

1 Challenging the superpower straitjacket (1965–1975)

Multilateralism as an instrument of smaller powers

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In this chapter we argue that most European governments – both East and West – came to see multilateralism as an opportunity to stretch their room for manoeuvre in a Cold War order largely dominated by the superpowers. Our analysis is based on the hypothesis that multilateralism offers small groups or even single countries the opportunity to either organise efforts at coordinating a position on international issues or even asserting their *individual* interests through using the multilateral mechanism as leverage over the superpower.

We use ‘small’ as a relative concept, which denotes all countries apart from the superpowers. Especially in the context of the Warsaw Pact (WP), all other members have usually been considered dwarfs in relation to the Soviet giant, regardless of their actual size. Accordingly, ‘small’ is not a matter of size, but rather of perception, in that the European countries under scrutiny have conventionally been regarded as subordinate and more or less subservient to either the Soviet Union or the United States. By ‘margins for manoeuvre’ we mean the scope these countries had to assert their own national interests.

In this chapter we will illustrate through key examples some actual steps taken by East and West European governments to increase the margins for manoeuvre within a multilateral framework. We will also report occasions in which multilateralism allowed small states to influence Cold War dynamics and examine what instruments and strategies they employed to do so. At the same time, we will assess to what extent the results matched the small states’ goals and whether the latter changed overtime. If this was the case, we will analyse to what extent adjustments were due to the practical reason of group coordination or to a change of attitude resulting from the interaction with the other members in the group. In the conclusion we will compare the strategies of both Western and Eastern European actors in order to assess whether multilateral frameworks intrinsically generate scope for manoeuvre for small powers, regardless of their political/ideological affiliation – socialist or democratic.

Our analysis responds to the call of New Cold War history to investigate the role of smaller powers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It is unique in explicitly assessing the strategies of small states to stretch their room for manoeuvre within the alliances and other forms of cooperation in Eastern and Western Europe simultaneously. We challenge the conventional image of the Warsaw Pact as a Soviet

transmission belt, while also offering a comparative analysis of surprisingly similar dynamics within the antagonistic blocs that defined the Cold War paradigm. As a starting point for comparison this chapter concentrates on the concept of European security and particularly the idea of a pan-European conference developed by the Warsaw Pact in the second half of the 1960s, which eventually took the shape of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). European security was a matter in which all European governments had an explicit stake, as many historians working on the CSCE and focusing on specific countries' policy, goals and actions have demonstrated in the last fifteen years.¹ We notice that the interests of smaller powers were often at odds with the interests of the respective superpower, and therefore the theme of European security offers an interesting framework to explore their action to widen margins of manoeuvre within their camp and internationally.

This chapter, which relies on multiple archival materials from both sides of the former Iron Curtain and draws from some of our published works, consists of two parts. The first analyses the way in which European socialist states used the initially Polish proposal for a European security conference to assert their own interests and emancipate themselves from the Soviet Union through the multilateral context of the Warsaw Pact. It thus shows the smaller allies' contribution to the European security conference in the second half of the 1960s, before it materialised in the CSCE from 1972 onwards. The second part of the chapter scrutinises how West European governments used the multilateral contexts of the European Community (EC) – particularly through European Political Cooperation (EPC) – and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to assert their interests and vision of East-West relations and shape Western preparation for and action in the CSCE. In this context, it shows West European governments' collective determination to challenge the US administration and their success in using multilateral fora to achieve their goals. The whole chapter thus deals with small powers' room for manoeuvre in four different multilateral contexts, that is Warsaw Pact, the EC/EPC, NATO and the overarching context of the European security conference (CSCE). It adds to the most recent historiography challenging the conventional bipolar Cold War paradigm that sees European security as shaped by the superpowers only, as it proves that small powers had an explicit stake and active role in the process of defining what security meant in the continent.²

Warsaw Pact initiatives on European security (1964–1966)

The initiative for a European security conference was first formulated within a multilateral setting, namely the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), where Polish Foreign Minister, Adam Rapacki, proposed to convene a multilateral conference on European security in December 1964.³ This was a bold move, since the Polish leadership had not discussed it beforehand with the Kremlin and had thus confronted the Soviet superpower with a *fait accompli*. The UN setting had already provided the Poles with considerable margins for manoeuvre: with all other UN members as witnesses, the Kremlin had to seriously consider the Polish

proposal, which was duly tabled for the next Political Consultative Committee (PCC) meeting of the Warsaw Pact in January 1965. Although the Warsaw Pact had been dormant for the previous couple of years, primarily due to Romanian obstruction to even convene a meeting, the Polish proposal brought the Warsaw Pact back to life in January 1965.

