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The German Democratic Republic's Path to True Democracy: The Role of the Media in 1989-1990 and Beyond

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the role of the media in the democratisation process in the German Democratic Republic, during and in the period immediately following the fall of the regime, and their impact in the redefinition of the international role of reunified Germany. The main research question that guided my work is: did the media really support Germany's democratic transition and reunification process? This research question gave rise to a series of sub-research questions such as: what function did the Western media play vis-à-vis an authoritarian regime like the GDR? Was the media in general able to stimulate the critical thinking of the population? Did some media prove to be more influential than others? And many others implicitly present within the different chapters.

The reasons that prompted me to delve into this topic are twofold: an interest in history, both European and non-European, in order to better understand international relations between states, with an emphasis on events, actors, processes, concepts and methods of investigation relating to the XX century, and the desire to integrate this interest with the world of communication and the media in general, which underwent a fundamental development in the context of the Cold War.

The aim of this dissertation is to construct a historical, geopolitical and social account of the complicated phenomenon of the influence of the media on the collapse of dictatorial regimes, with particular reference to East Germany and the Eastern Bloc, first, and then to reunified Germany. In addition, I also delved into the important topic of the Cold War as the scene of the events that led to the end of the GDR.

The analysis of socio-political and economic articles in English, Italian and German, published in various scientific and historical journals, concluding acts of international conferences, book chapters written by sociologists, historians and economists, as well as excerpts from interviews and articles by journalists from the most famous (especially German) newspapers, led me to write this thesis, without neglecting, therefore, the linguistic aspect that characterises my course of study.

Authors of the calibre of Mary Fulbrook were very important, especially in the first part of the paper, in tracing the contours of the GDR and the context in which it was set, offering a clear and detailed overview of the social, political and economic structure of East Germany. Fulbrook's work proved invaluable in understanding the internal

dynamics of the regime, its contradictions and the strategies adopted to maintain control over the population. Thanks to analyses of this kind, I was able to outline the historical context of the events covered in the paper, shedding light not only on the functioning of the socialist state, but also on how it was perceived and experienced by its citizens. This theoretical basis was crucial for developing a deeper reflection on the role of memory and collective identity in the reconstruction of the GDR's past. Likewise, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke and their interest in the media were very helpful in better analysing their history and functions, allowing me to develop the paper with a broader, multidisciplinary perspective. Thanks to their contributions, I was able to delve into the role that the media have played in shaping not only communication, but also social, cultural, and economic changes over time. In particular, their comparative approach allowed me to examine the different stages in the evolution of the media and to understand how they influenced the construction of collective and individual identities and ultimately contributed to the achievement of democracy.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first describes, firstly, the political, economic, and social situation in East Germany, as well as the international pressures to which the Eastern bloc in which it was embedded was subjected, and secondly, introduces the topic of the growing political and social tensions that affected the bloc and the GDR itself in the 1980s. The second chapter delves into the nature of opposition movements, offering in the first paragraph a theoretical introduction to the concepts of resistance, dissent, and opposition.

The third chapter, on the other hand, focuses on the role of the media in stimulating critical thinking. After a quick look at the history and functions of the media in the first paragraph, the second and third focus respectively on radio and television as tools for disseminating information and news beyond state control. The idea, in fact, that Western media played a decisive role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe is widespread. The fourth chapter covers the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification. The first paragraph describes and highlights Gorbachev’s figure, the second describes the fundamental role of communications and images in the fall of the Wall and, finally, the third marks the milestones leading up to reunification.

In conclusion, the fifth and final chapter of the thesis explores, on the one hand, the contribution of the media in the preparation and public acceptance of reunification

and, on the other, the socio-economic effects of reunification. Finally, the third section describes the formation of the historical memory of the GDR by the media, examining the phenomenon of Ostalgie.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

1.1

The GDR in the Preceding Decades: Politics, Economy, and Society

The German Question affected much of XX century European international politics.[1] At the Potsdam Conference (July 17 – August 2, 1945), after the unconditional surrender of Germany (May 8, 1945), Iosif Stalin, Harry S. Truman and Winston Churchill (later replaced by Clement Attlee), as well as the highest representatives of the victorious powers of the Second World War, officially recognised the occupation zones already established during the Yalta Conference (February 4 – 11, 1945), confirming, on the one hand, the jurisdiction of the Soviet military administration (Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland, SMAD) from the Oder – Neiße to the demarcation line and, on the other hand, the control of the western zone divided between France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Likewise, the city of Berlin was divided into four sectors: the Soviets in the east and the three western powers in the west.[2]

'Denazification' and 'demilitarisation' were the key words that characterised an initial common policy to restore democracy in Germany. However, after a short time, the Soviet and Western zones came into conflict over war reparations. The Soviets, in fact, demanded ten billion dollars to be paid, in part, with current production throughout Germany (as agreed in Potsdam).[3] The Americans and the British, whose areas of occupation were predominantly industrial and required imports of raw materials, objected, arguing, firstly, that the existing industrial production would have to pay for the imports and, secondly, that part of the agricultural production in the Soviet area would have to feed the population of the western ones.[4]

The growing political tension between the victorious powers in 1946, in particular between the USA and the USSR, led, on the one hand, the Americans and the British to

[1] Castaldo, M. (2014). L'Unione europea e la questione tedesca. *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, 81*(2 (322)), 180-181.
[2] Edmonds, R. (1986). Yalta and Potsdam: Forty Years Afterwards. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 62*(2), 197-216.
[3] Shlaim, A. (1985). The Partition of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War. *Review of International Studies, 11*(2), 127.
[4] Dobbins, J., McGinn, J., Crane, K., Jones, S., Lal, R., Rathmell, A., . . . Timilsina, A. (2003). GERMANY. In *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (1 ed., p. 18). RAND Corporation.

unite their respective occupation zones for administrative purposes in the so-called 'Bizonia' and to promote a kind of political pluralism[5] and, on the other, the Soviet authorities to insist that the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) merge to form the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED).[6]

The Conference of Foreign Ministers in Moscow (March 10 – April 24, 1947) confirmed the economic and political division of Germany that had been in progress for more than a year (on this occasion, France joined the Bizonia and relaxed its reparations policy). Berlin, on the other hand, although divided into occupation zones, was still jointly administered by the four occupying powers.[7]

The currency reforms of June 1948 intensified the division process. On June 20, the Deutschmark was introduced in the western zones. On June 23, the USSR introduced a currency reform in its occupation zone, specifying how it would also affect Berlin in its entirety. However, on the same day, the western powers introduced the Deutschmark in the city. Consequently, on June 24, the Soviet occupation forces began the blockade of Berlin to bring the entire city under control. Starting on June 25, the Allies decided to supply West Berlin by air: the Berlin airlift lasted for about eleven months and the blockade ended on May 12, 1949.[8] The western powers therefore remained in Berlin (now divided in two), while progress towards the creation of a new West German state continued apace.

The division of Germany was finally sanctioned by the creation of two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the west and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the east. The FRG came into existence in May 1949 and Konrad Adenauer was elected first Chancellor in September of the same year. The constitution of the GDR was approved on May 30, 1949, and came into force on October 7 of the same year.[9]

The East German political system, although similar to that of other socialist states, had certain specificities. Firstly, the Socialist Unity Party, unlike in other communist

[5] Fagiolo, S. (2013). Adenauer, Konrad. *Ventunesimo Secolo, 12*(32), 100.
[6] Glaeßner, G.-J. (1990). Staatsverständnis, Verfassungs- und Rechtsgeschichte der DDR 1949-1989. *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen, 21*(1), 102.
[7] The Moscow Conference. (1947). *Chronology of International Events and Documents, 3*(8), 226-233.
[8] Fagiolo, S. (2013). Adenauer, Konrad. cit.
[9] Ibidem.

regimes, was not given the role of leading party by the constitution. It was flanked by the Christian democrats of the Christian Democratic Union, the liberal democrats of the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany, the agrarians of the Democratic Farmers' Party and the national democrats of the National Democratic Party. These five parties, grouped in the National Front (Nationale Front der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik), controlled every aspect of the country's political, social, and economic life.[10]

Secondly, the constitution established a parliament with imperfect bicameralism consisting of the People's Chamber, Volkskammer,[11] and the Chamber of States, Länderkammer.[12] The former held legislative power, while the latter exercised consultative and veto functions in matters concerning the states. However, six years after the transformation of the Länder into Bezirke in 1952 (provincial districts more under the control of the central power),[13] the Länderkammer was abolished, and the parliament became unicameral. The Volkskammer was elected on the basis of a joint list prepared by the National Front Congress.[14]

Finally, the State Council (Staatsrat), established by Walter Ulbricht during his term as SED secretary, exercised the powers of the head of state and the SED-controlled Council of Ministers (Ministerrat) and the National Defence Council depended on it. The former exercised executive power and was the most important organ of the state apparatus, while the latter was a collegial body responsible for national security.[15]

The SED's original programme avoided any reference to Leninism and was oriented towards a democratic path to socialism. However, as early as 1948, its reorganisation was initiated. This aimed to progressively exclude social democratic influence and concentrate power in the hands of the party leadership. The SED thus declared itself a party based on Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism, focusing from the early years on the reunification of the people under socialism.[16]

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[10] Schmitt, H. A. (1967). Men and Politics in East Germany. *Current History, 52*(308), 236.
[11] Neugebauer, G. (1974). Die Volkskammer der DDR. *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen, 5*(3), 386-411.
[12] Schnorr, G. (1950). Die Stellung der Ländervertretungen im System der deutschen Verfassungen seit 1815: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung des deutschen Föderalismus. *Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts, 76*(3), 277.
[13] Schmitt, H. A. (1967). Men and Politics in East Germany. cit., 234.
[14] Ivi, 236.
[15] Cook, B. A. (2004). *Europe Since 1945: An Encyclopedia* (1 ed., Vol. 2). Routledge, 1284.
[16] Kaiser, M. (1995). Change and Continuity in the Development of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. *Journal of Contemporary History, 30*(4), 688.

After the hell of World War II, the GDR had the task of re-establishing the basic pillars of society and going back to a situation of normality. In this regard, the political leaders were inflexible in their reforms and citizens were left with little freedom of choice in their lives.[17] After all, from a country built from scratch on the basis of a dictatorship, one could not have expected the immediate emergence of a free, open, and economically developed country capable of competing with other nations. Although, from its inception, the GDR did not lack the essential characteristics to be considered a state, namely territory, people, and government, it (apparently) never managed to win the trust of its citizens. Thus, while the GDR fit the Weberian definition of state,[18] it did not fit the definition of nation, indicating 'a specific type of political community based on shared historical traditions, language, and customs'.[19] Therefore, since the East Germans felt more attached to their old homeland (Germany), the aim of the socialist authorities was precisely to promote a collective identity linked to the GDR as the one and only heir to Germany.

