

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
Charles Gati

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Charles Gati conducted by William McAllister on October 14, 2016. This interview is part of the phase two of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session: 1

Interviewee: Charles Gati

Location: Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: William McAllister

Date: October 14, 2016

Q: My name is William McAllister. I'm a Senior Research Fellow at INCITE, the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University. I'm here today on October 14, 2016 to talk with Charles Gati. Professor Gati noted in an interview he did a couple of years ago that there's a correlation between his getting older and the generosity of his being introduced. I hope now to continue that correlation, as we're very glad to have his participation in this oral history project.

Professor Gati is currently the Senior Research Professor of European and Eurasian Studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies—SAIS, as it says it's known—at Johns Hopkins University. Before going to SAIS, Professor Gati taught here at Columbia for fifteen years and at Union College, among other schools and was a Senior Advisor with the Policy Planning Staff of the U.S. Department of State in the early '90s. His books, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* and *Hungary & Soviet Bloc* were honored with the Marshall [Darrow] Shulman Prize for Outstanding Book on the international relations of the former Soviet bloc by the Association of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies [ASEEES]. Professor Gati is the only author to have won this prize twice. He's also written, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* and his most recent volume is *Zbig: The Strategy and Statecraft of Zbigniew Brzezinski*. Professor Gati earned his Ph.D. in Political Science at Indiana University. Welcome, Professor Gati.

Gati: Thank you.

Q: You came to the U.S., to Indiana University when the Soviets invaded Hungary. You were— if I understand correctly—a reporter in Budapest at the time. I was wondering what was the sense of things, politically, in Budapest in the year or two before the invasion, and is there a story around your being able to leave the country and come to the U.S.?

Gati: Well, I was both a university student and a budding reporter, just before the outbreak of the revolution on October 23, 1956. Actually, I was a reporter fulltime from 1953, after the death of [Joseph Vissarionovich] Stalin, when there was a little bit of a thaw in the Communist politics. But in 1955 I was fired because I was a bourgeois deviationist or something [laughs] like that. I was never a party member, and I guess I had to go. But even then, after I was fired, I was allowed to publish; I was not totally blacklisted, but I was without a fulltime job. I think what would be of some interest here was that approximately one month before the outbreak of the revolution, I published an article in the second largest weekly at the time called *Művelt Nép*, in Hungarian. It's hard to translate, "cultured people," maybe. Something like that. In any case, I'm very proud of that article because it was the first time that anybody in writing expressed a view that the obligatory, the mandatory teaching of Russian should be stopped in Hungary, and that students in the high school and university level should have a choice among several languages. That is my greatest contribution. I think the more specific contribution in the months or years just prior to the outbreak.

Now, you also asked me about leaving. Is there a story to it? Well, there are always stories about changing countries. I was a refugee in late November, 1956, when I decided that I had given the new Soviet installed regimes new record for two or three weeks of arresting people—I must be on some list as well, however young I was. And so I didn't want to be arrested and I felt that it was the time to leave. The decision was made from one day to the next, actually, on November twenty-one or twenty-two of 1956. With two friends, we got on a train, which amazingly was running, from Budapest to near the Austrian border. We got off. A farmer or a peasant, somebody there, we paid him a little bit—who knew the fields—led us through to Austria, towards Vienna. It was not without danger. There were some shots. But the Iron Curtain was gone. So therefore, in that sense, it was not dangerous. There were some shootings around. A few times we had to throw ourselves to the earth. I remember that. I also remember the Austrian Red Cross ladies offering us tea, but then we knew we were free.

Q: You take being shot and thrown to the ground with a great calm. [Laughs] I don't know that I would be so calm about it, even sixty years later.

Gati: Actually it was worse, that we heard dogs barking—I was more afraid of the [laughs] dogs than I was of the shots, which were not so near me.

Q: I could see that. The dogs.

Gati: The dogs.

Q: I would be, too [laughter]. So you came here. You took your Ph.D. in Political Science at Indiana [University]. How is it that you came from there to Columbia and to the Russian Institute?

Gati: Well, first I came to Union College in 1963. I didn't have my Ph.D. at that time. Formally I got that in 1965. I taught at Union College, which is in Schenectady, New York. In 1970 I had applied to and received a scholarship from what was then called the Research Institute on Communist Affairs or RICA. We subsequently became RIIC, Research Institute on International Change, headed by Zbigniew [Kazimierz] Brzezinski. I came as a fellow. I got an apartment on Riverside Drive, and I started the research. I don't remember now [laughs] exactly what my topic was. It was a long time ago. But I know how much I enjoyed the—I think they were Wednesday, maybe Tuesday or Wednesday—lunches at the Research Institute, where people from other places, including the Russian Institute, kept coming. Maybe the first or the second such lunch in the fall of 1970 where, by the way, I met my wife, who was Brzezinski's assistant, Toby Gati. That turned out to be the greatest achievement of my stay at Columbia University.

But I remember that on one occasion—maybe the very first lunch, maybe the second one—I ended up sitting next to Marshall Shulman at one of these lunches. The lunch, to describe it very briefly, consisted of—we were sitting at a long table and there were plates, I think actually paper plates, nothing very fancy, with very good sandwiches from—I think on Broadway there was a deli that delivered. It's maybe, Mama Mia?

