

## PART FOUR: COLLAPSE



## Chapter 4: Gorbachev's Old and New Thinking

### 1. The Paradigm of New Thinking

The 'Gorbachev revolution' began with only minor revisions of theory but ended in the complete replacement of the Ideological and Imperial paradigm. The then party leader and his chief advisors have acknowledged the gradual and essentially unplanned progression of change. 'It would be a great exaggeration to say that we envisaged from the very beginning the scope and difficulties of perestroika', Gorbachev has explained in retrospect. 'Its initial designs, furthermore, did not go beyond the framework of the system, neither ideologically nor politically. For us it was then a matter of improving the existing society, "forcing the system to work"'.<sup>462</sup> Similarly, Yakovlev remembers that 'at the beginning, we had little idea where events would take us'.<sup>463</sup> There was only a general 'understanding of what needed to be cast aside'.<sup>464</sup>

This general understanding, however, is precisely what explains the progressive, in its ultimate scope unintended, dismantling of the Ideological and Imperial paradigm and its replacement by the New Thinking. As in the Left and Right dichotomy of traditional Marxist-Leninist approaches, an inner logic existed that linked a set of policies of either one or the other orientation in domestic and foreign policy.<sup>465</sup> To illustrate this abstraction by an example, Brezhnev's approach to détente was bound to fail because of a dual violation of the logic of interconnectedness. A repressive policy at home contradicted an ostensible policy of opening in foreign policy. In the foreign policy realm, rejection of 'interference in the

---

462 M. S. Gorbachev, 'Mir na perelome', *Svobodnaia mysl*, No. 16 (November 1992), p. 10.

463 Lecture at Harvard University, 7 November 1991.

464 Alexander N. Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniiia bytiia. Perestroika – nadezhdy i real'nosti* (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), p. 330.

465 This logic was best described by Alexander Dallin, 'Linkage Patterns: From Brest to Brezhnev', in Seweryn Bialer, ed., *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1981), pp. 344-47, and earlier in his 'soviet Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: A Framework of Analysis', *Journal of International Affairs*, No. 2 (1969), pp. 250-65.

internal affairs of socialist countries', notably in Eastern Europe, a vigorous arms build-up and support for 'national-liberation movements' did not square well with attempts to improve East-West economic exchanges and gain access to Western technology, credits and know-how. The theoreticians of the new paradigm recognized such deficiencies and realized that the effectiveness of the new approaches depended upon coherence and consistency.

What, then, were the main ingredients of Gorbachev's New Thinking? The new paradigm included the following major principles:<sup>466</sup>

1. The use of military power, geopolitical expansionism and empire building are outdated forms of international conduct. They impose significant costs and impede socio-economic development.
2. Status and power in international affairs are determined by qualitative indicators, such as effectiveness of the political system, economic efficiency and the ability to adapt to rapid scientific-technological progress.
3. The internal resources of a nation, including a high level of education and technical skill of the population as well as the country's quality and way of life, are important factors of international influence.
4. Interests in world affairs are to be promoted through multilateral approaches and participation in international institutions. This also applies to security, which cannot be safeguarded unilaterally through the application of military-technical means but only politically and cooperatively.

---

466 On the origins, content, and evolution of the new paradigm through the eyes of their architects, see M. S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlia nashei strany i dlia vsego mira* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988); Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*; Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniiia bytiiia*; and Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*. For Western analyses of the new paradigm, see Falk Bomsdorf and Hannes Adomeit, 'Das "Neue Denken": Grundzüge und Verwirklichung', in Hannes Adomeit, Hans-Hermann Höhmann, and Günter Wagenlehner, eds., *Die Sowjetunion unter Gorbatschow* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), pp. 261-296; Seweryn Bialer, 'New Thinking and Soviet Foreign Policy', *Survival*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (July/August 1988), pp. 291-309; Stephen M. Meyer, 'The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security', *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall 1988), pp. 124-63; and Coit D. Blacker, *Hostage to Revolution: Gorbachev and Soviet Security Policy, 1985-1991* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993). In the present chapter, only a summary of the New Thinking will be provided. For more detail and the practical application of the theory, see Chapter 6.

5. Although the nation state continues to be an important organizing principle in the international system, nationalism is one of the many forms of unilateralism that needs to be replaced by processes of integration.
6. The main actors and factors of stability in the international system are the industrialized countries (G-7), which adhere to a common system of values, laws and norms.
7. The main factors of instability and threats to world peace are nationalism, ethnic conflict, religious fundamentalism, political extremism, migration, terrorism and environmental catastrophes.

To explain and provide some detail about the evolution of the new paradigm, the first and foremost realization was that of a close interrelationship between domestic and foreign policy and, as time went by, the priority of domestic over foreign policy. Statements made by Gorbachev himself reflect this progression of viewpoints. In an interview with *Time* magazine in September 1985, he remarked that

somebody said that *foreign policy is a continuation of domestic policy*. If that is so, then I ask you to ponder one thing: if we in the Soviet Union are setting ourselves such grandiose plans in the domestic sphere [perestroika], then what are the external conditions that we need to be able to fulfill those domestic plans? I leave the answer to that question with you.<sup>467</sup>

In February 1987, at an international peace forum in Moscow, he went one step further when he said that

our international policy is *determined* more than ever before by our domestic policy, by our interest in concentrating on creative work for the perfection of our country. For that very reason we need a more stable peace, predictability and a constructive direction of international relations.<sup>468</sup>

There is another aspect of significance to the relationship between domestic and foreign policy in the Gorbachev era. That is the idea of learning by trial and error in both dimensions of policy. Reflecting in his memoirs on the felt necessity at the beginning of his tenure in office to embark upon a

---

467 Gorbachev interview with *Time*, 9 September 1985 (italics mine). The ‘somebody’ Gorbachev referred to may have been Lenin, who is on record as having stated: ‘There is no more erroneous or harmful idea than the separation of foreign from domestic policy’; V.I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 4th (Russian) ed., Vol. 15 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1948), p. 67.

468 *Izvestiia*, 17 February 1987. In April, in a dinner speech in London, he reiterated that ‘Our foreign policy, to a greater degree than ever before, *stems directly from our domestic policy*’; *Pravda*, 1 April 1987 (italics mine).

fundamental change in foreign policy, he explains that 'perestroika in domestic [affairs] and in the foreign policy realm took shape only gradually; success in one area had a positive impact on the other, whereas, correspondingly, failures put a brake on the development in both areas'.<sup>469</sup>

A central point to be made at the outset, however, is that the trial-and-error process had its limits. Gorbachev was not much of a conceptual thinker. To the extent that he adhered to abstractions, he remained wedded to utopian ideas, 'reform socialism' and 'socialism with a human face' in the political realm, and, in economics, the 'harmonization' of the plan with the market. Fundamental re-conceptualization, both in domestic and foreign policy, was urged upon him, in part by events and in part by advisers who had a keener intellectual bent and greater analytical potential.

Re-conceptualization of domestic and foreign policy meant not simply 'creatively adapting' but abandoning Marxist-Leninist ideology. The necessity for taking such a momentous decision was understood by hardly anyone in a position of responsibility at the beginning of the Gorbachev era. But it was clearly stated in the midst of change by Soviet dissidents who had emigrated to the West. 'Ideology is that hard core of the Soviet system that does not allow the country to deviate too far for too long', they wrote in March 1987. Unless the central ideological tenets were changed, 'soviet strategy would remain imprisoned by its assumptions'. If the Soviet leadership was really serious about radical change, they concluded, it 'would have to begin by discarding the ruling ideology'.<sup>470</sup>

In the process of discarding Marxist-Leninist ideology, Vadim Medvedev, the CPSU CC secretary responsible for ideological questions, told his colleagues from the Warsaw Pact countries assembled in East Berlin in September 1989 how damaging Marxism-Leninism had been. He admitted that, 'When we ideologized foreign policy in an unbalanced fashion, it often harmed the prestige of the Soviet Union as well as socialism as a whole'. It did not at all contribute to the normalization of relations 'but at times even [achieved] the very opposite'.<sup>471</sup> Shevardnadze, in ret-

---

469 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), p. 7.

470 'The Time has Come Now to Reject the System Itself', *International Herald Tribune*, 24 March 1987. The dissidents in question were Vasili Aksyonov, Vladimir Bukovsky, Eduard Kuznetsov, Yuri Lyubimov, Vladimir Maximov, Ernst Neizvestny and Alexander Zinoviev.

471 Speech by Vadim Medvedev, the CPSU CC secretary responsible for ideological questions at the conference of the ideological secretaries of the socialist coun-

respect, confirmed this point. The notion of peaceful coexistence as a form of class conflict had inevitably led to perceptions of the ‘world as an arena of a perennial struggle between systems, camps, and blocs’. It had blurred the difference between ideological competition and psychological warfare and ‘erected insurmountable barriers on the road towards mutually beneficial cooperation between countries with different socio-economic structures’.<sup>472</sup> According to Medvedev, the emphasis on ideology in international affairs had also ‘furnished a pretext to our opponents to accuse us of expansionist and aggressive designs and of wanting to “export revolution”’. It had ‘contributed to the enhancement of “enemy images”’.<sup>473</sup>

The problem with such realizations in the Gorbachev era, however, was that the seeming or real abandonment of one ideological tenet or another was accompanied by qualifications and counteracted by euphemisms and ambiguities. Gorbachev’s speech at the seventieth anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution provides a glaring example of this.

Despite its many departures from ideological orthodoxy, the speech brimmed with Stalinist or, if one prefers, neo-Stalinist rationalizations.<sup>474</sup> ‘Under the conditions at that time [the 1930s]’, Gorbachev asked, ‘was it possible to choose a course [of action] other than the one adopted by the party?’ ‘No’ he unequivocally replied, ‘it was not possible.’ He correctly considered collectivization as a ‘fundamental alteration of the whole way of life of the main mass of the population in the countryside’ but he gave a positive spin to this generalization by saying that it had ‘created the social basis for the modernisation of the agricultural sector’. He then continued with blatantly Stalinist euphemisms such as that one should not overlook the ‘complicated nature of this period’ and that there were such deplorable things as ‘excesses’ – a term used by Stalin when he began to comprehend the enormous cost of forced collectivization. But then he turned Khrushchevian by saying that ‘There were also – I say this openly – real crimes because of the abuse of power. Thousands and thousands [sic] of

---

tries, on 21 September 1989 in East Berlin; SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/3248.

472 Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*, pp. 95 and 101.

473 Medvedev speech in East Berlin, 21 September 1989.

474 Text in *Pravda*, 3 November 1987.

party members and non-party people were subjected to mass repressions.<sup>475</sup>

Contrary to what was nothing more than a mere repetition of what Khrushchev had said at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Gorbachev's treatment of Stalin's *foreign policy* remained firmly stuck in the orthodox mold. He chastised the 'ruling circles of the West' for distorting the truth and attempting to show that 'the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939 had provided the starting shot for the attack of the Nazis on Poland and thus for [the beginning of] the Second World War'. Nothing was said about the secret protocols. There were no regrets and apologies about the occupation and treatment of the Baltic States. There was no hint about the Soviet deliveries of strategically important commodities right up to the beginning of the invasion in June 1941 that helped Nazi Germany build up its war machine.

Apart from all the specific euphemisms and distortions of Soviet history, the most noteworthy general feature of Gorbachev's anniversary speech is the absence of any moral consideration. Typically, it was left to Yakovlev to address this very issue. At the above mentioned meeting of communist party secretaries for ideological questions in Varna he expressed his regret that adherents of both socialism and capitalism had

convinced themselves by the trial-and-error method that there are more urgent factors and necessities than the abstractions that have turned into dogmatic clichés, that have nothing to do with morality and that have led to deafness and blindness towards good and evil.<sup>476</sup>

Gorbachev's speech is a sorry example of such blindness.

Marxism in its Leninist and Stalinist application was to prove a fundamental aberration that had led Russia into comprehensive crisis. The archival record of secret meetings and private conversations Soviet party leaders, including Gorbachev, clearly shows that for them 'socialism', whatever its precise meaning, still had a future. As Medvedev told another gathering of party secretaries for ideological questions in East Berlin, it was an 'illusion' of the forces inimical to perestroika to assert that 'our so-

---

475 For more realistic data on the number of party and non-party members who fell victim to mass repressions see *infra*, pp. 442-443.

476 Speech by Alexander Yakovlev at the conference of communist party secretaries for ideological questions, held in Varna (Bulgaria), 26-28 September 1989, included for agenda item 8 of SED Politburo meeting of 17 October 1989; Central Party Archives, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/3247.



ciety could evolve in the direction of capitalism and abandon socialist values'. Such speculation was 'built on sand'.<sup>477</sup> Yakovlev adopted a similar stance at the Varna meeting a few days later. No matter how one looked at it, whether 'from a political, ideological, or simply a pragmatic point of view', it was 'absurd' for both the 'conservatives of conviction and the conservatives of privilege' to charge that perestroika was tantamount to the abandonment of the 'principles and ideals of socialism'.<sup>478</sup>

What explains the retractions and reservations and the continued adherence to utopian goals? First, outright rejection of Marxism-Leninism would have destroyed the very basis on which power and legitimacy of the political leadership rested. Second, in the perceptions of the *perestroichniki*, retreat from utopia would have provided the orthodox elements in the party apparatus with the ammunition they needed to mount a political counteroffensive with the aim of ousting the new leadership. Third, many of the supporters of New Thinking, including Gorbachev, remained incapable of ridding themselves of the ideological baggage accumulated in the seventy years of travel that was intended to lead to a bright future. 'Why do I sit surrounded all the time by Lenin's works?', Gorbachev had asked rhetorically in July 1986. 'I leaf through them, I look for solutions ... because it is never too late to consult Lenin.'<sup>479</sup>

Who, then, was this man who embodied such contradictory attitudes but who had such an enormous impact on world history?

## 2. Gorbachev: A Political Profile

Gorbachev was born in 1931 in the small village of Privolnoe in Stavropol krai (region or territory), a fertile agricultural area in southern Russia.<sup>480</sup>

---

477 Speech by Vadim Medvedev, the CPSU CC secretary responsible for ideological questions at the conference of the ideological secretaries of the socialist countries on 21-22 September 1989 in East Berlin; Central Party Archives, SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/3248.

478 Yakovlev in Varna, see fn. 476.

479 Speech to members of the Soviet Union of Writers, Kremlin, 19 July 1986; excerpts as published in *Détente*, No. 8 (Winter 1987), pp. 11-12.

480 A *krai* in both past Soviet and current Russian definitions refers to a large administrative entity located in strategically important borderlands (*krai* literally means edge). In practical administrative terms, there is no difference between a *krai* and an *oblast'* (region or province).

His outlook on life and his career in the communist party, as his own memoirs and testimony from relatives, friends, and acquaintances show, were shaped by the rural character and agricultural base of this region.<sup>481</sup> 'Privolnoe' means the expanse of land that was steppe when the first peasants came, and it also means freedom.<sup>482</sup> The customs and traditions of the Cossacks – soldiers and peasants who, at the Czars' orders, settled the frontiers of the empire and pushed them south and east – have helped to mold the area. Peasants from Russia and Ukraine fled to this area from serfdom. 'Later', as Gorbachev explains, 'they were forcibly settled here – a human drama that claimed many victims. My family on the paternal side, the Gorbachevs, settlers from the Voronesh province (*guberniia*) but also my ancestors on the maternal side, the Gopkalos – settlers from the Chernigov province – had arrived here in this way.'<sup>483</sup>

His childhood was overshadowed by three major political and socio-economic events: collectivization, the purges, and World War II.

Concerning the first major influence, his maternal grandfather had been one of the first after the Bolshevik revolution to help establish a cooperative, a voluntary organization of peasants who kept and farmed their own land. His grandmother and mother also worked there. 'In 1928', Gorbachev writes tersely, 'grandfather entered the CPSU. He participated in the foundation of our *kolkhoz*, named Khleborob [Wheat Farmer], and be-

---

481 This sketch of Gorbachev's political profiles draws to a considerable part on his memoirs, which first appeared more or less simultaneously in both Russian and German; Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1995) and Michail Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1995). The memoirs are by far the best source for a political profile of Gorbachev. Where there are discrepancies between the two editions – there are some that are meaningful – they will be pointed out. His own portrayal will be critically evaluated and checked against facts as well as the opinions provided by close associates. – Some of the best treatments of the Gorbachev phenomenon are Robert G. Kaiser, *Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumphs and his Failure* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, exp. ed. (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1991); Zhores Medvedev, *Gorbachev* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); John Miller, *Mikhail Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); and Gerd Ruge, *Gorbachev: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991).

482 Ruge, *Gorbachev*, p. 13.

483 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33.

came its chairman. ... In the 1930s grandfather took over the leadership of the collective farm Krasnyi Oktiabr [Red October] in a neighbouring village, located twenty miles from Privolnoe.<sup>484</sup>

Whether because of idealism or a sense of self-preservation, the Gopka-los became active supporters of Stalin's collectivization drive. The Gorbachevs, in contrast, initially refused to submit to Stalin's plans. '[Pater-]nal] grandfather Andrei', as the grandson remembers, 'did not participate in the collectivization [campaign]; he did not enter a collective farm but remained a [private] farmer'. He was arrested in 1934, convicted as a 'saboteur' and sent to do hard labor in the Irkutsk region. He was released after two years, before he had served his full sentence, and returned from camp 'with two documents which certified him as an activist of labor, ... immediately joined a collective farm and, because he worked assiduously, he soon rose to become head of the pig farm of the *kolkhoz*'.<sup>485</sup>

What about the human and material costs of collectivization, the methods used and the moral problems involved? The approach Gorbachev adopts to deal with these issues in his memoirs is essentially the same he had used in his above-quoted speech on the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. The portrayal has the same euphemistic and apologetic quality, is devoid of moral opprobrium and follows the typically Gorbachevian 'on the one hand but on the other hand' pattern. He acknowledges that 'In 1933, a famine erupted in the Stavropol region ... The famine was terrible. In Privolnoe, at least one third if not half of the village population died. Whole families perished and long thereafter, essentially until the beginning of the war, [many] cottages stood there abandoned, near collapse, like orphans. Three [of the six] children of grandfather Andrei also perished of hunger'.<sup>486</sup> Yet he also thinks that 'historians argue until this very day about the origins [of the famine] and whether it was perhaps organized deliberately so as to finally subdue the peasants. Or did adverse weather conditions after all play the most important role in it? I don't know what things looked like in other regions but we [in the Stavropol area] were indeed visited by a terrible drought.' Did the famine, then, have natural causes? No, essentially, it didn't. 'The calamity did not lie in [the weather] alone. Mass collectivization ... in my view tipped the

---

484 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

485 Ibid., p. 42.

486 Ibid.

balance.<sup>487</sup> Was mass collectivization, then, gratuitous mass murder organized by the communist party, a heart-rending tragedy that could and should have been avoided? No, it wasn't. He fails to understand 'what "golden age" of the Russian village the current advocates of peasant happiness [who are these advocates?] are talking about. These people either know absolutely nothing, or they knowingly do not tell the truth or they have lost their memory.'<sup>488</sup>

The refusal unambiguously to condemn mass murder is also evident in his treatment of Stalin's purges in the late 1930s, the second major development in Soviet history that shaped his life. No one, he writes, was immune from denunciation, arrest, and execution. This was true also for his grandfather Gopkalo. He was arrested in 1937, accused of sabotage, charged with being a member of a 'counterrevolutionary, right-wing Trotskyite organization' and severely tortured in order to extract a confession. The arrest, according to Gorbachev, produced 'the first [major] upheaval in my life' and 'ingrained itself forever in my memory'. This was in part due to the fact that 'enemies of the people' were shunned by society. 'I still remember today that after grandfather's arrest, the neighbors passed by the house in a wide circle as if we had the plague and that our relatives only stopped by secretly at night.' Gopkalo was fortunate to be released in December 1938 and reinstated in his job as collective farm chairman in 1939. His wife's grandfather, however, was not so fortunate. He was arrested, also in 1937, in the Altai region in southern Siberia and shot.<sup>489</sup>

What is also lacking in Gorbachev's published recollections, despite the traumatic experience of the arrest of his maternal grandfather, is a reflection on Stalin's personal responsibility, the function of the communist party in the Soviet system, and his own willing participation and guilt by association with a criminal régime, rising rapidly in the party: In 1963, at the age of 32, he became Head of the Department of Party Organs in the

---

487 Ibid.

488 Ibid., p. 38. He adds that *he* certainly remembers the vestiges of the 'way of life that was characteristic for the Russian village before the revolution and before the foundation of collective farms'. This characterization as well as the treatment of the subject on the seventieth anniversary of the October revolution implies that collectivization was not only 'objectively necessary' but improved life on the farm. The 'in principle' positive assessment of collectivization may provide one of the explanations why Gorbachev, until the very end, refused to contemplate major changes in agriculture in the direction of private farming and the market.

489 Ibid., pp. 38-42.

Stavropol Regional Committee, and in 1970, he was appointed First Party Secretary of the Stavropol Regional Committee, a body of the CPSU, becoming one of the youngest provincial party chiefs in the nation. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when he was asked when he had begun to understand the role played by the NKVD and its successor, the KGB, that he said that he had begun to comprehend it long ago, from the time his grandfather was under arrest, but that there was much that had remained obscure to him, adding that even his grandfather had said of his arrest: 'I am sure Stalin does not know.'<sup>490</sup>

The third major influence on Gorbachev's life was the Second World War. For the purpose of reconstructing Gorbachev's attitudes towards Germany, it is particularly appropriate to try to assess its impact.

'My generation, he wrote, 'is a generation of the children of war. The war has left an imprint on us and shaped our character, even our world view.'<sup>491</sup> During his talks with chancellor Kohl in Moscow in mid-July 1990, he reminisced that, when the German offensive began in June 1941, he was ten years old, and that he could remember very well what had happened.<sup>492</sup> The events he remembers, as described in detail in his memoirs, were his father's temporary deferment because he was needed as a *kolkhoz* technician (the summer harvest had to be brought in) and his subsequent call-up for service at the front in August 1941; weary Red Army soldiers passing through Privolnoe after the evacuation of Rostov on the Don in August 1942; the occupation of the village by German troops for four and a half months; the collaboration of villagers with the occupation regime; and the restoration of Soviet control in January 1943.<sup>493</sup>

In the first phase of the German offensive, in the summer and fall of 1941, the southern army group (Heeresgruppe Süd) under General von Rundstedt made rapid advances, the Red Army retreating in disarray. Kiev, Kharkov, and the Donbas came under German occupation and, for a short time, so did Rostov. In the second phase, beginning in the summer of 1942, German offensives were launched in two directions, one towards Stalingrad to cut the communications lines between North and South Rus-

---

490 Interview with Gorbachev, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 7 November 1992; as quoted by Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 30.

491 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 51.

492 Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1991), p. 320.

493 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, pp. 42-51.

sia, and a second towards Grozny in the North Caucasus and Baku on the Caspian Sea. 'On 27 July 1942', to return to Gorbachev's recollections, 'our troops evacuated Rostov. Completely disorganized they embarked upon retreat; somber looking and tired soldiers passed through. Their faces betrayed bitterness and feelings of guilt.'<sup>494</sup> Stavropol was bypassed by both offensives, and the steppes to the north of the town where Privolnoe was located never became a major battle zone.<sup>495</sup> In August, however, German forces entered Privolnoe and established an occupation regime, initially consisting of regular German units, which were 'later exchanged for other units of which I only remember the stripes on their sleeves and that they spoke Ukrainian'.<sup>496</sup>

Several villagers collaborated with the occupation authorities, mostly people who had deserted the Soviet army and hidden for months. They were now cooperating with the Nazis, mainly as policemen. Gorbachev's grandmother was interrogated at the police station because her husband was a member of the communist party and chairman of a collective farm and because he, her son and her son-in-law were all serving in the Red Army. The house was searched. Rumors abounded about mass executions of Jews and communists. 'We were conscious [of the fact] that the members of our family would be among the first on a list [of suspects] and thus my mother and grandfather Andrei hid me in a livestock compound behind the village. The action was to take place on 26 January 1943. But on 21 January 1943 Soviet troops liberated Privolnoe.'<sup>497</sup>

According to Valery Boldin, later Gorbachev's chief of staff and one of the conspirators in the August 1991 coup attempt against him, he (Gorbachev) 'did not witness the kind of atrocities the Germans committed in Belorussia and many of the western regions of Russia'.<sup>498</sup> This may be a fair observation. Later, however, Gorbachev did become quite conscious of the war's consequences and the large-scale destruction it had brought to Russia. He remembers that

I travelled by rail from South Russia to Moscow [in 1950] to begin [university] studies. With my own eyes I saw the ruins of Stalingrad, Rostov, Kharkov,

---

494 Ibid., p. 45.

495 Medvedev, *Gorbachev*, p. 31.

496 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 45.

497 Ibid., pp. 45–46.

498 Valery Boldin, *Ten Years that Shook the World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 81.

Orel, Kursk and Voronezh. And how many other cities had been destroyed? Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Odessa, Sevastopol, Smolensk, Bryansk, Novgorod ... Everything was in ruins, hundreds and thousands of towns and villages, factories and enterprises. The most precious cultural monuments – art galleries, palaces, libraries and cathedrals – were plundered and destroyed.<sup>499</sup>

Such accounts are, indeed, personal reflections. No effort is made to deal with the broader issues of Russian-German relations and European security. The next section will attempt to reconstruct Gorbachev's thinking on these problems.

There were other important factors that shaped Gorbachev's outlook on life and politics. These include the ethnic diversity of the region in which he grew up and where he worked most of his life before being called to the center. In his memoirs, he asserts that Soviet patriotism was multifaceted and based on multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multiethnicity. He writes that in Stavropol krai, 83 percent of the population were Russian; other nationalities included Karachai, Cherkessians, Abasins, Nogai, Ossetians, Greeks, Armenians and Turkmen. He also mentions the region's Karachai-Cherkessian Autonomous Region and its radio and television programs as well as newspapers and books in five languages. 'Life among so many nationalities made us tolerant as a matter of habit, and it taught us to meet each other with respect.'<sup>500</sup> On the whole, then, he paints an idyllic picture of ethnic harmony.

On closer inspection of this picture, however, some blots do appear. One reads that starting with the rule of Catherine the Great, 'border strongholds' were constructed in the northern Caucasus; that 'in the not all too distant past, [many] years of Caucasian wars cost numerous human lives'; and that society during the Civil War 'was split not only in accordance with the class principle but also along national, religious, and territorial lines, at times even within individual families'.<sup>501</sup> Such admitted blemishes, however, cannot dispel the impression that the artist, having first painted a picture of ethnic harmony, is either unaware of Russia's colonial and imperial past or deliberately attempting to ignore it. He ap-

---

499 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 38; similarly Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 57. The date Gorbachev gave for his train trip in *Perestroika* is 'the late 1940s'. However, his studies at university began in 1950. Hence, the insertion in square brackets provides the correct year.

500 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 35.

501 *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 36.

pears to be immersed in nineteenth century romantic nostalgia, referring to novels by Mikhail Lermontov and verses by Nikolai Ogarev. Russia is not seen by him as a conqueror and a continental colonial power like the English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch maritime imperialist powers but as a benevolent, civilizing power *preventing* conquest: 'The more the Russian state strengthened, the more insistent did the Caucasian peoples seek salvation in the relations with Russia from conquerors of all kind.'<sup>502</sup> Although such notions may say little about Gorbachev's understanding of nationalism in Eastern Europe, they reveal much about his lack of sensitivity to nationality problems in the Soviet Union. They also provide an important explanation of his inability effectively to deal with the issue when it became acute during his reign.<sup>503</sup>

To return to Gorbachev's career, the remainder of his teenage years was spent helping his father at the *kolkhoz's* machine-tractor station (MTS) and finishing high school. He then applied to Moscow State University to study law. He could not 'claim that this decision had matured [sufficiently] ... but the rank of judge or prosecutor impressed me'.<sup>504</sup> The choice was consistent with his ambition and outlook on life. In the Soviet era, and least of all under Stalin, there was no independence of the judiciary. Torture had become the usual method of obtaining grotesque confessions that served as formal accusation in secret, closed trials. Millions of people were sentenced without due process of law to execution or to the labor camps. Lawyers were needed to provide a legal veneer for these proceedings.<sup>505</sup> Not objectivity and impartiality were required of them but *partiinost'* – behavior in accordance with the interests of the party. But Gorbachev's image of the party and its policies as well as that of Stalin was essentially favorable. He had, as mentioned, no problem with the principle

---

502 Ibid., p. 32.

503 To take one of the many examples of Gorbachev's insensitivity to nationality problems: In 1984, upon the retirement of Dinmukhamed Kunayev, a Politburo member from Kazakhstan, Gorbachev ignored the tradition of naming a Kazakh to the post and instead appointed Gennadii Kolbin, a Chuvash, whom the Kazakhs regarded as Russian; see Robert G. Kaiser, *Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumphs and His Failure* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 150-151. As his three-day visit to Lithuania in January 1990 revealed, he also subscribed to the idea that it could be possible to assuage nationalism by appeals to economic rationality; see below, pp. 465-66.

504 Ibid., p. 59.

505 Ruge, *Gorbachev*, pp. 33-34.



of collectivization, and he preferred not to probe too deeply to understand the rationale or ascertain the scale of the purges. He was by that time a candidate member of the CPSU. He had worked hard at the MTS and received the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. He had done well at school. With such achievements and his peasant background, he was accepted by the university.

In retrospect, Gorbachev discerns both positive and negative aspects of his university experience. The first three years of his studies, that is, the period from his enrolment until Stalin's death in March 1953, 'coincided with a new wave of repression – with the notorious campaign against "rootless cosmopolitanism"'. Teaching amounted to nothing less than 'ideological drill'.

It seemed as if from the very first day the learning process was designed to put shackles on the young spirit, to inculcate in the young heads a set of inalienable truth and to save them from the temptation of reasoning independently, analyzing and thinking. The iron brackets of ideology, therefore, were always felt, in lectures, seminars, and discussions, sometimes more, sometimes less.<sup>506</sup>

A stifling atmosphere, then, that accurately reflected the comprehensive assault on creativity? Not quite. Gorbachev explains that the readings covered a broad range and included Western classics on constitutional law and government. He even goes so far as to say that 'many problems notwithstanding, the democratic traditions of the Russian university remained alive. ... The spirit of scientific and creative work and sound criticism was maintained, even if for the most part this was without much awareness.'<sup>507</sup> In reality, of course, only traces of the broad-mindedness and openness of the pre-1917 university had survived. Encouragement of independent thinking did not occur during Gorbachev's first years as a student but only after Stalin's death, as a thaw set in and political, cultural, and scientific conditions in the country eased.<sup>508</sup>

At the university, Gorbachev continued to pursue his political ambitions. He became leader of the law department's Communist Youth League (Komsomol) group and was granted full membership in the party. Fredrik Neznansky, an émigré Russian living in the West who attended some of the same courses as Gorbachev at university, remembers him as a

---

506 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, pp. 61-62.

507 Ibid.

508 Ruge *Gorbachev*, p. 33.

hard-liner who made speeches scolding the shortcomings and improprieties of fellow party members and recalls 'hearing the steely voice of Komsomol secretary Gorbachev, demanding expulsion from the Komsomol for the slightest offense'.<sup>509</sup> Other students saw him and his behavior quite differently. Zdenek Mlynář, for instance, thought that Gorbachev exercised 'informal and spontaneous authority';<sup>510</sup> Vladimir Kuzmin regarded him as 'helpful and good-natured',<sup>511</sup> Vladimir Liberman as 'modest',<sup>512</sup> and Rudolf Kolchanov as 'intellectually curious', 'tolerant' and not displaying 'any signs of radicalism'.<sup>513</sup> One of his professors thought that 'he was a good companion, always ready for a joke' and that 'he never really showed off, and even when he became the [department's] Komsomol chairman, he never gave himself airs'.<sup>514</sup>

Gorbachev did retain some independence of judgment and show courage. In one instance in 1952, when one professor was reading page after page from Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Gorbachev sent him a note, complaining that the students had read the book and that failure to discuss it showed a lack of respect for the students. When the faculty member ridiculed the anonymity of the note, Gorbachev admitted that he had written it. He was called to the dean's office but was probably saved from expulsion by his position at the time of deputy Komsomol secretary responsible for ideological questions.<sup>515</sup>

His courage is demonstrated also by the fact that among his closest student friends were Zdenek Mlynář, a foreigner, and Vladimir Liberman, a Jew. Another incident involved the latter. About a month after the newspapers had reported the arrest of a group of doctors who had allegedly tried to kill Stalin, most of them Jewish (the 'doctors' plot'), Liberman was attacked in class by another student. Everybody was silent. Gorbachev,

---

509 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, p. 160.

