East Central Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1985-1991

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Abstract

The thesis examines the final years of the Cold War from the perspective of East Central Europe, focusing on the international background of the political transition. It demonstrates the gradual process through which the superpowers reached the psychological threshold beyond which the maintenance of the Eastern European status quo became redundant and impossible. Out of security considerations the West did not want to hasten the ferment in the communist bloc, but the improving relations with the Soviet Union and the peaceful nature of the processes changed the attitude of the American and Western European leaders. The change of perception in Moscow was caused by economic necessities and the “new thinking” introduced by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. The question of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the example of the German reunification provides an insight into the hopes and doubts of the Gorbachev led reformist decision-making group, whose positive intentions substantially contributed to disintegration of the communist system. As the termination of the arms race became a pressing need and the survival of the Soviet Union became the priority, the issue of Eastern Europe fell off the radar, thus these countries could enter into a vacuum of inattention. The states – especially Hungary – already pursuing a more independent foreign earned the right for themselves to choose the path toward European integration over the creation of a common European home.
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Introduction

The Soviet Union played a dominant role in the East-Central-European region, and this prevalence was further fortified with the establishment of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. During the course of the Cold War there were a number of attempts carried out by the members of the socialist bloc with the aim of disengagement from the sphere of interest of Moscow. Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1981 attempted to secede, but beside the Albanian decision to leave the Warsaw Pact in 1968, the anti-Soviet, anti-communist uprisings were unsuccessful. In neither of these above mentioned events took the Western powers steps which would have endangered the status quo. The stability in Eastern Europe was considered to be the key to the European stability and consequently to the stability of the whole Cold War system. The stability resulting from the bipolar system however, prevented the escalation of a nuclear war, thus the superpowers were in need of maintaining the vision of the enemy. Abruptly, the Soviet Union and the entire communist bloc collapsed overnight¹.

General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 until 1991, and the last head of state of the USSR, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev’s personality and his new foreign policy thinking combined with the excessive need for domestic reformation, the overly exhausted economy – which could only keep up with the United States of America in the field of arms race – and the ferment within the bloc induced the changes.

The Reagan Administration did not commit itself with a benevolent policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union; on the contrary, Gorbachev had to face with a harsh rhetoric in the first half of his leadership. The Western European countries were even more reluctant to face the inevitable. The example of the German unification illustrates well the process of change of perception. In the end the United States had no other choice than supporting the General Secretary’s endeavors since they were interested in peaceful changes and the preservation of their leading position. In Malta, although not saying it loudly, the two leaders declared the end of the Cold War.

¹ Albeit the fact that in 1985, only six years before its demise, the maturing Warsaw Pact was renewed for an additional thirty years shows the unforeseen nature of this breakdown.
The behavior of a group of Eastern European socialist countries also contributed to the realization that the Soviet Union lost the competition, but the joint action of these states would not have been so successful without the Soviet will, the gradual resignation driven by the face saving attitude. The coup attempt on 13, 1991 August frightened the West; it turned out that the processes did not have to be hastened. Partnership and common understanding was needed for a peaceful solution which allowed the smallest loss of prestige for the Soviet Union.

In my thesis I am trying to shed light on the complex issue of the birth of an entirely new Soviet frame of mind regarding the relationship with its Eastern European allies. Behind the decision to let them go there lay numerous, simultaneously evolving tendencies, the roots of which were inherent consequences of the system itself. With this paper I examine the change of the relationship between the Soviet Union and East Central Europe in the light of the domestic constraints of the Soviet Union, the politics pursued by the West and the more and more conscious Eastern European allies’ endeavors. When speaking about the paradigm change leading up to the breakup of the communist bloc, one has to notice that albeit it was the will from the side of the United States and an urgent need from the Soviet side to put an end to the Cold War, their considerations did not go beyond the sustainability of their own economies and the vision of a future free from nuclear threat. Mikhail Gorbachev’s foreign policy toward the allies was evolving in the spirit of “laissez-faire”, but his idea of the common European home was not invented to promote a political transition and the introduction of the market economy. It was the economy in ruins – unable to continue financing the military expenditure, and the Warsaw Pact member states also approaching the abyss – and the commitment to keep the Soviet Union itself together that made General Secretary decide to let the things flow. The Western parties would have easily agreed on the conservation of the Eastern bloc if the military tension would have been ruled out from the characteristics of the system. The notion of liberation could have remained a myth if it weren’t for Eastern Europe. The great powers took up the role of the observer, thereby in an unintended way giving the opportunity to these states to decide on their fate.

In my work, I go through the events leading up to the breakdown of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, and discuss the role of the actors and their contributions they made to this fundamental change. The recently published official and unofficial
documents coming from the foreign policy decision-making mechanism of the Soviet Union gives an unprecedented insight into the problem, helping to evaluate Gorbachev’s foreign policy behavior and its part in these eventful years.
1. Changes in great power relations

1.1. The process of détente
The 1970s brought substantial changes in the relations between the two opposing military blocs, more importantly, between the two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Behind the easing of tension, however, we can find the underlying interests of these powers. General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership realized the unsustainable nature of the economic burden resulting from the nuclear arms race. Under the Lyndon Johnson administration the United States pursued the expansion of the welfare state while the Vietnam War placed an ever-increasing financial burden onto the shoulders of the country; these parallel processes pushed the United States into a cumbersome financial situation. The other part of the necessity of improving relations with the US was the worsening relation with the People’s Republic of China and the subsequent Sino-Soviet split. Fearing from the amelioration of American-Chinese relations, the Soviet Union was eager to get closer to the US. In addition, both Brezhnev and President Richard Nixon hoped improved relations would boost their domestic popularity and secure their power. Moreover, since the superpowers accumulated the sufficient amount of nuclear weapons for the mutually assured destruction, the need for a sensible middle ground prevailed. Some positive examples – such as Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik – paved the way for the Soviet side to seek more extensive economic relations with Western Europe, as a first step toward rapprochement.

1.2. Summit meetings
The highlights of the détente period were the summit meetings of the two superpowers and the treaties as the results of such meetings. The Nixon Administration coming into power in 1969 brought more will to enter into negotiations with the other party; subsequently the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact called for holding an all-European summit on “security and cooperation in Europe” in March, 1969 in Budapest. The talks on actual limits in the nuclear capabilities led to the signing of the SALT I treaty in 1972, which document limited each power’s nuclear arsenals. The talks on the SALT II agreement began the same year, the Biological Weapons
Convention and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty were also concluded. Moreover, as a result of the Hungarian mediation\(^2\) for the conclusion of the Budapest declaration, the Warsaw Pact states initiated the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which gathering subsequently led to the ratification of the Helsinki Final Act.

While among the leading powers rapprochement started taking shape, tensions were unfolding in the Third World. The United States and the Soviet Union backed their surrogates in the Middle East and in South Asia and Latin America. There was no genuine trust between the superpowers, thus the threat of nuclear war could not be eliminated entirely. Although Jimmy Carter and Brezhnev managed to sign the SALT II agreement in 1979, military expenditures remained on a high level in both states. Responding to the threat coming from the installment of SS-20 missiles, the NATO accepted the double-track decision in order to ban the nuclear armed mid-range missiles in the territory of Europe.

1.3. Afghanistan

On 27 December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to preserve the Marxist regime that had taken power in the country the year before. The invasion shattered the little hope the West had on the lasting improvement in East-West relations. The reaction of the West to the actions of the communist alliance was severe, hence the US decided not to ratify the SALT II; later the negotiations were completely abandoned. The other consequence of the invasion was the boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics, which were to be held in Moscow. Jimmy Carter boosted the defense budget and began to aid the President of Pakistan, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who in turn subsidized the anti-Soviet Mujahideen fighters in the region. The 1980 American presidential elections saw Ronald Reagan elected on a platform opposed to the concessions of détente.

Although the sole bloc country that condemned the Soviet invasion was Romania, other Warsaw Pact member states had realized after this moment that the interests within the bloc are widely differing. The parties arrived at a critical situation in which, once again, Eastern European-Western relations were on top whilst Soviet-Western relations

\(^{2}\) which country also advocated the cause of a security conference among Western partners
reached a new low. The Eastern European states could not let that the fragile, but improving economic relations with the West get halted and cut off because of the collapse of the détente process, since even at that time it was visible that these states could not count on the Soviet Union leading them out of the ever aggravating economic difficulties. The Hungarian mediation could eventually change the Soviet attitude. The war in Afghanistan was not an issue to deal with for the Warsaw Pact members, not even supply was given by Hungary. It was evident that the Warsaw Treaty Organization’s military side started to erode; in this field it became superfluous, it gradually transformed into a political organization with the task of coordination.\(^3\)

The Soviet Union failed to fulfill the obligation of informing the allied countries about the deployment of troops, thus the bloc countries – just as in the case of the Cuban missile crisis – were put into an already defined situation.\(^4\) Apart from the general bloc-thinking\(^5\), the Hungarian government regarded the military conflict as the internal affairs of the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. The first reactions on the crisis were not elaborate, as the leaders thought that even in this political situation, the good and evolving economic relations with the West, notably with Western Europe, could be maintained. Even though, already at the January 1980 Politburo meeting there were voices considering these events harmful to East-West relations. The official Hungarian position expressed solidarity with the new Afghan government, but said the fewest words possible on the invasion itself. Furthermore, it promoted the preservation of the détente process.\(^6\)

During an unofficial Hungarian diplomatic mission to New York, the representatives of Hungary were ensured by the Americans that the US used a differentiated approach in its bilateral relations, and that they considered the Central European states as of high importance. Early next year, a shocking request came from Moscow, which asked for the freezing of the high level relations with the West.\(^7\) The request for cancelling the Hungarian foreign minister’s visit to Bonn brought a dramatic debate in the Hungarian Politburo on 29 January 1980; where the members were close to adopt a decision openly contravening the Soviet position. In their concern, even the hardliner

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\(^3\) Csaba Békés [2004]: Európából Európába p. 257-274
\(^4\) ibid. p. 259
\(^5\) which was guided by the principle of “not to be involved directly as an aggressor”
\(^6\) Békés [2004] p. 263
\(^7\) ibid. p. 265
communists would not have cared about the Soviet request, however, Hungarian party leader János Kádár in the end convinced his colleagues to postpone the visits to Washington and Bonn, claiming that betraying the Kremlin would have resulted in tremendous losses for Hungary. Contrasting to this, in the view of Realpolitik, the loans from the FRG and the USA were extremely important for Hungary, therefore the leaders could not allow themselves to let these bilateral relations deteriorate.\textsuperscript{8,9}

The Hungarian tactic eventually resulted in the improvement of Western-Hungarian relations, the state’s international positions improved significantly. The Hungarian Politburo came up with the idea of convincing the Soviets to organize a meeting on the impact of the invasion on East-West relations. Kádár sent a letter to Brezhnev demanding for consultation on the USSR’s policies which had international effect. The argument on the importance of sustainment of détente convinced the Soviets to incorporate the Hungarian idea into their thinking, and hold the meeting. Although, the Soviets demanded that the states must use all the possibilities lying in their relations with Western states in order to balance the US’s foreign policy.\textsuperscript{10}

All in all, this was a victory for the Hungarian foreign policy since the improvement of the important economic relations with the West remained unharmed. This breakthrough was even more important in the view of the Eastern bloc and East-West relations. Kádár’s intervention helped the more liberal members of the Kremlin - interested in cooperation - overcome Andrei Gromiko and the confrontational line of the Foreign Ministry. Hungary was successful in avoiding the overall worsening of East-West relations while the US-Soviet Union relations reached a new low. Partially, this is the reason why a “Second Cold war” did not erupt in Europe.\textsuperscript{11} The invasion of Afghanistan in a paradox way, fortified the common European consciousness emerging under the Helsinki process.\textsuperscript{12}

For Hungary, the only way forward was toward the European integration. The period between Afghanistan and Gorbachev’s election brought a dynamic improvement in the field of foreign relations for Hungary, in 1981 the country started talks with the EEC,

\textsuperscript{8} Békés [2004] p. 267
\textsuperscript{9} We can consider this decision making moment as a point of no return for Kádár, because from that time on his control started deteriorating.
\textsuperscript{10} Békés [2004] p. 270
\textsuperscript{12} instead of the established bloc perception
and the high relations with Western states were intensified through meetings with the leaders of these states. In 1982 Hungary joined the IMF and the World Bank. Interestingly, the Polish situation of 1981 resulting in the loss of sympathy from the West contributed to the favorable conditions for Hungary. Romania became unpopular because of its repressive policy. As the most presentable country of the bloc, Hungary became a favorite in the eyes of the West; it also had an important role in maintaining the dialogue between the blocs.\(^\text{13}\) This only changed with the promotion of Gorbachev to General Secretary; from that time on the Soviet leadership became the number one supporter of the dialogue. The Hungarian foreign policy retained its initiating, active attitude; however, it was now just the secondary power in this field.

The following years brought the next conflict in line, caused by a command post exercise\(^\text{14}\) of NATO in 1983, since in the period of deteriorating relations the signs were evaluated in the Politburo as a ruse of war, obscuring preparations for a genuine nuclear first strike. The USSR readied its nuclear arsenal, putting air units in Poland and in the GDR on alert. The end of the American exercise ended the threat of nuclear war.

### 1.4. The Polish crisis

While being occupied with the situation in Afghanistan, the political changes had already been started in the courtyard of the Soviet Union. In August 1980, after years of political repression, the Polish government had to start negotiating with the emerging Solidarity movement. The ongoing situation in Warsaw resulted in an ever growing restlessness in Moscow. The Soviet leaders considered the agreement between the two parties as a necessary but temporarily agreement. The Polish communist party was losing ground; the success of Solidarity gave courage to other independent political organizations to step up. In the eye of the Soviets the situation worryingly resembled to the 1968 Czechoslovakian. The signs\(^\text{15}\) showed the increasing danger of intervention.

While the press of the bloc countries interpreted the events as a counterrevolution and spoke about the obligation to help the Polish nation, János Kádár considered it as the duty of the Polish communists to pacify the situation with “socialist means”. For him,

\(^{13}\) Békés [2004] p. 273

\(^{14}\) called Able Archer 83, which exercise simulated conflict escalation leading to the use of nuclear weapons

\(^{15}\) suspension of the tourist traffic by the GDR and Czechoslovakia, Soviet military exercises on Polish territory
the Soviet intervention was the last resort, and from his own experiences of 1956 he knew that the consolidation had to be done by the country itself. Thus, he did not criticize the moves of the Polish leadership. The request of Marshal Viktor Kulikov meant that the border was opened to the allied forces and the invasion could actually start on 8 December 1980. On 5 December, the Secretary Generals of the Warsaw Pact held a meeting in Moscow. Although the plans of the invasion were already ready to be implemented, Brezhnev had feared from the potential American reaction to the Soviet intervention in Poland; with the burden of growing economic difficulties, the Soviet Secretary General could not let the further deterioration of the Soviet-American relation and the escalation of the nuclear arms race.

After the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Pact in December, the Soviet Politburo unanimously decided to reject Jaruzelski’s demand for military backing. The possibility of invasion after the Soviet support of détente in the 1970s would have been a severe blow to the Soviet international standing.

1.5. “Independent” foreign policies

Although the communist dictatorship imposed upon the bloc countries constrained the Eastern European leaderships, there were viable tactics for those who wanted to pursue self-interests within the bloc. Unlike Romania – who followed a deviant foreign political conduct – from the sixties Hungary was able to successfully maneuver in the given space to realize the domestic and economic objectives, at the same time maintaining political stability. While depending on the Soviet Union, the need for technology and loans made the bond with Western states stronger. Moreover, the all-East-Central-European context as a third determining factor played a more and more important role. This does not imply Hungary was not a reliable partner to the Soviets until 1989; on the contrary, the HSWP followed the policy of constructive loyalty. From this principle a dichotomy can be derived: Hungary played a mediating role within the bloc and promoted Soviet interests, while the loosened constraints allowed the leadership to readjust itself. From that time on “what was not forbidden, was allowed”.

17 The Soviets understood that the Polish situation was not identical to the Czechoslovakian one, as the Polish leadership retained its control over the television and the radio, the censorship was still functioning.
18 Tischler [1999]
The reward for being loyal to the Big Brother was the possibility to pursue more favorable economic conditions within the framework of bilateral relations.  

2. The Changes in Eastern Europe and the West

2.1. The American position

The Reagan Administration was facing with great challenges in the early- and mid-eighties. In addition, the United States and Western Europe had to face a new General Secretary on the scene. For them, the unfolding changes did not only imply that the fate of Central- and Eastern Europe was at stake, they were also worried about their own security. Therefore, the leaders of the Western European countries did not simply want to stay neutral, but rather they intended to exercise a blocking and moderating effect on the process of Eastern European transition. Initially, they would have liked to see the swift deterioration of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Reagan advanced with the arms race – launching the Strategic Defense Initiative program - in order to see the collapse of the “Evil Empire”. However, another, no less tempting alternative began to unfold for the Americans, namely the possibility of agreement and long-lasting cooperation. Even though the opposing parties gathered in Reykjavik, in 1986, it was only after George Bush’s coming into power at the beginning of 1989 – and the Malta Conference - when a significant step forward was made. Likewise, no significant change can be discerned in the United States’ Eastern European policy before 1989. Up until that point all the Western powers sought stability, fearing from the possible consequences of the fundamental transition of the communist system. After the realization was made that the quick and inevitable changes in the bloc countries would not result in great risks for them and that there will be no retribution by the Soviets, the Western powers let the things flow in their own way, and showed a neutral attitude. Although on moral grounds they did support developments pointing toward a democratic transition in these countries and the opposition movement fighting for this

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course, maintaining stability at any cost was of primary importance. The American and Soviet views concerning the desired transition of the region gradually came closer.\textsuperscript{20}

Gorbachev was able to reach a breakthrough in the most important field of Soviet foreign policy, namely in Soviet-American relations. The Reagan Administration moved from the policy of deterioration to stabilization, and the intriguing feature\textsuperscript{21} of the American policy toward Gorbachev was the fact that the closer the Soviet Union was to the collapse, the more the Americans tried to stabilize the situation. Meanwhile, normalization of the relations with the leading powers of Western Europe became extremely important.\textsuperscript{22} The two processes of rapprochement were closely interconnected, since Western Europeans were not prepared to end the cold war with the Soviet Union without American consent.

