

Matěj Bílý

To drive the slogan of human rights out of the hands of opponents of socialism
 Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact summits in the years
 1985–1989

When Mikhail Gorbachev took over as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985, the governing parties in the Warsaw Pact states still held a legal monopoly when it came to political matters and they showed little willingness to include general principles of human rights in their concept of the rule of law. It soon became apparent, however, that achieving the main foreign-policy objective of the Soviet leader (i.e. a de-escalation of the Cold War and the normalization of relations between East and West) would not be possible without the Soviet Union and its European allies first changing their attitudes to the observance of human rights. Efforts by the European Community to link the process of Europe-wide integration with respect for human rights dated back to proceedings concerning the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)¹ in the 1970s, while the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the mid-1980s was even more resolute than ever before with respect to this issue (also thanks to lobbying from activists in the Helsinki network). Negotiations within the framework of the CSCE were also utilised by human rights defenders in the Eastern Bloc, as a result of which repressive measures in these countries continued to attract the attention of Western media and governments. Therefore, in the middle of the 1980s, the human rights agenda was an integral part of the diplomatic agenda among CSCE states as well as an important element of international politics.²

Including the subject in the program for Warsaw Pact proceedings was therefore an obvious step. The main political function of the organisation was coordinating the actions of member states on key foreign-policy issues. However, the existing literature mapping the history of the organisation only deals peripherally with this matter.³

1 The Final Act of the CSCE adopted by 35 states on August 1, 1975. Among other things, the signatories undertook to respect human rights and basic freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and conviction for all. The signatories also accepted the observance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948.

2 Cf. THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt. Mezinárodní zásady, lidská práva a zánik komunismu* (The Helsinki Effect. International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism). Academia – ČSDS, Prague 2007, pp. 233, 243.

3 MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact*. CEU Press, Budapest – New York 2005, pp. 63–67; LUŇÁK, Petr: *Plánování nemyslitelného. Československé válečné plány 1950–1990* (Planning the Unthinkable. Czechoslovak War Plans 1950–1990). ÚSD AV ČR – Dokořán, Prague 2007, pp. 78–79; BÉKÉŠ, Csába: *Hungary in the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989: Documents on the Impact of a Small State Within the Eastern Bloc*, 2003 – see <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/>

Discussions on the approach to human rights on Warsaw Pact committees in the second half of the 1980s undoubtedly deserve greater attention, as they contributed significantly to the collapse of the alliance's cohesion. Consequently, on the basis of primary sources, this text aims to analyse the causes, development, and consequences of this debate and to place it in the context of the final phase of the Cold War.

Cuius regio, eius religio

The approach to human rights by Eastern Bloc countries was an issue that Gorbachev broached at Warsaw Pact proceedings in the very first year of his government. It was undoubtedly part of his wider plan to improve the tense relations between the Cold War blocs. In the course of discussions on the Political Consultative Committee, the alliance's supreme body, in Sofia on October 22–23, 1985, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) urged member states to give their positions “an offensive character” on the issue of human rights. Even though he did not specify his idea in detail, he essentially introduced a new topic to the Warsaw Pact agenda.⁴ It is not clear to what extent Gorbachev's initial, vaguely indicated intentions corresponded to the attitudes that prevailed among the leadership of the other states. According to the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia/CPC (Komunistická strana Československa), Gustáv Husák, the proactive approach was primarily meant to consist of presenting peace initiatives from socialist countries as well as the “successes of real socialism”, and “proudly accentuating” the social rights of citizens in the states of the Eastern Bloc.⁵ The first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party/PUWP (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza), Wojciech Jaruzelski, also spoke in a similar vein. He interpreted an assertive approach

lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_hun/intro07f3.html?navinfo=15711 (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020); LOCHER, Anna: *Shaping the Policies of the Alliance – The Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Warsaw Pact, 1976–1990, 2001* – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_cmfa/cmfa_intro7e2f.html?navinfo=15699 (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

- 4 The Warsaw Pact had only marginally dealt with the issue of human rights up to that time. In 1976, following the Helsinki Final Act, by way of a declaration by the Political Consultative Committee, the alliance's member states formally accepted their observance. Then, in 1977, in connection with the rise of opposition movements in countries of the Eastern Bloc, the issue was mentioned at a meeting of the alliance's Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. *Národní archiv* (The National Archives, hereafter referred to as NA) Prague, Fund (hereafter referred to as f.) Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ (Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC) 1976–1981 (hereafter referred to as 1261/0/7), sv. (Volume) 23, a. j. (Archive unit) 26/1, Za nové cíle v uvolnění mezinárodního napětí, za upevnění bezpečnosti a rozvoj spolupráce v Evropě. Deklarace členských států Varšavské smlouvy (For new objectives in easing international tensions, for consolidating security, and developing cooperation in Europe. Declaration by Warsaw Pact member states), 26. 11. 1976; *Ibid.*, sv. 41, a. j. 46/info7, Informace o zasedání Výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí Varšavské smlouvy (Information about a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs), 7. 6. 1977.
- 5 NA, f. Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ 1981–1986 (hereafter referred to as 1261/0/8), sv. P141/85, b. (Point of negotiation) 1, Výsledky zasedání politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Sofii (Results of a meeting of the political consultative committee of the Warsaw Pact states in Sofia), 29. 10. 1985.

Matěj Bílý

to the issue of human rights to mean emphasising the allegedly dismal state of social rights in the West.⁶ Jaruzelski, who accentuated the most conservative themes of Gorbachev's Sofia speech (e.g. the need to preserve socialism, to expose the "aggressive impulses of imperialism", and to strengthen ideological work), also declared that economically motivated concessions from the West must have clear boundaries and could not threaten socialism in Warsaw Pact countries.⁷ The East German leadership also understood Gorbachev's appeal in a similar fashion.⁸

The first declaration of the Warsaw Pact's supreme body in the Gorbachev era called on the West to engage in dialogue and to cooperate in the areas of education, science, technology, ecology, and health care. It also mentioned respect for human rights. It was also meant to be guided by the principle of respecting the sovereignty of individual countries.⁹ This therefore confirmed a persistent, long-term contradiction in the conception of international relations between the East and West. Whereas the Warsaw Pact had emphasised national sovereignty and the principle of not interfering in internal affairs as early as 1966 in its Bucharest Declaration, the European Community's Davignon Report from 1970 conversely stressed that a united Europe should be based on a common heritage of respect for the liberty and rights of man.¹⁰

With regard to the observance of human rights, in October 1985 the Warsaw Pact's Sofia declaration revamped the Westphalian principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), which quickly turned out to be unsustainable. Less than a month later, the first, closely watched meeting between Gorbachev and U.S. President Reagan took place in Geneva. The boss of the White House broached the subject of human rights during a conversation that took place behind closed doors. According to Gorbachev's memoirs, he made it very clear that the USSR had to change its approach to personal freedoms as the public in the U.S.A. was very sensitive about this and no American politician could ignore it. Gorbachev purportedly retorted that the United States had no right to impose its own way of life on other countries.¹¹ Despite this, however, he expressed a willingness to compromise. Incidentally, to

6 Among other things, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on 10 December 1948, speaks of the right of every person to social security, just and favourable conditions of work, protection against unemployment, security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability as well as the entitlement to fair and just remuneration ensuring an existence worthy of human dignity, and a reasonable limitation of working hours. The Final Act of the CSCE also committed signatories to the development of social rights.

7 NA, f. 1261/0/8, sv. P141/85, b. 2, Informace o pracovním setkání generálních a prvních tajemníků bratrských stran socialistických zemí v Sofii dne 23. října 1985 (Information on a working meeting of the general and first secretaries of the fraternal parties of socialist countries in Sofia on October 23, 1985), 28. 10. 1985.

8 *Bundesarchiv* (hereafter referred to as BArch), DY 30/J IV 2/2/2136, Schlussfolgerungen aus der Tagung des Politisches Beratenden Ausschusses in Sofia, 28. 10. 1985.

9 NA, f. 1261/0/8, sv. P141/85, b. 1, Deklarace Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy za odstranění jaderné hrozby a za pozitivní obrát v situaci v Evropě a ve světě (A declaration by the Political Consultative Committee of Warsaw Pact member states for the removal of the nuclear threat and for a positive turnaround in the situation in Europe and in the world), 23. 10. 1985.

