



## **“Keeping *Détente* Alive”: European Political Cooperation and East-West Dialogue during the 1980s**

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### **1. Introduction**

At the beginning of the 1980s, the atmosphere of *détente* which had characterized the “long 1970s” seemed to be definitively vanished: the events of 1979, from NATO’s dual track decision to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, had contributed to the return of a climate of tensions and confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, which contrasted sharply with the rhetoric of dialogue typical of the Nixon-Breznev era.

Soviet interventionism in the Third world, from Southern Africa via the Horn to the Middle East, along the so called Bzrezinski’s “arc of crisis” alarmed the Carter administration, thus contributing to the return of the “fear of Russia”. The President considered USSR foreign policy particularly aggressive and adopted a series of countermeasures, as the suspensions of the SALT II ratification, a new doctrine for the Persian Gulf, the reduction of grain exports to the Soviet Union and the boycott of the Olympic games of 1980, which clearly demonstrated that for Washington the dialogue with Moscow had come to a halt (Westad 2007: 288-230; Zanchetta 2013: 271-293).

The deterioration of the East-West climate reached its climax in 1983, when the SDI announcement by president Ronald Reagan in March, the South Korean Air Lines airplane incident in September and Soviet intelligence’s miscalculation about a NATO exercise named Able Archer 83 dramatically increased the fear of a war (Jones 2016: 25-39).

On the other side of the Atlantic, the European countries looked at these tensions with great apprehension: loyal to the principle of a “*global and indivisible détente*”<sup>1</sup>, which repeated in their declarations, they were not eager to follow the US confrontation policy with the Soviet Union.

The aim of this article is to investigate the European efforts to keep *détente* alive during the 1980s, focussing in particular on European relations with the Soviet Union (Bange 2008: 230-240). The European policy will be analysed from the particular perspective of European Political Cooperation (EPC), the mechanism of coordination of the European Community (EC) member states foreign policies, a forerunner of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) established by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992.

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives (NA), Kew Gardens, Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 98/895 Afghanistan, Eastern European Working Group meeting, 28-29 January 1980.

The article is divided in two parts: after a short description of the EPC's functioning and of its main achievements during the 1970s, the first part will deal with the European interest in revitalizing *détente* in the first half of the 1980s, analyzing two case studies strictly intertwined: the economic sanctions against the Soviet Union, following the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981 and the thorny issue of the Siberian pipeline.

The second part of the article will deal with the issue of the relationships between the EC and Soviet Union after the Single European Act (SEA) signature in 1986. Although the Single European Act was not originally designed to deal with foreign policy issues, as its main goal was to complete the Single market, it represented a significant step forward also for the development of a European foreign policy. For the first time it included the scope of a common foreign policy, linking EC procedures in a single legal instrument to the EPC (Nuttall 2000: 16). It introduced the issue of "consistency", or, in other words, the increasing recourse made by EPC to EC instruments (and vice-versa) as sanctions, or the use of conditionality in economic assistance, in order to further its policies. In particular the article will investigate how the completion of the Single market and the revival of European integration in the second half of the 1980s affected the EC's policy towards the USSR, wondering if the dialogue established between the European countries and the USSR through the EPC's framework represented an ultimate effort to keep *détente* alive (Bange 2008: 230-244).

## 2. The European Attempt to Speak with a Single Voice during the 1970s

The EPC, set up by the Davignon Report of 1970, was an informal arrangement by which the EC members coordinated their foreign policies, in the attempt to give a political dimension to the European Community, which aimed to play a role in the international system. The Report did not establish a real political union, instead it created a network of meetings, contacts and relationships at all levels from the Foreign Ministers, through the Political directors right down to working desk level in the Foreign Ministries of the member countries. The EPC machinery worked alongside the EC, but was completely outside the Community framework, it was purely intergovernmental and cooperation was limited to foreign policy issues, with the exclusion of defense and security matters (Nuttall 1992, Gainar 2012).

