

# British Ostpolitik and Polish Westpolitik: ‘push and pull’ diplomacy

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## Introduction

Current historiography has, for quite some time, been centred upon the theme of Western *Ostpolitik* and its influence on Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> More recently, scholarly research has broadened this picture, by linking the *Ostpolitik* conducted by Western countries to the parallel evolution of their *Westpolitik*, especially within the EC framework.<sup>2</sup> Yet, less attention has been paid to the other side of the coin: Eastern policies of opening towards the West. This is of course in part due to the limited availability of archival sources. This article contributes to the wider theme of this issue by investigating the role that Eastern *Westpolitik* has played in the elaboration of Western *Ostpolitik*. This shift is based on the central argument that East Europeans were not simply passively affected by Western policies, but purposely pursued co-operation with the West, in spite of Cold War boundaries.

The article focuses, not on the wider West European dimension, but on the main motivations which encouraged those decision-makers who were responsible for British *Ostpolitik* to respond to the spontaneous emergence of a distinctly national Polish ‘*Westpolitik*’. The aim is to advance an hypothesis of the relevance of British influence on the Polish process of transformation and of British reactions to Polish *Westpolitik*. It was specifically what we might call a ‘push and pull’ diplomacy that

1. Historiography dealing with European *Ostpolitik*'s repercussions is rich. Among the most recent J.A. ENGEL (ed.), *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: the revolutionary legacy of 1989*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009; C.FINK, B. SCAHEFER(eds.), *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and global responses*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009; W. LOTH, G.-H. SOUTOU (eds.), *The Making of Détente: Eastern and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965-75*, Routledge, London/New York, 2008; J. von DANNENBERG, *The foundations of Ostpolitik. The making of the Moscow Treaty between West Germany and the USSR*, Oxford University Press, London and New York, 2008; A. HOFMANN, *The emergence of Détente in Europe. Brandt, Kennedy and the formation of Ostpolitik*, Routledge, New York, 2007.
2. For instance N.P. LUDLOW (ed.), *European integration and the Cold War: Ostpolitik-Westpolitik, 1965-1973*, Routledge, London, 2007; and the Conference *Britain and Europe in the 1980s: East & West*, University of Pavia, Pavia, 1-2 October 2007, which has been conceptually framed around the idea of a relevant link between British *Ostpolitik* and *Westpolitik*. The theme is also discussed by I. POGGIOLINI in this issue and in her essay *Thatcher's double track road to the end of the Cold War: the irreconcilability of liberalization and preservation*, in: F. BOZO, M.P. REY, P. LUDLOW (eds.), *Visions of the end of the Cold War in Europe*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2010; see also A. DEIGHTON, *Ostpolitik or Westpolitik? British Foreign Policy, 1968-75*, in: *International Affairs*, 4(October 1998), pp.893-901; J.F. BROWN, L. GORDON, P. HASSNER, J. JOFFE, *Eroding Empire: Western Relations with Eastern Europe*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, 1987.

determined Britain's ability to adapt its foreign policy to changing Eastern realities as well as to exert a certain degree of leverage on both Poland's domestic and international status. This is clearly just one strand in a more complex West-East, and East-West European development that could be examined at the levels of individuals, states and institutions, including the EC, but which merits a focused state-based study, too.

From the early 1960s, Poland sent clear signals of its wish to cooperate with the West in different fields, from security to trade. This spontaneous move, along with the launch of West German *Ostpolitik*, broke the rigidity of the British post-war stance towards the East and brought about economic, cultural and even political openness. The result was an experimental, 'first', British *Ostpolitik*. This essay will argue that, during the 1960s, changes in Poland's international and domestic policies were both encouraged by the new British approach and encouraging for the assertion of British *Ostpolitik*. The achievements of the Polish reform process confirmed that dialogue and cooperation were more productive than confrontation and this further strengthened the thesis of *Ostpolitik's* advocates, enhancing their political clout and leading to a normalization of Britain's Eastern relations.

During the 1970s, Britain launched a 'second', more intense *Ostpolitik*, which was aimed at improving relations with Eastern Europe, while normalizing relations with the Soviet Union. In the mid 1970s, this broadened the possibilities of interaction with Poland, where, meanwhile, the opposition was gaining momentum. The activities of Polish civil society could then benefit from a growing Western support.

It could be argued that multifaceted opposition represented by Solidarity mostly derived from the cultural, social, and political turmoil that the *Ost/Westpolitik* interaction had created.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the long-term goal of British policy eventually proved to be that of keeping a self-reform process going, rather than fomenting a powerful revolt which could bring with it the risk of sudden and dangerous political

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3. The effects of the diplomatic, commercial and cultural interaction with Western European countries were clearly visible in Poland during the 1970s on both economic and social grounds and these contributed to the transformation of the country. The birth of a mass dissident phenomenon, as Solidarity was, with its innovative features, has to be partially reconnected to this phase of deep socio-economic transformation. The reference is first of all to the social consequences of the market socialism's phase. COMECON data regarding Poland economy show a significant run-up in the sectors of research, high education, and work force training and highlight the mass access to new consumer goods such as cars, televisions and washing-machines. See *COMECON data 1979*, edited by the Wiener Institut für Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche (first edition in 1979).

destabilization.<sup>4</sup> The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) measured the components of its parallel approach and sustained the choice of gradualism in the Polish process of transformation, even in the presence of martial law, at least until Mikhail Gorbachev started to shuffle the cards.