10 Cf. THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 35.

11 GORBACHEV, Mikhail: *Memoirs*. Bantam Books, London, 1995, pp. 526–527.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

a certain extent, this typified his actions on the international stage.¹² Thus, besides the traditional theses concerning the dangers of imperialist aggression and the need to improve defence capabilities, the foreign-policy resolution of the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, which took place at the end of February and beginning of March 1986, introduced some new elements, especially the concepts of a “common European home” and “universal human values.”¹³ These proclamations did not seem to credible to the West, however. First and foremost, the Reagan administration wanted to see signs of real change. For them, the main indicators of Soviet intentions became the Kremlin’s approach in Afghanistan and the progress that was being made with respect to the observance of human rights.¹⁴

Western governments, therefore, were not willing to cooperate more meaningfully with Moscow without clear proof that the vision of “universal human values” was definitively replacing the concept of class war, which had long been used to justify repression in Eastern Bloc countries. To this end, Gorbachev discovered that he had to speed up domestic political reforms. After all, in the first year of his government, Soviet independent organizations remained illegal, dissidents continued to be arrested, and people of faith faced persecution.¹⁵ The general secretary of the CC CPSU indicated a clear change of course at the turn of spring and summer 1986. On May 23, he called on the Soviet diplomatic corps, among other things, not to approach human rights as a “non-existent” phenomenon. He was not afraid of the issues and in tackling them he abandoned the hitherto defensive attitudes.¹⁶ A few weeks later, at a meeting of the Soviet politburo on June 11, Gorbachev stressed that political reforms were essential in the existing situation. He even presented the view that their timely implementation would have succeeded in limiting manifestations of discontent in Poland at the start of the 1980s.¹⁷

An important moment, which accelerated the debate about the observance of human rights on Warsaw Pact committees, came at the start of the CSCE’s Vienna meeting in the autumn of 1986. Among other things, the Warsaw Pact countries coordinated their approach for this long-term summit at a meeting of the alliance’s Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which took place on October 14–15, in Bucharest. The head of the Soviet diplomatic department, Eduard Shevardnadze, once again urged an offensive approach to human rights. The urgency of the issue can be seen in the fact that at the meeting the creation of an expert group was approved to formulate

12 Western observers soon realised that Gorbachev was different to his predecessors in many ways: He had no inhibitions, he spoke fluently and also moderately, he put an emphasis on universal human values. His openness, goodwill, persuasiveness, and willingness to compromise made a good impression. VOLKOGONOV, Dmitrij: *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. HarperCollins Publishers, London 1999, pp. 492–493.

13 Cf. DURMAN, Karel: *Útěk od praporů. Kreml a krize impéria 1964–1991* (Escape from the Banners. The Kremlin and the Crisis of the Empire 1964–1961). Karolinum, Prague 1998, p. 314.

14 ZUBOK, Vladislav: *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2007, p. 286.

15 THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 246.

16 TAUBMAN, William: *Gorbachev. His Life and Times*. Simon & Schuster, London 2017, p. 266.

17 THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 241.

Matěj Bílý

the approach of the Warsaw Pact to human rights.¹⁸ The self-confidence of some of the East European regimes on the eve of the CSCE's Vienna meeting was illustrated by a declaration from the Czechoslovak foreign minister Bohuslav Chňoupek, that *the virtues of socialism were indisputable*. According to him, more sophisticated argumentation and the adoption a better demeanour toward the Western public ought to have been enough to repudiate Western attacks.¹⁹ This viewpoint was not unique. The notion that socialist states had been needlessly left on the defensive was vociferously put forward in other forums, by the Polish leader Jaruzelski, for example.²⁰

The Warsaw Pact countries wanted to use the CSCE's Vienna meetings to further alleviate Cold War tensions and deepen the principles of the Final Act, in which they had the greatest interest. It primarily concerned economic and scientific-technological cooperation. In fact, the meeting actually provided the West with an opportunity to increase the pressure on the states of the Eastern Bloc due to breaches of the Final Act with respect to human rights. A number of NATO members made progress in observing the provisions of the CSCE's third basket²¹ a provision for moving forward on disarmament negotiations, which was of key importance to the Warsaw Pact countries. They viewed easing the enormous costs of armament as an important precondition for stabilizing their stagnant economies. The offensive approach that had been advocated at the alliance's meetings, i.e. the effort to deflect Western criticism of breaches of political and religious rights in socialist states by pointing to the poor state of social rights in the West, completely failed during the initial phase of meetings in the Austrian capital. The atmosphere of the talks changed rapidly and the Western countries, particularly the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, effectively refused to deal with the Warsaw Pact states as equals, and they took on the role of arbiters. Not

-
- 18 Federální Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí, Informace o zasedání ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Bukurešti ve dnech 14. a 15. října 1986, Praha 18. 10. 1986 (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information about the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held October 14 and 15, 1986 in Bucharest, Prague 18. 10. 1986 – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/20516/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/ce4eea02-39a9-4ec8-ac8d-51d4d4830fa4/cs/141086_InformationReport.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).
- 19 Federální Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí, Vystoupení ministra zahraničních věcí ČSSR s. B. Chňoupeka, Bukurešť, 14. října 1986, undated (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Speech of the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister comrade Bohuslav Chňoupek, Bucharest, October 14, 1986) – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/20514/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/8c78c5f6-28ad-4da7-9dae-11eca7b7406f/cs/141086_SpeechCzechoslovakFM.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).
- 20 *Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí* (Foreign Ministry Archives), Prague (hereafter referred to as AMZV), f. Dokumentace teritoriálních odborů (Documentation of territorial departments), (hereafter referred to as DTO) 1953–1989, inv. č. (inventory No.) 31, ev. č. (registration No.) 64, Vystoupení I. tajemníka ÚV PSDS, předsedy státní rady PLR, gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelského na pracovním setkání bratrských stran socialistických států – členů RVHP (A speech by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP, the chairman of the state council of the PPR, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski at a working meeting of the fraternal parties of socialist states – Comecon members), 11. 11. 1986.
- 21 The CSCE Final Act consisted of three baskets. The first included European security issues, the second concerned cooperation in the areas of culture, economics, science, new technologies, and the environment, while the third involved humanitarian issues, the free exchange of information, contacts between members of families living in different states, and respecting human rights generally.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

only did they make any progress on disarmament conditional upon the observance of human rights in the Eastern Bloc, they even cast doubt on the legitimacy of its socioeconomic system.²² In this light, it is not surprising that with hindsight, Shevardnadze called the CSCE's Vienna meeting a watershed event that "shook the Iron Curtain", as it emphasized the normative conditions for improving relations between the Cold War blocs in the form of respect for human rights in Warsaw Pact countries.²³

Meanwhile, a similar signal was sent to Moscow, and hence to its allies as well, by Ronald Reagan at his second meeting with Gorbachev. The meeting, which took place in Reykjavik in October 1986, produced a breakthrough in the debate on the observance of human rights, as the Soviet leader agreed to the inclusion of the subject in the dialogue between the superpowers.²⁴ Although after his return from Iceland, Gorbachev urged the Warsaw Pact member states to increase pressure on the U.S.A. with respect to disarmament, in reality the alliance's countries were even further on the defensive within the framework of the CSCE process due to human rights violations.²⁵ At this time, the general secretary of the CC CPSU obviously realised that the situation was untenable. At a meeting of the Soviet politburo on November 13, he declared that the USSR had to adopt a new position on human rights, as the "routine approach" up to that time only served to create new domestic dissidents, among other things.²⁶

The reasons that led Gorbachev to this decision deserve at least a brief explanation. First of all, the general secretary of the CC CPSU viewed foreign policy as an instrument of real change. He wanted to open up the Soviet Union to the surrounding world and to overcome the legacy of Stalinist isolation. He thus began to cast doubt on longstanding dogmas and did not hesitate to completely abandon them when necessary. His foreign-policy programme, so-called new thinking, soon became a synonym for the fundamental re-evaluation of ideological postulates.²⁷ Understandably, the members of the CPSU's leadership who had chosen Gorbachev as general secretary primarily expected him to oversee the economic revival of the country with the help of a managed economic restructuring. They did not expect the dismantling of the Soviet regime. Since as far back as the beginning of the 1980s, however, Gorbachev had maintained contacts with intellectuals whose ideas had influenced Soviet dissidents and the human rights movement. These included, for example, the USSR's ambassador to Canada, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and Anatoly Chernyaev, a member of the international department of the CC CPSU. Gorbachev subsequently made these peo-

22 NA, f. Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ 1986–1989 (hereafter referred to as 1261/0/9), sv. P25/87, info6, Informace o průběhu vídeňské následné schůzky signatářských států Závěrečného aktu konference o bezpečnosti a spolupráci v Evropě, 4. listopadu – 19. prosince 1986 (Information on the course of subsequent Vienna meetings between signatory states of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, November 4 – December 19, 1986), 16. 1. 1987.

