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## 13 The Warsaw Pact and the CSCE process from 1965 to 1970<sup>1</sup>

Csaba Békés

On October 23, 1954, the Western powers signed the so-called Paris Treaties, which included the accession of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), set for May 5, 1955. On the same day, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov submitted a proposal that the ministers of foreign affairs of the four great powers start preparatory negotiations on convening a pan-European security conference. Since the proposal was flatly rejected by the West, the Soviet leadership threatened to convene the meeting on its own if necessary. This is what eventually took place, and the representatives of the European communist countries, with the exception of Yugoslavia, held a meeting between November 29 and December 2, 1954 in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> As part of the new Soviet doctrine – the so-called doctrine of active foreign policy<sup>3</sup> – aimed at fostering greater formal participation of the East-Central European communist states since early 1954, the official appeal to convene the conference was made public jointly by the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary at Soviet request.<sup>4</sup> The resolution made at the conference – as expected – conveyed a two-fold message: the declaration still urged the establishment of a collective European security system, but on the other hand, it indicated that if the Paris Treaties were ratified, the Soviet Union and its East-Central European allies would take the necessary steps to improve their own security.

The Western powers rejected the Soviet initiative, however, for they were convinced that it was mere propaganda and therefore did not even attempt to put the genuine intentions of Moscow to the test. This Western suspicion seemed to be supported by the fact that following the rejection of the Soviet proposal to establish a collective European security system, the leaders of the Soviet Union decided that the Eastern bloc should also establish its own military-political alliance similar to that of NATO.<sup>5</sup>

Although the idea of establishing a collective European security system was not given up by Moscow in the long run, the period following the establishment of the Warsaw Pact (WP) in May 1955 was full of turbulent events in world politics that did not favor such endeavors.<sup>6</sup>



### From Warsaw – via Bucharest – to Budapest, from 1965 to 1969

The idea of starting a campaign for holding a pan-European security conference re-emerged just a decade after the abortive initiative of Khrushchev and Molotov in 1954. This time, it began as a project under the Polish leadership, which raised the issue at the end of 1964. In his speech at the UN General Assembly on December 14, Adam Rapacki, the Polish foreign minister, proposed the convening of a European security conference with the participation of the United States.

The proposal was then officially put forward at the session of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee (WPPCC) held in the Polish capital in January 1965 without, however, any special preparation or previous consultation with the member states. Although the issue was originally not even on the agenda of the meeting, the participants supported the improvised proposal unanimously. Thus, in the declaration published at the end of the session, a special paragraph was included to the effect that the member states of the Warsaw Pact considered it necessary to convene 'a conference of European states to discuss measures to ensure collective security in Europe.'<sup>7</sup>

Yet, this message – although it may be considered as the starting point of the process which eventually led to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act – was presented in a rather marginal way in the document. This was due to the chaotic nature of the PCC session, held just a few months after the fall of Khrushchev and was the first such meeting since 1956 in which real debates took place among the representatives of the member states. At the gathering, numerous issues more important at the time but historically less relevant had to be discussed: in the first place, there was the Eastern bloc's reaction to the Western plan for the establishment of a multilateral nuclear force (MNF).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the declaration – besides stating that in the event the MNF plan was implemented, the Warsaw Pact 'would be forced to carry out the necessary defense measures'<sup>9</sup> – put forward a series of previously suggested confidence-building proposals, such as the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe, the conclusion of a nonaggression pact with the NATO countries, a commitment on the nuclear-free status of the two Germanies, and so forth.<sup>10</sup>

In the second half of 1965, the management of the issue of a potential European security conference was taken over by Soviet diplomacy. From that time on, this question – in close correlation with Moscow's endeavors to settle the German question – became the central problem of the period lasting until the middle of the 1970s.

Consequently, the next session of the WPPCC, held in Bucharest in July 1966, was wholly devoted to the issue of the security conference. As opposed to the improvisational character of several previous and many later PCC meetings, this session was preceded by a very lengthy process of

intensive multilateral coordination, including the longest foreign ministers' session in the history of the alliance, lasting around two weeks.<sup>11</sup> The Soviets had an ambitious plan for the PCC meeting: On the one hand, they wanted to carry out the organizational transformation of the alliance that had been urged by several member states such as Poland and Hungary for a long time, and at the same time, they wanted to issue a powerful declaration on the security conference. Moscow's priority was the latter, and this was clearly shown by the last-minute special deal made with Romania, which strongly opposed the reforms. As a consequence of that arrangement, the reform of the political and military organization was taken off the agenda just before the meeting.<sup>12</sup> In turn, the Warsaw Pact's Bucharest Declaration was accepted unanimously. It called upon the leaders of the states of the continent to start preliminary talks on the staging of a conference on European security.

At the same time, however, the Eastern bloc's preconditions were also established: the West was to accept the existence of the two German states and the FRG was to give up the claim of sole representation of the German people and recognize the existing Eastern borders. In addition to this, the document – due to Romanian pressure – urged the withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of the European states and the elimination of foreign military bases and called for the simultaneous dissolution of the two military-political alliances. This appeal from the Bucharest session of the WPPCC constituted the Eastern bloc's first serious initiative concerning the institutional settlement of East–West relations, and, at the same time, it also meant the first important step on the road leading to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

Reactions to the declaration were not totally unfavorable in the West either, but the preconditions concerning the convening of the conference could not yet, at that time, be accepted by most states concerned. Nevertheless, these were basically demands of a *defensive* character, and in fact they were far from irrational. This was clearly illustrated by the fact that just a few years later, during the general settlement of the German question between 1970 and 1973, the FRG and the West in general accepted all preconditions set down in Bucharest. At the same time, the Bucharest declaration had a very harsh anti-American and anti-FRG tone, the text quite overtly calling upon the Western European countries to be rid of U.S. influence.<sup>13</sup> Although this idea might have coincided with the wishful thinking of many in the societies and even in the governmental circles in a number of Western European countries, such tactical advice coming from, as it were, the 'other side of the Moon' could hardly contribute to the success of the Soviet bloc's initiative. In reality, as we will see, it was exactly the case that *acquiring the cooperation* of these two states, that is, the United States and the FRG, was the key factor in the eventual success of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process leading up to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act.



