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The KGB in Eastern Europe during the Cold War: On Agents and Confidential Contacts*

Ben de Jong

The communist countries of Eastern Europe¹ were of primary political and strategic importance to Moscow during the Cold War years. They were to serve as a buffer zone in case of a conventional military conflict with the West. Moscow also had a considerable ideological stake in the region after it had installed communist regimes there in the beginning of the Cold War. A possible failure of communism in those countries would have been seen as a blow to Moscow's international prestige and an internal threat to one of the regimes in Eastern Europe was on several occasions a reason for Moscow to intervene militarily in the region, as happened in the German Democratic Republic in 1953, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It is reasonable to assume that the Soviet leadership in Moscow was closely following political developments in its East European sphere of influence, even during relatively stable periods. One of the ways in which the Soviet leadership collected information about its fellow communist countries was through the KGB, in particular through its official representatives and their offices in most countries in Eastern Europe during the Cold War.²

For the KGB, an important way of collecting information on political developments in a particular country was the recruiting of agents. The subject of recruitment in Eastern Europe during the Cold War was briefly touched upon publicly by a Russian government official during the so-called Oleksy affair in

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- 1 Unless clearly otherwise indicated, "Eastern Europe" refers to the countries of the former Soviet bloc that belonged to the Warsaw Pact, i.e. Yugoslavia and Albania are excluded. In this article, I will only discuss Soviet intelligence activities in Eastern Europe after the Second World War.
- 2 Former KGB general Nikolai Leonov writes in his memoirs that the KGB had no official representative in Rumania during the Cold War. Nikolai Leonov, *Likholet'e* ("Evil times") (Moscow: Meždunarodnye Otnošenija, 1994), 192, 231.

the beginning of 1996. Jozsef Oleksy was prime minister of Poland at the time and had to resign his office after he was accused of having been a KGB agent during the Cold War and an agent of the Russian intelligence service SVR since 1991. According to the Russian weekly *Literaturnaia gazeta*, SVR spokesperson Tatiana Samolis referred to two official documents pertaining to the recruiting of agents in Eastern Europe during a press conference in connection with the Oleksy affair.

The first was a document from 1949, signed by none other than Stalin, which simply forbade the recruiting of agents in the region, whereas the second document carried a later date – exactly which one remained unclear – and contained a decision by the Central Committee of the CPSU which did not allow the recruitment of communists anywhere in the world. Samolis said that the KGB and its Russian successor organizations had rigorously followed those two directives until 1992, which was the year a new Law on the Foreign Intelligence Services came into force in Russia.³ However unlikely it may seem, a formal prohibition on recruiting agents in Eastern Europe apparently existed during the Cold War. The Russian historian Nikita Petrov refers in an unpublished manuscript to a decision by the Council of Ministers of the USSR from August 1949 “to end intelligence activities with agents in the countries of the people’s democracy.” The people’s democracies in this case, according to Petrov, were Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania, North Korea and the ‘liberated’ regions of China. The East German Democratic Republic (GDR) was probably not mentioned in this sequence because the country at that time did not yet exist officially as an independent state and was only to come into existence as such later in the same year. The decision aimed “to dissolve the network of active agents in those countries and to prohibit further recruitments.” At subsequent meetings with their Soviet case officers each agent would be told that “he was released from the obligation to carry out intelligence work on behalf of the USSR.” Petrov writes that East European government leaders were also informed of this decision and rezidentura’s of the Committee of Information (at that time the main intelligence service of the USSR) and of the military intelligence service GRU in Prague were formally dissolved.

In other East European countries as well, the representatives of the two Soviet services were instructed to contact their colleagues with the aim of

3 “‘Russkii sled’ Yusefa Oleksy” (“‘The Russian trail’ of Jozsef Oleksy”), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 10 January 1996, 14.

providing “assistance with intelligence and counterintelligence work.”⁴ References to the prohibition to recruit agents in Eastern Europe can also be found in the fifth volume of the history of Russian foreign intelligence that is part of a six volume series being published in Moscow under the auspices of the present Russian foreign intelligence service SVR. According to this official history, the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) and the Council of Ministers of the USSR decided to end intelligence activity in Central and Eastern Europe and a directive from the leadership of the intelligence service was sent on July 30, 1949 to the Soviet branches abroad in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia. The directive

emphasized the necessity to thank the secret helpers [i.e. agents] for the services rendered and to make clear in a friendly manner that from now on the relations between the Soviet Union and the countries of the people’s democracy would be built on the basis of trust and cooperation, which would exclude intelligence activities against each other.⁵

In April 1950 the Politbureau and the Council of Ministers of the USSR instructed the Soviet ambassadors in the countries mentioned earlier to let the governments know officially that the activities of Soviet intelligence in Central and Eastern Europe had come to an end.⁶ Relationships with Soviet intelligence that had previously been secret now came into the open. In the majority of cases, relationships with agents and confidential contacts (more about the latter category later) were turned into “open, comradely and even friendly” ones. The SVR publication puts it as follows:

This part of the citizens of the countries of the people’s democracy continued to work now in an official capacity, to the extent of their strength, possibilities and official position, for the broadening and strengthening of relations and friendship with the Soviet Union.⁷

4 Nikita Petrov, *Plan dissertatsii: rol sovetnikov MGB SSSR v protsesse sovetizatsii stran Vostochnoi Evropy 1945-1953gg.* (“Plan for a Dissertation: the role of advisers of the MGB of the USSR during the process of sovietization of the countries of Eastern Europe 1945-1953”), unpublished manuscript, undated.

