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Commentary: COMMEMORATION OF SOVIET AGGRESSION AGAINST THE BALTIC STATES

The 25th anniversary since the annexation and incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union was commemorated on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Among the political highlights of these activities was the reception of free Baltic delegation by the Secretary of State Dean Rusk, U. S. Congress debate and passage of a resolution on Baltic freedom, and the speeches of Mikoyan, Kosygin, and Suslov in the capitals of the Baltic republics.

Free Baltic Delegation at the State Department

U. S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk received a delegation of the Joint Baltic American Committee on June 23, 1965 in Washington. In a half-hour audience, the basic problems of the Baltic States were discussed.

"The purpose of our visit to you," the Committee said in a statement conveyed to the Secretary of State, "is to express the appreciation of the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians in this country, united through their organizations in the Joint Baltic American Committee, for the stand which the United States took twenty-five years ago with regard to the occupation and subsequent annexation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union, which stand the Government of the United States continues to maintain, not giving recognition to this act of Soviet aggression."

"The purpose of our visit," the statement continued, "is also to register once more the protest of the Baltic peoples, voiced through the Joint Baltic American Committee, against the violation of international law and basic moral principles by the Soviet Union, which — by sheer military force and in violation of existing treaties — took away the basic human and political rights of the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians and imposed a communist regime upon them, thus establishing and maintaining a case of most flagrant colonialism in Europe at a time when other people of the world, one by one, are being freed from foreign domination on the basis of the principles of self-determination proclaimed by another great American, President Woodrow Wilson."

"In registering this protest," the statement concluded, "the Joint Baltic American Committee expresses its hope that under the leadership of the United States and with the support of the Free World the injustice perpetrated by the Soviet Union in 1940 will be rectified, and self-determination, freedom and independence will be returned to the Baltic peoples. The very fact of this meeting will give new heart and strength to the Baltic peoples behind the Iron Curtain in their resistance to communist ideology and physical and cultural genocide."

The reception of free Baltic representatives by Mr. Dean Rusk is of historical significance, since it marks the first time that a Baltic delegation was given an audience by a U. S. Secretary of State. The fact that the audience was timed with the 25th anniversary of Soviet aggression symbolizes the continuance of U. S. policy toward the Baltic States and did not go unnoticed either in the Kremlin or among the captive Baltic peoples.

U. S. Congress Resolution on Baltic Freedom

Nearly 150 Senators and Representatives joined in a far-ranging debate on the Baltic States, especially on June 14-17, 1965. The debate was notable for the relative absence of generalities and established a close connection between the case of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and the basic issues of today. One of the results of the debate was a passage of a resolution on Baltic freedom (H. Con. Res. 416), which was drafted and submitted by Congressman John S. Monagan (D., Conn.). The Resolution was adopted in the House of Representatives on June 21, 1965, with 298 Congressmen voting in favor, none against, and 136 not voting. The Senate is expected to pass on such a resolution in the near future. Prior to voting on the floor, the Resolution was unanimously approved by the Subcommittee on Europe and by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The U. S. Department of State has expressed its approval of the Resolution. The complete text of the adopted Resolution follows:

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION (H. Con. Res. 416)

Whereas the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination, and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and cooperation; and Whereas all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and reely pursue their economic, social, cultural, and religious development; and

Whereas the Baltic peoples of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have been forcibly deprived of these rights by the Government of the Soviet Union; and

Whereas the Government of the Soviet Union, through a program of deportations and resettlement of peoples, continues in its effort to change the ethnic character of the populations of the Baltic States; and

Whereas it has been the firm and consistent policy of the Government of the United States to support the aspirations of Baltic peoples for self-determination and national independence; and

Whereas there exist many historical, cultural, and family ties between the peoples of the Baltic States and the American people: Be it.

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the House of Representatives of the United States urge the President of the United States —

- (a) to direct the attention of world opinion at the United Nations and at other appropriate international forums and by such means as he deems appropriate, to the denial of the rights of self-determination for the peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and
- (b) to bring the force of world opinion to bear on behalf of the restoration of these rights to the Baltic peoples.

Soviet Reaction to U.S. Policy

The U. S. nonrecognition of Soviet annexation of the Baltic States has been a sore spot with the Kremlin. The reaffirmation of U. S. position this year hit a raw nerve in the Kremlin and among the Lithuanian Communist leaders.

Soviet Premier A. Kosygin, speaking in Riga on July 17th, said that "the Resolution on the Baltic republics, adopted by the Congress, is an integral part of the general policy line. American imperialism has made interference into foreign affairs almost a leading principle of its foreign policy."

Speaking at the main festive gathering to "celebrate" Soviet occupation of Lithuania, on July 17th, in Vilnius, Antanas Sniečkus, First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, said: "In connection with the 25-th anniversary of the Soviet regime, the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress has adopted a resolution, urging President Johnson to raise in the United Nations Organization the question of the violation of the Baltic nations right to self-determination. At the directions of the President of the United States, the 'Weeks of the Baltic Nations' are organized, in Which the Soviet system in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are attacked." (Tiesa, Vilnius, July 18, 1965) The main speaker at the festivity, organized by the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party and the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR, was Mikhail Suslov, Member of the Central Comittee's Presidium and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. Suslov violently attacked the U. S. policy in Vietnam and showed extreme sensitivity about U.S. support of Lithuania's freedom cause. He said:

"Especially disgusting is the villainous demagogy of the imperialistic chieftains of the United States. Each year they organize the so-called captive nations weeks, hypocritically pretending to be defenders of nations that have escaped from their yoke. These international gendarmes, stranglers of freedom and independence, would like again to enslave the free nations of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. But that will never happen!"

The Kremlin reaction to U. S. position crearly indicates the fears of the centralist leadership that the Baltic nations would choose freedom and independence if given a genuine chance for self determination, despite the great soviet effort of ideological, cultural and economic integration of these peoples into the Soviet Union.