The most impressive result achieved in the EPC's framework during the 1970's was represented by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). During the negotiations, which ended at Helsinki in August 1975, the EC member countries, which coordinated their works in the EPC framework, were able to speak with one voice and played an important role in the so-called "third basket" which guaranteed civil rights and political liberties, thus contributing decisively to the success of the Conference. As is well described by the literature on this topic, the Helsinki process increased relations and developed contacts between the two halves of Europe, thus contributing to the emergence of various dissident groups, which took advantage of

the new environment, as the movement Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia, or the Moscow Helsinki Group (Thomas 2001; Andréani 2005; Romano 2009).

In other cases, as for example the Euro-Arab dialogue, which grew out in the aftermath of the oil shock of 1973, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or the seizing of US hostages in Iran in 1979, the European countries were not so able to speak with one voice.

For example, in the case of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which took place on 26 December 1979, the Nine did not react promptly, due to the fact that the Presidency was passing from Ireland to Italy at the end of the year. The Foreign ministers issued a declaration condemning the Soviet invasion, only on 10 January 1980, two weeks after the beginning of military operations, on the eve of a meeting of the Asia working group and did not reach an agreement on sanctions against Moscow, which the Carter administration asked its allies to adopt to condemn the military intervention.

The reasons for this slow reaction depended only partially on the Christmas holidays and the turnover of the EPC's Presidency, they were mainly due to the European attempt to preserve, as much as possible, a policy of *détente*. The Nine showed little inclination to give up the accomplishments of *détente* for the sake of a confrontation with Moscow, as suggested by the Carter administration. They interpreted Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan less dramatically than the United States and considered the American reaction as thoroughly excessive (Loth 2014: 98).

Finally they decided to follow a policy of openness but firmness: openness towards a dialogue with the Soviet Union, but firmness in not making concessions to Moscow.

A Coreu dated 11 February 1980 clearly explained the European attitude towards the Afghanistan crisis:

*Détente* remains a fundamental goal for the Nine and they do not wish to compromise its achievements to date. The search for stability in Europe and cooperation among all European states must continue, but the process must benefit both sides and there shall be no presents for the Soviet Union. If the process of *détente* should falter, it will be because it has been gravely prejudiced by the actions of the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>.

### 3. Keeping *Détente* Alive in the First Half of the 1980s

In the first half of the 1980s, the European attempt to keep *détente* alive became particularly evident with regard to the economic sanctions taken against the Soviet Union, following the imposition of the martial law in Poland on December 1981 against the *Solidarity* movement.

Poland and the issue of sanctions against Jaruzelski's regime became one of the most thorny and debated issues in the EPC framework, which provided a forum where some member states exerted pressure on the others in order to take a common position, more favourable to dialogue with Poland and the Soviet Union.

<sup>2</sup> NA, Kew Gardens, FCO 98/895, Afghanistan, Coreu, Principal Elements of European Position after Afghanistan, 11-02-1980.

The FRG, in particular, was one of the main supporter of a policy of *détente*. By the mid 1970's, alongside the deterioration of US-Soviet relations, the Schmidt-Genscher government had increased its efforts to extend a web of economic relations with the countries of the Soviet bloc (Bange, 2008: 230-240). West Germany expanded its economic cooperation with Poland, the Soviet Union and from 1978, the GDR and, following the imposition of martial law in Poland, it resisted the pressure for new sanctions against Poland and the Soviet Union made by the Reagan administration (Loth 2012: 89-109).

The Chancellor Helmut Schmidt conceived the economic dimension of *Ostpolitik* as a means of "diplomatic cathedral building" and preventive diplomacy, aiming to involve the Soviet Union in a network of trade, industry and technology agreements, in the attempt to cope with the hazards of foreign affairs and the arms race (Kieninger 2018: 188-189).

So, when in January 1982 the EC Foreign ministers issued a declaration, which expressed the Ten's willingness to envisage economic sanctions against the Soviet Union (considered the accomplice of Jaruzelski) due to the opposition of the German Foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, the Nine refused to extend these measures to Poland. Subsequently, in March 1982, the European Council adopted a regulation imposing some watered-down restrictions on imports from the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup>. By reducing imports of items as caviar, pearls, alarm clocks and pianos, while deciding to not restrict truly significant commodities such as natural gas, oil, raw materials and automobiles, the countries of the EC demonstrated that they did not want to punish the Soviet Union for its role in crushing the *Solidarity* movement and that they wanted to distinguish themselves from the United States (Domber 2008: 97).