510 Zdenek Mlynář, 'Il mio compagno di studi Mikhail Gorbaciov', *L'Unità*, 9 April 1985. Mlynář was to become one of the leading reformers of the Prague Spring.

511 As quoted by Ruge, *Gorbachev*, p. 37.

512 Ibid.

513 As quoted by Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, p. 159.

514 Ibid.

515 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 64; the incident was reported earlier by Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, p. 160.

however, angrily came to his friend's defense, calling the perpetrator a 'spineless animal'.<sup>516</sup>

Gorbachev's friendship with Mlynář is of particular interest. The Czech student was to become one of the leading reformers of the Prague Spring and one of the authors of the Charter 77, which formed the basis of organized dissent in Czechoslovakia during the last twelve years of communist rule. It would, therefore, be reasonable to infer that Gorbachev and Mlynář, in their student days, developed concepts of reform socialism which they would later attempt to put into practice. Gorbachev, however, fails to confirm such inferences. He only goes as far as to say that 'The more thoroughly I immersed myself in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the more deeply I thought about [the problem of] congruence between their notions of socialism and our reality.'<sup>517</sup> Mlynář recalls that Gorbachev gained a greater awareness of the discrepancies between the glowing portrayals and the sordid reality of Soviet life. This concerned in particular rural life and the enforcement of discipline on the collective farm through common violence.<sup>518</sup> The notion that the two students developed reform socialist ideas at this stage in their life must be doubted also because of the fact that ideological orthodoxy under Stalin and even the limited relaxation after his death were not at all conducive to the development of such ideas. It was really only after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 that a more wide-ranging discussion of the Stalin era became possible. 'Stalinism', as another of Gorbachev's student friends has observed, 'was something deep inside us. We were only lucky that we were young and flexible enough to change later on.' It is also for this reason that he thinks that Mlynář's influence on Gorbachev has been 'overrated'.<sup>519</sup>

---

516 Liberman reported this incident to Ruge; see the latter's *Gorbachev*, p. 41. In his memoirs, Gorbachev does not mention the incident. He does say, however, that Liberman failed to appear in class one day because he was too upset to attend. People had ganged up, cursed, and maligned him, and finally thrown him out of a tram. Gorbachev was 'shaken' by the incident; Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 65.

517 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, p. 64.

518 Mlynář in *L'Unità*, 9 April 1985. Archie Brown, who interviewed Mlynář, provides additional information and competent interpretation of the relationship between Gorbachev and his Czech student friend; see Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, pp. 30-31.

519 Rudolf Kolchanov, as quoted by Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, pp. 159-60. Gorbachev mentions in his memoirs that, in 1967, Mlynář visited Moscow and then came to

At university Gorbachev met his future wife, Raisa Maximovna Titorenko. The daughter of a Ukrainian father and a Russian mother, she was born in the small town of Rubtsovsk in the Altai region of southern Siberia. Her family, too, had suffered greatly during collectivization and the purges. Her grandfather, as mentioned, had been arrested and shot. Her grandmother, as Raisa Gorbachev recalled, 'died of grief and hunger as the wife of an "enemy of the people"' and her four children 'were left to the mercy of fate'.<sup>520</sup> The couple had more in common than the legacy of an 'enemy of the people' family history. Like her husband, Raisa was intelligent, hard working, did even better in school than he (she received the highest mark in high school in every subject and was awarded a gold medal) and was accepted at MGU to study philosophy, because of her achievements, not as many other students because of party connections. She lacked Gorbachev's political ambition but added to the relationship by her interest in philosophy, art and literature. She also added to his awareness of problems of agriculture and rural life by her empirical sociological studies of the peasantry in the Stavropol region.

Upon completion of university studies, for Gorbachev the question of what to do next then arose. He returned to his native region and, in August 1955, began working in the Stavropol region's prosecution office (*prokuratura*), but only for ten days. To his wife, who was still in Moscow and arrived in Stavropol shortly thereafter, he wrote that 'working in the prosecutor's office is not for me'.<sup>521</sup> One of the reasons why he decided to abandon law enforcement was the 'unscrupulousness with which the USSR *prokuratura* officials were proceeding'.<sup>522</sup> Yet as if more sensitivity and compassion or less party tutelage could be expected there, he joined the Communist Youth League. He himself notes: 'Essentially, the political youth organization had no autonomy whatsoever; in practice, it acted as a "recipient of instructions" of the CPSU.' He also observes that 'any attempt of the Komsomol to act independently was not only regarded [by

---

see him in Stavropol'. 'Zdenek asked me about the situation in the Soviet Union, in the Stavropol' region, and about our life. He in turn told us a lot about the processes going on in Czechoslovakia.' Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. I, p. 119. Gorbachev doesn't say that this conversation had any impact on his thinking.

520 Raisa Gorbachev, *I Hope: Reminiscences and Recollections* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 14.

521 *Ibid.*, as quoted by Brown, *Gorbachev*, p. 36.

522 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 79.

the CPSU] as undesirable but as dangerous.<sup>523</sup> However, he makes no effort to explain why it would be preferable to work for one party-controlled institution rather than for another.

Gorbachev's rise in the Komsomol and party apparat was fast by Soviet standards after Stalin's death. In 1956, at the tender age of twenty-five, he became first secretary of the Komsomol for the city of Stavropol and quickly rose to the highest post in that organization for the entire Stavropol krai. In only fifteen years, at the age of thirty-nine, he became the most powerful person in the Stavropol region. His career in the *party* apparat began in 1962 and was advanced by Fyodor Kulakov, the first secretary of the Stavropol regional party committee, an association that was to last until 1978, when Kulakov, then a full Politburo member, died in office.<sup>524</sup> His initial position was that of party regional organizer and then, from 1963, head of the party organs department for the administration of collective and state farms, a new office created by one of the many administrative reforms under Khrushchev. 'An outside observer', he wrote of his function, 'may regard cadres work as scheming and paper shuffling, as dealing with intrigues in the apparat or as another dishonorable or unpleasant occupation, and up to a point this was true. In the [party] organs departments, intrigues were often spun and the fate of human beings decided.'<sup>525</sup> He, however, had set himself a higher task, which consisted in the attempt at promoting the best people in order to improve the performance of agriculture in the Stavropol region. Not a problem for him: 'I met hundreds of communists who were faithfully doing their duty'.<sup>526</sup>

Kulakov evidently considered his protégé's work to be effective. In 1966, at the age of thirty-five, Gorbachev was promoted to first secretary of the Stavropol city party organization and now had to deal primarily with urban problems. His next advancements occurred two years later, when he was moved to the position of second secretary of the party organization of the entire Stavropol krai, and in 1970, when he became regional first secretary. Since important regional party positions carried with them a seat in the Central Committee, Gorbachev was elected to that body

---

523 Ibid., p. 82.

524 For the at first rocky Kulakov-Gorbachev patron-client relationship, see Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, pp. 99-101. Later, shortly before Kulakov was relieved of his duties by Brezhnev, the relationship again became difficult.

525 Ibid., p. 101.

526 Ibid., pp. 101-6; 118.

at the Twenty-fourth Party Congress, held in 1971, just one month after his fortieth birthday.<sup>527</sup> At the same congress, Kulakov had become a full member of the Politburo and was able to continue to act as a patron for Gorbachev. When Kulakov died in 1978, Gorbachev moved into his place as CC secretary in charge of agriculture. Two years later, he became a candidate member of the Politburo, and in the following year, in October 1980, at the early age of forty-nine, a full member of that body. For the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, this was a remarkable career.

This sketch of Gorbachev's political profile would be incomplete without consideration of his attitude towards the reform efforts undertaken by Khrushchev and Andropov. In one of his few reflections on fundamental problems of the Soviet system contained in his memoirs, he argues that the failure of Khrushchev's reform attempts was due to the fact that

the system did not encourage innovation – even more than that, it resisted it. One should have assumed that Khrushchev's experience would have reinforced him in his recognition that a transformation was not to be achieved by operating on individual limbs. The framework of the system should have been ruptured instead so that one could have made more progress. But Khrushchev himself was a prisoner of outlived structures and ideological dogmas, which made it impossible for him to transgress the narrow confines of the system. This dilemma may also have been the root cause of his style of leadership, his emotional fluctuations, and his impulsive upswings. Khrushchev's intellectual potential could not flourish in this environment.<sup>528</sup>

This, it would seem, is an accurate characterization not only of the basic dilemma that Khrushchev was facing and his shortcomings and failures in dealing with them but also an apt description of *Gorbachev's* dilemmas and deficiencies.<sup>529</sup> A similar reasoning can be applied to Gorbachev's views of Andropov's failed reform efforts. 'He [Andropov] knew the situation in our country better than anyone else and he also knew how much our society was threatened but he shared the belief of many [communists]

---

527 Brown, *Gorbachev*, p. 39.

528 Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, p. 103.

529 To that extent, one would have thought it appropriate for Gorbachev's observation to be included in both the Russian and the German edition of his memoirs. This, however, is not the case. The Russian edition contains only the first sentence about the Soviet system's aversion to innovation (Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 98) but omits the criticism of Khrushchev's shortcomings. Irredeemably suspicious Kremlinologists may be excused for assuming that the parallels between Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's failures were too close for comfort to be presented to Russian readers.

that one only had to take care of the cadres and create discipline, and everything would be fine.<sup>530</sup> Gorbachev was an Andropov disciple and protégé but during his tenure in office as General Secretary he was unable to shed such beliefs and acted accordingly.

Most of Gorbachev's career before he assumed the top Soviet leadership position was concerned with agriculture and organizational matters in the party. There are a few instances in his life and career, however, which can be said to have had some influence on his later conduct in *foreign* policy. Such instances are his visits abroad, including trips to East Germany in 1966, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in 1969 and 1970, Italy in 1971, Belgium, with a side trip to Amsterdam, in 1972, West Germany in 1975, France in 1976, Canada in 1983 and Britain in 1984. Gorbachev's visits to East Germany (which, as his trip to West Germany, will be dealt with later) and Bulgaria apparently did not contribute anything to awakening any awareness of the imperial nature of the relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. His visit to Czechoslovakia was different.

The intervention of the Warsaw Pact had occurred only fifteen months prior to the arrival of a Soviet party delegation, which included Yegor Ligachev, then first secretary of the Tomsk region, and Boris Pastukhov, the CC secretary responsible for the Komsomol. Wherever the Russian visitors came into contact with ordinary Czechs and Slovaks, they were met with hostility. 'If I were to say that we felt uncomfortable this would be an understatement', Gorbachev remembers. 'We felt deeply that the people condemned and indignantly rejected this action [the intervention].' Prague, he thought, 'appeared paralyzed and numb. [Our Czech] colleagues did not consider it possible to get us together with workers' collectives; they themselves decided not to meet with them'. In Brno, the delegation visited a large enterprise but 'the workers did not return our greetings and demonstratively turned away. In August 1969, mass actions had flared up again against the new régime and the Soviet intervention ... [The] situation was extremely tense and the delegation had to be guarded around the clock'. In Bratislava, he observed that 'almost all the buildings in the center of the city had bullet marks, and everywhere anti-Soviet slogans were written on the walls'. When a member of the CPSU delegation pointed out in a meeting with party officials that Lenin had supported federalism in principle but not in the communist party, the first secretary of

---

530 Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, p. 151; Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 148.

the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak communist party rose and left. On the following morning, no one from the Slovak leadership appeared. He also recognized that there was a direct connection between the August 1968 events in Prague and events in Moscow. 'The developments in Czechoslovakia and the dynamics which it developed frightened the Soviet leaders – and to such an extent that they immediately abandoned their modest economic reform intentions and, in politics and ideology, hastened to tighten the screws.'<sup>531</sup>

It would be inconsistent with Gorbachev's political philosophy and personality for him unambiguously to condemn the intervention. He again finds extenuating circumstances and bends history to underpin his rationalizations. 'During the years of the Cold War', he writes, 'the parties to the conflict looked at much of what was happening through the prism of bloc interests and acted accordingly, not shrinking from the adoption of extremely harsh measures.'<sup>532</sup> These, in the Soviet case, were apparently justified because of a drift in Czechoslovakia to leave the Warsaw Pact.<sup>533</sup> There is even a whiff of 'all is well that ends well' in his treatment of the intervention: 'When I was in Czechoslovakia in the following year, good relations had been established between the people in the countryside and our soldiers.'<sup>534</sup>

Gorbachev's experience in the Western industrialized countries, as he acknowledges, also shaped his perceptions. The first and foremost realization was that Soviet propaganda had painted a skewed picture of life under capitalism. 'Irrespective of their purpose, the visits were instructive for me above all because [they underlined] the fact that the information we received from abroad was meager and also carefully filtered.'<sup>535</sup> He was surprised by the absence of border controls between Belgium and the Netherlands.<sup>536</sup> And he was completely unprepared for the openness of Western society and politics and the huge discrepancies in the standard of living

---

531 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, pp. 157-59.

532 Ibid., p. 157.

533 'The fact that, in the press of the ČSSR in mid-1968, there began to appear reports on the possible exit of the country from the WTO [Warsaw Treaty Organization] was the expression of the position of certain political forces, in other words, a result of the internal political development'; *ibid.*, p. 158.

534 Ibid.

535 Ibid., p. 168. Incongruously, however, he makes the West responsible for 'lowering an "Iron Curtain"' on the exchange of information; *ibid.*, p. 157.

536 Ibid., p. 165.



and in the level of economic and technological development between East and West. His 'a priori belief in the advantages of socialist as compared with bourgeois democracy was shaken'. He also thought that 'perhaps the most important thing which I brought back with me from my trips abroad was the realization that people there live in better conditions and have a higher standard of living [than in the Soviet Union]. Why do we live worse than the other developed countries? This was a question which was persistently to occupy me.'<sup>537</sup>

To sum up, the contours which emerge from the lines of Gorbachev's background and experiences before his becoming General Secretary add up to a very contradictory personality profile. The problem is not so much that the observer is faced with a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde phenomenon but that he has to struggle with several Dr. Jekylls. One of the clues to understanding his personality can be found early in his memoirs where he remembers that in his maternal grandfather's house,

in a corner in the living room hung an icon with an oil lamp in front of it, because grandmother was deeply religious, and under the holy picture, on a small table made at home, [the room was] beautified by portraits of Lenin and Stalin. This 'peaceful coexistence' of the two worlds did not at all embarrass grandfather.<sup>538</sup>

His approval of the allotment of equal space to icons Lenin, Stalin and Jesus is typical of his own attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable. Such attempts have had a positive and a negative dimension. Their positive features are his proclivity for compromise, his reluctance to condemn or rush to judgment, his preparedness to let things ripen and get more mature, his preference for persuasion rather than pressure and his abhorrence of violence. Their negative qualities lie in his refusal to engage in iconoclasm, firmly to take sides, his aversion to commitment, his proclivity for procrastination and his tendency to talk rather than to act decisively.<sup>539</sup> These

---

537 Ibid., p. 169. Nothing, of course, as has by now become obvious, is ever unambiguous. He finds a few things to criticize in the West and things that the Soviet Union does better. This concerns, for instance, the treatment of 'immigrants' (he probably meant the *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers): He also thought that 'public education and the provision of health services at home are built on more equitable principles' and that 'public transportation in the cities [in the Soviet Union] was preferable'; *ibid.*, pp. 165 and 169.

538 Ibid., p. 38.

539 'The only thing that is moving in the Soviet Union are Gorbachev's lips', was the memorable response by a (non-licensed) taxi driver on the way from the centre of

deficiencies were felt particularly acutely by those who expected effective political leadership in a difficult period of transition.

Gorbachev's disinclination to commit himself and act decisively is connected with his almost invariably indeterminate and inconsistent analysis. At university, as he writes in his memoirs, he felt attracted to the probing discussions with intelligent, open-minded classmates but until the very end of his career he defended the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism and socialism. In his search for a profession, he turned his back on the *prokuratura* because the state attorneys were so unscrupulous and the judiciary lacked autonomy but he joined the Komsomol, another Soviet institution without scruples or autonomy. Dwelling on Russian history, he acknowledged past Russian colonization of the northern Caucasus but simultaneously discerned contemporary interethnic harmony in this region. Concerning collectivization, he decried its excesses but justified the changes in the countryside as objectively necessary. He saw no necessity for the purges but de-emphasized their scale. He took Khrushchev and Andropov to task for remaining shackled by obsolete ideological beliefs and trying to reform the system without rupturing its framework but, when in office, he embarked on the same road of 'acceleration' and 'perfection' of the system, exhortations and an (utterly disastrous) anti-alcoholism campaign.<sup>540</sup> In the political realm, as a Western biographer observed,

As President he, in effect, dismissed a Politburo whose composition he could not control fully and substituted for it a Presidential Council, wholly appointed by himself – yet he did as good as nothing to build up his political support in place of the CPSU he had abandoned. He deprecated those who 'claim the role of the messiah', yet there was an impatience of teamwork here, a deliberate self-isolation that suggests delusions of irreplaceability, if not vulnerability.<sup>541</sup>

---

Moscow to Sheremetevo airport in early October 1988 to this author's question as to what changes he had seen.

540 'Noble intentions, deplorable results' is the apt title of the chapter in his memoirs on his anti-alcoholism campaign – a characterization that may well be applied to domestic politics and economic affairs as well. In foreign policy, the epitaph could be 'noble intentions, unintended consequences'.

541 John Miller, *Mikhail Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 72-73. Gorbachev's attack against those who 'claim the role of the messiah' as published, according to Miller, in *Izvestiia*, 1 December 1990.

In the economic area, in 1990, when he finally appeared ready to abandon the framework of the system by seemingly endorsing the Shatalin plan for the transformation of the Soviet economy to a market economy within 500 days, he reneged on his promises and demanded the plan's 'harmonization' with prime minister Ryzhkov's tired ideas for the retention of the centrally planned economy.

In Boldin's view, based on his observations as Gorbachev's chief of staff in charge of party affairs in 1987-91, there was no limit to his chief's vacillation and contradictory attitudes and behavior.

Gorbachev advocated democracy ... yet he decided people's fate as he alone determined the membership of the Central Committee and the Politburo, choosing first secretaries of republican parties, obkoms, and kraikoms according to his personal likes and dislikes. [He] fought to expand glasnost, yet he withheld from the people, the party, and even his own associates, vital information ... and threatened to dismiss newspaper editors who published material not to his liking, making good on his threats in several cases. ... He fought to protect the independence of the judiciary but instructed the procurator general on how to pursue certain investigations. [He] fought against administrative command methods of management, while keeping a tight grip on ministries and committees and setting policy on all economic issues from the center.<sup>542</sup>

Valentin Falin concurs with this view of Gorbachev's double standards and, coupled with the indecisiveness and incompetence he discerns in his former chief's personality, reflects on the consequences such features are likely to produce:

One cannot be a democrat and at the same time fear democracy. One cannot pledge allegiance to freedom of thought and be intolerant of the opinion of others. One cannot with one hand abolish totalitarianism and with the other assert one's own authoritarian style of leadership. And, finally, one cannot make numerous promises without taking the time and care seriously to address the matters at issue.<sup>543</sup>

Both Boldin, a co-conspirator in the August 1991 coup attempt, and Falin, for reasons which will be explained below, cannot be considered unbiased observers. But even some of those close confidants and advisors who remained loyal to Gorbachev throughout his tenure in office and even beyond have expressed frustration about their inability to fathom his genuine thoughts and convictions at any given time. Chernyaev, for example, has

---

542 Valery Boldin, *Ten Years that Shook the World: The Gorbachev Era as Witnessed by His Chief of Staff* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 298-99.

543 Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (Munich: Droemer Knaur, 1993), p. 44.

admitted to having felt 'bitter about the discrepancy between the views he [Gorbachev] expressed and his actions' and about the fact that, 'at times, his [public] declarations and actions deviated from what he told some of us close to him who sincerely sought to understand him, and even more so from what he told foreigners'.<sup>544</sup>

Gorbachev's foreign policy notions were and on many issues still are today characterized by the same discrepancy between public and private views, and reveal the same mixture of candor and caveat, insight and ignorance as well as admission and retraction. He was sensitive to the Hitler-Stalin pact as a causal factor for the outbreak of World War II but defended the non-aggression treaty as necessary, preferring to ignore the secret protocols. He disapproved of the restrictive Soviet policy on the exchange of ideas between East and West and lamented the skewed selection and scarcity of information in the Soviet Union prior to the advent of glasnost but charged that it was the West that had lowered the Iron Curtain on the free flow of ideas and persons. He realized the deep humiliation and injustice inflicted upon the Czechoslovak people in August 1968 but failed to question the legitimacy of Soviet imperial rule and, a year after the intervention, was able to see that things were going well in the relationship between Russians and Czechs.

There are, however, important differences in Gorbachev's approach to domestic as compared to foreign policy. It is also noteworthy that almost throughout his tenure in office he was regarded with much reservation by the population, resented by many reformers and despised by hard-liners in Russia but generally well respected and often enthusiastically celebrated in the West.<sup>545</sup> There are several reasons for this discrepancy. *First*, his policies abroad were characterized by relatively more consistency in conceptual approach and more congruence between theory and practice than those in domestic affairs. This is true despite all of the linkages and interconnections between the two policy areas.

*Second*, consistency in new thinking and practice – the reduction of global commitments, deceleration of the arms competition, withdrawal of forces and equipment, lowering of the Soviet threat profile and abandonment of ideological stereotypes – paid off in the form of benevolent West-

---

544 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 316.

545 An indication of the low popular esteem in which he is being held in Russia are the results of the first round of the June 1996 presidential elections. Gorbachev received a mere 0.51 percent of the vote.

ern attitudes and policies towards Soviet imperial contraction. It set in motion a process of positive reinforcement in international affairs. There was nothing equivalent domestically.

*Third*, his internal policies, particularly in the economic realm, were often indecisive and ineffective and produced a large and, after January 1987, rapidly widening rift between promise and achievement. This reinforced rather than detracted from the need to curtail imperial over-commitment and overengagement but did nothing to endear him to the Soviet public.

*Fourth*, whereas fundamental change in domestic affairs required a substantial redistribution of power and resources, change in foreign policy tended to affect personnel and resources to a lesser degree, and structural impediments were more easily overcome.

*Fifth*, it is easier to destroy and dismantle than to construct. In international affairs, the removal of the huge asymmetries in intermediate-range nuclear forces and conventional military power as well as the termination of ill-advised imperial entanglements were instantly applauded. In domestic politics, deconstruction was bound to be resisted, and reconstruction could only be a long-term and much more difficult endeavor.

After this description of the basic features of Gorbachev's personality, his political philosophy and difference in his approach to domestic as opposed to foreign policy, it is possible now to turn to his perceptions and policies on the German problem.

### 3. Gorbachev's Perceptions of the German Problem

In his memoirs, Gorbachev acknowledged that he was surprised by the course of events in Germany in the late 1980s.

I would be lying if I claimed that I had foreseen the way in which the German problem would be decided and the problems that would arise in this connection for Soviet foreign policy. I doubt in this connection whether any politician, in the East or in the West, would have been able to envision one or two years beforehand what would happen [in 1989-90]. After the precipitous changes in the GDR, events developed at such a breathtaking pace that there was the danger that they would spin out of anyone's control.<sup>546</sup>

---

546 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 150; similarly Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, p. 700.

He moves on to criticize the approach adopted by his predecessors, saying that

Brezhnev and Gromyko committed an error when they allowed themselves to be spoon-fed by the leading politicians in the GDR and, in the early 1970s, began to accept the official versions of events, which were impressive in their 'simplicity'. These myths were that there were two German nations, that the German problem was 'closed' and that it would make no sense to reopen it. But the point was not Ulbricht's and Honecker's theoretical constructs on the national question. The main issue lay in the sincere conviction of the Soviet leadership that the security interests of the Soviet Union necessitated a perpetuation of the division of Germany at any price.

In fairness, Gorbachev does not claim that when he assumed office he was determined to change well-established policies or that he should even alter what he now criticizes as the simple myths and categorical imperatives of the past.

I must confess that I, too, accepted these categorical imperatives, although I had doubts as to whether any circumstance can be preserved in perpetuity. The world is always in a state of flux, and if man ignores this objective law, it can only lead to defeat and loss. *When I embarked upon high politics, the existence of two German states was a fact and the question of reunification simply did not arise.*<sup>547</sup>

It is not surprising that Gorbachev, as he admits, shared the preconceptions of Brezhnev and Gromyko on the German problem. He had practically no exposure to the study of international relations at Moscow University. One of the subjects he took was diplomatic history but the teaching of the subject conformed to standard notions about the entirely peaceful character of Lenin's and Stalin's foreign policy.<sup>548</sup> Even Khrushchev, in his 'secret speech' to the Central Committee in February 1956, had – with the exception of Stalin's failure to anticipate the German attack of June 1941 and his post-war policy towards Tito's Yugoslavia – exempted this realm from criticism. Gorbachev not only seems to have believed and probably still believes the standard Soviet interpretation of the origins of World War II but also the Soviet version of the division of Germany. This

---

547 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, pp. 150-151; Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, p. 701 (italics mine). The Russian *kategorichnost'* has been rendered here as 'categorical imperatives'.

548 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 61. He also lists German language as one of his courses. There is no record, however, that he ever used any of it on his trips to East or West Germany or in his talks with German political leaders.

is evident, among other things, in a conversation he had when he visited West Germany as a member of a CPSU delegation, led by his mentor Kulakov, in May 1975, on the thirtieth anniversary of the capitulation of Nazi Germany.

The visit apparently made a big impression on him. In particular, a brief and sharp encounter with a German citizen engraved itself deeply in his mind. He mentioned the encounter several times to high-ranking West German visitors, including West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in July 1986 and president Richard von Weizsäcker in July 1987. This is what happened, according to his own description:

At a filling station [at Mannheim] near Frankfurt, I talked with the owner. He told me: 'stalin declared: The Hitlers come and go. But the German people remains. But then, at the end of the war, Stalin seized and divided the German people.'<sup>549</sup>

A discussion ensued, Gorbachev remembers, in the course of which he attempted to set the historical record straight. The plans for the division of Germany, he explained,

had been worked out during the war years by Churchill and American politicians. We opposed these plans and advocated the creation of one single, sovereign, and democratic German state. [However] ... the Western powers supported the creation of a separate West German state, and only later did the GDR come into existence. We also advocated the creation of a single, sovereign, and above all peaceful German state on the basis of the de-Nazification, democratization, and demilitarization of Germany. However, there were forces in the West which took the matter to where it is today. The Soviet Union, therefore, was not to be blamed (*ne vinovat*) for the division of Germany; one had to look elsewhere for the responsibility.<sup>550</sup>

---

549 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 210. When Gorbachev told this story to Genscher, the German foreign minister smiled. He (Gorbachev), Genscher thought, had been lucky that his German interlocutor was apparently not much of a historian. Stalin's statement not only referred to the German people but also to the *German state*: 'The Hitlers come and go but the German people and the German state remain.' See Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), p. 500. 'The experience of history shows that the Hitlers come and go but the German nation, the German state, remains' is the version in J.V. Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, 5th edition (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950), p. 84.

550 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 210. Gorbachev's report of this encounter can be found not only in *Perestroika* but also, with some variations, in his memoirs (Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 166; Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 167-168).

The ordinary German citizen was apparently just as unconvinced by these arguments as the West German president more than a decade later.<sup>551</sup>

There is, however, an important unreported sequel to the Mannheim exchange. Gorbachev continued the discussion privately with Viktor Rykin, the accompanying translator, a German expert with a doctorate in German history and at that time a junior official in the Central Committee's International Department. Prompted by the conversation, Gorbachev predicted that the day would come when Germany would be reunified.<sup>552</sup> He was challenged on this point by Rykin. German unity, he told his chief, was a phenomenon of relatively recent origin. Several German states like Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Hesse and others had existed separately, some of them for centuries. Furthermore, Austria – a much more homogenous country ethnically than, say, Switzerland – had evolved separately from the two Germanys after the Second World War and had developed a distinct national consciousness. Everyone seemed to accept this, including the Germans. So why shouldn't there be the possibility of the development of a separate *East German* national consciousness and the acceptance of two German states by the international community and by the Germans themselves?

Gorbachev stuck to his point. In his view, the difference between the two Germanys, on the one hand, and Austria and Germany, on the other, lay in the fact that German unity had been achieved at great cost. The division of Germany was artificial and considered to be so by most Germans. One only needed to think of the Berlin wall to understand the complete absurdity of the state of affairs in the center of Europe. But the wall could not and would not be there forever. It was only a temporary device. How, one had to ask, would the Russians react to a wall right through the heart of *their* capital? Would they put up with such a thing? Surely not.

Chernyaev was to say later that Gorbachev had an intuition 'deep down' that the reunification of Germany was 'inevitable'.<sup>553</sup> But what was

---

551 Unlike his book *Perestroika* (p. 210), which is neutral on this point, his memoirs suggest that his German interlocutor was inclined to accept what he (Gorbachev) considered to be the 'historical truth', that is, that 'the plans for the division of Germany had not at all been hatched in Moscow' (Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 166; Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 167-68). However, Viktor Rykin, his translator, remembers the attitude of the German citizen as being less agreeable and accommodating to the Soviet point of view. Interview with Rykin.

552 Ibid.

553 Interview with Chernyaev; see also Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 304.



the significance of this intuition for top-level decision making on the German problem? Are historians or political scientists justified in drawing a straight line from Gorbachev's 1975 perceptions of the artificiality of the division of Germany and the inevitability of German unity to his 1990 acceptance of German unification? This would be inappropriate. As he himself clearly acknowledged, as quoted above, he was still mired in conventional preconceptions and saw no need and also no possibility to change policies. Indeed, at no time during his tenure in office as party chief and executive president did he actively *promote* German reunification. On the contrary, the evidence is overwhelming that from 1985 through 1989 he, other chief policy makers and the most prominent experts on German affairs were quite *opposed* to putting it on the agenda.

The May 1975 visit to West Germany produced other impressions which may have had a bearing on how Gorbachev was to deal with the German problem when it became acute. In his memoirs, he writes that he was 'struck by a powerful anti-Fascist demonstration in Frankfurt, in which 250,000 people participated – communists, social democrats, representatives of the CDU, *Bundeswehr* soldiers, members of labor unions, and delegates from youth and veterans organizations'. In meetings with professors and students, he 'did not notice any hostility' toward the Soviet Union. He and his colleagues thought that 'overall, the attitude of the Germans towards the Soviet Union was [further] changing in a positive direction and that a profound change was taking place in German thinking'.<sup>554</sup> This reconstruction of his experience appears credible and, in addition to many meetings with leaders of West Germany's government, political parties and business in 1985-89, may have made it easier for him to abandon the deeply engrained Soviet stereotypes on the German problem.

Yet it would seem that, upon assuming office in 1985, Gorbachev did subscribe to time-honored stereotypes and shared many popular Russian notions about Germany and the Germans. Such notions, as amply reflected in Russian literature and Russian sayings, include the idea that Germans are characterized by organizational ability, dedication to work, technological skill, punctuality, rationality and efficiency but that they are often overly meticulous, stuffy and lack compassion as well as a sense of humor. He appears to cling to traditional images of the German national

---

554 Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, p. 168; slightly different in the Russian edition – the 'positive direction' is missing but the 'profound change' is duly noted; Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 167.

character as contrasted with presumed Russian national traits. Russian folk wisdom, for instance, holds that 'The Germans arrive at things by their brains, the Russians through their eyes.' (*Nemets svoim razumom dokhodit, a russkii glazami*). As for economic prowess and technological skills, another Russian proverb holds that 'For everything the Germans have an instrument.' (*U nemtsa na vsë instrument est*.) Another quips: 'Next to a church, there is a priest; next to a machine, there is a German.' (*Gde tserkov', tam pop, a gde mashina, tam nemets*.) In the post-war period, such images were applied also to East Germany. A standard Soviet joke explained the German acronym of DDR, or GDR in English, as meaning; *Davai, davai, rabotat*'. (Hurry up, hurry up and work.)

Gorbachev's recollections of his first trip to East Germany in June 1966 conform to such images. In that period, he writes, Soviet 'party officials were being sent [there] in order to study the [East German] experience in the implementation of reforms', that is, the harmonization of 'new methods of planning and administration [with] a system of incentives and more economic leeway for enterprises'.<sup>555</sup> The Soviet delegation appears to have been impressed because, after the completion of the trip, a memorandum was sent to the CC with the recommendation to study closely the East German reform efforts. 'However', Gorbachev deplores, 'the memorandum ended up no differently than many others during those years.'<sup>556</sup> On that occasion, he also met Honecker who was then a full member of the SED Politburo and only a few years away from the top leadership position and who, according to Gorbachev's recollections, 'already acted in a very self-confident manner'.<sup>557</sup>

Twenty-two years later, in private conversation with Honecker, he was to reiterate his impressions of the 1966 visit. The visit had been for him 'a very important journey' and one that had 'aroused deep emotions'.<sup>558</sup> The reason for this emotional experience, he explained, lay in a comparison of

---

555 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 155.