The Polish government had a particular stake in a European security conference, since it strove for its borders to be recognised in a multilateral setting. This applied even more to the East German leadership, since the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was not recognised at all. Moreover, the East German leader Walter Ulbricht worried that ‘West Germany [. . .] had had too much scope for manoeuvre with the socialist countries in the last couple of years’, since the previous Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, had allowed the bonds between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and several Warsaw Pact countries to be forged and strengthened – mainly for economic reasons.⁴ While Ulbricht was keen to widen the East German ‘scope for manoeuvre’ at West German expense, the opposite was the case for his Romanian colleague, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who wanted to tighten the relations with the FRG, because it needed its financial support: after becoming isolated within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), the Romanian economy was in such dire straits that it coveted a financial injection from the West. Moreover, Romania regarded a greater stake in European security as a means to free itself from the Soviet grip through rapprochement with the West.⁵ These smaller members in particular had a vested interest in convening a European security conference, and they will therefore be central to this chapter.

The Polish leaders had cleverly identified a topic which was both in their own interests and in which all other members had a stake, too. They were already stretching their margins for manoeuvre by getting everyone to discuss their own proposal. Meanwhile, the alliance leader (the Soviet Union) could hardly object to a proposal on a European security conference – something which the Kremlin had proposed with less success ten years previously. Through this proposal, the Polish leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, successfully sought ‘to multilateralise the foreign policy of the Warsaw Pact’, ensuring that this was no longer a Soviet prerogative.⁶ Teaming up with the East Germans against the Romanians, Gomulka also succeeded in getting Gheorghiu-Dej on board, by arguing that ‘[i]f you do not want to participate, we will consult with those countries that want to’.⁷ Even though the January 1965 meeting concluded in a stalemate on all other issues, such as non-proliferation and Warsaw Pact reforms, the WP members reached genuine agreement on developing a proposal for a European security conference. Its contents were, however, still subject to discussion. The Polish proposal thus provided an impetus for more meetings and also contributed to the so-called ‘multilateralisation of the Warsaw Pact’.⁸

The discussion on European security received a further boost by a West German ‘peace note’, which was presented on 24 March 1966, in which the FRG government ‘proposed to conclude bilateral treaties on a mutual renunciation of force’ as well as its participation in a disarmament conference. This gesture of

West German rapprochement towards Eastern Europe was unprecedented but sowed discord within the Warsaw Pact: it was addressed to all its members except East Germany, since the FRG still claimed to represent the whole of Germany, and there was no mention of the recognition of the Polish Oder-Neisse border either. Despite East German and Polish discontent, Brezhnev was initially enthusiastic, since it was in line with his aim to further détente. The discussion on European security within the Warsaw Pact nevertheless made him realise that he should involve his allies in the reply, in particular the Polish leaders, since they had such a clear stake in the issue. He therefore sent the Poles the Soviet draft reply. Rapacki's furious rejection of the Soviet draft and the consequent Soviet move are testimony to the extent to which the Poles had already stretched their margins for manoeuvre. Rather than acting unilaterally, Brezhnev sent a reply that also met Polish objectives – such as the recognition of the post-war borders and the GDR – to the FRG government on 17 May.