From this moment on, the EC countries pursued a common strategy towards Poland, using a mixture of political dialogue and economic leverage, with the aim to preserve *détente* as long as possible (Smith 1999: 38-42; Tavani 2014: 52).

In this context convergence between EPC and EC instruments took place, and the EC recourse to financial tools as sanctions, or the use of conditionality in economic assistance in order to reinforce the policies adopted in the EPC framework became if not the rule, at least more frequent and familiar, thus representing an important precedent for the introduction of the principle of "consistency" in the EPC's mechanism (Guasconi 2018: 190).

The European response to the imposition of martial law in Poland caused serious strains with the United States, which considered the measures adopted by the Europeans too weak and ineffective and started to exert strong pressures in order to convince their allies to take firmer steps in commercial measures against the USSR.

The quarrel over economic sanctions against the Soviet Union overlapped with an other dispute, which animated the European debate at the beginning of the

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<sup>3</sup> Historical Archives of the EU (ASUE), Florence, Emile Noël Papers (EN), Folder 1111, *Relations Est-Ouest*, 23-02-1982.

1980's representing an other example of the European effort to keep *détente* alive: the Siberian natural gas pipeline. This project had the goal to connect Urengoy, in the Yamal peninsula of Western Siberia, to Western Europe and was aimed at building one of the longest pipelines in the world, with a length of 5000 km (Kieninger 2018: 83-148).

The oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 for the Europeans had increased the importance of the Siberian natural gas, considered stable and more convenient than the Middle East's oil. Over a decade, from 1970 to 1980, Soviet gas exports to Western Europe had risen sharply, from 1 billion cubic meters per year, to approximately 24-30 billion cubic meters per year and the Urengoy pipeline would enable the USSR to export further 40 bcm (Kieninger, 2018: 110). The Soviet Union had huge gas fields in Siberia, but did not have the necessary technology available to extract and transport it, a technology which Moscow could acquire from the Western European countries. The agreement consisted of a gas for pipes deal: the Western companies in 1981 signed long-term contracts with the USSR for the delivery of gas in exchange for steel pipes and other gas-transportation equipment<sup>4</sup>.

From July 1981 the Reagan administration, seriously concerned that this involvement and the long-term contracts for the supply of natural gas would make the Europeans too dependent on the Soviet Union for energy supplies and that the hard currency earned would strengthen the Soviet economy, started to impose a series of sanctions and an embargo on all the technological exportations of American companies towards the Soviet Union (Kieninger 2018: 83-148)<sup>5</sup>.

One year later, on 18 June 1982, the United States extended the sanctions to equipment produced by subsidiaries of US companies abroad, as well as equipment produced abroad under licenses issued by US companies<sup>6</sup>.

The Europeans, even Margaret Thatcher, contested the extraterritoriality of these measures, fearing an outbreak of an economic war with Moscow<sup>7</sup>: they opposed the American embargo against the Soviet Union, considering the US request to extend the sanctions to equipment produced by subsidiaries, unilateral, extraterritorial and retroactive and issued a note, protesting against US policy, because those miscalculated economic pressures could lead to a "dangerous worsening" of East-West relations<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The agreement involved several European companies for delivering the turbines: in Italy Nuovo Pignone and Italsider; in Great Britain John Brown; in FRG AEG and Mannesmann/Demag and in France Creusot-Loire, Alsthom Atlantique and Dresser-France. West Germany's Mannesmann and AEG took orders for approximately 4,5 billions of Deutsche marks; the French companies Creusot-Loire Alsthom Atlantique and Dresser-France for 4,9 billions of French francs, the Italian Nuovo Pignone for 900 millions of dollars. See: Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), La Courneuve, Paris, Cotes 1930 Inva 1981-1985, Box 5674, Gazoduc d'Ourengoi, Tel. 31153 de Paris à Diplomatie, 27-07-1982; Note de synthèse de F. Mouton, 30-08-1982.

<sup>5</sup> National Archives, Washington D.C., CREST, Estimate of the CIA, The Soviet Gas Pipeline in perspective, 3-11/2-1982, secret.