556 Ibid.

557 Ibid. Gorbachev, in contrast, was at that time only a junior party official and unlikely to have caught Honecker's attention.

558 Protocol (*Niederschrift*) of talks between Gorbachev and Honecker on 28 September 1988 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/685 (indirect speech; this is to indicate hereafter that the original transcripts of the private conversations between Soviet and East German leaders are in indirect speech but that for better readability in the text *direct* speech was used. The transcripts sometimes alternate between the two forms).

the economic reform processes that had 'begun at the same time in the Soviet Union and the GDR' (his reference was apparently to the reforms introduced by prime minister Kosygin). The 'main question' which at that time had occupied both countries had been the problem as to 'how one could avoid remaining behind the pace of scientific-technological progress in the world'. East Germany, contrary to the Soviet Union, had looked at the highest world levels of production, drawn the appropriate conclusions for its own research and development, and succeeded 'in rapidly increasing labor productivity' and also 'catching up in the quality [of production] in comparison with the advanced [industrialized] countries'.<sup>559</sup>

What he didn't tell Honecker, of course, is what he noted in his memoirs. Although his meetings and conversations with East Germans had proceeded in a pleasant atmosphere, 'they lacked warmth'.<sup>560</sup> Specialists on Germany in the CPSU Central Committee thought that, while Gorbachev felt a 'certain affinity' with Poland and the Poles, and consequently had cordial personal relations with president Jaruzelski and prime minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski, his attitude towards East Germany and its official representatives was characterized by 'indifference' and 'psychological distance'.<sup>561</sup> This was bound to affect the personal and political relationship between the two leaders – a factor that needs to be examined in the context of East Germany's importance and its role in the Soviet Union's European strategic glacis.

---

559 Ibid. (indirect speech). – Gorbachev's regret to the effect that the Soviet Union, unlike the GDR, had failed to utilise the 'scientific-technological revolution' and had allegedly been able to 'catch up with' the Western industrialized countries is important because it serves to put into context the often quoted statement about countries or people 'who are late, will be punished by history'. That statement, quite contrary to conventional wisdom was *not* meant by Gorbachev to apply to the GDR but to the Soviet Union. Myths, however, die hard. Even reputable academic specialists on Russia continue to disseminate the view that 'There was no love lost between the inflexible East German leader and Mikhail Gorbachev, who used every occasion ... to remind his German counterpart of the need for political change.' Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2013), p. 119 and, based on their book, *id.*, 'How the 1980s Explains Vladimir Putin', *The Atlantic*, 14 February 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/02/how-the-1980s-explains-vladimir-putin/273135/>. For further clarification of the origins of Gorbachev's dictum see below, pp. 351-52 and 501-2.

560 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 1, p. 156.

561 Interviews with Tsipko and Rykin.

#### 4. East Germany: Strategic Ally but Waning Economic Asset

Gorbachev inherited East Germany as an integral part of the Soviet empire. But his consent in 1990 to German unification meant abandoning a 'strategic ally', as he called the GDR, and handing it over to what used to be an adversary alliance.<sup>562</sup> How could such, according to orthodox communist and Russian nationalist perspective, vile treachery occur? Part of the answer lies in the fact that, in the period from 1985 to 1990, individual leaders had a major impact on history. The alienation, animosity, and antipathy that pervaded the personal relations between Gorbachev and Honecker contributed to the Soviet leader's sense of imperial malaise and his view of the Soviet possessions in Eastern Europe as a source of embarrassment and a burden rather than an asset.

As in a marriage gone sour and drifting inexorably towards an uncivilized divorce, in the relationship between Gorbachev and Honecker insinuations alternated with reproaches. Charges were met by countercharges. For some time, cutting remarks and cryptic allusions became the order of the day. However, contrary to the acrimonious exchanges in July 1984 over the *Pravda* articles, Honecker's planned visit to West Germany and the GDR's economic dependency,<sup>563</sup> as the personal and political differences proved irreconcilable, open controversy and argument that might have cleared the air *disappeared* from the public and private discourse. Presumably in the interest of self-preservation, to impress foes and to reassure friends and neighbors, the two antagonists pretended that nothing was wrong. 'Outwardly, everything looked normal: the embraces, the kisses, the awarding of medals, the cordial receptions, attendance of congresses ... the ritual procession of the chosen' but beneath the surface there was smoldering suspicion, resentment, and scheming.<sup>564</sup>

It is probably true that even with the best of intentions and good will a cordial relationship was probably not to be expected. The personal chem-

---

562 Gorbachev referred to East Germany as a 'strategic ally' of the Soviet Union as late as December 1989, in his speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU after his return from the Soviet-American summit conference at Malta; see *Pravda*, 9 December 1989.

563 See above, pp. 203-28.

564 Shevardnadze in general terms about the relations between the reformist leadership in Moscow and the conservative leaders in Eastern Europe; *Moi vybor*, p. 199.

istry of the two leaders was too different for this to happen. Gorbachev's flair, his spontaneous, outgoing, radiant, optimistic, often unconventional attitude and sense of humor contrasted sharply with Honecker's prim and proper appearance, the petty demeanor of a petit bourgeois and miserly bureaucrat, the impatience and intolerance, and the penchant for utterly humorless, schoolmasterly lecturing performed in an unpleasantly high-pitched voice. The personalities of the two leaders couldn't have been more mismatched. In the past, such mismatches between Warsaw Pact leaders had, of course, not been an obstacle to cooperation. However, in the present case, the personality problem was exacerbated by the political dimensions of psychology, notably Honecker's acute loss of a sense of reality concerning the true state of economic and political affairs in East Germany and Gorbachev's overestimation of the chances for a successful introduction of 'democratic socialism' in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Another source of alienation lay in Soviet suspicions about Honecker's putative pan-Germanic, albeit socialist, pretensions. Honecker, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was born in 1912 in Neunkirchen, a town in the Saarland, one of the smaller German Länder, situated close to the German-French border. His career began with tasks in the communist youth organization and party work in the Saarland in the 1920s, continuing with agitprop training in Moscow in the 1930s. It was interrupted by a long prison term under the Nazis in World War II, resumed when Honecker became youth secretary and security chief of the SED Central Committee in the 1950s and 1960s, and culminated with his appointment as party chief in 1971. Not surprisingly, in the preparations for his visit to West Germany in 1987, Honecker insisted on returning to his birthplace in the Saarland and visiting the grave site of his father. As it happened, one of leaders of the West German Social Democratic Party, Oskar Lafontaine, was not only active in promoting the burgeoning SPD-SED exchanges but was also SPD chairman and prime minister of the Saarland. No wonder, therefore, that the *germanisty* in the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee thought that Honecker represented the pan-German communist party tradition and that for him his contacts with the West German social democrats were a potentially fatal attraction.<sup>565</sup>

---

565 Interview with Rykin.

Differences in education may also have played a certain role in fueling misunderstanding and distrust between the two leaders. Whereas Gorbachev, as described above in detail, had an extensive university education, Honecker barely managed to finish basic education and never began an apprenticeship. His only work experience before becoming an apparatchik in the youth organization and in the party was that of a farmhand in Pomerania and helper to his uncle, a roofer, in the Saarland.

Further seeds for mutual suspicion and distrust were laid during the emergency meeting of Soviet and East German leaders in August 1984. Although the record, as noted, shows that Gorbachev merely adhered to the adamant position of the Politburo, Honecker returned from Moscow reportedly convinced that Gorbachev was a 'scharfmacher', that is, that he had taken a particularly hard line.<sup>566</sup> In Honecker's perceptions, that line seemed to continue when he was in Moscow on 12 March 1985 to attend the funeral ceremonies for Chernenko. Chancellor Kohl, who was also in Moscow on that occasion, had let it be known that he was keen to meet with the East German leader. Since Gorbachev's suspicions of special intra-German relations had not been alleviated, several of his advisors were trying to dissuade the SED chief from agreeing to such a meeting – to no avail. Kohl and Honecker met in what was an extraordinarily, perhaps demonstratively, cordial atmosphere.<sup>567</sup>

Nevertheless, the two general secretaries seemed prepared not to start out their relationship as top leaders of their countries on a sour note. Gorbachev, in particular, wanted to reassure Honecker that there would be no major policy changes. After the arrival of the SED delegation at the airport in Moscow, he briefly talked with Honecker on the telephone and told him that the CC plenum, at its meeting of the previous day, had '*decisively come out for the consistent continuation of our political course. There is no necessity to change it. This concerns questions of domestic as well as foreign policy.*'<sup>568</sup> Similarly, the April 1985 CC plenum, which later assumed an almost mythical quality as having ushered in perestroika, did not provide any better clues as to what Gorbachev might have in mind. As

---

566 Interview with Krenz.

567 Ibid.; see also Egon Krenz, 'Honecker und Gorbatschow', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 January 1993.

568 Gorbachev – Honecker telephone conversation, 12 March 1985, 3.35 p.m., SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2739 (italics mine).

Chernyaev, then still deputy head of the CC's International Department, noted in his diary, on internal issues Gorbachev made some personnel changes and emphasized the need for 'discipline, law and order, and decentralized decision making'. On questions of foreign affairs, he was 'flat, commonplace and conventional' as if he 'didn't want to touch the subject' or, worse still, he 'deferred to Gromyko'. Overall, therefore, it did not seem that 'Gorbachev had a more or less clearly defined concept as to how to advance the country to world levels'.<sup>569</sup>

Business as usual in the 'socialist community' and Soviet-East German relations seemed to be indicated also in other fora. These included the meeting on 13 March 1985 of the first party secretaries of the Warsaw Pact countries held also on the occasion of the Chernenko funeral celebrations in Moscow; the extension of the Warsaw treaty for another twenty years at a meeting of the leaders of party and state of the alliance in Warsaw on 26 April; and the celebrations in Moscow and East Berlin on 8 May commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany.

There were only a few tenuous indications of change in Soviet policy towards the *West*. These concerned Gorbachev's announcement of a moratorium on the stationing of intermediate range nuclear missiles and the halting of the 'countermeasures' adopted after the deployment of INF in Western Europe.<sup>570</sup> But these announcements were not a problem for Honecker. They could be regarded as indicating that Moscow would now follow the course which he had charted earlier and for which he had been so severely reprimanded.

The first opportunity to talk in detail about international issues occurred on 5 May 1985 during Honecker's visit in Moscow. The transcripts of the Gorbachev-Honecker meetings show that the Soviet party leader now did have more specific ideas about the directions and the methods to be employed to achieve change. They also demonstrate that up to a point he was intent on mending fences with his East German counterpart. Finally, they reveal an important paradox in Gorbachev's attempt at restructuring the Soviet system in 1985 and 1986. The fence-mending notwithstanding, the Soviet leader (mildly) criticized his East German counterpart despite the fact that the ideological basis and the foreign policy and economic strate-

---

569 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 42-43.

570 As announced by Gorbachev in an interview with *Pravda*, 7 April 1985.

gies of perestroika were at first quite in conformity with East German preferences and practice.

Concerning the first, the ideological aspect of the paradox, Honecker could only have been reassured by the talks. The ideological basis of perestroika looked traditional, even orthodox. This was evident in Gorbachev's remarks to his East German counterpart on the tactics to be adopted by the communist parties in their struggle against imperialism:

The fraternal countries charge ahead and often pose themselves new questions. There are differences in tactics, and in the solution of concrete problems. All the more necessary [therefore] is a more intensive exchange and closer coordination. Failing that, everyone looks for his own model. What would remain of socialism if everyone were to withdraw to his own national apartment? Imperialism would then pick off one [socialist country] after another. ... *There is only one model, Marxist-Leninist socialism.*<sup>571</sup>

Honecker couldn't have put it more succinctly.

As for the foreign policy aspect of the paradox, Gorbachev's shift to a more flexible and conciliatory approach to the West, which was to bring him in line with previous East German approaches, was noted above. It is the economic aspect of the paradox that warrants analysis in more detail.

### The GDR in Gorbachev's Economic Strategy

In May 1985, Gorbachev assured Honecker: 'Between the Soviet Union and the GDR there is the broadest [possible] agreement on planning and guidance and on economic mechanisms.'<sup>572</sup> Furthermore, he was 'able to state with pleasure, after having listened [to you], that [we both] think along the same lines not only on general but also on specific questions.'<sup>573</sup> Did the GDR really fit into Gorbachev's economic scheme?

In Gorbachev's view, the GDR, because of its scientific and technological potential, could make a significant contribution to the revitalization and modernisation of the Soviet economy. In the confidential talks between the two leaders less than a year later, in February 1986, Gorbachev

---

571 Transcript of the talks between Honecker and Gorbachev in Moscow on 5 May 1985 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/631 (indirect speech, italics mine).

572 Ibid. (indirect speech).

573 Ibid. (indirect speech).



lamented in reference to the Soviet Union that ‘one should have begun with it [the utilization of science and technology for production] twelve to fifteen years earlier, and one would be much further along. Now it is much more difficult to solve these tasks.’<sup>574</sup> Honecker agreed and attempted to impress Gorbachev (successfully, it seems) with the first in an apparently never-ending series of East German progress reports on the improved relationship between science and production, the expansion of microelectronics and production automation in the GDR as well as the development of new processes and materials in the GDR – all of which undertaken under the heading of creating in that country a ‘computer-based society’.<sup>575</sup>

One of the best indications of what the two leaderships *specifically* had in mind can be found in the materials relating to the coordination of Soviet and East German national economic plans for the period 1986-90. The planning institutions of the two countries agreed on measures for the ‘acceleration of scientific-technological progress’ and the ‘broadest application of the most modern results of science and technology in the production process’, the ‘rapid acceleration of labor productivity’ and the ‘more effective and sparing use of material and labor resources’.<sup>576</sup> Particular attention was to be given to the coordination of plans in microelectronics and computer technology and to ‘cooperation in the development of new basic technologies, the creation and production of electronic building blocks and microprocessors as well as the necessary technological equipment and materials necessary for that purpose’.<sup>577</sup> The plans for Soviet-East German trade were to reflect these priorities.

---

574 Transcript of the talks between Gorbachev and Honecker on 27 February 1986 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2156.

575 Ibid.

576 The basis for all this were decisions adopted at the June 1984 CMEA summit conference in Moscow and the draft of a Long-Term Program on the Development of Cooperation between the GDR and the USSR in Science, Technology and Production until the Year 2000, agreed upon on 6 October 1984.

577 Protocol on the Results of Coordination of National Economic Plans of the GDR and the USSR for 1986-1990 and Beyond, Attachment No. 2, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2127.

Table 3: GDR-USSR Trade Projections, 1985-90 (in billions of roubles)

	1985	1990	Annual Growth in %
Volume	14.80	17.80	3.70
GDR Exports	7.40	9.10	4.20
of which:			
Machinery	5.20	5.60	1.50
Chemical products	0.35	0.46	5.60
Consumer goods	1.10	1.60	7.80
USSR Exports	7.40	8.70	3.20
of which:			
Machinery	0.90	1.90	16.1
Energy, raw materials and chemical products	5.80	6.00	0.60

These and other data clearly reveal the intentions of the economic planners until the year 1990 and beyond. East German exports of microelectronic equipment were to increase more than twofold and those of microelectronic products almost fourfold. Moscow officials, as indeed Gorbachev, expected a significant breakthrough in the modernisation of machine building in the USSR.<sup>579</sup> They thought it possible to decrease East German machinery exports to a growth rate of only 1.5 percent per year and hoped that Soviet exports of this type of commodity would increase by 16 percent annually.<sup>580</sup> Under the conditions of a ‘policy of increasing aggressiveness, boycott and discrimination by the imperialist states’ the two planning authorities of the two countries also agreed upon measures to reduce their dependency on the world market and to draw up a list of such products as were currently being imported and to substitute them by indigenous products.<sup>581</sup> Finally, in Gorbachev’s opinion, East Germany could play an important role in countering Reagan’s ‘Star Wars’ initiative, or SDI.

579 In fact, one of the most noteworthy features of the Soviet Union’s five-year plan (1986-90) was that the planned average annual growth of investment in the machine-building sector was to amount to no less than 12.5 percent.

580 Protocol on the Results, Attachment 2.

581 Ibid.

**East Germany and SDI.** The perceived seriousness of the challenge of SDI can vividly be demonstrated by a letter Gorbachev sent to Honecker on 12 September 1985.<sup>582</sup> The Soviet party leader wrote that the ‘necessity of an intensification of socio-economic development’ lay not only in the internal tasks which the CPSU had set itself. The ‘external factor’ was also increasing in importance. ‘The West has emphatically embraced scientific-technological progress and in the struggle against socialism is putting [the emphasis] above all on technological warfare.’ He contended that SDI had ‘not only military but also great economic significance’. Based on a policy of export restrictions, the ‘leadership of the USA is conducting a policy of a pre-programmed technological lag of the socialist countries’.<sup>583</sup>

He also deplored the Reagan administration’s attempt to enlist the support of the Western European countries and Japan for such a strategy. The West Europeans, he pointed out, had responded to SDI with Eureka, ‘a comprehensive program of coordinated efforts in the area of high technology’. He admitted that ‘we are as yet unsure as to the balance between [its] military and civilian, that is, peaceful elements’.<sup>584</sup> He also was ambiguous on the question as to whether the socialist countries should respond favorably to the invitation issued by the West Europeans to participate in the Eureka technology programme.

Irrespective of how the issue of participation in Eureka was going to be resolved, it was clear that the United States’ strategic design ‘poses in all sharpness the necessity for the member countries of CMEA [Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, hereafter, Comecon] to accelerate scientific-technological progress’ and, in a foreseeable time frame, ‘to assume leading positions’ in that sphere. He therefore suggested advancing the date for the adoption of CMEA’s Comprehensive Program for Scientific-Technological Cooperation and, even before details of the program could be agreed upon, embarking immediately upon large-scale joint projects of

---

582 Gorbachev letter to Honecker, 12 September 1985, SED, Central Party Archives, IV 2/2.035/58.

583 Ibid.

584 Ibid.

scientific-technological cooperation and the creation of a common fund for the financing of such projects.<sup>585</sup>

Gorbachev also impressed upon other party leaders the gravity of the challenge. At the October 1985 summit meeting of the member states of the Warsaw Pact in Sofia, he told the assembled party chiefs that '*we clearly recognize the dangerous military-political consequences of SDI*'.<sup>586</sup> He again regarded Reagan's initiative as an 'attempt to secure a permanent technological superiority of the West over the socialist community and, by the way, not only over it but also over the [United States'] own allies'. Returning to a dialectic Marxist approach to the relationship between the United States and Western Europe, he interpreted Eureka both as a European response to SDI and an integral part of an 'overall line of the West', with military industry in the United States and Western Europe seeking to maximize profit. Furthermore, he said: 'We cannot but recognize [the fact] that the imperialist states create their own scientific-technological programs which are in many ways subordinated to the tasks of struggle against the socialist community.' Again he saw the necessary Warsaw Pact response as consisting in 'the fastest possible development of scientific-technological integration. We have to solve these problems more effectively than the capitalists'.<sup>587</sup> The GDR and, to a lesser extent, Czechoslovakia were called upon together with the Soviet Union to play the most important part in countering the military-technological challenge emanating from the United States.

***Deficiencies in the Economic Relationship.*** It was, of course, a serious error of judgment to assume that East Germany could play a significant role in countering SDI. It was equally erroneous to think that technological progress could be accelerated in Comecon in accordance with its Comprehensive Program. As Soviet prime minister Ryzhkov was to tell his Comecon colleagues in July 1988, 'We have now been working for more than two years on the realization' of the programme but 'we cannot claim that we have made much progress'; the share of highly advanced techno-

---

585 Ibid. In keeping with Western word usage of the time, CMEA will be rendered as Comecon (communist economies). In communist sources, CMEA will be retained.

586 Gorbachev's speech at the meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee on 22 October 1985 in Sofia, SED, Central Party Archives, J IV,1/2A/2811 (italics mine).

587 Ibid.

logical products in CMEA economic exchanges remained ‘most insignificant’.<sup>588</sup> The same applied to the expectation that the GDR could meaningfully contribute to the modernisation of the Soviet economy. Soviet-East German economic exchanges were plagued by many problems, some of them specific to the bilateral relationship, others associated with the structural deficiencies of the Comecon’s planning system, the deteriorating overall performance of the economies, the burden of the arms competition and other growing costs of empire.

A first set of problems concerned exchange of information in science and technology. In his talks with Gorbachev on 20 April 1986, Honecker styled himself as an advocate of glasnost and dwelled on its virtues. He raised the subject by asserting that scientific-technological cooperation between the USSR and GDR should be improved by ‘de-bureaucratizing things’ and by ‘solving certain questions of secrecy’. Gorbachev replied that according to his information ‘some matters are being kept secret from the Soviet Union, too’. Honecker rejected the charge but Gorbachev did not relent. He knew how much Honecker had done for the development of Soviet-East German scientific and technological cooperation. Yet a joint committee for economic relations established for the purpose of better information exchange had become an ‘amorphous and ineffective institution’. He reiterated that he was ‘repeatedly receiving information to the effect that the comrades in the GDR keep this or that secret from the S[oviet] U[nion]’. In his concluding remarks on this topic, Honecker professed some understanding for the Soviet need for secrecy in military affairs. ‘The thing, however, is that eminent GDR scientists often find it impossible to exchange information with their partners in the S[oviet] U[nion] and that their wishes are not being accommodated to the same extent as they would be in the GDR.’<sup>589</sup>

A second set of problems was associated with the commodity composition of Soviet-East German trade. Major asymmetries existed and were confirmed in the national economic plans for 1985-90. The share of fuel and raw materials in the total East German imports from the Soviet Union

---

588 Quoted from the speech by Nikolai Ryzhkov, the Soviet prime minister, at the 5-7 July 1988 meeting of CMEA, that is, the 44th council meeting, SED, Central Archives, J IV 2/2A/3141.

589 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech). – For the respective uses of CMEA and Comecon see fn. 585.

was to amount to 70 percent in the planning period. This percentage would also be the share of metallurgical products, including technologies, in the total East German exports to the Soviet Union. As the GDR planning document stated, the 'supply of the country with raw materials and fuel to a large extent has to be paid by increasing GDR exports of machinery and equipment'.<sup>590</sup> But Honecker complained to Gorbachev that 'The Soviet Union is not prepared to import important machinery products from the GDR.' The state of affairs in the coordination of plans thus far showed that 'GDR machinery exports [to the USSR] in 1986 will *decrease* by 665 million roubles as compared to 1985'.<sup>591</sup> This downturn could not be explained 'by a lack of demand in the USSR or insufficient GDR production and delivery capacity'.<sup>592</sup> He did not advance a theory as to the reasons for the decline but economic planners in Moscow and East Berlin had a fairly good idea. Soviet officials had repeatedly protested against the East German practice of delivering industrial goods of low quality to the Soviet Union and of higher quality to Western industrialized countries. Moscow was also beginning to show a greater preference for more advanced and reliable Western technology and attempting to expand indigenous machinery production. Mutual recrimination did not end here. In the 1970s and early 1980s East Germany had become accustomed to both lavish supplies and the low cost of Soviet oil. In the second half of the 1980s, however, the Moscow cut supplies and raised the price with the consequence that East Berlin alleged and complained about the 'violation of agreements'.<sup>593</sup>

---

590 Decision Concerning the Coordination of Plans with the USSR for the Period 1985-1990, adopted at its meeting of 27 August 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV, 2/2/2A/2785. Attachment No. 7.

591 Protocol of the talks between Gorbachev and Honecker in Moscow on 5 May 1985, SED Politburo, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/638 (italics mine). Honecker's complaint about the 1986 figures is to the point and consistent with the five-year, 1985-1990, plan coordination, according to which GDR machinery exports were to grow on average by 1.5 percent per year. See Table 3 above.

592 Ibid.

593 East German protests continued until 1989; for one of the many examples, see Politburo meeting of 10 January 1989, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/3186. The Soviet Union, in turn, had repeatedly called upon the GDR to participate more extensively in the construction of gas pipelines; see, for instance, [Politburo] Directive for the Preparations of the Participation of the GDR in the Construction of the Natural Gas Pipeline Yamburg-

Third, hard currency was an issue. East Germany was contractually entitled to repair Soviet weapons systems, notably MiG aircraft, helicopters, jet engines, radar systems and missiles in the armories of the Warsaw Pact and in several developing countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The latter countries had to pay the GDR in hard currency. In top secret draft agreements, the Soviet Union now claimed a share of that money and began to demand full payment in hard currency for the Soviet spare parts to be used in the repair services in developing countries. It then lowered its demands to a share of 60 percent in hard currency, but this, too, was rejected by the SED Politburo.<sup>594</sup>

A fourth problem pertained to technology export controls. In what looked like a mirror image of Reagan's approach vis-à-vis his European allies to ensure compliance with economic sanctions towards the countries of the Warsaw Pact, in May 1985, Yuri Maslyukov – a first deputy head of the state planning committee and chief of its military department – attacked GDR export policies. He told a high-ranking East German delegation in Moscow that the United States, its NATO allies, and Japan had strengthened their policies of 'economic aggression and embargoes' and their attempts at 'inflicting damage' on the socialist economies. The Warsaw Pact countries, on the other hand, were deliberately or unintentionally exporting strategically important 'results of scientific research, advanced technologies and scarce materials'. The Soviet Union considered it necessary, therefore, 'to unite the efforts of the Warsaw Pact member states for the protection of their military economic and scientific-technological potential'.<sup>595</sup> To the amazement of the East German economic delegation, Maslyukov produced a detailed list of technological manufactures and scientific processes subject to export control to non-socialist states but refused to hand it over, 'pointing to its not yet final character'. In its report, the East German delegation characterized the document it had seen as unacceptable because it was 'unilaterally directed towards global export con-

---

Western Border of the USSR, SED Politburo, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Protocol of 15 January 1985, Central Party Archives, J IV, 2/2/2094, Attachment No. 7.

594 Directives for the Bilateral Coordination with the USSR on the Shaping of Foreign Economic and Scientific-Technological Relations with Capitalist and Developing Countries, SED Politburo, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Protocol of 2 July 1985, Attachment 2, Central Party Archives, J IV, 2/2/2119.

595 Top secret agenda item prepared for the SED Politburo session of 2 July 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV, 2/2A/2774.

trol'. The Politburo agreed. It rejected the Soviet approach and in subsequent negotiations insisted on a 'limitation [of export controls] to such products and technologies as are of strategic significance'.<sup>596</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of the year, a Warsaw Pact convention on technology export controls was signed.<sup>597</sup> As was true of many other agreements, it failed to produce meaningful results.

Finally, there was a problem with a commodity that to both administrators and victims of empire provided relief and escape – alcohol. As all Soviet institutions, the Soviet armed forces in Germany were unable to evade the rigors of Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism campaign. The forces anticipated a reduction of 8,700 hectolitres of hard liquor, 3,100 hectolitres of wine, as well as 800 hectolitres of champagne and, therefore, sensibly requested substitution of these products by clothing, shoes, industrial products and foodstuffs. This was apparently an item of utmost importance to be dealt with by the SED Politburo, which it did in its session of 27 August 1985. The deliberations were to provide yet another telling example of the absurdities of central planning and damaging interdependence on the basis of inflexible quotas. The Group of Soviet Forces in Germany was to be told that, unfortunately, the national economic plan had been completed and that, therefore, 'additional provision of these products was impossible'.<sup>598</sup> The end result was, one might have guessed, neither booze nor shoes.

Whatever the number and scope of Soviet-East German problems, they were probably in no way greater or smaller than those which the Soviet Union had with other Comecon countries. The main point here, however, is that the GDR was the most important country of the bloc to provide substance to Gorbachev's emphasis on science and technology as growth factors and his intended shifts from extensive to intensive development, from quantity to quality, and from coercion to incentives in economic management. Given Gorbachev's ideas about modernisation of the economy, acceleration of growth, and improvement of scientific-technical cooperation, the last thing he would have wanted at that stage was for anyone to rock the rickety boat of the socialist community on the shoals of the

---

596 Ibid.

597 For the text of the agreement, see SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2964.

598 Agenda item No. 34, Politburo meeting of 27 August 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2786.



German problem. He himself was to do so later for reasons which had as much to do with economics as with politics.

### Political Aspects of Soviet-East German Relations

In preparation for his departure for East Berlin to attend the Eleventh SED Congress, from 17 to 21 April 1986, Gorbachev agreed with the approach suggested by Chernyaev. His aide had proposed that

in our talks with Honecker in Berlin we should not convey the impression that we want to 'straighten him out' or influence him but we should [find ways] how jointly – philosophically and theoretically – to approach the problem of the 'two Germanys' in the context of current world development.<sup>599</sup>

In private, as demonstrated above and as will be explained further below, this was not quite how the Soviet leader chose to proceed. But publicly, at the Eleventh SED Congress, he certainly reassured the East German leader. He reiterated his concern that 'the ruling class of the FRG has not renounced its revanchist dreams and continues to speak of an "open German question"'. The Soviet Union, he then went on to say,

attaches much importance to the development of relations with West Germany as a major European state. What is more, we are prepared to develop these relations on an equal basis and for mutual benefit. But this first and foremost calls for Bonn's policy to meet in practice the interests of peace and security. We want to stress in that context that we unconditionally support the legitimate demand of the GDR to West Germany that relations between them be fully brought into accordance with the commonly recognized norms of international law.<sup>600</sup>

But differences in political perspective between Moscow and East Berlin existed on several major foreign policy issues. These included (1) Chinese-East German party relations; (2) East German criticism of Soviet domestic developments; (3) the political aspects of East Germany's economic relations with West Germany; (4) Honecker's refusal to inform his colleagues in the Politburo about emerging differences with Gorbachev; and (5) Honecker's persistent intention to pay an official visit to West Germany.

---

599 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 83.

600 Gorbachev's speech to the SED Congress, 18 April 1986, *Pravda*, 19 April 1986.

**The Chinese Connection.** The triangular relationship of Moscow-Beijing-East Berlin was one of the many factors putting strain on the difficult relationship between Gorbachev and Honecker. After Gorbachev's accession to power in March 1985, the process of rapprochement in Sino-Soviet relations had received a new impetus. In a speech to the CC, Gorbachev had assured the Chinese of his 'serious interest' in an improvement of the relationship, listed China again as one of the 'socialist states' and renounced the 'third party' argument, that is, the theory according to which Moscow could not conclude agreements with China at the expense of other countries. What was meant in the circumstances was obvious. Beijing was constantly citing 'three obstacles' which the USSR would have to remove before a normalization of relations could take place. Specifically, Moscow would have to reduce its military presence along the Chinese border to the level of 1964; end its support of Vietnamese expansionism in Southeast Asia, including in Cambodia; and withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. In previous Soviet interpretations, meeting any of these demands *would* have affected the interests of 'third parties', notably Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

The Chinese reacted swiftly to the Soviet overtures. In their congratulatory telegram to Gorbachev upon his election as first secretary, and for the first time since the rupture of party relations in March 1985, they again addressed a Soviet party leader as 'comrade'. Chinese vice premier Li Peng, who headed the Chinese delegation at Chernenko's funeral, even handed a message to Gorbachev from the Chinese party chairman, Hu Yaobang.<sup>601</sup> But all these gestures were mere harbingers of a possible spring in the Sino-Soviet relationship. It was not until after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 that a breakthrough in the relationship was achieved.<sup>602</sup>

East Germany, on the other hand, had already begun the 'normalization' of its relations with China in 1983 and 1984 at both the state and the party level. Some of the momentum driving the improvement of Sino-East German relations derived from Honecker's previous close contacts with Hu

---

601 See Dieter Heinzig, 'Soviet Policy Towards China', in Federal Institute for East European and International Studies, ed., *The Soviet Union 1984/85* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), p. 288.

602 *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

Yaobang.<sup>603</sup> The Chinese, like the East German, party leader had made his career in the communist youth organization and in June 1981 had been elected party chief. The GDR media commented favorably on the Chinese ‘four modernisations’ and other reform measures adopted by Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping. This was surprising given the SED’s domestic orthodoxies and even more so because of its consistent criticism of Hungarian economic reforms. Thus, East German observers found ‘remarkable progress made by the People’s Republic of China in its economic and social development’ and noted the ‘visible improvement in living conditions’ for the Chinese farmers,<sup>604</sup> who were raising their living standards more quickly than people in the cities, buying everything from washing machines to private cars.<sup>605</sup> The only reference to the ideological implications of the liberalizing agricultural and industrial reforms were quotations from Chinese decrees stating that China would ‘seek to counter the intrusion of bourgeois ideology’.<sup>606</sup> Honecker seemed to believe that in China the dangers of ‘revisionism’, let alone a restoration of capitalism, were slight.

