International Conference: Peace for the Sahrawi People – A European Concern

Paris 23rd and 24th November, 1985

The war in the Western Sahara has now been going on for more than ten years. It is a war which King Hassan II. of Morocco in waging against the Sahrawi people in the name of what he calls the territorial integrity of the kingdom of Morocco. In reality it is the first case of inner-African colonialism: In the middle of the 1970's Spain came under heavy pressure from the UN from the outside and from the liberation movement Frente Polisario (Frente Popular para la Liberación de la Saguia el Hamra y del Rio de Oro) in the Western Sahara itself. Instead of holding a referendum, as the decolonization committee of the UN had proposed, and as the International Court of Justice was to recommend later, Spain negotiated an agreement with Morocco and Mauretania, and while Spain withdrew Moroccan and Mauretanian troops moved into the territory. Large parts of the population fled to the Algerian part of the desert, where they have been living in refugee camps ever since. On February 27th, one day before the last Spanish soldier left the Western Saharan soil, the F. Polisario proclaimed the independent Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) which has been recognized so far by 63 states throughout the world. The armed forces of the SADR, fighting against Morocco and Mauretania, freed large parts of the country. In 1978 a military coup overthrew the regime of Mokhtar Ould Daddah, and in 1979 Mauretania signed a peace agreement with the SADR. On the evacuation of the Mauretanian troops Morocco invaded that part of the Western Sahara as well. Although relatively small and extremely dry, Western Sahara is of considerable economic importance; it contains some of the world's largest reserves of high quality phosphates; its coasts are among the world's richest fishing grounds, and there is as well oil, iron, and vanadium (of strategic value) and a high probability of titanium oxide, tungsten, platinium, gold, chrome, tin, beryl, manganese and uranium . . . They may be reasons enough for the strong support King Hassan gets in the West, especially from the US and France. Morocco may have believed that this war would be a relatively easy enterprise, but it has turned out increasingly to have brought about the ruin of the colonizer's economy: Morocco's international debt is now up to more than $ 13 000 billion and the cost of the war alone is estimated at between $ 2 and $ 4 millions at day!

Here lies the responsibility of Europe: not only is this war in flagrant contradiction with international law and the rulings of all the international organizations dealing with the conflict like the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and the Organization of African Unity, it is also a war on the very borders of Europe, threatening peace and stability in the Western Mediterranean. King Hassan's manifold and reiterated threats to attack Algeria could set the whole region on fire and the possible collapse of the Mo-

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roccan regime as a consequence of the economic effects of the war could turn Morocco itself into chaos and provoke foreign military intervention in order to »stabilize« a situation which may become more and more out of control. The two military bases, the USA was allowed to reopen in Morocco in 1982, which are officially designated to accomodate the Rapid Deployment Force in the Middle East could very probably be used as well for direct intervention in Morocco itself. The delivery of modern and highly sophisticated armaments to Morocco by the US, France and Israel is already a substantial involvement. And there is a further European responsibility: Spain, which just has become a member of the European Community has still not taken its responsibility for decolonizing the Western Sahara. Instead, through the Madrid agreement of 1975, it handed over the territory to the new colonizer, Morocco.

The subjects were the main themes debated at the Paris conference on »Peace for the Sahrawi People – A European Concern« which was outstanding by its participation: Some 460 people from 57 countries had come together, among them 13 ambassadors to Paris, 20 members of different governments or representatives of embassies, more than 70 members of Parliament and official representatives of political parties, several ministers and former heads of gouvernment, representatives of international agencies, and academics. The different parties represented ranged from the Swedish central and liberal parties and the Italian Christian Democratic party through the whole spectrum of the European socialist parties to most of the European communist parties. Also strongly represented were deputies from the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Two winners of the Nobel Peace prize, Perez Esquivel and Sean MacBride, were also among the participants. The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic was represented by its Foreign Minister Brahim Hakim, Omar Hadrani, a member of the Political Bureau of Polisario, and Guejmula Ebbi, president of the National Union of Sahraoui Women and a member of the Political Bureau. The importance of the conference has been underlined by the fact that it took place in the building of the National Assembly in Paris.
The conference was opened by Leo Mararasso, president of the International League for the Rights of Peoples, followed by Pierre Galand from Belgium, speaking in the name of the national solidarity groups of the Sahrawi people throughout the world. Then followed the opening speech of the foreign minister of the SADR and member of the political bureau of the Polisario-Front, Brahim Hakim. It would be too much to enumerate the different speakers or to try to resume their statements. It has to be pointed out, however, that in the name of the Organization of African Unity its head of the political department, Mr. Njenga in the name of that organization underlined once more the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people and that the President of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina addressed the conference in the name of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which had recently taken up diplomatic relations with the SADR.
The Federal Republic of Germany was represented by the three deputies of the party of the Greens, Bastian, Kelly and Reents. Frau Barbara Simons spoke in the name of the

