



**Shenzhen College of International Education Model
United Nations (SCIEMUN) Conference 2024**



HISTORICAL COUNCIL

Background Guide

**Topic: Reconstructing Post-Communist Eastern Europe
(c.1989)**

Committee: Historical Council

Topic: Reconstructing Post-Communist Eastern Europe
(c.1989)

Chair: Ramaa Radke



Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Historical Council in SCIEMUN 2024! We are honored to have you in our committee.

My name is Ramaa Radke, and it is my pleasure to chair alongside my deputy chair Katherine Zhang. In this committee, our discussions will revolve around two critical topics: Reconstructing post-communist Eastern Europe (c.1989) and Stabilizing Southeast Asia following the unification of Vietnam (1976).

It is an expectation to ensure that delegates are prepared with opening speeches before the beginning of the committee session, they have read the chair background guide, as well as done additional research. Considering that this committee is a historical council, delegates are expected to pay attention to the cutoff dates for each topic and also keep in mind that the discussions in the committee will be taking place in the respective cut-off date.

Please remember that both Katherine and I are here to support you. Should you have any concerns regarding the topics, procedure rules, reach out to me in this email:

26.ramaa.radke@swis.cn.

Kind regards,

Ramaa Radke

Committee Background and Mission Statement

The Historical Council plays a vital role in understanding and analyzing important moments in world history, with the goal of fostering a deeper understanding on how historical events shaped the current global dynamics. The council's objectives are significant because they not only provide a platform for historical reflection but also promote discussions that can lead to more informed decisions in present and future international relations. By examining the events of the past, the council aims to influence positive change and encourage diplomatic resolutions to ongoing conflicts.

The main goals of the Historical Council include promoting historical awareness, encouraging cooperation, and developing conflict resolution strategies. By enhancing awareness of historical events and their implications, the council allows delegates to engage critically with the past. Moreover, it fosters communication among member states, encouraging cooperation and understanding to address historical events and foster reconciliation. (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada)

Since its establishment, the Historical Council has made significant contributions to understanding historical conflicts and their resolutions. Notable achievements include the adoption of resolutions that emphasize the importance of recognizing historical injustices and promoting reparative measures.

The Historical Council operates within the framework of the United Nations, contributing to its mission of maintaining international peace and security. The council collaborates closely with other UN bodies, such as the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, to ensure that historical perspectives inform contemporary policymaking. The council's work is integral to the UN's mission, reinforcing the importance of historical understanding in fostering peace and stability in the international community.

In the Historical Council, delegates will engage in critical analysis and debate, exploring alternative historical outcomes and proposing what might have been

more effective strategies. They will draw connections between past and present, examining how historical events inform contemporary geopolitical dynamics, international relations, and current policies. Through this process, they will practice diplomacy, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills, working towards drafting resolutions that offer new insights or solutions inspired by the lessons of history.

Topic Overview

The reconstruction of Eastern Europe refers to the political, economic, and social transformations following the end of the cold war, where key events include the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transition from communist regimes to democratic governance.

Introduction

The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe around 1989 led to a huge transformation across the region. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, countries including Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were urged to rebuild their political, economic, and social systems after decades of totalitarian rule (News, BBC). Many countries opted for "shock therapy," an approach exemplified by Poland, which aimed to quickly stabilize the economy through rapid liberalization and privatization. This method, while successful in reducing inflation, led to significant social unrest and increased unemployment (Murrell). In contrast, nations like the Czech Republic adopted more gradual reforms, balancing economic changes with social stability. Socially, the shift towards democracy brought about significant upheaval. Citizens, suppressed under authoritarian regimes, by the new democratic leaders, leading to widespread disillusionment. There was a growing gap between the emerging capitalist elite and the working class, which fueled social unrest. Grassroots movements, such as Poland's Solidarity, exemplified the desire for political

accountability and civic engagement. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) not only provided security guarantees but also led to economic opportunities and democratic reforms, however also raised concerns of national sovereignty (Ku.edu.2024).

