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Poland and the Comecon – EEC relations

After 1945, the world was divided into two different political and economic systems dominated by the two superpowers: the USA and the USSR, respectively. Each bloc developed a different vision of its influence zones and identified different economic priorities. The USA and Western European capitalist states supported economic freedom, in particular free trade, which found expression in the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1947, the establishment of the OEEC in 1948 – set up to administer the Marshall Plan, as well as the signing of the EEC Treaty by six Western European countries in 1957. Even though capitalist countries, including the EEC and the USA, quite frequently clashed over economy and politics (for more cf. Puślecki, 1994) they presented a relatively coherent economic and political vision of the world based on the shared values of democracy, free trade and a free market economy.

The majority of socialist countries united within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), which was designed to support the advancement of national economies, technological progress and the Comprehensive Program for Socialist Economic Integration established in 1971 (for more see: Bożyk, Czepurko, Góra, 1972, pp. 118–146).

R. Skobelski rightfully notes that Comecon was a successive stage in the forming of the Eastern Bloc, primarily serving the interests of the USSR. It reinforced the Soviet economic model in dependent states (rejecting market principles, assuming central planning and industrialization) and facilitated the Kremlin's supervision and influence over the shape and directions in which their respective economies developed (Skobelski, 2010, p. 158). The USSR dominance over this group was unquestionable. Moscow administered the same solutions to Comecon members as to the Soviet republics, thereby sometimes stifling rather than fostering the economic development of its allies. The system of relations was supervised directly from Moscow and frequently failed to account for the economic differences in the socialist states and their peculiarities. Additionally, after 1964, Comecon countries were obliged to coordinate their respective economic plans according to the Kremlin's guidelines. In the opinion of S. Kuziński (1972, p. 14), this strategy failed to bring the expected outcomes. There was a certain period when Romania was the only country emphasizing its extensive independence from Comecon, and it expected to be given freedom in entering into trade agreements with capitalist states, including the EEC.[1] Poland expressed its readiness to defend its

[1] Skobelski notes that, especially in the period of the Soviet-Chinese conflict in the 1960s, Romania tended to become economically independent and less reliant on the Comecon in foreign policy (Skobelski, op. cit., p. 204). As early as 1972, Romania applied to the EEC for tariff preferences which was expected to allow the duty free export of Romanian industrial products to the EEC market,

national interests at the expense of socialist integration, but it did so behind the scenes rather than in the official talks with EEC representatives (P. Bożym, 1979, Zespół AKT MSZ DEP. IV MSZ, 3/84, wiązka 22).

From the beginning of the 1960s, both the EEC and Comecon stressed the need to establish mutual relations, including trade relations, although Comecon appeared more determined to do so. Given the increasing prosperity in the countries of the Common Market, socialist countries hoped to acquire modern technologies from the West and financial resources, in the form of credit and loans dedicated to the modernization of their uncompetitive economies. Although these needs had been identified and the benefits of the collaboration realized, Comecon-EEC relations generated numerous problems from their very beginning.

First, from the beginning, Comecon treated the European Economic Community as the economic supplier for the North-Atlantic Treaty. Countries of the Eastern Bloc approached the EEC as a trade superpower whose intention was to impose all the forms of Western institutional integration on socialist countries by force (Bartoszewicz, 1983, p. 2).

Second, in the opinion of socialist countries, the EEC applied numerous barriers and restrictions in developing trade contacts; therefore, they perceived the EEC as “the most extensive and compact protectionist bloc compared to other GATT members” (Ławniczak, 1975, p. 115).

Third, socialist countries did not recognize the EEC as a subject of international law, which hindered the establishment of official Comecon-EEC relations. Therefore, the discussion between the parties over who should negotiate a mutual agreement lasted from 1973 to March 1988. From the point of view of the European Community, which had developed supranational institutions, Comecon lacked appropriate bodies to negotiate with the EEC. Socialist countries made a fundamental procedural error at the very beginning of the mutual contacts when the Comecon Secretariat sent a letter concerning the negotiations to the Council of the European Communities instead of the EEC Commission. The EEC stood on the position that since Comecon lacked appropriate bodies to run a joint trade policy, EEC trade objectives could not be achieved and mutual contacts were generally hindered. A renowned economist, K. Michałowska-Gorywoda wrote in the 1970s that, in the opinion of the EEC, trade

among other things. Bucharest justified its request by the fact that it was a developing country, 60% of its population lived in rural areas and income *per capita* was comparable to that in other countries which enjoyed similar preferences. Additionally, Romania accounted for only 0.5% of EEC imports. Cf. Matosek do Staniszewskiego (tajny szyfrogram) z 3 marca 1972. DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT 4/84, wiązka 8 (protokoły tajne). Romania was thereby open to collaboration with the West since Bucharest believed that Comecon was not able to supply patents and licenses at a desirable technological level. The correspondence exchanged between Polish diplomatic outposts and Department IV of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was in charge of contacts with Western European capitalist states, shows that for a long time Romania hoped that an agreement signed between Comecon and the EEC would facilitate bilateral agreements between Romania and the EEC. Cf. Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT 4/84, wiązka 8 (protokoły tajne). W. Napieraj do dyr. DEP. IV MSZ J. Fekecza (tajny protokół) – notatka informacyjna z rozmowy I. Patana z wicepremierem rządu ZSRR, przewodniczącym Komitetu Wykonawczego RWPG K. Katuszewa na temat aktualnego stanu i perspektyw dialogu RWPG – EWG – z dnia 29 marca 1979 roku, Zespół Akt MSZ, DEP. IV, 4/84, wiązka 8.

agreements could be entered into only by the EEC and individual Comecon countries as parties (Michałowska-Gorywoda, 1981, p. 399).

Fourth, the mutual relations between Comecon and the EEC – the two leading economic organizations in Europe of different political origins – served as a measure of trade relations between the East and the West both in economic and political terms. According to the above-mentioned T. Bartoszewicz, Comecon-EEC relations were a function of relations between the East and the West (Bartoszewicz, p. 160).