<sup>6</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Cotes 1930 Inva 1981-1985, Box 5674, Gazoduc d'Ourengoi, Statement by the President, 18-06-1982.

<sup>7</sup> See ASUE, Florence, EN, Folder 626, Letter from Ronald Reagan to Gaston Thorn, 02-03-1982.

<sup>8</sup> ASUE, EN, Folder 1116, "Visite du President Thorn en Finlande", 07-06-1982, confidential.

It's impossible to describe in detail the debate which developed among the European countries, also because the EC's members decided to treat the issue of the Siberian pipeline as a matter of trade policy, therefore a Community one which did not involve EPC. The question was discussed informally at a Political Directors' dinner when it was feared that some members states were planning bilateral contacts with the United States (S. Nuttal 1992: 193-194). At the Brussels Council of 28-29 June 1982 the ten heads of State and Government issued a declaration in which they protested against the US attempt to provoke an economic war with the USSR, which stated:

The European Council emphasized its view that the maintainance of the open world trade system will be seriously jeopardised by unilateral and retroactive decisions on international trade, attempts to exercise extraterritorial legal powers and measures which prevent the fulfilment of existing trade contracts. The European Council expressed its concern at these recent developments which could have adverse consequences for their relations with the United States<sup>9</sup>.

In the end the commercial and economic war that the United States had provoked against the Soviet Union had become a transatlantic dispute: none of the European countries involved did rally to American requests and proceeded with the manufacture of turbine rotors.

In September 1982, the new secretary of State George Shultz proposed a *conciliatory démarche* to the British Foreign minister, Francis Pym and the other European countries gradually decided to support a negotiation with the United States in order to find an agreement on the Siberian pipeline<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, on November 1982, president Reagan lifted the embargo and in January 1984 the Urengoy pipeline was finished.

#### **4. The Single European Act and the Relations with the Soviet Union in the Second Half of the 1980s**

If the question of economic sanctions against the Soviet Union following the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981 and the thorny issue of the Siberian pipeline represented two case studies which clearly demonstrated the European willingness to keep *détente* alive, in spite of the new Cold War climate, the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 did not prove a dramatic turning point for East-West relations. Few Europeans recognized in him the seeds of transformation.

As well documented by the literature on this subject, Margaret Thatcher was the first European leader to assess Gorbachev, as she met him in December 1984, before he became general secretary during a visit in Great Britain, and received a very positive

<sup>9</sup> The European Council Brussels, 28-29 June 1982, in <https://www.aei.pitt.edu>

<sup>10</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Cotes 1930 Inva 1981-1985, Box 5674, Gazoduc D'Ourengoy, Coreu n. 874, 21-09-1982.

impression from the meeting. “I like Mr. Gorbachev – she famously remarked – We can do business together” (Sheehan 2009: 46-48, Braithwaite 2010).

Thatcher’s positive feeling was particularly important, both for her close relationship with Reagan and because it paved the way to an evolution of British-Soviet relations during the second half of the 1980s, typified by a continuous dialogue between London and Moscow and by the progressive widening of the agenda of the meetings<sup>11</sup>.

French President François Mitterrand also welcomed Gorbachev as a partner. In October 1985 the Soviet General Secretary chose Paris for his first official visit to Western Europe and when Mitterrand visited Moscow in 1986 they seemed to agree on a range of issues, including the renewal of *détente*.

Conversely, the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, in spite of West German efforts to keep *détente* alive, was initially very skeptical about Gorbachev. This was due to the fact that Gorbachev’s policy towards West Germany beard striking similarities to Soviet West-policy in the 1960’s and the soviet *élite* still regarded the FRG as a potential threat to European stability, blaming it for its support for the US security policy.

From his own side, Kohl invited such criticism, expressing doubts on the sincerity of Gorbachev’s advances. Lacking proof that Gorbachev was different from his predecessors, Kohl adhered to former perceptions and policies towards the Soviet Union. Moreover, in an embarrassing interview to *Newsweek* magazine in 1986, he compared Gorbachev to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda minister, thus seriously damaging this already fragile relationship (M. Gehler 2013: 241, H.D. Genscher 1998: 196-200, D. Shumaker 1995, 41-47).

