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Relations with the West: The Case Study of the EEC-USSR, as Viewed by the Community (1950–1991)

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Relations with the West.
The case study of EEC-URSS, viewed by the Community (1950-1991)

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The divided continent: reactions and cleavages

The initial process of European integration was greeted with profound hostility by the Soviet Union, fundamentally provoked by ideological motives and related to the two-sided confrontation and the Cold War¹. Such opposition is hardly surprising as the Soviet Union had been hostile to any form of European cooperation and unity from as early as September 1914, when Leon Trotsky published “The War and the International”². European unity had to be opposed because it would strengthen Western capitalism and support transatlantic relations. Yet over time this clear early opposition started to mute, until during the Gorbachev era the view had become explicitly positive and west European cooperation was considered almost as a model to emulate. Despite high initial expectations, however, following the implosion of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and the European Union have become uncertain³. Despite everything, relations between USSR and EEC developed and they represent an interesting case study of the difficult relations between the two cold war blocks.

The diachronic reading of the relations between the EEC / EU and the Soviet Union shows us the variety and changeability that developed over the decades, well beyond the by now outdated narrative of two blindly opposed blocs. Over the decades, many attempts were made to bring them closer and often turned back to a rigid opposition. It is interesting to note, however, that relations between Europe and the Soviet Union were direct, despite the American attempt to strictly control them. The complexity of these relationships is often undervalued by contemporary international observers and prevents us from fully understanding the current relations between Russia and the EU. Historical analysis shows the full complexity of this relations, providing multiple interpretative tools.

One of the main objectives of this chapter is precisely to create a link between current relationships and the history that produced them. The superficial reading that simply sees two opposing blocks, in

¹ Marie-Pierre Rey, *Le retour à l'Europe? Les décideurs soviétiques face à l'intégration ouest-européenne, 1957-1991*, in “Journal of European Integration History”, 2005, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 7-27; Francesca Gori, Silvio Pons (edit by), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53*, London-New York, MacMillan, 1996.

² Lara Piccardo, *Le relazioni tra Unione Europea e Federazione russa: collaborazione o competizione?*, in Marinella Belluati, Paolo Caraffini, *L'Unione europea tra istituzioni e opinione pubblica*, Roma, Carocci, 2015, pp. 140-150.

³ This is one of the most complete volumes on relations between the Soviet Union and the beginnings of the process of European integration in Italian: Lara Piccardo, *Agli esordi dell'integrazione europea. Il punto di vista sovietico nel periodo staliniano*, Polo interregionale di Eccellenza Jean Monnet di Pavia, 2012.

which Europe disappears completely, it is no more convincing. Indeed, in the chapter the different national positions of the European Community member countries are analysed, in particular of France and Germany, returning to Europe its actual role in the international sphere.

This alternating relationship has naturally been reflected in the geo-political sphere, with a move from a strong, common European identity, despite differences⁴, to a full and manifest alterity. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall the separation and contraposition were clear, yet reference to a shared identity, anchored in the geographical location within Europe, was frequent. Indeed, being part of the same sub-continent created a substantial closeness that was not only geographic, but also political. Khrushchev, above all, continuously referred to this common European identity and the fact of cohabitation on the same sub-continent in an effort to create a split, or at least a crack, in Western Europe's relations with the United States. He underlined, by contrast, a natural convergence of interests, especially regarding peace and peaceful coexistence. Moreover, geography may indicate a European Russia, though only half of the State falls within Europe, divided as it is by the Urals that form the natural boundary of geographical Europe. Yet the two areas are undoubtedly linked by history and especially their cultures, whether literature, art or, music, undoubtedly share common roots.

It is particularly interesting to note how the sense of a common identity was present and alive until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet the collapse of the Wall seems to have created an abyss, a truly profound cleavage. One of the aims of this chapter is to attempt to understand how the integration process actually reinforced this split, both in the diplomatic sphere and at the level of bilateral relations between the Member States and the USSR, and between the latter and the Community as a whole. Many scholars have analysed the issue of relations between the Community and the USSR solely within the context of the Cold War, thus taking for granted the existence of a lasting and irresoluble cleavage. Furthermore, most Cold War historians awarded a residual role to the integration process, consequently adopting a more Atlantic than European geopolitical vision. Instead, while it is true that after 1917 a split was created and increased, thus necessitating a defensive cordon, historical relations and primarily the fact of belonging to the same continent have given rise to a complex situation influenced by the areas' proximity. In the following pages I will try to understand how the Community and its member countries interpreted and reacted to the Soviet opposition to the Common Market, how they used this opposition in an ideological way and

⁴ From the earliest attempts to define the geographical spaces and identity of Europe, reference was made to Russia, albeit clearly opposed at the political level. See European Union Historical Archives - ASUE, European Parliamentary Assembly, Session documents, "Report presented on behalf of the Political and Institutional Committee on Membership and Association to the Community", Rapporteur: Willi Birkelbach, 15 January 1961. See also Michel Foucher, *The Geopolitics of European Frontiers*, London, Pinter, 1998.

how they have tried to overcome it to achieve better relations. France stood out among the Member States as being the true leader of the Community in its first twenty years, though by the early 1960s it had been flanked by an increasingly-strong Germany. Archival research, especially in the historical archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the Embassies of Moscow and Brussels, has enabled us to investigate in depth the relations between the USSR and Western Europe. Although these relations were complex, they remained present and important and were underpinned by a greater desire for détente and dialogue than the Cold War historians have previously shown. For reasons of security, but also of contiguity, identity and for economic motives, the Member States shared the goal of strengthening détente and cooperation on the European continent; they laboured, however, against a backdrop of total opposition and contrast promoted through the Soviet media.

