

The Helsinki Negotiations: The Accords and Their Impact

edited by

Michael D. Kandiah and
Gillian Staerck

ICBH Witness Seminar Programme

The Helsinki Negotiations: The Accords and Their Impact

Dedicated to the memory of

Sir Michael Alexander, GCMG (1936-2002)

with great respect for and appreciation of his contributions
to the witness seminars on contemporary diplomatic history
in which he played such a vital role.

**ICBH Witness Seminar Programme
Programme Director: Dr Michael D. Kandiah**

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Centre for Contemporary British History

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Contributors | 9 |
| Citation Guidance | 11 |
| Chronology | 13 |
| Britain and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1972-77 <i>Keith A. Hamilton</i> | 17 |
| The Helsinki Accords Summarised | 25 |
| Questions for Discussion | 27 |
| Pre-Seminar Written Contribution <i>Roger Beetham CMG, LVO</i> | 29 |
| The Helsinki Accords, The Negotiations and Their Impact: Seminar Transcript <i>edited by Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerck</i> | 33 |
| British Policy and CSCE in the 1970s <i>Sir Reginald Hibbert</i> | 75 |
| Reflections on the CSCE 'Circus' <i>K. A. Bishop CMG, OBE</i> | 81 |
| Some Observations <i>Laurence O'Keeffe CMG, CVO</i> | 85 |
| ...And the Walls Came Tumbling Down <i>Laurence O'Keeffe CMG, CVO</i> | 87 |

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Chronology

- 1954 FEB Soviet proposal of European security conference.
- 1966 JUL Bucharest Declaration in which Warsaw Pact members called for a conference with the Western powers because, lacking a post-war peace treaty, the Soviet Union wanted to settle the boundaries of Europe, and have the German Democratic Republic (and *de facto* the post-war division of Germany) recognised. The Soviet campaign for a European Security Conference was a recurring theme in East-West relations.
- 1968 AUG Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, following 'Prague Spring'
- NOV Enunciation of Brezhnev Doctrine that 'a socialist state may intervene in another socialist state if socialism *per se* is threatened'
- 1969 JAN Richard Nixon succeeded Lyndon Johnson as American President, with Henry Kissinger appointed his aide then Secretary of State.
- MAR Budapest Appeal by Warsaw Pact members for a European Security and Co-operation Conference between Eastern and Western European states to be held in 1970, preceded by preparatory talks between officials.
- JUN NATO discussions of European Security Conference proposal.
- OCT Reiteration of Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers' call for a European security conference.
- DEC NATO Ministerial meeting discussion of ESC proposal: willing to discuss reduction of tension but would need careful preparation. The British JIC saw the call for a conference as 'an instrument of propaganda'.
- 1970 JUN Edward Heath replaced Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, with Sir Alec Douglas-Home as Foreign Secretary.
- 1972 SEPT US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger went to Moscow in pursuit of a *quid pro quo* on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions
- NOV Multilateral Preparatory Talks (at Ambassadorial level) begin at Dipoli, near Helsinki. These talks are significant as they set the framework for the negotiations.

- 1973 JUN Sir Alec Douglas-Home went to Helsinki for the Stage I negotiations between Foreign Ministers which agreed the MPT Final recommendations.
- SEPT Stage II negotiations begin at Geneva. Committee stage, three monthly sessions, continued until July 1975.
- 1974 MAR Harold Wilson's second Labour administration replaces Edward Heath's Conservative administration of 1970-4; Sir Alec Douglas-Home is replaced by James Callaghan as Foreign Secretary.
- AUG Gerald Ford succeeds Richard Nixon as US President.
- 1975 JUL End of Stage II negotiations.
- AUG Stage III Conference of Heads of Government at Helsinki to ratify draft of Stage II.
Helsinki Final Act.
- 1976 APR James Callaghan became Prime Minister and Anthony Crosland succeeded him as Foreign Secretary.
- MAY Establishment of Helsinki Human Rights Group in Moscow.
- 1977 JAN Jimmy Carter succeeded Gerald Ford as US President.
Charter 77 set up in Czechoslovakia.
- FEB David Owen succeeded Anthony Crosland as Foreign Secretary.
- JUN-AUG Preparatory meeting for First Follow-up/Review Conference at Belgrade.
- SEPT Yuri Andropov, Head of KGB, equated dissident criticisms of the Soviet system (encouraged by human rights activists) with anti-Soviet activities, albeit that criticism is permitted under Article 49 of the Soviet Constitution.
- OCT Start of Belgrade Conference.
- 1978 MAR End of Belgrade Conference.
- JUN-JUL Preparatory meeting for Bonn 'Scientific Forum'.
- OCT-DEC Montreux meeting on Peaceful Settlement of Disputes.

- 1979 FEB-MAR Valletta meeting on Economic, Scientific and Cultural Co-operation.
- MAY Mrs Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister; Lord Carrington appointed Foreign Secretary.
- 1980 FEB-MAR Hamburg 'Scientific Forum'.
- AUG Strike of workers at Lenin Shipyard, Gdansk, Poland. The Strike Committee of Solidarity Union chaired by Lech Walesa.
- SEPT-NOV Preparatory meeting for Second Follow-up/Review Meeting at Madrid.
- NOV Solidarity's status was legalised. Solidarity's aims include contact with western labour unions, democratic reforms and guarantees of civil rights.
- 1981 JAN Ronald Reagan became American President.
- DEC Solidarity Union was deprived of legal status and goes underground.
- 1982 APR Francis Pym succeeded Lord Carrington as Foreign Secretary.
- NOV Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev died.
He was succeeded by Yuri Andropov.
- 1983 JUN Sir Geoffrey Howe succeeded Francis Pym as Foreign Secretary.
- SEPT End of Madrid meeting.
- OCT-NOV Preparatory meeting for First Stage of Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) and Disarmament in Europe, Helsinki.
- 1984 JAN Beginning of Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, Stockholm.
- FEB Soviet Leader Yuri Andropov died.
Succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko.
- MAR-APR Meeting on Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Athens.
- OCT Seminar on Economic, Scientific and Cultural Co-operation in Mediterranean, Venice.
- NOV-DEC Meeting to prepare 'Cultural Forum', Budapest.

- 1985 MAR Soviet Leader Konstantin Chernenko died.
 Mikhail Gorbachev elected General Secretary of CPSU.
 Dawn of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* period.
- 1986 SEPT End of Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and
 Disarmament in Europe, Stockholm.
- SEPT-OCT Preparatory Meeting for the Vienna Meeting.
- NOV Beginning of Third Follow-up/Review Meeting, Vienna.
- Gorbachev's administration made extensive commitments on humanitar-
 ian co-operation and guarantee of individual rights and jamming of
 foreign radio broadcasts ended.
- Jewish emigration expanded and political prisoners are released.
- 1989 JAN Ronald Reagan succeeded as American President by George Bush.
 End of Third Follow-up/Review Meeting, Vienna.
- JUN John Major succeeded Sir Geoffrey Howe as Foreign Secretary.
- OCT Douglas Hurd succeeded John Major as Foreign Secretary.
- 1991 SEPT Moscow Human Rights conference.

Britain and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1972-77

Keith A. Hamilton¹

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Politicians, like journalists, have a penchant for historical parallels. British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson was no exception. On 30 July 1975 he told delegates assembled in Helsinki for the third and final stage of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) that, in its territorial coverage and level of representation, their Conference made the 'legendary Congress of Vienna of 1814-15 and the Congress of Berlin of 1878 seem like well-dressed tea parties'.² Three days earlier the *New York Times* columnist, William Safire, had made a rather less flattering comparison. He explained to his readers that they were about to witness a 'Super Yalta', and that the Helsinki summit would put 'Washington's seal of approval on the Russian conquest and domination of Eastern Europe'.³ British diplomatic correspondence of the period might seem to lend some credence to this view. On 9 September 1975, just five weeks after the conclusion of Stage III, Sir Terence Garvey, Britain's Ambassador in Moscow, informed London that security in Europe had meant for the Soviet Union the 'consolidation and perpetuation of the new territorial and political order in Eastern Europe established by Soviet arms, diplomacy and skulduggery in the years following 1944'.⁴ He maintained that for the Russians the key importance of the Helsinki Final Act⁵ lay in the mutual acceptance of the inviolability of frontiers and the political *status quo*. The Act's non-binding character and the acceptance in its Declaration of Principles that frontiers might be changed by peaceful means would not, he reasoned, prevent them from interpreting Western signatures as confirmation that NATO would not set back the map of Europe. 'Moscow', he added, 'intends that note should be taken of this in Eastern Europe in case anyone there had been hoping for change'. The Soviet Government had gained an international success useful for internal propaganda, and a quarry of texts to use against those whom they classed 'enemies of *détente*' in the West.⁶

Seen, however, from another perspective Helsinki was anything but an endorsement of the *status quo*. The presence in the Finnish capital from 30 July to 1 August 1975 of 35 delegations, representing Canada, the United States, and all the European states except Albania and Andorra, seemed to signify the onset of a less confrontational era in East/West relations. The Final Act offered governments, non-governmental organisations and individuals fresh opportunities for

1 The opinions advanced in this paper are the author's own and should not be taken as an expression of official Government policy.

2 Cmnd 6932, *Selected Documents Relating to Problems of Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1954-77* (London: HMSO, 1977), p.216.

3 *New York Times*, 28 July 1975, p.21.

4 Gill Bennett and Keith A. Hamilton (eds), *Documents on British Policy Overseas* (DBPO), Series III, Volume II, *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1972-75* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998), No.141.

5 The full text of the Helsinki Final Act is printed in Cmnd 6932, pp.225-83.

6 See note 3 above.

transcending Europe's ideological divide. Its Declaration of Principles was in effect a political code of good behaviour which, since it applied unreservedly to all participating states, irrespective of economic, political and social differences between them, implicitly rejected the Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty. It emphasised the self-determination of peoples, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the Act's provisions dealing with human contacts, information, culture and education (the so-called Basket III issues) stipulated how such principles might be transformed into practice. They tackled the administrative hindrances facing applicants for visas and sought to reduce the chances of individuals being penalised for trying to travel abroad; they set out specific ways for facilitating the freer dissemination of oral, printed, filmed and broadcast information, including arrangements to end radio jamming and improve the working conditions of journalists; and they established a basis for promoting direct contacts in the cultural sphere and expanding public knowledge of, and access to, all kinds of works of art.

The Conference, despite its title, did not deal with the problems of European security in any real sense of the word. (It has of course to be remembered that Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) in central Europe were the subject of talks then taking place in Vienna.) A number of confidence-building measures were, however, agreed at Helsinki, though, as an FCO guidance telegram subsequently explained, these were of 'political rather than military significance, and rest[ed] on a voluntary basis'.⁷ Other texts covered co-operation in the field of economics, science and technology, and the environment—a basket of measures which, while they appeared to attract less close analysis than those in Basket III, opened up to the West new avenues by which to influence the Soviet Union. Tom McNally, political adviser to James Callaghan during his period as Secretary of State, made the point succinctly when he noted in a minute of 11 November 1975, 'that growing Soviet dependency on Western technology and on Western products to meet the rising expectations of the Soviet people [was] in itself a kind of Finlandisation in reverse'.⁸ In addition, the workings of the Act were to be subject to review. A follow-up Resolution provided for the continuation of the multilateral dialogue and for the meeting of a conference at Belgrade in 1977. This and further conferences at Madrid during 1980-83 and Vienna during 1986-89 offered means for monitoring the performance of the Soviet Union and its European allies, and allowed for the international consideration of practical progress towards a Western vision of *détente* which, as Harold Wilson explained in his Conference speech, would mean little if it were 'not reflected in the daily lives of our peoples'. There was, Wilson stated, no reason why in 1975 'Europeans should not be allowed to marry whom they want, hear and read what they want, travel abroad when and where they want, meet whom they want'.⁹

There was no guarantee that such aspirations would be fulfilled. The Russians had, however, been persuaded to discuss issues which they had previously insisted were purely domestic and therefore taboo in international negotiations. And the Final Act went much further towards meeting Western requirements than most British diplomats had originally expected. Three years earlier Whitehall had been distinctly sceptical about Soviet proposals for a conference.¹⁰ This was hardly surprising in view of the mutual antagonism prevailing between London and Moscow in the aftermath of the expulsion in September 1971 of 105 Soviet officials on charges of espionage. Senior FCO officials had then suspected that the Russians wished to use a security conference to enhance their position in Eastern Europe, to impede the economic and political integration of Western

7 *DBPO*, Series III, Volume II, No.137.

8 *DBPO*, Series III, Volume III, *Détente in Europe, 1972-76*, G. Bennett and K.A. Hamilton (eds), (London: Frank Cass/Whitehall History Publishing, 2001), No.83.

9 *Cmnd 6932*, pp.143-58.

10 For a more detailed examination of British policy towards, and diplomacy during, the CSCE, see Keith A. Hamilton, *The Last Cold Warriors: Britain, Détente and the CSCE, 1972-75* (Oxford: St Antony's College, EIRU, 1999).

Europe, and ultimately to weaken the Atlantic Alliance. Moscow, it seemed, was set upon legitimising the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty in the East and lulling the West into a false sense of security which could lead to the imposition on Britain and its neighbours of a restricted neutrality on the Finnish model. Moreover, at a time when three of Britain's principal allies, France, West Germany and the United States, were each engaged in bettering their bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, the FCO could not ignore widespread public support for a policy of *détente* which was popularly associated with the end of the Cold War. True, the Americans were even less enthusiastic about the prospects for a conference than were the British. But faced with demands in Congress for military retrenchment abroad, the Nixon Administration was ready in September 1972 to trade acceptance of the CSCE for a Soviet commitment to exploratory talks on MBFR.

Meanwhile, during the summer and autumn of 1972 British diplomats engaged with representatives of Britain's allies and partners, both in the context of NATO and the newly-established mechanisms of European Political Co-operation (EPC), in seeking to find ways in which *détente* could be turned more obviously to their advantage. The strategy that emerged was one that aimed at transforming Brezhnev's rhetoric of pan-European co-operation into practical measures for broadening and 'normalising' relations between peoples rather than states, on both sides of the European divide. This meant shifting the diplomatic agenda, forcing the Russians to negotiate on an unfamiliar terrain, and focusing public attention upon the shortcomings of Warsaw Pact countries in the sphere of individual rights and freedoms. George Walden, who was subsequently to join the British delegation to the multilateral preparatory talks for the CSCE, observed that the West's object was 'to secure genuine improvements in reducing barriers within Europe and "generally to spread the contagion of liberty"'.¹¹ The preparatory talks which began at Dipoli, just outside Helsinki, in November 1972, were the first and in many respects the most important test of Western tactics. Indeed, talks which had initially been billed as no more than informal discussions amongst ambassadors at Helsinki soon developed into a conference in their own right. Western diplomats were anxious to avoid a conference which would confine itself to broad declarations on international conduct, and to ensure instead that they had a negotiating structure which would allow their delegates the opportunity to raise points of detail relating to human contacts and the freer dissemination of information. But in seeking to draft terms of reference for conference committees and subcommittees they met with considerable resistance from Eastern participants. A breakthrough in January led to the East's acceptance of the grouping of proposals in the form of numbered baskets and to the building from the bottom up of agreed formulations corresponding to the projected work of subcommittees. It was not, however, until 17 May 1973, and then evidently with a view to avoiding further delay, that the Russians abandoned their demand that the application of Basket III measures be subordinated to a reference to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states.¹²

The Final Recommendations which emanated from the preparatory talks and which were endorsed at Stage I, the foreign minister stage, of the CSCE in Helsinki during 3-7 July 1973, served as the basis for the Stage II negotiations which began in Geneva in September and continued until July 1975. The complex committee structure worked in many ways to the West's advantage. Nevertheless, British diplomats were from the start aware that it might well prove necessary to slow up progress in Committee I, which dealt with the Declaration of Principles coveted by the East, in order to ensure that the West were in a stronger bargaining position to secure what they wanted in Committee III which handled the human contacts and information issues. What emerged was a diplomatic method which might best be described as competing procrastination,

11 DBPO, Series. III, Volume II, No.11.

12 *Ibid.*, No.34.

one of whose chief characteristics was long periods of deadlock when little or no progress was made towards the resolution of differences. As Sir John Killick, Britain's Ambassador in Moscow until the autumn of 1973, had predicted, it became a matter of playing it 'as long and hard in the Commissions as necessary'.¹³ Yet, British diplomats and their continental counterparts had also to reckon with what they sometimes perceived as US/Soviet bilateralism. Henry Kissinger, Nixon's Secretary of State, never seems to have taken the CSCE seriously until he turned to writing his monograph on diplomacy and his latest volume of recollections.¹⁴ These, however, simply serve to demonstrate how perspective can have a devastating impact upon even the most academic of diplomatic memories. During the summer of 1974, in the wake of Nixon's final presidential visit to Moscow, he appeared to view the Conference almost exclusively in terms of superpower relations. Crispin Tickell, the head of the FCO's Western Organisations Department and himself a late convert to the virtues of CSCE, complained: 'I do not think that he understands the genuinely idealistic element in the European approach but rather, in the manner of his hero Metternich, wants stability and *détente* (in the Russian sense of the word) for their own sakes.'¹⁵ European delegates were nonetheless able to withstand American pressure for the early tabulation of a list of their minimum objectives in Basket III and, taking advantage of both waning public interest in *détente* in general, and the CSCE in particular, and Brezhnev's expressed desire to wind-up the Conference with a summit meeting in the spring or summer of 1975, they were able to go some way towards achieving their objectives in Basket III without making too many concessions elsewhere.

The CSCE has, of course, often been cited as an example of successful foreign policy co-ordination on the part of the member states of the European Community. Britain, having signed the Treaty of Accession in January 1972, did not formally enter the Community until the following year, but it might well be argued that the CSCE provided a popular cause upon which it and its new partners in EPC could unite. Indeed, Anthony Elliott, Britain's Ambassador in Helsinki and Head of Delegation both during the preparatory talks and the first year of Stage II, seemed to subscribe to Achesonian logic when he wrote in June 1973: 'If Britain is not to act as a major European Power in the context of CSCE, she can hardly hope to be a Power anywhere.'¹⁶ And while Killick attributed some of the Soviet Union's hostility to Britain to the enthusiasm displayed by Edward Heath's Conservative Government for faster European integration, Garvey, his successor in Moscow, held that the subsequent improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations was due in part to Russian recognition of the leading role being played by British diplomats in determining Western tactics during the CSCE.¹⁷ In the spring of 1975 it was, for instance, Michael Alexander, one of the principal British negotiators in Committee III, who recommended that the West should capitalise on the Soviet desire for a July summit and consider offering the East the option of a 'global solution' to outstanding problems relating to human contacts and information. The Russians were thus to be confronted with a choice between making rapid and substantial concessions, but with an assurance that these represented the outer limit of the commitments which they would be called on to accept, and indefinite delay with no assurance that better terms would eventually be forthcoming. The idea was accepted by other Western delegates, and Russian acceptance of the

13 *Ibid.*, No.38.

14 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 758-9; *Years of Renewal* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1999), pp.635-63.

15 DBPO, Series. III, Volume II, No.94.

16 *Ibid.*, No.37.

17 DBPO, Series III, Volume III, Nos.38 and 59.

package put by Kissinger to Gromyko, reduced outstanding Basket III issues to manageable proportions.¹⁸

British diplomats felt themselves well-placed to promote acceptable compromises at Geneva. 'We have', an FCO briefing paper claimed, 'a major asset in that we are free from the commitment to individual hobby horses which distort the perspective of a number of participants; and we are therefore able to take the overall view.'¹⁹ Favourable comparisons were drawn with the French who, as Elliott remarked, 'liked to play out front', and could always 'break loose' if their views were not taken fully into account.²⁰ On one notable occasion they did. During a visit by Brezhnev to Paris in December 1974 they agreed on the redraft of a mini-preamble for Basket III, the non-acceptance of which by their allies and partners led to embarrassment all round. But in British eyes the West Germans could also be 'secretive and unreliable' on issues of particular concern to themselves.²¹ Thus, in March 1974, they suddenly abandoned their insistence that in the Declaration of Principles the inviolability of frontiers should be linked to a provision for their peaceful change. This was a substantial concession to the Russians, one of whose primary aims had been to achieve an unqualified acceptance of frontier inviolability. Largely for tactical reasons, the British opposed it. 'Peaceful change', was in their estimate, 'the one real bargaining counter which the West possessed.'²² They were right, and the Russians having won this point continued to resist concessions in other Baskets.²³ Moreover, in the run-up to the Helsinki summit the positioning of the provision on peaceful change and its exact wording and punctuation remained subjects of seemingly endless wrangling.²⁴

There remains the question of the significance of the Final Act itself. Safire claimed that the Helsinki summit had brought the Second World War officially to an end.²⁵ Other commentators saw the CSCE as being part of a process which had drawn down the curtain on the Cold War. Even in 1973 there had been a tendency to use the past tense when discussing the Cold War, and in some academic circles it is now fashionable to speak of a first and second Cold War, the two conflicts separated by an era of *détente* in the mid-1970s. Yet Western diplomats had from the start been determined that the CSCE should not be a substitute for a peace conference, and that the principles embodied in the Final Act should not carry the same legal force as did the terms of that of 1815. Moreover, there were those in 1975 who were far from optimistic about the state of East/West relations. Killick, by then Deputy Under-Secretary, certainly had his doubts. In his opinion it remained to be seen whether the Cold War was over, or had 'only taken a new shape'.²⁶ The Foreign Secretary was inclined to take a more positive view of the future of *détente*. Callaghan nonetheless endorsed the view expressed by most participants in a British heads of mission conference in November 'that the CSCE did not in itself amount to a watershed or turning point in East/West relations', and that it was unlikely 'to result in any significant modification of the relationship between the States of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union'.²⁷ After all, Moscow had already made it plain that the ideological struggle must continue, and the threat posed by commu-

18 *DBPO*, Series III, Volume II, Nos.118, 119 and 120-4.

19 *Ibid.*, No.104.

20 *Ibid.*, No.57.

21 *Ibid.*, No.107.

22 *Ibid.*, No.70.

23 *Ibid.*, Nos.59 and 74.

24 *Ibid.*, No.114.

25 See note 2 above.

26 *DBPO*, Series III, Volume II, No.90.

27 *DBPO*, Series III, Volume III, No.87.

nists to Portugal's nascent democracy and Cuban involvement in Angola indicated what this might mean in practice. 'There are', Callaghan reminded the Commons on 10 November, 'great ideological differences and there is no armistice in the war of ideas. That war will go on between the Soviet Union and those who espouse the ideology of the Soviet Union and the rest of the free world.'²⁸

All this would seem to echo George Walden's comment that while the Conference might be regarded as a 'natural successor to the Congress of Vienna', it had sometimes seemed like the 'continuation of Cold War by other, more subtle means'.²⁹ There is much in the British records of the CSCE which would tend to confirm the assertion of the former American diplomat, Raymond L. Garthoff, that *détente* was 'a phase of the cold war, not an alternative'.³⁰ Tom McNally may have believed himself to be living in a post-Cold War era. Nevertheless, in a minute of 11 November 1975, in which he argued in favour of Britain's making the fullest use of Basket III to influence events within the Soviet Union, he urged that it was 'more necessary than ever that our own strategy should be that of a positive [ideological] war of movement—advancing our own ideas, challenging theirs'.³¹ The Final Act had placed the way in which the Soviet and other East European Governments treated their citizens firmly on the diplomatic agenda. It would, however, be difficult to attempt any thorough assessment of the political and social impact of the CSCE on the basis of what has so far been published from the archives of the FCO. Documents published in the latest volume of DBPO suggest that the onset of economic recession in the West, the strengthening of Moscow's hold upon the economies of its European satellites, and the continuing build-up of Soviet armed forces in Eastern Europe soon dampened the public euphoria generated by the Helsinki summit. Callaghan would now seem to have been unduly pessimistic when, in a despatch of 11 March 1976 in which he emphasised the importance of expanding cultural, human and economic links with individual East European countries, he noted: 'We should not deceive ourselves that the Soviet Union will be willing, at least in our lifetime, to forgo or even to relax its ultimate control of the Eastern European region.'³² But an FCO Planning Staff paper subsequently admitted that disappointment had resulted from 'exaggerated and unwarranted expectations',³³ and that autumn Anthony Crosland, Callaghan's successor as Foreign Secretary, told the North Atlantic Council that the Final Act was 'symbolic but it was not the core of *détente*'.³⁴

During the 18 months that followed the Helsinki summit progress towards the implementation of Basket III within the Eastern *bloc* was distinctly slow. Reginald Hibbert, who had recently been appointed Deputy Under-Secretary, reminded colleagues in December 1976 that it was 'potentially of great value to dissenters'.³⁵ The text of the Final Act was published and circulated throughout the Warsaw Pact countries, and Charter 77, the manifesto issued by Czechoslovak dissidents in January 1977, cited it in support of their exposure of human rights abuses in their homeland. Yet for Richard Parsons, who headed the British delegation to the first follow-up Conference in Belgrade during 1977-78, the Final Act remained a 'blueprint for Utopia'. As British Ambassador in

28 *Hansard, Parl. Debs. 5th ser.*, H. of C., Vol.899, cols.937-8.

29 DBPO, Series III, Volume II, No.37.

30 R. L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation. American and Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington: Brookings, 1994), p.1147.

31 DBPO, Series III, Volume III, No.83.

32 *Ibid.*, No.88.

33 *Ibid.*, No.93.

34 *Ibid.*, No.94.

35 *Ibid.*

Budapest, he was in a good position to observe the impact of the CSCE on Eastern Europe. On balance, he then thought it had been of real value. Britain, he recalled in March 1978, had been able to solve two-thirds of the personal cases it had taken up with the East, and the Soviet Union and its allies had 'felt obliged to do some spring-cleaning in order to reduce their vulnerability to criticism'. He believed that in all the 'hard-line' countries of the region, amongst which he included the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, there existed people within the official hierarchy who were prepared to see some loosening up of the system and correspondingly greater toleration for individuals. 'It is', Parsons observed, 'these people we need to encourage discreetly in order to weaken the Soviet grip upon Eastern Europe, and the aggressive dynamic of international communism. CSCE is one of the tools we have available for this purpose.'³⁶ Seven years later, the FCO responded to the upheavals then taking place in Poland by seeking to foster what was termed 'creative ferment' in Eastern Europe in order to challenge the role of Communist parties and the Soviet Union there. The contribution of the CSCE and the mechanisms it established in promoting radical change in the region has, however, to be seen in the context of political and social developments there, not least the failings of the Soviet command economy. These are matters which lie beyond the scope of this introductory paper. But they are topics to which this seminar doubtless will want to return.

36 DBPO, Series III, Volume II, Appendix III.

Helsinki Accords Summarised

On 1 August 1975 the leaders of the original 35 participating States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, the Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Yugoslavia) gathered in Helsinki and signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Also known as the Helsinki Accords, the Final Act was not a treaty, but rather a politically binding agreement consisting of three main sections informally known as 'baskets,' which were adopted on the basis of consensus. This comprehensive Act contained a broad range of measures designed to enhance security and co-operation in Europe.

