CHAPTER 4. Squeezed between Bonn and Moscow:

The GDR's Foreign Policy – An Overview

The following three chapters focus on the two major external determinants of any GDR policy: The activities and policies of the Soviet Union and the competitive relationship with the "other" Germany. While the former can be considered the GDR's early political and ideological midwife, and later on, its custodian,[1] the latter remained a competitor and standard for comparison for Socialist Germany. The demands from within the national system itself are closely intertwined with these two external determinants and all three are considered mutually dependent. The most important watershed in the GDR's foreign policy were the years between 1969 and 1972. External pressures and new internal constellations had led to a policy change in West Germany and the "New Eastern Policy"[2] of Bonn's coalition of social democrats and liberals. These changes finally made it possible to end the GDR's international isolation.[3] When West Germany de facto recognized the GDR's statehood by signing the "Grundlagenvertrag" in 1971,[4] the GDR reached its long-sought goal of international recognition and was able to finally establish the foreign policy of a "normal" state in the international realm.[5] In the following chapter, the GDR's foreign policy is analyzed based on the two phases before and after this turning point, starting with a brief outline of the development of the GDR's priorities in the international realm.

1 | See for example: Winzer, Otto, 1972, 3.

2 | German: Neue Ostpolitik.

3 | For a short overview on the "Neue Ostpolitik": Görtemarker, 2004, 530-563. To this day, the most extensive analysis of the topic remains Baring, 1982. Interpretations and comments on the formation of the "New Ostpolitik". Bender, 2008, 151; Görtemaker, 2004, 475; Hacke, 1988, 162; Haftendorn, 1989, 41; Haftendorn, 2001, 180; Hölscher, 2010.

4 | "Vertrag über die Grundlagen der Beziehungen der beiden deutschen Staaten" (Grundlagenvertrag) December 21 1972.

5 | Siebs, 1999, 11.

1. Political Prologue: The Cards Are Shuffled Anew – Two German States and the Rules of the Cold War

> "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent."[6]
>
> (Winston S. Churchill, Speech at Westminster College on March 5 1946)

At the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the obvious differences between the Western occupying forces and the Soviet Union could not be denied any longer. Reaching an agreement on a policy toward the "German Reich" appeared more and more improbable and already fundamentally different development paths within the two Germanys seemed likely[7] – despite "almost identical industrial prerequisites."[8] Only two years later Andrej Zhdanov, party secretary of the Communist Party in Moscow, announced what was to become the "Two Camp Theory", an event considered by some to be the beginning of the Cold War:[9] Two irreconcilable world camps faced and confronted each other.[10] Just one year later Zhdanov's scenario became reality when Nikita Khrushchev declared an ultimatum on Berlin's status as a free city and blocked traffic between the western zones and West Berlin.[11] The Berlin Crisis and the Korean War accelerated the formation of the two "camps", or blocs. When in July 1955 the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the victorious powers finally failed as well, Khrushchev proclaimed his "Two States Doctrine": Reunification could only occur on terms of both German states and would only be possible if the GDR-style socialism and its achievements remained.[12]

The founding of the two German states in 1949[13] introduced an integration process for the two entities to join the respective economic and military systems of East and West, culminating in their memberships in the two major military alliances, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact

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6 | Churchill, The Sinews of Peace, March 5 1946.

7 | Bracher, Dietrich, in: Hacker, Jens, 1989, 41.

8 | Schroeder, Klaus, 2006, 89f. On the changes of German economy during the war and the scope of economic destruction after the war in Central and Easter Europe: Applebaum, 2013, 10ff.

9 | Applebaum, 2013, 219; Stöver, 2007, 74.

10 | Zhdanov, Andrej, September 1947, Zhdanov answers Harry S. Truman at the Conference of Communist Party of Europe, in: Lautemann/Schlenke (Ed.) 1980, 156f.

11 | On the Berlin Crisis and Blockade and possible interpretations: Stöver, 2007, 89ff; Wettig, 1999, 145-152.

12 | Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich, in: Schroeder, 1999, 132: Wentker, in: Hoffmann/Schwartz/Wentker, 2003, 65.

13 | Judt, in: Judt (ed.), 1998, 493; Sywotteck, in: Pfeil, 2001, 51.

