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A hole in the Iron Curtain: The International Committee for the History of Technology (ICOHTEC) as a bridge between East and West, 1968–1990

AT ITS FOUNDATION in 1968 the main aim of the ICOHTEC was to provide a forum for historians of technology on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The first President was Eugeniusz Olszewski from Poland, the first Secretary-General Maurice Daumas from France, both eminent scholars. Over the years the ICOHTEC has developed a network which has increased ever since; it has provided vital impulses for advancing research areas such as sources in the history of technology, mining and metallurgy, the technical sciences and technical education or the relationship between science and technology.

My paper will try to identify the main themes and to assess their impact on research and international communication between scholars in East and West. But, although the person offering this paper is the current President of the ICOHTEC: This will not be an eulogy of the ICOHTEC, it will not be uncritical. The main issues will be: What has the ICOHTEC set out to do? What has the ICOHTEC achieved? What were its shortcomings and failures?

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