5 *Ocherki istorii Rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki. Tom 5, 1945-1965* (“Essays on the history of the Russian foreign intelligence service. Volume 5, 1945-1965”), 45. Note that this volume, as opposed to the manuscript by Nikita Petrov, does not mention North Korea and the “liberated” regions of China as countries where Soviet intelligence activities came to an end.

6 *Ocherki istorii Rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki. Tom 5*, 46.

7 *Ibid.*, 45.

A reason for a formal prohibition to recruit in Eastern Europe is not difficult to think of. Presumably, East European communist leaders would not have appreciated their security services catching fellow communists in the act of secretly communicating with Moscow. East Europeans would have probably felt betrayed and not taken seriously by Moscow and they would have resented Moscow blatantly recruiting its agents from their midst.⁸

It must be considered extremely unlikely, however, that the KGB adhered to this prohibition to recruit agents in Eastern Europe in the strict way that Samolis suggested in 1996. Even the official history of Russian intelligence suggests that not all agent relationships were rigorously broken off at the end of the 1940s. Some agents apparently considered the termination of their conspiratorial relationship with Soviet intelligence premature, "dictated in many respects by an emotional political approach to problems of a strategic character." According to the official SVR history,

They pointed out 'underwater currents and reefs with which the cause of building socialism in the lands of people's democracy could shortly collide.' This point of view was sufficiently widespread among individuals who cooperated with our intelligence service in Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland on a strictly ideological basis. They convinced our operatives that 'in our countries there was still a lot of work to do for Soviet intelligence.'⁹

It is unclear what exactly happened to this category of agents. The official history is ambiguous on other points as well, for instance, when it says surprisingly that in the case of Yugoslavia Soviet intelligence ceased recruiting agents within the "party and state apparatus, the armed forces and OZNA [Department for the Defense of the People, i.e. Yugoslav state security]" already from the second half of 1945 onwards. The Soviet service supposedly was only allowed to recruit Yugoslav citizens for use against the Americans and other western powers. According to the SVR history, information about the "unfriendly intentions and actions towards the USSR" of Yugoslav politicians like Tito, Ranković, Djilas and Kardelj at first came from Soviet sources within

8 The CIA, in its turn, was apparently not allowed to carry out intelligence activities during the Cold War in some West European countries, the Netherlands among them, unless permission was given by the local security service. According to a recent memoir by a former officer of the Dutch security service the CIA did not always adhere to this agreement in practice. See Frits Hoekstra, *In dienst van de BVD. Spionage en contraspionage in Nederland* ("In the service of the BVD [Internal Security Service]. Espionage and counterespionage in the Netherlands"), (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004), 127.

9 *Ocherki istorii Rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki. Tom 5*, 45-46. The quotation marks are in the original.

the Anglo-American military mission with Tito's staff that was led by general Maclean.¹⁰ The suggestion that Soviet intelligence did not recruit in leading circles in Yugoslavia in the years immediately after the Second World War is contradicted repeatedly by Milovan Djilas in the volume of his memoirs that covers this period. Djilas writes that already before the open split between Yugoslavia and the USSR in 1948, Tito's security chief Alexander Ranković repeatedly complained to the head of the Yugoslav mission of Soviet state security about the numerous recruiting attempts by Soviet intelligence officers.¹¹ Convincing proof of the recruiting activities of Soviet intelligence can also be found in the 1954 correspondence between Tito and Soviet party leader Khrushchev which came out of the Yugoslav archives after the end of the Cold War. This correspondence occurred over a period of several months and was the prelude to the "normalization" of Yugoslav-Soviet relations which would take place after Stalin's death. In his opening letter to Tito from June 1954 Khrushchev admitted that "inexcusable acts of recruiting individual citizens of Yugoslavia for intelligence purposes" had indeed taken place, but he blamed Beria and his associates for this "provocation", an accusation which of course didn't make sense as the latter had undoubtedly been acting on Stalin's orders.¹²

Several KGB officers who defected to the West during the Cold War also mentioned the recruiting of agents by their service in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance in the German Democratic Republic.¹³ According to the KGB officer Aleksei Miagkov, who defected to the West in 1974, the agents recruited by the KGB in the GDR came from three categories: Soviet

10 *Ocherki istorii Rossiiskoi vneshnei razvedki. Tom 5*, 55.

11 Milovan Djilas, *Jahre der Macht: Im jugoslawischen Kräftespiel. Memoiren 1945-1966* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 96-98. For other examples of Soviet intelligence activities in Yugoslavia before or around 1948 mentioned by Djilas, see pp. 87-91, 261-263. The Soviet couple Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov, both intelligence officers who defected to the West from Australia in 1954, also mention recruiting activities in Yugoslavia in this period in their memoirs. Vladimir Petrov and Evdokia Petrov, *Empire of Fear* (London: Deutsch, 1956), 217.

12 "The Tito-Khrushchev Correspondence, 1954", *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 319.