23 THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 247.

24 DURMAN, Karel: *Útěk od praporů*, p. 315.

25 MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, pp. 63–64.

26 THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 248.

27 ZUBOK, Vladislav: *A Failed Empire*, p. 281.

Matěj Bílý

ple his closest collaborators. Together with them, he did not perceive Western Europe simply as a source of resources for the essential modernisation of the Soviet economy, but also as the inspiration for a model of democratic socialism. This had incidentally manifested itself in Gorbachev's vision of a "common European home". Even the part of the Kremlin leadership who primarily saw the idea as a means of economic salvation, or possibly a certain surmounting of cultural isolation, realised that its implementation required specific steps to be taken toward observing the Helsinki Final Act. It was not only the premise of Gorbachev's reformers that breaching human rights was morally unacceptable and politically untenable which led to a shift in the approach of the Soviet leadership, but also the discovery that moving closer to Western Europe unavoidably demanded their more thorough observance.²⁸

The situation was a good reflection of the evolution of the balance of forces in the Cold War. Western criticism of human rights violations in states of the Eastern Bloc had understandably been present for a long time. This had already been intensifying under the government of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Besides the so-called Euromissile crisis and the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, it contributed to the collapse of the détente and a revival of the confrontation between the East and West. This so-called Second Cold War, which flared up before the arrival of Gorbachev, obviously showed that the Eastern Bloc was not capable in the longer term of keeping pace in the escalating rivalry with the Western states, which were economically stronger. The Soviet Union and its allies needed to reduce Cold War tensions a lot more urgently than the West and this put them at a disadvantage. As Western politicians had made the observance of human rights a subject that was directly linked to progress in the relevant negotiations, the representatives of the Eastern Bloc could not ignore the topic as they had essentially done in the Leonid Brezhnev era and in the short interlude under his two successors.

Early conflicts

Gorbachev's re-evaluation of the approach to human rights accelerated an emergent disagreement between the members of the Warsaw Pact with respect to reforms in the USSR. The first hint came at a meeting of the alliance's deputy foreign ministers, which took place on February 18, 1987 in Sofia and actually concerned the coordination of further action on human rights. There was still an effort to make an offensive approach, which would have left the West with no initiative. Accordingly, the representatives of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) proposed that the alliance's relevant expert group should rapidly draw up a joint declaration by the Warsaw Pact countries on human rights. However, attempts to coordinate the approach in this way were complicated by Hungary's incipient distancing of itself from the Warsaw Pact. The leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party/HSWP (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt) had signed up for Gorbachev's reform programme. Of all the countries in the alliance, it was the quickest to proceed in this respect, which was

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

also reflected in its foreign-policy positions. Consequently, the Hungarian representatives in Sofia rejected the proposed common approach, whereby the Warsaw Pact states were meant to say the demands of the NATO members at the CSCE's Vienna conference were unacceptable.²⁹

The Hungarian shift to the Western concept of human rights was to a considerable extent motivated by an effort to defend the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania. As early as 1972, Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime there had declared a programme of so-called national homogenization, which anticipated the total assimilation of ethnic minorities and the creation of a racially unified Romanian state. These tendencies engendered a significant chill in relations between Budapest and Bucharest at the end of the 1970s. As Hungarian efforts at a bilateral solution failed, Hungary began to broach the issue on the international stage. Appeals for the observance of human rights, including the rights of ethnic minorities were a useful means of doing this. Hungary took its first major step in this direction at the CSCE's Vienna meeting in March 1987, when it supported a Canadian proposal to strengthen the rights of ethnic minorities in Europe. In doing so, the Hungarian objective was primarily to ensure condemnation of the Ceaușescu regime's attitude to Romanian Hungarians.³⁰

The situation intensified further at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which was held in Moscow on March 24–25, 1987. The Romanian representatives tried to include a condemnation of nationalism and chauvinism in the closing statement, which was implicitly directed against the policies of the Hungarian People's Republic (HPR) and the Hungarian minority in the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSR). Conversely, Hungary attempted to incorporate the doctrines of national self-determination and human rights into the document, which, of course, Romania decisively rejected. The Hungarian effort to purposefully weaken the traditional criticism of revanchism, however, also outraged other countries, particularly those of Central Europe, for whom the concept was primarily associated with potential territorial claims by West Germany. Even though separate negotiations between the Hungarian foreign minister Péter Várkonyi and his Romanian counterpart Ioan Totu partially calmed the heightened atmosphere, the desired compromise on the given issues could not be found.³¹ In the context of existing customs within the Warsaw Pact this was an extraordinary situation. The dispute over the status of the Hungarian minority in Romania was also carried over to the alliance's highest body two months later when it manifested itself at a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in East Berlin on May 28–29. Typically, it was not named openly, but it remained wrapped up in more general questions concerning relations between

29 *BArch*, DY 30/IV 2/2.035/33, Treffen Stellvertretenden Außenminister der Warschauer Vertragsstaaten, 23. 2. 1987.

30 Cf. BÉKÉS, Csába: *Hungary in the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.

31 *NA*, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P32/87, info 1, Informace o zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Moskvě ve dnech 24. a 25. března 1987 (Information on a meeting of Warsaw Pact member states' Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow on March 24 and 25, 1987), 30. 3. 1987.

Matěj Bílý

states, nationalism and chauvinism, human rights, and humanitarian cooperation. Unlike the Moscow meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, however, a compromise could be found within the framework of informal bilateral negotiations between the party leaders.³²

At the Berlin meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, Gorbachev had to admit that at the CSCE's Vienna meeting the West would probably not agree to a "thorough" discussion of human rights "from the ground up" – i.e. with the status of social rights being on the same level as political and religious rights – and without concessions from the East it would not be interested in the desired strengthening of commercial and scientific-technical cooperation. The Soviet leader saw a solution in convening a CSCE conference on humanitarian issues in Moscow, which had been previously initiated in Vienna by Shevardnadze, but without much success.³³ Nonetheless, Gorbachev feared that in the existing situation the conference could merely degenerate into unproductive reciprocal accusations between the East and West. Consequently, he told the allies that Moscow was willing to bring its human rights legislation into line with its international commitments. The response of the other party leaders was lukewarm to say the least. Only the first secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP, János Kádár, clearly supported the Soviet objectives. He gave assurances that Hungary attached the highest importance to the issue of human rights.³⁴

In June 1987, the Soviet Union confirmed to its Warsaw Pact allies that it intended at the CSCE's Vienna meeting to do its utmost to move toward calling a conference on humanitarian cooperation in Moscow. The Soviet leadership believed that the event would fundamentally change the atmosphere with respect to human rights issues. The conference was meant to address the prospect of cooperation while respecting civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights as well as extending contacts between organisations and citizens of CSCE countries. Moscow made it clear that it would not protest against an open meeting with the media, NGO representatives, and human rights activists in attendance. The objective was to replace the principle pushed by the West at the CSCE's Vienna meeting, which in terms of observance saw the East taking on the role of a mere monitored entity. Instead of this, the Moscow conference was meant to establish a more equal relationship based on cooperation between both blocs.³⁵

32 Ibid., sv. P37/87, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Berlíně (A report on the course and results of a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member states of the Warsaw Pact in Berlin), 1. 6. 1987.

33 Shevardnadze's proposal was surprising for the West, as it was a very radical change in the context of the refusal of previous Soviet delegations to discuss human rights. Despite this, Western governments and human rights groups expressed scepticism about this initiative. THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, p. 249.

34 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P37/87, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Berlíně, 1. 6. 1987.

35 AMZV, f. Základní politické otázky – KBSE 1980–1991 (Basic political questions – CSCE 1980–1991) (unprocessed), Hlavní myšlenky porady náměstků ministrů zahraničních věcí států VS k vídeňské následné schůzce ve Varšavě 30. 6. 1987 (The main ideas of a meeting of deputy foreign ministers of Warsaw Pact states on the subsequent Vienna meeting in Warsaw in June 30, 1987), undated.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

The approach to human rights in the Warsaw Pact was also discussed extensively at the Prague meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on October 28–29, 1987. Although the negotiations themselves did not bring about any major conflicts,³⁶ Hungary made it public after the meeting that it considered it important for the countries of the alliance to conduct a “constructive dialogue” on all principles of cooperation, including human rights, within the framework of the CSCE process.³⁷ This attitude went beyond what the Soviet leadership was willing to concede at that time. On the contrary, the Kremlin had partially changed direction after the conclusion of a watershed treaty on the abolition of short and medium-range missiles in the autumn of 1987. Before his first official visit to the United States, Gorbachev even told his Warsaw Pact allies that he now intended to appeal to Reagan so that human rights and humanitarian issues would no longer disrupt relations between the blocs.³⁸ A response from the anti-reform Ceaușescu regime was not long in coming. In December 1987, Romanian representatives in the Warsaw Pact Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information made it clear that, with respect to disarmament negotiations, the RSR would proceed on the key premise that it was not possible to accede to the demands of the West or to make concessions in the area of human rights in exchange for talks on military and security issues.³⁹ Disagreements on the approach to human rights therefore also began to manifest themselves in the area of disarmament negotiations, which all the Warsaw Pact member states had an interest in and which was one of the alliance’s key binding elements in the Gorbachev era as a result.

