

World reactions to Yeltsin's crackdown

Not everybody in international policymaking circles agrees with the Clinton administration's endorsement of Boris Yeltsin's assault on the Russian parliament. Much controversy now focuses on the issue of "shock therapy," imposed on Russia by the West. Here is a selection of responses from around the world.

United States

Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.), interview on CNN, Oct. 3:

"We're going to have to take a look at our fundamental relationship with Mr. Yeltsin. And some of the things that we've been doing, the so-called shock therapy, may not be able to work. . . . We've put a lot of pressure through the World Bank and the IMF on Russia to immediately move to a market economy . . . and, of course, the result has been chaos and a lot of inflation. And there are a lot of experts, including Jude Wanniski, who's an economic and political consultant, who think that's precisely the wrong way to go. . . . It seems to me if we take a look at what's happening in Poland and what may have happened in Yugoslavia, part of it was because we were pushing them too fast, too quickly."

Charles Blitzer, chief World Bank economist in Russia, quoted by the *Wall Street Journal-Europe* of Oct. 5:

"I've never had so much fun in my life." Blitzer asserts that the political obstacles should now be less to cutting subsidies for agriculture, cutting bank lending, encouraging foreign investment, and putting into effect the rest of the World Bank-International Monetary Fund package.

Poland

Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Oct. 5:

Poland is deeply concerned about a new "Yalta" deal by which the West would grant Russia a say on Polish affairs, for example on such vital issues as a future membership in NATO, said the foreign minister. In light of the developments in Moscow, the West is showing signs of pulling out of commitments given earlier to integrate Poland into NATO, and Poland is in danger of becoming a buffer zone again. International diplomacy resembles the wartime conferences of Teheran and Yalta, and of the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century between the West (Prussia and Austria) and Russia's Empress Catherine II. Russian "security guar-

antees are not acceptable for Poland under any conditions."

Rzeczpospolita, a leading daily, Oct. 4:

"What's important is not only what goes on in the streets of Moscow, but what's happening in the provinces, in the cities, regions, and republics, which have been long demanding more autonomy from the center, and in some cases complete independence. Russia is a large continent. A revolt in one place can set off fires in the remaining places. It's hanging by a silk thread, whether it comes to a civil war. One has to be clear about this. And also that therein lies the great danger and threat for Poland."

Germany

President Richard von Weizsäcker, as quoted in German media, speech to the annual German Army commanders' conference in Mainz, Oct. 6:

The present favorable security situation of Germany is not guaranteed into the future, said the President. Because of that, German policy is obliged to be cautious. The world became disoriented after the end of the East-West conflict, and in this situation of uncertainty, Germany's policy has to rest on the commitment to defense and loyalty to the western alliance.

Otto Graf von Lambsdorff, European chairman of the Trilateral Commission, former German finance minister, chairman of the Free Democratic Party, member of the German parliament, discussion with *EIR*, Oct. 4:

There is no alternative in Russia to shock therapy, despite the growing backlash throughout the former East bloc. "Even if we had given aid for the building of infrastructure from rail to safe nuclear energy, Moscow would not have channeled that aid toward infrastructure. The Russian people do not have a sufficient degree of responsibility. Where would the money go? It would go to private bank accounts, because you are still dealing with the old *nomenklatura*. . . . Yes, Poland does show the danger of IMF shock therapy. . . . Yes, it is true, IMF shock therapy may have caused the initial dissolution of Yugoslavia, but the situation has moved far from that now. Now, it is a problem of an outbreak of nationalism."

Süddeutsche Zeitung, a leading newspaper, editorial by Josef Riedmiller, Oct. 5:

"In this battle, Russia's President realized that the forces of the anti-reformers are stronger than previously assumed, and that they haven't given up the old idols and fighting spirit. On this count alone, he can't think of holding elections in December, as planned. This would also not be honest after the ban on extremist parties and newspapers. Yeltsin must take the odious upon himself, as the President elected democratically two years ago, to continue to govern as a dictator, until Russia—paradoxically enough—bids farewell irrevers-

ibly to dictatorship.”