The fact that the European security conference had been tabled within a WP setting compelled Brezhnev to convene the other first secretaries in a multilateral meeting on 7 April in order to discuss 'the problem of European security'. The meeting was also intended to discuss the agenda for the upcoming PCC meeting in July. The Romanian leadership was particularly pleased about this procedure, since 'for the first time since the Warsaw Pact exists we discuss the problems on time, as well as the agenda of the following session'.⁹ Moreover, the approval of the Romanian proposal to host the next meeting in Bucharest illustrates that the more recalcitrant members of the alliance had also increased their scope for manoeuvre. Although nothing was concluded at the meeting in question, its contents spilled over to a meeting of the WP ministers of foreign affairs a month before the PCC meeting, in which a Soviet proposal for a 'Declaration on the Improvement of Peace and Security in Europe' would be discussed. In this proposal Brezhnev had also taken East German and Polish qualms to heart, by stressing the 'rebirth of revanchism and militarism in West Germany' and rebuking West Germany for its 'aggressive' stance vis-à-vis the GDR.¹⁰ At the same time, he had further modified the Polish proposal by suggesting 'the convening of a *pan-European conference*' on European security in which all WP members should actively participate. The Romanian leadership strongly denounced the aggressive tone vis-à-vis the FRG and only favoured participating in a European security conference if it did 'not become a rigid platform that would hinder the initiatives and actions of every socialist state in European questions'.¹¹ It did, however, also realise that it was an opportunity 'for the multilateral development of normal relations between all European states'.¹²

The clash of interests on European security was, however, considerable. The Romanians presented an alternative draft in which they stressed the normalisation of intra-European relations that suited their purposes, which resulted in a divide between Romania and the other WP members. The smaller members thus clashed with one another rather than with the superpower. The issue was resolved by a secret meeting between the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Corneliu Manescu, and his Soviet colleague, Andrei Gromyko, who rewrote the Soviet

draft together in a more constructive tone. This did not only increase the Romanian scope for manoeuvre, but also served a Soviet purpose, since the Kremlin, too, was keen to improve relations with the FRG for the sake of détente. This draft also resulted in a compromise that was acceptable to the other WP members, satisfying the interests of each individual member. The scope for manoeuvre within the WP had increased in absolute terms. The multilateral context had compelled the alliance leader to take the interests of all its members into account in order to safeguard group cohesion.

The declaration on European security, which was on the agenda of the July 1966 PCC meeting, was accordingly an unprecedented success. All WP members agreed on the ultimate draft, which had been the result of East German and Polish input, as well as a secret Romanian–Soviet compromise. Highlighting the need to ‘normalise intra-European relations’ – a Romanian desire – it also stressed the necessity to recognise the ‘actually existing borders’, such as the Polish Oder-Neisse border, as well as the GDR itself.¹³ The Warsaw Pact approval on a declaration on European security was considered ‘the first serious initiative of Eastern Europe in institutionalising East-West relations’, as well as ‘the first important step on the road to signing the Helsinki Final Act in 1975’.¹⁴ The document was inherently contradictory, because it combined a moderately aggressive stance to the West Germans and Americans with a plea for expanding East–West collaboration.¹⁵ The smaller allies’ attempt to stretch their margins for manoeuvre had nevertheless resulted in a concrete and important initiative.

Stretching the margins within the Warsaw Pact (1967–1969)

In the following period two developments further affected the ensuing discussions on European security. In January 1967 Romania established diplomatic relations with West Germany, even though the latter still refused to recognise its East German counterpart, which infuriated the East German and Polish leaderships and emphasised their different interests. Although the Kremlin paid lip-service to Ulbricht’s and Gomulka’s concerns, Brezhnev welcomed a further relaxation of tensions below the surface. The difference between Romania and the rest became all the more pronounced when Romania was the only Warsaw Pact country (other than Albania, which had already left the alliance *de facto*) not to support the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Hungary on 21 August 1968, which was intended to stem the reforms in the wake of the Prague Spring.

The stakes for a European security conference had accordingly been raised, since the threat of the collapse of socialism in Czechoslovakia had made the Poles and East Germans all the more anxious for recognition of their borders and their country respectively. Meanwhile, the Hungarians joined the Romanians in considering the normalisation of intra-European relations of particular importance to salvage European détente in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the Romanian leaders now occupied the moral high ground, since they had single-handedly resisted alleged Soviet pressure to intervene. In actual fact,

both Ulbricht and Gomulka had put Brezhnev under considerable pressure to give the green light for an intervention, whereas the Hungarian leader János Kádár had been considerably more moderate.¹⁶