The first conclusions of the aforementioned Warsaw Pact expert group for human rights issues appeared at the start of 1988. Despite the Soviet concessions described above, the prevailing opinion was that the member states had to go on the offensive on the given issue at the CSCE’s Vienna meeting. This was based on the conviction that the existing Western pressure only had to be outwaited, because the general easing in international relations that had come with the arrival of Gorbachev would ultimately lead to a dampening of Western criticism. A human rights framework that was acceptable from the point of view of the Warsaw Pact countries was meant to be established with the help of the humanitarian conference in Moscow that had been

36 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P49/87, info6, Informace o zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Praze ve dnech 28. a 29. října 1987 (Information on a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Warsaw Pact member states in Prague on October 28 and 29, 1987), 11. 11. 1987.

37 AMZV, f. DTO 1953–1989, inv. č. 23, ev. č. 11, MLR – Ohlasy na pražské zasedání Výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí VS (The Hungarian People’s Republic – Responses to the Prague meeting of the Warsaw Pact’s Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs), 13. 11. 1987.

38 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P51/87, b. 2, Informace ÚV KSSS a setkání vedoucích představitelů členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Berlíně (Information of the Central Committee of the CPSU and a meeting of leading representatives of Warsaw Pact member states in Berlin), 1. 12. 1987.

39 AMZV, f. Porady kolegia (Collegium meetings, hereafter referred to as PK) 1953–1989, km-22/88, Informace o 5. zasedání mnohostranné skupiny pro aktuální vzájemnou informaci členských států Varšavské smlouvy (MSAVI) (Information on the fifth meeting of the Warsaw Pact member states’ Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information /MGCMI/), 6. 1. 1988.

Matěj Bílý

proposed by the Kremlin.⁴⁰ It was meant to allow the East to promote the concept of the “indivisibility” of human rights, which would prevent the West from attacking socialist states by emphasising political and individual rights while playing down the significance of social rights. Such an approach by the alliance was rejected by Hungary, however, which on the contrary sought to force the allies to make more ambitious concessions on human rights. For example, the Hungarian representatives purposefully warned that without them the West might paralyse disarmament talks that had been getting under way with the participation of 23 NATO states and the Warsaw Pact and in which the East had placed great hope.⁴¹

Moscow assured its Warsaw Pact allies that it would strive to act assertively in negotiations on human rights with the United States. For instance, at an informal meeting of alliance foreign ministers, which took place in Prague on February 23, 1988, Shevardnadze gave assurances that, in recent discussions with the head of American diplomacy, George Schultz, he had responded to criticism of human rights violations in Eastern Bloc countries by arguing that, conversely, the USSR was concerned about the social and economic situation of U.S. citizens, the existence of 3 million homeless people in that country, discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous peoples, as well as the fact that Nazi war criminals and hijackers of Soviet civilian aircraft were residing on American territory. As an example of double standards, he mentioned political prisoners in Northern Ireland.⁴² Then, at a May summit in Moscow, top American representatives were harangued about the failure to observe human rights in the U.S.A. (racism, the persecution of leftist thinkers and anti-war activists, handing down death penalties to minors) which they were told was causing disquiet in Soviet society.⁴³

Despite this rhetoric, Moscow’s actual approach was purely defensive from the middle of 1987. In an effort to win the West’s trust, Soviet diplomats made even greater concessions at the CSCE’s Vienna meeting and showed unprecedented flexibility on the issue of human rights. For example, the Soviet delegation agreed to the proposal that a new “human dimension mechanism” should be established within the framework of the CSCE, on whose basis member states could demand bilateral consultations due to breaches of human rights, or could even call a special meeting

40 The convening of such a conference partly complicated a French proposal to organise a similar summit in Paris, even though Moscow did not consider this initiative to be a direct competitor.

41 AMZV, f. PK 1953–1989, km-22/88, Informace o jednání pracovní skupiny expertů členských států Varšavské smlouvy pro vypracování návrhů na rozvoj spolupráce v zájmu posílení ofenzivnosti politické práce v oblasti lidských práv (Information on the proceedings of a working group of experts from Warsaw Pact member states for the formulation of proposals for the development of cooperation in the interest of strengthening the offensive nature of political work in the area of human rights), 21. 1. 1988.

42 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P61/88, info7, Informace o setkání ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Praze 23. února 1988 (Information on a meeting of Warsaw Pact member states’ foreign ministers in Prague on February 23, 1988), 25. 2. 1988.

43 Ibid., sv. P73/88, info19, O výsledcích sovětsko-amerického setkání na nejvyšší úrovni v Moskvě (29. května – 2. června 1988) (On the results of a Soviet-American meeting at the highest level in Moscow /May 29 – June 2, 1988/), 9. 6. 1988.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

of the CSCE. As of 1987, more than 600 Soviet political prisoners were also released as a result of the West putting pressure on Moscow for it to abide by the Helsinki agreements. By the end of 1988, the number of people imprisoned in the USSR for political reasons had been reduced to unprecedentedly low levels. According to Amnesty International, there were “only” 140 of them behind bars.⁴⁴ Thus, on his visit to Moscow in May 1988, Reagan had to admit that there had been a genuine shift in respect for human rights in the USSR.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, the approach to human rights was an issue that engendered ever-greater disputes in Warsaw Pact forums. At a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Sofia on 29–30 March 1988, the head of East German diplomacy, Oskar Fischer, cast doubt on the optimistic view of the international situation presented by his Soviet counterpart. Whereas Shevardnadze highlighted the political benefit of talks on reducing the armed forces and conventional weapons of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, Fischer expressed concern that socialist countries were losing a notional battle over human rights.⁴⁶ The East German viewpoint was very close to the Romanian stance. Ioan Totu urged allies to strongly resist the issue of human rights and to not allow the West to interfere in their internal affairs. On the other hand, Várkonyi, the Hungarian foreign minister, stated that the success of the CSCE’s Vienna meeting was clearly tied to concessions made by Warsaw Pact members on the issue of human rights. Referring to the ongoing reforms in the Soviet Union (so-called perestroika) and the declared concomitant effort to develop “socialist democracy,” he added that such concessions were on the agenda anyhow.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, i.e. the idea that a more flexible attitude to human rights was in accordance with the spirit of perestroika, was presented by Hungarian diplomats in the alliance’s Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information. They appealed to allies not to allow a rigid approach to this issue to thwart the successful conclusion of the CSCE’s Vienna meeting.⁴⁸

The Soviet approach moved increasingly closer to the Hungarian one on the committees of the Warsaw Pact during the spring of 1988. At an extraordinary meeting of the alliance’s foreign ministers, which took place in East Berlin in May, Shevardnadze stressed that without a breakthrough in the third basket of the CSCE’s Vienna meeting, it was not possible to expect progress in other areas, i.e. not even in the desired Europe-wide reduction in conventional forces. In mid-May, Moscow sent its

44 Cf. THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, pp. 251–252.

45 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P73/88, info19, O výsledcích sovětsko-amerického setkání na nejvyšší úrovni v Moskvě (29. května – 2. června 1988), 9. 6. 1988.

46 MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, p. 63.

47 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P65/88, info4, Informace o zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Sofii (Information on a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Warsaw Pact member states in Sofia, March 31, 1988), 31. 3. 1988.

48 AMZV, f. PK 1953–1989, km-29/88, Informace o 7. zasedání mnohostranné skupiny pro aktuální vzájemnou informaci členských států Varšavské smlouvy (MSAVI) (Information on the 7th meeting of the Warsaw Pact member states’ Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information /MGCM/), 1. 4. 1988.

