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## CONFERENCE

### “INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF PUBLIC INSTRUMENTS AND IDEAS: MICRO-PROCESSES AND ACTORS’ CONFIGURATIONS”

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### GOVERNING THE SOCIALIST WORLD THROUGH ECONOMIC DISCOURSES: ECONOMICISATION AND DEPOLITISATION OF TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AT THE COMECON

Willing to provide an alternative to the capitalist model, socialist economic theory was always challenged on the international stage. During the Cold War, COMECON, being the international organization embodying the political rhetoric of socialist international solidarity of the USSR and the people’s democracies, had a role to play in the discursive competition between conflicting economic ideologies.

The international organization was thus given the opportunity to develop a model discourse on socialist economics, and especially on its action towards shaping a socialist economic world-system. However, because of its lack of concrete economic outcomes, COMECON has long been considered – in the West as well as in the East – as a passive intergovernmental forum, unable to impact theoretical debates about what socialist economics could or should be in the eyes of its promoters.

This communication will intertwine several approaches of the Social Sciences, and particularly of the linguistics<sup>1</sup> and the sociology<sup>2</sup> to propose a historical analysis of the competition that took place within the socialist world itself over the legitimacy to shape a discursive definition of socialist international economy. I will focus on the series of publications aiming at publicizing its activity the Council launched in the second half of the 1950s. I would like to analyse the contents of this discourse, as well as the form in which it is shaped in order to question the way COMECON documents discussed at the same time the history of international economic

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1962

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993 ; Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York, Patheon Books, 1972

cooperation among socialist countries and valued the organization's day-to-day activity. Indeed, as Alexandre Duchêne puts it,

“the texts produced can be considered as a medium constitutive of the institution that makes it visible but also legitimizes it”<sup>3</sup>.

Then discourses on socialist international economy produced by COMECON contribute in shaping a common identity among the audience they are reaching. My research hypothesis asks the question, whether or not talking about socialist international economy participates in shaping a real-existing “Eastern Bloc” on the international stage? To paraphrase Austin, I would like to analyse how the Council does things with words. Following Bourdieu, this needs “examining the share of words in the elaboration of social matters”<sup>4</sup>.

Studying the official communication policy of COMECON, several questions arise: why did the international organization start to develop public discourse about its activity, who is responsible for its elaboration, what are the contents, the audience and the impact of this discourse?

This presentation will proceed in two steps. I will first cast a light on the production in COMECON of an autonomous discourse on a socialist international economy itself, before dealing with its legitimizing dimension and its role in shaping a real-existing socialist “bloc”.

## **1. Elaborating an autonomous discourse on socialist economics at the international stage.**

Since COMECON foundation is announced by no more than a press release published in Moscow in January 1949, and the organization remains silent about its activity until 1954, the establishment of regular publications by the Council is not self-evident. However, permanent representatives of the Member State themselves ask in 1956 for the issuing of a quarterly statistical bulletin by the secretariat<sup>5</sup>. This initiative has been actively endorsed by the international administration, which claims one year later for the right to publish another, more general, economic bulletin of the Council<sup>6</sup>. Within three years, between 1956 and 1959, the secretariat has established two series of periodical publications giving different types of information about international economic cooperation among socialist countries. The quarterly statistical bulletin circulates technical information, while the economic bulletin of the secretariat

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<sup>3</sup> Alexandre Duchêne, « Construction institutionnelle des discours : idéologies et pratiques dans une organisation supranationale », *TRANEL*, n° 40, 2004, p. 95

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, p. 99

<sup>5</sup> BArch DE 1-21877, *Protokolle der Diskussionen der Stellvertreter der Vertreter im Rat für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Protokoll der Sitzung vom 26.9.1956 in Moskau », f. 72-77

<sup>6</sup> BArch DE 1-3856, *Sekretariat des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe. Struktur, Statut, Stellenpläne der DDR-Vertretung*, « Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Arbeit des Sekretariats des Rats und im Zusammenhang damit zur Änderung seiner Struktur und seines Stellenplans », Punkt 3, f. 9-12

provides a more general and prospective one. The launch of these publications generates a dynamic inside COMECON, with standing commissions soon imitating the secretariat and publishing their own journals. As early as in 1959, the newly established standing commission for construction issues its “information bulletin”<sup>7</sup>, followed in 1964 by the standing commission for chemistry<sup>8</sup> and some others (agriculture, etc.).