The presence and prosperity of the neighbouring FRG did not help to erase the 'tear' from the memory of the East Germans from their own nation. Therefore, it was necessary to initiate normalisation around the concept of 'Heimat' (commonly translated as 'fatherland' or 'homeland'), as well as to create a feeling of sincere attachment to East Germany in order to offer an alternative model to the capitalist one. To achieve this, the SED sought to firmly connect the concepts of Heimat and nation with that of socialism so that every social situation would refer to this inseparable trinomial, arousing in the citizens that much desired feeling of belonging.[20]

The East German population was numerically smaller than the West German one (about 17 million), also due to the smaller size of the GDR. Nevertheless, most people lived in urban centres: the main cities were East Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz, Halle, Erfurt, and Rostock.[21]

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[17] Fulbrook, M. (1997). The Limits of Totalitarianism: God, State and Society in the GDR. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 7*, 25-52.
[18] Dusza, K. (1989). Max Weber's Conception of the State. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, 3*(1), 71-105.
[19] Martignetti, G. (2003). Nazione. In R. G. UTET, *l'Enciclopedia*. Roma: La Biblioteca di Repubblica, 659.
[20] Palmowski, J. (2004). Building an East German Nation: The Construction of a Socialist Heimat, 1945-1961. *Central European History, 37*(3), 365-399.
[21] Schmitt, H. A. (1967). Men and Politics in East Germany. cit., 232.

The control of the economy by the political power was very strong in the GDR. The SED, in particular, created an industrialised, competitive and apparently superior economic system to that of the other Warsaw Pact countries, characterised by an advanced chemical and steel industry, a self-sufficient agriculture and a good road and railway system.[22]

However, in the early post-war years, the situation was quite different. There was, in fact, a winner-take-all relationship between the USSR and its occupation zone: the Soviet Union, at first, only aimed at obtaining reparations for the damage suffered during the war, disinterested in financing the economic recovery of the zone. Until 1948, numerous industries owned by the state and Nazi hierarchs were confiscated, others exploited for reparations and still others nationalised.[23] After that, the focus shifted to the use of Soviet companies (Sowjetischen Aktiengesellschaften, SAG) and the exploitation of current production, which began shortly after the end of the war.[24] Nevertheless, these dynamics only partly determined the backwardness of East Germany compared to West Germany, as the separation from the West German market was the main factor. The GDR was indeed largely dependent on raw materials and intermediate goods also from the West.[25]

As soon as it became clear that Germany would continue to exist as a country divided into two areas of influence, the Soviet Union gradually assumed the role of the GDR's most important trading partner and gradually reduced its claims from 1950 onwards. In some periods, for example, the GDR came to have about half of its foreign trade with the USSR, but it should be pointed out that this economic interdependence was not the result of economic reasons alone, but also and above all of political decisions.[26]

At the III SED Congress, the first five-year plan (1951-1955) was launched. It initiated centralised state planning by setting higher production quotas for heavy industry and higher worker productivity to overcome the imbalances produced by the division of the country, but also because the products of heavy industry played a very important role

[22] Hanhardt, A. M. (1978). The German Democratic Republic. *Current History, 74*(436), 174.
[23] Naszádos, Z. (2019). The Involvement of the State in the German Economy. In M. Szanyi, *Seeking the Best Master: State Ownership in the Varieties of Capitalism* (p. 91). Central European University Press.
[24] Vale , M., & Bethkenhagen, J. (1982). The Development of GDR Economic Relations with the USSR. *International Journal of Politics, 12*(1/2), 235.
[25] Hanhardt, A. M. (1978). The German Democratic Republic. cit.
[26] Vale , M., & Bethkenhagen, J. (1982). The Development of GDR Economic Relations with the USSR. cit., 235-236.

in the GDR's foreign trade, especially with the USSR. These exports were to lay the foundations for building an efficient industry in the brother countries and, at the same time, guarantee the GDR the necessary imports from these countries.[27] After Stalin's death in March 1953, the SED announced the so-called 'New Course', concentrating production targets from heavy industry to consumer industry with the aim of improving the living conditions of citizens and workers. As a result, the New Course increased the availability of consumer goods, but further increased productivity quotas, leading to the workers' uprising on June 17, 1953.[28]

Walter Ulbricht announced the second five-year plan in 1956. While increasing coal and energy production were the planning priorities, the GDR began to see technological and scientific progress as a means of consolidating the system. According to the COMECON meeting of May 1956, the GDR was to provide the states of the socialist economic zone with qualitatively superior equipment to promote the automation of production processes and not lag behind the rest of the world market; in return, the GDR was to receive the raw materials it needed: coal, ores, crude oil and metals.[29]

Due to numerous difficulties, including increased migration flows to the west and the impossibility of renewing some foreign trade agreements, the government decided to replace the second five-year plan with a seven-year plan (1959-1965), aiming to increase productivity and match that of the FRG. However, faced with ever-increasing production demands, emigration intensified, and consequently annual industrial growth began to decline steadily from 1959, reaching a period of depression between 1961 and 1963.[30]

In 1963, Ulbricht introduced the New Economic System of Planning and Management (Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung, NÖS) with the threefold aim of reorganising the entire structure of economic decision-making and control, freeing the top of the hierarchy from most day-to-day responsibilities (so that they could focus more on long-term issues) and giving the lower organs greater decision-making power; stimulating technological modernisation at all levels of society; and

[27] Ivi, 237-238.
[28] Grabas, M. (2015). 17 June 1953 – The East German Workers' Uprising as a Catalyst for a Socialist Economic Order. *VSWG: Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 102*(2), 186-187.
[29] Ivi, 188-189.
[30] Vale , M., & Bethkenhagen, J. (1982). The Development of GDR Economic Relations with the USSR. cit., 239.

replacing the five-year plan scheme.[31] Contrary to the SED's expectations, the system turned out to be a failure and, as a result, between 1967 and 1968 it was modified and joined by the Economic System of Socialism (ESS). The state again assumed greater control over the economy and strategic sectors were identified for development through preferential access to funds and resources, while the NÖS would continue to regulate the rest of the economy. As could easily be expected, the desire to achieve accelerated growth and the concentration of most resources in some sectors led to shortcomings in others.[32] Dwindling consumer goods and problems in the industrial sector, in particular, led to the failure of the Economic System of Socialism on the one hand and, on the other, to the demise of Ulbricht, who was relieved of his post in May 1970.[33]

Erich Honecker, the new General Secretary of the SED, introduced a new programme in 1971 based on comprehensive long-term planning (15-20 years). The programme again emphasised Marxism-Leninism and the international class struggle, reaffirming the goal of industrial progress pursued within state planning. To this end, the last private enterprises were nationalised in 1972, adding to an already stagnant economy.[34] Factors such as the global increase in consumer prices in the 1970s, the growing foreign debt and insufficient funding in research and production of consumer goods left the GDR increasingly dependent on the USSR and led to its reduced competitiveness in the western market.[35] The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, made the situation even worse with the mass migration of workers westwards. This led to the collapse of production and the central planning authority.

1.2
Global Changes and International Pressure on the Eastern Bloc

During the Cold War, a phase in history that took place after World War II between the late 1940s and the late 1980s, the world was divided into two main blocs: the Western bloc, led by the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies,

[31] Baylis, T. A. (1971). Economic Reform as Ideology: East Germany's New Economic System. *Comparative Politics, 3*(2), 215.
[32] Baylis, T. A. (1986). Explaining the GDR's Economic Strategy. *International Organization, 40*(2), 385.
[33] Last, G. (2019). From Ulbricht to Honecker. In G. Last, *After the 'Socialist Spring': Collectivisation and Economic Transformation in the GDR* (NED-New Edition, 1 ed., p. 155). Berghahn Books.
[34] Baylis, T. A. (1986). Explaining the GDR's Economic Strategy. cit., 388.
[35] Benvenuti, F. (1999). Nascita e dissoluzione della Repubblica Democratica Tedesca. *Contemporanea, 2*(1), 134.

and the Eastern bloc, led by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.[36] As these two blocs were in constant political, economic and military competition, the eastern one was subject to particular international pressures. In detail, these pressures were determined by factors such as the existing ideological confrontation, precise US foreign policy strategies, particular economic initiatives, the creation of a specific intergovernmental organisation, national demonstrations and movements, the arms race, and the development of new systems of mass destruction.

The Cold War was first and foremost an ideological confrontation between USSR communism and western capitalism. The US represented the capitalist system, characterised by a free market economy, private property, and political democracy. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, promoted communism, with a planned economy, state control of the means of production and a one-party political system.[37] Both superpowers used propaganda and popular culture as ideological weapons: the United States promoted its 'American way of life' through the dissemination of films, music and other cultural products,[38] while the Soviet Union tried to spread its communist ideology through political and cultural propaganda.[39] This ideological struggle led to several tensions, including the spread of communist ideas to other parts of the world and the perception of Soviet expansionism as a threat to global stability.

On this last point, the Truman Doctrine was 'announced' by the US president himself in March 1947. It represented a significant shift in American foreign policy and was a direct response to the growing threats of communism, particularly the expansion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. The Truman Doctrine was part of the broader policy of containment, a US foreign policy strategy adopted in the early years of the Cold War to avoid the so-called 'domino effect' caused by the progressive political shift of countries towards Soviet forms of communism rather than towards Western capitalism and liberal democracy. The policy of containment was first described by George Kennan in his famous long telegram of 1946,[40] and then made public in July 1947 in his anonymous

[36] Schlesinger, A. (1967). Origins of the Cold War. *Foreign Affairs, 46*(1), 22.
[37] Garthoff, R. L. (1992). Why Did the Cold War Arise, and Why Did It End? *Diplomatic History, 16*(2), 287.
[38] Sharkey, R. W. (1941). The American Way of Life. *American Bar Association Journal, 27*(10), 618.
[39] Denny, A. (1951). Soviet Propaganda. *The Military Engineer, 43*(294), 259-262.
[40] Rabasa, A., Benard, C., Schwartz, L. H., & Sickle, P. (2007). The Cold War Experience. In *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (p. 7). RAND Corporation.

article ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’ (signed ‘X’) published in the influential periodical Foreign Affairs.[41]

A few months earlier, more precisely in February 1947, the British government, in the grip of a severe economic crisis, informed the US that it would withdraw its troops from Greece. Truman then decided that the US should intervene to replace the British troops and that aid should also be extended to neighbouring Turkey. On February 27, Secretary of State George Marshall, speaking to the US Congress, warned the western world of the real possibility that the Soviet Union could expand its dominance in Europe and the Middle East if Greece dissolved in a civil war and Turkey was surrounded (the so-called ‘domino theory’). On March 12, Truman again addressed Congress demanding a specific bill to provide aid to Greece and Turkey and stating that the USA should support, first and foremost economically and financially, free countries and peoples threatened by armed minorities or external pressure.[42] Truman’s speech to Congress marked the beginning of a global US commitment to contain communism. These statements did not bring about any immediate change in relations with the Soviet Union, particularly since Stalin did not seem interested in Greece. On the contrary, the latter reacted promptly to another American intervention: the Marshall Plan.