Thus, the Bucharest Declaration of the Warsaw Pact states calling for the summoning of a pan-European security conference proved to be a premature initiative that did not give rise to the actual preparation process for such a gathering. Taking into account the positive or at least neutral response to the declaration in several Western countries and also having thoroughly analyzed the reaction of the West to the Eastern bloc's initiative, the Soviets came to the conclusion, however, that a grand and comprehensive political campaign had to be launched in order to convince Western Europe of their position, both at a governmental level and at the level of society.

As far as working on the *public* was concerned, they could reckon primarily with the assistance of the Communist parties in Western Europe. During this period, these parties were already much less willing to follow obediently the orders of Moscow than before World War II or in the 1950s. The de-Stalinization process under Khrushchev had already been a serious test for most of them, and in the 1960s, they had to face various challenges and influences such as Maoism and other new left-wing ideologies, the theory of polycentrism, the non-allied movement, as well as some proto-Eurocommunist tendencies, and so forth. Thus, as far as the Western European communist parties were concerned, unity in the old sense was already a thing of the past, and the Soviets had every reason to be concerned about whether they would be able to line up these parties again on the 'battlefield,' this time with the aim of codifying the European status quo. Eventually, all the participants attending the conference of the European Communist and workers' parties held in April 1967 at Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia accepted the Soviet proposal, and the declaration issued after the conference unanimously endorsed the convening of a pan-European security conference.

From then until March 1969, the Bucharest appeal of the Warsaw Pact and the Karlovy Vary declaration were *jointly* used by the countries of the Eastern bloc as the principal basis for further steps concerning the security conference.

As for convincing the *political and governmental* circles in Western Europe, the Soviets again resorted to the tools of a decentralization policy. After the WP's Bucharest appeal, Moscow began very firmly urging the member states of the alliance to engage in *bilateral negotiations* with the Western European countries to convince them how significant this initiative was with respect to the development of East-West relations. The main goal of this campaign was to promote the Soviets' most important strategic goal, that is, convening the European security conference in order to confirm the *European status quo* that had been established after World War II. Yet, as a byproduct of this process not to be underestimated, the East-Central European states had a chance to strengthen their Western relations 'legally.' While carrying out the 'task' set by the Soviets, they gained extensive knowledge and experience during the intensive

bilateral talks as a result of which they could *quickly emancipate* themselves within the structure of East-West relations. Up to the early 1960s, they were regarded simply as 'Soviet satellite states' in common parlance as well as in the internal confidential political documents in the West, but by the end of the decade – with the exception of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – they could present themselves as legitimate partners in international politics. This was not simply an additional consequence of the unfolding détente process that had radically transformed the East-West relations, but a *qualitatively new status* acquired by these countries in their own right that was made possible by a series of bilateral negotiations with the Western states aimed at paving the way for the European security conference.

Naturally, the socialist countries of East-Central Europe had conducted one-on-one negotiations with Western countries earlier, especially from the beginning of the 1960s, but these were primarily bilateral talks in the *classical sense* of the term, focusing mostly on the development of economic relations. Up to this time, however, the Soviet Union basically had the privilege of representing the Eastern bloc on the most important issues of world politics. Now, from this time on, the Soviet leadership tried to give more maneuvering room to its allies in the arena of world politics, and subsequently, it had no alternative but to regard them as *partners*, although only in a limited sense.

This development resulted in active participation of some of the East-Central European countries on an unprecedented level – especially Poland, Hungary, and Romania – in international politics, which promoted their further *emancipation* both within their own alliance and in the East-West relationship overall.

These negotiations contributed to easing international tensions, gradually increasing confidence between the representatives of the two sides and promoting the development of a common European conscience in the long run. The active and intensive participation in the unfolding East-West dialogue – mainly concerning general issues up to this point – prepared these countries for the role that they would play later in the process initiated by the WPPCC's Budapest declaration issued in March 1969. As a result, the European allies of the Soviet Union participated in the preparatory negotiations for the Helsinki Conference not simply as the mere executors of Soviet policy but in several cases – and in many areas – they acted as independent entities, often playing an important role in shaping the overall process.

### The making of the Budapest appeal

The declaration of the Warsaw Pact member states that finally *did initiate* the preparatory process for the European security conference was issued in the glorious neo-Gothic building of the Hungarian Parliament on the



Danube, modeled after the Houses of Parliament in London. The official signing ceremony of the declaration on March 17, 1969 was open to the press as an unprecedented media event in the history of the Warsaw Pact.

Thus, the active role played by Hungarian diplomacy in supporting the Soviet project was rewarded by the fact that Budapest could become the venue of the most important WPPCC meeting since the establishment of the alliance – at least this is how it was perceived in retrospect.

Documents pertaining to the multilateral preparations for the session shed new light, however, on the genesis of this historically important declaration.<sup>14</sup> First, with the exception of Berlin, Budapest was the only capital where there had been no PCC meeting up to that time; so on the basis of the rotation system that had been in effect since 1965, it was quite logical to have the next one there. Second, on the agenda of the session, which originally was to take place in December 1968, there was up to the last moment *only one issue*: the establishment of the legal military structure of the WP for peacetime.<sup>15</sup> In early February 1969, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev mentioned to Kádár in Moscow that it would be a great achievement if, in addition to the required changes in the military structure, a general political declaration on the main issues of international politics could be unanimously adopted in Budapest<sup>16</sup> (the first PCC meeting to follow the WP's military intervention in Czechoslovakia, publicly condemned by Romania at that time).

