

## **Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Holy See in the Cold War Europe: Ostpolitik of the Holy See**

**Boris Vukicevic\***

### **Abstract**

This article deals with the foreign policy of the Holy See during the pontificates of Pope John XXIII and Paul VI which is known as the Ostpolitik of the Holy See. The Ostpolitik signifies the policy of opening the dialog with the communist governments of the Eastern and Central Europe during the Cold War. The article analyzes the factors that influenced it, its main actors and developments, as well as relations of the Holy See with particular countries. It argues that, despite its shortcomings, the Ostpolitik did rise the Holy See's profile on the international scene and helped preservation of the Catholic Church in the communist Eastern and Central Europe.

### **Keywords**

The Holy See, Ostpolitik, the Cold War, foreign policy, Eastern Europe

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\* Associate Prof. Dr., University of Montenegro, Faculty of Political Science.  
[borisvukicevic@ac.me](mailto:borisvukicevic@ac.me)  
([orcid.org/0000-0002-7946-462X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7946-462X))  
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### Introduction

The Cold War, unlike any other period in history of international relations, made all the subjects of international relations from all over the world involved into world affairs. One of the more specific actors of this period, dealing more in the background, but still remaining influential, and, arguably, in certain periods, instrumental, was the Holy See. The Holy See, the governing body of the Roman Catholic Church, as a subject of international law and international relations -thus specific among religious organizations- had its own evolution during the Cold War years, as the whole system evolved from confrontation and crises toward détente and coexistence, and then again toward final cooling of relations before the end of this era.

The Holy See early in the Cold War staunchly supported the West. Obviously, since it did not have its own army, and its political organization was *sui generis* (despite Stalin's famous question 'Pope - how many divisions has he got') it did not become a part of Western Bloc formally, but its leader, Pope Pius XII was an avid anti-communist and played an important role in preventing the communist victory in Italy in the election of 1948.

The Roman Catholic Church faced persecution in the new 'people's democracies' as they severed diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Various traditionally Catholic countries, like Poland, Croatia, Lithuania and Hungary fell under atheistic regimes, diminishing the influence of the Church. Also, Pius XII turned up to be too rigid for modern international relations, and, after he died in 1958, five years after Stalin's death partially brought the tensions down - the new, different and reformist Pope was elected. John XXIII, despite his advanced age and relatively short reign, together with his close associate, Agostino Casaroli, who would turn up to be the most important Vatican's diplomat of the second half of the 20th century, started implementation of the new doctrine of the Holy See's diplomacy. His encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, convocation of the Second Vatican Council and his active and open diplomacy (in less than five years he met three times more leaders than his predecessors in almost twenty years) marked the beginning of the new foreign policy. It would continue through the 1970s by his successor, Pope Paul VI, and it would be known as the Ostpolitik of the Holy See. Ostpolitik, the Holy See's political doctrine for dealing with the socialist East would include a series of events that would change significantly its position, and that would help - together with its namesake in Willy Brandt's West Germany, De Gaulle's independent foreign policy, Italy's opening to the East and Tito's non-

alignment - easing of Cold War tensions and preparations of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki (where the Holy See was an equal participant). These events include the visit of Khrushchev's daughter Rada Khrushcheva and son-in-law Alexei Adzhubey to Pope in 1963 and John XXIII's cordial exchange of greetings with Khrushchev, signing agreement with Hungary in 1964, establishment of full diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in 1970, Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito's official visit to Vatican in 1971, and the Holy See's participation in the CSCE in 1975.

This paper analyzes the Ostpolitik of the Holy See, vis-à-vis other diplomatic doctrines of the era that helped easing of inter-bloc tensions; the personal role of leaders, regarding the case of different pontificates' different attitude toward the Cold War issues; and also - the results of this doctrine's implementation and its evaluation. While the Ostpolitik faced criticism for its alleged minimal results and numerous concessions, it did achieve its most important goal, to preserve the life of the Roman Catholic Church behind the Iron Curtain –*salvare il salvabile*- while it also helped better positioning of the Holy See in the world affairs as truly neutral player and not a tool of the Western Bloc. This would be important for the Holy See's relations not only with the socialist countries, but also with the decolonized nations in the Non-Aligned Movement.

The paper also deals with the implementation of the Ostpolitik in the cases of particular socialist countries in Europe. It compares its development and results in relation to the Soviet Union and its satellites from the Eastern Bloc, including Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania and Bulgaria. It particularly emphasizes the greatest success of the Holy See – its reestablishment of full diplomatic relations with the non-aligned Yugoslavia, while the isolated Albania stayed out of the Ostpolitik.