Fifth, different benefits of the mutual economic contacts were sought by socialist countries, including Poland, and capitalist countries. The EEC constituted a significant sales market, primarily for foodstuffs, agricultural products and semi-products supplied by Comecon countries. They were also interested in importing mainly new technologies from the West and – as the economic situation deteriorated – in obtaining loans and credit on favorable terms. From the beginning of the 1960s, however, as socialist countries advanced their contacts with the EEC, they continued to emphasize the discriminatory nature of the Common Market which, in their opinion, deliberately applied quantitative limits in exports and differentiated the level of liberalization of trade allowed with individual socialist countries. Comecon member countries believed that the Common Market limited its exports to the socialist organization and restricted the influx of favorable loans to these countries. In 1981, a Polish journalist and publicist wrote that “no comparable limits were imposed by the Common Market on any other countries or their groups” (Bilik, 1981, p. 128). In the book *Dwa modele integracji: EWG i RWPG* [Two models of integration: the EEC and Comecon], T. Bartoszewicz sustained this view and argued that EEC member states did not extend the OEEC Code of Liberalization to include trade with socialist countries, although they included other third countries (Bartoszewicz, p. 154). EEC countries hinted that socialist countries did not apply the principles of GATT in their system of free trade.[2] Bartoszewicz continued his argument that the Common Market, acting through the EEC Council of Ministers, decided to differentiate its quantitative limitations in trade as early as 1962 (Bartoszewicz, p. 155). Even before that, in 1960, the same body made another play-safe decision to expand trade agreements with socialist countries by a provision enabling EEC member states to review their agreements concluded with socialist countries if the EEC introduced a common trade policy, which actually was the case in 1975 (Minkiewicz, DEP. IV MSZ, Zespół 17, teczka 41, wiązka 30).

In the circumstances of the dynamically changing international reality, socialist countries appeared to offer useful sale markets for the goods of EEC capitalist countries. They also hoped to get access to resources and inexpensive foodstuffs from socialist countries. From the point of view of the Common Market, political matters constituted an important set of arguments to settle the mutual EEC-Comecon relations. Capitalist countries took an official stance in favor of settling the mutual relations in

[2] E. Piontek notes that before 1967 neither the founding member of the GATT, Czechoslovakia, nor other socialist countries took advantage of customs tariff reductions by the EEC. In his opinion, this was discrimination against these countries since the MFN (Most Favored Nation) clause applied in relations with EEC countries. See: E. Piontek, *EWG: instrumenty prawne zewnętrznej polityki gospodarczej*, Warszawa 1979, p. 132. See also: E. Piontek, *Udział państw socjalistycznych w GATT*, Warszawa 1975.

a manner which would confirm the respect for the CSCE Final Act. The attitude of the EEC to the advancing process of liberalization of trade with socialist countries evolved over time. They expressed their desire to cooperate but, at the same time, for a long time they did not treat Comecon as a partner in negotiations with the Community. Socialist countries, in turn, increasingly emphasized their desire to sign a framework Comecon-EEC agreement. From the point of view of the EEC, however, they were not ready formally to do so.

As mentioned above, the origin of Comecon-EEC contacts dates back to the early 1970s and is associated with a détente in East-West relations. Yet the first attempts at establishing mutual relations were made at the turn of the 1950s. It was after the Treaties of Rome were signed in 1957 that the extremely prosperous EEC, which generated enormous economic profits from trade exchange with capitalist countries and other third parties, offered the high quality of its produce, advanced technological level of production and trade benefits to its partners. There could have been an opportunity for the countries behind the Iron Curtain, potential EEC partners, to import the products their countries needed, but also to attract foreign capital and introduce technological innovations. Yet, in this period, the EEC was assessed from a single perspective in Comecon, and J. Wieczorek noted that “the attitude of EEC countries to trade exchange with socialist countries was primarily determined by political rather than economic factors” (Wieczorek, 1981, p. 166).

From the mid-1960s, the European Community entered into a series of limited agreements with Comecon countries. They primarily concerned the imports mainly of agricultural and food products from socialist countries. The 1965 agreement signed with Poland provided for the import of Polish eggs to the EEC market. Podraza notes that this practice of entering into agreements by means of letters with highly detailed settlements concerning agricultural products, textiles, coal and steel continued in the following years (Podraza, 1996, p. 72). In the context of Cold-War competition, signing a framework trade agreement between the EEC and Comecon, which socialist countries began to urgently pursue, was out of the question. Only certain steps were made at that time that were to facilitate future contacts between the two parties.

In 1970, a list of 797 tariff items was agreed that liberalized the EEC’s attitude towards the socialist countries in Comecon (Bartoszewicz, p. 156). Mutual contacts continued to be burdened by the fact that the two organizations did not acknowledge one another. Given the progressing détente, in the early 1970s, both organizations began to pursue the normalization of mutual relations. It was socialist countries that argued that the establishment of EEC-Comecon contacts would be a distinct confirmation of the international détente, which in their opinion was initiated by the Eastern bloc. Before the talks began, in January 1969, the 22nd session of the Comecon Executive Committee (CEC) was held in Berlin, where socialist countries resolved to continue their bilateral trade relations with the EEC, while the EEC would not be recognized as an organization and no trade agreements would be signed with the EEC as a whole (Skrzypek, 1987, p. 189).

It therefore seemed that the speech delivered by the leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Leonid Brezhnev, at the congress of USSR trade unions in 1970 would inaugurate Comecon-EEC relations. At the meeting, Brezhnev enigmatically

announced that “our posture towards the members of this group will depend on the extent to which they, for their part, recognize the reality that emerged in the socialist part of Europe, especially during the Cold War. Therefore the recognition of the reality should be full and mutual” (Bartoszewicz, p. 165).

In August 1973, after the 27th session of Comecon, its Secretary N. Fadeyev was empowered to initiate a dialogue with the EEC on the part of socialist countries. Therefore he approached the EEC Council of Ministers with a preliminary collaboration offer and submitted a proposal to establish EEC-Comecon collaboration to the president of the EEC Council of Ministers, Ivar Norgaard. Since it was the EEC Commission and not the Council that held the mandate to run negotiations, the EEC’s response was evasive.