On the basis of currently accessible sources, we still do not know much about the circumstances under which the Soviet leadership made the decision on issuing a call for a European security conference at the Budapest meeting. Several important developments had taken place since the beginning of 1969, and especially prior to the meeting of the PCC, each of which might have made its own contribution to the decision. Richard Nixon, the newly elected president of the United States, took office in January 1969. During his election campaign, Nixon had already indicated that he was ready to take significant steps to improve Soviet–American relations,<sup>17</sup> and in February, a ‘confidential channel’ was established at his initiative between the two governments as a result of secret negotiations led by the president's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger.<sup>18</sup> Since the Americans were willing to include European affairs in the negotiations, there was then some hope among the Soviets that the United States would also endorse the issue of a European security conference that had been advocated by U.S.S.R. for so many years within the general framework of improving East–West relations.<sup>19</sup>

Little more than two weeks before the Budapest meeting, on March 2, 1969, there was an armed incident at the Ussuri River on the Soviet–Chinese border that evoked the danger of an open military conflict between the two countries after having severed their relations at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Since the Eastern borders of the U.S.S.R. then seemed to be severely threatened, it was quite logical that the Soviets

should make new efforts to secure the final borders of the empire in the West, that is, to codify the status quo established after World War II. The main opponent of this endeavor had up to that time been the West German government. On March 5, 1969, however, the social democrat Gustav Heinemann was elected president of the FRG. Although his post was not comparable to that of the American or the French president, the fact that he was elected half a year before the forthcoming general elections in September 1969 bode well for the Social Democratic Party and its chancellor candidate, Willy Brandt. As minister of foreign affairs in the grand coalition government that had taken office in 1966, Brandt had already provided ample evidence that he was ready to take even radical steps to improve relations with the East-Central European states if he were to come to power. As seen before, the Soviet leadership had long been preparing to promote the issue of a European security conference, and at the beginning of March 1969, they had to face immediate *pressure* in the East and a great *opportunity* in the West. These factors may have strengthened the recognition by Soviet leaders that the forthcoming conference of the WPPCC in Budapest would be a great opportunity for them to see whether conditions for the European security conference had really improved as a result of the efforts made since the Bucharest Declaration and the most recent developments in international politics. This also required the approval of their allies, who could be persuaded by the notion that this ‘Easter gift package’ had something for all parties involved. The Romanians’ share was the repeated announcement of the Bucharest Declaration of July 1966 calling for a security conference – this time *without any conditions*, which was welcome by the Hungarian hosts as well. The Poles and the East Germans understood that the resolution of the German question, so important for them, could only be achieved by a *unified* Warsaw Pact bargaining with the West, and this unity could only be maintained by making concessions to Romania.

The idea of issuing a declaration on European security at the Budapest meeting was raised in a letter of the Soviet leadership dated March 7, 1969 to János Kádár, first secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (HSWP). Even at that point, just ten days before the session, it was still clear that the declaration was meant to be a *secondary issue* on the agenda, while the Soviets were also planning to issue a general document evaluating the most important issues of world policy.

Thereafter, events gathered considerable speed. On March 9, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Firjubin sent two documents to the Hungarian leadership. One was the draft of a general political statement evaluating the main issues on the international scene in accordance with the old tried-and-tested practice. It formulated the position of the Soviet bloc concerning NATO, the FRG, the situation in the Middle East, the war in Vietnam, and the Chinese violations of the Soviet frontier. The other document was the draft of an appeal for convening a pan-European



security conference; the text proposed setting up an operative initiative committee. Apart from the military documents to be signed at the PCC meeting, these were the two official drafts that were submitted as *Hungarian proposals* to the member states.<sup>21</sup> This was all the more interesting given that the Hungarian leadership had fundamental objections to the *first* document, which was regarded as a rather confrontational draft.<sup>22</sup>

On March 13, Firjubin arrived in Budapest for preparatory talks with the Hungarian leaders about the forthcoming meeting. János Kádár strongly argued for seeking the simultaneous acceptance of the military documents and the declaration on European security. He warned Moscow, however, that this was possible only if serious concessions were made to the Romanians concerning delicate issues such as China, the FRG, and Israel, as otherwise Bucharest would not sign the general foreign policy document.<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian proposal was accepted by Moscow and thus a *virtual* Soviet–Hungarian–Romanian joint position was in the making. As a new development in the decision-making process within the alliance, however, all this was not enough for a unified decision: it was then the turn of the Polish and East German leaders who were fighting fiercely for their special interests. During the discussions of the deputy foreign ministers and the party leaders preceding the PCC meeting, the Poles and the East Germans therefore urged stronger wording on the condemnation of the FRG especially, while the Romanians were keen on producing a shorter and less bellicose text.<sup>24</sup>

The Hungarian tactical proposal therefore eventually became the basis of a compromise that made it possible to accomplish two tasks: the concurrent signing of the military documents and the appeal urging a European security conference. This was accomplished finally by giving up on a general foreign policy statement regarding current political issues. This result was achieved in a very intensive process of negotiations that could be characterized as dramatic rather than routine.

The deputy foreign ministers of the WP states started preparatory negotiations on March 15, in the course of which they discussed the content of the planned document on world policy.<sup>25</sup> The Polish party submitted a proposal that was even sharper in tone than the original Soviet draft but soon withdrew it. In the course of lengthy negotiations that lasted until the early morning hours of March 17, the Poles and the East Germans energetically insisted on making the text longer and using much harsher language – especially concerning the FRG – but the Romanians advocated a more conciliatory tone and a shorter version. On the morning of March 16, after the delegations had arrived, the Hungarian negotiators – János Kádár, Jenő Fock, Béla Biszku, and Zoltán Komócsin – sat down to talk with the Soviet leaders. The views of the two parties were in perfect harmony. This was especially because Brezhnev had in the meantime fully accepted the Hungarian position mediated by Firjubin and stated that in the interest of unity, the focus should be on the signing of the military documents. As

for the political statement and the call for European security, concessions should be made, if necessary. After sounding out the delegations before the meeting, Brezhnev also predicted that the major problem would be convincing the East German and Polish leaders. Kádár suggested that in the worst case, they should simply abandon the idea of a joint political declaration in the interest of unity if there was no way to achieve a compromise and instead issue a brief general communiqué. Brezhnev endorsed the proposal and stated, 'It is feasible that a short communiqué and the appeal should be accepted eventually.'<sup>26</sup> As we will see, this is exactly what happened.

