

NATO and the Transformation of Eastern Europe 1988–1991

Gusztáv D. Kecskés¹

Abstract

Present study gives an insight into the reactions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as it reacted upon the overall and deep political changes that took place in 1988 and 1989 throughout Eastern Europe. While surveying the course of events, which depended to a large extent on the overall political situation in the USSR, the paper gives us an exciting insight into the documents (confidential situation reports, expert evaluations, political predictions, etc.) produced by experts in the inner circles of the major Western political and military alliance and the North Atlantic Council. In order to understand the meaning and circumstances how was the transformation of Eastern Europe as the result of the collapse of communism perceived by NATO officials, the author analyses the period right after the radical change in the policies of NATO as approaching the end of the Cold War.

Keywords: NATO; Eastern Europe; military alliance; Cold War

Subject-Affiliation in New CEEOL: History – Recent History – Post-War period

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NATO: Its Principles, Structure, and Operation in 1989

NATO is a political and military alliance that was established on April 4, 1949 with the signature of the North Atlantic Treaty (also referred to as the Washington Treaty). It was intended to function as a counterweight to the Soviet army deployed in Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. The founding members were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 1952 Greece and Turkey joined the alliance, in 1955 West Germany, and in 1982 Spain also became a member. In 1966 France left the military organization of NATO, but remained a member of the political alliance.

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty states: *The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be con-*

¹ This article is an edited version of the Introduction chapter of Gusztáv Kecskés's recent book, *A view from Brussels. Secret NATO reports about the Eastern European Transition, 1988–1991*. Cold War History Research Center – Research Centre for the Humanites, Budapest, 2019, pp. 11–36.

sidered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949) Article 5 also regulates the geographical scope of the treaty: *armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America*. Other paragraphs of the Treaty identify other basic principles, like the strengthening of democracy, the development of joint military capacities and capabilities, and consultation between the members.

The primary aim of NATO during the Cold War was to unify and strengthen the military response of the western alliance in the case of an attack on Western Europe by the Soviet Union and its allies.²

NATO consists of sovereign countries, which preserve their independence in foreign as well as domestic policy. According to the founding documents all members have equal rights and possibilities to express their views through public forums of the organization regardless of the size, population, or political influence of the country. Decisions are achieved by consensus and not by majority vote. This implies that all decisions should enjoy the full support of all member states and express the mutual decision of all sovereign member states. To achieve close political cooperation, the member states undertake to inform one another about the goals of their foreign policies and about their changing views with regard to each issue that arises. (See *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 1989, 185 which provides information on the structure and operating principles of NATO.)

Pursuant to Article 9, the governments of the member states established the NAC (North Atlantic Council), in which each government is represented. This is the highest political decision making forum of the organization, whose task is to realize the aims laid down in the treaty. This is the only organization created directly by the Treaty with full legal and political authority in decision making. It constitutes the highest authority, which coordinates the network of subordinated committees and working groups. The decisions of the Council are often based on the reports and recommendations of these committees. Each member state sends one representative to the NAC, which can convene at the level of permanent delegates, foreign, or defense ministers and at the level of prime ministers or presidents (heads of state). Decisions made are compulsory and bear full authority regardless of the level at which the decisions were made. The sessions are chaired by the Secretary General of NATO. The International Secretariat located at the NATO Headquarters supports the entire work of the NAC, under the direction of the Secretary General.³

² Haglund. For the organizational structure, strategy, and activity of NATO see details in: *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 1989; and *Encyclopedia of NATO Topics*, see further: De Velasco Vallejo 2002, 505–520. For a general history of NATO see: Zorgbibe 2002; Kaplan 2004; Risso 2014; *Manuel de l'OTAN. Chronologie*, 1999. See also the following volumes: *The Atlantic Pact Forty Years Later*, 1991; *A History of NATO. The First Fifty Years*, 2001.

³ *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 1989. 321–328. See also the website of NA: <http://archives.nato.int/north-atlantic-council-2> [Accessed: August 2, 2018]

The Political Committee of NATO also supports the activity of the NAC. The members of this forum are the permanent representatives or political experts of the member states' delegations. Besides the regular exchange of information and discussion of problems, the Political Committee prepares reports requested by the Council. Its sessions are chaired by the Deputy Secretary General responsible for political affairs.