The beginning of greater cooperation between the six states of western Europe that commenced following the Schumann declaration of 9 May 1950, pleased neither Stalin nor his entourage. Yet Stalin's initial reactions to the Schumann plan, and then through the beginning of the integration process, were rather bland. In fact, he believed that these attempts at economic cooperation were destined to failure as any such cooperation could not be achieved in capitalist countries. Yet by the time of the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Defence Community (EDC), Soviet opposition to the European project was already clear and definitive⁵. Not surprisingly the EDC was the target of the harshest criticism as it was considered to be the West's attempt to re-arm Germany against the countries of the communist bloc⁶. Thus, when seeking an interlocutor on the western side, the Soviets attempted dialogue with France, which was the country that had most to fear from German rearmament⁷.

In the first years after Stalin's death, the concept of peaceful coexistence, the search for peace and the need to halt western rearmament began to dominate Soviet international political discourse. Security was therefore at the heart of the USSR's European policy⁸ and the Warsaw Pact of 1955 was presented to the world as a reaction to western aggression⁹.

⁵ V. ZUBOK, *The Soviet Union and European Integration from Stalin to Gorbachev*, in: *Journal of European Integration History*, 2(1996), pp.85-98.

⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of the Soviet position on the EDC see AHMAE, Amb. Moscou, 448PO/B/78, "Text du jour, Déclaration du Ministère des Affaires étrangères de l'URSS sur le reject de la CED par la France (9 septembre 1954), 11 septembre 1954.

⁷ Georges-Henri Soutou, Emilia Robin Hivert, *L'URSS et l'Europe de 1941 à 1957*, Paris, PUPS, 2008.

⁸ Marie-Pierre REY, *L'URSS et la sécurité européenne des 1953 à 1956*, in: *Communisme*, 49-50(1997), pp.121-136.

⁹ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Strategies in Europe, 1943 to 1956*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995.

The Soviet Union clearly opposed the signing of the treaties of Rome, as expressed in the document *On the creation of the Common Market and Euratom*, known as the *17 theses on the Common Market*¹⁰. The Communities were defined as the extension of the US imperialist will to control Europe, a slavish expression of American capitalism; essentially nothing of the new Communities was exempt from criticism. The integration process was not interpreted as an attempt at pacification at least in Western Europe, but rather as a tool to enable the economic recovery and rearmament of Federal Germany. Soviet opposition was the expression not only of an ideological barrier, but also of their deep fear that the integration process could strengthen the European West.

Yet Soviet experts in European politics believed that this experiment was destined to early failure due to the many divergences and contrasts among the Member States. This would be a short-lived pacifist project. Nevertheless, it was still an iniquitous project because it was piloted by the United States and as such it had to be resisted as much as possible.

In the 1960s the Gaullist position regarding Europe's role in the international panorama dominated in the Community. Europe was to have a powerful role, free of excessive pressure from the United States, and necessitated an increase in political strength, obviously at an intergovernmental level, that would permit greater investment in European security, including atomic power¹¹. This position prevailed not because it was shared by all the European partners, and certainly not by the Benelux countries¹² or with the overtones of "grandeur" to which De Gaulle aspired, but because the leading position of De Gaulle's France prevented other forms of international policy. While France foresaw the Community developing into a sort of confederation, the Benelux countries aspired to an increasingly supranational community¹³. These positions were therefore irreconcilable, both at a national and international level. The only position shared by all the Member States in that period related to Eastern Europe¹⁴: greater openness and a new détente were necessary both for political and economic reasons, but above all for the security of Western Europe.

At the same time the USSR considered Germany to be the core of European politics and the Federal Republic of Germany was therefore the focus of Soviet action as it attempted to win it over and

¹⁰ The translated document is present in S. Leonardi, *L'Europa e il movimento socialista. Considerazioni sui processi comunitari: CEE e COMECON*, Milano, Adelphi, 1977, p. 185.

¹¹ On the Community's foreign policy, Giuliana Laschi, *L'Europa e gli altri. Le relazioni esterne della Comunità dalle origini al dialogo Nord-Sud*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2015.

¹² The following secret document is interesting: AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136, "Incontro tra Couve de Murville e M. Spaak, Bruxelles, 1 May 1961.

¹³ On the position of the Belgian Foreign Minister Wigny, who was said to love "European mystic": AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136, Reports of the French Ambassador to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on 19 and 21 September, 23 and 26 November 1960.

¹⁴ Pascaline Winand, Andrea Benvenuti, Max Guderzo, *The External Relations of the European Union*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2015.

separate it from the other western powers in the European Community. The goal was that of a Germany at the centre of a pacified European system and an international system based on peace, détente¹⁵ and peaceful coexistence in line with the main elements of Leninist doctrine¹⁶. Most of the documents of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs referring to the thinking and actions of the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, essentially relate to these main objectives and to the absolute predominance of the concept of peaceful coexistence. Khrushchev devoted much of his activity on the domestic front to the goal of describing such relations with Western Europe. It was also the key theme of his first speech broadcast on Soviet radio and television on 1 June 1961, in response to the report Kennedy had made to the Americans after the Vienna talks. It was a profound innovation in the use of communication tools that surprised both Westerners and the Soviets: it was the first time that he had addressed the people directly without the intermediation of the party organs and the state.