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socialist group of the European Parliament and in the name of the presidency of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. She elaborated the historical and present responsibility of Europe in that war: »It was a European colonial power which dominated the Western Sahara until 1975 and whose failure during that November ten years ago has brought about this war. It was European diplomacy which facilitated the Moroccan invasion, it is mostly European artillery, tanks and rockets which are used in this attempted genocide of the Sahrawis. It is the European banks whose loans keep the Moroccan war economy going. Most importantly, it is Europe which holds in its hands the political and economic means to push Morocco to a peace agreement – and it is Europe which has refrained from doing this . . .«. She recalled the particular responsibility of two European states, Spain as the former colonial power, and France which, she said, is still pursuing a hegemonistic policy in North Africa. Declaring the trilateral Madrid Agreement of November 1975 which had handed over the Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauretania as null and void from the point of view of international law, she went on: »This trilateral agreement was the product of a dying dictatorial regime already on the point of falling apart. The democratic parties of Spain which at that time were still illegal . . . condemned that agreement, above all the Spanish Socialist Worder's party . . .« and finally: ». . . Europe acts not only against the principles of political morale but even against its own interests if it does not attempt to strive for a peaceful solution of this dangerous conflict.«

Speaking for the Christian Democratic Party of Italy Signor Loche appealed to the youth in Europe and in Italy reminding them of the role their parents had played in 1968 in ending the Vietnam war and appealed to give strong and consistent support to the Sahrawi people, the Palestinian people and the people of Cyprus.

For the Greens in the German Federal Parliament Petra Kelly said that the European Peace Movement had been in some ways too Eurocentric and had not taken enough account of the wars happening just next door. She then appealed: »All European governments must be brought to sustain *actively* the UN resolution which calls for a referendum to determine the wishes of the Sahrawi people.«

A particularly difficult performance was that of Raoul Weexsteen, speaking in the name of the French Socialist party. He called for the constitution of a European interparliamentary group to prevent the financing and realization of any industrial project in the occupied territories of Western Sahara. In view of the present policies of the Mitterand government this appeal was presumably directed more to his own party and to the government it supports than to the participants in the conference. A few days after the conference King Hassan was expected in Paris. The object of the visit: the delivery of highly sophisticated armament to Morocco, among that especially the ultra-modern combat aircraft »Mirage 2000« . . .[1]

1 During his first (!) visit in the occupied territories King Hassan declared in El Ayoun on March 18th, 1985, that a special budget of 1 billion of Dollars would be allocated to the modernization of the Royal Armed Forces. (Le Monde, 20-3-85).

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The final resolution of the conference adopted by the participants once again stressed the right of the Sahrawi people's self-determination, condemned the illegal occupation of its territory by Morocco, and the necessity for direct negotiations between the Polisario Front and Morocco. It insisted on the necessity for the European organizations to take up the Saharan problem and to act upon resolution AGH 104 adopted by the Organisation of African Unity which contains all the necessary elements for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The final resolution called for support for that resolution from the European governments, especially at the UN, for an end to the arms trade to Morocco and the financing of the Moroccan military budget, for a boycott of all investments in the Western Sahara as long as there is no peace, for the recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, for intensified material and humanitarian help for the Sahrawi people, and for immediate negotiations between the King of Morocco and the Frente Polisario as the only organization representing the Sahrawi people.

The participants in the conference expressed their solidarity with the Sahrawi people and decided to set up a network of political solidarity, to increase the dissemination of information on the political, diplomatic and military situation, to put pressure on the various governments to support the resolutions of the OAU and the UN and to recognize the legitimacy of the struggle of the Sahrawi people and of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic in order to promote peace and respect for national sovereignty.

In his closing address to the conference, Mr. Brahim Hakim, Foreign Minister of the SADR, declared: »(Europe's) contribution is vital for the return of peace in our region; however, the support of countries like France which may be decisive in order to end this colonial war is still lacking . . . Every country should refrain from contributing to the financial and military efforts which encourage the expansionist regime in Rabat in its intransigent position and its violation of international law. The OAU peace plan which is universally accepted today confronts everyone with a choice: the choice between Africa as a whole or Moroccan expansionism, between legality and law or injustice and genocide.« And looking forward to the meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Brahim Hakim said as well that the conference may have been »the first flower of the year of international peace proclaimed by the United Nations.«

In fact, the decolonization committee of the UN has accepted resolution AGH 104 which contains the OAU peace plan. On December 2nd, 1985, the General Assembly of the UN voted on the resolution and accepted it with 91 Votes against 7. Only four African states voted with Morocco against it, the reactionary governments of Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Gabon and Zaire – a country where King Hassan II. has already intervened twice militarily in order to save General Mobutu's bloody regime. Even Libya which in August 1984 had »unionized« with Morocco did not participate in the vote in order to avoid not supporting the Moroccan position.

As far as the European states are concerned, most of them – like the FRG – followed the example of the USA and abstained from voting. Among the European states which supported the resolution were Austria, Finland, Greece and Spain. In retaliation Morocco withdrew from the decolonization committee of the UN as it has already withdrawn

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from the OAU. If the European states would at least assume their legal and moral responsibilities and act in conformity with international law and the rulings of OAU and UN, the Moroccan regime would not only be totally isolated but it could no longer pursue the war. To put it even more simply: if, after abstaining from voting on the UN resolution the European governments would now abstain from supporting King Hassan's war economically and occasionally militarily this would be sufficient to bring it to an end.

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