

Eurocommunism and the SED: a contradictory relationship

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The recent historiography on the SED and its relationships to Western European communist parties has witnessed an unparalleled resurgence over the last couple of years. This holds true for „Eurocommunism”, a third-way interpretation of communism, which spread all over Western Europe from the early 1970s. It drew the attention of an entire generation of politicians, intellectuals and journalists, who were willing to understand and use its democratic, un-hegemonic potential to reform and renew the European left.

The gradual opening of archives and the declassification of masses of significant documents of the leading communist parties in both Western and Eastern Europe has spurred in the last twenty years a real revolution in the interpretation of socialism and its ideological sources during the Cold War until the fall of the Berlin Wall. This shift also testifies a radical intellectual change, accomplished by a new and young generation of historians, who started exploring Socialism from an international, comparative point of view and were more amenable at using modern methods of analysis. Eurocommunism was developed just after the momentous year of 1968, its theoretical grassroots being much older and dating back to such thinkers as Antonio Gramsci or Palmiro Togliatti, to mention only the most eminent. From 1968 on, the world witnessed on the one hand a thorough sharpening of communist rule in Eastern Europe – of which the Warsaw Pact’s military crushing of the „Prague Spring” in August 1968 was only the most blatant expression. On the other hand, a gradual and cautious opening in bilateral relationships across the blocks could be noticed. Even the SED, deemed as one of the most obedient parties behind the Iron Curtain, could very much profit from that and embarked upon a wide range of projects with Western European communists, mostly exchange programs for party members, aimed at deepening the mutual understanding and fostering peace and cooperation. In doing so it had to go to considerable length in being involved often even with partners holding different views or at least very sceptical of the social and political substrate of the “real socialist countries”. Eurocommunists, with their striving for freedom and avowal of a specific national path to communism without intervention and pressure „from above”, were among those. This didn’t eventually prevent the conformable SED – as we shall see out of an opportunistic approach – from coming to terms with them.

These issues will be investigated in the first (chapter 1 and 2) and second part (chapter 3 and 4) of this paper, which aims at outlining the political and ideological development of Eurocommunism in the light of its perception by the Socialist Unity Party of (East) Germany (SED) through the 1970s and 1980s of the past century; then some conclusions will be drawn. To do so this paper will encompass the relationships between the SED itself and the most influential Eurocommunist parties of that time, mostly the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the Parti Communiste Français

(PCF); sporadically it will also relate to the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and the West German social-democratic Party (SPD). The following article relies on comprehensive research in different archives, foremost in Germany, but also in Italy and France and critically re-examines previously published papers.

1. On „Eurocommunism“

The term Eurocommunism first showed in the Milan-based newspaper *Giornale Nuovo*, in an article by the Yugoslavian journalist Frane Barbieri, back in 1975.¹ With that he intended to coin a word which could exemplarily sum up and pinpoint the main intention by most of the Western European communist parties to break free from the traditional obedience to Moscow, thus questioning its status as the very centre of world communism.² The new concept stirred up a debate about its appropriateness as well as to which extent it actually reflected the willingness of West European communism to challenge Moscow and to build up a counterpart within the parliamentary democracies on the Western side of the continent. Moreover it was criticized because of its main concentration on Europe itself, even though the profile of many non-European parties (for instance the Communist Party of Chile) may have fit into the description and would feature very similar patterns of evolution.³

Also the main focus of the three largest West European communist parties, the PCI, the PCF and the PCE, as the pillars of Eurocommunism, was in this regard problematic. Apart from the PCI, which can be considered as the main source for Eurocommunist beliefs, both ideologically and politically, the reference to the PCF, a thoroughly Stalinist type of party, and to the PCE, which was operating from the exile until 1977, may be misleading. Even their diverging stance to the fateful crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 by the troops of the Warsaw Pact showed that they could not form a homogeneous block to hold against Moscow. The PCI, nationally and internationally very influential, denounced the military intervention in Prague emphatically and uniformly. So did the PCE executive, though in this way provoking an internal fracture which eventually undermined the exile party. The PCF initially

