

THE HELSINKI AGREEMENTS

THIRTY-FIVE NATIONS SIGN A BLUEPRINT FOR PEACE AND COOPERATION

(a Summary)

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THE AGREEMENTS set out in the "Final Act" of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe were the final stage of negotiations and discussions that had gone on for many years. Many obstacles had to be overcome before the Conference could be convened in 1973. After the first meeting of Heads of State agreed on the objectives of the conference, it was remitted to Commissions, with all the states taking part. For many months, and sometimes with sharp controversy, every paragraph was debated and every detail scrutinized.

In the end, they did reach agreement. On August 1st, 1975 in Helsinki, every European head of state except Albania, together with the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada, as members of the NATO alliance, signed the Final Act and did so, in the words of the document, "declaring their determination to act in accordance with its provisions." That is the miracle of Helsinki and the promise that it will not be allowed to become a scrap of paper. It is the most far-reaching agreement in history on measures to secure peace and cooperation between states with widely different social and economic systems. The outstanding fact is that in a continent, still divided by armed alliances, bestrewn with arms, including nuclear weapons, that could destroy us all, burdened with arms expenditure reducing the living standards of every country, all the powers could meet and agree on the most far-reaching measures for cooperation in trade, technological exchanges, science, travel, mutual recognition of human rights and many other fields of activity.

In all these fields, the leaders of all the countries recognized the reality that the interests of their peoples demanded peaceful coexistence and that the corollary to the Helsinki agreements must be disarmament. Nations cannot recognize their interdependence and their common interest in cooperation and peace, on one hand, while, on the other, building up ever more powerful armed forces against each other. Disarmament discussions are

being carried out separately, in talks in Vienna between representatives of the NATO and Warsaw alliances, between the USA and the Soviet Union and in United Nations bodies. The leaders who signed the Final Act in Helsinki gave notice that they expect these negotiations to make progress and to succeed.

The urgent need now is for the peoples to become aware of the pledges given in their name and to make their voices heard in concrete measures to ensure that the agreements are fulfilled. All the governments promised to publish the full text of the Final Act. Some, like the British Government, did so in a White Paper with a print of a few thousand. Others, particularly the socialist countries, printed it in millions. The Soviet Union did so in the language of the various republics. Even so, the text, running into some 30,000 words, makes difficult reading since it goes into meticulous detail and was subjected to examination of every sentence.

This summary seeks to present the main points of the agreement, which in Britain has been virtually ignored by the mass media. The peoples have the right to know the pledges given in their name and a duty to see they are carried out.

LOYALTY TO THE U. N. CHARTER

A number of basic principles run through the document. Repeatedly it stresses the loyalty of all the participants to the Charter of the United Nations and in one clause it says specifically that "if obligations under a treaty are in conflict with the Charter, the Charter will prevail." It is laid down in respect of many of the plans for cooperation that they shall be carried out through the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe which includes all European countries and provides the bridge between East and West. Projects for scientific and educational co-operation are to be worked out in conjunction with UNESCO.

Repeatedly, too, the Final Act stresses that the agreements will be put into practice, irrespective of the political, economic or social systems of the participating states. As befits a conference where the great powers met on equal terms with the tiniest countries like Liechtenstein and the Holy See, it declared that the principles apply irrespective of size, geographical location or level of economic development.

There is insistence that Europe is not thinking only of its own territory and that its security must be linked with that of the world as a whole. A specific pledge is given to make advances in all fields available to all, to narrow the differences in the levels of economic development and, in particular, to pay regard to the interests of developing countries throughout the world.

The need to take effective measures to complement political detente with measures of disarmament is clearly stated and the

ultimate goal of "general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" is affirmed.

Provision is made for the participating states to carry into effect agreements covering the widest range of activities by multilateral discussions with as many countries as are interested, by bilateral agreements with a particular state, or independently.

Switzerland submitted a draft convention on a European system for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the conference decided that this should be submitted for consideration to a meeting of experts. Progress in the implementation of the agreements will be reported at a meeting of foreign ministers in Belgrade in 1977.

INVIOABILITY OF FRONTIERS

The first section of the Final Act deals with security in Europe. All the participating states pledged themselves to respect each others' right to choose their political, social, economic and cultural systems.

One of the principles that had to be established before the conference could meet was the acceptance of the European frontiers established following the defeat of Nazi Germany, and the participation in the Helsinki meeting of both German states. The document affirms the inviolability of each others' frontiers and the signatories declare that they will refrain from military occupation or other direct or indirect measures of force and that "no such occupation will be recognized as legal."

The document goes on to lay down that disputes will be settled by negotiation, conciliation and arbitration and that the states will refrain from any action which might make a peaceful settlement more difficult. They will refrain from any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in the internal or external affairs falling within the jurisdiction of another participating state, regardless of their mutual relations, and will equally refrain from any other form of military, political or economic coercion.