Q: Mama Joy's.

Gati: Mama Joy's. That's correct, yes. They were very good sort of half sandwiches we got. You had roast beef and you had pastrami and you had, of course, lox and all the goodies. Marshall Shulman, who was a very polite, senior person—I looked up to him very, very much. He—as if he were a host at the event, which formally speaking he was not—he pushed one of these plates in front of me, that I should select one. I pushed it back and I said, “Well, you are a senior person here. [Laughs] I'm just a newcomer and a beginner.” But, “No, no,” he insisted that I take the first sandwich, or half sandwich, and I took a lox sandwich. That was the only one [laughs] of that, on that particular plate, and he looked at me and said, “You're a bastard.” [Laughs] I'll never forget that.

He called me a bastard right there—of course, jokingly—and so we became friends, even though politically I was closer to Brzezinski, who was—they were rivals; friends, but rivals. My views of the Soviet Union, and of politics in general, probably somewhat closer to Brzezinski's. But I became very fond of Marshall and I had the feeling that he liked me, too. We had good, little conversations. A week or two later I'm sitting at the same table, he turned to me and he said, he said, “Would you like to teach here next September?” This was still September 1970, “Would you like to teach here next semester?” I said, “What?” He says, “Well, we have a course called International Communism. Bill Griffith—” William E. Griffith “—has been coming here from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]—” Former Director of Radio Free Europe in Munich “—but I think he doesn't want to do it anymore, or maybe would like to have some change,” I don't remember what his reasoning was. But he offered me a job there. Today when

there are committees, and processes, and filling out forms, and affirmative action, and all that, the new generation might not even understand that it was done next to a sandwich, totally informally by Marshall—who probably didn't [laughs] ask anybody for his opinion. He offered me a job to teach a course. I had to ask Brzezinski if it was okay to do that, because I was on a scholarship from his institute on the thirteenth floor—this was on the twelfth floor. That's why, when I started to teach—that's one of my favorite stories about how it started.

Q: That's a great story. How long did the scholarship continue for? And how did you transition more into working with people or interacting with people at the Russian Institute?

Gati: The scholarship with the Zbig's institute, Brzezinski's institute, was just for one year. So it was over in 1971. But then I kept getting offers, not only from Shulman, but also from the Institute on East Central Europe, led at that time, for many, many decades, very well by István Deák. There was a little bit of demand, and so for fifteen years I taught either part time or fulltime, because occasionally—I am not so sure that I remember correctly, but let's say Shulman was on leave and so then the department—it wasn't the Russian Institute, but it was the Department of Political Science and its chairman at the time, Joe [Joseph Arthur] Rothschild, who then hired me fulltime as well. So some of those years I taught fulltime, some of those years I taught only part time, different courses, I would say listed or co-listed at the Russian Institute.

Q: Let me pick up with events at that time. Such as the big world events; Vietnam War, the Czech Spring and the subsequent invasion of the Soviets there, the [Richard M.] Nixon and [Henry A.] Kissinger policy of détente between the Soviet Union and the United States. What's

your sense of how the Russian Institute, either as an institution or the people at the Russian Institute, responded to these events in the late '60s—I guess early '70s—?

Gati: Yes. I wasn't there the late '60s. I heard about it. I heard about the student riots and how some of the students went after Brzezinski, who was for a long time—not forever, not [laughs] till the end, but almost till the end—supported the war in Vietnam. And so he was a particular target of the student demonstrators, who came up and threatened him, et cetera, et cetera. He was very calm and kept eating an apple, I hear, as they were talking to him. I don't have any firsthand recollection of the 1960s; I was not here.

In the 1970s and early '80s, I was associated with Columbia and lived here, then on Claremont Avenue, for fifteen years, from about 1971 at, through 1986, I believe. Not every year, but almost every year, I taught there. You are asking me about détente? There were divisions in the Russian Institute and discussions—the détente line was represented primarily by Shulman and then by [Robert H.] Legvold. As long as Brzezinski was here, the other side, the more skeptical side or even critical side, until he became National Security Advisor under [James E.] Jimmy Carter in 1977 was Zbigniew Brzezinski.

What I think I'd like to emphasize here is that the relationship between them—or among the three, but primarily between Shulman and Brzezinski—was quite cordial. They, and especially Shulman, attended Brzezinski's events. Their differences were substantive and not personal. I don't remember any case when Shulman would say, publicly or to me, that somebody with an East European background, like Brzezinski or myself, were not qualified to judge the Soviet

Union objectively. Never did Marshall Shulman say that. Now did he think it some of the time? Perhaps. We're all human, and we have to assign some motivation to people with whom we disagree. There is a good story about that, that was into the open with Governor [William Averell] Harriman. I should relate that, because that's in the book that I edited about Brzezinski. But here at Columbia it was collegial, it was pleasant, and it was very interesting because you knew that there were significant differences.

Essentially, Shulman's view rested in the dangers of nuclear war. Brzezinski's view was rooted in the unacceptability to him of totalitarian regime. It's as simple as that, and everything flowed from that. Brzezinski was not against negotiations, of course, and Shulman was not against defense spending, let's say. So it wasn't between black and white. There were overlapping interests and overlapping policy proposals, but they did differ significantly.