Despite the genuinely positive changes the memorandum from American intelligence analyst Robert Gates in 1987 provided an utterly wrong reading of Gorbachev\textsuperscript{23}. Gates expected further increase in Soviet military power and political influence; he did not take into account the Soviet recognition on the failure of Stalinist economic system. The memo suggested that since the USSR was still committed to the protection of its Third World clients, Gorbachev would have only agreed on arms reductions in case the advantages of the Soviet Union remain unharmed.\textsuperscript{24}

Five years after Ronald Reagan identified the Soviet Union with the image of the “evil empire”, by 1988 the American President reorganized his frame of mind and realized “that was another time, another era.” Despite the highly bureaucratic nature of the intelligence community, the Central Intelligence Agency’s National Intelligence Estimate entitled “Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe under Gorbachev” prepared in May 1988 claimed the General Secretary’s policies “increased the potential for instability in Eastern Europe”, but they “also expanded the scope for diversity and experimentation”, creating new possibilities for evolutionary reform. The estimate arrived to the conclusion that almost any government – that declared itself communist – in Eastern Europe would have been acceptable to Moscow. Gorbachev was facing great

\textsuperscript{20} Csaba Békés [2002a]: Back to Europe: The international background of the political transition in Hungary, 1988 – 1990 p. 18-23
\textsuperscript{21} and the paradox of history
\textsuperscript{22} Csaba Békés [2002a] p. 9
\textsuperscript{23} It is “hard to detect fundamental changes”.
\textsuperscript{24} Memorandum from Robert Gates, "Gorbachev’s Gameplan: The Long View", November 24, 1987
constraints against intervening militarily, but in extreme situations the CIA’s estimate could have imagined a Soviet invasion of a bloc country. Even though the analysis offered some unapt views – such as the notion that the General Secretary was striving for the adoption of perestroika in other communist countries – it envisioned some extreme scenarios – such as the backlash against Gorbachev’s reform policies; popular upheavals; and sweeping reforms – which would eventually materialize.\textsuperscript{25}

In another niche of the American political spectrum Jack Matlock, ambassador to Moscow, who could supervise Gorbachev’s steps from a much smaller distance, realized the genuine nature of the ongoing reforms in May 1988, when he read the theses of the upcoming XIX Party Conference in the Pravda. The excessive Politburo discussions preceding the Party Conference was the zenith of the revolution process from above. Even the more conservative members, such as Andrei Gromiko, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, agreed on the unilateral reduction of arms.\textsuperscript{26} According to Matlock Reagan began to fully trust in Gorbachev from the time of his visit to Moscow in 1988.\textsuperscript{27}

Prior to Gorbachev’s groundbreaking speech in front of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988, the CIA’s intelligence assessment evaluated the radical personnel changes made at the 1988 September Party Plenum. In spite of all the positive signs, the voice of the report – just as the mentality of H.W. Bush – was still cautious, claiming that the “greater Soviet foreign policy activism” was a threat to the stability of the West.\textsuperscript{28} “Gorbachev can only hope to lay the groundwork for a process of change that could take decades. If he fails to improve the quality of life of Soviet citizens, the political gains of September 1988 could be short lived”, said the analysis.\textsuperscript{29} However cautious the H.W. Bush was, his incoming administration brought former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as a voluntary intermediary. Notwithstanding, Secretary of State James Baker disavowed his idea of proposing a cooperative superpower effort to maintain stability in Europe\textsuperscript{30}, Kissinger’s initiative on a condominium\textsuperscript{31} between the

\textsuperscript{25} National Intelligence Estimate 11/12-9-88, “Soviet Policy toward Eastern Europe under Gorbachev”, May 1988
\textsuperscript{26} Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, June 20, 1988
\textsuperscript{28} Even though this would have been in the interest of the United States.
\textsuperscript{29} CIA Intelligence Assessment, "Gorbachev’s September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation", December 1988
\textsuperscript{30} Record of Conversation between Aleksandr Yakovlev and Henry Kissinger, January 16, 1989
Soviet Union and the United States would have provided an alternative approach for the American foreign policy. Subsequently, President Bush did not commit himself with this idea. At the beginning of his tenure, Bush decided to freeze high level relations with the USSR; this pause caused frustration in Moscow. Later, top foreign policy adviser Anatoly Chernyaev wrote down his thoughts in his diary about this halting of rapprochement, claiming the change of US administrations cost a year in moving toward the end of the Cold War. Bush himself described his feeling toward Eastern Europe as the following: "I realized that to put off a meeting with Gorbachev was becoming dangerous. Too much was happening in the East – I had seen it myself – and if the superpowers did not begin to manage events [], those very events could destabilize Eastern Europe and Soviet-American relations… I saw that the Eastern Europeans themselves would try to push matters as far as they could." During the “pause” of the Bush administration Ambassador Matlock tried to push the US toward a greater engagement. The tone of his cables was similar to that of the famous Long Telegram of George F. Kennan written in 1946. In February 1989 he highlighted that the Soviet Union “declared the bankruptcy of its system”, and even though he said there was “no turning back”, he expected Gorbachev to remain the leader for a decade. In sum, his cables were lagging behind the envisioned pictures drawn up by the Soviet analyses of the Bogomolov Institute and the International Department Matlock’s second cable was the pure manifestation of the hard-line position. He declared that “the new thinking started as a tactical shift…The intent most likely was to provide a temporary breathing space during which the Soviet Union could consolidate its strength and resume its expansionist policies with enhanced prospects for success”. He suggested that in this period of “insecurity and paranoia” the Soviet Union could be really threatening to their neighbors. He shared the view of the Bogomolov Institute’s

31 Report from Mikhail Gorbachev to the CC CPSU Politburo regarding His Meeting with the Trilateral Commission, January 21, 1989
32 Notes of Telephone Conversation between Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush, January 23, 1989
33 Letter from George H.W. Bush to Mikhail Gorbachev, January 17, 1989
35 Cable from Jack Matlock to State Department, “the Soviet Union over the Next Four Years”, February 3, 1989
36 Memorandum from the Bogomolov Institute, "Changes in Eastern Europe and their impact on the USSR" , February 1989
37 Memorandum from CC CPSU International Department, "On a Strategy for Relations with the European Socialist Countries", February 1989
report on the likelihood of the end of reforms in case of an intervention, however, he
warned the US not to “dismiss the possibility” of an armed intervention in Eastern
Europe. He did not see Gorbachev wanting to end the Cold War, and depicted the
official Soviet foreign policy as the one endorsed by the hard-liners of Moscow. “If they
are lucky, they will induce the West to disarm as fast or faster than they do…If they are
doubly lucky, they will cajole the West into picking up the tab…But even if the West is
sufficiently prudent to deny them these advantages, their tactics create problems for our
alliances and drive wedges.”, he wrote. What is more, Matlock suggested that the
capacity of using force for political ends would not disappear, Soviet influence could
even grow in some areas. Furthermore, he predicted that the tendency to shift from
intimidation to persuasion in dealing with the outside world would continue.”38 The
third cable from Matlock recommended that “the leverage of the US” had to be used
“not to ‘help’ Gorbachev or the Soviet Union, but to promote US interests.” One of the
vital interests was the “transformation of the Soviet Union into a society with the
effective organic constraints on the use of military force outside its borders.” The
ambassador was still hostile to Gorbachev – who already decided on the non-use of
force – since he wrote: “the smiling face will have a more divisive effect than the
belligerent growl.” He did not deal with the revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe.
Concerning arms reduction talks he suggested that although the Soviets gave arms
control pride of place, there was no reason for America to copy them in that respect,
since it was important to avoid too much concentration on arms control to the detriment
of other elements having a more direct impact on the evolution of the Soviet society.
“We should not underestimate the force of our example on Soviet minds and it will
serve our interest to increase opportunities for the Soviet political elite to see life in the
US.” Concerning alliance management, the cable suggested the US take the lead in
pressing the Soviet Union to live up to its avowed aspirations.39

Only four months passed after the CIA concluded that the change in the Soviet bloc
would be a decade long process; the latter conclusion stated that “even Gorbachev
realizes…that is far from certain that he will be able to control the process he has set in
motion.” The analysts found that the Soviet Union had never been in such an instable

38 Cable from Jack Matlock to State Department, “The Soviet Union over the Next Four Years”, February
13, 1989
39 Cable from Jack Matlock to State Department, „U.S.-Soviet Relations: Policy Opportunities”, February
22, 1989
situation in the past. Their prediction on the hard-line reaction in form of attempted coup and the reformer takeover by ousting Gorbachev would eventually take place. They advised the Bush Administration not to try to “exploit the USSR’s internal weakness during this vulnerable period” because that “would undercut Gorbachev’s arguments that Soviet security can be maintained by diplomatic, rather than military means and could threaten his reform process.”

The National Intelligence Estimate from April 1989 was the clear expression of the split in the American leadership between the hardliner skeptics – including President Bush, Robert Gates and James Baker – versus those who saw the fundamental changes taking place in the Soviet Union, a less influential group including Reagan and the senior analysts of CIA, such as Douglas MacEachlin. The key judgments of the estimate were strikingly narrow-minded, warning that the first effects of changes in the nature of the challenge would be the threatening “the security consensus developed in the West to combat Soviet expansionism” and “undercutting support abroad for defense programs”. The analysis outlined the limits of how far the Soviets would have wanted to go toward a less confrontational East-West relationship. It expected that the Soviet Union would protect its geopolitical interests and the selective support for communist regimes, and would continue to strive for reaching its objectives; therefore it would increase the intelligence activity. The estimate dealt with developments that could have disrupted the ongoing trends. These developments were namely the crackdown on unrest at home or in Eastern Europe, which could result in reverting to a more conservative direction. What is more, nationality unrest could also damage East-West relations. Gorbachev’s removal also would have had a significant impact. Nevertheless, there were differing views on the changes taking place in the Soviet bloc. The more influential corps perceived them as tactical moves, “driven by the need for breathing space from the competition”. They believed “the ideological imperatives of Marxism-Leninism and its hostility toward capitalist countries were enduring.” Other analysts believed Gorbachev’s policies reflected “a fundamental rethinking of national

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40 CIA Intelligence Assessment, "Rising Political Instability under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution", April 1989
42 The great example for the differing views is the inclusion of the section entitled “Disagreements”.
43 more hostile rhetoric and policies toward the West in attempt to reunify the country
interests and ideology as well as more tactical considerations”. The withdrawal from Afghanistan and the shift toward tolerance of power sharing in Eastern Europe were historic shifts in the national interest. Gorbachev’s changes were likely to have sufficient momentum to produce lasting shifts in Soviet behavior.\(^{45}\)

Still in June 1989 the Americans did not sense the change of pace in Eastern Europe, and were occupied with the CFE talks. The Bush Administration wanted to “avoid pouring the money down a rat-hole”, thereby undercutting the claim that the United States had a grand strategy for Eastern Europe. This might have been positive for the Soviet Union, as it reduced the paranoia about American intentions and helped the Eastern European “revolutionaries”\(^{46}\) to rush into the vacuum of inattention.\(^{47}\) Nevertheless, Gorbachev was trying really hard to change the West’s frame of mind regarding the new thinking and the outlook for Eastern Europe, thus he visited West Germany in the pursuit of the relaunch of the US-Soviet talks. He tried to persuade the Western states not to take advantage of the victory of Solidarity,\(^{48}\) and that he clearly rejected the Brezhnev Doctrine.\(^{49}\)

Next month Bush asked for advice from Kohl before his trip to Poland and Hungary, how to help the transition to democracy. Kohl called Bush’s attention to the Polish interests in economic-financial cooperation, and its grim economic situation partly arriving from the “failed attempt from the West to provide aid”. Kohl would have liked to see Poland treated the way financial institutions handle developing countries.\(^{50}\) His statement in Warsaw calling for the withdrawal of troops was not welcome in Moscow, it even made the General Secretary concerned.\(^{51}\) During his trip to Poland, Bush emphasized he did not want to undermine Gorbachev’s policy nor he would have liked to destabilize the region in any way. He even seemed to be favoring Gorbachev’s vision of a common European home. Additionally, he tried to make the Soviets understand that

\(^{45}\) National Intelligence Estimate 11-4-89, “Soviet Policy toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge”, April 1989  
\(^{46}\) a term coined by Timothy Garthom Ash, merging the notions of reform and revolution  
\(^{47}\) Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, June 23, 1989  
\(^{48}\) Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, June 12, 1989  
\(^{49}\) With his speech at the Sorbonne – where he embraced the ideals of the French revolution – Gorbachev eventually made it clear that the Doctrine was gone.  
\(^{50}\) Letter from Helmut Kohl to George H.W. Bush, June 28, 1989  
\(^{51}\) Record of Concluding Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand, July 6, 1989
he was not waiting for the unilateral troop withdrawals, which was the concern of Gorbachev.\textsuperscript{52}

As a consequence to the melting tensions, the “misunderstandings” generated by the diplomatic cold were the topic of the conversation between Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev – who was a leading force behind perestroika and glasnost – and Matlock. The American ambassador assured Yakovlev that President Bush’s statement on the troop withdrawing was “not planned”, the president made a “mistake”. Interestingly, when the discussion was diverted to the issue of nationalism in the USSR, the Soviet reformist politician gave an overly optimistic picture on the state of affairs, saying “nobody is seriously planning to secede from the Soviet Union”. The question of nuclear weapons was also discussed, and Matlock revealed the difference between the attitude of Reagan and Bush. While the previous president “believed in the possibility of liquidating nuclear weapons”, his successor would prefer minimizing their number without liquidating them.\textsuperscript{53}

Unlike the National Intelligence Estimate of Fall 1989 – which predicted Gorbachev would survive the economic crisis without resorting to widespread repression – the Intelligence Assessment of CIA’s Office of Soviet Analysis from September 1989 concluded that the reforms would eventually fail, a coup and crackdown would come, and perhaps the breakdown of the entire empire. The United States “will confront a Soviet leadership that faces endemic popular unrest and that, on a regional basis at least, will have to employ emergency measures and increased use of force to retain domestic control”. This process of decline would bring “the decay of communist systems and growth of regional instability in Eastern Europe.” The United States would have to foster a “post-Yalta” arrangement.\textsuperscript{54}

On the other hemisphere of the American foreign policy thinking, the National Security Directive 23 on US-USSR relations, the formal expression of American foreign policy was completely divorced from the radical transformations occurring in Eastern Europe. It stated that in the new era upon them it was plausible that they would be able to “move beyond containment to a US policy that actively promoted the integration of the Soviet

\textsuperscript{52} Information Note regarding George H.W. Bush’s Visit to Poland (July 9-11), July 18, 1989
\textsuperscript{53} Record of Conversation between Aleksandr Yakovlev and Jack Matlock, July 20, 1989
\textsuperscript{54} CIA Intelligence Assessment, "Gorbachev’s Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR", September 1989
Union into the existing international system.” The directive still required the Soviet Union to denounce the Brezhnev Doctrine – which action had already taken place with Gorbachev’s speeches in New York and in Strasbourg – and refrain from the threat or use of force. The analysts had come up with other sterile prescriptions, such as the President’s directive to the Secretary of State to eliminate “threatening Soviet positions of influence around the world.” They also declared that the United States “may find that the nature of the threat itself has changed, though any such transformation could take decades.”55

Certain scholars argue that Gorbachev trusted more in the Western leaders than he trusted in the Eastern European ones. He thought that the Western leaders would support him and deliver on the entry of the USSR into Europe. But eventually, his Bismarckian geopolitical idea was rejected. He thought that the West would not take advantage of the transitions taking place in Eastern Europe, and they would not promote the collapse of the USSR, neither would they want the reunification of Germany.56 The General Secretary began talks with Brzezinski in November 1989 on the issue of arrangement between the superpowers in Europe, and it was likely that the US was ready to enter into some kind of condominium arrangement. At that time the American adviser thought that collapse in Germany could lead to the collapse of European institutions. Eventually, his assessments proved to be incorrect.57 Jack Matlock stated the world was changed and Gorbachev got the best deals with Western leaders that were objectively possible. Negotiating the future of Eastern Europe was the last thing the United States needed to do.58

57 Record of Conversation between Aleksandr Yakovlev and Henry Kissinger, January 16, 1989; Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Henry Kissinger, January 17, 1989; Record of Conversation between Aleksandr Yakovlev and Zbigniew Brzezinski, October 31, 1989
2.2. Western Europe