(WP).[14] When neither the Soviet quelling of the uprising in June 1953[15] nor the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 changed the Western powers' strategy of restraint, it became clear that the West would not make any move to endanger the fragile balance in Europe.[16] The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 signaled the climax of the East-West Conflict on the fringe of escalation. Scholars point to the attempts of superpowers and their allies to strive for an international détente in the wake of the crisis wake as the end of the first "hot" phase of the Cold War.[17] Up to this point, the management of international crises had been achieved through the "classic instruments of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy,"[18] though in the bloc conflict they had not yet been deployed comprehensively as preventive instruments. This process was about to change with the "Treaty Policy" of the late 1960s. The treaties generated the feeling of a certain safety in the atmosphere of détente, ushering in the second phase of the Cold War, and last until the late 1970s. Both sides of the Cold War arranged themselves with the status quo and after the Berlin Wall had been become a fact, it was obvious that the division of Germany was not to be easily remedied.[19] If control over Germany was only possible for a part of it, the Soviet Union preferred two German states instead of one.[20]

Thus the birth of the two German states also sounded the bell for four decades of separation in the heart of the two superpowers' confrontation. Haftendorn describes the German predicament as a "system of structural dependencies."[21] Provisional occupation became permanent, as both superpowers hoped for more sustainable influence on Europe's "political order". Initially, American presence was meant to support the interests of Germany's neighbors, particularly France, by preventing Germany from re-establishing itself as a European power. With the Berlin Crisis and the beginning of the proxy war in Korea solidifying the Cold War in 1948-49, the Western occupation forces changed their major goals, with Washington shifting from "Containment" to its "Roll-back Policy" so as to not only prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its sphere of influence, but to repulse any Soviet presence. Meanwhile, the West organized itself according to the newly divided Germany. Germany's east and west had to fulfill their role as

14 | Foitzik, in: Hoffmann/Schwartz/Wentker, 2008; Haftendorn, 2001, 60.

15 | Schroeder, 1999, 83; Wettig, 1999, 256.

16 | Staadt, in: Schwartz (ed.), 2008, 160ff; Alisch, in: Schartz (ed.), 2008, 150.

17 | Most depictions of the Cold War follow the scheme of three roughly described phases and tend to subdivide these depending on their approach: Halliday, 2005; Steiniger, 2004; Stöver, 2007.

18 | Glaeßner, 1984, 239.

19 | Wentker, 2007, 316.

20 | Glaeßner, 1984, 239.

21 | Haftendorn, 2001, 11.

bridgeheads at the "Iron Curtain"[22] and soon became the major proxies for the Cold War in Europe.

The international power constellation at the time did not leave many alternatives for the two German states. During the early years of their existence the occupation forces controlled all areas of day-to-day life and granted only a little room for maneuvering at the national and especially the international levels.[23] But even though both Germanys found themselves in similar positions in the late 1940s, their paths, predefined by their respective occupational forces, led them in very different directions of development. This is also true for their attempts to regain some autonomy in foreign policy. Despite the comparatively early establishment of foreign policy institutions in the young GDR,[24] it remained highly dependent on foreign policy guidance by the Soviet Union and expanded its sovereignty solely "by grace of Moscow."[25] The institutions and competencies granted to West Germany, however, offered partial sovereignty to Bonn, including some measure of autonomy for its foreign-policy decisions.[26]

2. The GDR's Foreign Policy Priorities From the "Phase of Recognition" to the "High Times of Diplomacy"

> "Foreign Policy means something different for a defeated [...] Volk as the German Volk is [right now] from what it means for a Volk as we have once been. As long as we are still the object of other powers' politics we cannot implement social policies, a proper national policy. Thus our [...] first and foremost intention must be to [...] become a subject of politics in our own right again." [27]
>
> (Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1952)

22 | Churchill, The Sinews of Peace, March 5 1946. The theatre term "iron curtain" had been used in politics before, e.g. by the German Reichskanzler Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg in 1916 ("Der gescheiterte Taktiker Bethmann Hollweg," sine anno) but is widely used as a metaphor for the division of the world during the Cold War.

23 | Wengst, in: Schwartz (ed.), 2008.

24 | The "Commission for Foreign Affairs" (German: Kommission für außenpolitische Fragen) and the "Ministry for Foreign Affairs" (German: Minsterium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten), Scholtyseck, 2003, 6.

25 | Scholtyseck, 2003, 14.

26 | On the establishment of the FRG's Foreign Ministry in March 1951: Schöllgen, 2004, 29. On the expansion of Bonn's international room of maneuver: Begrenzte Souveränität, in: Bierling, 2005, 111-169; von Bredow, 1999, 89.

27 | Adenauer, Konrad. Speech for the CDU. Bonn, 28 March 1952. Bulletin 38/52.