Q: Do you have a sense from your observations—of Shulman and Brzezinski at the time, or other people—of an interest, or an ability, of the Russian Institute people, the scholars there, to have a policy influence—directly or indirectly—on détente? Or later on, with the Carter administration?

Gati: Well, yes. Shulman became an extremely influential person at the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a big deal and very, very widely respected. Then, in the Carter administration—I visited with him there, as I visited Brzezinski, too, in the White House. His office was next to Secretary of State [Cyrus Robert] Vance's. I mean, literally he could walk into

Vance's office any time he wanted to. That's the mark of influence in Washington, [laughs] for sure. Where you sit is where you stand.

The differences became more pointed, I think, at that time, in the Carter administration, because you have to keep in mind that—in contrast to the previous years at Columbia—they were not equal. Brzezinski was the National Security Advisor to the president. He could walk into the president's office just about any time he wanted to. He was probably the only official in the Carter administration to have that kind of relationship with the President of the United States. Marshall Shulman was a Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State. The two positions are not comparable. One, Brzezinski's, he could make decisions. The other one, he could give advice to the Secretary of State.

They were in touch, but the relationship suffered because, I think, Vance and Shulman did not like the idea, primarily of the reasons for reaching out to China. The reason was to isolate the Soviet Union. More than anything else. There were other reasons. The Chinese cooperation in the intelligence field was something that seemed quite threatening to the possibility of détente with the Soviet Union.

Q: When Shulman was in Washington—and perhaps this is true for Brzezinski, but I think it may be more true of Shulman—I was wondering whether he brought people from Russian Institute down there to consult with them, or he came up here. Was there any kind of formal or informal relationship where he tried to draw on the Russian Institute scholars to advise—?

Gati: That's an interesting question. I don't know the answer. As far as Marshall is concerned, I know that when I called him. He was quite available—and by the way, we became friends. Well after that, we celebrated Thanksgiving together quite a few times, as well. Brzezinski did bring somebody who was associated with Columbia, got a Ph.D. here, and then was General William [Eldridge] Odom, who subsequently became head of the National Security Agency. But he was the military advisor in the White House, or Brzezinski. I do know that Shulman did not have the same respect for Odom as he did for, occasionally begrudgingly, but he still has for Brzezinski.

Q: Let me move on a little bit historically, so into the late '70s and early '80s, where you get the invasion of Afghanistan, which seemed to have changed Carter, at least I think that's what led to Vance's resignation, I think. And then of course, you get [Ronald W.] Reagan and a harder line anti-Communism, coming to power—at least compared to Nixon and Carter—and then you also have renewed concern over development and expansion of nuclear weapons, with the Star Wars program, for example.

Do you see—or did you see at the time—these events as connected? The Afghan invasion, the Reagan hard line, anti-Communist stand, and renewal concern over nuclear weapons? Did these strike you as events that triggered one another, perhaps? Or in other ways related to each other?

Gati: I'm not sure that I get the gist of your question, but I do know that, at least initially, Brzezinski was more comfortable with Reagan than Shulman must have been. I don't recall a conversation with Marshall at that time about Reagan. But I think his views were more critical—as was mine by the way—of Reagan's policies. I thought that he was pushing to too hard. The

second Reagan term was a little more collected, more reasonable, but initially this anti-Communist rhetoric did not suit well with me, and I guess—based on what little that I know—that Shulman was very upset because Reagan ruined whatever there was left in good relations. Don't forget, there were other events at the time, notably the intermediate range nuclear weapons issue, which introduced a significant difference, I suspect, between Shulman and Brzezinski.

Q: During this time, again, was the Russian Institute actively involved in trying to influence the Reagan administration? I guess at this point—

Gati: I don't think they had any access to the Reagan administration because, when the government was in Republican hands—but more importantly, in Reagan's hands, who was so clearly, not just antagonistic to the Soviet system, but very hostile to it—the Russian Institute's more moderate approach simply was disregarded. By then, Legvold was taking a greater interest in the Russian Institute and was playing a role there and so did Seweryn Bialer, whom we have not mentioned yet. He took over Brzezinski's institute, by then called Research Institute of International Change. His views were actually closer to Shulman's than to Brzezinski's, even though both of them were Polish, but Bialer, who was a very bright guy, played a very significant role at that time here at Columbia.

Q: Can you expand on that? In what way did you see him playing that role?

Gati: Well, Bialer was very ambitious and very smart. He understood the significance of keeping the door open with the Russians, and particularly after Gorbachev's rise. First of all, he spoke

superb Russian, unlike Marshall or Brzezinski. I don't know about Bob Legvold, frankly. But I do know that Bialer's Russian was superb. So the Russians, some of the Russians, including at least one—but maybe more than one—member of the Politburo liked to talk to him. He took that seriously, and he got some information out of them and brought it back. And so at the Council on Foreign Relations, for example, but also here at Columbia, Bialer became a very important figure, even though his English was very heavily accented [laughs], interestingly enough, even more than mine, and a lot more than Brzezinski's.