Pre- 1989 Context

Communist Information Bureau (COMINFORM)

COMINFORM was a short-lived international communist organization active from 1947 to 1956. It was essentially the successor to the Communist International (COMINTERN), (“Cominform and Comecon | Facts, Summary, Creation & Establishment”). The organization was created in response to the Marshall Plan and aimed to strengthen Soviet influence over European communist parties. It had nine founding members, primarily from Eastern Europe. Cominform's main activities involved publishing propaganda to promote communist unity and resist perceived threats from the West. However, Cominform became less relevant after Stalin's death in 1953. The Soviet Union eventually replaced it with other organizations like COMECON and the Warsaw Pact to maintain influence over Eastern European communist states. Cominform was officially dissolved in 1956 as part of the Soviet Union's rapprochement with Yugoslavia and de-Stalinization efforts. Its brief existence reflects the changing geopolitical landscape of post-WWII Europe and the evolving strategies of the Soviet Union in its relations with Eastern European communist states. (The “Cominform”)

Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact, formed in 1955, represented the military alliance of Soviet-aligned Eastern European communist states (“Warsaw Pact”). By 1989, the Warsaw Pact was no longer in use, and its formal dissolution occurred on July 1, 1991, at a final summit

meeting in Prague (“Warsaw Pact”). Unlike the Marshall Plan, which actively promoted economic cooperation and reconstruction, the Warsaw Pact primarily served as a tool for Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe (“Warsaw Pact”). Its final dissolution marked the beginning of post-communist Eastern Europe.



Figure 1: Map of Warsaw Pact Countries

Marshall Plan

The Marshall Plan, launched in 1948, was a reasonably successful U.S.-sponsored program aimed at rehabilitating the economies of Western and Southern European countries after World War II (“Marshall Plan”). This initiative provided over \$13

billion in economic aid between 1948-1952, resulting in a 15-25% increase in gross national product for participating countries (“Marshall Plan”). The plan contributed substantially to the rapid renewal of Western Europe's chemical, engineering, and steel industries, stimulating U.S. economic growth and institutionalizing the concept of U.S. foreign aid programs (“Marshall Plan”). However, it is important to note that the Marshall Plan’s influence on post-communist Eastern Europe in 1989 was minimal. The actual reconstruction efforts in Eastern Europe during this period were driven primarily by domestic factors.

The Council For Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)

Established in response to the Marshall Plan, COMECON was a Soviet-led economic organization for Eastern countries (“Cold War”). It aimed to promote economic cooperation and mutual assistance among member states, providing machinery, equipment, agricultural goods, industrial goods, and consumer goods to the Soviet Union (“Cold War”). The reliance on COMECON led to the development of shortage economies in Eastern Europe, characterized by chronic shortages of goods and services (“Cold War”). The contrast between the relatively rapid economic growth in Western Europe and the slower recovery in Eastern Europe resulted in a widening gap between the two regions (“Cold War”).

Event Timeline

The series of events can mainly be divided into pre- 1989, and post-1989.

Pre-1989	Event
1945	World war II ends Yalta conference: Division of Europe into Eastern and Western influence
1947	George Marshall's Harvard speech: The call for European recovery Truman Doctrine: U.S. commitment to contain Soviet expansion. Cold War begins
1948-1949	Marshall Plan introduced + overall \$12 billion invested in aid for western Europe COMECON was founded (A soviet led organization for Eastern countries) NATO was formed (an alliance between North America and Western Europe) Berlin Blockade and Airlift
1956	Hungarian revolution suppressed
1969	Prague spring crushed
1970s-1980s	Economic stagnation in Eastern Europe Rise of dissident movements (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) USSR starts undergoing reform

During 1989	Event
January 1989	Free elections are held in Poland (Since WWII) First Non-Communist Leader is elected.
April- may 1989	Mass protests in Hungary Solidarity movement gains strength in Poland
July- August 1989	Thousands flee Hungary through Austria and West Germany
September- November 1989	Protests continue across Eastern Europe Berlin Wall falls on November 9th Massive demonstrations took place in Czechoslovakia in November The Czech government opened its borders with the West and permitted the formation of additional political parties
November 1990	In Hungary, the communist party renamed itself the Socialist Party and announced that free elections would be held in 1990. Large-scale protests the communist government occurred in Bulgaria during this period.
December 1990	In December 1990, a brief but violent revolution took place in Romania, resulting in the execution of the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.
March 1990	In March 1990, the Baltic states, led by Latvia, declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Post-1989	Event
1990	German reunification completed Free elections held in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania
1991	Soviet Union dissolves Warsaw Pact disbanded COMECON dissolved

Bloc Positions

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia initially maintained a hardline communist stance but eventually joined the reform wave, leading to the Velvet Revolution. The country experienced protests and uprisings, including the Prague Spring in 1968 (“Democratic Change in Central and Eastern Europe 1989-90”). Czechoslovakia eventually joined the reform wave, leading to the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (Zhu, Xiaozhong). The country then dissolved peacefully in 1993, reflecting its unique position in navigating both communist and post-communist realities (Zhu, Xiaozhong). This is because leaders responded to growing popular discontent and economic challenges by embracing reform. The country's position shifted dramatically from resistance to revolution.