### 'First' British *Ostpolitik*: a reaction to Polish *Westpolitik*

Nikita Khrushchev's famous acknowledgement of the 'national ways to socialism' and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) reforms produced domestic reforms and noticeable signs of openness towards the West in Poland.<sup>5</sup> From the 1960s onwards, Poland, without questioning its membership in the Warsaw Pact and in CMEA, inaugurated a course that did indeed often clash with the limits inherent in the socialist system and the alliance's commitments. Adam Rapacki's proposal of 1964<sup>6</sup> and the moderate attitude taken with regard to Chinese-Soviet disputes were obvious signals of growing Polish autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

Western governments and their intelligence services demonstrated full understanding of the spontaneous process under way in Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> British diplomats were also very much aware that a real and independent Polish *Westpolitik* was taking

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4. After the introduction of martial law, the British Ambassador in Warsaw blamed the "intellectual militants in Solidarity" of bearing "a heavy responsibility for their lack of realism and historical perspective". Poland's Annual Review for 1981. HM Ambassador at Warsaw C. M. James to the Secretary of State for FCO, Poland, 30 December 1981. This document, as many others in this essay, has been released in response to a series of FOIA requests regarding the Annual Reports of British Ambassadors from Eastern-Central Europe between 1979 and 1989. These requests were advanced during my participation at the research project "A Common European destiny and identity beyond the borders of the Cold War? British '*Ostpolitik*' and the new battlefield of ideas in Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia) 1984-92", led by Ilaria Poggiolini at the University of Pavia. All documents we have obtained are now available online on the Thatcher Foundation website [www.margarethatcher.org](http://www.margarethatcher.org).
  5. Regarding the effects of CMEA reforms see, for instance, W.V. WALLACE and R.A. CLARKE, *Comecon Trade and the West*, Frances Pinter, London, 1986, See also on OSA webarchives the report of RFE Research and Evaluation Department, *Background Research. 11 November 1961, The Background of Polish-Czechoslovak Economic Co-Operation*.
  6. About the Rapacki plan see: European Navigator web archive, Polish Government memorandum on the freezing of nuclear and thermonuclear armaments in Central Europe, Warsaw, 28.02.1964; and Z. MARUSZA, *Denuclearization in Central Europe? The Rapacki Plan during the Cold War*, Cold War History Research Center, Budapest, on line publication May 2009.
  7. About the Polish 'soft' position with regard to the Chinese-Soviet controversy see: Open Society web archives, Polish-East German Talks End; Party Declaration Stresses Chinese Achievements. Munich, 21.06.1957. RFE News and Information service.
  8. Thomson Gale Collection, n.1825, 2004, Memorandum for the Director from Sherman Kent. Recent Trends in Eastern Europe, Central Intelligence Agency, Office of National Estimates, 15.01.1964.

shape,<sup>9</sup> although it was still tentative in testing the “limits of Soviet tolerance”.<sup>10</sup> The British government decided to encourage the signs of insubordination within the Soviet block by promoting contacts and exchanges with the Polish government. This ‘first’ British *Ostpolitik*, thus, paved the way to relevant economic and cultural relations between the two countries. The improvement in bilateral economic relations proved to be the easiest of the changes, because it was fostered by a clear Polish willingness to ensure new commercial relations with Great Britain so as to counterbalance the growing West German economic influence since the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The new West German approach towards Eastern Europe emerged as a result of the 1958-1961 Berlin crisis, when Konrad Adenauer’s Eastern policy became the object of questioning even by conservative forces.<sup>12</sup> Among the signs of change in Bonn’s relations with Washington as well as Moscow, were Chancellor Ludwig Erhard critics of the US approach towards the German problems and new autonomous overtures towards Eastern countries.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Poland had chosen to intensify its economic relations with major West European countries.<sup>14</sup>

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9. Anne Deighton argued that the British understanding of Polish domestic tendencies dates back to the 1956 Polish crisis, even if at that time the fear of Soviet intervention and the comfort of a divided Europe determined a restrained behaviour. See A. DEIGHTON, *Different 1956: British responses to the Polish events*, in: *Cold War History*, 6(November 2006), pp.455-475.
  10. A. BROWN, *Seven Years that Changed the World. Perestroika in Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 2007, p.194.
  11. This was the American Intelligence perception: “In recent years, West Germany has moved cautiously to regain an economic toehold in the area and it is now the most important non-Communist trading partner for nearly all East European states. [...] As the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe has loosened, Bonn has discovered room for increased manoeuvre in the area and there are signs, finally, that it may be willing to improve the political climate”. Thomson Gale Collection, n.1829, 2004, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Special Report, “Eastern European Attitudes toward West Germany”, 21.10.1966, p.12.
  12. About the West-German reaction to the Berlin crisis, and especially towards the American behaviour during the crisis, see Thomson Gale Collection, n.1340, 2003, US Department Of State, Memorandum of telephone conversation with Ambassador in Bonn Henry Cabot Lodge, 14.03.1960, p.2. This is also confirmed by memories, such as W. BRANDT, *Memorie* [Erinnerungen], Garzanti, Milano, 1991, p.9, p.54 and p.63; A. GROMYKO, *Memories*, Hutchinson, London, 1989, pp. 196-197. On the subject see also P.F. WEBER, *Le Triangle RFA-RDA-Pologne (1961-1975). Guerre froide et normalisation des rapports germano-polonais*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2007; J. SURI, *The diplomacy and domestic politics of Détente*, in: J. SURI, *Power and Protest. Global revolution and the rise of détente*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp.213-259; A. HOFMANN, op.cit.
  13. Evidences of Chancellor Erhard’s new approach can also be found in Thomson Gale Collection, n. 3514, 1992: US Department Of State, Background Paper, Visit of Chancellor Erhard of Germany, 28-29.12.1963. Object: “German Reunification”, 18.12.1963; *ibid.*, n.3523, 1992: US Department Of State Position Paper, Visit of Chancellor Erhard of Germany, 19-21.12.1965. Object: “German Reunification”, 15.12.1965, p.3; *ibid.*, n.3011, 2000: CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum, “Erhard’s visit to the US”, 21.12.1966, p.15.
  14. Visit of Chancellor Erhard of Germany, 15.12.1963, op.cit. See also K. LARRES, *Britain, East Germany and Détente: British Policy Toward the GDR and West Germany’s ‘Policy of Movement’, 1955-65*, in: W. LOTH (ed.), *Europe: Cold War and Coexistence 1953-1965*, Frank Cass, London, 2004, pp.111-131; J. SURI, *The diplomacy and domestic politics of Détente*, op.cit.