But he took a position on Russia that set the moment very, very effectively, in that it could not be easily characterized as soft or hard. Not Reagan, for sure. Close to Marshall. Close to Shulman and Legvold, with whom he became very, very friendly. But quite realistic about the extent to which U.S.-Russia relations could improve.

Q: Did he have a sense earlier on than other people perhaps—certainly perhaps people in the Reagan administration—that Gorbachev was for real, in the sense that he actually did want to pursue Glasnost and Perestroika and—?

Gati: You asking me about Bialer?

Q: Bialer, yes.

Gati: The answer is yes. He took it seriously because he understood Communism, the mentality, the political culture, the sociology of Communism, better than almost anyone else I have ever

known, because he was one of them. He was a high-ranking official, very high-ranking official of the Polish Communist Party. A true believer, who sometime around 1954, '55—after the death of Stalin and some other events which you're not interested in—decided to defect and ended up in America, where under tutelage of Brzezinski, he eventually—and then later on by Marshall and Legvold and Bob [Robert] Jervis, by the way—he got tenure eventually—and Stern, by the way, Stern; they all helped him very much. So in my personal opinion, for what it's worth, he understood Communism better than anybody else. Whether he understood international relations the way Brzezinski and Shulman and Legvold did, I'm not so sure. Also I think his exaggerated sense of the political role that he could play, I think got in the way of his career.

Q: When you said “the exaggerated sense of political—” what did he want to do?

Gati: He wanted to be National Security Advisor under [Walter Frederick “Fritz”] Mondale. And made himself believe that he had a very good chance.

Q: You've mentioned a couple times, in reference to Bialer and reference to Shulman before, their role with their Council of Foreign Relations. I was wondering if you had a sense of the relations between the Council of Foreign Relations insofar as Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were concerned, during your time at Columbia. Any sense of any institutional relationship? Or was it pretty much a set of individuals who were at the council and were also at the Russian Institute?

Gati: I don't know if any institute—I was a member, too, starting 1977, of the council. I didn't know of any relationship. I mean, Brzezinski was a director at some point, but I don't remember, now, even seeing him there. But I did see Shulman there a lot at those seminars. And of course, Legvold still writes those wonderful, beautifully written, masterful book reviews on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. I have only admiration for Legvold's skill, first of all to read so many books and then summarize them, and yet between the lines convey a sense of what he thinks of them. Shulman was a star at the Council of Foreign Relations. Everybody adored him. I don't know of any institutional relationship, no.

Q: Speaking of Gorbachev—and this may be past your time at Columbia, so I think the major transformations in the Soviet Union, that eventually led to its collapse, start, or really gain strength, perhaps, after you left Columbia in '86. But perhaps, even from after you had left, I was wondering whether you noticed any effect that Gorbachev's coming to power—and this Perestroika and Glasnost, and increasingly people realizing he was for real, and not the usual Soviet leader—did that have some kind of effect at the Russian Institute? Was there a division of people saying, some not taking him seriously, some others—any tensions around that or any of that sort?

Gati: The Russian Institute was dominated by Shulman and Legvold. Their views were very similar, or the same. They were probing the possibilities of limited accommodation—that would be my—to make sure that accidents don't happen. They were not naïve, but some people called them naïve about the Soviet Union. I never thought that, and I think that's unfair. They dominated—I don't know anybody at the Russian Institute who, at that time, had a different

view. I think there was a consensus there. And I don't blame them for it, but I can't think of anybody who held a different view. That was the view, in contrast to the Reagan administration. Brzezinski was gone, he was already—he had remained in Washington. Tried to come back here but that didn't work out well, and so he joined Johns Hopkins there. So there was no counterpart to the Shulman/Legvold perspective of seeking limited accommodation with the Soviet Union, due primarily to the danger of nuclear war. What there was in the '70s, because of the presence of Brzezinski, was no longer there.

Q: Again, I know you weren't there at the time, but perhaps you noticed from afar. When the collapse actually happened, do you have a sense that the people were expecting this at the Russian Institute? Or was this a kind of a surprise to them, that it happened relatively quickly, it seems? And whether there was even, then, a division over whether they should take it seriously or not, whether in fact it would revert—

Gati: I don't know. Good question. I wish I knew the answer. I don't know the answer. I can guess that they were probably taken somewhat by surprise, as almost everybody was. I never thought that Communism would last forever, but I didn't see the collapse coming as quickly as it did in the Soviet Union. I would give myself some credit for seeing the end coming in Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Hungary. I wrote about it in *Foreign Affairs* so I can take some immodest credit.

Q: Apropos that point, were there people like yourself and others—we've been talking a lot about the Soviet Union—but were there other people like you, from Hungary, maybe other

people from Poland, as you say, maybe somebody East German, Germany or Czechoslovakia, who had intellectual and policy concerns about those countries? Have relationships with political actors in those countries had a different kind of insight into what was going on in Eastern Europe than the more Soviet-oriented scholars at the Russian Institute?

