

3 Perfect timing? 1973–75

Introduction¹

The assumption of the stability of the international situation that underlaid the ambitious national strategy faced immediate challenges. The financial and oil crises in the West, Western European integration, and the Helsinki process, reorganised the international political and economic systems. Cold War historiography has already demonstrated the influence of these developments on the socialist regimes and shown how they contributed to their economic, political, and ideological erosion in the late 1970s and the 1980s.² However, in the case of Poland, with the notable exception of the Helsinki process, the immediate reactions of the socialist elites to these international challenges have gained scant scholarly interest.³

This chapter fills this gap by discussing how the Polish socialist elites interpreted the international situation of the early 1970s and how these interpretations influenced policymaking. It shows that the elites considered the period of international political and economic change as perfect conditions for expanding contacts with the West. In this sense, while international developments carried potential dangers for Poland, they also accelerated its policy of opening. At the same time, the three processes presented Poland with the difficult dilemma of whether to coordinate its actions with other socialist regimes or to act independently. The experience of the first half of the 1970s showed that the latter strategy often proved the more fruitful one, generating increased scepticism towards closer socialist cooperation.

Crisis in the West

After two decades of economic and financial stability, in the late 1960s, inflation in the US started to shake up the Western markets. In response to these developments, in 1971, the US president, Richard Nixon, announced the cancellation of the dollar's convertibility into gold, which since the end of the Second World War had been the backbone of the Bretton Woods financial system. The decision of the European Economic Community (EEC) and Japan to remove the fixed dollar exchange and allow their currencies to float marked the system's final collapse. However, even before this occurred, Western European states

also experienced inflation and financial instability, which triggered their closer cooperation in these fields within the EEC framework.⁴

Initially, internal Polish reports and academic publications considered the monetary crisis as a Western development with only minor importance for socialist regimes. For this reason, the topic did not attract the attention of the highest policymaking bodies. Nevertheless, bankers regularly prepared reports on the financial situation in the West and explored how it could influence Poland. According to a Trade Bank prognosis from March 1970: 'The situation in the credits market in industrialised countries in 1970–1975 will be shaped by a lack of funds caused by high public and private demand for bank loans. In these circumstances, the interest rates will remain very high'.⁵ Such an interpretation only fuelled Gomułka's scepticism towards taking credits. However, just one year later, following the political change and subsequent shift of attitudes towards foreign loans, a new reading of the international circumstances emerged. According to a report prepared by experts from the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and the Ministry of Finance for the Politburo in June 1971, inflation in the West created beneficial credit opportunities. As the document stated: 'the inflation proceeding in the West results in the devaluation of money, and therefore decreases the real value of taken loans'.⁶ Moreover, against the Trade Bank's prediction from 1970, in 1972 Western credits became even cheaper; the Ministry of Foreign Trade noticed this phenomenon, claiming in its report: 'the majority of capitalist states decreased their discount rate, which should influence costs of long- and medium-terms credits'.⁷ While proclaiming beneficial financing conditions, the reports from the early 1970s did not expect these circumstances to last. The analysis from 1971 predicted that 'as a consequence of a restrictive policy of some capitalist countries, credits might become more expensive'.⁸ In 1973 the Ministry of Foreign Trade was even more explicit, stressing that 'we should take advantage of this period to receive the most suitable credits'. It also suggested that becoming indebted to the capitalist countries would make them more interested in exports from Poland, which would secure the country's situation in the future.⁹ As a result, Poland's strategy of the early 1970s aimed to use beneficial financing conditions created by Western inflation to prevent adverse effects from the expected crisis.

Internal documents did not discuss the long-term consequences of Western financial destabilisation. However, the possible repercussions for socialist regimes were mentioned in some expert reports and academic publications. For instance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs analyses expressed concern about a possible decrease in Western interest in socialist states as a consequence of more pressing problems.¹⁰ Similarly, studies on economic integration in the West addressed the project of the West European monetary union, which they considered a threat to East-West trade.¹¹ Closer monetary cooperation within the EEC, however, was primarily considered a sign of the disintegration of the Western alliance. Reports and academic publications discussing the financial crisis distinguished strongly between the US and Western Europe, considering

the former responsible for the problems of the latter and expecting a severe crisis in the transatlantic alliance and between the EEC members.¹² This prediction was reinforced after the eruption of the oil crisis in 1973.¹³

In October Arab members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) announced an oil embargo targeting Western states, which had supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War. By March, when the embargo was lifted, the price of oil barrel had increased from US\$3 to US\$12. This resulted in an inflow of OPEC's members surpluses to Western banks. The 'petrodollars', as this money is referred to, rendered Western loans cheap and easily accessible. At the same time, expensive oil reinforced the financial difficulties of Western countries and caused global turbulence in the prices of resources.¹⁴

The widespread accessibility of beneficial loans became a phenomenon recalled by policymakers, experts, and bankers. As noted by Bożyk:

The increase of petroleum prices resulted in the snowballing of petrodollars [...] to European and American banks, which gave credits to anyone who asked for them and who was creditworthy. [...] When the news about Gierek's interest in credits reached foreign banks, a long line of bankers with profitable offers appeared in front of his office.¹⁵

Similarly, the chairman of National Bank, Witold Bieliński recalled:

CEOs of influential banks started visiting our country [...]. Offers for credit cooperation were made personally by David Rockefeller, a CEO of Chase Manhattan Bank, and a long line of representatives from other leading Western banks in the US, France, UK, Italy, etc. visited Trade Bank with credit offers. Most sought to meet the minister of finance and the chairman of the National Bank.¹⁶