The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was among the firsts who realized that Gorbachev was “a man you can do business with”. She took part in persuading Reagan to engage in conversation with the Soviet leader, similarly, Gorbachev could feel less threatened by the West. After the breakthrough speech of the General Secretary in front of the UNGA, Thatcher proclaimed the end of Cold War and tried to integrate Gorbachev into the circle of world leaders. The two leaders shared thoughts in London in April 1989, where Gorbachev was willing to listen to Thatcher. The Prime Minister sensed rightly that political pluralism in Hungary and Poland exceeded the party leader’s conception. Gorbachev was concerned with the indecisiveness of the West about the faith of perestroika, since the slowing down process of working out a response undermined the interest in perestroika. Margaret Thatcher talked about the promising economic and political changes taking place in Hungary, and she was also content with the events in Poland, where Solidarity’s leadership initiated the dialogue with the government, thereby striving for political pluralism. As Thatcher composed, she “can see the first fruit of their joint effort and the new approaches”. She was convinced that Bush would strive to achieve agreements that would be in the common interest of all; however, this was not enough to ease the anxiety of Gorbachev, who remained uncertain about the intentions of Bush.\footnote{Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher, April 6, 1989} In September 1989, Thatcher expressed her position to one of Gorbachev’s top aids in favor of stability in Europe, and praised the Polish leadership, promising the assistance of the West.\footnote{Record of Conversation between Engeny Primakov and Margaret Thatcher, September 18, 1989}

The discussion of Thatcher and the Soviet party leader from September 1989 revealed the British Prime Minister\footnote{who expressed the view of the Western bloc} was willing to go into a bargain with the Soviet Union on the German unification. “I understand your position [on Eastern Europe] in the following way: you are in favor of each country choosing its own road of development so long as the Warsaw Treaty is intact. I understand this position perfectly...I understand your position on Eastern Europe, please accept mine on Germany”, she said. She further concretized the will of the West, even encouraged Gorbachev to disregard the NATO communiqué’s words. “Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany...It would lead to changes in the post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire
international situation and could lead to threats to our security…We are not interested in the destabilization of Eastern Europe or the dissolution of the Warsaw treaty either…we are in favor of those processes remaining strictly internal; we will not interfere in them and spur the decommunization of Eastern Europe. I can tell you that this is also the position of the US president…the United States would not undertake anything that could threaten the security interests of the Soviet Union…” This provided a certain comfort to Gorbachev that he would rely on until it was too late for him actually to prevent the merger.62

During and after the pause of high level diplomatic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, Moscow could successfully seek European states more committed to rapprochement, such as France. At their informal meeting, Mitterrand became the peer of Gorbachev63, and later, they openly discussed their opinion about the leaderships of Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and their positive impression about Jaruzelski. Mitterrand criticized Bush as one that had a “very big drawback - he lacks original thinking altogether”.64 In November 1989, the soviet General Secretary tried to get reassurance from Mitterrand that they had a “mutual understanding” on the issue of Germany. The response of the French president was positive. “There is a certain equilibrium that exists in Europe, and we should not disturb it.” Mitterrand however did not support the immediate border changes. Gorbachev hoped Kohl would “abide strictly to the existing agreements”.65

62 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher, September 23, 1989
63 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev, François Mitterrand and Their Spouses, July 4, 1989
64 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand, July 5, 1989
65 Record of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev, François Mitterrand, November 14, 1989
2.3. The security dilemma of the West

The West was facing a security dilemma in relation with the Warsaw Pact member states, since undoubtedly there was an excessive need for fundamental political and economic changes in the region, however, the United States and the Western European countries had reservations against unleashing these processes.

In July 1989 the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party was aware of Western Europe’s opinion about the changes taking place. The transitions in the region were threatening the stability and status quo; this meant the communist regimes should have remained in power in order to avoid any threat to the security interests of the Soviet Union. Keeping the Warsaw Pact alive was the duty of Hungary, leaving the organization was not an option for the Eastern European states. The West was not willing to intervene into the domestic affairs of the socialist countries. The grand strategy would have preferred a slow, gradual transition to a democratic system, thus ending the Cold War, and avoid another “1956”. The reason for the cautiousness of the Bush administration could be explained by the willingness to resolve the situation in a peaceful way, and to keep Gorbachev in power.

Mitterrand was more in favor of the stability of the Soviet Union than the transitions in East Central Europe. Margaret Thatcher reacted positively on the sudden changes, but he calmed Gorbachev that the process in Hungary would not affect the Warsaw Pact. Great Britain even made a positive example out of Hungary, a big amount of know how fund was given to the country. The EC expressed that even though they appreciated the approach of the countries in transition, they did not urge to abandon socialism. The official position revised by the Western European leaders was that for the stability of Europe Soviet security was more important than the Eastern European reforms.

When the Western powers realized that the processes in the region could not be blocked, and Moscow could not do a thing to stop them, they accepted the fact. Once the use of force was ruled out as a possible penalty imposed upon Eastern Europe, a lot of things could have happened and the only thing the people could do was scratching their heads. Bush brought Eastern Europe into the focus of US foreign policy, as then it

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67 ibid.
68 ibid. p. 268
became the key to end the Cold War. However, Poland and Hungary were not given any substantial financial aid, and the US chose the policy of non-intervention. In the summer of 1989 – at the time when Hungary had to reinforce its position in the political-military organization of the Warsaw Pact due to the ‘Romanian threat’ and the standing-point of the Western powers – Bush proposed Gorbachev to start the negotiations on the question of Eastern Europe. Although the rhetoric of liberation continuously surfaced in the United States, a book by Philip Zelikow and Condolezza Rice states that the real priority for Washington was NATO’s unity and particularly a peaceful reunification of Germany within the Western alliance.

2.4. Malta

Some might argue that the Cold War was over when Gorbachev made his first 50 percent proposal in November 1985, in Geneva. In Reykjavik the leaders went all the way up to the brink of a comprehensive arms control agreement, and then it broke on the Star Wars issue. By February 1987 they had agreed on the INF treaty and also on intrusive on-site inspections. The summit in Malta was intended to be an interim one to prepare for a full-scale summit in 1990, but eventually it turned out to be the symbolic ending of the Cold War.

During his trips to Hungary and Poland in the summer of 1989, Bush was encouraged to support the Soviet leader and engage into a discussion with him. Gorbachev, on the otherside, was eager to meet with George Bush, because of frustration coming from the period of “pause” by the Americans. However, by the time the Malta Summit was organized in December, the Soviet empire had already collapsed in Eastern Europe. As Chernyaev rightly said it the Bush “pause” – which was in a way maintained in Malta as well, since the meeting was meant to avoid any substantive discussion of arms control – in American-Soviet relations during 1989 delayed both strategic and tactical demilitarization for at least two years, up to the point Gorbachev had effectively lost the domestic power to fulfill the requirements envisaged in the START treaty. After the summit the American president would join in the arms control process offered by the

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71 Vladislav M. Zubok: New Evidence on the “Soviet Factor” in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989 p. 5
General Secretary. It only became clear for President Bush in Malta that Gorbachev would not press for the removal of US troops from Europe; to the contrary, he actually believed the US presence along with the NATO alliance to be a stabilizing force in Europe, particularly against any danger of German revanchism. At that moment Bush changed his mind on Gorbachev. Gorbachev presented ideas which already came up at the Yakovlev-Kissinger conversations, namely the superpower condominium. He insisted on that the United States had to stay in Europe, his aim was to get the US “equally integrated into European problems”. Bush did not want to posture over East Germany, even though there was domestic pressure to do it otherwise. He lasted out with perestroika, and the pronouncements of the Helsinki Final Act on the inviolability of borders. As the world was “experiencing a major regrouping of forces”, Gorbachev was occupied with the broader picture, whereas Bush was rather interested in smaller details. Although, both politicians were uneasy about the dramatic transformations that were taking place. Gorbachev not only warned Bush not to provoke or accelerate the changes, he required collective actions to be taken. He hoped that the two blocs would be dismantled – “what to do with institutions created in another age?” – and proposed the NATO and the Warsaw Pact transform into political organizations, rather than remaining military ones. Concerning the German unification, he intended to “let history decide” the faith of the countries, meaning that he was in favor of the continuation of two states moving only slowly towards unification. Nonetheless, he asked about the American plans on the reunited Germany that could become either a neutral country or a member of the North Atlantic alliance. Gorbachev announced personally “the Soviet Union will not under any circumstances initiate a war…the USSR is prepared to cease considering the US as an enemy and announce this openly.” Nevertheless, he saw the exportation of Western values as ideals causing ideological confrontations. Bush stated after the meeting that the need to end the division of Europe was in accord with “values that are becoming universal ideals.” The meeting was significant in terms it gave reassurance to the leaders through a face-to-face meeting. They would rely on this personal relationship in the following years.

74 According to Jack Matlock From that time on Gorbachev enjoyed the support of President Bush. The support was never transferred to Yeltsin, although they could not afford not dealing with him.
75 Record of Conversation between Aleksandr Yakovlev and Henry Kissinger, January 16, 1989
76 Soviet Transcript of the Malta Summit, December 2-3, 1989
3. Gorbachev and the change in perception

The political stability in Central and Eastern Europe was deceptive and tenuous, the national liberation movements were temporarily discouraged, yet the need to prop up their legitimacy pushed them toward asserting their national character as distinct as possible from the Soviet Union. The Kremlin leadership was not at all dynamic; they closed their eyes and did not see these developments. The imbalances in economic and trade relations among Warsaw Pact members were constantly growing, thus as the sole realistic option, they were given considerable autonomy in making economic deals. By continuing subsidizing Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union would have risked a reduction of living standards of its own citizens. In the middle of the eighties Soviet policy continued to give the preservation of East-Central Europe as a security zone for the Soviet Union a priority. In exchange for the lack of changes in this field the allies were allowed to make the economic system more efficient and the political system more democratic in a limited sense. The reason why the Soviet Union did not try to impose the reforms on its allies was the ultimate goal of the preservation of political stability. Gorbachev seriously believed that a new relationship was needed to be built, but this did not mean the abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine in the middle of 1988.

After being able to strengthen his position in the leadership, Gorbachev succeeded in giving a new momentum to the policy of perestroika in the national Party Conference held in June, 1988. The program of modernizing the Stalinist model came to be replaced by an effort to develop a new model of socialism; but the leadership realized too late that this new model would be nothing else but capitalism. The Conference was intended to show that perestroika was bringing a genuine change in foreign policy. Soon, the West had to realize the true nature of these changes. Gorbachev began with the replacement of the old guard with reformers who shared the General Secretary’s view on the unacceptable nature of the Soviet interference in Eastern Europe. Even

77 Melvyn P. Leffler – Odd Arne Westad [2010]: The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3 - Endings p. 97
78 Although, some scholars, for example Csaba Békés suggest that instead of a Brezhnev Doctrine, it was rather a Stalin Doctrine which ideology characterized the relations with the communist countries. – Savranskaya-Blanton-Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 151
though it was in dichotomy with the notion of non-interference, they also felt the obligation to help these countries through the crisis and democratization.\textsuperscript{81} However, in the initial stage of his leadership the freedom given to Eastern Europe brought nothing more than the preservation of the status quo and stagnation.\textsuperscript{82}

Gorbachev moved quickly to come into power, and brought a new style with himself\textsuperscript{83}. He surrounded himself with people capable of independent thinking, notably from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. Gorbachev had an internal impulse, and he raised hopes among the Moscow intelligentsia even before being a General Secretary. According to Anatoly Chernyaev, on the part of generals and colonels there was no opposition against Gorbachev becoming the leader, up until the launch of glasnost they were silent.\textsuperscript{84} The understanding in the society was growing that they could not live the way they had been living, since it was abnormal. Shakhnazarov stated that the need for reformation had already been born under Nikita Khrushchev, if the West would have reacted to his proposals, the process could have started even then. Even Leonid Brezhnev was ready for the ideas of Alexei Kosygin. It was evident this system could only be reformed from the top down, and the policies of Gorbachev enjoyed the unanimous support of the Politburo. Everybody wanted changes, the strengthening of socialism, and democratization. Up until 1989, all thought everything was going as it should.\textsuperscript{85}

3.1. The debate on Soviet foreign policy

Among the firsts who began to see the process as the undermining of the system as it existed one of the loudest was Nina Andreyeva whose essay (“I cannot forsake my principles”) was welcomed by the orthodox party officials. Gorbachev subsequently revealed that many members of the Politburo seemed to share Andreyeva’s views, and that he had to coerce them into approving the publication of an official rejoinder. From this time on the liberal intelligentsia had to face with direct obstructionism. Shakhnazarov states that this stimulated resistance, which was the most visible after the 19th Party Conference, the turning point where it was first outlined that the goals were

\textsuperscript{82} Vladislav M. Zubok: New Evidence on the “Soviet Factor” in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989 p. 8
\textsuperscript{83} already as a Secretary of Agriculture
\textsuperscript{84} Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 114
\textsuperscript{85} ibid. p. 115
civil society, a lawful state, democratization and economic reform.\textsuperscript{86} By then the society nurtured the need for reform inside itself.

The ferment\textsuperscript{87} in Eastern Europe was no surprise for the Kremlin, ever since the 1940s the Soviet leadership took it into consideration when formulated the policy toward the region. The changes in that region undisputedly had effects on the “mother country”, and vice versa, perestroika influenced the other bloc countries as well.\textsuperscript{88} The member states of the Warsaw Pact did not follow the new policy of Gorbachev, Hungary and Poland interpreted the reforms as the confirmation of their own policies. Some skeptics already saw the failure of these reform policies and the end of the Gorbachev era. The domestic conditions and the instability made the introduction of such changes difficult. Furthermore, the implementation of economic reforms was likely to result in the need for political changes. Except for Romania, the Pact members welcomed the new winds blowing in Moscow.\textsuperscript{89} The reason of the dichotomy was that regional stability and the cohesion of the bloc did not exist mutually. In addition, the member states were trying to reach a bit of independence through distancing themselves from Moscow. Gorbachev allowed diversification, by doing so the allies could enjoy greater freedom. However they were required to maintain the socialist system.\textsuperscript{90}

Up until Gorbachev’s entrance to the scene, the General Secretaries of the Soviet Union considered the territory of the Warsaw Pact member States the extension of the Soviet terrain, thus the security issues of these countries concerned the Soviet Union itself. This sphere of influence was chained to the Soviet leadership through the Brezhnev Doctrine. Gorbachev – after giving up the following behavior and successfully consolidation his position - could loosen his policy in 1988. The events of 1988 and 1989 made the implementation of political reforms inevitable. The progressing East-West relations were undoubtedly helping the new approach. The first indicator of the changes was Gorbachev’s trip to Yugoslavia. His speech in front of the UN concerning the unilateral disarmament was rather a symbolic gesture than a step of high military

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\textsuperscript{86} ibid. p. 116
\textsuperscript{87} Mark Kramer [2004 a]: The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1) p. 178
\textsuperscript{88} Even though it was only meant to be introduced in the Soviet Union.
\textsuperscript{89} Todor Zhivkov greeted the changes. Poland benefited from them the most. The GDR was more moderate. Kádár’s Hungary was characterized by prudence. Czechoslovakia was vulnerable at this time. - Charles Gati [1987]: Gorbachev and Eastern Europe p. 961-969
\textsuperscript{90} ibid. p. 973
\end{flushright}
importance, even though according to some members of the Politburo this step endangered the socialist system as a whole. He promoted the preservation of socialism throughout the bloc in front of the European Parliament; regarding the future however he was willing to accept any outcome in the Eastern European region.\textsuperscript{91}

For the time being the question of how to keep the Brezhnev Doctrine in force was not the most relevant anymore, the only thing the Moscow leadership could do was “floating”\textsuperscript{92} the Doctrine, in the sense they disguised the fact that effectually there would be no retaliation in case communism is “endangered” in any of the bloc countries. The Soviet foreign policy had to face once again the same dilemma with which Khrushchev had to confront, namely how anti-Sovietism and the emergence of violence could be avoided. In case of the eruption of a conflict, the intervention would have contained high risks; furthermore, Gorbachev's opposition undoubtedly would have caused serious difficulties. The policies pursued by the General Secretary catalyzed processes in the region that could have culminated in armed conflicts. The Bogomolov institute’s report and other analysts were warning Gorbachev about these dangers by criticizing the nature of relations between Russia and the whole bloc. Before Gorbachev's time experts were not involved in policy making, from that time on their opinion affected the thinking of the Party leader’s inner circle, including Georgy Shakhnazarov, Alexander Yakovlev, and Eduard Shevardnadze. Soon they realized that the longer the reigning systems remain in the region the more they threaten the Soviet Union itself. This was stated in a secret memorandum written in 1988.\textsuperscript{93} The reservation of the artificial totalitarian systems in East Central Europe could lead to explosions at a higher scale\textsuperscript{94}. The peaceful runoff of the process was vital, as an incidental conflict could have endangered the sustainability of the ongoing reform process in the Soviet Union.

By 1988 the leadership marked out two targets, namely avoiding a Soviet military intervention at whatever cost, and assuring a peaceful transition in Eastern Europe. With a drastic change, the accumulated tension could be relieved, but this would need an

\textsuperscript{91} Kramer [2004 a] p. 196
\textsuperscript{92} a term coined by Csaba Békés in: Back to Europe: The international background of the political transition in Hungary, 1988 – 1990 [2002]
\textsuperscript{93} ibid. p. 186
\textsuperscript{94} ibid. p. 187
active Soviet policy towards the region. The stricter socialist regimes – Bulgaria, GDR, Romania and Czechoslovakia – were left alone with their own “devices”, not thinking about reformation. The international and domestic pressure made them intransigent. As the hardliner communist leaders of the satellite countries were against the liberalization – and rather pro use of violence in case of the emergence of a loud opposition – the Soviet politicians of new thinking realized the importance of fostering the fundamental changes. Albeit the spillover effect of the changes and Gorbachev’s idea of liberalization worried some, like Ligachev – who saw the dilemma of reforming the USSR without losing socialism in Eastern Europe as a mission impossible – others had already realized communism was “in a profound crisis”, the revolutionary processes promised its “rescue”, and therefore “primitivism and narrow-mindedness” could not kill the “enlightened cause”. 