In September 1973, the EEC Council of Ministers issued an official response where it suggested that the institution appointed to run negotiations with Comecon was the EEC Commission, which was mandated to receive the official statement from Comecon. Although the EEC tried to persuade Comecon that its reply did not mean a refusal, from the beginning of 1974, socialist countries concluded that there was no desire on the part of the EEC to establish relations. From then on, both parties mainly examined one another and ran both official and unofficial talks at diplomatic outposts. They also initiated other forms of collaboration, but they were so varied that the chances of extensive collaboration seemed negligible.

For instance, in November 1974, the EEC Commission put forward a proposal to sign a trade agreement. Bilateral agreements were addressed to individual socialist states and provided for an MFN clause to be granted to them. According to Mr. Zimny from the Economic Section at the Department of Studies and Programming at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) at the time, this offer was refused by Comecon for formal reasons (Zimny, DEP. IV MSZ, Zespół 2/83, wiązka 6).

The situation changed in early 1975 when bilateral relations entered a new stage. As of January 1, 1975 the EEC began to apply the same, highly disadvantageous, trade policy principles to all the socialist countries. Fadeyev replied to this, inviting the president of the EEC Commission, François-Xavier Ortoli to hold talks on this topic. The meeting was held in Moscow on February 4–6, 1975. EEC representatives and Director-General of the Department for Foreign Relations, Mr. Wallenstein took part in it. The Western delegation was received by the head of the Foreign Department at the Comecon Secretariat, Mr. Moiseenko and discussed preliminary cooperation terms and the operating mechanisms of both organizations. Comecon addressed the context in which the EEC applied a common trade policy to socialist states which hindered the development of mutual relations, in particular trade relations. Consequently, the EEC Commission proposed that non-preferential agreements be entered into with interested Comecon members for a period ranging from five to ten years. Such agreements would provide, among other things, “for an MFN clause to be granted, the possible application of customs tariffs concessions and further liberalization of the import of those goods that the EEC still applied quantitative restrictions on” (Michałowska-Gorywoda, p. 268). The above-mentioned clauses were further expanded by the inclusion of those facilitating industrial collaboration and security clauses. Demonstrating its good will, the EEC Commission proposed to increase the volume of trade in foodstuffs from socialist countries, although this was theoretically complicated due to the provisions of

the EEC's common agricultural policy. On the other hand, the EEC expected increased imports of its goods by socialist countries and, most importantly from the point of view of its economic interests, to obtain resources and energy from Comecon countries.

According to Michałowska-Gorywoda who graduated from the Central School of Planning and Statistics (SGPiS), these proposals by the EEC were neither realistic nor progressive, but were actually a step backwards, given the status quo of mutual EEC-Comecon relations (ibid., p. 269). She noted that the MFN clause accompanied every bilateral agreement between socialist countries and the EEC from 1972, even if it was not always applied. Additionally, the above-mentioned agreement did not provide for the increased exports of industrial goods from Comecon to the EEC which the former was striving for. In the opinion of Michałowska-Gorywoda, this proposal was a probe, aiming to test the response of Comecon, rather than a realistic and consensual collaboration proposal for either party.

From 1975, both organizations declared their intention to commence negotiations, each on its own terms. The EEC envisaged the possibility of signing bilateral agreements between the EEC and Comecon countries, whereas the latter expected to sign a framework trade agreement between the organizations.

In February 1976, Comecon put forward a proposal to sign an agreement on the foundations of mutual relations with the EEC. The President of the Comecon Executive Committee, Mr. Weiss submitted a draft of the agreement to the President of the European Council, Mr. Thorn. The content of this proposal was developed during the 73rd session of the CEC held in Moscow on October 13–15, 1975. It encompassed a number of fields that reflected the wide range of expectations Comecon countries had; among other things it addressed the issue of tariffs and other protectionist measures, as well as an MFN clause to be applied in trading with Comecon countries. This draft was strongly associated with the provisions by the CSCE (Preamble, Article IV). Additionally, from the point of view of Comecon members, this draft was to facilitate signing agreements between the members of both organizations on the one hand, and between Comecon members and Community institutions on the other, which was not feasible according to the EEC. This draft was advantageous from the Polish perspective. It secured the interests of Poland, and its adoption did not entail any concessions from Poland towards the EEC. In the opinion of the officers of the Department of Studies and Programming at the Polish MoFA, the implementation of the agreement would generate the following benefits to Poland:

- discriminatory quantitative restrictions on Polish exports applied by the EEC would be abandoned;
- Polish exports of foodstuffs and agricultural products to EEC markets would be protected against discriminatory measures;
- the Community would confirm that an MFN clause was applied to Poland in terms of the entirety of economic and trade relations, rather than exclusively customs tariffs; thereby, the non-discrimination principle would be confirmed. Formally, both these principles should apply to Poland due to its membership of GATT;
- market protection clauses would be generally handled. The call for mutual consultations to be held before applying any market protection measures was deemed as advantageous (Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne, 1975, p. 45).

On November 17, 1976, the EEC presented its response to this proposal through diplomatic channels. The EEC declared its intention of establishing collaboration with Comecon, but in terms of a significantly narrower range of issues. They were to encompass primarily such matters as standardization, information exchange, environmental protection and transportation. For political reasons, the EEC did not agree to enhancing trade and economic collaboration and argued that Comecon did not have the relevant institutions to start negotiations with the EEC as a whole (Michałowska-Gorywoda, p. 400). Additionally, as a gesture of good will, the EEC suggested that the agreement provided for a mutual obligation that both parties should pay special attention to the harmonious development of trade collaboration.

In the following months, Polish diplomatic outposts carefully monitored the situation in EEC member countries hoping that mutual relations between the two organizations would advance. Polish diplomats were of the opinion that the EEC was not eager to start talks about the draft agreement because the reservations made by EEC members prevented the draft from being adopted, whether in whole or in part (Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne, 1976, p. 218).