13 Several East European defectors during the Cold War, e.g. František August from the Czechoslovak intelligence service, also mention the recruiting of agents by the KGB in their respective countries. I largely ignore information from people such as August, since they did not have access to this type of information from the "inside", not being KGB officers. See František August and David Rees, *Red Star over Prague* (London: The Sherwood Press, 1984), passim.

citizens, westerners (especially West Germans), and GDR citizens.¹⁴ That Soviet citizens were recruited by the KGB in the GDR was to be expected considering the large number of the so-called "Group of Soviet forces in Germany". Attempts to recruit western citizens in the GDR, in particular West Germans, were also to be expected, but it is the recruiting of GDR citizens which concerns us here. The former KGB general Nikolai Leonov writes in his memoirs that the KGB was not allowed to recruit agents among citizens of East European countries. The Soviet service was allowed, however, to recruit among East German citizens, "by agreement with the German colleagues", whereby with "colleagues" Leonov undoubtedly means the leadership of the East German Ministry of State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS).¹⁵ East German documents that became available in the public domain after the end of the GDR in 1990 clearly show that Leonov was right. The text of two cooperation agreements between the KGB and the East German MfS, for example, makes this clear. One is from 1973 and the other one probably from 1976. The 1976 agreement says explicitly that the KGB was allowed to recruit GDR citizens in their own country and the tasks which could be given to such agents are mentioned. Among those are "intelligence and counterintelligence tasks in the West", "[intelligence] work with personnel of the military liaison missions from the US, England and France, accredited with the staff of the GSFG [Group of Soviet Forces in Germany]", "counterintelligence measures ... aimed at the protection of military units of the Soviet Army". According to this document, the recruitment of an East German citizen had to be taken up with the MfS by a KGB liaison officer. Interestingly, the MfS was also allowed to recruit Soviet citizens in the GDR, although the official KGB representatives in East Germany had to be informed of this.¹⁶

14 Aleksei Myagkov, *KGB Intern* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe Verlag, 1979), 54. Another former KGB officer who discusses the recruiting of agents in the GDR, among them East German citizens, is Rupert Sigl. See Rupert Sigl, *In den Klauen des KGB. Erinnerungen eines Doppelagenten* (Leoni am Starnbergersee: Druffel-Verlag, undated), passim. Sigl defected to the West from Berlin in 1969.

15 Leonov, *Likholet'e*, 192.

16 Karl Wilhelm Fricke and Bernard Marquardt, *DDR Staatssicherheit: - Das Phänomen des Verrats - Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen MfS und KGB* (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1995), 118-19. Markus Wolf, the former leader of the intelligence service of the MfS, the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HVA), confirms in his memoirs that the KGB recruited East German citizens. The Soviet military intelligence service GRU, according to him, did likewise. He also says that both Soviet services did not inform the MfS and the HVA. This seems to contradict the cooperation agreement between the two services referred to in this article. Markus Wolf, *Man zonder gezicht. Memoires* ("Man without a Face.

KGB officers who express the opinion that their service did not recruit agents among citizens of East European countries are thus probably wrong, at least as far as the GDR was concerned.¹⁷ In fact, they are also wrong with respect to other East European countries, if the material is to be believed that was brought to the West by the KGB defector Vasilii Mitrokhin in the beginning of the 1990s. According to Mitrokhin, from the end of the 1960s the KGB recruited agents in practically all East European countries by so-called *Progress Operations* which began at the time of the Prague Spring in 1968. Until that time KGB illegals only operated in the West, as is confirmed in his memoirs by Vladimir Semichastnyi who was KGB chairman in 1961-1967.¹⁸ During these *Progress Operations* the actual recruiting was done by illegal intelligence officers who went to Eastern Europe in the guise of, for example, western journalists and human rights activists. This made these recruitments classic examples of false-flag operations. These officers often posed as western anti-communist sympathizers of the dissident movement, which made them obviously interesting people to get to know in the eyes of some East Europeans.¹⁹ One of the KGB "active measures" carried out by illegals during the Prague Spring was the leaving behind of false evidence which allegedly indicated that an armed takeover of power was being prepared in Czechoslovakia.²⁰ After 1968 *Progress Operations* continued in Czechoslovakia and were extended to other countries in Eastern Europe as well. According to Mitrokhin, agents and informants were recruited in Poland within the Polish Catholic Church and the dissident movement using these methods. For instance in 1971, apart from Czechoslovakia and Poland, thirteen illegals were sent to Rumania,

Memoirs") (Leuven/Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans/Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 1997), 280. This Dutch version of Wolf's memoirs is a translation of the English edition. The German version of his memoirs is in some respects different and his remark about the KGB and GRU recruiting in the GDR cannot be found there. Markus Wolf, *Spionagechef im geheimen Krieg. Erinnerungen* (München: List Verlag, 1997).

17 Among the KGB officers who express this view is the former KGB general Viktor Grushko. Viktor Grushko, *Sudba razvedchika. Kniga vospominanii* ("The fate of an intelligence officer. Book of memoirs") (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1997), 133.

18 Vladimir Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe serdtse* ("A heavy heart") (Moscow: Vagrius, 2002), 190.

19 Christopher Andrew and Vasilii Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Penguin, 1999), 328-30. *Progress Operations* are discussed in the book in chapters 15 and 16, 322-82.