One can argue that rising West German political ascendancy in Central Europe was instrumental in convincing the British government that it had to compete with such a successful Eastern policy model. British interest was both that of engaging in this competition, and of contributing to the overall effect of European *Ostpolitik* towards the Eastern satellites. At the end of 1963, Prime Minister Douglas Home was in the position to react to what the West German diplomat Franz Krapf said about the Wall, that it was perceived as "less and less acceptable to the East European countries".<sup>15</sup> As perceived in London and Washington, Bonn's *Ostpolitik* had paved the way to new possibilities for social exchanges, leading to comparisons between East and West lifestyles. So it was referred to the British Prime Minister during a meeting with the US Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the American embassy in London in December 1963:

"Krapf said that the German Foreign Office thinks the Wall is less and less acceptable to the East European countries. The same goes for [Walter] Ulbricht. The East Europeans are now in a position to compare their economic conditions, freedom, etc., with the other nearby countries which they can visit. The East-Germans return from abroad and ask questions of their Communist Party heads. A German intelligence source indicates that the Soviets have asked Ulbricht to "try to look more human". Another factor mentioned by Krapf was that the East European countries are interested in Western tourism".<sup>16</sup>

Such comparisons constituted a direct threat to the stability of the Eastern block.

British ambassadors in Eastern Europe, periodically summoned to conferences in London, played a significant role in pointing out that new opportunities were available to exert political influence in Poland. They were privileged witnesses and analysts of a major process of change. In 1968, the ambassadors' conference did not hesitate about strongly supporting the necessity of taking part in the new commercial and scientific cooperation between East and West, as well as in information exchanges.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside political *Ostpolitik*, Britain was also engaged in bilateral cultural cooperation in Eastern Europe. One can observe that the dialogue between Polish and British intellectuals intensified, in a line of continuity with the overall post World War II experience.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Polish Libraries in London turned into venues

15. Thomson Gale Collection, n.0799, 1999: Embassy London, Memorandum of Conversation on Germany by L. Jones, 19.12.1963. See also S. BERGER, N. LAPORTE, *Ostpolitik before Ostpolitik: The British Labour Party and the German Democratic Republic, 1955-64*, in: *European History Quarterly*, 3(2006), pp.396-420; G. NIEDHART, *The British Reaction Towards Ostpolitik. Anglo-West German Relations in the Era of Détente 1967-1971*, in: C. HAASE (ed.), *Debating foreign affairs: the public and British foreign policy since 1867*, Philo, Berlin, 2003, pp.130-152.
16. Memorandum of Conversation on Germany by L. Jones, 19.12.1963, op.cit.; see also M.E. SAROTTE, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2001.
17. G. BENNETT, K.A. HAMILTON (eds.), *Documents on British Policy Overseas. Britain and the Soviet Union, 1968-1972*, s.3, vol.1, The Stationery Office, London, 1997: Record of 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of HM Representatives in Eastern Europe, 10.05.1968, pp.42-48.
18. See A. PACZKOWSKI, *The new opposition*, in: A. PACZKOWSKI, *The Spring will be ours, Poland and Poles from occupation to freedom*, Pen State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2003, pp.376-386.

where common initiatives were discussed and launched<sup>19</sup> and Polish scholars found their way to Oxford. This was the case of several well-known Polish sociologists, such as Zdzisław Najder and Jerzy Szacki, both of whom studied at Oxford during the 1960s and 1970s respectively. Najder later became a vocal critic of the Polish system, as head of the Polish section of the American Radio Free Europe, while Szacki was a more moderate supporter of the opposition.

The ‘first’ British *Ostpolitik* met a prompt response on the part of Polish *Westpolitik*. The country had began a journey towards its historical past, particularly towards its political and social traditions, pre-dating the communist experience. Indeed, Poland was considered by Moscow as its most problematic partner, both geopolitically and as a result of its national and international history, including its relations with Great Britain, Germany and France.<sup>20</sup>

Polish domestic developments in the social and economic spheres confirmed the continuity of the new ‘Polish course’, embracing the views of the advocates of *Ostpolitik*. Specifically, in the 1960s, the Polish leadership pursued a ‘Polish way to socialism’ and rapidly distanced itself from more Stalinist methods of social control. Greater attention and respect were paid to national values, as well as to the role of the Catholic Church, whose activities and rights were increasingly tolerated. Within the economic field, changes led to an increase in trade relations with the West and to the introduction of new cooperative models.<sup>21</sup> The best results were seen in the area of agriculture, once the model of collectivization was rejected.<sup>22</sup>

However, compared to German and French *Ostpolitik*, the British attitude towards the East was still characterized by deeper mistrust. The FCO monitored the process of change under way in the Soviet alliance, but without deciding to advise the government to make a daring move towards any improvement of bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. This showed a degree of prudence far more marked than that of other Western European countries.<sup>23</sup> This can be explained by the pursuit of a strategy based on the idea that overtures towards the Kremlin should be balanced with gains in other political fields: a strategy of ‘linkage’ which remained central in the following years.<sup>24</sup>

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19. C. NOWACKI, *The Polish libraries in Paris and London*, in: *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 2(1983), pp.87-104.
  20. Author’s interview with Vadim Andreevich Medvedev at the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow, October 2006.
  21. L.S. LYKOSHINA, A.L. SHEMJAKIN (eds.), *Vlast', obshchestvo, reformy. Central'naja i jugovostochnaja Evropa. Vtoraja polovina XX veka*, RAN, Institut Slavjanovedenija, Nauka, Moskva, 2006, esp. pp.191-206.
  22. Open Society web-archives: Poland's New Agrarian Policy And Workers' Councils Discussed Over Prague Radio, From Collins, Munich, March 4, 1958. RFE Evaluation and Research.
  23. G. BENNETT, K.A. HAMILTON (eds.), op.cit.: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 17.06.1968, pp.48-57.
  24. Ibid. According to the Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, the inspiring concepts of British *Ostpolitik* were the “wait and see” policy and the “compartmentalisation” of relations.