Although in the following public discussion Kohl defined the interview a “monumental nonsense”, trying to explain that he never wanted to offend Gorbachev, that he did not even mean to compare him with Goebbels, and that his conversation with *Newsweek* had not been reported correctly, this diplomatic incident effectively froze Soviet-German relations.

At the beginning of 1987, Gorbachev started a systematic reevaluation of his foreign policy, which also involved Soviet relations with West Germany: the CPSU secretary embarked on a new path, beginning to evaluate Chancellor Kohl more favourably and sending clear signals of this change, as shown by the highly successful visit of the FRG president in July 1987, thus making the summit with Kohl possible in October 1988, when the “ice was finally broken” (M. Gehler 2013: 242)<sup>12</sup>.

As regards Italy, since the visit of Bettino Craxi to Moscow in May 1985, the Italian government started a fruitful dialogue with Gorbachev, which contributed to increase

<sup>11</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Cotes 1935 Inva 1986-1990, Box 6650, L’URSS et l’Europe occidentale, tel. n. 2989 from Moscow to Paris, 14-07-1988.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth stressing that the German Foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher distinguished himself, as he maintained an outspoken support for better relations with Gorbachev and the Soviet Union.

the economic and commercial flow between the two countries, as shown by the large amount of economic and financial investments made by important Italian companies in the Soviet Union<sup>13</sup>. Gorbachev, whose views had been particularly influenced by his travels in Europe, when he was Central Committee secretary for agriculture, had been particularly impressed by the Italian communists and by their Euro-communist ideas (Adomeit 2016: 395)<sup>14</sup>.

In October 1988 the Italian Trade Agency (ICE) organized an exhibition in Moscow, called *Italia 2000*, with the aim to demonstrate the contribution that the Italian companies could give to improving the Soviet economy<sup>15</sup>.

Less certain and documented is how important Europe and the EC seemed to Gorbachev. When the Italian Prime minister Bettino Craxi visited Moscow in May 1985, he was told by Gorbachev, in a luncheon speech, that "inasmuch the EEC countries act as a political entity, the Soviet authorities are ready to look together with them for a common language, including on specific international questions"<sup>16</sup>. This concept was repeated by the Soviet leader few months later, during his visit to Paris.

Gorbachev's remarks raised a debate among the European Foreign ministers, developed mainly inside the EPC framework, on how interpret such *démarche*. The USSR, in fact, had started to change its traditional negative attitude towards the EC since the beginning of the 1970's, when Breznev, in a public speech in 1972, had talked about the necessity to recognize the Community "as an independent economic entity within the capitalist world" (Romano 2014: 33). In spite of the Soviet efforts to seek the establishment of official relations between the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA-COMECON) and the EEC, the EC countries preferred to sign commercial and trade agreements with the single Eastern European countries.

During his first two years in office Gorbachev continued to meet his Western European partners, but he developed "a tactical and opportunistic approach" to European questions, concentrating his attention on Soviet-American relations (Rey 2004: 33-65). According to Svetlana Savranskaya: "The effort to split NATO was always at the heart of Soviet strategy during the Cold War years and early Gorbachev-era Politburo discussions show that the reformers did not shy away from the same thinking" (Savranskaya 2010: 19).

So, in 1985 and 1986, Gorbachev viewed his relations with European leaders mainly in terms of their usefulness in dealing with the United States and hoped that he could use the European channel to force the US to give up the SDI project, regarding which most West European leaders had been reluctant (Kalic 2009: 98-123).

<sup>13</sup> Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ILS), Rome, Giulio Andreotti Papers (GA), Series USSR, Box 709, Note by the Italian Foreign Ministry for the visit paid by Giulio Andreotti to Moscow on 28/30-05-1985; a huge number of Italian companies made investments in the Soviet Union in this period; just to mention the most important: FIAT, Finsider, Finmeccanica, Fincantieri, Montedison, Olivetti, Pirelli and of course ENI.

<sup>14</sup> In 1984 Gorbachev had visited Italy to participate in the funeral celebrations of the Italian communist leader Enrico Berlinguer and he acknowledged that the visit made a "deep and lasting impression on us".