Soviet-East German controversies over the Chinese issue after Gorbachev’s accession to power in April 1985 started with a visit by East German planning chief and deputy prime minister Gerhard Schürer to Beijing in July 1985, and his favorable report on the state of affairs in China. A copy of the report had been dutifully transmitted to the CPSU. At the beginning of August 1985, Politburo member and secretary for security questions Egon Krenz received the first deputy chief of the Soviet embassy in East Berlin, who stated that he had a personal message from Gorbachev to Honecker. To Krenz’s surprise, the Soviet envoy wanted to read out the message but retain the written text. Since the content of the message thus promised to be highly sensitive, Krenz insisted on having a

---

603 Honecker was to point out to Gorbachev that he ‘knew him [Hu Yaobang] from the youth movement and the WFDY [World Federation of Democratic Youth]’ and agreed with the Soviet party leader that Hu had ‘more positive views than Deng Hsiaoping’, SED, Central Party Archives, IV 2/1/638.

604 Christa Runge, writing in *Horizont* (East Berlin), June and September 1984.

605 Werner Micke, a confidant of Honecker, writing in *Neues Deutschland*, 7-8 July 1984. The author was also deputy editor of the newspaper.

606 Article by Fritz Verner-Osten (pseud.) in *Horizont* (East Berlin), December 1984; for detail, see B.V. Flow, ‘Orthodox East Berlin Reacts Favorably to Major Reforms in China’s Economy’, *RFE / RL Soviet and East European Report* (Munich), Vol. 2, No. 12, 1 February 1985.

stenographic record taken.<sup>607</sup> Posterity, therefore, became privy to yet another bizarre occurrence in the 'fraternal' discourse.<sup>608</sup>

Gorbachev first politely thanked the SED for the Schürer report but immediately came to the point. Motivated by the importance of formulating coordinated actions by the socialist countries towards China, he wished to convey some considerations about certain aspects of the policy of the Chinese leadership. He charged, in essence, that Chinese policies were characterized by duplicity. As Chernenko had done previously concerning the GDR's policy towards West Germany, Gorbachev now implicitly accused Honecker of gullibility and naïveté on East Germany's policies towards *China*. He noted that 'the Chinese in the talks with Comrade Schürer professed full understanding for the special relations' existing between the GDR and other socialist countries on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. They had 'said that "We will never have insidious intentions". However, Gorbachev wanted to tell his German friends 'that there are reasons for doubting the sincerity of such assertions'. Deng Xiaoping, for instance, one of the main architects of Chinese domestic and foreign policy, had stated that China's strategic interests 'required that the Soviet Union be considered "a political opponent"'; that the 'Warsaw Pact and CMEA should "not be strengthened but weakened"'; and that 'a harsh policy of "separating the socialist countries of Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union"' should be adopted. Chinese premier Zhao Zi-yang had made essentially the same points when he had visited Turkey.<sup>609</sup>

Gorbachev also charged that 'Hu Yaobang attempts to give assurances that China is pursuing a consistent line in support of the GDR on the so-called "German problem"'. Such declarations would be welcome, Gorbachev continued, if they corresponded to the real state of affairs. In actual fact, however, the Chinese leaders had 'several times publicly advocated the "unification of Germany"'. As evidence for this allegation, he pointed to a visit by premier Zhao Zi-yang to West Germany in June 1985 where he had assured his hosts that 'China has "understanding for the striving of the German people for unification"'. This position, the Soviet leader regretted, was not much different from what the G-7 leaders had stated at

---

607 Interview with Krenz.

608 Stenographic record of the Gorbachev message to Honecker, as transmitted by Popov [first deputy chief of the Soviet embassy] to Krenz, SED, Central Party Archives, Büro Krenz, IV 2/2.039/280.

609 Ibid.

their meeting in Bonn in May 1985, namely, that they wanted to achieve a state of affairs ‘that would permit the German people to create “unity by free self-determination”’. After mentioning several other examples of Chinese double-dealing, he denounced Beijing for supporting Bonn’s position on the allegedly unsolved German question.<sup>610</sup>

Quite in accordance with the Ideological and Imperial paradigm, Gorbachev thought that the West German class enemy was elated by such expressions of Chinese support. He reproached the East German leadership for having failed to realize that Chancellor Kohl had ‘declared during his visit to Beijing in October of last year [1984] that for the FRG “it is of special significance that the Chinese People’s Republic advocates the unity of Germany”’. He also indicted the SED for not realizing that, ‘in June 1985, Bavarian prime minister Strauß warmly thanked the Chinese government for its constant support of the “right of the divided countries to self-determination”’. In view of all this, Gorbachev said, there could only be one conclusion, namely, that ‘*the position of Beijing contradicts the vital interests of the German Democratic Republic as a socialist state*’.<sup>611</sup>

How is one to interpret these ‘confidential considerations’ – in essence, blunt criticism of East German foreign policy draped in thinly veiled charges of East German inexperience, ignorance and gullibility? Their purpose evidently was , to restore the proverbial but perennially elusive ‘unity and cohesion of the socialist community’. To that extent, Gorbachev’s attacks on GDR-Chinese relations were also a clear indication and confirmation that there was as yet no deviation of the new Soviet leader from previous patterns of Soviet foreign policy. More fundamentally, they underline the deep foreign policy crisis in which the Soviet Union still found itself in 1985 but also the inability of the new leader effectively to deal with it.

To conclude this episode of imperial pressure on a strategically important actor at the periphery, Honecker found Gorbachev’s information important or, more correctly perhaps, interesting enough to write on top of the document: ‘To the members and candidates of the Politburo.’ He also initialled the document (‘EH’) and dated it ‘2 August 1985’. But this is apparently where the matter ended. In a personal conversation between Gorbachev and Honecker at the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Sofia later

---

610 Ibid.

611 Ibid. (italics mine).

in the year, the East German party leader gave his critic the chance to expound on the theme of alleged Chinese duplicity on the German problem by reminding him, in the context of a discussion of Chinese developments, that 'we gave [you] the protocol on G. Schürer's trip to China'.<sup>612</sup> Gorbachev, however, did not react. There is no further trace of any repercussions produced by the document. It thus remains buried in the archives, a sorry landmark on the road to the dissolution of empire.

**Soviet and East German Domestic Policies.** When Gorbachev visited East Berlin in April 1986 to attend the SED's Eleventh Party Congress, the still carefully concealed rift in his relations with Honecker was to widen. This occurred in private conversation between Gorbachev and Honecker on 20 April. The meeting got off to a bad start. After the usual opening formalities, invocation of the 'vital necessity for the CPSU, the SED, the people of the two states, and the General Secretaries personally to underline unity' and appeals not to allow 'even the most minute cause for ambiguity', Gorbachev expressed displeasure. Although the 'Twenty-seventh Party Congress of the CPSU [25 February - 6 March 1986] was supported by the party and people of the GDR', he had the impression that '*Comrade Honecker was irritated by something*'. He felt that the East German leader had 'displayed a certain reserve' and had 'reservations' concerning domestic developments in the Soviet Union.<sup>613</sup> For instance, he (Honecker) had 'spoken very extensively about international problems [and] how they had been dealt with at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress but not about their significance for socialism'.<sup>614</sup> He had also 'failed to

---

612 Protocol (*Niederschrift*) on the meeting between Honecker and Gorbachev at the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Sofia on 23 October 1985, SED Politbüro, *Reinschriftenprotokoll*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/638.

613 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech, italics mine). – Based on conversations with Honecker, the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin, too, concluded that the East German party leader 'supported without qualification the *international* course' charted by the Twenty-seventh Party Congress but 'concerning the assessment of our concept for *domestic* development, he remained distant'; Wjatscheslaw Kotschemassow, *Meine letzte Mission: Fakten, Erinnerungen, Überlegungen* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994), p. 51 (italics mine).

614 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech). Gorbachev apparently referred to what Honecker had said in his report to the Eleventh Congress of the SED. – Gorbachev's laudatory remark about the

mention anything about the fact that we are now [following the East German example] and pursuing the course of the unity of economic and social policy'.<sup>615</sup>

Gorbachev evidently referred to the emphasis Honecker, after he had taken office in 1971, had put on the social dimension of the SED's policies, including an ambitious housing program and the 'quality of life' as an important factor of production but also to what under Ulbricht and in the first years of the Honecker era had been an important feature of economic and social life in East Germany: small-scale commodity production and the activity of private traders and craftsmen. However, another paradox in Soviet-East German relations is to be noted here. Gorbachev was apparently ignorant of the fact that, in the second half of the 1970s, small-scale commodity production and private economic activities had significantly been curtailed in conjunction with the establishment of large production associations, the *Kombinate*. This had occurred under the headings of rationalization, automation, standardization, and intensification of production.<sup>616</sup> This change in East German economic policy may have been the very reason why Honecker failed to compliment Gorbachev on his supposed imitation of the East German example and why the Soviet leader stubbornly continued to adhere to an outdated view of East German developments. It also raises the question of what it was that the Central Committee's specialists on East Germany, to the extent that they existed, were telling Gorbachev or whether he was interested in listening to them.<sup>617</sup>

If Gorbachev's complaints were meant to impress Honecker, they failed to achieve their purpose. The East German leader denied the Soviet allegations. He only went as far as to acknowledge, without further comment, that 'the question is being posed, for instance, why Comrade Honecker

---

'unity of economic and social policy' refers to the GDR's concept of the *Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik* adopted at the Eighth SED Congress in June 1971.

615 Ibid. (indirect speech). This was added by hand with a preface that the remark was made 'in the car'.

616 Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, ed., *DDR Handbuch*, 2nd edition (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979), pp. 175-85.

617 Concerning the persistence of Gorbachev's erroneous notions about small-scale private production and trading in the GDR, including the idea that these features of East German life were 'more democratic' than what existed in the Soviet Union, see *infra*, p. 352, fn. 816.

previously said, "To learn from the Soviet Union means to be victorious" but no longer says this today.<sup>618</sup>

The effectiveness of Gorbachev's criticism was undermined further by his deference to Honecker and his praise for what he considered to be achievements of socialism in the GDR and deficiencies in other socialist countries. He deplored increasing dissension in the socialist community:

Even when jokingly certain remarks are being made as, for instance, who ought to be considered the *doyen* among the General Secretaries in the socialist community, [I] am thinking about what may lie at the root of this. Are certain ambitions at issue here or efforts to appear infallible? Certain models [of socialism] are always being emphasized.

These remarks could have been taken as applying squarely to Honecker's pretensions. Yet Gorbachev *exempted* the East German leader from criticism. He deplored 'discussions of the Hungarian model' and 'discussions in that direction also in Bulgaria' but complimented Honecker by saying: 'In essence, only the Soviet Union and the GDR rest on firm foundations of socialism – and perhaps also the ČSSR.'<sup>619</sup> He further undercut any case he might have wanted to make against East Germany by repeating what he told Honecker the previous year: 'If one wants to talk about any model of socialism at all, there is only one, and only one: the Marxist-Leninist model.'<sup>620</sup>

Honecker's 'certain reserve' and his 'reservations' concerning domestic developments in the Soviet Union, in essence, did not yet play a big role in the increasing alienation between the two leaders. Quite another matter is the controversy over East Germany's increasing indebtedness to West Germany.

***Debts and Dependency.*** The controversy was carried over from before Gorbachev's appointment as party chief. It concerned, as noted, West German credits and alleged East German political dependency – an issue that had sharpened in the spring and summer of 1984. In keeping with his gen-

---

618 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech). The slogan reads in German: *Von der Sowjetunion lernen, heißt siegen lernen*. To add insult to injury, in October 1989, when Gorbachev visited East Berlin as the personal embodiment of reformism, but Honecker continued to cling to communist orthodoxy, banners could be seen in the large-scale demonstrations reminding the SED of its time-honoured slogan.

619 Ibid. (indirect speech).

620 Ibid. (indirect speech).



eral proclivity not to address contentious issues openly, Gorbachev raised the problem of debt and dependency but failed to discuss it in detail. He prefaced the topic by a review of ‘worrying’ developments in Eastern Europe.<sup>621</sup> Poland was ‘lying flat on its back’, Gorbachev thought, and it was difficult to predict ‘when it would get up again’. Hungary had recently received a letter from the International Monetary Fund reminding the country of its obligations to pay principal and interest coupled with the ‘repressive demand that otherwise no [more] credit would be extended’. As for East Germany, he had talked with prime minister Ryzhkov who had reported that ‘the FRG is attempting to buy up the GDR’s obligations towards [foreign] countries in order to bind the GDR to the FRG’.<sup>622</sup>

Honecker, as previously, vehemently objected to the insinuation that the GDR was financially vulnerable. Indeed, ‘intensive efforts’ had been made by the West to ‘cause difficulties’ for the GDR but these efforts had been unsuccessful. This was due to the fact that the GDR had reduced its imports from hard-currency countries with the result that it now had ‘a surplus in its balance of trade amounting to between \$3 and \$6 billion per annum’. He sought further to undercut Gorbachev’s argument by saying that only a small portion of the foreign trade credit in the amount of 850 million Deutschmarks available to the GDR had been called up: ‘only 170 million DM [Deutsche Mark] in the first quarter of the year’. Finally, citing data released by the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, he asserted that the Soviet Union and East Germany were ‘considered to be among the financially most stable countries in the world’, the latter’s net debt amounting to only \$3.5 billion.<sup>623</sup> The conclusion that Honecker wanted Gorbachev to draw was simple: the subject of political dependencies created by financial strings, at least in the East German case, was simply not worth discussing.

**Secrecy and Lack of Trust.** Another factor contributing to alienation in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the GDR, as well as Gorbachev and Honecker at the personal level, was the fact that Honecker kept important matters not only from the ‘soviet comrades’ but also from the SED Politburo. In particular, in order not to weaken his position in the party leadership, he systematically suppressed information about Soviet-

---

621 Record (*Information*) of the meeting between Gorbachev and Honecker on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, Central Party Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666.

622 Ibid. (indirect speech).

623 Ibid.

East German differences. This was well known in Moscow party circles long before Gorbachev's accession to power.<sup>624</sup> Kvitinsky, speaking about the second half of the 1970s, has described the problem and the inability of the Soviet leaders to solve it:

Since it had been reported to us that Honecker filed away all reservations and warnings conveyed to him from Moscow in his safe without informing even the Politburo about them, Gromyko expressed the wish that the other comrades also be given notice of the Soviet standpoint. Honecker gave the reply that this would be the last thing he would do. After all, he did not want to 'undermine' the standing of the Soviet comrades in the eyes of the Politburo. The insinuation could not have been any clearer: 'Your remarks, esteemed Soviet comrades, bear witness to such a lack of expertise that it is within your own interest that no one finds out about them.'<sup>625</sup>

In the August 1984 Soviet-East German emergency meeting in Moscow, as noted, Chernenko had voiced his suspicion to Honecker that 'your comrades are not properly informed about our positions' on matters of foreign policy.<sup>626</sup> In the private talks with Honecker in April 1986, Gorbachev (as noted) complained about the lack of information exchange between the Soviet Union and East Germany on scientific-technological matters. However, on this point at least, he adhered to the line agreed upon in advance with Chernyaev that it would be better not to give the impression that he was attempting to 'straighten' Honecker out. He refrained from extending the discussion of secrecy in the scientific-technological sphere to the political realm. Yet from Honecker's perspective, the transcript of the meeting would apparently contain too much evidence already of the emerging differences in the relationship between the two leaders for his colleagues in the Politburo to know about it. The transcript was, presumably for that reason, not included in the materials submitted to the SED Politburo for consideration at its session of 29 April but transferred to his (Honecker's) private files.<sup>627</sup>

---

624 Interviews with Tsipko and Maksimychev.

625 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, pp. 262-63.

626 Transcript (*Niederschrift*) of the August 17, 1984, meeting, SED, Central Archives, J IV 2/2.039/280; for the context and the full quotation see above, p. 214.

627 Büro Honecker, 41666; interview with Krenz; see also Egon Krenz, 'Honecker und Gorbatschow', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 January 1993, and Küchenmeister, *Honecker – Gorbatschow: Vieraugengespräche*, p. 78.

The lack of glasnost in the political relationship between the GDR and the USSR and in the personal exchanges between the two leaders deepened mutual suspicions and undermined trust even further. Gorbachev, in retrospect, has acknowledged the existence of these interconnections:

Soon after [in 1986], we began to address each other with the familiar form of 'you'. Yet a really open relationship, one of mutual trust, never did develop between us. Honecker, it seemed to me, was somehow tense and couldn't abandon the official manner. I was taken aback most of all, however, by [the fact] that he informed his colleagues about our talks only sparingly and selectively, whereas I always saw to it that the transcript of the notes of our meetings was transmitted without cuts to all the members of the Soviet leadership.<sup>628</sup>

**Honecker's Plans to Visit West Germany.** Another serious controversy, and one directly addressed by the two leaders, concerned yet again Honecker's persistent desire to visit West Germany. It was Gorbachev who introduced the issue in the context of a review of Soviet-West German relations. He made it clear that he himself had absolutely no intention to visit West Germany at this stage. This adamant position was, in part, based on the argument that the ruling coalition of conservatives and liberals would be rewarded for its policies and the chances of the social democrats in the upcoming state elections in Lower Saxony at the beginning of July would be hurt. In what can be considered a telling indication of the influence of the SPD in Moscow, Gorbachev admitted to Honecker that SPD presidium member Egon Bahr had 'called upon [me] to promise not to go to the FRG this year. [I] thereupon communicated to Willy Brandt that [I] would not go this year'. He concluded by claiming that both 'the SPD and the Greens do not want Gorbachev and Honecker to go to the FRG'.<sup>629</sup>

Honecker flatly contradicted Gorbachev on that point. Brandt and the prime minister of North Rhine Westphalia, Johannes Rau, had 'proposed to [me] that I go to the FRG in May [1986]'. He conceded that it might perhaps not be a good idea to visit West Germany before the elections in

---

628 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, pp. 407-408. It is not entirely clear from the context whether the use of the second person singular in the conversations between the two leaders occurred 'soon after' Gorbachev had attended the Eleventh SED Congress in April 1986 or after a visit by Honecker to Moscow in October of that year.

629 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech, italics mine).

Lower Saxony (not least, one might add, because this would not have fit his own schedule, which included his involvement in the East German parliamentary elections on 8 June, participation in the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Budapest 10-11 June and a visit to Sweden at the end of June). But to visit the Federal Republic at some time 'between the beginning of July and 12 July', he thought, would 'be useful for the SPD'.<sup>630</sup> The tug of war continued, with mutual irritation and annoyance increasing in the process. Honecker, at one point in the conversation, snapped that 'the games that are being played [in Moscow] in connection with [my] visit to the FRG have finally got to come to an end'. At another point he insisted that it would be 'good to accept the invitation now in order to get the thing off the table'.<sup>631</sup> In a huff, he also refused to accept Gorbachev's invitation for dinner, only to relent shortly thereafter.<sup>632</sup>

On the day after the official end of the party congress, Gorbachev told the SED leadership that he had asked Honecker what would happen if he were to travel to the FRG but he (Gorbachev) would not: 'How should [we] explain this to the Soviet communists and to the Soviet people? This also would have to be explained to the party and the people of the GDR.'<sup>633</sup>

Gorbachev, to sum up, made it quite clear that he thought that the visit would not serve a useful purpose. Honecker, on the contrary, felt that the visit should be scheduled as soon as possible but again did not dare override the Soviet opposition. The plans for the visit were canceled accordingly, but the episode strongly reinforced Honecker's negative disposition towards Gorbachev.

---

630 Ibid. (indirect speech).

631 Ibid. (indirect speech).

632 Interview with Krenz; see also Egon Krenz, 'Honecker und Gorbatschow', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 January 1993.

633 Transcript of the meeting between Gorbachev and the SED Politburo on 22 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech, italics mine). According to Krenz, on 22 April, at the meeting with the SED Politburo, Gorbachev adopted a 'jovial' tone and, to Honecker's consternation, reported 'full agreement between the two parties' on the main lines of policy, including 'abandonment of comrade Honecker's plans for visiting the FRG'. Honecker considered this to have been inexcusable double-dealing and never forgave Gorbachev for this (interview with Krenz and *id.*, 'Honecker und Gorbatschow', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 January 1993). The official transcript of the 22 April meeting, however, does not note the 'full agreement'.

One of the reasons why the new Soviet leader, like his predecessor, was so adamant on the issue of Honecker's visit had much to do with Gorbachev's negative attitude towards Kohl and the West German government.

#### 5. West Germany: Troublesome Tenant in Gorbachev's 'Common House of Europe'

In his memoirs, Gorbachev glosses over Soviet-West German relations during the first two years of his tenure in office. This is perhaps because of some embarrassment. An honest appraisal would have necessitated acknowledging that, in essence, he was continuing the stale approach of 'insulted giant' and 'bear in hibernation' that Chernenko had adopted vis-à-vis Bonn. West Germany, he writes, 'was our number-one trading partner in the West but in the military-political ranking order it figured as one of our "potential adversaries"'. Furthermore, contrary to the grand fanfare about the Common House of Europe, in the period from his accession to power in March 1985 until October 1988, Gorbachev concentrated on the reordering of relations with the United States.<sup>634</sup> Western Europe played a subordinate and subsidiary role in Soviet policy towards the West. West Germany fared even worse: it was given the cold shoulder. The 'new page' in the book of Soviet-West German relations, a phrase used frequently by both Soviet and West German political leaders and analysts, failed to be written.<sup>635</sup> Moscow, in essence, continued the previous policy of attempting to isolate and circumvent West Germany or, more specifically, the ruling center-right coalition in Bonn, and 'punish' it for its role in legitimizing the stationing of U.S. medium-range missiles in Western Europe and supporting the idea of strategic defense.

In detail, it was no accident of diplomacy that in Western Europe, Gorbachev first visited Paris, not Bonn. Shevardnadze, in 1985 and 1986, held

---

634 'In the conditions of a general increase in tension', Gorbachev wrote, 'the course of the FRG was primarily considered in Moscow in the context of Soviet-American conflict'; *ibid.* The emphasis on Soviet-American relations will be dealt with separately in the following section.

635 The metaphor was used for the first time by Gorbachev during West German foreign minister Genscher's visit to Moscow in July 1986; see Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 501, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 July 1986.

talks in Washington, Tokyo and a number of European capitals but he, too, studiously avoided the West German capital. It took one visit of the president of the Federal Republic (July 1987), three visits by Chancellor Kohl (July 1983, March 1985, and October 1988), five by Foreign Minister Genscher and one each by the prime ministers of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg (December 1987 and February 1988) to Moscow as well as Honecker's visit to West Germany against unabated Soviet opposition (September 1987) for Gorbachev to feel that the time had finally come to abandon his reservations.<sup>636</sup>

The lack of congruence between Gorbachev's rhetoric about the Common House of Europe and his policies towards West Germany is touched upon in his memoirs.

My meetings with Reagan in Geneva and Reykjavik were already history, and we were in an active political dialogue with France, Italy and Great Britain, but our relations with the FRG essentially remained unchanged. The abnormality of this situation finally became apparent for both sides, and it was becoming ever more evident to me that we would not be able, in the long term, to pursue a serious European policy without Germany. I spoke of this fact on several occasions during Politburo meetings and in the small circle of like-minded colleagues.<sup>637</sup>

Who was to blame for the 'abnormal' state of affairs? In Gorbachev's view, the fault lay with Bonn. 'The relaxation of Soviet-West German relations begun by Willy Brandt in the years of Ostpolitik', he writes in his memoirs, 'gave way to stiffening of positions at the beginning of the 1980s.'<sup>638</sup> The extent to which this was, indeed, true will be examined later. At this stage, it may suffice to argue that the lack of progress in Soviet-West German relations had more to do with *Soviet* stereotypes and clichés, inertia and objective difficulties of management of the contradictions in the Soviet empire than with West German intransigence. The argument can be supported by what Gorbachev told Honecker in private conversation on 20 April 1986.

---

636 For a detailed treatment of the Gorbachev's failure to respond to West German overtures, see the series of articles by Hannes Adomeit, 'Gorbatschows Westpolitik: "Gemeinsames europäisches Haus" oder atlantische Orientierung?', *Osteuropa*, Nos. 6, 9, and 12 (1988).

637 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 152 (italics mine). The precise moment as to when both sides realized the 'abnormality' of the situation remains unspecified.

638 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

In that conversation, the Kremlin leader introduced a discussion of Soviet-West German relations by saying that the federal government vacillated between acting insulted and attempting to blackmail the Soviet Union. Representatives of the ruling coalition of the CDU/CSU and the FDP, with Helmut Kohl as chancellor and Genscher as vice chancellor and foreign minister, had repeatedly argued that the government was going to be in office for a long time and that the Soviet Union would be making a mistake if it ignored that fact of life and continued to cultivate its relationship with the social democrats.<sup>639</sup> But Gorbachev showed himself unimpressed by these pleas. He clarified that the social democratic channels would be maintained. Furthermore, he contended, it would be pointless to take any initiatives and useless to pay a visit to West Germany because one would only be hearing in Bonn what one was told in Washington. The German chancellor was so wedded to American policies, Gorbachev claimed, that 'he [Kohl] has already overtaken [British prime minister Margaret] Thatcher. He not only moves in the wake of the USA but behaves like a lackey of the USA and completely associates himself with Reagan and the SDI plans'. In the final analysis, the question arose: 'Are we not facing here a cross breed of FRG revanchism with the course of social revenge pursued by the USA?'<sup>640</sup>

One could argue that Gorbachev's hard line vis-à-vis Bonn was motivated by his determination to dissuade Honecker from visiting West Germany. The argument may be valid but only up to a point. The fact is that the Soviet leader did not deviate much from the tough line, neither at the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Budapest in June 1986 nor in his talks with Genscher in July of the same year. At the summit conference, Gorbachev adopted the traditional two-pronged approach in Soviet relations with West Germany. On the one hand, he acknowledged the 'importance the role the FRG plays in Europe and in the world. Our relations with the FRG are based on the positive experiences which significantly contributed

---

639 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666. Gorbachev's point of departure was a visit by Horst Teltschik, Chancellor Kohl's foreign policy advisor, to the Soviet embassy in Bonn. In interviews with the author, Teltschik has confirmed that this is an argument he had made in talks with Kvitsinsky.

640 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech).

to détente in the 1970s'. He also saw 'great opportunities which could open for the development of a political dialogue on broad problems as well as for the development of stable economic, scientific-technological and other relations'. On the other hand, however, he regretted that in the last few years the FRG government had made the realization of these possibilities difficult to achieve.

You know Kohl's policy. If it had not been for the support extended by the FRG, US missiles would not have been stationed in Europe. As regards SDI, the West German government not only associates itself with the American position but supplements it by a European variant of the militarization of space. Not to speak of the continued fanning of revanchism.<sup>641</sup>

After having taken note of the fact that parliamentary elections were soon (January 1987) to be held in West Germany and that the outcome of the elections was uncertain, he furnished one major rationale for his policy of watchful waiting on the German problem: 'Our approach is the following: *In our contacts with the Kohl government for the time being [we will] not undertake anything beyond the necessary.*' As if in justification of his opposition to the Honecker visit, he applied this policy of deliberate distance to the question of a personal visit to West Germany:

It is obvious what purpose the West Germans have in mind when they rather steadfastly are striving for a summit conference with us. They need it in order to improve their electoral chances. We [therefore] have arrived at the conclusion that it is better not to proceed with such a meeting this year. We do not want to support Kohl; on the contrary, it is necessary to let him and the West German public feel our [negative] attitude to his policy.<sup>642</sup>

In continuation of the traditional policy of differentiation among the socio-economic and political forces in West Germany, he concluded that it was 'useful to continue our active work with the Social Democrats, the Greens, and other circles of the opposition – perhaps also with Genscher'.<sup>643</sup>

In the more restricted session of first party secretaries only, Gorbachev was even more blunt. He said that he was of the opinion that 'the socialist countries have a *proven policy of pressure on the Kohl government*'. The Soviet Union, in essence, had communicated to Kohl the following mes-

---

641 Text of Gorbachev's speech at the Budapest PCC meeting, attachment for 18 June 1986 Politburo session, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2897.

642 Ibid.

643 Ibid.



sage: If Bonn had anything new to say, then and only 'then should one be thinking about inviting [sic] Kohl and talking with him about current problems'. Kohl had reacted by 'cursing a lot' and complained that Gorbachev was 'meeting with [French president François] Mitterrand, the demagogue, and with [Italian prime minister Bettino] Craxi'. But he (Gorbachev) refused to meet with him despite the fact that Kohl was advocating the continuation of German Ostpolitik and dynamic relations with the Soviet Union. Gorbachev also reported that he had answered Kohl that we 'would talk with him if he, as chancellor, were to show his own political profile'. Gorbachev concluded his account by telling his East European colleagues that he thought that 'the FRG government had been given a lesson' and that this would be useful 'with regard to the upcoming elections and public opinion'.<sup>644</sup>

Gorbachev's outline of the approach to be taken by Warsaw Pact countries towards Bonn did not remain unchallenged in the closed room. Honecker confirmed that he had talked about the German problem with Gorbachev. But he gave a different spin to the content of his meeting, evidently one that suited his unabated desire to visit West Germany. He had allegedly told Gorbachev that when one attempted to 'create the Common House of Europe, one had to be careful not to shunt the FRG to a siding. It is playing an important role in the EC [European Community] and NATO'. Attempts at isolating West Germany policy 'could create an unwelcome effect of solidarity' in the West.<sup>645</sup>

Hungarian party leader János Kádár supported the Honecker line. He (like Honecker) thought that 'the explanations on the FRG provided by Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev [should be put] into an all-European context'. He elaborated that it was appropriate that Gorbachev had made his first international appearance in Paris. The fact that he had given hope to the Italian government for a visit and his contacts with Britain and the FRG also had to be seen in a positive light. He asked the Soviet Union not to rupture the relations with West Germany because experience showed that it was difficult to restore them later. Gorbachev, obviously taken

---

644 Gorbachev's remarks to the restricted meeting at the Budapest summit conference; see protocol on the restricted meeting of the party chiefs of the Warsaw Pact member countries, attachment to 18 June 1986 Politburo meeting, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2896 (italics mine).

645 Ibid.

aback, remarked that the Soviet Union 'did not have such an intention and, of course, one could not approach the FRG like that'. Kádár, undeterred, continued that 'if a summit meeting with Kohl were not to take place it would be important to clarify that this was not the Soviet Union's fault'. Gorbachev (contrary to facts) countered that on the issue of visits, 'the FRG was playing games. Erich Honecker was being invited to the FRG but others [among Warsaw Pact countries] were not'. But he did agree yet again that one had to 'take into consideration the weight of the FRG in international politics'.<sup>646</sup>

It was in the circumstances of a clearly defined Soviet policy towards Bonn that Genscher paid his first visit to Moscow after his attendance of the funeral celebrations for Chernenko. In comparison with visits by other foreign ministers, the date of the visit (21 July 1986) in itself was a telling indication of the abnormal state of Soviet-West German relations. Gorbachev, with Shevardnadze, Kvitsinsky and Chernyaev present, told his visitor that the Soviet leaders did not always find West Germany's policy comprehensible.<sup>647</sup> A discrepancy existed in their view between Bonn's peaceful declarations and its actions. The federal government had been the most active advocate of the stationing of intermediate-range nuclear missiles. More importantly, it had tried to dictate terms to the Soviet Union and issue ultimatums. Efforts were now being made to search for solutions. He (Gorbachev) was able to understand why the United States had an interest in the stationing of missiles in Europe but the strong German pressure for the deployment was difficult to comprehend.<sup>648</sup> The German foreign minister's explanations of the rationale of the coalition government's policies fell on deaf ears. Genscher even formed the impression that Gorbachev had wanted to end the talks after he had rehashed the Soviet argument on INF and had been told that his ideas about West Germany rested on misperceptions.<sup>649</sup>

The discussion revived when it turned to Europe and the German problem. Gorbachev provided the West German foreign minister with an open-

---

646 Ibid.

647 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 495-496. German participants included the ambassador to Moscow, Jörg Kastl, and the Political Director in the German Foreign Office, Gerold von Braunmühl, who was assassinated by the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) only three months later.