The Marshall Plan, officially known as the European Recovery Program, was an ambitious programme of economic aid and technical assistance provided by the United States to European states destroyed by World War II. The plan was proposed by George Marshall in a speech on June 5, 1947, at Harvard University and had as its main objective the economic recovery of Western Europe.[43] The United States offered a vast amount of financial aid in the form of loans and grants providing a total of more than thirteen billion dollars between 1948 and 1952. However, the Plan’s aid was not free. The beneficiary European states had not only to cooperate with each other and present detailed economic development programmes, but also to remove trade barriers and promote free trade.[44] This cooperation laid the foundation for the creation of European institutions such as the

[41] Gati, C. (1972). What Containment Meant. *Foreign Policy*(7), 22-40.
[42] Rabasa, A., Benard, C., Schwartz, L. H., & Sickle, P. (2007). The Cold War Experience. cit., 8.
[43] Ivi, 8-9.
[44] Development of the European Recovery Plan. (1948). *Monthly Labor Review, 66*(1), 40-45.

European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1952),[45] first, and the European Economic Community (EEC, 1957), later.[46]

The Marshall Plan was not only an act of generosity, but it also had a geopolitical objective. Since, as already mentioned, the US intended to prevent the spread of communism in Western Europe, the plan helped stabilise this area by helping to consolidate Western influence in the Cold War. Thus, while the European Recovery Program helped stabilise Western Europe, leading to economic and political growth, Eastern Europe remained under Soviet influence and suffered a different fate.

After the Paris Conference on Marshall Plan aid on July 12, 1947, which threatened to see the participation of some Eastern bloc states before they were called back by the Soviet government, Stalin could no longer tolerate differences within the bloc itself. Consequently, he convened a conference of the leaders of the communist parties of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, France, Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary in Szklarska Poręba, Poland, from 22 to 27 September 1947. The conference, stated that the Marshall Plan was nothing more than a programme for the subjugation of Europe and not for its reconstruction, set up the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (COMINFORM), with the aim of promoting unity and cooperation between the communist parties throughout the world. COMINFORM played an important role in the early years of the Cold War as it was able to promote Stalinist communist orthodoxy and openly criticised communist parties that deviated from this line, such as the Yugoslav party, which adopted a path independent of the Soviet bloc.[47]

A very important factor that brought pressure to bear on the Eastern bloc was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949, and the subsequent creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in December 1950, an intergovernmental political-military organisation founded to promote the collective security and defence of its member countries.[48]

The February 1948 coup d'état by which Czechoslovakia firmly entered the Soviet sphere and the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49 (discussed in the previous paragraph) alarmed

[45] Trattato istitutivo della Comunità Europea del carbone e dell'acciaio. (1951). *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, 18*(2), 303-358.
[46] Olivi, B. (2013). Comunità economica europea. *Ventunesimo Secolo, 12*(32), 35-55.
[47] G., I. (1950). The Evolution of the Cominform 1947-1950. *The World Today, 6*(5), 213-228.
[48] Henrikson, A. K. (1980). THE CREATION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE, 1948-1952. *Naval War College Review, 33*(3), 4.

Western Europe and the USA. According to Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, the Western European states and the US would have to act quickly and support each other to counter an imminent danger of internal communist subversion or an external Soviet invasion, or both possibilities simultaneously. Negotiations to form an alliance between Britain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (the Benelux countries) began in February 1948, but made little progress until the Czechoslovakian coup. On March 17, the same countries met in a conference in Brussels and signed the Treaty of Brussels, which bound all participants to rush to each other's aid if one of them was attacked in Europe. The Brussels Treaty was a crucial step in the realisation of the North Atlantic Treaty.[49]

The creation of NATO was thus formalised through the latter treaty, signed by the twelve founding member states in Washington: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Article 5, in particular, stipulated that an attack against one or more NATO members was considered an attack against all members and committed states to respond with military action if necessary.[50] The North Atlantic Treaty was important politically and especially psychologically because it involved the United States in European affairs (ensuring stability) and at the same time did not result in their complete dominance in the affairs themselves.

In response to the establishment of NATO and the accession of the Federal Republic of Germany to it, the Soviet Union and seven other communist states (Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania) signed the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955: a treaty of military alliance by which they pledged to consult each other on all international issues involving their common interests and to establish a unified military command based in Moscow.[51]

Revolts and national movements were another constitutive factor in the pressures on the Eastern bloc. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968 were significant examples and events in the history of the Eastern bloc as they were both characterised by attempts to liberalise and challenge Soviet rule.

[49] Ivi, 13.
[50] Ivi, 25.
[51] Haigh, P. (1968). Reflections on the Warsaw Pact. *The World Today, 24*(4), 166-172.

The first one began on October 23, 1956, initially as a peaceful demonstration in Budapest, later turning into an armed uprising against the pro-Soviet communist government led by Mátyás Rákosi. The rioters demanded political-economic reforms (with the return of Imre Nagy) and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Following the demonstrations, Nagy assumed the post of prime minister and, after abandoning the one-party regime, declared on October 31, that Hungary would become neutral and withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. As a result, during the night between November 3 - 4, Soviet troops, and tanks, which had meanwhile abandoned the capital, intervened to brutally suppress the uprising, causing thousands of deaths and forcing many to flee to Austria. The uprising was suppressed by force, the pro-Soviet government restored, and Nagy was arrested, imprisoned in Romania, and finally killed in 1958.[52] This turmoil had a lasting impact on Eastern European politics because it showed, on the one hand, how Soviet dominance depended exclusively on force and, on the other, the limits to the freedom allowed to its satellites, even after Khrushchev's speech by which the process of 'destalinisation' was initiated. There were no further problems within the Soviet bloc until 1968.

Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček was a key figure in the Prague Spring. Under his leadership, the Czechoslovak Communist Party began to promote a series of reforms that sought to open up the political system, abolish censorship, improve civil rights, and allow greater freedom of expression and organisation. In addition, reforms introduced by Dubček included the promotion of limited multipartyism and the adoption of a foreign policy more independent of the USSR line. These reforms soon caused concern among Soviet leaders, who feared that Czechoslovakia was drifting away from their orbit. For this reason, on August 20, 1968, troops from the Soviet Union, along with troops from other Warsaw Pact countries, invaded Czechoslovakia. Despite popular resistance, the military forces managed to restore control of the Czechoslovak government. Dubček was first forced to go to Moscow, where on August 26, he agreed that communist orthodoxy would be restored in Czechoslovakia; then in April 1969 he was replaced by Gustav Husák, who initiated a process of 'normalisation' (purge), and finally in May 1970 he was expelled from the communist party.[53]

[52] A., R. (1957). The Hungarian Revolution. *The World Today, 13*(1), 3-16.
[53] Goodman, R. M. (1969). The Invasion of Czechoslovakia: 1968. *The International Lawyer, 4*(1), 42-79.

The Soviets justified their action through the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine. This doctrine upheld the principle that the Soviet Union had the right and duty to intervene militarily in communist or socialist (non-Soviet) countries to protect socialism, the socialist order or the interests of the Union itself. In other words, the freedom of foreign socialists to determine their own country's path of development was to be subordinated to the cause of universal Marxism-Leninism.[54]

Finally, ideological rivalry resulted in a nuclear and conventional arms race. Both superpowers sought to accumulate increasingly powerful nuclear arsenals as a mutual deterrent. This competition led to a widespread fear of possible nuclear war, known as Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD.[55] In this context, the most tangible successes of détente were achieved precisely in strategic arms limitation through the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty I (SALT I) of May 26, 1972, and its extension in the Vladivostok Agreement of November 1974. SALT I provided for limits on intercontinental nuclear warheads (ICBMs) and anti-missile defence (ABM) systems for each of the two nations, as well as provisions to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and a commitment not to transfer them to non-nuclear countries.[56]

In March 1977, the Carter administration put forward proposals for a new strategic arms agreement, and after just over two years, negotiations resulted in a further SALT II, signed by Brezhnev and Carter himself on June 18, 1979, in Vienna. This treaty established a limit of 2,400 on all types of strategic delivery vehicles on each side, to be reduced to 2,250 by 1981, as well as the establishment of a system to verify compliance.[57] However, six months after the Vienna summit, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and Carter refused to submit SALT II to the Senate for ratification.[58] In fact, these agreements possessed a number of weaknesses; first, they left open the possibility of developing other weapons not included in the treaties, and second, the slow pace of negotiations would actually allow the development of such weapons.

The U.S. and Soviet governments decided to attempt a new round of long-range missile negotiations only in June 1982, this time under the new acronym START

[54] Baroch, C. T. (1971). The Brezhnev Doctrine. *American Bar Association Journal, 57*(7), 686-690.
[55] Lebow, R. N., & Stein, J. G. (1995). Deterrence and the Cold War. *Political Science Quarterly, 110*(2), 158-159.
[56] Doty, P. (1975). Strategic Arms Limitation after SALT I. *Daedalus, 104*(3), 65.
[57] SALT II. (1987). *Arms Control Today, 17*(3), 10A.
[58] Sartori, L. (1985). Will SALT II Survive? *International Security, 10*(3), 147-148

(Strategic Arms Reduction Talks). The negotiations proved very difficult and were broken off by the Soviets in November 1983 in protest against the arrival of the first Pershing missiles on European soil. As a result, the nuclear arms race resumed and it was not until 1991 that the United States and the Soviet Union concluded START I, a significant step in reducing the two countries' nuclear arsenals that helped reduce tensions and improve global security.[59]

1.3

The Growth of Social and Political Tensions in the GDR in the 1980s: An Overview

In the 1980s, the German Democratic Republic faced a series of social and political tensions that contributed to its decline and subsequent reunification with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990.

On March 10, 1985, Konstantin Chernenko, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), died at the age of seventy-three; therefore, two days later, the Politburo appointed Mikhail Gorbachev as his successor. Few at the time would have predicted that the latter would initiate a series of fundamental reforms at home and tolerate such a change in the Soviet empire; however, from the outset, the leaders of the GDR expressed concern about his appointment. While the figures of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, reflecting the weakness of Moscow's leadership, had given the East German leaders more freedom, they suddenly found themselves faced with a new dynamic figure eager to leave his mark both at home and abroad.[60] Gorbachev, who in no way aimed to harm the socialist commonwealth, thought that the Soviet Union needed, firstly, effective reform to achieve economic and technological acceleration (uskorenie); secondly, a set of measures to effectively reorganise the party and state apparatus (perestroika); and, finally, greater transparency and clarity in political and social relations (glasnost). These measures, which aimed at a modernisation of the USSR, were supported by the majority of the party leadership. Depression and social apathy in Soviet society forced Gorbachev not to stop there: the 1987 Central Committee meetings showed how he intended to strengthen the role of the

[59] U.S.-Soviet/Russian Nuclear Arms Control. (2002). *Arms Control Today, 32*(5), 12-13.
[60] Childs, D. (1989). East Germany: Coping with Gorbachev. *Current History, 88*(541), 385.

party against the various state bureaucracies and ultimately reform the political system of the USSR (demokratizatsiya). Fear of economic and socio-political reforms led technocrats and conservatives to unite against the radical reformers.[61]

The SED, therefore, rejected the idea that changes in property relations, the development of market relations, the extensive development of socialist democracy, and competition were necessary to accelerate the scientific-technological transition and increase economic efficiency. The Kremlin did not put pressure on the GDR, and, for its part, the SED thought it was in a strong position for several reasons. Firstly, the East Germans believed that their economy was efficient enough not to need further reforms. Indeed, the Honecker regime had already undertaken limited economic reforms in the 1970s, including some decentralisation to 'combines' and regional agricultural cooperatives. Honecker could therefore state with some confidence that there was no need for further economic interventions.[62] Secondly, an uprising in the GDR would only have damaged the current Soviet leadership and threatened its entire dominance. Moreover, the USSR was largely dependent on East Germany's qualitatively superior exports and received support from it in every international initiative. Finally, many SED leaders expected Gorbachev to fail. Thus, on the one hand, the party had to maintain firm control over the state and the economy, on the other hand, measures to improve the economy should not undermine central planning and party control.[63]

The idea that East Germany in the 1980s represented a great socio-economic success was, in reality, a myth. Although the SED claimed the achievement of important goals such as full employment, a ten-year integrated socialist school system, health services extended to all, a comprehensive housing programme, a modern economy, and no food shortages, more and more reports from the GDR itself indicated substandard living conditions for its citizens. The main problems were the terrible housing situation, the demand for civil rights, and shortages of everything from light bulbs to razor blades, from buttons to clothing, from furniture to bicycles, etc.[64]

[61] Oldenburg, F. S. (1989). Perestroika in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. *Irish Studies in International Affairs, 3*(1), 28.
[62] Mason, D. S. (1988). Glasnost, Perestroika and Eastern Europe. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 64*(3), 444.
[63] Childs, D. (1989). East Germany: Coping with Gorbachev. cit., 386.
[64] Ivi, 387.