In this formative period lasting until the mid-1960s, a leading actor of the international organization’s communication policy is hard to define. Several voices concurrently develop discourses on multilateral economic cooperation between the USSR and the people’s democracies. Besides, the information published mainly comes from the Member States that give economic data about their cooperation to the Council’s organs, which seem to only collect, compile and publish it. The tension between national and international actors in the elaboration process of a discourse on socialist international economy leads first to the presentation of multilateral cooperation as it is understood by the Member States. Socialist economics on the international stage is defined as the harmonious adjustment of national interests by COMECON and not as a common economic project with its own rationality.

If the authority of the international organization over its own discourse is contested by the Member State in the late 1950s, the debate also focuses on the publicity that should be given to these publications. Considering the secrecy surrounding economic data in the national spheres, the decision taken in 1959 to publish the economic bulletin of the secretariat as an intern and confidential publication does not seem astonishing<sup>9</sup>. However, it is soon repealed under the pressure of some Member States, such as the GDR and Poland, who claim for the elaboration of an international economic information that could help national governments improve their economic development choices<sup>10</sup>. The discourse on multilateral economic cooperation between the socialist countries established by COMECON is then open to the largest possible audience in the socialist world. It is not originally published in order to inform capitalist countries about the economic situation of COMECON members, neither to compete with them over the best socio-economic development model.

Nevertheless, the simultaneous development of series of economic publications issued by Western European international organizations active in the field of economics cannot be

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<sup>7</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 21795a-1959, *информация сообщения постоянная комиссия по строительству. Informationsschriften der Ständigen Kommission für Bauwesen*, « Nummer 1 », 9.1959

<sup>8</sup> BArch DG 11-260, *Bulletin der Ständigen Kommission Chemie*, « Protokoll der 2. Sitzung des Redaktionskomitees », 28.-30.10.1964

<sup>9</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 20333a-1960, *Wirtschaftsbulletin des Sekretariats des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Bulletin Nr. 1 », 10.1959

<sup>10</sup> BArch DE 1-21257, *Ausarbeitung und Schriftwechsel mit dem Sekretariat des RGW zur Arbeitsweise der Ratsorgane und wissenschaftlich-technischer Zusammenarbeit*, « Niederschrift über eine inoffizielle Aussprache der Stellvertreter der Vertreter der Länder mit dem Vertreter der UdSSR im Rat », 10.8.1957

considered as a coincidence. In the Cold War competition for the legitimation of new economic orders and considering the increasing complexity of sub-regional groupings in Europe, the ability to elaborate and to promote a discourse on international economic cooperation becomes a real challenge for COMECON at the turn of the 1960s. Since 1956, the ECSC's High Authority has also started to publish statistical bulletins and a monthly information bulletin to publicize its activity, as well as to justify its specific role at the time of creation of the EEC<sup>11</sup>. In 1959, an English publisher, Europa Publication Limited, asks COMECON secretariat to provide it with information about its activity for its next Europa Year Book<sup>12</sup>. Not being members of the EEC at that time, the British officially regret to be unable to publish as much information about COMECON as about the ECSC, the EEC or the OECD. Even though the real interest of an English publisher for COMECON is doubtful, and most likely to be explained by an attempt to narrow the attractiveness of the EEC while integrating it in a web of European economic organizations, one can identify here a change in the role of the publications. The discourse on international economic cooperation is no longer limited to internal information within the blocs, but rather becomes a weapon in the international competition for the economic credibility of the socialist model. Even at the UN-ECE in Geneva, Eastern European staff members inform their colleagues at COMECON of the necessity to develop their own discourse on economic cooperation and to participate in the exchange of economic information organized by the ECE to avoid marginalization and public criticism of socialist economics on the international stage<sup>13</sup>.