648 Ibid.

649 Ibid., p. 498.

ing when he asked what one should think of a recent statement by Reagan to the effect that the conferences of Yalta and Potsdam had occurred a long time ago and that it was now time for Europe to be unified. Genscher replied that the federal government had adopted a clear position on the inviolability of borders. But he could hardly imagine that the General Secretary, when he was speaking of the Common European House, wanted to preserve a *divided* house. President Reagan had wanted to clarify this. The Germans, because of the division of their country into two states, thought exactly the same way.<sup>650</sup>

Genscher had brought into the open a central contradiction in Gorbachev's conceptual approach. The continued existence of two separate German states, was part of the Soviet leader's design for Europe. Only the *forms* of the division could be altered. East Germany, according to Gorbachev's thinking, should introduce reform socialism, West Germany would return to social democracy, and both states would establish a *modus vivendi* in their relations with each other in some mixture of reform socialism and social democracy. Although the Federal Republic, in a separate Letter on German Unity to the 1970 Soviet-West German agreement, had declared for the record that its objective was still for 'the German people to regain its unity, based on the principle of free self-determination', in Moscow's interpretation, the treaty was not designed to overcome the division of Germany but to make it more acceptable.<sup>651</sup> For that reason, Genscher was misreading Gorbachev's intentions when he, in his memoirs, quoted the Soviet leader as having stated: '*Let us open a new page in our relations*' and when he considered this to be a '*decisive sentence*' in the conversation, the implication being that his interlocuteur had in mind a comprehensive reassessment of the German problem.<sup>652</sup> In the Soviet perspective of the mid- and late 1980s, one has to conclude, there could be

---

650 Ibid., p. 499.

651 In more detail, the letter was handed by the German Foreign Office to, and was accepted by, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the signing of the 1970 Moscow treaty. It stated that 'in connection with today's signing of the treaty' between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union, the West German government declared that it interpreted the treaty 'as not being in contradiction to the political goal of the Federal Republic of Germany to strive for a state of peace in Europe, in which the German people, in free self-determination, [can] regain its unity'. *Dokumentation zur Ostpolitik der Bundesregierung: Verträge und Vereinbarungen*, 11th edition. (Bonn: Federal Press and Information Office, 1986), p. 15.

652 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 501.

new pages in Soviet-West German relations but the book of divided Germany had to remain closed.

The Soviet book on censorship rules also was not touched. The central newspapers expunged practically all the paragraphs and sentences from Genscher's dinner speech that described the German vision of the Common House of Europe. They deleted his assurance that, 'through regular contacts with its eastern neighbors, including in the current year, the federal government has demonstrated its interest in a positive development between East and West'. They omitted his statement that Bonn advocated an end to the division of Europe and was, therefore, aiming at a state of affairs that 'would make it possible for all the European peoples to shape their destiny autonomously without fear of threat and the use of force, that is, a Europe in which the right of self-determination will be safeguarded'.<sup>653</sup> Typically, as indicated by the controversy over the deletions of text from the speech of visiting West German president von Weizsäcker almost exactly one year later (see below), in such cases of censorship, high-level political approval was required. If so, a closer look at *Gorbachev's* concept of the Common House of Europe is warranted.

Before doing so, it is appropriate briefly to point to the reverberations of Genscher's visit in Soviet-East German relations. On 3 October 1986, in the round of talks between Gorbachev and Honecker in Moscow, with West Berlin communist party leaders Herbert Mies and Horst Schmitt present, the East German leader reported that, in talks with Otto Reinhold, the Dean of the SED Central Committee's Academy of Social Sciences, Genscher had 'talked very respectfully about the meeting that he had had here in Moscow'. The West German foreign minister had emphasized that a new page had been opened in the relations between Bonn and Moscow. And he had stated that he would do everything possible in order to exert influence in Washington to improve the chances for successful Soviet-American negotiations.<sup>654</sup> In a reply reflecting superpower arrogance Gorbachev said that when Genscher was in Moscow '[w]e made him sweat a lot'. He had brushed aside Genscher's declared preparedness to use his

---

653 For the full text of Genscher's speech, see *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamts der Bundesregierung*, No. 89, 24 July 1986; for the Soviet version, see *Pravda*, 23 July 1986.

654 Verbatim record of the meeting between Gorbachev and Honecker (as well as Mies and Schmitt) on 3 October 1986 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2937.

good offices in Washington with the remark that 'in our relations with the FRG, we don't want any translation of the policy of the USA into German. What we have to say we will say directly, in Russian, to be translated into English'.<sup>655</sup>

### The Common House of Europe

On his visit to London in December 1984, in a speech before the House of Commons, Gorbachev, for the first time in his tenure in office, referred to Europe as 'our common house' (*nash obshchii dom*).<sup>656</sup> Soviet leaders had done so before. Brezhnev had used the term in November 1981 in a dinner speech during his visit to Bonn.<sup>657</sup> Gromyko, the Politburo member and foreign minister, had taken it up in January 1983 at a press conference in Bonn. 'The Federal Republic of Germany as well as the Soviet Union', he said, 'live in one common house, under one roof.'<sup>658</sup> Traditionally, the term was reserved almost exclusively for *Western European* audiences.<sup>659</sup> It also had a decidedly anti-American connotation, its implication being that the United States, as a trans-Atlantic power, really had no business in that house. 'Washington', as a *Pravda* editorial accordingly put it, 'is a stranger in that house.'<sup>660</sup>

Gorbachev initially subscribed to such notions. In his speech to the House of Commons, he evidently had in mind the controversy about the stationing of U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe when he said that the continent should not be regarded simply as 'a theater of military operations'.<sup>661</sup> In the same vein, in a speech before the elections to the

---

655 Ibid.

656 *Pravda*, 19 December 1984.

657 Ibid., 24 November 1981.

658 *Sowjetunion heute*, No. 2 (February 1983), Supplement, p. xiii.

659 To the author's knowledge, it was never used in any of the private conversations between Honecker and Gorbachev. It was Krenz who finally, on 1 November 1989, asked Gorbachev how he saw the role of the GDR in his Common House construct. The details will be discussed in the next chapter.

660 Literally, for Washington it is a '*khuzhoi dom*', that is, a house that belongs to others; 'Evropa – nash obshchii dom', *Pravda*, 13 November 1985.

661 Ibid., 19 December 1984; similarly, the above-mentioned *Pravda* editorial claims that, for Washington, Europe is 'a battlefield on the maps of [its] strategists'; *ibid.*, 13 November 1985.

Supreme Soviet in February 1985, he said the Soviet Union considered a normalization of relations with the United States to be important. However, he continued, 'we are not forgetting for a single moment that the world is not limited to that country alone'.<sup>662</sup> A few weeks later, in an interview with *Pravda*, he asserted: 'The relations between the USSR and the USA are an extremely important part of international politics. But we are far from seeing the world through the prism of these relations.'<sup>663</sup>

What was the framework of reference Gorbachev used in his overtures to Europe? One set of ideas was historical and cultural, the other political and ideological. Concerning the former, Alexander Bovin, one of Gorbachev's foreign policy advisers and a frequent member of the party leader's entourage abroad, raised the theme of Europe linked by 'historical ties' and a 'common foundation of European culture'.<sup>664</sup> Such an interpretation could have and, as it turned out, *did* have disastrous consequences for the ideological foundation of the bloc and Soviet imperial control. The ideas of a Common European Home and common European cultural traditions were quite compatible with the Westernizing tradition in Russian historical development but *incompatible* with the Marxist-Leninist notions of antagonism and their manifestation in the division of Europe along ideological, socio-economic, and military-political lines.

The problem was made more acute by the fact that European political theorists objected to the notion that Russia, and hence the Soviet Union, belonged to a common European tradition. In their view, there had been three major European currents of thought: the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. These had led to the emergence of a civil society and the codification of human and citizenship rights in the western and central parts of the continent. Russia and, *mutatis mutandis*, the Soviet Union, according to this argument, did not form part of this tradition. Moscow had rejected the three major Western currents and embraced the Byzantine tradition: religious orthodoxy, absolutism, and despotism. Europe, as an idea, therefore, did not stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific

---

662 Ibid., 20 February 1985.

663 Ibid., 8 April 1985. Similar formulations were used by Gorbachev in his speech to the Twenty-seventh CPSU Congress in February 1986.

664 *Izvestiia*, 25 September 1985. The term 'political culture' is used in his 'Evropeiskoe napravlenie', *ibid.*, 20 July 1986.

and not even to the Urals but extended only from Brest (in Brittany) to Brest (at the border of Belorussia/Belarus with Poland).<sup>665</sup>

In a speech in Prague in April 1987, Gorbachev attempted to reconcile the irreconcilable and align the Soviet Union with European culture. 'In the Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals"', he said, 'world civilization was enriched by the ideas of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the humanist tradition and *the teachings of socialism* experienced a powerful development.'<sup>666</sup> The replacement of the Reformation by 'socialism' was apparently meant to put Russia and, by extension, the Soviet Union, firmly back into the camp of European culture and civilization.

Perhaps even more harmful to Soviet ideology and imperial control in 'Eastern Europe' was the resurrection the idea of a special common *Central European* culture and tradition – the *Mitteeuropagedanke*. The concept geographically included Germany, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, the Baltic States, and the 'Hapsburg', that is, the western part of Ukraine and, thus, cut across the post-war boundaries in central and eastern Europe and its organizational manifestations such as the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. It excluded Russia and, by extension, the Soviet Union, as well as Bulgaria.

'What do the borders that were drawn in Europe after the Second World War have to do with the historic areas and the [borders] that arbitrarily tear them apart or no less arbitrarily put them together?', an eminent German historian asked in 1986. But what did the historical *Mitteeuropagedanke* have to do with *current* politics and policies? It should, in his perspective, 'constitute the Archimedean point and act as a lever with which something can be achieved against the preponderance of the superpowers'.<sup>667</sup>

---

665 The fundamental differences of political culture were to be explored and elevated to a general theory in a global context by Samuel P. Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

666 *Pravda*, 11 April 1987 (italics mine).

667 Karl Schlögel, *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts: Die Deutschen, der verlorene Osten und Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986), as quoted by Klaus Bednartz, 'Die Wiedergeburt Mitteleuropas', *Die Zeit*, Online-Archiv, [http://www.zeit.de/2002/3/2/Die\\_Wiedergeburt\\_Mitteleuropas\\_](http://www.zeit.de/2002/3/2/Die_Wiedergeburt_Mitteleuropas_) Other influential advocates of resurrecting the historical and cultural interconnections and current political importance of the *Mitteeuropagedanke* were Austrian Erhard Busek, Czech Václav Havel and Milan Kundera, Polish Czesław Miłosz, and Hungarians György Konrád and György Dalos. – The *Mitteleuropa* discussion that was taking shape beginning in

Washington was keen to apply that lever – although, of course, not to itself but to the adversary superpower. In a speech to the Austrian Association for Foreign Policy and International Relations in Vienna on 21 September 1983, Vice President George H.W. Bush expressly used the term *Mittleuropa* and sharply turned it against Moscow. ‘It has often been remarked’, he said, ‘that of the three great evens in European history – the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment – Russia took part in none.’ He then goes on to quote from Czesław Miłosz’s book, *The Captive Mind*, in which he emphasizes the differences between the European countries that developed under the influence of Rome and those, like Russia, that followed the tradition of Byzantium and decries the current state of affairs that requires ‘surrendering to the hegemony of a nation which is still wild and primitive [Miłosz means the Soviet Union, obviously], and to concede the absolute superiority of its customs and institutions, science and technology, literature and art’. Bush then goes on the propagandistic offensive and charges that

Over a hundred years ago, some Tsarist historians spoke with contempt of the ‘decadent West.’ One example of such decadence was, no doubt, the music of Frederic Chopin. In a recent essay, the Czechoslovak author, Milan Kundera, tells of how, fourteen years after Chopin’s death, Russian [sic] soldiers on the loose in Warsaw, hurled the composer’s piano from a fourth-floor window. ‘Today,’ writes Kundera, ‘the entire culture of Central Europe shares the fate of Chopin’s piano’.<sup>668</sup>

The renaissance of the *Mittleuropagedanke* was bound to be regarded with suspicion if not alarm by Soviet thinkers still stuck in the orthodox ideological framework of the ‘irreconcilable contradictions’ among the ‘imperialist power centres’. Europe was conceived of in terms of one of these power centres. Ideology took precedence over political culture. In accordance with the former’s precepts, even Gorbachev’s main theoretician of the New Political Thinking, writing in *Pravda* in March 1984, claimed that the current economic and political condition of the capitalist world system was characterized by a ‘sharpening of the imperialist contradictions between the USA, the Western European countries and Japan, un-

---

the early 1980s and continued unabated until the fall of the Berlin wall can best be retraced in a special issue of *Daedalus* (Winter 1989); see esp. Timothy Garton Ash, ‘Mittleuropa?’, *ibid.*, pp. 1-21.

668 Text in U.S. Wireless Bulletin, No. 175, 22 September 1983. In his speech, Bush expressly used the German term *Mittleuropa*.



precedented in the post-war period'. The dynamics underlying this sharpening, in his opinion, resulted from a 'counteroffensive' conducted by the United States to regain the positions lost in the past decades. The means utilized by that 'power centre' to achieve this purpose was, above all, its predominant role in the military affairs of the Western alliance.<sup>669</sup>

Gorbachev, too, propagated such views. In December 1984, in an important speech on ideological matters, he noted 'a general but increasingly pronounced loss of the previous economic and political preponderance of the United States and an erosion of its positions in comparison with the *new power centres, above all the Western European region and Japan*'.<sup>670</sup>

When Gorbachev made that speech, and for the first few months after having assumed office as General Secretary, he may still have been conscious of the intense controversies that had raged between the United States and Western Europe. These had concerned the 'neutron bomb'; the stationing of INF; the scope of modernisation of NATO's theatre nuclear forces; the utility of arms control; burden sharing; East-West trade; the divisibility or indivisibility of détente; and the utility of sanctions in response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the imposition of martial law in Poland.

What were the policy implications of the view that the conflicts between the United States and Western Europe were more pronounced than the interests that bound them together? One was sounded by Gorbachev in May 1985. In talks with Bettino Craxi, the Italian prime minister, and Gianni Cervetti, the chairman of the communist section of the European parliament and member of the presidium of the Italian communist party, Gorbachev advocated the expansion of economic contacts between Comecon and the European Economic Community as well as the establishment of official relations between these two organizations. While this approach was not new, he extended it by saying that 'to the extent to which the states of the EEC were to act as one single unit', he would be ready 'to search for a common language with them on specific international prob-

---

669 Alexander Yakovlev, 'Imperializm – sopernichestvo i protivorechii', *Pravda*, 23 March 1985. At the time of his writing, Yakovlev was head of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO). Similarly at that time also the Soviet ambassador to Washington under Yeltsin and human rights commissioner under Putin, Vladimir Lukin, '*Tsentry sily!*: *Kontseptsii i real'nost'*' (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1983).

670 *Pravda*, 12 December 1984 (italics mine).

lems'.<sup>671</sup> Gorbachev, for the first time in Soviet attitudes and policies towards the European Community, therefore, was signalling a Soviet interest in some arrangement with that organization at the *political* level.

For the most part, however, Gorbachev's theme of the Common European Home found very little practical political application. In 1985-86, it had decidedly instrumental purposes. This was clearly stated by Bovin. He was 'not revealing any secrets by saying', he wrote in September 1985, 'that Soviet policy takes into account the differences of view between Western Europe and the United States. But it does so by no means in order to squeeze the United States out of Europe and gain political control of the continent. ... Our objective is much more modest. We would like to utilize Western Europe's [intellectual and political] resources to make good, via the trans-Atlantic channel, the obvious shortage of common sense in the incumbent US administration'.<sup>672</sup> In other words, the preferential treatment of selected European countries, political parties and movements was to serve the purpose of changing the direction of American foreign policy. Similarly, in his speech to the French National Assembly in October 1985, Gorbachev declared as 'absurd' the allegation that the Soviet Union wanted to drive a wedge between Western Europe and the USA. He strictly denied any 'anti-American' direction of Soviet policy toward the West and any Metternich-style 'balance of power' tactics aimed at 'inciting one state against the other'.<sup>673</sup> 'We are realists', he avowed, 'and know how stable are the historical, political, and economic relations between Western Europe and the USA'.<sup>674</sup>

Indeed, at the Twenty-seventh CPSU Congress in February-March 1986 and the Tenth Congress of the Polish communist party in June 1986, Gorbachev continued the line of inducements and persuasion vis-à-vis Europe. At the latter occasion, Gorbachev said:

The ancient Greeks have a myth concerning the rape of Europe. This fairy tale subject unexpectedly has received new significance in the modern age. Of course, Europe remains untouched in the geographical sense. But the impression arises that the independent policy of certain Western European states has been abducted and deported across the ocean and that the national interests of

---

671 In his talks with Craxi, *Pravda*, 30 May 1985; see also the report on his discussions with Cervetti, *l'Unità*, 22 May 1985.

672 *Izvestiia*, 25 September 1985.

673 *Pravda*, 4 October 1985.

674 *Ibid.*

the peoples as well as the destinies of the 700 million inhabitants of our continent and the civilization which originated here a long time ago are being mortgaged under the pretext of safeguarding security.

No one should misinterpret us: We do not intend to drive a wedge between the USA and its NATO allies. ... At the time [in the 1970s], the socialist countries welcomed the participation of the USA in the all-European process. ... But now it looks as if the American administration wants to pursue goals diametrically opposed to it [the CSCE process]: acceleration of the arms race and confrontation. Who can profit from this? Are the European peoples really interested in such a development of events?<sup>675</sup>

In 1985-86, to sum up, Gorbachev's slogan of Common House of Europe had nothing to do with an attempt at resurrecting a common European culture and civilization. The *Mitteleuropagedanke*, a concept cutting across the ideological and military-political borderlines in Europe, was anathema and so explosive that it failed to be mentioned. The purposes to be achieved by the Common House of Europe campaign were quite limited. The appeals were directed to *Western* Europe with the idea in mind that improved relations between the Soviet Union and Western Europe would induce the latter to exert influence on US policies and, in turn, make the United States more amenable to compromise with the Soviet Union. 'For us', as he put it in retrospect, 'the European direction was not only an independent good; it was also an important factor in the dialogue with the Americans.'<sup>676</sup> It is for that reason and also because he regarded Kohl as Reagan's European bailiff that a closer look at the American dimension of Gorbachev's policies is warranted.

## 6. Priority for the Relations with the United States

Attempts to change American foreign policy were to assume top priority in Gorbachev's international designs. This endeavour was evident at and after the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February-March 1986 and characterized by astounding persistence. It was reflected in concessions to Washington and several reversals of positions to which Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko had tenaciously clung. It was demonstrated by the unprecedentedly high number of Soviet-American summit conferences, a total of seven in five years, and even more frequent meetings at the minis-

---

675 Ibid., 1 July 1986.

676 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 152.

terial level between Shevardnadze, on the one hand, and George Shultz and James Baker, on the other. And it manifested itself in the rise of the *amerikanisty*, Soviet experts on American affairs, to influential posts in the central decision-making apparatus.

Foremost among them were Anatoly Dobrynin, former ambassador to the United States, who became secretary of the Central Committee, responsible for relations with non-communist parties and states;<sup>677</sup> Georgi Kornienko, a former first deputy foreign minister and formerly Dobrynin's right hand in Washington, who was appointed Dobrynin's new deputy in the Central Committee; Yuli Vorontsov, former deputy ambassador in Washington, who succeeded Kornienko in the foreign ministry and Viktor Karpov in his post as chief negotiator at the arms talks in Geneva; Alexander Bessmertnykh, also a former deputy ambassador to Washington, who was named deputy foreign minister; Alexander Yakovlev, a former student at Columbia University, ambassador to Canada, and director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, who was elevated to the post of secretary of the Central Committee responsible for propaganda; and Georgi Arbatov, who remained director of the Institute for the United States and Canada. As is particularly apparent in the case of Yakovlev and Arbatov, the impressive array of *amerikanisty* in influential positions did not at all mean that Soviet policies were bound to move in a pro-American direction. What it did mean, however, was that the relationship with the United States was considered the main issue in Soviet foreign relations.

In his memoirs, Gorbachev is quite specific on this point.

My supporters [favoured] a forward movement in international affairs but I thought that we had to begin with the *United States*. It was, after all, not only a superpower but also the recognized leader of the Western world. Without its consent any effort to achieve a turn in East-West relations was impossible; [if we had acted otherwise] we would have been accused of attempting to 'drive wedges' [between the United States and its allies] or of engaging in 'intrigues'.<sup>678</sup>

Shevardnadze agreed. He has acknowledged in retrospect that, 'by 1985, the situation was extremely gloomy' and 'we in the Soviet leadership were acutely aware of the need for fundamental changes in policy and a quest

---

677 As his visit to Kabul with foreign minister Shevardnadze in January 1987 showed, he also actively involved himself in policy towards communist states as long as the matter at hand was considered to be of vital interest.

678 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 11 (italics mine).

for alternatives. Naturally, Soviet-American affairs were our central concern.<sup>679</sup> He also provided the reasons why this was the case: (1) ‘American sanctions, which had been imposed because of our involvement in Afghanistan, were having their effect.’ (2) ‘The question of political dissidents in the Soviet Union and human rights practices in general was a sore point.’ (3) ‘Negotiations on nuclear weapons in space were stalled’. (4) ‘A major controversy over the fate of the ABM Treaty’ had flared up, with accusations flying that the Soviet Union had violated the agreement on strategic arms limitation. (5) ‘No solution was in sight concerning the deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe.’<sup>680</sup> Shevardnadze then aptly summarized: ‘No matter where we turned, we came up against the fact that we would achieve nothing without a normalization of Soviet-American relations.’<sup>681</sup>

At the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Sofia in October 1985, Gorbachev painted the same gloomy picture as Shevardnadze. In open session, he said there was a fairly widespread opinion that the situation in the world was changing for the better and that everything was all right. One talked about a remarkable invigoration of the political dialogue between East and West. This was correct up to a point. Changes were obvious, and these had been achieved by the efforts of the socialist community for the support of forces and countries opposed to the aggressive course of the imperialist powers. However, one had to admit that, ‘without wanting to dramatize the situation, the state of affairs in the world continues to remain tense and in some aspects even explosive’.<sup>682</sup>

In the closed session of the first party secretaries, he was even more blunt and gloomy. He discerned ‘massive pressure by imperialism, connected with its attempts at blackmailing us politically and economically and taking social revenge’. The Soviet leadership had information to the effect that ‘everything in the current USA policy was aimed at achieving in one or another socialist country of Europe, or if possible in several of them, a political destabilization’. The United States was endeavoring to ‘create constant sources of unrest in the Soviet Union and other socialist

---

679 Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*, p. 146.

680 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

681 *Ibid.*

682 Gorbachev’s speech at the PCC meeting in Sofia, on 23 October 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2811.

countries'.<sup>683</sup> The remedies suggested to counter this threat, however, were *not* of the traditional Soviet variety. The struggle against imperialism, in Gorbachev's opinion, rather than calling for a redoubling of efforts in the military sphere, posed the 'necessity of an acceleration of our development'. *It required 'the growth of [our] economic potential, the improvement of the life of the people and the maintenance of the military balance'*. The main and general line of the CPSU to meet these challenges was the 'economic strategy of the CPSU' and the 'comprehensive intensification of the national economy on the basis of scientific-technological progress and its acceleration'. For these purposes to be achieved, implementation of the five-year plan for 1985-1990 would be decisive.<sup>684</sup>

In his private talks with Honecker half a year later Gorbachev was still mesmerized by the 'question as to what one could expect from the main adversary. Will it be possible to drive him into a process of disarmament?'<sup>685</sup> He thought that the CPSU and the SED were in 'complete agreement' on how to assess the nature of American foreign policy. In vivid testimony to the persistence of outdated Leninist concepts on the nature of the opposed socio-economic system, he stated:

Analysis in the Soviet Union proceeds from the principle that US imperialism cannot exist without the military machine. One-third of the national product of the USA derives from the exploitation of the Third World. In order to maintain this level, American imperialism cannot dispense with its military machine.<sup>686</sup>

Political logic would have it that if systemic imperatives really drove American arms production and foreign policy, the chances for the United States to change course without a systemic transformation would be non-existent. Logic would also have it that if it were true, as he asserted, that the 'economic state of affairs in the United States is becoming ever more tense', tendencies for American expansion in the Third World would, for

---

683 Statement by Gorbachev at the closed session of first party secretaries at the PCC meeting in Sofia on 23 October 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/2811.

684 Protocol on the closed session of first party secretaries at the PCC meeting in Sofia on 23 October 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/2811 (italics mine).

685 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (indirect speech).

686 *Ibid.* (indirect speech).

systemic reasons, be *strengthened* rather than weakened. Whatever the logic, Gorbachev advocated adopting a dual approach – to combine a conciliatory and accommodating stance vis-à-vis the United States with defense efforts, while at the same time maintaining the course on domestic economic development. He felt that it was necessary

to conduct a realistic policy. Voices are being heard, especially in the USA, which demonstrate that Reagan will not last forever and that other forces will be at the helm. It is [therefore] definitely important to act serenely and sensibly, to keep a cool head, to develop initiative, if necessary, to give a rebuff to certain forces and, naturally, constantly to strengthen our defensive might.<sup>687</sup>

He also thought: ‘One cannot leave the fate of the world to Reagan and at the same time one *should not yield to provocation*.’<sup>688</sup>

Gorbachev had consented to the summit meeting in Geneva in November 1985 despite his previous insistence that he would attend such a conference only if it were a serious and well prepared matter *and* clear beforehand that agreements in one or two important areas of arms control would be signed. In reality, the summit was held according to an American agenda, no arms control agreements were concluded and the United States subsequently adopted uncompromising and unyielding policies that could easily be characterized as provocative by critics in the Soviet Union. Such policies included the continuation of strategic modernisation programs; the announcement by the Reagan administration in May 1986 that it no longer felt bound by the SALT II treaty; the apparently unshakable support by Reagan and other leading administration officials not only for conducting research, development and testing of space-based defensive weapons but also for their deployment; the refusal to consent to a comprehensive nuclear weapons test ban and limitation of anti-satellite systems; the adoption of a more assertive, militarily oriented policy of countering Soviet advances in the Third World, with money and weapons provided to the Contras in Nicaragua, the National Union for the Total Independence in Angola and the mujaheddin in Afghanistan; the dispatch of US naval vessels into the 12-mile zone off the Soviet Black Sea coast in March 1986; air attacks against Libya in April 1986; persistent demands for the curtailment of Soviet embassy, consular and United Nations personnel; continued restriction of East-West technology transfer; pressure on the Western allies

---

687 Ibid. (indirect speech).

688 Ibid. (indirect speech, italics mine).

to curtail their credit relations with Eastern Europe; opposition to most-favoured nation status for the USSR and to Soviet membership in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Some of Gorbachev's foreign policy advisors and propagandists did claim that they considered such policies 'provocative'. However, such challenges were portrayed by them and by Gorbachev at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February-March 1986 as a trap laid by the imperialists to induce the Soviet leadership to break off the dialogue with the United States rather than as a valid reason to do so.<sup>689</sup> As if in preparation and justification for the next Soviet-American summit meeting, Gorbachev reminded Honecker that, in May 1972, even as the United States had imposed a blockade on North Vietnamese harbors and 'were dropping bombs on Haiphong, Nixon was in Moscow'.<sup>690</sup> Conciliatory responses were still the order of the day in June 1986. Talking about Soviet-American relations in a session restricted to the first party secretaries at the Warsaw Pact summit conference in Budapest, he reiterated that the fraternal countries were '*not to be nudged from political dialogue, irrespective of what the other side does*'. He also reasserted: 'Our constructive course will be continued.' In sharp contrast to the negative and condescending attitude adopted vis-à-vis Kohl, he spoke almost warmly of Reagan and even showed himself well informed about the latter's health. He continued by saying that he had recently received another personal message from the American president and, although it had contained nothing new, it had struck 'a calm and casual tone'. He had again been invited by Reagan to a summit meeting. This, too, was 'characteristic' for Reagan's conciliatory approach. The Soviet Union was 'still considering' accepting the invitation but the main line was clear. He would accept the invitation if it were possible 'to consult about matters of substance'.<sup>691</sup>

---

689 In his closing remarks to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, Gorbachev briefly mentioned the lack of progress on arms control and other aspects of Moscow's relations with Washington. He spoke of the alleged fear by 'someone there' in Washington of a radical, long-term improvement in Soviet-American relations. He then went on to say: 'What are we to do comrades? Slam the door? It cannot be ruled out that this is exactly the sort of thing they want us to do'; *Izvestiia*, 7 March 1986.

690 Transcript of the conversation between Honecker and Gorbachev on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED, Central Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666.

691 Gorbachev's remarks to a closed session of first party secretaries at the June 1986 Budapest summit conference; see the protocol on the restricted meeting of the



The October 1986 Gorbachev-Reagan summit meeting in Reykjavik did not produce any agreement on conventional, intermediate-range, or strategic nuclear weapons, and to that extent it could be considered a failure. Gorbachev, however, was intent on making the summit appear to have been successful. In a press conference in Reykjavik and two radio and television addresses in Moscow, Gorbachev called the meeting an ‘important stage’ in the negotiating process that had created a ‘qualitatively new situation’, deepened mutual understanding, and shown that ‘agreements are possible’.<sup>692</sup> Dobrynin, on the contrary, in a meeting with a group of representatives from a number of peace committees from Britain on 26 October 1986, stated that ‘it seems that the extremists are taking over in the U.S. administration, and they will do ... everything they can to negate and undermine the positive things that were achieved in Reykjavik. We will have to revise all aspects of our cooperation with the United States.’<sup>693</sup> Arbatov similarly was to claim: ‘Attempts are being made to provoke us so that we will rupture the dialogue with our own hands, to bury the negotiations which have become an embarrassment to them [the Reaganites].’ However, he continued, ‘the Soviet Union has learned something in the past years. There can be no doubt that the American administration will fail in provoking M.S. Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership.’<sup>694</sup>

It is in the light of, in essence, negative American responses and operational problems in the Soviet Union that Gorbachev’s overtures and concessions are of particular interest. They underline his determination fundamentally to change Moscow’s relations with Washington. Moves of this kind in the arms control sphere in 1986 and 1987 included, at the Stockholm Conference on Confidence Building and Disarmament in Europe (CDE), the abandonment of previously deeply ingrained and unwavering Soviet objections to on-site inspection by foreign observers of military

---

party chiefs of the Warsaw Pact member countries, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2896 (indirect speech, italics mine).

692 The press conference of 13 October as reported by *Pravda*, 14 October 1986; the radio and television addresses of 14 and 22 October 1986 in *ibid.*, 15 and 22 October 1986. The direct quotes are from the latter sources.

693 Notes from personal diaries of Sergei Grigoriev.

694 Georgi Arbatov, ‘Ne ot khoroshei zhizni’, *Pravda*, 21 November 1986. Arbatov went on to say that he, too, had not allowed himself to become provoked when he wrote the article, even though he had felt like expressing himself more drastically.

moves and maneuvers. On the subject of strategic arms control, the Soviet Union was prepared to make the 'deep cuts' in offensive strategic missiles that Carter had proposed in 1977 and that Reagan had demanded in START; agree to count neither the US forward based systems (FBS) nor the French and British missiles and bombers against the total American strategic arsenal; accept rules for counting strategic bombers and cruise missiles that were advantageous to the US; and consent to the setting of sub-limits on heavy ICBMs. On intermediate-range nuclear systems, Moscow relinquished its demands for the full inclusion of the US Poseidon force and US forward based systems as well as the French and British INF in the overall tally. Final agreement on the INF issue, so hotly contested in the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, was reached at the summit conference in Washington in December 1987. The noteworthy features of the accord were its applicability to both Europe and Asia; the exclusion of the British and French nuclear forces from its provisions; the scrapping of an entire category of modern weapons; the acceptance of significant asymmetrical cuts; and a comprehensive régime of on-site verification.

On other matters, too, Gorbachev was determined to change the relationship with the United States. Concerning human rights issues and the development of contacts and communications between the East and the West, Moscow reduced the jamming of Voice of America broadcasts to the Soviet Union. After the resolution of the controversy over American correspondent Nicholas Daniloff, who had been imprisoned on false charges of espionage, it granted exit visas to dissidents Yuri Orlov, David Goldfarb, Viktor Flerov and Irina Ratushinskaya. Finally, Andrei Sakharov was allowed to return to the Soviet capital from his exile in Gorky.