Gati: Well, I think this is an important question, and I'll answer it not quite the way you ask—but then we can go back to that—which is to add a dimension to Marshall Shulman's activities, precisely because the criticism, explicit or implicit, of his willingness to seek détente or accommodation with the Soviet Union. Even when he did that, I know that he maintained, and his wife maintained, extensive relations with dissidents. Once the dissidents began to be visible, Marshall Shulman did not shy away from meeting them. As a result the Soviets didn't quite know what to make of him. It was rather interesting to watch from afar, that Shulman liked to deal with [Alexei G.] Arbatov, the head of the U.S. Institute—a shrewd, clever guy. Didn't particularly like him. Mr. Arbatov, the U.S.A. Institute and Shulman, they got along quite well because of Shulman's willingness to take them more seriously than Brzezinski would. But Arbatov and others didn't know what to make of Shulman's proximity to the Soviet regime's critics and opponents. It was one of the interesting parts of Shulman's public personality.

Q: What was it that allowed you to have this insight about the collapse of Hungary and Poland? I'm thinking of the whole issue of Area Studies, and whether the Area Studies people—that intellectual perspective gave them a vantage point to see Hungary and Poland in a way that was different from just a focus on the Soviet Union.

Gati: Well, I'm a great fan of Area Studies, and I am quite disturbed by its decline. Area Studies now, in some universities, is a dirty word. This is absurd. It just shows that academic life follows—

Q: Fads?

Gati: Fads. That's the word I was looking for, exactly. Fads. And so now it's out. There are still a few universities that kind of tolerate, but most places they don't. So that's about Area Studies. Did that help me? [Laughs] Yes, probably yes. Knowing some history helps. Knowing some economics helps. And above all, knowing the languages of the area help. I focused primarily on Poland and Hungary. I don't think it belongs in this interview, of what specific events and where made a difference. But the article that I had just referred to in *Foreign Affairs*, which was published in January 1989, took its line about the end of Communism in Eastern Europe from Gorbachev's appearance at the United Nations in December of 1988, when he declared—to my utter surprise—that the Soviet Union was withdrawing, as I recall now, fifty thousand troops from Eastern Europe, without waiting for an equivalent American concession.

That gave me the courage of my convictions to put in writing that it's—the title of the article was *Eastern Europe on Its Own*. First—here is the story—I put a question mark to that, because I'm a cautious scholar, but my wife said, "Take it off." And so I went to the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, Bill [William George] Hyland, who really, really liked my article. He says, "Absolutely. No, Toby [Gati] is right. We're taking the question mark off it." [Laughs] So if you only look at the title, I look far more perceptive and courageous than I [laughs] really was. But now, looking

back, I'm delighted. It was Gorbachev's statement that they were beginning to get out militarily, that gave me the—I mean, there was a lot of other evidence by then, but I just was too cautious to have gone that far without the Gorbachev statement.

As for the Soviet Union, frankly, until it happened I personally would not have foreseen it. I could see that they would give up the Outer Empire, which was Eastern Europe. I did not think that they would give up the Inner Empire, which was the Soviet Union itself, until it happened. I don't think there was anybody here at the Russian Institute—I can't believe that Shulman or Legvold or Bialer foresaw this. But I don't know this for a fact.

Q: I was thinking about Area Studies, and especially how valuable you think they are. I was thinking about the ongoing nationalists' political development in Hungary for the last five to ten years or more. We were talking before the interview about your lecture tour in Central Europe and Italy on this and other matters over this past summer. And I was wondering if the, in this context of Area Studies, do you think that the crises, if you will, in Hungary—and perhaps other countries—the nationalist crises, underscore the dangers of dismantling Area Studies, at a time when international policymakers need more help from regional experts? Do you think there's a relationship there, about not having Area Studies is problematic for bringing scholarship to these, you know, these developments in Eastern Europe?

Gati: Well, that would be my position, a very strongly held position, that applying universal theories to individual cases or even regional cases is a mistake. You just have to go back to the early 1990s when the victory of democracy throughout the world was forecast by everybody.

Very few skeptics were there who believed that Hungary or Poland would not end up with western style democracies. This turned out to be untrue. I am guilty here, too, because I was also caught up in the enthusiasm of those years, at least for a while. I take some pride in anticipating very early—I would say fifteen years ago—the problems in Hungary and in Poland as well and elsewhere, perhaps because of regional studies, perhaps some other factors. I don't know. But I know places like Freedom House, where you had to fight to—I was a member of some advisory board there—we had to fight not to be caught up in this broad tendency, that was so widely accepted, that the victory of democracy was inevitable.

Nothing is inevitable, first of all, in my view, to start with. But the problem here is the over-theorizing of future trends, which I think social science is guilty of. Some modesty about political behavior would very much be in order.

Q: In terms of Area Studies, there are two questions in my mind. One concerns the rise of Nationality Studies. My sense is that these are usually thought to be—

Gati: You said Nationality Studies?

Q: Nationality Studies, yes. That these are usually thought to be compatible. But there's a part of me that wonders if they have some underlying tension, in that Nationality Studies do call for focus on a particular nation. Whereas Area Studies is more borderless, let's put it that way, perhaps. I was wondering if you shared this kind of sense of a tension between the two, number one. And number two, I was wondering if a focus on Nationality Studies is problematic, having

to do with—has a potential at least, for allowing scholarly underpinnings for nationalism, for a nationalist political stance.