Although external influence can be considered stimulating for COMECON secretariat to engage in the dynamic elaboration of a discourse on socialist international economy, this new activity cannot be considered as a forced commitment. COMECON also sets its own goals to its editorial activity. These concern the relationship to time of the institution and its attempt at empowering its own space while shaping a public sphere at the bloc scale.

Alexandre Duchêne has defined three functions of the publications of international organizations that can be applied to COMECON's publications. These represent

“a tool for the proper functioning of the organization, an element of institutional transparency but also a duty of memory”<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Monthly information bulletin of the ECSC High Authority, n° 1, January 1956, [http://aei.pitt.edu/view/euseries/Bulletin\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Coal\\_and\\_Steel\\_community.html](http://aei.pitt.edu/view/euseries/Bulletin_of_the_European_Coal_and_Steel_community.html)

<sup>12</sup> BArch DE 1-18325, *Organisation und Arbeitsweise des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Brief von Faddejew an Steinwand », 19.11.1959

<sup>13</sup> BArch DE 1-41429, *ECE-Grundsätzliches*, « Brief von Winzer, 1. Stellvertreter des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten an Leuschner, Vorsitzender der Staatlichen Plankommission », 8.11.1962

<sup>14</sup> Alexandre Duchêne, « Construction institutionnelle des discours... », *art. cit.*, p. 97

Whereas the two first functions are related to the present and the day-to-day activity of the international organization, the last one opens a broader time frame in which the institution develops its action. COMECON publications contribute to the stabilisation of a discourse on the past of the organization, while elaborating a discourse on its future. This sustains the empowerment of the Council against the influence of its Member States' governments and offers a new master narrative in which COMECON becomes an actor of socialist history.

The contribution of the Council's publications to the discourse on international socialist solidarity already developed by its Member States is a key to understand its progressive legitimation. However, COMECON not only reproduces the discourse of the national governments on socialist economics, it develops the idea of a socialist international economy shaped in the Council. Thus COMECON activity specifically impacts socialist economics and shall be subject to a learning process. The various publications of the organization are given a pedagogical role. According to the standing commission for chemistry in 1974, its bulletin should

“popularize more broadly the solutions implemented by the commission, explain their efficiency, point out the real successes obtained by the cooperation and the principles leading the organization and the activity of the commission”<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, COMECON publications have to propagate information not only about socialist international economy and its results, but also about the international organization itself to contribute to a better knowledge of it among Soviet and Eastern European societies. Two obstacles hamper this pedagogical goal set to the Council's press. On one side, the secretariat is aware of the fairly technical character of its discourse on socialist economy that limits its ability to reach a broad audience. Since the scientific rationality of the discourse is the main argument of the international organization to legitimate an autonomous discourse on socialist economics different from the ones developed by its Member States governments, this obstacle cannot easily be circumvented. On the other side, the secretariat regrets the lack of a real public opinion of the socialist countries considered as forming altogether a common public sphere. According to the secretary of the Council, Nikolai Faddeev, in 1983,

“the information bulletin has gained in a very short time high authority in the Member States of COMECON as a press organ of the secretariat actively propagating the successes and the achievements of COMECON Member States. (...) Its propagandistic role is however significantly limited by the fact that it is edited only in Russian, whereas its main objective is to offer the world's public opinion truthful information about the activity of COMECON”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> LArch Sachsen-Anhalt I 525-14912, *Ständige Kommission für Chemie des RGW (40. bis 45. Tagung 1972-1974)*, « Protokoll der 43. Tagung der Ständigen Kommission für Chemie, 16.-18.4.1974

<sup>16</sup> SAPMO-BArch DY 30-27065, *Sitzungen des Exekutivkomitees*, « Brief von Faddejew an G. Weiss », 23.2.1983