Basket I contained a Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between participating States, including the all-important Principle VII on human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also included a section on confidence-building measures and other aspects of security and disarmament aimed at increasing military transparency.

Basket II covered economic, scientific, technological and environmental co-operation, as well as migrant labour, vocational training and the promotion of tourism.

Basket III was devoted to co-operation in humanitarian and other fields: freer movement of people; human contacts, including family reunification and visits; freedom of information, including working conditions for journalists; and cultural and educational exchanges. Principle VII and Basket III together came to be known as 'The Human Dimension'.

Since 1975 the number of countries that have signed the Helsinki Accords has expanded to 55, reflecting changes such as the break-up of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Institutionalisation of the Conference in the early 1990s led to its transformation to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, effective since January 1995.

Questions for Discussion

Given that they were initially ambivalent about CSCE, at what point and why did British officials see a positive way forward in the run up to Helsinki?

How far was this as a result of the Preparatory talks?

What did British officials understand by *détente*?

What did they think the Europeans understood by *détente*?

What did they believe the Americans understood by *détente*?

Was there a point in the discussions where the word *détente* acquired a different meaning or meanings?

Given the perception of decline in Britain's global role during the late 1960s and the 1970s, for example the need to withdraw from East of Suez, what were the implications and significance for Britain of co-operation with European partners on foreign policy, as practised during the Helsinki negotiations?

What was the extent of differences over CSCE between the Americans (who wanted a 'quick fix') and the Western Europeans who were prepared to take time to achieve a different agenda? How far was the European negotiating position affected by a perception of a Moscow/Washington axis?

Given that the British negotiators feared to be labelled 'old fashioned Cold Warriors', how far did the apparent lack of public interest in the negotiations and progress on *détente* allow them to spin out the negotiations the better to achieve their aims?

Had the United Kingdom a specific agenda for Belgrade, Madrid and Vienna conferences?

If so, did the British officials perceive how such agenda could be pursued? Or was it all rather *ad hoc*: see what the Eastern *bloc* wants and what mood they are in and take it from there?

How far did Belgrade, Madrid and Vienna build on Helsinki's achievements? Did negotiators manage to push the SU further in agreeing human rights? Or were these meetings a 'holding operation' to enforce Soviet compliance, as far as possible, with the Helsinki Accords?

Were differences in approach and ultimate goal between the American and the European negotiators apparent to the Eastern *bloc*? Were these differences exploited by the Eastern *bloc*?

How successful was the process of EEC negotiations at Belgrade being conducted as a joint venture?

Sir Richard Parsons has suggested that the economic failures of the Communist system were more responsible for the collapse of the Soviet *bloc* than the erosion from within deriving from the Helsinki process. How far would you agree with this conclusion?

Belgrade 1977-8 CSCE Review Meeting

Charter 77 came into existence a year or two after the Helsinki Accords were signed in 1975. Did Britain realise the nature and extent of dissident movements in the Soviet Union and East and Central Europe?

Was the existence of dissident movements attributed to the Helsinki Accords? Or was it felt that dissident movements would have existed in the Eastern *bloc* regardless of the Helsinki Accords?

Did the United Kingdom have any plans to support Charter 77?

The Concluding Document states that Consensus was not reached on a number of proposals submitted to the meeting. Why? What was the problem? If so, what was proposed?

Madrid September 1980-September 1983

Solidarity: Did Britain perceive the Polish trade union's activities as a 'Trojan horse'?

How far did Britain perceive the existence of the Helsinki Accords as putting a brake on Soviet invasion/suppression of Solidarity's activities?

It was noticeable that the Concluding Document lists several strands of negotiation. For example: Security in Europe; Co-operation on Science, Technology and the Environment; Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean area; Co-operation on Humanitarian and other fields. Given that this was still the Brezhnev/Andropov/Chernenko 'dinosaur' era, what did the British negotiators perceive as the reasons why so much was up for discussion after the comparative deadlock at Belgrade?

Gorbachev Era 1985-91

After Mikhail Gorbachev's assumption of power in 1985 and the introduction of *glasnost* and *perestroika* into the lexicon of Soviet thinking, was there a perception that these ideas stemmed from the Helsinki Accords and the proceedings of the follow-up meetings?

At Moscow and German Reunification witness seminars that ICBH organised, witnesses suggested that the break-up of the Soviet Union was not foreseen as imminent in 1989-90. Might this suggest that the break-up and aftermath in Eastern and Central Europe was an unforeseen consequence of Helsinki?

Pre-Witness Seminar Written Contribution

Roger Beetham, CMG, LVO

14 February 2002

Background

From early 1969 to early 1972 I was FCO spokesman on European questions, including the EC Accession Negotiations, the Berlin Agreement and European Security matters, including the conference. I then went to the British Embassy in Helsinki as Head of Chancery, partly to liaise with the Finns on the preparation of the Helsinki Consultations, and subsequently to be part of the UK CSCE team, particularly in Basket II. Given my previous role, I also became unofficial British press spokesman. As the only resident member of the team (apart of course from the Ambassador) with a residence very near Dipoli – the site of the Consultations – I was also able to play an additional role as host to many informal lunches and dinners. I remained in Helsinki for the First (Ministerial) and Third (Summit) Stages of the CSCE, but did not cover the Second Stage in Geneva.

First Steps

When the Russians/Warsaw Pact³⁷ relaunched their European Security Conference proposal in 1969, the Western (including British) reaction was dismissive of a regurgitated cynical proposal. It did not, however, go away, and Western interest in MBFR, the moves towards a Berlin agreement, and the Finnish eye for a chance to escape from a difficult relationship with the Soviet Union forced a reassessment, which London was the first Western capital to engage in. Kissinger's³⁸ cynicism may well have been a factor, but Crispin Tickell³⁹ (Head of the FCO department responsible) saw the chance to turn the tables on Moscow and extract a price for the ESC – Human Rights. The West Europeans (and crucially the Neutrals – Sweden, Austria and, above all, Switzerland) were convinced, though the Finns were desperately afraid their pet project might be sabotaged!

The Conservative Government in London, not terribly enamoured of the ESC proposal, nevertheless saw the attractions of the Tickell approach (and of a British leadership role) despite the risks of differences with the Americans. No doubt for Ted Heath⁴⁰ Britain's imminent entry into the EC was a factor (to add a personal note: our role helped me enormously in establishing my credentials in Helsinki with my EC colleagues). The French, while not caring at that stage much for Human Rights, crucially saw the advantages of a European position different from the Ameri-

37 The Warsaw Pact (Warsaw Treaty Organisation) was a military treaty signed in 1955 by the Soviet Union, Albania (until 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. It was disbanded in 1991.

38 Henry Kissinger, American statesman. Assistant to President for National Security Affairs, 1969-75, Secretary of State, 1969-73.

39 Sir Crispin Tickell, diplomat. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Desk Officer dealing with CSCE, 1972-5.

40 Sir Edward Heath (1916-2005), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1970-4.

cans'. The latter (though not at working level) grossly underestimated the steam which developed behind the idea, and grossly overestimated the dangers in the Russian reaction.

Détente and Dipoli

The Western (or at least West European) position was more or less established before the Helsinki consultations – though for a time the newly found and grotesque West German love-in with the just-recognised East Germans threatened it for a while. Dipoli was about continuing the Consultations (which the Russians – naively – thought might be over before Christmas, having started on 22 November) until we first got Human Rights on the agenda, and then a satisfactory interrelationship between the three 'baskets'. This was where the Tickell concept and British-led determination, supported by some remarkably determined Neutrals, paid off.

It was less a difference of concept about *détente* that created difficulties or difference – though it is true that the FCO was a bit obsessed by the propaganda successes of the Russians in this regard, and after the change of government, by what they saw as Harold Wilson's⁴¹ cavalier attitude to the differing West and East interpretations of the concept. It was more that a small group of middle – ranking officials did some lateral thinking and saw the chance of changing the goalposts, if not the level of the playing field, and then to carry it through. I don't remember great theoretical discussions about concepts of *détente* in the run-up to the CSCE – but they did come afterwards.

The FCO Recalcitrants

There was a strong body of opinion in the Diplomatic Service which believed the whole approach was wrong, and continued to express scepticism, even to the verge of sabotage, well after the undoubted success of the CSCE in putting Human Rights on the permanent agenda. Since their views are in the public domain, to name in particular Sir Terence Garvey,⁴² Sir John Killick⁴³ and above all Sir Bryan Cartledge⁴⁴ is no betrayal of the Official Secrets Act – but to my mind their failure to understand and support one of the most significant successes, not just of British Foreign Policy, but of a small number of officials supporting Crispin Tickell is a sad detraction.

I have never been sure of George Walden's⁴⁵ real views (despite a number of conversations then and since) but I think that the other three key participants – Brian Fall,⁴⁶ Andrew Burns⁴⁷ and the, alas now dead, Christian Adams⁴⁸ – saw a real chance to do something rather than to advance any academic theory. I do not think they would pretend that we brought about the fall of the Berlin Wall,⁴⁹ but we did want to give hope to the Central and East Europeans. The fact that

41 Sir Harold Wilson (Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, 1916-95), Labour politician. Prime Minister, 1964-70; 1974-6.

42 Sir Terence Garvey (1917-86), diplomat. HM Ambassador to Soviet Union 1973-5.

43 Sir John Killick (1919-2004), diplomat. HM Ambassador to Soviet Union 1971-3, Deputy Under-Secretary of State FCO and Permanent Representative on WEU Council 1973-5, and Ambassador and UK Permanent Representative to NATO 1975-9.

44 Sir Bryan Cartledge, diplomat. Counsellor Moscow 1972-5, Head of East European and Soviet Department 1975-7 and HM Ambassador to Soviet Union 1985-8.

45 George Walden was a participant in the witness seminar.

46 Sir Brian Fall was a participant in the witness seminar.

47 Sir Andrew Burns was a participant in the witness seminar.

48 C. Christian. W. Adams (1939-96), diplomat. CSCE Helsinki 1972-4; Deputy Political Adviser, British Military Government, Berlin 1974-8.

49 The Berlin Wall (*Berliner Mauer*) was constructed in 1961 and its dismantlement began on 9 Nov. 1989.

American public opinion (rather to the general surprise) was also mobilised was an extra bonus. The only blot on our conscience is our (and the French) cynical encouragement of the worst régime in Eastern Europe, Ceausescu's,⁵⁰ in the vain interest of breaking up Soviet hegemony. The real disappointment at Dipoli was the general supine uselessness of the other East Europeans, so unused to opportunities. Even the newly arrived East Germans seemed better (quel commentaire!)

Global Considerations

I do not recall that events such as withdrawal East of Suez⁵¹ or our general global decline played any role in influencing British policy (indeed the normal knee-jerk reaction of loyalty to the Americans was initially there). I think the European dimension was clearer in retrospect than at the time: it was more a case of a clear appreciation that the Americans were not pursuing a policy which took sufficient account of European (West and East) interests and that we could – at least needed to try to – extract some advantage from an irritating proposal that wouldn't go away.

What were fundamental conceptual differences with the Americans were minimised during the Dipoli Consultations by the American need for an outcome, and therefore (through grinding teeth) an understanding that not only the West Europeans but (new discovery for H. Kissinger!) the Neutrals were vital. The other factor (since individuals and their personalities were vital, particularly in the Dipoli Consultations where the fundamental battles were fought and for the most part won – by the West) was the remarkable performance of George Vest,⁵² the American representative in Helsinki, a consummate diplomat – in my 37 years' experience, one of the three best – in the sense of most effective – representatives of US interests I have encountered. He also showed that charm is no disadvantage!

The British Approach

I have already set out the genesis, and I cannot really comment on the middle period (Stage II in Geneva), which seemed to me hard slog to consolidate, build on and above all not lose what had been gained in Helsinki. I don't think (certainly not as Spokesman in London and then as unofficial press briefer during the Helsinki Consultations) the lack of public interest was either a plus or minus. When it subsequently grew, after the end of the CSCE, the British role in putting Human Rights on the permanent agenda certainly helped the Labour Government's image, while giving rise to some of the reactionary reaction referred to above. One senior FCO official, annoyed at the demands for follow-up, even claimed that 'there's no public opinion on Helsinki – only the Zionist lobby'.

Before that, I don't think the more forward thinking officials such as Crispin Tickell or Brian Fall were at all concerned to counter an image of Cold Warriors – except to the extent that saying 'No' continually to Soviet proposals such as the ESC with no alternative became, *auf die Dauer*,⁵³ a

50 Nicolai Ceausescu (1918-89), Romanian politician. Head of State from 1967 until his deposition and summary execution in 1989.

51 In 1967 Harold Wilson's Labour Government announced that the UK would be withdrawing her established military bases east of the Suez Canal. This moment is considered to be when the UK significantly revised her global position. See <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/icbh/witness/esuez/esuez.pdf>

52 George Southall Vest, American diplomat. Special Assistant to the Secretary for negotiations on CSCE in Helsinki and Geneva, 1972-3; Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, State Department, 1977-81; Representative of the USA to the European Communities, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, 1981-5.

bit difficult convincingly to sustain. As a spokesman, I felt under so little pressure that when Britain did take the initiative it took a while for it to be appreciated!

Envoi

As a contribution to discussion of historical theory (do individuals matter?) I would venture the thought that the CSCE was the best case argument that they are vital – and that the esprit de corps the CSCE built up was a recently unequalled international phenomenon.

53 *Auf die Dauer* translates roughly as 'in the long run'.

The Helsinki Negotiations, the Accords and their Impact

Edited by
Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerck

This witness seminar on the Helsinki Accords and their aftermath was held on 19 February 2002 in the Locarno Room of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Whitehall. It was chaired by Lord Wright of Richmond, GCMG. The introductory paper was presented by Dr Keith A. Hamilton of the FCO historians. The participants included Sir Andrew Burns, KCMG; Sir Brian Fall, GCVO, KCMG; Sir Nicholas Henderson, GCMG, GCVO; The Rt. Hon. The Lord Howe of Aberavon, Kt, CH, PC, QC; Professor Keith Kyle; J. M. Macgregor, CVO, OBE; Malcolm Mackintosh, CMG; David Miller, OBE; Colin Munro, CMG; George Walden, CMG; and Professor D.C. Watt.

**LORD WRIGHT
OF RICHMOND**

Can I first ask Dr Harriet Jones, who is Director of the Institute of Contemporary British History,* to say a few words.

HARRIET JONES

From October 2002 the Institute of Contemporary British History became known as the Centre for Contemporary British History. Its activities remained unchanged.

I just wanted to say how pleased we are at the ICBH to be collaborating one more time with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in producing a witness seminar. This afternoon, as we all know, the subject is the Helsinki Accords, their aftermath and impact, and we are especially delighted that it is being held here in the beautiful and historic Locarno suite.

It is our belief that contemporary history must be recorded and that events of this kind are vitally important for the work of future generations of historians. Our witness seminars at the ICBH are absolutely unique in this respect because, as group interviews, the interaction between witnesses allows us to get very different types of evidence than we have experienced when interviewing people in one-on-one situations. The ICBH is becoming internationally recognised for our work in this area and we are very pleased that, in the past two years, we have developed very close relations with the Presidential Oral Histories Project at the University of Virginia, at the Miller Center in Charlottesville. And many other European countries are beginning to emulate the work that we are doing. In fact two colleagues, including Dr Kandiah, are going to be visiting

Japan later on this spring in order to consult with colleagues there. As most of you are aware, an edited transcript of this witness seminar will be circulated to witnesses, and then their edits or redactions will be incorporated and it will be made available on our website. This post-production process of the witness seminar is very painstaking and does take quite a long time: it always surprises people how many months it takes to get that just right. But once this is done, it will form part of our online archive of witness seminars, which is rapidly becoming an extremely important resource for teaching and researching contemporary British history, not only in the UK, but also others around the world. Copies of the transcript will also be available to order, either in the form of a CD or as a pamphlet.

Particularly I just want to say that as we move into a new era of e-government it will be this kind of event, with the testimonies of past witnesses, that provides some of the most valuable documentation for the historical record, because increasingly the way that the decisions are made in Whitehall today doesn't involve memos and correspondence the way they did even 15 or 20 years ago. So we are very grateful indeed for the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and for the time that the witnesses who are here today have taken from their busy schedules to be with us, and we are very much looking forward to hearing what you have to say. Thank you very much.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much Dr Jones. In apparent contradiction to what Dr Jones has just said – and it is only apparent – this meeting is under the Chatham House Rule. As I am sure you all know the Chatham House Rule (and can I just remind you there is only one, although it is frequently referred to as the Chatham House Rules) is that you may use anything you hear at this seminar but nothing should be attributed to any particular speaker, and the apparent contradiction is only apparent because the transcript will actually be circulated to all participants *before* it goes on the website and it would be open to anyone to excise whatever they want or amend whatever they want.

Now having said that I would like to ask the witnesses, starting with Lord Howe please, to introduce themselves very briefly, saying who they are and what their connection with CSCE has been.

LORD HOWE OF ABERAVON

My connection with CSCE is relatively tenuous. It had been invented by the time I arrived in the Foreign Office in 1983. I attended the ministerial meetings at Madrid, Stockholm and Vienna and was at Helsinki for the tenth anniversary of the Final Act in 1985.

SIR NICHOLAS HENDERSON

The Northern Department at the FCO covers diplomatic relations with the USSR and with their East and Central European Warsaw Pact allies/satellites.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Lord Home of the Hirsel [14th Earl of Home, disclaimed peerage 1963], 1903-98), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary 1960-3, Prime Minister 1963-4, and Foreign Secretary again 1970-4.

I was Ambassador in Poland and at one time Head of the Northern Department.* But I have to say I know very little about the negotiations at Helsinki. I wasn't really involved. All I can say is how the East-West scene of *détente* looked from Poland, and my experience of how the arrival of the Tory government, with Alec Home* as Foreign Minister in 1970, had some effect on our handling of East-West relations.

SIR BRIAN FALL

I was Head of Section in the East European and Soviet Department and simultaneously an Assistant Head of Western Organisations Department in the [Foreign and Commonwealth] Office when we were preparing the Western negotiating position for the Helsinki preparatory talks. I then was in Helsinki almost throughout those preparatory talks, acting as Deputy Head of the British delegation.

DAVID MILLER

I was a member of the UK delegation to the CSCE in the Geneva phase, i.e. the actual negotiations on the text of the Final Act, and also at the first CSCE follow-up conference in Belgrade in 1977.

J. M. MACGREGOR

Peter Blaker (Lord Blaker of Blackpool and Lindfield), Conservative politician. Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1979-81.

I had nothing to do with the negotiations of the original Helsinki Agreement, but in 1981 I became Private Secretary to the Minister responsible for Central and Eastern Europe,* and was then Assistant Head of the Soviet Department, which included responsibility for CSCE as it then was. Subsequently I was Head of Chancery, now called Deputy Head of Mission, in Czechoslovakia for the last three years of the 1980s and present at the 1990 CSCE summit in Paris.

COLIN MUNRO

Ostpolitik was the more conciliatory policy adopted by the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) towards the Eastern *bloc* and especially the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) resulting in the agreement of treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland, accepting the Oder-Neisse line as frontier between Germany and Poland.

I was in Bonn from 1971 to 1973 during the development of German *Ostpolitik*.* Many of the concepts were subsequently incorporated in the Helsinki Final Act, particularly the renunciation of force. As Private Secretary to the Minister responsible for Central and Eastern Europe I attended the opening phases of the Madrid follow-up meeting in 1980. I was Head of Chancery in Romania in 1981-82, and later Deputy Head of Mission in East Berlin at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I was Head of the FCO's

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The Dayton Peace Accords on Bosnia were initialled on 21 Nov. 1995, providing a General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Parties to the agreement included the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was witnessed by representatives of the Contact Group nations – the USA, the UK, France, Germany, and Russia – and the European Union Special Negotiator. The terms of the agreement provided for a sovereign state known as the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would consist of two entities: the Bosnian Serb Republic and the Federation of Bosnia.

GEORGE WALDEN

OSCE,* Council of Europe Department in the mid-1990s. This was the moment when the CSCE became the OSCE, i.e. an organisation. There was a tremendous expansion in the work of the organisation, notably of Missions such as the one deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the Dayton agreement.*

I was the counterpart of Brian Fall, the Head of Section for Internal Affairs in the Soviet Department in those days, and went with Brian [Fall] to Dipoli, Helsinki – where we waited for spring to arrive, and it never did as I recall. But as everyone knows they were preparatory, those meetings, and it took longer to get to the problem than perhaps we had thought. Then I was our representative on Basket III at the negotiation.

SIR ANDREW BURNS

Sir Anthony Figgis, diplomat. CSCE delegation Geneva 1974-5; Head of Chancery, Madrid 1979-80; Counselor Belgrade, 1982-5; and Head of East European Department, 1986-8.

I was the Desk Officer for the Balkans in 1972 when I was summoned to join Brian Fall and George Walden at Dipoli, Helsinki, for the preparatory talks. And I stayed with the delegation right the way through Stages I, II and III as the Delegation Secretary and also as the WOD [Western Organisations Department] Desk Officer back here in London, boxing and coxing with two other colleagues, Christian Adams and Anthony Figgis.* Then I went on to be the Head of the Soviet External section at the East European and Soviet Department before going to the British Embassy in Bucharest, as the Head of Chancery.

WRIGHT

Bohuslav Chňoupek (1925-2004), Czechoslovakian politician. Foreign Minister, 1972-88.

I am Patrick Wright and my two connections with the CSCE were first of all that I attended the Helsinki Conference as Private Secretary to Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, and more recently, about 12 years ago, as Permanent Under-Secretary I visited Prague. One of my duties in visiting Prague was to take up a human rights case with the Head of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office,* with the students audibly demonstrating in Wenceslaus Square outside the window. It is, I think, if I may say so to my former Foreign Secretary, the only triumph I ever had in my career, because actually the young man for whom I was speaking was released the next day. It may have been coincidence!

Now I will ask Dr Keith Hamilton, a Foreign Office historian,

briefly to introduce his paper, which I think probably has been seen only by witnesses rather than other participants. If you could just briefly set the scene for us, before we start.

KEITH A. HAMILTON

Talks between NATO and Warsaw Pact that began in Vienna in Oct. 1973 and concluded with a treaty in 1989.

I should first of all start by saying that I have no connection with CSCE beyond the fact that I edited one of the volumes that we historians in the Office produce, the volume on the CSCE which was published in 1998, one of FCO documents. More recently, last year, we published another volume which I edited dealing with broader themes of *détente* in Europe, from about 1972 to 1976, which focuses more on the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) talks in Vienna,* but it does actually contain quite a bit of material on the CSCE, particularly the aftermath of Helsinki.

I have been asked to speak for only five minutes, which does not leave me time to say much at all really, but I will just try to bring out some of the main points in my paper. I think first of all for those in the audience who are perhaps less aware of what the CSCE was about I really ought to point out that it was a long and protracted negotiation. It officially began in November 1972 with the opening of the multilateral preparatory talks at Dipoli, just outside Helsinki. Those talks were conducted at ambassadorial level. There were altogether 35 participants, representing all the states of Europe with the exception of Albania and Andorra, plus Canada and the United States. These talks went on until June 1973. There was then a Stage I conference. This was conducted at Foreign Minister level, attended by Alec Douglas-Home, the British Foreign Secretary. It met in June 1973 and effectively accepted the Final Recommendations which had been worked out in the preparatory talks. The Final Recommendations, that is, covering matters like the agenda and the committee.

T. Anthony K. Elliot (1921-76), diplomat. HM Ambassador to Finland, 1972-5, and Head of British delegation, CSCE Geneva, 1973-4.

Stage II was the negotiating stage, the committee stage if you like, and lasted far longer than anybody had initially expected. It began in September 1973 in Geneva and it was not concluded until July 1975. It is an interesting point that Anthony Elliott,* who was the British Ambassador at Helsinki, led the delegation to the preparatory talks and was head of the delegation at Geneva right up until the summer of 1974, partly I imagine because it was expected that the conference would be wound up by that time.

James Callaghan (Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, 1912-2005), Labour politician. Foreign Secretary, 1974-6, and Prime Minister, 1976-9.

We then have Stage III, the summit conference – a heads of government conference – with Britain represented by Harold Wilson as Prime Minister and by James Callaghan* as Foreign Secretary. There, the heads of government concluded the Helsinki Final Act. This is a document which confirmed, without legally endorsing, the territorial *status quo* in Europe. It thus specifically included provision for the peaceful change of frontiers. This Declaration of Principles in effect was a code for good behaviour: it emphasised the self-determination of peoples, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Act's provisions dealing with human contacts, information, culture, education (the so-called Basket III issues),

stipulated how such principles might be transformed into practice; for instance measures to reduce the hindrances to foreign travel and for ending radio jamming. There was also a follow-up resolution: this provided for the continuation of the multilateral dialogue at future review conferences. The first of these took place in Belgrade in 1977-78, the second in Madrid from 1980 to 1983, and the third in Vienna in 1986-89. In that period the CSCE also acquired its own secretariat and eventually it was transformed into an international organisation – the Vienna-based OSCE.

Now one or two points about the history and particularly the British attitude towards Helsinki. Firstly, I must emphasise this: the extreme scepticism with which the idea of the CSCE was originally greeted in Britain, particularly in Whitehall. FCO officials were amongst some of the most wary of Soviet intentions. The CSCE *was* of course a Soviet proposal in the first instance, and senior officials in the FCO were extremely apprehensive about proposals which seemed to be aimed at enhancing the Soviet position in Eastern Europe. They viewed it as part of the *détente* policy, designed to lull Western Europeans into a false sense of security, and which must ultimately impede Western European integration and weaken the Atlantic Alliance.

WRIGHT

I think I am going to stop you there if I may. I would like to address that point in particular, about scepticism. Of course you are free to come back later. I am going to invite witnesses to speak now in roughly the chronological order in which they became involved in the process. For initial interventions, can I please ask witnesses to try to limit themselves to ten minutes, in the knowledge that there will be further opportunities to intervene as the discussion goes on. After the break for tea there will, if time is available, be the opportunity for members of the audience to intervene. When invited to contribute I would be grateful if they would please try to limit their interventions to five minutes each: I am afraid we are going to be pretty tight for time.

The witnesses will have seen the questions for discussion, one of which is indeed the one that Dr Hamilton has just raised about the extent of scepticism in the Foreign Office. It is worth reminding ourselves that the proposals of course came from the Soviet Union, which no doubt explains a degree of scepticism as to why they wanted it. I don't propose to take those questions seriatim, but I would ask witnesses please to try and bear them in mind when they are speaking, and I hope we will have time to go back and review them at the end of the seminar, together with any other questions Dr Hamilton wants to put to us. I suggest we now start with the preparations for Helsinki in Finland and Geneva and the Helsinki conference itself, perhaps addressing particularly whether the British government, or the Foreign Office, regarded the process in a positive or ambivalent light. So could I ask Andrew Burns please to open, followed by Brian Fall and George Walden.