Unlike previously, however, state institutions now identified the oil crisis as a danger to Poland's national strategy. In January 1974 the Planning Commission presented the government with a report on the factors threatening the economic plan. The document identified unstable global prices and access to resources as endangering the Polish agenda and estimated that they would result in 1 billion exchange zlotys (US\$300 million) of additional costs. The Commission report recommended saving resources, decreasing costs of production, especially by lowering imports from the West, and reinvigorating exports.¹⁷ While the immediate reaction was necessary and received general support, the question of the long-term consequences of the crisis remained unsettled. Although the Planning Commission noticed that: 'the consequences of the fuel-energy crisis in capitalist countries might be long-lasting', it did not explore the influence it could have on the global economy and, consequently, the situation in Poland. As framed by Kisiel: 'Every day brings changes. No one can say with full certainty what the price of copper in 1974 will be. If there is someone who can, he should get a prize'.¹⁸ Indeed, the unstable prices made long-term planning

particularly difficult and the phenomenon went beyond access to natural resources. As a draft Five Year Plan from 1975 assessed: 'In the circumstances of inflation and recession in the capitalist world, it is difficult to predict to what extent the capitalist market will be able to absorb Polish products and what prices and the situation on the credit market will look like'.¹⁹ The blurry picture of economic developments allowed a positive interpretation to prevail, and, despite expressing concerns, the draft of the Five Year Plan still predicted an explosion of Polish exports.²⁰

Not only did this interpretation of the oil crisis not cause a radical revision of economic strategy, it also encouraged closer cooperation with the West. Having significant resources of coal and copper, Poland could gain from turmoil in the prices of resources. The foreign policy plan for 1974 expressed high hopes in this respect:

Inflation and the worsening economic situation in highly developed capitalist countries might cause difficulties for Poland's exports to these countries. On the other hand, however, the West could increase its interest in cooperation with socialist regimes, above all with the Soviet Union and Poland, aiming to secure its access to natural resources and energy.²¹

This idea was further developed in the work-plan for 1974 by Department IV of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerned with Western Europe:

Looking for alternative sources of energy will result in an increasing demand for coal, which would strengthen the position of Poland as a provider of this critical resource. The increase in demand for coal and electric energy creates the need to secure our partnerships in a long-term and complex manner through economic and cooperation agreements.

The same report also suggested that Poland could take advantage of the turmoil in global resources in talks with EEC members: 'In the upcoming year, we should pay special attention to economic relations with the 'nine'. Taking advantage of the energy arguments (export of Polish coal, interest of the West in connecting energetic systems), we can pressure them'.²² From the Polish point of view, the turmoil in global resources created the perfect conditions to leverage its coal production and build economic ties with the West. These predictions materialised as the guarantee of resource deliveries from Poland soon became a bargaining chip when negotiating new credit lines with Western politicians and bankers.²³

Poland's energy security fuelled its headstrong attitude towards the crisis. As described in the *Nowe Drogi* in the wake of the oil crisis: 'To a certain degree, our energetic structure makes us independent from the instability of the oil market, and increasing demand for the hard coal opens up the prospect of increasing hard currency incomes. At the same time, long-standing agreements with the Soviet Union secure our access to oil'.²⁴ Indeed, along with other

Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) countries, since 1946 Poland had relied on cheap oil subsidised by the Soviet Union. This mechanism was enabled by the CMEA's set-prices structure, which undervalued resources and overvalued consumer and industrialised goods which the socialist regimes exported to the Soviet Union. Beginning in the 1960s, the Soviet Union became unhappy with this arrangement and sought to readjust the CMEA's terms of trade. It was only in 1973, however, when the cost of oil skyrocketed and the prospect of lucrative exports to the West emerged, that it decisively pushed for price reform.²⁵

Poland was the only socialist regime to support the idea of the aforementioned price reform. However, its proposals based the prices of resources on regional costs instead of on world prices, which in practice meant that the price of coal would go up while the price of oil remained the same. Unsurprisingly, this idea failed to gain the support of the Soviet Union or the other socialist regimes.²⁶ Given that the price mechanism remained unreformed in the wake of the oil crisis, the increase in exports of Polish resources to CMEA was a threatening scenario. According to the Planning Commission, during the next CMEA sessions coordinating Five Year Plans for 1975–80, the Polish delegation might 'find itself under increasing pressure of CMEA members to increase its deliveries of resources, above all coal, coke and copper'. The goal for the negotiation was to resist this pressure and agree to additional imports only if, in turn, Poland received other resources, above all oil.²⁷ However, Poland was not the only country interested in preserving its resources for exports to capitalist states, which further limited such exchanges.²⁸ At the same time, given the reluctance of the socialist regimes to increase mutual trade, in 1975 the Soviet Union requested that the CMEA immediately increase prices for resources. The new mechanism annually recalculated prices based on average world market prices from the last five years. Although that meant that in 1975 the price of oil doubled in the CMEA, it tripled on the capitalist market.²⁹ With the slower speed, the oil price followed this trajectory. Despite readjustments, selling to capitalist countries remained more profitable than trading with the CMEA members.