In 1959, in his justification of the necessity to answer the request of *Europa Publication Limited*, Faddeev already mentioned the objective to create a public opinion<sup>17</sup> of the socialist countries through the development of a discourse on their economic cooperation and its outcomes. In this regard, although unable to establish a sphere of debate at the bloc scale, the publications of the organization contribute to the emergence of an information sphere, common to Eastern European socialist societies. To bring the idea of a socialist international economy closer to them, the secretariat even discussed in 1975 the possibility to transform its technical bulletins into more accessible magazines<sup>18</sup>. All in all, publications that were originally conceived as a tool for public propaganda became a medium aiming at materializing the “bloc” for socialist societies.

This goal can also be read in the contents disseminated by the Council’s publications and their editorial construction. The most important publication of COMECON, the economic bulletin of the secretariat, is always organized in the same four categories. It starts with an analysis of the economic cooperation between the Member States, followed by a resume of the activity of the Council and its organs since the previous issue. The third section deals with the development of national economies and the last with diverse economic information<sup>19</sup>. This presentation is meaningful<sup>20</sup>. The two first categories present economic information at the international scale, while the nationalization of the message is left for the last sections of every issue. Thus the construction of the discourse values economic thought at the international scale and its actors, namely the secretariat and the standing commissions.

The journal of the standing commission for agriculture even goes further. It is structured by a purely technical logic aiming at putting forward a scientific rationality in the construction of a model discourse on socialist international economy. The journal deals with the organization of the production, and then the production of crop, livestock, the mechanization of agriculture, manpower education, etc. It rejects any publication of the information along national categories<sup>21</sup>. However, the journal follows a political goal<sup>22</sup>, which is to deny the legitimacy of national approaches to common economic problems. A scientific, that is to say apparently non-politicized

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<sup>17</sup> BArch DE 1-18325, *Organisation und Arbeitsweise des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Brief von Faddejew an Steinwand », 19.11.1959

<sup>18</sup> BArch DC 20-22247, 113. *Sitzung des Exekutivkomitees*, « Anlage 8 zum Protokoll »

<sup>19</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 20333a-1960, *Wirtschaftsbulletin des Sekretariats des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Bulletin Nr. 1 », 10.1959

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of international organization’s discourses as communication devices, see Dominique Maingueneau, « Les rapports des organisations internationales : un discours constituant ? », in : Gilbert Rist (dir.), *Les mots du pouvoir. Sens et non-sens de la rhétorique internationale*, Paris, PUF, 2002, p. 119-132

<sup>21</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 21111a-1979, *Internationale Zeitschrift der Landwirtschaft*, « Nummer 1979/6 »

<sup>22</sup> See Jean-Louis Siroux, « La dépolitisation du discours au sein des rapports annuels de l’Organisation mondiale du commerce », *Mots. Les langages du politique*, n° 88, 2008/3, p. 13-23

and rational analysis of economic issues should thus be conceived first and foremost within and by the international organization.

COMECON gives precedence to economic action taken at the international level over national strategies in its main discursive production: the catalogues of technical norms developed and approved by the international organization. Even though it officially simply labels national products conform to COMECON-standards, the secretariat actually imposes its own codification of the notice and recombines national information. These standardisation notices, massively published by COMECON, must be considered as an important communication mechanism of the institution. Their content is as important as the form established by the Council to shape its discourse, namely the so-called “international passports”<sup>23</sup>. Here the publication reveals how COMECON organizes a discourse on socialist international economy. The passports issued map the territory over which the legitimacy of the Council is recognized. They establish the external border defining the limits of the power of the standing commission. In talking about the “bloc” and international standards in force over its territory, the institution makes it exist in the real world.

Thus COMECON becomes an actor capable of producing resources shaping a new transnational identity. Promoting through its publications its own image with logos, aggregating and redistributing information, COMECON’s publication policy produced a real “information capital”, in the sense of Bourdieu<sup>24</sup>. This means that the international organization managed to achieve theoretical homogenization of a discourse on socialist economics. Being the one owning and distributing this capital, COMECON became able not only to give sense and meaning to economic information coming from the national spheres, but also to give itself a direction to the economic collaboration of the socialist countries with its own discourse.