BURNS

The Brezhnev Doctrine was issued in 1968 to justify the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The doctrine stated that Warsaw Pact member-states had only limited sovereignty and that the Soviet Union must take whatever steps were necessary to combat anti-Socialist forces.

Quadrupartite (also known as Four Power) Agreements on Berlin of Sept. 1971 in which France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States settled the status of Berlin.

The Eastern European Mutual Assistance Treaty of May 1955 was agreed between Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. These countries became known as Warsaw Pact countries. The 1955 treaty provided for unified military command and mutual assistance in the event of armed aggression against any of the signatories.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was formed in 1949 on the basis of the Treaty of Brussels (1948) by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Greece and Turkey joined in 1952, the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955, Spain in 1982, and the united Germany in 1990.

I am delighted to do so, but I have some trepidation because I reckon that much of the diplomacy I learnt at the Foreign Office was at the feet of Crispin Tickell, Brian Fall and George Walden, for whom I had enormous admiration for the way they steered that first part of the conference. So I think we should listen to them particularly.

From my perspective, we turned up in Helsinki indeed infused with caution and a sense of scepticism and concern that this was an exercise that the Soviets wanted to use to consolidate the *status quo* in Europe, the division in Europe, to give a certain credence to their notion of the Brezhnev Doctrine of limited sovereignty,* their ideas of collective security, and so on. We were determined to find ways to expand the discussion, so that instead of treating *détente* (which in our view was security and co-operation) purely in government terms we would try to widen it out and make it real for ordinary people and non-governmental organisations. We went there determined to ensure that the notion of security was indivisible, in other words you couldn't separate political and military security out, you had to deal with the problem in the round. We were conscious of the developing move towards MBFR negotiations on force reduction, but nonetheless wanted to see some confidence-building measures in the Helsinki text. We were aware of the complications of the Four Power Agreement on Berlin,* which had been under long negotiation by that time.

So we went out there – yes, sceptical – and, if you like, a bit aggressive on the subject, but I have to say when I look back what I recall is really how exhilarating the whole process was, what fun it was. It was the hunt; the chase. For the first time we were able to discuss issues openly with the Warsaw Pact countries,* issues which they always tried to keep off the table. And, of course, in a sense, that was the ultimate triumph of the Western successes at the CSCE conference: that we were able to put on the agenda the different subjects for future discussion, issues which had been in the past kept out of inter-governmental debate. I think, in fact, as we went on our horizons widened: we began to appreciate more and more the possibilities of the conference. This was particularly true of the neutral and non-aligned nations who, the more the conference unfolded, the more the principle of consensus was established among 35 countries in order to agree, the more they saw the opportunity to get their own interests protected. But I think we too, on the Western European side of NATO* (where we were nine), got a sense of a growing understanding of what the Europe was that we wanted to see emerge from a more relaxed relationship between East and West.

Although the papers talk about the long haul, I think that for many of us we kept on trying to dampen expectations, lest ministers should rush off and think that they could have an early summit very quickly. If you read through the papers, as I did at the weekend, all the time there is the pressure about 'when are we going to get to the summit, when are we going to have the summit'. In fact it took

European Political Co-operation (EPC) was introduced informally in 1970 (in response to the Davignon report) and formalised by the Single European Act with effect from 1987. The object is consultations between the Member States in foreign policy matters. EPC was superseded by the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Anatole Shcharansky, Soviet dissident and human rights activist. For nine years a political prisoner in the Soviet Union. Now known as Natan Sharansky, Israeli politician and member of the Knesset.

from November 1972 to the end of July 1975 until we got there. We were always trying to fend off the pressure to make unnecessary concessions – concessions which wouldn't have achieved anything because you needed 35 countries all agreeing with what was laid out in the text. I think what you also have to remember is that one of the key ingredients of the Western approach was the need to co-ordinate it in the European Political Co-operation* – the fact that we worked well together. Increasing the impact of that on the East European countries was that this was the first time of doing this. And that worked rather well, I think. We rather enjoyed it and we were rather successful at getting our good tactics accepted by the other governments. Of course, the tactics were very important, since we were trying to get the Russians to accept our bottom-up approach to the discussion of European security co-operation, rather than accepting a top-down approach which would have prevented us from raising all the issues that we wanted to. By the time the conference ended in July 1975 I think we had better understanding of the core relationship between the Declaration of Principles and the rest of the negotiation. And it wasn't until those principles were sorted out that we really got the breakthrough on Basket III: on freedom of information and human contacts. But indeed we wanted at the same time to get something on the military front, and to get some satisfaction on the follow-up. That was to satisfy some pretty maverick neutral and non-aligned views, particularly the Maltese I recall.

As to the success of what we did, I just would like to recall one of the people in Russia who throughout this process was being harassed and given a lot of aggro, who was Shcharansky.* And when I went out as Ambassador to Israel in the early 1990s, there was Shcharansky as one of the Ministers in the Israeli government. So it certainly was fun and exciting.

FALL

I think there will be some shared memories of what *was* an exciting time. There are one or two things that I would add to the chronology, of course it could go on and on forever, but which seemed to be key to the scepticism point. For 1954 it says 'Soviet proposal for European security conference'. Well, when first proposed, it was European excluding the United States and Canada and it would have involved the instant recognition of East Germany by all the other participants. So really it is not a great surprise that there was scepticism. What happened in the Soviet/Warsaw Pact recovery from Czechoslovakia from 1969 onwards is first of all that US/Canadian participation was included as part of the proposal, and subsequently that the Four Power negotiations on Berlin led to an agreed concession that involved recognition of East Germany. So the Russians, having invented proposals to achieve two very obvious self-serving purposes, found themselves rather stuck on their conference bandwagon, even though these gains were no longer to be looked for. Certainly the change was enough to justify some

Western rethinking about the pros and cons and that is, I think, essentially what happened.

One might include in the chronology September 1971, which George Walden may want to talk about, because that affected some of the British views concerned. I think it was in February 1973 that Alec Douglas-Home went to Moscow on a bilateral visit, as Secretary of State, a very public recognition of the fact that we were there as a major player to be dealt with and that the tactic of sulking, and trying to isolate the British, had failed.

The Berlin negotiations were absolutely crucial to the possibility of the CSCE. The other crucial date, from the British point of view, is February 1972 when, although we were not yet members of the European Community, we started in Political Co-operation. Tom Brimelow* went to a Political Directors meeting in February, and I can remember following as I think the first ever head of a British working-level delegation in the EPC format. For the rest of that year we worked out a position with our partners: it was a completely new way of doing business.

When we arrived in Helsinki for the Preparatory Talks, the pessimists claimed that the French were going to rat on us. They never did, because the French delegation, like the British delegation at the time, was staffed with people with a good deal of firsthand experience of what it was in Moscow that they were trying to change. Roger Beetham* has produced a rather trendy, journalistic, revisionist view of how it all happened,* which some of you will have seen, which singles out for disfavourable mention [Sir John] Killick, [Sir Terence] Garvey and [Sir Bryan] Cartledge as representative of a sort of reactionary, sceptical old-fashioned Moscovite view. Interestingly, no mention of Bullard,* no mention of Brimelow, those well-known 'pinko-liberals', both of whom were crucially engaged at the London end. And all the papers which went out, all the ideas, all the tactics, all the objectives, had that team absolutely in the driving seat throughout, and it was therefore very much a British Soviet-watcher inspiration that was being fed into the briefing and instructions for these talks. So I don't think it was scepticism: it was hard-headed.

The reason that George [Walden] had to be summoned was because, when delegations got bigger as Helsinki broke out into different working groups, our EC partners and NATO countries started sending, to reinforce their Basket III delegations, people from their cultural exchanges departments. We would have been stuck with cultural exchanges, if George [Walden] hadn't come and reminded people that our concept was all about information and travel.

The Beetham paper (see pp.???) gets the focus wrong also about human rights. We have to remember that human rights (this is my last point) was invented slightly late. It was necessary in the Declaration of Principles, because we wanted a Declaration of Principles which made respectable Western reading – hence also getting self-determination, inviolability of frontiers and peaceful change right.

Thomas Brimelow (Lord Brimelow of Tyldesley, 1915-95), diplomat. Consular Section, British Embassy, Moscow 1942-5, Head of Northern Department, Foreign Office 1956, British Minister in Moscow 1963-6 and Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service 1973-5.

Roger Beetham, diplomat. Head of Chancery, Helsinki 1972-6.

For the Beetham paper, see pp.29-32.

Sir Julian Bullard, diplomat. HM Embassy, Moscow 1966-8, Head of East European and Soviet Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1970-5.

Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, Committee of State Security, was established in 1954 as successor to the Cheka, OGPU and NKVD.

Justice Arthur Goldberg (1908-90), American lawyer. US Ambassador to the United Nations 1965-8; and Ambassador-at-large for the Carter administration 1977-8.

Jacco Itoniemi, Finish diplomat. Ambassador, Head of Mission to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Geneva 1973-5. Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1975-7.

WALDEN

Expulsion in 1971 of 105 Soviet Embassy personnel/agents that were accused of espionage activities (see also witness seminar on *The Role of HM Embassy in Moscow* <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/icbh/witness/moscow/>).

But having done that, we just left it there. It was done, and we concentrated on travel, information, human contacts, specifically. We had to fight for this on a legal basis because, the minute you produced a legal document, there would have been the standard escape clause about 'public health, public safety and public morals'. In a legal text, the British Home Office would have done all the work, saving the KGB* the trouble. We recognised that it was crucial not to go down that route and it was, therefore, important to have a non-legal document, talking the new language of human contacts, travel and information rather than the old language of human rights (a language which Arthur Goldberg,* a lawyer of course, reinvented in time to make headlines at the follow-up Conference in Belgrade). But that was a retrofit: it wasn't in the original thing.

One other point to Keith Hamilton, who says that the length of the second stage of the conference took everybody by surprise. The head of the Finnish delegation, Jacco Itoniemi,* representing a not very rich and very politically correct member state in those days, arrived with his horse, by special permission of his Foreign Ministry. So one person at least had a fairly shrewd idea that this wasn't going to be over in a few weeks!

I think it is worth stepping back a bit and remembering what is the image of the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office is viewed as a lily-livered, cowardly institution. That is the understanding and always has been in the press. And yet here was the Foreign Office at this time, taking a tough line with the Russians, which when you think of it does not square with the accepted English game of the Foreign Office. It is worth remembering that. And then of course the CSCE also followed the expulsion of the spies,* which took people by surprise too because, again, the Foreign Office was supposed to be soft. So that is a point of some importance.

In a sense of course our scepticism, which has been quite rightly stressed, was because the government had to take some account of our public opinion, which always is in favour of either peace or war, normally in rapid succession. What was the press saying at that time? I assume they were broadly in favour of peace. The Russians were pretty okay as far as they could see, so why were we being difficult? So I suppose it is worth remembering that we weren't operating in a void, and therefore, despite our scepticism, we had to go through the motions.

The other thing to remember is a small point, but it mattered certainly to me. That was the youth and the callowness, as some people might see it, of our delegation. We were very young I think by diplomatic standards. I seem to remember that we were First Secretaries, whereas the people we dealt with in Helsinki tended to be more senior.

FALL

Yes, it mattered with Zorin.*

WALDEN

Valerian A. Zorin (1902-85), Soviet diplomat. Soviet Permanent Representative to the United Nations at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in Oct. 1962.

Zorin famously denied the presence of Soviet missiles installations on Cuba when challenged in the United Nations.

David Owen (Lord Owen of Plymouth), Labour politician. Foreign Secretary, 1977-9.

The 6th Lord Carrington, Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary, 1979-82.

And I found myself as a callow, relatively inexperienced, First Secretary on Basket III with Zorin – the man who said the USSR had no nukes in Cuba.* He was very impatient and upset to have a whippersnapper like me with the same technical rights at the conference as he had, and he made that very clear. One of the reasons we sent whippersnappers like us was to show our scepticism: that was the reason to keep the level of representation low. And of course, being whippersnappers, we were quite keen to sort of bounce around in the way that inexperienced youth tends to do. And, a very important point Brian [Fall] made, most of us were people who had lived in the Soviet Union and did not like it, they really didn't. So we got stuck into this conference, saying, 'Why don't you have freedom of information?': asking these absurd questions that no-one would normally ask of the Russians. It was seen as somehow indelicate to bring these matters up. We persisted in doing that and, as Brian [Fall] says, we had help from a lot of other delegations who were similarly, when roused, hostile to the Russians. We felt we had been let off the leash a bit and could try and make life difficult for the Russians, whereas normally (and again it is important to remember this) we were, I think, historically in a sort of permanently defensive posture *vis-à-vis* Moscow. Particularly under Wilson I have to say, so we liked it all the more when we were let off the leash a bit. We were also in our natural position of being halfway between the Europeans and the Americans, as seems to happen on every historical occasion. I think there was part of that in it too, so we were playing the bridge game as usual, which worked out in the end quite well I think.

I later went on to France (since I didn't stay with the thing as Brian [Fall] and others did, though I did come back as Principal Private Secretary to Owen* and Carrington).* The result of this was that, by then, when anything Soviet turned up it was all muffled. The CSCE, I think, played an enormous role in sort of bureaucratising the peace. It was as if you had sprayed a simmering fire with fire foam: it was all muffled. Not that there weren't problems of course. There were. But, somehow, when you have got those huge, lumbering, permanent, multilateral negotiations going on, and review conferences and all that, somehow they stifled everything. It helped to stifle the East-West thing in what turned out to be historically quite a useful way. Of course I don't have to stress the fact that the East Europeans themselves did something that we never ever expected when we were playing this game of chess, because that is what it was to us, and scoring points to our juvenile satisfaction. The East European peoples took the bits of paper we negotiated seriously and said, 'Look, it says here that you can do this and that and that'. The Helsinki business was taken over in the East, I think, with very beneficial consequences which are historically very obvious. So what began as a bit of a game to us became quite serious. I

don't want to sound too self-congratulatory. My own part in all this was relatively brief and limited, but it is one of those few things that one looks back on as a small triumph. I do think the British as a whole historically have always played rather a good hand.

HENDERSON

First I would like to say something on the scepticism. You see, these three speakers are all viewing it really from the Moscow angle and it is the Moscow angle which dominated the outlook at the Foreign Office. I think, in trying to understand the undoubted scepticism that prevailed in Whitehall, you have to allow for the fact that the policy was, as it were, led by those who were experts on the Soviet Union. They were quite right to be sceptical, I think, about what the Soviet intentions were. Brian Fall just mentioned Tom Brimelow – he was a crucial figure in the general attitude towards the Soviet Union and towards the Eastern *bloc*. He had been Ambassador in Poland. He was *the* leading expert. He propagated this definition of peaceful coexistence, which was a word that appealed to people who wanted to be sympathetic to Russia, that it was Russia's attempt to achieve political and security advantage by their own means. I think you have to be sceptical about the use of peaceful coexistence.

But what I think we left out of account, or was left out of account at Whitehall, was the difference in even those in power but certainly in much of the population in the countries of Eastern Europe. Going back to the end of our subject, the greatest beneficiaries of Helsinki were really the East Europeans, because here was an example of us, the West, doing something that was in the interest of the people of those countries rather than of the Soviet Union.

If I could mention Poland, even as early as in the 1960s, late 1950s even, we were having conferences – they were called Jablonna conferences* – in Warsaw between many people of all kinds – politicians, journalists, economists – meeting with the Poles and talking about things astonishingly freely. I think that was extraordinarily important, the difference between what was possible with the Soviet Union.

I mentioned just now in my introduction Alec Home. Coming back to see him when he became Foreign Secretary again in 1970, I was saying there were certain reasons why it would be to our advantage politically to encourage trade in some ways with Poland, apart from the commercial aspect. To which, in response, he ridiculed me. He said, 'That is absurd. I am a farmer. Why should I be happy to see my crops undersold by Poles or people from Eastern Europe?' I don't think Alec understood it at all. He was perfectly sound on Russia, but I think he, like a great many people, did not realise that Eastern Europe was quite different from Russia and had to be dealt with in a quite different way.

If you come to the question which we haven't touched on, although Brian Fall did mention it, why did this change? It certainly

Jablonna conferences held at the Polish Science Academy.

Józef Cyrankiewicz (1911-89),
Polish politician. Prime Minister,
1954-70.

did change. The anti-Helsinki people, I don't say they got softer, but I would like to think that the East European aspect became a bit more involved. But I would quite like to know why. I wasn't in Whitehall. I don't think it was a stronger European Union that did it, frankly. I don't know what did it. It came as a surprise to me, by 1974, when clearly the spirit in Whitehall was moving. So I would just like to raise this point about the historic theme, the difference in the requirements and the needs of East Europeans as distinct from those of Russia so far as it affected British policy. Can I just add one thing to show you how difficult it was, even in Poland. I was having a conversation once with Cyrankiewicz,* the Polish Prime Minister, and he was holding forth, in the way I was used to, about how lucky Poland and the people of Warsaw were to have this wonderful big brother to their East: it made them feel so happy and content, and they flourish under it. And suddenly a look of horror came into his eyes when he thought that I might be believing what he said!

WRIGHT

I don't know whether other witnesses might like to come in on this stage of the process. I would just like to add two things myself. You referred to peaceful coexistence. One of the most painful arguments that I remember in my life between the Foreign Office and Number 10 was Harold Wilson's wish to include the words peaceful coexistence in his speech in Helsinki and very powerful arguments from the Foreign Office, without, sadly I think, consulting the Foreign Secretary who was abroad at the time, that the words peaceful coexistence should *not* be included in Harold Wilson's speech at Helsinki. I think in the end it wasn't.

BURNS

Oh no, it is. It is full of it.

WRIGHT

It is full of it, is it? Right. The controversy was so painful that I have traumatically excised from my memory exactly what happened in the end. But I think nevertheless that it wasn't just a painful row. It was symbolic of Harold Wilson's much softer attitude towards the process. As some of you no doubt will remember, Harold Wilson regarded himself, possibly second only to Tom Brimelow, as an expert on Russia, because he had sold wood in Russia as a young man. I don't say this cynically at all, but he did, I think, perhaps have a slightly exaggerated view of how well he understood the Russians. And he was therefore extremely angry with the Foreign Office at trying to get him to exclude the words peaceful coexistence from his speech, because he thought the Foreign Office were not understanding the real issue.

Now related to that, I would really just like to ask if anybody has any quick intervention on the meaning of *détente*. Was there agreement – and this is brought out well in the questions for the discussion – among ourselves and our European and American

common partners on what *détente* really meant and where it was going?

MUNRO

Harmel Report (after the Chairman, the Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel) on the future of the NATO alliance, Dec. 1967. (See also witness seminar on 'Anglo-German Relations and German Reunification', <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/icbh/witness/germanreunification>).

On *détente*, we should not forget the Harmel Report* which was commissioned in December 1966 and approved in 1967. This coincided with a change of government in Bonn. NATO decided to combine strong defence with a search for progress towards a more stable relationship in which underlying political issues could be solved. This was set back in 1968 by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, but revived at the beginning of the 1970s, underpinning the policy that the German government then pursued. And the UK had played a central part in negotiation of the Quadripartite Agreement. This removed Berlin as a source of East/West tension and provided a foundation for a new relationship between the two German states. Our relationship with the Germans within the European Community from 1973, was a further factor in changing attitudes towards a more positive view of what could be achieved.

WRIGHT

But how much disagreement, if any, was there between ourselves, the French and the Germans on the approach? Do you recall consensus?

FALL

I think with the French consensus, because the British and the French were really co-architects of this well-structured negotiating position. It was our policy jointly and the French and British were very strong in defending it. We had trouble with the Germans, because they had much more political people who came and took over the delegation from time to time. It is true that the Helsinki Blue Book formulation on the inviolability of frontiers was a much better text from a strong West German point of view than what they had managed to negotiate bilaterally, and that was hugely embarrassing to them, because the Russians would turn out in Bonn and say, 'Why are you reneging on a paper that we have agreed?' So we were, I think, closer to the French on probably more issues than to the Germans and very close indeed to the tougher-minded neutrals on the information and travel requirements.

HENDERSON

Just one word on the Germans. It has been mentioned, the word *Ostpolitik*, and I think it is very crucial in the analysis of all this that the development of *Ostpolitik* went along very much with the Helsinki process.

BURNS

I think that, as the negotiation unfolded, there was a growing sense of common understanding of what at least the non-Russian delegations meant by *détente*. In those days the negotiations were peppered by high-up visits to capitals, at which everything that we were negotiating about seemed to be in danger of being unravelled. One day

it would be the French, then it would be the Germans, then it would be Dr Kissinger who would turn up; and suddenly the ship of negotiation would be rocked vigorously by messages from capitals saying we should give ground this way and that way, and then we had to re-stabilise things and plod along purposefully again.

To answer the consensus point of view, one of the reasons why the attitude changed by 1974 was that we felt that we had got the mastery of negotiations, that the Russians were on the defensive. The Soviets were on the defensive, and we were quite confident in our own ability tactically to co-ordinate and play the conference in a successful way. So we saw fewer dangers and more potential benefits of the game.

WRIGHT

What about the Americans at this stage?

HENDERSON

We must mention the Americans. Kissinger was a completely dead loss in all of this. And he to the last, to the day of the fall of the Berlin Wall, believed that the policy of the West – their advantageous policy – was to preserve the *status quo* on frontiers and the *status quo* politically as it was.

HAMILTON

Leonid Brezhnev (1906-82), Soviet statesman. Succeeded Khrushchev as First Secretary of CPSU in 1964 and served as leader 1977-82.

Brian Fall raised the question of the formula for peaceful coexistence. I know there was considerable opposition to the use of the term ‘peaceful coexistence’ in official documents. But I was under the impression that the definition of peaceful coexistence given in a speech by Brezhnev* on 14 February 1975, during the visit Harold Wilson and Callaghan paid to the Soviet Union, was included in the Joint Statement issued at the end of the visit and that that was then taken as meeting British requirements on its use.

WRIGHT

You were probably there, were you?

BURNS

Well I provided the firm advice in 1975 which caused all the trouble. I mean, we spent two-and-a-half, three years trying to make sure that the text did not include the words ‘peaceful co-existence’ and I was damned if I’d let the Prime Minister put them in his speech. So that was my approach to it.

FALL

I wasn’t there at the time, I was safely in New York doing trade negotiations on behalf of British companies in those days. I think that John Killick produced a brilliant redefinition of peaceful coexistence which allowed this bilateral use. The trouble is that, although this was seen as a brilliant redefinition, it was the old one that counted, because that was the one that everyone remembered. The reason for being opposed to it was that it was saying that we would behave in a civilised fashion only towards countries with different social systems. Now, we wanted Helsinki to lead to civilised behaviour also as between countries with the same social system,

witness Czechoslovakia in those days. So it was a fairly fundamental piece of theology.

HENDERSON

You mentioned British companies. I don't know whether my colleagues would agree with me on this, but in this whole period of relationships with Russia and East Europe the people who were softest, weakest of all, were of course the business community. This is the opposite of what George Walden was saying of course: that far from the Foreign Office being the softest and the wettest, it was the business world that ran rings round the wets of us in this era. And we had to keep on reminding them what the Soviet system meant for the Russians and even Eastern Europe.

WRIGHT

Now, since the press's attitude to the negotiations and the Foreign Office at this stage has been mentioned, I am going to break my rule and ask Richard Davy if he would like to say anything at this point. As a journalist, how did this all look to you? I am not sure you were actually involved at this stage.

RICHARD DAVY

I covered the whole process for *The Times*, starting in Dipoli, visiting Geneva and returning to Helsinki for the signature of the Final Act. Then I attended follow-up meetings in Belgrade and Madrid. As a journalist for a serious newspaper in those days one was not supposed to have a personal agenda, but I confess that my main reason for taking such a close interest in the negotiations was that I hoped they would help the peoples of Eastern Europe. In the end they did, and by fostering the development of civil societies and awareness of democratic values they also contributed to preparing the ground for the peaceful transition to democracy when the chance came.

I found the whole British negotiating team immensely impressive. They did a fantastic job in the negotiations and were also very helpful to journalists, both on the spot and in London. Without their clear thinking and stubborn negotiating tactics the Final Act might have been much weaker because some of the other delegations were quite wobbly.

But one thing that has always bothered me is how much misunderstanding there was of the end result, particularly in the US but also initially in Eastern Europe. The myth that the CSCE sanctified the *status quo*, and endorsed the Brezhnev Doctrine (claiming the right of Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe) became astonishingly widespread and is still around today. I don't think anyone here is to blame, because their press briefings, as I've said, were very good. Moreover, Roy Hattersley* put the record straight very well in the House of Commons. And a parliamentary committee report, with which I helped as a specialist adviser, also made it clear that the Final Act did not legitimise the *status quo* and indeed called for radical changes.

Yet Polish and other East European intellectuals were initially very

Roy Hattersley (Lord Hattersley of Sparkbrook), Labour politician. Minister of State at the Foreign Office 1974-6.

The Yalta Conference, 4-11 Feb. 1945, was one of the series of conferences held during the Second World War between the Allied leaders (of the USA, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union). It is believed by some that the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was tacitly agreed to at this conference.

James Brown, broadcaster. Head of Radio Free Europe.

critical because they had gained the impression, perhaps from the Soviet press, that the Final Act was another ‘Yalta’* that recognised the Soviet sphere of influence in the area. Only gradually did they come round to seeing the value of the human rights elements and Basket III. They then used these texts to press for more freedom, but many did not wholly abandon their belief that the rest of the Final Act had endorsed the *status quo*. Jim Brown,* who was head of Radio Free Europe at the time, told me recently that some of his *émigré* staff took the sell-out line, but the general guidance that went out from his office was that the Final Act was a positive step and would help Eastern Europe.

So we are left with this mystery: how did the notion of a sell-out gain such wide credibility and survive even after people recognised the compensating advantages of the human rights clauses and Basket III? A particularly large number of American experts and publications got it wrong but so did some Britons (maybe because they did not read *The Times*). Was there a conscious decision among Western governments to avoid triumphalism because it might impede implementation? Did anyone say, ‘Let’s not rub the Russians’ noses in it in case they become awkward?’ Or was there just neglect? Or did the negotiators not feel as victorious at the time as they seem in retrospect for having turned a Soviet proposal around to the West’s advantage?

There was not even much co-ordination inside the Foreign Office. When I turned up in Helsinki for the signing I met one of the British Reuters correspondents from Moscow. He said, ‘Oh well, Brezhnev has won great victory, hasn’t he? He’s got what he wanted.’ ‘No’, I replied, ‘he hasn’t at all; he has lost on nearly all major points. In some respects it is quite defeat for him.’ ‘Oh’, said the correspondent, ‘that is not what the British ambassador in Moscow told me’. So there was a good deal of disarray in public presentation even within the Foreign Office.

This was, thank goodness, before the age of spin doctors, but did no one give serious thought to presenting the Final Act to the public in a more favourable light, especially in view of all the suspicions and criticism that had surrounded the start of the negotiations?