As Poland had very modest oil resources, it was hit with a drastic increase in oil prices. In light of the government's strong emphasis on motorisation, since the early 1970s Poland's demand for oil drastically increased. As the Soviet Union restricted access to oil not only by increasing prices by also by restricting quantity, in the mid-1970s Poland started importing expensive oil from capitalist countries. The Soviet Union was aware that limiting deliveries of oil to the socialist regimes would result in their closer cooperation with the West. The capitalist countries would have to become an alternative source of energy and a market for socialist exports, necessary to cover higher oil prices.³⁰ Indeed, from the perspective of socialist regimes, this decision encouraged their closer cooperation with the West and removed one of the principal advantages of economic cooperation within the CMEA.³¹

The financial crisis created beneficial conditions for taking loans. While Western inflation made them cheaper, the oil crisis additionally increased their

accessibility. Like countries in Latin America and other regions, Poland recognised these circumstances and wanted to use them to its advantage. Aware that this situation might not last long, it accelerated taking credits. At the same time, the Western crisis blurred the picture of the economic situation, which allowed the optimistic prognosis to prevail. Moreover, domestic mining and access to cheap Soviet oil made Poland's position strong when compared with the capitalist countries. Such an advantage confirmed the perception of the crisis as particularly well suited for regulating economic contacts with the West. However, after 1975 the CMEA no longer provided full energy security for the socialist regimes. As in the case of other members, this reform structurally encouraged closer cooperation with the West and increased scepticism about socialist cooperation.

Western European integration

Western European integration threatened the plans of the Polish leadership, which were based on a complex economic exchange and close bilateral ties between socialist and capitalist countries in Europe. In 1970 EEC members received around 12 per cent of Polish exports. According to estimations from 1971, after the EEC's enlargement, trade with the organisation would constitute 60 per cent of Poland's trade with capitalist countries.³² Moreover, in contrast to countries such as the Soviet Union or Romania exporting above all resources which were not subject to EEC protectionist policies, Polish exports consisted predominantly of agricultural products and textiles, two types of goods which became subject to EEC regulations.

From the mid-1960s Poland experienced adverse effects from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which impacted exports of its agriculture products. It was however, not before the Hague Summit in 1969 that the Western European integration process acquired a new dynamism. The original six members agreed on a further extension of the EEC and envisaged the completion of the common market.³³ The prospect of the expansion of the organisation towards the UK, Denmark, and Ireland, expected for 1973, meant that Polish trade with the West was to be further limited. This scenario was especially worrying in case of the UK, Poland's second-most important economic partner among the capitalist countries. Moreover, the EEC members agreed to complete the Common Commercial Policy (CCP), which would prohibit outsiders from signing economic agreements with member states on a bilateral level, oblige them to follow unified European terms, and deal directly with the European Commission.

Despite Poland's economic interest and the prospects created by the Hague Summit contacts between the socialist regimes and the EEC remained restricted by the general agreement between CMEA members, according to which member states were not supposed to make deals with the European Commission or recognise it as a diplomatic entity. The Soviet Union, able to disregard the adverse effects of trade restrictions, was the main advocate of this

ideologically motivated policy. Alongside Romania, Poland challenged the no-recognition approach in the 1960s. The two countries pushed through acceptance of the informal so-called 'technical' contacts with European Commission representatives. Through these, Poland managed to partly overcome the harmful effects of the CAP, concluding segment agreements on the export of products such as eggs and poultry.³⁴ At the same time, Romania and Poland adopted different strategies towards the CMEA. While the former hindered any attempts at coordinating policy towards the EEC, the latter pushed for a joint response.³⁵ These Polish efforts, however, did not bring tangible effects in the first half of the 1970s.

According to the report sent to the Politburo by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Trade in May 1971, considering the new agenda of the Polish leadership, as well as the prospect of the closer Western European integration, the existing modest, unofficial, cooperation with the EEC needed to be expanded. The report encouraged the use of various contacts to collect information about Western European integration and establish closer relations with the EEC.³⁶

Following these suggestions, in the early 1970s Poland developed its institutional apparatus with an eye towards the EEC. The new institutions included a special unit in the Polish Embassy in Brussels concerned with European integration, established in 1971,³⁷ and integration units in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1971 and the Ministry of Foreign Trade in 1973 in Warsaw.³⁸ In 1973, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to further coordinate efforts to collect information about the EEC and requested that each embassy delegate one employee to work exclusively on Western European integration.³⁹ Moreover, it started to organise annual meetings of ambassadors to EEC member states on the integration process.⁴⁰ Similar gatherings were hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Trade for Trade Councillors and representatives of both ministries.⁴¹ Rurarz, personal adviser to the PUWP first secretary and later to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Stanisław Długosz, vice minister of foreign trade played particularly instrumental roles in these state institutions conducting research on Western European integration. They were both trained at the prestigious Main School of Planning and Statistics, had international experience, and continued academic research alongside their political activities.

Among the expert bodies, the Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych (PISM—Polish Institute of International Affairs), the Polish Foreign Trade Institute and the Main School of Planning and Statistics were the key institutions scrutinising the EEC. The journal *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* (International Affairs), issued monthly by the PISM, almost always opened with an article on European détente, usually touching on Western European integration, as did the monthly *Handel Zagraniczny* (Foreign Trade), published by the Polish Foreign Trade Chamber, which was associated with the Polish Foreign Trade Institute. In these periodicals, authors like Józef Sołdaczuk, Michał Łytko, and Zbigniew Kamecki, pioneered research on Western European integration.

This research into Western integration processes carried out by different institutions provided Poland with a solid picture of the integration's progress.