Despite the numerous obstacles on the path to signing a Comecon-EEC agreement, contacts between the parties somewhat developed from 1970–1977. Pinder notes that socialist countries obtained advantageous loans for the modernization of their respective economies over this period (Pinder, 1994, pp. 14–19). As a consequence, the share of EEC countries in the trade turnover of socialist countries grew. Comecon countries, however, recorded a negative trade balance with capitalist countries (Bartoszewicz, p. 175).

The first round of Comecon-EEC negotiations was commenced in Moscow in May 1978, where a representative of the Comecon Council Mr. Fadeev met Vice-President of the EEC in charge of external relations Mr. Haferkamp. During the talks, both parties admitted that the circumstances were right to start the talks on the fields of the protection of natural environment, standardization and statistics, among other things. As early as then, however, there emerged fundamental differences as to the content of the agreement on mutual relations. The EEC reiterated its former stance that Comecon lacked an institution able to enter into negotiations with the EEC Commission. Collaboration agreements could be signed only between the European Community and Comecon members. Comecon, in turn, as an organization, expected to sign a framework trade agreement with the EEC.[3] In the course of the talks, both parties diplomatically observed that the state of relations between Comecon and the EEC at that time, or rather the lack of those relations, would have to be altered in order to meet the expectations of the participants in the Helsinki process and the provisions of the CSCE Final Act. Comecon clearly stated that the parties of the agreement concerned should

[3] It is worth noting here that, before the first round of Comecon-EEC negotiations, the majority of contentious matters for socialist countries concerned the status and content of a future Comecon-EEC agreement. During a meeting of Comecon experts, held in Moscow from March 13–16, 1978, Romania proposed to regulate the collaboration between both organizations within the framework of their respective competences, whereas some trade issues should be resolved in principle by Comecon member states and EEC member states as well as between Comecon members and the EEC as an organization. Cf. Napieraj do Feliksiaka (tajna notatka informacyjna) z 21 marca 1978.

feature Comecon and its member states on the one side, and the EEC and its member states on the other side. Comecon also suggested that the agreement be supervised by a joint commission encompassing the EEC, Comecon and their respective member states (Bartoszewicz, pp. 171–172).

The Moscow meeting was followed by an invitation extended by the EEC to a Comecon delegation to visit Brussels in July 1978. This meeting was held at the level of experts, who tried to reach a compromise in crucial areas and bring different points of view closer to each other. The participants of these talks managed to confirm mutual collaboration in the least controversial areas, but the negotiations did not take the direction most expected by socialist countries.

Another meeting of the presidents of both economic groups was held in Brussels from November 22–25, 1978. As was the case before, the parties failed to reach agreement and used almost the same arguments to defend their respective positions as in the preceding rounds of talks. Some small progress was achieved concerning the proposals submitted. The EEC proposed that the negotiated agreement should entail a clause on the increasing role of international trade and associate this clause with the CSCE Final Act. Another suggestion made by the EEC concerned introducing a remark about future agreements to be concluded, for instance on special import terms and security clauses. Eventually, the EEC conceded to have members of Comecon and the EEC on the one hand, and Comecon and the EEC as organizations on the other, to be parties to the framework agreement under discussion (Michałowska-Gorywoda, p. 272). Michałowska-Gorywoda noted also that Comecon countries were not satisfied with these proposals, which they viewed as administrative, working proposals. In her opinion, the prospect of trade contacts between the parties was overshadowed by the political arguments put forward primarily by EEC countries.

In the following years, both Comecon and Poland were interested in enhanced economic and trade collaboration with the EEC. On January 9, 1979, the director of Department IV at the Polish MoFA, Mr. Fekecz sent a draft of his Department's tasks for 1979 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Czyrek. Fekecz outlined the priorities of his Department for the following year, including Poland's increased involvement in Comecon-EEC negotiations. He noted that "Poland's contribution to establishing the position on the matters under these negotiations will be important" (Fekecz, 1979, DEP. IV MSZ, 3/84, wiązka 22). An additional crucial task the Department took upon itself concerned the examination of the respective positions of EEC countries on this topic. On January 29, 1979, the 88th session of the CEC was held, where members of the Comecon Commission were appointed to attend a meeting in Brussels. It was also resolved that a letter from the President of the CEC, Mr. Katushev, would be sent to the President of the EEC Council of Ministers, Jean François-Poncet, presenting a general assessment of the talks held so far and – as Janusz Fekecz put it – "expressing a conviction that they can be successfully concluded only if they encompass a whole range of matters discussed in both drafts of the agreement. A new meeting is proposed to be held in order to work out a draft of a joint agreement" (Fekecz, 1979, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 4/84, wiązka 8). A secret encrypted memo with this message was sent by the Director of Department IV of the MoFA to Polish diplomatic outposts in Cologne, Paris, Brussels, London and Rome.

The following months featured CEC sessions during which the Committee regretted that no framework trade agreement had been signed, which the socialist countries saw as the foundation of collaboration between the two organizations. Yet Comecon delegates, including the representatives of Poland, were turning increasingly consensual. Compromise and taking both the ECC’s and Comecon’s proposals into account were discussed. Nevertheless, socialist countries continued to prioritize the issue of a framework agreement over bilateral, general agreements. In his communication addressed to the Director of Department IV of the MoFA, Mr. Napieraj noted that “such bilateral agreements between individual Comecon members and the EEC Commission could be signed only upon the signing of a framework Comecon-EEC agreement” (Napieraj, 1979).

The 89th session of the CEC on Comecon-EEC relations was important in terms of the future of the dialogue between the two organizations. Held in Moscow from March 27–29, 1979, it was a response to a meeting both parties held in Brussels in the preceding year. During the meeting, the President of Comecon, Mr. Fadeev informed its participants that Comecon was ready for another round of negotiations with the EEC. As was mentioned before, Poland was highly interested in this.