The content was much less innovative than the form of communication: according to the Soviets the Westerners did not want to disarm because the monopolies were unwilling to give up the huge profits that the arms race produces for them. For the Soviet Union it was already clear in the early 1960s that the European Community had no economic objectives, but “under the direction of Hallstein, this organization had rapidly appeared as a direct link to the political integration of Europe¹⁷”. And this was the real danger for Soviet supremacy on the European continent.

The years of confrontation

The early sixties saw a reaction by the Soviet Union to the development of the Common Market and to the process of European integration, and the attempt by the USSR to give a rational and incontrovertible form to the distortions caused by the EEC. The Community was portrayed as an economic tool of NATO, of its neo-colonialist policy; a market managed by monopolies, an autarchic block, with an agricultural policy that favoured only large property holders¹⁸. Furthermore, it was an imperialist economy that increased unemployment and exploited the

¹⁵ In the AHMAE-Nantes 448PO/B/76 e 77 files there are many documents on détente as the main objective of the Soviet Union towards Europe. An interesting document in 76 of 1956 specifies the content and objectives of this policy. In ibidem, from the chargé of French affairs in the USSR to the French Foreign Minister Pinay, “De la politique de détente envisagée du point de vue soviétique, 3 Janvier 1956.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics. Coexistence, Revolution and Cold War, 1945-1991*, London, Routledge, 1999.

¹⁷ AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, Diplomatie Paris, “Le Marché commun et le réarmement allemande”, 3 aout 1962.

¹⁸ The most complete document is in AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448PO/B/313, Commission de la Communauté économique européenne, Principales critiques soviétiques à l’égard du marché commun et reponses, Octobre 1962.

workforce. Thus, a wide-ranging critique that took the form of an all-out attack backed up by press campaigns.

One of the most important attacks launched by the USSR was conducted with a virulent press campaign to coincide with the first British application for entry to the Community. On this occasion, in the period from the summer of 1961 and throughout 1962, the Soviet press orchestrated a vast campaign claiming that Great Britain was merely a tool of American imperialism. In fact, this line was then taken up by European public opinion and mentioned several times by de Gaulle himself. The British application was described as a kind of capitulation and the interventions of the Member States during the negotiations underlined the indignity of acceptance. The challenging work of diplomacy and the so-called Monnet method were portrayed by the Soviet press as an internal struggle of the imperialist states for the conquest of power¹⁹.

Soviet hopes that the EEC might implode were dashed by the results achieved throughout the early 1960s in which the young Community began to shape its first common policies: the trade and agricultural policies. With the former, the Commission assumed the mandate to negotiate autonomously for the six Member States, accelerating the move towards integration. The Common Agricultural Policy founded in 1962, after an exhausting round of negotiations, was established in a completely supranational way. Characterized by the openness of the internal market, and robust tariff protection towards those outside, it projected the image of a strong Community in search of a powerful international role. This image was soon strengthened by early clashes on agriculture with the American allies. In 1962 Soviet information and propaganda responded by upping the heat, multiplying interventions both in the specialized press and in widely circulated newspapers: not only was the Community born, but it was developing and strengthening²⁰.

According to European diplomacy, Soviet criticism was undeniably ideological and unacceptable: “The doctrinal approach to the problems posed by the Common Market is unbending, most of the articles start by repeating a number of statements of principle: the EEC is the modern incarnation of imperialism, whose guideline is that of dictatorship, the use of force, slavery, inequality and of monopoly privileges. The economy of the Common Market is largely directed towards the objectives of war and remains the infrastructure of NATO²¹”.

Whenever an opportunity arose, the Soviet Union tried to divide the Member States. For example, during a meeting in the summer of 1964 between the Italian foreign minister and Khrushchev, the

¹⁹ In all the files present at the AHMAE-Nantes of the Embassy of Moscow, there are many documents that report (also verbatim, actual translations) articles of the Soviet press on the EEC. But on this period see in particular the file 448P/B/314.

²⁰ AHMAE-Nantes, Amb. Moscou, 448P/B/314, “La presse soviétique et le Marché Commun”, 8 aout 1962.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

latter tried to convince his counterpart of the necessity for Italy to leave the European Economic Community.

The crisis of the Community was emphasized by Pravda in a very long article by Maievski on 11 November 1964, which analysed the reasons that had led the Western powers to this stalemate. The article once again presents the familiar themes of the aggression of the Atlantic block as against the peaceful policies of the USSR. However, a new theme is introduced: that of the British membership application to the Common Market and, therefore, a possible opening to the American monopolies. The only positive comments in the analysis concerned the policy implemented by General De Gaulle, his vetoing of the British application and the reaffirmation of what the article defined as “Euro-Gaullism” against the Atlanticism of the other five Member States²². The enlargement of the Community, and the success that made it attractive, was naturally fought as far as possible by the Soviet Union. The danger was twofold: on the one hand, the strengthening the European West through the extension of the boundaries of the Community and the single market, on the other hand the highlighting of the Community’s undeniable capacity to drive the economic development of its Member States. Interventions in the press and by political leaders as well as Soviet diplomacy continued to increase throughout the 1960s, in an attempt to discredit the policy of Community enlargement.