WRIGHT

What Richard Davy has just said was presumably the basis for your worries, Andrew Burns, about the meaning of the words ‘peaceful coexistence’, because they went back to Brezhnev’s remarks and therefore appeared to endorse the Brezhnev Doctrine. Is that right?

BURNS

Well, yes, in the sense that any negotiation is going to lead to concessions on both sides. We didn’t get absolutely everything we wanted, so it is people looking at the pot half full or the pot half empty. I think a lot of it actually was because of the Americans. They took an extremely sceptical view if you remember. Gerald Ford* and Kissinger, they were not happy campers, I think,

Gerald Ford, American politician. Vice-President, 1973-4; President, 1974-7.

because they felt that the basic relationship between East and West had been taken out of their hands and shared out amongst the nations of Europe.

HOWE

On 19 May 1989 eight Soviet diplomats and three journalists 1989 were expelled from the UK for 'activities incompatible with their status'. The expulsions caused tit-for-tat expulsions from the Soviet Union.

Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet statesman. General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR 1985-91 and President 1988-91.

Could I, because it is in my mind, make a comment about the Foreign Office, the other end of this process. You may remember Andrew [Burns] does certainly – that in the spring of 1989, we had to expel a whole lot of KGB people.* The original decision had been taken in January. But, we had to postpone it then, because of the uncertainty about the date of a Gorbachev* visit to London. Number 10 was very reluctant about the whole thing and said, 'No, we can't. You must wait until the visit is over and then try to resolve it without fuss'. After the visit was over (and when KGB activity in the UK resumed intensity), No.10 was persuaded that we had to act. But the Prime Minister insisted on sending a personal letter to Gorbachev, in effect saying, 'Sorry. This is a decision we had hoped not to have to take. We won't publicise this decision...?' and so on. When the news came out – as it was bound to do – knee-jerk press criticism of this 'Pre-emptive cringe' (as *The Evening Standard* described it) was directed against me and the Foreign Office. But it was Number10 that had insisted on the 'cringe'.

WRIGHT

I think we might now move on to Belgrade and Madrid. David Miller, you have the floor.

MILLER

Jimmy Carter (James Earl Carter, Jr), American politician. President, 1977-80.

After Geneva and Helsinki, the first follow-up meeting at Belgrade in 1977-78 was an anti-climax. It was at Belgrade that, thanks largely to President Carter,* the human rights label got attached to CSCE. Hitherto, 'human rights' as such, as distinct from humanitarian issues generally, had got only a passing mention in the Helsinki Final Act.

Yuly Vorontsov. Russian diplomat. Russian Ambassador to the USA 1994-9.

Moscow saw the American approach to Belgrade as provocative and designed to encourage political dissidence in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Because of this, the meeting soon degenerated into a polemic between the leader of the US delegation, Mr Justice Goldberg and his Soviet colleague, the patrician deputy foreign minister, Yuly Vorontsov,* though both were very careful to avoid confrontation. The arrival of the United States 'public' delegation at the Sava Conference Centar in New Belgrade caused something of a sensation. It was enormous and very colourful and represented just about every minority group in the United States: ethnic and cultural diversity was the order of the day. For several weeks, Senator Bob Dole* and Mrs Elizabeth Dole were active members of that delegation.

Bob Dole, American politician. Leader of the US Senate 1992-6 and Republican candidate in 1996 presidential election.

But the results of Belgrade were nugatory. After reviewing how the CSCE Final Act had been implemented since Helsinki, the meeting was unable to agree on any practical measures designed to improve performance and decided only that it should meet again at Madrid. With hindsight, this should have come as no surprise because, at

Geneva and Helsinki, we achieved more than we ever thought we would, particularly in Basket III. And here I would like to reinforce Nicholas Henderson's point about the role of the East Europeans. In the negotiations at Geneva, they often came up with very helpful proposals and suggestions, some of which had never occurred to us at all. The Hungarians were particularly interested in access to works of culture and intellectual property in other participating states. The Russians tried to substitute 'information about' for 'access to' in a number of Basket III texts, but the Hungarians came up with a clever compromise formula which covered both direct and indirect access in a way which left everyone happy. And in other, rather more coded, ways the Warsaw Pact delegations were sometimes able to help their Western colleagues round potential sticking points and to avoid traps.

I sometimes think the Russians rather took their eye off certain aspects of what was going on in Basket III. In Human Contacts and Information they were very vigilant. And the sub-Committee on Culture produced very few concessions to Western ideas on cultural exchange and diversity. But the results in Education and Science were more encouraging, thanks largely to the personality of the Soviet negotiator, Professor Shumovsky.* In actual fact we owe a lot to the Soviet delegation that was there. The famous Scientific Forum was something very dear to their hearts, as indeed it was to all the East Europeans. I think the reason may have been not only that the Russians and their partners set a premium on scientific exchange with the West – for obvious reasons – but also that this was a much safer ground on which to promote individual contacts. What the Scientific Forum was supposed to discuss was left suitably vague. So far as the Follow-up at Belgrade was concerned, I think the charitable view of Belgrade was that expectations had been pitched too high and that the two-year interval since Helsinki was an unreasonably short time in which to hope for further progress.

Professor Alexander Shumovsky,
Soviet physicist.

BURNS

Can I just make the point that there was a lot of discussion about follow-up in Geneva before Stage III of Helsinki. And one of the dilemmas we faced [was] that we wanted a follow-up that was sufficiently soon to show that follow-up mattered and that the process was continuous. But actually it reached a high point in what we had agreed in 1975 and it was far from clear that, as early as 1977 actually, any of us would be able to come up with anything more. We were very conscious that we had been in the thick of it at the Home Office and other parts of Whitehall to get interesting ideas, and it was not clear that we would actually be able to deliver as much as we hoped to do on other fronts. Once we had agreed on Confidence Building Measures that one would get a constraint on manoeuvres, only the size of manoeuvres was so big that it was quite hard to find any countries conducting manoeuvres at that

level. But that was one of the problems we faced, so it is not surprising that Belgrade proved to be a rather unsatisfactory event.

WRIGHT

How far was it true to say that, at this stage, the Americans were actually much more interested in MBFR, the arms negotiations, and really had taken their eye off Helsinki and its follow-up?

MILLER

Civil war broke out in the Portuguese colony of Angola in 1961 between the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), supported by interested communist and socialist states including Cuba, and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) supported by interested western states, and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) which was supported by southern African non-left groups and foreign mercenaries. Independence from Portugal was achieved in 1975. By Feb. 1976 the MPLA was virtually in control, and established an MPLA People's Republic, although it was not until 2002 that the UNITA leader, Jonas Savimbe was killed and UNITA forces finally surrendered.

I think one theory is that the Americans were worried about what had been going on in Southern Africa since November 1975, especially the Cuban involvement in Angola,* and they felt somehow that the Russians were using the CSCE and *détente* in Europe as cover to pursue their aims in other parts of the world. The American 'human rights' offensive at Belgrade was seen by some people at the time as a counterpoint to Russian policies in Africa.

D. C. WATT

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (born Ulyanov, 1870-1924) Marxist theorist and leader of the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, militant Russian Social Democrats, seized power in Russia in Nov. 1917 and set up a Marxist-Leninist state.

Professor Alexander O. Chubarian, Russian academic. Director of the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.

Anglo/Russian Seminar on Churchill and Stalin, hosted by FCO Historians and Eastern Department on 8 Mar. 2002.

Sir Winston Spencer Churchill (1874-1965), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1940-5; 1951-55.

See *Papers Presented to the XIV International Conference of the Historical Sciences, San Francisco, 22-29 Aug. 1975* (American Historical Association, 1975)

I could add to this picture. In 1975 and 1980 I was one of the British delegation to the Quinquennial Historical conferences organised by the International Commission for the Historical Sciences, first in San Francisco in 1975 and then in Bucharest. In 1975, the Soviet delegation put up a paper on Lenin's* Doctrine of Peaceful Co-existence – a very timely paper in view of the current Helsinki conference and the Soviet line on peaceful co-existence. The speaker was a then very young Soviet historian, named Chubarian.* He is now head of the Russian Institute for World History and is to attend the next Witness Seminar to be held by the FCO* on Churchill.* He and I were speakers on the same platform. Chubarian's paper* was an exegesis on Lenin's enunciation of the Doctrine of Peaceful Co-existence, which, as all the American Sovietologists in his audience united joyfully in pointing out, failed to quote the second part of Lenin's statement to the effect that this was the best way of bamboozling the innocent bourgeoisie as to the reality of Soviet determination to destroy them. Quite how those who had proposed Chubarian and his topic thought they would get away with so crude an exercise in selective history I do not know. My own feeling is that it represented the last

There were actually more Soviet than American historians registered at the Conference.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) was a non-aggression pact which permitted Hitler and Stalin to divide Poland after it was invaded and defeated in Sept. 1939. It also provided a free hand to Germany in Lithuania, and to the Soviets in Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Bessarabia; and additionally for delivery to Nazi Germany of food and war material from the USSR. Most significantly, the pact detached the Soviet Union from the League of Nations and the policy of collective security.

In Aug. 1968 Soviet tanks invaded Czechoslovakia in order to end the 'liberalisation' of Czech government, introduced by Alexander Dubcek: the so-called 'Prague Spring'. The Soviet hierarchy justified their intervention with the Brezhnev Doctrine, (see note on p.39).

gasp of the old Stalinists in the Soviet historical hierarchy. Their effort was so cynical, and so obvious a piece of ill-thought out chicanery, that most of the younger Soviet and East European historians present (and the Soviet authorities had put together an enormous delegation), could not but feel pleased to see it shipwrecked.* They were fascinated to be shown over the Hoover Library's archive of Soviet documentation, especially to see the photostat of the German copy of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939.* I learnt subsequently that the Soviet copy had disappeared from the archives, so that the American publication of the German copy in 1947 had been easy to pass off as a forgery. When they learnt that I had worked for the Foreign Office on the captured German Foreign Ministry archives, I was repeatedly questioned about its genuineness. On the whole, the 1975 San Francisco meeting of what is generally referred to as the World Historical Congress destroyed the plausibility of the official Soviet line for the young and upcoming generation of Soviet professional historians. By 1980, Russian historians seemed to have changed their line completely; no-one more so than Chubarian, who had wisely left it to his elders, who had landed him with the theme if not the text of the paper he had given in San Francisco, to defend it. In 1980 in Bucharest, western historians of international relations, led by representatives of the French and Italian schools of the subject, and invoking my support as the best known of the British historians in the field, proposed the establishment of a special grouping of international historians, a *commission interne*. We held preliminary talks in the wings of the Bucharest meeting and held a further meeting on the subject at Milan in 1982. The Frenchman, the Italian and I were very wary lest the commission be taken over by a Soviet-dominated doctrinal school. Quite unnecessarily so, as it proved. The Eastern *bloc* historians wanted to plead the need to avoid any debacles like that which had occurred at San Francisco as part of freeing their own hands in their own countries. This became clear not only in the private socialising which accompanied the meeting, but also in open discussion when the three leading western historians, having been elected as the three permanent officials of the new Commission, asked whether we should not invite a Czech historian to join the steering committee. As one man, led by Chubarian and seconded by the Hungarian, all the Eastern *bloc* historians there said, 'Why should we do that? There is not a decent historian among them. All the decent Czech historians lost their jobs in 1968.*' So much for the solidarity of the Eastern *bloc*! It had already begun to break up, so far as the professional historians in university posts in Poland, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary were concerned. We were, I think, stronger then for not having any American representatives; this resulted from the disappearance of international history, as opposed to the diplomatic histories of individual countries, from the American historical profession. This was remedied in time for the next World Historical Conference, which met in Stuttgart in 1985, insofar as an American historian was co-

There is a Society of Historians of American Foreign Policy, with its own newsletter and Journal, *Diplomatic History*. There are now chairs of International History at Yale and Harvard.

Young Men's Christian Association, which provides affordable short-term accommodation for young men.

Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1937-9.

The Left Book Club, which sold and/or distributed socialist and Marxist-Leninist publications, was launched in 1936 by publisher Victor Gollancz, Labour MP John Strachey and Professor Harold Laski of the London School of Economics.

Sir Michael Howard, historian. Chichele Professor of History of War, 1977-80; Regius Professor of Modern History and Fellow of Oriol College, 1980-9, University of Oxford.

Professor David Dilks, historian. Assistant Lecturer, then Lecturer, in International History, LSE, 1962-70; Professor of International History, University of Leeds, 1970-91.

Sir Lewis Namier (1888-1960), academic. Lecturer in Modern History at Balliol College, Oxford, 1920-1; Professor of Modern History, Manchester University, 1931-53.

A. J. P. Taylor (1906-90), academic. Lecturer in International History, Oxford University, 1953-63; Tutor in Modern History, Magdalen College, 1938-63, Fellow, 1938-76.

Michael Foot, Peter Howard and Frank Owen, *Guilty Men* (London, V. Gollancz, 1940).

General Georgii Arbatov, Head of Moscow School of International Affairs – Arbatov Institute.

opted to the steering committee. But it is still the case that all but a handful of American historians are historians of the foreign policy of a particular country, especially of their own, rather than historians of international relations *per se*.*

My own experience in the field of cultural relations convinces me that to discuss 'The Soviet attitude' as though there was a single, monolithic, line to be encountered at all levels misses the reality, already apparent at least five years before Helsinki. At the level of the individual Soviet university historian, and for that matter of other Soviet representatives who were allowed to come to Britain and felt free to discuss issues of politics and history with people like me, one was encountering a quite different set of attitudes from that apparent in the 1950s. I had two Soviet historians, one a historian of Middle Eastern diplomacy in the 1930s from Sverdlovsk, one a historian of British foreign policy in the 1930s, attached to me in these years. Neither sounded remotely like the kind of stuff one used to get from the Soviet journal, *International Affairs*, in the 1950s. Indeed the young man from Sverdlovsk stayed quite openly at the YMCA,* not something I had been brought up to believe was a characteristic career move for an ambitious Soviet historian. As for the man who was interested in Chamberlain* and appeasement, nothing could have been less Left Book Club* than his approach which centred on the disparity between British resources and British commitments in a way that owed more to Sir Michael Howard* and Professor Dilks* than to Churchill, Sir Lewis Namier,* A.J.P. Taylor* or the anonymous authors of *Guilty Men** published in the war years.

I had much the same experience with a young Soviet journalist, correspondent of a Soviet economic periodical who was later to be expelled for being a KGB agent. He was a graduate of the Moscow School of International Affairs, headed by General Arbatov.* His attitude to international affairs was a revelation in sophistication. He was a pleasure to argue, dispute and disagree with. It struck me that the old air of ideological certainty, the concept of the two cultures – capitalism and socialism – being irreconcilable and natural enemies, had simply disappeared, and with it the unbearable sense of arguing with someone who had the deity, or in the Russian case, historical determinism, in his pocket. When I was a new entrant into the historical profession I had eschewed taking a year off to learn Russian. Anything I wrote would be rejected as bourgeois and predictable, my record in the Intelligence Corps would make any visits to the Soviet Union more than ordinarily hazardous, and anything that the Russians might publish would be automatically suspect. So I took my first and most fruitful sabbatical immersing myself in the US records in Washington DC instead.

What was becoming clear in my contacts with Soviet historians in the 1970s was that the younger men were avoiding the party line areas and turning, as I would have, to new areas, where there was no party line and where they could behave like 'scientific' historians of the Rankean rather than the Marxist variety; and that they were

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1876)
German historian.

Josef Vissarionovich Stalin (born
Djugashvili, 1879-1953) Soviet
leader, 1927-53.

judging both their own seniors and the non-Soviet historians they were allowed to study by the standards of Ranke* rather than Lenin or Stalin.* And they desperately wanted to find out how the minds of their opposite numbers, at least in Britain and Europe, were moving because they were getting very little enlightenment from their more cautious and perhaps more scarred seniors. This view was amply confirmed at the World Historical Conference of 1990, at which the Soviet Historians divided into three groups: the surviving old guard, who tended to be shouted down; the new heads of institutes, of whom Chubarian was one, arguing for a synthesis of the more rational parts of the old line and the new evidence; and the self-styled 'Young historians' (youth seemed, to my delight, to extend at least up to the mid-40 year olds) who simply wanted a public lynching. One has to remember that all these historians had passed official scrutiny for their trips to the Madrid to receive official funding.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much indeed. We are about to break for tea. When we resume I would quite like to see if any of you, either at the table or around the room, would like to address the very basic question of to what extent did the Helsinki process actually lead to the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Session II

WRIGHT

I would like to start with the large and crucial question of the extent to which the Helsinki process really contributed to the break-up of the Soviet Union and I will ask Lord Howe please to open proceedings.

HOWE

Chequers in Buckinghamshire is the
country residence of the Prime
Minister.

Although subsequently an appreciative consumer of the product, I had nothing at all to do with its creation – [which was] well before I reached the Foreign Office. But, it turned out to be a tool of very substantial and growing importance, as the years went by. Its ultimate potential was initially unappreciated. If I take my mind back to the meetings we had in the Foreign Office in the summer of 1983 – and subsequently in September at Chequers* – to discuss our whole approach to the East-West question, I am struck by how limited were our ambitions and expectations at that time. A very cautious conclusion at Chequers was that there was no scope for, and no point in trying, to destabilise the Soviet regime. We had to move very carefully. We didn't want to provoke a repressive counter action by the Soviet Union. It made sense to approach each of the countries individually, to encourage greater diversity – but recognising that the possibilities were severely limited. And that was broadly speaking what we set out to try and do.

Laurence O’Keeffe, diplomat (1931-2003). Head of British Delegation to CSCE Review Conference, Vienna 1986-8, HM Ambassador to Czechoslovakia 1988-91.

In 1983 Korean Air Lines flight KAL 007, which had strayed into Soviet air space near the Kamchatka Peninsula, was shot down by a Soviet military aircraft. See Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p.314.

Andrei Gromyko (1908-89), Soviet politician. Foreign Minister, 1957-85.

Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, pp.351-3.

Andrei Sakharov (1921-89), Soviet academic and dissident. Nobel prize winner 1975.

Stefan Terlezki, Conservative politician. MP for Cardiff West, 1983-7.

The term *Perestroika* refers to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s programme of economic, political, and social restructuring.

George Schultz, American politician. Secretary of State, 1982-9.

Roland Dumas, French politician. Minister of Foreign Affairs 1988-93, Minister of European Affairs 1983-4, Minister of External Relations 1984-6, President of the Commission for Foreign Affairs, National Assembly 1986-7.

Eduard Shevardnadze, Soviet statesman. Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1985-90, 1991.

I have to confess that I found the documentary details of the CSCE, given that the 1975 Helsinki Act was in place, deeply unfathomable! The Ambassador, who was in charge of the process for a long time, Laurence O’Keeffe* I think it was, tried to explain the process to me with great enthusiasm, but my impression was that at each of the many meetings not very much was actually happening.

Madrid of course was the first one I went to, and it was dominated by the KAL 007 incident* and nothing could possibly be said about human rights or anything serious there. The Stockholm one came next, in January 1984. I can remember, as I said in my book, that *there* at least human rights was one of the key points on the agenda. I regarded it, in retrospect, as having offered one of my best ever insights into Gromyko.* For, when I raised the topic of human rights at Stockholm, he looked at me and said simply, ‘You are lowering the tone of our conversation’.*

When I next returned to the subject at some length, in Moscow in July of the same year, he refused to say anything about it at all in more than five hours of conversation. But we were able then to hand over lists of names of people about whom we were concerned – people like Shcharansky and Sakharov* – and he was at least accepting them. He refused to do anything about most of them. But we did, as a result of that and of invoking the Helsinki Principles, achieve success with a few family re-unification cases – for example with the father of the Conservative MP Stefan Terlezki.* So Helsinki did prove to be quite a useful lever.

We also, of course, were then well down the way towards securing a Gorbachev visit to this country. And Gorbachev’s arrival indicated a change of direction in this matter from the outset. Gorbachev was, for example, ready to respond on human rights questions at the bilateral meeting I had with him at Hampton Court. So too, when he met the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, he was ready to face the issue, in public as well. So it was creeping onto the agenda.

It was indeed all the more important when, later on, I visited five Iron Curtain countries in the first half of the following year. I raised the issue with greatest clarity in East Berlin. It was probably the strongest item on our agenda there. It provoked different reactions in different places. It began to feature as an increasingly strong aspect of Britain’s foreign policy in relation to Warsaw Pact countries. Lurking in the background of all this, of course, was *perestroika** – it was the beginning of the breakthrough.

In the summer of 1985, I remember the thirtieth anniversary celebrations of the Austrian State Treaty. One aspect of that was the fact that all four foreign ministers, Schultz,* Gromyko, Roland Dumas* and myself, had to make speeches and Roland Dumas astonished us all by paying tremendous tribute to the outstanding courage and tenacity of the Austrian resistance – which was slightly bizarre. And that was the last we saw of Gromyko because, by the end of July, Shevardnadze* had arrived. And Shevardnadze, from

the outset, was completely different. He was prepared to discuss human rights issues seriously, at the very first meeting we had. He said he wasn't going to go for the rather childish routine of giving lists to us. He certainly was prepared to challenge us on the issues. So from there on it developed and there is really not much else to say. I think Shevardnadze's first speech, and indeed Gorbachev's, at the United Nations in 1985 were striking a completely different note on these and other issues. And one thing that I remember, in particular, was a Shevardnadze speech to a Soviet diplomatic school in the summer of 1988, in which he was describing the relationship between government and people in relation to human rights, in terms that, by previous standards, were completely unrecognisable. I don't think we realised the implications of this for what was going to happen later on.

We had 1989 meetings in the spring and summer, both in Vienna: one was a NATO meeting and one was a CSCE meeting. I had to make a keynote speech for the NATO side and again, of course, returned to the human rights theme and called for the demolition of the Berlin Wall to be included on the agenda. I was ridiculed by *The Guardian* for suggesting such a foolish thing. And yet it was the pace at which people in the Soviet empire became disillusioned, in a way which none of us could foresee, that undermined the structure of the Warsaw Pact and produced even that astonishing change.

That is my view of it: that we were using this Helsinki-based tool with increasing confidence and increasing certainty – to an extent which even then nobody fully appreciated. And what I have never been able to work out is how and why there was such a tremendous shift in the perceptions of the Gorbachev team of all that had gone before. Where had he got it from? Or the sophistication that was shown by Shevardnadze over the years to follow: where he got that from? How much realisation there was by any of them of the extent to which they were pulling the roof down on their heads by using this Helsinki instrument, which some of you, with such innocence and so honestly, had crafted in 1975.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. Brian Fall, as Ambassador in Moscow, do you think, retrospectively, that this rings true? Basically, that the Helsinki process contributed to *perestroika* and it was very much in Gorbachev's mind in setting *perestroika* on the way forward?

FALL

Yes, it is a fascinating question and it is a difficult one because, to some extent, Helsinki helped it forward and, to another extent, Helsinki and the Final Act reflected movement which was in any case happening in Eastern Europe.

The sensible Western approach to the East at that time was that you tried to take individual countries individually, and it paid off. Now at Dipoli in particular it was quite clear that, however true that might be in bilateral relations, multilateral diplomacy was not the place to look for individuality: everybody was out there on parade,

being watched by the sergeant-majors, so that you had a very boring, line-toeing performance from even the most sophisticated Warsaw Pact countries.

But the way that the Final Act was drafted served to encourage individuality. No legal rigidity, but a non-legal permissiveness: everybody should try to do a bit more and we will meet in two years' time and see how far we have got. That meant that you could have various speeds in various parts of Eastern Europe. Our relationship with one country might be further ahead: you could do things with the Hungarians that you couldn't do with the Poles; you could do things with the Poles that you couldn't do with the Czechs. It created an atmosphere where it wasn't a convoy anymore: it wasn't at the speed of the slowest. And all those visits that took place to the various capitals, with or without lists of personal cases, were continuing to probe whether it might be possible to do some thing more next year.

As Andrew Burns said earlier on, the one thing you could never do after Helsinki was add other paragraphs to the basic text, because the basic text pretty much wrote down all the paragraphs that were ready to be written in that era. But, in trying to get a little bit of concrete activity inspired by one paragraph or another, there was a great deal of freedom for individual countries (and for the Russians, who increasingly came to realise the extent to which they were falling behind economically). Their economic problems were very serious, and they came to realise that the modern economy couldn't be run in a command-from-behind-the-walls sort of way, and that it was access to information that you needed to be economically successful. That realisation was one of the great themes of the 1970s and 1980s, and probably more important than the Helsinki text in forcing change. But we happened to have the texts with us, and we did take advantage of this.

WRIGHT

John [Macgregor], do you want to add anything, either from your time in the Soviet Department or from Prague?

MACGREGOR

What I remember with pride, Patrick [Wright], is that you and I of course were in the Czech Foreign Ministry (I was *Chargé* at the time) when we raised the case of Mr Pospisil, and the students were demonstrating outside.

WRIGHT

Perhaps I could just pick up on that, because somebody referred to generational differences. It was very striking when John [Macgregor] and I were sitting on a banquette facing the hard-faced Permanent Secretary, the Director General of the Foreign Ministry. Hard-faced and totally unmoved by our representations, but nevertheless not sort of flinging the case back in our face: it was quite clear that he accepted that we had the status to raise it. But what I remember most about that meeting John [Macgregor] (I don't know whether you were also struck by this) was that the hard-faced

Director General was sitting on my right, and opposite me were three junior Czech diplomats. And they all made absolutely no secret of the fact that they agreed with every word that we said and were nodding their heads and smiling – no doubt partly smiling because of the accompanying noise from the Wenceslaus marchers outside the window. But it was a very striking illustration of the difference, and also of the responsibility, of course.

MACGREGOR

For the record I would like to mention one thing, because I think it is unique, which is that in 1988 the Czechs raised a Helsinki case with me (also as *Chargé*) and it was the poll tax riots in London! They said, ‘With reference to Basket III, *Chargé*, which you have often mentioned to us...’. And I think it was unique. I don’t recall any other occasion when this happened.

HOWE

Leonid Zamyatin, former Soviet, then Russian, diplomat. Ambassador to the UK, 1986-91.

I remember that Ambassador Zamyatin* certainly made representations to me as Foreign Secretary, in London, with a list in relation to the miners’ strike.

MACGREGOR

Going back to your thesis, the first observation is that the text of the Helsinki Final Act is still with us, it is untouched. There have been various suggestions that it should be revisited since 1990 and no-one has really been able to find the political will, I think, to return to it. But reading through it again, I think it remarkably still applies to the new Europe, because it was drafted in this curious language that never really mentioned the Soviet *bloc* and us, the West. It is all quite neutral.

WRIGHT

Is there anything in it that contradicts human rights legislation which has subsequently been incorporated in our laws?