The meeting of Comecon delegates was reported to Department IV of the MoFA by Mr. Dmochowski. He observed that a vast majority of the representatives of Comecon countries advocated the scenario of incorporating both drafts of a Comecon-EEC agreement when designing its content. Another important matter was to “make gradual concessions when drafting the agreement in the course of negotiations” (Dmochowski, 1979, Zespół Akt DEP. IV MSZ 4/84, wiązka 8). Further on, Dmochowski noted that Comecon representatives were of the opinion that the Common Market was not inclined to make concessions to Comecon and its proposals should be interpreted in political rather than economic dimensions. For that reason, the representatives of Czechoslovakia, GDR, Mongolia and Poland, among others, suggested making a political proposal to the EEC and continuing talks. The Polish diplomat Dmochowski noted that Romania’s attitude was criticized during the session, since a majority of Comecon countries believed that it hindered the development of a joint Comecon stance towards the EEC.[4] The 89th session of the CEC in Moscow was concluded with a resolution that, in Dmochowski’s opinion, revealed to the West the lack of unity inside Comecon (due to Romanian lassitude). On the other hand, the counterproposals developed then demonstrated Comecon’s intention to establish collaboration and persuade the EEC to make greater concessions.

It did not take the EEC long to respond. On July 27, 1979, the First Secretary of the Polish embassy in Brussels, Mr. Feliksiak sent a secret encrypted memo to the Director of Department IV of the MoFA, Mr. Fekecz, where he observed that the EEC Commission was ready to take up talks with Comecon, preferably at the level of experts, since it was intent on the success of the negotiations. He went on to explain: “For that reason, for now, the EEC refused to hold talks at the highest level. What they would like most, is a quiet meeting of experts (the press excluded), prefer-

[4] In the opinion of Polish diplomats, the absence of noticeable progress in the normalization of Comecon-EEC relations resulted in Romania valuing a bilateral agreement more than signing a framework agreement.

ably in Geneva” (Feliksiak, 1979, Zespół Akt DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 4/84, wiązka 8).

These meetings were followed by tumultuous discussions in the Polish MoFA on the form of Comecon-EEC collaboration and Poland’s involvement in the negotiations. On November 5, 1979, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Trade and Maritime Economy (MoFTME) sent an urgent memo to the Director of Department IV of the MoFA. It featured an assessment of the talks between the EEC and Comecon and outlined the future prospects of the mutual collaboration. It also suggested the stance that the Polish party should take. The authors of this memo referred to the preliminary talks held internally between Comecon members in the past, and they emphasized the different expectations of the members of both organizations as to the development of collaboration.

They started by presenting the expectations Comecon had of the collaboration with the EEC. They stressed that members of the socialist community wanted to handle a wide range of issues related to trade in which both organizations and all member states would take part. Socialist countries also expected that protectionist measures in trade would be lifted, and the MFN clause would be respected, which had not been the case so far, in their opinion. According to Polish diplomats, the proposals the EEC had put forward so far concerned a highly restricted scope of collaboration between the two organizations: “the EEC makes an assumption that Comecon, as an organization which does not run a common trade policy and therefore does not have any common instruments to this end, cannot be an efficient partner for the EEC which does have such a policy. […] Judging from the course of the talks held so far, the EEC sees the normalization of mutual relations in terms of establishing loose, working contacts accompanied by the acknowledgement of direct trade agreements between the EEC and individual Comecon countries” (Dmochowski, 1979, A MSZ, DEP IV 4/84, wiązka 8). As has already been mentioned, this was the form of collaboration the EEC preferred from 1975. Whereas Comecon expected a framework trade agreement to be signed, the EEC provided exclusively for bilateral agreements.

As early as October 1979, the EEC sent an altered draft of the agreement to Comecon, which – in the opinion of Polish diplomats – maintained the former standpoint but in a slightly more flexible form. This draft was evaluated by Mr. Bożym from Department IV of the MoFA, who sent his comments to the Deputy Director of the Department, Mr. Zieliński. This memo, marked as urgent, started with Bożym’s remark that the following section of the agreement requires special attention: “The project stipulates that the parties to the agreement would be the EEC on the one side and Comecon and its member countries on the other. Given this approach, the obligations would fall directly on Comecon member states on our part whereas on the other part – only on the authorities of the EEC” (Bożym, 1979, DEP. IV MSZ, Nabytek 3/84, wiązka 22). Bożym stressed also that the draft left the most crucial aspects of trade which, in the opinion of the EEC, were not within the scope of Comecon’s power to be agreed by individual countries of the EEC and Comecon respectively. The Polish diplomat stressed the fact that the increased flexibility of the EEC is expressed in its opinion that more attention needed to be given to the matters of international trade and supporting the exchange of goods and services (ibid.). The memo ended with a remark

that, from the point of view of Polish interests, the draft might serve as a basis for further discussion and further expansion of provisions on trade should be sought in the talks with the EEC (ibid.).

Another meeting which continued the Comecon-EEC dialogue took place in Moscow from November 26–28, 1979. This time, Comecon Secretary, Mr. Fadeev met the Vice-President of the EEC Commission, Mr. Haferkamp. During the meeting the Comecon delegation presented its own Draft Framework Agreement with the EEC, which contained a modified trade provision. Named Article 5, it defined the principles of trade and economic collaboration between the parties to the agreement which should apply an MFN clause, lift discriminatory restrictions and enable making mutually profitable foreign exchange and financial decisions (ibid.). During this meeting, the EEC delegation maintained its position that the principles of trade between the EEC and Comecon should be ruled only by bilateral trade agreements.

In early December 1979, another round of talks was held by experts from the EEC and Comecon to discuss the expected collaboration. None of the parties was open to making any significant concessions. The Polish embassy in Brussels reported to Department IV of the MoFA that, after the latest talks held in Belgium, the EEC got the impression that there were some problems on the part of Comecon, that the delegation strictly stuck to its position and there was no leeway allowed. Therefore, EEC diplomats concluded that the negotiations would take a long time (Sławiński, 1979, Zespół Akt DEP. IV MSZ, Zespół AKT 4/84, wiązka 8).