20 Ibid., 333.

nine to Yugoslavia, seven to the GDR, four to Hungary and three to Bulgaria.²¹ It does not seem likely that the KGB informed the East European security services of these operations. Indeed, one of the main reasons the KGB used illegals for this was probably that in this way the operations were much less easily detected by East European security services.

According to Mitrokhin, not only was the KGB allowed to recruit agents and confidential contacts (more about this latter category later) in Eastern Europe from 1969 onwards, he also writes that from that time, apart from the office of the KGB representative in a Warsaw Pact country, an additional secret rezidentura was established under diplomatic cover at the Soviet embassy.²² However, he does not elaborate upon this and secret rezidenturas in Eastern Europe are not mentioned by other defectors, albeit with one exception: Victor Sheymov. Sheymov, an officer with the Eighth Chief directorate of the KGB (communications and cryptography), was "exfiltrated" from the Soviet Union by the CIA in 1980, together with his wife and daughter. In his memoirs he writes that in Warsaw in the 1970s, apart from the office of the KGB representative, such a secret rezidentura indeed existed:

Because it was a Warsaw Pact station, there were in fact two KGB teams here. One was more or less visible, run by the KGB Representative, ostensibly for friendly liaison purposes only, and operating with the Polish service against third parties. The KGB Representative even had an office in the Polish service's headquarters. The second team, however, was strictly undercover, run by a Resident, who reported to the Representative. This team had no official contact with the Polish service. In fact, as far as they were concerned, the Poles were no less an enemy than the service of any Western country. The Bloc services were aware of this KGB practice and bitterly resented it. Not openly, however.²³

Unfortunately, as is the case with Mitrokhin, Sheymov gives no further details about the way such a secret rezidentura operated.

It seems possible that the statement to the effect that the KGB did not recruit agents in Eastern Europe during the Cold War has to be interpreted in a more limited sense. Maybe this prohibition meant in practice that the KGB did not recruit full-fledged agents among leading communists. In that case there was still the possibility for the KGB to acquire valuable information through confidential contacts as will be seen below. Several KGB officers indicate in their memoirs published in Russia after 1991 that a very important flow of

21 Ibid., 346, 350-52.

22 Ibid., 350.

23 Victor Sheymov, *Tower of Secrets: A Real Life Spy Thriller* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 71-72.

information on political developments in Eastern Europe went from the communist political leadership in the region to Moscow. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the KGB recruited East German or Polish communist leaders as agents. The information reached Moscow mainly through informal contacts cultivated by staff members of Soviet embassies and KGB representatives in those countries. Nikolai Leonov writes that the KGB received a "huge flow of information on developments in those countries" from "officials of the party and state apparatus, colleagues from the ministries of the Interior, economic officials and the like."²⁴ According to Leonov, the KGB gathered information especially from Eastern Europe "on relations within the highest leading circles, on views and feelings among the leaders and their closest comrades."²⁵ It becomes clear from Leonov that the question if someone was recruited as an agent or not, when applied to leading East European communists, was in a sense academic, when he says:

We acquired this information not by intelligence methods but the representatives of the leadership [in Eastern Europe] communicated it themselves. Some did this because they considered themselves true supporters of the USSR, others because they meant to acquire our support for their upward movement on the ladder of party and state.²⁶

A fairly elaborate description of the way the KGB acquired information in Poland during the Cold War can be found in the memoirs of Vitalii Pavlov, that cover the years 1973-1984 when he was the head of the official KGB Representation in Warsaw. His primary task in those stormy years for Polish politics was to report on internal developments in Poland to KGB Centre in Moscow and the Soviet party leadership. Of relevance here is what instructions Pavlov received from KGB chairman Iurii Andropov on his departure for Poland in 1973. Pavlov had by that time already a long career in Soviet intelligence behind him. He had been the NKVD rezident in Canada at a very young age, when in September 1945 the GRU cipher clerk in Ottawa, Igor Guzenko, asked for political asylum in that country. Andropov explicitly told Pavlov that there were important limitations to the way he was to collect information in Poland. Andropov said, according to Pavlov in his memoirs:

Please be aware that you are not entitled to work there [in Poland] with intelligence methods in the sense of operational work with agents. No

24 Leonov, *Likholet'e*, 192. The intelligence and security services in most communist states of Eastern Europe were a separate department of the ministry of Internal Affairs.

25 Ibid., 198.

26 Ibid.

recruiting or conspiratorial activities [are allowed] that can be seen as interference in the internal affairs of a friendly and allied socialist state.²⁷ Pavlov was supposed to gather his information largely by "legal" means, by working as a "diplomat" as he puts it. That meant exchanging opinions and meeting with representatives of the Polish party and state apparatus including those from the ministry of Internal Affairs to which the intelligence and security service belonged.²⁸ According to Pavlov, the prohibition to recruit agents in Poland only applied to Polish citizens. Foreigners, by which Pavlov presumably meant westerners, could be recruited, provided the Polish service was informed and gave its consent.²⁹ Pavlov described his task and working method in Poland as follows:

