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VLIV MARGARET THATCHEROVÉ NA ROZPAD SOVĚTSKÉHO SVAZU

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THE ROLE OF MARGARET THATCHER IN THE DOWNFALL OF THE USSR

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ABSTRACT

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The object of this undergraduate thesis is to determine the influence of Margaret Thatcher in the process of disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics during the Cold War. The thesis is divided into three main parts based on important events of Margaret Thatcher's career. The first part describes her way up to the position of the Prime Minister, including her upbringing, school years at Oxford and her first time in the Parliament. The second main part focuses on the three terms of her office and the important events that shaped the international affairs at the end of the 20th century, including diplomatic visits and speeches. Attention is paid to the evolution of the relationship between the East and the West and how the political activities of Margaret Thatcher helped to shape this relationship and contributed to the beginning of the disintegration process of the Eastern Bloc. In the third part, the special relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev is described.

Keywords: Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister, Mikhail Gorbachev, USSR, Communism, Cold War

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1 INTRODUCTION

Margaret Hilda Thatcher was the first woman in the history of the United Kingdom who became a leader of a major political party and consequently the Prime Minister. Initially, hardly anyone believed that her political career would last for long. However, she remained in her function for eleven and a half years and thus became the longest governing prime minister of 20th century Britain. She was also the only prime minister whose political strategy was named after her.

This thesis aims to give an insight into Margaret Thatcher's foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. The focus is on the evolution of her approach to the USSR and communism in general throughout her term in office. I will attempt to reveal all the important factors and circumstances that had an influence on the relationship between United Kingdom and Soviet Union and what the impacts or consequences were. The main aim of this thesis is to evaluate Margaret Thatcher's influence on the downfall of the USSR and this could not be done without a close examination of her relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev, a former leader of the Soviet Union.

In the beginning, I will describe Margaret Thatcher's way to becoming the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. I will mention the important events that had helped to shape her personality, social awareness and political views. The relationship with her father, her school years and harsh times at Oxford - all these are essential when trying to understand her future political decisions.

The main part of the thesis will be divided into three chapters representing Thatcher's three terms in office. In each chapter, I will cover the most significant events and subsequent changes in international relationships, hers as well as her colleagues' opinions on contemporary events. In this thesis, I will try to confirm the hypothesis, that her influence on the field of international politics was a crucial one that contributed greatly to the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union.

2 THE WAY UP

Early life and education

Thatcher was born Margaret Hilda Roberts in the small town of Grantham, Lincolnshire, on 13 October 1925. Her father Alfred Roberts was an owner of two grocery shops in the same town. He was active in local politics but stood as an Independent and in 1945-46 he became the Mayor of Grantham. It was he, who excited young Margaret's interest in politics. He was also a Wesleyan lay preacher (Berlinsky, 2008, p. 16). Undoubtedly, he passed some of his rhetorical talent on his daughter.

In 1930, Margaret Roberts enrolled for her first term at Huntingtower Road Council School. One of the main reasons her father chose it was that it was non-denominational (Aitken, 2013, p. 31), which showed his planning of his daughters' education as quite progressive. She was an exceptionally hardworking and disciplined student (Aitken, 2013, p. 43). One of the first examples of her determination was a handwriting competition for all the children in the town. "I'll enter it, and I'll win it," said young Margaret (Bridgman, 2004). However, her most important day as a student came on 13 July 1963 when she was granted a scholarship, which made it possible for her to go to the best grammar school in the town – Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School (Aitken, 2013, p. 31). This success was the turning point in the early life of Margaret Roberts.

Father's influence

The most important person to shape young Margaret's character was undoubtedly her father. Alfred Roberts wanted to become a teacher, but was denied this career by financial difficulties in his family. He had to leave school when he was thirteen so that he could earn a living. Nonetheless, he compensated this with a keen life-long interest in books. In a father-daughter relationship, a shared love for poetry became an important part. Never having been

able to finish school himself, he was determined to ensure the best possible education for his daughters. Aitken (2013) states there were at least four areas where her father's way of upbringing had great impact on young Margaret: her education at home, her spiritual values learned at the Methodist Church, her first experiences of politics and on the development of her personality greatly influenced by his principles (p. 32). Alfred Roberts achieved this, aside from other things, by a very strict regime at home. Margaret Thatcher remembers one on occasion when she wanted to go for a walk with friends. According to Thatcher (2011), her father refused this, telling her: "Never do things just because other people do them" (p. 6). However upsetting those words may have sounded to young Margaret, she later praised his father such a strict approach. As she put it:

We were taught what was right and what was wrong in very considerable detail. There were certain things you just didn't do, and that was that. Duty was very, very strongly engrained into us. Duties to the church, duties to your neighbour and conscientiousness were continually emphasised (Murray, 1980, p. 17).

Alfred Roberts was a spiritual, as well as political, leader of his community. He was elected to Grantham Town Council when Margaret was two years old. Although he stood as an Independent candidate, he had become a staunch Conservative by the 1930s. According to Aitken (2013):

In the general election of 1935, he gave ten-year-old Margaret her first experience of politics, using her as a runner who carried voting slips from the Tory tellers outside the polling station to the nearest committee room. She also folded leaflets for the Conservative candidate Sir Victor Warrender, who held the seat by a reduced majority (p. 34).

For Alfred Roberts, having the right values and principles when holding a public office was important. One of the principles accounted for the importance of being certain, to adhere to what he thought was right. This principle was certainly adopted by his daughter.

Oxford

The beginnings at Oxford University were quite unhappy for Margaret Roberts. For students who worked as hard as she did to get there, it was usually an exciting and welcoming place, Aitken claims (2013, p. 48). Yet, she described it as “cold and strangely forbidding” (Thatcher, 2011, p. 35). She felt lonely and homesick. Furthermore, she had chosen chemistry – a subject that could hardly capture her imagination and required being isolated in a laboratory for long periods of time. She also experienced patronizing from well off students. Another problem was her pocket money. Having to pay full fees for his daughter’s tuition, Alfred Roberts’ budget was stretched. Thus, Margaret had hardly any money to spare.