The decision itself – that Moscow decided to assist in the ongoing reforms by simply not opposing them in any way – was astonishing regarding the foreign policy reorientation. Gorbachev did not simply accept the changes in the Warsaw Pact countries, but gave assurance that the Soviet methods remain within the Soviet Union; however, by 1989 the processes accelerated so much there was a need for a more substantial participation by the Soviet Union. Unlike his predecessor, who defended socialism with arms, Gorbachev had to get involved directly in this unpleasant situation in order to avoid unrest.

After the collapse of the orthodox communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union acknowledged the reformist governments, but this does not mean anyone in Moscow could even imagine that the collapse of the whole communist system would be so sudden. Gorbachev truly believed in the sustainability of a more livable socialism and in the possible reformation of the Warsaw Pact. The process could have been stopped by force, but it was the time to realize it was not an option; the decisions made by the Soviet leadership even accelerated the process.

95 Kramer [2004 a] p. 188
96 The events on Tiananmen square even reassured these regimes about their way of thinking. – ibid. p. 188
97 Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, March 24-25, 1988
98 ibid. p. 190
99 ibid. p. 191-192
The events in East Central Europe echoed in Moscow, the orthodox communists, especially the military elite – were strongly objecting. The debate between the two opposing groups led to the coup d'état attempt in 1991. Eduard Shevardnadze, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Alexander Yakovlev were the two most prominent representatives of the reformists; their fiercest opponents were Second Secretary Yegor Ligachev and Minister of Defense Dmitry Iazov. Gorbachev's new thinking and the unilateral force reduction generated disputes before 1989, yet nobody knew the dissolution of the political-military organization was approaching.100

The orthodoxy regarded the Soviet troops stationing in East Central Europe as the guarantee of Soviet security, the region was considered to be a buffer zone.101 When the Soviet society started to give voice to its misgivings arriving from the domestic and international changes taking place under the leadership of Gorbachev, the military leaders started to criticize the policies of the General Secretary, even in the press, which was an unusual phenomenon. Ligachev, had always been a protector of socialist parties who opposed to the reaches towards capitalism, expressed in front of the Politburo that the peaceful cooperation of the states could not diminish the positions of the socialist idea what happened with the shift of balance of power from the Warsaw Pact, in favor of the NATO.102

By the spring of 1990, the state of affairs in the foreign policy arena substantially aggravated the positions of the Soviet Union in East Central Europe. The Hungarian and Czechoslovakian pressure was successful on the question of troop withdrawals by mid 1991. Joining these two countries, the GDR also withdrew its forces from any provisional unified military action. Romania too insisted on the very same thing, and soon, Poland and Bulgaria joined this cause.

It was not solely the military aspect of the Pact which was severely diminishing, but also its political role and prospect. The Hungarian foreign minister, Gyula Horn went a step further with his statement on Hungary’s intention of joining the NATO after the Warsaw Pact had been dissolved.103 Furthermore, the integrity of the Soviet Union was evaporating due to the spillovers. The changes in the Warsaw Pact, the troop

100 Mark Kramer [2005]: The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3) p. 14
101 ibid. p. 16
103 Horn Gyula [1991]: Cölöpök
withdrawals, the situation in the FRG led to the exasperation of the debate on the question of Eastern Europe. This even resulted in the suspension of the troop withdrawals in May 1990.\textsuperscript{104}

In spite of the ongoing quarrels, Gorbachev and his inner circle promoted the organization of a PCC meeting assigned to deal with overhaul of the Pact. Although the end results of the conference could not live up to the expectations of some – for example Hungary’s – it generated widely diverse reactions within the Soviet military leadership. Iazov’s circle imagined the mutual dismantlement of the military structures of the opposing blocs, but in their view the unilateral troop reductions could not have brought the end of the Warsaw Pact, the organization that was still the safeguard of European peace, stability and security. The Yakovlev-led commission dealing with foreign affairs greeted the ideological changes which let the buffer zone go.\textsuperscript{105}

The Party Congress brought the astonishing speech of the hardliner military officer, Makashov, who went completely against the policy envisaged by Gorbachev. He and Ligachev associated the changes with Gorbachev, Shevardnadze and Yakovlev, naming them traitors by not protecting the worth of socialist values with the use of force in the Eastern European countries. This would have been the sacred duty of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{106} Others viewed the European strategic parity as the basis of the country’s sovereignty. The Foreign Ministry was blamed for the weakened defensive capacity of the state.\textsuperscript{107}

The supporters of the changes, who were becoming more and more realistic, took the side of the oppressed countries, Shevardnadze pointed out that the political changes in the countries concerned would have merely taken place if it were to the continuation of the Soviet interference in their domestic affairs. He dared to state that these states deserved the right to dismiss the oppressive regimes. It was not the more liberal thinkers who were to “blame” for the changes, but quite to the contrary, it was the rigidity of those who looked for scapegoats what triggered the downfall of the socialist community. The Soviet Union had the opportunity to surround itself with democratically established states, instead of the cordon sanitaire of unstable regimes,

\textsuperscript{104} Kramer [2005] p. 19
\textsuperscript{105} ibid. p. 20-22
\textsuperscript{106} ibid. p. 24-27
\textsuperscript{107} ibid. p. 30
overcoming the chaos by doing so. In Pravda, he gave his apologies for the people of the bloc countries. Iazov openly criticized the Foreign Minister in the media; this was unprecedented up to that day.

On the 28th Party Congress Gorbachev clearly took sides with the Foreign Ministry’s position. The decisive victory over Gorbachev’s opposition happened at this Party Congress. Here the General Secretary stepped up against the military elite. He stated there that there was no alternative, the Soviet Union could not tell the other bloc countries anymore what to do, and that the changes in Eastern Europe did not undermine the cooperation between the Soviet Union and Europe. The question of the CMEA was discussed as well, as the future of economic cooperation. Shevardnadze promoted the constraints-free collaboration, and praised the London statement of the NATO members, which showed that the Western bloc was willing to introduce some changes. Soon after the Congress, Gorbachev agreed with Helmut Kohl on the NATO membership of Germany.

In the fall of 1990 the critical voices regained some impetus when it became clear that the NATO would not follow the Warsaw Pact into the forgotten, thus the military leaders tried to postpone the definitive dissolution. The government, without further explanation, cancelled the forthcoming PCC meeting; later it asked the International Office of the Party to formulate a memorandum regarding the policy toward the Eastern European region. In this memorandum the aim of preventing the West from penetrating into the region was declared, and also the importance of overcoming anti-Sovietism and national separatism. However, the meeting of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland in Budapest, on January 21, 1991 derailed the goals enlisted.

The last Soviet attempt to have a word in the ongoing changes was with the proposal of bilateral agreements for each Warsaw Pact member state. Beside the democratic principles, the prohibition of joining military organizations that would possibly endanger the Soviet Union was stated. The Visegrad countries and Bulgaria strongly opposed to these agreements, it was solely Romania who, with reservations, accepted

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108 Kramer [2005] p. 16
109 ibid. p. 26
110 ibid. p. 27-38
111 ibid. p. 39
112 ibid. p. 51-52
the debate slowly became meaningless as the events outpaced the
Soviet Union. The fate of Germany was decided.

3.2. The Brezhnev Doctrine and the question of the use of force

For the outside world, the biggest question was whether Gorbachev could handle the
economic processes, and if not, would he revert to the old methods. There came the
biggest surprise, the decision over the non-use of force. According to political
scientist Jacques Levesque, all thought that with the perestroika there would be a limit
to the changes. What is a bit of a tragicomedy of the situation is that Gorbachev truly
believed in the reforms until everything began to fall apart, he believed that socialism
could be improved. He counted on an internal reform of socialism, and was trying to
turn the Communist Party into the vanguard of perestroika. The Plenum of January
1987 brought the need to start the party reform. Gorbachev hoped that by making these
changes in the leaderships of the countries, the economy could turn into a market
economy. However, within the framework of their socialism it could not. Some consider
it was Gorbachev’s major mistake leading to the failure that he held on to the Party up
until the very last moment. He held on to it even after it turned into an opposition, yet
he remained General Secretary. Shakhnazarov believed that Gorbachev had a chance to
take the position that was later taken by Boris Yeltsin. He wanted to preserve everything
that was good, and build a system like “public capitalism”.

Formulated quite shrewdly by Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev can be blamed for two things,
that he brought political freedom to the country, and that he did not abandon that
freedom when they began to use it to destroy the state. After Chernenko’s funeral

113 Kramer [2005] p. 59
114 The comments of some members of the orthodoxy on the backing out from the CFE treaty and the
relocation of troops to the Ural showed that these politicians did not face the realities. – ibid. p. 43
116 ibid. p. 119
117 Gorbachev explained to James Baker what reason made him decide not to listen to Yakovlev and
Chernyaev and leave the party, thus become only the president. “In general I am for separating these
posts, but not right now...[because] two centers of power would form”. - Record of Conversation
between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker, February 9, 1990
118 Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 120
Gorbachev gathered all the party leaders of the bloc, and implied from that time on the relations between the bloc countries would be redefined. This commitment was the first major step toward the abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In his way of saying, the kindergarten was over; from that time on the interference was out of question even when the party leaders ask for it. Nevertheless, Gorbachev had the illusion that the Eastern European countries, freed from the nightmare of a Soviet intervention in the spirit of the Brezhnev Doctrine, would follow the process of perestroika and the Soviet way of reformation.\(^{120}\) The maintenance of the belt of friendly states around the Soviet Union was important for the General Secretary, but he would not have tried to hold it together by force. In the preparatory notes of Shakhnazarov to Gorbachev written for a Politburo meeting the aid strongly suggested that in case of a crisis in Eastern Europe, the military means as in terms of Soviet reaction are to be fully excluded. His further important advice was to avoid non-policy. The Politburo’s International Commission\(^{121}\) coordinated by Yakovlev was responsible for considering the options for an economic and financial bailout of bankrupt Eastern European regimes.\(^{122}\) The top politicians and advisors, even Shakhnazarov were occupied with the internal political reforms, thus Eastern Europe fell from the radar screen, and the newly formed opposition movements could rush into this vacuum of inattention.

As the evidence shows, Gorbachev did not waste time to indicate his vision regarding the new establishment of the bloc. His first meeting with the Eastern European leaders\(^{123}\) was a watershed, but it was not so sure they all heard his message about the revitalization clearly.\(^{124}\) He was determined and decided, not knowing that in couple of years there would be a situation potentially demanding for an intervention. Even though he called for perestroika, made changes in the personnel, and gave a new approach to the allies, his signals were not immediately seen as carte blanche. Although he met with Foreign Ministry officials and ambassadors in May 1986 in order to propagate the new perception, his treatment of Eastern Europe appeared as immobilism until the end of

\(^{120}\) ibid. p. 122
\(^{121}\) The Commission would order analysis but the leadership never identified any specific policy options.
\(^{122}\) Preparatory Notes from Georgy Shakhnazarov for Mikhail Gorbachev for CC CPSU Politburo Meeting, October 6, 1988
\(^{123}\) At the funeral of Chernenko he gathered the General Secretaries of all the bloc countries and stated that the Soviet intervention to their countries is out of question, even when they ask for it.
\(^{124}\) Transcript of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Conference with CC CPSU Secretaries, March 15, 1985
1988. But his speech to the Foreign Ministry officials in 1986 was a powerful signal on the issue that from that time on Eastern Europe would be treated differently. “It is impermissible to think that we can teach everyone. No one gave us that right” stated the General Secretary. The problem was two-folded as he did not see an acute crisis in his own backyard and didn’t want to interfere with the domestic affairs of the friendly states. At this early stage of his leadership he was optimistic about the prospect of reforms, and he did not consider Eastern Europe as a burden. “Lean on our shoulder”, he proposed to János Kádár. Over time, during the process of reassessment of Eastern Europe the focus was switched from intra-bloc engagement to all-European integration.

Returning home from the PCC meeting organized in Budapest in 1986, Gorbachev presented a positive overall picture to the Politburo, and evaluated the growing independence of the Warsaw Pact member-states positively as “they were still drawn to the Soviet Union” Concerning the economic ties between the Socialist countries and the common foreign policy he expressed his desire that the member states would coordinate their decision-making both within the ties of the CMEA and towards the EEC. He expected that Eastern Europe would follow the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s long memorandum sent to the Politburo members in 1986 summarized his views on Eastern Europe at the initial stage of his career as General Secretary. This memo named the economic integration and the real coordination of the foreign policy as the main tasks. He suggested the initiation of the discussion of Eastern Europe and the development of a strategy. Contrary to what he said to the Politburo members, his personal memorandum depicted a much more negative picture of the situation admitting the difficulties the socialist bloc needed to face. As they were lagging behind Western states “a genuine turning point in the entire system of collaboration was needed”. At that time, he asserted the Politburo that the socialist countries would remain the priority of his foreign policy, but in his mind he already reprioritized the problems the USSR was facing. The memorandum called for the making the relations with the allies a top priority, but behind the ideological and strategic reasons he was aware that this was not the biggest concern for the Kremlin. This was the first of his numerous calls to the

125 The majority of the leading politicians like Yakovlev and Chernyaev were more dedicated to the question of internal liberalization and relations with the capitalists.
126 Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 28, 1986
127 Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, June 13, 1986
129 Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, June 13, 1986
Politburo for a new coordinated strategy toward Eastern Europe, yet the first concrete steps were not taken until 1989. Although in November 1988, in front of the Politburo, Gorbachev again gave a positive assessment of the socialist countries’ willingness to reform. He had hopes they would accept perestroika. Gorbachev’s speech at the Politburo session in 1987 represented the fullest expression of his non-interference principle. Furthermore, he said it was in their “interest not to be loaded down with responsibility for what is happening, or could happen, there.”

During his trip to Prague in 1987 he had the opportunity to address the issue of past Soviet interventions, but the Czechoslovak leadership requested not to do so. The fact that he agreed to this shows that Gorbachev himself “had become a hostage of the Brezhnev Doctrine”. Gorbachev could have tackled the distrust of the Czech people toward the Communist Party – because of the linkages with the events of 1968 – with the denouncement of the actions of the Prague Spring. We can observe the duality of aspiring for change and the feeling of responsibility for the regimes installed by the Soviet Union. Although Gorbachev was ready to renounce the policy of intervention, he understood the possible drawbacks of it, thus, he declined to change the Soviet interpretation of the events of 1968. Simultaneously, he began to build ties with Western leaders, showing them his peaceful intentions regarding Eastern Europe. His idea was allowing – even encouraging – gradual reform within the “European process”. Evidently, the reactions of the bloc countries were widely differing, the more conservative regimes were worried about the ongoing processes in the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, the new policy was not backed by a unified strategy; it was formulated on an ad hoc basis. This resulted in a contradictory situation in which the Brezhnev Doctrine was already abandoned but the support was not withdrawn from the most
repressive leaders, thus this ambivalence led to uneven progress within the bloc.\textsuperscript{137} To an extent, the Soviet leadership was reluctant to inject the bloc countries with the new ideology. (“God forbid we go to them with our own jumble of thoughts on the theme of their perestroika.”)\textsuperscript{138} The vision for Eastern Europe was simply encouraging “little Gorbachevs” in place of the “little Brezhnevs”. A Politburo discussion in 1987 on the Doctrine brought internal disagreement. Defense Minister Sokolov ran headlong into the new thinking on military affairs. This was the lieu of the first acknowledgement that the troops had to be withdrawn, and that “sufficiency” needed to replace “parity”.\textsuperscript{139}

Despite the uneven progress within the bloc, there existed basic principles in the international relations; these were articulated at the 19\textsuperscript{th} Party Conference in 1988.\textsuperscript{140} The use of force was completely rejected; the freedom of choice was respected; so was the supremacy of common human values, with regards to strategic armaments reasonable sufficiency was emphasized; and finally the integration into a common European home was promoted.\textsuperscript{141} As Chernyaev wrote in his diary, during his meeting with Helmut Kohl, Gorbachev behaved as if they were already entering a new world.\textsuperscript{142} Consequently, the Politburo discussion of March 1988 marked the changes of tone about the allies, since from that time on they were seen as debits rather than the subjects of the communist obligation to bail them out. Gorbachev drew the attention to the failure of the CMEA. When the discussion moved toward the political upheavals in the socialist countries, Gorbachev stated: “if the situation begins to crack, the very idea of socialism will be discredited.” Yet, the sole proposed solution was the already-failing acceleration policy of investing in machine-building and technology.\textsuperscript{143} In line with the realization of the fact that the existing system was unsustainable, Gorbachev’s conversation with the Yugoslav communist leader in 1988 can be considered as one of the purest examples of the renunciation of intervention in Eastern Europe. “No one can impose anything on anyone”, the Soviet General Secretary said.\textsuperscript{144} The General Secretary could even imagine the organization of genuine elections that would have

\textsuperscript{137} Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010]. p. 10
\textsuperscript{138} Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, November 19, 1987
\textsuperscript{139} Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding the “Vladimirov” Article, July 5, 1985 and later in front of the United Nations General Assembly
\textsuperscript{140} Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 11
\textsuperscript{141} Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding a Meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, October 28, 1988
\textsuperscript{142} Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, March 10, 1988
\textsuperscript{143} Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Lazar Moisov, March 14, 1988
allowed the communists to get into state bodies “by the free vote of the people”. His statement on being “in power legally for the first time” was not just the admission of the illegality of the past, but also the evidence of his belief that the party could remain in the leading role by a free vote. These ideas however were the messengers of the future radical reforms that largely contributed to the collapse of the USSR.145