The worst was still to come for the Soviet delegation. On March 16, Brezhnev spent the whole evening and much of the night (!) visiting the various delegations in their rooms at the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island in an attempt to achieve a compromise, but his efforts met with little success.<sup>27</sup> During these encounters, he met with the Romanians and the Bulgarians twice and once each with the Czechoslovakian, Polish, and East German leaders. Between two and half-past-three in the morning, the Soviet leaders shared with Kádár and Komócsin the information they had gathered during their night patrol. They said that as had been expected, the Poles and East Germans insisted upon sharpening the tone of the political declaration and condemning the FRG, Israel, and the Chinese border violations, while the Romanians adopted a much more flexible position on these issues. The middle-of-the-road stance of the Soviet–Hungarian duo was loyally supported only by Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. With a view to the extraordinary situation, Kádár and Brezhnev eventually agreed to postpone the time of the forthcoming meeting from ten in the morning to three in the afternoon so that the Soviets could have another chance to talk with the leaders of the delegations. On the morning of March 17, the Soviets sat down to talk again with the Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, and Polish delegations. Since the negotiations with the Poles were drawn out, there was a danger that the PCC would not be able to meet at the newly set time in the afternoon, which justifiably caused the host delegation to fear for the success of the meeting. 'It was close to half past twelve, and we were still waiting for the results. Then we decided to take action,' as János Kádár recalled the dramatic events at the March 24 meeting of the HSWP Politburo.

The Soviet comrades were still negotiating with the Polish delegation, and we said that Comrade Károly Erdélyi<sup>28</sup> should make his way into the negotiating room and tell them: We propose that the first secretaries and the prime ministers come together at two o'clock to discuss how we could start the negotiations at three. The proposal was then accepted.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually, the crisis could only be resolved by cutting the Gordian knot: the party leaders and the prime ministers made a decision at the extraordinary



meeting that the planned foreign policy document would not be issued at all. This was a serious concession on the Soviet side, since Brezhnev was under strong domestic pressure to have the recent Chinese moves harshly condemned at the Budapest meeting, and now the WPPCC session would say nothing about the issue.<sup>30</sup>

After all this, there was no more excitement for the participants at the merely two-hour meeting of the Political Consultative Committee. The session was chaired by Alexander Dubček, and only two comments were made on the speech delivered by Marshall Jakubovskii, one by Kádár and the other by Brezhnev. Then the five military documents were signed. The short communiqué and the text of the appeal for the European security conference were unanimously accepted by all the parties without any comments, as had been previously agreed. The definitely cooperative and civilized tone of the appeal was primarily due to the efforts of the Romanian leaders who had made several motions for an amendment along those lines. It was also the Romanian leaders who persuaded the Poles at the meeting between Gomulka and Ceausescu in the morning to accept a more conciliatory evaluation of the FRG.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the visible and rather spectacular outcome of the meeting, that is, executing the first reform in the military structure of the Warsaw Pact and issuing a promising appeal for convening a conference on European security was based on a *virtual* Soviet–Hungarian–Romanian trio.<sup>32</sup>

The main achievement of the meeting was that the Soviet- and Hungarian-sponsored proposal stipulating there should be *no precondition of any kind* for the convening of a European security conference was eventually accepted by all parties. The inclusion of this standpoint in the appeal of the Warsaw Pact states would later become a crucial factor in successfully initiating the CSCE process.<sup>33</sup>

### From Budapest to Budapest

In late March 1969, following the WPPCC meeting in Budapest, Moscow initiated a large-scale campaign for exploiting the favorable situation concerning the security conference. In this campaign, Hungarians became the closest collaborators of Soviet diplomacy, as their interests basically coincided with those of the Soviets in fostering a radical *rapprochement* in East–West relations. The Hungarian leaders had no preconditions concerning a European settlement – unlike Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR – and therefore could only gain by the success of the process. By now, they had well-developing contacts with the Western part of Europe and acquired a certain level of prestige as promoters of Détente. On the other hand, they were much more loyal, flexible, and obedient partners in following Moscow's tactics than the much less manageable East Germans and Poles, who often adhered rigidly to their own ideas concerning the potential agenda of the security conference – not to mention the Romanians.

At the end of September 1969, the Soviets indicated to their allies that they were planning to hold a conference of the WP foreign ministers in October, the main task of which was to create a position concerning the planned conference on European security. In order to test the opinions of the individual states, several Soviet deputy foreign ministers made simultaneous trips, and on 26 September, Ilyichov had talks with Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter in Budapest.

According to the suggestion from Moscow, the two main items on the agenda were to be the renunciation of violence and a declaration urging the development of economic, trade, and technical-scientific cooperation among the European states.<sup>34</sup>

However, as a result of the Soviet 'testing campaign,' it became obvious that it would not be so easy to achieve a unified position at the meeting of foreign ministers, nor was it only a matter of the expected Romanian attitude. Therefore, on October 17, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov requested the Hungarian party to hold an urgent personal consultation, and the following day, Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi had talks with his partner in Moscow.<sup>35</sup> The Soviets had serious worries that owing to the Polish, Romanian, and East German suggestions, regarded as excessive, they could not reach consensus, which could result in the Warsaw Pact's failure to control the initiative concerning the security conference in spite of the favorable international circumstances. Therefore, in the framework of the 'special relationship' evolving at that time, the Soviets asked the Hungarian leadership to act as moderators in neutralizing excessive Polish, East German, and Romanian proposals at the meeting of the WP foreign ministers in Prague on October 30 and 31, 1969,<sup>36</sup> convened to reconsider the Warsaw Pact's policy in light of the victory of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in West Germany that September. The Polish proposals aimed at the recognition of the territorial status quo and the existing European borders, as well as the *de jure* recognition of the GDR. The Romanians wanted to include in the joint documents an appeal for the dissolution of the military blocs, the withdrawal of foreign troops from Europe, the elimination of foreign military bases, and the renunciation of the demonstration of power. The East German proposals sought the recognition of the GDR by the security conference.

In addition, to facilitate the talks, the Hungarians were advised not to present their own ideas at the meeting either – ideas that were no less ambitious than the above proposals, although in a different way. They were nevertheless encouraged to resubmit their proposals at a later point in the preparatory process. These included the establishment of a European Security Council, concluding agreements on regional cooperation, summoning a meeting of the mayors of the European capitals in Budapest, and the elaboration of the system of European economic cooperation that would concern the linking of European electricity, gas and oil, as well as post and telecommunication systems, the coordinated improvement of



European transportation networks, the promotion of industrial cooperation, the harmonization of standards, the abolition of trade barriers, and the promotion of tourism.<sup>37</sup>

As is clear from the above, the Hungarian proposals contained quite ambitious and long-term plans for European cooperation, some of which could only be realized after the political transition in 1989/90, while others could only be implemented after the accession to the European Union. Another point deserving attention is that while the above-mentioned Polish, Romanian, and East German proposals were all aimed at strengthening European *security*, the Hungarian proposals almost exclusively sought to develop European *cooperation*; in other words, Hungarian diplomacy – only in formal accord with the Soviet intentions – essentially followed the Western strategy of emphasizing cooperation.

