

Warsaw Pact foreign ministers responded to this Western move and also went to Stockholm. Of special significance was the presence in Stockholm — and it would not have happened otherwise — of US Secretary of State Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, who met for over five hours. Both also met with my colleague the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Broad political contact was thus re-established between the countries of East and West for the first time since the acrimonious conclusion of the Madrid Conference last September, in the shadow of the Korean airliner tragedy.

Even Prime Minister Thatcher has taken steps to improve contacts between East and West. Her visit to Budapest last week is a further signal of momentum in East-West dialogue — a determination to seek out areas of understanding between members of opposing alliances, and to promote a reassuring clarity about intentions.

In contrast to earlier statements, President Reagan twice last month signalled a constructive tone in American policy towards the USSR. The response from Moscow has been mixed — elements of tough rhetoric together with signs of a cautious readiness to re-open lines of communication.

I have, Mr. Speaker, just returned from consultations with the leaders of Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and Romania. Those countries represent a middle-European geography, and a middle-power psychology, with long experience of East-West tensions.

Obviously they are closely allied to the Soviet Union. But their leadership, their influence, and their identity are, in present circumstances, significant. I found, for example, a very positive response to my suggestion that the middle powers of each alliance could play a constructive part in reviving habits of consultation at the highest levels of East-West politics.

I gave them our Western perspective on the decline of *détente*, and on the importance of its renewal, and I listened to their own. We talked about the mixture of signals between East and West, and about the need to go beyond an improvement in rhetoric, toward acts and gestures to restore confidence and reduce tensions.

I return with several conclusions from my talks in Eastern Europe:

— First, I was struck by the contrast between the cordial, reasonable, and non-ideological private talks, and the occasional blast of Warsaw Pact fundamentalism to which we were subjected in public. I believe this disparity underlines the importance of personal contact and private dialogue. Without that dialogue, both sides risk remaining prisoners of their own polemic.

— Second, because we were able in our private talks to strip away much of the invective surrounding key issues, I believe we were able to begin a process of exposing areas of common interest. That process will take time, but I dare hope that a new level of maturity in East-West relations is within our grasp.