As an intelligence officer I understood that I could only do all this [i.e. the information gathering] if I had reliable sources of information at my disposal. And those sources could only be those Poles who were in the centre of power, who were daily involved in the practical realization of state policy in all given areas. But recruiting Poles or persuading them to cooperate in a conspiratorial way was not possible, as it was categorically forbidden to do this in socialist brother countries. Only one road was therefore open to me: establishing contacts and relations, establishing relations of mutual trust with some of them, those who on a personal, strictly individual basis could help me to understand the developments taking place in the country, the phenomena and activities of individual politicians and the decisions of leaders.³⁰

This is the working method already described by Leonov in an earlier quotation. For this type of relationship Pavlov uses the term "confidential contact" (*doveritelnaia sviaz*'), which is also used by other KGB officers in their memoirs.³¹ Among Pavlov's confidential contacts in Poland were ministers and high party officials and key figures on the provincial and local levels as well. He maintained good relationships with such important politicians as Wojciech Jaruzelski, Stanisław Kania and Czesław Kiszczak, to name only a few, and he emphasizes that these contacts were based on "ideological affinity

and common interests in the defense of the security of our states."³² It becomes clear from his memoirs that his meetings with such people were not fully conspiratorial in nature as would have been the case with fully-fledged agents. Indeed, Pavlov himself makes a remark to that effect,³³ even though certain precautions were always taken, even in the case of confidential contacts. For instance, Pavlov left his other Polish contacts always in the dark about the contents of his conversations with their colleagues and he did not communicate to them what information he had received from whom. Even Soviet officials who were informed by him about developments in Poland did not get to know his sources, KGB chairman Andropov and the head of the First Chief Directorate Vladimir Kriuchkov being the only exceptions. The Soviet ambassador in Poland was not informed about the identity of Pavlov's sources either.³⁴ In another volume of his reminiscences, Pavlov remarks that he guaranteed his sources anonymity, as opposed to the usual practice followed by Soviet diplomats, and would even withhold their names from KGB Center in Moscow. In his experience, this made them much more communicative, for this meant they would not be held responsible by other Soviet officials for what they had told Pavlov.³⁵

According to his account, Pavlov took meticulous care not to go too far in his contacts with Polish politicians. For instance, he never asked Stanisław Kania, leader of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) in 1980-1981, questions that would place him in the "awkward position of an informer" (*informator* is the Russian word used here) and that could exceed the limit of "his loyalty to the [Polish] party and state".³⁶ In the case of other Polish acquaintances and contacts as well, like the high security official Mirosław Milewski, minister of Internal Affairs in 1980-1981, Pavlov would not discuss "delicate topics which could be seen as running counter to the interests of his country."³⁷ In his dealings with Kania and Milewski Pavlov did not ask questions

... about their 'internal, purely Polish' affairs, that would create a delicate situation for them. No, instead of [showing] an outspoken, direct interest in

27 Vitalii Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi glazami razvedchika* ("The leaders of Poland in the eyes of an intelligence officer") (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi Klub, 1998), 7.

28 Ibid., 7.

29 Ibid., 54.

30 Ibid., 8. See also 54.

31 See for instance Oleg Gordievsky, *Next Stop Execution: The Autobiography of Oleg Gordievsky* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 275, and Grushko, *Sudba razvedchika*, 121.

32 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 98.

33 Ibid., 8.

34 Ibid., 14, 43, 369.

35 Vitalii Pavlov, *Sesam, otkroisia! Tainye razvedyvatelnye operatsii. Iz vospominanii veterana vneshnei razvedki*. ("Open Sesame! Secret intelligence operations. From the memories of a veteran of foreign intelligence") (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi Klub, 1999), 528.

36 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 122.

37 Ibid., 238.

things important for me to know, I mostly listened to them by analyzing attentively their opinions and views and comparing those with what I gained from my other contacts. As a rule, I came to the right conclusions.³⁸ It is unclear what kind of questions exactly would have created "a delicate situation" for the two Polish politicians. Even if Pavlov did not ask those questions, it does not seem to have mattered much in practice. He says, for instance, that between him, Kania and Milewski, there were no "special secrets in the area of maintaining state security".³⁹ This probably meant that in practice Kania and Milewski were very communicative and open as "confidential contacts". Probably that is what the former KGB officer Oleg Kalugin has in mind when he writes in his memoirs that Milewski was an 'asset' of the KGB in Poland, even though, according to Kalugin, his reports to the KGB and his own party leadership were sometimes unreliable.⁴⁰ Pavlov could probably improve on Milewski's reports by consulting his other Polish contacts. In his turn, he communicated information to Kania and Milewski pertaining to western views on the policies of the then Polish party leader Edward Gierek.⁴¹ Pavlov undoubtedly intended to influence Kania and Milewski to Gierek's disadvantage, by sharing with them positive western views on the policies of the party leader. Pavlov namely held a rather negative opinion on the economic and political course followed by Gierek as it led in his view to a large increase of western influence in Poland. This was mainly because Gierek made ample use of the possibilities to acquire western credits for his country.

To clarify the concept of a confidential contact further it is useful to quote Mitrokhin's definition from his *KGB Lexicon* published in 2002. He gives the following definition of "confidential contacts":

Individuals of foreign nationality who, without being agents, communicate to intelligence officers information of interest to them and carry out confidential requests, which in substance are of an intelligence nature, on the basis of ideological and political affinity, material interest, friendly or other relations which they have established with the intelligence officers. Confidential contacts do not have any obligations towards the intelligence officer (or the intelligence service).⁴²

38 Ibid., 239-40.

39 Ibid., 239.

40 Oleg Kalugin, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 189.

41 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 240.