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1. On this see M. STEINKÜHLER (ed.), *Eurokommunismus im Widerspruch. Analyse und Dokumentation*, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, Cologne, 1977, pp.389-392.
 2. N.R. DÖRR, *Wandel des Kommunismus in Westeuropa. Eine Analyse der innerparteilichen Entwicklungen in den kommunistischen Parteien Frankreichs, Finnlands und Italiens im Zuge des Eurokommunismus*, Arbeitspapiere für Internationale Politik und Regionalstudien, Berlin, 2006, pp.10-19.
 3. K. PRIESTER, *Hat der Eurokommunismus eine Zukunft? Perspektiven und Grenzen des Systemwandels in Europa*, Beck, Munich, 1982; W. LEONHARD, *Eurokommunismus. Herausforderung für Ost und West*, Goldmann, Munich, 1980; F. BONDY, *Eurokommunismus – das Wort und die Sache*, in: *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 11(1977), pp.1030-1033.

rebuked the aggression; it then revised its position thoroughly until the end of the year and manoeuvred back to a Soviet-friendly strategy.⁴

Given the manifold differences within the Eurocommunist area it is quite appealing to question whether there has ever been such thing as „a” Eurocommunism. Some of its most influential leaders, Enrico Berlinguer (PCI), Georges Marchais (PCF) and Santiago Carrillo (PCE) were themselves sceptical about that matter, at times questioning its meaning. So it is clear that the Western European communist parties involved in this were far from being compact. How did the SED relate to such a fragmentation and how and why did it build up relations to those parties?

2. The SED and (Western) Europe at the beginning of the 1970s

Until 1968 the SED had kept quite stable relationships to its Western European counterparts. The tenet of „proletarian internationalism” with its particular focus on solidarity was there the inspiring force. Moreover it was the Soviet Union, with its strong leading role, which held most communist parties together, despite political issues and controversies. This changed abruptly in 1968, as the thus ensuing international debate about the Czechoslovak crisis exposed a deep ideological fracture within the European communists, between East and West, as well as among the westerners.⁵

The call for more diversity, for a freer approach to governmental and oppositional work in their own countries was amidst the major claims formulated by the communist parties of the West. In fact all these requests were not new at all. Palmiro Togliatti, the partisan and illustrious leader of the PCI, had already called for „polymorphism” and a higher degree of self-determination back in the 1950s.⁶ His plea remained for

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4. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die Partito Comunista Italiano und der Eurokommunismus (1968-1989). Akteure, Netzwerke, Deutungen*, in: A. BAUERKÄMPER, F. DI PALMA (eds), *Bruderparteien jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs. Die Beziehungen der SED zu den kommunistischen Parteien West- und Südeuropas (1968 bis 1989)*, Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin, 2011, pp.136-152.
 5. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs (PCF) und die kommunistische Partei Italiens (PCI) von 1968 bis in die achtziger Jahre – ein kritischer Einblick in das Dreieckverhältnis*, in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 1(2010), pp.80-89; on the PCE see, A. BAUMER, *Kommunismus in Spanien. Die Partido Comunista de España – Widerstand, Krise und Anpassung (1970–2006)*, Nomos Verlag, Baden-Baden, 2008; Idem., *Camaradas? Die Beziehungen zur SED im Kontext der Debatte um das Verhältnis zum Staatssozialismus innerhalb der Partido Comunista de España 1968–1989*, in: A. BAUERKÄMPER, F. DI PALMA, *Bruderparteien ...*, op.cit., pp.187-209, here pp.189-191; S. CARRILLO, *Eurocommunism and the State*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977.
 6. Togliatti spoke about polycentrism for the first time on an interview for the journal *Nuovi Argomenti*, soon after the XX. Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956. On this C. SPAGNOLO, *Sul memoriale di Yalta: Togliatti e la crisi del movimento comunista internazionale*, Carocci, Rome, 2007; A. AGOSTI, *Togliatti negli anni del Comintern: (1926-1943). Documenti inediti dagli archivi russi*, Carocci, Rome, 2000.

the most part unanswered, as the ongoing Cold War and its propaganda forced the communist parties of the world to stick to the traditional two blocks division.

The crushing of the Prague Spring was going to change the communist world forever.⁷ Differences were to plague all communist parties, the larger ones – as we saw beforehand – as well as the less influential, as for instance the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) or the Greek KKE, which denounced the military campaign in Czechoslovakia, but literally fell apart over the issue, with a considerable amount of criticism coming from the lower cadres as well as from intellectuals.⁸ The blanket refusal by the SED to allow third-way socialist theories proved to be shallow when it came to opportunistic strategies to bolster its own diplomatic and economic position in Europe. A short overview of its stance toward the PCE will yield explanations as to how the East Germans approached the building of relationships to uncomfortable partners.