Even so, the UK's interest in individual Soviet satellites, and especially in Poland, grew. Such domestic change was interpreted by the British Ambassador in Warsaw, Sir Thomas Brimelow, as an anticipation of reformist tendencies in the country and as a permanent social and economic threat for the authority of the Communist Party. He fully believed that Britain should encourage and sustain reformism as a central goal in its bilateral relations with Poland. This new diplomatic approach furthered Polish domestic transformation during the 1970s.

### British 'second' *Ostpolitik*: the 1970s

The Prague Spring neither interrupted the first phase of British *Ostpolitik* nor did it disrupt British plans of 'transformation inside the socialist system'. Over the following years, prominent voices inside the FCO, such as that of Ambassador Brimelow, upheld the conviction that bilateral relations with Warsaw had a fundamental role in British *Ostpolitik*. He believed that Polish longing for independence could withstand the Brezhnev doctrine and that Polish reformers would continue to turn to the West for support. British diplomacy should continue to exercise "patience, understanding and friendliness".<sup>25</sup>

The crisis of 1968 confirmed that changes could not occur overnight in Eastern Europe. Instead they had to be pursued in the framework of a broad evolution of East-West relations in Europe and along with the emergence of a new security system that would weaken the satellites' reliance on the Soviet military guarantee. Within this broader process Great Britain had an active part to play. Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, soon after the Soviet intervention, delivered the following instructions to the Eastern embassies:

"We recognize that in the longer term contact with Eastern Europe is the principal means by which we can hope to encourage the liberal forces in these countries".<sup>26</sup>

The search for a wide spectrum of interaction with Polish *Westpolitik* at the beginning of the 1970s went hand in hand with a revised view within the FCO regarding the benefit for Great Britain to join the European process of integration. London's role as a 'mediator' between Washington and Moscow had been reduced by bipolar détente.<sup>27</sup> However, within the EC, it was hoped that the UK government could regain an influential role in the regional, East-West dialogue. To this purpose, the UK needed to enhance its relations with both Western and Eastern European countries, along

25. Record of 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of HM Representatives in Eastern Europe, op.cit.

26. G. BENNETT, K.A. HAMILTON (eds.), op.cit.: Stewart to Certain Missions and Dependent Territories, Guidance Telegram n.264, FCO, 29.10.1968, p.85.

27. B. WHITE, *The decline of British influence on East-West relations*, in *Britain, détente, and changing East-West relations*, Routledge, London/New York, 1992, pp.108-135; J. NOAKES, P. WENDE, J. WRIGHT (eds.), *Britain and Germany in Europe: 1949-1990*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002.

with the completion of the accession process to the EC. The FCO aimed, therefore, to establish stronger diplomatic and commercial relations with Eastern Europe and with the Soviet Union. This goal brought about a ‘second’ *Ostpolitik*, characterized by a stronger determination and clarity of purpose.

The pursuit of an improved Eastern policy meant that new channels of dialogue had to be opened with Moscow. Once more, this shift was prompted by fears of marginalization by West German and French dialogues with the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> The Ambassador to Moscow, Duncan Wilson, went so far as to presage the risk of a “Rapallo-type bilateral pact” between USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany and to advise the government to prevent it.<sup>29</sup>

Soviet reactions to the ‘first’ British *Ostpolitik* had been very harsh. London was accused of subversive goals, having refused to open a dialogue with the Soviet Union, while intensifying relations with its satellites. British Ambassador John Killick noted with regret that the degree of suspicion surrounding British diplomats in Moscow was unparalleled, compared to other European diplomats in Moscow. In 1973, he urged the FCO to foster better bilateral relations with the USSR, in order to avoid being perceived as “cast in the role of the West’s leading and unrepentant reactionary”.<sup>30</sup>

Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas Home supported a re-examination of the costs for Britain regarding the existing anti-Soviet policy and the risks in making Britain the “odd man out” within the process of East-West reconciliation, damaging at the same time the trade balance.<sup>31</sup> To avert all this, Prime Minister Edward Heath eventually decided in 1973 to re-launch bilateral relations by sending Trade Secretary John Davies to Moscow. Another signal of improved British-Soviet relations was the replacement in London of the elderly Ambassador Mikhail Smirnovsky with the younger Nikolay Lunkov. A meeting between heads of government became possible, as Brimelow observed: “we accept at official level that this would probably be a price worth paying”.<sup>32</sup>

The improvement in East-West relations in Central Europe, following the Warsaw Treaty in 1972,<sup>33</sup> and the cooperative climate created by all-European negotiations,

28. About British fears of marginalization see H. PARR, *Bridge-building and the empty chair*, in: *Britain’s Policy towards the European Community. Harold Wilson and Britain’s world role, 1964-1967*, Routledge, London, 2006, pp.41-69.

29. G. BENNETT, K.A. HAMILTON (eds.), op.cit.: Wilson (Moscow) to Stewart, Moscow, 14.07.1969, pp.179-187.

30. Ibid.: Letter from Killick (Moscow) to Brimelow, Moscow, 05.01.1973, pp.196-198. Footnote 2, p. 187.

31. Ibid.: Memorandum by Douglas-Home for the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, FCO, 18 February 1973, pp.196-198; Record of Ninth Meeting of the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, Cabinet Office, 06.04.1973, pp.205-207.