It happened this time, in mid 1988, when the General Secretary changed the relationship with Eastern Europe. In September 1988, the Polish foreign minister did not ask for his permission but informed him that the Polish communists had decided to start the process of roundtable negotiations. The Soviet party leader started treating the allied countries as equals.146 The reason for the “non-policy” 147 of Gorbachev was partially “to avoid criticism for trying to impose Soviet-style reforms through force”.148 The dynamics of the talks with these states changed fundamentally, but there were still some who were looking for Soviet approval.149

Beside the reorientation of the foreign policy, Gorbachev was committed to restructure the CMEA, but in 1988 came the realization – alongside with the drop in the oil prices and the birth of the concept of common European home150 – that the economic integration was unsustainable, the Soviet Union was losing the economic leverage needed to keep the community tied together and to the USSR.151 They undertook a reassessment of the issue, and started to encourage Eastern European states to pursue independent economic policies and relations with the European economic integration. At a Politburo session the General Secretary stated that in their relations with the CMEA they had to “take care of their own [Soviet] people first. He concluded that “in the economic sense, socialism has not passed the test of practice”.152 The collusion of several factors gave birth to a gradual process in which they realized the economic burden of an empire facing severe economic difficulties. The strategic importance of

145 Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, June 20, 1988
146 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Józef Czyrek, September 23, 1988
147 Although, Shakhnazarov warned him about the dangers of non-policy, and compared it to an ostrich burying its head in the sand.
148 Preparatory Notes from Georgy Shakhnazarov for Mikhail Gorbachev for CC CPSU Politburo Meeting, October 6, 1988
149 Summary of Conversations between Károly Grósz, János Berecz, Miklós Németh, Mátyás Szűrös and Aleksandr Yákovlev, November 10-11, 1988
152 Notes of CC CPSU Politburo Session, March 10, 1988
Eastern Europe diminished over time as the possibility of an attack by the United States reduced significantly.\footnote{Chenyaev notes in his diary after the Reykjavik summit that “no one will attack” the Soviet Union even if they disarm completely. Masterpieces p. 17}

The signs of the inevitable loss of Eastern Europe became clearer at the end of 1988, from which point onwards the Politburo spent much time debating how to preserve the core, not to mention its periphery. According to S. Tarasenko during the period of perestroika some already felt that the organizational structure of the Warsaw Pact – which organization operated as a mirror image of the NATO - was flawed.\footnote{Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 106} At that time, the military personnel were not willing to reform the Pact; the idea of reformation was shared by only the workers of the Foreign Ministry.\footnote{As Tarasenko argues, if the major changes in the foreign policy would have been done by 1986, the withdrawal process could have been less controversial.} The single most convincing event for the outside world regarding the Soviet commitment on the reformation of the outdated military structure of the bloc happened on 30 September 1988, on the Central Committee Plenum with a major restructuring of the CC apparatus which created the International Commission headed by Alexander Yakovlev, and produced a radical leadership shake-up, removing several hard-liners from their posts, including Gromiko, Ligachev and Chebrikov.\footnote{Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 109} At that time no one knew what the future would be like, but it was clear that it would not be like the past. Gorbachev was convinced that it was not only in the interest of the Soviet republics to remain within the alliance, but also he expected Poland, Hungary and the GDR voluntarily remain in the Warsaw Pact and not risk losing economic and trade relations with the Soviet Union.

Even though the reasons of non-intervention in Poland included the burden of Afghanistan\footnote{Carter’s reaction to the intervention further aggravated the situation.}, the lack of resources, the fear from the reaction of the West, and the fact that the people of the Soviet Union just did not want another armed conflict, what made the difference was the end of the floating of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the proclamation that they did “not want to interfere”. The abandonment of the Doctrine, although, could not be combined with the forceful push of the socialist states into the arms of the NATO. Gorbachev was strongly advised to maintain some degree of uncertainty about what the USSR would do to protect its interest in given circumstances. However, the views in the top leadership were gradually easing, as by
this time Moscow would have accepted if the countries of Eastern Europe become capitalist as long as they stay outside the NATO.

Proving that his intentions were honest, Gorbachev did not just announce the unilateral troop withdrawals with his speech in front of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988, but he also rejected the Marxist-Leninist analysis of international situation and replaced it with the point of view of existing realities. The main principles enumerated by him were freedom of choice and the non-use of force in international relations. After the breakthrough UN speech, the European scene also needed to be addressed through the European Parliament. Here, the General Secretary promoted the Euro-focused vision of Mitterrand instead of Thatcher’s Atlantic conception. The reason of this change in view was that by this time every question – including the fate of the allies – were subordinated to the aim of ending the Cold War and the improvement of the relations with the United States and Western Europe.

An indication of the abandonment of Eastern Europe was the reaction of Gorbachev on the Hungarian Prime Minister, Miklós Németh’s statement on the removal of the Iron Curtain on their border. The General Secretary acted casually, the relations had changed drastically. Németh was aware of the importance of the issue which touched upon the stability of the entire bloc, essentially on the stability of the GDR. Yet, Gorbachev gave a non-response: “We have a strict regime on our borders, but we are also becoming more open.” Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Eastern European communist regimes and the eventual merger of the two Germanys were inevitable, and the members of the new thinking knew this by early 1989. What was unknown however was the price of such changes. The tragedy of the event was that the Soviet Union paid a much higher price than it would have wanted to. For the Soviets, the maximum concession to be allowed was a neutral Germany, the simultaneous dissolution of the two military blocs, and the establishment of a common European security system. In his interview with the Time magazine Shevardnadze was questioned about the degree of

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158 Chernyaev commissioned a team to work on a draft which would “keep Europe in movement”
159 Memorandum from Anatoly Chernyaev to Vladim Zagladin, February 4, 1989
161 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Miklós Németh, March 3, 1989
freedom of choice given to the friendly states in the Warsaw Pact, and in his answer he envisaged a situation comparable to the one in the NATO.\footnote{Savranskaya–Blanton–Zubok (ed.) [2010] p. 140}

The Memorandum from the Bogomolov Institute from February 1989 gave an overview on the changes in Eastern Europe and their impact on the USSR. It declared that the direct use of force by the USSR would most evidently signify the end of perestroika and the crumbling of trust, but it would not prevent a disintegration of the social-economic and social-political systems. While being reassuring about the outcomes of the reform and revolution, the study missed how much the communist parties had lost from their legitimacy; the possible dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and that East Germany would fold into West Germany. According to the Memorandum, the newly formed political establishment of the region would be based on political finlandization\footnote{meaning that the Soviet Union would still have some influence on the politics of the given countries}, with the maintenance of the Warsaw Pact as political organization, and with a neutral Germany. The USSR could alleviate the economic burden from itself if it decided to ease the control over the socialist countries, thus showing a more benevolent image of itself. The Bogomolov Institute was convinced that the rethinking of the notion of “world socialist system”, and a revolution from above in foreign policy would prevent a revolution from below. The progress of reforms in the bloc would lend a powerful side-effect to the process of internal perestroika in the USSR. The paper offered the following steps to be made: initiation of the practice of genuine consultation, a strategic program to develop the relations with Eastern Europe, the advancement of proposals on the reform of the Warsaw Pact with a bigger role for fraternal countries and the creation of regional commands which would help to tie the countries to the WP. Apart from these steps, further gradual reduction of military presence was inevitable, just as the periodic consultations with Western Europe and the US on the issue of preventing explosions in Central and Eastern Europe.\footnote{Memorandum from the Bogomolov Institute, "Changes in Eastern Europe and their impact on the USSR", February 1989} This assessment of the 1989 situation could be interpreted as a reformist view, since it presented an alarming picture of the state of affairs in Eastern Europe. The document was based on the paralogism that if the Soviet Union pursued a proactive policy toward the region then some degree of influence could be saved. The memo argued that by allowing the allied countries to take the middle ground, the Western countries would be more willful to accept the economic and
political stability in the region, thereby reinforcing the détente and the disarmament. This summary substantially contributed to Gorbachev’s decision to take a benevolent attitude toward the events, out of the conviction that this is the best way to push the countries toward the voluntary acceptance of the Warsaw Pact.\textsuperscript{166}

The Memorandum from the CC CPSU International Department, entitled “On a strategy for relations with the European socialist countries” was the summary of a renewed thinking towards bloc countries. It stated that socialist model was in the midst of prolonged crisis. The establishment of the Warsaw Pact gave a fully representative role to the other countries. The Memorandum was cautiously critical to Gorbachev’s non-interference policy. It agreed on the plausible sever consequences of the usage of the methods of 1956 and 1968. The document was also cautious with the notion of freedom of choice, since the Soviet Union had to avoid the stimulation of the anti-socialists of a given country to try to test the fundamentals of socialism. The memorandum recommended Moscow to move away from a policy of non-engagement, and resume the mantle of leadership in Eastern Europe, and begin to actively seek channels for establishing contact with all forces that stake a claim to participation in the realization of power in the socialist countries. It was then visible that the Kremlin was facing a choice between preserving by all means the ruling communist parties at the wheel of power and preserving alliance relations with those countries. By declining the use of force, Gorbachev evidently chose the latter.\textsuperscript{167} Although this document still represented the realm of perestroika, it was a more conservative approach compared to the Memorandum prepared by the Bogomolov Institute. It was considerably more sanguine about the plausibility of a Soviet Union-led smooth democratization. What is more, it advocated patience toward the conservative leaderships of the area. It also suggested that the importance of the region could not be underestimated, and connected the fate of socialism in the world with the future of this region. It refused the idea that these states were an economic burden to the Soviet Union. It was also this document which advised Gorbachev to disguise the Soviet intentions in relation with the Brezhnev Doctrine. However, the General Secretary did not take into account these ideas when he openly rejected the Doctrine in 1989 to reinforce his credibility for the Western parties. The Memorandum specified the possibilities and limits of interactions between the new

\textsuperscript{166} Jacques Lévesque: Soviet Approaches to Eastern Europe at the Beginning of 1989 p. 47
\textsuperscript{167} Memorandum from CC CPSU International Department, ”On a Strategy for Relations with the European Socialist Countries”, February 1989
socialism and modern capitalism. While the Memorandum from the Bogomolov Institute suggested that Eastern European countries should be allowed to move toward economic integration with Western Europe and take the role of the bridge and “advance” for the Soviet Union, the document of the International Department insisted on a coordinated and common policy between the USSR and Eastern Europe in dealing with Western economic institutions. By doing so, the gradual integration of the CMEA into the EEC could have been achieved. The General Secretary and his foreign minister identified themselves rather with this approach.\textsuperscript{168}

It was only the matter of time for Eastern Europe to notice the opportunity, and realize there was no need to stop at the establishment of a national communism, since there was no reason to believe there might be a military action in response. Chernyaev’s diary testified about the puzzlement reigning even in the inner circles of the Muscovite leadership. “Inside me, depression and alarm are growing, the sense of crisis of the Gorbachevian idea. He is prepared to go far. But what does it mean? His favorite catchword is “unpredictability.” And most likely we will come to a collapse of the state and something like chaos. He feels that he is losing the levers of power irreversibly, and this realization prevents him from “going far.” For this reason he holds to conventional methods but acts with “velvet gloves.” He has no concept of where we are going. His declaration about socialist values, the ideals of October, as he begins to tick them off, sound like irony to the cognoscenti. Behind them—emptiness.”\textsuperscript{169}

The only thing the Soviet Union could do was giving out their helplessness, thus adjourning the inevitable. Henry Kissinger already asked Chernyaev how the Soviet Union would react if Eastern Europe showed interest in joining the European Communities. The foreign policy adviser was aware of the needs of these countries that the Soviets simply just could not fulfill. Consequently, he knew these states would run away after the split unless Moscow started dealing with the issue. The countries of Eastern Europe “simply do not know that if they pulled this leash harder, it would break.” The solution offered by Chernyaev was the transformation of relations on the basis of the market, and technological development. The notion of keeping them attached to the Soviet Union only by means of energy resources became

\textsuperscript{168} Jacques Lèvesque: Soviet Approaches to Eastern Europe at the Beginning of 1989 p. 48

\textsuperscript{169} Excerpt from Anatoly Chernyaev’s Diary, 2 May 1989
unsustainable.\textsuperscript{170} On the meeting with the ambassadors to the socialist countries Gorbachev expressed the importance of the policy of non-intervention to the diplomatic corps under transition. He showed his resentment of the allies who reproached them for “giving up their leadership role”, but the Soviet Union did not want to assume responsibility for their actions. The conversation and Chernyaev’s notes demonstrated that this Soviet inner circle showed little reluctance to see Eastern Europe go.\textsuperscript{171}

While talking with party leader Károly Grósz, Gorbachev still had some hope in the ability of the Party to constrain the change. Not only he drew out the possibility of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of socialist countries, but stated that the reassessment of 1956 was “entirely up to them.” However, there were boundaries to be respected, such as the safekeeping of socialism and assurance of stability. Grósz summarized the situation as such: “the lack of self-confidence is palpable enough in the party.” He claims that the direction of change was according to their intentions, it is only its pace which was somewhat disconcerting.\textsuperscript{172}

A month later, after the events in Tbilisi and the mixed results in the election for the Congress of People’s Deputies, Gorbachev was beginning to feel deprived of political levers to control and steer the processes he himself unleashed. By this time perestroika had lost its bearings.\textsuperscript{173} By mid-1989 the Soviet leadership became conscious of the real prospect of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The development in Eastern Europe was permanently dropped out from the center of attention. Even though it was not connected directly to the disaster in Tbilisi, it was then when Gorbachev publicly ruled out the use of military force as a solution.\textsuperscript{174} The Soviet leader even gave voice to his deprivation during his conversation with the first non-communist Eastern European leader, the Polish Prime Minister who claimed the Party was in a “helpless” situation. Gorbachev confessed the situation in the Soviet Union was “just like” in Poland.\textsuperscript{175} In response to the Polish demands for more supply of oil, Gorbachev admitted the huge

\textsuperscript{170} Anatoly Chernyaev’s Notes from the Politburo Session, 21 January 1989
\textsuperscript{171} Notes of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Meeting with Soviet Ambassadors to Socialist Countries, March 3, 1989
\textsuperscript{172} Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Károly Grósz, March 23-24, 1989
\textsuperscript{173} Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding Gorbachev’s State of Mind, May 2, 1989
\textsuperscript{174} Session of the CC CPSU Politburo, May 11, 1989
\textsuperscript{175} Session of the CC CPSU Politburo Discussion of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Talk with Mieczyslaw Rakowski, October 12, 1989
technological gap between the East and the West, “we are even in different technological eras, it seems”, he said.\textsuperscript{176}

The prospect of the formation of a new Europe was not abandoned by the party leader. Gorbachev’ address to the Council of Europe can be regarded as the strongest expression of his vision of the new Europe and the integration of Soviet Union into it. He used the expressions “European unification” and “co-creation of all nations”. Moreover, he promoted the transformation based on European common values, and the making “it possible to replace the traditional balance of forces with a balance of interests.” The pillars of the new system would have been the collective security, economic integration – “emergence of a vast economic space from the Atlantic to the Urals” –, protection of the environment, and humanitarianism. In the spirit of the Helsinki Accords, the General Secretary called for the building of a European Community of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.\textsuperscript{177} At this time a Europe without blocs and borders still sounded realistic as Germany had not yet moved toward unification.\textsuperscript{178}

Gorbachev was anxious and ambivalent about the radical changes taking place in Eastern Europe when he travelled to East Germany. However, by that time “the total dismantling of socialism as a factor of world development” was underway. Chernyaev’s statement claiming the process as “inevitable and good” is great example of the profound radicalization of political thinking within the reform-minded echelons of the political elite, who even applaud this spectacle. On the other hand, the General Secretary was stuck to an extent with the Leninist legacy, and still regarded “democratic socialism” the path to follow for Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{179} In Berlin, Gorbachev even pushed for leadership changes, which was not in accordance with his insistence about staying out of bloc personnel matters.\textsuperscript{180} His adviser, Shakhnazarov suggested that being stuck in the defensive might be less favorable than making the inevitable steps, therefore the conclusion of the unilateral troop reduction from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia

\textsuperscript{176}Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, November 24, 1989
\textsuperscript{177}The summit produced the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.
\textsuperscript{178}Address by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, July 6, 1989
\textsuperscript{179}Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding Mikhail Gorbachev’s Visit to the GDR, October 5, 1989
\textsuperscript{180}Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Members of the CC SED Politburo, October 7, 1989
and calling for a re-convened Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe as replacement for the two opposing blocs would be advantageous for Moscow.\textsuperscript{181}

Oddly, on the November 9 session of the CC CPSU Politburo there was not a word spoken about Eastern Europe, nor about the fall of the Berlin Wall. By this time, the top leaders of the country were occupied with the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself. Contrary to the conclusions of the American analyses\textsuperscript{182}, Gorbachev already sensed the rising instability in the Soviet Union and the spillover effect to the Baltics as early as 1988 December. Although “self-delusion and naiveté” might be noted from the part of the General Secretary\textsuperscript{183} in the end of 1988\textsuperscript{184}, by the end of the following year the leadership grasped that there was not much they could do to prevent the seceding of the Baltic countries\textsuperscript{185}. Some already feared from the worst; the prime minister smelled “an overall collapse”. He added “then there will be another government, another leadership of the country, already a different country.”\textsuperscript{186} By the time the ties between Moscow and its allies practically ceased to exist. From documents prepared in December 1989 it is revealed how little insight the Soviet Union had on Romania at that time, resulting in relying on Western telegraph services for news of Romania.\textsuperscript{187}

A day passed after the groundbreaking event, Chernyaev reacted on the fall of the Berlin Wall in an overwhelmingly positive manner, stating the “entire era in history of the socialist system” was over. The collapse of the wall denoted a shift in the world balance of forces. “This is the end of Yalta…the Stalinist legacy and the defeat of Hitlerite Germany”….That is what Gorbachev has done. And he has indeed turned out

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\textsuperscript{181} Memorandum from Georgy Shakhnazarov to Mikhail Gorbachev regarding Military Détente in Europe, October 14, 1989
\textsuperscript{182} CIA Intelligence Assessment, "Gorbachev’s September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation", December 1988
\textsuperscript{183} who was convinced that these countries would “doom their people to a miserable existence” if they leave the SU. His initial reactions on the Baltic issue were quite harsh. As a head of the Soviet Union it is his duty to undertake measures to preserve the state, and prevent the spillover of the Baltic endeavor to Uzbekistan and Ukraine. – said Shakhnazarov
\textsuperscript{184} Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev on the Situation in the Baltics, December 10, 1988
\textsuperscript{185} According to Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev’s harsh initial reaction on the Baltic issue can be explained by his sense of duty to undertake measures to preserve the state and prevent the spillover to Uzbekistan and Ukraine. Masterpieces of History [2010] p. 168
\textsuperscript{186} Session of the CC CPSU Politburo, November 9, 1989
\textsuperscript{187} It is interesting to note that after the flee of Ceausescu the possibility of Soviet assistance against continuing violence came up. The American position tells a lot about their pragmatic thinking of the time, since the Soviet Union’s military involvement may not have been regarded in the context of the Brezhnev Doctrine.
Four Soviet Foreign Ministry Documents regarding the Situation in Romania, December 20-25, 1989
\end{flushright}
to be a great leader. He has sensed the pace of history and helped history to find a natural channel.”