Further forums of consultation are the *ad hoc* committees dealing with special topics and the discussions of the experts sent by the member states and regions, held twice a year (for details, see below). The material for working papers and reports is provided by the delegations of the member states, while the editing and coordinating activity is supervised by the Political Affairs Division of the International Staff.

The Political Directorate operating within this division provides the administrative basis for all political activity of NATO. Its sphere of influence includes political aspects of East–West relations, world events concerning non-member states, the observation of European political processes, and negotiations on arms reduction.⁴

The Activities and Situation of the North Atlantic Pact in 1988–1991

Celebrating in 1989 the fortieth anniversary of its establishment, NATO had to face serious challenges. A problem unresolved for a long time was the preponderance of the Soviet Bloc in conventional weapons. General John Galvin, the Commander in Chief of the European Forces of NATO, pointed out in 1989 that Soviet tank and artillery production had steadily increased since March 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. The declarations on arms reduction in December 1988 effected only modest changes in this situation. Among the leaders of NATO countries, uncertainty prevailed regarding Soviet goals. (Kaplan 2004, 104)

Another problem, which had been unresolved for decades, was the uneven distribution of the cost of defense within NATO. The cost of common defense was primarily borne by the US budget despite the fact that European economies, having overcome the crisis caused by WWII, showed better economic performance year by year. This problem caused tensions in US government circles from the 1960s on. The presumption of US politicians that the growing European Communities had huge unexploited resources for purposes of defense exacerbated the situation further at the end of the 1980s. (Kaplan 2004, 50–51, 104) On the other hand, there had for a long time been efforts to increase the independence of Europe from the US.

But sudden and radical transformation of East–West relations and the problems related to Eastern Europe exceeded the above mentioned problems in significance. This was considered the main challenge at the end of the 1980s. The bipolar world system dominated by the US and the Soviet Union ceased to exist by 1991: the Soviet Union gradually retreated, first militarily, than politically from the region, the East European communist regimes collapsed, and Germany united. Thus, the eastern safety zone of NATO transformed radically. The competing alliance system, the Warsaw Pact, eroded, then ceased to exist by July 1991. The Soviet Union even disintegrated by the end of that year. The destabilization of an

⁴ *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* 1989, 191–192, 330.

Eastern Europe that had been immobile for decades, the revival of suppressed nationalisms,⁵ the mass movements generated by social crises, and conflicts within some states of the region posed a persistent threat in the view of the leading circles of NATO.⁶ The character of the transformation and its fast pace surprised observers who were unable to clearly foresee the further development of the region of the Soviet bloc.⁷ The US ambassador to NATO shared his doubts with his colleagues with the following words: “we do know nothing sure about the future direction of reforms in the Soviet Union. Are Moscow and his allies heading toward the establishment of stable political systems? The situation is in fact fluid and unpredictable”.⁸

It is important to emphasize that archival documents now accessible to researchers, interviews with political decision makers, and diplomatic memoirs agree that the US and its western allies experienced the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe and the loosening control of the USSR over the region with a growing fear of the modification of the decades long relative equilibrium. The direction of changes, which were welcomed in accord with their liberal stance and values, were to be accepted only if they happened gradually, with the maintenance of the ruling reform communist elite in power and in parallel with the maximum acceptance of Moscow’s desires in security questions. Numerous messages urging caution and deceleration were sent to both the opposition and the government forces in the Soviet bloc. Following the traditions of European power politics, stability was valued more than the desires of the small nations for emancipation.⁹

Henning Wegener, Deputy Secretary General of NATO, stated in his public speech in the fall of 1989 that the *Warsaw Pact... could well perform useful functions and enhance stability if reformed on the basis of strict equality*.¹⁰ Half a year later, in February 1990, the spokesman of the alliance replied to the idea of Gyula Horn, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, that Hungary could become a

5 Experts convening to elaborate the 1988 April report (C-M(88)14) on Eastern Europe completely agreed that “the ethnic question / question of nationality in its globality” is the most important issue to resolve for Gorbachev. AMAE: Série Europe 1986–1990, 1935INVA, carton 5882. Note de Bernard Fassier, chef de la Section URSS à la Sous-Direction d’Europe orientale, Réunion du groupe d’experts „URSS et Pays de l’Est” de l’OTAN, à Evère les 23, 24 et 25 mars 1988, 995/EU (March 29, 1988).