Gati: Well, I probably wouldn't go that far. Area Studies is a function of academic realities and even there they are disappearing, but they were—I'll put it in past tense—they were a function of academic realities. In other words, you cannot have just Polish studies; you have to put it in a broader sense. There were certainly enough similarities, and there are still certain similarities in that region, which I think would warrant a regional approach. After all, we cannot afford to have a study center in Bulgaria. This is not feasible. So to the extent that there enough similarities, I think the area approach is the best.

Q: The other side to the Area Studies is that they were being replaced, or have been replaced, by what are called “functional” areas. So you get concerns about the environment, for example. How problematic—what use do you see for the idea of functional institutes? Are they compatible with an Area Studies approach? Do they have to be antithetical in the way they seem to have been, in terms of being set up institutionally funded?

Gati: That's a question of probably, of financial support. If you can afford to have both, then you should have both. They could be complimentary. They could even—courses could be cross-listed. Why not? The environment is a significant issue, so in that sense, yes, the functional approach makes a lot of sense. But my problem would be if they—if they cancel Area Studies, then we have a problem.

Q: And your concern, if I understand it right, is that the substitution is not so much about functionalism for Area Studies, it's this notion of universality, of—

Gati: Precisely, yes. That was the word I was looking for. Thank you.

Q: Yes. When you went to the—you were in the State Department in the early '90s? Late '80s, early '90s? I wasn't quite sure.

Gati: No. I was an outside consultant to the Policy Planning Staff starting in 1989, which was the first [George H. W.] Bush administration and so I flew to—I lived in New York and I flew to Washington every week, for a day, just for a day. Then the [William J.] Clinton administration came in and in 1993, but just for one year, because I resigned. In '94 I was a fulltime senior member. I was one of the two senior members of the Policy Planning Staff, in charge, basically, of the former Soviet space and of all of Europe. So it was a pretty big responsibility, actually.

Q: Large portfolio, big.

Gati: Just as we started to talk, for example, about NATO enlargement, yes.

Q: Relating that back to, now, the Harriman Institute, did you have any contact with the folks at the Harriman Institute, from your position in the State Department? Was there any interest on their part in trying to have some policy influence? I'm curious about how you, in this

government position now, as opposed to being in an academic position, interacted with, or not, or how you regarded the Harriman Institute.

Gati: Well, very highly. The best Russian study center in the world. So never had any doubt about that that it was true. I think it is true today. That, I think, is beyond serious dispute. No, I don't recall any—certainly no institutional relationship with the Harriman Institute. I do remember that at one point I was asked to invite some people “from the outside,” as they said, to come into the State Department for luncheon discussions, to this—actually Strobe [Nelson Strobridge] Talbott [III] was involved in that somehow, because he was in charge of the Russia policy. We convinced him, I think, that we needed some outside influence, I felt that we did, to counter his views—his early views, I'd like to emphasize—with which I disagreed.

I remember getting Brzezinski in there, and he made quite an impact on the Policy Planning Staff, including the director, Sam [Samuel W.] Lewis. And then I believe also, while he was just sort of marginal to the Harriman Institute, I guess General Odom also came in there. I don't remember others. I don't remember now. Personally I continued to have relations with Marshall, and occasionally with Legvold. But with Shulman I continued to have—but not institutional relations, just very friendly relations. His best friend, or I think his best friend, was Bob [Robert] Kleiman of the *New York Times*, by then retired. They worked together back in the '40s. My wife and I were very friendly with the Kleimans in Washington. On Thanksgiving, for all I know—I don't remember now when—I think occasionally they came down and we were together.

But on the Policy Planning Staff, I don't remember anything else with respect to the Harriman Institute, except a couple of seminars.

Q: Pardon me, I was going to ask you, but I think you've already answered this question. You've been SAIS now for thirteen years. If I've got my dates right. Longer now?

Gati: Longer, no, no, it's longer.

Q: Okay.

Gati: In one capacity. By the way, I don't have any association with the Foreign Policy Institute. My title is Senior Research Professor at the European and Eurasian something or another. So, your, International Foreign Policy Institute is—

Q: Thank you for correcting that—

Gati: At some point I was, so it's—

Q: They still list it that way at SAIS.

Gati: Oh, really?

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

Gati: They pronounce it, by the way, “sise.”

Q: “Sise.” Oh, that’s right, it is SAIS. Pardon me. Thank you very much. I actually knew it was SAIS, and I was reading it more phonetically than—

Gati: Yes, many people make that. No, I got there in—I don’t know, but it’s almost twenty years now. Late ’90s, yes.

Q: Is there much interaction that the Harriman Institute has with SAIS now, in any kind of—? again, from your vantage point, from what you’ve seen.

Gati: Not that I know of, no.

Q: That it hasn’t really interacted as much.

Gati: I don’t think so. Well, the professor who’s been there for many decades is Bruce Parrott. Bruce Parrott is the Senior Professor in Russian Studies, and former chairperson of the Russia program, Russia/Eurasia Program, and he is a Columbia University graduate. He got his Ph.D. from Bialer. But I’m sure that he took courses with Shulman and Brzezinski, too. He was at Columbia in the late ’60s, early ’70s. And then his first job was at Johns Hopkins; he’s been there ever since.