However, as in the case of the Western financial crisis, interpretations of these developments varied.

Polish reports and the Party's press tended to see the problem of the EEC primarily as that of German growth. They expressed concern not only that the economic rise of the organisation would strengthen the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), but also that through the multilateral channel the country would soon dominate Europe.⁴² However, following the 1970 Treaty of Warsaw, new voices challenging the equation between the FRG and the EEC appeared. Łytko, in his article in *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* from January 1972, argued against assuming that the FRG was dominant in the organisation and revealed how the internal mechanisms of the EEC prohibited all members from uncoordinated political and economic growth. For this reason, he encouraged a positive perspective on the upcoming EEC enlargement to the UK, which in his view would limit FRG domination and slow down the integration process.⁴³

The evolution of perceptions, when compared with the 1960s, also concerned the overall place of the EEC in international relations. Unlike in previous years, when Western integration had been considered an American project, it started to appear as an opportunity to weaken the Western European transatlantic bond. The monetary and the oil crises exposed conflicts in the Western alliance, confirming this view.⁴⁴ In addition, the research institutions explored this aspect of the integration processes, pointing out the chance for a reorganisation of the existing, bipolar world order.⁴⁵ Rurarz, in his collection of essays, suggested that if the development of the EEC was successful, it would become a super-power comparable to the US and the USSR.⁴⁶

The challenge for those ambiguous foreign policy views came from the security institutions. When the plan concerning relations with Western Europe, prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1971, was sent to the Ministry of Defence, it received many negative comments. Army experts criticised the authors for forgetting that 'for the countries of the Warsaw Pact, the biggest threat is and will be the NATO, and on the economic level EEC', equalising the character and goals of the two organisations.⁴⁷ One year later, in a similar report, the Ministry of Defence described the EEC as a tool of 'economic war' influenced by 'cold-war oriented military circles'. The author also argued against perceiving the EEC as independent from the US and forgetting about the FRG's domination in it.⁴⁸

Regardless of differences in interpreting specific aspects of the Western integration process, the bulk of the reports and studies of the EEC were marked by a concern for deepening the division of Europe. This prognosis could materialise not only through the successful integration of Western Europe but also through the influence this process had on the situation in the East. Research institutions and academic journals often explored the parallels between the CMEA and the EEC, and two different models of integration in Europe.⁴⁹ Some highly positioned policymakers in the 1970s perceived the EEC as a possible source of inspiration for the future of socialist integration. While advocating for

the creation of a special EEC unit in Brussels, Kisiel stated that its reports would nourish the plan of the reconstruction of the CMEA.⁵⁰

The parallels between the two integrations caused concern among some of the socialist elites. Although such scepticism towards socialist integration was never expressed publicly, the increase in Western European unity was perceived as prompting an increase in socialist unity, which for many meant an increase in control from the Soviet Union. The possibility of such a scenario worried, for example, Rakowski. In his memoirs, he claimed to have expressed his concerns to Western politicians, including Brandt.⁵¹ Similarly, Rurarz, concerned about the possibility of an increase in the Soviet domination of Poland, criticised academics praising the Western European model, such as Soldaczuk. In his view, the positive perception of the EEC and its supranational authority would only provide the Soviet Union with arguments to increase its control over the CMEA.⁵²

Even though the judgement about the EEC differed among the state bodies and research institutions, they all agreed upon the irreversibility of the integration. Even the critical Ministry of Defence, in its report from 1972, admitted: 'The process of the Western European integration is so advanced that it had already passed the point from which there is no return'.⁵³ Similarly, Łytko, in his article for the *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* from 1971, noted 'we had passed the times when the socialist states regarded Western European integration as a temporary, unsustainable phenomenon'.⁵⁴ Although Western Europe faced numerous difficulties in its integration, it succeeded in fashioning the process as unique and continuously progressive.⁵⁵ The Polish conviction about the inevitability of integration reveals the power of this narrative.

In light of these assessments, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and other involved institutions pushed Polish policymakers towards acknowledging this new geopolitical actor and working out Poland's political position towards it. Regardless of this pressure, in the first half of the decade, the highest political bodies rarely issued recommendations about the EEC and the CMEA activity with regard to the EEC in the early 1970s was minimal. Under those circumstances, national goals could be secured only through profiting from the possibilities offered by the EEC and its members without violating the accords between the CMEA members. This situation paradoxically accelerated the processes of Polish engagement with the capitalist world.

From the CMEA standpoint, the EEC was a non-existent entity, so relations with its members were to be carried out bilaterally.⁵⁶ Consequently, between 1971 and 1974, Poland concluded economic agreements with all six original EEC members, and two out of three new ones. These were followed by unprecedented diplomatic activity and efforts to institutionalise relations, for example through annual bilateral round table meetings between politicians and economists. Moreover, the anticipated political and economic closure of Western Europe also stimulated interest in countries outside the EEC. Their non-participation in the organisation motivated a rise in Polish diplomatic activity

towards Scandinavian states.⁵⁷ Similarly, Poland tried to establish ties with Spain and Portugal. As a Ministry of Foreign Affairs report stated, ‘we need to secure our interest in Spain in case the EEC integrates it’.⁵⁸

