

Belgrade was singled out for explicit praise in the final communique, suggesting that Madrid, and future meetings, would be entitled to engage in similar discussions. These meetings will be hampered, as was Belgrade, by the principle of consensus that was the main unwritten rule of procedure, and that, going beyond the practice at the United Nations, gives every state, large or small, the right of veto on all decisions, procedural or substantive.

It may still be asked whether, after the experience of Belgrade, such conferences can perform a useful function. Is the "process" so much hailed by spokesmen of both East and West anything but a meaningless charade, having merit only in the minds of the diplomats who participated? The response to this query depends on one's evaluation of the debate on implementation that consumed most of the time of the Belgrade conference. In the opinion of some observers, for example the *Baltimore Sun* (February 28, 1978), the value was found in "Roasting Bear in Belgrade" - i.e., condemning the Soviet Union for its human-rights record. It was this kind of confrontation that some governments had feared before the session, and that the Soviet-bloc countries condemned as a deliberate Western effort to turn it into "a platform for a campaign of slander against the socialist countries" (*Rudé právo*, March 11, 1978). It seems highly doubtful, as it did before Belgrade, that such a bonfire of polemics would contribute to the trust and confidence required by *détente*, or would even encourage the Soviet regime to honour its human-rights commitments.

#### Accountability

In another, less provocative, sense, the Belgrade debate established the important principle, presumably to be respected at Madrid, that the signatories of Helsinki - all of them, West and East - were accountable to the others for their observance of the commitments assumed. This confirmed the right of Belgrade, of Madrid and of future meetings, as well as of governments, through diplomatic channels during and between conferences, to discuss human rights and their violations openly. Such matters, whether linked or not to specific commitments under the Final Act, are clearly seen to be, as was implicitly proclaimed at Helsinki, matters of legitimate concern for all signatories, and hence the proper subject of discussion, and are not protected by the ban on so-called "interference in domestic affairs" under Principle VI of Helsinki. Ironically, the Soviet Union made many charges of infringements of human rights in the West, thus ignoring its

own professed principle of non-interference in domestic affairs.

The debate at Belgrade was, it is true, not the frank and genuine dialogue some observers had hoped for. In the cut and thrust of debate, many delegations - for instance, those of France, Belgium and even West Germany and Canada, as well as some neutral and non-aligned states - that had hoped to avoid an open confrontation over human rights joined in public criticism of the U.S.S.R. and other bloc countries, notably the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia. Provocative actions by certain Communist governments, such as the political trials in Czechoslovakia and the arrest of Shcharansky and others in the Soviet Union, literally forced certain Western governments, including those that had not wanted to discuss concrete cases or name names, to condemn the Soviet and Czechoslovak regimes. Thus the differences in tactics and in style between the more polemical approach of some delegations, and the more reserved attitude of others, assumed less serious proportions than was expected. The nine countries of the EEC, and the broader group of members of NATO, usually found themselves in basic agreement, and were often joined by neutral or non-aligned states. The Soviet Union and its bloc allies, though responding in emotional tones to censure of their policies and actions, did not, as they sometimes threatened, walk out, and even accepted the likelihood of a repeat performance at Madrid.

#### Hopes doomed

A more serious question remains: Did Belgrade succeed or fail, and will the CSCE process in the future succeed or fail in effecting changes in the policies of participating states? Certainly, hopes that Helsinki and Belgrade would produce substantial and rapid transformation of basic features of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were doomed to disappointment. It was, and is, clear that systemic changes in "real socialism" (for instance, concerning human rights), would occur, if at all, only in the long run, and would be produced by powerful domestic forces rather than by external pressures. Even the strongest of outside diplomatic actions would accomplish little in the absence of such indigenous forces and might, on the contrary, lead to a harsh backlash by existing regimes. Other "actions", in the form of "words", at Helsinki, Belgrade and Madrid, were not likely to produce fundamental alterations in the Communist systems in the near future.

What *was*, more properly, expected, or at least hoped for, was that Helsinki would bring about some changes in the policies of

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