Spanish communism had been banned by the Franco regime and had restructured in exile. Many Spanish communists settled in East Germany, where they had eventually been given shelter and the possibility to do politics and to organize resistance to the detested fascist regime at the home country. In the GDR they were able to run their own party schools and training camps for both the ideological and the paramilitary battle. The SED supported and financed all this generously in the firm conviction that this would pay off.⁹ The dooming events in Prague from the summer of 1968 not only polarized the entire European Left, it also fragmented it. With it the SED changed its attitude toward the Spanish companions brusquely. East Berlin let the PCE executive know that it condemned the position the party had expressed about the Warsaw Pact's military intervention in Czechoslovakia. As a matter of fact the PCE had shown great insecurity about the position to take in that respect. Once again, Prague had caused internal fractures, which the SED ostensibly tried to use for its own interests. The reformers around Santiago Carrillo, the Party Secretary of the PCE, and the supporters of a Soviet friendly policy led by Enrique Lister had engaged in a struggle with each other. The conflict was to weaken the exile organization visibly, until at least the beginning of the 1970s.¹⁰ Yet not all West European communist parties were imbibed by Eurocommunist ideas, the fewest of them were indeed. Over all the smallest of them refused generally the search for a more independent path to communism and remained loyal to Moscow or at least to the common bipolar world

7. M. BRACKE, *Which Socialism? Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1968*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2007; S. PONS, F. ROMERO (eds), *Reinterpreting the end of the Cold War: issues, interpretations, periodizations*, Frank Cass, London, 2005; M. NAUDY, *PCF. Le suicide*, Michel, Paris, 1986, here pp.9-57; U. PFEIL, *Sozialismus in den Farben Frankreichs. SED, PCF und „Prager Frühling“*, in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 2(2001), pp.235–245.

8. On CPGB see, G. ANDREWS, *Endgames and New Times. The Final Years of British Communism 1964–1991*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2004; on the Greek KKE, A. STERGIOU, *Im Spagat zwischen Solidarität und Realpolitik: die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Griechenland und das Verhältnis der SED zur KKE*, Bibliopolis, Mannheim, 2001.

9. A. BAUMER, *Kommunismus ...*, op.cit., pp.228-253.

10. A. BAUMER, *Comaradas ...*, op.cit., pp.191-193.

view. This was the case of the Finnish (SKP), the Portuguese (PCP) and the West-German (DKP) communists, among others.

Yet the SED was willing to take advantage of any possible exchange with influential partners in order to achieve its own goals. Once the GDR's recognition as a sovereign state had been stipulated through the Basic Treaty (Grundlagenvertrag) with the FRG in late 1972, the GDR set out to improve its international credit by embarking upon multi- and bilateral cooperation projects even with political actors who had been very critical of the communist system in East Germany. These efforts were aimed at consolidating the position of the „new-born” GDR within Europe as long as its status as an independent country. In order to do so the SED had signalled that it better keep a balance between its alignment towards Moscow and the strategic cooperation with the West.¹¹ The Italian Communist Party seemed to be a perfect addressee of this search for cooperation partners: the PCI was the largest Western European communist party, with the highest electoral figures as well as the highest number of party members (almost as high as the Christian Democrats [DC], who were a leading political force in Italy for over 40 years). Moreover it maintained strong ties to West European leading institutions and political organizations, such as the European Parliament as well as the powerful Socialist Party of France (PS) and of West-Germany (SPD).¹²

On 16 October 1973 a communist representative fraction could be built in the European Parliament. It was the first time ever that a communist organization became member of such an institution, thus overcoming much adversity and the traditional veto by the majority Christian Democratic fraction.¹³ There seemed to be a window of opportunity for the SED, beyond all ideological frictions and political tensions of the past years – the echoes of the Prague Spring and its violent crushing were still much alive – to gear up its diplomatic machinery and make a step towards reconciliation with old foes.

3. SED facing Eurocommunism

The SED rejected Eurocommunism as a heretic form of socialism: According to its analysts it was bereft of the ideological scaffolding of Marxism-Leninism and seemed to show patterns of convergence to common social-democratic policies, such as those adopted by the West German SPD. Through the 1970s Eurocommunism had been thoroughly monitored by East German observers, who kept at the behest of the unified

11. On this see, H. WENTKER, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: die DDR im internationalen System 1949-1989*, Oldenbourg, Munich, 2007.

12. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs ...*, op.cit., pp.85-89.

13. SAPMO-BArch [Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bunderarchiv], DY/30/IV B 2/20/189, Information Nr. 3/74 für das Politbüro, Haltung der FKP und der IKP zur Frage des Weges zur Macht, 10.01.1974.

