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Working the sub-surface chambers of an open economic source.

THE INTELLIGENCE YIELD FROM ECE

Ernest Chase

UNESCO's Economic Commission for Europe is the only international organization to which all European governments belong and which deals exclusively with problems of interest to both Eastern and Western Europe. Each year it holds several hundred meetings attended by government representatives and experts from East and West. Its highly professional Secretariat of economists and technicians includes an increasing number of East Europeans, now close to one-third of the staff. The Secretariat maintains contact on staff level with other international organizations in Europe, including the Soviet Bloc's CEMA.

Because ECE is uniquely in a position to obtain economic and related data from East European governments, its publications are an important source of information on the Soviet Bloc economies. But the intelligence value of the published data can be increased and additional unpublished information can be obtained by participating in the work of the Commission. U.S. participation for this purpose has been effected principally through the assignment to the U.S. Mission in Geneva of an officer with a background in economic intelligence, and it has proved worth while.

Organization and Operations

The Commission itself meets annually and its ten main committees (Steel, Electric Power, Gas, etc.) periodically to decide what projects are to be undertaken and to make a review—usually rather perfunctory—of the resulting products. At these policy-making meetings the typical delegate is a senior government official at the assistant secretary or division director level, sometimes even a cabinet minister. The discussions tend to be rather general and are often flavored by political considerations, but from them emerge the decisions

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which determine broadly what kind of information will be developed.

When a project has been approved for inclusion in the work program, it becomes the task of the Secretariat to carry it out, most frequently by preparing a questionnaire for member governments, analyzing the replies, and publishing the results in a study or statistical bulletin. Before publication the information furnished by member governments is for internal Secretariat use only, and there are said to have been cases of dismissal for prior disclosure to delegates from other countries.

This work of the Secretariat involves numerous meetings of expert groups, some of them permanent bodies devoted to a particular kind of activity, like the Statistical Working Parties, and others formed ad hoc for work on specific projects, sometimes even helping draft the publications. The members of these are generally technicians, including national experts from East and West, and their meetings, devoted to technical agenda in which political considerations play little part, are often distinguished by a rather free exchange of information.

Data furnished by the East European governments for ECE projects often leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, the East Europeans try to appear cooperative in the meetings, and in recent years their data have slowly improved under pressure from the Secretariat and other member governments. The main reason for the deficiencies is undoubtedly their concern for security, but in some cases there may be bureaucratic or other reasons: the new Soviet director of the ECE Steel, Housing, and Engineering Division has declared that much of the Soviet data missing from ECE publications is readily available and that he will work on the problem. It is possible, accordingly, that the growth of East European representation on the staff may result in some improvement in the data on Bloc countries.

In recent months representatives of CEMA and other East European economic organizations have attended a number of ECE meetings, and members of the Secretariat staff have reciprocated by going to at least one CEMA meeting. These contacts will probably increase.

Only about half the Secretariat staff works on projects originating as described above within the committee structure and thus specifically approved by member governments. The other half compose a Research Division which conducts independent studies of European economic problems and prepares an annual European Economic Survey and a Quarterly Bulletin. Theoretically the Division is able to go to member governments and get the information necessary for its studies; but since the East European governments are not willing to cooperate unless they can influence the conclusions, its research on Eastern Europe has become virtually dependent upon published data.

Intelligence Potential

There are several ways in which the intelligence value of the ECE documents can be increased and supplemented through U.S. participation in the Commission's work. Both the policy-making committees and the expert groups offer certain possibilities; also important are the relationships established with Secretariat members.

In the meetings of the Commission proper and its committees where the work program is established, attempts can be made to steer the program along the lines of intelligence interests. The procedure is to identify and develop the rationale for projects that will yield data of interest and then seek approval from the appropriate committee. It is not easy to find such projects that will be acceptable, but the United States has had considerable success in the Steel Committee, where it has been helped by the interest of the U.S. steel industry in obtaining commercial intelligence. This interest has made it possible to obtain the services of industry officials as delegates and to brief them on economic intelligence requirements, which have consequently had a significant influence on the Committee's work program and in particular on its collection of statistical data.

But even when the work program has not been so influenced, a number of the ECE projects under way at any particular time are of possible intelligence value. To take advantage of this fact it is necessary to become familiar with the program, evaluating the potential of the individual projects. If a project appears promising, participation in the appropriate

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Intelligence From ECE

expert groups and close contacts with the responsible ECE officials are the important lines of action. To be of influence in the execution of a project, the United States must play a constructive role not only by providing requested data but by participation in the expert groups assisting the Secretariat. Such participation provides a legitimate reason to expect and obtain cooperation from the Secretariat. One can then raise questions regarding gaps in the data or designed to clarify it, including questions of definition, coverage, methodology, and sources. It can be asked, for example, whether the data were provided by governments in the form used or were modified or estimated by ECE, and if the latter on what basis.

It is difficult to assess the value of such participation in relation to its cost. Some additional information has thereby been developed, particularly in the areas of steel, energy, and agriculture. Thus a project on the relative merits of various steel-making processes provided some information on comparative capital and operating costs in East European steel plants; a project on agricultural statistics clarified the methodologies used in Eastern Europe for the collection of meat and milk statistics; certain energy projects have developed information on forecasting techniques and criteria for making investment decisions.

The potential intelligence value of its projects would normally be only a marginal factor in deciding on U.S. participation in ECE. For policy reasons the United States usually sends delegates to Commission and Committee sessions even though they are of little intelligence value, while because of the absence of policy considerations it usually does not send experts to the technical meetings which often have some intelligence potential. To take care of intelligence interests, therefore, the U.S. Mission in Geneva has had for several years, in addition to its foreign service officer, one with a background in general economic intelligence. He has the main responsibility for identifying the ECE projects of possible interest, familiarizing himself with their scope and methodologies, participating in appropriate expert meetings, establishing contacts with the ECE officials, and following up on specific questions and requirements from Washington reflecting its judgment on the potential significance of particular projects.

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The U.S. Mission's intelligence activities in ECE are not limited to the above. Its reports on meetings, for example, are often the only record of the bits of information divulged by delegates during technical and economic discussions. It recommends that U.S. experts be furnished for the working groups when such participation seems warranted, and it briefs these to take full advantage of their participation. It reports on trips by Secretariat members and others into Eastern Europe and participates itself in study trips. To the extent it can within the framework of legitimate liaison, it questions the ECE Secretariat regarding its contacts with Eastern experts and Eastern organizations such as CEMA.

The degree and kind of U.S. participation in ECE thus to some extent determines its value as a source of economic intelligence. Participation in the Commission and Committees can influence the content of the work program; participation in the expert groups can influence the quality and coverage of specific projects. The U.S. Mission in Geneva is usually the most efficient channel for such participation. The assignment to it of one officer with intelligence background, though not sufficient to cover all possibilities of intelligence gain, assures that the more promising avenues are explored.