The strikingly honest Memorandum of the International Department prepared in January 1990 openly discussed the failures of the Soviet policy toward the oppressed countries. It commenced with the statement that the crisis of the neo-Stalinist model of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe had become “a general crisis” and had “broken into the open arena…During the entire post-war period the USSR systematically interfered in the internal affairs of its neighbors, including through the use of force.” It was internationally accepted that “this region was a sphere of Soviet influence.” The policy priorities of Moscow were still not clarified, since the foreign policy of the Soviet state had been “paralyzed by a sense of the CPSU’s moral responsibility” for the complications the communist parties were facing in Eastern Europe. Some decisions were reached “in the outdated spirit of loyalty to a narrow group of party leaders”. Moreover, the policy toward Eastern Europe was “in the hands of people personally responsible for Soviet actions in the spirit of the Brezhnev Doctrine.”

By 1989-1990, Gorbachev replaced the faded Stalinist imperial consensus with a new neo-Leninist utopia, based not on force and party monopoly, but on consensus and pluralism, which decision led to the quick disappearance of the empire in Europe in 1989. Simultaneously, the image of the enemy was constantly blurring, to the point of making it practically disappear as the enemy. The General Secretary created an unlimited space for foreign policy innovations by means of keeping the rest of the party leadership, the military and other hierarchies out of the loop, making his personal diplomacy the sole voice filtering out from Moscow. The internal events in the Soviet Union and the influence of new norms and beliefs made Gorbachev and his coalition reassess the strategic value of the socialist camp. Over and above, the notion of a common European home made the use of force in one part of that home unacceptable and counterproductive.

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188 Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding the Fall of the Berlin Wall, November 10, 1989
189 including the failure to change the official interpretation of 1968 during Gorbachev’s visit to Czechoslovakia, and the attitude toward the Katyn massacre, or awarding Ceausescu with the order of Lenin; visits which were “demonstrations of loyalty to leaders who had long lost public support…were steeped in corruption and obscenely violated the principles of communism they publicly advocated, hurt the interests of the USSR”
190 Memorandum from the CC CPSU International Department, “Towards a New Concept of Relations between the USSR and the States of Central and Eastern Europe”, January 5, 1990
191 Vladislav M. Zubok: New Evidence on the “Soviet Factor” in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989 p. 6
The Soviet acceptance of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe can be considered the most significant event leading up to the end of the Cold War. This tolerance of change was the definitive reality check of the new thinking of Mikhail Gorbachev.\(^\text{192}\)

### 4. The German reunification

The question of the German reunification is the best example for the Soviet foreign policy toward the Eastern part of Europe, because the loss of the huge territory and the withdrawal of the troops stationing there really shook the Warsaw Pact, thereby the Soviet Union itself. In the context of European security, the key issue needed to be resolved was the German question. Beside Bulgaria and Romania – who were in the excessive expansion of economic relations with the FRG – Hungary could follow a policy of national interest within the bloc, contributing to the process of unification.\(^\text{193}\)

The reunification of Germany took place on October 3, 1990, and the first democratic elections and the Two plus Four agreement helped the country regain its full sovereignty. The process of reunification was quick, albeit the question always played a dominant role in the Cold War policies of the superpowers. During the ending of the Cold War the FRG pursued an active foreign policy and established good relations with Washington and Moscow as well. The United States would have liked to see the FRG playing a balancing factor during the crisis within the Soviet Union.\(^\text{194}\) The Washington-Bonn axis and the wish to impede the Soviet Union dominated the negotiations. It was the chance for the US to help dissolve the communist bloc and to construct an America-friendly Europe.

The perestroika of Gorbachev resulted in unrest among the malcontents living in the GDR. The Soviet General Secretary catalyzed the ferment; he did not intend to expand

\(^{192}\) Melvyn P. Leffler – Odd Arne Westad [2010]: The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3 - Endings p. 311

\(^{193}\) Csaba Békés [2004]: Hungarian foreign policy in the Soviet alliance system, 1968–1989

\(^{194}\) Deák András [1998]: A német újraegyesítés diplomáciája: a 2+4 tárgyalások
his reform policy to the friendly states neither he wanted to induce the collapse of the Socialist system. The impatience was growing due to the increasing number of refugees, the lack of reforms; hence, the demonstrations had begun. Eric Honecker resisted to perestroika and had hostile feelings toward the new thinking of Moscow. Even in June 1989 he expressed his concerns to Eduard Shevardnadze about Poland, stating “socialism cannot be lost” there as the country ensured the communication between the Soviet Union and the troops stationing in the GDR. The Soviet foreign minister’s assurance (“our friends in the GDR need not worry”) was not backed by a genuine commitment, since the East German socialism was completely outdated by that time.195 It was soon realized that if the imminent unification arrives, the other Eastern European states can become independent and would be more attracted to the West.

At the same time however, Gorbachev could manage to build a positive relationship with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, which was even more important in the light of the diplomatic cold with the United States introduced by President Bush.196 The two leaders shared the same views on what was happening in Eastern Europe. Kohl agreed that the FRG would do nothing to destabilize the situation in Eastern Europe.197 The German chancellor also provided a linkage between the superpowers, as he “debriefed” Bush about Gorbachev’s ideas, and even challenged the hardliners’ view on the USSR.198 In October Kohl gave President Bush a detailed briefing on the unfolding changes, and he even supported these processes. Bush was somewhat concerned with the media stories “about German reunification resulting in a neutralist Germany and a threat to Western security”, he does not believe in this.199

The decision of the Hungarian leadership to make it possible for GDR citizens staying in Hungary to leave for the FRG through Austria accelerated the collapse of communist systems in Eastern Europe. The Pan-European Picnic on the Austrian-Hungarian border and the subsequent brief lifting of the Iron Curtain led to the permanent abolition of the border surveillance on 11 September 1989. However, it was not with the intent to destroy relations with the German Democratic Republic. When Hungary started opening up to the West in May 1989, the “iron curtain” was removed from the Austrian-

195 Record of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Eduard Shevardnadze, June 9, 1989
196 Record of Second Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, June 13, 1989
197 Record of Third Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, June 14, 1989
198 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, June 15, 1989
199 Record of Telephone Conversation between George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, October 23, 1989
Hungarian border. The resulting refugee problem had to be resolved, the GDR requested Hungary to comply with their bilateral treaty, which document included provisions on the deportation of trespassers. Hungary was hoping the two parts of Germany would reach an agreement, but after the failure of the negotiation between them, the talk between Hungary and East Germany also broke down. In late August, Hungary presented its plan on allowing the citizens of the GDR to leave the country freely to the West-German leaders; the decision was made without preliminary consultation with the Soviet Union. Hungary was worried about the Soviet reaction, but the answer to the feelers sent to Shevardnadze was that it was an issue needed to be resolved by Hungary, East- and West Germany. When the FRG reached out to Gorbachev, the Party leader gave the obscure answer that “the Hungarians are good people”, which statement turned out to be the approval of the situation.201 Early in September 1989, after the Hungarian decision on opening the border, the German Democratic Republic started blaming Hungary for bidding on the FRG and betraying “socialism”.202 The East German ambassador to Budapest dismissed Nyers’s claim that the border opening was a temporary measure, and described it as “an attempt at stalling and deliberately misleading the GDR. They did not perceive the East Germans’ voting by foot as a critique of the regime, but as “a coordinated and successful attempt by the imperialist states”.203 The GDR was left alone with its orthodox views, as Gorbachev and Shakhnazarov criticized Honecker in a really harsh manner for not stepping down; moreover they shared the view that there was no possibility to end the regime of Honecker “gracefully”.204 The leader – then the whole government – resigned soon, the new General Secretary, Egon Krenz did not waste time, and presented to Gorbachev the new draft law on foreign travel. The announcement of this legislation resulted in the immediate start of people pouring into West Germany on November 9, and on the same day the tearing down of the wall itself.205 The Soviet General Secretary overestimated the strength of Western European opposition to the reunification; nonetheless the top

200 Albeit, as Jacques Levesque reported his conversation with László Kovács, it can be said that even though it was the decision of the Foreign Ministry and Minister Horn Gyula, still, there were some tentative attempts toward Moscow to find out their position. – Masterpieces of History [2010]
201 Békés [2004]: Back to Europe: The international background of the political transition in Hungary, 1988 – 1990 p. 35
202 Transcript of SED Politburo Sessions, September 5, 1989
203 Letter from Gerd Vehres to Oskar Fischer, September 10, 1989
204 Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding Erich Honecker, October 11, 1989
205 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Egon Krenz, November 1, 1989
leadership rightly suspected that there was will in the West to prevent the reunification with Soviet “hands.”

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 the process accelerated even more; chancellor Kohl tried to resolve the issue of unification with his 10 point proposal. Soon afterwards, roundtable talks were initiated. Apart from the troubling economic situation of the GDR, the crisis unfolding in the Soviet Union urged for the swiftest resolution possible, since it was questionable how long Gorbachev could remain in power.

Not even the democratizing Poland was in favor of such changes – “events in the GDR are developing too quickly…one must try to slow them down” – as Lech Wałęsa was among those few who foresaw the rapidly approaching fall of the Wall, and his forecast manifested soon. He feared that if the Wall goes down, the GDR would get into the center of attention for the FRG, and West Germany “would no longer help Poland with its reforms. Helmut Kohl reassured him about their willingness to help, and about the lack of military alternative in the GDR.

Chancellor Kohl described the fall of the Wall to Bush as “a dramatic thing; a historic hour,” “like witnessing an enormous fair” with “the atmosphere of a festival” where “they are literally taking down the wall” and “thousands of people are crossing both ways.” Bush appreciated Kohl’s gesture of publicly thanking “the Americans for their role in all of this.” The German Chancellor reached out not only to Washington but to Moscow as well, in order to assure stability in the two Germanys, and to promote the unification. Soon, he notified Bush about his “10 Points” speech pointing toward reunification. As a mediator between the superpowers, he was encouraging the American president to engage in discussion with Gorbachev. He also made it clear that the most crucial decisions on stability or destabilization would be made by the Central and Eastern European countries. The West was obliged to support the process from the outside, but Kohl criticized the pace of help going to Poland and Hungary. He also appreciated Gorbachev’s policies facilitating the reform changes in Eastern Europe.

\[206\] Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding German Reunification, October 9, 1989  
\[207\] Record of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and Lech Wałęsa, November 9, 1989  
\[208\] Record of Telephone Conversation between George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, November 10, 1989  
\[209\] Record of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, November 11, 1989  
\[210\] Letter from Helmut Kohl to George H.W. Bush, November 28, 1989
The German Chancellor thought that he enjoyed the support of Gorbachev, and without informing neither the US nor the other Western allies, he made his groundbreaking speech. The American president was “not too worried”, thinking Kohl cannot pursue the reunification alone; however, the Chancellor actually did go it alone.211

The turning point in the process of German unification became visible immediately after the Malta summit, when President Bush joined Kohl’s program. The chancellor told Bush the opposite of what the American president had told Gorbachev about the inviolability of borders under the Helsinki Final Act. According to the Final Act, border changes can be made through peaceful means. What is more, he outlined his three-step plan, which envisioned a free government in the former GDR, and the confederation of the two independent states, then the future project of a federation. Neither of the two politicians imagined the issue of reunification would dominate next year’s elections in Germany.212

Gorbachev had to face with the idea of a confederation, due to the fact President Bush weighed in on Kohl’s side. The Soviet leader felt the German chancellor did not adhere to their agreements. (“I cannot call him a responsible and predictable politician.”) He expected the Germans would at least consult with him. For him, the “ultimatum” of the 10 Points was a “crude interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state”. Gorbachev regarded it as the “funeral for the European process” that he imagined, thus he criticized the policy of Kohl and Genscher harshly. The foreign minister assured him the confederate Germany would not repeat the old mistakes. Ultimately, it was up to the GDR to decide whether these suggestions were suitable or not. The FRG already considered the question as their internal affair, but the Soviet General Secretary warned him it was an “internal affair [that] was making everybody concerned.”213

The substantial changes made the Western European leaders wake up as well; Mitterrand was getting closer to Kohl, seemingly without any intention to slow the process of unification down. He was still in accord with Gorbachev on the primary importance of “European integration, the evolution of Eastern Europe, and the all-European process.” The 10 Points “turned everything upside down”, but his treaty

212 Memorandum of Conversation of George H.W. Bush, John Sununu, Brent Scowcroft, and Helmut Kohl, December 3, 1989
213 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Hans Dietrich Genscher, December 5, 1989
commitments with the FRG made it more difficult for him “to deny the Germans the right to make mistakes.” Reflecting on the conversation with the German foreign minister, the only thing Mitterrand could give was moral support for the Soviet leader for his “courage” in rejecting established ideas inherited from the past. Gorbachev tried to mislead – at the same time deluding himself as well – the French president, telling him “more than half of the population of the GDR would like to preserve the existing character of their country, with changes in its political structure, of course.”

In late January Gorbachev and his foreign policy advisers realized the process of German unification could not be stopped. All they could do was participating in the process; thereby making sure it will not have negative effects on the USSR. The disagreement at the meeting focusing on the unification was only about which side – Kohl’s or the Social Democrats’ – to take. By the time the recognition that the GDR ceased to exist as a real state was mutual.

In Moscow, the progression of the unification process resulted in uncertainty and opposing views, with the conservatives seeing it as a threat to the whole bloc, and the Shevardnadze led new thinkers not willing to prevent the changes. The most crucial issue was the polemic of membership in military organizations. Even in February 1990 at the time of the Dresden meeting of Hans Modrow and Kohl, Gorbachev found the NATO membership of Germany inadmissible.

Shevardnadze even proposed that the country could be the member of both organizations. The reformists had already started criticizing Gorbachev for his stubbornness, saying that this attitude discredited the image of the Soviet Union. The troop withdrawal was stagnating; the Soviet foreign policy could not measure the importance of the issue. Since they had leverage on the Modrow government, the unification seemed as a defeat, not simply a shift in the balance of power. With the Modrow plan the GDR attempted to come up with an alternative to the 2+4 agreement; this proposal emphasized neutrality and would have slowed down the whole process thus favoring the Soviet Union.

The crisis in Moscow forced Gorbachev to change his mind, and accept the inevitable. He listened to the advisors, and crushed the attacks against him in the Party Congress.

214 Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand, December 6, 1989
215 Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding German Reunification, January 28, 1990
216 Deák [1998]
217 ibid.
He was reelected by a grand majority. In his statement on February 10 he let the GDR go. Behind the unforeseen announcement there could by multiple underlying reasons, for example not knowing how much time he had left as a Secretary General, the offensive of the American foreign policy, the visit of the US Foreign Minister, and the fact that the Western parties could reach an agreement in the form of the 2+4 treaty. The Soviet Union had more urgent issues to solve within its own backyard, and perhaps Gorbachev did not realize how isolated the Modrow plan was. In January, on a confidential meeting they accepted the 2+4 agreement, and as a compromise they supported Kohl without turning away from Modrow.\textsuperscript{218} On the negotiations beginning in May the Soviet Union was quickly left alone with its views; the debate was turned towards the role the unified Germany could fulfill in the federal system. The aid and loan streaming from Germany to the Soviet Union and the 9 point proposal by the United States contributed to the change in perception in the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{219}

The explanation of the more active participation by the Americans in the question of Germany could be the consideration that the Soviet Union could be stopped here, and the whole bloc would tremble if East Germany was lost, thus a United States-friendly Europe could be created. In the 2+4 negotiations the American-West German axis dominated. The American offensive in diplomacy, the unified will of the West on the 2+4 negotiations made Gorbachev change his mind. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was occupied with its own internal problems. Gorbachev may have thought the reform communism was strong in the GDR, and perhaps he did not recognize the alienation of the Modrow-plan.

