

*Human-rights
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in some countries*

East European governments on the specific matters dealt with in Baskets II and III, and might perhaps also lead to a less-repressive policy in accord with the principle of human rights. It was also hoped that Belgrade, through a process of "mutual education", would contribute further to this result. Yet it is doubtful whether there were more than marginal improvements in the implementation of a few of the many and varied commitments of the Helsinki Final Act (estimated by Canadian experts as numbering about 148). Changes in procedures affecting emigration, exchange of information, the working conditions of journalists, etc. have been modest, and sometimes minimal, and have varied from country to country.

On the broader question of human rights, the situation in the "socialist" countries has hardly altered - and, indeed, in certain cases (the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia), has worsened. These governments, the main targets of censure at Belgrade, regarded every criticism of their specific shortcomings in carrying out Helsinki as striking at the very heart of their systems and reacted with increased repression. Other countries, such as Hungary and Poland, had followed more conciliatory policies in recent years and were spared the sharp condemnation suffered by their allies. The diversity of conditions and policies among the Communist-ruled countries existed before Helsinki and does not seem to have been affected, except marginally, by Helsinki or by Belgrade. In general, Belgrade did not show itself to be effective in promoting implementation of the Helsinki commitments, either through general discussion or by the adoption of new procedures.

Human rights

Perhaps the most important contribution of Belgrade, and of the CSCE process, was the support given to the human-rights movements in Eastern Europe. These groups, such as the monitoring committees in the Soviet Union and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, which were seeking to promote the observance of Helsinki, were subject to severe reprisals and harassment, and inevitably became the subject of sharp discussion at Belgrade. They were considered by Western states as embodying "the right of the individual to know and to act upon his rights and duties" in the field of human rights, as stated in Paragraph 7 of Principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act. More important still, they are the main forces oriented to change in these countries, keeping alive democratic aspirations, raising the

morale of dissenting forces, and striving for fundamental change in the existing models of socialism. Conscious of their significance, both symbolic and practical, Western delegates made a concrete proposal that would have confirmed "the right of institutions, organizations and persons to assist their governments in the task of ensuring the full implementation of the provisions of the Final Act".

This proposal and a similar phrase in the Western draft of the concluding statement were not approved, owing to the absence of consensus. Though such "civil initiatives" were thus not given "legal support", to use the terms of the post-Belgrade statement of Charter 77 (March 12), they did receive "moral support" from Belgrade, thus "firmly anchoring them in the consciousness of the European and world public". The decision to hold a conference in Madrid, said *The New York Times* (March 12), would, like Belgrade, give the "courageous members" of these groups "a focus", without which they would have been undercut. Anything less would have been a blow to them, and hence to the principal forces in Eastern Europe striving for serious implementation of Helsinki and working towards democratic change.

Sharp focus

Belgrade was valuable, therefore, in putting in sharp focus the status of human rights in Europe. The Soviet Union revealed its fundamentally conservative character and its fear of human rights even when such matters were discussed in secret, and its political image throughout the world suffered as a consequence. The profound differences of viewpoint among the delegates of East and West on human rights were clearly exposed, as was the lack of the confidence that is so necessary for real *détente*. It was also demonstrated that Belgrade, and Madrid, could not accomplish miracles of change, at least in the short run, and could not even serve as an effective instrument for improvement in the application of the Helsinki agreement. Belgrade thus served as a mirror of reality, reflecting how hard and long was the road to the adequate safeguarding of human rights in Europe, and therefore to genuine *détente*. It made manifest the fact that the conflicting nature of the Eastern and Western systems was a major hindrance to *détente*, but also that it constituted the primary reason for continuing the effort. Though the weaknesses and inadequacies of the CSCE process were rendered obvious, this process was endorsed and extended as the only available European mechanism for promoting human rights as a constituent element of *détente*.