

Extended abstract: *Paper: The European Parliament, Perestroika and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991*

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Ten Years of Hopes for a New Europe: Moscow and Brussels from 1985 to 1994

Department of Political Science, University of Pisa

The paper will focus on the distinct views of the European political groups in the European Parliament (EP) on the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union from March 1985 until the end of the dissolution process, in December 1991. This paper's unique contribution is to explore the underresearched EP reaction to the transformation in the USSR as connected to related major changes at the end of the Cold War. The key question is how the EP and its political groups desired and expected relations between the EC/EU and the Soviet Union respectively Russia and the post-Soviet space to evolve, a crucial question not least in the light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EP's attitudes included questions of human rights, Gorbachev's domestic reforms, and the future prospects of Europe-Russia relations in the broader context of the Maastricht Treaty negotiations and the envisaged evolution of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Methodologically, the paper draws on content and discourse analysis of plenary debates and committee level reports and resolutions to be combined with quantitative research on voting behaviour in motions on USSR reforms. The paper also draws on minutes of MEPs' direct interactions with Soviet and Russian representatives, on media records as well as on archived interviews (e.g. at HAEU and the Historical Archives of the EP), all of which relating to the second and third parliamentary terms of the directly elected EP.

The European Parliament closely followed developments in the Soviet Union and the superpowers' global power struggle well before March 1985. Growing EP involvement in the Helsinki process, coherent responses to the infringement of human rights in the USSR and the communist bloc, democracy promotion as well as extensive debates

on disarmament and arms control informed what could be called the EP's shadow foreign policy at the time – an attempt to shape and influence the intergovernmental European Political Cooperation (EPC), while gradually enhancing the EP's own role and powers.

MEPs reacted almost immediately to Gorbachev's start of reforms in the USSR. The topic was briefly debated in the EP plenary with the President-in-Office of the Council, Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi in April 1985. Gorbachev confirmed to the Italian Prime Minister the desire for a normalisation of relations between the Community during the latter's visit to Moscow in May 1985. The Committee on Political Affairs subsequently submitted a request, at the beginning of May 1985, for a report on the relations between the European Community and the USSR. Following an intricate internal process, the report drafted by the German Social Democrat MEP Klaus Hänsch, future EP president during 1994-1997, was tabled in July 1988, debated and approved by the plenary in September 1988. A high level delegation of the Socialist Group in the EP visited Moscow in December 1985 for substantive talks with the leadership of the Supreme Soviet, the USSR legislative body, as well as with party and government officials. The willingness to recognize the European Community and resume diplomatic relations was clear. The EP's subsequent contacts were part of a broader framework of EC institutions' interactions with the CMEA and its member countries, leading to the start of official diplomatic relations from June 1988. The European Parliament created a parliamentary delegation for relations with East European countries already in December 1985. The EP established independent relations with the Supreme Soviet in July 1988.

The EP closely followed the evolution and effects of glasnost and perestroika since 1985 until the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. The political groups reached compromises between different and often divergent views, based on the assumption that the normalization of relations between the EC and USSR (and with the COMECON states) would benefit the Community. Nevertheless, the EP's agreed formal narrative was that reforms only enhanced the preconditions for the normalization of relations with the EC which should be critically assessed in themselves. Overall, the EP's negotiated take on the reforms was sober, unlike the sometimes emotional "Gorby-mania" with some European publics. A clear majority of

EP political groups and members remained highly critical of Soviet human rights infringements, the continued presence of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe, and the risks associated with the Soviet Union's enormous military potential.

The paper identifies distinct positions that the groups and individual MEPs took on the USSR's internal transformation as well their assessment by the Commission and member-states in the Council. The analysis of the motions for resolutions, of the plenary debates and the work in the Committee on Political Affairs and later of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security includes not only the agreed final majority position but the opposing views, which were often not reflected any more in the final texts of the resolutions, but remained relevant for the EP political debate.