At his conversation with the General Secretary James Baker reassured the Soviet party leader that the United States did not intend “to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes taking place. He asked Gorbachev whether he preferred “a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that

\textsuperscript{218} Deák [1998]  
\textsuperscript{219} ibid.
NATO’s jurisprudence or troops would not spread East of the boundary.”\textsuperscript{220} The General Secretary would think everything over.\textsuperscript{221}

The CIA’s Intelligence Estimate, published five months after the fall of the Berlin Wall tried to catch up with the events. The realization was made that the communist party rule in Eastern Europe was finished and it would not be revived. It also endorsed some ideas of Gorbachev on the mutual dissolution of the blocs and transfer of functions to an institutionalized CSCE.\textsuperscript{222}

In July 1990, on the meeting with Helmut Kohl, Gorbachev agreed on the NATO membership of Germany. Furthermore, they agreed on the troop withdrawal and the prohibition of implementation of NATO capacities on the territory of the FRG. In November, they ratified the partnership treaty.

At the end of the day it was the East German refugee crisis, the demonstrations throughout the GDR, and the unexpected collapse of the Berlin Wall that produced such an acceleration of events that the Soviet leadership lost any chance to contain them. Chernyaev had no illusions about the course of events. “A total dismantling of socialism as a world phenomenon has been taking place. This may be inevitable and good. For this is a reunification of mankind on the basis of common sense. And a common fellow from Stavropol [Gorbachev] set this process in motion.”\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{220} Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker, February 9, 1990
\textsuperscript{221} Gorbachev explained to James Baker why he did not listen to Yakovlev and Chernyaev and leave the party, thus become only the president: “In general I am for separating these posts, but not right now…[because] two centers of power would form”.
\textsuperscript{222} National Intelligence Estimate 12-90, ”The Future of Eastern Europe,” (Key Judgements Only), April 1990
\textsuperscript{223} Excerpt From the Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev, 5 October 1989
5. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact

The Soviet Union played a dominant role in the region of East Central Europe, and this dominance was strengthened by the Warsaw Pact. It was the constraint that held this entity together, since stability was the key to the European status quo. On 14 May, 1955, in Warsaw, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Soviet Union established the political-military organization of the Soviet bloc countries. The GDR joined it in 1956. According to the text of the treaty, if any member country was attacked the others were obliged to give military help right away. The military strategy of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were nearly identical, the power focused in the hands of the Soviets, the meetings of the most important decision making body, the Political Consultative Committee were mere formalities at the beginning. For several times the idea of dropping out of the organization emerged, furthermore Albania could realize it in 1968.

The quick formation of the organization can be explained as a response to the Austrian state treaty, the birth of NATO and the WEU, and the rearment of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Soviet troops could station in the territory of the Warsaw Pact member countries after the bilateral agreements, which meant that the Soviet Union attached these satellites to itself. By canceling the treaties of mutual assistance with Great Britain and France, and establishing an opposing military bloc to the NATO, an almost forty year long rivalry commenced. From the outside the pact fitted into the thinking of the era, the founding document pretended being a fully democratic organization. It envisioned a collective European security system including all the states of the continent working side by side for peace and security. Unfortunately, the creation of the WEU and the rearment of the FRG forced the peace-loving countries to react, strictly in accord with the principles listed in the covenant of the United Nations. All in all, the Warsaw Pact was more likely the elongated arm of the Soviet Union than a voluntary alliance of equal countries. Later on the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was fortified with bilateral treaties, this gave permission to the Soviets to station troops in the countries. Protection was offered to the smaller states and generated security for the Soviet Union on its western border.
5.1. New winds

A new military doctrine was formulating in 1987, and it brought a defensive perception into the life of the alliance. According to Marshal Sergei Sokolov, the rhetoric of the NATO blamed the opposing military organization for having an offensive military doctrine whilst this was not the case with the Western Alliance. This new plan, however, was never presented to the international community\(^\text{224}\). In accordance with the new perception, the Pact would not start a war, but should remain able to defend itself in case of a NATO attack. The doctrine was very ambitious, as it suggested restriction on nuclear tests, reduction of European conventional forces, creation of nuclear weapon-free areas in Europe, the mutual dissolution of the opposing political-military organizations. This new approach resulted in debates in Moscow since the military leadership did not agree with the troop reduction; this was emphasized in Iazov’s statement on 26 November. The basis of the new military doctrine was the transformation of the Warsaw Pact from a military-political organization to a political-military one, taking into consideration the economic and humanitarian questions as well.\(^\text{225}\)

In the Sofia meeting of the WP Foreign Ministers, Shevardnadze promoted unilateral troop reductions, without fearing from the consequences. Nevertheless, Marshal Kulikov and Eric Honecker would still discuss the possible responses to an American attack, and the hostile nature of the US foreign policy.\(^\text{226}\)

Surprisingly, it was Romania who submitted a reform plan, demanding an ’overhaul’ which would have affected the structure of the Warsaw Pact, but in the Prague meeting of the Defense Ministers it became clear that the majority of member states only wanted improvement in terms of quality and efficiency. The bullet points of such an overhaul would have been the insurance for the independent nature of the PCC, and the introduction of a rotating presidency. However, up until the birth of the Bulgarian counterproposal, there were no steps taken toward a major structural reform.\(^\text{227}\)

In the same month, the Soviet General Secretary’s speech on the future of the military alliance, presented to the Ministers of Defense, showed his endeavors toward a more

\(^{224}\) Soviet Explanation of the Warsaw Pact’s New Military Doctrine at the Chiefs of Staff Meeting in Moscow, May 18-25, 1987

\(^{225}\) Speeches at the Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Sofia, March 11, 1988

\(^{226}\) Memorandum of Kulikov-Honecker Conversation, March 19, 1988

\(^{227}\) Romanian Proposal for Warsaw Pact Reform: Information Regarding the Romanian Proposal
livable world, in which the Soviet Union would be freed from the unwanted heavy burden of the European issues. He also suggested the initiation of the CFE talks. His subsequent speech in front of the PCC was, in a way, the justification of his speech presented in front of the United Nations. In addition, he depicted a favorable picture regarding the future of the Warsaw Pact with the prospect of a reform within two or three years.²²⁸

Before the meeting in Sofia, Hungary also presented some ideas which were dedicated to make the organization more decisive and strengthen the importance of debates. In March, 1988 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense prepared a joint declaration on the acute matters related to the expansion of the military organization, in which document they stated that the Warsaw Pact had lost its purpose.²²⁹ On 6 March 1989 the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry of Hungary prepared a joint statement that was occupied with the timely questions regarding the Warsaw Pact and its development. While stating that the organization fulfilled its duty of promoting peace and security for its member states, the main function of this military-political body had lost terrain with the economic rivalry coming into the foreground in world politics. Troop reductions, the improvement of human rights, and the shift from the pursuance of the Soviet foreign policy to the synesthesa of the national foreign policy interests were inevitable.²³⁰

The starting point of the substantial changes in the views of the members took place in 1989. At the beginning of April, at an unofficial meeting – where the Soviet delegation did not participate - of the Foreign Ministers it became clear that the interests of the subordinated countries differed from the Soviets’. Even the GDR, the most “dedicated” member of the alliance and Romania, the most “problematic” student shared this view. East-German foreign minister Fisher complained about the pressure from the West for the importation of ‘imperialist’ human values, for the demolition of the Berlin wall as

²²⁸ Summary of Gorbachev’s Speech at the Committee of Ministers of Defense Meeting in Moscow, July 7, 1988
²²⁹ Feljegyzés a VSZ együttműködési mechanizmusá fejlesztésével foglalkozó szakértői tanácskozásáról; Moszkva 1988. december 8-10.
²³⁰ A Varsói Szerződés fejlesztésével összefüggő időszerű kérdések
the necessary step to change the current situation, all in all: they want “more market, less Marx” in the Soviet bloc.

In the spring of 1989 the Soviet influence on the region of East Central Europe diminished even more. On Hungarian and Czechoslovak pressure, Moscow agreed to withdraw the troops from these states by mid 1991. In the middle of 1990, the Hungarian, Czechoslovak and the GDR governments announced that their forces no longer participate in the military movements of the Warsaw Treaty. Romania shared the idea; soon afterwards Poland and Bulgaria followed the others.

When Bulgaria responded to the Romanian proposal of 1988 with its own, it summed up the vision of the Soviet-Bulgarian axis. They both hoped that by maintaining the Warsaw Pact, the communist regimes of the member countries could be preserved as well. Thus Bulgaria presented the organization as the key to the European stability and security. 232

In the Bucharest meeting of the PCC diverse views evolved concerning the future of the organization. The real problems were not discussed at the meeting, there were no reform proposals, neither the Eastern European situation was discussed thoroughly, however, the atmosphere was positive overall, and the participants left as soon as they could. The first delegation to depart was the Soviet Union, by which action a tradition was broken. The final document stated there is no universal model of socialism, in addition, for the first time, the intention to enforce the political aspect of the Pact was written down. 233

The shallowness of the discussion – the “dialogue of the deaf” – indicated the lack of capability and will by the Soviet side to keep the organization together.234 On the October conference of the Foreign Ministers it was even more evident that the participants did not share the same conception when talking about the problems which would have been the responsibility of the PCC to solve. Even days before the collapse of the Berlin wall, there was no perspective for joint efforts. Shevardnadze spoke about the turning point, the time to redefine the goals of the Warsaw Pact. Based on a Polish proposal, the formation of a new body occupied with the political questions on a daily basis was also supported by the Soviet Foreign Minister. He said that the people of the

231 Report by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister at the Unofficial Meeting of Foreign Ministers at Niederschönhausen near Berlin, April 10, 1989
232 Bulgarian Proposal for Reform of the Warsaw Treaty, June 14, 1989
233 Records of the Political Consultative Committee Meeting in Bucharest, July 7-8, 1989
234 Notes of Meeting of Warsaw Treaty Members-States, July 8, 1989
bloc had lived in an artificial political atmosphere far too long, and then it was possible to breathe in some fresh air. Both Poland and Hungary were in favor of a more political oriented Warsaw Pact. Gyula Horn called the attention to the fact that the ideological element of the alliance was outworn, and the non-intervention into the members’ home affairs should be respected. Furthermore, he addressed the issue of the inaptitude of the organization to handle economic questions. The meeting was significant in the sense that it was a test of the pluralism within the Pact.

The negotiations on the withdrawal of the troops started soon after the regime changes. The Soviet plan would have left 270 thousand soldiers in the region (most of them in Poland and East Germany). By June 1990 more than seventy thousand troops left the territory of Czechoslovakia. The talks with Poland hit a snag, but eventually the withdrawals could start in April 1991. In the GDR the unification process made the withdrawal of the 380 thousand troops difficult.

In Hungary, the negotiations started in January 1990 and successfully ended on 10 March, when the Németh government signed the contract on the withdrawal of the temporarily stationing Soviet troops. The last soldier left the country on 19 June 1991. The financial settlement was not without problems, since both parties had demands toward the other, but Boris Yeltsin and József Antall could eventually reach an agreement renouncing all demands.

Despite all happening at that time, in Ottawa, the representatives of the NATO and the Warsaw Pact equally supported the idea of maintaining the two opposing blocs, regarding them as the guarantee for stability. The Soviet Union could not let itself get into an unpleasant situation with the shift of the balance of power, and the United States would have liked to see the stability unharmed.

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235 Czechoslovak Report on a Meeting at the Soviet General Staff, January 29, 1990
236 Some argue that the reason why Poland was not requesting for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from its territory was the fear from the consequences of the German unification on the Western Polish borders.
237 Jeszenszky [2003]
238 East German Summary of the Ottawa Meeting of NATO and Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers, February 12-13, 1990
5.2. The last days

On the preparations of the Moscow meeting of the PCC in June, 1990, Hungary interpreted its view that there was no other way to reform the WP but dismantle the military side of it. Hungary found itself alone with this idea as the other representatives of the member states were promoting minor reforms; the maximum concession would have been the reconstruction into a consultative defensive organization. All other members but Czechoslovakia were in favor of the sustainment of the military side. The Czechoslovak proposals would have affected the Combined Command of Pact Armed Forces by restricting the role of cooperation in this field. The supreme command would have been reorganized into a coordinating body that loses its political authority. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia promoted changes helping the disarmament.\textsuperscript{239} The Soviet Union, having interests in maintaining the whole military alliance, tried to avoid negotiating on the questions regarding the military cooperation.\textsuperscript{240}

In the meeting on 6-7 June, 1990 of the PCC in Moscow – which turned out to be the last one of its kind – the Hungarian prime minister, József Antall reached a kind of breakthrough, in spite of that the Hungarian ambassador and analysts had pointed out to him that even the Western powers did not encourage the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact at that time. In the meeting the participants declared that from that time on the peaceful coexistence was a possible way of living. On the question of the reform, the delegation did not reach an accord. The Czechoslovak delegation went the furthest by demanding for the dismantlement of the military structure, and the possible dissolution of the whole Pact. The Hungarian delegation pronounced that the raison d’être of the military structure had ceased to exist, and in that manner, it could be dismantled by the end of 1991. Out of its security interests, Poland was still not ready to join these two countries. The Soviet Union and the others, representing a more moderate opinion promoted the refurbishment of the organization. A committee was set up and was assigned to work out the research proposals;\textsuperscript{241} the member states also agreed on the organization of an extraordinary PCC meeting in Budapest. The two pioneers announced that in the case of an unsuccessful reformation of the Warsaw Pact, they both would leave the Treaty Organization by 1991-1992.

\textsuperscript{239} Information on Czechoslovak Proposals before the Moscow Political Consultative Committee Meeting, 4 June 1990
\textsuperscript{240} Magdolna Baráth – János Rainer M. [2000]: Gorbacsov tárgyalásai magyar vezetőkkel
\textsuperscript{241} Records of the Political Consultative Committee Meeting in Moscow, June 7, 1990
The Hungarian view on the future rooted in their evaluation of the new situation in Europe. They were convinced that the member states should not waste their efforts trying to reform this organization. Instead, the countries were to be engaged in establishing a new, joint European structure for security and co-operation, and fit the Warsaw Pact into such a framework. The new system should be based on European and regional co-operation, rather than the balance of power and the rivalry. However, this initiative did not mean that Hungary wanted less security. Antall wished to initiate talks in order to review the nature, the function and the activities of the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, he expressed that Hungary was willing to regain control over its armed forces. These provisional steps did not entail that Hungary was willing to terminate unilaterally the relations with the member states.

The final document, did not just request for the review of the nature, function and activity of the WP, but demanded the transformation into a democratic entity based on the cooperation of sovereign states. From this time on the East Central European countries got the upper hand, and the Soviet Union had to accept their initiatives. The reform proposals were meant to be announced in the November meeting of the PCC, but the events took an unexpected turn.\(^{242}\) The propositions on the reform were due in October, and should have been presented in the Budapest meeting, which never came.

Speaking of József Antall’s role in the process of dissolution, there are differing conceits,\(^{243}\) but what cannot be taken away from him is that the Hungarian Prime Minister was the first to speak about secession. Antall expressed that even in case of a major overhaul Hungary was going to step out from the Warsaw Pact. In the meeting he presented a harsher proposal than the Soviets, even though the Council of Foreign Ministers rejected it before. On the Hungarian demand, Gorbachev modified the second point of the agenda, which now dealt with the review of the military organization’s character, functions, and a possible radical reconstruction. The answer of the Soviet General Secretary (‘Da, haraso.’\(^{244}\) ) was unexpected. Gorbachev did not intend to dismiss the military structure, neither the Unified Command of Pact Armed Forces. Antall advised a gradual liquidation, which would reach its end in 1991, since the military side of the Pact was unnecessary under the international circumstances. Václav

\(^{242}\) Chaos in the Soviet Union, and the events in Lithuania
\(^{243}\) Gyula Kodolányi [2001]: A mese igaz
\(^{244}\) Géza Jeszenszky [2003]: Antall József, a külpolitikus
Havel was willing to assist this endeavor, but as he did not get an authorization from the Czechoslovak government, he had to withdraw this promise before the start of the meeting.\textsuperscript{245} The Polish and the Czechoslovaks joined the Hungarian politics in November, 1990, in Paris.

The commissioners started to examine the functions and the activity of the Warsaw Pact, and they have decided to create an extemporal committee which body was assigned to review the Pact’s scope of duties, and subsequently present the results to the PCC. This body, however, could meet only two times, once in Prague, later in Sofia.

At the bilateral meeting of the Soviet Union and Hungary, József Antall expressed that his goal was the abolishment of the organization through negotiations. At that time, Gorbachev was against this idea. The Hungarian prime minister’s argument was that the NATO was functioning on a democratic basis, voluntarily, on the other hand, the Warsaw Pact was entirely hierarchical, and pleaded the Soviet interests. On the following day Lajos Für, Defense Minister announced the Hungarian troop withdrawal from the Unified Command of Pact Armed Forces.\textsuperscript{246}

The Hungarian Parliament’s regulation of 29 June 1990 was a document of tremendous importance regarding the dissolution of the military organization. By citing the 62\textsuperscript{nd} paragraph of the Vienna Convention, the regulation asked the government to initiate negotiations on Hungary's withdrawal from the organization. As a first step, Hungary would quit the military structure of the Warsaw Pact, which meant that Hungary would not participate in any military operation, and the forces of the Warsaw Pact would be excluded from the country’s territory. In addition, the regulation necessitated the initiation of bilateral negotiations on the Hungarian sovereignty. Finally it stated that Hungary was ready to leave the Warsaw Pact unilaterally by the end of 1991.

The pioneer countries of the process of dismantling were aware of the fact that for a new European political and security system, the abolishment of the organization was merely sufficient; the existing relations of the region were awaiting to be redefined. At that time, Poland was afraid of the possible unfavorable consequences of emerging nationalism in the security vacuum, and the possibility of the German threat. Thus, they were ready to remain inside the bounds of the Warsaw Pact, in case their demands –

\textsuperscript{245} Jeszenszky [2003]  
\textsuperscript{246} Kodolányi [2001]
striving for the establishment of an all-European system; respecting the sovereignty of member states; the Polish army got under national control – would be fulfilled.  