As East Germans often compared their living conditions with those of West Germans, a progressive apathy and alienation of the population from both the rulers and the regime developed. While coercion and repressive tolerance had allowed the GDR to maintain a certain political stability until the end of the 1970s, the relative openness to the West in recent years contributed to making the once secret criticism of people's living conditions more explicit. The new generations, in particular, who disliked the dullness of East German life, began to criticise the formulas of the founding fathers more and more openly by turning to the Church and the figure of Gorbachev.[65]

In the second chapter, I will examine in depth this paragraph by describing the rise of peace and environmental movements, the emergence of human rights and free speech organisations, and the 1989 popular protests in search of democracy.

[65] Oldenburg, F. S. (1989). Perestroika in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. cit., 33-34.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POPULAR PROTESTS

2.1

The History of the GDR Between Resistance, Dissent, and Opposition

Exploring resistance, dissent, and opposition within GDR history demands a concise theoretical preamble due to their intricate nature. Although these terms can be interchangeable, their nuanced disparities warrant a precise delineation to capture the intricate dynamics within the Republic's past. 'Resistance,' with multifaceted definitions and referred to as 'Widerstand' in German, signifies an active political challenge targeting the complete overthrow of a political system, frequently through forceful ruptures.[66] Alternatively, 'dissent' and 'opposition' encapsulate as 'Opposition' in German. They signify either discontent and social defiance or a reform-minded, critical stance toward a political system itself.[67] Therefore, when considering the GDR context through these concise definitions, we observe the Widerstand advocating for the GDR regime's overthrow and the reunification of the two Germanies. Conversely, the Opposition aimed to introduce elements for enhancing the power structure while preserving the established status quo to some extent.[68] However, it must be borne in mind that throughout the history of the GDR, Widerstand and Opposition behaviour has been mixed in many cases and that the line between the two is very thin.

With this pivotal differentiation established, it becomes feasible to delineate two primary phases in GDR history. The initial phase, extending from its inception until the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, was characterized by the dominance of Widerstand actions over Opposition strategies. Subsequently, the period spanning until 1989 witnessed a shift toward the predominance of Opposition methods, prompting alterations in the repressive mechanisms and rationale. Notably, during the era of active political resistance, the regime largely favoured violent repression tactics such as murder,

[66] Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). Conceptualizing Resistance. *Sociological Forum*, *19*(4), 533–554.
[67] Blondel, J. (1997). Political Opposition in the Contemporary World. *Government and Opposition*, *32*(4), 483-484.
[68] Fulbrook, M. (1993). Popular Discontent and Political Activism in the GDR. *Contemporary European History*, *2*(3), 266.

deportations to labour camps, and severe criminal penalties.[69] In response to the opposition's use of legal channels for critical discourse, the SED leadership employed two key strategies. Firstly, they sought to legitimize the regime through innovative approaches such as Ulbricht's industrialization policies and, notably, Honecker's utilization of the welfare state from 1971 as a compensatory measure.[70] Secondly, they expanded the authority and operational freedom of the Ministry for State Security (commonly known as the Stasi) to deeply infiltrate society, aiming for comprehensive yet discreet control. Consequently, the Stasi adopted a more nuanced strategy aimed at isolating, discrediting, and ultimately neutralizing behaviour, whether at an individual or group level, deemed threatening to the regime. This approach involved brief detentions, threats, and denunciations, operating alongside the persistent presence of harsher repressive measures that remained a looming potential threat.[71]

During the 1940s and 1950s, the main actors within the realms of resistance and opposition primarily comprised four groups: political dissenters hailing from social democratic and bourgeois parties, the youthful resistance, the Church, and those fostering social resistance.

Once the imposition of a Soviet-style dictatorial regime in East Germany became evident, various forms of resistance began to proliferate. The establishment of the SED and subsequent 'alignment' (Gleichschaltung) of bourgeois parties and mass organizations resulted in the expulsion, persecution, arrest, and deportation of numerous social democrats who refused to conform to the communist leadership's directives, which staunchly opposed any dissenting voices. Western assistance proved pivotal for the Widerstand, evident not just through political parties like the Ostbüro der SPD but also via entities such as the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity (Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit, KgU), private Western resistance groups, and covert service operations.[72]

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[69] Bruce, G. (2003). The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East Germany: Stasi Operations and Threat Perceptions, 1945–1953. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *5*(2), 16-24.
[70] Burdumy, A. (2013). Reconsidering the Role of the Welfare State Within the German Democratic Republic's Political System. *Journal of Contemporary History*, *48*(4), 873.
[71] Jedlitschka, K. (2012). The Lives of Others: East German State Security Service's Archival Legacy. *The American Archivist*, *75*(1), 82-85.
[72] Bruce, G. (2003). The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East Germany: Stasi Operations and Threat Perceptions, 1945–1953. cit., 13.

Youth resistance emerged early on and gained strength as ideological strictness infiltrated educational institutions. When high schools and universities started conforming to a Stalinist educational model, groups like the Eisenberger Kreis intensified their resistance efforts. They engaged in various acts of dissent, such as distributing illicit pamphlets and staging protests, to critique both the educational system's framework and the targeted persecution of numerous students.[73]

Furthermore, youth organizations faced discrimination even within the protective realm of the Church. Despite the regime allowing the Church to maintain its existence as an institution, the period from 1952 to 1953, marked by Walter Ulbricht's initiation of the New Course, witnessed a significant deterioration in relations between these entities. This initiative aimed at centralizing administration, eradicating remaining bourgeois structures, and socializing agriculture, concurrently intensifying the regime's confrontation with the Church, especially targeting its youth initiatives. Repressive measures were employed, putting substantial pressure on individuals attending church services or undergoing confirmation. The 'Young Community' (Junge Gemeinde), representing young Protestants within the church, was labelled an illegal organization, leading to coercive measures in schools compelling students to distance themselves from it. Consequently, numerous pupils faced expulsion, fuelling discontent within the GDR and prompting mass defections of teachers, students, and farmers to the West.[74]

June 17, 1953, marked the ignition point when a protest movement, triggered by a strike among East Berlin construction workers, unveiled the fragility inherent in the SED dictatorship's control. This spark swiftly transformed into a widespread movement that spanned over seven hundred cities, drawing nearly a million people into demonstrations, strikes, and protests. Despite the central aspirations for free elections, the reunification of Germany, and improved living standards, the Soviet military quashed the uprising. The uprising's objectives clashed with the established post-war order from Yalta and Potsdam, rendering its success improbable. Many faced dire consequences for their bravery, with dozens losing their lives, hundreds sustaining injuries, and tens of thousands seeking refuge in the West. The aftermath involved numerous summary executions, with

[73] Connelly, J. (1997). [Review of *Der "Eisenberger Kreis:" Jugendwiderstand und Verfolgung in der DDR 1953-1958*, by Patrik von zur Mühlen]. *Central European History*, *30*(4), 628–630.
[74] Eppelmann, R. (1994). Opposition und Kirche in der DDR. *German Studies Review*, *17*, 102.

over 1,800 individuals detained.[75] Between 1949 and 1961, around three million East Germans left the country. The SED exploited both the phenomenon of 'voting with one's feet'[76] and the practice of 'selling' unwanted citizens to the FRG as a means of fighting resistance and opposition, because the more the emigration of resistance and opposition grew, the weaker the movement in East Germany became.[77]

By the 1960s, the Widerstand phase reached its conclusion, partly owing to a relative economic and political stabilization within the country. Consequently, the resistance actions transitioned into opposition movements. This opposition, as previously mentioned, shifted its focus away from toppling the GDR regime and instead aimed toward enhancing and reforming specific aspects within it. This approach did not challenge the existing power structures or the coexistence of the two German states.

During the Honecker era, GDR citizens entered into an unspoken, informal agreement. By outwardly acknowledging and adhering to the regime's logic and regulations, they managed to carve out zones of relative independence within their private lives, shielded from potential persecution.[78] This fostered a dual existence: within the confines of the private sphere, a semblance of autonomy thrived within small communities, while in public, conformity and subservience reigned, characterized by specific languages and codes tailored to comply with the regime.

The politicized opposition was confined mainly to internal debates within the SED or arose only in rare instances, exemplified by the significant event in 1976 when Wolf Biermann's citizenship was revoked. This incident led to a mass departure of writers and artists, serving as a decisive verdict on the SED's cultural policies, ultimately marking their definitive failure.[79] As previously noted, the opposition predominantly opted for occupying pre-political realms, leveraging legality to foster critical dialogue. For instance, youth opposition found expression through the emergence of beat or punk subcultures. The primary themes around which legal and pre-political opposition coalesced encompassed the defence of fundamental rights, environmental protection, and

[75] Bruce, G. (2003). The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East Germany: Stasi Operations and Threat Perceptions, 1945–1953. cit., 24-28.
[76] Banzhaf, H. S., & Walsh, R. P. (2008). Do People Vote with Their Feet? An Empirical Test of Tiebout's Mechanism. *The American Economic Review*, *98*(3), 843–863.
[77] Horster, M. (2004). The Trade in Political Prisoners between the Two German States, 1962-89. *Journal of Contemporary History*, *39*(3), 403–424.
[78] Hyde-Price, A. (1988). East Germany: Calm before the Storm? *The World Today*, *44*(8/9), 144.
[79] Fulbrook, M. (1993). Popular Discontent and Political Activism in the GDR. cit., 277.

pacifism. These movements found support, notably from the Protestant Church, which not only provided communal spaces but also facilitated the dissemination of their ideas through publications disguised as internal church services.[80]

In the following paragraphs, I will investigate in detail the nature of these three opposition movements in the context of promoting real demonstrations up to the explosion of protests in 1989.