In addition to the arms competition and human rights, regional conflicts had been another major bone of contention in Soviet-American relations. On this issue, too, Gorbachev made significant concessions. Moscow agreed in the April 1988 Geneva accord to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan within nine months. In July 1988, it concluded a framework agreement with Washington providing for the withdrawal of an estimated 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola, the pull-back of about 3,000 South African troops from the south of the country and the establishment of a timetable for the implementation of a ten-year-old United Nations plan for the independence of Namibia. It induced Vietnam to begin the withdrawal of troops from Cambodia. Its stance in the war between Iraq and Iran in

the summer of 1988, including its support in the U.N. for a cease-fire, contributed to the cessation of hostilities between the two countries.

Given Gorbachev's determined and increasingly successful attempts to place Soviet-American relations on a new footing, it would seem that the stage was now set for a return to the Common European Home and the inclusion of West Germany in an overall improvement of East-West relations. This, however, did not occur until October 1988. In addition to the more general reservations about Germany and the Germans, aversion to touching the German problem, suspicion about the budding intra-German contacts and concern about rising West German influence in Eastern Europe there were several specific reasons for the long delay in the alignment of Soviet-American and Soviet-West German policies. One of these was the interview Kohl gave to *Newsweek* in October 1986.

## 7. German Unification in a 'Hundred Years'

In the interview, published in *Newsweek* on 27 October 1986, Kohl had said: 'I don't consider him [Gorbachev] to be a liberal. He is a modern communist leader who understands public relations. Goebbels, who was one of those responsible for the crimes in the Hitler era, was an expert in public relations, too.'<sup>695</sup> This was a serious gaffe that should never have been allowed to appear in print. But it did. In the embarrassing circumstances, all the usual efforts at damage-limitation were made. The chancellor's office paraphrased Kohl to the effect that his remark had 'not been rendered correctly'; that 'erroneously, the impression has arisen that he had compared the General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, with Goebbels'; and that it had not been his 'intention to insult the General Secretary'.<sup>696</sup> But the damage was done. When Genscher in

---

695 *Newsweek*, 27 October 1986, p. 29. As is customary with such interviews, the transcript of the tape recording was submitted to the interviewee for verification and, if necessary, revision. Kohl's press spokesman, Friedhelm Ost, had received the transcript. He made things worse. Rather than recognizing the seriousness of the comparison and suggesting to delete the Goebbels remark, he *inserted* – presumably for the benefit of the American public – the clarification of Goebbels as being 'one of those responsible for the crimes of the Hitler era'; see *ibid.*, 17 November 1986, p. 58.

696 The 'clarification' was provided in Kohl's interview with *Die Welt* (Hamburg), 2 November 1986. On 4 November, the German foreign minister read the full text

Vienna on 4 November dutifully conveyed the chancellery's authorized explanations to Shevardnadze, the Soviet foreign minister replied that Moscow had initially believed that the remarks lacked a factual basis and that the matter had been a provocation. It had, therefore, made inquiries with *Newsweek*. On the basis of its tape recordings, the journal had confirmed the accuracy of the quote. Furthermore, after the chancellor, through a spokesman, had distanced himself from the remarks, Moscow had contacted the editor-in-chief of the weekly, who also had rejected the German contention that he had been misquoted.<sup>697</sup>

No matter how many times one may re-read, twist and turn the remark, one is left to conclude that Kohl did believe, or profess to believe, that a fundamental political change had not taken place in Moscow; that some or all of Gorbachev's initiatives were exercises in propaganda; and that the Soviet leader was quite skillful at that game – as skillful, indeed, as Goebbels. One could, charitably, interpret the remark as having been directed at a domestic rather than an international audience.<sup>698</sup> This notion could be regarded as being supported by his barb, also published by *Newsweek*, about the Social Democrats being 'more Russian than the Russians'. But the interview was granted to an American, not a German news magazine. The unkind characterization of both Gorbachev and the SPD could be regarded as an expression of his frustration at the Soviet leader's apparent view of the West German government as a disagreeable and uncooperative tenant in the Common European Home and his annoyance with Gorbachev's preferential treatment of the opposition. The matter was made worse by the impression that was being conveyed, or by the fact, that Kohl was too proud and stubborn to express regret and too keen to brush things aside with 'taken out of context' and 'wrong impression' excuses.<sup>699</sup>

---

of the chancellor office's explanations, including the reference to the interview in *Die Welt*, to Shevardnadze; Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 518.

697 Ibid.

698 The idea that Kohl's remarks were related to the German electoral campaign has been expressed by David H. Shumaker, *Gorbachev and the German Question: Soviet–West German Relations, 1985–1990* (Westport, Conn.: 1995), p. 36.

699 Speaking to the Bundestag in November 1986, Kohl insisted that the printed portion of the interview 'does not correctly reflect the meaning or the context of the one-and-a-half-hour conversation ...' He also said that he had not intended to compare Gorbachev to Goebbels: 'I regret that this impression was given and distance myself from it emphatically.' (*Newsweek*, 17 November 1986, p. 58.) In his

What was the impact of Kohl's blunder in Moscow? Most of all, the remarks were met with incomprehension among the German experts at the Central Committee and the foreign ministry. The authenticity of the remarks having been established beyond reasonable doubt, the assumption of the officials was that there must have been a purpose behind them. However, no one could convincingly explain what it was.<sup>700</sup> Publicly, Gorbachev chose not to react to the remarks. But Chernyaev has credibly stated that the Soviet leader felt 'deeply offended' by them,<sup>701</sup> and Shevardnadze charged that they 'angered us to the depth of our souls'.<sup>702</sup> They reinforced Gorbachev's negative predisposition toward Kohl and the CDU/CSU as well as his tendency to differentiate between the chancellor and Genscher. And although the remarks did not change Moscow's policy towards Bonn – as mentioned, the course towards 'minimum contact' had already been set – they delayed even further the inclusion of West Germany in Moscow's evolving efforts to improve relations with other Western European countries and the United States. 'Gorbachev', to quote his foreign policy advisor, 'intensified contacts with Britain, Italy and the United States, and in that way wanted to "teach the Germans a lesson"'.<sup>703</sup> Several visits by West German cabinet ministers to Moscow had to be canceled. Even more demonstratively than before, Moscow's representatives were by-passing Bonn by in a wide arc, and the Soviet ambassador in Bonn was instructed to avoid talks with the chancellor.<sup>704</sup> The remarks also revealed internal controversies about Moscow's relations with Bonn. Based upon talks with Gorbachev, deputy foreign minister Yuli Vorontsov recommended to the Soviet ambassador in Bonn (Kvitsinsky) that he try

---

memoirs, perhaps too tactfully, Genscher merely reiterates the lame excuses of the chancellor's office; Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 517-522. President Richard von Weizsäcker apparently was more blunt. Honecker had reportedly mentioned to Dobrynin, who was in East Berlin in January 1987, that in a conversation with the permanent representative of the GDR in Bonn he (Weizsäcker) had called Kohl a 'fool' (*Dummkopf*); Record (*Niederschrift*) Talks Between the General Secretary of the SED Central Committee, Comrade Erich Honecker, with the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Comrade A.F. Dobrynin, on 20 January 1987, in the Central Committee Building, SED Politburo, Central Party Archives, J IV/2/2A/2976, pp. 36-37 of the typed transcript (indirect speech).

700 Interview with Rykin.

701 Interview with Chernyaev.

702 TASS, 10 November 1986.

703 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 261.

704 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, p. 416.

gradually to bury the issue. 'After all', Vorontsov asked, what is Kohl supposed to do now, 'get a rope and hang himself'?<sup>705</sup> Kvitsinsky took this to mean that there was a struggle in Moscow between two points of view and that Gorbachev himself appeared to be wavering.<sup>706</sup>

In Moscow, the gaffe also brought into sharp focus the question as to who should be the proper partner in Bonn. This concerned in particular the problem of the appropriate status and role to be allocated to the SPD. In East Berlin, on 20 January 1987, Dobrynin (in his capacity as head of the Central Committee's International Department) in private conversation with Honecker agreed that all the support one had attempted to give to the SPD in the electoral campaign had been in vain. 'We wanted to help them but they can't be helped. No one really seriously believes that they want to govern. They are a true social democratic party; they are afraid of government responsibility.'<sup>707</sup> The chances of that party in the elections, then only a few days away, looked bleak. 'The danger exists', Honecker lamented, 'that the SPD will not receive 40 percent of the votes but only 37 percent'.<sup>708</sup> Dobrynin, too, thought that the 'SPD is playing a weak game'.<sup>709</sup> The CDU, in contrast, had the upper hand. Many representatives of that party, as he acknowledged, now wanted to visit the Soviet Union. 'No one was willing to admit that they would be acting as an envoy of Kohl, but they were asking what could be done in order to rectify what has happened.'<sup>710</sup> Dobrynin then revealed his own and perhaps a more widespread dissatisfaction in Moscow with the negative and unproductive approach taken vis-à-vis West Germany by saying: '*After the elections [we have] to approach [the relationship with West Germany] differently.*'<sup>711</sup>

---

705 Ibid.

706 Ibid.

707 Record (*Niederschrift*) Talks Between the General Secretary of the SED Central Committee, Comrade Erich Honecker, with the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Comrade A.F. Dobrynin on 20 January 1987 in the Central Committee Building, SED Politburo, Central Party Archives, J IV /2/2A/2976 p. 35 of the typed transcript (indirect speech).

708 Ibid., p. 36 of the typed transcript (indirect speech).

709 Ibid., p. 34 (indirect speech)

710 Ibid., pp. 34-35 (indirect speech).

711 Ibid., p. 35 (italics mine; indirect speech). Nevertheless, Dobrynin cautioned that one should not be too much in a hurry to alter the approach because 'if change were to take place too rapidly, the impression would be conveyed that [we] had not expected an electoral victory by Kohl'.

The CDU, as Dobrynin had correctly observed, was intent on changing Gorbachev's mind about the West German government's policy. Its determination increased almost in direct proportion to the progression of his New Thinking after the important January 1987 Central Committee plenum, which introduced *demokratizatsiia*. It also began to subscribe to the (erroneous) belief that the New Thinking would spawn a major Soviet initiative on the German problem. One of the earliest examples of this belief was expressed in a working paper by CDU parliament member Bernard Friedmann and presented to the party for discussion in early 1987.<sup>712</sup> More senior representatives of the governing coalition took up the topic, including FDP presidium member Otto Graf Lambsdorff; the prime minister of Rheinland-Palatinate, Bernard Vogel; and the chairman of the CDU parliamentary party, Alfred Dregger. They argued that the federal government should not simply sit back and wait for a Soviet proposal on German unification, and then improvise a response, but that it should take the initiative itself and propose a new security architecture in Central Europe.<sup>713</sup> In September 1987, in a speech to the Kurt Schumacher Foundation, the secretary of state for intra-German relations, Otfried Hennig asserted that there were 'reports in Moscow' according to which Gorbachev had told 'top party officials [Valentin] Falin, [Georgi] Arbatov, [Danil] Melnikov and [Nikolai] Portugalov' to prepare new policy options on Germany. On the basis of these studies, the leadership in Moscow wanted to formulate a concept that it would then present to the Western powers as a draft basis for a solution of the German problem.<sup>714</sup>

---

712 See the report on the working paper in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 May 1987.

713 Ibid.

714 Kurt Schumacher Foundation, press release, as quoted by Fred Oldenburg, 'sowjetische Deutschland-Politik mit neuen Perspektiven? Mutmaßungen über Moskauer Studien und Dobrynins Antworten', *Aktuelle Analysen*, Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien (Cologne), No. 37 (1987). Only three of the four persons mentioned, that is, Falin, Mel'nikov and Portugalov could be considered experts on Germany but none of them qualified as a 'top party official'. Falin was head of the foreign correspondents' office at the *Novosti* press agency, Portugalov a consultant for the propaganda department of the Central Committee, Mel'nikov a researcher at the Institute of World Economic and International Relations (IMEMO) and Arbatov director of the Institute for USA and Canada. For more data on these officials and their possible role in the intra-Soviet discussions on German policy, see below, the chapter on Soviet domestic politics and the German problem.

The impression in Bonn about impending policy changes in Moscow's German policy was reinforced by remarks made by CPSU Central Committee advisor and German expert Portugalov. The parliamentary elections in West Germany in January 1987, in his view, had revealed a 'concrete and dynamic process of [rising] national self-confidence among the West Germans'.<sup>715</sup> This process was taking place 'not only among revanchist, chauvinist, and military circles and a hard-line steel helmet (*Stahlhelm*) faction in the CDU/CSU alliance. It could also be noted among left and liberal forces.' In their view, 'West German national confidence and legitimate national pride should be in harmony with the postwar realities of Europe.' Portugalov even called the representatives of this view 'patriots', who recognized that today's Germans still had to bear responsibility for Hitler's crimes. He *de facto* rejected the idea advanced by Honecker at the East German SED Party Congress in 1971 that the GDR had become a separate German nation. 'Certainly, for all Germans, including socially progressive West Germans', he argued, '*the people of the GDR will always be Germans who belong to one and the same nation.*'<sup>716</sup>

Portugalov, however, was far from diagnosing, let alone advocating, reunification. He attributed to 'left and liberal Germans' the idea that 'life of the Germans as one nation could only be achieved within the context of two independent and sovereign states with different political systems'. In a follow-up article, he predicted the expansion of German-German relations within this framework and finally the construction and completion of the Common European Home. One could, for example, 'imagine without any difficulty that the citizens of both of the sovereign and independent "German apartments" would live in their own way yet maintain close relations with one another, particularly since they speak a common language.' He predicted that 'the time will finally come to terminate the foreign military quartering in the apartments of the central part of the home.'<sup>717</sup>

There was also no change in the Soviet position on the Berlin problem – Gorbachev's ruling on 'minimum contact' was extended to that city. As if in preparation for his twice-postponed visit to West Germany, Honecker appeared keen to accept an invitation by the West Berlin senate to take

---

715 *Moskovskie novosti*, 2 February 1987; Portugalov's views on the German issue were cited in the German press, including *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 February 1987.

716 *Ibid.* (italics mine).

717 *Neue Zeit*, No. 22 (May 1987), pp. 10-12.



part in the city's 750th anniversary celebrations. Shortly before the visit was to take place, in April 1987, the East German party leader declined the invitation.<sup>718</sup> Did Honecker yet again yield to a Soviet veto? There is no direct evidence to that effect. However, Vadim Medvedev, the head of the CPSU Central Committee Secretariat responsible for relations with the ruling communist parties, clarified what *he* at least thought of the celebrations. Speaking at the party congress of the Unity Party of West Berlin (SEW) in mid-May 1987, he deplored that the events in West Berlin were being 'abused for propaganda purposes to spread outdated slogans and revanchist ideas' and that Bonn and West Berlin apparently regarded the city as a 'kind of Trojan horse of the West in the socialist East'.<sup>719</sup> Surely, no decent person would have wanted to lend support to such purposes.

As the attacks against Bonn and West Berlin demonstrated, Gorbachev's professed desire to see a 'new page' opened in Soviet-West German relations was counteracted and contradicted by phraseology from the rubbish bin of Soviet history. He himself failed to open a new page when President von Weizsäcker, accompanied by Genscher, visited the Soviet Union from 6 to 11 July 1987.

### German Unity: 'In a Hundred Years'?

In the year after Genscher's talks in Moscow, Gorbachev had refused to receive any high-ranking representative of the Federal Republic. Given the federal president's high international standing, his sensitivity to the damage done to Germany's image because of the Second World War and his commitment to German-Russian reconciliation, the opportunity presented itself to break the ice in Soviet-West German relations. The chance was used only up to a point. To the extent that cordiality characterized the conversations between Gorbachev and von Weizsäcker, this was probably a tribute to the visitor's reputation and an indication of the mutual compatibility of personality rather than the 'opening of a new page' in Soviet-West German relations. There is a reflection of this in Gorbachev's memoirs where he acknowledges that the German president had 'very cautious-

---

718 Honecker's refusal to attend the anniversary celebrations was 'approved' by the SED Politburo on 14 April 1987 (see SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2/2214) and published in *Neues Deutschland* on the same day.

719 Quoted in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 May 1987.

ly and tactfully touched upon the question of the unity of the German nation'.<sup>720</sup> Yet Genscher's account is also credible. 'The conversation between Federal President von Weizsäcker and General Secretary Gorbachev was occasionally quite pointed, in fact, at times harsh.'<sup>721</sup>

Genscher's characterization of the talks is to some extent confirmed also by the account Gorbachev has provided in his memoirs. In reply to von Weizsäcker's evident wish to raise the topic of German unity, he (Gorbachev) had said:

Today, the two German states are a reality from which one must proceed. The [1970] Moscow treaty and [West Germany's] treaties with Poland, Czechoslovakia and the GDR as well as with other states are also a reality. It is on this basis that the effective development of political, economic, cultural and human contacts is possible. Any attempts to undermine these treaties, however, must be sharply condemned. The Soviet Union respects the post-war realities and respects the German people in the FRG and the Germans in the GDR. It is on this basis that we intend to build our relations in the future. *History will give its judgment in the future.*<sup>722</sup>

What is missing in the memoirs – understandably, given the achievement of German unification within little more than three years – is what Gorbachev thought about the likely time-frame in which history might decide the question of German unity. That time frame was 'a hundred years'. Soviet ambassador Kvitsinsky and German ambassador Blech both confirm that this was indeed the time horizon that was mentioned by Gorbachev.<sup>723</sup> Von Weizsäcker expressed disappointment about the relegation of the issue to an almost indefinite future.<sup>724</sup> A TASS report issued after the meeting also contains the reference to a hundred years, and it conveys the harshness remembered by Genscher.<sup>725</sup>

---

720 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 152.

721 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 543. The terms Genscher used were *deutlich* and *hart*.

722 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 152 (italics in original). The term used is *nas rassudit*, literally, history 'will judge between us' or 'will judge who is right'. Erroneously, the memoirs refer to June as the month in which Gorbachev made this statement.

723 Interviews with Kvitsinsky and Blech; see also Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, p. 421.

724 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 544.

725 According to the report by the Soviet news agency TASS, when the West German president raised the issue of 'one German nation', Gorbachev replied that he did not wish to 'theorize' about the topic. To him, only 'the political aspect, the exist-

How is one to interpret Gorbachev's remarks to von Weizsäcker? One way is to emphasize that Gorbachev considered the German problem to be unresolved – *eine offene Frage*, as the German adherents of the interpretation of a significant change in the Soviet stance went on record. In their assessment, by saying that history would decide, Gorbachev proceeded from the idea that there *was* something to be decided – an obvious deviation from the position the Soviet Union had stubbornly adhered to from Khrushchev to Chernenko and apparently a basis for talks and even negotiations. This fit squarely into Genscher's overall approach towards the new Soviet leader and his new foreign policy slogans. The West had no reason meekly to shun talks and negotiations, the West German foreign minister stated in a speech in Davos on 1 February 1987.

Our motto can only be: Let us take Gorbachev seriously; let us take him at his word. ... Let us not sit there with folded arms and wait what Gorbachev will present to us! Let us rather try to influence developments, to advance and shape them.<sup>726</sup>

In July 1987, however, Gorbachev's glass was not even half full regarding the German problem. It contained only a few drops of stale political rhetoric. By handing to impersonal and unpredictable 'history', and in a ridiculously long time frame, the responsibility for solving what he, at least openly, did not even recognize as a problem, he *de facto* rejected the idea that any initiative was required. European statesmen in that view could comfortably sit back and see what might happen in a century.

---

tence of two German states with different socio-economic systems', was relevant. What things would look like 'in a hundred years, history will decide'. If, furthermore, one could 'hear time and again' that the "'German problem" remains open', this gave rise to doubt as to whether the Federal Government was still thinking about adhering to the 1970 Moscow treaty; TASS report, as published in *Pravda*, 8 July 1987. – The tougher, that is, the Genscher and TASS version of what the Soviet party leader told von Weizsäcker, is also contained in his book, Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie*, pp. 208-10. The elaborations there, however, are not characterized as a direct response to what the West German president had said but as general reflections arising from the conversation. – Falin asserts that 'I recommended to the General Secretary to delete the half a century [sic]. The reference to history would have been enough. He did not accept this advice.' Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen*, pp. 483-84. There is, however, no confirmation by anyone that the time frame of fifty years had ever been mentioned by Gorbachev.

726 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 527.

This interpretation is corroborated by the possible origin of Gorbachev's 'history will decide' phrase. In April 1986, Gorbachev had told Honecker about a conversation he had had with Egon Bahr. The SPD leader, according to Gorbachev, had stated that '*today's existence of two German states is advantageous for peace*' and that everything else would '*be decided by history*' – a phrase which to the Soviet leader showed how 'cunning' the social democrats really are<sup>727</sup> but which he found convenient enough to adopt as his own position.

Gorbachev's book *Perestroika*, which went to the publisher in June 1988, confirms the interpretation that he was averse to taking any initiative on the German problem. Even in retrospect, taking the conversations with von Weizsäcker as a point of departure, he scathingly called 'all these declarations on the restoration of "German unity" far removed from *Realpolitik*, to use the German term.' No matter what Reagan and other politicians were saying, the West could

not make the FRG a realistic offer on the so-called [sic] "German problem". What had developed historically should also be left to history. [The crux of the matter was] the existence of two German states with different social and political systems. ... Both [states] could make a contribution to the cause of Europe and the world. What would be in a hundred years, history would decide.<sup>728</sup>

Gorbachev's unwillingness substantially to revise Moscow's position on the 'so-called' German problem was underscored also by scathing Soviet press reports<sup>729</sup> and by Soviet leaders other than the Kremlin chief. Perhaps predictably, the attitudes of disapproval and condescension were most pronounced in the treatment of the von Weizsäcker visit by Gromyko, who by that time had been shunted from the post of foreign minister to the largely ceremonial position of president of the Soviet Union. Putting West Germany on the defensive on *moral* issues, at a diplomatic reception on 8 July 1987, he charged that Bonn was guilty of sheltering war criminals who had committed atrocities in the Soviet Union, handed to the German president a corresponding list of such persons 'still living in freedom', demanded their extradition and expressed his hoped that would

---

727 Transcript of talks between Gorbachev and Honecker on 20 April 1986 in East Berlin, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, Büro Honecker, 41666 (italics mine).

728 Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie*, p. 209.

729 For instance, *Pravda*, 8 July 1987.

take appropriate action. Regarding the *Berlin problem*, he asserted that there were countries that wanted 'to use West Berlin as a detonation charge and a source of provocation in Europe'; the Federal Republic apparently had to be admonished so that it would strictly adhere to the existing 'agreement on West [sic] Berlin'. Concerning *military* affairs, he still decried Bonn's position on intermediate range nuclear missiles and warned the coalition government not to insist on the stationing of Pershing missiles on its soil. Finally, concerning Bonn's stated desire for an improvement of *political* relations and cooperation in *economic, technical, and cultural* matters, Gromyko expected the German side to show the same 'spirit of favorable disposition with due observance of mutual interests' as displayed by the Soviet Union.<sup>730</sup>

The von Weizsäcker visit, then, was *not* a turning point in Soviet-West German relations. Gorbachev confirmed this publicly. In reference to Genscher's visit in the preceding year, he said that agreement 'seemed [sic] to have been reached on "opening a new page" in the relations between the two countries'. However, the page had 'remained empty'. Alluding to the Goebbels remark, he continued that 'at one time there was even a threat that [the book] would be closed. Fortunately, this did not happen.'<sup>731</sup>

Privately, too, Gorbachev had not revised his negative image of West Germany. His attitude of superpower arrogance and condescension toward that country persisted. This can be demonstrated, among other things, by the following event: Gromyko had invited von Weizsäcker to an official luncheon. Speeches were given on that occasion. When *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* appeared on the following day, however, important sections of the West German president's speech had been excised. This included von Weizsäcker's references to Kant and Königsberg; the existence of an all-German national consciousness; the wish of the Germans to be united in free self-determination; and pleas for liberalized emigration procedures for ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the pattern of censorship set during Genscher's visit one year earlier was repeated and, as on the previous occasion, it was decidedly not the result of standard operating procedures but occurred upon authorization by the top political leadership. Immediately after the banquet, Gromyko, She-

---

730 *Pravda*, 9 July 1987. As for Gromyko's warning on the Berlin problem, an agreement on *West* Berlin was never concluded. All four-power agreements applied to Berlin as a whole.

731 *Pravda*, 8 July 1987.

vardnadze, Yakovlev, and Ryzhkov had discussed the problem. The latter three advocated publication of the full text. Earlier speeches by Thatcher and Mitterrand had, after all, been published unabridged. But Gromyko disagreed and left the meeting, sulking. He then called Gorbachev and successfully persuaded him to authorize the cuts. Gromyko then gave ambassador Kvitsinsky instructions 'to delete those parts which "the Soviet people dislike"'. Chernyaev was courageous enough to call Gorbachev and tell him that the cuts had been a mistake. Gorbachev answered angrily: 'I don't care. *You have to treat the Germans that way. They love order – Ordnung!*'<sup>732</sup>

Until October 1988, in accordance with Gorbachev's persisting negative perceptions of West Germany, examples of change in Moscow's policies continued to be scarce or lacking altogether. In 1987, the number of emigrants of German descent from the Soviet Union did rise considerably as compared to the previous year, from less than 1,000 to 14,000 persons. At the beginning of that year, cooperation agreements on nuclear energy, health care, and research in agriculture were signed by German cabinet ministers Heinz Riesenhuber and Rita Süßmuth, and Soviet deputy prime minister Vsevolod Murakhovsky. When agreement was reached in Washington in December 1987 on the dismantling of intermediate range nuclear weapons, Moscow was polite enough to praise West Germany for its contribution to that success.<sup>733</sup> The prime ministers of Bavaria, Franz-Joseph Strauß, and Baden-Württemberg, Lothar Späth, visited Moscow in December 1987 and February 1988, respectively. There was some, although not much traffic in the other direction. Dobrynin visited Bonn at the beginning of October 1987, as did Shevardnadze in mid-January 1988. On the latter occasion, some more agreements were signed. These applied to political consultation at governmental level, the establishment of consulates general in Kiev and Munich, and long-term economic cooperation.

Yet the ambiguities and contradictory attitudes towards Bonn also continued. In his meeting with Späth, Gorbachev provided the usual rationale for the necessity of change in the Soviet approach to West Germany – and *vice versa*. Moscow, he claimed, had reconsidered its relationship with

---

732 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 155 (italics mine).

733 Gorbachev intimated this for the first time in his article about world security in *Pravda*, 17 September 1987; see also Shevardnadze's press conferences in Washington, 18 November 1987, *BPA Ostinformationen*, No. 179, 21 November 1987, and Geneva, *ibid.*, 26 November 1987.

Bonn because, without an independent European role, international relations could never be freed 'from the military strategic constraints of security' and, in turn, a new role for Europe could not be imagined 'without the FRG and an improvement in its relations with the USSR'. It was encouraging, therefore, that the time of 'hostility and estrangement' between the two countries was receding into the past and that 'the century-old linkages between our peoples and cultures are being restored'. But he also warned Bonn that it would commit a grave mistake if it tried to circumvent the Washington agreement on the removal of intermediate range weapons by arms 'compensations' – an obvious reference to the Pershing IA issue.<sup>734</sup> Furthermore, he reproached the German government for having reacted with 'hesitation and vacillation' to appeals from Moscow for more extended cooperation.<sup>735</sup>

But hesitation and vacillation were more characteristic of Moscow's attitudes. Thus, Dobrynin's speech on 8 October 1987 in Bonn at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, a research foundation under the auspices of the SPD, contained nothing more than relatively general and noncommittal phrases on German issues. As if the notion of the Common European House had not remained diffuse enough, it was blurred even further by his wish for cooperation in 'our common home, the planet earth'!<sup>736</sup> To the disappointment of those who had expected Dobrynin's visit to produce an announcement concerning a visit by Gorbachev to Bonn, nothing was said on that matter. In January 1988, in talks between Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze a 'possible meeting' between the chancellor and the General Secretary was discussed again. But to little avail. Bonn acknowledged that any decision on the visit would be taken only 'in the second half of the year'.<sup>737</sup>

Disregarding customary diplomatic protocol and considerations of prestige, the German chancellor nevertheless took the initiative and visited Moscow in October 1988. On that occasion, the Soviet position of principle was again stated without ambiguity. Gorbachev rejected the West Ger-

---

734 The Pershing IA missile was considered to be a short-range nuclear system and its deployment, so the argument went, would not have been a violation of the INF treaty.

735 Gorbachev, see fn. 733.

736 Text of his speech according to the official press release by the Soviet embassy in Bonn.

737 Information provided to this author by government officials in Bonn.

man idea that the status of (West) Berlin should be improved and that it should be made the touchstone of Soviet-West German relations. Regarding larger issues, he complained that he had already '*spoken several times about the so-called [sic] "German problem"*' but that the matter apparently still needed clarification: '*The current situation is the result of history. Attempts at overturning what has been created by it or to force things by an unrealistic policy are an incalculable and even dangerous endeavor.*'<sup>738</sup>

Kohl's visit nevertheless was a time when Gorbachev realized that the relations with West Germany could not remain forever at the 'minimum contact' level. Chernyaev even thought that a 'turning point' in the relationship had been reached.<sup>739</sup> On 23 October, when Gorbachev and Chernyaev had discussed the materials for the upcoming summit meeting, the latter had expressed the following concern:

I assess the situation as follows. 'The country (FRG) is willing to support us energetically but he (Kohl) is not.' Gorbachev answered: 'It is the opposite with us. The leadership is willing but the country is not.'<sup>740</sup>

Personality factors played a large role. The chemistry between the two leaders ultimately turned out to be more compatible, and Kohl appeared much more flexible and sensitive to Soviet interests than Gorbachev had expected. Soon after the meeting, in Chernyaev's opinion, 'mutual trust [between Kohl and Gorbachev] increased rapidly and they moved to a first name basis.'<sup>741</sup> Equally important, the leaders' personal aides, Chernyaev and Horst Teltschik, had a strikingly similar psychological and political make-up. Both of them approached politics without ideological preconceptions and stereotypes and both of them were conscious of this very fact. Writing in reference to the October 1988 talks, Chernyaev observed in retrospect:

We sat opposite each other [in the Kremlin], and I looked the chancellor's extraordinary advisor in the eye. He was a man with a sharp practical sense who played an important role in German politics at the time, in particular with regard to Soviet-German rapprochement. Our press and the foreign ministry of-

---

738 At the dinner speech of 24 October 1988, *Pravda*, 25 October 1988 (italics mine).

739 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 261.

740 Ibid.

741 Ibid.



officials [had] painted a rather 'unpleasant' picture of this official but as in so many other cases that proved to be wrong.<sup>742</sup>

Teltschik, in turn, has attributed the same non-ideological outlook, sharp intellect, and keen practical sense to his counterpart.<sup>743</sup> When the time arrived for Moscow to abandon previous principles and preferences and deal with the practical issues of united Germany's status and role in Europe, the smooth working relationship between these officials proved to be of considerable importance.

Several agreements were signed during the October 1988 visit – on cooperation in space, environmental protection, prevention of accidents at sea, food processing, construction of a high-temperature nuclear reactor, and cultural programs. The most important agreement signed, however, was that on the extension of a credit of 3 billion Deutschmarks. On 17 October, after five months of negotiations, a consortium of West German banks led by the Deutsche Bank and the Soviet Bank for Foreign Trade finalized the agreement. The loan was a low-interest commercial credit to be used for the modernisation of the Soviet light and food industry. Despite the fact that the credit was not guaranteed by the West German government, it had encouraged and facilitated the deal. Its political importance was underlined by the fact that it was officially signed during Kohl's Moscow visit.<sup>744</sup>

---

742 Ibid., pp. 261-62; interviews with Chernyaev. I very much share these perceptions. I've known Teltschik since my student days at the Freie Universität Berlin in the late 1960s. When he was Kohl's personal assistant, I was a senior research associate at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. During that time, we exchanged views on German-Soviet relations and, more specifically, cooperated on the content and wording of the Soviet-West German Joint Declaration of June 1989.

743 Interview with Teltschik. Despite the friction that was to develop between Gorbachev and Chernyaev on the one hand, and Falin on the other, the latter was to acknowledge in an interview in 1993: 'Chernyaev was a genius and definitely a sincere and very honest person [who] developed his own ... ideas in his work [as advisor to Gorbachev] and made sure that speeches and documents would be written properly'; interview series conducted by Ekkehard Kuhn, *id.*, *Gorbatschow und die deutsche Einheit*, p. 97.