32. Ibid.: Letter from Brimelow to Dobbs (Moscow), FCO, 06.02.1973, pp.199-202.

33. The Warsaw Treaty was ratified in 1972 by the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland. It stood for Bonn’s acknowledgement of the Oder-Neisse post-war border and it marked the beginning of a growing normalization regarding German-Polish relations.

substantially boosted Western *Ostpolitik* and inaugurated the phase of so called 'Polish Market Socialism'. Polish commercial links with the West deepened from the early 1970s and trade with the West quickly reached 50 % of Polish foreign trade.<sup>34</sup>

London was now ready to seize this new opportunity. In December 1973, the Heath government accomplished its diplomatic revolution. Douglas Home felt that the moment had come for visiting Moscow with the aim of improving bilateral relations and paving the way for closer relations with Eastern Europe.<sup>35</sup>

The Wilson government and the return of the Labour Party in 1974 boosted this 'second', more articulated *Ostpolitik*. In the mid 1970s, high-level British politicians, such as the new Foreign Secretary James Callaghan, were sent to Poland, and relations with the Edward Gierek leadership intensified. British-Polish cooperation improved, thanks to new initiatives which included the re-launching of the bilateral Round Table in Toruń, in 1976, that promoted industrial joint ventures in Poland.<sup>36</sup>

### British 'carrot and stick' and the new 'stream of ideas'

The Polish-German Warsaw Treaty, ratified in 1972, provided a convincing diplomatic outline which would later be a source of inspiration at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) negotiations. It simultaneously dealt with humanitarian and territorial-commercial issues. It was a model that Great Britain also adopted in Poland, focusing on demands of domestic social and political softening in exchange for commercial and financial concessions. This is how the mechanism of "carrot and stick"<sup>37</sup> in British Eastern policy was adopted and would remain central to its diplomacy in the following years.

As recent research has shown, the CSCE Conference was a major opportunity for *Ost-Westpolitik* interaction.<sup>38</sup> The conference provided a unique opportunity for dialogue with Eastern governments and for supporting the emerging demands of Eastern societies, which were the engine behind the process of the self-reformation of the Eastern European countries. During the CSCE preparatory talks, the British representative championed international cooperation to assure the implementation of the

34. *Politika's* data, quoted by G. ANDERSEN, in: *Combat*, 16 April 1974.

35. A. GROMYKO, op.cit., pp.151-163.

36. The reference is to the first agreements between Massey-Ferguson industry and Petrocarbon Developments Ltd. with the Polish authorities. *Times*, 15.06.1976.

37. This is the way the American Ambassador Burns defined European diplomacy toward the East. Thomson Gale Collection, n.0829, 2004: Embassy Bonn, Telegram from Burns to Secretary of State. Subject: Schmidt-Mitterrand meeting talks, 14.01.1982.

38. Some recent examples are O. BANGE, G. NIEDHART (eds.), *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2008, A. WENGER, V. MASTNY, C. NUENLIST, *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-1975*, Routledge, London, 2008; D.J. GALBREATH, *The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Routledge, London/New York, 2007.

Helsinki commitments on human rights.<sup>39</sup> In strong opposition with the Warsaw Pact countries, Britain demanded a special role for NGOs.

The British stance, along with that of the Americans, fostered the creation of new citizen groups to monitor the behaviours of Eastern governments (for instance, the Committee of Polish Youth for the Observation of CSCE Resolutions),<sup>40</sup> and later this led to the creation of ‘watching groups’ all over Eastern Europe. This favoured the emergence of an East-West stream of information concerning living conditions in Eastern countries, producing both a renewed criticism on real socialism’s distortions and ideas on reforms.<sup>41</sup> In Poland this new ‘stream of ideas’ blended with pre-existing claims and moods. As Professor Edward Lipiński’s 1976 open letter to Edward Gierek pointed out, in the mid 1970s *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (KOR) members quickly won the support of British well-wishers and their activities succeeded in arousing new worldwide interest. In addition, new Polish and Soviet engagements regarding human rights imposed a moderate reaction to the 1976 protests against price rises and constitutional reform.<sup>42</sup>

It followed that from the mid 1970s, large economic and technical aid from Great Britain allowed for an increase in the publication and dissemination of an independent or samizdat’ press inside Poland. The new press rapidly spread thoroughly around the country and contributed to reinforce the social network as well as free speech.<sup>43</sup>

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39. About the negotiation of the 9<sup>th</sup> Principles of Helsinki FA, see A.V. ZAGORSKY, *Chel'sinskij process*, Prava cheloveka, Moskva, 2005, esp. p.80. See also G. BENNETT, K.A. HAMILTON (eds.), op.cit.
40. A. PACZKOWSKI, *From Amnesty to Amnesty: the Authorities and the Opposition in Poland, 1976-1986*, paper presented at the Conference “From Helsinki to Gorbachev 1975-85”, Artimino, Florence, April 2006.
41. D.I. ZUBAREV, G.V. KUZOVKIN (eds.), *Moskovskoj Chel'sinskij gruppy. Dokumenty 1976-1982*, MChG, Moskva, 2006.
42. R.F. STARR, *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1978*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1978.
43. Especially during Edward Raczyński’s presidency of the London émigré community (1976-1986), London became a very active centre of dissident publishing activities. Some examples, quoted by Paczkowski, concerned the initiatives of the Sikorski Institute, or the Polish Cultural Centre. See A. PACZKOWSKI, *The émigré community in the era of détente*, in: *The Spring will be ours, Poland and Poles from occupation to freedom*, op.cit, pp.586-588. This also involved several London-based periodicals like *Wiadomosci*, edited by Mieczyslaw Grydzewski, *Aneks*, created by Aleksander and Eugeniusz Smolar, or *Pulse*. These periodicals were also disseminated in Poland. For relations between the dissident editorial activities abroad and inside Poland see for instance the review *Zapis*, directly supported by Aneks entourage. For relations with KOR activities, like for example Aneks’ launch of a special *Appeal for Polish workers* in 1976, see M. TYRCHAN, *Aneks. Post March émigré*, in: *Studia Medioznawcze*, 2(2009). About “the flood of ‘goods’ (books, equipment, and later office supplies and computers) and ‘services’ (visiting lecturers) coming from London”, see B.J. FALK, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe*, CEU Press, Budapest, 2003, p. 93. See also activities described in A. JASTRZĘBSKI (ed.), *Dokumenty Komitetu Obrony Robotników i Komitetu Samoobrony Społecznej*, Aneks, Warszawa/Londyn, 1994, quoted in O.N. MAJOROVA, *Pol'sha 80-ch godov: poisk puti k kompromissu*, web-magazine Mezhdunorodnyj Istoricheskij zhurnal, n.7, janvar'-fevral' 2000.