MACGREGOR

It was designed to be compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights in the first place, but it is pretty minimal on the subject of human rights. I mean, George Walden worked tremendously hard to get some fairly short passages in. The second point I would like to make is that clearly, looking at it in operation over the whole of the 1980s, it worked pretty badly for the Russians. If one takes as a starting point that the deal for them was that they got something on stability, got something on security, got an economic bit. I can’t recall the frontiers issue ever being mentioned at all during the 1980s, it just became a given. And in any case, thanks to the skilful negotiators, we got in that frontiers ‘can be changed in accordance with international law’. On security, well you could argue that Stockholm was a major leap forward, but that didn’t in fact go in favour of the Soviet Government; it went in favour of transparency, and transparency always turned out to be a bad thing as far as the Russian confrontationalists were concerned, both ways. There were two inspections by Russians in the UK. But I

think it was a sort of voyage of discovery and education for them when they came on these CSCE inspections. The economy was a train that was neatly put into the siding of the UN organisation (ECE) in Geneva and so it never came to anything at all. So one ends up with the bit that the Russians didn't like from the start, Basket III. All they wanted was cultural exchanges and village dancing girls. But, as others have said, the whole pattern of the 1980s was the increasing use of Basket III, mainly just to raise individual human rights cases, but also to make wider pressure points about the media and travel.

However, I think my third point is to be slightly sceptical about the cause and effect. I think you can differentiate between what happened in the Soviet Union, perhaps, and what happened in Eastern Europe. Although much did happen in the Soviet Union, I think one of the most significant things was the publication of the Helsinki Final Act, which was published in a newspaper.

FALL

I think that that was collectively agreed, wasn't it?

MACGREGOR

Izvestia (News) was first published in 1917 as the daily newspaper of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, *Izvestia* became the official organ of the Soviet government after the Nov. 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

Non-Governmental Organisations.

In Jan. 1977 the Charter 77 manifesto was signed by a group of Czechoslovak dissident intellectuals who were committed to the pursuit of human rights.

By negotiation, in two newspapers. And indeed there was a great complaint, I can recall it accurately, much later on when I came into the picture, from the Soviet side that *The Times* had not published the Final Act unlike *Izvestia*,* or whatever it was. We had totally failed at this and produced instead a miserable booklet, very few editions of which became available to the public. The dissident organisations in the Soviet Union did take courage from the published text, but, seen mainly from the London end as I saw it, it wasn't really so much individuals who took advantage, but organisations, NGOs,* which came to represent their cases. In London the Jewish NGOs were enormously effective, so we tended to end up with a completely Jewish list of human rights cases. We had to search around for the odd dissenting Orthodox priest and so on to try and give it a bit of balance. But, like Brian Fall, I don't see all this actually as the crucial thing about the demise of the Soviet Union: that was an economic and a political development.

Eastern Europe I think was always in a different category and there the experience of Czechoslovakia was that Charter 77* really did grab the issue and that there was a Helsinki watch group inside Czechoslovakia. They used references to the Helsinki Final Act in court. Thanks to Geoffrey Howe we took a very forward position and, remembering those times, we were well ahead of any other European and the Americans in behaving in this provocative (as it was called in the terms of those days) way. Certainly British diplomats went along to a range of court cases. And, to an extent, all this did encourage a group who, in the Czech case, came to take over power. But this was not the story in the Soviet Union. You have got to differentiate between the two in talking about cause and effect.

WALDEN

One little point. I am not saying that in those early days we were engaged in putting dynamite under the Berlin Wall, as it might be seen retrospectively, though I think there is an element of that. Because what was the result of the Helsinki agreements? Well it did help to sort of stabilise the position in Europe quite obviously. We didn't have any more Berlin crises and so on. But it also helped to destabilise the position in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I remember being amazed when, after long negotiations with the East German representative, we got this agreement on a phrase: I think it was freedom of movement and information. And I remember thinking – are you sure you want to do this? Is this wise from your point of view? Because I was very excited that he was giving in on this.

FALL

'Freer and wider distribution of information of all kinds'. An amazing concession.

WALDEN

That's right: 'Freer and wider distribution of information of all kinds'. And I remember thinking, 'We've got it. This is wonderful'. And then thinking, 'Well, in your position, I wouldn't give this away'. You know, it was quite a dangerous thing to do. And sure enough, it was a wrong thing to do from their point of view. Because, although in their constitution a lot of these freedoms were inbuilt notionally, I think by then – and this is where it gets complicated and goes back to something Professor Watt was saying – you had a generation like the Professor's historians: you had them in the economy: you had some bright young people coming through who handled international affairs: some of the diplomats one met were not fools, and there was forward thinking in relative terms. So you had this generation coming through, and you had it outside of the Soviet Union. And when Helsinki was published they invoked those rights which, although they technically existed already in the Soviet Union, they were spelled out then. We even had a problem on freedom of information on our side. The Irish were afraid it could include birth control!

So from this follows a very important point about the collapse of the Soviet Union: that although I think most of us agree that it wasn't just done by the Helsinki movement, there were these other things going on that Professor Watt has talked about. What we can conclude from this is that it is ridiculous and absurd to say, as is commonly believed by many journalists and by the political establishment in America and Britain, that the Wall came down when Mrs Thatcher* and Mr Reagan* blew their trumpets.* It is not true. It is a much deeper, much more prolonged historical development than that. It may have been the arms build-up, etc. and the technological gap feeding through into the economy – of course all that is true – but the simplistic notion of our a-historical times that this was done by Thatcher and Reagan getting tough whereas everyone else had been weak is historical nonsense.

Margaret Thatcher (Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1979-90.

Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), American politician. President, 1981-9.

An allusion to Joshua and the battle of Jericho, during which Joshua blew a trumpet and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down

HENDERSON

The accepted American view is that it was the American defence programme of such intensity that the Russians tried to match and bankrupted themselves over this. It is a complete misinterpretation in my view.

WALDEN

One little point just on the budget. As I remember it from those days, even the pre-Reagan administration had committed themselves to a rise of 3 per cent, I think, in the military budget, so it was not a new development.

HENDERSON

But Reagan has put the argument against. It is an absurd contention, because a totalitarian state could have had any defence budget it liked.

WALDEN

The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People - In Their Own Words by Liang Zhang (Compiler), Andrew J. Nathan (Editor), E. Perry Link (Editor), Zhang Liang (Compiler), Perry Link, Orville Schell (New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2001). The authenticity of the contents of this book is disputed.

Finally, one point that may seem out of place, but I don't think is. We are talking about a communist system here, and there is still a chunk of that left – it's called China. So when we are talking about new generations coming through, I think the *Tiananmen Papers** are extremely interesting documents, which had been leaked by some enlightened person on the inside. I think most people view them as genuine. I certainly do. I worked a long time on China as well as Russia, and I see parallels. And I think one of these days we are going to find in China that there are surprisingly sophisticated and surprisingly forward-looking people buried in the system (and of course the Chinese are particularly good at playing on different levels, so you might not think it now), but they are going to come out in the way that this guy who leaked this stuff has come out. You can see the parallel and I think that we are going to see this type of movement take place in China and I hope and suspect within the next, I don't know, 10-15 years.

WRIGHT

Am I right in saying that a very significant difference between China and the Soviet Union is that a lot of Chinese have been educated in the West? I imagine very few nationals of the Soviet Union were educated in the West. I mean, they had business men and diplomats travelling in the West, but I think that quite a lot of Chinese now have come out of Harvard and Princeton and the like. Isn't that right?

WALDEN

Yes. A lot of them with a degree in their pocket don't go back of course, but of course you are quite right, there is this whole network of international relations – relations in the parental sense – with the Chinese that we don't have with the Russians, which of course should give them a head start in the sort of process I am describing.

FALL

I would just like to underline George Walden's point about the long historical perspective, which is crucial here. One of the shocks I

On 12 May 1927 London's Metropolitan Police raided the premises of the All-Russian Co-operative Society (Arcos) – ostensibly a trade organisation but in reality a cover for a Soviet espionage organisation to spy on British industry and armed forces. Ample evidence of espionage activity found in the raid provided grounds for the breaking of Anglo-Soviet relations, restored only in 1924.

had, was when I was putting together papers right at the beginning of the process, was that somewhere very early in the 1930s, when we re-established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union after the Arcos raid* and what have you. We, and I think other Western countries, were insisting that it was a condition for diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union that the Soviet Union would control the propaganda that it was sending to us. In other words, we were asking for restrictions on the freedom of information, because we were so terrified about the influence on our public opinion of the sort of things that they were broadcasting. Now, the complete revolution which led to it being the Western countries that had a message that was beguiling and thought to be dangerous was something which took us a long time to realise. One of the striking things in Helsinki of course was that the Swedes and the Swiss realised that too. That was the contagion which eventually worked, but which was working in parallel and separately from the Helsinki process, as well as being nudged forward by the Helsinki process. And it is the years and the decades 'wot done it'.

HOWE

Gibraltar is a UK Overseas Territory, ceded to the British by Spain in 1713 under the Treaty of Utrecht. It has been a source of tension between the Spanish and UK Governments.

I only wish the Brussels process for negotiations about Gibraltar* had been half as successful!

MUNRO

I agree very much with the thrust of what Geoffrey Howe, John Macgregor and others have said. Already, in the run-up to the Madrid CSCE Review meeting, in 1979-80, the Basket III provisions of the Helsinki Final Act were the benchmark for bilateral relations with the countries of the then Warsaw Pact. We were able to achieve progress in family reunification cases, for example during Ministerial visits, even in such extremely difficult territory as Ceausescu's Romania. Romania is interesting. Romania had its maverick position in the Warsaw Pact. It stood out against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, something that coloured perceptions in the early 1980s. At this time the Final Act seemed on balance to have achieved little. The Soviet Union had breached it and we could not do much about it. In retrospect, it was much more effective. In the case of Czechoslovakia there was Charter 77. There was the rise of Solidarity in Poland, which got underway in 1980. As we approached that meeting, we thought it possible that the Soviet Union would invade Poland. We spent a lot of time debating what we should do if they did – should we go there and denounce them, should we not go at all, or should we stay and negotiate. Of course in the end they didn't, and we did negotiate. But a reprise on the Home Office. We worked up a speech denouncing the Soviet Union for having broken all ten Principles of the Final Act and then we were told by the Home Office that our minister, Peter Blaker, couldn't deliver it, because the UK had broken some of them too!

Erich Honecker (1912-94), East German statesman. First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, i.e., Head of State and Party Leader (1971-89).

The *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, was formed in 1946 by an enforced combination of the German Communist Party (KPD) with the Social Democrat Party (SPD). In 1946 the Soviet Union was still occupying East Germany following the end of the Second World War.

DAVY

We must distinguish between what happened in the Soviet Union on the one hand and in Central and Eastern Europe on the other. Even in Romania some progress was possible. In the GDR [The German Democratic Republic] the Final Act was extremely effective, reinforcing the efforts of the West Germans to smother the place with kindness and credit and massive programmes of family reunification. Moreover, when the [Berlin] Wall came down and German reunification took place, it was the Helsinki Principle that the Soviet Union never thought it would have to implement (because they would never agree to any change of frontiers) which provided the basis for this peaceful change, and the transformation of Europe. So the Principles were good. Basket III in particular gave us on the Western side a legitimate reason for asking awkward questions about the social, political and economic conditions in each of the participating states. This worked more effectively in Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union. There, the decisive factors were the economy and, above all, the appearance on the scene of new leaders, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, who saw the world as it really was. My striking memory of Honecker's* East Germany is how deplorable the SED* leadership found the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. At that point the Soviet Embassy's publications were banned because of the contamination that they were spreading. So news from the Soviet Union was in the same category as *The Times* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. I remember poking fun at the GDR delegation at a CSCE information forum held here in London in 1989.

The Helsinki Principles were a powerful tool for bringing about the end of the division of Europe.

Yes, in Prague in 1987 the Czechoslovak regime also complained bitterly about the 'subversion' emanating from the Soviet embassy, which had suddenly become very popular with dissidents because of the freedom with which the Soviet press was debating reform.

On the main point, the Final Act was not a cause of change but it was a facilitator. The main reason for the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe was the growing crisis within the Soviet Union which led to a reassessment of its interests in Eastern Europe. Under Brezhnev, and until Gorbachev, the Soviet leadership regarded their hold over Eastern Europe and East Germany as an absolutely vital interest. Brezhnev said a number of times that he would go to war to defend it. Gorbachev, in contrast, saw that Eastern Europe had become an expensive liability and that using force there would damage his vital relations with the West, whose help he badly needed.

The crucial moment came when he publicly renounced the use of force for propping up the regimes of Eastern Europe. After that the empire was doomed. When the East German regime asked him to back the use of force against demonstrators in Leipzig he refused, citing the Final Act as one of the considerations that held

him back. So the main trigger for change was the change in Moscow's perception of its interests in Eastern Europe, but the Final Act certainly helped. It can certainly be argued that, without the contacts and elements of mutual understanding built up during the period of *détente*, to which the Final Act contributed, the Soviet Union would not have felt secure enough to risk abandoning Eastern Europe and in particular East Germany. That is part of the answer to those who assert – mistakenly in my view – that Ronald Reagan won the Cold War.

WATT

I think before we get too congratulatory over this, we have to remember that what really happened was with Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister and that whole group of people on whose advice they relied. Now it is I think a far cry from either the American interpretation, if I may put it this way, which emphasises the heroic efforts of the Soviet civil rights movement, to think that it was just simply a gradual breakdown of order that caused Gorbachev and his advisers to panic. The one thing that seemed to me to be apparent at the time was that Gorbachev wasn't panicking. He was wrong, in that he thought that the better parts of the Soviet system as he saw it could be salvaged if *détente*, of which he firmly approved, could be firmly established. But it was he who changed it, and most of all (I remember, because I was entirely wrong) it was his telling the East Germans that they could not rely on the Soviet Union to help them put down their own people, which brought down the Berlin Wall and the Eastern *bloc* with it. I have in my snap book a copy in of something I wrote for the *Daily Telegraph*, saying, 'You could always rely on the East German army to imitate their Prussian predecessors by shooting fellow Germans'. In the margin, I wrote, 'Wrong again, Watt'. That happened not in the minds of the civil liberty groups, it didn't happen in the minds of the Soviet economists, it happened in the minds of Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, his military advisers, the people who supported him in the KGB and the people who supported him in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and in the rest of the *Apparat*. And unless you can relate these external changes to the changes in mind and perception of these people, it seems to me that you are jumping the gun historically. Some of these Americans remind me of what Lord Melbourne* said about Lord Macaulay:* he wished he was as sure of *anything* as Lord Macaulay was of *everything*. I think that is something the historians ought to keep in mind. It was a revolution from above; but it was not intended.

The Viscount Melbourne (William Lamb, 1779-1848), Tory politician 1806-29 and thereafter a Whig. Prime Minister 1834, and 1835-41.

Lord Macaulay (Thomas Babington Macaulay, 1800-59), Whig politician and historian. Author of four volumes of *The History of England*.

MALCOLM MACKINTOSH

I really have a question to offer. I spent some time in the Second World War with the Red Army in the Balkans and I have always been interested in the military aspect of the relations between Allies during that war and in diplomatic activity in the post-war period. If you look at the process of the Helsinki Agreement, which I have listened to with much interest since the subject was raised here,

SS20 Soviet IRBM (Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile), introduced in 1978 and able to deliver multiple nuclear warheads over a range of 3000 miles

Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov (1917-94), soldier. Soviet Chief of the General Staff in 1970s and 1980s who was an exponent of the need for Soviet military supremacy and expansionism.

Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev (1923-91), Soviet soldier. Former Soviet Chief of General Staff who committed suicide after the demise of the Soviet Union.

while those negotiations and talks were going, on the military, it seems to me looking back, in the Soviet Union were actually steadily increasing their defence expenditure, their weapons development, and the evolution of their military doctrine in a most amazing way. Leaving aside strategic and the global military issues, which are outside the context here, and looking just at the European area, in the time when the talks were going in at Helsinki, we witnessed the operational deployment of the Soviet SS20 missile,* which later on of course had tremendous effect on the military balance in our region. We had the introduction of the operational manoeuvre groups in the Soviet army in Eastern Europe, associated first with Marshal Ogarkov,* Chief of the General Staff, and his successor, Marshal Akhromeev,* which involved increasing the armoured resources, given to each of the motorised rifle divisions which were stationed in Eastern Europe, and the speed of their ability to advance. There were a number of other developments going on, for example, in tactical and other exercises in the Soviet armed forces. My question really is: what was being said in Helsinki seems to me to be different from what was going on in the Soviet Ministry of Defence. Is there any evidence that there was simply no regular communication between the military's planners and executors and those who were actually negotiating with the West in the Helsinki process? Or was it that they knew what was going on but left it to the military to do what they thought was right? Of course, when Gorbachev came to power the whole process changed.

WRIGHT

George Walden, would you like to have a shot at that?

WALDEN

No. I didn't think they were incompatible, because there is a sort of group realism and they were very realistic, the Russians. I think it is a very important question to bring to light, but now you mention it, these things are not incompatible. I don't know what we ourselves were doing at the time; I don't recall the Americans letting down their guard at the time.

WRIGHT

Is it not quite possible that the Russian negotiators to whom you were talking also didn't know?

WALDEN

Brian Fall would know more about that.

FALL

I think Helsinki was almost wholly non-military. We had those Confidence Building Measures in there because it seemed odd to have a security basket and not say anything at all. But what had to be put in had to be applicable to a thirty-five-nation conference that included the Neutrals. So a great deal of the Warsaw Pact-NATO balance items were just untreatable with that framework. We had the MBFR talks going on in parallel, which Western delegations were hoping would get somewhere. The fact that they got

absolutely nowhere shows where the Soviet military interest was concentrated. And then, of course, the people who were really making their careers in the United States and the Soviet Union were negotiating with each other about strategic arms. That was the fashionable and the big-ticket item. So, from a military point of view, I think that Helsinki was just a backwater. I very much doubt whether anybody very senior in the Soviet Defence Ministry was there as one of the delegates. And it was a reasonable assumption in those days that, if a negotiating brief was in the hands of a civilian called Mendelevich,* the subject matter wasn't hitting very close to the military core.

Lev Isaakovich Mendelevich, a leading member of the Soviet delegation.

MILLER

I think it is also worth inspecting the ideological underpinning of CSCE. The Soviet Union purported to believe that, under conditions of *détente*, the political barometer swings to the left. They were trying to persuade themselves, and Communist parties in the West, that peaceful co-existence would lead to the emergence of left-wing governments in Western Europe. Portugal was a case in point, though the armed forces revolution in November 1975 was too strong a lurch to the left for Moscow's liking. But, if you believed this theory, the West was in effect being hoodwinked by the Helsinki process. And so, from the Soviet point of view, in a situation where the 'gains of socialism' might have to be protected, the military component of their foreign policy, far from diminishing, became even more important. They would have seen no contradiction.

WRIGHT

Keith Hamilton, would you like to pose another question?

HAMILTON

Yes, I would really like to pose a question for Lord Howe. Some years ago, before I started on the CSCE volume, I had to prepare an internal history of the Know-How Fund – the British technical assistance programme to Eastern Europe in the aftermath of 1989. Researching this history, one of the things that struck me was a despatch, drafted in the mid-1980s and sent to Warsaw, which suggested a break with past policies towards Eastern Europe and the adoption of a far more proactive approach towards the region. The despatch referred to the need to encourage 'creative ferment' in the East. This is rather different from earlier metaphors used in this context, in say the 1970s and early 1980s, when there was a tendency to talk about the West as a pole or magnet of attraction which would eventually draw the East away from the Soviet Union. Am I right in thinking that there was a genuine policy change in about 1985 in this respect? If there was, then how far does it relate to the CSCE? How far was it a reaction to other events in Eastern Europe?

HOWE

I can't recollect a particular despatch at that time. I am quite clear about our initial caution in 1983, but equally that became creatively

Westminster Foundation for Democracy was founded 1995 to fund projects around the world which are aimed at building and strengthening pluralist democracies. It works closely with all the political parties in the Westminster Parliament.

MUNRO

active. So it is perfectly possible we did make a conscious effort at that time. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy was founded, I think in 1990,* after the Wall had come down, so that would have been later. And, of course, I had ceased to be Foreign Secretary in July 1989.

‘Peaceful evolutionary change’, was our brief in the GDR where I went in 1987, on the eve of this remarkable visit by Honecker. The West Germans certainly subscribed to that. The magnetism of the Western way of life was evident. We were confident that the more that the East saw of it, not through the media but by personal experience, the more that they would like it. And this turned out to be the case in relation to East Germany, and also of course in relation to a country such as Hungary. Travel from Hungary, unless you were really in trouble with the regime, had been largely liberalised by the mid-1980s. So the process was underway.

HOWE

I was always extremely curious as to why it was that the Soviet leadership itself didn’t, as it seemed to me, know more about the contrasting conditions in the East and West. When Gorbachev came in 1984, he travelled to and from Chequers, (and also, later, to the ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries] laboratories) and drove through perfectly normal country villages and saw the shops with their lights on as dusk was falling at the time. And he couldn’t believe that such things existed; he was astonished to find people plying their trade and then being in the shops after working hours. But he wouldn’t have had come to Oxfordshire or Buckinghamshire to see that; he could have gone to a city just over the Finnish border (like Helsinki) to see the same thing. I have never understood why there was so little perception of how things worked outside the Soviet Union.

MUNRO

Fake villages purported to have been built by the Russian Minister, Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin, to fool the Empress Catherine the Great during her visit to Crimea in 1787. They were supposed to have been composed entirely of building façades, with no real existence as a community living there. Recent historians have, however, disputed that these villages were in fact fake.

Gregor Gysi. East German Communist, Mayor of East Berlin, 2001-2.

I think they believed it had been set up by us to impress them, like Potemkin’s villages.* I remember a lively discussion with Gregor Gysi,* who took over the former Communist Party in East Germany and is now Deputy Mayor of Berlin. He had been to Paris, his first time in a Western country. He believed that he had seen a show, and that the toiling masses were just behind the Potemkin facades past which he had been conducted. A lot of people really believed this.

WRIGHT

Can I just intervene to say that I am very ready to believe that. As a recently retired director of BP [British Petroleum] I was told that a Russian oil delegation (and I say Russian because this was just after the collapse of the Soviet Union) was invited to visit BP’s facilities in Alaska. Because the Russians could not see any oil on the

Baku in the Caucasus region is the centre of the oil industry.

John Davison Rockefeller (1839-1937), American entrepreneur. An oil millionaire who set up Standard Oil Company and became a noted philanthropist.

WALDEN

Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976), Chinese statesman. Leader of the Chinese Communists that defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (Nationalist) army in 1949 and set up the People's Republic of China, which he led, as Chairman Mao, until his death.

Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), Soviet politician. Premier 1958-64, but leader in all but name after 1955.

ground, as you see if you go to Baku* where the oil industry is almost exactly in the same state as Rockefeller* left it in 1890, although perhaps that is an exaggeration, the Russians refused to believe that BP were actually producing any oil in Alaska at all. They thought that the whole set-up was a fake.

They simply didn't travel, these people. I mean, people like Chairman Mao* hadn't been anywhere apart from Russia. But even such an advanced individual as Gorbachev hadn't been around much. But of course when they did – and that takes us back to this new generation that has been welling up ever since Khrushchev* – don't forget Khrushchev went to America and was astonished above all by the size of the corn; he couldn't believe it. He went back and launched a campaign about corn on the cob as 'queen of the fields'. They were very impressed when they saw simple human things, and that sort of juddered through the system. You had all these contacts and you get back to Professor Watt's point: there were these people, seeing things and learnings and becoming more sophisticated, and that is probably the reason ...

HENDERSON

Did our leaders in this country know what was going on in the Soviet Union in the 1920s or 1930s? The answer is, 'No'.

WRIGHT

And did the West really understand – and I say this with great respect to former Ambassadors to East Germany – how bad the economy in East Germany was?

HENDERSON

No.

MUNRO

No, we didn't. We knew less about the economy of East Germany than almost any other country of the communist *bloc*. There were no joint ventures. The East Germans wouldn't let anybody into their factories, except showcase establishments. The GDR turned out to be in a much worse state than even the biggest pessimists had predicted.

MACGREGOR

Sir Derek Thomas, diplomat. Head of North American Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1975-6, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1976-9, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Europe and Political Director, 1984-7.

Timothy Renton (Lord Renton of Mount Harry), Conservative politician. Parliamentary Private Secretary to Geoffrey Howe 1983-4, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth

Can I just say one thing to answer your question, which is that I think there must have been some kind of policy change in the 1985-86 period; because when Geoffrey Howe came, the deal was indirect contact with dissidents and, as he said, Derek Thomas* made these contacts during his visit. That was just before I arrived. In 1986 when Tim Renton* came – he was the junior minister responsible for Eastern Europe- he had direct contact with dissidents: that was the first time there had been British ministerial contact with dissidents in Czechoslovakia. But it was done in the Second Secretary's house and there was a wonderful sort of vegetable van outside the Second Secretary's house with amazing gadgetry showing through the windows, recording the details of the half

Office, 1984-5, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1985-7.

David Mellor, Conservative politician. Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1987-8.

MACGREGOR

dozen or so somewhat moth-eaten dissidents – because many were pretty moth-eaten at the time – who came in. Then the following year David Mellor,* who really took these things head-on and no doubt had his instructions ...

... he actually had a party, a sort of knees-up, with about 40 or 50 dissidents in my house when I was *Chargé*, so we had gone all the way really over a period of three years. As I say, I am not sure whether he was under instructions or not, but it happened, anyway.

WRIGHT

When I visited Warsaw in, I think, 1987, a dissident whose name I have forgotten was actually invited to come and have tea with me. I asked him whether he wasn't worried by the fact that the guard at the gate would certainly have taken his name. And he said, 'No, they have got so many names they can't do anything about it'. But it was quite a brave thing to do. Keith Hamilton, have you got a final question for us, or a comment on anything that has been said?

HAMILTON

Yes, about the conference itself, the CSCE in the early years, 1972-75. One thing that struck me, when I was looking at reviews of developments at the end of 1975 and particularly the debate at the conference of Heads of Mission in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in November 1975, was the number of references made then to the energy crisis. This is something we have not mentioned at all, yet which evidently had an impact at the end of 1973 and beginning of 1974 and which *was* relevant to Eastern Europe in so far as it impacted upon their economies and enhanced the influence of the Soviet Union. I am just wondering to what extent this accounts for some of what appears to be sort of disillusionment with the CSCE in the very early days, in the immediate aftermath of Helsinki.

MUNRO

COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) was established 1949 to further trade between Communist states. Membership included Albania (expelled 1961), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. East Germany became a member in 1950, Mongolia joined in 1962 and Cuba in 1972.

Just one thought from Romania, which did not participate in the COMECON* system for obtaining oil supplies from the Soviet Union at a favourable price, because it had oil of its own. There was a burst of optimism and over-investment in what turned out to be useless industrial plants, which depended on cheap oil. After the energy crisis, when the price of oil increased, the Romanians began to run short, couldn't afford to import. The economy, which had seemed quite promising in the early 1970s, went into a tailspin. This is another element in the collapse of the Soviet system. Their economic model simply didn't work.

WRIGHT

They were never net exporters of oil, were they?

MUNRO

They would have been earlier on, pre-Second World War. In the early post-war period they were self-sufficient.