<sup>15</sup> ILS, Rome, GA, Series USSR, Box 710, Tel. 5589 from Moscow to Rome, 15-10-1988, urgentissimo riservato.

<sup>16</sup> ILS, Rome, GA, Series Europe, Box, 368, Note from the Italian Foreign Ministry for the EPC Meeting in Luxembourg, June 1985.



In spite of Gorbachev's remarks at his meetings with Craxi in May and with Mitterrand in October 1985, the Soviet strategy towards Europe remained rather tactical in nature, designed to induce the United States to negotiate on arms reduction.

As a consequence, the Ten's reactions were extremely prudent. They believed that the "Gorbachev style" and tone were new, but that the substance of Soviet foreign policy had not changed.

This attitude would start to change in 1987, when Gorbachev became increasingly interested in European affairs and, regretting Soviet lack of knowledge about the European Community, emphasized the need to study the organization, its functioning and decision-making process. During Margaret Thatcher's visit to Moscow, commenting a report written by the deputy minister for Foreign Affairs Anatoly Kovalev, the CPSU secretary said in front of the Politburo: "Europe is our business. There our interests are enormous [...] You have to understand that Western Europe is our essential partner" (Rey 2008: 28).

In 1988 Gorbachev established the Institute for Europe, within the USSR Academy of Sciences, under Vitali Zhurkin's direction, a specialist on US and arms control matters. This institute provided the Central Committee with detailed analysis on current developments in Western Europe and on East and West Germany (Adomeit 2016: 367).

During a conversation with the Italian Foreign minister Giulio Andreotti, on 27 February 1987, Gorbachev described the change in Soviet attitude towards Europe:

As in spring small streams flow together, so, also for peace, it's necessary to take small steps. Nowadays we miss definitive steps, but something is moving. East-West dialogue has resumed. In the last years, Europe has given its contribution. It would be a mistake to reduce Europe's weight only to economy. We had made such a mistake<sup>17</sup>.

Which were the reasons for such a change of Soviet attitude towards Europe and European integration?

Scholars have usually stressed the role played by *perestroika*, by Gorbachev's contacts with West European leaders, by his travels in Western Europe, as well as by the reassessment that the socialist bloc was more a burden than a strategic asset for Moscow. However, the role played by the relaunching of European integration process in the second half of the 1980s and in particular by the implementation of the Single Act has been underestimated, and generally told as a separate story (Evangelista 1999; English 2000; Savranskaya 2010: 18-19). My point of view is that instead they were strictly connected: a reinforced, prosperous, democratic European Community as a consequence of the implementation of the single market in 1992 and the Soviet fear to remain excluded, encouraged Gorbachev to imagine an extended system of

<sup>17</sup> ILS, GA, Series USSR, Box 365, Meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Giulio Andreotti, Moscow 27 February 1987, 11.00 a.m.-13.00 a.m.

relationship between the two halves of Europe. He would call this system "a European common home" in which a reformed Soviet Union could find its place and security (Malcom 1989, Savranskaya 2010: 350, 595).

The Single European Act, in fact, triggered the EC's resurgence and spurred on a revival of the European integration process after years of stagnation and decline. By eliminating all non-tariff barriers and establishing the free movement of goods, labour, capital and services within 1992, the Community established a European single market of over 325 million people, thus rescuing the European countries economies from the doldrums of the 1970s.

What is interesting in the Cold War context was that member countries not only pressed forwards with creating a large, competitive economic market that the Soviet bloc could not emulate, but they also developed a policy on social justice that gave fair treatment to individuals and workers. It guaranteed basic rights such as those contained in the Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of 1989.

On the other side of the Cold War curtain, instead of being an integrated community, Eastern European countries were heavily in debt, inefficient in their use of resources, unable to compete in world markets and a burden on Soviet Union, which supplied them with oil and raw materials (Young 2012: 302).

From 1988, Gorbachev focused on the concept of a European common home, as a way to overcome the Cold War by working together on a gradual rapprochement between the two halves of Europe (Piccardo 2015: 13-33). The EPC became the main framework where the Twelve Foreign ministers debated the project of a European Common Home and tried to develop a common European foreign policy.