It was accordingly no coincidence that Kádár suggested to add ‘an appeal on European security’ to the agenda of a deputy foreign ministers’ meeting in Budapest on 9 March 1969. Although the Kremlin had taken the initiative to convene a PCC meeting in Budapest on 17 March 1969, the Romanians had suggested to precede it by a preparatory meeting of the deputy foreign ministers. The Kremlin had drafted both the communiqué and an appeal on European security, but the Hungarians considered the draft of the communiqué ‘so bad’ that it was ‘out of the question that it would be accepted and signed by the Romanians’, since it was strongly directed against the West Germans. The Hungarian room for manoeuvre had increased to such an extent that the Kremlin ‘agreed with us [the Hungarians] in everything letter by letter’.¹⁷ The opposite applied to the East Germans and the Poles, whom the Kremlin ‘considered the main problem’ in the wake of the invasion in Czechoslovakia instead of the conventionally recalcitrant Romanians. Brezhnev endorsed the Romanian desire for a normalisation of relations with West Germany in order to salvage European relations.

As had been the case with the draft proposal in July 1966, the matter was resolved bilaterally. Gomulka and Ceausescu reached a compromise. The Romanian leader agreed to tone down his criticism of the Brezhnev Doctrine, although the proposal still stated that no European state should ‘undertake actions that could serve to poison the atmosphere in the relations between states’. In return, Gomulka moderated his aggressive stance vis-à-vis West Germany. The result was a very constructive document, which served the interests of all allies, by *both* stressing the inviolability of borders and the necessity to recognise the GDR *and* the need for ‘multilateral collaboration on a European level’.¹⁸ The smaller allies had acquired such a taste for multilateralism that they wanted to export it to a pan-European context.

The March 1969 PCC meeting was accordingly successful in two different ways: first, the smaller members felt that their influence had significantly increased. The Romanian leadership concluded with satisfaction that the Kremlin had ‘yield[ed]’ to Romanian pressure, and Janos Kadar argued that both the Warsaw Pact and the relations between the WP members had ‘consolidated’.¹⁹ Moreover, Ceausescu had succeeded in stretching the margins for manoeuvre of the individual countries even further, by persuading the other WP members to sign the communiqué after the meeting in the name of ‘the participating states’ instead of the ‘Political Consultative Committee’.²⁰

Second, the Budapest Appeal for a European security conference was taken seriously by neutral and non-aligned and NATO countries alike. Already in May 1969 the Finnish president Urho Kekkonen offered Helsinki as a venue for such a conference. The Budapest Appeal was the first Warsaw Pact proposal for a European security conference that was seriously considered within the Atlantic Alliance. The decision at another PCC meeting in Budapest in July 1970 that the USA and Canada could also be included in such a conference paved the way for

NATO's green light, and in November 1972 the 'Multilateral Preparatory Talks' to design the 'Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe' began among delegations from 35 participating countries – including the US and Canada – except Albania. The WP initiatives on European security had resulted not only in increased room for manoeuvre for the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) members but also in a still bigger pan-European, multilateral process that would prove of paramount importance throughout the second half of the Cold War. The next half of this chapter will be dedicated to the way in which smaller Western powers stretched their margins for manoeuvre – within both the EC and NATO – and thus defined the process that would culminate in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The West: accepting the conference

The first collective discussion of the Budapest Appeal in the West occurred during the Atlantic Council of April 1969, convened in Washington to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty. The US administration described the Warsaw Pact proposal as a mere propaganda tool, while most European governments considered the idea of a pan-European conference admissible.²¹ Their views were in line with the Harmel Report on the Future Tasks of the Alliance, approved in 1967, which introduced the notion of deterrence and *détente*. Interestingly, the Harmel Report had been part of an extraordinary exercise in consultation aimed at transforming the Alliance into a less hierarchical and more participatory forum that would give more voice and room to the superpower's allies.²² The Washington final communiqué made no references to the Budapest Appeal or a conference but confirmed *détente*, i.e. cultivating bilateral contacts with socialist countries.²³

The conference idea entered the diplomatic agenda when on 7 May 1969 the Finnish government sent all European states a memorandum to offer Helsinki as host and organiser of the pan-European negotiations. As more and more countries replied positively, the Atlantic Alliance had to take a clear position. The Belgian government, which had developed an intense diplomatic activity with East European states within the scope of its own *détente* policy, asked the NATO Council for an explicit mandate to engage in exploratory talks with the East about the pan-European conference. The majority of the allies considering it premature to signal openness to the idea of the conference, it was decided that the Belgians would act on their own behalf and then report to the Council. Only after receiving a complete dossier would the Atlantic Alliance express recommendations.²⁴ The Atlantic Council of 5 December 1969 accepted – in principle – the idea of a pan-European conference but set preliminary conditions: the signing of the *Ostpolitik* treaties, a quadripartite agreement on the status of Berlin and the beginning of negotiations on conventional force reductions in Europe (MBFR).²⁵

