

The road to greater security within a divided continent

By Robert W. Reford

It is ironic that so many of the issues that have made Europe potentially insecure should be well on the way to settlement at a time when a European security conference seems almost certain to take place. An agreement on Berlin has been negotiated. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has ratified agreements with the Soviet Union and Poland, accepting in the latter case Poland's Western frontiers as being on the Oder-Neisse Line. German reunification has been recognized as a dream for a more distant future rather than something that can be achieved tomorrow; and West Germany has been talking to the other half, the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

East Germany is increasingly accepted as something that exists, and formal recognition by Western nations is in prospect. With the signing by the two Germans in December of a treaty on basic relations between them as the climax to a series of negotiation sessions, both are being recognized and it seems certain that both will be admitted to the United Nations in 1973.

The two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, have agreed to some limitation on the development of

strategic weapons. Although this does not affect Europe directly, it does provide a climate for negotiation, especially for a mutual and balanced reduction of nuclear weapons (MBFR) on the continent.

These political issues, however, are only one side of the coin. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) is expected to deal with a wide range of issues, including economic questions, cultural and scientific exchanges and co-operation in many areas such as control of the environment. In fact, too, progress has not depended on political interference. Trade between Eastern Europe and the rest of the world has been expanding. Economic co-operation is growing, even to the extent of multinational companies building plants in the European Union itself. Cultural groups are making changing visits, and there has been an increasing flow of scientific information. There are even signs of a loosening of restrictions on personal movement. Both sides have agreed both in greater tourist travel and in granting of exit visas to a small but an important number of Soviet Jews.

In these circumstances, it is tempting to ask whether a European security conference is really necessary. If so, what is happening without the panoply of international meetings, should one be held at all? It may turn out to be little more than a propaganda exercise, generating a "Helsinki" as illusory as the "Geneva" after the summit conference of 1954 or the "Spirit of Camp David" after Nikita Khrushchov's talks with Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1959? What will 34 nations be able to accomplish if they are down together that they could not do bilaterally or in smaller groups?

Definition of security

Part of the answer to these questions is in posing another: What is security depends far more on a psychological feeling than on accepted boundaries, automatic recognition, arms or the well-being of them, or economic prosperity.

Mr. Reford has served as executive director of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs since August 1971. Author of the book Canada and Three Crises, Mr. Reford worked on the staff of British United Press, the International Service of the CBC and on the editorial board of the Ottawa Citizen. He served as United Nations correspondent for a number of Canadian newspapers before joining the staff of the UN Institute for Training and Research in New York. His article on the origins of the proposed European security conference is one of a series of studies commissioned by the Committee of Nine of the North Atlantic Assembly. The studies deal with future relations within the Atlantic Community.