The 'friendly request' was listened to, however, and the Hungarian delegation played a constructive role once again at the session of the foreign ministers in Prague. In return for its cooperation, Hungarian diplomacy succeeded at this early stage in presenting several important proposals that would later become crucial elements of the joint WP policy concerning the CSCE process. Thus, the idea was accepted at the foreign ministers' meeting in Prague that there should be a *series* of security conferences<sup>38</sup> and that a *permanent organ* should be set up to coordinate preparation work.

It was also agreed that a group of experts dealing with European economic cooperation should be established within the WP and its work be coordinated by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.

Two documents were accepted at the conference of WP foreign ministers, a statement that was made public and a memorandum that was handed over to the Western European governments. The latter also contained a draft of the *final document* of the planned security conference, which shows a good deal of optimism – or rather, today we can be confident in saying, a good deal of naivety. It should be noted that this document was only two pages long, while the document to be signed later on August 1, 1975 in Helsinki devoted 100 pages to laying down the text of the agreements. Similar optimism could be observed with respect to the possible date of the conference among the leaders of the Eastern bloc; from that time on, they made a prediction at every meeting that the security conference would be convened within six months or one year the most.

The main result of the foreign ministers' meeting was the declaration that the WP states proposed discussing two basic topics at the security conference: (1) the issues of European security and the renunciation of violence in the relationships among states; and (2) the broadening of trade, economic, and technological relations based on equality, promoting political cooperation among the European states.

The other significant result of the Prague meeting was that a new series of bilateral negotiations were started between the East and the West with the active participation of the East-Central European states.

By the end of 1969, it became clear to most Eastern bloc states that the changes in the FRG were tantamount to a real breakthrough on the issue of the security conference. The radical transformation of the West German position and the announcement of a new *Ostpolitik* by the Brandt government meant a qualitative change presenting the possibility of resolving the German question that was central from the point of view of European security.

As a consequence, talks were begun on December 8 regarding a treaty between the Soviet Union and West Germany, and an agreement was reached on conducting similar talks with Poland, promising the recognition of the Oder–Neisse border.<sup>39</sup> At the initiative of a rather confused GDR leadership, a summit meeting was held in Moscow on December 3 and 4 to coordinate the Warsaw Pact's policy vis-à-vis the FRG. While the East German leaders were rather skeptical about the FRG's intentions and were strongly against the idea of direct Polish–FRG talks, a virtual Polish–Hungarian–Romanian 'axis' was formed at the meeting, arguing that there had been a genuine turn in the FRG's policy such that there now existed a historical chance to settle the German question to the advantage of the Eastern bloc. This position was basically supported by the Soviet leaders as well.

With knowledge of the earlier facts, the only thing that is rather surprising is the radical change in the Polish position, for the Polish leadership had up to that time been the most loyal ally of the GDR in condemning West German 'revanchism.' Now, however, the new government of the FRG held out the prospect of recognizing the Oder–Neisse border, and the Polish leaders overnight became the most enthusiastic advocates of direct negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

The result of the meeting was a compromise: the WP member states were encouraged to enter into negotiations with West Germany, but they could establish diplomatic relations with the FRG only after Bonn recognized the GDR. This was in some sense a move away from the still valid *Warsaw Principle*. In February 1967, after Romania had unilaterally decided to enter into diplomatic relations with the FRG, the participants of the meeting of the WP foreign ministers in the Polish capital were made to accept a secret document under East German and Polish pressure (as well as Soviet assistance) without any prior information – pretty much like an ultimatum. This document stated that the necessary conditions for entering into diplomatic relations with the FRG were not ripe for those Eastern European countries that did not yet have such relations. The East German and Polish position maintained that with sufficient resolve, the FRG could be pressed to recognize the GDR within a few years, to give up its demand to be the sole representative of the German nation, and to recognize the frontiers that came into being after World War II.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the way to direct negotiations with the FRG was reopened after the Moscow conference was held in December 1969. Now there was only one precondition for entering



into diplomatic relations: the FRG should officially recognize the GDR. However, the *Warsaw Principle* was further softened under Polish pressure, and after the West German–Polish agreement had been concluded on December 7, 1970, Poland eventually entered into diplomatic relations with the FRG on September 14, 1972.

From the end of 1969, further favorable events indicated that the chances for convening a conference on European security had improved substantially. The NATO Council meeting in Brussels on December 4 and 5 – held at almost exactly the same time as the Soviet Bloc summit in Moscow mentioned earlier – produced a declaration containing a special chapter on ‘Perspectives for Negotiations.’ NATO thereby conveyed a cautious *potential* promise that ongoing and future bilateral and multilateral talks with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries might eventually lead to the staging of a conference on European security.<sup>42</sup> In his speech to the U.S. Congress on February 18, 1970, President Nixon declared that the United States recognized the Soviet Union’s legitimate security interests in Eastern Europe, and he emphasized the American government’s readiness for talks in order to reduce international tension and promote détente.

The Rome session of the NATO Council on May 26 and 27, 1970 was the first meeting of the alliance that was *predominantly* devoted to the issue of how to respond to the initiative of the Soviet bloc concerning a conference on European security.<sup>43</sup> The resulting communiqué contained several new, positive elements, such as the fact that the published text already stated that the aim of permanent East–West contacts was to ‘explore *when* it will be possible to convene a conference or a series of conferences on European security and cooperation.’<sup>44</sup> It was also stated that under certain conditions, the NATO countries considered it possible to start *multilateral* talks on this topic, whereas they no longer linked the issue of the reduction of troops in Europe to the cause of the security conference.<sup>45</sup>

It was now the Warsaw Pact’s turn to summarize the results of bilateral talks conducted with many West European states since the Budapest appeal and offer another, more concrete initiative based on the understanding that their campaign could be successful only if they reacted in a flexible way to the ideas raised by their Western partners concerning the security conference.<sup>46</sup> This historical task was accomplished by the conference of the WP foreign ministers held in Budapest in July 1970.<sup>47</sup> It proved to be a turning point in the CSCE process.