Of the wide range of issues that the EP addressed regarding developments in the USSR and EC/EU relations with it as well as with the CMEA and East-Central European states, the paper will focus on two particularly relevant case studies: the 1988 Hänsch report on EC-USSR relations and the debates and resolutions on the dissolution of the Soviet Union between September 1991 and January 1992. It will do so by investigating the political dynamics behind the intra-EP negotiations of a common outcome from motions for resolutions tabled by the different political groups.

Thus, the analysis of the particularly dense 1988 report scrutinizes the differences between successive iterations, working documents and amendments as well as related motions tabled by political groups in regard to the report. Examples include the 1985 motions tabled by the Italian Socialist MEP Mattina on EC-USSR relations, by the Dutch Christian Democratic MEP Boot on behalf of the EPP on the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union and by the French Front National MEP Pordea on the Romanian territories annexed by the Soviet Union. The paper will evaluate the 1988 report's key messages on the political background to the normalization of relations, on the human rights dimension, the improvement of relations in the field of trade, technology and environmental protection as well as security and cooperation on international issues. The Hänsch report realized that "the process of reform in the Soviet Union has only just begun and that it will not be possible to make a definitive political assessment of it for some time to come". The resolution was adopted on 15 September 1988 with a large majority: 215 votes for, 7 against and 9 abstentions, after

voting on 47 plenary amendments. Furthermore, the EP plenary approved, on the same day, three of its many resolutions in response to violations of human and civil rights in the USSR, e.g. a resolution on harassment of Ukrainian Catholics in the Soviet Union and two other resolutions on human rights abuses in individual cases.

The second case study analyses the way in which the EP tackled the rapidly changing situation in the Soviet Union after the failed August 1991 coup attempt and the events leading to the dissolution of the USSR. In this turbulent context, the political groups tabled 12 motions for a resolution for the September 1991 debate on the situation in USSR. The final joint resolution was built on the thrust of the motions tabled by the Socialists and the EPP Group, reflecting their growing informal alliance in the EP at the time.

The attempts to reach a compromise as broad as possible in this particular case, confirm academic research on the frequent use of balancing acts as a common tactical approach for consensus building within the EP. One relevant example is the equal recognition of the roles of rivals Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin before and during the coup attempt. Similarly, the final negotiated resolution reaffirms the EP support for the principle of self-determination and welcomes the declarations of independence of the Baltic states, but is less willing, alongside the accepted Community position of the time, to recognize the independence of the other republics of the Soviet Union, until the formal dissolution at the end of December 1991. In this context, the EP always treated the Baltic States as a separate issue, due to their inter-war experience of statehood. Furthermore, the September 1991 joint resolution reflected the view of the vast majority of MEPs, which was also shared by the Member States' governments, on what at the time was erroneously perceived as the irreversibility of the democratic process.

Subsequent debates and resolutions, shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, warned against the danger of nuclear proliferation if parts of the huge nuclear arsenal of the former USSR and nuclear scientists were to find their way into dictatorships. The EP debates also reveal MEPs' concerns on the threat of an aggressive future Russian foreign policy following the USSR's dissolution. For example, German

Rainbow group MEP Dorothee Piermont and the Italian Socialist Lelio Legorio almost prophetically warned against the threat of a revival of Russian imperialism.

The debates selected as relevant case studies for the purpose of the paper shed light on similarities and differences in the approaches of political groups to the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union and later to its implosion. At the same time, as is often the case for most European Parliament resolutions and debates on foreign affairs of the time, the MEPs also used the debated issues as springboards for initiatives for institutional reform, especially for the creation of a common foreign and security policy, in which the EP would play a more substantive formal role. Consequently, the paper reveals the connection between the approaches on transformations in the Soviet Union and the constantly reiterated need for a unique EC/EU voice in foreign affairs.

