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Africa: Confederation on the far horizon

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significance of these deposits. The importance of the seas as a source of food and for transport is however better known than these opportunities for turning the seas to economic use. Besides, the pollution of the seas is a problem in need of a global solution which is closely linked to the problem of the seas as a source of food. In the circumstances the conference will presumably have to answer two crucial questions: Up to what distance from the coast is the utilisation of the bottom of the sea to be reserved for the states bordering on the sea? And who is entitled to exploit the resources underneath the open seas?

The essentially practical economic aspects of these two complexes will probably give rise to more clashes between developing and industrialised countries as was already observed during the preparatory work, for many developing countries have vast off-shore areas and marine sedimentation basins. Clearly there are limits to the use of the treasures of the seas; by the end of August maritime law is to be developed to a point where the possibility of destructive competition between the states is ruled out for the future. In the light of the results of previous UN conferences one can but feel sceptical about the outcome. iwe.

Africa

Confederation on the Far Horizon

This year's summit conference of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, showed no sign of fresh impulses towards a political community. The majority of member states still seem to have little liking for the idea of ceding their hard won sovereignty to a central pan-African Government. The poorer countries are also afraid of domination by the economically stronger ones, and the francophones are deeply suspicious of the anglophones.

The 41 member states are however agreed on the demand for an independent continent, ruled by black people, south of the Sahara. Following the latest developments in Portugal and its African territories the white minority governments in South Africa and Rhodesia are now left as the main targets for attack. The hope for black governments in Angola and Mozambique raises new possibilities for economic and military pressures since South Africa would forfeit two important buffer states on its northern border.

In the long run however the fight against "white imperialism" will serve less and less well as the political raison d'être of the OAU. It should be its main purpose to give political and economic backing to the member states afflicted by droughts, inflation and disastrous trade balances, the more so as not much help can be expected from outside. Progress in the negotiations with the EC, for instance, is tardy. And the break with Israel which many states performed reluctantly under Arab pressure has not paid; after all the fine words about "Afro-Arab solidarity" the African countries have not received any more or cheaper oil than others. It is to be hoped that this experience will open the eyes of the OAU states to the fact that they have one great and so far unused chance – to move beyond national-state concepts and resolve on self-aid through closer cooperation. ch.

COMECON

Anniversary Meeting

The 28th meeting of the COMECON Council in Sofia which marked the 25th anniversary of the organisation ended after four days with the signing of a joint communiqué. The participants have not built any qualitatively new elements into their economic cooperation. Aside from passing joint schemes for specific action on the pressing problem of energy supplies, there were only the customary vacuous formulations although the main item on the agenda was the economic integration of the COMECON states. While the Soviets however wanted to speed up the economic integration through an amendment to the COMECON statutes which threatened to curb the independence of the member states, the Rumanian leaders insisted on the principles of national autonomy which rule out any interference with economic cooperation between the members. The resolution on the role of the COMECON in the intensification and perfection of the cooperation and the development of socialist economic integration which has been adopted should therefore be regarded as no more than a compromise.

The central topic were energy questions. The socialist countries want to open up Soviet natural gas deposits and take part in laying a gas pipeline to the western border of the USSR and an electricity trunk line to the interior of Hungary. Other decisions concern the establishment of a common system for the production of electric power and the design of a grid and joint work to hasten the production of nuclear energy. In the past the socialist countries have felt little inclination for technical, financial and material participation in Soviet projects, which would tie them too closely to the big brother, but faced with a chronic foreign currency stringency, they have now that raw materials and energy are everywhere scarcer and dearer have had to go the road to Siberia. All said and done, this will be Moscow's trump card at future integration talks. zz.