At the preliminary meeting of the deputy foreign ministers and at the conference itself, very intensive debates once again took place among the representatives of the member states. In the quest for a compromise, the Hungarian hosts played a very active mediating role, similar to the one played in the making of the Budapest appeal. The success of the conference was due to the close cooperation of the Soviet and Hungarian diplomats who were mostly supported by the Romanians. In this way, it was possible to

reject endeavors of GDR and Polish leaders to make the settlement of the German question a precondition for the security conference. Thus, the main result of the meeting was that the *Budapest Principle* was maintained, that is, the Warsaw Pact states declared once again that there should be no preconditions for the European security conference.<sup>48</sup>

At the meeting of the foreign ministers, two important elements were accepted that proved to be determining factors in soliciting a positive Western reaction to the idea of the security conference. In return for a Western inclination to accept the GDR as a participant at the conference, it was now declared that the United States and Canada could also take part in the meeting. Another important Western precondition was also agreed to: besides the issues of political and economic cooperation, *cultural* cooperation could also be put on the agenda of the conference.

The Soviets and the WP member states had, from the beginning, been well aware that the conference could not be held without the participation of the United States and Canada, but for tactical reasons this possibility was constantly and deliberately *floated* so that in return they could ensure the participation of the GDR. The field of *cultural relations* was accepted at the Hungarian initiative, which meant nothing less than including a ‘disintegrating bomb’ on the agenda, to be called the ‘Third Basket’ in later phases of the preparatory work. As is well known, this Third Basket played a key role in later developments, for most of the elements representing Western interests were included in it. At this point, the concession opened the way for acceptance of the Western idea of discussing the ‘freer movement of people, ideas, and information between the countries of East and West.’<sup>49</sup> The Third Basket eventually provided the basis for developing the human rights campaign in the period after Helsinki and especially during the successive conferences that eventually played a significant role in the disintegration of the communist systems of East-Central Europe at the end of the 1980s. The importance of the Eastern bloc’s acceptance of the cultural field as part of the conference agenda can therefore hardly be overestimated.

The WP foreign ministers also decided on the establishment of a permanent organ dealing with the issues of European security and cooperation. To facilitate the issue of the security conference, Moscow had by this time agreed to the Western claim that prior to or at least parallel with preliminary talks on European security, negotiations should be started on the reduction of European armed forces. The new body was to create a framework for such negotiations.

It was also officially accepted that the venue for the conference should be Helsinki, and the Finnish proposal to start multilateral talks via the ambassadors in Helsinki was also accepted at this meeting. After the conference, a draft document on economic, technological, and cultural cooperation was forwarded to the Western European governments.

There was a long road from Budapest to Helsinki, where in November 1972, official multilateral preparatory talks started on the European security



conference. The foundations had, however, been laid at the WP foreign ministers' meeting in Budapest. Thus, the way was open for conducting concrete negotiations on crucial issues such as the Soviet–West German and Polish–West German treaties, the Four Power Treaty on Berlin, and the treaty between the FRG and the GDR – all important elements in the settlement of the German question that was in fact the main precondition for the European security conference.

## Notes

- 1 Research for this article was supported by the OSZK–MTA 1956-os Dokumentációs és Kutatóhely [Research Group for the History and Documentation of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, National Széchényi Library–Hungarian Academy of Sciences].
- 2 Csaba Békés 'Titkos válságkezeléstől a politikai koordinációig. Politikai egyeztetési mechanizmus a Varsói Szerződésben, 1954–1967' [From secret crisis management to political coordination. Political coordinating mechanism in the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1967] in *Múlt századi hétköznapiak. Tanulmányok a Kádár rendszer kialakulásának időszakáról. [Everydays in the Past Century. Essays on the Period of the Emerging of the Kádár Regime]* Szerk. János M. Rainer, Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2003, pp. 13–14.
- 3 At the beginning of January 1956, less than a month before the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, an important summit meeting was held in Moscow with the participation of the European Communist states' leaders. At the meeting, Khrushchev emphasized in a very explicit way the importance of the new foreign policy doctrine, the so-called active foreign policy:

All countries of the socialist camp have to make their foreign policy efforts more active, they have to strengthen their international relations. In this field, we do not sufficiently exploit the possibilities. Usually, it is that the Soviet Union takes action as the main force in our camp, and then the countries of peoples' democracies support it. It is true that the Soviet Union is the great force in our camp, but if we organized our work in a more flexible way, the Soviet Union would not always have to be the first to take action. In certain situations, one or another of the peoples' democracies could take action, and then the Soviet Union would support that country. There are issues where the countries of peoples' democracies would be better.

While until that point, no such initiatives had been made, from this time on and especially from the mid-1960s until the collapse of the communist regimes in East-Central Europe, this strategy became an effective model for cooperation among the Soviet Bloc states in the field of foreign policy. (China was also represented at the summit meeting as an observer, similar to the session where the Warsaw Pact was established in May 1955.) Speech of N.S. Khrushchev at the meeting of the European socialist countries' leaders, Moscow, January 4, 1956. Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives–henceforward: MOL], M-KS-276.f.-62/84.ö.e.

- 4 Urbán Károly, 'Magyarország és a Varsói Szerződés létrejötte' [Hungary and the establishment of the Warsaw Pact], *Társadalmi Szemle*, 50, 1995, 11, p. 77.
- 5 For the history of the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, see Vojtech Mastny, 'The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Warsaw Pact in 1955,' in *Mechanisms of Power in the Soviet Union*, Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, Bent Jensen and Erik Kulavig