HAMILTON

Isn't it true that certainly the East European satellites would have been very largely dependent upon the Soviet Union for energy resources in the period in the 1970s, so there was less chance of them being able to act independently after the onset of the energy crisis? I see the energy crisis having two effects really. On the one hand it weakened the magnetism of the West, and on the other hand it also may well have strengthened the position of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.

MUNRO

It had a perverse effect in East Germany. The Soviet Union actually increased the price. The East Germans couldn't afford to pay that. So they came to depend on brown coal, ruined the environment, and gave their economy another twist down the spiral.

WRIGHT

It is just a historical question, but did rising energy prices mean that the Soviet Union vastly increased their investment in their own oil production? Because one of the things that has always mystified me is the enormous resources they put into the military and space expenditure, but the extent to which they did not put comparable investment into their sources of foreign exchange.

WATT

The Arab-Israeli conflict of Oct. 1973 (called the Yom Kippur War) in which, Israel decisively defeated Arab attacks on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

If I may comment on that. The effect of the rise in oil prices on the international oil business in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973* was not at all what the OPEC [Organisation of Oil Exporting Powers] powers wanted. This was particularly apparent in the North Sea oil province. Up to then the British government had gone ahead with the exploitation of the natural gas reserves of the southern North Sea. But, until the price of crude oil went above the \$8 mark, none of the oil companies was interested in the massive up-front capital investment these enormous new fields that were being established demanded. There was even a touch of paranoia discernible in the fear that OPEC could be playing a Machiavellian game of waiting and that, once real money was invested in the northern North Sea, they would cut the price of crude oil and bankrupt the exploration business. Mr Callaghan spent the only major international meeting of the Western oil consuming countries working frenziedly to secure international agreement that the price of crude should not be allowed to fall below \$7 a barrel. It was in vain that outsiders warned him that the dependence of the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries on higher revenues from their oil made it politically impossible for all but the merest handful of its membership to play so sophisticated a game of blackmail with the consuming countries.

The terms which the Labour government laid down for the successive licensing rounds ensured the destruction of the monopoly in the international supply of oil hitherto enjoyed by the 'Seven Sisters' – the two British, one French and four American international oil companies. British insistence on licenses being applied for by consortia rather than by individual oil companies, ensured the entry

American Oil Company (Amoco) was incorporated in 1922 and bought by Rockefeller's of Standard Oil Company of Indiana in 1923. It was merged with British Petroleum in 1998.

Conoco was set up in 1875 as Continental Oil and Transportation Company.

into the North Sea oil province and thus into the international oil scene of a whole slew of new entrants from middle range American companies, like Amoco* or Conoco,* German and French state and private companies, to a whole range of new small British companies coming along for the ride. What was so noticeable was that there were no Soviet applicants. It may be taken as read that the Soviet oil-producing organisations had the know-how and the capacity at least to enter into one or more of the various consortia if not to put their own together. But it was quite clear that the Soviet system simply lacked the necessary venture capital. What HMG would have done if the Soviets had applied separately or in an Eastern European consortium for one or more licenses nobody knew. A flat refusal on strategic or other grounds would have been difficult to reconcile with the Helsinki agreements. The Soviets, still half-convinced that these enormous oil exploitation platforms that were towed out into the mid-North Sea and then sunk over the oil discoveries hid some kind of naval fortification, spent some time sniffing around them with the type of Soviet trawler that seemed to be designed to discover fish flying at several thousand feet, so thick and so misdirected were its electronic fittings, until it was made clear to them that the security exclusion zones established by law around each of the platforms were seriously intended.

WRIGHT

But getting back to the subject of our seminar, to what extent could or should the Helsinki process have enlightened, if I can put it that way, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on how to do things when selling fish. Did the exchanges actually contribute to a better awareness of what the other side was doing?

FALL

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was set up on 1947 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, one of the five regional Commissions of the United Nations, to foster greater economic co-operation among its member states.

John (Jean François) Gordon, diplomat. European Union Department, First Secretary, United Kingdom Delegation to United Nations Conference on Disarmament, Geneva 1983-8.

I think not, for the ECE* reason really, which John Macgregor has mentioned. The ECE was there and was doing as good a job as you could do in the political circumstances at the time. It did better when the politics were better, and less well when the politics were strained. But the reason that these issues came into the CSCE talks is that we on the Western side wanted very detailed terms of reference: that was our sort of conference, and we wanted quite a lot on human contacts and quite a lot on information. You couldn't therefore exclude the economic and technical agenda, which became Basket II. We assumed that the East Europeans would be actively going for as much detail as they could there, to try and win a few ECE points if you like, and that was tactically to our advantage. But the Western negotiators were really not expecting any breakthroughs or expecting any new machinery in that area, because we had an organisation already there. People like John Gordon,* who did extremely well at Dipoli, were thoroughly useful, because they knew the ECE stuff backwards and were able to play the game of draughts or chess which got played every year in the trade committee of the ECE. There was nothing really very breakthrough-y to be expected on that side of the agenda. Basket III was stuff that we

had never really negotiated with the East about before. Basket II was routine stuff which was borrowed from ECE, and sent back to ECE when Helsinki had finished with it.

WRIGHT

Incidentally, there is one very small point and that is going back to the Helsinki Conference. As Private Secretary to the Prime Minister I was probably rather more concerned with trying to handle the enormous number of bilateral briefs for the meetings which went on in the margins of Helsinki than the speechifying at the main conference itself. I don't now remember how many meetings he had, but it was jolly nearly with every one of the thirty-five heads of government I would say. It is just worth remembering that it was – and I am sure this was true of all delegations – a forum for an extraordinarily complicated programme of bilateral meetings, of which by far the most difficult thing was trying to book a room at the right time to have the meeting in. Because it was certainly part of the scene that the order of speeches had changed and therefore when you got to the meeting you found the Greek was already there talking to the Pole.

BURNS

Archbishop Makarios III (1913-77), Greek Cypriot cleric and politician. Proponent of Enosis (union of Cyprus with Greece); deported to the Seychelles in 1956 for alleged association with the EOKA terrorist group. Elected President of the Cypriot Republic 1959; survived numerous attempts on his life, but died of a heart attack in 1977.

I can remember the visuals of Stage III of Helsinki, with everybody on the stage dressed in black. Archbishop Makarios,* he was the blackest of black and headdress to boot. Everybody else wore suits, dark suits, except one who was in a light summer suit, off-white, and two-tone shoes: Tito.*

MACGREGOR

Josip Tito (1892-1980) Yugoslav soldier and statesman. Communist and leader of Partisan resistance against Nazi occupation, became Leader of the post-war federal government of Yugoslavia. The only Communist leader able to sustain opposition to Stalin and the Soviet Union. Subsequently became prominent in the Non-Aligned movement. Elected President in 1953 and President for Life in 1974.

Tito, yes!

WRIGHT

Keith Kyle, do you have any closing comments to make?

KEITH KYLE

Field Marshal R. Michael P. Carver (Lord Carver 1915-2001), soldier. Chief of Defence Staff, 1973-6,

John F. Kennedy Foundation is a private non-profit educational organisation which administers and funds programmes on behalf of the Kennedy Library and Museum.

I was involved in two minor ways in the preliminaries for the Belgrade Conference. I was a member of the UK Monitoring Group, in which Michael Carver* was a leading figure, which drew up a report ahead of Belgrade. Quite a number of us were putting in drafts and, largely thanks to Michael Carver's ability as a literary editor, I think we produced quite an effective document in record time. I also remember travelling to Maastricht at the invitation of the John F. Kennedy Foundation,* a Dutch organisation, which

had organised a sort of preliminary run-in on the Belgrade Conference. People had been invited from the East and the West and we rehearsed in these debates many of the arguments subsequently employed which have just been described.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. I think really it only remains for me to thank everybody, the witnesses and others, for attending. I hope it has been useful for historians and the like and we shall look forward to seeing the transcript, as indeed will those who were not here who have offered to add their contributions when they see it. So thank you all very much, and John [Macgregor], Colin [Munro] and Andrew Burns, I think I should say to you as the only serving members, I think, of the Diplomatic Service round the table, would you please pass on our thanks for being allowed to use the Locarno Room for this seminar. Thank you very much indeed.

British Policy and CSCE in the 1970s

Written Response to the Witness Seminar

Sir Reginald Hibbert (1922-2003)

Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1975-76;

Deputy Under-Secretary of State, 1976-79

My first point is drawn from the documents in Series III, Volume III, *Détente in Europe 1972-76*, in the series Documents on British Policy Overseas.

It is clear from those documents that, until mid-1974, the attitude of FCO officials dealing with CSCE and relations with the Soviet Union was defensive and negative. Peaceful coexistence was a Soviet weapon to weaken NATO and to get the Americans out of Europe. Our proudest hour in relations with the Soviet Union had been, and still was, the mass expulsion of Soviet intelligence agents. We would join in negotiations with the Soviet Union as long as our allies and partners wanted to conduct them, but we were deeply sceptical that any good could come of it, and the British foot was kept firmly on the brakes.

In mid-1974 Mr Hattersley, at the request of Mr Callaghan, wrote a long paper calling for a modification of this attitude.¹ We were to seek a more productive relationship with the Soviet Union and show a willingness to initiate movement rather than respond to the proposals and policies of others. In other words, we were no longer to regard relations with the Soviet Union as a zero-sum game.

The reaction of FCO officials, as can be clearly seen from the documents, was to say, 'Yes, Minister', and then add a grudging little series of 'buts'.

However, the modified policy went forward. Prime Minister Wilson visited Moscow in February 1975. Nothing dramatic was achieved, but Britain was back in line with her allies. No harm ensued.

This was soon followed by the Summit Meeting at Helsinki at which Heads of Government endorsed the Final Act. The terms of the Final Act were somewhat better than the pessimistic FCO Soviet experts had ever believed possible. It furnished handholds in Basket III which could slowly be used against the Soviet Union. But it was not fashionable to be enthusiastic about it and, in general, an attitude of scepticism continued to prevail.

I had been brought back from Singapore in 1972 to become No.2 to Nico Henderson in Bonn. There I learned to sympathise with Chancellor Brandt's² policy of seeking *Wandel durch Annäherung*³, of which Egon Bahr⁴ was the main executive. It seemed to me to be a good policy for the German people and indeed good for all of us if it was pursued with care. I was often adversely impressed by the tendency of people in the FCO to regard the Germans as a bit soft and

1 DBPO, Series. III, Volume III, No.66

2 Willy Brandt (1913-92), German politician. Mayor of West Berlin 1957-66, Chancellor of FDR 1969-74.

3 *Wandel durch Annäherung* is perhaps best (but not literally) translated as 'change through approach'. It was used for the first time by Egon Bahr in a speech at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing on 15 July 1963 as a way to find a new basis of the East-West-relationships in the mutual recognition of interests. *Wandel durch Annäherung* became the basis of Chancellor Brandt's policy towards East Germany.

4 Egon Bahr, West German politician. An SDP politician who assisted Willy Brandt in development of *Ostpolitik*. Mayor of West Berlin 1960-6, served as FDR Foreign Minister 1966-9, Under-Secretary of State 1969-72 in Brandt administration.

Egon Bahr as a bit too inclined to compromise. In fact Egon Bahr was a good German nationalist, a moderate and careful one, but in no way inclined to give things away. One day at a meeting on the negotiation of the Final Quadripartite Protocol⁵ there had been much talk of ‘*Gesamtdeutschland*’.⁶ In an interval I invited him to point out on a map in front of us how much was included in his ‘*Gesamtdeutschland*’. Without saying a word he put his finger on East Prussia. No-one seemed to believe that ‘*Wandel durch Annäherung*’ would achieve big change, but it alleviated the predicament of the German people in small but important ways and there was the long-term chance that, if the Soviet system changed over many years, it would have prepared the way for the dream of German reunification.

I came back to the FCO as Assistant Under-Secretary for Europe in 1975 and a year later became Deputy Under-Secretary and Political Director. By then it had become perfectly respectable in the office to discuss *détente* as a pragmatic diplomatic technique, provided one was not starry-eyed about it. It was easy to define it. It consisted of reacting firmly to provocations from the East (e.g. around Berlin), but if possible avoiding rushes to confrontation, and certainly to physical confrontation, so as to keep international tension from flaring. Below that, the aim was to find ways of wearing away at the Soviet *bloc* side while avoiding being worn away ourselves and avoiding provoking the Soviet side to break off. In fact the aim was a carefully controlled, very narrow band of *détente* at the top of a standing and long-established column of East-West tension. This had the approval of ministers. It was a generally understood procedure among the Political Directors of the Nine.⁷ It was, importantly, very acceptable to the neutral and non-aligned states.

It was easier to define than to implement. Many people did not believe in the definition. There were incidents here and there which gave rise to pressures to confront the Russians, for example to expel two or three spies now and then, to react sharply to Soviet provocation in various parts of the world, etc., etc. There were rough incidents in East Germany for BRIXMIS.⁸ The East German government tried to chip away at Berlin. There tended to be demands for unnecessarily strong and showy action, particularly from the Embassy in East Berlin and from British Military Government Berlin, but also from officials in various parts of the office and posts abroad who had never really been convinced by the Hattersley minute of 1974.

An interesting confrontation occurred in the spring of 1977. When Lord Goronwy Roberts⁹ was visiting posts in Eastern Europe, Percy Cradock¹⁰ in East Berlin complained to him that the wise counsels of those who knew about Germany were being overridden and even ignored in London, and he pointed the finger at me. Behind this lay frictions with the East Germans who

5 1971 Quadripartite Agreements on Berlin (see reference no.53).

6 *Gesamtdeutschland* is a particular German term that may be translated as ‘all Germany’. However, the extent of ‘all Germany’, particularly during the period before unification, was not clear.

7 The Nine – EEC members – Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

8 BRIXMIS is an acronym for the British Commanders'-in-Chief Mission to the Soviet forces in Germany. BRIXMIS was set up on 16 Sept. 1946 under the Robertson-Malinin Agreement between the chiefs of staff of the British and Soviet forces in occupied Germany. The agreement called for the reciprocal exchange of liaison missions in order to foster good working relations between the military occupation authorities in the two zones.

9 Goronwy Roberts (Lord Goronwy-Roberts of Carnarvon, 1913-81), Labour politician. Minister of State, FCO 1967-9, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, FCO, 1974-5, Minister of State, FCO 1975-9.

10 Sir Percy Cradock, diplomat. HM Ambassador to German Democratic Republic, 1976-8. See also *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London: John Murray, 1997) and *Experiences of China* (London: John Murray, 1999).

were trying to remove symbols and practices which supported the four-power status of Berlin and the rights of access of the West Germans. From London, we took the line that we would move if the Russians moved, but we were not so worried about the East Germans unless the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] became anxious. So we confined ourselves to protests and to maintaining our legal position, but tried to avoid retaliatory action. Percy Cradock regarded this as a sort of appeasement. It was the zero-sum game raising its head again. Percy [Cradock] was supported from BMG Berlin and a bit from Bonn, where Julian Bullard, one of the strongest of the pre-Hattersley FCO pessimists, had replaced me. Of course, those in Berlin and Bonn were in the front line and keen not to let the East win points. A large meeting was held in London with representatives from Moscow, both Berlins, Bonn, Washington, Paris, Budapest and all the interested FCO departments. Dr David Owen himself attended part of it. Ian Sutherland,¹¹ the Assistant Under-Secretary for Europe and himself an accredited and respect Sovietologist, and David Goodall,¹² the head of Western European Department, made excellent presentations. The Berliners had their say. Others were 'statesmanlike'. No conclusions were reached and we all went back to work and continued as before.

Policy formation on CSCE tended to be a bit haphazard. It was somewhat at the mercy of events, in the press, in Parliament, in President Carter's policies, etc. An anecdote may show how erratic it could sometimes be. At about this time it became necessary to appoint a head of the UK delegation for the CSCE Review Conference. I was abroad a great deal canvassing colleagues of the Nine, the neutral and non-aligned and even the East Europeans and Russians, and of course the Americans, mostly about CSCE. When I returned to London on one occasion I was told that the No 1 Board¹³ had met and had agreed unanimously to appoint Percy Cradock to lead the delegation. I did agree, didn't I? I refused to vote for him and said that we needed to appoint a firm and flexible negotiator and not a potential public prosecutor. I was called in by the Permanent Under-Secretary¹⁴ and then by Lord Goronwy Roberts, who both tried to persuade me to give way. I said I could work with anyone they appointed, but I would not vote for Percy [Cradock]. Two or three weeks later, at the next meeting of the No 1 Board, without any explanation, Richard Parsons¹⁵ was proposed as leader of the delegation. He did a very good job at the Review Conference.

The Review Conference entailed a great deal of discussion among the Nine in the Political Committee, in NATO, with the neutral and non-aligned states, and of course with Washington. On the whole the various teams held well together and it was possible to work towards that narrow band of *détente* which kept the Russians at the table as targets and prevented them from doing us down in any way. Difficulties began to arise towards the end, when Senator Arthur Goldberg arrived from Washington with the mission of raising the level of attack on the Soviet Union. This tended to make it more difficult to keep the neutral and non-aligned alongside us and caused some disarray among the Nine. The Callaghan government had grown very weak at this time. On one occasion, after spending an hour with Senator Goldberg, Dr David Owen remarked to me that the only time when he could get applause from both sides in the House of Commons was when he criticised the Soviet Union sharply. I think we managed to hold on to Senator Goldberg's

11 Sir Ian Sutherland (1925-86) diplomat. Minister, Moscow 1974-6, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, FCO 1976-8 and HM Ambassador to Soviet Union 1982-5.

12 Sir David Goodall, diplomat. Head of Western European Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1975-9.

13 No.1 Board is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Board responsible for senior appointments, including Heads of Delegation.

14 Sir Michael Palliser, civil servant. Permanent Under Secretary at the FCO, 1975-82.

15 Sir Richard Parsons, diplomat. HM Ambassador to Hungary 1976-9; HM Ambassador to Sweden 1984-7.

coat tails and maintain the gains we had made in the negotiations. The Review Meeting ended inconclusively; but in retrospect it can be seen that this was not necessarily a bad thing. The Russians did not feel themselves able to walk away, and the friction on them of the CSCE process continued.

Another anecdote illuminates this period for me. My daughter spent six months at the Karl Marx University at Sofia working on a project led by Michael Kaser¹⁶ of St Antony's [College, Oxford] on the economics of the Eastern European countries. One day she was in a bus in a remote part of the country and listened to the passengers talking about their concerns. Suddenly one of the men said he was going to go to America to join his brother who had gone there after the war. The rest laughed him down. 'You can't get out', they said. 'No-one can get out.' He pulled out of his pocket a sheet of the government newspaper containing the full text of the Helsinki Final Act, and for the rest of the journey the travellers conducted a sort of seminar on Basket III. Of course an incident of that sort was only a tiny straw, or even just a tiny blade of grass. But I think that many, many thousands of such straws were appearing throughout Eastern Europe, and we in the West knew almost nothing about it. Even if all such straws were woven together into a rope, they would not have been enough to pull down the Soviet system. But I think the propagation of the Final Act throughout Eastern Europe was of cardinal importance in preparing people in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary and in East Germany to believe that it would be possible to go on the streets and make demands. And by the time they had worked themselves up to do so, the Soviet Union was for other reasons of growing internal crisis inhibited from shooting them down.

The Helsinki Final Act has never enjoyed general commendation in the West. I think this is because its effects were on the attitudes of ordinary people, with governments trying to catch up rather than leading. Officials know more about governments than about people. They can perhaps be excused for not having been very sure what they had achieved. None of us foresaw the collapse of the Soviet system so soon. Some of us, the optimists, believed it might occur as a form of decay in the twenty-first century, but not in our lifetimes. The most we were achieving until then was a very little gradual peaceful coexistence, and even that was still not regarded as a politically correct term.

Another anecdote is that in, I think, 1986 at Ditchley¹⁷ we had one of our conferences on the German question. There was a very strong attendance from the *Auswärtiges Amt* and *Bundestag*.¹⁸ The Germans all swore that the question of German unification simply did not arise. The British and Americans expressed incredulity. How could '*Wandel durch Annäherung*' make sense if the idea of ultimately reuniting Germany in some way did not exist? And how could you persuade those of us who had been in Germany on the day when the Eastern Treaties were debated in the *Bundestag*, and you could not get service anywhere in the FRG because everyone was glued to the radio listening to the debates, ever be persuaded that the question of reunification did not form a sort of bedrock on which German politics were built? Only three or four years later the Berlin Wall fell. The high German officials, like we Western officials, had left out of account the deep, powerful and obscure movements of peoples and popular opinion and underestimated what was happening in the world.

My final point is that, when I returned to London, I found the basic Whitehall assessments of the Soviet threat somewhat exaggerated and unbalanced, and this seemed to me to underlie some

16 Professor Michael Kaser, economist. Director, St Antony's College, Oxford, 1988-93 and Special Adviser to Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons 1985-7.

17 Ditchley Park is the setting for series of conferences held annually by the Ditchley Foundations which were set up in 1958 to further Anglo-American links.

18 Respectively the West German Foreign Ministry and Parliament.

of the defensiveness and negativeness in attitudes towards East-West relations. The assessments always stressed the Soviet Union's long-term theoretical aims and underplayed the many powerful constraints which actually determined Soviet actions. And they made relatively little of the Soviet Union's very real economic and social weaknesses. Naturally, the weapons count was always uppermost. I tried to get some of the assessments modified a little, but it was an uphill task. The general mindset in various quarters in the FCO and Whitehall continued to contain hangovers from the period before the Hattersley minute of 1974. Perhaps this did not matter. We were only one country among many. The 1974 modification enabled us to get back into the front line in the *détente* struggle, and we all got there together in the end.

February 2002

Reflections on the CSCE 'Circus'

K. A. Bishop, CMG, OBE

Principal Conference Interpreter, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1968-98.

I was a 'dirty-hands' practitioner rather than a policy-maker, both at the Geneva stage and at the later Madrid conference. At Geneva I 'did battle' (yes it *was* a largely adversarial experience) performing essentially in the Basket I context. As the FCO's chief Russian-speaker and one of its long-term in-house Russia-watchers, I also acted as linguistic advocate and watchdog trying to ensure that any Russian texts both said the same as, and carried the same nuances (sometimes constructive ambiguities) as, corresponding texts in English and the other official languages. This linguistic watchdog role I repeated at the Madrid meeting in 1983, both for the UK delegation and also, by agreement, on behalf of the NATO caucus.

We had consistently found in earlier negotiations, e.g. the Berlin Quadripartite talks in 1971 (in which I participated), that Soviet negotiators, at all levels, clearly recognised the importance of language in the negotiating process. They frequently sought to exploit the rendering of agreed texts into Russian as an opportunity of last resort for sharp practice, such as clawing back earlier concessions. They tended to claim the right to criticise texts in other languages but to reserve for themselves the exclusive right to dictate what was acceptable or legitimate Russian. Often they prepared thoroughly dishonest translations of agreed documents and resisted all but minor changes, in the hope that foreign delegations would lose interest and cease objecting, or even 'pay' for any amendments with concessions on matters of substance. Other tendentious ploys included: using words in other than their normally accepted sense; misquotations or selective quotations; exploiting differences of nuance between Russian words and the other languages being used; substituting narrow for general meanings and *vice versa*. Sometimes, after a text had been agreed, even in private and delicate negotiations, they later substituted and even published a different version. If this was pointed out, they tended to admit the difference and claim that an error had been made in transmission. They attached great importance to Titles of documents, to Preambles, as also to Communiqués, Agreed Minutes and Joint Declarations, and were prepared to invest many hours of effort and guile in their drafting. They would go to great lengths to secure even a title or preamble which favoured the Soviet approach, as these, in Soviet eyes, were 'political' essentials which conditioned all that followed.

It was, therefore, found important whenever possible in negotiating with the Soviet Union to include in the British official delegations at least one person with substantial expertise in the Russian language in order to help to counter or prevent this Soviet chicanery. On many occasions, and the CSCE was no exception, negotiating outcomes would have been fundamentally worse or even totally nullified by Soviet linguistic sharp practice if such expertise had not been employed. As noted above, I represented that expertise at Geneva and Madrid. At the former, my efforts involved (to give just one example from among the many) ensuring that, when agreed English texts spoke of the 'inviolability of frontiers', the correct Russian word was used rather than ones preferred by the Soviet delegation (and used, to reinforce the 'Brezhnev Doctrine', in Soviet/Warsaw Pact bilateral documents) which meant 'untouchability' and even, in some cases, 'immutability'! There were rows too over Soviet assertions (false) that, when the Basket III text required the participating states to respect citizens' rights to 'profess and practise religion', the Russian language and hence the official Russian text needed only *one* verb 'to profess' to cover both concepts!

Soviet delegates at Madrid (Kondrashev¹⁹ [of the KGB] and Shikalov of the Foreign Ministry) were even prepared to do violence to the rules of Russian grammar to gain advantage on a matter of substance, seeking in one instance to suppress an essential comma in the Russian text in order to obfuscate the area to which confidence-building measures would extend; we spent much time arguing with them literally over that single comma, one that made all the difference.

After the Madrid meeting, it was recognised on the Western side that the linguistic efforts deployed by myself and in particular an American colleague (Count Obolevsky)²⁰ on behalf of the NATO caucus had succeeded in persuading the Soviet Delegation to bring the Russian version of the Final Document back into line with the text already agreed and with the five other conference languages on a number of issues of political importance to the future of the CSCE process. The Russians had attempted, by surreptitiously introducing textual changes which were minor in linguistic terms but highly prejudicial in substance, to claw back earlier agreements. Had these Soviet ploys succeeded, they could for example have completely prevented the Ottawa meeting of Experts on Human Rights from reviewing the performance of participating states in each others' countries; and they would also have radically reinterpreted to Soviet advantage previous agreements on the Mandate of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament.²¹

This linguistic task, exercised at the negotiations and requiring repeated checks with the FCO in London and Legal Advisers, involved a kind of daily war of attrition. This was both caused by and reflected the almost completely opposed aims of the Soviet and Western sides in starting and pursuing the CSCE process: on the Soviet side defensive and static, seeking to codify and to perpetuate the *status quo* including a permanent hold on their client states in Eastern Europe and to keep 'contamination' from outside at arms' length ('what we have we hold'); and on the Western side offensive and dynamic, seeking both the '*Gulliverisation*' of the Soviet Union (its tying down with a myriad of small agreements or undertakings which it would have to live up to and by which it might be restrained from dangerous adventure) and at the same time its '*Colanderisation*' (its opening up to the outside world and its penetration by observers [external and, even more importantly, internal], who would for the first time shed light in corners till then kept deliberately dark and who could speak out about abuses, Soviet failure to honour agreements, etc.). With the emergence of 'Helsinki Watch' and other CSCE monitoring efforts and through the fearless and self-sacrificial diligence of Soviet champions of human rights such as Academician Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner, Nathan Shcharansky and hosts of other whistle-blowers, we were in due course to find, in my view, that the 'Colanderisation' had been vastly more far-reaching and quicker in its effects than the 'Gulliverisation'. The Soviet Union's undertaking (Basket 3) to end the jamming of foreign broadcasts for example, along with the obligation to publish all the main CSCE texts including certain unprecedented 'dynamic' commitments (all of these moves being induced and legitimised by the CSCE) opened the eyes of millions of Soviet citizens to external realities, and to 'Western' rights and opportunities which had been concealed from them or presented distortedly to them for so long. I believe it is not fanciful to assert that the CSCE Final Act and the follow-up meetings – especially Madrid – (though we in the FCO and in other Western chanceries did not at all appreciate it at the time) were perhaps the greatest single instrument producing that eventual radical and mould-breaking change of *zeitgeist* which, a decade and more on,

19 S. A. Kondrashev, Soviet KGB official, diplomat and member of delegation to Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1972-5. Kondrashev later served as head of the KGB's German department, spent time in Karlshorst and Vienna, and became a leading KGB disinformation activist. He is joint author of *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* with David E. Murphy and George Bailey (Yale: Yale University Press, 1997).