During her chemistry studies, she was the usual hard-working student, although one cannot be sure to what extent she enjoyed her studies. Although she approached chemistry with her usual diligence, her tutor Dorothy Hodgkin saw a certain lack of devotion in her case: “I came to rate her as good. One could always rely on her producing a sensible, well-read essay and yet there was something that some people had that she hadn’t quite got” (Campbell, 2011, p. 62). Dame Janet Vaughan, the Principal of Somerville, remembered Margaret Roberts in a somewhat dismissive way:

She wasn’t an interesting person, except as a Conservative. I used to entertain the young a great deal, and if I had amusing, interesting people staying with me, I would never have thought really of asking Margaret Roberts because she wasn’t very interesting to talk to, except as a Conservative (Campbell, 2011, p. 62).

The most important thing, even during her studies, was of course politics. After she joined the Oxford University Conservative Association (OUCA), she was reported persistently to be persuading other undergraduate students to join the OUCA and being very successful at it. In fact, the number of recruited people was so impressive, she was considered for the role of General Agent – a person who is in charge of all the College Representatives in the university, a post to which she was elected at the end of her second year at Oxford. According to Aitken (2013), it was this position that gained Margaret Roberts a certain status, as it was the Association's fourth highest elected office after the President, Treasurer and Secretary (p. 53). In the 1945 election, she heavily supported Conservative candidates and she even made her first public appearance back in Grantham, where she delivered her first political speech to be reported. Even though the Conservatives lost in the election, Margaret Roberts did not seem at all subdued upon her return to Oxford. In addition, she became Treasurer and then President of OUCA in the elections of March and October 1946, after she had proposed how to reform OUCA's policies. One of the things that had contributed to her success was undoubtedly her increasingly confident speaking ability.

Political career

The 1948 Conservative Party Conference in Llandudno, where she travelled as a representative of the Oxford University Graduate Conservative Association (OUGCA), was to become a crucial event in pursuing her political ambitions. Initially disappointed after not being allowed to speak, she was unexpectedly invited to lunch by John Miller, the Chairman of Dartford Conservative Association, along with the key members of the Dartford delegation. She presented herself well.

On 31 January 1949, the Association held a meeting where the Executive Committee intended to choose a person for the Labour seat in North Kent. From all the original twenty-six candidates, she made it to the final run-off. She entered it as a favourite. The Central

Office Deputy Area Agent described her speaking ability as “far above those of other candidates” (Campbell, 2011, p. 72). She won the nomination by a clear majority.

In the general election of 1950, Margaret Roberts launched her campaign with two fiery slogans: “Vote right to keep what’s left” and “Stop the rot: sack the lot.” During her three-week campaign, she was full of passion which kept her going at a very high pace, as a candidate was expected to speak at two or three public meetings every night. Hers were very well attended. Despite all the hard work and high hopes, the seat eventually proved to be unwinnable. By October 1951, the Labour government was on the brink of collapse and the Prime Minister Clement Attlee called another general election. It is not without interest that only twenty-four hours before the poll, information was leaked into the London papers stating that Margaret Roberts had been engaged to Denis Thatcher for five weeks. This was true, but it had no observable effect on the voters. Even though the result was a creditable one – the Labour majority was further reduced similarly to the previous election – it was again a failure. It was now clear for Margaret Roberts that she would not be fighting her next election for the same constituency. It was time for her to move on.

The main goal in the years to come was for Margaret Thatcher to find a new constituency. She decided to leave Dartford, as the idea of winning here seemed unrealistic. However, even other attempts were unsuccessful. Although happy in marriage, she had to face the prejudices of male chauvinism, which were still present in the mid-1950s. Despite heavy support from Conservative Central Office, she lost final rounds at Orpington, Beckenham, Hemel Hempstead and Maidstone. The turn of the tide came in 1958 in Finchley. She won the second ballot of the final round with forty-six votes, as opposed to her opponent with forty-three votes, and the adoption meeting on 31 July 1958 was her personal triumph. At the age of thirty-four, she arrived in Westminster as one of the youngest member of the new House of Commons.

The first time in Parliament

Margaret Thatcher won the 1959 election and entered Parliament for the Finchley constituency, which she subsequently represented continuously for thirty-three years. Her early steps were supported by a stroke of good luck. After two weeks at Westminster, she earned second place in the ballot for Private Member's Bills. This was very significant, because it gave her the possibility to be allocated on the floor of the House and propose a bill of her choice with a good chance of it becoming a law. When winning the ballot, she was still unknown to most of her colleagues. Moreover, the House did not appear to be a very friendly place. Aitken (2013) describes it as "a male-dominated and male chauvinistic place. Only twenty-five of its 630 MPs were women, twelve of them Conservatives. They tended to be marginalised, often rather badly treated in terms of facilities and fellowship. Most of them had to do their constituency work in the communal 'Lady Members' Room'" (p. 83). However, as Clarke (2002) points out:

There were some corresponding advantages in being a woman, one of only seven, as against 246 men, sitting on the Conservative benches in the 1966 parliament. It was virtually impossible not to promote someone of her ability under these conditions (p. 362).

And in this environment, backbencher Margaret Thatcher delivered her maiden speech - the first obstacle on the path to a successful parliamentary career, and something which follows long established conventions. According to the official webpage of the UK Parliament, it should be non-controversial, with a basic outline of the member's constituency and should contain a brief reference to the previous MP with appropriately flattering tone ("Maiden Speech," n. d.). The speaker may not be interrupted, but in turn ensures the absence of controversial topics. In her first speech, Margaret Thatcher broke all these rules. However

unprecedented a move this was, it surely helped her reputation of a newbie backbencher. Both her colleagues and the members of the press were astounded by her performance, as she spoke without referring to notes and delivered her speech with distinctive passion. After some time spent with learning her way around the House, a possibility of promotion appeared thanks to an oncoming government reshuffle. On 9 October 1961, she was summoned to see Harold Macmillian, the Prime Minister, who invited her to join his government (Thatcher, 2011, p. 117). Margaret Thatcher now had her foot on the ladder of government. She became the youngest woman appointed to ministerial office, being at the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance (MPNI). However, she lost this position when the Conservatives lost the 1964 election and had to settle down at the opposition front bench.