744 Information as supplied by Deutsche Bank officials in Moscow in October 1988; see also *Handelsblatt*, 10 October 1988, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 October 1988, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 October 1988. It is characteristic for an emerging pattern of West German and, later, united Germany's determination to support economic reform in the Soviet Union but Moscow's inability to use it

For reasons to be explained in the next chapter, the credit accord was connected with a shift in Gorbachev's perceptions of the relative role of the two Germanies and the fate of perestroika. Contrary to his praise of the GDR's achievements in the private conversations with Honecker, it was beginning to dawn on Gorbachev that he had gravely overestimated the importance of East Germany or, for that matter, of the Soviet bloc, for the modernisation of the Soviet economy.

## 8. Gorbachev and Eastern Europe: Decline of the Will to Empire

Chernyaev has described Gorbachev's attitudes and policies towards Eastern Europe as follows.

It seems to me that at first subconsciously and then consciously he considered the role [of the Soviet Union] as the 'leading and directing force of socialism' to be a burden. It interfered with his embarking with full sincerity upon a world policy in line with the New Thinking.<sup>745</sup>

The only thing that Gorbachev hoped for, he continues, was to be understood and that the East European party leaders would embark upon changes akin to what he was trying to do in the Soviet Union. He 'did not have any particular interest in the socialist community' and 'maintained contacts with the leaders of the socialist countries without any particular interest, only grudgingly agreed to visits, and was clearly disinclined to demonstrate a "leading role"'.<sup>746</sup>

This disinclination increased over time. As Georgi Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's advisor on East European affairs, has stated, three stages can be distinguished in Soviet relations with Eastern Europe.<sup>747</sup> In the first stage, in 1985-1966, 'there were hardly any changes; [our policy] remained within the traditional framework and was carried out by relying on conventional and ingrained methods, even though the dynamic personality of the new

---

productively and efficiently that by mid-March 1989 *not a single Pfennig of the available DM 3 billion had been called up*. Leonid Abalkin, one of the chief economic advisors to Gorbachev, confirmed this to the author at the first session of the newly founded German-Soviet Forum, 13-15 March 1989.

745 Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 81-82.

746 Ibid.

747 Georgi K. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody. Reformatsiia Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchni-ka* (Moscow: Rossika, Zevs, 1993), p. 100.

leader here, too, injected some original elements'. The second stage, 1987-1988, was marked by the impact of perestroika on the relationship. But this did not occur as a result of a deliberate attempt by Gorbachev to put pressure on the dependencies and impose his will. 'On the contrary, ... he thought that changes were entirely the subject of the sovereign choice of the parties and peoples.' The third stage, in 1989, was characterized by a sharp decline in the intensity of cooperation, the rupture of the bonds of the socialist community and leading ultimately to the dissolution of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. The new governments which replaced the communist regimes in Eastern Europe

began to orient themselves towards the West, and the Soviet leadership, in the conditions of a mounting crisis in the country and occupied by acute forms of political struggle, had neither the strength nor the means to counteract this [development].<sup>748</sup>

To use the present conceptual framework and terminology, it would seem that Gorbachev's vision was the restructuring of Soviet-East European relations from the Kremlin's imperial domination to benevolent and mutually advantageous hegemony. This vision existed irrespective of whether he lacked awareness or was purposely denying that he was presiding over a repressive imperial construct. As mentioned above, Gorbachev – in conversation with Havel – resented the characterization of the relationship with Czechoslovakia as colonial.<sup>749</sup> Even in retrospect, his terminology on Soviet relations with Eastern Europe remained euphemistic and apologetic. Generalizing about the difficulty of restructuring these relations, he writes:

Stubborn resistance in the system of the socialist community had to be overcome – a system that, since the Stalin, era had hardly experienced change. Only the forms, the decorum so to speak, had become more decent. The essence and the methods, however, with some rare exceptions, had remained the same. ... The [Soviet] cadres were, after all, used to a certain style. It took a long time until they renounced arrogance and conceit towards the *allies*.

He also deplored that 'the inertia of *paternalism* made itself felt for a long time'.<sup>750</sup>

---

748 Ibid.

749 On the conversation with Havel see *supra*, pp. 36-37.

750 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, pp. 312-13 (italics mine).

As defined earlier, however, an imperial or colonial relationship is more than an alliance and governed by more than benevolent paternalism. It is characterized by the penetration of the internal system and control over the domestic and foreign policy of the dependencies.<sup>751</sup> This had been the nature of the relationship between the center and the periphery in the Soviet bloc prior to Gorbachev's ascent to power. The major difference between Gorbachev and his predecessors in the Kremlin was his gradual *loss of will* to maintain the imperial relationship. His goal, to use a term much decried in the West in the mid-1970s, was the establishment of an 'organic' relationship between the centre and the satellites.<sup>752</sup> It was to be a hegemonial system that would not have to be based on the threat or use of force in order to keep unpopular communist governments in power.<sup>753</sup>

Concerning the use of force, Shevardnadze has written that, after the April 1985 CC plenum that ushered in the Gorbachev era, 'military interference [in the socialist countries] was completely ruled out'.<sup>754</sup> This decision raised the question of the continued presence of Soviet armed forces in the area.

Our military presence in Eastern Europe was questioned long before the start of events in 1989-90. And it was not just the governments that came to power in those years that demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops, but their predecessors [had done so] as well. Some of them told us in strictest confidence, using very cautious formulations, that the continued presence of Soviet troops in their countries would create serious problems for them. It would be better

---

751 See above, pp. 41-46.

752 In December 1975, at a conference of American ambassadors, U.S. State Department advisor Helmut Sonnenfeldt had stated that the relationship between the USSR and Eastern Europe was 'unnatural'. The United States should 'strive for an evolution that makes [that] relationship ... an *organic* one'. Washington should support the 'visible aspirations in Eastern Europe for a more autonomous existence *within the context of a strong Soviet geopolitical influence*'; 'State Department Summary of Remarks by Sonnenfeldt', *New York Times*, 6 April 1976 (italics mine). This definition of American policies came to be called the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.

753 Support for this assessment can also be found in a conversation between Gorbachev and Vadim Medvedev shortly after the appointment of the latter to the post of chief of the Socialist Countries Department in March 1986. Interference in the internal affairs of these countries had to stop and a fresh look at the problems that had accumulated was necessary, Gorbachev told Medvedev; see Medvedev, *Raspad*, pp. 7-8.

754 Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*, p. 206.

for us to take steps ourselves in this direction, they said, than to be forced later to move in haste under the pressure of events.<sup>755</sup>

In the summer of 1987, Yakovlev had specifically raised the question of Soviet troop withdrawals from *East Germany* in a conversation with ambassador Kochemasov. ‘What do you think, isn’t the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany too large? What would happen if we were to accede to its – even unilateral – reduction?’<sup>756</sup> It is doubtful, however, that a formal decision was ever taken on the matter of military intervention. It is more likely that the general aversion to the use of force in Eastern Europe evolved in conjunction with an emerging consensus among Gorbachev and his advisors in 1985-88 that the reapplication of such methods would destroy the credibility of the New Thinking and seriously damage relations with the United States and Western Europe.<sup>757</sup>

To provide some detail about the evolution of Gorbachev’s attitudes and policies in the first phase of the process, there is no evidence that he was disinterested in the fate of the Soviet bloc. On the contrary, he attempted to achieve much closer cooperation and coordination among its members. This was apparent in the line he adopted at the Warsaw Pact summit conferences in the first two years of his tenure of office as Soviet party chief. This included his role at the meetings of the alliance in Moscow in March 1985, informally convened on the occasion of Chernenko’s funeral; in Warsaw in April 1985, scheduled in order to renew the Warsaw Treaty for another twenty years; in Sofia in October; in Moscow in December, to discuss economic cooperation; and in Budapest in June 1986.

Gorbachev’s intentions were clearly stated at the first ordinary summit in Sofia, where he emphasized the need for more coordination and expressed the thought that there was ‘general agreement’ among the participants that Warsaw Pact summit meetings should ‘take place not less than once a year’.<sup>758</sup> He also suggested that cooperation should be made more effective by instituting the practice of sessions restricted to the party first secretaries, the idea being that ‘each comrade could present the considera-

---

755 Ibid.

756 Kotschemassow, *Meine letzte Mission*, pp. 62-63.

757 Interview with Tarasenko.

758 Gorbachev’s speech at the Warsaw Pact summit meeting in Sofia, 22 October 1985, SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2811.

tions dear to his heart'.<sup>759</sup> The meetings should proceed 'without an agenda'.<sup>760</sup> Kádár agreed and called the meetings a particularly appropriate forum for the consideration of economic issues, including basic structural changes in CMEA since its institutions were 'relatively independent and not very effective'; if the first secretaries agreed on any particular question 'this would carry at least as much weight as the decision of any other body'.<sup>761</sup>

Gorbachev's idea reflects a certain amount of naïveté. Considering the career patterns as well as the psychological and political make-up of the majority of the participants and the long history of secrecy and distrust among them, it was strange to assume that glasnost would suddenly arise and permeate the small circle of the chosen few. Leaders like Jaruzelski and Kádár did not need the restricted forum because they were prone to address issues irrespective of the venue in which they appeared. In contrast, leaders such as Ceaușescu, Honecker, Husák and Zhivkov, all of them disinclined to show their cards, would hardly be swayed suddenly by a new forum and engage in glasnost. In fact, a cursory comparison of the content of the leaders' public speeches and their remarks in the restricted meetings reveals no significant discrepancies between the public and the private stance. Gorbachev's presentation at the closed session in Sofia was even *less* open and controversial, and more conservative, than his public statement. Perhaps to the surprise of his colleagues, he declared communism still to be the goal of the CPSU. The Soviet Union, he told them, was engaged in constructing 'mature socialism' (Brezhnev had invented this term), and the important thing now was to advance towards 'the highest stage, that of the communist social formation'. When exactly this goal

---

759 Opening remarks at a closed session of first party secretaries at the June 1986 Warsaw Pact summit conference in Budapest; see the protocol on the restricted meeting of the party chiefs of the Warsaw Pact member countries, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/2896.

760 Protocol of the closed session of first party secretaries at the PCC meeting in Sofia on 23 October 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/2811.

761 Kádár, final remarks at a closed session of first party secretaries at the June 1986 Warsaw Pact summit conference in Budapest; see the protocol on the restricted meeting of the party chiefs of the Warsaw Pact member countries, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, J IV 2/2A/2896.

would be achieved, he thought, was difficult to say. This was ‘not a question of arithmetic but of politics’.<sup>762</sup>

At the summit meeting in Warsaw, Gorbachev had used the catchwords for Soviet intervention – the claim that relations in the bloc were ‘based on the full equality and comradely mutual assistance of sovereign states’ and the ‘principle of socialist internationalism’.<sup>763</sup> In fairness, however, he cannot be blamed for the notorious article that appeared in *Pravda* three months later under the pseudonym of Vladimirov.<sup>764</sup> The article, written by Oleg Rakhmanin, the deputy head of the CC department for the relations with the ruling communist parties, contained all of the stereotypes of ‘socialist internationalism’, ‘common interests of the socialist community’, and ‘observance of the fundamental principles of socialist economic management’, and it viciously attacked ‘anti-communist theoreticians and opportunists’, ‘revisionist, nationalist, and clerical concepts’, ‘national models of socialism’ and ideas about the specific nature and special role of individual members of the socialist community. ‘Did you know’, Gorbachev asked Konstantin Rusakov, the head of the department, in the Politburo meeting of 29 June 1985, ‘that this kind of article [was] prepared in your department? The author is Rakhmanin, your second in command.’ Rusakov claimed that he had not known. ‘And you’, turning to Zimyanin, the CC’s secretary for propaganda, ‘did you know that this article was received by *Pravda*, the central organ of the Central Committee?’ Again the answer was no. ‘And you’, he asked Yuri Afanasyev, the *Pravda* editor-in-chief, ‘didn’t you understand what you were doing? Why didn’t you send it to the Politburo or at least to the [CC] Secretariat?’ Afanasyev mumbled something in defense about Rakhmanin’s influence and powers of persuasion.<sup>765</sup> The editor-in-chief could also have argued in his defense that Gorbachev’s own – at least his publicly stated – views on Soviet-East Euro-

---

762 Statement by Gorbachev at the closed session of first party secretaries at the PCC meeting in Sofia, 23 October 1985, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2811.

763 *Pravda*, 28 April 1985.

764 *Ibid.*, 21 June 1985.

765 Politburo proceedings of 29 June 1985, as quoted by Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 50. Chernyaev errs concerning the month. The Vladimirov article was published in 21 June. The Politburo meeting took place on 29 June, not in July. In his memoirs, Medvedev criticized Rakhmanin as having been ‘hopelessly wedded to the stereotypes of the past’; Medvedev, *Raspas*, p. 23.

pean relations were at that time conservative enough for such an article not to be out of place.

Gorbachev's approach of non-interference and disinclination to involve himself actively in the affairs of Eastern Europe emerged more clearly in the second stage of the center-periphery relationship. A crucial juncture in the process of reconsideration of the relations, as he himself has written, was the Central Committee plenum of January 1987 that introduced democratization and broadened openness.<sup>766</sup> This meeting heralded a fundamental and, as it turned out, fateful shift from economic to political reform in the Soviet Union. It increased differentiation in the bloc or, more to the point, sharply divided its members. It also shaped Gorbachev's attitudes and policies towards individual leaders and countries, depending on the degree to which they were prepared to follow the Soviet lead.

Honecker, as noted, had made his 'reservations' about Soviet domestic developments known as early as the preceding year; how he reacted subsequently will be explored below in detail. Romania's Ceaușescu, as Gorbachev deplored, 'declared unambiguously that he could agree with what was said at the [January 1987 CC] plenary meeting; the CPSU was entering upon a dangerous path'. Zhivkov adopted a contradictory stance. On the one hand, he rejected the new approach but, on the other hand, thought that it did not go far enough: 'Reorganizing the political system of his country with all its mechanisms of economic administration and management [but failing to introduce] real democratization, would require unfettered public opinion.' Czechoslovakia's Husák, according to Gorbachev, 'displayed common sense and circumspection'. His reactions, for the most part, were positive but 'the practice of the C[ommunist] P[arty] was determined mainly by [Vasil'] Bi'lak, [Jan] Fojtík, and [Miloš] Jakeš [party leader after 1987], who still vividly remembered [the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia in] 1968 and therefore didn't think about "loosening the reins"'. Contrary to that, Hungary's Kádár 'wholeheartedly welcomed the changes in the Soviet Union since they presented him with the opportunity to proceed more consistently' with reform. Poland's Jaruzelski, too, endorsed the changes in the Soviet Union because they reinforced his reformist course in Poland and because 'he knew very well that the

---

766 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 318.



problems of any country cannot be solved by the method of force – at least not the basic ones.<sup>767</sup>

Medvedev has observed in retrospect that the attitudes of the socialist countries and leaders towards perestroika were ‘the main criterion of differentiation in [their] political positions’.<sup>768</sup> In turn, Gorbachev’s attitudes and behavior towards individual East European countries and leaders were shaped by his awareness of this differentiation, as Chernyaev has explained.<sup>769</sup> The most cordial personal rapport, according to his observations, existed between Gorbachev and Jaruzelski. This was not only a matter of personal compatibility but also because of Gorbachev’s conviction that the Polish leader, by imposing martial law in December 1981, had acted not as a traitor to Poland but as her savior. His policies of ‘socialist renewal’ (*obnovlenie*) preceded and, after Gorbachev’s accession to power, coincided with perestroika. Gorbachev also had a deep respect for Kádár and always had great pleasure communicating with him. Concerning his attitudes towards the Czechoslovak communists, he had ‘a certain amount of respect only for Husák’. His relations with Zhivkov, too, were difficult, partly because the Bulgarian leader arrogated to himself the right to act as doyen of the ‘socialist community’ and partly because of his proclivity for lecturing Gorbachev on both ideological and political questions. His relations with Honecker were also strained. The worst rapport existed between Gorbachev and Ceaușescu, ‘to whom he sometimes referred as the *Führer*’. He ridiculed and contemptuously dismissed his manoeuvres as a nuisance and contrary to *Realpolitik*.<sup>770</sup>

### The Demise of the Brezhnev Doctrine

In practice, then, ideological *Gleichschaltung* and military-political coordination in the bloc were being replaced by a colourful but fading patchwork of bilateral relations. The Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty was being abandoned in favor of what in 1988 came to be called Freedom

---

767 Ibid., pp. 318-19. Gorbachev’s laudations of Jaruzelski and Kádár in his memoirs stand in stark contrast to his bad-mouthing of the Polish and Hungarian reform efforts in his conversations with Honecker; see, for instance, below, p. 351-52.

768 Medvedev, *Raspad*, p. 34.

769 Chernyaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 81-82.

770 Ibid.

of Choice (*svoboda vybora*), which supplemented the concepts of the New Thinking and the Common House of Europe and transformed the Soviet role in Europe. Gorbachev and his closest advisers and colleagues were later to convey the notion that this principle existed and was communicated to the East European party leaderships and peoples at the very beginning of his rule. This, however, was not the case. The principle began to take root firmly, and essentially only in the mind of Gorbachev and his closest advisers, at the second stage of Soviet-East European relations. Uncertainty about likely Soviet reactions in case of anti-communist and anti-Soviet upheavals persisted until 1989.

To trace the application of the new principle to bloc relations, at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February-March 1986, Gorbachev refrained from mentioning socialist internationalism or any of the other code words for Soviet interventionism. Instead, he emphasized 'unconditional respect in international practice for the right of every people to choose the paths and forms of its development' and averred that 'unity has nothing in common with uniformity, with a hierarchy'.<sup>771</sup> At the February 1988 Central Committee plenum, at the Nineteenth Party Conference in June 1988 and in his speech on 7 December 1988 at the United Nations, Gorbachev elaborated on the new concept. For the Soviet Union, he said, 'the obligation of the principle of freedom of choice is above every doubt. Freedom of choice is a general principle which does not know any exceptions.'<sup>772</sup> Several specialists at the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System and in Central Committee Departments were even more radical in their break with past approaches, denouncing 'methods of domination', 'great power ambitions' as well as 'hegemonial pretensions' and, in a direct attack against the Brezhnev doctrine, denied that 'respect for national sovereignty could be subordinated to some higher principle governing their relations – that of unity'.<sup>773</sup>

---

771 Speech by Gorbachev at the Twenty-seventh party congress, *Pravda*, 26 February 1986.

772 Speech by Gorbachev to the UN, *Pravda*, 8 December 1988.

773 Yurii Novopashin, 'Politicheskie otnosheniia stran sotsializma', *Rabochii klass i sovremennii mir*, No. 5 (September 1985), pp. 55-65. Details about this and other criticism by academic specialists and Central Committee officials of the imperial Soviet approach to Eastern Europe and the Brezhnev doctrine as provided by Karen Dawisha, *Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform: The Great Challenge*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 201-205.

Yet there were several reasons why, in 1985-88, skepticism was warranted among Eastern European leaders, parties and citizens about the scope and durability of Soviet adherence to the principle of non-intervention.<sup>774</sup> First, it was unclear whether Gorbachev would be able to hold on to power for long. Whereas his supporters in the Soviet Union were concerned that perestroika would turn into *perestrel'ka* (mass execution by the firing squad, liberally translated), reactionaries in the bloc like Czech Politburo member Vasil' Bil'ak were saying: 'Let's wait and see! Ultimately, those who let themselves get carried away by perestroika will break their necks. New people will then appear.'<sup>775</sup>

Second, even if Gorbachev were not replaced by a coup, there was no guarantee that he would not yield to hard-line domestic pressures and reverse his permissive stance. Some lessons of the past were perhaps applicable. At the Twentieth CPSU Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev, too, had promulgated such lofty principles as non-interference in the internal affairs of socialist countries, respect for their independence, equality in inter-state and party relations, and the legitimacy of different roads to socialism. The principles notwithstanding, in November 1965 the Soviet Union massively used force to suppress the Hungarian revolution.

Third, it was uncertain what Gorbachev really meant by the 'freedom of choice'. Did that license pertain to *peoples* or only to the communist parties? In his speech in Prague in April 1987, it was evident that he meant the latter: 'We consider the independence of every *party*, its responsibility to the people of its own country and its right to decide the questions of the country's development to be unconditional principles.'<sup>776</sup> In his programmatic 1988 book *Perestroika*, he reiterated that the freedom of choice was limited to the communist parties and their leaders:

The entire framework of political relations between the socialist countries must be strictly based on absolute independence. This is a view held by *the leaders of all fraternal parties*. The independence of each *party*, its sovereign

---

774 An excellent analysis of the ambiguities of Gorbachev's statements and policies within the bloc, which has inspired the present discussion, is Charles Gati, *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 65-103.

775 Gorbachev told Alexander Dubček in Moscow in May 1990 that Bil'ak had made this statement. He (Gorbachev) had heard it in connection with Husák's impending replacement by Jakeš, which took place in December 1987; Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 362.

776 Speech by Gorbachev in Prague, *Pravda*, 11 April 1987 (italics mine).

right to decide the issues facing its country, and its responsibility to the nation are unquestionable principles.<sup>777</sup>

Fourth, although the traditional code words for Soviet intervention had been omitted at the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, they resurfaced subsequently. This applied to terms such as 'socialist community', the 'common interests' and 'common responsibility' of the communist parties, and the requirement of 'unity'. The ominous flavor of interventionist terminology, despite all of the assurances of Soviet non-interference, was contained, for instance, in his speech in Prague.

At the same time [while upholding the right of each party to be independent], we are of the firm conviction that the *community of socialist nations* will be successful only if every party and country is concerned not only about its own interests and only if every party and country treats its friends and allies with respect and is sure to *take their interests into account*.<sup>778</sup>

The same flavor permeates *Perestroika*.

We are also convinced that the socialist community will be successful only if every party and state cares for both its own and *common interests*, if it respects its friends and allies, heeds their interests and pays attention to the experience of others.

Awareness of this relationship between domestic issues and the *interests of world socialism* [is typical of the countries of the socialist community. We are united, *in unity resides our strength*, and from unity] we draw our confidence that we will cope with the issues set forth by our time.<sup>779</sup>

Fifth, there was little uncertainty that in Gorbachev's mind the right of every people or party to choose the paths and forms of its development meant *socialist* development. But what would happen if anti-communist and anti-Soviet forces were to become ascendant and wanted to establish a

---

777 Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie*, p. 170 (italics mine). The book had gone to press in June 1988 and appeared on the bookshelves later in the year.

778 *Pravda*, 11 April 1987 (italics mine).

779 Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie*, p. 170 (italics mine). The text in square brackets is missing in the Russian version but can be found in both the English and German versions of his book. In 1985-88, the code words for interventionism were used quite often. For instance, in his speech commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in November 1987, Gorbachev said that 'we also know what damage can be done by weakening the *internationalist principle of mutual benefit and mutual aid* and by a lack of attention to the *general interests of socialism*'; *Pravda*, 3 November 1987 (italics mine).

multi-party system, abandon central planning, and introduce a market economy? And even if political and socio-economic changes transcending the parameters of Soviet perestroika were deemed acceptable in Moscow, what would be its reaction to demands for an exit from the Warsaw Pact?

Sixth, about 575,000 Soviet troops were still deployed in Eastern Europe – more than 400,000 in East Germany, 75,000 in Czechoslovakia, 65,000 in Hungary and 40,000 in Poland – embedded in an offensive military doctrine.<sup>780</sup> Revision of the doctrine occurred even more haltingly than that of other aspects of theory. The new concepts included ‘reasonable sufficiency’ (*razumnaia dostatochnost’*) of military forces; the superiority, under some conditions, of strategic conventional defense over offense; and the restructuring of the armed forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact towards their mutual ‘structural inability’ to launch a surprise attack. It was not until December 1988, however, that Gorbachev – in his speech at the United Nations – launched a major initiative that would, for the first time since the end of World War II, significantly and *unilaterally* reduce the huge Soviet preponderance in conventional forces in Europe, curtail the Soviet Union’s offensive capabilities and impair the role of the Soviet armed forces as the guardian of Moscow’s imperial position in Eastern Europe.<sup>781</sup>

Six tank divisions of the 28 Soviet tank and motorized rifle divisions based in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were to be disbanded. Fifty thousand troops and 5,000 tanks were to be withdrawn, including assault landing formations and river-crossing units which, in the NATO

---

780 The distribution of troops according to Western estimates; Douglas L. Clarke, ‘Soviet Troop Withdrawals from Eastern Europe’, *Report on Eastern Europe*, (Munich, Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe), 30 March 1990, pp. 41-49; Robert E. Harkavy, *Bases Abroad: The Global Military Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 114-15.

781 *Pravda*, 8 December 1988. Gorbachev had told members of the communist youth organization only several weeks before his speech to the United Nations that unilateral troop reductions were not on the Soviet agenda. ‘You understand, we cannot come along just like that and dissolve (*rasputit’*) our army at a time when all the others maintain an army and arm themselves. To do that would be wrong. We will for that reason set out on the road of reducing armies and armaments [only] together with other states’; *Pravda*, 1 November 1988.

perspective, had been designed for offensive operations in West Germany.<sup>782</sup> Also to be withdrawn from this region were one in four Soviet artillery pieces in Europe and one in eight combat aircraft.<sup>783</sup> An additional 5,000 tanks were to be pulled back from the western Soviet Union. Such measures were a dramatic departure from the prior stubborn Soviet refusal to contemplate anything but symmetrical reductions. They also enhanced confidence that Gorbachev was serious about the achievement of a military balance at lower levels of armament. But even after full implementation of the announced measures in the course of 1989, the strength of the Soviet armed forces in Eastern Europe would remain sufficient for military intervention in the countries concerned if the Kremlin considered such intervention to be necessary.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, in 1985-88 Gorbachev failed to take a step that more than any other would have removed doubt that a clean break with the Soviet Union's imperial past had been made: a clear and unequivocal condemnation of the Warsaw intervention in Czechoslovakia. The opportunity to do so presented itself in April 1987 when the Soviet party leader visited Prague. In his memoirs, he asked: 'What, then, did the year 1968 mean, when [we looked] at it from the perspective of 1987 and 1988? It meant that perestroika had been delayed by twenty years.'<sup>784</sup> Thus, he did ask that question, but only in retrospect, not in 1987 or 1988. In Prague, he said: 'An honest admission of [our] own errors and mistakes and the determination to eliminate them strengthen the prestige of socialism.'<sup>785</sup> Gorbachev made this pertinent observation but only in general. He did not apply it to the Warsaw Pact intervention.

To look more systematically at the problem of the demise of the Brezhnev Doctrine, three possible forms of revision can be distinguished. First, revision could have been initiated by not only calling the intervention – euphemistically – a political mistake but inadmissible in principle and reprehensible on moral grounds. Second, since Soviet forces were still sta-

---

782 As for precise modalities, according to confidential information provided by civilian Soviet arms control experts, the 5,000 tanks to be withdrawn from Eastern Europe were to replace older models in the western parts of the Soviet Union; in this region a total of 10,000 tanks were to be dismantled.

783 The percentages as calculated by Western military experts; see *Financial Times*, 9 December 1988.

784 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 354.

785 Text of the speech as published in *Pravda*, 10 April 1989.

tioned in Czechoslovakia as a result of the intervention, eradication of the doctrine from the political fabric of the bloc could have taken the form of denying the legitimacy of the Soviet military presence in that country. Third, since the doctrine's main content was that of the postulate of limited sovereignty of the members of the 'socialist community', restoring the right of the members to decide matters on their own could also have meant explicitly abandoning the doctrine. Gorbachev failed to address the issue of the legitimacy of Soviet military intervention and of the presence of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. It was only on the third issue where some movement was noticeable, although – as noted *supra* – still qualified by references to 'general interests of the socialist community' and the unconditional right for each 'party' (that is, not of the people) to solve questions of the country's development.

In politics as in life there are sins of commission and omission. Condemnation of the intervention in principle and on moral grounds would have discredited those Czechoslovak leaders who had come to the top as a result of the intervention and it would have generated pressures for the reinstatement of those half a million party members who had been purged. Gorbachev received reformist prime minister Lubomír Štrougal in November 1987, but in the following month the predominantly conservative Czechoslovak Politburo and Central Committee replaced Husák by Jakeš, one of their own, as General Secretary of the party. Almost immediately thereafter, in January 1988, the new leader went to Moscow. 'If the Soviet leaders were to acknowledge that its action [the military intervention] had been a mistake', he told Gorbachev, 'the CPC [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] would inevitably be weakened considerably, and the opposition, on the other hand, would be strengthened.'<sup>786</sup> He begged his Soviet counterpart not to hurry but to delay reassessment of the intervention until the situation in Czechoslovakia had stabilized – a request that was granted.<sup>787</sup> 'Non-interference' in this way turned into interference by omission. It went beyond that to interference by commission, when the Soviet media joined the Jakeš leadership in condemning demonstrations against the new regime that took place in mid-January 1989.<sup>788</sup>

---

786 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 358.

787 Ibid.

788 The reports and commentary in *Pravda*, 20 January 1989, are a good example of this.

To summarize, the Gorbachev factor in Eastern Europe in 1985-88 was important in delegitimizing communist rule and a source of intellectual and political inspiration among the people of the countries concerned. The enthusiastic popular welcome Gorbachev invariably received during his visits to Eastern Europe was as much a tribute to his courage for trying to reform the Soviet Union as a declaration of no-confidence in the conservative regimes of the bloc. The models of change that inspired intellectuals and ordinary citizens, particularly in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, were not 'reform socialism' led by the communist parties but the political and economic systems of neighbouring 'capitalist' countries such as West Germany, Austria and Finland. The popular motive forces were not utopian concepts such as 'socialism with a human face' or and 'market socialism' but real-world Western-style political pluralism, social democracy, a law-based state, market economy with fair competition and an active civil society. As Moscow's loss of will to empire became more apparent and its disinclination to use force in order to uphold conservative regimes in the bloc more credible, it was only a matter of time before the limits of Soviet tolerance would be tested. But this did not occur in all seriousness and with repercussions unforeseen by Gorbachev until the third phase of Soviet-East European relations. In the interim, assumptions were widespread in both Eastern and Western Europe that the sparks of change would spread from Hungary and Poland to Czechoslovakia and only from there – perhaps –to East Germany. Surprisingly, the sparks remained just that in Poland and Hungary but they ignited and produced popular flames first in East Germany and were to spread only later to Czechoslovakia. The following section examines in more detail why this fateful sequence occurred by reverting to the fateful events taking place in the GDR and in Soviet-East German relations.

#### Soviet-East German Relations: Deference versus Defiance

In his memoirs Gorbachev states tersely that after the January 1987 CPSU Central Committee plenum the differences between the Soviet and the East German leadership could no longer be concealed.

Honecker personally gave instructions no longer to publish in the GDR any materials of our [Central Committee] plenary meetings. ... Thereafter, news and documents from the Soviet Union were subjected to political censorship, cut extensively, or held back entirely. The distribution of German language



periodicals published in Moscow, such as *Sputnik* and *Neue Zeit* [in November 1988 and February 1989 respectively], was outlawed. Mutual misunderstanding, in fact alienation, increased.<sup>789</sup>

He also notes that Honecker, as well as other SED leaders, became ‘critical of me in the same measure as our perestroika and glasnost unfolded; and although he visibly displayed moderation in our talks, it was impossible not to notice his rejection of [our] democratic changes’.<sup>790</sup>

In ordinary circumstances, that is, in a normally functioning empire, one would have expected its chief representative to take the recalcitrant provincial governor to task. In the Soviet empire after 1987, however, this was no longer the case. A strange anomaly arose and became the order of the day. As tension between the two leaders increased, and Soviet and East German policies drifted apart, a reversal of traditional imperial roles took place: the exponent of the most exposed part of the imperial periphery was lecturing and admonishing, hassling, harrying and haranguing the head of the imperial center while the latter reacted to the ignominies with lame excuses, apologies, disclaimers, retractions and promises to take remedial action. *Passé* was the refreshing atmosphere of the August 1984 emergency meeting in Moscow where both sides had openly and confidently presented their case and attempted to convince each other of the validity of their arguments.

To revert to the analogy of a disintegrating marriage, it was almost as if, after every reasonable effort had been made to achieve reconciliation, the erstwhile partners felt that there was nothing more to say, with one partner withdrawing in silence, the other incessantly engaging in gratuitous bickering. Not that there was no opportunity to talk. At the end of May 1987, Gorbachev attended a Warsaw Pact summit conference in East Berlin, mainly to discuss problems of European security; Honecker attended the seventieth anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik revolution in Moscow in November; and the Soviet party leader again traveled to East Berlin in December to report on the Soviet-American summit and explain his rationales for agreeing to the Washington treaty on the abolition of intermediate-range nuclear forces. Yet these opportunities failed to be used for a fresh start.

---

789 Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 408.