6 For the latter the evolving conflict between Hungary and Romania is a good example regarding the increasing oppression of the Hungarian minority in Romania, or the tension between Hungary and Czechoslovakia regarding the power plant in Gabčíkovo and Nagymaros. For the impact of this in 1989, see Békés 2012, 337–341.

7 The notes of Michael Alexander, the permanent representative of the UK in the NATO Council, to Douglas Richard Hurd, Foreign Secretary of the UK. Revolution of 1989: how should the alliance respond? (January 4, 1990) See: Britain in the NATO, 2009, 144–145.

8 AMAE: Série Europe 1986–1990, 1935INVA, carton 5882. Rapport du représentant permanent de la France au Conseil de l’Atlantique Nord au ministre des Affaires étrangères – Affaires Stratégiques et Désarmement, Rapports des groupes d’experts au Conseil, 597/STR (May 17, 1989).

9 The book of László Borhi (Borhi 2016) provides a thorough overview on the opinions and actions of the western powers. See Chapter 10. “1989: Together We Liberated Eastern Europe”, 364–433. Read further: Békés 2002; Békés 2012, 330–362; Békés 2016; Békés–Kalmár 2019. The same conclusion: Blanton 2011. Regarding French relations see: Magyar–francia kapcsolatok, 1945–1990, 2013, 125–145; Garadnai–Schreiber 2008.

10 NATO at Forty: New Visions of East-West Relations, 20 November 1989. MNL OL, Külügyminisztérium (Hungarian State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), NATO, 1989. XIX-J-1-j, 111. box. Cited by Borhi 2016, 369.

member of the political organization of NATO, as follows: *Any future political or military reorientation of Hungary is a question that should be left to the Hungarians. However, we are unaware of it arising as a serious question in Hungary.* (Nem ez a kérdés van ma napirenden, 1990. Quoted by Pietsch 1998, 11, 57.)

Another challenge that NATO had to cope with was the deepening, strengthening, and broadening of European integration. With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in December 1991, the EU was born and demands for a common and independent European foreign and defense policy were interpreted by many as a demand for independence from the USA or from NATO. (Kaplan 2004, 113) The alliance also had to react to the Gulf Crisis. It threatened the petroleum supplies of the member states and began with an attack of Iraqi troops on Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

The Birth of a New Concept

In a study dealing with the adaptation to the new situation after the Cold War, Kori Schake emphasized that for its members NATO always had other functions besides averting the Soviet threat. It secured the possibility for Washington to intervene in European affairs, it made the Europeans more comfortable with the cooperation with increasingly powerful West Germany, and decreased the member countries' defense costs. But these factors were difficult to demonstrate to the broader public when it recognized the rapid decrease in the Soviet threat. Therefore, for the governments of the allied countries it became important to articulate new goals that could be communicated better. (Schake 2001, 31) And, in the decision making centers of the member states the opinion was gaining strength that, despite the positive direction of the East European changes, there was still need for military and security cooperation between the member states. In other words, the NATO is necessary, but with a more flexible approach (Risso 2014, 142) and a new mission: instead of serving as a deterrent against the Soviet bloc, emphasis shifted to conflict prevention and crisis management. In this process the First Gulf War played a catalyzing role.