The Conservative Party was out of office for six years from 1964 until 1970 and during this period, Margaret Thatcher, an appointed opposition frontbencher, covered six separate portfolios - pensions, economic policy, housing, transport, education and power. The last three opened her way to the shadow cabinet. In 1970, she won the elections in Finchley and was appointed Secretary of State Education in a new Conservative government. Her importance of the time was further documented by U.S. ambassador Walter Annenberg in a message to Washington. O'Sullivan (2008) quotes him:

Mrs. Thatcher is an almost archetypical, slightly to the right-of-center Tory whose views are strongly influenced by her own middle-class background and experience. A well-educated, intelligent, and even sophisticated woman herself, Mrs. Thatcher shares with others in her party a certain anti-intellectual bias (p. 20).

She remained in her function until 1974 when the Conservative Party lost the election. Once again, she assumed the position in the ranks of opposition. The year 1974 was one of important event for Margaret Thatcher, as she announced her candidature for the position of

chairperson of Conservative Party. Throughout the world, this was perceived as a sensational event, as for a woman to reach such office was something unheard of for the western world. The election followed on 4 February 1975. Thatcher did not gather enough votes, so the election had to be run once more. In the meantime however, Edward Heath, the incumbent leader, decided to withdraw. Thus in the second round on 11 February, new candidates stood against Thatcher: William Whitelaw, Geoffrey Howe, James Prior and John Peyton. This time, Margaret Thatcher gained the majority of votes and became the leader of the Conservative Party.

3 THE PRIME MINISTER

The first term in office (1979 - 1983)

In the 1979 election on 3 May, the Conservative Party emerged as the winner. As party leader, Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister leading the newly formed government. A new and important era began for the United Kingdom - the Era of Thatcherism.

Foreign policy of Margaret Thatcher

The Prime Minister considered herself a follower of Winston Churchill, whom she greatly admired, when tackling with foreign politics. Fajmon and Hynek (1999) explain that Churchill had defined British foreign and defence politics as “three interconnected circles”, (p. 286) the first being the circle of Commonwealth, followed by the second circle of British and American partnership and completed with the third circle for Europe. This system prevailed until Margaret Thatcher took charge. Her orientation turned to the partnership of the United Kingdom and the United States of America with a still strong focus on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This overshadowed the other two interests throughout her years as Prime Minister. During her time at Downing Street, five different ministers alternated at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The first one was Lord Carrington, whose resignation in 1982 was the consequence of the inability to foresee developments in the Falkland Islands with a surprising Argentinian invasion. A mere year after, He was followed by Francis Pym, whom Margaret Thatcher removed from his post a mere year after, when she won the elections for the second time, because of their mutual disagreements. Thus in 1983, Geoffrey Howe appeared in the post, which he then occupied until 1989, having a noticeable impact on the foreign policies towards the Soviet Union.

As for Margaret Thatcher’s own way of foreign politics, Dyson (2009) notes that “Thatcher’s colleagues and biographers found a tendency toward black-and-white thinking to be one of the foremost characteristics of her leadership” (p. 38). Professor Anthony King

(1985) describes her attitude as “a disposition to see the political world as divided into friends and enemies, goodies and baddies” (p. 132). During her time of reign, the British interests were clearly built on cooperation with U.S. in the fight against communism.

Both foreign policy and defence policy remained a scope of activity for the executive in Great Britain, namely the Prime Minister herself, the Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Secretary of State for Defence. In this decision-making process, the Prime Minister’s voice stands the strongest. However, Mrs Thatcher did not excel in the field of foreign policy from the very beginning, as she had very little experience in this sphere. This was the main reason why the relationships abroad were initially handled by Lord Carrington. Yet there was one area of interest which Margaret Thatcher immediately proclaimed her own, namely the relationship with the U.S. and their joint help in the fight against their mutual enemy of the Cold War - the Soviet Union.

Naturally, conflicts occurred between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who were not always eye to eye on certain topics. These problems were caused mainly by Thatcher’s attitude. Dyson (2009) mentions the former cabinet minister David Howell reflecting upon her style of holding a discussion:

There is a deterring effect if one knows that one is going to go not into a discussion where various points of view will be weighed and gradually a view may be achieved, but into a huge argument where tremendous battle lines will be drawn up and everyone who doesn’t fall into line will be hit on the head (p. 33).

United States ambassador Nicholas Henderson, who came into contact with Margaret Thatcher in her early Prime Minister years, concurs that she “doesn’t really believe that there’s any such thing as useful negotiation. She doesn’t see politics as it is, which is a lot of give and take” (cited in Young, 1989, p. 381). She pursued other fixed principles instead - the

promotion of British principles, the alliance with the U.S., and the destruction of the communist regime in the USSR.

Suffice to say, the policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Thatcher years were perceived by the general public as easily comprehensible and with a clear course. Although she was not really expected to shine in the field of foreign affairs - she had no diplomatic training, nor did she have the necessary experience - she steadily improved herself during her terms in office.

Anti-communism

One of the basic elements in Margaret Thatcher's foreign policy was undoubtedly anti-communism. This attitude was rooted in her mostly because of her upbringing, as mentioned in the first chapter, and it further amplified after her visiting of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, witnessing how the totalitarian regime and its propaganda negatively influenced the lives of common people.

Whenever she addressed the communist regime in her countless speeches and interviews, it was always with a relentless tone, which can be documented by the following sentence from her *Europe as I see it* speech (Thatcher, 1977): "There is only one Communism. It is a doctrine which when in power denies all other creeds and all fundamental freedom." Critique aside, she also warned about its dangers for the world. In her *Youth for Europe* rally speech (Thatcher, 1979) she said: "Communism never sleeps, never changes its objectives, nor must we. Our first duty to freedom is to defend our own." Such a stern attitude naturally did not go unnoticed throughout the world and especially in USSR. Yuri Gavrillov, a military journalist, commented on this in the *Red Star* newspaper with a headline *The 'Iron Lady' Sounds the Alarm* (Red Star, 1976, January 24, p. 17). It was a reaction to Margaret Thatcher's "Britain awake" speech (Thatcher, 1976), which she delivered shortly after being elected Leader of the Conservative Party. It included a claim that "The Russians are bent on

world dominance, and they are rapidly acquiring the means to become the most powerful imperial nation the world has seen.”