Party a well detailed dossier on its development.¹⁴ The dismissing tone of the document left very little room for doubts: there would neither be an agreement on ideological matters, nor any kind of mingling on the part of East-Berlin.

Eurocommunists themselves however looked at the third-way doctrine from a slightly different point of view. It wasn't Social Democracy they were tending to, nor were they absolutely objecting Marxism-Leninism: they wanted to assert themselves as a recognizable force in between, a third way indeed, able to draw consensus from larger parts of the society, even from the conservative bourgeoisie. It was a very ambitious project, bearing the risk of watering down the traditional underpinning of West communist Parties, thus weakening their identity. Then the distinguishing aspect of the „Eurocommunist Turn“ was its avowal of the Parliament as the main stage of political struggle, and not anymore its dismissal as the very stronghold of revisionist, anticommunist powers. The concentration on international politics, as the prefix „euro“ reveals, was considered to be consequence of a strategic overhaul in the policy of West European communist parties, signalling their cohesion and agreement on a supranational orientation, in order to make Communism more appealing to a larger amount of population. Indeed, as Eurocommunist leaders were asked about the main objectives of the new doctrine, there was profound vagueness and imprecision. The „third way“ had been eventually called upon by the media and specialized journalists and it was now a highly praised political phenomenon.¹⁵

As a matter of fact only little agreement on substantial questions could be found within the Eurocommunist family. The above mentioned concentration on international politics, for instance, finds no match for the PCF, which was traditionally strongly bound to pro-national, protectionist forms of policies. Even the common belief that Eurocommunists would be seeking to overcome the typical Cold War bipartition of the World, thus vanquishing the two blocks logic, wouldn't apply to the French Party, which continued to be – except for short periods – mostly Stalinist in structure and political disposition.¹⁶ Even the SED was well aware of the intrinsic incongruences affecting Eurocommunism and felt that it was no real threat for “Real Socialism”, nor at all for its own goals.¹⁷ It was indicative of this that even the gathering of the three main protagonists of the „third way“, Enrico Berlinguer, Santiago Carrillo and Georges Marchais, who in 1974 laid the foundations for a strategic co-operation in Brussels, did not preoccupy Soviet Russia and its satellite states.¹⁸ The Western front seemed fragmented and utterly fragile, as we already stressed. The

14. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/170.

15. A. KRIEGEL, *Eurocommunism: a new kind of communism?*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1978; D. OBERNDÖRFER, *Einführung: Die sozialistischen und kommunistischen Parteien Frankreichs, Italiens, Spaniens und Griechenlands*, in: D. OBERNDÖRFER (ed.), *Sozialistische und kommunistische Parteien in Westeuropa*, Bd.1: Südländer, Leske + Budrich, Opladen, 1978, p.11.

16. See A. AGOSTI, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano 1921-1991*, Carocci, Rom, 1999; S. PONS, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Einaudi, Turin, 2006.

17. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/61, Büro Hermann Axen, Information für das Politbüro. Tagungen des ZK und der Zentralen Kommission der IKP vom 2. bis 5. Juli 1979 und am 10.07.1979, Berlin 13.07.1979.

18. See S. PONS, Berlinguer, pp.21-161.

agreements reached at the summit in the Belgian capital (among others, enhanced cooperation to foster democracy, higher autonomy from Moscow) could not be fulfilled and the core of the Eurocommunist movement started very quickly to fade away.

SED observers repeatedly tied the birth and the „survival” of Eurocommunism to the PCI, which in their analysis dominated Western European Communism. French communists, entangled in internal quarrels such as the maintaining of the political alliance with the Socialist Party they had stipulated in 1972, would just uncritically trail the PCI. The SED concluded that this was to be attributed to the fragility of the PCF, internally as well as internationally, due to the French comrades’ increasing dependence from the Socialist Party and to lacking willingness for ideological renewal. At the same time they conceded that its opening to Eurocommunism was solely tactics and couldn’t be considered as a sign of opposition against the Eastern Block.¹⁹

As a matter of fact the two main pillars of Eurocommunism, PCI and PCF, differed greatly in many aspects of their policies. The first relied thoroughly on its ties to the German Social Democracy (SPD) as a powerful intermediary in both the political and the financial sphere; the latter was very critical of the SPD, overtly accusing it to operate as an “agent” for the allegedly “hegemonic”, “imperialist” US. Moreover the PCF would not agree on manifold ideological beliefs with the PCI.²⁰ Indeed the French companions were never able to cut loose conclusively from the Russian model and continued to depend on guiding principles from Moscow.²¹