The White House had no interest in the CSCE and accepted the conference because most European allies favoured it. By supporting their exploratory contacts, the US administration intended to rein in European allies' readiness to convene the conference.²⁶ NATO members agreed on a three-phase procedure to

handle the question: they would first analyse and debate the Budapest Appeal; then the Secretariat would issue a list of questions aimed at orienting bilateral talks with the East European countries; finally, the Political Committee would report the results of the consultations to the Council.²⁷ Any further step in the East–West dialogue would need a decision of the Atlantic Council. Indeed, NATO allies reproached Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel for having gone too far when, on the way back from a visit to Belgrade, he affirmed that he considered the opening of the multilateral phase of talks likely to occur by the end of the year.²⁸

Yet the Belgians did not cease to work for rallying support for the pan-European conference. Following the Hague summit of December 1969, the member states of the European Community (EC) initiated an intergovernmental mechanism to coordinate their foreign policies – European Political Cooperation (EPC). At the first EPC meeting in November 1970 foreign ministers debated East–West relations thoroughly, and the Belgian representative proposed to engage EPC in the CSCE question.²⁹ The EC partners endorsed the Belgian idea and established the sub-committee on CSCE, where national senior officials with expertise on NATO or Eastern Europe would investigate the political aspects of the conference likely to impinge on the Community.

On its first meeting on 1 March 1971, the sub-committee on CSCE agreed that delegates should report on five topics: the attitude of the Soviet Union, its allies and of the neutral European countries towards the Community (assigned to Germany); possible East European countries' initiatives at the CSCE (Italy); possible EC initiatives at the CSCE on economic matters (Belgium); CSCE duration and follow-up (France); the role of the Community at the CSCE (Netherlands). However, the sub-committee interpreted its mandate quite largely, once again thanks to the Belgians. Ambassador Pierre Forthomme, backed by Italian delegate Luigi Vittorio Ferraris, proposed to extend the debate to issues examined within NATO, in order to allow EC members to play a more active role within the West. The Luxembourg delegate remained silent; the West German representative adopted a neutral position, while the French was appreciative of the idea. By contrast, the Dutch delegate was lukewarm about actions likely to undermine the role of NATO. In a compromise they agreed that the written report would be limited to the selected topics, but the sub-committee would also debate on transatlantic works, harmonise the positions of the EC members and advise their delegations to NATO accordingly.³⁰ This was certainly a clear step to increase the EC members' margins for manoeuvre within the Western camp.

At the beginning of 1972 there were setbacks in transatlantic coordination. In January 1972 the EPC agreed on starting exploratory talks with Finland to prepare the conference. The US administration protested against what it saw as a violation of the NATO decision to wait for the signing of the Berlin agreements. The European allies defended their action and explained that they had simply engaged in bilateral contacts with the Finns in line with NATO recommendations. Yet the White House considered the Europeans too keen to start preparations for the conference.³¹ Washington 'had no interest in a conference in 1972'; no decision on CSCE should be taken before the Nixon–Brezhnev summit, nor should

the multilateral phase start before the US presidential elections.³² The superpowers bilaterally agreed on the schedule at their Moscow Summit of May 1972.³³ After the summit, a NATO ministerial meeting accepted the proposal of the Finnish government to meet in Helsinki in November for the multilateral preparatory talks of the CSCE.³⁴

Hence the smaller European countries, particularly Belgium, had succeeded in putting the CSCE on the NATO agenda vis-à-vis a highly reluctant superpower; in talks with the British, Nixon explicitly affirmed that he had never wanted the CSCE and that the European countries had insisted on Western acceptance.³⁵ However, they could not coerce the US administration into speeding up preparations for the conference, as Washington relied on superpower agreement to set the pace.