During her time in opposition, Thatcher never visited the Soviet Union. She tended to voice her opinions about the Soviet threat from London instead. This changed in July 1979 when she flew to Tokyo to attend a summit of the seven most powerful industrial giants (The G7). The Soviets allowed the plane with the British Prime Minister to take the shorter route to Japan across their territory with refuelling at Moscow Airport. Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin together with half the Politburo awaited her there when the plane landed. She was then unexpectedly invited to dinner in the airport lounge. The reason for such hospitality was apparent - they all wanted to see the dreaded “Iron Lady.” It came as a great surprise to them that she did not appear a bit disconcerted. Subsequent discussions with Alexei Kosygin revolved around the topic of defence matters and the military potential of USSR. The Soviet Prime Minister reassured Margaret Thatcher that the Soviet Union was a peaceful country that did not produce nearly as much military equipment as she proclaimed. He remembered to emphasize that the course of the Soviet Union was nothing but non-aggressive, but a simple sentence was not enough to convince her.

The most sensitive matter that came about later was the issue of so-called “Boat people”¹. Thatcher pointed out that Vietnam was also a communist country and a close ally of the Soviets, and thus had considerable influence there. She asked him whether there was anything he could do about it. And she found his answer very disturbing. He called the immigrants “drug-takers or criminals” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 29). Margaret Thatcher replied “What? One million of them? Is communism so bad that a million have to take drugs or steal to live?” (1993, p. 29). Thus their conversation abruptly ended.

¹Boatpeople - Vietnamese immigrants, leaving their homeland in hundreds of thousands during the Vietnam War.

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979

1979 was a crucial year in the West-East relationship. On 24 December, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, under the rule of Leonid Brezhnev (“Timeline: Soviet war in Afghanistan”, 2009). Margaret Thatcher immediately condemned the invasion and emphasized the need for a proper response. Nonetheless, she appeared somewhat less surprised when the USSR took military action, as she believed the policy of détente to be ineffective against the aggressive policy of the Soviets. She saw the invasion as but a part of a greater strategy. Despite all the claims about international peace, the USSR kept its military growing in numbers that highly exceeded its defence needs. The war in Afghanistan was yet another warning. It could not be ignored just because it was happening in a country far away from Europe.

The Soviets have always considered Afghanistan a strategically important and sought to gain influence there via so-called “Treaties of Friendship”. This was supposedly caused by Soviet concerns with growing anarchy in Afghanistan (Brown, 2011, p. 431). The image of formation of another fundamentalist Muslim state right at their borders worried them greatly. Besides, the USSR did not want to see its own Muslim population destabilized. As an avowed anti-communist, Margaret Thatcher naturally expressed a strong conviction about the dangers of communism. Having been invited to the USA by President Carter, she stressed the need for a strong defence of the West:

The immediate threat from the Soviet Union is military rather than ideological. The threat is not only to our security in Europe and North America but also, both directly and by proxy, in the Third World ... we can argue about Soviet motives but the fact is that the Russians have the weapons and are getting more of them. It is simple prudence for the West to respond (Thatcher, 1993, p. 35).

And the West did respond. Aside from a U.S. trade embargo, the American President Jimmy Carter also announced the intended boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics in 1980 (Smith, 1980, para. 1). The British Prime Minister also helped convince some British athletes to miss the forthcoming Olympic event, but that was as far as she went. Most of the Olympic team still left Britain for Moscow, despite the Prime Minister's explicit wish. She did not join the Americans in economic sanctions, however. Lahey (2013) explains that Britain's economic situation appeared uncertain, and most of NATO was not keen on cutting the trade ties (p. 22-41).

Margaret Thatcher also defended Afghani soldiers who fought against the invaders. The Soviet press asserted that troops of its homeland were in Afghanistan to fight against rebels. Thatcher found this claim outrageous. She said that it was impossible label somebody a rebel, if those people are defending their own country against the invading army: "Surely they are genuine freedom fighters, fighting to free their country from an alien oppressor" (Thatcher, 1980).

It was this conflict that forced Margaret Thatcher to make a change of course in the British-Soviet relationship. She came to an understanding that it is necessary to pursue a path of strong negotiations in the future.

Poland crisis in 1981

The matters of Poland were significant to Margaret Thatcher. She was a great admirer and supporter of the Solidarity movement, which actively challenged communists within its country, and was ready to help however she could to strengthen its position in the fight against communism.

Since the end of 1980, the Americans were convinced that the Soviets were plotting against the Polish reform movement and are preparing themselves for potential military actions. It was about the same time that Margaret Thatcher in cooperation with Lord

Carrington started to consider measures for a possible punishment of the USSR. They decided that the measures would be graduated according to severity of the situation in Poland.

Thatcher (1993) describes four possibilities they accounted for (p. 98):

1. a situation in which the use of force by the Polish Government against Polish workers was imminent
2. a situation in which the use of force had already taken place
3. a situation in which Soviet intervention was imminent
4. a situation in which Soviet intervention had already taken place

The crucial part in creating this strategy was to balance the efficiency of the countermeasures, so that they would not be rendered useless in case of a conflict, or as the Prime Minister herself put it: “[the] sanctions would have to hit the Soviets harder than they hit us” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 98).

But there was a sudden twist in the story. On 13 December 1981, martial law was declared in Poland, marking the beginning of a coup staged by the Prime Minister, General Jaruzelski. A Military Council for National Salvation was set up, the borders were sealed, telephone links severed, curfew imposed, and strikes and assemblies banned (Darton, 1981, para. 1)

Margaret Thatcher immediately started to discuss the proper reaction with her colleagues from NATO. It was a difficult task to decide, as there was a significant shortage of information on who was actually behind the crisis. To the United States, it was clear immediately that nobody but the Soviets had caused the problems in Poland. The American President Ronald Reagan decided to implement far-reaching economic and political measures.