> "The United Germany shall have accordingly full sovereignty over its internal and external affairs."[28]
>
> (Article 7(2) of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, 1990)

With the "unconditional surrender" by the German High Command of the so-called "Third Reich"[29] on the 7th of May 1945,[30] Germany forfeited its sovereign rights as an equal member of the international state community. In June 1945, the Allied Powers[31] agreed that

> "[t]here is no central Government or authority in Germany capable of accepting responsibility for the maintenance of order, the administration of the country and compliance with the requirements of the victorious Powers"[32]

and thus claimed "supreme authority" over Germany. The founding of two separate German states just four years later did not do much to change this status and despite a successive expansion of the two Germanys' competencies, first with regard to their internal affairs, later on to the international realm, their sovereignty remained restricted. It was not until Germany's reunification in 1990 that the Allied Powers "terminate[d] their rights and responsibilities relating to Berlin and to Germany as a whole." [33]

When consulting sources from the West, conclusions about the GDR's foreign policy regularly paint the state as a "non-active actor", neither enjoying autonomy nor the incentive to achieve any goals in the international sphere. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, for example, labels the construction of the Berlin Wall as proof of the failure of the GDR's political system. According to him, East Berlin's policies did

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28 | Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany September 12 1990 in: Bundesgesetzblatt 1990 Part II. October 13 1990 (pub.), 1318-1329.

29 | On the origins and the controversies about the term "Third Reich" (German: "Drittes Reich"), in: Winkler,2000, 6f.

30 | Act of Military Surrender, in: Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949. Vol. 3. Multilateral 1931-1945. Bevans, Charles I. (ed.). Department of State Publication 8484. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969.

31 | The "Allied Powers" at this point include the governments of the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United Kingdom, and the Provisional Government of the French Republic.

32 | Declaration Regarding the Defeat of Germany and the Assumption of Supreme Authority by Allied Powers. Introduction. 6 June 1945, in: Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949. Vol. 3. Multilateral 1931-1945. Bevans, Charles I. (ed.). Department of State Publication 8484. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969.

33 | Article 7 (1), Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany September 12 1990. In Bundesgesetzblatt 1990 Part II. October 13 1990 (pub.), 1318-1329.

not go beyond maintaining grandfathering the GDR's status quo after that.[34] Regardless of this judgment, the GDR did indeed declare and actively strive for policy goals during all phases of its existence, though any policy goal following the GDR's foreign policy priorities was in some way connected to either the Soviet Union or West Germany, the two decisive determinants of the GDR's scope of action. Recalling Czempiel's triangle of priorities, the foreign policy interests of the GDR have been interpreted based on the relation between the priorities "security/peace", "liberty/stability" and "economic welfare". For the analysis of Bonn's foreign policy, Helga Haftendorn added national unity to liberty/stability,[35] as it had been a pivotal topic among East German foreign policy priorities. As such, "National unity" and how its interpretation changed over time must be considered as well when discussing the GDR's foreign policy interests.

"Security and peace" are not only the major goals of any state but may even be regarded a conditio sine qua non for the continuous existence of a state, comparable to food and shelter in Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs."[36] Without basic security from internal instability and external threats to its population, no state can uphold its existence in the long run. This ties in with Campbell's interpretation of foreign policy as the "discourse of danger" in that it is premised on the delineation of a state's inside and its outside. Throughout the GDR's history, the major priority for the SED regime remained "security" in its most fundamental sense: to secure the GDR's existence as a state, its territorial integrity, and thus the SED's claim to power. Accordingly, East German foreign policy was first and foremost focused on the "dangers" outside the GDR. Hence, the tight integration of the GDR into the Eastern Bloc was not only in Moscow's interest but also a primary foreign policy goal of the GDR. The major legal basis for this integration was the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance" (Warsaw Pact) of 1955 and the bilateral "Treaties of Friendship" of 1964 and 1975.[37] The Treaty of 1964 sealed the GDR's integration as a state among others in the Eastern Bloc, though it did not explicitly affect "rights and obligations" agreed upon in "mutual [...] agreements including the Potsdam Agreement."[38] Any other policy goal was subordinated to the SED's overarching interest to secure the GDR's existence while upholding the SED's political autocracy. With its aggressive public policy, the SED leadership successfully tied the GDR's survival to its own predominance. The VIII. Party Conference of the

34 | Interview of Hans-Dietrich Genscher (2015), Minister of Foreign Affairs in the FRG from 1974 to 1992, by Miriam Mueller on January 16 2009.

35 | Haftendorn, 1989, 32-49.

36 | See: Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs," in: Maslow, 1954.

37 | See: Extracts of the GDR's First Treaty of Friendship with the USSR of September 20 1955, in: Judt, 2008, 549.

38 | "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between the GDR and Soviet Union." June 12th 1964, Article 9, in: Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1973, 894.