In his famous speech delivered in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe on July 6, 1989, the secretary of the CPSU explained that the European common home combined four elements: collective security based on the doctrine of restraint rather than deterrence, full economic integration, environmental protection and respect for human rights in every country. This idea, based on the assumption of the gradual dissolution of the two military-political blocs of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty, was quite persistent among Gorbachev's advisers and supporters and had the goal of strengthening the CSCE structures as the main framework of European security (Savranskaya 2010: 21-22).

So my point is that the revival of the EC after the implementation of the Single European Act, the fear to remain excluded from the *forteresse Europe* but also the EPC's mechanism influenced Gorbachev's concept of a European Common Home.

The EPC's working group on Eastern Europe was appointed to produce a report on the Soviet concept of a European Common home, issued in March 1989, which stressed the connection existing between the implementation of the Single European Act and Gorbachev's fear of remaining excluded:

La préoccupation croissante de l'URSS à l'égard du renforcement de la CEE et du succès économique et technologique impressionnant de l'Europe des 12. L'approbation de l'Acte Unique européen, les perspectives du Marché unique de 1992 et l'altération en faveur de l'Occident de la corrélation des forces existant en Europe préalablement au Traité de Rome, sont une source de préoccupation croissante pour l'Union Soviétique. Cette préoccupation augmente au fur et à mesure que Moscou constate l'attrait que le succès de la Communauté exerce sur les pays de l'Est.

Le leader soviétique a transmis ses craintes à ses interlocuteurs européens plus récents: le chancelier allemand Kohl, le président Mitterrand et le premier ministre italien De Mita, en exprimant son inquiétude à l'égard d'une perspective d'une Europe fermée, et le besoin urgent de coopérer avec la CEE afin de pouvoir parvenir à la modernisation et au démarrage économique qui sont indispensables pour son projet politique. Tout récemment l'URSS a déclaré qu'elle reconnaissait maintenant que la Communauté ne se replie pas sur elle-même et ne devient pas une "forteresse" face aux autres<sup>18</sup>.

In the EPC framework, the twelve governments debated at length on how to react to such a change in the USSR's policy towards the West, as some European governments were slow in picking up the signals that Gorbachev was sending out. There was a clear difference of attitude between those governments, led by Germany, Italy, Belgium and Spain who wanted to interpret these signs in a positive and encouraging way and aimed at establishing a political dialogue with Moscow and those, led by the UK and France, who remained cautious, and preferred to maintain a policy of "wait and see"<sup>19</sup>.

In April 1987 the German government issued a report on Gorbachev's policy, which almost prophetically stated:

The path embarked by the new Soviet leadership does not afford an absolute guarantee of the Soviet Union possibly moving in the direction of Western-style democracy and pluralism, but it is the essential prerequisite of such movement. There are some signs that Gorbachev's policy offers the Soviet Union an opportunity, perhaps the last, for achieving peaceful and gradual change. It cannot be in the West's interest for Gorbachev to fail, unless the West prefers the developments in the Soviet Union to come to a head<sup>20</sup>.

Although the first group of countries interpreted the common European home more as a general framework, than a real political program, they were convinced that it contained a perspective that could be used to speed up the Helsinki process, in a

<sup>18</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Direction Europe, Cote 1935 Inva 1986-1990, Box 6649, L'Union Soviétique et la CEE, Groupe de Travail Europe de l'Est, Maison Commune Européenne, 1/3/1989.

<sup>19</sup> ILS, Rome, GA, Series Europe, Box 381, Report from Ambassador Jannuzzi to Andreotti, 20-10-1988. Riservatissimo; AMAE, la Courneuve, 1935 Inva 1986-1990, Box 6649, L'Union Soviétique et la CEE, Note du Quai d'Orsay Réunion ministérielle de Nybourg: relations des Douze avec l'URSS, 28-09-1987.

<sup>20</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Cotes 1935 Inva 1986-1990, Box 6650 L'Union Soviétique et l'Europe occidentale, Étude de la délégation allemande, 10-04-1987.

direction which could be useful to Europe and to the EC's goals in Eastern Europe. For these reasons they exerted strong pressure on the other EC members in order to begin a political dialogue with Moscow, to be conducted through the EPC framework.