In addition to passive reactions to enlargement as seen in the case of Great Britain, the Soviet Union also tried to dissuade some European countries from association or membership of the Community. This occurred in the case of Austria which had approached the Community in 1964 with a view to association²³, but then decided to desist to avoid compromising its neutrality and relations with Eastern Europe. In some cases, this abandonment took on apocalyptic tones, as reported in an exchange of information between the Austrian and French Embassies: an association agreement between the Community and Austria could be interpreted by the USSR “as a step towards a new *Anschluss*. The close economic interdependence between Austria and the Federal Republic constitutes, with the common language, clear indicators in the eyes of the Soviets and it is unclear how we might reassure them²⁴”. The Soviet concern was such as to fear that this was just the first step towards a German recovery of aggressive *grossdeutsch* aims towards central Europe, starting

²² AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, Telegramme “Diplomatie Paris”, Moscou 12 novembre 1964.

²³ On the modalities and objectives of the tool of association with the Community, in which Austria was fully included, see Historical Archives European Commission-Brussels, BAC 1/1971, n. 19/2, *Considérations sur les principes d’une politique d’association de la Communauté*, Bruxelles, 30 avril 1960.

²⁴ AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, telegramme Diplomatie Paris, Moscou 4 aout 1964. In the same file, many other documents report the negative opinion and concern of the USSR in view of a possible association of Austria to the Community.

with Czechoslovakia²⁵. This concern obviously had repercussions on the policy of the six Member States that consequently put a brake on the negotiations to avoid exacerbating tension with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the attack launched by the USSR, including that of the media, was very strong as evidenced by a statement from the TASS agency of March 1963, which indicated the reasons for Soviet opposition to Austria's association: "The Common Market is an appendix of NATO; led by West Germany and France, it is an unequal group that does nothing to hide its political and military objectives. The Treaty of State, which prohibits *Anschluss*, would be violated²⁶". Basically, it was considered an act against the neutrality of Austria, which the Soviet Union intended to respect as laid down in the Treaty. This statement is undoubtedly among the most explicit on Moscow's position towards Vienna. In this case, Soviet pressure proved decisive and prompted the Austrian government to desist from association to the Community which, for its part, appeared unwilling to open an international dispute over respect for Austrian neutrality.

The non-association of Austria, as well as the French decision to prevent the Community's first enlargement, prompted Professor Arzoumanian, defined by the French ambassador in Moscow as the leading Russian specialist on the European Community, to publish a long article in Pravda on the failure of the common policy²⁷. The article, entitled "The crisis of imperialist integration", was published just a few days after the meeting in Brussels of the communist parties of the six Member States where they discussed strategies to counter the economic and military integration of Western Europe. The development of the Community had produced a clash between the Western imperialist monopolies: with Great Britain, but also with the United States, which had not initially understood that the EEC would create serious problems for the American economy. Moreover, America was in decline as the communist doctrine had predicted, foreseeing that after reaching the peak of its power a downward trend would begin in 1961. Although America remained the strongest capitalist power, Europe was by no means a simple appendage as it had been at the end of the Second World War. Despite this, the process of integration was certainly not what the "bourgeois ideologues" wanted people to believe, namely that an international organization of monopolies could manage to "breathe new life into a decrepit and dying system and that it could tip the scales on the side of capitalism in the competition with the socialist system". It was now evident that the Common Market exacerbated the contradictions between "the bourgeois monopolists of the imperialist countries and weakened the position of capitalism towards socialism". These positions were not

²⁵ AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, Embassy of Prague to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, "association of Austria to the common market", Prague, 3 aout 1964.

²⁶ AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, Diplomatie Paris, 2 mars 1963.

²⁷ The article was published on 8 and 9 March 1963 on Pravda. See AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Moscou, 448P/B/314, From the Ambassador in Moscow De Jean to Minister Couve de Murville, "Article de Arzoumanian sur le Marché commun, 16 Mars 1963.

easy to argue in the midst of the economic boom being experienced by the six members of the European Community.

In addition to these instruments of dissuasion, the Soviets also tried to make a positive change by creating an alternative project to which they asked Western Europe to adhere. From 1960, they began working on a pan-European ideal.

Openings and state visits

The Community had greeted the changes made by Khrushchev, i.e. the important swing in foreign policy aimed at establishing stronger relations with the West, with a mixture of optimism and scepticism. In the early 1960s this need contrasted with the persistence of very weak and tense relations, made especially complex by the fallout from the Berlin crisis and the prolonging of the German problem. The division of Germany and Berlin was actually the tip of an iceberg; however, for both the Soviets and the West it was beginning to appear as overwhelming and disastrous for Europe. The Soviet perception of the European Community, therefore, underwent a radical transformation. Moreover, it was now clear that the Community was consolidating and despite Soviet forecasts, economic integration was becoming increasingly dynamic and successful, as evidenced by the birth of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Thus, in December 1962, Khrushchev decided to radically evolve his thinking on the EEC and published an article in “Kommunist” in which, for the first time since 1957, he recognized the “vitality” of the Community²⁸.

This change was also the result of the deepening of relationships with Western European leaders. In this regard, Khrushchev’s state visit to France from 23 March to 3 April 1960 is of great interest. According to most European newspapers the effects of this visit, like other visits by Soviet leaders, strengthened European politicians while the Soviets did not cut a great figure. In this case, the press emphasized the dominance of General De Gaulle, while Khrushchev appeared to have little influence even on the French Communist Party partly, it was claimed, due to the verbosity of his public interventions, especially the radio and television broadcast he made before departing. His speech was indeed lengthy and dull and far removed from European-Western standards. On the Soviet side, of course, the political outcomes were instead emphasized on several occasions, “in every word spoken by the head of the Soviet government, people felt the immense power of

²⁸ Yves Bertoncini, Thierry Chopin, Anne Dulphy, Sylvain Kahn, Christine Manigand (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de l’Union européenne*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2008.

truth²⁹”, as Pravda stressed. Thus, the reading of the meaning and results of the visit differed, seen more as a comparison of opposing stances than any effective strengthening of relationships.