42 *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook*. Edited and introduced by Vasili Mitrokhin. With a Foreword by Peter Hennessy (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 34.

It becomes clear from this definition, as followed already from Pavlov's views on the subject, that an agent had a much closer relationship with the KGB than a confidential contact. An agent could probably be instructed by his case officer to look for and acquire particular information or even documents, which would be less likely to happen in the case of a confidential contact.⁴³ Elsewhere Mitrokhin remarks that unlike an agent, a confidential contact does not receive operational training.⁴⁴ It is known from memoirs by KGB officers that agents were often instructed by their case officers how to get rid of a tail of the adversary or to apply other security precautions.⁴⁵ According to Mitrokhin, secrecy played a much more important role in the relationship with an agent than with a confidential contact, even though in the latter case sometimes a certain amount of secrecy was observed and other security precautions could be taken as well.⁴⁶ The extent to which this happened probably depended on the circumstances. Sometimes a person could be transferred from one category to the other. The KGB officer Evg. Grig writes in his memoirs, for instance, that confidential contacts in some cases could develop into fully-fledged agents.⁴⁷ It was even possible for a group of agents to be transferred to the category of confidential contacts, as happened in Afghanistan in or around May 1978. As Mitrokhin writes:

When a regime similar to the Soviet system is established in a country and KGB agents come to power and occupy the most senior posts, then the agent

43 Other intelligence services, not surprisingly, use similar concepts. For instance, at the very least in the 1960s the Dutch foreign intelligence service BID made a distinction between an "informer" (*informant* in Dutch) and an "agent", whereby the latter carried out tasks in communist states and the former operated in other countries. A higher level of secrecy was apparently involved in the case of agents. See Bob de Graaff and Cees Wiebes, *Villa Maarheeze. De geschiedenis van de inlichtingendienst buitenland* ("Villa Maarheeze. The history of the foreign intelligence service") (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1998), 107.

44 Vasili Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*. English Edition, Working Paper No. 40, Introduced and edited by Christian F. Ostermann and Odd Arne Westad (Washington D.C., Cold War International History Project, 2002), 35. Accessed at <http://cwhip.si.edu> in February 2002)

45 See, for instance, Alexander Feklisov and Sergei Kostin, *The Man Behind the Rosenbergs: By the KGB Spymaster Who Was the Case Officer of Julius Rosenberg, Klaus Fuchs, and helped resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Introduction by Ronald Radosh. (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 116-17, 211-12.

46 Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, 34-35.

47 Evg. Grig, *Da, ja tam rabotal. Zapiski ofitsera KGB* ("Yes, I worked there. Notes from a KGB officer") (Moscow: TOO Geya, 1997), 112.

relationship with the country is interrupted and some agents become trusted contacts.⁴⁸

Something similar had happened earlier in the case of the prominent Afghan communist Nur Muhammad Taraki who had been a KGB agent with the code name "Nur" since 1951. According to Mitrokhin, when Taraki was elected in 1965 to the position of secretary-general of the Democratic People's Party of Afghanistan, i.e. the communist party, the KGB decided to break off "agent contacts" with him, which incidentally did not mean that all contact with him was broken off. The KGB kept open the possibility to contact Taraki again secretly in order to possibly give practical assistance to the Afghan party.⁴⁹ This was in all likelihood an allusion to financial support. The KGB informed the Central Committee of the CPSU of its decision concerning Taraki. It does not become clear from Mitrokhin what exactly the reasons were not to treat him any longer as an agent in 1965. In Afghanistan in 1978 a situation had apparently developed that was roughly comparable to the one in the communist states of Eastern Europe, where the recruiting of agents also had to take place with great caution, if it happened at all.

Even if Vitalii Pavlov did not work with agents during his years in Poland, the nature of the information he acquired there and especially its level of confidentiality was impressive. In the middle of the 1970s, for instance, he managed to obtain through a "contact" a stenographic report of a speech by Polish leader Edward Gierek to provincial party secretaries in which he expressed himself very negatively about his own people. The Poles had for the umpteenth time in their history shown themselves very rebellious subjects and Gierek had called them "a flock of mangy sheep" in front of the party secretaries.⁵⁰ Another telling example is from the end of the 1970s when Gierek had remarked in the circle of his close advisers that Poland needed its own nuclear weapon. This came after publications in western media about the possible production of such a weapon by Israel. Gierek even issued an order to explore the technical possibilities for a Polish bomb. Pavlov received information on Giereks thinking on the subject "through strictly confidential channels" but in the end nothing came of the project. The same thing happened when the Polish leader remarked, again in a small group of people, that his country should try to claim part of the Antarctic.⁵¹ Pavlov also refers to two