## **2. A self-referential discourse legitimizing the “bloc” scale and its main actors**

There is no doubt that COMECON was able to shape a discourse on socialist international economy and to promote it through a dynamic publication policy. However, the audience of this discourse and the nature of its impact on economic agents and their practices in the socialist countries still need closer analysis.

Indeed, a clear delimitation of the audience helps defining the comprehensibility of the discourse and, therefore, its impact on the economic sphere. One must acknowledge that COMECON

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<sup>23</sup> See for example the information bulletin of the standing commission for construction, SAPMO-BArch ZB 21795a-1959 to 1966, *информация сообщения постоянная комиссия по строительству. Informationsschriften der Ständigen Kommission für Bauwesen*

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, « Esprit d’État », p. 54

series of bulletins and periodic monographs, mostly edited at the occasion of an anniversary of the institution, enjoyed a very limited circulation. The economic bulletin of the secretariat for example starts with a total circulation of 700 copies in 1959, raises to 1000 in 1971 and reaches a climax at 1250 copies in 1974<sup>25</sup>. The bulletin of the standing commission for chemistry also increases its circulation over time from 250 copies in 1964 to 900 in the 1980s<sup>26</sup>. Finally, the information bulletin of the standing commission for construction irregularly evolves between 500 and 1000 copies<sup>27</sup>. In all those cases, the circulation remains very limited. One of the reasons explaining this situation is the cost of this communication policy. COMECON publications are free or sold at a very cheap price. Thus the financial resources the secretariat can allow from its own budget for the edition of this discourse limit their reproduction.

Considering this restricted audience and the fact that their personal professional experience at the secretariat of the Council constitutes the basis of the reality described in the discourse of COMECON, it becomes evident that the secretariat civil servants represent its main audience. The discourse about socialist economics elaborated by the international organization's press makes sense to them and their own experience in the international community of the secretariat reinforces it.

However, the main constraint limiting a larger circulation of COMECON discourse on socialist international economy is the language in which this discourse is shaped. Two issues can be distinguished here. First, all publications of the Council are published in Russian and any translation in the national languages of the people's democracies is left at their own costs. Second, the discourse of the international organization makes great use of its own jargon, so that the reality described is again mostly understandable by those speaking the language of the Council, that is to say by the international civil servants of COMECON themselves.

Nevertheless, the secretariat is aware of this linguistic peculiarity of its discourse and willing to unveil it in order to reach a wider audience. If shaping an autonomous discourse can be achieved through the control of the edition process, the secretariat relies on direct access to a broad range of readers willing to learn more about its activity to legitimize its discourse in front of the Member States' governments. This explains why it encourages different forms of translation of the organization's publications by their editor themselves.

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<sup>25</sup> See BArch DE 1-21102 to 21106, *Wirtschaftsbulletin des Sekretariats des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Bulletin Nr. 1 to 12 », and RGAE, F. 561, O. 85, D. 47, f. 15, f. 70 ; F. 561, O. 85, D. 48, f. 129 ; F. 561, O. 85, D. 49, f. 30. Our data goes only until 1974

<sup>26</sup> SAPMO-BArch DY 30-27086, 57. Bis 62. *Tagung der Ständigen Kommission Chemie*, and RGAE, F. 561, O. 85, D. 47, f. 35, f. 63 ; F. 561, O. 85, D. 49, f. 33

<sup>27</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 20505a-1969 to 1972, *интерстойинформация ИСИ*



Since 1969, the standing commission for construction has added a removable folio in its information bulletin translating the whole table of contents in each official language of the organization<sup>28</sup>. This decision aims, for a limited cost, at generating public interest among larger groups of experts in the Member States for COMECON discourse. Despite such incentives, the Hungarian government is the only one publishing a systematic translation of the economic bulletin of the secretariat after 1977<sup>29</sup>.