Q: Speaking of Shulman, you just reminded me of something that I thought of earlier when you were talking about interacting with [Georgy Arkadyevich] Arbatov.

Gati: Arbatov, yes.

Q: Arbatov. And Arbatov's curiosity, or uncertainty, about his interacting with the dissidents. I was wondering if there were other people from the Russian Institute or Harriman Institute, subsequently, who tried—I've been asking you questions about policymaking, policy influence in the U.S. government, towards the U.S. government. I was wondering if there were people who tried to have the kind of influence with the Soviet government—or perhaps like Bialer with the Polish government, or other people with the governments in Eastern Europe—that they sought policymaking influence that way. Or whether the institute, as an organization, sought to do that.

Gati: Well, nothing with, on the part of Bialer with Poland. He would not want to deal with that. In effect, he assigned the Central European—or as we called it, then, East European Portfolio—to me. He didn't want to deal with what that. He was truly only a Soviet specialist. Well you know, I don't know; you'll have to ask others about this. I don't know. I suspect Elizabeth [K.] Valkenier, for example, should be able to tell you much more than I can. I am sure there is doubt to—well probably when the Soviet Jews came, I would think there was a lot of interaction. But I don't remember, and maybe I never knew, but I don't remember now.

Q: I don't know how closely you follow the Harriman Institute, what it's doing these days. Well, let me ask you the question this way. Knowing what you do know about it and its institutional

place in scholarship, and what's happening in Eastern Europe, in Russia now, in the Former Empire, Internal Empire. Are there directions that you think a place like the Harriman Institute should take thinking about the next ten, fifteen years, that there are intellectual or substantive paths that they really should move down that maybe they're not?

Gati: I don't follow it closely enough. Even if I did, I would not presume to tell them what to do. I'm just not involved with this.

Q: One of the issues that arises a lot in a place like the Harriman Institute is this something, perhaps tension—I don't know—between policy influence and knowledge development, there's an interest in having influence on policy. It gets expressed in students. Some people are, business people for example, and come to get some credentials and knowledge about the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe—Soviet Union more importantly back then, Eastern Europe now—in terms of business. There's that kind of concern. On the other hand, they're also going to develop scholars, Ph.D. students. Do you see that this is kind of a tension, or are they compatible?

Gati: It's not a real problem. I don't think so. You have to do both. There is no pure scholarship that's possible on contemporary political issues. We can pretend that we are fully objective and fair-minded; we can even strive to be fair and objective. But the fact of the matter is that we have two issues here. One is that we can hide but we cannot get rid of our various biases. We can do the best we can, certainly in the classroom, to be fair-minded and present every conceivable perspective towards students. That is our obligation.

On the other hand, it's a dangerous world out there, and I don't see why our students should not be exposed to that. There were the dangers in the Soviet period and there are dangers today. In fact, I would make the argument—probably doesn't belong here in this interview—that in some ways today's world is more dangerous than it was in the Soviet period. Partly because America is deadlocked and confused about its role. It lacks proper leadership. And voters don't seem to accept leadership.

On the other hand, in Russia you have, essentially, one-man rule, the like of which we have not seen since Stalin. Because whatever you may think of a [Leonid Ilyich] Brezhnev, or an [Yuri Vladimirovich] Andropov, or some of these other people, they had a Politburo to look after them and they could not—they had a lot of authority, but they were not alone. Today, [Vladimir Vladimirovich] Putin appears to me to be not the first among equals, but he is the first. I find that very dangerous. Under these circumstances, not to discuss contemporary policy issues in the classroom and in seminars after classes would be a terrible mistake in abdicating our responsibility.

Q: Let me just conclude the interview by asking you about—there's been a development, of course, in the area of human rights in Eastern Europe, and especially in Soviet Union, perhaps starting—well, back before Helsinki, but certainly get some impetus from that. Is this something that, an institute like Harriman, that you think this is a useful way for it to have it intellectually, as well as in terms to just talking about, policy-wise, try to promote, to pursue, to develop this field of human rights? To be a major actor in it?

Gati: Well, I think of course, it's—

Q: As a part of—

Gati: The instruction?

Q: Yes, as part of instruction, a part of scholarship, for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Former Soviet Union, in that context.

Gati: Well, I do, being of Liberal persuasion. I don't even embrace the new word, of progressive, that Liberals prefer these days because supposedly the liberal phrase is so unpopular. I'm very proud to be a Liberal. And so to advocate human rights, to me, comes naturally. But it's not the purpose of a university, or of the Harriman Institute, to have a very special focus on this, but if they have a course on human rights and Russia, or human rights—absolutely yes. It is a legitimate subject of scholarly inquiry. But I make a huge distinction between what a professor does with his own life and what he does in the classroom. In the classroom, you can and you should discuss, let's say, policy towards human rights in Russia in a way as to clarify that idealists want to make that the center piece of foreign policy, but the realists say that there are other ways to think and other ways to act, and that what happens within the confines of another country is primarily their citizens' business and not ours.