important sessions of the Politbureau of the Polish party in the mid-1970s whereby he got to know details of the deliberations from the participants a short time afterwards.⁵² Elsewhere he writes that in the breaks between important sessions of the Politbureau or the Central Committee in the stormy year 1980 he was informed by members of both organs by telephone or by direct personal contact about what had happened.⁵³ This kind of information for Moscow was probably not unusual. Mitrokhin writes that the KGB Representation in Warsaw sent the minutes of a meeting of the Polish Politbureau to Moscow in December 1970, before Pavlov came to the Polish capital.⁵⁴ One of the Polish politicians whom Pavlov followed closely during his years in Warsaw was Mieczysław Moczar, who had been minister of Internal Affairs for a couple of years in the 1960s. Pavlov heard from a Polish source that Moczar had told a member of the Polish Politbureau that he had incriminating material in his possession on many members of the elite.⁵⁵ Incidentally, Mitrokhin writes that already before Pavlov's arrival in the Polish capital in 1973, the KGB Representation had informed Moscow Centre that Moczar used compromising material on Polish politicians in the internal political struggle and systematically listened in on their conversations.⁵⁶ The fact that Moczar had such information at his disposal and the fact that Pavlov subsequently found out about this could of course be of considerable political interest in certain situations. Pavlov's method of information gathering worked in such a way that he was also able to get to know the personal views of those Politbureau members who would not communicate to him for whatever reasons through his sources. He knew beforehand which matters would be discussed at meetings of the Politbureau and the Central Committee of the Polish party and which important personnel changes would occur in the party or state apparatus. This way he could pay attention at an early stage to people who would have an important position in the near future, through which they would have interesting information at their disposal.⁵⁷ No wonder that Gierek complained at times to his aides that Moscow was better informed about the situation in Poland than he was. He apparently suspected that Moscow received information from his own ministry of Internal Affairs, to which the security services belonged. According to Pavlov, the

48 Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, 34. In this English edition of Mitrokhin's work the translation "trusted contact" from the Russian is used instead of "confidential contact".

49 Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, 19-21.

50 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 21-22.

51 Ibid., 161-62.

52 Ibid., 192-203.

53 Pavlov, *Sezam, otkroisia!*, 538-40.

54 Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 350.

55 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 182.

56 Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, 350.

57 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 115.

ministry submitted much information to the Polish leadership about internal developments in the country but it was mostly ignored.⁵⁸

In another of his volumes that is also partly memoirs, Pavlov goes into some more detail about the way he gathered information on political developments in Poland as head of the official KGB Representation in Warsaw. He called the method by which he worked "indirect penetration" (*zaochnoe proniknovenie*), a term that has a clear connotation of intelligence work, even though, as we saw earlier, according to Pavlov, intelligence methods like the recruiting of agents were not used.⁵⁹ Indirect penetration meant that Pavlov, as he puts it, "realized my presence [in the highest regions of Polish politics] by the eyes and ears of others."⁶⁰ He mentions the conditions that have to be fulfilled for a successful indirect penetration:

An interest in meeting me on the part of interlocutors whom I wished to talk to, a readiness on their part for frank conversations and for the discussion of all possible Polish problems, the most elaborate listing of personal characteristics of each separate interlocutor, their readiness for meetings and conversations on each requested moment and my readiness for meeting them when they felt a wish to meet me.⁶¹

From the above it becomes clear that Pavlov's contacts displayed a measure of accessibility which is often not possible at all in the case of a common agent. For obvious reasons, an agent usually has to adhere to very strict rules of secrecy and will often be restricted in the frequency of his personal meetings with his case officer. In the case of some KGB intelligence operations, meetings between agents and case officers were the exception or did not even take place at all.⁶²

Among the organizations Pavlov wanted to "penetrate indirectly" were the most important organs of the Polish communist party: the Politbureau and the Secretariat, the most important departments of the Central Committee and the regional committees of the party. The government apparatus ranked lower in

importance, with the exception of bodies like the cabinet of the prime minister, the ministries of Defense, Internal and Foreign Affairs, and the highest authorities at radio and television. According to Pavlov, other objects of great interest were the leadership of the trade unions, the catholic episcopacy, unions of writers and artists and the highest bodies of other political parties 'allied' to the communist party. This list of organizations and bodies to be penetrated was put together by Pavlov at the beginning of his time in Poland and important carriers of information had been identified, who would make the most promising interlocutors. Only those people who had constant personal access to the "object" in question were considered promising. In the party leadership this included the members of the Politbureau and Secretariat, their close aides, heads of important departments of the Central Committee and regional first secretaries of the party. Similar carriers of information were identified at the ministries of Defense, Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs, and Pavlov remarks that he concentrated on the "triangle of influence" for the recruiting of confidential contacts: the ministry of Internal Affairs, the ministry of Defense and the Central Committee.⁶³ After he had come to Poland he went to work energetically. At the end of 1973, shortly after his arrival, Pavlov had already made contact with fifteen interlocutors whom he could arrange a meeting with at any given moment. Eventually, this group would comprise several dozen leading figures at important "objects" in Warsaw and ten to fifteen individuals outside of the capital, mainly first secretaries of important regions.⁶⁴ In selecting the right interlocutors Pavlov and the other members of the KGB Representation were assisted by officials of the Polish ministry of Internal Affairs, i.e. by officers of the Polish security service. They shared with Pavlov and his colleagues "their views on useful interlocutors and sometimes provided interesting details about their lives and activities."⁶⁵ Of particular relevance for Pavlov's method of work was the fact that he himself, in his turn, was very useful to his Polish colleagues and acquaintances because he was well-versed in Polish affairs and well-acquainted with the thinking of the Soviet leadership as well.⁶⁶

It is doubtful if the KGB still needed any fully-fledged agents at all within Polish leading circles, when one looks at the way Pavlov operated and at the confidential contacts he had at his disposal. That is in fact what Pavlov himself said in so many words in a short interview with the Russian newspaper *Izvestiia*.