The second part of the paper goes on to investigate MEPs' direct interactions with high level officials, parliamentary delegations as well as, briefly, with human rights defenders and members of civil society, within what has been termed parliamentary diplomacy. One of the especially underresearched dimension of the EP perspective on the USSR reform process is the inter-parliamentary dialogue with delegations of the Supreme Soviet. At the same time, the paper recalls the meetings of individual MEPs and political group delegations not only with government and party officials or research institutes but also with dissidents and civil society representatives. The history of the EP inter-parliamentary delegation is relevant in itself: starting in December 1985 as an inter-parliamentary delegation with the countries of Eastern Europe, it split into three delegations, two for East European countries (depending on how advanced they were in their reform process) and a delegation for relations with USSR constituted in July 1988. In January 1992, the delegation changed to delegation to the Community of Independent States to cover relations with Russia and the former Soviet Republics.

The inter-parliamentary meetings mattered for two reasons. First, the level of participation and the agenda of discussion substantively changed from one meeting to the next and provide relevant indicators on the interest and value both parties attached to the bilateral relations. The paper identifies patterns of representation at

the level of EP and Supreme Soviet for the successive meetings in Moscow in February - March 1989, in Strasbourg in February 1990, in Moscow in December 1990, and in Strasbourg in March 1991. On the Soviet side, the meetings were often chaired or attended by close advisors of Gorbachev, like Vadim Zagladin, and included exchanges with high level Communist party and government officials.

Second, the usually extended reports after the meetings as well as the internal research notes prepared by the services of the Parliament, provide valuable insights into developments in the Soviet Union. The historiographical view that between 1985 and 1986 Soviet elites had only a tactical and opportunistic approach to European questions, will be thus reviewed and further nuanced considering parliamentary interactions in this period.

Relevant further examples concern the level of representation and substance of discussions in March 1989, just before the first elections for the future Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union as compared with the much more pragmatic approach to parliamentary diplomacy with the soviets during the third parliamentary term of the elected European Parliament. The last parliamentary visit of a small EP delegation at the end of November, beginning of December 1991, focused on emergency aid, the economic and financial problems and particularly on contacts with the parliaments of the individual republics. According to the minutes of the last meeting of the interparliamentary delegation to USSR, the delegation was split to allow individual MEPs' visits to Saint Petersburg, Alma Ata, Kiev and Minsk. At the time, the EP had to approve the Commission proposal for a massive increase in economic and financial assistance as well as the emergency aid to the Soviet Union.

The paper also explores the relevance of high level meetings outside the formal framework of inter-parliamentary delegations, based on newly accessible archival sources as well as interviews with and memoirs of the Presidents of the EP and other relevant actors. One example of such a meeting is the visit of Lord Plumb, President of the European Parliament, to Moscow on 6-9 September 1988. As recorded in his memoirs and archived interviews, he met Andrey Sakharov during the visit, in an example of the prominence that the EP gave to the human rights dimension of its external policy stance and initiatives. At the same time, inviting Communist Party

Secretary General Gorbachev to the EP was an intensely debated political matter in the EP, with proposals and opposition starting as early as Spring 1985. Nevertheless, such a visit never happened during the time of Gorbachev's leadership of the USSR. In fact, both US President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II addressed the plenary of the European Parliament on 8 May 1985 and 11 October 1988 respectively.

The paper in conclusion considers the overall approach of the EP to the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and its dissolution, in the wider context of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. Crucially, it highlights the relevance for the MEPs and Group leaderships of strategically linking the question of institutional reform and powers for the EP leading up to the Maastricht Treaty and beyond with the changing configuration of the European political and security order. The paper ends with a note of caution highlighting the need, in addition to analysing the EP's stance on the USSR reform and dissolution, to explore in much greater detail the parallel and inextricably linked question of how the EP related to and strongly supported the democratic transformation of the former communist countries, including the Baltic states.

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Dr. Sergiu Nicolae Vintila

European Parliament

Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services

European Parliament History Service

Luxembourg – Adenauer 01Y 024 – Tel. +352430021144

sergiunicolae.vintila@ep.europa.eu