

“The Need for Better Economic and Commercial Information.”

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I must point out that our experience has been very much like that of our Western partners so far as economic and commercial information from the Eastern countries is concerned. I must also mention that, as in the area of contacts, the situation differs noticeably from country to country, although there is one common characteristic — which is a kind of tension between the information available and the information required. Nevertheless one can, for the sake of argument, identify three distinct types. On one hand there are countries — or at least one country — where real efforts have led to a situation where information, particularly of a statistical nature, is widely available and of adequate quality. I would put Hungary in this class. Undoubtedly there are still some gaps in the statistical field — and this also applies to other countries I will mention — but the situation generally appears good, at least from the standpoint of commercial requirements.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, in contrast, are the countries where information needs are constantly coming up against limitations; either the information does not exist, or it is not accessible, which often amounts to the same thing. These are situations that lead one to ask whether there have been any significant changes in this field since Helsinki. Finally, there is an intermediate state of affairs, where, although efforts have been made, there are still serious deficiencies. I should like to speak at greater length concerning these last two categories.

In the Soviet Union, to speak first of statistics, it must be realized that a substantial mass of documentation and data now exists. As well, we know that, in addition to annual statistics on foreign trade, these figures are now published on a quarterly basis — and this is a positive step. We also know that agricultural and industrial production statistics exist, on an annual basis. In addition there is a fund of statistical and other information in chamber-of-commerce publications and other specialized or general-interest publications. This does not prevent our representatives from considering the lack of information as a real difficulty. Why?