Khrushchev had presented the visit during the meeting of the Supreme Soviet on 14 January 1960, explaining the need to express solidarity with the French people, who had fought a major war of resistance against Nazism, and to pay tribute to the eminent role of France in both culture and the sciences³⁰. During their stay, the Soviets travelled briefly through France, and learnt something of French policies in the industrial, agricultural, scientific and cultural sectors. They also had the opportunity to meet the representatives of various French economic, political and cultural circles. Some themes touched upon by Khrushchev were taken up favourably by De Gaulle and had a positive effect, especially the Soviet people’s desire for peace and the unwillingness on both sides of the Iron Curtain to engage in aggression. Naturally their visions diverged radically when Khrushchev spoke of the inevitable universal extension of communism. No mention was made, even in passing, of the European Economic Community; indeed, Khrushchev avoided speaking of it even during his meetings with the French trade unions.

A joint communiqué was issued at the end of the visit, together with the announcement of trade and cultural agreements and atomic energy cooperation for peaceful purposes. The importance of the visit was also demonstrated by the numerous influential figures accompanying Khrushchev, such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Gromyko, the vice-president of the Council of Ministers, the head of the Atomic Energy Directorate, in total about a dozen political heavyweights. What caused a sensation and produced politically divergent reactions, was the size of the entourage accompanying Khrushchev at the expense of Soviet citizens: in addition to the 10 major figures, he brought his wife and four children and 43 other people, including service staff and 13 guards. Of course, the tabloids and the more strongly anti-communist press went to town on this in all the Member States. As was to be expected, on his return to the USSR Khrushchev recounted the experience of his visit to the Soviet people, reunited en masse in Lenin stadium on 4 April.

An important turning point that aroused great attention was De Gaulle's visit to the Soviet Union, preceded by that of Couve de Murville in 1965. It was a visit that caused a sensation and had enormous media coverage throughout Europe and within the Community. On the one hand, there were high expectations for a political and economic opening which was certain to produce extraordinary results for all the countries of the Community. At the same time, however, the visit created considerable fear and anxiety, because many worried that De Gaulle's visions of “grandeur” could distance France from its Community partners and from the whole of the European West. The

²⁹ The words of Pravda of 4 April are reported in AHMAE-Nantes, Embassy in Moscow, 448PO/B/135, “Visit of Khrushchev to France”, 23 April 1960.

³⁰ Ibidem.

newspapers of the six Member States followed each aspect of the visit with great interest³¹. Firstly, the psychological significance of the event was highlighted: “the primary result of the visit that General De Gaulle is making to the USSR is psychological. The Kremlin has succeeded, thanks to its willingness to stage the event, in creating a climate that has never been seen during previous visits by western heads of state [...] because De Gaulle is De Gaulle and the circumstances seem favourable, the event has taken on the dimensions of history³²”.

Apart from the exaggeration of the importance of this visit, it surely represented also De Gaulle’s desire to send a signal to his European partners in the Community, which was recently emerging from a deep crisis marked by the stance of De Gaulle himself, the so-called “empty chair crisis”. De Gaulle made it clear that European interests were not the only ones that France was developing and that his country maintained a prominent international role and had by no means disappeared from the international system. The warning was directed particularly to Germany, which was not to imagine itself as the only player to maintain an interest in Central and Eastern Europe.

Surprisingly in the 1960s, a complex modification of the concept of integration was advanced by the Soviet intellectual elite that from 1965 onwards began to converge around the Academy of Sciences Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO). The Academy rejected the idea that the process of integration was only a creation of capitalism aimed at strengthening and consolidating this system, as had always been argued by the Soviet Union. Instead it was a project that united the peoples of Europe and their States in a common project; it was essentially an evolution of capitalism itself, but it also contained a drive for deep union³³.

A setback to the opening of possible dialogue between the EEC and the USSR was produced by the Soviet reaction to the Prague Spring³⁴, as had occurred following the 1956 revolt in Hungary³⁵. “The entire press underlines the considerable regression in the policy of détente caused by the occupation of Czechoslovakia. This signals the downfall of all efforts towards bringing the two blocs closer³⁶”. The Member States accused the Soviet government of irresponsible and reckless behaviour, leading to the strengthening of the two military blocs and undermining the peaceful

³¹ A file on the visit is present in AHMAE-Nantes, AHMAE-Nantes, RP-Bruxelles, 122PO/D/136. In addition to extensive documentation it also contains a rich European press review.

³² “Le Soir” of 27 June 1966.

³³ V. Baranovsky *The European Community as seen from Moscow: rival, partner or model?*, in N. Malcom (edited by) *Russia and Europe: an end to confrontation* Burns & Oates, 1994, pp.61-62.

³⁴ Peter Van Ham, *The EC, Eastern Europe and European Unity: Discord, Collaboration and Integration since 1947*, London-New York, Pinter, 1993.

³⁵ Békés, Csaba, *Hungary, the Soviet Bloc, the German question and the CSCE Process, 1965–1975*, in “Journal of Cold War Studies”, Vol. 18, n. 3, Summer 2016.