### **What is the Holy See and its Ostpolitik?**

The Holy See, as a very specific entity, is part of a triangular relation with the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church. While it is the largest religious organization in the world, the Roman Catholic Church, like other religious groups, is not a subject of international law. The Vatican City State, on the other hand, is the term that is usually colloquially used for the entity that enters diplomatic relations and forms and implements foreign policy. However, the Vatican City State, founded in accordance with the Lateran Accords in 1929 is

first of all symbolic confirmation of material existence and visibility of the Holy See and its independence from any territorial entity. Thus, while there are rare organizations where the Vatican is represented (mostly of technical nature) it mostly serves as a guarantor of independence of the Holy See as the governing body of the Roman Catholic Church. The Holy See itself represents either the papal seat – the Pope himself and his immediate surrounding - or the Pope and the other offices of the Roman curia, first of all the Secretary of State. Hence, the Holy See is an entity that is a subject of international law and that also enters diplomatic relations with states and the intergovernmental organizations. Since its undisputable leader is the Pope, as the Holy See is theocratic absolute monarchy, each Pope, while usually emphasizes continuity, still brings something new to both internal and foreign policy of the Holy See.

In that sense, the Pope who brought major changes to the Holy See, and particularly to its attitude toward other religions, but also toward atheistic regimes of Eastern and Central Europe, was John XXIII. Born Angelo Roncalli, he was for many years papal diplomat in various countries, including Bulgaria, Turkey and France before becoming the Patriarch of Venice. Because of his advanced age (he was almost 77 years old) it was believed at the time of his election that his pontificate would be only transitional one after the long pontificate of Pius XII (1939-1958). However, he actually proved to be, instead of a Pope of transition, the Pope who initiated the transition of the Church into contemporary era<sup>1</sup>. His convocation of the Second Vatican Council, but also his personality and attitude were instrumental in formulating and pursuing the new policy of the Holy See toward the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under communism, which would become known as the *Ostpolitik*.

The *Ostpolitik* shares its name with the foreign policy of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt toward communist countries. This name, used for the Holy See's foreign political doctrine actually started before West German *Ostpolitik* could be implemented, since Brandt became chancellor only in 1969. Also, the German language name doesn't appear suitable for policy that did not have much to do with Germany. However, the name was frequently used and remains in usage, so it will be used also in this paper.

A combination of different factors helped or made relations between the Holy See and the communist countries harder. One was demographic – there

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<sup>1</sup> Giancarlo Zizola, *Il successore*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1997, p. 85.

was long historical presence of Catholicism in some of the Central and Eastern European countries, like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, or Soviet republic Lithuania and Yugoslav republics Croatia and Slovenia. Another factor, related to the first, was cultural and historic – not only were Catholics statistically important in some of these countries, but some nations, like Croatia and Poland (unlike, for example Czechoslovakia) found an important pillar of their national identity in the Catholic faith. Finally, there was a political factor – the Yugoslav regime, while one-party like the other regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, was still much more tolerant and liberal toward social, if not political, pluralism. On the other hand, many other socialist regimes in Europe of the era were more rigid, and obeyed to Kremlin, although there were differences between them (Romania tended to appear more independent, Bulgaria was the most obedient among the Soviet satellites). Finally, Albanian regime was the most repressive, isolationist and atheistic<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Factors that Influenced the Ostpolitik – the Concurrent Policies**

The Ostpolitik of the Holy See was a result of different factors. For certain, it would not be possible if there were no changes in the Eastern Bloc, and in the global relations overall, that took place during the 1950s. After Stalin died in 1953 and Khrushchev denounced Stalinism on the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, certain moves were made by the Soviets toward the Catholic Church although they were rather symbolic and probably mostly done for propaganda purposes. However, despite many events that proved that the Cold War was still on, like the Soviet intervention in Hungary, the Second Berlin Crises and, particularly, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the changes were visible, as seen in the Soviet delegation's visit to Belgrade in 1955 – the Soviet Canossa- unthinkable just two years before.

The Ostpolitik of the Holy See belongs to complex and deep set of changes of policies and in the structure of international relations of the late 1950s and 1960s. The decolonization process reached its peak in 1960, and, together with the rising stature of Yugoslavia and President Josip Broz Tito, countries that did not want to join either bloc started to connect – first through

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<sup>2</sup> Boris Vukićević, "Faktori uticaja Svete Stolice na demokratske promjene u zemljama realsocijalizma osamdesetih godina XX stoljeća" *Glasnik of the department of social sciences of Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts*, No. 21, 2012, p. 242.

the Bandung Conference in 1955, that was still only officially Asian–African Conference, but remains a landmark on the road toward formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. A year later, leaders of Yugoslavia, India and Egypt, Tito, Nehru and Nasser signed the Declaration of Brioni, which advocated the middle road between the blocs. Finally, in 1961, the first Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries took place in Belgrade. The Holy See looked with sympathies toward the Movement. At the time, it wanted to reaffirm, after years of being tied with the US policy, one of the central principles of its foreign policy – neutrality. As it was trying to shift into more neutral ground between the Eastern and Western Bloc, the Holy See also started to emphasize other global issues that were more related with the North-South global division<sup>3</sup>.