Matěj Bílý

allies a proposal for a possible approach: citizens of socialist countries would win a hitherto forbidden opportunity to engage in the defence of human rights, to create appropriate organisations for this, and to disseminate their opinions. The rights of churches, the possibility of teaching religion and other religious freedoms, including pilgrimages to other countries, were also supposed to be guaranteed.⁴⁹ Moreover, at this time, Gorbachev also initiated the creation of a permanent interparliamentary forum on humanitarian issues.⁵⁰

Moscow's watershed proposals and the general thrust of the CSCE's Vienna meeting led to political fragmentation in the Warsaw Pact, which had at least maintained an outward show of unity until then. In June 1988, with partial support from the GDR, Romania vigorously rejected a proposal from neutral European countries for the CSCE Vienna meeting's final document. The provisions on the issues of the third basket, which included a human rights agenda, was unacceptable to the Ceaușescu and Honecker regimes.⁵¹ The increasing discord manifested itself not only in official alliance forums, but also during consultations between leading delegations from the Warsaw Pact states at the Vienna meeting. While Romania clearly declared that it would not support any proposal that didn't take its standpoint into account, Poland joined Hungary in refusing to condemn the West's demands concerning human rights as "maximalist".⁵² The Polish U-turn was notable. As has been mentioned above, Wojciech Jaruzelski had still been relatively uncompromising on human rights in 1986. According to the memoirs of the Polish diplomat Jerzy Nowak, however, this was about the repercussions of the crisis that had hit the Polish People's Republic (PPR) in 1980–1981. Subsequently, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party quickly established good personal relations with Gorbachev⁵³ and his approach changed.⁵⁴ Thus, Polish policy within the Warsaw Pact became increasingly consistent with the Soviet course of reform over time.⁵⁵ This

49 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P71/88, info3, Informace o setkání ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Berlíně (Information on a meeting of Warsaw Pact member states' foreign ministers in Berlin), 17. 5. 1988.

50 Ibid., sv. P73/88, info19, O výsledcích sovětsko-amerického setkání na nejvyšší úrovni v Moskvě (29. května – 2. června 1988), 9. 6. 1988.

51 AMZV, f. PK 1953–1989, km-12/88, Informace o 9. zasedání mnohostranné skupiny pro aktuální vzájemnou informaci členských států VS 7.–8. června 1988 (Information on the ninth meeting of the Warsaw Pact member states' Multilateral Group for Current Mutual Information June 7–8, 1988), 1. 7. 1988.

52 BArch, DY 30/2345, Aussenpolitische Sonderinformation Nr. 136/88, 13. 7. 1988.

53 Gorbachev admired Jaruzelski for his alleged ability to clearly and precisely assess even a complex situation. According to the testimony of his adviser Anatoly Chernyaev, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU had almost unlimited faith in Jaruzelski. He considered his personality to be a guarantee that Poland would emerge from the crisis as an ally and friendly state. Similarly, Jaruzelski believed in Gorbachev and his reform-oriented collaborators. TAUBMAN, William: *Gorbachev*, pp. 481–482.

54 Cf. NOWAK, Jerzy: *Od hegemonii do agonii. Upadek Układu Warszawskiego – polska perspektywa*. Wydawnictwo Bellona, Warsaw 2011, p. 65.

55 JARZĄBEK, Wanda: *Poland in the Warsaw Pact 1955–1991: An Appraisal of the Role of Poland in the Political Structures of the Warsaw Pact*, 2010 – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_poland/Introductionb85a.html?navinfo=111216 (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

change was undoubtedly also motivated by negotiations on external economic aid, which Poland desperately needed. The United States, however, was reluctant to pursue such a possibility and it purposefully made it conditional upon not only a specific agreement within the framework of the International Monetary Fund, but also on a shift in Warsaw's approach to human rights.⁵⁶

The Warsaw Pact as a guarantor of the status quo

Divisions within the alliance further intensified at a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in Warsaw on July 15–16, 1988. At these talks, Erich Honecker tried to mobilise the Warsaw Pact to defend the *status quo* in regard to human rights. According to him, the organisation should fight against the CSCE Vienna meeting's tendency to exempt the issue of human rights from the sovereignty of individual countries. His words were clearly at variance with Gorbachev's speech. Although he had assured the socialist states that he would not permit the West to interfere in their internal affairs, he also expressed sympathy for the idea that human rights was a subject that was within the *legal care of the entire global community*. The new first secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP, Károly Grósz, was even more radical. He stated that the Warsaw Pact countries could only play a significant role on the international scene on condition that they carried out internal reforms. He stressed that any economic reform under consideration could not be successful without changes in social thinking and the system of political institutions, i.e. consolidating the rule of law and improving people's quality of life. Kádár's successor also escalated the Hungarian-Romanian dispute, as he identified the collective right of ethnic minorities to use their mother tongue, to develop their own culture, and to maintain ties with the country where the national majority lived to be an integral part of human rights. This provoked a furious reaction from Ceaușescu, who clearly came out against this idea. He described the tendency to strengthen the right to religious freedom as a *return to the Middle Ages*.⁵⁷

The Warsaw meeting confirmed the Romanian-East German convergence on human rights issues and disarmament negotiations. In the inner circle of foreign ministers Oskar Fischer admitted that the West had made the observance of human rights a condition for further disarmament negotiations. He emphasised, however, that the GDR did not intend to accept this "trade-off" as socialist countries understood human rights differently to Western states. First and foremost, according to Fischer, the Vienna meeting of the CSCE should not affect the sovereignty of individual countries' legislations in any way. This standpoint was supported by Ioan Totu.

56 AMZV, f. DTO 1953–1989, inv. č. 31, ev. č. 66, Informace o návštěvě náměstka ministra zahraničních věcí USA J. Whiteheada v PLR (Information on a visit by the U.S. deputy secretary of state J. Whitehead to the PPR), 10. 2. 1988.

57 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. 79/88, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy (A report on the course and results of a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member states of the Warsaw Pact), 20. 7. 1988.

Matěj Bílý

He declared that the Vienna final document could not make any claim to interfere in internal affairs. He recalled that the RSR had previously not hesitated to reject such tendencies even though it meant giving up the American most-favoured-nation clause as a result.⁵⁸ He added that, although the socialist states had to act flexibly, they also could not abandon their principles. In response, Shevardnadze warned that if the Vienna summit was not a success it would slow down European dialogue for a long time. He admitted to the allies that it was a priority for Moscow to begin disarmament talks, as the West had such an economic advantage that the Soviet economy, which was on the brink of crisis, could not continue with the arms race. He therefore proposed that the Warsaw Pact countries make certain concessions in Vienna and then they could possibly compensate for them with specific domestic laws.⁵⁹

The RSR and GDR found themselves isolated. Shevardnadze's compromise proposal was supported in principle by Poland and even by Bulgaria, which was ideologically rigid but wracked by economic problems. Its foreign minister, Petar Mladenov, called on the allies to create a new concept of human rights, as the issue could no longer obstruct desperately needed economic cooperation with the West. Hungary again tried to go further than Moscow and proposed creating a commission for human rights in the Warsaw Pact. Shevardnadze did not support this initiative, however, even though he admitted that the states of the alliance had to act in a coordinated manner in respect to this issue.⁶⁰ Thus, the bloc of pro-reform countries in the Warsaw Pact countries was far from being unified. The fragmentation of the alliance was underlined by the fact that, in the middle of 1988, Hungary began to present different approaches not just with respect to human rights, but even in regard to the hot topic of reducing conventional armed forces.⁶¹

The attitude that the Soviet leadership presented at Warsaw Pact meetings changed in the second half of 1988. At a session of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Budapest on October 28–29, 1988, Shevardnadze told the allies that it was necessary to face the issue of human rights “head on”, as the ideals of socialism corresponded to these universal values. Moscow, however, continued to expect a coordinated approach from the alliance. Even though Gorbachev had given the Warsaw Pact countries full responsibility for their internal political development, he still counted on them acting uniformly on the international stage. Even Czecho-

58 Romania was the first country in the Eastern Bloc to receive the American most-favoured-nation clause, which significantly eased economic cooperation with the United States, in 1975. In 1988, Bucharest itself abandoned it in response to growing criticism of the state of human rights in the country.

59 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. 79/88, b. 1, Informácia o rozhovore v úzkom kruhu ministrov zahraničných vecí členských štátov Varšavskej zmluvy (VZ) vo Varšave 16. 7. 1988 při příležitosti zasadnutia Politického poradného výboru (PPV) VZ (Information on a discussion in the inner circle of foreign ministers of Warsaw Pact /WP/ member states in Warsaw on July 16, 1988 on the occasion of a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee /PCC/ of the WP), undated.