³⁶ AHMAE-Nantes, RP Bruxelles, 122PO/D/133, Report on the reaction of the Belgian press, 22 August 1968.

coexistence on which the USSR had insisted since 1956, thereby jeopardizing all the progress made by international cooperation. Indeed, the armed reaction to the Prague Spring had abruptly halted the many outcomes of European and Soviet diplomacy, which during the 1960s had led to the signing of a range of agreements of a primarily cultural and scientific nature³⁷.

All the reactions in Brussels were strongly negative, to the extent that the Councillor of the Soviet Embassy had to pay an urgent visit to the French Councillor to clarify the nature of the USSR's military intervention with the other Western allies as well. However, the reasons put forward by the Councillor proved to be so realist and so totally unacceptable that both the French Embassy and public opinion as a whole were even more shocked by the unusually bloody repression. Moscow's intervention was justified not through what is known as *jus gentium*, but by an ideological and strategic stance that envisioned Moscow as the guardian of socialism and thus determined the impossibility of allowing a liberal regime to be installed in Czechoslovakia, heralding an unacceptable "contamination"³⁸. The decision to intervene so abruptly had prevented the occurrence of greater risks and above all that of a propagation of Germany's action against the USSR to the satellite countries.

European and international détente

The 1970s brought significant changes in relations between the Community and the Soviet Union, because these were the years of détente, both at a global level thanks to the moves of the United States brought about by Nixon and Kissinger, and at a European level in line with the desires of most of the Western European countries and expressed most strongly in the Ostpolitik of German Chancellor Brandt³⁹. For the Europeans détente was not only desirable from the political and ideal point of view, but much more interesting for the Community than the sharp clash of the Cold War. For the EEC Member States such an approach was also fundamental for their security because they lacked sufficient means to resist a possible military threat from the Soviets: "we must therefore work towards détente and cooperation, with prudence and vigilance"⁴⁰.

Détente was also the only possibility that the Community's Member States had to measure their strength independently of the United States and to signal autonomy from their great allies, because dependence weighed heavily particularly in the early 1970s. In the words of Pompidou: "Quand M.

³⁷ Cultural agreement between Belgium and Hungary of 11 February 1965.

³⁸ AHMAE-Nantes, RP Bruxelles, 122PO/D/133, Embassy Report of 9 September 1968.

³⁹ Wilfried Loth, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Willy Brandt, and European Security*, in *Journal of European Integration History*, 2005, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 45-59.

⁴⁰ Archives Historiques du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères Francoise-Nantes (AHMAE), Ambassade Bruxelles, Minutes of the meeting between the President of the French Republic and the Belgian Prime Minister on 25 May 1971, 4 June 1971. A very interesting document on the relationship between the EEC and the USA and the need for détente in Europe.

Brejnev m'a demandé à Moscou si l'Europe pouvait se dégager de l'influence américaine, je lui ai répondu: cela dépend surtout de vous et de votre attitude⁴¹”.

By the late 1960s and early '70s the choice of a strategy of détente on the European continent had become focused and reinforced, especially following Nixon's unilateral cancellation of the direct international convertibility of the United States dollar to gold. “Europe's problem is that of its relations with the United States and with the East⁴²”. As regards the East, Western Europeans wanted détente and the development of trade, partly because it was evident that in the event of a threat from the communist area, they would be unable to resist Soviet military power with their own means. Détente was thus an integral part of the active defence policy of the Community's Member States. It was a strategic requirement for the Community, to be sought with caution and constancy. Détente and cooperation with the East were also necessary steps to regain full independence as Europeans, because the economic, cultural and, obviously, military influence of United States on the continent was excessive⁴³. “Each of the six countries certainly does what it can”. This attempt to redefine an area of European autonomy, especially at the level of defence, did not imply a counterposition to the United States, on which Europe was still largely dependent, rather it encompassed the need to reaffirm the European identity and that “Europe exists, distinct from the rest of the world and exists as such⁴⁴”. In an ever-changing international system, European security was firmly on the agenda and security on the continent needed to be strengthened through détente and the development of social, intellectual, economic, scientific and political relations with Eastern Europe. Yet vigilance remained high because the Soviet Union “may be compared to Etna; it tends to advance where it finds empty spaces in its path⁴⁵”.

The United States was reassured on several occasions and at the same time Nixon repeatedly reaffirmed American support for a strong Western European community, although this created considerable problems in US trade: “the political advantages of a solidly established European Community dominate over all other considerations⁴⁶”. Not only that, Nixon also reaffirmed the

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136, Minutes of the meeting between the President of the French Republic and the Belgian Prime Minister, Brussels, 25 May 1971.

⁴³ The following explanation given by the Belgian Prime Minister Harmel: “The king asked me yesterday what we depend on America for; I answered: everything; in the space of one or two years, the habits, the customs pass from one shore of the Atlantic to the other; American civilization imposes itself on our continent; the large American companies established in Europe control a considerable part of the European economy”. Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136, Minutes of the meeting between the President of the French Republic and the Belgian Prime Minister, Brussels, 25 May 1971.

⁴⁶ AHMAE-Nantes, AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136, Azores Conference, strictly confidential, 22 December 1971.

political importance of Western European cooperation and of its expansion through enlargement. At the same time, the Six claimed that the European integration policy was indispensable to détente⁴⁷.

