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### A CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ABOUT THE WEAKENING RIVAL: NATO EXPERTS ON THE TRANSFORMING SOVIET BLOC (NOVEMBER 1989)

A confidential expert report, prepared for the NATO Council in October 1989, provides a general survey about the Soviet zone of influence in Europe, which, after decades of inertia, began to show the signs of disruption. Listing the phenomena regarded as of key importance, the western observers at first dealt with the transformation of Soviet domestic policies, the decline of the Soviet Communist Party, and the increasing ethnic tensions. The part dealing with the satellite states starts with developments in Poland and Hungary, the two countries where changes unfolded most dynamically. Thereupon the situation of the Bulgarian Turks and of the political opposition in Czechoslovakia was reported on. Although not parts of the Soviet bloc, the analysis also devoted attention to communist Albania, as well as to the deepening crisis of Yugoslavia.

The voluminous document was intended as a background material for the session of the NATO Council scheduled for 22 November 1989. By then, systematic analysis of the situation in the Soviet Union and in the East-Central European satellite states could look back on a several decades old tradition. In October 1952 the NATO Council decided on the establishment of an ad hoc working group for the analysis of trends in Soviet foreign policy. This was the origin of a whole series of documents, which until 1991 examined in detail twice a year at first the Soviet Union, and later its satellite countries as well.

In the elaboration of reports an important role was played by the preparatory studies of national diplomatic organs, and the conciliatory talks among invited experts, which, in agreement with the decision making process of NATO, aimed at general consensus. The document presented here accordingly illustrates the way in which the foreign administrations of the NATO powers assessed the situation of the Soviet bloc on the basis of the work of their own diplomatic apparatus, the negotiations pursued within the NATO itself and among the individual foreign ministries, and of other sources, in the fall of 1989.