

EUROPE'S MESSY REBIRTH

Any new security system for Europe won't be nearly as tidy as the old one – maybe it doesn't need to be.

BY CHRISTOPH BERTRAM

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS. FOR FORTY years, history seemed frozen in the Soviet empire and in East-West relations, and gradually West Europeans, including West Germans, came to arrange themselves in a reality which seemed enduring. Now that reality is past. As a result, old certainties have been replaced by new uncertainties.

The very base on which Europe's security system has rested for so long is crumbling: Eastern Europe, no longer a security bulwark for the Soviet Union, is becoming a large buffer zone between Russia and Western Europe. Soviet forces, against whom NATO was set up, are leaving their garrisons in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and are being thinned out in Poland and East Germany. The threat which NATO deterred so effectively for so long, is shrinking, if not disappearing.

What will this mean for the future? In March, East Germans voted for a new government whose only mandate is to negotiate the quick unification of Germany. By this summer, economic and monetary union will be established between the two German states, and West Germany's Deutschmark the currency for the whole area. In three to four years – some think even earlier – there will not be two, but only one, united German state.

The Soviet Union has ceased to be the dominant power in the centre of Europe. That seems irreversible. Of course, nobody can predict the future of President Gorbachev and the fate of the reform for which he stands. The task of turning the Soviet Union into a modern state capable of integration into the international political and economic system is gigantic – the present reform leadership may well stumble and possibly fail in the effort. But even if it is replaced by a more traditional regime, the changes that occurred in Eastern Europe cannot be reversed.

Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary will not accept a return of Soviet troops and of Soviet tutelage, nor will East Germans forgo unity with the West. Any Soviet attempt to reconquer the lost terrain by military force would risk what East and West have so care-

fully avoided ever since the beginning of the nuclear age – direct, and possibly escalatory, military confrontation.

So much is clear. But now the uncertainties – and the chances – are coming to the fore. How should the unification of Germany be accommodated in the existing European security structure? How should the structure itself evolve, given the virtual disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the need, for the Atlantic Alliance and its NATO-organization, to adjust to the fundamental changes in Europe? What threats, if any, are left to justify military alliances at all?

To date, nobody knows the answers to these questions. For some time the need to develop new structures of security in Europe has been widely recognized. But when the East European revolution occurred, none of them had been brought to conclusion. So there is no firm framework in which to integrate the united Germany, the newly democratic states of Eastern Europe or the two alliance systems.

THE FIRST QUESTION IS WHETHER SUCH A framework is at all necessary. Have the military threats not disappeared, is détente not finally accomplished? Unfortunately, the prospects for a Europe of peace and harmony remain clouded. Europe – despite the cuts in military forces that have been made and those that are currently, with good chances of success, being negotiated between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries in Vienna – remains, in military personnel and fire-power, the most militarized region in the world, and nuclear weapons are in the arsenals of the major powers.

It is true that the old concept of threat which the West has so long feared and which Soviet sources now confirm was part of Soviet military planning – namely a massive, rapidly moving attack by Warsaw Pact forces against the West – appears today like a faded cartoon in an old journal. But the potential for conflict remains: ethnic strife in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Balkans; crises in the nearby Third World – the Middle East and Northern Africa – spreading to Europe. And there is, of course, one traditional problem of

European security which the unification of Germany has revived in the minds of many of her neighbours: whether a strong Germany might once again challenge European stability.

Europe's ability to address these problems would depend not least on the organization that can be found to deal with the new threats as effectively as the Atlantic Alliance has dealt with the old ones. Today, a number of candidates are available, but none of them fully qualify.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) seems best placed to provide a framework which spans East and West Europe. It includes practically all European states, plus the Soviet Union, the United States and Canada. However, it is a traditional international conference: every state has one vote, and no agreement or common action is possible unless there is total consensus among them. The CSCE is thus like the United Nations without a Security Council, a Secretary General, or even a Secretariat.

While it is increasingly accepted that the CSCE's organizational structure should be strengthened – for example, by regular meetings of foreign ministers, the establishment of a crisis centre, or an organization for arms control verification – it is essentially a framework for negotiation, communication and dialogue, not for decisive common action in case of crisis. The idea that one day the two existing alliance systems could merge under its roof, therefore, still belongs more to the realm of wishful thinking than to reality.

CAN THE TWO ALLIANCE SYSTEMS DO THE JOB, by serving on the one hand the security needs of their respective members and, on the other, by building a joint network of arms control and crisis cooperation? Again, the answer is negative, for the simple reason that the Warsaw Pact has ceased, for all practical purposes, to operate as a cohesive body. Instead, the Atlantic Pact with NATO is today the only functioning security structure left in Europe.

Nor does the demise of the Warsaw Pact imply that of NATO. In contrast to the Eastern bloc which was essentially a transmission belt