Though the war waged against Iraq in January–February 1991 was not led by NATO but by the US at the head of an international coalition, the participation of member states in the campaign exerted strong influence on the development of the alliance. Twelve member states out of sixteen participated in the war, and Great Britain and France even sent troops. (Kaplan 2004, 111-112) The session of the NAC on June 7, 1991 in Copenhagen pointed out in this connection that *the long practice of cooperation, common procedures, collective defence arrangements and infrastructure developed by NATO provided valuable assistance to those Allies that chose to make use of them.* (Zorgbibe 2002, 185. See: Final Communiqué, 1991.) The joint victory over Saddam Hussein contributed greatly to the unity and the future mission of NATO, namely organizing crisis management. At the meeting of NATO defense ministers in May 1991, plans for handling conflicts with smaller forces were negotiated and the plan for a multinational rapid reaction force also arose. (Kaplan 2004, 112-113)

According to the New Strategic Concept accepted by the NATO summit held in Rome in November 1991, “Risks to Allied security are less likely to result from calculated aggression against the territory of the Allies, but rather from the adverse consequences of instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes, which are faced by many countries in central and eastern Europe.” (The Alliance’s New Strategic Concept, 1991.) The new concept and tasks emerged more vigorously in the meeting, as there were not only predictions of new threats coming from the area of the disintegrating Soviet Union, but the first concrete experiences: ethnic clashes on the territory of the former Soviet Union. The unsuccessful coup d’état against Gorbachev was especially disturbing. Thus crisis management arose as a new task in view of the politically unconsolidated neighboring regions. NATO extended its routine monitoring to the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The formulation of this new concept strengthened cooperation between the two pillars of the transatlantic alliance, North America and Europe. (Kaplan 2004, 114–116)

The Transformation of the Alliance and An Opening towards Eastern Europe

The emerging crisis management function of NATO became evident when the organization undertook to provide military assistance to the UN and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The session of the Foreign Ministers of the NAC held in Oslo on July 4, 1992 stated, in accord with the proposal of the Netherlands, that NATO member states were ready to support the activity of the CSCE in maintaining peace *on a case-by-case basis in accordance with... [NATO’s] own procedures” offering “alliance resources and expertise.* The Brussels session of the NAC on December 17, 1992 extended the same offer to the UN, subject to the authority of the UN Security Council.¹¹ The war beginning in Yugoslavia in July 1991 offered an excellent opportunity for the practical application of the crisis management function of NATO. (Kaplan 2004, 116. See also Spohr 2012, 53)

The foreign ministers of NATO countries already in their meeting at Turnberry (Scotland) on June 7–8, 1990 sent a message offering friendly relations to the Soviet Union and the other European countries. (*Manuel de l’OTAN. Chronologie* 1999, 37) Soon the establishment of military and political relations with Eastern Europe got underway. With regard to military affairs, the NATO council stated at its July 1990 session in London: *We are ready to intensify military contacts, including those of NATO military commanders with Moscow and other Central and Eastern European capitals.*¹² By increasing contacts, the military leaders of the alliance wanted to increase trust and the sense of community. Another goal was to promote the establishment of civilian control over the forces of the Warsaw Pact. (Schake 2001, 31)

To realize this in practice, a direct link was established between NATO institutions and the general staffs of East European countries. In order to make the po-

¹¹ Zorgbibe 2002, 191–192. Final communiqué, 1992a; Final communiqué, 1992b. For the relation between NATO and UN in historical perspective after the Cold War see Gardner 2001.

¹² Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, 1990. The Verbatim Record of the London Summit (C-VR(90)36) has been published: 1990 Summit.

litical and military elite well prepared and compatible with the Euroatlantic system, training courses were organized beginning in October 1991 for the military officers of the region. (Zorgbibe 2002, 189) Thus in the fall of 1991 special courses began in the NATO Defense College in Rome and the school of SHAPE in Oberammergau. (Risso 2014, 151. Cites the article of Wörner 1991) Based on the proposal of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German Foreign Minister, and James Baker, US Secretary of State, on December 20, 1991 the North Atlantic Coordinating Council, NACC, was established in order to strengthen cooperation with the states of the former Soviet Bloc, creating an „interlocking network” to discuss any defense policy questions.