Eventually, looking for the widening of its audience, the organization also developed a translation policy oriented toward the circulation of its discourse on socialist international economy outside its Member States territories. Standing there as the official common voice of the socialist countries in the global rhetorical Cold War, COMECON enjoyed much more room for manoeuvre and occasions to legitimize its own contribution to the definition of socialist economics.

In this regard, the role played by Western audience in shaping a discourse on socialist international economy at COMECON must be analysed further. The Council is entangled in an international web of economic discourses. Since the late 1940s, the UN Economic Commission for Europe had published a yearly Survey and a quarterly information bulletin that can be considered as models for COMECON publications. With these two series, the ECE secretariat clearly set itself the objective to sustain the legitimacy of the international administration<sup>30</sup>. It produced what presented itself as a “scientific” description of the outcomes of international cooperation and opened it to the elaboration of a prospective discourse. The consensus characterizing the opinion edited by the ECE secretariat legitimizes this discourse and makes it acceptable by the Member States of the organization.

Since the 1960s, the two secretariats of ECE and COMECON and their standing commissions engaged in a dynamic process of circulation and exchange of publications, contaminating each other’s discourse. This generated at the European scale common structures of a model discourse of international organizations on multilateral economic cooperation, its actors and its issues. COMECON publications are mentioned and used by the ECE in its work. More than an interlocutor, the Council becomes a co-author of an international discourse on international organizations and their role in Cold War Europe, shaped and legitimized in Geneva.

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<sup>28</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 20505a-1969, *интерстейинформация ИСИ*, « Number 5 »

<sup>29</sup> SAPMO-BArch DY 30-27065, *Sitzungen des Exekutivkomitees*, « Brief von Faddejew an G. Weiss », 23.2.1983

<sup>30</sup> ECE – ARR 2100/34, *ECE History*, « The Economic Commission for Europe. A general appraisal. Part 11 : The research work of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe », 2.5.1957

Even though interaction with the ECE generated a real emulation in the elaboration of COMECON discourse on socialist international economy, competition was the main paradigm the organization had to deal with in its day-to-day activity. NATO for example organized several academic conferences about COMECON in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>31</sup>. However, instead of criticizing directly these Western publications, the Council proved able to engage in a strategy of pre-orientation of alien discourses on economics in the socialist world. COMECON publications indeed provided the participants of the NATO conferences with information they had sometimes difficulties to find elsewhere. The issue at stake in the international detour is to guide and try to preform the economic discourse of the West on Eastern European economic cooperation in circulating adapted information to the capitalist world. However, the international sphere shaped a slightly different COMECON discourse on socialist international economy than the one forged for its own Member States. In Eastern Europe, COMECON discourse puts forward the economic rationality and the scientific character of the Council's action. In the West, it insists more on its role in ensuring cohesion of the bloc. The discourse is made to convince about the usefulness of COMECON in the East, whereas it tries to charm in the West and present the image of a smooth cooperation.

Finally, in the late 1980s, with the editorial project of the so-called *COMECON Business Guides* – the first being published in 1989 in Russian, English and French – the international organization even ended up presenting the socialist world-economy not as an alternative and unknown space anymore, but as a place for foreign investment. Within 40 years, COMECON discourse in the West evolved from the defence of an alternative economic system, to the attempt to guide Western analysis about socialist economics and finally to public advertisement for economic opportunities in the East.

In the end, COMECON seems a more legitimate actor than its Member States' governments to talk about socialist economic cooperation at the international scale. The Cold War rhetorical competition empowers the organization in its attempt at establishing as autonomous producer of economic knowledge in the socialist world. Interaction with Western agents constitutes an indisputable element of the dynamic of COMECON discourse on socialist international economy since the late 1960s.