Testimonies of this uncensored press can now be found in the Budapest OSA archives.<sup>44</sup>

Publishing initiatives were often representative of the activities of the political opposition groups and were therefore the result of this new tendency to form associations. The KOR experience, from which we can argue that Solidarity derived, can be recalled as the most significant, but it was not alone, as there were several other political groups contributing to this new turmoil. They all demonstrated that Polish civil society was very much alive and open to Western influence. Polish opposition forces focused on human rights, as in the case of the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) and Freedom and Peace (WIP). They also sought intellectual freedom, as the Society for Academic Courses (TNK) and many student organizations such as the Independent Students' Union (NZS); alongside these dimensions, was a rise in nationalism, as the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KNP) and the Committee for National Self-Determination (KPSN); and last, the defence of the private agricultural sector, as *Solidarność Wiejska* and the All-Poland Farmers' Resistance Committee (OKOR).<sup>45</sup>

These new ideas penetrated the establishment. Polish reformists, or 'revisionists' according to the Soviets, included party officials Tadeusz Fiszbach, Mieczysław Rakowski and Henryk Jabłoński, whose influence was on the rise during the 1970s and the 1980s. These reformists were openly opposed by the CPSU leaders.<sup>46</sup> The Soviets believed that their *Westpolitik* was too similar to the objectives of the Solidarity movement. Both the will to carry out socialist 'renewal' and the ambiguous slogans of socialist 'modernization' and 'improvement' were interpreted as subtle attempts at overturning the system.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the August 1980 agreement between the Polish government and Solidarity could be interpreted as a result of such an ambiguity.<sup>48</sup>

An overt willingness to reform the system was strongly expressed from within the Polish State Academy. Economists belonging to the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) progressive wing increasingly showed their interest in the Western scientific models of development. Leszek Balcerowicz, for instance, studied in Western Universities and had the opportunity to experience different analytic methods. In 1980, he argued in favour of softening the planned economic system and opening to external

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44. For instance *Głos, Gospodarz, Opinia, Robotnik, Polish Independence Compact*. See Open Society web-archives: Review of Uncensored Polish Publications, November 1977, RAD Background Report/89.
45. For an overview of groups and publications, see the catalogue compiled by Z. KANTOROSINSKI, *The Independent press in Poland, 1976-1990*, Library of Congress, Washington, 1991.
46. Soviet archives website, Johns Hopkins University project: O razvitií obstanovki v Pol'she i nekotorych shagach s nashej storony. Reshenie Politbjuro CK n. P7/VII ot 23.04.81.
47. *Ibid.*: Ob ukazaniyach sovposlu v Italii v svyazi s poezdkoj L. Valensy v Italiju. Vypiska iz protokola N. 246, IGS Sekretariata TsK.
48. N.I. BUCHARIN, *Vnutrennie faktory pol'skoj revoljucii 1989 g.*, in: web-magazine *Mezhdunarodnyj Istoricheskij zhurnal*, n.7, janvar'-fevral' 2000.

markets.<sup>49</sup> These proposals became more radical at the end of the 1970s, along with the worsening of the state of the Polish economy, when the WOG experiment (Wielkie Organizacje Gospodarcze, i.e. Large Economic Organizations) demonstrated that a partially reformed and centralized economy could not work.<sup>50</sup> As a result, progressive Polish economists called for deeper reforms.<sup>51</sup>

### The need for gradualism

Yet, the FCO also understood that the revival of civil society was not the only major process of change under way in the 1970s and the 1980s. During the same period, and thanks in part to the normalization of European East-West relations in which Britain had chosen to take part, Poland's strategic position within the Warsaw Pact which was still determined by the post World War II security framework, was now shifting.<sup>52</sup> Successes at the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions) negotiations consolidated the quiet political project of a block-free Europe, and this greatly encouraged Poland to be more independent both on the international stage and in domestic policy. A new security concept, based on dialogue, collaboration and eventually disarmament, seemed to be emerging<sup>53</sup> and it seemed clear that this might reduce the necessity of superpower protection. Poland was in 1978 among the advocates of a European Defence Conference, along with the CSCE follow-up. Indeed, Warsaw promptly declared its willingness to host such an initiative.<sup>54</sup>

Nonetheless, reshaping the European 'security concept', and the possibility for Poland to renounce its military ties with the Soviet Union, was going to be a very slow process. Even among the most progressive Polish politicians, a political trans-

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49. The reference is to Leszek Balcerowicz's contribution to the "Marlene" project, supported from 1974 by the CC Secretary Verbljan. Balcerowicz also spent time studying the Southern Korean model of reform at the University of Brighton and one can argue that this experience might have influenced his later approach as Polish Minister of the Economy, during the transition of Polish economy to the liberal system. L.S. LYKOSHINA, *Politicheskie portrety 2000: Leszek Balcerowicz*, RAN, INION, Moskva, 2000.
50. P. DEMBINSKI, *L'endettement de la Pologne ou les limites d'un système*, Anthropos, Paris, 1984; B. SIMATUPANG, *The Polish economic crisis*, Routledge, London/New York, 1994.
51. L.S. LYKOSHINA, op.cit., with reference to the Balcerowicz's reports: "Reforma gospodarcza: Główne sposoby i kierunki realizacji" (1980, Warszawa) and "Reforma gospodarcza: warunki i problemy realizacji" (1981, Warszawa).
52. Regarding the normalization of Central European relations, see W. LOTH, G.-H. SOUTOU (eds.), op.cit.; T.G. ASH, *Under Western eyes*, in: *The Polish revolution. Solidarity*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, pp.318-355.
53. Regarding the founding of a post-Yalta European order see F. BOZO, *Mitterrand, la fin de la guerre froide et l'unification allemande: de Yalta à Maastricht*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2005.
54. A.V. ZAGORSKY, op.cit.; F. CHERNOFF, *Negotiating Security and Disarmament in Europe*, in: *International Affairs*, 3(1984), pp.429-437.

