

Preface

Anne DEIGHTON

This special number of the *Journal of European Integration History* has been compiled and coordinated by Ilaria Poggolini, Professor of International History at the University of Pavia, Italy, for the *Groupe de Liaison*. The number has been made possible because of a research project at the University of Pavia, co-funded by the Italian Minister of Education and the University of Pavia and carried out by Ilaria Poggolini in cooperation with the Machiavelli Centre for Cold War Studies (CIMA). The project is entitled ‘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’. Another rationale for this special number is of more general interest to historians of the late cold war world. The British government passed a Freedom of Information Act in 2000. Under this new legislation, it is now possible to request access to state documents on a vast range of subjects that may be of personal, regional, or national significance. This legislation has been used extensively, and it has proved to be a gold mine for contemporary historians who wish to examine documents that were generated in the years after the end of the Thirty Year Rule. Some of the documents that dealt with the 1980s were requested by the project leader, and were then released to the research project. Many of these have now also been made available on the Thatcher Foundation website. In particular, it is now possible to follow both the thinking and actions of Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials, and in particular, of their senior diplomats who were serving in Eastern Europe during the 1980s. It is also possible to read more documentation generated by the Prime Minister herself, or annotated by her during her premiership. It is interesting that this Act has also stimulated a more generous release policy, as the Thirty Year Rule is to be reduced to a Twenty Year Rule in the UK; and two special volumes of documents have already been released relating to the end of the cold war in Europe as well. The French and the Germans have now also released a large amount of archival material covering the 1989-91 period.

Further, given that this is very contemporary history, Professor Poggolini has included a number of witness/participant contributions. These personal observations resonate well with one of the main themes of the volume. This is the examination of the importance of key individuals during a period of dramatic and unpredictable change. 1989 was not widely predicted, although we can now, post hoc, detect many signs of earlier change on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Because the events themselves were so little predicted, it would seem that it is of even more importance to examine the role of key individuals, as all parties were relying on a combination of hard national interests, vision, risk, and luck.

This volume does of course not aim to be a definitive account on the end of the cold war in Europe. Rather, Professor Poggolini has focused on one major player, the UK, and on a number of themes: the role of the individual; and the deeper roots

of British cultural attitudes and policies towards Europe and Eastern Europe in particular. This opens up new avenues for research both for historians of British foreign policy, but also for other national accounts of the period. She has also developed a theme that is still very controversial in Britain, and which is central to the interest of this journal, the relationship between British policy towards the European Community at a time of a sharp integrationist thrust – the Single European Act, and how British policies about European integration did, or did not, fit with the wider views about the European continent. This therefore brings into sharp focus the extent to which the history of European integration should be considered both as a *sui generis* study, but also as being within the intellectual, diplomatic, and policy environment of a wider Europe, both during and after the cold war.

Britain in Europe in the 1980s: East & West. Introduction

Ilaria POGGOLINI / Alex PRAVDA

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War the literature on the history of a divided and then reunited Europe is richer than ever. This issue builds on four trends in historiography which have emerged over the last two decades. First, it draws upon the writings of those who have linked the phenomenon of European détente to West European *Ostpolitik*, Eastern *Westpolitik*, and, more generally, to the process of liberalisation in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ Second, the last decade of the Cold War has now become a very attractive object of investigation for scholars, and not only for historians, thus requiring knowledge of different disciplinary approaches to the topic.² Third, studying the “return” of the other half of Europe to the West as a vital moment in the process ending the Cold War and transforming Europe, has highlighted the need to access sources beyond the thirty years rule and for historians to use these sources to transcend the earlier boundaries separating areas of study such as transatlantic relations, the history of European integration, the study of the former Soviet Union, or Western and Eastern Europe.³ Finally, this tendency to overcome disciplinary barriers and the interest of historians in the 1980s has provided fertile ground for reflecting the role played by Britain in the 1980s, in Europe and in its

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