Ironically, the measures proposed would have had much greater impact on the economy of Europe than that of the Soviet Union. In addition, minimal harm would have been

done to the United States. The Americans were clearly trying to impose their law on European companies. What is more, the Germans were reluctant to put their own embargo against Poland, still less so against the Soviet Union. Besides that, France heavily insisted that the current trade with food at subsidized prices between the Europe and the Soviet Union be continued. Neither of them was then willing to support the American sanctions. Above else, the reason was their contracts on the trans-Siberian natural gas pipeline.

At the same time, it was made clear that the power of communists in Poland was growing weaker and weaker. The following years have shown that the crisis itself was a very important milestone in the East-West rivalry. Naturally, Margaret Thatcher did not remain silent in the years to come. In some of her subsequent speeches, she remembered to point out the significance of the Soviet threat. At the 1982 Conservative Party conference, she summarized what she saw as the detrimental deeds of the USSR in the past:

Ever since the War the principal threat to our country's safety has come from the Soviet bloc. Twenty-six years ago, the Russians marched into Hungary. Twenty-one years ago, they built the Berlin Wall. Fourteen years ago they reconquered Czechoslovakia (Thatcher, 1982).

The second term in office (1983 - 1978)

Changes in the relationship with USSR after 1983

In British foreign affairs, 1983 was a ground-breaking year, mainly because after the events in Afghanistan and Poland, Margaret Thatcher refused to start any talks with the Soviets again. It was not until 1983 that she came with a public statement in which she described the Soviet regime as a modern version of former tyrannies, which lacks conscience (Jenkins, 1988, p. 288).

At the beginning of September, the Soviets shot down a South Korean civil aircraft with 269 people on board. Certainly, this did not contribute to the relationship between the East and the West, as the Soviet Union had not been able to voice a public apology. It was a time when the international relationships stagnated at a freezing point. The situation forced Margaret Thatcher to re-evaluate her approach to the USSR. A meeting in Chequers had been planned on 8 September 1983 devoted to the Soviet issues.

It was her intention to gather people who had studied the Soviet Union or had had experience of living there, in order to gain insight into the social and political issues of Soviet society (Walker, 1993, p. 107). It was a very complex discussion, which included economic issues of the USSR, their foreign policy, military expenditure, influence of various religions and technical underdevelopment. The sole purpose of this seminar was clear – to provide Margaret Thatcher with the necessary knowledge for the forthcoming talks with Soviet politicians. According to Brown (2011) it was this particular seminar that changed the approach to East Europe (p. 569). The evidence for this is an unfamiliar conciliatory tone of her 1983 speech in Washington: “We have to deal with the Soviet Union. [...] We live on the same planet and we have to go on sharing it“ (Thatcher, 1983).

Visiting of Hungary in 1984

The first peek behind the Iron Curtain for Margret Thatcher was the visit to Hungary in February 1984. It was no coincidence that she chose this communist country in particular. Among all so-called Soviet satellite countries, Hungary had the highest level of freedom (Brown, 2011, p. 636). Margaret Thatcher saw her visit as an opportunity to reveal at least some detail of Soviet intentions.

Economically speaking, Hungary was the most advanced in its reforms. To ensure the highest possible standard of living for his people, János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party who came to power in 1956, took advantage of his trade

ties to the western world, whilst at all times reassuring the Soviets about his loyalty to socialism.

The British Prime Minister also met her counterpart - György Lázár. During the meeting with both Hungarian politicians, Margaret Thatcher gained a better notion of the Soviet leader at that time - Yuri Andropov. She was surprised to be welcomed warmly by the common Hungarian people. This was partly because of her reputation of a convinced anti-communist, partly because she was a representative of a western country. After some time, this proved to have a heart-softening effect. Upon her return to Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher (1993) uttered a memorable sentence: “\Communists were human beings too” (p. 173). She later interpreted her positive impressions to Ronald Reagan:

I am becoming convinced that we are more likely to make progress on the detailed arms control negotiations if we can first establish a broader basis of understanding between East and West. But I am under no illusions that it will be very hard to achieve that. It will be a slow and gradual process, during which we must never lower our guard. However, I believe that the effort has to be made (Thatcher, 1993, p. 173).

A mere six days after Margaret Thatcher returned to Great Britain, Yuri Andropov passed away. Albeit perceived as a liberal politician, he did not change the Soviet Union much: the war in Afghanistan continued and East European countries were still being monitored heavily. Andropov took over a country in a desperate economic situation and although he took necessary steps to avert it from the path to the brink of collapse (Brown, 2011, p. 582), he was not able to enforce any significant changes, as he spent a mere two years in his office.

Gorbachev's visit in London in 1984

Back in Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher started to contemplate her relationship with the Soviet administration. She had sent a handful of invitations addressed to high members of Soviet administration. Mikhail Gorbachev was the one to accept the invitation.

At the end of 1984, Margaret Thatcher met with Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa in her countryside residence in Chequers - an untypical move, as it was common to meet foreign politicians at Downing Street. However, she thought the countryside would create a better laid-back atmosphere. It is important to mention that at the time, Gorbachev was not yet the Soviet General Secretary. During the conversation, he strongly defended the Soviet regime as the best possible one. The economic problems of the USSR were another significant issue that was bound to be discussed. Naturally, Margaret Thatcher tackled the ever-present problem of violations of human rights, specifically the issue of so-called *refuseniks*².

However, the most important topic was the control of armaments. It was not being discussed in terms of complete abolition of nuclear weapons. Margaret Thatcher believed in the imminent threat that nuclear weapons posed to the world, preventing nations from waging long meaningless wars. Mikhail Gorbachev absolutely agreed. They both knew, however, that with the increasing numbers of weapon and the fully developed process of their modernization, the threat of war heightens considerably. Of course, by the time of their discussion, the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) had already been launched by Ronald Reagan. Margaret Thatcher sensed fear of the SDI coming from the Soviet Union and used the opportunity of Gorbachev's visit to reassure him of her full support for Reagan's plans and the fact that she would never recommend him to stop the SDI (Campbell, 2003, p. 299).