formation of the country that did not take into account the basic security concerns was unthinkable, as indeed it was to most in the FCO.<sup>55</sup>

Yet the FCO was aware that changes were occurring in Poland both outside the party and inside the PUWP. The ruling bodies were seeking popular consent, and granting greater freedoms and reforms, on condition that the alliance with the Soviet Union be preserved.<sup>56</sup> Ambassador Kenneth Robert Pridham referred to the 'Experience and Future' movement as an example of dissidence within the establishment which strongly promoted reforms, while at the same time respecting existing Polish international commitments. The British believed that the Polish government was striving to balance "the need to govern without provoking unrest against the need to maintain itself in power and placate the Soviet Union".<sup>57</sup> Once again, British diplomacy urged that UK *Ostpolitik* should intensify and give clear signals, such as the visit by the new Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to Warsaw. At the end of 1980, the Warsaw Pact summit in Moscow was perceived by the British embassy as no more than a tactical move to produce an intimidating effect. Despite Soviet pressures, Pridham unshakably observed "Poland is a much freer country than it was in July".<sup>58</sup> He was persuaded that the PUWP Extraordinary Congress scheduled for 1981, still had a chance to propose an effective recovery plan, with "that measure of reform which the Communist system should be able to contain". Facing this perspective, London had to continue to strengthen its economic leverage and encourage the democratic evolution within Poland. Specifically, the long-term aim was to keep "the Polish economy going and with so conducting matters in other fields so as to foster the preservation of Polish independence".<sup>59</sup>

At the beginning of the 1980s the FCO clearly perceived the risk of instability inherent in Solidarity, which had become stronger, more divided and unpredictable. The British embassy in Warsaw understood the necessity to contain and channel grassroot forces in Poland. Soon after the introduction of martial law, despite public shock, Pridham's successor in Warsaw, Ambassador Cynlais Morgan James, advised the FCO not to rush into "over-simplification" against Wojciech Jaruzelski's move, arguing that the best reaction on the part of Western diplomacy was still "to keep the door ajar".<sup>60</sup>

55. A.R. RACHWALD, *Poland between the superpowers: security versus Economic recovery*, Oxford University Press, London, 1991.

56. H.G. WERNER, *Democracy in a Communist party: Poland's experience since 1980*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987.

57. Poland's Annual Review for 1979. HM Ambassador at Warsaw Kenneth Robert Komyn to the Secretary of State for FCO, Poland, 02.01.1980, online at [www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).

58. Poland's Annual Review for 1980. HM Ambassador at Warsaw Kenneth Robert Komyn Pridham to the Secretary of State for FCO, Poland, 01.01.1980, online at [www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).

59. *Ibid.*

60. C.M. James wrote: "There may still be something of a reformed Poland to be rescued even more from the present wreck", Poland's Annual Review for 1981. HM Ambassador at Warsaw C.M. James to the Secretary of State for FCO, Poland, 30.12.1981, online at [www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).

## Conclusions

FCO calculations and the strategy of gradualism in British *Ostpolitik* were largely successful in the early 1980s. Reformism in Poland was not defeated in the early 1980s, though it experienced a major setback.<sup>61</sup> Cultural and social cooperation with the West remained vibrant. The Thatcher government accepted to moderate the EC pressures exerted on Jaruzelski's government. As pointed out by Karen Smith, the EPC (European Political Cooperation) represented for the Europeans an extremely useful "framework to counter the US pressure" on this matter. The UK Ambassador believed that reformism in Poland could be rescued. He supported the rescheduling of Polish debts, as both a political and a financial choice, to the advantage of the Polish government and its economic reforms.<sup>62</sup>

This article argues that the ability of *Ostpolitik* to adapt itself to signals of changes deriving from Eastern *Westpolitik* contributed to foster those changes. However, a full assessment of the balance between external European influences and other factors within the state and East European/Soviet system will not be possible until archival sources are made available. But what is clear is that a major transformation of the Soviet system soon became unavoidable. The level of East-West interdependence, as the Polish public debt demonstrated,<sup>63</sup> represented a well-established reality that military blocks could not ignore.<sup>64</sup> The rise of Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid 1980s, can therefore be construed both as the natural epilogue of such an evolution, as well as a new turning point in the domestic and international stands of Eastern Europe. It also directly affected the evolution of British *Ostpolitik*.

The intra-block reforms introduced by the new Soviet leader actually unchained Poland from what was left of its ties with the Soviet system.<sup>65</sup> The socialist system was no more an unquestionable reality and Poland could now choose to reform without fear of a backlash from Moscow.<sup>66</sup> This, first of all, meant that the strategy of gradualism pursued by the Thatcher government, in continuity with previous British policies, became suddenly outdated. The end of the Cold War balance of power in