On the one hand, the case of Yugoslavia could serve as an example to other socialist countries to choose their own path, away from the Soviet Union, and it also made founded hopes that there could be advancement in the Holy See's relations with Yugoslavia. On the other hand, through forging relations with Yugoslavia it could help rebranding its image in the Third World countries where it was seen by many as an ally of colonial oppressors. Tito's appeal in the Third World, in a way similar to relations with Fidel Castro's Cuba, had a strong impact on the Holy See's policy toward Yugoslavia<sup>4</sup>. The Holy See would support the Non-Aligned Movement verbally, although it would not become its member. The reason for that was that it wanted to pursue strict neutrality and the Movement, while it gathered countries that were not part of the two blocs, still was very much actively engaged in world affairs in a way that would not be suitable for the Holy See's foreign policy. Additionally, some of the members of the Movement, like Cuba, and later North Korea and Vietnam were obviously aligned, despite their alleged non-alignment. The Holy See's role was still predominantly religious and the Movement was first of all a political organization, so the Holy See could not be its member but would be expressing an 'interested distance'<sup>5</sup>. For example, Pope Paul VI sent a message to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and through him to all participants, when the Conference of Non-Aligned States was organized in Lusaka, in September 1970.

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<sup>3</sup> Marie Gayte, "The Vatican and the Reagan Administration: A Cold War Alliance?", *The Catholic Historical Review*, No. 4, 2011, p. 718.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Evans "The Vatican and Castro's Cuba", *World Affairs*, No. 2, 1998, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Tvrtko Jakovina, *Treća strana hladnog rata*, Zagreb, Fraktura, 2011, p. 63.

The emergence of the Ostpolitik of the Holy See also coincided with the changes in French foreign policy. When General de Gaulle came to power in 1958 not only that he brought vast changes to the French political system, being a founding father of the Fifth French Republic, but he also significantly changed French foreign policy. France started pursuing more independent foreign policy, which resulted in leaving military structures of NATO in 1966, forcing NATO to move its headquarters from Paris to Brussels. De Gaulle visited the Soviet Union in 1966, as well as its Warsaw Pact allies, Poland in 1967 and Romania in 1968. His stance during the Cuban Missile Crises confirmed his strong solidarity with the United States, but still with a strong urge to emphasize the independence of France. As France was a large, predominantly Catholic country, it maintained influence through history on the Holy See's diplomacy, its influence being second only to Italian. With the College of Cardinals still not as global as it is today, the cardinals from France and countries related to it (like Lebanon) played an important role in conclaves of 1958 and 1963, and the actions of French diplomacy at the time showed that France supported the opening of the Holy See toward the East. It's worth noting also that the Italian President, Giovanni Gronchi, visited Moscow in 1960, and supported the opening to the East, and, with support of the influential Amintore Fanfani, the Mayor of Florence Giorgio La Pira visited some of the Eastern capitals, including Moscow. Influential member of the Christian Democratic Party's left faction, Enrico Mattei, leading man of the Italian oil industry, signed an agreement with the Soviets, and continued negotiating with socialist governments before dying in a suspicious plane accident. Situation in Italy suited much more the opening to the East than in the previous decade<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, the Ostpolitik's namesake in West Germany shared not only the name but the basic idea that, through dialogue and cooperation with the communist countries (the East, Ost) better results could be achieved than through confrontation. However, while it took its name, the Ostpolitik of the Holy See started before. While Willy Brandt conceived the Ostpolitik before coming to power, only since 1966, when he became Foreign Minister in the "Grand Coalition" government, and, particularly, after his Social Democratic Party finally came to power as a major partner, in 1969, he could implement that policy. The West German Ostpolitik thus presented a smaller influence to

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<sup>6</sup> Alberto Melloni, *Un diplomatico vaticano fra dopoguerra e dialogo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, p. 153.

its Vatican namesake, particularly in the intra-German relations context, where East Germany played a minor role in dialogue with the Holy See. However, it did add to the wider sense of dialogue, coexistence and weakening of the bloc division of Europe and the world.

### **The Development of the Ostpolitik and its Main Actors**

The Holy See early in the Cold War staunchly supported the West. Pius XII was not adaptable enough to modern international relations, and, after he died, five years after Stalin's death partially brought the tensions down - the new, different and reformist Pope was elected. John XXIII, despite his advanced age and relatively short reign, together with his close associate, Agostino Casaroli, started implementation of the new doctrine of the Vatican diplomacy (continued through the 1970s by his successor, Pope Paul VI) that would be known as the Ostpolitik of the Holy See.

While there were some contacts between the communist regimes and the Holy See during the pontificate of Pius XII, they were either protocol contacts (like the Pope's message regarding floods in Czechoslovakia) or made for propaganda reasons (like the Soviet's party Central Committee statement from November 1954).

Pius XII's character and his staunch anti-communism were certainly the obstacles. Although he criticized anti-communism as well as communism in his Christmas message in 1955, he reiterated in the Christmas message of 1956 that it is inconsistent to sit at the same table with God and his enemies, communists. His image as the Pope who remained silent during the Holocaust, and who helped Nazis and their allies to escape from law to Latin America, while today disputed and controversial, remained an important instrument of communist regimes in depicting their ideological enemy, the Roman Catholic Church, as almost an equal to fascism. Such was the propaganda in Eastern bloc that Pius XII was depicted as an ardent supporter of American imperialism – “the Coca-Cola Pope”<sup>7</sup>.