Poland’s unusual bilateral activity was accompanied by increased interest in multilateral cooperation. By 1971 Poland was a member of 583 international organisations, overtaking all other socialist regimes, including the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.⁵⁹ The prospect of closer cooperation with the EEC only encouraged this trend. On the practical level, participating in international organisations provided a chance to interact with the EEC without officially recognising it. More importantly, however, multilateral organisations offered an alternative to the exclusive integration model proposed by EEC.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was particularly important for securing Polish economic interests. As reports by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade on multilateral cooperation stated, the main goal of the Polish delegation to GATT was to mitigate the harmful effects of EEC policy.⁶⁰ The multilateral forum constituted an excellent place for unofficial interaction with European Commission representatives. Moreover, GATT functioned based on the Most-Favourite Nation clause, meaning that the members were to apply equally beneficial terms of trade. The creation of the EEC threatened this, as it aimed to protect the Common Market through external tariffs and quantity restrictions. Participating in GATT gave Poland an argument against EEC discrimination, which the Ministry of Foreign Trade recommended was to be applied in talks with Western diplomats.⁶¹

Recognising the possibilities GATT offered, Polish experts started to discuss the organization in positive terms. A report from Brussels identified the development of foreign trade, enabled by the GATT system, a pillar of peaceful coexistence after the Second World War.⁶² According to Rurarz, the EEC represented ‘localism’ and ‘exclusivism’ while GATT stood for ‘globalism’, which he considered the future of the economy.⁶³

While mitigating the adverse effects of EEC integration, GATT was fundamentally a Western organisation representing the interests and values of capitalist states. Moreover, it obliged its participants to annually increase their trade with other members by seven percent, which systematically increased Poland’s entanglement with the capitalist economy.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was another multilateral platform that offered Poland closer engagement with Western European states. Unlike GATT, it did not require any economic adjustments but only facilitated multilateral economic cooperation. From 1947 the ECE was the only space where diplomats and experts representing all European countries regularly met.⁶⁴ Poland had high hopes for its development and expected that after the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) it would become a permanent framework for East-West economic cooperation.⁶⁵ Academic journals also described the ECE as an organisation which resisted the permanent division of Europe.⁶⁶ As with GATT, the need to create an alternative to Western European exclusiveness drove Polish engagement in the ECE.

While securing bilateral and multilateral channels of cooperation with the EEC members for the future, Poland also aimed to gain as much as possible before the closure of the Common Market. Cooperation agreements and credits were the principal tools in Poland's modernisation programme threatened by Western European integration.

Introduction of the CCP would mean not only the end of bilateral economic agreements with the EEC member states but also the unification of those countries' tariffs. Consequently, states that traditionally offered Poland beneficial terms of trade were to adjust their standards to the others. The new policy did not usually include, however, cooperation agreements concluded before its introduction. Therefore, as suggested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signing as many cooperation deals as possible was a good strategy to avoid the harmful effects of Western European integration.⁶⁷ An even more significant concern was related to credit opportunities, regularly identified in Polish analyses as a possible adverse outcome of Western European integration.⁶⁸ As the European Commission never aimed to regulate credit policy, this anxiety was misguided.⁶⁹ However, in 1972 the Ministry of Foreign Trade sent the following recommendation to the government:

We should expect that the EEC will aim to unify the terms of export credits for socialist states, especially after 1974. We should take advantage of the time separating us from this moment to become as indebted as possible to EEC member states. The position of debtor would be more beneficial for maintaining bilateral interests.⁷⁰

The expansion of diplomatic and economic ties, however, sometimes reached a dead end, making direct relations with the EEC inevitable. In the early 1970s, this happened after the EEC introduced further restrictions on Polish exports of textiles and meat. However, it was not before 1974, with the looming introduction of CCP, that unofficial contacts with representatives of the European Commission multiplied.⁷¹

The CCP also triggered the coordination of policy among CMEA members. Acting under the pressure of countries harmed by the new restrictions, including Poland, in 1974 the CMEA issued an invitation to the European Commission to launch talks in Moscow. In November, the EEC accepted the proposal, and the first meeting was envisaged to take place in 1975.⁷² Such an outcome was not a desired one from the point of view of the EEC, which pursued a strategy of dealing with the socialist countries independently, not through the CMEA. Being afraid of the possibility of strengthening socialist cooperation and empowering the Soviet Union, the EEC tempted socialist regimes with beneficial separate deals. At best, it considered a broad, general agreement with the CMEA, which would lead to specific agreements with each country.⁷³

Also from the Polish perspective, the launch of the CMEA-ECC negotiations was not necessarily beneficial. Concluding a deal with the European Commission would require granting the CMEA supranational power, which it never

had before. Moreover, the experience of socialist cooperation when facing the EEC was disappointing. In the 1970s, Poland hardly ever consulted with other socialist states in bilateral meetings about its policy on Western European integration. Paradoxically, Polish diplomats sometimes learnt about the independent actions of other socialist regimes from EEC representatives or other Western partners.⁷⁴ While facing the EEC as a unified front could have strengthened the position of socialist regimes, it also foreshadowed prolonged negotiations.