² Originally referred to (mostly Jewish) citizens of the former Soviet Union who were refused permission to emigrate.

Her impression of Gorbachev was overall positive. When giving an interview to BBC shortly after the meeting, she openly said: “I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together” (Thatcher, 1984). She came with the similar statement later at the OSN press conference in New York: “[T]here are certain things which are in the interests of both blocs” (Thatcher, 1985).

In his speech to the members of Parliament of Great Britain on 18 December 1984, Mikhail Gorbachev added the following: “Ladies and gentlemen, we all agree that ours is a vulnerable, fragile yet interdependent world where we must coexist, whether we want this or not. For all that separates us, we have one planet, and Europe is our common home, not a theater of operations” (Excerpts from speech by Gorbachev, 1984, para. 11).

In March 1985, another opportunity appeared for Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev to meet again - Konstantin Chernenko’s death. Gorbachev replaced him in the position of General Secretary shortly afterwards. Thatcher saw this as an opportunity to further increase her influence on him. It was obvious that Gorbachev was much more open to discussion and could be reasoned with.

Thatcher’s visit in Moscow in 1987

The General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev brought about a new invigorating style of leadership and policies. He realized very well that the economic situation of his country was desperate. He was also very aware that improving the image of the USSR worldwide would be essential. To achieve this, he came up with the concept of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

Perestroika - literally ‘rebuilding’ - was a number of reforms intended to extricate the Soviet Union from stagnation. Gorbachev himself describes the reasons for the Perestroika in his memoirs as follows:

When I get asked about the motives and the cause for the creation of the Perestroika, I always emphasize the main importance of domestic reasons. However, the external affairs were also an important motive, especially the actual threat of a nuclear war with unforeseeable consequences for both, the USSR and the world. When we started the Perestroika, we saw the meaning in giving freedom to our nation. The Soviet administration had to acknowledge this right to other countries as well (Gorbachev, 2012, p. 456-457).

As he pointed out numerous times during his public speeches, the main goal of the Perestroika was to rescue the Soviet system. It was thanks to his promises about providing the politburo and the army with more funds, that he gained strong support from the party (D'Souza, 1997, p. 176).

Perestroika was fundamentally connected with the second grand idea of Gorbachev's - Glasnost. This was not another reform, but rather a change of approach in a political sense. Glasnost meant openness and criticalness. Most of the attempts of implementation often collided with the defiance of old rigid systems and the distrust of some parts of the public. In the field of foreign affairs, Gorbachev tried to reduce the tension between the world powers. D'Souza (1997) notices this resulted in a notable warming of the American-Soviet relationship (p. 176).

Margaret Thatcher felt the need to stay vigilant in her approach to Soviet politicians, despite the fondness she felt towards Gorbachev. Their relationship was a special one indeed. They did not share the same views on basic issues of the Soviet Union and Thatcher generally rejected communism, yet they took a liking to each other. This was crowned by the visit of the British Prime Minister in Moscow, 1987.

Similarly to the previous cases, she had prepared herself thoroughly before she took the flight. Once again, she sent for experts on the Soviet Union to help her consider the strategy for the talks to come. This time around, the gathered experts were divided in their opinions. Some praised Gorbachev's reforms, while others recalled his strictly communist goals (Thatcher, 1993, p. 178). Margaret Thatcher herself was a careful optimist and declared that "We shall continue to judge the Soviet Union not by what they say but by what they do" (Thatcher, 1987). She also recalled Gorbachev's speech from January 1987 to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which she considered of the utmost importance and she reflected on it thus:

He placed a new emphasis on democratizing the Party and, at the local level, the Soviet body politic itself [...] This would prove to be the beginning - though only the beginning - of the replacement of democratic centralism by real democracy in the Soviet Union (Thatcher, 1993, p. 179).

On her first day in Moscow, Mrs Thatcher met with Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa. The second day was filled with official meetings, beginning with the arguably most important one - the meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin. She expressed disappointment about the fact that the Soviet Union still based its policy on the so-called Brezhnev doctrine.

After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of both communism and capitalism, the conversation reached the topic of arms race once again. Mikhail Gorbachev was the leader of a country with the biggest amount of nuclear weapons and intercontinental missiles at its disposal. Margaret Thatcher thus saw through the Gorbachev's criticism about the slow process of disarming weapons situated in Europe. Removing those weapons would strengthen the position of the Soviet Union in terms of nuclear supremacy. On the positive

side, Soviet leader still remained open to further talks about the control of armament. It is important to note however, that Margaret Thatcher never liked the idea of abolition of nuclear weapons and let her opinions be known:

We do not believe that it is possible to ensure peace for any considerable amount of time without nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are the most powerful and most terrible guarantee of peace that was invented in the XX century. [...] We can dream of a nuclear-free world in the future, but in the present circumstances the absence of nuclear weapons could lead to war with conventional weapons (Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher, 1987, p. 5).

After her return to Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher said that she had just participated in her most important journey abroad. From what she witnessed there, she assumed that communism in the Soviet Union was slowly crumbling down.

The reactions of British politicians varied. It was only logical of the Conservative members to support her action and it was logical even more of the Opposition to condemn it. The strongest disapproving voices belonged to a Labour politician Brian Gould, who accused the Prime Minister of using her visit of the Soviet Union as a tool for getting more support in the oncoming elections. He also blamed her for openly supporting Reagan's SDI and thus not pursuing a diplomatic path to mutual demilitarization. Margaret Thatcher rejected these accusations.

The third and the last term in office (1987 - 1990)

Margaret Thatcher kept her office even after 1987, as the Conservative Party again won the general elections. By this time, the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union had already been set off. Optimistic western politicians, including Margaret Thatcher and Ronald

Reagan, predicted big changes inside the USSR and in the West-East relationship as well. Yet nobody was able to foresee the speed at which the Soviet regime would collapse.

In February 1988, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR announced that in May of the same year, a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan would begin.