France

Bernard Cohen, Moscow correspondent, in the daily *Libération*, Oct. 4:

One of the “fashionable” lines of discussion in Russian economic circles these days, is that a “dictatorship would not necessarily do damage, far from it, to the business market.” The Yeltsin team is generally refusing to see that there is a growing “social bitterness generated by [the government’s] reforms, and especially by the application of these reforms to the advantage of a tiny part of the population, which the people continue to call, as in Soviet times, the ‘speculators.’ ”

Jan Krauze, Moscow correspondent, in the daily *Le Monde*, Oct. 5:

There are numerous signs that the “uprising” in Moscow could have been a contrived set-up, by the forces backing Yeltsin, in order to provide a pretext for crushing the Ruskoy-Khasbulatov-led forces. “If one reflects on the massive deployment of the preceding days, the [police] resistance was astonishingly weak.” There are some who claim that this was because the Yeltsin team was vacillating on the afternoon of Oct. 3. But there is another explanation, offered by certain observers, who claim that “someone deliberately permitted the supporters of the parliament to commit the irreparable, in order to justify the assault.”

Italy

Corriere della Sera, Milan daily, editorial by Piero Ostellino, Oct. 5:

“In light of what is happening today in post-Soviet Russia, how pathetic is the West’s ‘idealistic school,’ with its disquisitions on the redemptive virtues of transition to democracy, to the market, to capitalism. . . . In Old Russia. . . an autocratic power will come, disguised as representative democracy, as it is in its historical traditions, in the logic of its political culture, in the vocation of the majority of its people. Capitalism, if at all, will come in a pre-modern version, a *rapine capitalism* (financed by the Monetary Fund in the name of democracy?) a contemporary version of that same capitalism that, last century, generated as a reaction the Communist Manifesto.”

Roberto Formigoni, deputy minister for the environment, interviewed in the daily *Corriere della Sera*, Oct. 6:

“I want to distance myself from the trumpet blast with which the West has accompanied President [Yeltsin’s] victory over the rebel parliamentarians. Maybe the West has forgotten that it could have enormous bargaining power in today’s Moscow, power that could have allowed Clinton and the other allied governments a more decisive intervention in

favor of a peaceful solution. . . . We must now prevent Russia from turning into a second Poland. Discontent is real, it has an objective foundation in the economic crisis which is largely caused by the strangling conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund. The IMF wants to impose the impossible operation of moving from Stalinist socialism to a perfect neo-liberalism. That is impossible, and plays into the communists’ game. Therefore I say: West, wake up, and Yeltsin be careful not to push Russia into the arms of the nostalgics.”

Great Britain

Martin Walker, former Moscow correspondent, in the *London Guardian*, Oct. 6:

Western leaders must “rethink the failure” of their support for shock therapy policies in Russia, or the latest developments in Moscow will be a prelude to disaster. The West is repeating the same mistake it made when Mikhail Gorbachov was in power, “again confronting the gap between a titular leader and the hugely controversial policies associated with his name. The shock in the brisk economic reform known as shock therapy has fueled unemployment, hyper-inflation and deep public resentment against the policies associated with President Yeltsin and his main reformer, Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar. . . . Readiness to rethink the failure of their economic support so far will be the real challenge for those western leaders who helped bring Yeltsin to this pass, with Russian blood on his hands, and his tanks reducing to a charred hulk the very White House he once stood on another tank to defend.”

Reuters, British wire service, Oct. 7:

“The fires may be out at the Russian parliament, but western experts on Russia are waging war against each other. The battle is over whether President Yeltsin, with parliament forcibly disbanded, is now free to impose ‘needed’ shock therapy on the vast, unmanageable Russian economy, or whether it was the imposition of drastic economic changes that created the problems in the first place.”

Jeffrey Sachs says that Yeltsin’s triumph has now freed him to impose drastic measures. “The fact is that there was no shock therapy. It was only a plan on paper, only incoherently and fitfully put into practice. Now there is a chance to do something,” Sachs says.

But Alex Motyl of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute says that introducing shock therapy “would mean that you would have to abandon democracy and human rights there and use force. Economists live in a world of mathematical formulas and people like Sachs have no sense of political and social realities. He may be right about the money supply. But you can’t throw people back to near slave-like conditions and expect them not to protest. Shock therapy is a prescription for disaster.”