Western European integration mattered for Poland, and, following the change in national strategy in 1971, its significance only increased. The expansion of the institutional apparatus developed to study the EEC reveals the importance attached to this matter. Although assessments of the integration varied, in the 1970s the Polish socialist elites did not doubt that the EEC would remain a permanent international actor. As a consequence, Poland pushed for a change in the non-recognition policy in the CMEA and in parallel aimed to secure its interest through building enduring economic ties and participation in international organisations. The overestimated progress of Western European integration resulted in the assumption that Poland needed to hurry in order to secure its situation in the future, and achieve as much as possible before the situation deteriorated. As in the case of the oil crisis, the Soviet Union, refusing to acknowledge the EEC's existence, failed to protect socialist regimes from external developments. From the Polish perspective, however, its change of attitude in 1974 was not necessarily beneficial. The experience of socialist cooperation when facing the EEC was disappointing and, given the attitude of the European Commission, national manoeuvring could bring more beneficial results.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Poland was the first country to call for an international conference that would confirm the territorial status quo in Europe. Adam Rapacki, the minister of foreign affairs, presented this idea at the UN as early as 1964. He later promoted the idea in talks with Western diplomats and in meetings of Warsaw Pact members. As a result, in 1966 in Bucharest, the socialist regimes called for a European conference on security and cooperation. While this proposal remained unanswered, after the Budapest appeal in 1969, the West reacted positively. The prospect of the conference was itself a triumph of Polish diplomacy.

As an initiator of the conference on the socialist side, Poland quickly started conceptualising its objectives for the international talks. Three subsequent ministers of foreign affairs supervised reports on conference proposals: Rapacki, Jędrzychowski, and Stefan Olszowski. They were assisted by experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Bogusław Rychłowski, specialising in international relations and security, and Kamecki, specialising in international economic relations. However, the PISM also played an important role in

shaping Poland's position. Academics and diplomats such as Marian Dobrosielski and Adam Daniel Rotfeld diligently observed the CSCE preparation, and participated in the concluding event. The former even became head of the Polish delegation during the follow-up Belgrade conference in 1977, replacing Adam Wilmann, the Polish ambassador to Finland, who led the delegation during the Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT).

From the late 1960s, Poland started presenting its ideas during talks with other Warsaw Pact members, and above all with the Soviet Union. It was during the inter-bloc negotiations rather than during talks with Western states that many of Poland's proposals encountered objection. This included demands to use the conference for disarmament in Europe and to create a pan-European model of economic cooperation. The latter was especially important given the threat presented by the EEC and the need to regulate the relationship with it. Moscow blocked both of these proposals. Unlike Poland, it believed that military issues should be settled between superpowers. Regarding economic cooperation, it considered a multilateral framework as granting too much economic independence to the socialist regimes.⁷⁵ Polish ideas also faced the opposition of other Warsaw Pact members, most notably Romania, which showed a lack of interest in the coordination of foreign or economic policy with other socialist states.⁷⁶

At the same time, the multilateral negotiation allowed Poland to gain the support of the socialist regimes for its core proposal, namely the inviolability of borders.⁷⁷ Although the Treaty of Warsaw from 1970 and its ratification by Bundestag in 1972 largely accommodated this goal, Poland wanted to 'multilateralise rules and norms, which the Treaty between the Polish People's Republic and the FRG from 1970 and other normalisation treaties between the socialist states and the FRG reached on bilateral levels'.⁷⁸ Despite the lack of interest on the matter of socialist states being free of territorial issues, the proposal to make borders inviolable entered the socialist states joint objectives. The next step involved winning Western support and especially finding a compromise with the FRG, which did not want the CSCE Final Act to undermine the long-term possibility of German reunification. While the FRG advocated a formula allowing the change of borders according to the rule of national self-determination, Poland preferred the signatories to confirm they would not make territorial claims in the future. Eventually, a compromise was struck by accepting that frontiers could change but only 'in accordance with international law, by peaceful means and by agreement'.⁷⁹ Although Poland needed to compromise on the matter of wording, still, the First Basket of Helsinki Accords concerned with European security matched its principal objective set over ten years before. The final report from the conference referred to all of its provisions as: 'non-containing elements, which could be considered inconvenient for Poland's goals and interests'.⁸⁰

Another Polish objective concerned the institutionalisation of the conference. All the European socialist regimes initially supported this idea. However, after the MPT exposed the Western attachment to the principles of free movements

of people and ideas, Soviet enthusiasm for the matter declined, and eventually Moscow removed that demand from the joint socialist CSCE proposal. Nevertheless, the idea of institutionalisation was also strongly supported by the neutral and non-aligned countries. Thanks to their advocacy and the unofficial diplomatic manoeuvrings of some of the socialist states, including Poland, the Helsinki Final Act announced a follow-up conference in Belgrade in 1977.⁸¹ In addition, the Second Basket of the Final Act, concerned with cooperation in the fields of economics, science and technology, and the environment, referred to the ECE as a multilateral forum responsible for implementing its decisions. Although Second Basket's provisions had minor importance, as neither the Soviet Union nor the West regarded the CSCE as an adequate framework for regulating economic cooperation, reinvigorating the ECE corresponded to Poland's strategy of counterweighing the EEC and institutionalising the CSCE's achievements.⁸²

The Third Basket of accords, concerned with cooperation in humanitarian and other fields, was the main challenge during the MPT. The crux of the disagreement was the different understandings of *détente*. While the socialist states considered it above all a form of cooperation between states, the West wanted to broaden the understandings through a 'human dimension'. Specifically, they were interested in freer movement of people, ideas, and information. In the face of prolonged debates and Western resistance, the Warsaw Pact countries compromised on this issue. Eventually, the socialist regimes agreed to most of the Western proposal on humanitarian matters.⁸³