Thatcher's visit in Poland in 1988

In 1988, the communist regime in the country with President Wojciech Jaruzelski in the forefront went through an economic crisis, and the government could not find a way to face it. Furthermore, the Solidarity movement started to gain more and more influence to an extent which was threatening the established government. As a democratic politician herself, Margaret Thatcher saw the only viable solution to such a crisis - restoration of democracy and markets. Her trip naturally caught the attention of the British media and, suffice to say, they did not treat her well in their headlines:

The Prime Minister sets out today on a visit many will say she should not be making. Her trip to Poland was always a questionable proposition, capable of being interpreted as a gesture of succour to the Jaruzelski regime. Now it is doubly so. (quoted in *The Downing Street Years*, 1993, p. 293)

However, a significant incident took place in Poland on 1 November 1988. The government announced their decision to close the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk, the birthplace of the Solidarity movement (Tagliabue, 1988). This announcement had been made public just a short time before Margaret Thatcher set foot on Polish soil. This could be seen as tactical move, as the Polish communists had hoped that the British Prime Minister would welcome the shutdown of an economically inefficient enterprise and condemn the resistance of the Solidarity movement, based on the principles of Thatcher economy.

President Jaruzelski himself declared during the interview for British television, that “[Poland is] full of admiration for Mrs. Thatcher, for the reason that she has pursued such a consistent and aggressive economic policy” (Whitney, 1988). It was a sort of diplomatic trap, but the Margaret Thatcher did not fall for it. On 2 November 1988, she met with the Polish Prime Minister Rakowski according to the plan. She attempted to present him with her ideas on a working economy, explaining that the economy was not the only thing that needed to be changed: “There had to be personal, political and spiritual change. Under communism, people were like birds in a cage: even when you opened the door, they were afraid to go out” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 293).

Another important part of her agenda was the opposition leader Lech Walesa, whom she met the following day. Together, they walked through the Lenin shipyards where thousands of Poles had gathered to protest against the closing of a symbol of resistance against communism. A scene presented itself, where huge crowds of workers shouted “Solidarity!”

Lech Walesa clarified to Margaret Thatcher the goals of the movement - pluralism, an acknowledgment for more than just one political party inside one country. A meeting with representatives of the Solidarity movement followed, where Margaret Thatcher convinced the opposition to start talks with the government. Later that day, Mrs Thatcher met with President Jaruzelski. Later on a press conference, she claimed to have persuaded him into negotiating with the Solidarity movement.

In Great Britain, the critics of Margaret Thatcher were irritated, as they felt that she supported union movements abroad, yet suppressed them at home. She reacted to those accusations in the House of Commons: “Solidarity is the only expression of opposition to Communism and Socialism in Poland. Solidarity wishes to have a plural society of the kind that we have” (Thatcher, 1988). A short time after she left Poland, the government there

announced that the talks would be held with the opposition about a new election system. It was made possible for the Solidarity movement to participate in those talks.

The fall of communism

It was a pleasing view for Margaret Thatcher to see, when the process of liberation from communist dominance started in Poland and continued like a domino effect across the Eastern Bloc. Warning signals had been coming from various parts of Eastern Europe about the worsening economic and political situation. General discontent pushed the totalitarian regimes closer and closer to the precipice of defeat.

During 1989, communist governments throughout the Eastern Bloc allowed their opposition to attend general elections. In Hungary, it was made possible for East German refugees to use Hungarian territory to escape to Austria. Subsequently on 9 November 1989, the government of East Germany opened the Berlin Wall. On 17 November 1989, the Velvet Revolution started in Czechoslovakia.

It was thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev's decisions, or lack thereof, that the process of disintegration was successful. Gorbachev could have send soldiers and tanks to suppress any sign of resistance, just as his predecessors had done, but he chose not to. He wanted to reform the existing system and lead it to prosperity; however, it was thanks to his reforms that the wholeness of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic slowly disintegrated.

Naturally, not everyone in the Soviet Union was content with standing by and watching the foundations of their precious ideology crumble. The West feared a violent coup. Reports from the Soviet Union alleged possible uprisings inside the Soviet army. Many doubted Margaret Thatcher's decision to further support Mikhail Gorbachev. She believed, however, that Gorbachev was the only one who could accomplish the goals of his reforms.

Thus it might have been surprising when Boris Yeltsin arrived in Great Britain to officially meet with Margaret Thatcher. As she says in the *Downing Street Years* (1993), she

merely wanted to make her own opinion about him (p. 301). It was this meeting that changed Thatcher's way of thinking about the oncoming process of reforming and decentralization of what was left of the Soviet Union. She realized the fundamental difference between Yeltsin and Gorbachev: unlike Gorbachev, Yeltsin was not a pursuer of the traditional communist dogma, but a pro-reform politician who wanted the decentralization of Soviet Union to happen. When looking back, Margaret Thatcher (2002) states that despite her admiration for Gorbachev, for what he had achieved, and despite liking him as a person, she was certain that it would only be a good thing for Russia when Boris Yeltsin replaced him (p. 84).

Thatcher's visit in USSR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1990

In 1990, Margaret Thatcher spent a few September days in the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. Václav Havel was already president of the country so it was possible to talk about the defeat of communism there. A very warm welcome awaited her at Ruzyně Airport in Prague. While still in Czechoslovakia, she saw how popular she was with Czechoslovak people at every corner, on the Old Town Square or at the Federal Assembly (Rovná, 1991, p. 172). In the speech she gave there, she appreciated the role of Alexander Dubček during the "Prague Spring of 1968", the bravery and determination of Václav Havel and Charter77 in defending human rights.

She then continued to Bratislava, where she met Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, who assured her that Czechoslovakia would remain a federal state, with which she agreed. After that, she left Bratislava for Hungary. She grew fond of this country mainly because of the President János Kádár, who started a slow liberalization of Hungary and who was very aware of the boundaries of Soviet tolerance when Brezhnev was still the leader of the USSR (Brown, 2011, p. 636)

Back in Great Britain, she made it known how pleased she was with seeing the Czechoslovakia together with Hungary and Poland return to their rightful place in Europe. She said that once the barriers were down, there was no time to waste (Evans, 2005, p. 108).