20 Count Alexis N. Obolensky, Russian émigré and former US State Department diplomat.

21 Quotation from an internal FCO memorandum analysing the CSCE process.

saw thousands of citizens in East Germany prepared to demonstrate on the streets and to defy the police and the *Stasi*²² to arrest them all: in short, that ‘hinge’ moment which rapidly thereafter resulted in the unravelling of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and the collapse of communist rule in Russia. (I am of course aware of other, including economic, factors such as the Soviet refusal to quit the unwinnable arms race, which contributed to that same outcome).

We were all, on both sides of that East/West fence, taken by surprise at the speed of the unravelling, though the CSCE had done so much to make it inevitable *some day*. Had I been able to attend the witness seminar I would have quoted the taunting phrase thrown at the West at the height of Gorbachev’s *glasnost* and *perestroika* period at the end of the 1980s by the late doyen of Soviet America-watchers, Academician Georgii Arbatov, ‘We’ve done a terrible thing to you: we’ve deprived you of an enemy’. Within two years of this jibe, by which time Soviet rule had collapsed in Russia, Arbatov would have been open to the rejoinder, ‘Yes indeed you have, but *we* have deprived *you* of an ideology, a *raison d’être* as a system and – unless you now join us collaboratively (for which we have long hoped) – of much of a say in the shape of the future. So do join us please’.

The CSCE – viewed originally and well into the 1980s with some caution, much doubt as to its usefulness and at times with scepticism by the FCO and many of its Western European counterparts – had served in ways originally unimagined to get Soviet behaviour in a wide range of fields onto the international (and national) agenda as a legitimate topic for mutual examination and review. That and other unprecedented CSCE-induced moves proved to be irreversible and uniquely far-reaching in their consequences. I doubt that the collapse of Communist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe would have happened anything like as soon without the catalytic ‘CSCE effect’. The ultimate rewards of the CSCE process massively outweighed its initial drawbacks, which included, paradoxically,, an opportunity that was seized by the KGB for further empire-building on the grounds that, with all these foreigners as well as Soviet busy-bodies who would now (thanks to Basket III) be moving around the USSR to assert the new rights of greater freedom of travel etc. as well as to dig out and publish evidence of Soviet ‘misdeeds’ the internal watchdogs needed to be even more numerous and vigilant.

I should finally add my voice to those of many others with inside knowledge who are aware of the enormous debt of recognition owed to two young British diplomats: (Brian, now Sir Brian, Fall and George Walden, MP) who – in the Helsinki ‘tea party’ talks leading to the launching of CSCE and the Final Act at Geneva – devised and then won Soviet acceptance for the ‘Three-Basket’ arrangement. That brainchild of theirs – and Basket III in particular – proved to be a true maker of modern history.

22 The *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* or *Stasi* was the principal security and intelligence agency in East Germany.

Some Observations

Laurence O'Keefe, CMG, CVO (1931 – 2003)

Head of the British Delegation to the Third (Vienna) Follow-Up Meeting 1986-89

After reading the transcript of the witness seminar, I feel bound to comment that Lord Howe was not the only minister to find the documentation and, indeed, the CSCE proceedings as a whole, deeply impenetrable. People like me were employed to save them the trouble of delving too deeply. I shall always be grateful to him and to the FCO generally for letting me conduct the detailed negotiations on the ground within the broad, agreed ministerial remit. As with the Geneva negotiations themselves, ministers from other countries were not so forbearing.

Roland Dumas and Genscher,¹ for instance, got so fed up at one point that they descended on Vienna with the ambition of breaking what they conceived to be the Gordian knot that they believed that we, the negotiators, had created for ourselves. Their ignorance of the specialised and rigid form of Helsinki negotiations, the product of East-West suspicions and outright hostility going back to Dipoli, caused them simply to kick over the table and scatter all the pieces. This created the longest procedural hiatus in the whole history of the Helsinki process, while the Austrian and Cypriot delegates (yes indeed) fought out a personal battle over the latter's insistence on adding an animal rights cause to Helsinki commitments. I refer to the outcome in my lecture to St. Anthony's College, Oxford, which will be reproduced in this collection: here I would only add that these ministers caused us to lose three weeks at the precise moment Gorbachev broke clear of his adversaries at the All Union meeting of the CPSU (only the fifth since the October Revolution) thus enabling the delegation in Vienna to begin negotiating in earnest at last – not only with us but with the recalcitrants on their side like Czechoslovakia and the DDR.

Vienna was no different from Helsinki/Geneva, or the Belgrade and Madrid meetings, in that it was apparently static to the outside observer, but absorbing to the players (hence my 'enthusiasm' which I see was no different from that of the original British negotiators who testified at the Witness Seminar). The apparent torpor in Vienna was due not to the idleness and obtuseness of the players but the time it took Gorbachev to prevail in Moscow, and subsequently in Prague and East Berlin. The West itself was not entirely guiltless as long as some EU partners sought to establish a 'European' identity by distancing themselves from the United States. This was an unforgivable waste of time when no difference of substance existed between us over human rights; but happily matters improved with the arrival of the adroit and subtle Gilles Curien² as French delegate about half-way through. Even then, there were dozens of national sensitivities to cater for: the Scandinavian obsession with the environment; Canada's concern for Soviet Inuit (on behalf of Canadian Inuit); Greek/Turkish differences which provoked bellicose headlines in the Greek and Turkish press, to name but a few.

As to the necessity of a Concluding Document at all in Vienna, this was a common position of all participants at all Follow-up Meetings, not always for the same reasons. For the West, the Vienna Document was important in that it established a work programme on human rights (the Human Dimension meetings in Copenhagen, Paris and Moscow) to counterbalance the 'military' programme on Conventional Arms and Confidence-building Measures which risked hijacking the

1 Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German politician. Foreign Minister, 1974-82, 1982-92.

2 Gilles Curien, French diplomat. Ambassador to Switzerland, 1979-82, and to NATO, 1985-7.

Helsinki process as a whole. As it happened, the Human Dimension meetings changed the whole landscape of pan-European co-operation, making the Vienna Document of cardinal importance, at least in retrospect. The other major gain was the inclusion of the freedom of movement clause, the practical effects of which are described in my St Antony's lecture which now follows.

... And The Walls Came Tumbling Down

Laurence O'Keeffe

Seminar at St Antony's College, Oxford, 18 November 1996

My contribution can only be to add a dash of pepper and salt to a dish which the historians among you will spend the rest of your professional lives trying to digest.

I have to start with a description of the part of the Cold War battlefield I found myself in towards the end of 1986. From this I will go on to describe the events I witnessed and some of the people I met during the collapse of Communism in Central Europe in 1989 and early 1990. Call it oral history if you think this gives my remarks greater academic respectability.

In the spring of 1986 I was appointed Head of the British Delegation to the Review Meeting of the Helsinki Final Act, which was to open in the autumn in Vienna. I had no qualifications for the post and no relevant experience whatever. But, then, that never stopped Personnel Department and they do like their little jokes.

The Helsinki process may be as unfamiliar to you now as it was to me then. This is an enormous and complicated subject. If it ever fitted into any course on European politics or security or whatever at St Antony's I would be glad to contribute. It is not my subject today, but so relevant is it as background I must at least try to give you a thumbnail sketch. To those to whom it is new I say: try to prevent your eyes from glazing over. Any specialist here will know I am simplifying to the point of parody.

Undeterred I'd better begin. The Second World War was the only war affecting Europe that did not end in a peace treaty. The best that could be done was the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which was devised with a great deal of difficulty over the years 1972 to 1975, to govern relations between states in a divided continent. Here in Oxford I should add that the present Principals of Lady Margaret Hall³ and Green College⁴ played notable parts in the drafting.

There are many ironies about the Final Act. For starters it was not drafted in Helsinki at all, but in Geneva, which has a better climate and is easier to get to. To be sure the work began in Dipoli, a suburb of Helsinki, and Dipoli veterans always have a special prestige in those circles to this day. The Final Act was also signed in Helsinki at a jamboree of the great and the good in 1975. But in terms of the mental and physical effort it ought by rights to be called the Geneva Final Act.

Secondly, in the general perception these days it is always associated primarily with human rights.

In fact, the Act covers everything from military security and commercial exchanges to family visits and town twinning. These last two look rather peculiar, until one realises that they were dear to German hearts as a means of promoting human contacts across the great divide. But in sum the Helsinki Final Act is a bit like *The News of the World*: all human life is there.

And as for human rights, all Helsinki does is to reaffirm, with a bit of padding, the two United Nations covenants on the subject which already had the force of international law. The only participant in Helsinki that had not accepted both was the United States, where the Senate had refused to ratify the Convention on Economic and Social Rights as too socialist.

3 Sir Brian Fall was Principal of Lady Margaret Hall (LMH), Oxford, between 1995 and 2002.

4 Sir Crispin Tickell was Warden of Green College, Oxford, between 1990 and 1997.

Compliance was another matter and it was for this reason that the Act was initially more controversial in the West than in the East. Here is Mrs Thatcher, as she then was, in the House of Commons ten years later:

There were very real fears that we in the West had accepted the division of Europe for all time, in return for a few scraps of paper which would never be honoured. People remained in prison or psychiatric hospitals simply for the 'crime' of claiming their human rights ...

Etc., etc. The catalogue will be familiar to you. These fears were not unreasonable if one remembers that Helsinki began as a Soviet initiative and that Henry Kissinger thought it a price worth paying for the Berlin Agreement and the talks on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions. These enjoyed an idle and fruitless existence until they were dissolved at the end of the Vienna meeting I have yet to come to.

Appearances were, however, deceptive.

Built into the Act was the principle of Review, whereby every three years or so all participants from the superpowers down to little Liechtenstein and San Marino met to consider 'progress' in its implementation. To the West, this came down to an attempt to shame the Soviet Union and its allies into improving their deplorable human rights record.

Of course, we paid lip service to the rest, even to the merits of town twinning. My negotiating brief covered the lot and I had a team under instructions to participate to the full in all the earnest discussions on each and every part – or 'Baskets' as they are called. Helsinki legend has it that we owe this quaint but useful term to the present Principal of LMH, Sir Brian Fall.

But Mrs Thatcher herself had written across the top of my brief, 'This meeting is about human rights and nothing else'. We took our lead from this and for negotiating style we took as our text some words of Sir Geoffrey Howe's opening speech in Vienna. 'Frankness', he said, 'may not always be welcome but it is seldom a barrier to greater understanding.'

Vienna in consequence was hugely enjoyable for those of us whose usual working environment was the world of gentle hints and mild reproaches. It was thus no different from the two previous Reviews, although we never quite had the fisticuffs that marked the Madrid meeting three years before. Madrid started in the shadow of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; was suspended a year later while M. Claude Cheysson,⁵ then French Foreign Minister, was in mid-speech condemning martial law in Poland; was resumed with great difficulty after months of recess; and ended in the wake of the Korean Airlines disaster.

Vienna was not that bad, but, surprisingly when one considers that the Gorbachevian Revolution began within weeks of our starting, it was hard pounding all the way. This was mystifying and exasperating: but looking back I can now see that the Russians simply had to put up a smoke-screen until Gorbachev was clear in his own mind and master in his own house. This took until July 1988. After that there was the difficult task of persuading the Soviet Union's more reactionary allies to fall in line. For the record, Czechoslovakia was the second last, and East Germany the last to do so. Romania, scarcely by then an ally at all, was intransigent to the bitter end; but the very first act of Ceaucescu's successors was to announce that they accepted the Vienna Concluding Document after all.

But why, in the years of Brezhnevian night, did the Soviet Union put up with all the aggro? I think because they interpreted the Act as implicitly recognising the post-war settlement of Europe and for this they were prepared to put up with the occasional – harmless as they saw it – wiggling on human rights. For the same reason many in the West saw no value in the Review procedure. But all were wrong. The post-war settlement, as we now know, proved illusory and the human rights issue was far from harmless.

5 Claude Cheysson, French politician and diplomat. Minister for External Relations, 1981-4.

For what the Russians had no experience of was the power of a free press. In the global ideological battle they were engaged in, their own people – and people in countries they were trying to influence – were being periodically reminded by radio that Soviet leaders did not respect freedom of thought and information and the rest of it. Furthermore, they did not honour international undertakings which they themselves had freely undertaken. So was it any wonder they were so mistrusted generally? The rulers had ideological answers which satisfied them, but the common sense of the ruled saw these as specious and indeed mendacious. For these reasons, while ordinary people in the West hardly knew there was a Helsinki process at all, it was taken deadly seriously by rulers and ruled in the East.

The rationale of Helsinki of course changed once Mr Gorbachev embarked on reform. As we battled on in Vienna we began to be conscious that the proceedings were actually helpful to him and his allies. Both reformers and reactionaries in Moscow were agreed on the desperate financial necessity of scaling down their forces in Europe. By making clear in Vienna that there was no possibility of a deal on conventional arms unless we got satisfaction on human rights, the West was thus giving the reformers a hand in their struggle with Ligachev⁶ and Greschko and the rest.

Well, as you will know, we were eventually able to strike a satisfactory deal on both human rights and conventional arms. This was a feat an unkind British critic at the outset described as trying to go through a revolving door in both directions at once – so you will allow me a little modest satisfaction at our having accomplished this trick. Such at any rate was my part of the battlefield between 1986 and 1989. I can now return to my oral history.

I first began to sense something unusual in the air as early as September 1986, when I went to Moscow to get some measure of the opponents we were about to face in Vienna. The meetings themselves were nothing special, simply the usual diplomatic minuet that characterised our relations with the old Soviet Union. Some of the characters sitting round the table were more interesting though.

One was the young Andropov, as in Andropov.⁷ He was a timid alcoholic; victim I assumed of all the complexes common to the sons of famous fathers. Gorbachev owed his career to the father and wanted to give the son his chance in Vienna: but the attempt foundered at the preparatory meeting and he was replaced by the wholly more formidable Yuri Kashlev,⁸ who was both a worthy adversary and an honourable colleague.

The second figure of historical interest round that table was Kondrashev of the KGB. He I looked on with some alarm, knowing he had been expelled from Britain for running George Blake, the notorious spy.⁹ My terror would have been greater if I had known then that in 1946 he had been one of the interrogators of those surviving Hitler's bunker at the fall of Berlin. All of these, both men and women, had been systematically and savagely tortured before Stalin was satisfied that his fellow-criminal was well and truly dead.

Kondrashev revealed all this in a television programme here last year and I thought then, how unlike our own dear Trevor-Roper.¹⁰ But Comrade Kondrashev had a certain silky charm and

6 Yegor Ligachev, Russian politician. Although initially an ally of Gorbachev, Ligachev approached the reform programmes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* with suspicion and eventually became a critic within the Kremlin. The divisions within the Soviet hierarchy came to a head in July 1990, when he failed in his challenge to oust Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

7 Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov (1914-84), Soviet politician. General Secretary of the Communist Party, 1982-4.

8 Yuri Kashlev is now the First Vice-Rector, Diplomatic Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow.

9 George Blake was a double agent who was unmasked in 1961. He escaped from Wormwood Scrubs prison in 1966 and fled to the Eastern *bloc*.

absolutely perfect, idiomatic English. He was an old Helsinki hand, but he too faded from the scene after the Preparatory Conference for reasons that are not entirely clear.

But no, it was not at the table but at the Bolshoi in the evening that I felt the first tremor of what was to come. It was Swan Lake – it always seems to be Swan Lake at the Bolshoi – and there I was with my opposite number and his wife, sophisticated, educated Muscovites both. He and I had discussed music and literature over lunch and there we were seeing the best that classical ballet has to offer. He must have been much moved, for during the applause at the end when he could be sure that he could not be overheard he leaned over and murmured something for my ears only. ‘Vienna was going to be rough’, he said, ‘Very rough’: but I was to remember that underneath it all, ‘We all share the same values’.

I often remembered his words afterwards in Vienna. I was convinced I had heard the voice of Gorbachev’s natural constituency: those on whom he tried to build a freer and more intelligently ordered society. These were the people who had more to fear from the oriental tyranny that was Marxist-Leninism than ever we did. Indeed the incongruous thought occurred to me then that people like this were probably *in favour* of the Iron Curtain – always provided it was erected somewhere to the east of Moscow. Some Communist delegates in Vienna, the Hungarians and Poles in particular, also thought there was nothing wrong with an iron curtain either, except the one they had was in the wrong place. And where was the right place? Anywhere to the east of *them*, of course.

This is worth thinking about as NATO grapples with the problem of trying to accommodate Central European states without isolating Russia.

But whatever their private feelings, our Russian colleagues were professionals and Vienna was just as rough and tough as I had been promised. There were some lighter moments, however. To give you the flavour I will remember two tonight.

During the debate on radio jamming, I much enjoyed recounting the troubles of the Soviet Ambassador in London who had complained to the press that our jamming was preventing him from hearing Radio Moscow as clearly as he would have liked. This caused us some consternation, until we found that Radio Moscow couldn’t get *out* because of his side’s enthusiastic efforts to prevent the BBC from getting *in*. So, in pleading the BBC’s cause in Vienna, I said, I was also speaking for this distinguished member of our profession denied the latest in news and entertainment from home.

A few weeks later, the BBC ceased to be jammed, the second sign after the release of Sakharov that the Gorbachevian revolution had begun. The reporting telegram from our Moscow Embassy quoted a Soviet official as having made an ‘obscure reference’ to the comfort of their Ambassador in London. I smiled at this, comforted in turn by the confirmation that what had been said in Vienna, at least, had been heard loud and clear in Moscow.

We had our farcical moments too. The Cyprus delegate, for instance, proposed an additional provision to the Act to protect animal rights throughout the continent. This, she explained, arose out of concern for her cats left behind in Nicosia. Her proposal ran and ran – nothing it seemed could withstand its inexorable progress, even though on occasion it caused the proceedings to seize up altogether. In despair, we asked our High Commissioner there to see what he could do. This worked, for a kindly message eventually came from Nicosia assuring her all was well. Perhaps inevitably, her proposal was universally known as the cats’ clause.

I thought I owed this high hall of learning this vital piece of information. I should add that no one in Vienna was against animal rights, whatever they may be. It was just that other organisations exist to consider what should be done. Scandinavian delegates were equally keen on the Environ-

10 Hugh Trevor-Roger (Lord Dacre of Glanton, 1914-2003), historian. Regis Professor of History, University of Oxford, 1957-80.

ment – with a capital E – and cravenly, as the price of an agreement, we had to agree to spend the taxpayers' money on an utterly pointless environmental meeting under the Helsinki umbrella. We knew that there is no international body in existence that isn't spending the taxpayers' money in pious pursuit of Scandinavian dreams of a world as pure as Lapland but, then, that's Diplomacy.

At all events, looking back on Vienna, one thing is clear. This is that we had inadvertently hit upon the Achilles heel of the whole oppressive system. I stress: inadvertently.

One of the West's concerns over many years had been the plight of Soviet Jews who had been denied the right to emigrate and those who had been prevented from returning to their homes when emigration had not proved a success. There were thousands of cases, many of them truly heart-rending. To meet the problem we had proposed that a formula should be included in the Vienna Document, taken from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This read:

Everyone has the right to leave any country and return to his own.

To my certain knowledge, none of us ever considered the effect this could have on a divided Germany. We could see that in principle it should – but by this time we were inured to Honecker's intransigence. Our motive was purely humanitarian, relating to Soviet Jewry. If adopted, we thought, it would at least give us some leverage in the worst cases in future. And, of course, we all knew the impact that the Jackson-Vannick¹¹⁰⁰ Amendment had had on Jewish emigration in the past.

But it was this, the so-called freedom of movement clause in the Vienna document, that was to be the key to opening the gates.

There are worrying signs, or at least signs worrying to a diplomat, that the Russians were thinking a good deal further ahead than we were. One is the way they chose to tell us they were minded to accept the clause. This took place, in the classic Le Carré¹² tradition, at a clandestine meeting – where else but on a park bench in the Burggarten?¹³ The meeting was between their two biggest bruisers and our two, one of whom I am proud to say being British. It was also one of this 'what would you say if...?' kinds of conversations, which should have indicated to us that the Russians were not entirely easy in their own minds.

We in the Western camp were so astonished at the message that we overlooked the method. I fear we rather dismissed it as just the sort of thing that would appeal to their tiny conspiratorial minds. With hindsight this may have been a misjudgement. They might have seen that the only way to overcome the opposition of some of their allies on a point of much more significance to them than to the Soviet Union was to present them with a *fait accompli*: they may have wanted some sort of reciprocal concession from us to sweeten the pill but, if so, I cannot now remember what. But the excessive secrecy also suggests now – it didn't then – that for the first time the Russians were getting serious about implementing what they agreed to.

Another thing which might have alerted us to what was to come was the deal struck between Hungary and Austria in 1988 allowing their nationals free movement across their common border. That year, every Hungarian in creation it seemed flocked into central Vienna to celebrate their national day, the anniversary of their conversion to Communism. Their enthusiastic participation in the consumer society brought the traffic, the cars of the preoccupied delegates included, to a standstill.

11 The 1972 Jackson-Vannick Amendment sought to restrict American trade with those countries whose immigration policies prevent their own citizens from travelling abroad.

12 D. J. M. Cornwell (John le Carré) is the author of a number of a number of best-selling spy novels.

13 The Burggarten is in Vienna.

In sum, one edge of the Iron Curtain was fraying before our very eyes just as we were negotiating freedom of movement across frontiers as part of the Vienna package. Someone may have put two and two together. I certainly didn't and I don't know anyone claiming that they did.

But I now have to divert again from personal reminiscence for a moment to describe what followed.

The Vienna meeting came to an end in January 1989. In June, East German tourists holidaying around Lake Balaton in Hungary saw the open frontier and made a bolt for it. The East German government protested, calling the bilateral treaty of friendship in aid. The Hungarians refused to close the border, rightly claiming among other things that, having been concluded later, the Vienna document superseded the Treaty of Friendship on this point.

The Czechoslovak authorities tried to give the East Germans a hand by closing their border with Hungary to the tourists; but this only diverted the flow into the West German Embassy in Prague – and to a lesser extent Warsaw. You will remember the scenes from the television news that summer. In the ensuing contests of wills between the two Germanies the East Germans blinked first and closed their only remaining borders, a bitter humiliation to the regime.

Honecker then made two mistakes. While agreeing that those in the West German Embassy in Prague could leave for West Germany, he insisted that they did not go direct but by train through East Germany. They could then be formally expelled and thus have their property confiscated as a deterrent to others. But the sight of the empty trains going south to pick them up turned what had until then been quite small demonstrations in Leipzig and Dresden in favour of – I think – Gorbachevian reform, into enormous affairs.

Honecker then compounded the error by trying to call in the military with orders to shoot the demonstrators. This proved too strong meat for the rest of the Politburo and Honecker had no alternative but to go. His successors simply had to reopen the borders as the price of civic peace. After that, the Berlin Wall had lost its point. After some confusion it fell in early November, a few days before things erupted in Czechoslovakia.

By this time I was in Prague and I can therefore resume my eyewitness account.

It still seems to me unlikely that the fall of the Wall, of itself, triggered off the Velvet Revolution. I say this because of the extraordinary indifference of the Praguers to the influx of near hysterical East Germans only weeks before.

During that episode, my wife and I took our afternoon walk in and around the Petrin Hill, many of you will know it, that dominates central Prague and runs down on one side to the German Embassy. Every day, for weeks it seemed, we saw panic-stricken East Germans streaming down through the trees into the Embassy garden.

And the Praguers? There they were, apparently oblivious to all the commotion. There were the couples strolling hand in hand in the gardens at the top. There were the couples at the next stage of life's journey pushing prams. There were the old people gossiping on the park benches, with kids playing everywhere. All, all, it seemed were simply not noticing.

A Czech friend told me this was surely natural. It was an intra-German problem for them to solve. Besides, he added with a cynical smile, you know the Germans. One over the garden wall, *everyone* over the garden wall. More seriously, he argued that there was no analogy with the Czechoslovak situation: neither the Czechs nor the Slovaks had brothers over the frontier – and powerful brothers at that. He was too polite to say that mere friends – or even allies – were no good. As you can guess, Munich¹⁴ has scarred the national psyche, I would say for ever.

After the fall of the Wall we could see that with the Western frontiers to the north of them as they had always been to the south, Czechoslovakia would have to follow suit sooner or later. But

14 On 29 Sept. 1938 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and other leaders signed the Munich Agreement with Nazi Germany, which allowed for the absorption of the Sudetenland.

that is not the same thing as saying that outright and fundamental revolution was inevitable. We thought this improbable, as everyone else with an interest did – the West generally, the Russians, even the gallant band of dissidents themselves.

We had long been aware, of course, of the deep divisions between the reactionaries and the reformers in the Party: but this in a way was a distraction for all its observers. One concentrated rather on the alarmist speeches of Adamec,¹⁵ the reformist Prime Minister: unless we change, he was saying – and by implication in line with Gorbachev's reforms – we face economic stagnation and political isolation. I had known of the reactionaries' stubborn resistance to change from my days in Vienna, when in desperation my Russian colleague had sometimes asked me whether there was anything we could do to help. I had to tell him that not only did we have no leverage, but we had enough problems with our own side, which were almost as intractable.

So divisions within the Czechoslovak Communist Party certainly. But with all the power at its disposal it hardly seemed credible that it could be toppled altogether. If change came at all, we argued, the only foreseeable outcome would be a takeover by the reformers, with Gorbachev's help, and prepared to work to the Gorbachevian agenda. I suppose we thought this probable at some time or other, but none of us would have placed a bet on when.

As it happens, a month or two before (August I think), I myself played a small and oblique part in the internal Party debate. This was at a dinner ostensibly arranged by the Prague School of Economics to discuss the prospects for attracting Western investment.

The School knew, of course, that this was not a promising subject since the prospects were dim to the point of non-existence. They therefore dangled a little bait before us in the person of Lenárt,¹⁶ the Presidium – or Politburo – member for the economy. Here, flatteringly, was a member of the Supreme Body Itself so anxious to hear our views at first hand that he had agreed to attend.