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61. Poland's Annual Review for 1982. HM Ambassador at Warsaw C.M. James to the Secretary of State for FCO, Poland, 31 December 1982, online at [www.margaretthatcher.org](http://www.margaretthatcher.org).
  62. K.E. SMITH, *The making of EU foreign policy: the case of Eastern Europe*, Palgrave, London, 1999, see pp.38-41; see also P. MARSH, *Development of Relations between the EEC and CMEA*, in: A. SHLAIM, G.N. YANNOPOULOS (eds.), *The EEC and Eastern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, New York/London, 1979.
  63. According to the Western press, Polish foreign debt was about \$ 25 - 27 billion in the mid 1980s.
  64. Very soon, Western European countries turned out to be dependent on Eastern countries' ability to repay their huge debts. See F. LEMOINE, *Les conditions de l'endettement des pays de l'Est*, in: *Economie et statistique*, n.116, 1979, pp.31-41.
  65. A.S. CHERNYAEV, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2000 p.12; A.S. CHERNYAEV, *Diary*, 1985, Entrance for 4 January, 1985, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, National Archives website. See also G.R. CHAFETZ, *Gorbachev, Reform and the Brezhnev doctrine: Soviet policy Toward Eastern Europe, 1985-1990*, Praeger, Westport-Connecticut, 1993.
  66. W. JARUZELSKI, *Doroga k novej istoricheskoj situacii v Evrope i mire*, in: *Kontinent*, 123(2005).

Europe did not tally with Thatcher's long-term vision of the end of Cold War.<sup>67</sup> Second, during Gorbachev's leadership, British cultural policy was freer than ever before, because the danger of violent repression or escalating social conflicts was now considerably reduced. Once the last obstacles in overcoming East-West divisions had been eliminated, many cultural programmes were financed by the British government and private citizens with the aim of spreading democratic and liberal ideas, as well as promoting and educating new democratic leadership.<sup>68</sup> It was a new starting point, though the European political and geostrategic framework still remained tentative.

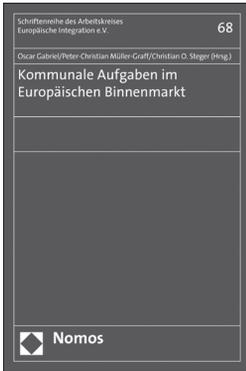
From the mid 1980s, greater priority was given to the activities of the opposition and to possible alternatives to the ruling party, all of which contributed to the ensuing Round Table negotiations. However, this was not a revolutionary, but an evolutionary process: specifically, the result of two decades of evolution both within the British diplomacy and in the Polish domestic situation. The interaction with the Polish political and social actors gradually pushed the FCO towards a better understanding of Poland's needs, ties and ambitions, bringing about a new, less dogmatic vision of East-West relations in Europe and providing the necessary tools to exert a major influence on them. British 'push and pull' diplomacy therefore emerged as a dynamic, pragmatic undertaking, designed to adapt itself to the emerging signals and to seize new opportunities, to overcome the ideological divisions and re-shape European relations.

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67. See I. POGGIOLINI, *op.cit.*

68. The reference is to initiatives like the CEEPP or the Soros Foundation. *Freedom for publishing, publishing for freedom: the Central and East European Publishing Project*, Central and East European Publishing Project, Central European University Press, 1995.

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## Book reviews – Comptes rendus – Buchbesprechungen

**Alan Paul FIMISTER, *Robert Schuman: Neo-Scholastic Humanism and the Reunification of Europe***, Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2008, 284 p. – ISBN 978-90-5201-439-5 – 40,20 €.

Dans sa monographie intitulée *Robert Schuman: Neo-Scholastic Humanism and the Reunification of Europe*, Alan Paul Fimister aborde le personnage de Robert Schuman sous un angle très original. En effet, il examine si l'œuvre de Schuman en faveur de l'intégration européenne est liée à son adhésion à la philosophie humaniste néo-scholastique, qui est introduite sous le pontificat de Léon XIII en 1879 et ensuite développée sous Pie XII, pendant la période de la création des institutions communautaires.

L'ouvrage de Fimister tente ainsi de faire le lien entre la sphère religieuse et les relations internationales, entre le catholicisme et la construction européenne. Fimister tente de prouver que les valeurs chrétiennes défendues par le chrétien-démocrate et catholique Robert Schuman se retrouvent dans le projet de la construction européenne qui est lancé avec la déclaration du 9 mai 1950. Selon l'auteur, une nouvelle étude sur Robert Schuman serait d'autant plus nécessaire qu'il y aurait une non prise en compte, voire même une méconnaissance de Robert Schuman dans la littérature britannique sur l'intégration européenne. Dans son introduction, il n'hésite pas à critiquer le silence sur ce personnage clé dans l'histoire de la construction européenne chez certains auteurs anglophones (comme Michael P. Fogarty) ou une interprétation trop biaisée chez d'autres (comme Rodger Charles S.J.). Fort heureusement, il ne remet pas en cause les ouvrages de référence français, tels que *Robert Schuman, Homme d'État (1886-1963)* de Raymond Poidevin.

Pour initier le lecteur à l'humanisme néo-scholastique, Fimister qui témoigne ainsi de son savoir-faire en tant que politologue et expert en sciences philosophiques, retrace l'introduction de l'humanisme néo-scholastique dans les doctrines de l'Église catholique sous les papes Léon XIII jusqu'à Pie XII. Dans un premier chapitre, il aborde le *magisterium* social et la société supranationale comme deux éléments clés de la période qu'il dénomme néo-Thomasisme (signifiant la reprise de la doctrine sociale de St. Thomas d'Aquin) qui commence en 1879 et se termine en 1958. Il explique que sous le pontificat de Léon XIII, l'idée d'un nouvel ordre social catholique voit le jour au sein duquel le rôle de l'Église catholique serait le représentant d'une société universelle. L'objectif du pape Léon aurait aussi été de lier la sphère religieuse et politique par l'affirmation d'une philosophie politique catholique qui n'a pourtant pas beaucoup de chances de réussir sous le régime de la Troisième République en France, marquée par un fort mouvement anticlérical.

Le deuxième chapitre est ensuite consacré à la réception du *magisterium* social du pape Léon XIII dans la classe politique et les écrivains-philosophes en France après la Première Guerre mondiale. Fimister montre, par exemple, les abus de