By the mid-1970s it seemed like the emphatic boost that had accompanied the emergence of Eurocommunism had already come to an end. In addition, the SED dismissed the avowal of the PCF to the heretic doctrine and claimed that the French would adhere to it only out of opportunism. East German analysts argued that the PCF was still too much influenced by Marxism-Leninism as to be able to break free and steer a course of democratic communism the Italian companions were promoting.²² The main gap between the two major Western European communist Parties remained structural as well as ideological: the PCF was in the eyes of the SED still a class-party, the PCI rapidly transforming into a social-democratic, catch-all kind of

19. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/187, Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen (hereafter, Int. Verb.), Einschätzung der Gemeinsamen Erklärung der FKP und der IKP, 17.11.1975.

20. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/187, Int. Verb., Vermerk über Aussprache zwischen Genossen Erich Honecker und Genossen Georges Marchais am 1. November 1975, 04.11.1975, here p.5.

21. Bericht über die Konsultation des Genossen Paul Markowski, Mitglied der ZK und Leiter der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, mit Vertretern des ZK der Italienischen Kommunistischen Partei am 19. und 20. Mai in Rom, in: SAPMO-BArch, Int. Verb., DY/30/IV B 2/20/508, pp.4-6.

22. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV 2/2.035/92, Büro Hermann Axen, Einschätzung des gemeinsamen Programms von FKP und Sozialistischer Partei, (no date), p.9.

organization, with interests and ramifications reaching well beyond the national borders.²³²⁴

Official SED declarations would generally depict Eurocommunism as a highly subversive theory underpinning attempts of US- and FRG-driven “capitalistic imperialism” to erode the heterogeneity and solidity of world communism. Eurocommunists would aim at weakening Soviet Russian predominance and drive a wedge between Moscow and the rest of its allies.²⁵ So what use was for East Berlin rulers to still maintain relationships to the alleged renegades?

The GDR was on the one hand reluctant to support „emancipatory” efforts of fraternal parties in the West; on the other hand it sensed that it could very much benefit from such ties. In this struggle between communist interparty solidarity and GDR regime interests, often the latter prevailed. In 1973 the SED suddenly announced the recognition of the fascist Franco regime in Spain, a decision that caused quite a stir.²⁶ Cooperation with a sovereign state, albeit an authoritarian and that was poised to recognize the GDR in return, carried much weight. The same approach was to characterize the international policies of the SED for the years to come: gaining and asserting power within the given restraints of a small satellite nation at the very border of the two superpower systems.

So while the PCI drew much attention from the SED, for all the reasons we already mentioned, the PCF began to fade inexorably into the background, even though its profile was still very congruent with the general tenet of the East Block. The PCF was going to pull out of the Left Coalition it had started with the French Socialists back in 1972 as late as 1977, thus plunging into a crisis.²⁷ On the contrary the PCI was intensifying its international clout, backed up by very successful electoral campaigns in Italy that had made it by far the largest Communist Party (it boasted over three times as many party members as its French counterpart) of the West and one of the biggest overall. It was indeed Enrico Berlinguer's Party, the charismatic leader who during the 1970s would arise to one of the most popular personalities in Europe and set the PCI out to a more comprehensive interpretation of communism, at odds with traditional, Soviet Marxism-Leninism and very dissuasive of any form of dogmatism. So it is easily comprehensible that the SED would seek and ensure regular contact with the Italians solely out of opportunism.

23. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/189, Int. Verb., Information Nr. 3/74 für das Politbüro, Haltung der FKP und der IKP zur Frage des Weges zur Macht, 10.01.1974.

24. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/60, Int. Verb., Information Nr. 90/1978 für das Politbüro, Rede des Gen. der IKP, Enrico Berlinguer, auf der Kundgebung zum Abschluss des Pressefestes der „L'Unità“ in Genua am 17.09.1978, 27.09.1978, p.20.

25. SAPMO-BArch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/60, Int. Verb., Zum „Eurokommunismus“, 1975 (anonymous), p.2.

26. A. BAUMER, *Camaradas ...*, op.cit., p.202.

27. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs ...*, op.cit., p.85; see also U. PFEIL, *Die anderen deutsch-französischen Beziehungen. Die DDR und Frankreich 1949-1990*, Böhlau, Cologne, 2004.