Yet superpowers' entente would not be able to prevent, detour, or stop West European states from pursuing their goals at the CSCE, set the agenda, lead the negotiations and successfully extract concessions from the East. In the multilateral forum where states had equal rights and decisions were taken by consensus, small powers had a great leverage, and the EC member states – the 'EC Nine' – proved determined and well organised to use it.

The West, shaping the conference: the multilateral preparatory talks

In September 1972, the Americans informed the British that they would not take the lead on any issues of the conference.³⁶ The US administration regarded the CSCE as an element of the overall relationship with the Soviet Union: satisfied with Soviet cooperation on key matters such as Berlin, SALT treaty and the opening of MBFR negotiations, Nixon and Kissinger were ready to give the Soviets the conference they wanted and would not endanger détente by introducing elements of attrition such as freer movement and human contacts.³⁷

In addition, the Americans were inclined to agree on the opening date of the conference, as the Soviets wished, rather than adhere to the European position of waiting for satisfying results before giving their assent. Kissinger put continual pressure on the allies in this sense. In March 1973, talking with Luxembourg Foreign Minister Gustav Thorn, Kissinger overtly accused the Europeans of being 'unhelpful' on the CSCE and MBFR and affirmed that they should let the Soviets have 'a short snappy conference with little substance'; he added that the question of freer movement, though of some tactical value, was unlikely to bring any practical results.³⁸

The EC governments grew exasperated with the US stance, which ignored the importance of promoting contacts across the Iron Curtain. The EC states had developed a distinct collective approach to East–West relations: first, they aimed at gaining some form of recognition of the European Community by the socialist countries; second, they conceived of détente as a process to gradually overcome the Cold War divide in Europe and engender reforms and liberalisation of the socialist regimes. Crucial in this endeavour was the deepening of mutual interdependence

between the two halves of the continent through human, economic and cultural exchanges, political dialogue and cooperation in several fields.³⁹ Consequently, the Nine made promotion of *their* détente the main task of EPC at the conference. Not only did they formulate proposals and tactics for the CSCE, they also set procedures for coordinating their action closely within NATO in order to promote their vision and safeguard EC interests. The EC foreign ministers had decided, on 17 May 1971, to create another working body to deal with the economic aspects of the pan-European conference – the ad hoc Group on CSCE – which included officials of the EC Commission.⁴⁰ In February 1972 they resolved that EPC states' representatives to the NATO Economic Committee should participate in the ad hoc Group on CSCE meetings to receive detailed information about EC positions and inform EPC about the views of non-EC NATO allies. Shortly later, EC states established the *group of the Eight* (representatives of EC states) in the NATO Economic Committee; it would convene before the latter's meetings to harmonise EC members' positions and be more effective in expressing the interests of the Community.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, important divergences had emerged between NATO recommendations and EC proposals for the CSCE. The former were generally lukewarm on offers towards socialist countries and in some cases advised against taking initiatives; on the contrary, EC states intended to table a genuine offer of economic cooperation. Moreover, NATO proposals referred neither to EC competence nor to its existence (*sic!*), a serious omission that could provide a hold to the socialist bloc's policy of non-recognition of the Community.⁴²

The British government proposed to create a similar mechanism for political matters, arguing that the EC Nine should feel free to table proposals that might be unpalatable to Atlantic allies.⁴³ After months of discussion, a few weeks before the Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT) the EC states established another *group of the Eight* in the NATO Political Committee; it worked in close coordination with the EPC sub-committee on CSCE to harmonise national positions.⁴⁴ Any amendments to EC proposals resulting from NATO discussions would have to be submitted to EPC for approval before the Alliance could adopt a position.⁴⁵ Although the EC member states remained committed to working for Atlantic coordination, it is evident that, with the creation of their sub-groups within the NATO committees, they had shifted the emphasis from NATO to the EC, where they first agreed on common positions. As a collective entity speaking with a single voice, the EC Nine enlarged their margins of manoeuvre vis-à-vis the United States and strengthened their influence within the Atlantic Alliance, where the other members were not equally cohesive.

The enhanced role of West European states also materialised in the multilateral CSCE negotiations. The low profile of the US delegation at the MPT was counterbalanced by the firmness and cohesion of the EC states, which succeeded in elaborating and defending common positions and gathered the support of most NATO allies and neutral states. The sub-committee and the ad hoc Group on CSCE were on permanent session and supervised the negotiations; when important changes were required to the position of the Nine, governments stepped into and instructed the CSCE delegations accordingly.⁴⁶ In spite of the White House's preference,

the Nine refused to agree to an opening date of the conference until they gained satisfactory results at the MPT, namely a specific chapter on human contacts and clear mandates for the Commissions.