Eventually, the main outcome of this international strategy is to be seen on the Eastern European stage itself. Talking about socialist economics helped COMECON shape a real-existing socialist

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<sup>31</sup> See for example NATO – Direction des affaires économiques, *Comecon. Progress and Prospects*, Brussels, 1977 ; *COMECON : Energy. 1980-1990*, Brussels, 1981 ; *Comecon Five-Years Plans 1981-1985 in a New Perspective*, Brussels, 1982 ; *The external economic Relations of Comecon countries*, Brussels, 1983.

international economy in the socialist world. In this peculiar rhetorical sphere only, the international organization became a powerful player capable of imposing its own economic discourse to its Member States governments.

The information propagated by COMECON publications gives itself as international. The secretariat imposes the idea according to which it is the most efficient actor to publicize common work of the socialist countries. Considering the fact that socialism is an international ideology, the international organization claims to possess the most accurate discourse about what socialist economy is. Then COMECON discourse needs to be taken for what it really is, namely a discourse on power – and not a pseudo “neutral” or “scientific” – discourse. It corresponds to Bourdieu’s concept of “depoliticized political discourse”<sup>32</sup>, defining discourse in which politics seems neutralized. As Siroux puts it, the “statements of the international organization do not appear as a political option, but as an evidence or a necessity”<sup>33</sup> in such discourses.

The strategy followed by COMECON to produce such messages is to disguise a reflexion on power in the socialist world in a discourse that aims at influencing the reality. The secretary often presents its intervention as being “truthful”<sup>34</sup> or contributing to the “correct understanding”<sup>35</sup> of international economic cooperation. Thus the discourse of the organization gives itself as transparent and presenting a complete coincidence between what is and what is said. It claims to be neutral, when it is actually militant and willing to impose a new *doxa* on internationalism in the field of economics.

In order to do so, the discourse always presents the action of COMECON as a work in progress, creating a linear vision of its activity<sup>36</sup>. Past attempts at coordinating national economies are presented as “insufficient”. COMECON plays on the idea of a turning point in the history of international cooperation. It also relies on the dramatization of the issues to legitimate its action. The Council often invents fictive but legitimate authors of its actual action, such as “the workers of the socialist countries”<sup>37</sup>, whose legitimacy it captures. Most of the discourse is also laconic and dissimulates political issues in shaping the message about the organization’s work and goals.

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<sup>32</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, p. 155

<sup>33</sup> Jean-Louis Siroux, « La dépolitisation du discours au sein des rapports annuels de l'Organisation mondiale du commerce », *art. cit.*, p. 14

<sup>34</sup> BArch DE 1-18325, *Organisation und Arbeitsweise des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Brief von Faddejew an Steinwand », 19.11.1959

<sup>35</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 20333a-1960, *Wirtschaftsbulletin des Sekretariats des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, « Bulletin Nr. 1 », 10.1959

<sup>36</sup> We join here the analysis of the discourse of the WTO made by Jean-Louis Siroux, cf. Jean-Louis Siroux, « La dépolitisation du discours... », *art. cit.*, p. 18-20

<sup>37</sup> SAPMO-BArch ZB 21795a-1959, *информация сообщения постоянная комиссия по строительству. Informationsschriften der Ständigen Kommission für Bauwesen*, « Nummer 1 », 9.1959, p. 1-2

Putting forward its own rhetoric and its jargon, publicizing common successes in the context of a never achieved future project, COMECON presents itself as the possessor of a unique knowledge about internationalism in the field of economics. Thus it elaborates what Bourdieu calls an “authority discourse”. Indeed,

“the purpose is not only to communicate, but to promote a new authority discourse, with its new political vocabulary (...) its metaphors, its euphemisms and the representation of the social world it carries and that, because this representation is linked to new interests of new social groups, cannot be told using the local idioms”<sup>38</sup>

This idea of new social groups directly connected to the existence of the discourse leads to the last point of this analysis. How and in whose interest does COMECON establish a discursive bubble that the national governments have to take into account? If the limited success of the Council’s publication to reach an audience in the Member States or outside the socialist world has been mentioned, it also means that their main audience are the agents working for the international organization themselves. Indeed, the regular documentation of what it at stake at the bloc scale and of the outcomes of multilateral economic cooperation first of all values in mirror image the everyday life of the international civil servants of the secretariat. Dominique Maingueneau describes the discourse of the international organization as

“the place where the discursive community producing those texts self-legitimizes itself. (...) Reports of international organizations may have a *global* scope, (...) they are elaborated *locally*, in restricted institutional places that are not overshadowed by their production, that shape this discursive production through the lifestyle of agents, who are no transparent brokers”<sup>39</sup>.