In the September 1990 meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, the Hungarian foreign minister, Géza Jeszenszky announced the plan on dismantling the Pact. With his words – “What are we doing here?” – Hungary deemed the WP an ineffectual organization; this encouraged the Polish Foreign Minister. Although the Soviet Union insisted on the mutual dissolution of the opposing organization, this New York meeting can be considered as the breakthrough. Margaret Thatcher's approval on the idea of an East Central European Union can be considered as a positive sign from the side of the Western powers. This organization could have served as a bridge to the NATO, and even though it did not come to life, the Western backing of this endeavor had a symbolic importance.

After the Budapest conference in November, even Romania and Bulgaria took side with the vision of the subsequent Visegrad Cooperation countries. On 11 February, 1991, Gorbachev sent a letter to Budapest, the location of the next PCC meeting. In this message the leader of the Soviet Union expressed that the time had come to disband the military structure of the Warsaw Pact by 1 April, 1991. Two weeks later, the Foreign- and Defense Ministers held a meeting in Budapest. The delegations evaluated the function of the military framework of the Pact, eminently its timely dissolution. In the records, they fixed a July deadline for the dismantling. What is more, the radical changes of the region were discussed. On the principles of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the need for an all-European structure in the place of the two opposing blocs was stated. On the Hungarian side, Géza Jeszenszky and Lajos Für signed the document.

On 1 July, 1991, at the Warsaw Pact Summit in Prague, the delegations produced a four article long document on the liquidation. It was signed by Antall, Havel, Walesa, Janajev, Iliescu and Zelev. The first article annulled the prolongation, the second banned the territorial claims against each other, and the last two stated that after the compulsory ratification, the original text and the records on the ratification are going to

247 Bogdan Szajkowsi [1992]: The demise of the Warsaw Pact; p. 3
248 Interview with Dr. Géza Jeszenszky, January 2009
be placed in Czechoslovakia. These came into force after the deposition of the last ratification. A few days earlier, the CMEA was abolished as well, on 28th June, 1991.

6. Hungary and the Visegrad Cooperation

Hungary's contribution to the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact is undisputed, since the country played the dominant role in establishing the Visegrad Cooperation, which organization helped the three member states unify their views on the timely dismantlement of the Warsaw Pact, which event was the symbol of the change in relations between East Central Europe and the Soviet Union. However, in the period of political transition, the new born Hungarian political plurality was not helping to come up with a unified security plan.

By the end of the seventies Hungarian foreign policy managed to become relatively independent, striving to become the bridge-maker between the East and the West. The broadened relationship with the West, and the reliance on their loans – combined with the oil crisis – pushed the state toward its transition in 1988-1989. The enhanced connection with the West demanded concessions to the democratic opposition, and by the eighties the Western ideology spiraled into the country to such an extent, that even the party members started promoting a new political establishment achieved through a peaceful transition.250

At the same time, Hungarian domestic reforms251 – such as the reorganization of the agriculture, partial acceptance of the role of the market, introduction of the system of multiple candidatures at the parliamentary elections – reflected in the reform policies of Gorbachev. However, the close cooperation was not always fruitful for the more progressive members of the bloc. Hungary had to make concessions in the question of Hungarian-Romanian conflict in 1988, since the Soviet party leader feared not only

251 The first major development during the course of the Hungarian transition, which occurred without consulting the Soviets, entailed an interview with Imre Pozsgay on 28 January 1989 and the re-evaluation of the 1956 October events as a people’s uprising, respectively.
from the possible destabilizing factor within the Warsaw Pact, but form the unforeseeable consequences regarding the internal stability of the Soviet Union suffering from separatist movements and ethnic conflicts.\textsuperscript{252}

An additional factor which significantly contributed to the positive Soviet attitude and their tolerance toward the active foreign policy of Hungary and its transition was the formation of an “informal Moscow-Warsaw-Budapest triangle”\textsuperscript{253}, a group came into being for policy harmonization in the Warsaw Pact and the CMEA. Albeit it was a more forward grouping than the other, conservative bloc members, the differences in progression, in particular Hungary’s advancement, could result in policies not necessarily reformist enough for Hungary.

The circumstances were such that the Hungarian leadership had to face with a dilemma of how to handle the situation. This quandary was caused by the floated Brezhnev Doctrine and perhaps to an extent by the prudent stance taken by the leading Western powers in the question of a major overhaul of the Cold War system. Even in 1989, there were still doubts within the inner circles of the HSWP which steps would be permissible. Undersecretary of state for foreign affairs Gyula Horn stated at a Central Committee meeting in February that “today there is no question within the Warsaw Pact – the Brezhnev doctrine is outdated for ever – that they would interfere in any domestic issue, for instance, our position as regards the multiparty system was our sovereign decision.”\textsuperscript{254} Nevertheless, in June as Foreign Minister cautioned the members of the same plenum about unrealistic illusions\textsuperscript{255}, saying”…no one should confuse our situation with any other country that has a democratic regime. There is no rotation mechanism as regards politics in Hungary. […] If the HSWP – as the governing party – were to fall, it would be the same as a change of regime. I don’t know whether the alliance system would tolerate this. I don’t believe it would”.\textsuperscript{256} According to the statements of Rezső Nyers and Imre Pozsgay it was in late summer to autumn when they realized that the Soviets would not intervene in Hungary even if the transition was

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{252} Csaba Békés [2004]  
\textsuperscript{253} Csaba Békés [2002a]: Back to Europe: The international background of the political transition in Hungary, 1988 – 1990, p. 26  
\textsuperscript{255} Some internal evaluations still warned about a possible unilateral military intervention in defense of socialism in case the Soviet Union reverts to the old system.  
\textsuperscript{256} Gyula Horn’s comment at the meeting of the HSWP CC, July 23-24, 1989, ib., Vol. 2, p. 1174.
\end{flushright}
to lead to the demise of socialism.\textsuperscript{257} With the unfolding domestic political changes the question of political-military commitment was ruled out from the domain reserve of the Socialist Party, resulting from the establishment of the de facto multiparty system and the Assembly Act.

In 1989, the Hungarian Democratic Forum pursued the idea of neutrality; however, the realities were against this idea. In their program devised in their first national assembly, they campaigned for the troop withdrawal and a neutral status as national interests. The importance of the Warsaw Pact decreased significantly, at the same time a more open foreign policy was required.\textsuperscript{258} The new foreign policy was to respect national interests and had to be centered on Europe.\textsuperscript{259} The economic cooperation had to be reorganized using a market-based system, instead of the outdated system of the CMEA. At that time the party thought accepting the Warsaw Pact as a political reality would not prevent the Hungarian foreign policy from becoming more independent. This would need however opening to the outside world and providing space for the member states to move. The Soviet Union and the European Communities would also support the establishment of such a system promoting Europeanization. Strengthening the economic ties with the European Communities was the fundamental economic interest of Hungary.\textsuperscript{260} Quitting the Warsaw Pact and joining the Atlantic cooperation in the broader sense meant the complete reorientation of the foreign policy.\textsuperscript{261} Neither of the superpowers would have accepted a NATO member Hungary, however, neutrality could have been a viable option.

On the ‘opposite’ side, the Liberal Democrats emphasized the importance of the integration into the West.\textsuperscript{262} The newly formed Socialist Party could imagine a mutual dissolution of the NATO and the Warsaw Pact before 2000.\textsuperscript{263} The notion of neutrality\textsuperscript{264} was included in the sole joint declaration issued by the opposition organizations, but while the Hungarian leadership entertained the idea of neutrality,

\textsuperscript{257} Békés [2004]  
\textsuperscript{258} The military organization would be more open, with the opportunity to reconcile the interests of the different countries. Hungary’s position could be somewhat similar to that of France’s in the NATO. Für [2003]  
\textsuperscript{259} Rudolf Joó [1989]: Szempontok a Magyar Demokrata Fórum külpolitikai programjához; p. 8 ibid.  
\textsuperscript{260} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{261} Jeszenszky [2003]  
\textsuperscript{262} Pál Pritz [2006]: Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században  
\textsuperscript{263} Lajos Für [2003]: A Varsói Szerződés végnapjai – magyar szemmel p. 78  
\textsuperscript{264} arriving from the legacy of 1956
eventually it was considered that in the short-term it would jeopardize the peaceful political transition.\textsuperscript{265} The signals\textsuperscript{266} warning about the risky nature of crossing the line made the government take up a pragmatic approach with regards to foreign policy and the Warsaw Pact.

The first official contact towards the NATO was made by Gyula Horn in 1988. At that time his statement that the mutual dismantlement could not be executed, and the Warsaw Pact should not be more than a consultative organization, produced acute reactions in the Hungarian press.\textsuperscript{267}

On 23 May, 1990, József Antall expressed the government's opinion in the Parliament. In this opinion, he stated that they had already made a final decision on the question of leaving the Warsaw Pact. The organization could not give anything to Hungary anymore. Already in 1956, the Hungarian people had shown their will, but it was in 1990 when Hungary could quit the organization, but not with a unilateral decision. The goal was to do it within the framework of the international law and diplomacy, backed by the Western world. \textsuperscript{268}

The relationship between the Visegrad Cooperation's members was good for most of the time, but a kind of rivalry can be observed too. The leading role of Antall cannot be questioned, but Waclaw Hável was the celebrity of the cooperation. In his autobiography he considers the dismantlement of the Warsaw Pact the biggest achievement of his political career. However, József Antall ("the unsung hero of transition") was the one, who initiated the establishment of the Visegrad Group in Paris, 19 November, 1990. Even the name and the location of the first meeting were advised by him. He brought back the alliance of 1335 to life to take the road to the European integration more easily\textsuperscript{269}. After the collapse of the communist regimes, the member states helped each other in the process of changing to a democratic, pluralist system. The mutual cultural and intellectual values, traditions and the religion helped them; furthermore, they shared the same security interests.

\textsuperscript{265} Békés [2004]
\textsuperscript{266} both from the Soviet Union and the Western partners
\textsuperscript{267} Lajos Pietsch [1998]: Magyarország és a NATO
\textsuperscript{268} Antall József minisztériumok felszólalása az Országgyűlés 1990. május 23-ai ülésnapján
\textsuperscript{269} A Visegrádi Együttműködés alapító okirata
At the meeting on 15 February 1991 in Visegrad Václav Havel, József Antall and Lech Walesa decided on the name of the organization, and agreed to take the steps toward the European integration together. Although, this collaboration cannot be considered a formal one, it did not create an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic cooperation.²⁷⁰ The Foreign Ministers of the cooperation met in Budapest in January, 1991, when they declared that in case the Soviet Union remained unwilling to negotiate on the dissolution of the entire organization, the three states would quit. They asked Gorbachev to organize the PCC meeting. The Soviet General Secretary responded in a letter to Hával, that he was willing to demolish the military structure of the organization by April.

The true power of the Visegrad Group was in the co-operation of the member states. The three ‘weak’ could appear strong when united. Through regular harmonization, they came up with a unified will that the Soviet Union could not abandon. The reinforced arms race exhausted the Soviet Union, the ‘new thinking’ of Gorbachev came too late. The once superpower was now forced to reestablish friendly relations with the United States. Losing the GDR was more than the Soviet Union could bear, and the collaboration of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia aggravated its situation. The Soviet resources were insufficient to maintain influence in East Central Europe, so the only thing Moscow could do was letting these countries go. The Western European countries realized the ferment could not be stopped, and that it was going down peacefully. Thus, they did not stick to the promotion of the status quo, and let these pioneer countries step on the road which was leading to the European integration.

²⁷⁰ Jeszenszky [2003]
Conclusion

In the early eighties distressing gerontocracy characterized the Soviet leadership. The economy reached its apex in the Seventies; however, even in these years its level barely reached the one fifth of the output of the economy of the United States. Moreover, after this period of relative prosperity the growth even slowed down. On the Party Congress of 1986 the party leaders admitted that the agriculture was in an awful situation. The public life was chaotic as well when Gorbachev rose to power. The campaign in Afghanistan put heavy burden on the country; the income from oil was spent on the military. Restructuring waited for Gorbachev, thus he grabbed the initiation, but he and his inner circle had to face the two, newly emerged rival groups. The impatient West-oriented democrats and the orthodox communists besieged Gorbachev at the same time. Another problem was waiting to be dealt with, namely the ethnic conflicts emerged on the peripheries of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1989, more precisely on the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact the Baltic States started a protest, by doing so they caused severe difficulties to the Soviet Union, and contributed to the process at the end of which Gorbachev’s center lost its power. The cruel reaction of the Soviets showed the limits of the system and the reform policy. The government was unable to criticize itself, and denied the existence of the secret deal 50 years after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

The problems were in the system itself, the perestroika was invented to fix such problems. Simultaneously with the overhaul of the Soviet economy, the reshaping of the society started. The Chernobyl accident and the perplexity, the blocking of information sobered the leadership; this led to the formulation of the policy of glasnost. The government policies however were not flawless. If the oil prices hadn't been declining, if there had been a sufficient amount of resources, if they had left Afghanistan earlier, if the dialogue with China had restarted\textsuperscript{271}, perhaps the system could have been conserved for a little while. The realization was made by Gorbachev that the country has to get rid of the spiral of arms race and the burden of military expenditures, and reinitiate high level meetings with the United States. Geneva and Reykjavik were the first two stations of this process.

\textsuperscript{271} The opportunity was there with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, but the events at the Tiananmen square made the detente between the two countries impossible.
The collapse of the communist system, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and subsequently the disintegration of the Soviet Union were caused by several parallel processes. The Soviet Union just got stuck in one place while the world outpaced it. The independence of Central European countries, the new political thinking of Gorbachev were all contributing factors that mutually influenced each other.

Although the small countries contributed to a significant extent to the political changes, it was the superpowers who eventually decided on their fate, but nobody in Moscow intended to unleash revolutions in East-Central Europe, nor had anybody decided how to react on such events. At the same time, Cold War mentality was eroding in Europe, the Soviet Union underwent substantial developments, and Gorbachev was promoting the “universal values” of freedom of choice and the non-use of force. The overall effect of these above mentioned processes pulled the rug from under the East-Central European dictators. The sole mean for Gorbachev and his political circle for keeping the status quo in East Central Europe was the “floating” the Brezhnev doctrine, the adoption of the principle of “socialist pluralism” and the introduction of a new strategy in the alliance. This policy was successful, at least temporarily. From the middle of 1988 the floating of the Brezhnev doctrine was virtually the only “weapon” left to the Soviet leadership.

The fate of Eastern Europe was subordinated to the highly ambitious goals of the Gorbachev leadership in world politics and to the success of the Soviet transition. The main reason why the Soviet Union agreed to let Eastern Europe go was it found itself in a situation in which its own survival was at stake. After realizing that the objective of ensuring the success of the new model of socialism and preserving the foundations of this renewed system might not be enough for the allied countries, the Soviet Union was willing to preserve its influence through regional finlandization, in case socialism was abandoned by these states. Still, the Warsaw Pact would remain as a coordinating body.

The Soviet factor proved to be crucial in the success of the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe and in the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a naïve way, the leadership insisted on the feasibility of the “socialism with a human face” as a possible third way for Eastern Europe, between old style communism and capitalism. They were categorically against any direct interference, either by military or non-military means, out of the
consideration not to compromise Gorbachev’s global project of a new world order based on his “new thinking.”

The real change in perception concerning the East Central European region did not come right away at the beginning of the Gorbachev era, we can identify the decisive moment as the WP PCC in Warsaw in July 15-16, 1988, when the participating politicians agreed on the transformation of the structure and deployment of the armed forces, in order to meet the real defensive needs. The decision on the increase of the defense budget was motivated by the endeavor of modernizing the Soviet army, but eventually this contributed to a large extent to the loss of the arms race. Although pragmatic political thinking was introduced, there was no intention to cut down the imperial periphery and this inflexible policy – and the fact that Gorbachev was ready to support liberation movements - led to the loss of influence over East Central Europe. The first months of 1989 can be considered as a turning point in the transformation of the Soviet position concerning the fate of the region, as the period of becoming accustomed to the idea of change was over. From that time on their aim was to conceal this secret as long as possible. They gave voice for their hopes that in case the fundamental changes were carried out under the control of the communist party, they would arrive to a new model of socialism.

The considerations of Mikhail Gorbachev arriving from his new thinking made him accept the gradual alteration of the national communist systems up to a point of no return, where these states pushed the changes to the threshold, and the Soviet Union had to let them go in order to save what it thought can be saved. But soon afterwards, the reformist leadership was proven wrong and had to face the fact that the new economic-political establishment with a “human face” was nothing else but capitalism.

Nevertheless, the General Secretary’s intentions were good, and eventually he was the one who put the things in a higher gear, thus accelerating the entire process of change. Chernyaev’s diary entry from October 1988 testifies about the genuine nature of the Soviet party leader’s good will. “I came to realize how brave and farsighted M.S [Gorbachev] is. He declared a “new thinking” “without any theoretical preparation” and began to act according to common sense. His ideas are: freedom of choice, mutual respect of each other’s values, balance of interest, renunciation of force in politics, all-European house, liquidation of nuclear armaments etc. All this, each by itself, is not
original or new. What is new is that a person—who came out of Soviet Marxism-Leninism, Soviet society conditioned from top to bottom by Stalinism—began to carry out these ideas with all earnestness and sincerity when he became the head of state.”

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272 Excerpt from Anatoly Chernyaev’s Diary, 28 October 1988
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