

Human rights on agenda despite Soviet opposition

By John Best

Despite the rather ignominious end to its recent deliberations in Belgrade, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) has generated a kind of momentum that is evidently going to be hard to arrest.

"Momentum" is perhaps a little too strong a word, considering the minimal results of the Belgrade meeting, as officially recorded in the concluding document. It was totally devoid of substance. The closest it came to saying anything concrete was to state that delegates "reaffirmed the resolve of their governments" to implement fully the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, implementation of which the Belgrade meeting was called to examine.

As a summation of the sometimes vigorous debate on concrete issues at Belgrade, the concluding document left plenty to be desired. It was certainly below the expectations of most of the delegates from 35 countries who had assembled six months earlier, in gorgeous Yugoslav Indian summer weather, to take a look at what had and had not been accomplished since 1975.

The document could not get into specifics because of Soviet determination to keep specifics out of it. Thus the strong criticism that the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in particular were subjected to in closed session went officially unrecorded for public consumption.

Yet, in its own way, the Belgrade document adopted by consensus speaks volumes about the present state of the East-West

"dialogue", such as it is, on humanitarian issues. Communiqués can sometimes be more eloquent by what they do not say than by what they do say. There was something devastatingly accurate about the remark of the chief Soviet delegate, Yuli Vorontsov, that the concluding document reflected a "realistic assessment" of the situation. Another remark of his is also worth pondering – that the Soviet Union must not be "placed under pressure" through a human-rights campaign in the West.

For all the anaemic character of the Belgrade final report (reflecting "lowest common denominators", as Canada put it in a concluding presentation), there can be little doubt that the CSCE has developed an inner dynamic of sorts. Western states have evolved their own special and collective interest in pursuing the process in which they acquiesced when, a few years before Helsinki, they decided to take Russia up on its long-standing proposal for a European security conference.

Reunification of families

All, to a greater or lesser degree, see it as a means to further the reunification of families hitherto kept apart by Europe's East-West division. At the opening of the Belgrade meeting last October, Deputy External Affairs Under-Secretary Klaus Goldschlag, speaking for Canada, said the Canadian Government was pursuing a policy "that attached priority to the reunification of families", and looked to the Final Act "to break the impasse that has often inhibited the pursuit of that policy".

Canadian officials say that, owing at least partly to the Final Act's influence, there has, in fact, been an increase in the number of East Europeans allowed to emigrate to Canada or visit relatives in Canada. The stake that Canada has in this aspect of the affair is nothing, however, compared to

Belgrade called to examine implementation of Helsinki Final Act

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