2.2

The Development and Strengthening of Social Movements: The Peace, and Environmental Movements

During the 1980s, the GDR appeared stagnant and under tight control by authorities who closely supervised any political activities outside state-endorsed groups. Media channels were strictly regulated, with press permissions granted solely to an elite faction aligned with the SED. Despite these limitations, opposition and protest movements against the communist regime sprouted along three clear trajectories.

The initial challenge to the regime came from the peace movement. Despite the 1972 ratification of the Basic Treaty between the two Germanies, which partially reduced tensions between East and West and brought about a degree of stability within both states,[81] the persistent fear lingered that the FRG and GDR could potentially become a significant battleground for a military conflict among superpowers. By the late 1970s, the surge in nuclear weapon production reignited concerns that the two German zones might become a nuclear 'ground zero' at any given moment.

Starting in 1950, the GDR regime adopted peace as the central pillar of its policy. As per the 'Law for the Protection of Peace' on December 15, 1950, the regime asserted an inseparable link between peace and socialism, framing an assault on socialism as a direct threat to peace itself.[82] The regime aimed to propagate a peace-oriented policy by bolstering socialist society. In this pursuit, particular emphasis was placed on engaging and integrating new generations as the bedrock for sustaining ongoing transformations. In 1952, Honecker, then president of the Free German Youth (FDJ), the sole youth

[80] Ibidem.
[81] Bender, P. (1973). The Special Relationship of the Two German States. *The World Today*, *29*(9), 392.
[82] Losano, M. G. (2020). *Le tre costituzioni pacifiste. Il rifiuto della guerra nelle costituzioni di Giappone, Italia e Germania* (Vol. 14). Frankfurt am Main: Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, 59; 328-330.

organization sanctioned by the SED, catering to youth aged fourteen to twenty-five, articulated the regime's educational objectives. These goals leaned on values like patriotism, equality, and freedom.[83] During that same year, the SED instituted the Society for Sports and Technical Sciences (GST) to advance paramilitary physical education. Subsequently, in 1956, the National People's Army (Nationale Volksarmee, NVA) was established. Following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the FDJ called upon males aged eighteen to twenty-five to voluntarily enlist, aiming to protect the Republic from perceived threats from the West. By 1962, the SED implemented universal conscription. This approach, termed 'armed peace' by the regime, sharply contrasted with the aspirations of the younger generation. These individuals sought a national revival, a pragmatic peace strategy, and envisioned a unified German democracy with associated rights. From 1964 onward, the state continued to endorse pre- and paramilitary training through the FDJ, Young Pioneers, and the Red Cross. These programs took the form of sports competitions, apprenticeships, and work groups, intending to instil identification with the state and the NVA while promoting attributes like courage, determination, unwavering loyalty, and ultimately, class consciousness.[84]

Despite the allure of the regime's policies and the prospects it offered for careers, challenges emerged early on. From 1949 to 1961, roughly three million East Germans migrated to the FRG, with nearly half of them under 25 years old. This mass exodus reflected widespread dissatisfaction among the populace. Yet, during those years, there wasn't a distinct youth opposition movement within the GDR. Surprisingly, it was often the older generation that primarily resisted, organizing through groups like the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity and the Investigative Committee of Free Jurists (UfJ). These groups were dissolved in 1959 and 1969, respectively.[85]

However, the construction of the Wall became the groundwork for emerging forms of youthful opposition. It widened existing divides in society and symbolized the erosion of socialist ideals and belief in the GDR's communist mission. Consequently, in the late 1960s and notably in the 1970s, a sort of counterculture slowly emerged in East

[83] Mleczkowski, W. (1983). In Search of the Forbidden Nation: Opposition by the Young Generation in the GDR. *Government and Opposition*, *18*(2), 177.
[84] Mushaben, J. M. (1984). Swords to Plowshares: The Church, the State and the East German Peace Movement. *Studies in Comparative Communism*, *17*(2), 125.
[85] Mleczkowski, W. (1983). In Search of the Forbidden Nation: Opposition by the Young Generation in the GDR. cit., 178-180.

Germany. The first appearances of 'hippies' marked the onset of the hippy movement and punk culture. While not politicized subcultures as seen in Western Europe, their mere existence constituted a political statement within the GDR's regime. Rather than assimilating into socialist society and engaging in discussions about its principles and objectives, young people avoided such interactions. Rock music, deemed an 'imperialistic non-culture,' became the emblem of this opposition movement.[86]

Around 1980, the autonomous peace movement emerged with distinctive traits. Firstly, it was a highly decentralized and spontaneous movement, functioning without a formal organization. Secondly, it managed to progress with minimal reliance on mass media, bureaucracy, or charismatic leaders. Information circulated mainly through word of mouth (Buschfunk), while small clandestine publications, similar to the Soviet 'samizdat,' were utilized for idea dissemination and group coordination. The East German peace movement primarily focused on creating alternative peace services for conscientious objectors (those who opposed armed military service). In September 1964, under Church pressure, the SED introduced 'construction units' (Baueinheiten) as a non-armed military service option for conscientious objectors. However, the regime rejected other forms of alternative service not under military control. The 'construction soldiers' (Bausoldaten, BS) remained the only legally recognized form of conscientious objection within the Warsaw Pact. By 1981, numerous youth groups, mainly from Dresden, petitioned for an alternative peace service and sought support from the Church.[87]

Only the Evangelical Lutheran Church gave the movement logistical and moral support because it was the largest body in the country that was not directly under party control. However, despite the fact that it brought together the vast majority of believers in the GDR, it had to suffer harsh repression and a severe restriction of autonomy in the preceding decades. Pressure from the regime, for example, forced the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Germany (VELKD) or 'Kirchenbund' to cut ties with the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) in 1969.[88] In order to gain some room for manoeuvre, the Church had to compromise with the regime during the 1970s. The decision in 1971 to become a 'church in socialism'[89] and the summit of 6 March 1978

[86] Ivi, 180-181.
[87] Sax, B., & Sax, B. (1982). The Peace Movement in East Germany. *CrossCurrents*, *32*(4), 391–393.
[88] Ivi, 390.
[89] Mushaben, J. M. (1984). Swords to Plowshares: The Church, the State and the East German Peace Movement. cit., 126.

between Church and State leaders gave the Church a legitimate place in GDR society and, to its associates, the confidence to create a serious opposition to the State within its physical and metaphorical boundaries in the 1980s.[90] The structure of the Kirchenbund was both democratic, in a process that began with the local parishes and ended with the election of the national leadership by the federal synod, and decentralised, as it left significant decision-making power to individual pastors.

The Lutheran Church played dual roles: it became a primary avenue for opposition against the arms race while also serving as the primary intermediary between a troubled youth and a state rationalizing its actions through 'Realpolitik'. For young individuals, the Church represented a sanctuary to inquire freely and find a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals sharing similar apprehensions. GDR adolescents, having undergone extended compulsory education and regularly exposed to West German media, became increasingly cognizant of and critical toward the disparities between official propaganda and regime actions.[91]

Additionally, the peace groups stood against the escalating militarization of education and broader East German society. By the summer of 1978, the SED had mandated the inclusion of 'socialist defence studies' as a compulsory subject for 9th and 10th-grade students, later extending it to the 11th grade. The initial opposition emerged from evangelical youth groups advocating for the regime to prioritize peace studies and replace military service with a social service for peace. In Erfurt, for instance, around 25,000 individuals congregated in church gatherings in 1978, among them numerous young voices reiterating these demands.[92]

With the aim of promoting peace, the movement aspired for the GDR to contribute to international détente efforts by scaling down its formidable military structure. In 1980, the Theological Study Department of the Evangelical Church advocated for the elimination of all arms in Eastern Europe capable of firing conventional or nuclear warheads. They also seized the occasion to initiate their inaugural annual Peace Decade from November 9-19, marking the traditional Repentance Day as Disarmament Day.[93]

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[90] Ivi, 128.
[91] Ivi, 124.
[92] Mleczkowski, W. (1983). In Search of the Forbidden Nation: Opposition by the Young Generation in the GDR. cit., 186-187.
[93] Hall, B. W. (1986). The Church and the Independent Peace Movement in Eastern Europe. *Journal of Peace Research*, *23*(2), 201.

During the intense activity of the peace movement in Europe in late 1981, a parallel movement called 'Swords into Plowshares' emerged in East Germany. Their motto, 'Make Peace Without Weapons,' stood in contrast to the slogans of the regime's official peace movement, represented by the Official GDR Peace Council, which advocated for 'Making Peace Against NATO Weapons' and 'Peace Must Be Defended - Peace Must Be Armed.'[94] Furthermore, in September 1981, Robert Havemann, a prominent Marxist dissenter, authored the 'All German Peace Initiative' directed at Leonid Brezhnev. This public letter, endorsed by numerous individuals from both German states, called for the removal of all occupying troops from German territory.[95]

Following the significant anti-nuclear protests in West Germany in November 1981, East Berlin pastor Rainer Eppelmann (a friend of Havemann) initiated a petition known as the 'Berlin Appeal'. This bold proposal advocated for a nuclear-free Europe, the withdrawal of NATO troops from the FRG and Soviet troops from the GDR, and the demilitarisation of East German society. The document also criticized certain aspects of GDR life, such as the sale of war toys, the emphasis on military education in schools, and military demonstrations. The apex of the peace movement was the Dresden Peace Forum. Commemorating the devastating bombing of Dresden during World War II, approximately 5,000 young people from across the GDR convened at the Kreuzkirche on February 13, 1982. Many donned the white badge of the Swords into Plowshares movement depicting a blacksmith forging a sword into a plough. Coincidentally or deliberately, this symbol mirrored a statue gifted by the Soviet Union to the United Nations in the late 1940s. Once more, the Lutheran Church provided space for demonstrators to openly discuss topics like civil disobedience and conscientious objection. Thousands of others across the country participated in similar demonstrations.[96]

The authorities hesitated to take swift action against the peace movement for several key reasons. Firstly, they anticipated that Western European activists, following the lead of the Eastern independent movement, might effectively deter the deployment of NATO missiles. Secondly, they were aware that influential critical authors and clergy could publicize any severe crackdown on the movement. Lastly, it's plausible that certain

[94] Ivi, 203.
[95] Boutwell, J. (1983). Politics and the Peace Movement in West Germany. *International Security*, *7*(4), 87.
[96] Hall, B. W. (1986). The Church and the Independent Peace Movement in Eastern Europe. cit., 202.

state officials privately supported the movement. Nonetheless, the regime gradually escalated its crackdown on the movement. Initially, the aim wasn't solely to crush it but rather to weaken and diminish its impact. Individuals wearing the peace movement's emblem increasingly faced police interventions, interrogations, and demands to remove their badges. Some students associated with the movement were expelled from universities and barred from continuing their studies elsewhere. The production of the Swords into Plowshares emblem was outlawed, and wearers were at times denied access to public transportation.[97] Swift repressive actions in overt forms followed soon after. In November 1987, authorities conducted a raid on the basement of the Zion Church in East Berlin and detained seven individuals. They were apprehended for using the space, sanctioned by the pastor, to produce a newsletter criticizing state policies, particularly concerning the environment. The subsequent month, ten members of the 'Initiative for Peace and Human Rights' were arrested for delivering a written statement to the GDR Committee for Human Rights. Then, on January 17, 1988, over a hundred demonstrators were apprehended by the police during a rally commemorating Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.[98]