60 Ibid.

61 *Archiwum Akt Nowych*, Warszawa (hereafter referred to as AAN), f. Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – komitet centralny (hereafter referred to as PZPR KC), V/417, NOTATKA INFORMACYJNA o naradzie Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego (Warszawa, 15–16 lipca 1988 r.), 18. 7. 1988.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

slovakia, which had been relatively passive until then, inclined toward the Soviet positions. In the words of its foreign minister, Jaromír Johanes, it was of the opinion that a certain form of declaration on human rights in socialist countries could have a positive effect on the international situation and dampen Western criticism. The Romanian-East German tandem, however, continued to reject any concessions. Fischer and Totu again warned that the Warsaw Pact states should not provide the West with an opportunity to interfere in their internal affairs under the guise of checking the observance of human rights in exchange for disarmament agreements. The gap between reformist and conservative regimes in the Eastern Bloc was underscored by Várkonyi, who strongly endorsed mechanisms enabling CSCE countries to check on how human rights were being respected.⁶²

At a bilateral meeting in Berlin in November 1988, Honecker and Ceaușescu agreed that the pressure to observe human rights was actually the most topical threat to the Warsaw Pact countries. Their opinions already differed however in terms of how the alliance could maintain its integrity and how they could ensure the integrity of their own regimes. Like Mikhail Gorbachev, the East German leader saw the role of the Warsaw Pact as being primarily on a political level, which would provide sufficient existential guarantees to the GDR. The Romanian dictator again demanded a fundamental restructuring of the organisation. Incidentally, Romanian proposals for the complete reform of the alliance, which were submitted in July 1988, were in keeping with this line of thinking.⁶³ Among other things, these proposals counted on the Warsaw Pact opening its doors to the other European socialist countries, i.e. Albania and Yugoslavia. According to the historian Petr Luňák, Ceaușescu's regime assumed that these states would promote objectives within the alliance that were close to those of Romania.⁶⁴

Moscow did not respond to the Romanian initiative for several long months.⁶⁵ But the prospect of deeper institutional changes in the Warsaw Pact had resonated within the Hungarian leadership since the end of 1988 at the latest. It had correctly surmised that the former military-political confrontation between the blocks was increasingly shifting to an economic level. Military factors were put on the backburner and consequently the "modernisation" of political cooperation appeared to be a necessity. At the same time, reformists from the Hungarian Foreign Ministry recom-

62 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P91/88, info6, Informace o zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Budapešti ve dnech 28. a 29. října 1988 (Information on a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Warsaw Pact member states in Budapest on October 28 and 29, 1988), 2. 11. 1988.

63 Romania proposed a comprehensive restructuring of the Warsaw Pact's political and military bodies, which would have thoroughly separated its political and military frameworks and introduced the rotation of key positions in the alliance's leadership. MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, p. 65.

64 LUŇÁK, Petr: *Plánování nemyslitelného*, p. 77.

65 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P119/89, info5, O odpovědi SSSR na dopis ÚV RKS ze 4. 7. 1988, překlad informace vydané velvyslanectvím SSSR v Praze (On the USSR's response to a letter from the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party dated July 4, 1988, a translation of information sent by the USSR's embassy in Prague), 2. 6. 1989.

Matěj Bílý

mended to the leadership of the HSWP that, besides negotiating on disarmament, the alliance should focus primarily on human rights, humanitarian issues, supporting economic growth, and environmental safety. At this time, Budapest was watching with concern the ongoing economic, political, and military integration in Western Europe. It was worried that potential space was being created for accentuating the division of the continent, which would also result in the consolidation of the existing political-military blocs. As relations between the East and the West were increasingly based around the issue of human rights, Budapest was of the opinion that the unwillingness of part of the Warsaw Pact to resolve this problem could ultimately bury the idea of an undivided Europe.⁶⁶

The disbandment of the political-military blocs, which would enable Hungary to extricate itself from Soviet influence, was something that the reformist leadership of the HSWP at the time had already envisaged as a key long-term goal. Consequently, Budapest had no interest in strengthening the operation of the Warsaw Pact and unlike in the past it rejected the creation of a permanent political body for it. In the event that this stance left the country isolated, Hungary intended to push for also including the improvement of cooperation on human rights and humanitarian issues on the agenda of the new institution. Similarly, Budapest planned to continue recommending the establishment of a Warsaw Pact committee or commission for human rights.⁶⁷ Thus, in its official response to the Romanian proposal to reform the organisation, the Hungarian leadership wanted to emphasise that any possible changes would have to correspond to current international developments and therefore should expand the alliance's agenda to include a human rights and humanitarian dimension.⁶⁸

An expert meeting on the possible reform of the Warsaw Pact, which took place in Prague in March 1989, actually accommodated Hungary's wishes, as it provisionally pledged to establish a committee for human rights issues within the framework of the alliance.⁶⁹ In the end, the idea was surprisingly abandoned by Budapest itself. At a meeting of the HSWP's political committee on May 16, 1989, the new foreign minister, Guyla Horn, recommended withdrawing the proposal. He argued that there was a chasm between the formal rules within the Warsaw Pact and what happened in practice. Therefore, he recommended that the issue of human rights should be

66 Joint Memorandum of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of National Defense on the Future of the Warsaw Treaty, 6. 3. 1989 – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/16970/ipublicationdocument_singleddocument/2af3f79d-b24f-471a-a95a-9ca16a4ebd18/en/890306_joint_memo.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

67 Memorandum on the Hungarian Position Concerning the Transformation of the Warsaw Pact Working Mechanisms, 6. 12. 1988 – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/16972/ipublicationdocument_singleddocument/28892a48-09dc-41fb-ab92-6a27672219eb/en/881206_memo.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

68 Joint Memorandum of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of National Defense on the Future of the Warsaw Treaty, 6. 3. 1989 – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/16970/ipublicationdocument_singleddocument/2af3f79d-b24f-471a-a95a-9ca16a4ebd18/en/890306_joint_memo.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

69 LUŇÁK, Petr: *Plánování nemyslitelného*, pp. 78–79.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

resolved in other forums, primarily within the framework of bilateral cooperation with the USSR and the PPR. The secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP, Mátyás Szűrös, believed that this was not a tactical approach. He was anxious that such a step would not be interpreted by the allies as a Hungarian retreat from putting an emphasis on the human rights issue. Rather, he wanted to let the question slide, as was common within the Warsaw Pact. The Hungarian side also considered it problematic that a committee for human rights was meant to function as a permanent body. It began at this time to act against its establishment and therefore also against the institutional consolidation of the alliance.⁷⁰

A proposal to reform the Warsaw Pact, which Bulgaria submitted as an alternative to the Romanian initiative after consultation with Moscow in June 1989, did not reckon with the creation of a human rights body. Instead of this, it primarily counted on improving the activity of existing alliance committees and the long-delayed establishment of a permanent secretariat. According to the historian Vojtěch Mastný, the proposal assumed that the Warsaw Pact would primarily be conceived as a political organisation that provided its members with protection against growing pressure to respect human rights.⁷¹ The historian Csába Békés, however, points out that Hungary had definitively abandoned the idea of creating an alliance committee for human rights within the framework of a compromise with Moscow, which had been lukewarm about this possibility from the outset. In return, the USSR blocked a Romanian request that the next meeting of the Political Consultative Committee should deal with the “threat to socialism” in reformist Poland and Hungary.⁷²

The definitive disintegration of unity

Western officials realised that in the given situation human rights were the figurative Achilles heel of the state-socialist dictatorships. With their approach in the given issue, they were undoubtedly pursuing political objectives. For example, in his report for the U.S. State Department in February 1989, the American ambassador to the USSR, John Matlock, stated that the emphasis on respecting human rights must remain a key element of American policy toward Moscow. He emphasised that Washington now had an extraordinary unprecedented opportunity to put pressure on Moscow and consequently its allies, too. He described the CSCE process, in particular, as a suitable lever.⁷³ This was also reflected in the opening to negotiations between the 35 CSCE states on strengthening confidence in Europe, which started

70 Minutes of the HSWP Political Committee Meeting Held on May 16, 1989 (Excerpt) – see http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/16965/ipublicationdocument_single-document/fdb03e23-ea79-4903-b533-bac00f081c36/en/890516_minutes.pdf (quoted version dated 21. 4. 2020).

71 MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, p. 66.

72 BÉKÉS, Csába: *Hungary in the Warsaw Pact, 1954–1989*.

73 Cable from Jack Matlock to the State Department, “U.S.-Soviet Relations: Policy Opportunities”, 22. 2. 1989. SAVRANSKAYA, Svetlana – BLANTON, Thomas – ZUBOK, Vladislav (eds.): *Masterpieces of History. The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*. CEU Press, Budapest 2010, doc. 47, pp. 399–407.

Matěj Bílý

the following month. The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR), the GDR, and the RSR, in particular, came under fire from neutral and Western countries for failing to respect human rights.⁷⁴ At this stage, the Warsaw Pact had already clearly fragmented and did not provide its members with any protection against such attacks.

