attempting to refute the unity of German medicine. The unyielding East German position on the Berlin passes at Christmas time; the increased number of shootings at the Wall; and the renaming of the Secretariat for All-German Affairs, the "Secretariat of West German Affairs", follow this same pattern of GDR attempts to show strength where there is weakness, namely the weakness stemming from fear of contacts with the West. This was shown most dramatically perhaps by the SED's last minute withdrawal from the planned SED/SPD speakers' exchange last June. It is strange to observe that East Germany is cutting itself off from West Germany increasingly the more it fears being isolated from the rest of Eastern Europe, and in its nervousness is aggressively lashing out in all directions at once.

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