All the countries pledged themselves to respect each others' right freely to choose and develop their political, social, economic and cultural systems as well as their right to determine their own laws and regulations.

Then comes the declaration that the participating countries consider that their frontiers can be changed in accordance with international law by peaceful means and by agreement, and that they also have the right to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties. They also have the right to neutrality.

A pledge is given to act in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this is supported by specific

promises to respect freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Minorities will be equal before the law.

The document "recognizes that this respect is an essential for peace and for development of friendly relations and cooperation between all states."

"OBSERVERS" AT MANOEUVRES

Then comes a reference to the dangers of armed conflict and the possibility of misunderstanding or miscalculation of military activities and the document proposes as a means of strengthening confidence and stability that observers be exchanged by invitation at military manoeuvres and that prior notification be given of major manoeuvres. It recognizes that this must rest on a voluntary basis, but it proposes that any manoeuvre exceeding 25,000 troops shall be notified 21 days or more in advance, and asks: "They may also notify other military manoeuvres and will invite other participating states, voluntarily and in a spirit of reciprocity and goodwill, to send observers to attend military manoeuvres."

A separate clause deals with the Mediterranean and notes the interest taken in the conference by Mediterranean states which did not take part. A pledge is given to conduct relations with the Mediterranean states in the spirit of the Helsinki agreements "with the purpose of contributing to peace and reducing armed forces in the region."

Having laid down these principles, the document goes on to detail the various fields of cooperation and the means of carrying them out.

REMOVING OBSTACLES TO TRADE

It calls for *trade* on as broad a multilateral basis as possible and also recognizes the value of bilateral trade agreements. It affirms the need to reduce all obstacles to the development of trade and to ensure favourable conditions for participation of firms, organizations and enterprises, these to include measures to improve working conditions of representatives of foreign organizations concerned with foreign trade, considering favourably requests for establishment of permanent representation and provision of business and residential premises and means of communication. Information will be provided in the form of statistics on production, national income and productivity. Information will be exchanged, if appropriate through joint commissions, for economic, scientific and technical cooperation. Support is given to the idea that the UN Economic Commission for Europe should work out a system for notification of laws and regulations concerning foreign trade and for harmonization of statistical nomenclature.

Market research, says the Final Act, should be encouraged and improved, and methods of effective marketing worked out. Exchanges of "know how," joint industrial research, exploration of possibilities of joint projects are all listed, and the promise is repeated to bear in mind the economic structures and the development level of the different countries. There is a specific reference to the usefulness of small and medium sized firms.

TECHNOLOGICAL EXCHANGES

Among the possible spheres of cooperation, the document lists energy resources, including petroleum, natural gas and coal, and exchanges of electricity, within Europe so as to use the capacity of the power stations as rationally as possible. It proposes bilateral agreements to avoid double taxation and steps to facilitate the transfer of profits and the return of the value of invested assets.

A pledge is given to remove obstacles to scientific and technological information. Proposals are made for international exchanges of scientists in various fields, including agriculture, transport, physics, including nuclear theoretical and experimental physics, the practical application of improved technology to industry, meteorology, oceanography, seismological research, computers and telecommunications, space research, environmental research and public health.

Ways suggested for these forms of cooperation include exchanges of technological publication, exchange visits, international conferences and seminars on joint programmes of mutual interest. It is suggested that the UN Economic Commission for Europe should sponsor conferences to bring together younger scientists and eminent scientists.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

A special section is devoted to protection of the environment. "Technological progress," it says, "must be compatible with preservation of historical and cultural values." The ecological balance, it adds, must be preserved in the exploitation and management of natural resources, and agreement is registered to study national and international measures in this respect, these to include protection of rivers, lakes and seas, especially the Mediterranean, ensuring soil productivity with due regard to possible negative effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the harmful effects of noise, recovery and regeneration of waste and research on substitutes for non-biodegradable substances (plastics).

On this question, too, the document declares for exchanges of information, meetings of scientists and joint projects within the programmes of the UNECE and the UN Environment programme.

The section on transport notes that the speed of technical development in the various fields makes desirable a development of cooperation and more exchange of information. It refers to the work of the Inland Transport Committee of the UNECE and advocates harmonization of administrative and technical provisions concerning road, rail, river, air and sea transport.

PROMOTING TOURISM

Meticulous attention is given to various ways of promoting tourism and the document speaks of the contribution tourism makes to the development of mutual understanding among peoples and the value of increased knowledge of other countries' achievements and their economic and cultural progress. It affirms the intention to encourage increased tourism on an individual and group basis, "dealing in a positive way with allocation of financial means for travel abroad, having regard to the economic possibilities as well as those connected with travel formalities." Conferences and symposiums on planning and development of tourism are suggested with attention to travel outside the peak periods.

RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS

The rights of migrant workers are the subject of a series of pledges and recommendations. These include measures to ensure that they have equal rights with nationals of the host country, their right to free instruction in the language of the host country and access for their children to the same educational facilities. Encouragement is also to be given to efforts, in the countries from which the workers migrate, to increase possibilities of employment in their own territories.

The training of professional staff and technicians is set out as important for the development of all countries and proposals are made for cooperation and exchanges of these workers and for a study of methods of training on the job particularly in professions involving modern techniques.

FREER MOVEMENT OF PEOPLES

Then comes the section on cooperation in humanitarian and other fields on which so much discussion took place. It expresses the determination of the participants to "cooperate among themselves irrespective of their political, economic and social systems in order to create better conditions and strengthen existing forms of cooperation and to work out new ways of doing so." They say that they will make it their aim to facilitate freer movement and contacts, individually and collectively, whether privately or officially among persons, institutions and organizations of the participating states and to contribute to the solution of the humani-

tarian problems that arise. They promise to consider favourably applications for travel to enable persons to leave their territory temporarily to visit members of their families, and to do so without distinction as to the country of origin or destination, with priority treatment for emergencies. Steps will be taken to ensure that fees for official travel documents and visas are acceptable. They confirm that presentation of an application on this basis will not modify the rights and obligation of the applicant or the members of his family.

The participating countries also promise to deal in a positive and humanitarian spirit with applications by persons wishing to be reunited with members of their family and to allow them to take household and personal effects. When they reach the new country, they are to be guaranteed education, medical assistance and social security on the same scale as its own citizens. Requests for exit or entry permits by persons who have decided to marry a citizen of another participating state will be examined favourably and in a humanitarian spirit.

Wider travel for personal or professional reasons will be facilitated, restrictions will be eased and, where appropriate, multilateral or bilateral conventions for improvement of consular services will be considered.

The document confirms that religious faiths, institutions and organizations practicing within the framework of their countries will be able in the field of their activities to have contacts and meetings among themselves.

There is a firm pledge to further the development of contacts and exchanges among young people and to expand cooperation in the field of sport.

EXCHANGES OF INFORMATION

A long section on information declares that the participating states will facilitate freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds, and will encourage improvement of the conditions in which journalists from one participating state exercise their profession in another state, and that "the legitimate pursuit of their professional activity will neither render journalists liable to expulsion nor otherwise penalize them." In the event of a journalist being expelled it is laid down that he will be informed of the reason and may apply for reexamination of his case.

Cooperation between journalists, radio and tv commentators will be encouraged, and other measures will include lecture tours by specialists from other countries, round table meetings, more imports of newspapers and publications from other states with more points of sale and availability in public libraries, and wider showing of films illustrating life in the different countries.

CULTURAL LINKS

Pledges are given to improve at various levels cooperation and links in all cultural fields and where appropriate to conclude agreements on joint projects. Direct contacts between persons engaged in cultural activities will be encouraged. A proposal is made for a "bank of cultural data" to make an inventory of cultural and scientific films and to encourage exhibitions and exchanges. Measures are to be taken to facilitate exchanges of works of art and to promote translations of literary works, especially from the less spoken languages. The contribution made by the cultural heritage of national minorities will be recognized. Architects and town planners will be encouraged to cooperate.

A specific proposal is made for a scientific forum in the near future of leading scientists from the participating states to discuss interrelated problems of common interest in regard to the future developments in science and to promote expansion of contacts and exchanges of information. An early meeting of experts to prepare the conference is anticipated.

Contacts between universities and other institutions of higher education, travel facilities for teachers and students, awards of scholarships to teachers and students from other countries, exchanges of material for fundamental research in natural sciences and medicine are among other agreed projects.

IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENTS

Finally, the document records the decision taken by all the states to implement the agreements. They declare that within the broader context of the world, the Conference is an important part of the process of improving security and developing cooperation in Europe and that its results will contribute significantly to this process and they record their intention "to give full effects to its results."

This will be done by the individual states (unilaterally), where appropriate, by agreements between two states (bilaterally) and by multinational agreement, by meetings of experts of the participating states within the framework of existing international organizations, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and UNESCO.

They agreed on proceeding to a thorough exchange of views on the implementation of the provisions of the Final Act and the tasks defined by the conference and to the first meeting at foreign ministers level in Belgrade on June 15th, 1977. The last paragraph records that all the heads of state signed the Final Act, "mindful of the high political significance which they attach to the results of the Conference and their determination to act in accordance with its provisions."