On the contrary, internal disputes escalated in an extraordinary manner in the spring of 1989. This was illustrated by the attitudes of the Warsaw Pact countries on the UN Commission on Human Rights, which adopted a resolution condemning their violation in Romania in March 1989. The Soviet Union refused to support Bucharest and abstained from voting. Bulgaria and even Romania-friendly East Germany obediently followed its lead. The Soviet representatives made it clear that supporting the RSR could compromise the new concept of human rights within the framework of perestroika. The USSR for that matter had a month earlier recognised the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in the area of human rights. According to reports from Hungarian diplomats, however, there was no consensus among top Soviet representatives as to how Warsaw Pact countries should approach this sensitive issue on the international stage. Naturally, Moscow did not go so far as to publicly condemn the Ceaușescu regime itself for human rights violations. However, it abandoned the previous approach whereby internal disputes between members of the Warsaw Pact were set aside or hushed up with the alliance presenting an outwardly unified face. The GDR, in particular, lobbied against this change.⁷⁵ The ailing Honecker regime, however, did not find enough courage to stand up to Moscow during the voting as it had previously recommended during internal alliance meetings.

Bucharest adopted a hard-line response. Hungary's position was labelled anti-Romanian and anti-socialist.⁷⁶ In its official reply, however, Hungary dryly declared that agreeing to the draft resolution reflected the official Hungarian position on human rights in the world, which was strengthening the "authority of socialism" and the "democratising efforts of socialist countries".⁷⁷ The strained relations between the HPR and the RSR had a marked influence on the meeting of the alliance's Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs that took place in East Berlin on April 11–12, 1989. There were such differing attitudes between the representatives of both states on the issue of human rights that for the first time in the entire existence of the body it was not even possible to compile an internal record of the proceedings. The dispute primarily concerned the evaluation of the recently completed Vienna meeting of the

74 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P109/89, info2, Informace o zahájení jednání 23 států Varšavské smlouvy a NATO o konvenčních ozbrojených silách v Evropě a 35 států KBSE o opatřeních k posílení důvěry a bezpečnosti v Evropě (Information on the commencement of a meeting of 23 states from the Warsaw Pact and NATO on conventional armed forces in Europe and 35 states of the CSCE on measures to strengthen trust and security in Europe), 16. 3. 1989.

75 AMZV, f. DTO 1953–1989, inv. č. 23, ev. č. 26, Usnesení ve Výboru pro lidská práva OSN proti RSR (A resolution of the UN Commission on Human Rights against the RSR), 22. 3. 1989.

76 Ibid., Obsah poselství Rumunské komunistické strany Maďarské socialistické dělnické straně (Content of a message from the Romanian Communist Party to the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party), 7. 3. 1989.

77 Ibid., Obsah odpovědi MSDS Rumunské komunistické straně (Content of the HSWP's reply to the Romanian Communist Party), undated.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

CSCE. Hungary very much appreciated its final document. Totu acknowledged its contribution to easing international tensions, but criticised the passages concerning human rights, which according to him only led to an increase in anti-communist propaganda. The Romanian attitude to the Vienna meeting was so negative that it was not even supported by the other Warsaw Pact states who also saw the pressure for the observance of human rights as problematic.⁷⁸

The complexity of the problem is exemplified by the attitude of the GDR. Oskar Fischer warned his alliance counterparts against any substantial transformation of the international situation. He pointed out that the West was augmenting its traditional ideological and military pressure on socialist countries with a coordinated economic approach that was directed against the Warsaw Pact states. Nonetheless, Honecker's regime realised that the East was not in a position to respond by ending efforts to develop cooperation with the West. Its foreign minister urged the allies to adapt to the situation and to focus on defending their state-socialist systems. East Germany's helplessness was illustrated by Fischer's recommendation to return to the previously proposed but not very effective tactic on human rights, i.e. to accentuate their complexity, including their social dimension.⁷⁹ However, Moscow was also aware of the fact that the topic of human rights continued to pose a problem. Therefore, within the framework of setting out the Warsaw Pact's current objectives in the CSCE process, Shevardnadze's deputy, Aleksandr Bessmertny,⁸⁰ once again spoke of the need to break out of a defensive stance in relation to human rights. The USSR continued to see a possible solution in convening a suitable conference in Moscow.⁸¹ The West, however, was still reluctant about this initiative. Together with progress on talks to reduce conventional forces, it rather used the issue to put pressure on the Kremlin to implement further reforms in the area of human rights.⁸²

According to the historian Anna Locher, the Berlin meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in April 1989 led to the definitive disintegration of unity among the Warsaw Pact countries on the international stage. From this time, the member states began pursuing their own objectives and henceforth did not intend to generally harmonise their own policies in line with the path the alliance was taking.⁸³

78 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P113/89, info4, Informace o zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy v Berlíně (Information on a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Warsaw Pact member states in Berlin), 19. 4. 1989.

79 BArch, DY 30/2356, Rede des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genossen Oskar Fischer, auf der Plenarsitzung des Komitees der Außenminister der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 11./12. April 1989 in Berlin, undated.

80 Shevardnadze did not attend the meeting as he had been called without delay to his native Georgia where extensive unrest had broken out. Nonetheless, Bessmertny presented a speech that had to a large degree been conceived by the head of Soviet diplomacy.

81 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P113/89, info4, VYSTOUPENÍ 1. náměstka ministra zahraničních věcí SSSR A. A. Bessmertnycha na zasedání ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy (SPEECH by the 1st deputy foreign minister of the USSR A. A. Bessmertny at a meeting of Warsaw Pact member states' foreign ministers), 11. 4. 1989.

82 THOMAS, Daniel: *Helsinský efekt*, pp. 252–253.

83 LOCHER, Anna: *Shaping the Policies of the Alliance*.

Matěj Bílý

This split was confirmed during the course of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee in the Romanian capital on July 7–8, 1989. This took place at a time when the nervousness of the conservatively oriented party leaders had grown considerably. Looking back on it all, the then general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC, Miloš Jakeš, described their expectations as follows: *They wanted to hear something to stop the current that had arisen here. Everywhere, opposition that had previously been invisible suddenly raised its head and there were demonstrations.*⁸⁴

The core of the official programme concerned the Warsaw Pact's approach to disarmament negotiations and strengthening security in Europe, which the member states managed to agree upon at least in general terms. Considerable attention was also devoted to human rights, however. Together with the overall attitude to reforms and the future of socialism in the countries of the alliance, it was the main source of polarisation.⁸⁵ A day previously, Gorbachev had appeared before the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and among other things in his speech he had talked about the "humanisation" of international relations. He emphasised, for example, that a world where weapons arsenals were restricted could not be genuinely safe without the observance of human rights.⁸⁶ The Political Consultative Committee's declaration was in a similar vein. The document spoke about previously inconceivable principles such as the rule of international law, a policy of partnership, and the right of free choice of socioeconomic development and human values. For the first time all the Warsaw Pact states agreed with the term "renewal of socialist society." Its aim was to improve the quality of life, to develop the capabilities of every person, and to ensure human rights and freedoms, although the alliance stressed that it considered interfering in the internal affairs of individual countries continued to still be unacceptable.⁸⁷

There were stormy discussions about the given formulations. The longest and most scathing speech was given by Ceaușescu. He urged the allies to act in the spirit of the Final Act, but not to accept its "distortion" on the issue of human rights. He criticised the Warsaw Pact's lack of unity at the CSCE's Vienna meeting, which according to him led to the adoption of Western proposals establishing a claim to interfere in the internal affairs of socialist countries. In the name of the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party/RCP (Partidul Comunist Român), he announced that Romania "could not abide by such principles, as it would be acting against the interests of the people and socialism". He once again compared the situation to a "return to the Middle Ages". The Romanian leader gave assurances that it supported a united Europe, but one based on state sovereignty. He completely refused to adopt the Western political model.⁸⁸

84 Author's interview with Miloš Jakeš on March 28, 2017.

85 AAN, f. PZPR KC, V/490, NOTATKA INFORMACYJNA o naradzie Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego państw-stron Układu Warszawskiego, 11. 7. 1989.

86 Address by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, 6. 7. 1989. SAVRANSKAYA, Svetlana – BLANTON, Thomas – ZUBOK, Vladislav (eds.): *Masterpieces of History*, doc. 73, pp. 492–496.