The election of John XXIII as the Pope in 1958 brought a huge change to the Holy See's image and also to its foreign policy. He started *aggiornamento* – a bringing up to date – of the Church, by convocation of the Second Vatican Council, as well as through his encyclicals, in particular *Mater et Magistra* and

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<sup>7</sup> John M. Kramer, “The Vatican's ‘Ostpolitik’”, *The Review of Politics*, No. 42, 1980, p. 285.



*Pacem in Terris*. He also started the Ostpolitik through his prime diplomat Agostino Casaroli's contacts with the communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. His openness and dynamism are confirmed through the fact that compared to Pius XII who met 10 chiefs of state during 19 years, he received visits from 34 of them during less than five years of his pontificate<sup>8</sup>.

Even as a nuncio in France in 1945, Angelo Roncalli, the future John XXIII, greeted cordially the Soviet ambassador on a social event, when he was standing apart from the others - a gesture that Soviets would remember<sup>9</sup>. Later, as a Patriarch of Venice, he sent a telegram to greet the participants of the congress of the Socialist Party in 1957. After his election, he visited poor areas of Rome, known as communist strongholds, and raised the wages of the Vatican employees, taking care that the poorest ones get the highest raises<sup>10</sup>. This helped building his image in the East as more open and socially aware than his aristocratic predecessor.

The countries that were in the focus of Pope John XXIII's Ostpolitik were, beside Soviet Union as the leader of the bloc, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland as well as the non-aligned Yugoslavia. These five countries contained among them over 90% of the region's Catholics<sup>11</sup>. The first positive signals came in 1960 – the Pope's appeal for peace in was published by Moscow newspaper "Pravda", and Premier Nikita Khrushchev spoke affirmatively of the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. Small, but still important steps followed. In November 1961 the Soviet ambassador to Italy, Semen Kozyrev, delivered a telegram to papal nuncio to Italy in which Khrushchev expressed his best wishes for Pope's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. While two men never met, Khrushchev appreciated John XXIII's will to improve relations with Kremlin, and once said he thought they can understand each other since "we both come from peasant families; we both have lived close to the land; we both enjoy a good laugh"<sup>12</sup>. Then, in 1962, the Pope authorized papal nuncio in Turkey, Francesco Lardone, to negotiate with the Soviet ambassador in Ankara, Nikita Riyov, the

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Luxmoore & Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: the Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1999, p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Phayer, *Pio XII., holokaust i hladni rat*, Zagreb, Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2010, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> Alexis Ulysses Floridi, *Moscow and the Vatican*, Ann Arbor, Ardis Publishers, 1986, pp. 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Kramer, "The Vatican's 'Ostpolitik'", p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York, Hill and Wang, 2007, p. 161.

participation of bishops from Lithuania and Latvia on the Council. Riyov was cordial in his meetings with Lardone, and helped in his contacts with Kremlin for some bishops from the USSR to participate on the Council. Also, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church were present at the Council as observers<sup>13</sup>. Other signs of goodwill followed – Pope's role in solution of the Cuban Missile Crisis was appreciated by both sides, Khrushchev accepted Pope's appeal to release Ukrainian Archbishop Slipyj after long imprisonment, and Slipyj was later a participant at the Second Vatican Council<sup>14</sup>. Also, when Pope was presented the peace award Balzan, the Soviet ambassador was present. Finally on March 7, 1963, John XXIII received in the audience Khrushchev's daughter Rada and his son-in-law, Alexei Adzhubei. Adzhubei visited the Pope as a journalist and not as an official, but visit of members of the Soviet leader's family still had a great weight. This visit met mostly positive responses, although it was criticized by the USA and CIA director John McCone (who was also a knight of Malta) was sent to Vatican to express American discontent<sup>15</sup>. During the last months of John XXIII's pontificate Agostino Casaroli started his visits behind the Iron Curtain, first of all Prague and Budapest, as it was easier to start dialog with them after goodwill signs with the leader of the Eastern Bloc. At the same time, from the late 1962 informal contact started between Yugoslav diplomats and some prominent Italians related to the Holy See, like Nicola Jaeger, judge of the Constitutional Court of Italy, who was also a personal friend of Archbishop of Milan, Montini, soon to become Pope Paul VI.

What was started during the relatively short pontificate of John XXIII was continued by his successor, Paul VI, and during his pontificate, that would last until 1978, would the Ostpolitik show its most visible results before its ending, or at least alternation during the pontificate of John Paul II. John XXIII's human warmth<sup>16</sup> and innate friendliness<sup>17</sup> changed the image of the Church as austere, anachronistic and rigid on both sides of the Iron Curtain and made way for the new pontiff to more easily continue the opening of the Holy See in the era of rise of mass media.

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<sup>13</sup> Guy Bedouelle, *The History of the Church*, London-New York, Continuum, 2003, p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Georges-Henri Soutu, *La guerre de cinquante ans: Le conflit Est-Ouest 1943-1990*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 437.

<sup>15</sup> Eric O. Hanson, *The Catholic Church in World Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, Belmont, Wadsworth Publishing, 2001, p. 572.

