

'Following Moscow's decisions: Europe-USSR relations' from Europe (5 October 1988)

Caption: In his editorial of 5 October 1988, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, focuses principally on economic and trade relations between the European Community and a Soviet Union led by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Source: Europe. Dir. of publ. Riccardi, Lodovico ; REditor Riccardi, Ferdinando. 05.10.1988, No 4866. Brussels. "Following Moscow's decisions: Europe-USSR relations", auteur:Gazzo, Emanuele , p. 1.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/following_moscow_s_decisions_europe_ussr_relations_from_europe_5_october_1988-en-ae26a70f-cd4a-4d11-82ae-901f50ac5b13.html

Last updated: 02/07/2015

Following Moscow's decisions: Europe-USSR relations

We wrote yesterday that Europe (and we might add the rest of the free world) has no interest in seeing the Soviet Union fall into a situation of chaos or political and economic destabilisation. Such a situation might be determined by what we called an “explosive mixture”, namely the combination of a greater freedom of expression with a clear lack of success of the “perestroika” (or the effects that the people expect from it). These effects will only come about gradually and provided that public opinion accepts the constraints that are logically linked to it.

The question arising now is to know whether the concentration of the highest power in the hands of one man in a system based on the single party concept allows the desired effects to come about. It is difficult to answer that question. We recall that in his speech given before the Supreme Soviet on 7 September (EUROPE/Documents No 1525), EP President Lord Plumb declared, inter alia, that “these problems are not easily solved by referring only to one ideology”, a transparent allusion to pluralism. Moreover, no later than yesterday, in a speech given in Brussels at the Royal Institute for International Relations, NATO's Secretary-General Mr. Woerner declared that “it is not in the interest of the West that the reforms advocated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev fail” and the West “should encourage Soviet and Eastern European leaders” whose programmes mean greater freedom and greater well-being for their peoples.

Without a doubt, the European Community can only wish that the changes now taking place will allow the optimal realisation of the new type of relations that will be established at the economic and trade levels — but also at the political level — between itself and the COMECON countries, amongst them the USSR. This without prejudice to the political and institutional structures that the people of the Soviet Union will decide to adopt for themselves. Everybody remarked about how much Mr. Gorbachev insisted on his will to give “power back to the people” : he obviously does not ignore the fact that, during the last 70 years of his country's history, this transfer of the power to the people, which was at the basis of Marxism-Leninism, hardly made any progress.

“The opening to the East” carried out by the European Community through the signature of the joint declaration on the establishment of official relations between itself and the COMECON (more precisely CMEA, Council of Mutual Economic Assistance) will be implemented along two parallel tracks: one for the two organisations and the other for each of the COMECON member countries on the one hand and the Community as a whole on the other. We should not forget that the opening was made possible by the changes that took place in the USSR when Gorbachev became First Secretary of the CPSU. This is why Europe is betting on the maintenance and the improvement of these conditions, since, as noted by Mr. Klepsch in his excellent report adopted by the EP last month, if the new phase “opens new opportunities”, it “also includes new uncertainties and the EEC-USSR cooperation must be prepared for both”. The reform of external trade is probably one of the most revolutionary aspects of the “perestroika”, according to Klepsch. A Soviet commentator, M. I. Frantseva, researcher at the “Economic Institute for the World Socialist System”, goes maybe somewhat too far when he states that the framework agreement “might result in a radical change of the world economic map”. The way to be travelled on those parallel tracks is long and difficult, and Mr. Cheysson was right in advising the MEPs to be somewhat cautious. Moreover, M. Frantseva considers that — in accordance with the programme decided recently in Prague — the COMECON countries interested in it will want to establish a unified market, with a common customs tariff, a common trade policy, currency convertibility, etc.” He knows also that the Twelve must solve some of the fundamental problems concerning the nature itself of Union. His conclusion is that “tremendous work will have to be done” . We agree wholeheartedly. A task that will succeed if we build without destroying, if we move forward together in the right direction.

Emanuele Gazzo