East Germany

East Germany, or the German Democratic Republic (GDR), was ruled by a communist regime under the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The country faced significant economic challenges, with the East German mark being nearly non-existent outside its borders. Citizens had limited political and personal freedoms compared to those in West Germany. However, as the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, East Germany began to transition towards democracy. The country held its first free elections in March 1990, leading to a government supportive of reunification with West Germany (“German Reunification”)

West Germany

West Germany, or the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), was a stable capitalist democracy with strong ties to Western Europe and North America. It had experienced rapid economic growth and development since the 1950s. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced a 10-point program calling for increased cooperation towards eventual reunification. As East Germany began its transition, West Germany played a

significant role in shaping the reunification process through diplomatic efforts and economic support. On October 3, 1990, East and West Germany officially merged to form modern Germany. (“German reunification”)

Hungary

Hungary pursued gradual economic reforms under the slogan "goulash communism," aiming to balance socialist elements with market-oriented policies. Hungary experienced significant unrest in 1956, leading to Soviet intervention (“The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)”). The country pursued a policy of "goulash communism," maintaining some socialist elements while introducing market-oriented reforms (Zhu, Xiaozhong). Hungary's transition to democracy and capitalism was smoother than some other Eastern nations (Zhu, Xiaozhong). Hungarian leaders sought to maintain stability while introducing reforms, balancing domestic interests with international pressure. Hungary's position became more aligned with Western models as reform progressed.

Poland

Poland led the way among Eastern European countries in transitioning to democracy, driven by the Solidarity movement. Poland experienced periodic protests and dissent throughout the communist era, culminating in the Solidarity movement in the 1980s (“Democratic Change in Central and Eastern Europe 1989-90”). The country was one of the first Eastern nations to transition to democracy, serving as a model for others (Zhu, Xiaozhong). Poland signed bilateral treaties with the Soviet Union in 1956, ensuring Soviet troop deployment in the country (“The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)”). This is because Polish society demanded radical change, with Solidarity pushing for immediate democratization.

USSR

The Soviet Union initially resisted reform but eventually allowed limited political freedoms and economic changes. Moscow maintained control over the Communist parties ruling satellite states and dictated their policies (“The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)”). The USSR concentrated on its own recovery, seizing and transferring most of Germany's industrial plants. The Soviet Union exacted war reparations from Eastern European countries using Soviet-dominated joint enterprises (“The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)”). This is because Moscow faced internal pressures and external demands for reform, while maintaining control over satellite states. The USSR's position evolved from hardline communism to a mix of authoritarianism and limited reform.

Yugoslavia

In 1989, Yugoslavia was experiencing significant political and economic challenges internally. The death of long-time leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980 had weakened the federal system of government, leaving it unable to cope with rising economic and political problems. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 symbolized the collapse of Soviet-style communism and the end of the Cold War era, affecting Yugoslavia's position as a socialist state outside the Soviet influence. The country experienced a surge in nationalism among its various ethnic groups. This shift towards nationalism, combined with economic difficulties and political instability, set the stage for Yugoslavia's eventual breakup in the early 1990s. Reforms were proposed, which aimed at modernizing the economy and instituting liberal political changes, but these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. By the end of 1989, Yugoslavia was characterized by increasing fragmentation and the rise of nationalist movements in its various republics. (“Yugoslavia 1989: A Story of Unfated Events”)

Possible Solutions

Delegates could propose strengthening COMECON to facilitate a more coordinated economic transition among Eastern European nations. By enhancing COMECON's role, member states could share resources, expertise, and best practices for economic reform. This approach would allow countries to avoid the pitfalls of rapid liberalization and ensure a more gradual transition.

The Marshall Plan could have been restarted in 1989 and would include contributions from several developed Western countries. This initiative would involve significant international financial aid focused on rebuilding infrastructure, supporting key industries, and stabilizing economies. By seeking assistance from Western nations, Eastern European countries could gain access to capital and expertise necessary for a smoother transition. Such an approach would not only help alleviate immediate economic hardships but also assist in terms of long-term growth by fostering investment in critical sectors. However, delegates should keep in mind that this would require careful negotiation to ensure that the aid is not perceived as an infringement on national sovereignty.

A slower economic transition, characterized by gradual reforms rather than abrupt shifts, would be crucial in managing social unrest and economic instability. This approach would involve implementing changes, such as initial privatization of small enterprises while retaining state control over larger industries, allowing for a more stable adjustment period. By emphasizing on social safety nets, the adverse effects of economic restructuring on vulnerable populations could be mitigated. While this solution promotes social stability, it may also face resistance from those advocating for rapid reforms.

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