58 Ibid., 123.

59 Pavlov, *Sezam, otkroisia!*, 522-23. *Zaochnyi* means "in one's absence" in Russian, among other things.

60 Pavlov, *Sezam, otkroisia!*, 524.

61 Ibid.

62 The FBI agent Robert Hanssen, for instance, was an intelligence agent for the GRU, the KGB and the present Russian intelligence service SVR over a period of 22 years until his arrest in 2001. In all those years he did not have a single personal meeting with his Soviet and Russian case officers. David Wise, *Spy: The Inside Story of How the FBI's Robert Hanssen Betrayed America* (New York: Random House, 2002), passim.

63 Pavlov, *Rukovoditeli Polshi*, 38.

64 Pavlov, *Sezam, otkroisia!*, 525-26.

65 Ibid., 527.

66 Ibid.

in the beginning of 1996, when the spy scandal in connection with Polish prime minister Józef Oleksy made the headlines. This is what he said:

There was in fact no need at all for a formal arrangement of this cooperation [i.e. a formal recruitment as an agent]! Most highly placed Polish politicians, beginning with members of the Politbureau, communicated everything to KGB representatives that was of interest to Moscow. They were practically queuing up to be the first to communicate the newest information to Moscow ... They were very frank ... Many of my interlocutors felt that close relations with the KGB Representative would improve their position in Warsaw. Some members of the Politbureau of the CC of the PUWP [Polish United Workers Party] asked me to organize for them on critical moments a direct connection with the KGB leadership by high-frequency communication.⁶⁷

In this interview Pavlov pointed out another important characteristic of an agent, namely that a file was compiled on him at the KGB archive in Moscow. This meant that, according to him, in order to comply with the demand that no agents were to be recruited in a country like Poland, there existed no files in Moscow by the names of his confidential contacts. Presumably, the mainly oral information received from them was recorded in the archives somewhere, but not under their name.

Judging from Pavlov's memoirs and other sources mentioned in this article, the KGB most likely possessed excellent information on internal developments in Poland regarding the period Pavlov was stationed there in 1973-1984. It is interesting to note that considerable intelligence activity was carried out in an allied state by the KGB, even if it was not with the help of agents.⁶⁸ It seems quite possible that no agents were recruited in the formal sense in Polish leading circles in the period mentioned, even though one can of course never be completely sure. It is simply too much to assume that KGB officers like Pavlov are completely frank in their memoirs. If a real agent network of their most important ally had been discovered being in communication with the KGB in Warsaw or directly with Moscow by the usual intelligence "tradecraft", it understandably could have had serious repercussions for Polish-Soviet

67 Leonid Mlechin, "Osobennosti ezdy na okhotu s russkim agentom," ("The details of going on a hunt with a Russian agent") *Izvestiia*, January 5, 1996. My thanks to Tennant H. Bagley who drew my attention to this interview.

68 Apparently western intelligence services also carried out intelligence activities in allied countries during the Cold War. In roughly the first decade after World War II, the Dutch intelligence service BID paid more attention in its operations to allied countries in Western Europe than to the Eastern bloc. De Graaff and Wiebes, *Villa Maarheeze*, 105, and *passim*.

relations. The gathering of intelligence by KGB illegals in Poland and other East European communist countries, as described by Mitrokhin, was much more difficult to trace. Besides, an important characteristic of these operations was that they were primarily directed at dissident circles and not so much at the party and state leadership. In a certain sense therefore, they were politically much less sensitive. Apparently, a formal prohibition to recruit agents did not seriously impede the quality of the KGB information from Polish leading circles. In a particular instance, as related by Pavlov, a confidential contact even delivered the text of an important speech by Edward Gierek, something a fully-fledged agent could hardly improve upon. Presumably, the KGB tried to gather information on political developments in other East European countries by similar means, but information on this topic is sorely lacking.⁶⁹

69 It is possible, of course, that not all East European countries were treated by Moscow and the KGB in the same manner in this respect. The memoirs of the Rumanian security official Ion Mihai Pacepa, who defected to the West in 1978, show a high degree of alertness on the part of the Rumanian leadership under Nicolae Ceausescu to the possibility of KGB agents operating in their midst. See Lieutenant Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1987), 161, 409-10. According to several defectors from the Czechoslovak intelligence service, working with agents by the KGB increased considerably in their country on the eve of the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968. Frantisek August and David Rees, *Red Star over Prague*, 123. Ladislav Bittman, *Zum Tode verurteilt. Memoiren eines Spions*. ('Sentenced to death. Memoirs of a spy.') (München: Roitman Verlag, 1984), 191-92. Josef Frolik, *The Frolik Defection: The Memoirs of an Intelligence Agent* (London: Corgi Books, 1976), 180. Bittman defected to the West in 1968, August and Frolik both in 1969.