<sup>17</sup> Floridi, *Moscow and the Vatican*, p. 28.

Paul VI himself proved even when he was still Archbishop of Milan in his contacts with Yugoslav diplomat Vjekoslav Cvrlije that he saw the Ostpolitik as his own project as well. Paul VI was onetime a close associate of Pope Pius XII although they moved away from each other and Pius XII never named him a cardinal thus excluding the possibility of popular Montini succeeding him. While Paul VI did not have sympathies for communism, he thought that there should be cooperation with it on pacification of Europe<sup>18</sup>. Like his predecessor, Paul VI was more open and heartfelt than Pius XII, and unlike John XXIII, he was much younger and in better health, so he became the first Pope since 1809 to leave Italy. He was also the first Pope to travel by plane<sup>19</sup>, and the first to visit all inhabited continents, including Australia in 1970. Secretary of State of the United States of America Henry Kissinger said of Paul VI that he, better than almost any leading figure he encountered, understood the moral dilemmas of a period “in which tyranny marched under the banners of freedom”<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, completing the creators of the Ostpolitik, comes also Agostino Casaroli. The role of this skillful diplomat and later, under John Paul II, Secretary of State (the number two position –“the prime minister”- in the hierarchy of the Holy See) must not be underestimated. He was an enthusiastic driving force behind many meetings and sometimes prolonged and tiring negotiations. Casaroli started working at the Secretary of State in 1940, and became the Undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (deputy foreign minister) under John XXIII before becoming its Secretary in 1967. Between 1979 and 1990 he was Secretary of State of the Holy See, named by John Paul II who promoted him among else in order to have a man known for dialog close to him in order to pacify Moscow. Thus, not only that for years he had been the leading diplomat of the Ostpolitik, but the leading Vatican diplomat overall of the second half of the twentieth century. He was the only diplomat that signed both the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Final Act in 1975 and the The Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Casaroli was criticized by conservative forces in Vatican since he became a leading figure of the Church's opening to the East, although his later cooperation with John Paul II and his memoirs, published after his retirement, “The Martyrdom of Patience” showed a man who was far from a “Trojan horse” of communism in the Vatican – just the

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<sup>18</sup> Peter C. Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII*, Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002, p. 181.

<sup>19</sup> Paxton, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 572.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Memoari, knjiga druga*, Zagreb, Mladost, 1981, p. 140.

opposite, his policy was a kind of Trojan horse behind the Iron Curtain that helped the fall of communism.

### **The Ostpolitik at Work – by Country**

The Ostpolitik was manifested through series of meetings and negotiations between Vatican diplomats and representatives of socialist countries of Europe – with the exception of Albania- official and unofficial, some of them giving visible results, like signed agreements, and, only in case of Yugoslavia, reestablishment of full diplomatic relations, followed by the first official visit of a socialist country's leader.

If diplomatic visits are taken in concern, the Ostpolitik started with Casaroli's visits to Budapest and Prague in May 1963. Poor status of bishops and particularly problems regarding Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop (from 1965 Cardinal) Beran respectively were discussed with the officials of both governments, with very modest results, although at that time, the fact that meetings took place was itself a success.

It continued with further visits but also negotiations, giving birth to first tangible results – the agreement signed with Hungary, the first one signed with any socialist country. The Ostpolitik continued with different level and intensity of meetings with officials of the Eastern Bloc countries but was most successful in regard of the non-aligned Yugoslavia. Intensive negotiations were held between the Holy See's and Yugoslav officials. They negotiated through 1964 and 1965 in both Rome and Belgrade, before finally signing the Belgrade Protocol on June 26, 1966. Yugoslavia was the last socialist country in Europe to sever relations with the Holy See, in late 1952, and became the first (and, as time would tell, only) to reestablish these relations. After Castro's Cuba, Yugoslavia became the second socialist country in the world to have a representative to the Holy See<sup>21</sup>. Both sides exchanged representatives that were not named ambassador/nuncio, but envoy on Yugoslav side and apostolic delegate and envoy (Delegato Apostolico e Inviato) on the Holy See's side. Thus, it was emphasized that papal representative was not only an apostolic delegate (as apostolic delegates are not formally diplomats and they maintain relations between the Catholics in the country where they are named and the

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<sup>21</sup> Gorazd Bajc, "Dietro le quinte della visita di Tito a Roma nel 1971: il contest locale e internazionale letto dalla diplomazia Britannica", *Annales: Annals for Istrian and Mediterranean Studies. Series Historia et Sociologia*, No. 4, 2014, p. 718.

Vatican) but also an envoy, who was listed on the Yugoslav list of representatives in the diplomatic corps, although on additional sheet of paper. After proving as successful and non-problematic, the relations were almost routinely upgraded into full relations in 1970, with Mario Cagna, up to then delegate and envoy, becoming a pronuncio in Belgrade, and Vjekoslav Cvrlije, Yugoslav envoy to the Holy See, becoming an ambassador. The title of pronuncio was used by the Holy See since the 1960s for its ambassadors in those countries that did not make them doyen of the diplomatic corps (given to nuncios mostly in Catholic countries, confirmed legally on the Vienna Congress in 1815), without any other significant difference from nuncio. There were also internuncios, recognized by the Vienna Convention as the diplomatic representative of the second class, but both pronuncios and internuncios mostly disappeared from the practice of the Holy See's diplomacy in the 1990s.