The CSCE negotiations phase in Geneva

The action of the US delegation in Geneva was also limited, especially since Kissinger became Secretary of State in September 1973. His numerous statements about the pointlessness of the Third Basket (cooperation on human contacts, information, culture and education) indicated that the US government did not endorse the West European approach to détente.⁴⁷

For the EC Nine the conference offered an opportunity to change intra-European relations: they thought it possible to engage the Soviets and their allies in serious discussions by introducing specific proposals with reasonable argumentation and no polemics – the apparent weakness of the Third Basket provisions was the result of a conscious choice. What the Nine fought for was not an immediate change of the socialist regimes, but a *locus standi* for people in the East trying to promote reforms and some degree of liberalisation. The effort to encourage a wider circulation of people and information across Europe also permeated the EC proposals for economic, scientific and technological cooperation (the Second Basket).

The EC Nine set up procedures for coordination. Belgian delegate Étienne Davignon advocated a common position on each issue, as had been the case at the MPT. French delegate André Arnaud proposed a looser coordination that would leave delegations the possibility to express the national viewpoint on a single point of a proposal without affecting the common position.⁴⁸ The French thesis did not convince the partners; throughout the CSCE the Nine were even more aligned and organised to speak with a single voice. This was possible because the EC Nine had a common interest in preserving the EC and boosting its international role and shared the vision of détente as a process for overcoming the Cold War divide. Vested interests – as FRG willingness to preserve options for changing borders and hence allow future German reunification – were recognised and supported, because they were part of that same vision. National differences on some details and proposals were discussed and composed for the sake of reaching the common goals that had clearly been established within EPC.⁴⁹ The two committees on the CSCE worked on permanent session and sent instructions to the nine delegations in Geneva, which met daily to agree on tactics. The most pro-active and close-knit group at the CSCE, the Nine took the leadership of the West at the negotiations.

From the Helsinki MPT to Nixon's resignation, not only did the United States remain passive on human contacts, but it also pressed upon allies to speed up the negotiations and conclude the CSCE at summit level, despite the NATO-agreed position that only a satisfying outcome would justify consenting to a top-level finale.⁵⁰ For instance, Kissinger told the Dutch foreign minister that the summit had to be accepted, because 'Europe [could] not say no to the Soviets on this point'.⁵¹ In March 1974 even the British admitted that they 'should not rely upon

the Americans to fight too hard against a summit however meagre the results of the second stage'.⁵² Kissinger urged the Europeans to conclude the negotiations soon; he described the Geneva talks as 'over-bureaucratic' and said that Western delegations should not waste time chatting but rather present a list of essential and reasonable requests, the acceptance of which would lead to a final summit.⁵³ This position was reiterated in NATO meetings in July.⁵⁴ The White House clearly aimed at closing the conference by summer 1974. The presidential turnover did not change the US stance: the joint communiqué of the Ford–Brezhnev summit in Vladivostok in November 1974 called for the conclusion of the conference as soon as possible and at the highest level.

The EC Nine stuck to their requests and resisted all Soviet attempts to undermine or narrow the Third Basket provisions; they also slowed down the work of the other commissions to prevent the Third Basket negotiations from falling behind. Moreover, the Nine resisted US pressure and refused to agree to a top-level final phase until concrete proposals had been agreed on human contacts; they even threatened not to accept the concluding phase altogether had the Soviets persisted in refusing concessions.⁵⁵ The ground-breaking Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975, endorsed the EC Nine's view of détente as a process, and one that involved the liberal concepts of human rights, centrality of the individual and promotion of contacts and exchanges beyond state-controlled activities. Moreover, they had asserted the role of the European Community as a political actor, epitomised by Aldo Moro's signature of the Final Act as president of the EC Council, which officially engaged the EC to the implementation of the Helsinki provisions in accordance with its competence and rules. This was *per se* also a change of the Cold War bipolar order in Europe.

