

“On the Madrid Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe”

The battle for the freedom of its citizens is the key problem in the Soviet Union, an unavoidable step in confronting the entire body of its internal problems. But this is not only an internal matter. A real guarantee of international security is impossible without public control of the Soviet superpower. For this reason the human rights situation in the U.S.S.R. must become a common concern for the politicians and the public of the entire world, and above all the concern of nations who are the Soviet Union's partners in the Helsinki Accords.

Members of the human rights movement in the Soviet Union have appealed and continue to appeal to the West. In calling for help, we are counting not on pity and good will, but on the farsightedness of the West: this is our common concern, and human rights activists are carrying out the most difficult part.

The Final Act signed at Helsinki is the first international agreement based on the close ties between honoring human rights and international security. At the Belgrade conference on the fulfillment of the Helsinki Accords, for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union's relations with the West, an attempt was made to question the Soviet government's behavior to its own citizens. The Soviet delegation refused to make explanations under the pretext that this is an internal matter. Unfortunately, the Western diplomats' first step towards defending human rights as the basis for common security turned out to be very timid. The timidity of the Soviet Union's Western partners in the Helsinki Accords has led to a deterioration of the public climate within the U.S.S.R. This was felt by millions of believers, as there was a sharp rise in religious persecutions. Tens of thousands of people hoping to emigrate were refused. There was an increase in pressure on nationalist movements, and on non-Russian peoples in general. Members of independent human rights groups, publishers of religious literature, editors of samizdat journals, members of the fledgling workers' movement, all found themselves behind bars. Thousands of active citizens ended up in prisons, camps, psychiatric hospitals. The academician Sakharov was imprisoned. Conditions for political prisoners grew harsher.

If one needed a confirmation of the indissoluble ties between upholding human rights and common security, this was tragically highlighted in the period after Belgrade: the lack of control and growing self-confidence of the Soviet government manifested itself again, and especially visibly, in the invasion of Afghanistan.

What can be done in Madrid, to change the turn of events after Belgrade?

1. Analysis of the fulfillment of the requirements of the Final Act should begin with the Act's categorical requirement for the immediate release of imprisoned members of the Helsinki Groups: it is impossible to acknowledge the fulfillment of any responsibilities while those who were monitoring their fulfillment are denied freedom.

The Helsinki Accords demand the release of prisoners of conscience in all the participating nations. In determining which prisoners fall in this category we should be guided by Amnesty International's lists.

2. Based on the foundational premise of the Final Act regarding the indissoluble ties between common security and human rights, give equal attention to both sides of this formula at the Madrid conference and at all future meetings of the partners in the Helsinki Accords.
3. Create an international commission consisting of representatives of the governments and people of all partner nations of the Helsinki Accords to keep track of all the available information about human rights violations in these countries; regarding the U.S.S.R. – facts contained in the documents of the Helsinki Groups, Committees for the investigation of the use of psychiatry for political purposes, the Christian committee for the defense of the rights of believers in the U.S.S.R., the Catholic committee for the defense of the rights of believers, the Council of relatives of Evangelical Baptist Christian prisoners and other independent human rights associations, as well as in the Chronicle of Current Events, the Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church and other informative human rights publications.

Create a permanent international commission, with the participation of the public, to investigate concrete instances of government violations of citizens' rights. Establish that any citizen who appeals to this commission cannot be the object of persecution in spite of the commission's conclusion about their complaint.

The Moscow Helsinki Group, calling for the delegates of the Belgrade conference to give due attention to human rights concerns, wrote:

“The Soviet Union can threaten to break from the conference in Belgrade under the pretext that it is interfering into internal affairs... We think that in reality it is very unlikely that they will carry out such a break, as their own interests are too strongly concerned. But if this break does take place, it would, of course, be a great misfortune, but only a temporary delay in the historically inevitable process of détente. On the other hand, it is our deep conviction that it would be a much greater misfortune, a catastrophe with not easily remediable consequences for the future of humanity, if there is capitulation and indifference in the face of this intimidation and other threats”/document No 26 MHG/.

These recommendations continue to stand for the Madrid conference.

Will the Western governments have sufficient political farsightedness and firmness not to back down this time? We are doubtful, but nevertheless we call for them to be farsighted and firm.

We call for the public of Western nations to use all possible means to put pressure on their governments. Our common future depends on this.

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[Translated by Anya Grenier for the National Security Archive]