NATO also aspired to establish tight connections with Russia, in part because of the danger that nuclear weapons could fall into unauthorized hands. (Kaplan 2004, 115–116. See also Schake 2001, 35–36) The establishment of the NACC served to realize the “euroatlantic community from Vancouver to Vladivostok,” a concept favoured by Baker. (Zorgbibe 2002, 190) Moscow yielded and accepted that American forces should remain garrisoned in Europe, while Washington accepted that the security concept of NATO be broadened to take into consideration Russian interests. (Soutou 2001, 715) The first assembly of defense ministers of the countries participating in the NACC was held on April 1, 1992, and ten days later the Chiefs of the General Staffs established its Military Committee. The NACC also participated in the solution of practical questions, like sending food aid to Russian towns. The session on December 18, 1992 even dealt with the civil war in Tadjikistan. (Zorgbibe 2002, 190) However, the effective operation of the NACC was limited, because it was only a consultative forum without authority to make decisions, the number of participants was too high and, because of Soviet and Russian participation, concerns of restoration of the old regime in Moscow and Eastern Europe could not be discussed on their merits. (Valki 2002, 389)

The first significant event in this opening toward the East was the visit of Eduard Shevardnadze, Soviet Foreign Minister, to NATO Headquarters in Brussels on December 19, 1989. By receiving him, the Alliance expressed its desire to play a crucial role in the support of the transformation process in Eastern Europe. (Risso 2014, 141) The leaders of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were also invited to the London summit of the NAC on July 5–6, 1990, to come to NATO, not just to visit, but to establish regular diplomatic liaison with NATO. This will make it possible for us to share with them our thinking and deliberations in this historic period of change. (Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, 1990.) Wörner himself traveled to Moscow in July 1990, but in the next months he also visited Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest. NATO Headquarters received several high ranking East European politicians, first of all the foreign and defense ministers, later the prime ministers and heads of state (Risso 2014, 141) including Vacláv Havel and Lech Wałęsa. In June 1990 Géza Jeszenszky, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in July and October 1991 József Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary, then Lajos Für, Minister of Defense, visited NATO Headquarters.¹³ The information service of the

¹³ For the chronology of the visits of eastern European leaders at NATO Headquarters between December 1989 and 1991 see: Manuel de l’OTAN. Chronologie, 1999, 34–48.

alliance put emphasis on the media effect of these visits.¹⁴ The Political Committee of NATO visited many former member states of the Warsaw Pact and gave advice regarding the ongoing political transformation. (Risso 2014, 141)

Among the countries belonging to the former, now disintegrating Soviet bloc, the GDR (united with West Germany in October, 1990) received special treatment. The Soviet Union agreed to reunited Germany's full membership in NATO after a long negotiation. This agreement became one of the most important pillars of the contemporary European security system. US President Bush stated at the NATO summit in Brussels in December 1989 that he considered the fulfillment of the American demand for the approval of full membership to be one of the basic preconditions of German unification. (Soutou 2001, 716. On the so called "Two-Plus-For" negotiation see also Westad 2017, 605–607.) The NATO institutions also promoted the process of unification. The closing statement of the London NATO summit in July proposed that the members of the Warsaw Pact send envoys to the alliance and pledge their mutual non-aggression; it invited Gorbachev to the NATO assembly; and it expressed the willingness of the Alliance to revise its strategy by giving it a more defensive character. These gestures induced Gorbachev to accept the German unification as the Americans demanded, and made it easier for his internal opponents to accept it too.

Regarding the eastern enlargement of NATO, David J. Rösch has noted that the idea occurs in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty: *The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.* (Rösch 2016, 60; The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949.)

Although in 1989–1991 official forums made no mention of the enlargement of NATO, recent studies show there were intensive talks about this question behind the scenes. (See Spohr 2012, cited by Risso 2014, 143.) During the debates, NATO officials came to the conclusion that it was in the interest of NATO that there be peace, security, and „good government” to the east.¹⁵ In an interview by László Borhi with Mark Palmer, the former US ambassador to Budapest mentioned that William Odom, the earlier Director of the National Security Agency, initiated a campaign as early as 1990 to promote NATO membership for the countries of Eastern Europe. (Borhi 2015, 470) However, US National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft proposed prior to the final dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 that NATO should negotiate separately with the member states of the East European alliance