Alongside the question of pacifism, the first units of organised dissent hinged on the ecological and energy question. The economic development of the GDR was pursued without taking any account of this factor, which, on the other hand, became increasingly important in the eyes of the people. In truth, the period from 1949 to 1969 saw a continuous deterioration of the environment in both halves of Germany, with the capitalist West presenting even more serious environmental problems in some cases than the communist East. Serious problems stemmed from factors such as greater affluence (greater availability of consumer goods such as telephones, refrigerators, washing machines, cars, etc.), greater technology and greater population. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, there was a reversal of the trend that led to an acceleration of the deterioration in the East and a moderation of the damage in the West.[99]

In the first period under consideration, the FRG prioritised economic growth above all else. Yet, the celebrated ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ of the late 1950s resulted in

[97] Sax, B., & Sax, B. (1982). The Peace Movement in East Germany. cit., 391-392.
[98] Ozawa-De Silva, B. R. (2005). Peace, Pastors, and Politics: Tactics of Resistance in East Germany. *Journal of Church and State*, *47*(3), 522.
[99] Dominick, R. (1998). Capitalism, Communism, and Environmental Protection: Lessons from the German Experience. *Environmental History*, *3*(3), 315.

significant environmental collateral damage. Although air pollution posed a serious issue, water pollution in West Germany was even more severe. The state of rivers like the Rhine notably deteriorated in the 1950s due to three primary reasons. Firstly, since the late 1800s, towns along the waterways had been dumping their excrement into nearby streams and lakes. Secondly, the already poor condition of the waterways was aggravated by the wartime destruction of sewage treatment plants and the rapid growth of the population. As if this was not enough, the increase in waste production, and especially the lack of systematic waste collection in many parts of the country, led in many cases to its burial in unhygienic dumps and the consequent contamination of groundwater.[100] With regard to air pollution, mainly caused by fumes from the various industries, it is significant that during the period of the economic miracle, West Germany became the second largest global producer of automobiles on the one hand and suffered from the highest road traffic density in the world on the other.[101]

A survey conducted in 1958 highlighted that over 80% of the GDR's rivers suffered from severe pollution. Despite industrial hubs primarily located in the south, the predominantly agricultural north also grappled with high levels of pollution. The shift towards collective farming and industrial agricultural methods had dual consequences: vast fields vulnerable to wind erosion emerged, while the natural diversity of the landscape, home to numerous animal species, diminished. Additionally, unlike western farming practices that integrated animal husbandry and horticulture, eastern farmers chose to separate livestock. This approach led to waste pollution affecting both surface and groundwater, especially concerning in water-scarce East Germany. Moreover, air pollution posed a significant challenge due to acid rain and other detrimental forms of airborne pollutants impacting the region.[102]

During the 1970s and 1980s, the West initiated efforts to address environmental issues, eventually becoming a global leader in environmental protection. Conversely, East Germany faced a slow descent into an environmental crisis. Air pollution emerged as the most severe and widespread concern within the GDR. Lignite, the nation's primary energy source, particularly for heating and power generation, stood as the chief culprit behind air pollution. The high sulphur and ash content in coal resulted in substantial emissions of

[100] Ivi, 315-316.
[101] Ivi, 318.
[102] Ivi, 317-318

sulphur dioxide and dust. Beyond emissions from major power plants, fumes from home furnaces and smaller factories contributed to the problem. In 1985, approximately 82.7% of electricity production relied on lignite, producing Europe's highest SO_2 emissions at 5.8 million tonnes. Cities like Leipzig, Bitterfeld, Karl-Marx-Stadt, and Halle suffered severe pollution, impacting life expectancy. Halle, in particular, recorded a five-year lower life expectancy compared to the national average, with higher rates of heart and respiratory diseases. Air pollution took a toll beyond human health, damaging around 90% of East German forests, with 15% to 20% dead or dying. The extraction of lignite scarred the landscape and lives even before its combustion. From 1960 to 1980, about seventy villages or parts of villages were sacrificed, roads and waterways affected, farmland left uncultivated, groundwater depleted, water further contaminated, and wildlife habitats disrupted, necessitating the construction of new infrastructure for resettled populations.[103]

After lignite, agriculture stood as the GDR's second most detrimental contributor to environmental degradation. Extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, including DDT, aimed to bolster crop yields. However, the aerial spraying of these chemicals, disregarding wind direction, often led to inadvertent contamination of soil, rivers, streams, and nearby livestock. Concerning levels of DDT and mercury were detected in breast milk, birds, and plants, raising alarm among scientists. Additionally, elevated nitrate levels rendered water undrinkable in certain rural areas, prompting industrial and agricultural entities to adopt technological advancements to reduce wastage, enhance purification processes, and facilitate recycling within production procedures.[104]

Under socialist ideology, environmental issues were believed impossible under communism, as ecological harm stemmed from profit-driven capitalism. In 1970, the GDR showcased this belief by enacting the 'Landeskulturgesetz,' among Europe's most forward-thinking environmental legislations. This law not only ensured measures for pollution control and nature preservation but also encompassed urban planning, protection of cultural landmarks, and overall enhancement of living and working conditions.[105] Over the decade, however, it became evident that this law was hardly ever

[103] DeBardeleben, J. (1988). "The Future Has Already Begun": Environmental Damage and Protection in the GDR. *International Journal of Sociology*, *18*(4), 145-148.
[104] Ivi, 151-152.
[105] Jones, M. E. (1993). Origins of the East German Environmental Movement. *German Studies Review*, *16*(2), 235–236.

implemented, allowing high levels of pollution to have a significant impact on the environment and people's lives. Instead of addressing the worsening situation and its causes, on November 16, 1982, the regime adopted an ‘Order for Ensuring the Secrecy (Geheimschutzes) of Environmental Data’.[106]

Around 1983-1984, amidst mounting concerns over escalating acid rain and widespread forest depletion, most environmental groups emerged. However, as early as the early 1970s, both the Protestant Church and ordinary citizens had begun expressing interest in these matters. Environmental neglect was considered a transgression against God's creation, prompting the leaders of the Church of Saxony-Magdeburg in 1971 to involve the Ecclesiastical Research Centre in Wittenberg (KFH) to explore Christianity's stance on nature. This marked the initial organized environmental concern in the GDR. Spearheaded by Dr. Hans-Peter Gensichen starting in 1974, their work culminated in the GDR's first independent publication on environmental topics, ‘The Earth is ours to save’ ('Die Erde ist zu retten'), in 1980. Simultaneously, KFH initiated the biannual newsletter 'Letters on the orientation of the man-nature conflict' (‘Briefe’). At a grassroots level, KFH supported Leipzig theology students in launching 'Highlights’ (‘Streiflichter') in November 1981, the nation's inaugural grassroots environmental newsletter. Gensichen's lectures also inspired the formation of several environmental groups. In 1972, the Club of Rome, an NGO established in 1968, released its groundbreaking report 'The Limits to Growth,' predicting finite natural resources (particularly oil) and the planet's restricted capacity to absorb pollutants, thereby suggesting that endless economic growth was untenable. For many East Germans, this report sparked a burgeoning interest in environmental concerns, marking the inception of a movement.[107]

In 1978, amidst growing concern for the environment in both religious and non-religious circles, the Saxony-Magdeburg Provincial Church dedicated a significant portion of the agenda during the Erfurt Kirchentag to discussions on human survival, focusing particularly on peace and environmental issues. Subsequently, in 1979, the World Council of Churches (WCC) conference in Boston centred around the theme 'Faith, Science, and the Future.' This gathering further motivated the East German Church to actively engage with environmental concerns, leading to the establishment of various

[106] DeBardeleben, J. (1988). “The Future Has Already Begun”: Environmental Damage and Protection in the GDR. cit., 144.
[107] Jones, M. E. (1993). Origins of the East German Environmental Movement. cit., 240-241.

specialized research committees within the Kirchenbund, covering areas such as agriculture, forestry, energy, and more.[108]

Given these considerations, environmental groups found it essential, much like peace ones, to establish connections with the Church, leveraging its protective umbrella. Operating independently was often unfeasible for these private groups. Many relied on resources provided by the Church, such as access to parish meeting spaces, outdated mimeograph machines, and supplies like paper and ink for printing underground bulletins. The Church played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of civil society and facilitating freedom of expression. Through sermons, seminars, discussion groups, conferences, and gatherings, activists challenged the prevailing materialistic and consumerist ideologies, implicitly presenting an alternative to the government's priorities. Specifically, young Christians engaged in dialogues about alternative lifestyles centred on seeking fulfilment through 'being' rather than 'having'.[109]

Up until the mid-1980s, the state delayed intervening in this movement because it didn't perceive it as a direct threat. Firstly, these groups were scarce and relatively disconnected from each other. Secondly, their communication was severely restricted to internal Church networks, limiting their outreach. Thirdly, many of these groups primarily focused on personal lifestyle and the connection to Christian beliefs rather than openly criticizing the regime. This allowed the state some control over the movement's activities as environmentalists faced limitations in their scope. The state's efforts were directed towards dissuading activists from aligning with the Church and disrupting the effectiveness of the green movement through covert tactics. For instance, in 1980, the state established the 'Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt' (GNU), aiming to channel environmental activities through state-controlled channels and involve citizens in environmental protection initiatives. Moreover, employing the Stasi, the state monitored communications and infiltrated environmental and church groups to anticipate their actions. Additionally, exploiting the hesitation of certain church officials to fully support environmental groups under their protection, the state suppressed some underground publications like 'anstöße' and 'Aufbruch'.[110] At first, the state's hidden tactics, including

[108] Ivi, 241.
[109] DeBardeleben, J. (1988). "The Future Has Already Begun": Environmental Damage and Protection in the GDR. cit., 158-159.
[110] Jones, M. E. (1993). Origins of the East German Environmental Movement. cit., 243-246.

discrimination, intimidation, obstructing communication, and applying pressure on the church, effectively impeded the movement's growth. However, despite these obstacles in a somewhat permissive environment, the movement still managed to establish a foundation for accelerated growth during the latter half of the 1980s.