1990 – Margaret Thatcher's resignation

There were upheavals inside the Conservative Party since the end of 1989. It started with resignations of some minister who initially had supported Margaret Thatcher. Her popularity stagnated because of many problems that troubled Great Britain at the time: among them were a budget deficit and an increasing inflation; the poll tax caused an outrage; her open support of American operations in the Persian Gulf did not help her public image at all. Her long-time colleague Geoffrey Howe, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, decided to resign for the reasons connected with refusal of the European Monetary System, as he stated in his resignation speech (Personal statement of Geoffrey Howe, 1990, column 461).

Despite the adversity of fate, Margaret Thatcher still believed she would win the next elections. However, this changed with the oncoming election of the Conservative Party's leader on 20 November 1990. Michael Heseltine, who had left the cabinet because of disagreements with Margaret Thatcher, decided to stand as a rival candidate.

She won the first ballot but she was missing two votes to reach the minimal acceptable percentage of the total number. As a common practice would have it, the second ballot was to take place a week later; however, the second ballot never happened. On 22 November 1990, the Prime Minister announced her resignation from both the position of leader of the Conservative Party and the position of Prime Minister. Walker (1993) appears to have a partial answer for her resignation: "She failed, because she allowed herself to become isolated, in the G-7, in the European Community [...] and finally in her own cabinet." (p. 108).

4 THATCHER-GORBACHEV RELATIONSHIP

Margaret Thatcher liked Mikhail Gorbachev from the first time they met. She saw him as a progressive reformist, someone who would finally be able to rebuild the crumbling empire (Thatcher, 1993, p. 177). However, Gorbachev himself never shunned the communist ideology; he merely wanted to give a new course to his sinking country. Thatcher believed that deep in his soul he was a democrat who appears to be a communist by intent (Campbell, 2003, p. 298).

Although she strongly supported Gorbachev's reforms, she had very little to do with their actual enforcement. She thought her influence on Gorbachev substantially contributed to the process of revitalization of the USSR. However, Mikhail Gorbachev knew exactly what was necessary for him to do. The evening before his appointment to the position of the General Secretary of the Communist Party, he told his wife Raisa that they could not live like this any longer (Gorbachev, 1997, p. 165). When reminiscing during his visit to the USA in 2004, the former Soviet leader said in an interview that Reagan wanted to be a peacemaker like Gorbachev did and thus "[their] interests collided" (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 115).

Margaret Thatcher went the right way in pressuring Gorbachev to change the attitude of his regime on the field of human rights, dealing with dissidents and emigrants. Her extraordinary relationships with both the American president and the Soviet leader further enhanced her importance in the territory of international policy.

In her memoirs however, she gave the most credit for ending the Cold War to Ronald Reagan. She believed that the Soviet-American arms race and economic competition forced the Soviet administration to abandon their plans for the world supremacy and to start the process of democratization, which ultimately led to the collapse of communist regime (Campbell, 2003, p. 626).

The fall of the Berlin Wall - the symbol of communism in Berlin - and subsequently the downfall of the communist regime together with the start of democratization in Eastern Europe was undoubtedly a great victory for Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. So did Gorbachev lose? He did, in a way. He failed to keep together the union, which he wanted to reform and to see thrive. Many years later, he shared his own thoughts on the result of the Cold War: "I think we all lost the Cold War, particularly the Soviet Union. We each lost \$10 trillion... We only won when the Cold War ended" (Gorbachev, 2006, p. 115).

5 CONCLUSION

From the first weeks in the position of the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher immediately engaged in international policy with her typical straightforward approach. Despite her controversy at home in Britain, her image on an international scale improved with every visit behind the Iron Curtain. Her strong anti-communist feelings supported her belief that the eventual fall of the communist regime in Europe was unavoidable. This confidence was further strengthened after she visited both, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, and saw the fundamental problems of the totalitarian regime.

It was essential for the development of the Cold War that Mikhail Gorbachev was put in the forefront of the Soviet Union, that the administration realized the necessity of changing the course. It was convenient for Margaret Thatcher to negotiate with a man open to talks. Naturally, he did not intend to lose to the West and he still firmly believed in the fundamental principles of communism. It remains an open question whether he was able to foresee that with a loosening of the strict regime, a greater hunger for freedom would come and the process he had begun could then no longer be stopped.

Margaret Thatcher certainly played her part in quickening the process. She visited the countries of the Eastern Bloc very often, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union. Wherever she arrived, she strongly voiced her support to the common people in their resistance against totalitarian governments. She made sure to always mention the issue of human rights and stressed that it was of utmost importance to abide by them. She never changed her view of the Soviet Union as a tyrant, but as she gained experience in international policy, she changed her way of holding talks with the Soviet representatives. Her relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev was in her eyes a surprisingly warm one, but certainly not as heartfelt as the one she had with Ronald Reagan.

Although Margaret Thatcher witnessed the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe no longer as the Prime Minister of Great Britain, she considered it a huge victory of hers and Reagan's. However, the speed with which the chain of events was going since the Berlin Wall fell was surprising to her. Numerous factors caused the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, some of them more or less significant, but the importance of the role Margaret Thatcher played in this process is undeniable.

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SUMMARY IN CZECH

Cílem této bakalářské práce je určit vliv Margaret Thatcherové v procesu rozpadu Svazu Sovětských Socialistických Republik během studenoválečných let. Práce je rozdělena na tři hlavní části, které jsou založeny na důležitých událostech kariéry Margaret Thatcherové. První část popisuje její cestu vzhůru k postu premiérky Velké Británie. Je zde zahrnuta její výchova, studijní léta na Oxfordu a její první zkušenost v parlamentu. Druhá část se zaměřuje na tři její funkční období a důležité události, včetně diplomatických návštěv a projevů, které utvářely zahraniční vztahy na konci 20. století. Pozornost je věnována vývoji vztahů mezi východem a západem a také tomu, jakým způsobem pomohly politické aktivity Margaret Thatcherové utvářet tyto vztahy a zároveň přispět k rozpadu Východního bloku. Ve třetí části je pak popsán zvláštní vztah mezi Margaret Thatcherovou a Michailem Gorbačovem.

Klíčová slova: Margaret Thatcherová, premiérka, Michail Gorbačov, SSSR, komunismus, studená válka