Significantly, it did so consistently: it tackled neither Euro- nor Italian communism as such, apart from standard verbal attacks. Along these lines it went on to reconcile with the PCE, still bewildered by the German decision to recognize the Franco regime. In late 1974 the SED summoned a meeting with the Spanish companions in East Berlin to talk about the latest events and make up for past misunderstandings. Confronted by the reality of the situation the SED assuaged its ideological differences with the Spaniards, which dated back to the Prague Spring, and offered to reset the mutual relationships. As a matter of fact it was neither „fraternal solidarity” nor conviction but rather a long-sighted calculation that led to settlement. Signals showed that Francisco Franco was teetering and losing control of the regime, so it was all set for an imminent takeover by democratic forces, among which the PCE would surely play an influential role. Erich Honecker wanted to take the SED into a position where it would directly benefit from good connections with a potential government party.²⁸

Differences among Eurocommunists would deepen over the years, despite all efforts to find a common basis of shared values and concerted policies. Even propaganda events like the gathering of PCI and PCE with their own leaders, Berlinguer and Carrillo, in summer 1975 in Livorno, emphatically making the case for „the Communism of the future” – irrespective of borders, free from dogmatic tenets, thoroughly integrated into democratic parliamentary systems – to be rapidly laid down and implemented everywhere, was to yield no tangible results.²⁹ Quite the contrary occurred. As it became clear that the European Community was going to accept new membership applications, Western European parties reacted very nervously, mostly abiding by their own national traditions. PCI and PCE expressed almost directly their conformity with the plans of the EC, the PCF instead wasn’t willing to accept a formal joining of for instance Spain, because this would undermine French agricultural interests in the South of the country.³⁰

The 9th SED Party Congress in late May 1976 was meant to make the final arrangements for the imminent Conference of the European communist Parties, starting one month later in East Berlin.³¹ Symbolically the Conference had to boast the integrity and cohesion of the communist world and propagandize that no slight differences on ideological matters could ever infringe the unity of the socialist family. Indeed the meeting was a breakthrough as it helped arbitrate pending quarrels and drew the attention of the media from all over the globe. Conflicts of opinion with fellow Western European communist parties could actually not be solved, yet the gathering was of great importance as it took different personalities together. All

28. A. BAUMER, *Kommunismus ...*, op.cit., pp.114-129 and 171-173.

29. Gemeinsame Erklärung der IKP und SpKP/1975, in: M. STEINKÜHLER, *Eurokommunismus ...*, op.cit., pp.272-273.

30. SAPMO-Barch, DY/30/IV B 2/20/50, Int. Verb., Tagung des ZK der Kommunistischen Partei Spaniens vom 28. bis 30. Juli 1976 in Rom, 11.08.1976.

31. S. WOLLE, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989*, Ch. Links, Berlin, 1998, pp.46-49.

speeches, without exceptions, were replicated in the SED organ *Neues Deutschland*, even the most critical ones.³²

The willingness of East Berlin to take advantage of bilateral relationships, also with partners that had been very censorious of Moscow, proved stronger than any formal affiliation to the Eastern Block.³³ This doesn't mean that the SED contravened by any chance the international policy set out by the Russian „mother party“, the CPSU, it yet tried to widen its scope of action – it desperately needed in order to keep up its diplomatic and political legitimacy on the one hand, and on the other hand to be involved in lucrative financial and commercial activities to relieve the disastrous economic situation of the country – mostly with Western partners. The Marxist-Leninist tenet of solidarity and loyalty to the members of the Warsaw Pact was still strongly clasped; East Berlin rulers recognized nonetheless the strategic importance of preferably good relationships to NATO countries, all propagandistic hostility notwithstanding.

This certainly was the case as in February 1977 the three main Eurocommunist „ambassadors“, PCI, PCF and PCE, gathered in Madrid on a meeting designed to revive Eurocommunism. Pluralism, freedom of thought, of opinion and the press, respect of voting rights and results etc. were the pivotal requests they expressed. The CPSU made no secret of its concern about the message sent out in the Spanish capital city and called upon its allies to energetically go up against the ideological foes and sap the subversive platform.³⁴ All of this went quite unheard within the SED, which just didn't see the necessity of freezing important contacts to the West. This stance was refined subsequently on a session of the „Central Committee Secretaries of Eastern Countries“, as the SED allegedly thwarted the plan of its fellows to start a major attack against Eurocommunism and its leaders.³⁵

4. The 1980s between rearmament issues and perestroika

As the Cold War winds started to blow stiffer again since the end of the 1970s the action radius of the SED narrowed visibly. The crises in Afghanistan and Poland signalled that military options were still very much on the agenda, the Soviet Union invading the Asian country in 1979, only a few days after NATO had made the Double-Track decision, which countered the Soviet SS-20 deployments by reinforcing missile presence in Western Europe. Here again, Eurocommunism showed all its

32. For example the speeches by Santiago Carrillo, *Rede des Genossen Santiago Carrillo*, and Enrico Berlinguer, *Rede des Genossen Enrico Berlinguer*, both in: *Konferenz der kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien Europas. Dokumente und Reden*, Dietz, (East) Berlin, 1976, respectively pp. 119-127 and 223-233.