The high point of the Ostpolitik was the visit of President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito to Vatican, the first ever official visit of a leader of a socialist country. The visit, considered a success for both sides, took place on March 29, 1971. The Yugoslav side wanted to express its respect to Pope Paul VI and followed all the rules regarding the Vatican protocol, so, for example, Tito was the last statesman to wear top hat on his visit to Vatican<sup>22</sup>, while his wife, Jovanka Broz, although an atheist, was dressed in black and wore a black mantilla. On the other hand, for example, when Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife came to the Vatican almost two decades later, Raisa Gorbacheva did not respect the protocol (which, indeed, was not strictly followed since the early 1980s) and met Pope John Paul II with her head uncovered and wearing a red suite. There were various visits of socialist leaders since the late 1960s – Todor Zhivkov (of Bulgaria), Nicolae Ceausescu (of Romania), Janos Kadar (of Hungary) and Edward Gierek (of Poland) were among the leaders that met the Pope in Vatican, and as early as in January 1967 Nicolay Podgorny, nominal chief of the Soviet state (but far less significant than the Party Secretary Brezhnev) visited Vatican. However, these visits were unofficial, were generally less cordial and devoid of important discussion. For example, Podgorny said that the status of Catholics in the USSR was Soviet internal matter and that the Soviet Union does not interfere in that<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, there were a lot of

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<sup>22</sup> Silvio Tomašević, *Tito u Vatikanu*, Zagreb, Profil, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Andrea Riccardi, "La diplomatie pontificale en Europe orientale, de la Révolution bolchevique à la coexistence pacifique (1917-1978)", *Le Vatican et la politique européenne*, editor Joël-Benoît D' Onorio, Paris, Mame, 1994, p. 74.

empty phrases, like – the Pope said: “We love workers” and Podgorny answered: “Who doesn’t love them?! After all, we are all workers!”<sup>24</sup>

The early, modest contacts between the USSR and the Holy See were mentioned before. They gave some limited results, like acceptance of Julian Vaivods as the apostolic administrator of Riga and Liepaia in 1964. As a part of its appeasement toward the Soviets, the Holy See downgraded the status of Lithuanian envoy from *envoyé* to *gérant des affaires* in late 1958<sup>25</sup>. However, the subjects of most of the talks between the Soviet officials – Gromiko visit in 1966 and above mentioned Podgorny’s visit a year later were dictated by the Soviets, so they were mostly about general, not specific issues, like peaceful coexistence and reduction of armaments. The Soviets expressed satisfaction with Paul VI’s statement that the Church is equidistant from all big alliances in international relations<sup>26</sup>.

One important event in the Soviet-Holy See relations worth mentioning is Casaroli’s visit to Moscow from February 24 to March 1 1971, for the deposit of the Holy See’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Holy See did not need to access this treaty, to send its high official to deposit it, or to deposit it in Moscow (depositories were also the United Kingdom and the USA). Again, talks were mostly on general issues, although the fact that high official of the Holy See was in Moscow for talks was already a sign of improvement. Casaroli had talks on three levels – in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (general political issues), Council for Religious Affairs (no particular agreement, but Casaroli said that the talks went from a monolog to a dialog), and the Russian Orthodox Church (mostly ceremonial since it was not in the Casaroli’s portfolio)<sup>27</sup>. The real dialog, however, would start only in Gorbachev years, when diplomatic relations (of special type) would be established.

Despite (or exactly because of) the strength and importance of the Catholic Church in Poland, the Ostpolitik in that country did not give particularly important results. Pope Paul VI did not manage to fulfill his wish to

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<sup>24</sup> Hansjakob Stehle, *Eastern Politics of the Vatican 1917-1979*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1981, p. 360.

<sup>25</sup> Kristina Spohr Readman, “West Germany and the Baltic question during the Cold War”, *The Baltic Question during the Cold War*, eds. J. Hiden, V. Made, D. J. Smith, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Barberini, *L’ostpolitik della Santa Sede, un dialogo lungo e faticoso*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, p. 328.

<sup>27</sup> Floridi, *Moscow and the Vatican*, p. 39.

visit Poland in 1966 for celebrations of one millennium since the Christianization of Poland, nor any future attempt of his to come there met a success, until Poland's native son, John Paul II, came for a historic visit in 1979, but that was already a part of a new policy, or at least the significantly altered Ostpolitik. The only relative success was the agreement on continuous working contacts in 1974, which started in 1975 when chiefs of delegations were named.

The Church in Poland was so strong that, while there was no political pluralism in the country, there was a social pluralism, whose most important factors were the Church and the existence of agricultural holders,<sup>28</sup> as well as the patriotism of Polish Army<sup>29</sup>. Thus, the Church managed to survive and the efforts of the Ostpolitik, that were moderately successful in some countries where a mere survival of the Church was the goal, were not needed, and on the other hand, more serious efforts, because of the regime's suspiciousness toward the Church, but also, importantly, the local Church's negative attitude toward concessions to the regime, were not possible.