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster on April 26, 1986, had several significant repercussions. Firstly, it spurred the spread of environmental activism across the Soviet bloc. Secondly, it heightened Western consciousness regarding environmental issues in Eastern Europe. Lastly, it steered Gorbachev toward the implementation of his policies of Glasnost and Perestroika. Following the incident, the informal alliance between East German peace and environmental groups solidified, culminating in a petition titled 'Chernobyl is everywhere.' This petition was presented to the government as a protest against nuclear energy policies. Prior to this event, environmentalists had primarily focused on concerns such as air pollution, water contamination, deforestation, agriculture, and personal lifestyle choices, overlooking the potential hazards associated with atomic energy.[111]

Beginning in 1986, environmental groups gradually gained more autonomy while maintaining a loose connection with the church. On September 2 of that year, activists Carlo Jordan, Oliver Kämper, Wolfgang Rüddenklau, and Christian Halbrock, with the support of Pastor Hans Simon, established the Umweltbibliothek (UB) within the basement of the Zion Church Community Centre in East Berlin. Alongside gathering predominantly prohibited literature concerning environmental and human rights issues, this library also served as a meeting point for clandestine gatherings of opposition members within the GDR. Serving as the sole printing press not under state control in the Republic, the library had the capacity to produce and circulate underground publications like 'Umweltblätter' (the most significant opposition magazine until the Berlin Wall's collapse) and 'Grenzfall'.[112] As mentioned earlier, on the night between November 24 and 25, 1987, the Stasi raided the library and seven people were arrested. With this raid, the library gained international fame and the Western media gave wide coverage to the event. Throughout the GDR there were demonstrations of solidarity for the UB and those arrested were released shortly afterwards without punishment.[113]

[111] Ivi, 247.
[112] Ivi, 248.
[113] Ivi, 253-254.

During the spring of 1988, a rift emerged within the UB, marking a quest for increased autonomy. The disagreement centred on the strategic direction for the GDR environmental movement going forward. While some aimed to expand the UB into a nationwide network encompassing the entire movement, others feared this might centralize the movement, potentially leading to structures resembling political parties. A conflict, exacerbated by a Stasi infiltrator, resulted in a faction led by Charles Jordan, who later became the spokesperson for the Green Party in the GDR, breaking away to establish the environmental association 'Arche' along with the clandestine magazine 'Arche Nova.' Arche effectively intensified the political engagement of the environmental movement and fostered connections with various groups across East Germany and Europe. Moreover, Arche's investigations into waste disposal revealed the unauthorized incineration of significant amounts of toxic waste from West Germany at unregulated sites in East Germany. Remarkably, the GDR, in exchange for foreign currency, was accepting millions of tons of waste from neighbouring FRG.[114]

Finally, the third major strand in the contestation of the GDR, which I will discuss in the next paragraph, was the human rights movement, whose violation by the regime was one of the leitmotifs of the opposition groups despite the signing of the Helsinki Accords.

2.3

The Human Rights Movement and the Explosion of Protests in 1989: In Search of Democracy

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, contained several provisions that directly contradicted the political and social structure of the SED-led GDR. These articles advocated for an independent judiciary, prohibited arbitrary arrests and violations of privacy, ensured the right to strike, and notably emphasized the right to emigrate from one's own country. On the surface, the UDHR appeared fundamentally at odds with the SED's ideology. However, somewhat paradoxically, until the mid-1980s, East German leadership found ways to selectively utilize the Declaration more effectively than the burgeoning domestic opposition. They began to view the document as a strategic asset,

[114] Ivi, 249.

aligning its principles with the perceived accomplishments of socialism within the GDR's borders.[115]

Over decades, Western nations consistently criticized the Soviet Union and its satellite states for disregarding or violating human rights within their borders. They often dismissed socialism's proclaimed dedication to these global principles as a hollow facade, concealing a lack of liberty and blatant government abuses. This perceived clash between socialism and human rights primarily stemmed from Marxist ideologies. In the late 1940s, Soviet theorists openly articulated their views: human rights, according to them, were based on a metaphysical, natural, or anti-historical concept of humanity. They warned that such ideas masked injustice and class conflicts.[116] Marx contended that 'the human essence' wasn't grounded in individual abstraction but in societal relations and conditions. Consequently, according to this perspective, political and civil rights couldn't be separated from economic rights. Only through economic freedom and equality could such rights truly exist.[117] This 'materialist' view of rights was foundational in communist theory. So much so that the initial Soviet Constitution of 1918 emphasized the state's obligations to enable the realization of proclaimed freedoms (like conscience, expression, assembly, association, etc.) rather than defining the content of those freedoms.[118] In Marxist ideology, rights were inseparable from duties, and active citizenship was essential to secure material support for the realization of these rights.

Soviet theorists critiqued the 'abstract' nature of the concept and also took issue with the transformation of human rights from a religious standpoint. The surge of human rights after the war was tightly connected to the moral revival in Christian-democratic Western Europe. Consequently, in the 1950s, the Christian aspect of human rights became a key element in opposing collectivism and totalitarianism in the West. This alignment of human rights with Christian values peaked in the 1960s with Pope John XXIII's Pacem in Terris (1963), solidifying Catholicism's association with human rights.[119]

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[115] *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (2010). *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, *3*(2), 145-151.
[116] Kolakowski, L. (1983). Marxism and Human Rights. *Daedalus*, *112*(4), 81-85.
[117] Sichel, B. A. (1972). Karl Marx and the Rights of Man. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *32*(3), 358.
[118] Gettell, R. G. (1919). The Russian Soviet Constitution. *The American Political Science Review*, *13*(2), 296.
[119] McRedmond, L. (1973). Pacem in Terris: Ten Years On. *The Furrow*, *24*(4), 198-199.

Even amid a challenging atmosphere, Khrushchev's leadership from the mid-1950s spurred a shift in the Soviet stance on human rights. This transformation occurred due to two primary factors: initially, the Soviets adopted the language of human rights and national sovereignty to gain backing in Asia and Africa during an era marked by a growing push for decolonisation and a universal call for liberation.[120] Secondly, the USSR gravitated towards human rights discourse after the US pulled back, partly in response to civil rights abuses in the southern region.[121]

In the 1960s, human rights experienced a resurgence in East Germany, a stark contrast to the prior official dismissal by the ruling SED, which viewed them as tools favouring the Western elite. East German media celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1963, dedicating an entire page in the official party newspaper, Neues Deutschland, to its contents. This coverage highlighted East Germany's adherence to Article 26 on education and free expression, while critiquing the FRG's failure to ensure social rights.[122] The UN's adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[123] and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[124] in 1966 further clarified these fundamental rights. Leveraging the first article of both covenants on the right to self-determination, the SED aimed to position itself as a model in this aspect, garnering increased international recognition and consensus, especially among new UN members from the Global South.

In the 1970s, East German thinkers often argued that socialist citizen rights held deeper significance than their Western counterparts. They believed these rights were more comprehensive, intertwining political, economic, and cultural aspects, rather than being merely abstract civil liberties. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) from 1950 drew heavy criticism from them, seen as a tool favouring Western ideals, undermining the broader spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).[125]

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[120] Singleton, S. (1980). Soviet Policy and Socialist Expansion in Asia and Africa. *Armed Forces & Society*, *6*(3), 345.
[121] Hall, S. (2007). Civil Rights Activism in 1960s Virginia. *Journal of Black Studies*, *38*(2), 251–267.
[122] *Archiv der Ausgaben von 1946-1990*. (1963). 12-12-2023 from ND-Archiv: **https://www.nd-archiv.de/ausgabe/1963-12-10**.
[123] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (1987). *Human Rights Quarterly*, *9*(2), 274–284.
[124] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (1985). *Human Rights Quarterly*, *7*(1), 132–154.
[125] Greer, S. (2008). What's Wrong with the European Convention on Human Rights? *Human Rights Quarterly*, *30*(3), 680-682.

In 1973, amidst the Helsinki Process negotiations, the SED marked its entry into the UN[126] and celebrated the UDHR's XXV anniversary.[127] While the Helsinki Accords of 1975, including human rights provisions (the third 'basket'), spurred grassroots dissent, they didn't singularly shape an independent movement. Many East Germans saw these Accords mainly as a means to legally migrate to West Germany.[128] Despite growing migration requests post-Accords, the SED maintained confidence, commemorating the UDHR's XXX anniversary in 1978. Media coverage praised the realization of human rights under socialism while portraying life in the United States as challenging.[129]

Even though in the early 1980s, there was a declaration of harmony between Marxism and human rights, by the mid-decade, certain peace and environmental factions accepted the domestic repression by seeking refuge in the Protestant Church. Simultaneously, other groups began using the language of human rights to push for political reforms within the country, redirecting their attention to fresh concerns. Inspired by Czechoslovakia's Charter 77[130] (a pivotal movement advocating various rights) some individuals from these groups established the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte, IFM) in 1986. This marked the GDR's first independent human rights group. Wolfgang Templin, an activist in the autonomous peace movement and a former Marxist who had left the SED in 1983, emerged as one of the group's most vibrant and vocal advocates. On January 24, 1986, Templin, along with Eppelmann and other representatives, signed and made public a programmatic document addressed to Erich Honecker, solidifying the group's ties to the independent peace movement. Their letter not only emphasized the practical implementation of UDHR's rights but also called for unrestricted citizen travel, the ability to nominate independent candidates in elections, and increased freedom of assembly and association. In that same year, Templin circulated a letter among autonomous peace groups stressing the critical connection between peace and human rights while vehemently condemning the arms race

[126] United Nations: Application of German Democratic Republic for Admission to U.N. (1966). *International Legal Materials*, *5*(3), 535–544.
[127] *Archiv der Ausgaben von 1946-1990*. (1973). 12-13-2023 from ND-Archiv: **https://www.nd-archiv.de/ausgabe/1973-12-10**.
[128] Allen, B. (1989). Human Rights and Ecology: The New Opposition. In B. Allen, *Germany East: Dissent and Opposition* (pp. 133-134). Montréal: Black Rose Books.
[129] *Archiv der Ausgaben von 1946-1990*. (1978). 12-13-2023 from ND-Archiv: **https://www.nd-archiv.de/ausgabe/1978-12-09**.
[130] Tomin, Z., & Nulty, C. (1983). Human Rights and Socialism. *The Crane Bag*, *7*(1), 119–121.

between Eastern and Western blocs. Furthermore, in 1986, to commemorate the X anniversary of the Czechoslovak group's founding, the Initiative issued a statement expressing solidarity with Charter 77, urging greater collaboration in the pursuit of solidarity and democracy.[131]

In 1989, a whirlwind of historic events unfolded, marking a pivotal time. From the profound peace prayers (Friedensgebete) to the transformative Peaceful Revolution (Friedliche Revolution), epitomized by the Monday demonstrations (Montagsdemonstrationen) in cities like Leipzig, Dresden, Schwerin, Halle, Potsdam, and Chemnitz, this year witnessed a cascade of change. It encompassed the mass exodus from Hungary and Czechoslovakia, alongside the disintegration of the SED and GDR power structures. Leipzig notably emerged as a key player in this sequence, catalysing the fall of the Wall, the opening of Germany's internal borders, the dismantling of Stasi institutions, the democratization of the GDR's societal framework, and ultimately, the reunification of Germany.[132]

The year commenced with the implementation of a new travel rule in the GDR, supposedly enabling visits to Western relatives. However, despite this, the SED and Erich Honecker, the Head of State, retained authority to permit or deny departures, often using bureaucratic hurdles to arbitrarily reject travel requests. Responding to these ongoing curbs on freedom and multiple arrests, roughly five hundred individuals assembled on Leipzig's Marktplatz in January, advocating for freedom of speech, assembly, association, and the press. The demonstration, shortly after it began, was forcibly disbanded by the police, leading to numerous arrests.[133] Despite this, protests persisted in the subsequent months. By March, approximately three hundred people gathered outside St. Nicholas Church (Nikolaikirche) after the routine peace prayer. Since 1982, these peace prayers occurred every Monday at 5 p.m. in Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church, originally initiated to oppose NATO and Warsaw Pact missile placements in Europe.[134]

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[131] Allen, B. (1989). Human Rights and Ecology: The New Opposition. cit., 133-136.
[132] Tismaneanu, V. (2009). The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences. *Contemporary European History*, *18*(3), 276.
[133] Humphrey, S. (1990). A comparative chronology of revolution, 1988-1990. In G. Prins, *Spring in Winter: The 1989 Revolutions* (p. 218). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
[134] Ozawa-De Silva, B. R. (2005). Peace, Pastors, and Politics: Tactics of Resistance in East Germany. cit., 522.