A few days before the dinner an emissary arrived at the Embassy – a unique occurrence – with a request. Some of those coming, he said, would appreciate it if I said something about human rights based on my Vienna experience. Would I oblige? My reward, it was hinted, would be the privilege of sitting next to Presidium Member Lenárt himself. The thinking presumably was that every man has his price, so how could I resist?

I would have done it for less. There are times, as Gwendolyn Fairfax says in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, when speaking one's mind is more than a Duty, it is a Pleasure.

The organisers might have been aware that I had met Comrade Lenárt before. Then he had argued that the lamentable state of his country was all our fault – Munich and all that. I said that this could scarcely be the whole truth. We had bombed Germany out of sight in the war and yet there was the Federal Republic, unquestionably the most prosperous country in Europe. Lenárt had not liked this; but I have since wondered whether I had unknowingly expressed the doubts that he himself was beginning to feel about the whole Communist experiment. As John Stuart Mill¹⁷ says somewhere: the greatest tragedy that can befall a theory is for it to be put into practice, because then its disadvantages become apparent.

I shall never know whether I had indeed made any impression on Lenárt. Not being able to predict the future is only the second worst thing about diplomacy. The worst is not being able to reconstruct the past.

15 Ladislav Adamec, Czechoslovak statesman. Prime Minister, 1988-9.

16 Jozef Lenárt (1923–2004), Czechoslovak politician. Prime Minister 1963-8; Acting-President, 1968. Member of Czechoslovak Parliament, 1960-90. The name of this body underwent a number of changes and hence the difficulty of giving it a precise name.

17 John Stuart Mill (1806–73), philosopher and economist.

The dinner when it came was bizarre even by Communism's Potemkin standards. We all recognised the setting and the fare as Party institutional Class A plus – absolutely *vaut le voyage*¹⁸ and something way beyond the pretensions, indeed the imagination, of the Prague School of Economics. More sinister was the presence of not one, but three, camera crews filming everything from the cocktails to the brandy. Judging from past experience, we the Western Ambassadors assumed that this was not dissociated from the presence among of General Lorenz, the Chief of the Secret Police himself, for in a police state no one is more curious or, for that matter, more nervous than the police. And, sure enough, there was I, a relatively junior Head of Mission, placed at table in the place of honour next to Presidium Member Lenárt. This is something all Ambassadors are sensitive to; and I heard gratifying murmurs of pain from my seniors seated lower.

It was not a privilege worth having, for the great man had nothing noteworthy to say, indeed nothing at all for most of the evening. But when invited to say my piece I ventured the thought that the prospects for investment might improve if more attention could be paid, not so much to the investment climate, but to the image of the country more generally. Ask the man in the street in Britain what he associated with the word Prague and the reply was likely to be: Prague? Isn't that where they beat students up on the street? As long as this was the case investors were unlikely to risk their reputations by venturing into such a market. The answer had to be to find ways and means of accommodating dissent.

All this was duly filmed and I suppose served some purpose somewhere in the works. (We had all been promised copies of the film but of course none ever turned up.) I fear I shocked some of my Western colleagues not used to the rough and tumble of Vienna. General Lorenz too was greatly put out. I heard from the emissary later that I had been – and I quote – both arrogant and condescending. I have often wondered whether from his prison cell after the Revolution he reflected that he should have listened with a more open mind.

What the evening had given the rest of us was proof positive that elements in the Party – perhaps even Lenárt himself – had become desperate enough to seek the help of *any* outside agency, however improbable. Even so, I still think it was pretty cool of them to have chosen someone with a reputation of being so unkind about the whole lot of them in Vienna.

So here was a ruling Party both confused and divided. Alas, facing them, across the vast mass of an apparently indifferent public, was a tiny band of dissidents to all appearances incapable of mounting a significant challenge. For all their courage and determination, they had so far been strikingly unsuccessful in persuading the population to come off the fence.

1988 had been the high water mark of their campaign, offering opportunities for demonstrations to mark the great anniversaries of the nation's history: the founding of the Republic in 1918; the Munich betrayal of 1938; the Communist takeover in 1948; the Prague Spring of 1968. There was even a coda in January 1989 to mark the anniversary of the death of Jan Palach.¹⁹ This was the last time Václav Havel²⁰ was arrested and imprisoned, something which did not deter him on release from organising yet another demonstration in August 1989 on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of 1968.

But what impressed the outside observers was something the dissidents were all too aware of themselves. This was that the numbers attending these rallies never varied much above or below 5,000. There was much excitement about them in the foreign press and not a little brutality on the ground. But the rest of the population went about their daily concerns apparently unmoved.

18 Worth the journey.

19 Jan Palach (1948-69) Czechoslovak student. He committed suicide in Wenceslas Square, Prague, to protest the Soviet-led suppression of the so-called 'Prague Spring' liberalisation programme of Alexander Dubcek's government.

20 Václav Havel, Czech author and politician. President of Czechoslovakia, 1989-92, and President of the Czech Republic, 1993-2003.

Round the edges of the demonstrations we saw people hurrying to the Metro stations or the tram stops, doing their late night shopping and queuing for the cinemas. The calm, as we now know, was deceptive, but it had its uses. Lulled into a false sense of security, the Party had complacently allowed itself the luxury of internal division and disagreement when unity was essential for survival.

We thought there was just a chance that, with everything else that was going on in Eastern Europe, the Party might seek an accommodation with the dissidents along the lines I had argued for at that famous dinner. There were some unexpected people on the other side who were, apparently, of like mind.

I had a quiet lunch with Václav Havel just after he came out of prison that last time. He was looking dreadful: prison-pale and obviously still suffering from his ordeal. But he told me then that his very own case-officer, the person responsible for his arrest and interrogation, was now convinced that there would have to be a Round Table on the Polish model and that he fully expected Havel to be at it. I thought the interrogator was being pretty fanciful. I could see little analogy between a mass working class movement like Solidarity and a tiny group of middle class intellectuals in Prague and Bratislava. But guided by this wise officer's advice I did venture to suggest to London that Václav Havel would one day assume the mantle of Tomáš Masaryk²¹ and become the Father of the nation himself. This happy guess helps me nowadays to offset painful memories of the many predictions I got wrong in the course of a long career. And, of course, I got the timing hopelessly wrong. It was only six months later that Havel became President.

But while mine is at best a patchy record, I can at least say we were not entirely unsighted on the evening of 17 November 1989 when a student demonstration started the Velvet Revolution off. The following is the story as we knew it then; but there may well have been cross-currents unknown to us at the time.

That morning, 17 November, Jan Urban,²² a leading dissident, called on my deputy. He came with the news that there was to be a huge student demonstration that evening, something much bigger than anything the dissidents had ever been able to manage. His story was that the organisation of Communist students had sold the idea of an anti-fascist demonstration to the authorities to mark Opletal day. Opletal had been a university student in 1939 when the Germans marched in. He and others were arrested and shot on 17 November.²³ The university traditionally took the day off in remembrance; but on this, the fiftieth anniversary – or so the students said – it was surely appropriate to do something a bit special.

The authorities were apparently delighted that their young had thought up something so original as a spontaneous anti-fascist demonstration. This, they thought, would be an antidote to the plague of anti-Communist protests the dissidents had organised over the past year. Indeed, so pleased were they that they offered the University Chancellor as the keynote speaker, or possibly even Stepan, the thuggish Presidium member for Youth. No, the students said, they thought it right to ask an old Professor, now in retirement,²⁴ who had actually known Opletal personally.

The authorities had not smelled a rat – Jan Urban told us – nor had they yet woken up to the fact that, by agreement, not only the Communist students but the entire student body – all forty thousand of them – had agreed to participate in an anti-government protest.

21 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), Czechoslovak politician. First President of Czechoslovakia, 1918-35.

22 Jan Urban, Czech politician. Co-founder, Civic Forum, 1989. Leader, Civil Forum, 1990.

23 Jan Opletal (1915–39), medical student. Killed during an anti-Nazi demonstration following German occupation. He was shot on 28 Oct. 1939 and later died on 11 Nov. 1939. On 17 Nov. 1939 Nazi troops began arresting dissident students and sending them off to concentration camps.

24 Josef Jira.

Needless to say, every able-bodied member of the Embassy was on the streets that afternoon – all that is except the frustrated Ambassador who was debarred *ex-officio*. The old professor spoke, disobligingly likening the situation in 1939 to that in 1989, with a captive people in thrall to a foreign ideology. The students, duly fired up, marched up the Visherad hill (familiar to music lovers from Smetana's *Má Vlast* as sacred ground to the Czech nation).²⁵

There they sang their haunting national anthem, placed lighted candles all around the natural amphitheatre there, and marched down again in the general direction of Wenceslas Square. Along the quays next to the river they were joined by hordes of ordinary citizens on their way home from work. As they turned the corner by the National Theatre, there were usherettes at every window cheering and waving them on. The din was terrific, whistles, klaxons, football rattles, car horns. I was green with envy when I heard.

The students later claimed that their intention had been to disperse after another rally in front of the Faculty of Pharmacology where Opletal had been a student. I wouldn't have placed a bet on it. The Faculty is in Opletal Street, which begins in Wenceslas Square about a hundred yards from the statue of the saint where the Republic was declared in 1918 and where Jan Palach set himself alight in 1969.

Nor were the authorities taking any chances either. By this time the riot police were drawn up about halfway up the road leading from the National Theatre to the Square. There was then a stand-off during which most of the crowd dispersed. Those that remained proffered flowers to the riot police – we have a marvellous photograph of this at home – and were rewarded with a savage and wholly unnecessary beating up.

Anyone going to Prague should look out for a small monument on the exact spot where it all began. It is in the arcade on the right of the street, a little higher up than the Theatre. Imagine, if you will, how we saw it the day after, covered in the most horrendous bloodstains. And not only there, I might add, but in every one of the little alleyways up and down the street.

As the days of revolution unrolled, the arcade became a place of pilgrimage with an ever-lengthening line of candles and an ever-increasing mound of flowers. This was the tribute of a people who had not the least expectation that their hour of liberation was so close at hand. The city had been outraged, particularly when a rumour swept Prague that one student, a certain Martin Schmidt, had been rushed to hospital and had died at eleven o'clock that evening.

Well, not quite everyone had been outraged. Long afterwards the riot police were still feeling aggrieved at being so misunderstood. They complained to some British visitors that they had only been upholding the law, which after all was their job. And anyway, hadn't the CRS²⁶ done far worse things during *les événements* in Paris in 1968? I record this comment in fairness: but I shall never forget the bloodstains.

I take it everyone is roughly familiar with what followed. My memories are now a confused jumble of indelible images: candles, pamphlets, wall posters, processions everywhere, crowds gathering to listen to the songs and the speeches in the bitter cold while the Communists met in gloomy conclave in plush and heated offices. Church bells rang, factory hooters hooted; there was excitement, gaiety, laughter, everywhere.

There was a plot, of course. The aim of all this urban agitation was to arouse the working classes, whom the Communists thought of as their own constituency. The assumption, quite correct as it turned out, was that if there were a general strike, the Party would be so disheartened that they would at least agree to share power, if not to cede it entirely.

25 Bedrich Smetana (1824-84), Czech composer. His six symphonic poems, *Má Vlast (My Country)*, are particularly well-known.

26 *Compagnies Republicanes de Sécurité* are mobile units forming a general reserve of the French national police.

The method was pure theatre. In Communist times, Praguers flocked to the theatres nightly simply to listen to their beautifully expressive language unperverted by ideology. Every other source, all the media, schools, universities, was polluted beyond all imagining by what was called Party Chinese. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that theatre was the analogy that most easily came to mind. The demonstrations with the jangling keys and the candles and the sparklers were street theatre. Every proper theatre in the capital became a forum for the people, released at last to say in public what they had been bottling up for twenty years or more. The list of speakers outside one consisted entirely of writers, scientists and philosophers well known to the Embassy. This was mainly, not entirely but mainly, due to the British Council, which had spent years quietly building bridges to the intellectual community despite the most enormous restraints.

And where was the Civic Forum²⁷¹⁶ itself formed but in a theatre? This, appropriately enough, was known in those days at the *Laterna magika*, and it served as the Revolution's headquarters until all was accomplished. And you don't need me to tell you that the hero of the hour was the country's leading dramatist, a man of the theatre to his fingertips.

So there was a plot and there was a method. What there wasn't was foresight. The dissident community, for one, was at least as unprepared for the dramatic outcome as the Communist Party. I can attest to this myself since, at it happened, my deputy and his wife, who were leaving, had their farewell dinner for their dissident friends on the very evening of November 17. All the talk round the table that night was of the prospects of success for the reformist wing of the Party – and remember this was when the candles were still burning on the *Visherad* just above the house and several of those present had children out on the streets. The proceedings incidentally were interrupted by our only resident English journalist (working for *The Independent*) who came in nursing a cut to the forehead administered by the riot police earlier that evening. I have seldom seen anyone so gleeful.

Now, as we were leaving, I offered a lift to anyone willing to squeeze in. Two couples took me up on the offer, wives sitting on their husband's knees. And as they got out and disappeared into their apartment blocks, I bet it no more occurred to them than it did to us that the next time I would see them, one of the husbands would be Foreign Minister and the other – our old friend Jan Urban – would be Secretary General of the Civic Forum, charged with fighting, and winning, the first free elections since 1946.

Another wing of the Forum was similarly unsighted. These were the economists associated with the Prognostics Institute, a think-tank feeding the heretical fruit of their research to the party reformists including the fiery Prime Minister himself. The Institute led a precarious existence. At least once in 1989 it was threatened with closure, only to be reprieved at the last moment. An institute it may have been, but it is impossible to conceive of a more eclectic band of scholars.

Its head was Professor Walter Komarek, formerly economic adviser to Che Guevara.²⁸ I never quite grasped his intellectual position, though he tried to explain it to me on several occasions in Communist times; but whether the fault was mine or his I cannot say even now. My confusion was worse confounded when I called on him for the last time at the height of the revolution – or counter-revolution from his perspective I suppose. To get to his office, I had to step over the sleeping bodies of students resting between bouts of counter-revolutionary activities. He had given them permission to use his offices as their headquarters. He never explained why; and I never thought to ask.

27 The Civic Forum was a Czech democratic movement, which was formed after the 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia in Nov. 1989. The following month it formed a government after the old regime collapsed. In 1991 the party began to splinter.

28 Che Guevara (Dr Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna, 1928–67), Latin American revolutionary. Cuban Minister of Industry, 1961-5.

The Prof's deputy was also a one-off. He, I guessed, was about thirty and he told me he owed his excellent English to his overseas tours with a pop group. He too described himself in those days as a Communist, which never discouraged him from making brilliantly analytical speeches to visiting foreign businessmen openly deploring 'socialist stagnation'.

The Number Three was even more intriguing. When showing me out the first time I called he stopped on the stairs to denounce all Communism, reactionary or reformed. 'Take no notice of them upstairs', he said – or rather shouted, for he was very worked up – 'Communism's only purpose is to make life easy for bureaucrats and businessmen. What had they done to deserve a quiet life?' And the person who understood this best was 'Your Mrs Thatcher'.

Now I know our then Prime Minister was a controversial figure – nowhere more so than here in Oxford – but I was sufficiently intrigued by his independence of mind and reckless courage to arrange for him to air his views at the Foreign Office's own conference centre at Wilton Park. This non-too-subtle scheme foundered rather. Three days after the student demonstrations he told me over dinner that the government was unlikely to give him a passport. The day before, he had become a founder member of the Civic Forum. A couple of weeks later he telephoned to say that it was now certain he couldn't go. When I asked why, he diffidently replied that he was, er, being made Minister of Finance the next day. London, I said grandly, would understand.

At the same time, the former pop star was being made Minister for Industry. The Prof too was enjoying his moment of fame after airing his views on television. Some of his fans renamed the old Gottwald Metro Station after him. There were even some who saw him as Prime Minister, even President; but his star soon faded and we heard nothing of him or his Institute again. I imagine the Che Guevara connection didn't help – or maybe others eventually found his philosophical position as impenetrable as I did.

But whatever the Prognostics Institute was good at, it certainly wasn't good at prognosticating the end of Communism in Czechoslovakia.

The Church comes off rather better, having chosen the previous weekend to canonise the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia. Agnes had been kept waiting for a thousand years and the Czechs, who are about as irreligious as the English, were unnerved by this development. One of their oldest legends is that she would be so honoured when the nation was about to be delivered of its oppressors. So what, the Czechs asked, did the Church know that the rest of the world didn't? Wisely, the Pope has never said; but the Cardinal's celebratory mass for St Agnes at the height of the revolution was heart stopping.

Before I come to that I have to say how much we all enjoyed the dreadful Stepan's discomfiture just beforehand. He called on Cardinal Tomášek²⁹ to try to persuade him that so emotive a service in the cathedral next to the Presidential Palace at such a time would not be conducive to civic calm. This, Stepan said, must surely be in the common interest. The mass, replied the Cardinal, was being held to honour the Saint, not for the health of the Communist Party. *Rude Pravo*, the Party newspaper, had tried the week before to suggest the good old Cardinal, then nearly ninety, had lost his marbles, so he was probably feeling a trifle peevish.

The ceremony itself was straightforward enough, except for the presence of more television crews than I have ever seen before or since. The great moment came at the end when the Cardinal was tottering down the aisle towards the great west doors. There was the usual soft organ music playing. But then, the small choir at the side of the altar lifted their right hands in Churchill's V for Victory salute and began the National Anthem. Within two or three notes, the organ and then the entire congregation joined in. And not only them, but all the vast crowds gathered in the courtyards around out into the Hradcany Square beyond. I defy anyone not to be moved by that.

29 František Tomášek (1899-1992), Czechoslovak priest. Cardinal, 1976; promoted to the Metropolitan See of Prague, 1977.

But while mine is – with the possible exception of the Church – a tale of political myopia, it is also one of inspired opportunism and improvisation. There, with the ceiling falling in as it were, a whole new political order had to be created, however sketchily at first, and this in a matter of days. Tactics had to be devised to rouse a people who had been politically traumatised since 1948 – and even more so after 1968. A strategy had to be worked out, sometimes minute by minute, against a rattled, divided and confused Communist Party which presented a moving target at best. And yet all was splendidly accomplished by people with no experience of government or administration whatever.

To give you just one example of their beginner's luck, if the most striking. 'Well, who precisely do you want as President?' the Communist negotiators asked. After a pause for reflection someone said, 'Why not Václav?'³⁰ Another pause, during which some thought: 'Oh no, not Václav, he's only a writer.' After that the decision was unanimous.

It is a decision the Czech nation has never had cause to regret. When he went out on the balcony after his inauguration to thank the people for their support, they all shouted back: 'No, no, we thank you.' I never saw his standard floating above the castle without recalling the old Chinese proverb: happy the nation ruled by a virtuous prince.

But it is also a tale of brilliant organisation. My eyewitness account is necessarily confined to Prague, because that is where I was at the time. The effort was nonetheless nationwide. Just as dramatic events were taking place in Bratislava and, indeed, after a shocked and rather anxious few days, throughout the country. The first to take up the cause were the universities and almost without exception in the English faculties. For with the language comes a system of civic and political values about which we ourselves are unnecessarily diffident these days. Whatever: after the revolution came a wave of anglophilia such as I would never have dreamed possible.

And as for the working classes on which the Communists pinned their waning hopes, we owe our French colleagues an account of the general strike in Pilsen, famous for its huge engineering works – and its beer. Ten minutes before it was due to begin, the local branch of Civic Forum had no idea whether they had persuaded the workers to down tools or not. And yet, when the hooters went at noon, the strike was 100 per cent solid, as it was in most of the other industrial centres.

But I don't want to leave you with the impression that this was a one-dimensional plot. As the speeches in the Square made clear, there were many agendas, happily for the most part convergent.

The students were vital to the whole enterprise. Being too young to have been traumatised by 1968, and having nothing to lose, they were the only group in society that could have started the whole thing off. And because there is a despondent side to the Slav temperament, their genial derision, expressed in a blizzard of posters, was essential simply because they made everyone laugh. At one stage they ran out of paper and appealed to us for help. Although no one could accuse the Embassy of impartiality, I thought this would be overstepping the mark. Thankfully someone remembered a private source in London that might help and a van was on its way across Europe within twenty-four hours.

Students popped up everywhere. I was taking tea one afternoon with a lady when she interrupted the conversation with an apology. She simply had to tune in to watch her son on the box. She hadn't seen him for a week and just wanted to make sure he was all right. And there he was, with one or two others, plying the Minister of Defence and the Army Chief of Staff, no less, with questions a newspaper the next day described as 'arrows going to the heart of things'. Eat your heart out, Jeremy, I thought, these kids are doing just as well from a standing start without any experience or training at all.

30 Havel.

I cannot make up my mind whether, as many believe, the KGB was also working to an agenda of its own. Some, including the BBC's John Simpson,³¹ believe theirs was the hidden hand behind the Communist students' cunning appeal to the authorities over Opletal day. Conspiracy theorists also see something sinister about the highly circumstantial rumour that was floated about the death of Martin Schmidt. This was clearly inflammatory: his girlfriend was even quoted as saying she had seen him being wheeled into the hospital on a trolley. His own mother gave us a very different story. No, he was visiting relatives in the country. What? With every student in the capital about to go on the streets? Was he under orders to go missing? Was he in fact wheeled into hospital to lend credence to the rumour? Or what? Who knows?

There are stories that all the KGB's top brass were in Prague at the time. But here we get onto the slippery ground of rumour and counter-rumour. I myself saw a huge Zil, or Zis, or whatever those Russian limousines are called,³² outside the Prime Minister's office late one night. It was bedecked with the Czech flag and the Hammer and Sickle, which doesn't suggest clandestinity. I assume now, as I did then, that the emissary, who was clearly a very big wig indeed, had come to say that the Czech comrades were now on their own and there would be no fraternal assistance as there had been in 1968.

Certainly Gorbachev had no cause to cherish the reactionaries in Prague who had given him such a hard time during the Vienna meeting. I also thought it rather foolish for Jakes,³³ the ultra-reactionary General Secretary, to accept Ligachev's invitation to visit Moscow in 1989 when Ligachev and Gorbachev had locked horns over the future of the collective farms. (Czechoslovak collective farms were reasonably productive and presumably were held to prove that collectivisation was not all bad.) But whether all this had provoked Gorbachev to try to bring Jakes and his friends down I do not know. If the KGB were more actively involved, all I can say is that they revealed an intimate knowledge of what made Czech students tick. In the end it scarcely matters, since the reformist wing didn't win either. The entire sorry regime was brought down by the sheer weight of numbers. The people had simply had enough of oppression and evil and the sheer tedium of life under Marxist-Leninism.

And I suppose we shall have to wait for the release of the papers, or possibly a book of memoirs, to find out whether Vernon Walters,³⁴ the American Ambassador in Bonn, knew something we did not know. It is on the public record that he told Dan Rather of CBS³⁵ in early November that he did not give the Czechoslovak regime more than another ten days or so. He was right, of course, but whether this was a lucky guess or not remains to be seen.

So my theme this afternoon has been the unpredictability of things, or if you like, the un-inevitability of history. I could go on all night about what happened to the cast of characters I have mentioned. Some lost, some won, some permanently, some for a time only. The Czechs gained more than the Slovaks. A new class of politicians, administrators and businessmen has emerged, many of whom took no, or minimal, part in the revolution, and the place is unrecognisable after six short years.

For, apart from Václav Havel himself, the most conspicuous winner so far has been that free marketer in the Prognostics Institute who went on to be Finance Minister. He is Václav Klaus,³⁶

31 John Simpson, journalist. World Affairs Editor, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1988-.

32 The company producing limousines for the Soviet leadership was re-named Zavod Imjeni Stalina (ZIS) in 1931 and it was subsequently changed to Zavod Imeni Lihacheva (ZIL).

33 Miklos Jakes, Czechoslovak politician. General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1987-9.

34 Vernon A. Walters (1917-2002) American diplomat. Ambassador to Germany, 1989-91.

35 Dan Rather is the chief evening news anchor of the Columbia Broadcasting Corporation (CBS) in the USA.

36 Václav Klaus, Czech politician. Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, 1992-7; President of the Czech Republic, 2003-.

now Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and author of a burgeoning economic miracle beginning to bear comparison with Erhard's *wirtschaftswunder* in the 1950s.³⁷ [Note in April, 1999: this has not turned out to be the case, largely due to Klaus's inexperience of practical government.]

I end with history again as theatre.

In the spring of 1990 the new President went down to Pilsen for the anniversary of its liberation by Patten's³⁸ Third Army in 1945. The Party had chosen to forget the nation's debt to the Americans: before the Velvet Revolution I had by coincidence seen a map in a local primary school indicating that the town owed its liberation to the Red Army which, of course, scarcely got beyond Prague before the war was over. Now it was time for the truth to be told.

And yet the truth scarcely needed telling at all. Part of the day's ceremonies was a most extraordinary parade. It could have been taken from an old war movie. There passing before us was a unit of the victorious army, their jeeps and trucks emblazoned with the famous white star. These had doubtless been war surplus and had been kept oiled and greased – and hidden away in barns and outhouses throughout the land since 1948. (By some curious trick of memory I now see the scene in black and white, perhaps because taking the salute was Shirley Temple Black,³⁹ my American colleague, older certainly but as photogenic as ever.) They were filled with what appeared to be GIs of the era. These were not Americans, but Czechs wearing uniforms that had been carefully and lovingly preserved for forty years or more. Indeed so many wanted to take part that some uniforms had to be shared, one wearing the helmet, another the jacket and so on. I caught the sheepish smile of one of them and realised with a start that he was one of my very own Administration Officers. We had always assumed he worked for you-know-who. Perhaps so: but that is obviously not where his heart lay.

The last memory I want to share with you is that of a lone Spitfire flying down a runway on a lovely June day in 1991. The occasion was the Czechoslovak Airforce's tribute to the veterans who fought with us in the war. (It was also, incidentally, my last official function in the Service.) The veterans' story had been a tragic one. There had been appalling losses during the war, particularly during the bomber offensive about which many of us have mixed views. The survivors were received as returning heroes in 1945: but all without any known exception had suffered years of imprisonment as 'spies' after 1948. Before the Revolution one of them had told me he had only got nine years when the usual tariff was fifteen. What, he wondered, had he done wrong to get off so lightly? But now here they all were on the podium of honour in June 1991, receiving the recognition that was their due from a vast crowd of their fellow-countrymen. All were wearing their old RAF uniforms, the one with 'Czechoslovakia' at the shoulder. All of my generation will remember them well from the war.

And as the Spitfire flew down the runway in front of them, everyone of these gallant old men stood to attention and saluted. And it was then that I realised we had been forgiven for Munich long ago.

37 Ludwig Erhard (1897-1977), West German statesman. Economics minister, 1949. Vice Chancellor, 1957-63; Chancellor, 1963-6.

38 General George S. Patton, Jr. (1885-1945), American soldier. Commander, Third Army, 1944-5.

39 Former child film star Shirley Temple