87 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P124/89, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy (A report on the course and results of a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of member states of the Warsaw Pact), 12. 7. 1989.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

The approach to human rights divided the Warsaw Pact countries into several groups. The Romanian approach was primarily supported by East Germany. At the meeting, Honecker abandoned all optimism and rejected Gorbachev's enthusiasm regarding developments in the international situation. With reference to "Western demagoguery" on human rights, he even re-evaluated his previous support for disarmament agreements. He stated that the Warsaw Pact could not adopt a "soft attitude" in the relevant negotiations.⁸⁹ The RSR and GDR both subsequently demanded that the West accept the principle of different value systems and that instead of criticism Warsaw Pact countries it should itself begin to abide by previously adopted commitments in the area of social rights.⁹⁰ The Romanian-East German tandem clashed primarily with the two most pro-reform Soviet allies, Hungary and Poland. Their representatives blocked a proposal by the GDR and RSR for the Warsaw Pact to condemn the Western influence on the internal political processes of its member states; on the contrary, the declaration was meant to highlight the contribution of the final document of the CSCE's Vienna meeting. The Romania delegation resolutely opposed a Hungarian effort to force a formulation into the communique emphasising the importance of human rights in contemporary international relations.⁹¹ Bulgarian and Czechoslovakia leaned more toward the Romanian and East German positions. Conversely, the Soviet Union, whose position continued to be crucial in the Warsaw Pact, sided with Hungary and Poland. Thus, the Soviet delegation called on the allies to adopt international standards in the area of human rights despite the problems associated with this.⁹² Gorbachev highlighted the key importance of perestroika, which he compared to the reforms that the Western countries had implemented in the 1970s. He stated that for it to succeed it was completely essential *to drive the slogan of human rights out of the hands of opponents of socialism*.⁹³

In fact, Ceaușescu and Honecker's critical speeches were not at all pleasing to Gorbachev. Miloš Jakeš, who chaired the meeting as part of the regular rotation, recalled that the Soviet leader tried to force him to end Ceaușescu's speech due to a lack of time, but Jakeš refused to do so. Referring to his packed programme, a disgruntled Gorbachev subsequently shortened an unofficial meeting with his counterparts from allied countries. Each of them allegedly got roughly five minutes to present their ideas. No discussion was held; therefore this meeting inevitably did not produce anything.⁹⁴ In this way, Gorbachev avoided the possibility that opponents of reform

88 Records of the Political Consultative Committee Meeting in Bucharest, July 7–8, 1989. MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, doc. 146, pp. 644–654.

89 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

90 Records of the Political Consultative Committee Meeting in Bucharest, July 7–8, 1989. MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, doc. 146, pp. 644–654.

91 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P124/89, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy, 12. 7. 1989.

92 Records of the Political Consultative Committee Meeting in Bucharest, July 7–8, 1989. MASTNÝ, Vojtěch – BYRNE, Malcolm (eds.): *A Cardboard Castle?*, doc. 146, pp. 644–654.

93 NA, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P124/89, b. 1, Zpráva o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání Politického poradního výboru členských států Varšavské smlouvy, 12. 7. 1989.

94 Author's interview with Miloš Jakeš on March 28, 2017.

Matěj Bílý

could form a faction within the Warsaw Pact and try to use the alliance to make a certain correction to the course established by him.

These tendencies manifested themselves on the eve of the definitive collapse of the state-socialist dictatorships in the Eastern Bloc. Even though at a meeting of the alliance's Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which took place in Warsaw on October 26–27, 1989, all the member states declared a willingness to “constructively” cooperate on human rights and humanitarian issues, the RSR and GDR, with the support of the Bulgarian People's Republic and ČSSR, insisted that the Warsaw Pact countries could not fully comply with the commitments ensuing from the final document of the CSCE's Vienna meeting. On the contrary, Poland and Hungary declared their willingness to adopt the Western concept of human rights, which they also recommended to their allies.⁹⁵ The Soviet delegation inclined toward this approach. Shevardnadze stated that Warsaw Pact policy reflected the interests of individual member countries and ensured their security, but that it was necessary for the alliance to adapt to the demands of the time and to find a new balance between national and collective interests. The desperation of supporters of the old order is illustrated by speeches given by Oskar Fischer and Ioan Totu. Both of them talked about the negative aspects of international developments. Totu pointed out that the results of disarmament talks remained unconvincing while there was a burgeoning Western anti-communist campaign as well as an increasing effort to force socialist countries to adopt a Western style of life under the banner of observing human rights. Fischer evaluated the situation in a similar vein, but with respect to economic problems he emphasised that the GDR had a paramount interest in developing economic cooperation with the West. According to him, it was precisely the Warsaw Pact which should ensure a defence against Western pressure. To this end, the East German foreign minister called for closer cooperation in its political structures.⁹⁶ He was apparently pinning his hopes on the possibility that the counter-reform regimes would manage to push their position into a common alliance approach. It was a final, albeit vain attempt to mobilise the Warsaw Pact in defence of state socialism in its member states.

Conclusion

There had been Western criticism of human rights violations in Eastern Bloc states long before Mikhail Gorbachev took over the leadership of the CPSU. But, as has been shown, its influence on relations between the Cold War blocs grew stronger after 1985. This is also borne out by the fact that the subject began to be regularly discussed within the political structures of the Warsaw Pact organisation. The reason why pressure to respect human rights became important in the second half of

95 *BArch*, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2356, Anlage Nr. 9 zum Protokoll Nr. 47 vom 31. Okt[ober] 1989.

96 *NA*, f. 1261/0/9, sv. P137/89, info6, Informace o průběhu a výsledcích zasedání výboru ministrů zahraničních věcí členských států Varšavské smlouvy ve Varšavě (Information on the course and results of a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of member states of the Warsaw Pact in Warsaw), 2. 11. 1989.

Discussions on human rights on Warsaw Pact

the 1980s can primarily be found in the crisis that was affecting the USSR and the countries in its European sphere of interest at the time. Economic problems pushed Moscow and its allies into attempting a reconciliation with the West, which could result in limiting exhausting arms programmes and potentially revive the East European economy through enhanced cooperation with Western European countries. This was such an urgent requirement that the Warsaw Pact, which had been ideologically shaken by Gorbachev's reforms, was not hellbent on opposing the West and it did not intend to firmly defend its existing stance on human rights.

From a structural point of view, in the second half of the 1980s, the Warsaw Pact worked the best it ever had throughout its existence. Political consultations within the alliance framework became regular and systematic.⁹⁷ As the course of debates on the approach to Western criticism of human rights violations in Warsaw Pact member states shows, the strengthening of alliance cooperation after 1985 did not always have the desired effect. On the contrary, the alliance failed to act in a coordinated manner on fundamental issues. Thus, it did not fulfil the vision of Gorbachev's leadership that more regular and above all more open consultations within the Warsaw Pact would lead to the formulation of a more effective common political line for the Eastern Bloc. Freer discussions and the end of Soviet pressure for uniformity of opinion resulted in the leaders of the alliance's individual member states beginning to defend their own, often conflicting, interests. This was most apparent in their attitude to Gorbachev's reforms, which also included a change in the approach to respecting human rights.

In this context, it is possible to state that Western pressure for the observance of human rights contributed to the disintegration of power structures in the Eastern Bloc. It was a factor, albeit one of many, which undermined one of the integral features of government in the East European state-socialist dictatorships, namely repression. As this study shows, the West succeeded in engendering a dispute among members of the Warsaw Pact in the approach to human rights, thereby creating a substantial area of friction between them, which together with other factors weakened the cohesion of the alliance. Therefore, pressure to observe human rights not only had an impact on the internal situation in individual countries within the Soviet sphere of interest in Europe, but also undermined its multilateral relations, as symbolised by the Warsaw Pact. It is important to emphasise here that the reasons for the collapse of the Eastern Bloc were more complex and cannot simply be reduced to a Western human rights offensive.

At the same time, in relation to the Warsaw Pact, the situation is a good illustration of the fact that in the Gorbachev era it was the attitudes and steps taken by Moscow which remained key to the development of relations between the East and the West, not the official political line of the alliance. The Kremlin often made concessions to the West, which from the outset went beyond the framework of possible

97 Cf. BÍLÝ, Matěj: „Je třeba se poučit.“ Vývoj politických struktur organizace Varšavské smlouvy v letech 1985–1989 (“Lessons to be learned.” The development of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation's Political Structures in 1985–1989). *Soudobé dějiny*, 2019, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 32–74.

Matěj Bílý

compromise between the member states of the organisation. The unhappy proponents of the *status quo*, especially the Honecker and Ceaușescu regimes, either did not dare to deny Moscow their longstanding loyalty or they failed to formulate an effective majority in the Warsaw Pact, which would have at least partially slowed down the Soviet reformist course.