33. H. TIMMERMANN, *Ost-Berlins Beziehungen zu Jugoslawien und „Eurokommunisten“*, in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 9(1977), pp.949-965.

34. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs ...*, op.cit., pp.1-2 and 85.

35. H. TIMMERMANN, *Ost-Berlins Beziehungen ...*, op.cit., pp.963-964.

intrinsic fragility. The PCF at least condoned the Soviet attack in Afghanistan; the PCI criticized it vehemently and billed the NATO resolution on deployment of further American weaponry at the border to the Iron Curtain. Italian communists, according to Russian observers, would have taken much the same stance as the US-President.³⁶

Propaganda bore its fruits. Transnational relationships over the Curtain suffered strongly from the crisis, delegation visits, political and technical, decreased dramatically while Eurocommunism was actually coming adrift. PCE and PCF were internally fragmented, reformers and pro-soviet traditionalists antagonizing each other, electoral power breaking away, steadily moving to the brink of insignificance.³⁷ Yet characteristically the SED didn't break up with the PCI, still strong and influential enough to guarantee useful links to the ruling parties in France (François Mitterrand and his Socialist Party) and West Germany (Helmut Schmidt and the SPD), two of the most powerful figures in Europe; it did instead reshape its relationships to both French and Spanish communists, putting them on hold.³⁸

At a summit in January 1980 in Moscow PCF leaders reconciled definitively with the CPSU. Both parties put on record that they were willing to overcome all past differences and cooperate again against capitalism and the power of monopolies.³⁹ Also they didn't miss the chance to send a reproach out to the PCI, who was found guilty of having lately endorsed NATO policies. The resurgence of the „axis” Paris-Moscow sealed eventually the end of the Eurocommunist base frame that once reached from Rome over Paris all the way to Madrid. *Le Matin de Paris* would afterwards much representatively headline: „le PCF rentre dans son ghetto”, in other words, „the PCF gets back to its own ghetto” by reaching out again to Soviet rule and breaking with the libertarian attempts of a more comprehensive kind of communism the Italians had in mind.⁴⁰ On the situation in Poland again the two major Western European communist parties differed deeply, the French maintaining that Solidarność would only endanger the Government's efforts to restore order and security, the PCI arguing that the upsurge led by Polish workers would act as a stimulus for democracy.⁴¹

Yet, despite all disagreement on sensible issues, the Eastern Block, especially the SED and the CPSU, would not stop contemplating the possibility to cooperate with

36. APCI [Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano], Sez. Estero, Mikrofilm 8012, Lettera del KPdSU al PCI, 05.12.1980.

37. A. BAUMER, *Camaradas ...*, op.cit., pp.205-206; F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs ...*, op.cit., p.89.

38. APCI, Sez. Estero, Mikrofilm 8110, Relazione della delegazione del PCI (Cervetti, Cacciapuoti, Mechini) al X. Congresso della SED, Berlin 10.-16.04.1981, pp.6-7; Mikrofilm 8112, Verbale dei colloqui tra delegazioni della SED e del PCI, 11.11.1981, p.5.

39. APCI, Sez. Estero, Mikrofilm 440, Conclusi a Mosca i colloqui tra il PCUS e il PCF („Unità”), 12.01.1980.

40. APCI, Sez. Estero, Mikrofilm 440, Les communistes explorent la voie (*Le Matin de Paris*), 26.01.1980.

41. APCI, Sez. Estero, Mikrofilm 487, Critiche di Marchais al PCI sulla Polonia („Unità“), 14.11.1980.

the PCI, or at least to take advantage of its intermediary role.⁴² East Berliner rulers had ever since the end of the 1960s regularly resorted to it to keep their contacts to the SPD alive, with which they were going to embark upon (among others) projects on a chemical-weapons-free corridor at the inner German border.⁴³

By the mid-1980s the general framework changed drastically. Hovering above the increasingly difficult domestic political situation in East Germany – where the Friedensbewegung (peace movement) was rapidly gaining weight, thus endangering the legitimacy of the communist regime – and the ailing financial conditions of the country was perestroika, launched by Mikhail Gorbachev a year after his inauguration as General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. Perestroika called for détente and a more transparent approach to the exercise of power, proclamations which couldn't encounter much enthusiasm in East Berlin, taken in desperately trying to save both SED and GDR from ruin.