¹⁴ Risso 2014, 141. The same happened during the visit of Géza Jeszenszky on June 29, 1990, after which the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the General Secretary of NATO held a joint press conference, then gave exclusive interviews for the Belgian and Hungarian journalists. MNL OL: Külügyminisztérium, 001822/3/1990, VI-L//NATO. [National Archives of Hungary: Foreign Ministry]. Jelentés a Minisztertanácsnak Dr. Jeszenszky Géza külügyminiszter és Manfred Wörner NATO-főtitkár és Peter Corterier, az Észak-atlanti Közgyűlés főtitkára közötti megbeszélésekről [Report to the Council of Ministers on the talks between Dr. Géza Jeszenszky, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Manfred Wörner, NATO Secretary General, and Peter Corterier, Secretary of the Northern Atlantic General Assembly] (July 5, 1990). Source: Iratok az Antall-kormány külpolitikájához és diplomáciájához, 2015, 352.

¹⁵ Risso 2014, 151. See: The Situation in the Soviet Union, 1991. On the eastern enlargement of NATO see: Asmus 2002 and Grayson 1999. For Hungarian relations see Pietsch 1998; Valki 2002; Jeszenszky 2016.

and (according to Philip David Zelikow, a former member of the National Security Council) this preceded the opening of NATO to the East and Central European states. (Sarotte 2009, 174) According to Ronald D. Asmus, US Deputy Secretary of State responsible for European affairs, the idea of the eastern enlargement of the alliance came from the former opposition politicians of the Soviet bloc who were to become leading politicians and diplomats. For them this step was a *logical extension of their struggle against communism and the culmination of their fight for freedom, democracy, and national independence*. (Asmus 2002, xxvi.) However, even the ruling politicians of the region raised the demand that the western alliance should provide security and defend the region from the weakening, but still militarily important Soviet Union.

The analysis of the situation of the Soviet Union and its allies in Central and Eastern Europe had a decades long tradition in NATO by 1988. (An excellent good work on NATO expertise regarding the Soviet Bloc: Hatzivassiliou 2014; see also Hatzivassiliou 2018.) The task of the Political Working Group, operating in London between March 1951 and March 1952 (besides the reorganization of NATO) was to provide information to the Council of Deputies. The latter held its sessions between those of the NAC, discussing such topics as the situation in the GDR and the Soviet Union and the relative military, political and economic potential and capacity of the Soviet Union compared to that of NATO. After this working group ceased to exist, the NAC had to bear responsibility for proper orientation on political topics.¹⁶

The Working Group on Trends of Soviet Policy, established by decision of the North Atlantic Council of October 8, 1952¹⁷ as an *ad hoc* group, prepared its reports for the sessions of the foreign ministers of the NATO Council.¹⁸ Its activity was taken over in January 1957 by the Political Committee, which was formed originally as the Committee of Political Advisors following a proposal by the Committee of Three established for the reform of the alliance. There were five experts' working groups belonging to the Committee of Political Advisors, among them the ones examining trends in Soviet politics and in the East European satellite states. In their reports they also dealt with East–West relations, the development of the states in the Soviet bloc, and their relation to the Soviet Union.¹⁹ In accordance with the general goals of NATO, the working group dealing with Eastern Europe was considered the most important one.²⁰

In the elaboration of these analyses about the Soviet Union and the other states of the Soviet bloc a great role was played by the preliminary studies of the national diplomatic organs and the consultative discussions of the experts delegated by the individual states. In the spirit of the decision making principles of NATO, the purpose of these meetings was to develop a consensus. Most of the delegated

16 The website of NA: <http://archives.nato.int/political-working-group> [Accessed: August 4, 2018]

17 NA: C-R(52)24, item 5.

18 The website of NA: <http://archives.nato.int/working-group-on-trends-of-soviet-policy> [Accessed: August 4, 2018]

19 The website of NA: <http://archives.nato.int/political-committee> [Accessed: August 4, 2018] Documents published in English from the series up to now: North Atlantic Council Document C-M(56)110, 2002.