Documents show that most European skepticism dissipated in 1988, as a consequence of the improvement of US-USSR relations, of the release of Soviet political dissidents from custody and of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Agreement (INF) signed between the USA and USSR in December 1987.

From a diplomatic point of view, the rapprochement between Western Europe and the Soviet Union took place in June 1988, when a first "Common Declaration" between the EC and the CMEA was signed, thus paving the way for a series of agreements on trade and economic cooperation between the Community and the CMEA's members.

At the European Foreign ministers meeting in Ioannina (Greece) in October 1988, the Belgian Foreign minister, Leo Tindemans, stressed the need to exploit the unique opportunity offered by history and the German Foreign minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, expressed the hope to encourage the progressive rapprochement between East and West, assessing that the EC would act as a "magnet" able to hold the remnants of the Soviet empire together<sup>21</sup>.

At the Rhodes European Council, which took place two months later in December 1988, the twelve European countries seemed to have harmonized their foreign policy. They issued a declaration, stating that "1992 Europe will be a partner, not a fortress" and reaffirmed their will to develop "a political dialogue with our Eastern neighbors", taking into account each country's specific situation<sup>22</sup>.

Such a political dialogue started with Moscow in January 1989 and was characterized by a series of political meetings organized at different levels, involving political directors, ambassadors and Foreign ministers, with the aim to promote the Helsinki process, to encourage the respect of human rights in the Soviet Union and to develop economic, scientific and technological cooperation<sup>23</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

The end of the Cold War took Gorbachev and the Western European political leaders by surprise, preventing Soviet politicians from substantiating their project of a European common home, which remained more a metaphor, than a real political program. The trade agreement between the USSR and the EC was signed too late,

<sup>21</sup> ILS, Rome, GA, Series Europe, Box 381, Report from the Ambassador Giovanni Jannuzzi to Giulio Andreotti on the Foreign Ministers meeting in Joannina, 15-16 October 1988, riservatissimo.

<sup>22</sup> ILS, Rome, GA, Series Europe, Box 382, Madrid European Council, 26-27 June 1989, Report on the relations between the EC and Eastern Europe, confidential.

<sup>23</sup> AMAE, La Courneuve, Cotes 1935 Inva 1986-1990, Box 5964, Relations avec les pays de l'Est, Coreu, Diner à Moscou des ambassadeurs communautaires avec le ministre soviétique des Affaires Etrangere, 11-02-1989.

in December 1989, when all the Eastern European regimes had collapsed, one after the other, the CMEA was agonizing and the Kremlin was ready to accept German reunification.

The EPC mechanism, with its prudent exercise of collective reflection and lengthy discussions could not be the right framework to face the revolutionary events of 1989 and “to speak with one voice” faced with the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

However, the 1989 revolutions rooted into the European efforts to keep *détente* alive at the beginning of the 1980’s and were profoundly influenced by the way in which European Political Cooperation and the Community worked together.

If the different interpretations given by the European governments to Gorbachev’s foreign policy delayed development of a common EC policy towards the Soviet Union, this article has highlighted how the EPC became the framework where the European governments discussed issues of great importance, such as the concept of global and indivisible *détente*, or how to interpret Gorbachev’s foreign policy and his project of a European common home, trying to harmonize their foreign policies.

Since 1988, as demonstrated by the Declaration of the European Council of Rhodes, thanks to the action of some European politicians such as the Belgian Leo Tindemans and the German Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Twelve gave birth to a real *Ostpolitik*, which combined the prudent exercise of developing a political dialogue with the Soviet Union, with the conclusion of a series of commercial agreements with the countries of Eastern Europe and with the USSR too.

Co-ordination between the two sides of the Community, the political and the economic, worked well and provided the necessary stimulus for making a reality of the consistency provisions contained in the Single European Act, which had been previously experimented in Poland.

Thanks to this strategy, the Community was able to exercise a strong attraction towards the Soviet bloc.

In conclusion, the analysis of the EPC’s evolution during the 1980’s and in particular of the changes introduced in its mechanism by the Single European Act, have thus demonstrated how the European countries coordinated their foreign policies and acted as one political actor, making the voice of Europe towards the great revolutions which took place in Eastern Europe, distinctly felt.

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