On the other hand, the only remaining advocate of Eurocommunism, PCI, was going through a stage of harsh discomfort, after its leader Enrico Berlinguer had passed in 1984. His death had widened the schism within the Party, with Soviet supporters beginning to speak up and majority reformers behind the new Secretary Alessandro Natta showing all kind of difficulty in handling the dire situation. Against this background the SED put its relations to the Italians on ice, particularly since Natta and his companions had begun to enhance their affiliation to the CPSU under the new rule of Gorbachev. Ironically, as contacts between Italian and Russian communists grew both in quantity and in quality, East Berlin opted out of the „privileged connection” to the PCI. Overall conditions were hostile: Eurocommunism had ceased to exist, the Italians were themselves in an awkward position and the SED was facing the last crisis of its history, which would pave the way to the fall of the Berlin wall.

5. Final remarks

East German rulers, ever since the founding of the GDR in 1949, were strongly committed to the Soviet Union. They owed the CPSU almost everything, power, legitimacy and not least economic security. Yet, as the Superpowers began to ratchet up the Cold War and financial hardship to be felt, the SED found itself in a position where it had to act from necessity.⁴⁴ This meant it should spare no effort but try and

42. APCI, Sez. Estero, Microfilm 8112, Verbale dei colloqui tra delegazioni della SED (Heinz Lehmann, Helmut Schiffner – Abteilung Außenbeziehungen; Hans Voss, DDR-Botschafter in Italien) e del PCI (Antonio Rubbi, Rodolfo Mechini, Michele Ingenito), Roma 09.-11.11.1981; Microfilm 8112, Incontri politici in URSS, Luciano Barca e Franchi, 23.12.1981.

43. F. DI PALMA, *Die SED, die kommunistische Partei Frankreichs ...*, op.cit.

44. F. DI PALMA, *Europa als transnationales „Konstrukt“? Europapolitik und Europavorstellungen bei der SED (1945-1989)*, in: F. DI PALMA, W. MUELLER (eds), *Kommunismus und Europa. Vorstellungen und Politik europäischer kommunistischer Parteien im Kalten Krieg*, Schöningh, Paderborn, forthcoming.

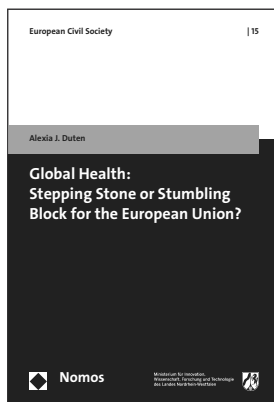
come to terms with any potential counterpart, even those holding different views, to maintain and consolidate its status. Once the national sovereignty was reached, at the beginning of the 1970s, it turned to lucrative commercial and political operations with Western European partners. These happened to be often Eurocommunists, who were then quite influential, both nationally and internationally, as we saw.

Ever since Soviet Russia had set the main frame of action for the Eastern Block, the SED could take advantage of bilateral contacts with selected organizations, such as the PCI and the PCF, often bypassing negotiations with the mother party. Quite characteristically East Berliners would prefer to go back – despite all criticism and profound ideological disagreement – to the Italians, who had become behind the leading role of Enrico Berlinguer one of the most influential political forces in Western Europe. Much less appealing to them was the PCF, although mostly Soviet friendly, but at the same time strongly nationally bound and by far not as powerful as the PCI.

Eurocommunism, the third-way communist doctrine that was meant to offer an alternative to both Social Democracy and Marxism-Leninism, was never at stake, nor did it ever constitute a real threat for the SED. No ideological mingling, nor at all adhesion was allowed. On the contrary, East Germans criticized the “heretic” Eurocommunist ideas with great energy and unequivocally. The SED sought in general dialogue with useful partners solely out of opportunism and showed no reluctance to do so until the very end in the late 1980s.

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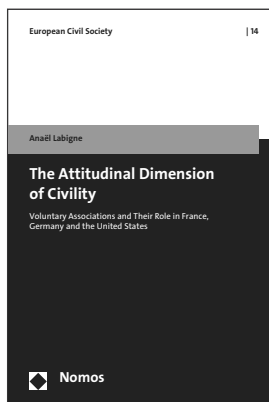
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