On the other hand though, neither Nixon nor, to a greater extent, Kissinger liked European détente and they asserted their right to make political and international choices in the bipolar sphere.

The whole Community focused considerable attention on Pompidou's visit to the Soviet Union in September 1970, which reassured Westerners facing the possible fear that Germany would acquire a privileged role in Russian diplomatic relations with the West.

Brezhnev's visit to France, in November 1971 also aroused much interest⁴⁸. It was widely considered to be a true diplomatic success that led to positive political and economic results. A common declaration of principle was signed; this document was of extreme importance, especially for the Soviets, because it represented a precedent in their relations with non-communist countries. Nevertheless, France had succeeded in conducting the negotiations without in any way compromising the solidarity of the Western world, as the Soviets would have liked.

In the 1970s, in the wake of the German agreements, the other members of the EEC also began a rapprochement towards the Eastern European countries and the number of visits and commercial and cultural agreements multiplied. In 1973, moreover, the Member States of the EEC signed mutual recognition treaties with the German Democratic Republic and the respective Embassies were opened simultaneously, marking an epochal change in the relations between the two Europes divided by the Iron Curtain and hence crowning continental détente⁴⁹. Although no shared strategic choice existed on this issue, there were frequent meetings between the nine Ambassadors in Brussels, both to inform each other of developments in individual relations, and to attempt an approach that if not actually common, was at least concerted.

While the action of the German Federal Republic had paved the way towards the resumption of relations between the two sides divided by the Iron Curtain, the Helsinki Conference had strengthened the desire for relations and peaceful coexistence⁵⁰. The importance of the Conference for the process of European integration and for the external action of the Community has been underlined by historians, above all because on this occasion the Nine were able to act with a strong commonality of ideas and political objectives and to speak with a single voice, as they almost never had before or were to do again. For the European Community and its conception of foreign policy

⁴⁷ "Pompidou adds that the consolidation of a united Western Europe is an indispensable element for the policy of détente and agreement with the East, for which we have taken the initiative". Ibidem.

⁴⁸ A whole file is dedicated to this visit and there are many interesting documents that analyze the visit and the declarations of the Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party and of the main French and European leaders. In AHMAE-Nantes, AHMAE-Nantes, RP, 122PO/D/136.

⁴⁹ Extensive documentation in AHMAE-Nantes, RP-Bruxelles, 122PO/D/231.

⁵⁰ Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente. How the West Shaped the Helsinki CSCE* Brussels, PIE- Peter Lang, 2009.

and the international system, détente was essential. Based on military balance, it was to create an atmosphere of stability, necessary for a constant political dialogue between the two blocs in Europe. Détente aimed to secure a situation in Europe, and in the world, that excluded war as a solution to international controversies and its success depended on the degree of peaceful coexistence guaranteed by states belonging to different political systems. The cardinal principles of détente were peace and security and cooperation and there would be no development unless these were assured. For the Community, the final act of the Helsinki Conference thus became a set of rules to be followed to create an international system based on the political rights and objectives pursued by the Community itself.

In fact, although this détente was of limited duration, it did create a space of interesting relations between the two Europes on each side of the Iron Curtain and between the EEC and the Soviet Union, which as mentioned above, culminated in the Helsinki Accords in 1975⁵¹.

Brandt's foreign policy, which set in motion the actual process of détente in Europe, was questioned not only by the United States, but also created strong suspicion in Europe, mainly because of the positive reaction of the Soviet Union. The fear was that once Germany resumed its role as an international power, it might choose a closer concord with the USSR and could even aim for the German reunification that had always been supported by the communist camp⁵² but would have compromised the success of the Community in which Germany would have assumed a hegemonic role. One solution to this extremely risky situation was Britain's accession to the European Community that would counterbalance Germany's power and prevent it from gaining too much economic and political space that the other Member States, especially the small Benelux countries, would never have been able to control.

In an attempt to clarify the German position and reassure the other members of the Community, various political leaders made a series of interventions. One such was the president of the parliamentary group of the Federal Social Democratic party Erler, who held a conference in the prestigious Flemish circle of Brussels. While expressing criticism towards Ulbricht, he spoke of the need to attempt a resolution of the German problem and stated that for such an outcome the best interlocutor was the Soviet Union. At the same time, he spoke positively about Poland, which explained the later decision to resume trade. The direct attack was on the trade bloc against the countries of Eastern Europe, which he considered not only inappropriate, but also meaningless⁵³.

⁵¹ Marie-Pierre Rey, *The USSR and the Helsinki Process, 1969-1975. Optimism, doubt or defiance?* in Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, Christian Nuenlist *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75*, London, Routledge, 2008.

⁵² Along these lines the article signed by Charles Rebuffat in the Belgian newspaper "le Soir" of 30 November 1968, entitled "Le meme bateau".

⁵³ AHMAE-Nantes, Ambassade Bruxelles, 122PO/D/133, Conference de M. Erler, 19 Mars 1965.

In 1972, the year in which the EEC decided on its first enlargement and set up the European currency snake to respond in a communitarian form to the financial shock created by Nixon's declaration ending dollar convertibility, Brezhnev recognized the right of the EEC to work and to proceed in a positive way despite being a grouping of capitalist countries.

