

EAST-WEST RELATIONS

BACKGROUNDER

East-West relations have evolved dramatically of late.

The radical restructuring of almost all the governments in Eastern Europe, together with the expectation of democratic elections to be held there in the coming months, the substantive high-level visits and summits held between the USSR and the West, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the INF Agreement, progress on arms control, announced cuts in future Soviet military budgets and the improvement in the Soviet human rights record are but some of the factors which bear witness to this evolution.

It is now clear that the wide-ranging and profound changes championed by President Gorbachev offer the best chance for improved East-West relations in the post-war era.

Canada and the USSR share many characteristics; this means that Canada, of all the NATO allies, has a unique opportunity to develop a wide range of cooperative ventures with the USSR in its chosen course of action. This common ground includes the Arctic, multicultural heritages, environmental concerns, and the challenges posed by resource-based economies.

It is in Canada's interest that the process of reform in the USSR and Eastern Europe succeed. We are in a position to co-operate on both political and economic reform with the Soviet Union and East European countries, especially through increased contacts and the development of existing ties. Canada recently announced an economic assistance package to help the governments of Poland and Hungary implement economic reforms. The Canadian government is also actively engaged in the development of the concept of a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in which it plans to participate.

Canada supports the continuation of NATO's stabilizing function in East-West relations and welcomes the manner in which the Alliance has promoted and managed change by encouraging those forces in the East which are working towards a transformation of their societies. NATO will continue to assert itself for many years to come as a useful and flexible political entity in the ongoing dialogue between East and West.