SED in 1971 shows this focus on state survival: Each treaty mentioning territorial questions in Europe was supposed to acknowledge the territorial status quo and equated European security with "the security of its borders."[39]

In the GDR "national unity" was declared a primary foreign policy goal as early as October 1949[40] and was closely connected to the GDR's existence as a state as well as its self-perception as the "better", anti-imperialist Germany until the mid-1960s. This strive for national unity was abandoned with the recognition of the existence of two German states in 1971.[41] In the "Grundlagenvertrag." the FRG was cautious not to endanger its foreign policy priority of reunification,[42] as demanded for in the Grundgesetz. Bonn insisted on the continued existence of one German nation. This notion of "the continuity of a unified German nation." even after the de facto recognition of the GDR, was naturally considered an imminent threat to the GDR's existence as a separate sovereign state by the SED and thus part of the "discourse of danger" generating Eats German foreign policy. By "imagining"[43] an East German national community, that is, creating a separate identity of a "socialist nation"[44] the SED aimed to reduce this threat against its national existence.

"Liberty" as a foreign policy priority for the GDR first of all is interpreted as external "autonomy" as well as freedom from external influence and thus may also be considered part of the foreign policy "discourse of danger". The FRG and its policies were perceived as an imminent threat to the GDR's existence. Thus, one of the major goals was the termination and prevention of any direct or indirect influence by West Germany on the GDR's internal affairs, i.e. to expand East Berlin's autonomy towards its Western sibling. With regard to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, "autonomy" was defined profoundly differently. Indeed, the SED never really hoped for the GDR's full sovereignty, in the sense of being able to act free from its creator's interference. As early as 1947, the SED leadership had publicly insisted to aspire to an "autonomous foreign policy orientation."[45] And indeed, compared to its Western sibling, the GDR started with an advantage: While Bonn still had to wait to reclaim the ability to run its state's foreign affairs, East Berlin was granted a recognizable upgrade by Moscow in 1950.[46] This "permit" included the ability to establish diplomatic relations and to give binding

39 | Honecker, 1980, 379.

40 | First foreign policy declaration by the government of the GDR on October 24 1949 by Georg Dertinger, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the GDR, in: ND, Vol.4, No.250, October 25 1949.

41 | BVerfGE 36,1, vom 31.Juli 1973, Grundlagenvertrag; Hacke, 1988, 288; Haftendorn, 2001, 200; Schroeder, 1999, 195.

42 | Preamble, Grundgesetz of the Federal Republic of Germany, May 23 1949.

43 | "Imagined Communities," in: Anderson, 1983.

44 | Howarth, 2001, 88.

45 | German: "eigenständige außenpolitische Orientierung." in: Scholtyseck, 2003, 5.

46 | Pieck, Wilhelm, "The Problems of German Foreign Policy" July 20 1950, in: Judt, 1998, 511.

declarations.[47] However, despite this apparent freedom in the early years, the GDR usually had to receive Soviet approval for its actions and all in all was not able to deviate from the foreign policy path predefined by Moscow.

"Economic welfare" in East German foreign policy firstly balanced the SED's lack of legitimacy on the inside by appeasing the population through modest, but steady increases to their economic well-being. Secondly, the SED used economic policies to work toward international recognition as a state through foreign trade.[48] "Foreign trade is the strongest weapon in the fight for recognition of the GDR,"[49] summarizes Johannes König, East German ambassador to Moscow in 1956. Thus, "economic welfare" rather must be considered a foreign policy objective of medium range than a priority.

With its internal consolidation after the erection of the Berlin Wall, the sealing of the inner-German border and a positive economic trend, the GDR gained a certain self-confidence as a state. As a consequence, the SED aimed to loosen the tight corset of Moscow's "reign" by proving its loyalty to the Kremlin, but also by attaining "autonomy through status" within the framework of bloc discipline. Through economic progress and preemptive subservience to the Kremlin, the SED attempted to establish itself as a model state within the Eastern Bloc to expand liberty "on the outside."[50] Liberty "on the inside," however, was no policy goal of the SED. The ruling party reduced political rights and liberties of the East German population to a minimum right from the start. To sum it up, this first priority throughout the GDR's history was to secure the GDR's existence. "Security" was closely linked to liberty in the sense of a limited autonomy and "economic welfare" as a means to an end. These priorities were expressed by closely bonding with Moscow, establishing the GDR as the political and economic "No. 2" within the Warsaw Pact, and attaining recognition as an equal German state in the international community of states. All these priorities, including the political survival of the GDR, intersected with the overall state objective: To establish first a socialist and then a Marxist German state and subsequently guarantee its survival.

47 | First foreign policy declaration by the government of the GDR on October 24 1949 by Georg Dertinger, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the GDR, in: Neues Deutschland, Vol.4, No.250, October 25 1949.

48 | Muth, 2001, 81 and Wippel, 1996, 4.

49 | König, Johannes, ambassador of the GDR in Moscow 1956, Meeting of the heads of missions, in: PA AA, MfAA, A 15470.

50 | Schweisfurth concedes the GDR a role as a trailblazer towards the "federation" of the Eastern Bloc. Schweisfurth, in: DA, September 1977, 940 and Judt, 1998, 499.