Conclusion

As small countries strove to become more influential, they used multilateralism as an instrument to both bolster their foreign policies within the bipolar Cold War framework and alter the dynamics within their respective alliances. European security, which concerned small powers deeply, offers a perfect field for inquiry to assess their capacity to organise and assert their interests via actions in multilateral fora.

In the East, small European states used the multilateral forum of the Warsaw Pact to prevent Soviet unilateralism and to create a platform for their individual national interests. It soon transpired that the interests of the various non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members were more at odds with each other than with the Soviet Union, with East Germany and Poland representing one end of the spectrum and Romania the other. Their respective goals – recognition of the borders versus normalisation of intra-European relations – clashed to such an extent that the Soviet Union as alliance leader was often forced into the position of arbiter rather than initiator. This implied that, in order to guarantee WP cohesion, the Kremlin had to take the interests of all its allies to heart. As the Warsaw Pact provided the smaller allies with an instrument to make their voices heard, it began to convene

more regularly at the behest of the NSWP members. Rather than acting as a transmission belt of Soviet demands, the alliance began to serve as an instrument for initially formulating NSWP interests and eventually finding compromises that addressed their concerns.

In the West, the member states of the European Community used multilateral discussions within NATO to coerce a reluctant US administration into accepting the pan-European conference. They also created an additional multilateral forum – European Political Cooperation – to coordinate their actions on international issues, assert their vision and interests vis-à-vis the superpower ally and have a better chance to influence non-EC NATO members' positions. Rather than competing with each other, as was the case within the Warsaw Pact, the EC members increasingly closed ranks against US pressure. In the case of the European security conference, the interests of the Western superpower seemed to diverge more from the views of its smaller allies than those of the Soviet counterpart. By contrast, in the East all Warsaw Pact members were after all committed to a European security conference.

The Warsaw Pact *increased* the margins for manoeuvre vis-à-vis the superpower, since the NSWP members began to initiate meetings and table proposals, but it also *decreased* the scope for manoeuvre between the smaller powers, which had to learn how to compromise in order to salvage at least some of their interests. This would happen all the more strongly to the NSWP members in the course of the CSCE: desiring to present a united stance towards the West, the Soviet Union's smaller allies had less scope to assert their individual interests within the CSCE than they did in the period preceding the conference. The case in Western Europe differs in two ways. First, the main interests of the EC members converged. Second, by creating an additional layer for multilateral discussion among themselves – EPC – they increased their scope for manoeuvre by teaming up and then presenting a common front within NATO. To this aim, they also established their groups *within* NATO committees and assured their delegates to the alliance close links with EPC machinery and discussions in order to maximise the capacity of advancing the EC proposals. The downside of the close EPC coordination was that the EC members could see their individual margins for manoeuvre in relations with third countries *decrease*. The French government, for instance, had sought to loosen EPC coordination at the CSCE in order to be able to preserve a more visible role for itself in the East–West dialogue. Although not running against common interests, the French were clearly concerned to see their role disappear into the EC group. However, these were isolated attempts, which were more or less grudgingly brought back within an EPC position in order to strengthen the group's impact on the CSCE negotiations.

In both the East and West, the multilateral settings had provided smaller powers with a scope to increase their margins for manoeuvre, either vis-à-vis each other or vis-à-vis the superpower. The experience led to the institutionalisation of multilateral fora on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the case of the Soviet allies, they began to consider the Warsaw Pact as the proper forum to prepare the European security conference, and, by consequence, as a platform for genuine

discussion in general. The impression of the Polish delegate after the PCC meeting in 1969, namely ‘that his country’s room for manoeuvre had increased’, was illustrative for all smaller WP members.⁵⁶ In the case of Western Europe, the pan-European conference gave EPC a real boost and added to its *raison d’être*. When the MPT closed, the German Ambassador to the United States affirmed that the Nine were imbued with the idea that whatever they were doing in EPC had to advance Europe’s identity (i.e. vis-à-vis the United States), because through the CSCE the Europeans had ‘discovered that they could work with each other and produce results’.⁵⁷

Despite some differences, then, it is possible to affirm that smaller powers perceived and used multilateral fora as an instrument to widen their margins for manoeuvre on both sides of the Iron Curtain and that the opportunities of multilateralism transcended the constraints of specific ideological and political systems.

Notes

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