The different outlooks of Comecon and the EEC on the shape of their collaboration and the deterioration of the international relations between the East and the West, which started in the late 1970s (largely triggered by the USSR’s aggression in Afghanistan), resulted in the Comecon-EEC negotiations coming to a gridlock. The global situation was difficult both in political and economic terms at that time. Due to the economic recession the West suffered, its trade relations with socialist countries slipped to the background. Facing increased prices of raw materials, socialist countries were forced to export their goods to the USSR. Once again Comecon turned out to serve the interests of the USSR, first and foremost. The balance of payments in Comecon countries was also far from optimistic. The complicated global economic situation resulted in the growth of interest rates and increased level of debt in socialist countries. The situation in Poland, where the authorities repressed the society and were criticized by capitalist countries, was also important for East-West relations. Only Romania managed to sign two agreements in July 1980, despite the pressure coming from other socialist countries, including the USSR.

In spite of unfavorable international economic trends, the development of the difficult Comecon-EEC relations was watched carefully by Department IV of the Polish MoFA from the beginning of the 1980s. In early 1981, the Polish ambassador in Brussels, Mr. Feliksiak sent a report on the operations of his outpost in the previous year to Department IV. He emphasized in it that the European Community had adopted a new negotiation strategy with Comecon and that the embassy should pay particular attention to this strategy. He also observed that the Romania-EEC negotiations would be significant for Poland. Hoping for a framework Comecon-EEC agreement to be signed in the near future, the ambassador hoped that a Poland-EEC agreement would also be

signed, and a Polish mission at the EEC would be established (Feliksiak, 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 1).

On March 26, 1980, Mr. Bożym sent a confidential document to Mr. Napieraj, Director of Department IV of the MoFA, in which he discussed the Comecon-EEC negotiations. He stressed the need to accelerate these negotiations, which might result in the desired agreement and a temporary détente in that time of international tensions. Bożym emphasized the profound political significance of such an agreement. He wrote that “[s]igning it [the agreement] would by itself help to reduce the psychological barriers in the West that considerably hamper the development of economic relations between the countries from both organizations. […] It should also be realized that an agreement will not solve all the problems and it should therefore be treated only as one stage in organizing economic collaboration between socialist countries and Western Europe” (Bożym, 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84, wiązka 16). The diplomat went on to note that the principle of the equality of partners needed to be defended in the mutual relations, and that compromise should be sought, but without allowing concessions in matters of importance to Poland. He finished the memo by saying that Poland should execute the obligations of the EEC in bilateral relations and take advantage of all possible methods of operation that would suit Polish interests.

On June 26, 1980, First Deputy of the Minister of Trade and Maritime Economy, Mr. Długosz, sent a document titled “Directions in the development of economic relations between the Polish People’s Republic with developed capitalist countries by 1985,” developed by the Planning Committee working at the Council of Ministers and Polish MoFA. The author of the document addressed at the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Czyrek, stressed that in the long term, Poland might suffer the consequences of Greek accession to the EEC in 1981 and the planned accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Community, because the integration of these Mediterranean countries with the EEC might reduce Polish exports to EEC markets. Długosz was of the opinion that new members would use the Single Market to “intensify trade of their commodities, especially in light industries (textiles and footwear) which might impair our competitive position in trade with the EEC” (Długosz, 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 16). The resumption of a productive Comecon-EEC dialogue would be crucial for Polish interests.

A gradual progress in EEC-Poland technical relations could be noted from the early 1980s. They primarily concerned the exports of Polish mutton and textiles to the EEC. This matter was urgent, as on June 27, 1980, the EEC Commission resolved to organize a common market of mutton in order to protect it from third party competition, including that of socialist countries. In order to protect its trade interests the EEC did not rule out the possibility of introducing high compensation charges on commodities imported from these countries. Consequently, on June 24, 1980, Deputy Director of the MoFTME, Mr. Martowski, requested the Director of Department IV of the MoFA, Mr. Fekecz, to grant his permission to sign a technical agreement on the export of mutton from Poland to the EEC. He explained that the value of export of Polish mutton livestock in 1979 amounted to 48 million Polish zloty in foreign currency and it was likely to grow in the future. He went on to remark in his memo that Hungary and

Czechoslovakia developed similar trade contacts. Having obtained permission from the Ministry, it would be possible to have talks with the representatives of the EEC Commission who were visiting Poland at that time, invited by the ANIMEX company (Martowski, 1980, Zespół AKT DEP. IV MSZ 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 1). MoFA Undersecretary Mr. Dobrosielski shared this opinion, adding that the Polish party could aim for the so-called territorial clause to be withdrawn from the talks (Dobrosielski, 1980, Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84 (jawne), wiązka).

This initiated a lively exchange of correspondence between the MoFA and the MoFTME on the topic of the Polish-EEC collaboration. On August 29, 1980, undersecretary at the latter Ministry, Mr. Karaś, sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Czyrek in which he presented the conditions of exports of Polish mutton to the EEC. He declared to the Minister that, according to the Ministry’s recommendations, Poland would aim for the territorial clause to be deleted from the agreement. In the case of the EEC Commission’s inflexibility, Poland would agree to the provisions agreed in the textile agreement (Karaś, 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 16).

The interministerial talks on this topic continued in the following months. On October 9, 1980, Minister Karaś asked Minister Dobrosielski for his permission to start negotiations with the EEC on a textile agreement to be held in November of the same year. In the opinion of Karaś, negotiating this agreement was in the interest of Poland (Karaś 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ Zespół AKT, Nabytek 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 16).

From October 15–17, 1980, a Comecon-EEC meeting at the expert level was held in Geneva. Its topic was the progress made in the field of the normalization of mutual relations and rapprochement in trade conditions. A representative of the Polish MoFA, Mr. Orzeszko, sent a memo from this meeting to Department IV of the MoFA, where he noted that it seemed that the observers of the meeting in Brussels were of the opinion that the rigid standpoint of Comecon countries made it impossible for a political agreement to be signed. He observed that this standpoint resulted in the EEC demanding additional guarantees that the Community be politically recognized. The diplomat wrote in his report that Comecon experts stated that the rigid position of EEC countries was the outcome of the influence of the USA, which was against the signing of a Comecon-EEC agreement in principle. The Comecon negotiators concluded that the hitherto standpoint of EEC countries evidenced that the Community was not ready for many concessions as regarded the framework agreement. Therefore, a strong outside stimulus would be useful, possibly coming from the highest level, for instance provided during such meetings as the approaching Brezhnev-d’Estaing or Brezhnev-Schmidt talks (Orzeszko, 1980, Zespół DEP. IV MSZ, Zespół AKT 43/84 (jawne), wiązka 1).