- (eds), New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 241–66. Also on PHP website, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php). See also Békés, 'Titkos válságkezeléstől', pp. 10–15.
- 6 It is revealing that in the complex policy paper on the future role of the Soviet Bloc in world policy prepared by the Soviet Foreign Ministry for the summit meeting of European Communist leaders in Moscow in early January 1956, there is no mention of any plan for the establishment of a European security system. The document is published in Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer (eds), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution. A History in Documents*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2002, pp. 106–15.
- 7 Jagdish P. Jain (ed.), *Documentary Study of the Warsaw Pact*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1973, p. 409.
- 8 On the meeting see, Vojtech Mastny, 'Seventh meeting of the PCC, 19–20 January 1965, Warsaw,' editorial note, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php). See also, Békés, 'Titkos válságkezeléstől', pp. 37–8.
- 9 Jain (ed.), *Documentary Study of the Warsaw Pact*, p. 408.
- 10 Csaba Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*, Documents on the Impact of a Small State within the Eastern Bloc, Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, 2003, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php), and Békés, 'Titkos válságkezeléstől.'
- 11 For the records of the conference see, 'Records of the Committee of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs,' 2002, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php). See also the introduction to the document collection by Anna Locher, 'Shaping the Policies of the Alliance. The Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Warsaw Pact, 1976–1990,' 2002, *ibid*.
- 12 On the meeting see, Vojtech Mastny: 'Eighth Meeting of the PCC: 4–6 July, 1966, Bucharest,' editorial note. [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php). See also Békés, 'Titkos válságkezeléstől', pp. 42–3.
- 13 For the text of the declaration see, Vojtech Mastny, 'Eighth Meeting of the PCC: 4–6 July, 1966,' Bucharest, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php).
- 14 On the Hungarian role see, Csaba Békés: 'Magyarország és az európai biztonsági értekezlet előkészítése, 1965–1970' [Hungary and the Preparation of the European security conference], in *Évkönyv 2004. 1956-os Intézet. Szerk. Rainer M. János, Standeisky Éva*, Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004, pp. 291–309.
- 15 For the innovations concerning the Warsaw Pact's military structure agreed upon at the PCC meeting in Budapest, see Vojtech Mastny, 'Tenth Meeting of the PCC: 17 March 1969, Budapest' editorial note, [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php).
- 16 Account by János Kádár of his visit to the Soviet Union on February 5–10, 1969 at the HSWP PC session on February 18, 1969, MOL, M-KS 288. f. 5/484. ö. e.
- 17 The determination of the U.S. leadership to start top-level negotiations with the Soviet Union was expressed as early as the last months of the Johnson administration. Surprisingly, soon after the Warsaw Pact's intervention in Czechoslovakia, while first harshly condemning Moscow's move for the public, in September 1968, Johnson made a secret proposal for Brezhnev to hold a Soviet–American summit on Vietnam, the Middle East, and anti-missile systems. The Soviets agreed to the idea and the summit was planned to take place in Leningrad in October 1968, but eventually it was cancelled. MOL-M-KS-288 f./47. 744.ö.e. Quoted in: Csaba Békés, *Európából Európába. Magyarország konfliktusok keresztjében, 1945–1990. [From Europe to Europe. Hungary in the Crossfire of Conflicts, 1945–1990]*, Budapest: Gondolat, 2004, p. 236, see also, Anatoly Dobrinin, *In Confidence. Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents*, New York: Random House, 1995, pp. 189–95.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 19 On Soviet foreign policy during this period, see Vlad Zubok, 'Brezhnev Factor in Détente 1968–1979' paper presented at the international conference: NATO



- the Warsaw Pact and the Rise of Détente, 1965–1972, Dobbiaco, September 26–28, 2002, Machavelli Center for Cold War Studies.
- 20 While incidents on the Chinese–Soviet border became widely publicized at that time, Hungarian archival documents prove that at the very same time a similar raid occurred on the Chinese–North Korean border as well. On March 15, 1969 along the boundary river Anmoka (Yalu), a formation of 50 Chinese soldiers entered Korean territory, but Korean border guards and Red Guards managed to push the group back to the Chinese bank of the river. Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Phenjan to the Foreign Minister, April 17, 1969, MOL XIX-J-1-j-Korea-1-002216–1969. Document obtained by Balázs Szalontai.
  - 21 Memorandum by Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi for János Kádár on the WP PCC meeting in Budapest on March 17, 1969. (March 19, 1969.) MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/486. ö. e.
  - 22 Account by János Kádár at the HSWP Political Committee session on March 24, 1969, *ibid.*
  - 23 Memorandum by Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi for János Kádár on the WP PCC meeting in Budapest on March 17, 1969. (March 19, 1969.) MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/486. ö. e., and Account of János Kádár at the HSWP Political Committee session on March 24, 1969, *ibid.* For an English translation of the document, see Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.
  - 24 On Romanian policy in this period, see Mircea Munteanu (ed.), *Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989 Vol. I-II*. Document Reader compiled for the International Conference ‘Romania and the Warsaw Pact, Bucharest, October 3–6, 2002, Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989,’ Anna Locher (ed.), [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php), and Dennis Deletant, ‘New Evidence on Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989,’ Cold War International History Project e-Dossier No. 6. [www.cwihp.si.edu](http://www.cwihp.si.edu)
  - 25 Record of the meeting of the WP deputy foreign ministers on March 15, 1969 (March 16, 1969), MOL XIX-J-1-j-VSZ-VI-1-001547/63/2/1969, 106. d.
  - 26 Memorandum by Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi for János Kádár on the WPPCC meeting in Budapest on March 17, 1969. (March 19, 1969.) MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/486. ö. e.
  - 27 Account of János Kádár at the HSWP Political Committee session on March 24, 1969, *ibid.* For an English translation of the document, see Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.
  - 28 Károly Erdélyi, Hungarian deputy foreign minister.
  - 29 Account of János Kádár at the HSWP Political Committee session on March 24, 1969. MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/486. ö. e., For an English translation of the document see, Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.
  - 30 According to Ceausescu, Brezhnev presented the China issue during their talk in a rather dramatic way:  
  