The place of Hungary in the Ostpolitik was important, although its importance was mostly symbolic. It was the first country Casaroli visited, and the first to sign an agreement with the Holy See, in 1964, which was the first agreement of any type it signed with a socialist country since 1922's agreement on famine relief with Russia<sup>30</sup>. The Agreement, although it did solve some personal issues regarding the local church, was partial, and it was much more favorable for the regime than for the Holy See. For example, the taking of an oath of allegiance to the state by all priests was agreed, and also the new statutes of the Papal Hungarian Institute of Rome, which was removed from control by emigrant priests and put under the supervision of the Bench of Bishops in Hungary, thus effectively putting it under control of the Hungarian government. Many open issues were mentioned in the adjoining Protocol as it was hoped they would be solved in the future. However, that never happened. Still, the survival of the Church in Hungary was achieved. As Casaroli argued, the Church's immediate objective was simply to live (*esse*), hoping to go a stage

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<sup>28</sup> Milovan Djilas, "The Disintegration of Leninist Totalitarianism", *1984, Revisited: Totalitarianism in Our Century*, editor Irving Howe, New York, Harper and Row, pp. 145-146.

<sup>29</sup> Huan Linc, Alfred Stepan, *Demokratska tranzicija i konsolidacija: Južna Evropa, Južna Amerika i postkomunistička Evropa*, Beograd, Filip Višnjić, 1998, p. 306.

<sup>30</sup> Vjekoslav Cvrlije, *Vatikanska diplomacija*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1992, p. 67.

further and live well (*bene esse*), and only then, if everything worked well, to live fully (*plene esse*)<sup>31</sup>.

One of the first impulses for dialog between the Church and the communist regimes was a letter of Archbishop Beran, who had been for years isolated on unknown location, to Pope John XXIII, in which he said that his situation may finally be resolved. Czechoslovakia was one of the countries where persecution of Church went furthest, and the Pope hoped that letter could mark the beginning of a dialog that could improve its position. While Casaroli visited Prague and then two promemoria were made, the agreement was not signed, despite expectations. Pope named Beran a cardinal which was seen as provocation by the Czechoslovak authorities. There was no significant progress even during the Prague Spring, although the Church's decision to adjust ecclesiastical boundaries with state boundaries in Slovakia was well received by the regime<sup>32</sup>. Overall, the dialog with the Czechoslovak government was not a big success, although it helped to certain extent the survival of the Church in the country where it was heavily persecuted.

In the years following communist takeover, the Church faced sever persecutions in Romania as well. The Greek Catholic Church (Uniate) in Romania was forcefully abolished and it became part of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1948. In the Ceausescu era (1965-1989) Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu wanted to present himself as more independent from the Soviet Union than the other Eastern Bloc leaders. For example, Romania did not sever relations with Israel (the only socialist country not to do so) after the Six Day War in 1967, it did not take part in the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Ceausescu received a visit from the US President Nixon in 1969, and Romania did not follow the other Eastern Bloc members in their boycott of Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. Following that pattern, Ceausescu supported meetings with the officials of the Holy See – Casaroli met Cornel Burtica, Romanian ambassador to Italy in late 1967, while Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu met the Pope and Casaroli in Vatican a month later. Ceausescu himself, together with his wife Elena went to private visit to Pope Paul VI in 1973. However, there was no continuous dialog and no agreements were signed. Relatively small number of Catholics in Romania, together with Ceausescu's

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<sup>31</sup> Luxmoore, Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: the Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe*, p. 155.

<sup>32</sup> Agostino Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti*, Zagreb, Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2001, p. 291.



regime becoming more sultanistic in the later years, and with the fact that Romanian government did not want to discuss legalization of the Greek Catholic Church added to this lack of important progress in Romania before the fall of the regime in December 1989.

Bulgaria played a very small part in the Ostpolitik, as its Catholic population is rather small in comparison to most of the other former socialist countries. Its size helped in the late 1970s to have bishops accepted by the regime easier, although it did not save it from the Stalinist persecution a quarter of century before. Bulgaria crossed the line other satellites did not dare to do and executed a Catholic bishop – Eugene Bossilkov was shoot by the firing squad in November 1952<sup>33</sup>.

During the 1970s there meetings between the officials, including Todor Zhivkov meeting Pope Paul VI in 1975, a result of new atmosphere in international relations following the commencement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe<sup>34</sup> and Casaroli's visit to Bulgaria in 1976. However, the talks were mostly ceremonial and formulistic, although both sides got to certain extent what they wanted – the Holy See preserved, although in hard conditions, the life of small Catholic population of Bulgaria, and Zhivkov and his regime added some international recognition they were pursuing.