In the face of the deepening economic crisis in Poland, in 1981 Polish authorities deemed it necessary to develop the Polish economy via increased trade between Poland and the EEC, among other things. By special order of the Department of Trade Policy at the MoFTME, the Institute of Economic Trends, Prices and Foreign Trade (IETPFT) presented the list of commodities imported from the EEC to Poland whose value exceeded USD 1 million in 1976. It turned out that their imports accounted for ca. 40% of global Polish imports and ca. 87% of dutiable imports (Martowski, 1981, A MSZ, 45/84, wiązka 11). The study showed that if Poland had obtained extended

customs preferences, the country’s imports would not have been so expensive and exports could have increased from 24% to 41%. “The greatest increase would pertain to the commodity groups of textiles, processed foods, drinks, tobacco, rubber and plastics” (ibid.). In the long term, this would translate into more extensive economic aid to Poland. The study by the IETPFT showed that Poland would certainly benefit from customs preferences, but their granting would involve a series of political decisions by the highest EEC authorities: the Council of Ministers and the European Commission; they would also have to be approved by other GATT members. In the opinion of Polish economists, this might trigger protests by developing countries. Therefore, Polish diplomats believed that it would be more reasonable for Poland to obtain special preferences for a defined period than to obtain reliefs under the General System of Preferences. Martowski remarked in his memo that “Polish authorities would have to make a political decision to turn to the EEC asking for customs preferences under a specific package of broader economic aid granted to Poland” (ibid.). In his opinion, a thorough examination would be required in order to determine the influence such negotiations might have on the Comecon-EEC dialogue. He also noted that Comecon-EEC talks should be preceded by preliminary consultations with the European Commission on the conditions of granting such preferences.

In the early 1980s, Comecon-EEC contacts did not inspire optimism. From November 1980 to September 1983, a meeting went on in Madrid within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe where disputes emerged between the European Community, participating in the talks as a union, and socialist countries. The principal topic of these disputes was the situation in Poland and the martial law declared there in 1981. Martial law allowed the authorities in Poland to implement a number of repressions against its political opponents and Polish society. Economic rapprochement between Comecon and EEC was impossible at that time. Both the European Community and Comecon expressed their desire to establish relations as equal partners as late as at the turn of 1983.

In June 1984, the leaders of communist parties met in Moscow and adopted a resolution where they opted for the development of trade and economic contacts between Comecon and the EEC on fairer principles and for the abandonment of repression: blockades, sanctions and embargoes (Podraza, p. 148). This meeting failed to provide a significant incentive to either party, though. Comecon member countries only probed EEC representatives at that time. The long-awaited change in Comecon-EEC contacts was brought by the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as First Secretary of the USSR Communist Party in 1985. This period marked a number of crucial changes in the USSR and the entire Eastern bloc. From November 1982 to March 1985 three successive USSR leaders died: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, who were famous for their reluctance to execute any reforms in socialist countries, including the USSR. They were more inclined to confront the West, including the EEC, than to collaborate with it. In 1985 they were replaced by the reform-oriented Mikhail Gorbachev who initiated Perestroika (“restructuring”) soon. In a conversation with Italian Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, held at the beginning of his office, Gorbachev recognized the European Community as an economic as well as political entity, which was interpreted as a crucial step on the path to mutual agreement.

Another significant step on the road leading to an agreement between the parties was marked by a letter sent by Comecon Secretary Mr. Sychov to President of the EEC Commission, Jaques Delors where the former proposed to enter into an agreement on mutual relations to be effected by signing a declaration at a high level. On July 29, 1985, the EEC Commission declared its intention to resume the talks while requesting Comecon to present the details of what this declaration should concern. Podraza (ibid.) notes that the EEC was primarily concerned with making sure that the declaration did not influence the current and future EEC-Comecon relations, and thereby with setting socialist countries free from political pressure by the USSR. On September 26 the same year, Sychov replied sending a draft declaration to the EEC Commission and its justification where he addressed the concerns of the EEC. In this letter, Comecon declared its desire to establish mutual relations first and foremost, and to develop such methods and forms of collaboration that would suit both parties in the future. The document explained that this would be the beginning of enhanced collaboration not only between the European Community and Comecon, but also between the Community and specific socialist countries. The Community confirmed its objectives at a session of the European Parliament held in October 1985 and a meeting of the Council in October 1986. Three essential principles of the collaboration were established at that meeting: normalization, parallelism and differentiation,[5] which applied both to the economy and politics. The Community assumed the development of trade relations with Comecon, as well as with specific socialist states on the basis of mutual contacts. The EEC Council took patronage over this field of activities, whereas strictly political matters were supervised by the European Political Community and agreed by the parties primarily in the forum of the CSCE. On January 29, 1986, the Community declared the collaboration with Comecon member countries and with Comecon as an organization. Willy de Clercq notified Secretary Sychov, the organization’s representative, and all Comecon member states to this effect. Although a few socialist countries, such as the GDR and USSR conditioned signing bilateral agreements with the EEC on a prior signing of an agreement normalizing the relations with Comecon, eventually even they agreed to enter bilateral contacts with the Community and establish EEC-Comecon contacts. The positive attitude of both parties made it possible to sign agreements in 1986, for instance between the Community and Poland and Bulgaria, among others.

Both parties met on several occasions from January 1986 to March 1988 but they were unable to agree on the content of the agreement. Another serious obstacle to signing the agreement was the expectation on the part of the EEC that the so-called territorial clause would be applied to West Berlin which would be recognized as part of the European Community. A final agreement was reached, providing for the clause on

[5] Ambassador Matosek informed Director of Department IV, Janusz Fekecz that the President of the EEC Commission, Willy de Clercq wanted these principles to be maintained with respect to socialist countries regardless of the earlier declaration of Romania and Hungary which were for combining the establishment of diplomatic relations with a trade and economic agreement. In his opinion, an agreement could accompany the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations while trade and economic relations could continue. Ambasador PRL w Brukseli T. Matosek do DEP. IV MSZ (tajny szyfrogram z 13 października 1987).