20 See also: NA: United Kingdom Delegation to the North Atlantic Council NATO/OTAN, Meetings of the NATO Experts, POL 4/13/1 (annex II to POLADS(70)46)(September 18, 1970).

were employees of the sections of their respective foreign ministries that dealt with Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union.²¹

For the period of the eight reports published in this volume, four documents may be found in the French Foreign Ministry Archives (AMAE) where the French delegates of the working groups report on the sessions. These documents shed light on the character of the debates and on the evaluation methods used in the experts' reports. While the reports' conclusions reflected a consensus, sharp disagreements can be detected in the discussions. For instance, in the course of the meeting in March 1988 the West German expert forcefully requested that a statement from the British draft be removed from the final text according to which the Brezhnev doctrine was still valid in relations between the Soviet Union and the allied states, and that therefore Moscow might still intervene if some of the East European communist regimes were threatened by sudden collapse. But the French delegation, supported by the Americans and British, spoke out against deleting those sentences.²² But there was general agreement with the statement during the April talks in 1990 that *in the final analysis, Hungary is a nationalist country, where the removal of the prohibitions imposed by communism coercion makes it possible for 'chauvinism' to reappear*.²³

Diplomatic representatives in the Soviet bloc from the very beginning of the Cold War often had to face with obstacles in obtaining valuable and reliable information on the relations between political leaders in the countries where they were stationed.²⁴ This situation prevailed until the end of the 1980s, as demonstrated by a French document from the meeting of experts in March 1988. In order to overcome these obstacles, and also to measure the internal support for Gorbachev among Soviet party leaders, the French delegates proposed a peculiar method. They defined „concentric zones” with the first circle for those questions on which all significant leaders agreed (for instance, the necessity of deep structural reforms in the economy and society), and continuing with the next zone, where opinions were less likely to coincide (as in the differing content of „democratization”), finally ending with the most debated questions in the outermost zone. This method reflected deviations in opinion regarding the limits of reforms or their speed. According to the French report, this method of evaluation aroused great interest, and it strengthened the general view that Gorbachev's influence had significantly

21 AMAE: Série Europe 1971–1976, 1928INVA, carton 2901. Secretary of Political Committee, signed M. J. Jordan to Expert Working Group on the USSR and Eastern Europe (through members of the Political Committee), Meeting of 2nd – 5th May, 1972, MJ/72/35 (April 27, 1972).

22 AMAE: Série Europe 1986–1990, 1935INVA, carton 5882, Note de Jacques Faure, chef de la Section Pays de l'Est à la Sous-Direction d'Europe orientale, Réunion du groupe d'experts „Pays de l'Est” à l'OTAN, les 24 et 25 mars 1988, 993/EU (March 30, 1988).

23 AMAE: Série Europe 1986–1990, 1935INVA, carton 5882, Note de Christine Toudic, Sous-Direction d'Europe Orientale et Centrale, Compte-rendu de la réunion du groupe d'experts „pays de l'Est” de l'OTAN (9–11 avril 1990), 1118/EU (April 19, 1990).

24 See NA: Note du secrétaire général de la Commission permanente du Traité de Bruxelles, Situation des missions occidentales dans les pays au delà du rideau de fer, A/1111 (définitif) (March 27, 1951). Also: AMAE: Europe, 1944-1970, Généralités, 248QO, dossier 80. Note de la Sous-Direction d'Europe orientale, Attaques des pays de démocraties populaires contre la France (February 13, 1954).

increased since his accession to power in 1985.²⁵

The documents published in this volume reveal how the situation in the Soviet bloc was evaluated by the foreign ministries of the NATO powers in 1988–1991 on the basis of their internal documentation, the consultations in NATO and among each of the foreign ministries, and other sources. But it should be emphasized that the NATO states that played a key role in the elaboration of these reports, that is, the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany, did not share all available information with their allies. They prepared summaries for the ministerial sessions of the North Atlantic Council, which occurred twice a year. These documents, which review the previous six months of the Soviet bloc, constitute an excellent source for the views about Eastern Europe held in the important decision making centers of NATO in a given period.

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NA = NATO Archives (Brussels)

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²⁵ AMAE: Série Europe 1986–1990, 1935INVA, carton 5882. Note de Bernard Fassier, chef de la Section URSS à la Sous-Direction d'Europe orientale, Réunion du groupe d'experts „URSS et Pays de l'Est” de l'OTAN, à Evère les 23, 24 et 25 mars 1988, 995/EU (March 29, 1988).

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