East Germany also played a fairly small role in the Ostpolitik of the Holy See. The number of Catholics there was small and, while, like in case of Bulgaria, the state could be more lenient toward them than in the socialist countries with Catholic majority, it was not among priorities of the Holy See. Besides its lack of strong Catholic presence, the reason was also the pressure from the West Germany's side, since West Germany did not want to see East Germany further expanding its recognition by establishing relations with the Holy See. West Germany threatened that, if relations were established, it would represent violation of the Concordat, and the consequences would not be easy to predict<sup>35</sup>. So, despite the serious consideration of establishing diplomatic relations between East Germany and the Holy See in the 1970s<sup>36</sup>, it never happened. Also, Casaroli visited East Berlin in 1975 and met highest officials of East Germany, but that was not well received by West Germany as well.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 459.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>35</sup> Barberini, *L'ostpolitik della Santa Sede, un dialogo lungo e faticoso*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>36</sup> Bernd Schäfer, "State and Catholic Church in Eastern Germany, 1945-1989", *German Studies Review*, No. 3, 1999, p. 448.

It should be mentioned that Albania, while also a socialist country in Europe, was not included in the Ostpolitik, since it was not possible to try to have a dialog with Enver Hoxha's increasingly isolationist regime that in 1967 officially proclaimed Albania the first atheist country in the world. The churches (as well as mosques) were closed and priests of all religions persecuted. To realize how successful was Hoxha's policy, it should be noted that the first Catholic mess in Albania after 1967 was held on November 15, 1990 (when communist regimes in most countries except for the Soviet Union were already gone)<sup>37</sup> and as late as 1995 only 14% of Catholic priests in Albania were from Albania<sup>38</sup>.

One more event should be mentioned, as it was a high point of the Holy See's diplomacy of the 1970s, and it is related to its Ostpolitik. It is the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Helsinki in 1975. The Holy See received the Budapest Appeal and the aide memoire from Finnish government and gave positive answers to them. The call to the Holy See to participate in such a conference by all sides involved was recognition to its Ostpolitik<sup>39</sup>, since the Holy See was seen as an independent subject that was not a priori on anyone's side and who may help the success of the Conference. Neutral countries also participated, and they could use their neutrality at the service of international diplomacy<sup>40</sup> – that way the Holy See made a rare decision not to be an observer, but a full participant. Casaroli signed the Helsinki Accords on behalf of the Holy See on August 1, 1975.

### Conclusion

Opinions vary on the question whether the Eastern policy of the Holy See was successful or not. The Holy See started its revised foreign policy toward the socialist countries in Europe not inspired by idealism, but as acceptance of

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<sup>37</sup> David Willey, *God's Politician, Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church, and the New World Order*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Nathalie Clayer, "Religion et nation en Albanie", *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe*, eds. A. Capelle-Pogăcean, P. Michel, E. Pace, Paris, Sciences Po, les Presses, 2008, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> Barberini, *L'ostpolitik della Santa Sede, un dialogo lungo e faticoso*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Jérôme Candrian, "Quelques réflexions sur les relations diplomatiques de la Suisse avec le Saint-Siège: diplomatie et religion au service du règlement pacifique des différends bilatéraux, *Promoting Justice, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution through International Law/La promotion de la justice, des droits de l'homme et du règlement des conflits par le droit international*, editor Marcelo Kohen, Leiden, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007, p. 1062.

reality. When it was accepted that the divided Europe will not be a phase that would last for only a few years, the most important thing was to preserve the Church in Eastern and Central Europe as much as possible, *-salvare il salvabile-* (to save what could be saved) and that could not be achieved without a dialog. Thus, the dialog was opened and modest results came with signing of agreements with Hungary in 1964 and later with Yugoslavia, and, finally, reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in 1970 – arguably the greatest visible achievement of the Ostpolitik. Also, the Ostpolitik brought bigger prestige to the Holy See because of its direct communication with the world super-power, the Soviet Union, and through its acceptance as an equal partner on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. It also helped its relations with the Third World, firstly, because it was not seen any more as a mere propagator of American imperialism, but looked more like a genuine neutral actor, and secondly, because of good relations with the Non-Aligned Yugoslavia which helped rebuilding its post-colonial image through the non-aligned world. It had its failures, and some opinions reduce it only to cessation of all public Vatican criticism of communist regimes, and endless negotiations with communist governments with minimal results<sup>41</sup>. It also temporarily damaged relations between Vatican and some local churches. However, its positive results for general image of the Holy See in the international public cannot be eclipsed by different policy led by the successor of the Council Popes, John Paul II.

The change of relations between the superpowers, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the same year Margaret Thatcher came to power in the United Kingdom, and the election of Ronald Reagan for President of the United States of America a year later, helped the Holy See more easily adapt its new course, expected, if not visible when John Paul II was elected October 1978. His role in bringing down communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe was important, although the years of Ostpolitik through the 1960s and 1970s were not a sign of weakness or naiveté of the Council Popes, but their own way of fighting communism the best way possible in a given time and of repositioning the Holy See on the changing international scene.

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<sup>41</sup> George Weigel, *The Ostpolitik failed. Get over it*, First Things, 20 July 2016, <<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/07/the-ostpolitik-failed-get-over-it>>, (access date: 15 December 2017).

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