However, Poland's attitude towards what became the Third Basket was never as rigid as that of the Soviets. On the contrary, some Polish reports expressed enthusiasm for 'spreading abroad knowledge about Poland's achievements, presenting our cultural and scientific heritage'.⁸⁴ Moreover, unlike Moscow, it initially advocated the broad idea of a conference and saw it as a chance to build European cooperation in many different fields. This became clear when even after agreeing on the common socialist proposal when, during the MPT, Poland expressed interest in cooperation in the issues of education, school manuals, and translations.⁸⁵ Although the welcoming attitude towards some ideas present in the Third Basket did not find reflection in Poland's official statements, Western observers noticed it. As recalled by Luigi Vittorio Ferraris, from the Italian delegation:

The USSR continued to maintain her closed attitude, which was only supported energetically by Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, whilst other countries of the East did not, during informal contacts, conceal the pressure exerted by the USSR for her allies to abstain from any even minimal opening towards the Western working documents.⁸⁶

In his view, Poland and Hungary had the least rigid attitude towards the matter.⁸⁷ Other participants of the conference, as well as the members of Poland's delegation, confirmed this assessment.⁸⁸

This approach was largely shaped by the fact that the Polish delegation's number one priority was security. For this reason, more flexibility in other topics was a necessary strategy. The open attitude of the Polish representatives supposedly also stemmed from the fact that alongside Hungary, Poland was the most liberal country among the Warsaw Pact and CMEA members. As a consequence, the 'human dimension' of détente did not clash as severely with Poland's domestic policy as it did with the policies of other socialist regimes. Moreover, the liberal segment among the socialist elites welcomed improvements in that field. In 1972, in an interview with the BBC, Rakowski claimed that 'Europe of peaceful coexistence, which excluded wars, must assume a closer exchange of people, ideas and information'.⁸⁹

Szlachcic, one of Gierek's allies in the early 1970s, recalled the political climate among the socialist elites after signing the CSCE Final Act: 'Huge event, huge enthusiasm, as if the world revolved around us'.⁹⁰ In a similar manner, the results of the conference were presented to the public. Frelek in *Nowe Drogi* called Helsinki a 'momentous event'. He also declared it an achievement of the socialist bloc: 'which initiated it and made a maximum effort for the historic meeting to take place'.⁹¹ Other articles published after the conference contained a similar message. They stressed the confirmation of the territorial status quo in Europe, the triumph of the principle of peaceful coexistence, and the influence of the socialist regimes on the Helsinki Accords. Moreover, some authors, including Dobrosielski, discussed in detail not only the text of the CSCE Final Act but also the negotiations leading to it, including disagreements concerning the Third Basket. Although the question of its provisions tended to receive much less attention than agreements in other fields, there is no reason to suppose that its decisions were consciously hidden.⁹² The censorship regulations of 1975 did not prohibit referring to the Third Basket. On the contrary, they encouraged relying on the original text of the Final Act and avoiding undermining its importance by bringing up the fact that it was not legally binding.⁹³

Apart from cementing détente with its Final Act, the CSCE, and the period preceding it, created the ideal conditions for strengthening bilateral relations with Western states. This diplomatic activity of high-profile officials had no precedent in Poland's socialist history. Thanks to his command of French and German, the first secretary, could himself put into action the diplomatic offensive. Gierek's visits to France in 1972, Belgium in 1973, and the US in 1974 were the clearest examples of the renewed approach. Similarly, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Nixon, and Gerald Ford visited Poland in this period. The agenda for the CSCE was one of the main topics discussed on these occasions. Moreover, the event itself offered an opportunity for talks between the politicians. During the Helsinki conference, Gierek met separately with Harold Wilson, the British prime minister and with Helmut Schmidt, chancellor of the FRG since 1974. The talk with the latter had particular importance as it resolved some of the most challenging issues in the Polish-West German relationship, including the problem of family reunification for Germans who had been living in Poland since the end of the Second World War.⁹⁴ Moreover, on this occasion, the FRG

offered Poland a credit line worth 1 billion deutsche marks (around US\$400 million).⁹⁵ The question of foreign loans and economic deals was discussed during high-profile meetings, which regularly resulted in such offers.

Polish historians labelled this diplomatic offensive as a ‘diplomacy of prestige’⁹⁶ or ‘diplomacy of success’.⁹⁷ This phrasing understates its role and suggests that it aimed mainly at strengthening the leadership image in the eyes of the public in Poland and abroad. In reality, these practices brought an enduring change in Poland’s relations with the Western states. Reports from Western European embassies in Warsaw reveal how Poland’s renewed image was interpreted as an invitation for closer political and economic contacts. The French ambassador to Poland, Augustin Jordan, in his final report from a mission in 1973, noted: ‘Never, since the end of the last world conflict, was there a Polish leadership with a better attitude towards us. Thanks to their cooperation, we can secure a privileged position in all fields in this country’.⁹⁸ Much of this he attributed to Gierek, whom he described as: ‘Open spirit, trained in the West, most probably a convinced communist but not formatted solely by the Soviet way’.⁹⁹ The British ambassador Frank Brenchley came to a similar conclusion and encouraged the Foreign Office to expand its relationship with Poland. He stressed that unlike other socialist regimes Poland, was ‘a deserving cause’ and that ‘we can contribute to its independent stature and thus help it to give it immunity from Soviet interference’.¹⁰⁰ These remarks show that Poland’s strategy of fashioning itself for the most liberal and open among the socialist regimes brought tangible results. The Western European states welcomed this attitude and were ready to reward it with closer political and economic cooperation.