How can we go home and tell our Political Bureau that we came here and did not speak about this issue, that we receive information every two hours that the situation is changing, that (so and so) took over the command of the troops, that [the Chinese] mobilize their agricultural divisions, etc. Why do we keep discussing the FRG. ... I can spit on the FRG, but China is the main danger.
- For Ceausescu’s account of the talks in Budapest, see Stenographic transcript of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, March 18, 1969, ‘Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989,’ Anna Locher (ed.), [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php)
- 31 Memorandum by Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi for János Kádár on the WPPCC meeting in Budapest on March 17, 1969. (March 19, 1969.) MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/486. ö. e.
  - 32 Stenographic Transcript of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, March 18, 1969.
  - 33 As a ‘must’ for the Eastern bloc, the text of the Budapest appeal also had to include a paragraph (borrowed from the text of the Bucharest declaration in an amended form) on the German question and the issue of frontiers. It claimed that a basic prerequisite of European security is the inviolability of the existing frontiers between the European states, including the Oder–Neisse border and the border between the FRG and the GDR, the recognition of the two German states, that the FRG give up the principle of sole representation of the German people and renounce the possession of nuclear weapons. West Berlin must have a special status and it does not belong to the FRG. While in reality all these claims constituted the main strategic goal of the Eastern Bloc concerning the project on European security, these demands were now presented in the appeal as *eventual political goals* and *not as preconditions* to the staging of a conference on European security.
  - 34 Notes on the discussion with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister L. F. Iljichev, September 27, 1969, MOL XIX-J-1-j-Szu-1-00358–20/1969, 85. d.
  - 35 Notes by Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi for the HSWP PC, October 18, 1969. MOL, M-KS-288. f. 5/501. ö. e. The document is published in Békés, *Hungary and the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.
  - 36 Memorandum of conversation between Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi and Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Semyonov on October 17, 1969 in Moscow, (October 18, 1969) MOL, M-KS 288 f. 5/501 ö. e.
  - 37 Foreign Ministry memorandum for the HSWP Political Committee on the European security conference. MOL M-KS-288. f. 5/ 501. ö. e.
  - 38 The proposal was originally made by the Soviets, brought up by Deputy Foreign Minister Semyonov to Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter at a meeting in Budapest on September 24, 1969. It became a ‘Hungarian’ initiative as a result of the Soviet–Hungarian game played at the conference of foreign ministers in Prague.
  - 39 The Soviet–West German treaty, recognizing the Oder–Neisse border, was signed on August 12, 1970, and the similar Polish–West German treaty was signed on December 7, 1970.
  - 40 On Polish policy concerning the German question, see Douglas Selva, ‘The Treaty of Warsaw: The Warsaw Pact Context,’ *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Washington, DC: American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969–1972, Supplement 1, 2004, pp. 67–79, and *idem.*, ‘“The Warsaw Pact is Dissolving”: Poland, the GDR and Bonn’s Ostpolitik, 1966–1967,’ paper presented at the international conference: NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the Rise of Détente, 1965–1972, Dobbiaco, September 26–28, 2002. Machavelli Center for Cold War Studies.
  - 41 Minutes of the session of the HSWP Political Committee on February 13, 1967, MOL, M-KS-288. f. 5/417. ö. See also Békés, ‘Titkos válságkezeléstől,’ and Douglas Selva, ‘“The Warsaw Pact is Dissolving”: Poland, the GDR and Bonn’s Ostpolitik, 1966–1967.’
  - 42 *NATO final communiqués 1949–1974*, NATO Information Service, Brussels, pp. 231–2.
  - 43 In the communiqué, 14 out of the 21 paragraphs dealt with East–West relations in general and 3 specifically with the issue of a conference on European security. *NATO final communiqués 1949–1974*, pp. 233–7.
  - 44 *Ibid.*, p. 236. Emphasis added.
  - 45 *Ibid.* p. 232–2



- 46 In the meantime, to improve political coordination within the Warsaw Pact in this crucial period, Hungarian diplomacy launched a campaign for the establishment of a Council of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Pact. The Hungarian strategy was based on the firm belief that only a Warsaw Pact operating in unity could successfully maintain a proactive role in this historical process. In December 1969, Foreign Minister János Péter once again made a proposal for the establishment of a Council of Foreign Ministers at his meeting with Gromyko in Moscow in December 1969. On January 5, 1970, a positive reply was received from Moscow authorizing the Hungarian leaders to conduct bilateral talks with the WP member countries. Except for the Romanians, all members replied positively to the Hungarian initiative; however, the plan had to be given up at that time. The long process starting at that point bore fruit only in 1974 when Ceausescu eventually gave up his resistance to the idea, and it took another two years until the council was actually set up.
- 47 The conference was convened at Hungarian initiative. Report on the visit of Foreign Minister János Péter in Moscow on December 22–29, 1969, (January 6, 1970) MOL, XIX-J-1-j-Szu-00949–1/1970.
- 48 Report to the government on the meeting of the WP's foreign ministers in Budapest on June 21–22, 1970, (June 29, 1970) MOL XIX-J-1-j-EU-208–00482/20/1970, 93. d.
- 49 December 4–5, 1969, Brussels. NATO *final communiqués 1949–1974*, p. 231.

## 14 The limits of détente

### The United States and the crisis of the Portuguese regime

*Mario Del Pero*

The Nixon administration came into office with the goal of improving U.S. relations with the autocratic Portuguese regime. Richard Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger aimed at restoring, at least in part, the 'special relationship' between the United States and Portugal – a 'special relationship,' which had, however, gone through difficult and turbulent times during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. This was particularly the case after the 1961 American embargo on the sale of arms that could be used in conflicts in the Portuguese colonies (Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau).<sup>1</sup>

From their first months in office, Nixon and Kissinger promoted intense efforts to achieve a *rapprochement* with Lisbon. Kissinger and Secretary of State William Rogers met frequently with their Portuguese counterparts. Nixon was the first U.S. president since Dwight Eisenhower to visit Portugal (though it was only a short stop in the Azores) and meet Portuguese Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano.<sup>2</sup>

Both sides had important, contingent reasons for re-establishing a good relationship. Portugal was increasingly integrated commercially and economically into the area of the European Economic Community (EEC); in the early 1970s, almost 50 percent of its imports and exports were with EEC countries. It was the case, however, that political and diplomatic isolation complemented this economic integration. Denunciations of Portugal's authoritarianism and imperialism were quite common in Atlantic forums, particularly by Western European socialists and social democrats. To rebuild a sort of privileged relationship with the United States was considered the best (and probably only) option to escape such isolation. Furthermore, establishing a good relationship with the new U.S. leadership could confer political legitimacy to Salazar's successor, Marcelo Caetano, thus strengthening him domestically.<sup>3</sup>

The United States also had more than one reason to seek a better relationship with the Portuguese regime. This was particularly true in a period when relations with other Western European countries were strained by several factors and when the strategic importance of Southern Europe was