In fact, the 1970s marked a period of change in diplomatic relations between the Community and the USSR. While until then relations had been mainly bilateral, the 1970 Davignon Report proposed a European Political Cooperation project (EPC), laying the foundations for Community members to speak with a single voice on foreign policy. In fact, regular meetings were held by the foreign ministers of the Member States to adopt coherent and common policies.⁵⁴

The Soviet Union no longer had any interest in disavowing the economic development of the EEC, given its desire to escape the economic stagnation that had affected the Soviet Union since the mid-1960s. The USSR was in search of trade and transfers of technology, and this explains the increased interest in the EEC and the fact that economic exchanges between the USSR and the Community saw significant growth. In the years 1971-74, the proportion of Soviet trade with the EEC rose from 8.5% to 16%. Thus, together with the softening of ideological barriers, important economic and commercial interests increased, ensuring that the dialogue established during détente was maintained despite any international tensions that might arise.

Epilogue

This rapprochement between Western Europe and the Soviet Union did not, however, resist the resumption of the Cold War in the years 1979-81 and there would be no full détente again until Gorbachev came to power⁵⁵. His ascent, in fact, marked a new phase in Soviet politics, aimed at moving beyond the politics of the opposing blocs and working on both parts of Europe, to start a process that would lead to the construction of the "Common European Home"⁵⁶. The scope of the European Community is broad in this project, since the most natural rapprochement would have been between Comecon Member States and those of the European Community. This was Gorbachev's approach in supporting the joint declaration of June 1988, which established official relations between the two bodies. Gorbachev increased his positive vision of the role of the EEC

⁵⁴ Bulletin of the European Communities. November 1970, n° 11. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. "Davignon Report "(Luxembourg, 27 October 1970)", p. 9-14.

⁵⁵ Vladislav Zubok, *The Soviet Union and European Integration from Stalin to Gorbachev*, in "Journal of European Integration History", vol. 2, n. 1, 1996, pp. 85-92.

⁵⁶ Laetitia Spetschinsky, *De la «maison commune européenne» aux espaces communs euro-russes. Une idée au cœur des bouleversements de la scène européenne de 1985 à nos jours*, in "Journal of European Integration History", 2005, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 61-81.

from late 1988, when he clarified that the project for rapprochement was not to be based solely on respect for the differences but based rather on the very values that until then had been ascribed to Western Europe, namely respect for human rights and democracy based on political pluralism. This was therefore a radical change of position: from the refusal of the integration process to the recognition of the EEC as a bearer of values to be shared. Important treaties were signed in this new perspective: in December 1989 a first agreement on trade and economic cooperation and in November 1990 the signing of the treaty of reduction of conventional weapons in Europe and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

The position of Gorbachev was maintained by Boris Yeltsin who repeatedly referred to the European characteristics of Russia in public speeches, until the entry into force in 1997 of the partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Russia. The agreement, which was signed during the Corfu European Council in June 1994, was of great strategic and political importance, since it defined Russia and the European Union as “strategic partners” and entered into force with the end of hostilities with Chechnya, in December 1997⁵⁷. The preamble of the agreement even made reference to “the importance of the historical links existing between the Community, its Member States and Russia and the common values that they share”, while a full resumption of relations was indicated among the final objectives and the aim “to provide an appropriate framework for the gradual integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe”. Based on the respect for human rights established at Helsinki, full political consultation, increased trade and investment and economic cooperation were hoped for. In the same year, the Treaty of Amsterdam introduced the common strategies and new policy tools for joint action between the EU and Russia.

With the election of Putin to the Russian presidency in 2000⁵⁸, Russian policy towards the European Union changed again, though not immediately in a direct and formal manner. The first obvious symptom was the non-renewal of the ten-year partnership agreement, because Putin showed no interest in such close relations with the Union. Moscow showed a similar lack of enthusiasm for the European Neighbourhood Policy launched during the Prodi Commission in 2002 to bring Europe closer to Russia and the former Soviet Republics. Russia’s subsequent foreign policy choices have further distanced the European sub-continent’s two powers mainly because of tensions in the former Soviet area, which had repercussions in Russian-European relations,

⁵⁷ Official Journal of the European Communities, L 327, vol. 40, 28 November 1997, Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States and Russian Federation.

⁵⁸ Elena Dundovich, *Goodbye Europa: la Russia di Putin e il difficile rapporto con Bruxelles*, in “Studi urbinati di scienze giuridiche politiche ed economiche”, n. 3, 2005, pp. 539-547.

especially from 2008 onwards and the Russian conflict with Georgia that followed the invasion of Ossetia, which had proclaimed independence.

In an attempt to prevent new wars and international tensions in the area, the EU launched the Eastern Partnership with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It was precisely the request for ratification of this agreement that triggered the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-14. The difficulties that followed, also in Crimea, have complicated the situation between the European Union and Russia and the EU is unable to propose particularly stringent policies or common strategies, partly because of the divisions and the detached position of the Russians.

Relations between Europe and Russia through the EEC and the EU have therefore been complex and unstable, but both sides have sought to maintain relations, considering them fundamental for their foreign policy. The Community, which was inevitably caught up in the Cold War though it tried to emancipate itself in order to develop both politically and economically, has sought a privileged interlocutor in the USSR and Russia, by starting from those parts of Eastern Europe from which it was dramatically split in the aftermath of the Second World War. Like the Soviets, the Europeans have also used the two-sided confrontation to render the process of European integration indispensable or at least very important. However, at the same time they have sought stronger relations that would allow the European continent to develop economically and to create a level of independence from the United States. An autonomous relationship, therefore, between the Community and the USSR, which goes beyond the simple constraints imposed by the Cold War and the super powers, and in which Europe has played a leading role.