In other words, to universalize our human rights, in the classroom, as the only alternative, I think is a huge mistake. Probably some strong advocates might well do that. On the other hand, in your

private life, or in my private life, I consider it extremely significant. And yes, it is as important as discussing arms control with the Russians, in my book. I don't know if the distinction is clear. But I make a clear distinction between what one does in the classroom, where an attempt at balance and discussing alternative interpretations is essential. It is the heart of decent teaching. On the other hand, what you do in your seminars after class and your Wednesday afternoon, something or another, I hope that the Harriman Institute will have lots of speakers on human rights and how they are being violated in today's Russia.

Q: So that's what I wanted to clarify. I had a sense from the way you were talking that you thought that centering on human rights can be problematic because it can have normative connotation to it, a normative position to it, that you find objectionable—maybe for two reasons. One is that it's—well, maybe three reasons. One is that it's normative, one is that it has to do with telling countries how to live, and the third is that it smacks of this issue that you talk about in other contexts, about the universalizing, that there is such a thing as human rights in a kind of universal sense, rather than some kind of contextual sense. Does that make—?

Gati: Yes, I think that's a fair summary, yes, yes. Yes, something like that. Yes.

Q: Well, I think we've come to the end of most of my questions, if not all of them, in one way or another.

Gati: There are a couple of things I'd like to add. I can?

Q: Sure. Please do.

Gati: Unrelated to anything, but perhaps it has a place here and there.

Q: Absolutely.

Gati: The extent of interest in the Soviet Union, as opposed to the extent of interest in Russia, is striking. Once, when I taught at Columbia, a course in Soviet Foreign Policy—that was Marshall Shulman's course, but he was away on sabbatical or something or another. I believe I had 120 students. [Laughs] I don't hold that as an example for faculty, because it was a hell of a lot of work. All the more so because the assistants, who supposedly helped me with the grades, turned out to be not particularly good. And so, in the end I had to do that. And believe me, I wouldn't want to do that again. So I just want to record the pleasure that I had then, and I have now looking back, at being able to teach so many students at the Russian Institute and the Harriman Institute.

It was a wonderful place. Even though most of the courses eventually were cross-listed, because Professor Deák sort of took me away from Russia studies, which was my Ph.D. field. My Ph.D. is in Soviet Studies, not in East European Studies. But here, discovering my Hungarian past, Deák said, "Well, you can teach this and you can teach that." I could and I did, but I had never taught Eastern European things at Union College, for example—or Indiana University, where I had taught—never taught East European politics until I got here, because my field was Soviet

foreign policy. So Columbia transformed me into an East European specialist. That was one thing I wanted to say.

And I'm very happy for it. I had a wonderful time here. I was treated well by Shulman, by Legvold, by Brzezinski, Bialer, everybody. That was a great fifteen years in my life. And as I told you, this is where I met my wife. In connection with that, she reminded me to tell you something. This morning she says, "Don't forget." And that is teaching female students, how different it was then. I never had to keep the door open. Since then now, because of [laughs] all this stupid lawsuits that we—I mean, I haven't experienced anything—but concern about that. Anytime I have a female [laughs] in my office, a student, I keep the door open. It's absurd and a reflection on changing times when most things are better than they used to be, but there are some things that I miss, perhaps because I'm getting too old.

Q: I share some of the flexibility that we had in the past. Something that you had said about your transformation at Russian Institute, and at Columbia—

Gati: I became an East Europeanist.

Q: Maybe you became an East Europeanist.

Gati: Although I taught Soviet Foreign Policy many times, yes.

Q: I was wondering, did you notice that the Russian Institute did that for other people, too? In some sense, you're kind of a living example of the Area Studies approach of the Russian Institute. It takes you from just focusing on the Soviet Union has made you more of an Area Studies person, perhaps, you could say—

Gati: I didn't think of it this way, but as you say, it makes sense. The way I have thought of it was that Deák's program was primarily rooted in history and literature, East European history and East European literature. I don't even know if he had had anybody teaching politics. So once Shulman hired me I became available and legitimate [laughs]. And so we became friends and he says, "Well, you'll just have to teach it." Then Rothschild, who did teach East European Politics—this is true, I neglected to mention that—but didn't like to teach it. He moved towards more theoretical subjects, and he liked me a lot. So with Deák and Rothschild—and then Bialer doesn't want to do anything with East Europe, never mind Brzezinski, of course—so there was nobody who still—everybody wanted to focus on the big issues of Russia. And so I became available, and that's how I looked at it. But maybe your interpretation is also valid, yes.

Q: I assume, from what you said, that you kind of welcome this greater focus on Nationality Studies and getting away from the—there was a dilemma for the Harriman Institute once the Soviet Union collapsed. It's kind of, How do we now think of ourselves and—?

Gati: Russians and Eurasian Studies, isn't that what it's called?

Q: Yes. Now there's a quote from—[Mark L.] von Hagen about basically— thinking of it as, “preparing people in terms of a knowledge of language, culture and political economies and societies from the German-Polish border to the Pacific Ocean.” So a pretty wide swath of the world. Anyway, thank you very much for doing this.

Gati: Thank you. I appreciate—

Q: I appreciate it greatly, very much. It was a lot of fun.

Gati: Your questions were very stimulating. I haven't thought of these things for a long time.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]