790 Ibid.

To provide some evidence, Dobrynin had been given the assignment by Gorbachev 'confidentially to inform comrade Honecker' about the impending January 1987 plenum of the CPSU Central Committee.<sup>791</sup> Although the Politburo still had to finalize the proceedings, the main outlines of a program of political democratization and economic reform had more or less taken shape. They concerned (1) a new law on enterprises, providing for more autonomy in the production process; (2) democratization of the electoral process by allowing choice among several candidates; and (3) democratization of the party by mitigating the time-honored *nomenklatura* system (appointment in accordance with party lists), letting lower-level entities propose their own candidates and abandoning the practice of determining in advance who would be allowed to speak at Central Committee meetings. When Honecker – in reference to the third point and contrary to fact – interjected that, 'We [in the SED, already] do it like this', Dobrynin repeated the Gorbachev line of admiration for East German experience and practically apologized: '[I] am not saying this [in order to make recommendations] but rather think that much of what is now intended in the Soviet Union is already being done in the GDR.'<sup>792</sup> But the point about the CC plenum was precisely the opposite! The CPSU was *departing* from the neo-Stalinist model, to which the GDR was tenaciously clinging. By failing to state that very fact, and stating it strongly, Dobrynin was handing Honecker the very argument he and other top SED officials were already making, that is, that everything was fine in the GDR, change was unnecessary, and that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was embarking on a wrong path with possibly disastrous consequences for its allies.

On behalf of the SED, Kurt Hager was to reiterate this very stance. A veteran of the Spanish civil war and a long-time friend of Honecker, Hager was responsible for ideology in the Politburo, where he had sat as a full member since 1963.<sup>793</sup> When he was asked in April 1987, whether the SED would eventually emulate Soviet-style reforms in the GDR, he

---

791 Protocol (*Niederschrift*) of a meeting between Honecker and Dobrynin on 20 January 1987, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2976. Also present at the meeting on the Soviet side were the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, and Viktor Rykin as translator.

792 *Ibid.*, p. 12 of the typed transcript (indirect speech, italics mine).

793 Jeffrey Gedmin, *The Hidden Hand: Gorbachev and the Collapse of East Germany*, For the American Enterprise Institute (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1992), pp. 56-57.

snapped: ‘Just because your neighbor puts up new wallpaper, does that mean that you should feel obliged to do the same?’<sup>794</sup> Hager was perhaps aware of what Yakovlev had told his colleagues in January 1987 at the conference of CC secretaries for ideological questions in Warsaw. Moscow had received complaints from some comrades in the fraternal countries about certain interviews and articles by Soviet citizens, who had expressed opinions with which they disagreed. The main thing he wanted to say about this was that

we, too, [sometimes] disagree with such remarks and particularly with the way in which they are presented in the West. But on this issue there should be complete clarity. If we are talking about democracy and publicity, one has to take these [concepts] seriously, not treat them as empty phrases.<sup>795</sup>

The imperial center’s deference to a recalcitrant satrap at its periphery is evident also in an extraordinary exchange that took place between Gorbachev and Honecker on 3 October 1986 in Moscow.<sup>796</sup> The private conversation, among other topics, had concerned glasnost and the role of intellectuals in promoting change. Honecker had taken the initiative and commented about a recently held congress of Soviet film producers. The Soviet comrades obviously had their problems, he said condescendingly. However they wanted to deal with them, the problems of the Soviet Union should not be exported to the GDR. He then exemplified what he meant by this cryptic comment by two events.

West Berlin television and radio stations [recently] broadcast a question-and-answer game [sic] with [Yevgeni] Yevtushenko. Yevtushenko spoke of [the existence] of a single body of German literature. This is also what the official circles of the FRG are saying. However, the fact is that since the Weimar Republic a single body of German literature has never existed, only a bourgeois and a proletarian body. [I would like to] mention only [Bertold] Brecht,

---

794 ‘Jedes Land wählt seine Lösung’, interview with Kurt Hager, *Stern* (Hamburg), 9 April 1987.

795 Speech by Aleksandr Yakovlev at the conference of ideological secretaries of the Warsaw Pact countries, Warsaw, 23 January 1987, SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2976, p. 8 of typed transcript.

796 Transcript (*Niederschrift*) of the talks between Honecker and Gorbachev on 3 October 1986 in Moscow, SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2937, Supplement No. 2, pp. 35-43 of the typed transcript. Except for the identification of the speakers at the beginning of the quoted paragraphs, all italics are mine. The transcripts alternate between direct and indirect speech; the quotations have been rendered here consistently in direct speech.

[Willi] Bredel, [Thomas] Mann, [Lion] Feuchtwanger and [Erich] Weinert. *Yevtushenko said he is for German unity. This is a provocation.* West Berlin television is broadcasting, above all, with the GDR in mind. Such a statement is directed against the GDR. He also talked other nonsense.<sup>797</sup>

Honecker buttressed his argument against glasnost by a second example of Soviet provocation:

West Berlin television also broadcast a conversation with three other Soviet writers. In that broadcast, [Andrei] Voznesensky stated that the writers are the conscience of the nation. One cannot in the least agree with that. The radio and television stations in West Berlin, furthermore, are financed by the US Congress. *The appearance by Voznesensky and others is directed against the general line of the [East German] party and state.*<sup>798</sup>

The criticism betrayed an unreconstructed Stalinist mind-set about the legitimacy of censorship and it provided the Soviet host with a golden opportunity to educate his guest about the function of glasnost in the impending program of democratization in the Soviet Union. Instead, Gorbachev embarked upon what can only be called an undignified, even degrading, apology. He stated that

Comrade Kochemasov [the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin] reported to the [CPSU] Central Committee on Yevtushenko's statements and a discussion with him. In the discussion, Yevtushenko had said [to Kochemasov] that no one really could tell the German people anything different than that it is for unity. Naturally, he had had unity on a socialist basis in mind. Comrade Kochemasov had then pointed out to him that perhaps he had said one thing but meant another. *As for the above-mentioned writers, they are, in principle, not bad people.*<sup>799</sup>

In principle they are not, but in practice they are?

Honecker then brought up the biggest gun in the arsenal of communist invective and fired it directly at Gorbachev: '[I] ask for forgiveness, if [I] have to say this. But the appearance of such writers on television and radio financed by the USA is counterrevolutionary.'<sup>800</sup>

The Soviet leader failed to react to this charge.

*Comrade M. Gorbachev:* We have done everything in the past and will continue to do so in the future so that the GDR as a state of German workers and peasants and as an independent socialist state will strengthen and develop.

---

797 Ibid., pp. 35-36 of the typed transcript (italics mine).

798 Ibid., p. 36 of the typed transcript (italics mine).

799 Ibid. (italics mine).

800 Ibid., pp. 36-37 of the typed transcript.

*Comrade E. Honecker:* This is why the comrades of the SED and the citizens of the GDR have good relations with the Soviet Union and it is also the reason why [we] cannot contradict people who come here from the Soviet Union. Polemic [arguments] against citizens from the S[oviet] U[nion] can always be interpreted as anti-Soviet. *One should let those people appear in Siberia but not in West Berlin.* What is being said in West Berlin cannot be irrelevant to us. [But] [w]e don't have any influence on that.

*Comrade M. Gorbachev:* When a Soviet citizen commits a lapse and does so in the GDR [sic], then the comrades in the GDR can also tell him their opinion directly. That is their duty and their right. We will naturally tell this to our people, too.

*Comrade E. Honecker:* What was said in West Berlin can't be helped now. If it is being said now that the writers in the Soviet Union are the conscience of the nation, deviationists in the GDR will very quickly use that [for their own purposes]. That would be consistent with FRG propaganda.<sup>801</sup>

Later in the conversation, Honecker returned to the subject and complained that the GDR 'does not want to fight on two fronts' (that is, against Western bourgeois propagandists and misguided Soviet intellectuals). Gorbachev meekly replied that he would 'give the highest priority' to this question and 'instruct Yakovlev to talk to Yevtushenko'.<sup>802</sup> Finally, he regretted that

several writers, for a number of years, have not accepted invitations to visit the GDR. Statements about freedom, censorship, etc. have been uttered by Yevtushenko for the past thirty years. These people like publicity. [I] think that one has to talk to them about this [too].<sup>803</sup>

Honecker's perceptions of Gorbachev as a politically naïve and ineffective political leader were most likely nourished by His (Gorbachev's) failure to assert himself firmly and decisively in the bloc. This may explain why he finally decided to ignore the unabated Soviet opposition to his unchanged desire to visit West Germany.<sup>804</sup> In April 1987, he had the SED Politburo

---

801 Ibid. (italics mine).

802 Ibid., pp. 42-43 of the typed transcript.

803 Gorbachev made these remarks at a dinner conversation with Honecker, Mies, and Schmitt; SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2937, Supplement No. 3, p. 41 of the typed transcript.

804 Kochemasov (*Meine letzte Mission*, pp. 136-37) cursorily describes the history of the Soviet-East German controversy over the Honecker visit and writes: 'Finally, I was instructed [by Moscow] to transmit to Honecker the agreement of the Soviet leadership to an official visit to the FRG.' No date is provided for the receipt of the telegram.

endorse his travel plans.<sup>805</sup> At the end of May, a summit conference of the Warsaw Pact countries took place in East Berlin which produced no record as to whether Honecker's plans were approved or even discussed. In September, the twice postponed (i.e. vetoed) visit to the Federal Republic finally took place. From Honecker's perspective, the visit was a resounding success. Although billed by the West German government as a visit by a head of government, the visit unfolded as a state visit with all the proper paraphernalia of protocol. Honecker met with President von Weizsäcker, Chancellor Kohl, the prime ministers of North Rhine Westphalia, Bavaria and Saarland – Johannes Rau, Franz-Josef Strauß and Oskar Lafontaine respectively –, the leaders of the major political parties and, not to forget, rock star Udo Lindenberg.

Perhaps the most symbolic part of his visit was his stay in the Saarland where, as noted, he was born and had acquired his leftist credentials, where he still had friends and relatives, and where he now laid a wreath at his father's grave. It was to little avail that he reiterated his often quoted phrase that 'to unite socialism and capitalism was as impossible as it is to unite fire and water'. Internationally, suspicions arose that what Kohl and Honecker were 'really' trying to do was to lay the groundwork for the achievement of 'reunification on the sly'.<sup>806</sup>

Apart from real or apparent symbolism, what about the more tangible results of the visit? To Dobrynin, Honecker had boasted that the GDR 'annually receives 3 to 4 million Western visitors' and that in 1986, '1.773 million GDR citizens travelled to the FRG and other Western countries'.<sup>807</sup> Such visits, Honecker said, were to be increased and relations between the two German states to be strengthened in other dimensions of policy. Indeed, several agreements were concluded between East Berlin and Bonn. These pertained to the environment; protection from radiation

---

805 On the Politburo decision see SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2214.

806 This suspicion was, in fact, expressed by William Safire, 'The Germans: Reunification on the Sly', *International Herald Tribune*, 14 August 1984.

807 Dobrynin was apparently duly impressed and commented: 'That's a lot.' Honecker-Dobrynin talks, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2976. These figures, however, are misleading. Honecker was using the term visitors. However, individual visitors were not recorded, only *visits*. Since many persons, including functionaries on official business, were travelling to the West several times a year, the actual number of visitors was less than the figure suggested by Honecker.

exposure; scientific and technical cooperation; easing of travel; sister-city partnerships; the improvement of existing and construction of new train connections between Berlin and the Federal Republic; and the establishment of a joint electricity network between the two German states.

Despite the fact that the five-day visit received wide international press and television coverage, officially in Moscow the event was almost completely ignored. One day after the end of the visit, a short article appeared in *Pravda*, written by its correspondent in *East Germany*, who reported disparagingly that ‘an interesting event’ had taken place. ‘Official talks’ had been held in Bonn and a ‘joint statement’ had been issued.<sup>808</sup> No details were given about the broad scope of the East German leader’s visit, including Honecker’s side-trip to his native Saarland and his laying a wreath at his father’s grave. No statistics were provided about visits by East Germans to West Germany. Not a word was expended on the easing of travel restrictions, the joint electricity network, the transportation agreement or the sister-city partnerships.<sup>809</sup>

Superficially, Soviet-East German business continued as usual, and so did the rituals. When Honecker visited Moscow in November 1987, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, he received yet another Soviet decoration, the Order of Lenin. In private conversation with Honecker on 4 November, however, a new practice was instituted by Gorbachev.<sup>810</sup> In what must again be considered highly unusual in the history of empires, the Soviet leader reported extensively on the centre’s internal problems and was to continue to do so until the collapse of the communist regime in the GDR.

Intra-party life was beginning to acquire greater dynamism, he told Honecker. A new consciousness was starting to develop; citizens were becoming more active; private initiative was on the rise; cooperatives were being founded; and much progress was being made in agriculture. However, on many issues society was more advanced than the party. ‘Scum’, which had been submerged, was now drifting to the surface. ‘Nationalist sentiments’ were on the increase. There were ‘certain difficulties in the struggle against alcohol[ism]’. He then went on to describe at length the

---

808 M. Podkliuchnikov, ‘Glavnoe – uprochenie mira’, *Pravda*, 12 September 1987.

809 Ibid.

810 Notes (*Aktennotiz*) on the talks between Honecker and Gorbachev on 4 November 1987 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/627.

controversies in the top Soviet leadership. On 21 October, Politburo candidate and head of the Moscow city party organization Boris Yeltsin had severely criticized the slow pace of change and asked to be relieved of his duties (a request retracted some days later); in the Central Committee, there had been heated discussions which had lasted approximately five hours but had failed to resolve matters.<sup>811</sup>

Honecker graciously refrained from commenting directly on the Soviet internal problems. His criticism was indirect and it was contained in his customary progress report on East German economic affairs. As on previous occasions, he underlined the GDR's apparent importance to the USSR in high technology, telling Gorbachev that every third employee in East German science and technology was now involved in one or several of the more than 170 projects agreed upon between the two countries. He sparkled with data and much new-fangled terminology about micro-electronic processors, memory bits, lasers, digitalization, image resolution of satellite photography, precision surfacing of materials, optical sensors, new measuring instruments in medicine, fermentation in biotechnology and nuclear fusion. He reminded his host, since he seemed to have forgotten, of the 'May 1985 agreement for the strengthening of the scientific-technological positions of socialism against the acceleration of the arms [race] in space'. He claimed that by the progress the GDR was making 'we are counteracting the strategic embargo of the United States and other imperialist states'. He even went as far as asserting that the production of micro-electronic equipment in the GDR was being organized in such a way 'that the requirements of the USSR can be met'. How was all this possible? 'Strict state control' was the answer. This observation reinforced one of his (very few) earlier responses to Gorbachev's report on the controversies in the top Soviet leadership: '[I] agree with [you] that the decisive question is [how] to increase the role of the party because otherwise one cannot make progress.'<sup>812</sup>

To distill the essence from the November 1987 talks, Gorbachev's concern about domestic problems was beginning to mount. The burden of empire, he realized, was getting heavier but East Germany's apparent stability suggested to him that it would be a mistake to rock the boat of Soviet-East German relations. '[T]he [class] adversary contends that the leader-

---

811 On 11 November 1987, Yeltsin lost his position as Moscow party chief and in January 1988 his candidacy in the Politburo.

812 Ibid. (indirect speech).



ship of the SED and Comrade Honecker allegedly do not understand the policy of the Soviet Union', he said. 'On the other hand, the adversary is trying to tell the GDR that there is ambiguity in the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the GDR.' However, nothing had changed in Soviet-East German relations and nothing should be changed.

All the sworn commitments are being adhered to. The relations with the GDR continue to be a [top] priority for the Soviet Union. There will be no deviation from this whatsoever. If problems arose, one should always discuss them openly.<sup>813</sup>

Problems did continue to arise but, for the reasons just outlined, they were not discussed, neither openly or in private. At their meeting in the Polish capital in July 1988 on the sidelines of the Warsaw Pact summit conference, Gorbachev had proposed another meeting with Honecker. It would be 'important', he thought, 'for Comrade Honecker to come to Moscow prior to Helmut Kohl'[s] planned visit in October.<sup>814</sup> Coordination of Soviet-East German policies towards Bonn seems to have been the rationale for Gorbachev's suggestion. However, when Honecker visited the Soviet capital on 28 September, that is, less than a month before Kohl's visit, such coordination did not appear to have been an important part of their talks – at least the transcripts of their private conversation contain nothing about it. One also might have expected by now to discern an increase in Soviet criticism of East German policies. There is no evidence of this either, but what the transcripts do show is yet again Soviet praise for the GDR and a continuing pattern of East German assertiveness and Soviet deference.

First, Gorbachev told Honecker again that, whereas the Soviet Union under Brezhnev had failed to draw the appropriate lessons from the scientific-technological revolution, the GDR 'succeeded in rapidly accelerating

---

813 Ibid. (indirect speech). As these remarks would seem to show, it was Gorbachev who was trying to avoid controversy. His memoirs (*Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 409) convey a different impression. He writes that a 'temporary "détente"' occurred in their relations when Honecker visited Moscow on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik revolution, and he attributes this relaxation to a change in Honecker's attitude. 'After he had familiarized himself with my speech, he remarked that all differences had now been removed. In fact, the speech was published shortly thereafter in the GDR, unabridged.'

814 Notes (*Aktennotiz*) of a meeting between Honecker and Gorbachev on 15 July 1988 in Warsaw, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/685.

labor productivity and also the quality [of production], catching up with the advanced countries'.<sup>815</sup> Second, 'the conditions in the economy of the GDR are also significantly more democratic. There are even private craftsmen and traders. All this existed in the Soviet Union under Lenin. But later it was abolished.'<sup>816</sup> Third, and most astonishingly, in comparative perspective the overall development of socialism in the GDR had much to recommend itself. There were '*many negative and critical facts*' in the socialist development of '*the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Poland but far fewer in the GDR*'.<sup>817</sup>

---

815 Transcript (*Niederschrift*) of the talks between Honecker and Gorbachev on 28 September 1988 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/685. (indirect speech).

816 Ibid. (indirect speech). Gorbachev's favourable view of what in Soviet parlance was called *melko-tovarnoe proizvodstvo*, or small commodity production, was confirmed to me by Aleksandr Tsipko, a Central Committee official in the department for relations with communist and workers' parties and a specialist on the GDR and Poland. In Tsipko's opinion, Gorbachev's view played an important role in the origins of both the January 1987 program of democratization and marketization of the Soviet economy and the frictions with Honecker. In 1985, the journal *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* had published an article by Richard Kosolapov, chief editor of *Kommunist*, in which he had sharply criticized small commodity production and the SED's support for that programme. Honecker was offended by that article and even took up the matter in the SED Politburo. In January 1986, Tsipko and Oleg Bogomolov, the head of the Institute on the Economy of World Socialism, wrote a report for Gorbachev, arguing that such 'leftist' outbursts as published in *Kommunist* not only undercut moves towards the market economy in the Soviet Union but also soured Soviet-East German relations. Shakhnazarov supported this argument. When small commodity production became part of the Soviet Union's reform program in 1987, Gorbachev expected Honecker to respond enthusiastically to it but was 'bitterly disappointed' and 'irritated' when the opposite occurred. This enhanced his 'psychological estrangement from the GDR and Honecker', which later turned into 'hostility'. Interview with Tsipko. – On Gorbachev's view that the GDR, contrary to the USSR, had done things right and that the dictum of 'Those who are late will be punished by history' applied to the Soviet Union, see pp. 501-2.

817 Transcript (*Niederschrift*) of the talks between Honecker and Gorbachev on 28 September 1988 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/1/685 (indirect speech, italics mine). The transcripts use the acronyms of HPR (Hungarian People's Republic) and PRP (People's Republic of Poland). The criticism of the two countries contrasts sharply with what Gorbachev was saying in internal discussions in Moscow at the time and later in his memoirs where he portrays and praises the two countries as being pioneers of reform.

Honecker, as usual, accepted the compliments in good grace and went on the offensive again, complaining about glasnost. He returned to the problem of his ideological war on two fronts. It was one thing, he said, that two dozen radio and ten television stations of the class enemy were directing their broadcasts against the GDR, spreading hostile propaganda in German. One could cope with that. But it was 'intolerable' that journals such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the literary journal, and the popular weekly magazine *Ogonek* were allowed to carry articles purporting to demonstrate the failure of socialism as an historical experiment, and that such views and articles were disseminated in East Germany through Moscow's German language publications *Neue Zeit* and *Sputnik*.

Gorbachev, as previously, was apologetic. He knew that 'the mistakes that are being made in the Soviet Union worry the comrades in the GDR. The Soviet comrades, too, are worried when the pace is too fast and excesses occur'. He could assure Honecker, however, that 'these negative phenomena are not being looked upon with indifference' and one would 'deal with them'. He extended this promise to cover glasnost. 'As for the publications mentioned by Comrade Honecker, we won't put our hands into our lap, but we will continue to work with these press organs.' He also appealed to the East German party leader to keep things in perspective. The GDR, as he (Honecker) had mentioned, was struggling on the most forward ideological front and had to cope with bourgeois propaganda twenty-four hours a day. 'What difference, then, can a few Soviet publications, which are met with disapproval also by the Soviet comrades, make to the SED? They will certainly not cause an upheaval in the GDR, which has stood fast against more serious attacks.'<sup>818</sup>

Gorbachev's appeal to Honecker not to worry too much about the effects of Soviet glasnost on the GDR implied that the problem would not disappear. Indeed, it erupted again only one month later. Among other materials offensive to the GDR, the November 1988 issue of *Sputnik* featured

---

818 Ibid. (indirect speech). In his memoirs, Medvedev claims that, during his visit to East Berlin and in his talks with Honecker on 24 August 1988, *he* had asserted the Soviet point of view more forcefully: 'Concerning the measures by the GDR authorities prohibiting [Soviet periodicals I] had to reemphasize the astonishment we had expressed earlier and point out again that the limitation of glasnost and the ban on Soviet periodicals and on the publication of Soviet materials in the GDR did not serve to strengthen our relations and in my view did not enhance the authority of the SED'; Medvedev, *Raspad*, p. 164.

an article about one of the 'blank [that is, dark] spots in the history of German communism.

The German communists [the author correctly wrote] refused to join the social democrats in their struggle against Hitler. Had they done so, Hitler would not have been able to win the [1933] *Reichstag* elections and European history would probably have run a very different course.<sup>819</sup>

The suggestion that the KPD was co-responsible and culpable for the rise of Hitler struck a raw nerve of its successor organization, the SED. It banned *Sputnik* and adopted other protective measures on the ideological front. It ordered the withdrawal of five films, among them Tengiz Abuladze's anti-Stalinist satire 'Repentance', from East German movie theaters. In December 1988, because of a 'paper shortage', it suspended publication of *Freie Welt*, the weekly magazine of the (East) German-Soviet Friendship Society. In February 1989, it stopped distribution of *Neue Zeit* because the journal had included an interview with Polish Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa. And in April 1989, it refused permission to stage an art exhibition on 'Glasnost and Perestroika in the Name of Gorbachev'.<sup>820</sup>

The East German regime found itself increasingly isolated in the bloc. This was demonstrated, among other events, by the third follow-up conference of the CSCE, held from 4 November 1986 to 19 January 1989 in Vienna. East Germany was forced to accept, as a basis of discussion and final agreement, a draft document on human and citizens' rights submitted by the neutral and non-aligned countries. The document included many provisions abhorrent to the East German representatives but, with the exception of Romania, acceptable to every other delegation in the bloc. As the GDR delegation lamented in an internal report, the 'Soviet Union is increasingly prepared, in the interest of concluding the Vienna meeting soon, to accept the ... [Western] demands. Hungary and Poland support this position. The ČSSR and Bulgaria only point to difficulties on religious and minority issues.' This only left Romania as the only fraternal country that, according to the report, 'continues to reject the draft of the neutral and non-aligned states and NATO's supplementary proposals'.<sup>821</sup>

---

819 As quoted in *Neues Deutschland*, 24 November 1988.

820 The above examples of East German *Abgrenzung* from Soviet glasnost are from Gedmin, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 59-62.

821 SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2295.

The proposals to which the GDR objected pertained to the detailed publication of balance of payment and trade statistics; unrestricted institutional and personal contacts between universities and other educational and research establishments; the right of citizens to freedom of movement; and the obligation of states to provide written justification for the rejection of applications for travel and emigration.<sup>822</sup> Most objectionable, however, were two Basket 3 (human rights) draft provisions, which both Honecker and Ceaușescu, during the latter's visit to East Berlin in November 1988 in a joint statement, rejected outright: (1) the legalization of Helsinki Watch Committees that had been formed in Eastern Europe in order to check on the implementation of commitments made by their governments and (2) the abolition of requirements for minimum currency exchanges for visits in CSCE countries.<sup>823</sup>

Honecker was adamant on these two points. On 5 January 1989, he warned Yuri Kashlev, the head of the Soviet delegation to the CSCE follow-on conference in Vienna, that even to mention anything about the Helsinki watch groups in the final document would amount to a '*legalization of counter-revolutionary activities*'.<sup>824</sup> As for the abolition of minimum exchange requirements, the GDR had no intention to lose money and co-finance West German 'capitalist exploitation'. He told Kashlev to inform Gorbachev that if these two points were not changed, the GDR would use its veto and thereby prevent the adoption of a final document. He certainly had no intention 'to carry out an agreement on these two points'.<sup>825</sup>

The alarm with which Honecker treated the Basket 3 provisions of the CSCE follow-up conference was commensurate with the threat they posed to the legitimacy of his regime. In the final analysis, they amounted to the legitimation of the pernicious influence of transnationalism and external 'soft power' in the Soviet empire. They also helped produce an entirely new phenomenon in the GDR: demonstrations were beginning to occur in a country where a revolution could allegedly not take place because, as Stalin had said, people wouldn't even step on the lawn, and this phe-

---

822 These and several other provisions were enumerated in the new directives for the GDR delegation to the CSCE on 15 September 1988; see SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2295.

823 SED Politbüro, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2/2505.

824 *Ibid.* (italics mine).

825 *Ibid.*

nomenon was to continue and gain momentum in the fall of 1989 despite the massive presence of the forces of the ministry for state security (*Staatssicherheitsministerium*, or Stasi), arrests and intimidation.<sup>826</sup>

Honecker's alarm and his futile threat to exercise a veto in Vienna were contradicted by his characterization of the contrast between stability in the GDR and mounting instability in other countries of the Soviet bloc. There were lots of problems in several socialist countries and in Union republics of the USSR, he lectured Kashlev. The problems included 'the unsatisfactory development in Poland, the processes in Hungary and the increasing controversies in the ČSSR and the unsettled situation in Estonia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia'. East Germany, as opposed to these countries and Soviet republics, constituted 'an island of tranquility'.<sup>827</sup> He also reminded Kashlev that, because of its geostrategic location, the GDR's stability was 'important for the socialist world as a whole'.<sup>828</sup>

Honecker's alarm was coupled with defiance. The CSCE follow-up conference had put the spotlight on the main symbol of the division of Europe, the Berlin wall. In a speech in East Berlin, he repeated some of the standard arguments that he and Ulbricht had made in defense of the construction of the wall in 1961, including the charge that the West was intent on 'plundering' the GDR by an artificial currency exchange rate.<sup>829</sup> The wall was necessary to prevent the West from exporting its 'society hanging on drugs' (*Drogengesellschaft*) to the GDR. He also discerned a good deal of hypocrisy in the Western wailing at the wall. West Germany, for instance, was quite satisfied to see the wall kept in place because it wanted to safeguard itself against 'asylum seekers from distant countries'. Therefore, he concluded, notwithstanding the 'vehement advocacy' of the abolition of the Berlin wall by 'Herr Genscher and Herr Shultz' at the final session of the January CSCE follow-on conference in Vienna,

---

826 On 15 January 1989, the same day the CSCE final document was adopted in Vienna, some 190 people demonstrating for democratic change were arrested in Leipzig. – On Stalin's dictum see p. 45.

827 Talks between Honecker and Kashlev on 5 January 1989, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/2310.

828 Ibid.

829 To the extent that there was hypocrisy, it was not limited to the West. Honecker chose to ignore that the free-market rate of one West German Deutschmark to seven East German marks was almost precisely the rate applied to West German consumer goods in GDR chain stores Exquisit and Delikat.

*the wall will remain for as long as the conditions have not been altered which led to its construction. It will still be there in 50 and also in 100 years if the reasons for [its existence] have not been abolished.*<sup>830</sup>

At least on the time frame for the abolition of the division of Germany and Berlin and when, if at all, ‘history’ would decide, there was congruence of Gorbachev’s and Honecker’s view.

Since the present account has been brought up to the beginning of East Germany’s terminal illness and established that Soviet policies played a large role in triggering it, it may be useful to provide a summary of the rationale of Gorbachev’s perceptions and policies towards the GDR in the period from his assumption of office as General Secretary in March 1985 until his visit to West Germany in June 1989.

## Summary

Gorbachev’s view of the German problem looked at through the lens of East Germany was the creation of a reform socialist East Germany that would remain an integral part of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and continue to be an active member of a reformed Warsaw Pact and CMEA. The method to be applied in order to achieve this goal was persuasion rather than pressure. East Germany was not to be forced to copy Soviet developments. The likelihood of a successful reformist transformation was, in his perceptions, greater in the GDR than in other countries of the bloc, including in the Soviet Union, because of East Germany’s high levels of education and scientific-technological development. What needed to be addressed and prevented, however, was the translation of West German economic power and GDR indebtedness into West German political influence in East German affairs because ultimately this could open the road to the reunification of Germany in accordance with Western democratic, pluralist and market principles and pose the risk of East Germany leaving the Warsaw Pact and CMEA.

That diagnosis was deficient in several respects. The first was the idea of reform socialism. Such a system had never existed before, and it is doubtful that such a model – that is, the harmonious combination of the

---

830 ‘Schlußbemerkungen Erich Honeckers auf der Tagung des Thomas-Münzer-Komitees’, *Neues Deutschland*, 20 January 1989 (italics mine). The Vienna follow-up conference had ended only a few days prior to Honecker’s remarks.

plan and the market, capable of adapting rapidly to innovation – could ever be realized.

The second fault was connected with the notion that the ruling communist parties of Eastern Europe could transform themselves into a reform socialist vanguard. Such a metamorphosis was perhaps possible in a democratic environment, such as in Western Europe, but hardly in Eastern societies where civil society had to be rebuilt from the bottom up.

The third deficiency concerned Gorbachev's belief that the GDR had taken the direction of socio-economic development that the Soviet Union belatedly was only beginning to pursue; that it was, as Honecker incessantly impressed upon him, in the midst of creating a computer-based, science-and-technology, innovative economy and society – a Silicon Valley writ large; and that the GDR politically was a bedrock of stability that could easily afford reform. Neither the perception of East Germany's economic prowess nor that of political stability conformed to reality.<sup>831</sup>

Fourth, Gorbachev was mistaken to assume that West German economic power and GDR indebtedness translated into political influence. Honecker's GDR was definitely *not* moving towards the West German model, including democratic elections, free speech, political pluralism, a multi-party system, a market economy and an active, independent (from the communist party) civil society. Honecker's concessions to West Germany were only at the margins of the traditional communist model of the one-party state, controlled elections, censorship and a command economy.

Fifth, equally wide of the mark was Gorbachev's idea that Honecker was leading East Germany onto a path to reunification under capitalist auspices and renunciation of membership in the Warsaw Pact and CMEA. The East German leader remained as wedded to the theory and practice of the long-term existence of two independent and sovereign states as his Soviet counterpart. Even Politburo member and foreign minister Gromyko, neither a friend of Germans nor of perestroika, failed to see any deviation of the GDR from the Soviet line in foreign policy. In private conversation

---

831 As an extenuating circumstance, Gorbachev with such views was in good company. Many Western observers, including specialists on East Germany, were thinking along similar lines. And even SED's Politburo leaders, as will be shown below (pp. 517-19), were ill-informed and hence unaware of the huge gap between their confident claims and reality.



with Honecker in June 1989, he acknowledged that ‘Soviet-GDR cooperation in the foreign policy sphere is especially close’.<sup>832</sup>

Gorbachev’s misperceptions of East Germany and the essence of the German problem raise the question as to what his international relations specialists, including the *germanist*, were telling and advising him to do. More fundamentally, what were the domestic factors that were conducive to the comprehensive change away from the adherence to the concept of two separate German states to the acceptance of German unification? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

---

832 Transcript (*Niederschrift*) of talks between Gorbachev and Honecker on 28 June 1989 in Moscow, SED Politburo, *Arbeitsprotokolle*, Central Party Archives, J IV 2/2A/3228 (indirect speech).