The socialist elites recognised the CSCE as a success of Polish diplomacy and a particular chance to cement and strengthen East-West relations. In this sense, the Helsinki Accords confirmed the Polish national strategy and encouraged its continuation. While the beneficial results of the CSCE were enabled by socialist cooperation, and above all Soviet support for Poland’s objectives, the run-up to Helsinki also revealed the downsides of strong socialist cohesion. Some of Poland’s proposals did not enter conference negotiations because of inter-bloc opposition. Also, the contemporaneous flourishing of bilateral cooperation showed that distancing from the Soviet Union was an effective strategy for gaining Western sympathy.

Conclusion

By the mid-1970s Poland had increased its cooperation with the West much more than it had planned in 1971. According to official statistics, between 1970 and 1975, the trade volume with developed capitalist countries rose by 304 per cent. Also, in 1975 fully 28 per cent of the value of Poland’s overall imports came from the EEC, and 18 per cent of its overall exports value was directed to the EEC.¹⁰¹ In all likelihood, these numbers were even higher. Many policy-makers from the 1970s recall a massive manipulation of statistics.¹⁰²

Other numbers further confirm the drastic increase in exchange with capitalist countries. Taking advantage of beneficial financial and political conditions and fearing the reversal of economic trade and the coordination of credit policy among EEC members, Poland raised its foreign debt tenfold in the first half of the 1970s. In 1976, foreign debt reached US\$11 billion, which was over four times more than the policymakers had assumed in 1971.¹⁰³ Similarly, aiming at securing its economic ties for the future, Poland concluded numerous new cooperation agreements with capitalist countries. Between 1970 and 1976, the country's expenditures for this purpose increased six-fold.¹⁰⁴

In addition, as a consequence of the oil crisis, Poland's natural resources trade turned increasingly towards the West. While, in 1970, imports from developed capitalist countries amounted to 5 per cent of the overall value of Polish imports of resources, in 1975 they reached 27 per cent. This increase was caused above all by oil, which until 1972 was imported almost exclusively from the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, between 1970 and 1975 the export of Polish resources towards the West rose from 42 per cent of overall value to 55 per cent.¹⁰⁶

The acceleration of the national strategy as a response to changes in international circumstances shows the proactive and ambitious character of policy-making in the 1970s. Moreover, the idea that Poland could successfully take advantage of financial and resources crises as well as resulting tensions between Western states indicates that the attitude of the socialist elites was not only bold but also cunning.

However, as is apparent especially in the cases of the financial crisis and Western European integration, interpreting developments in the West was not an easy task, and experts and analysts from state bodies failed to reach an agreement about it. As a result, events in the West made the political and economic future particularly difficult to predict. This blurry picture, combined with significant achievements in strengthening the relationship with Western states, allowed the positive perspective to prevail.

The emergence of previously unknown phenomena in international economic and political relations such as the global financial crisis and supranational integration had another effect on Poland. It resulted in the need to mobilise experts to study international developments and regularly provide policymakers with reports. In the 1970s topics of critical importance, including Poland's relationship with the EEC and its shaping of the CSCE Final Act, were handled by professionals and academics who had not pursued careers within PUWP structures.

Finally, the global financial crisis and increasing multilateralisation of international politics placed Poland in a delicate position. On the one hand, close cooperation with the socialist regimes often proved rewarding, as in the case of the CSCE talks. It may also have strengthened Poland's position in negotiations with the EEC. On the other hand, it strongly limited its room for independent manoeuvre and, especially since 1975, threatened its economic interests.

Notes

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- 2 See for instance: Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises*; Komornicka, 'The Unity of Europe is inevitable'; Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect. International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 3 Jarzabek, 'The impact of the German Question'; Jarzabek, *Polska Wobec Konferencji*; Jarzabek, 'Hope and Reality'; Lachowski, 'Diplomatic File- Polish Diplomacy and the CSCE'.
- 4 On collapse of the Bretton Woods in the Cold War context see: Daniel Sargent, 'The Cold War and the international political economy in the 1970', *Cold War History* 13:3 (2013): 393–425; Giovanni Arrighi, 'The world economy and the Cold War, 1970–1990', in Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 3, *Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23–44.
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- 11 AAN, IF, 1828, 391, Danuta Gotz-Koziarkiewicz, *Plan Wernera w sprawie utworzenia unii ekonomicznej i walutowej EWG*, 29.
- 12 See for instance: AAN, KC PZPR, XIB/194, J. Chowaniec, 'Kryzys Zachodniego systemu', 10–11.
- 13 See for instance: AMSZ, Dep. IV, 48/77, w.16, 'Europejska Wspólnota Gospodarcza- po instancjach Rady Ministrów z 3/ 4 grudnia 1973- przed szczytem w Kopenhadze' (On EEC in 1973), Report by Chrupek, 6 December 1973; AMSZ, Dep. IV, 48/77, w.16, 'Stosunki Europa-USA'; Andrzej Wiczorkiewicz, 'Ekonomiczne problemy Europejskiej "Dziewiątki"', *Nowe Drogi* 5 (1973): 73.
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- 30 Kansikas, 'Calculating the Burden of Empire', 361.
- 31 Lorenz Lüthi, 'Drifting Apart: Soviet Energy and the Cohesion of the Communist Bloc in the 1970s and 1980s', in Perović (ed.), *Cold War Energy*, 371–99; André Steiner, "'Common Sense is Necessary'".
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