Thus COMECON discourse on socialist international economy is first and foremost a narrative about the life of its agents. This explains how committed the international civil servants are to the edition of the Council’s publications. In 1973, the yearly report of the standing commission for chemistry stresses how

“the collaborators of the general direction for chemistry of the secretariat of the Council pay great attention to the edition of the “bulletin of the standing commission for chemical industry” and its annexes. They are involved not only in its redaction, but they also participate in the organization of its publication”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31

<sup>39</sup> Dominique Maingueneau, « Les rapports des organisations internationales... », *art. cit.*, p. 124-125

<sup>40</sup> BArch DC 20-19963, *Ständige Kommission Chemie des Rats für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe. Band 7 : Jan.-Mai 1974*, « Tätigkeit der Abteilung Chemie des Ratssekretariats im Jahr 1973 », f. 175

In 1980, the standing commission for chemistry then firmly rejects the merging of its bulletin with the one of the secretariat<sup>41</sup>. If the international civil servants are so dedicated to this press, it is also because the secretariat keeps a significant portion of the limited number of copies edited. These enjoy an important circulation among the international staff, considering that they represent albums in which they are the heroes. International civil servants constitute the most capable audience for understanding this discourse of the international organization and the most likely enthusiastic audience.

Eventually, the circularity of COMECON discourse becomes evident. The discourse on a socialist international economy with its own rules and its own language, shaped in and by the international organization, limits the international civil servants in their possibilities to talk about their activity. However, it reinforces at the same time their legitimacy in developing a normative opinion on internationalism in the field of economics. The communication policy of the Council allows them to talk about themselves autonomously, without relying on the willingness of the Member States to take over this discourse on socialist international economy. This is how they impose public recognition of the collective identity they develop at COMECON.

Commemorating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1976, the standing commission for chemistry decided for example to publish a list of people dedicated to its work in the last two decades. Theirs names should be published in the bulletin of the commission under the title “servants of the international cooperation”<sup>42</sup>. This discursive self-celebration of a unique international capital shows how the agents of the Council gave meaning to an autonomous public space, which in return legitimizes their peculiar international resources. COMECON discourse participates in the integration of each and every member of its staff in a collective *ethos*. As Ruth Amossy defines it,

“the collective *ethos* is at the same time action (it shapes a social reality) and persuasion: it looks for engaging the audience in subscribing to a certain image of the community”<sup>43</sup>.

In talking about the bloc, international civil servants establish themselves as a cohesive group and let a parallel public space arise, whose codes and language the national governments need to adopt if they wish to contest the action of the international organization. The discourses elaborated in the Council had a performative power and showed how it is possible to do things with words, to make the “bloc” exist while talking about it. In the end, COMECON efficiently

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<sup>41</sup> SAPMO-BArch DY 30-27086, 57. Bis 62. *Tagung der Ständigen Kommission Chemie*, « Protokoll der 57. Tagung », 24.-27.10.1980

<sup>42</sup> LArch Sachsen-Anhalt I 525-16192, *Ständige Kommission für Chemie des RGW (46. Bis 49. Tagung. 1975-1976)*, « Protokoll der 48. Tagung », 6.-8.4.1976

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Amossy, *La présentation de soi : ethos et identité verbale*, Paris, PUF, 2010, p. 158

shaped a discursive bubble, largely self-referential and self-legitimizing, that the Member States cannot blow up if they don't want to undermine the international organization's position in a Cold War competition in which the solidarity of a geopolitical space is heavily shaped by words.