West Berlin to be included in the EEC-Comecon agreement, while not breaching the 1971 quadripartite agreement between the US, USSR, France and the UK on the status of West Berlin. Having resolved the matter of the territorial clause, both the EEC and Comecon were ready to sign the joint declaration.

The Comecon-EEC rapprochement was noted by Polish journalists, including Wojciech Pomianowski from “Życie Warszawy.” At the very beginning of his article *RWPG-EWG – sprzyjający moment?* [Comecon-EEC – a favorable moment?], he noted that the mutual relations between those two great economic organizations were abnormal, lacking formalized foundations. In his opinion, this should no longer be the case because it invited tensions, and continued the division of Europe into two parts. Additionally, it “diminished the role of trade and economic collaboration as a factor facilitating understanding between the East and West and the improvement of international climate” (Pomianowski, 1986, p. 5). According to Pomianowski, for a long time the collaboration of the two organizations was impossible on account of their different attitudes to mutual relations. Comecon expected formal and legal relations between the organizations, whereas the EEC was interested in individual contacts with specific countries, hoping to strengthen its bidding position in EEC-Comecon negotiations.

In 1987, the Team of Officers of the Programming and Planning Department at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Trade, headed by Mr. Sienbeichen, developed a document titled *Węzłowe zadania handlu zagranicznego PRL* [Essential tasks of Polish foreign trade], which was published on January 15, 1987 and sent to Department IV of the MoFA. Analyzing this document, it transpires that Poland apparently did not envisage its economic and trade development without close collaboration with the EEC. The Ministry assessed the import of new technologies to Poland to have been insufficient, given the needs, and thereby “suppressing the implementation of solutions that would facilitate more complex manufacturing capable of the better use of production capacity” (Ministerstwo Handlu Zagranicznego, 1987, Zespół Akt MSZ, 32/90, wiązka 5). The Ministry of Foreign Trade regretted that West European states had a conservative attitude to the matter of granting credit to Poland. It was noted that it was indispensable for the Polish economy “to ensure the influx of modern technologies, machinery and devices crucial in order to fulfill the long-term goals defined for 1986–1990” (ibid.). Therefore, the Ministry assigned an essential role to Poland-EEC relations saying that “[t]he negotiations on the agreement between Poland and the European Economic Community on diplomatic and trade and economic relations are of crucial importance. Such agreements will be signed upon the successful conclusion of Comecon-EEC talks on the agreements between these two organizations. Our fundamental goal is to increase the access of Polish commodities to European Community markets by eliminating the discriminatory quantitative limits” (ibid.). The Ministry assumed in the document that foreign trade in 1986–1990 should generate a surplus over import, thereby generating the resources to pay for the increasing debt of Poland. This situation was to be resolved by favorable loans obtained from the EEC and financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank.

The Comecon-EEC agreement was ultimately signed after many years. The declaration was initialed on June 9, 1988, and signed at a meeting in Luxembourg on June 25, 1988. The EEC was represented by Hans Dietrich Genscher from the Council and

Willy de Clercq from the EEC Commission. Comecon was represented by its Secretary Mr. Sychov, among others. The declaration signed by the EEC and Comecon was of crucial importance for both economic and political contacts between the East and West. It was also essential for Poland, as the agreement facilitated contacts between Poland and the EEC. The Polish People’s Republic established diplomatic relations with the Community in September 1988. In September 1989, they were followed by the signing of a trade and economic collaboration agreement between the EEC and Poland.

The attitude of the Polish People’s Republic towards trade relations with the EEC evolved from the mid-1960s. Initially, Poland strictly observed socialist principles and – under the supervision of Kremlin – it was unable to initiate closer relations with the EEC. As a member of Comecon – a competitive economic organization – Poland did not recognize the European Community as an international legal entity. In the opinion of Comecon, trade and political contacts could be maintained only by member states, not institutions. As time went by, and the uncompetitive Polish economy was unable to carry the burden of its growing debt, Polish diplomats were more and more eager in their attempts to obtain technological and financial help for their country, operating mainly in the wings of the diplomatic salons of Brussels, Cologne and Rome as well as running interministerial talks between the MoFA and MoFT. After martial law in Poland was lifted in 1983, the Polish authorities came to believe that the economic development of the country and bridging the gap between the Polish economy and western economies could only be achieved by contacts with West European countries, including the EEC first and foremost.

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Summary

The main aim of this paper is to present the long and complicated process of establishing contacts between Comecon and the EEC and developing their trade relations. The paper also discusses the Polish attitude to the EEC at a time when Poland – as a member of Comecon – could not reject the principles that guided socialist states. As time went by, Poland sought different methods to develop its collaboration with the EEC, as it realized that this was the only way to avert the downturn of Polish economy, thereby exerting a positive impact on the attitude of Polish society in the long run.

Key words: European integration, Comecon, the EEC, protectionism, free trade

Polska Ludowa wobec relacji RWPG–EWG

Streszczenie

Zasadniczym celem artykułu było przedstawienie długiego i skomplikowanego procesu nawiązania stosunków pomiędzy RWPG a EWG i wypracowania oczekiwanych stosunków handlowych pomiędzy podmiotami. W artykule zaprezentowano również stanowisko Polski wobec EWG, która będąc członkiem RWPG nie mogła zrezygnować z pryncypiów państw socjalistycznych. Z biegiem czasu w różny sposób dążyła do rozwijania współpracy z EWG, zdając sobie sprawę, że tylko tą drogą może zahamować regres gospodarki polskiej i w dalszej konsekwencji wpłynąć pozytywnie na nastroje w społeczeństwie polskim.

Słowa kluczowe: integracja europejska, RWPG, EWG, protekcjonizm, wolny handel

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