Throughout the year, protests and demonstrations were rampant, resulting in numerous arrests by the Stasi. On September 4, 1989, approximately 1,200 individuals gathered for a prayer for peace during the autumn fair. A few hundred persisted, advocating for the freedom to travel.[135] Following a call for mobilization by the evangelical pastor Christoph Wonneberger in late September, nearly 20,000 people rallied on October 2. This demonstration was marked by clashes, police actions involving dogs, helmets, batons, shields, and numerous arrests, escalating the already tense situation. As the state's intimidation tactics intensified, October 7 saw 4,000 people demonstrating in Leipzig's streets, resulting in 210 arrests. The regime escalated further on October 9, deploying thousands of police officers, combat groups, and NVA soldiers to suppress demonstrations. However, despite these measures, around 70,000 citizens gathered after the prayers for peace, chanting 'We are the people' ('Wir sind das Volk'). Astonishingly, the security forces withdrew instead of intervening. This event in Leipzig inspired widespread protests across the GDR. October 9 marked a pivotal moment in the GDR's Peaceful Revolution, compelling SED leaders to transition from hostility to a more open and dialogic approach.[136]

[135] Ibidem.
[136] Ivi, 522-523.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN STIMULATING CRITICAL THINKING

3.1

A Look at the Functions of the Media: Informing, Educating, and Entertaining

Prior to Gutenberg's invention of movable type printing around 1450, books were written by hand by scribes, a time-consuming and expensive process that limited the dissemination of knowledge. Gutenberg made it possible for books to be produced on a large scale, in a shorter time, and at a more affordable cost, thus easing the rapid spread of ideas throughout Europe. Although the increased spread of knowledge, philosophical, scientific, and religious ideas contributed to the development of the Renaissance and the spread of Humanism (promoting critical thinking and freedom of expression), the invention of printing and its rapid spread across Europe failed to create the necessary conditions for mass communication similar to that of today's society. It was only one of the technological prerequisites for this new situation, and it took three centuries for the printing press to give rise to one of the most flourishing sectors of the cultural industry: large-scale publishing.[137]

In 1641, Samuel Hartlib, a renowned English educationalist, declared that the art of printing would spread knowledge to such an extent that ordinary people, aware of their rights and freedoms, would no longer accept being ruled by oppression. During the XVIII century, a bourgeois public opinion consolidated in the salons and cafés of pre-revolutionary France, leading to the formation of a political consciousness critical of power and the monarchy. On the eve of the French Revolution, the foundations already existed for a press that had popular information as one of its main objectives. On August 26, 1789, the basic principle of freedom of the press was enshrined in the Declaration of Rights approved by the Constituent Assembly, and subsequently, the Constitution of 1795 proclaimed freedom of the press as one of its fundamental principles, prohibiting any preventive censorship. From then on, the press was committed to promoting current ideas and became a propaganda medium for the main parties of the time. From the end of the

[137] Barbier, F. (2004). *Storia del libro: dall'antichità al XX secolo*. Bari: Dedalo.

XVIII century, France thus became the nation where the press acquired its modern form.[138]

In the XIX century, systematically organised communication networks emerged on a global scale, leading to the globalisation of communications. This was due to the advent of technologies that allowed communication to be separated from physical transportation. We can therefore begin to speak of mass media, starting with the press, thanks to the development of submarine telegraph networks by the European imperial powers, the creation of international information agencies (Havas in France, Reuter in Great Britain, and Wolff in Germany), and the division of the world into exclusive spheres of activity. This cartel dominated information until the outbreak of the First World War. By the end of the century, the press became a mass medium as the industrial and communications revolutions progressed hand in hand.[139]

One of the most widely accepted definitions of mass communication by scholars, especially American ones, is that of M. Janowitz and R. Schulze, who describe it as the use by groups of specialists of technical inventions (such as the press, radio, film, etc.) to disseminate a symbolic content to a large, heterogeneous, and geographically extended audience. The sociologist C. R. Wright, while departing somewhat from this definition, defines the mass communication audience as relatively large, heterogeneous, and anonymous. He identifies three main functions performed by the mass media: control of the environment, correlation between the various parts of society in responding to environmental stimuli, and transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next. Moreover, he adds a fourth function: entertainment. Wright's definition highlights how mass communications have absorbed the functions of many traditional institutions of culture transmission, including museums, theatres, cinemas, and folk festivals. Finally, U. Eco offers a synthesis of the various definitions, stating that one can speak of mass communication when there are: an industrial-type society, apparently levelled but rich in differences and contrasts; communication channels that enable an indefinite group of receptors to be reached in different sociological situations; and producer groups that process and emit certain messages by industrial means.[140]

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[138] Anania, F. (2007). *Storia delle comunicazioni di massa*. Novara: De Agostini, 5-7.
[139] Ivi, 7.
[140] Tarroni, E. (1972). I mezzi di comunicazione di massa. In L. Volpicelli, *La Pedagogia: Storia e Problemi, Maestri e Metodi, Sociologia e Psicologia dell'Educazione e dell'Insegnamento*. Milano: Vallardi Commissionaria Editoriale, 738-741.

Cultural historians often state that with the introduction of a new medium, such as the printing press, previous genres and media do not disappear completely. The old and the new coexist and compete until a division of functions is established. An example of this phenomenon was the continuous circulation of manuscripts alongside printed books, often to escape religious, moral, and political censorship. In other words, the manuscript functioned as the samizdat of the modern age, similar to the self-published typescripts and xerographs that criticised communist regimes and circulated through unofficial channels in the Soviet Union, Poland, and other countries before 1989. However, the censorship system could have had effects contrary to the intentions of the authorities, raising interest in banned books that would otherwise have remained unknown to many readers. A common reaction to official censorship, as seen in the previous chapter, was the organisation of clandestine publications. Another strategy in the modern age was publication abroad, adopted by many Eastern European writers during the Cold War. Finally, it was always possible to publish normally, conveying messages on two levels: overt and covert. Regardless of the laws of various countries, the press established itself by 1900 as an important force within society, maintaining a fundamental role even after the advent of electronic media.[141] The public's 'right to information' has found few advocates as eloquent as Evans, who in a 1974 speech published by Britain's Granada Television said:

> Governments, like citizens, need a free and inquiring press. With a changing and pluralistic electorate and a complex bureaucracy, a free press provides a system for gathering information back from the governed to the rulers, from consumers to producers, from regions to the centre and, not least, from one sector of the bureaucracy to another.[142]

At the beginning of the XX century, cultural activities were absorbed into the circuit of capital, especially in large cities and more industrialised regions. Cultural goods were reproduced on a large scale, traded on distant markets, and increasingly treated as commodities. The increasing control exercised over the press by large corporations and banks with strong political connections in the early years of the century is often seen as

[141] Briggs, A., & Burke, P. (2002). *Storia sociale dei media: da Gutenberg a Internet*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 58-70.
[142] Ivi, 255.

evidence that the ruling class uses the media to hegemonize other social classes. In the XX century, the media acquired unprecedented importance. Major opinion newspapers, the cinema, the radio in the early 1920s and, in the mid-1930s, the first television experiments were born. State propaganda emerged with the First World War, as countries felt the need to explain the reasons for the conflict to the population. Thus, propaganda structures and new techniques to convince the masses were developed.[143] The United States immediately demonstrated its persuasive power with the creation of the Creel Committee in 1918, the American Ministry of Propaganda and Censorship. The cinema, in particular, was used as the main tool for disseminating news.[144] The First World War was an epoch-making event in terms of the involvement of civilian populations, and it is no coincidence that the term 'mass-medium' arose soon afterwards, in 1923, to define the radio, the new medium of communication that allowed for a wide and immediate dissemination of information.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the great press put itself at the service of governments, becoming an instrument of both internal and external propaganda. The populations felt a strong need for news from the front, while the ruling classes tried to make people understand the reasons for entering the war. Germany demonstrated a remarkable inability to use propaganda in its favour, being overwhelmed by opposing propaganda from Great Britain and the United States. Censorship, which was already present before the conflict, and the scarcity of news during the war caused a deep crisis in the daily and periodical press. News arrived only through the Wolff Agency, which was set up to serve the government. As the situation worsened, the military created its own information agency that systematically falsified all news from the front, keeping the population in the dark about the defeats. As a result, the birth of the Weimar Republic in 1919 was affected by an economic and social crisis. Once again, the inability to manage communication that mixes truth and falsehood demonstrates the importance of a judicious use of the media. However, from now on, the example no longer comes from Europe, but from the United States, an emerging country trying to combine written and visual communication. The US collaborated with countries such as France, England and Italy to

[143] Lutz, R. H. (1933). Studies of World War Propaganda, 1914-33. *The Journal of Modern History*, 5(4), 496–516.
[144] Larson, C., & Mock, J. R. (1939). The Lost Files of the Creel Committee of 1917-19. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 3(1), 5-29.

publish the 'Official War Review', while distributing and producing most of the film programmes. Despite this, the press remained the most widely used medium for advertising, with postcards, posters, brochures, and flags flooding Europe and beyond.[145]

In 1932, one year before the rise of Nazism, there were 4703 newspapers and periodicals in Germany, 94 of which were affiliated with the National Socialist Party. A total of 26 million copies of newspapers were sold throughout the country. When Hitler came to power, he already found a series of Bismarckian laws in force that tended to centralise the press. Through ordinances and decrees, he further intensified this centralisation and suppressed freedom of expression. In 1933, an ordinance regulated the content of articles, abolished the constitutional right to freedom of the press, established the Ministry for Propaganda under the direction of Goebbels, and confiscated communist and social democratic newspapers. No political, social or economic sphere escaped mass indoctrination, turning information into pure propaganda.[146] It was only after 1945 that the subject of press freedom became topical again. The connection between the press and public service, understood as the protection of the community's founding values, contrasted with three models emerging in different states: authoritarianism, characterised by state control over the media; the Soviet model, which subordinated the media to political objectives; and the libertarian model, which promoted unfettered freedom. In 1950, the Council of Europe approved the European Convention on Human Rights, which in Article 10 took up the UN Declaration, establishing 'freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers', but specifying that 'the exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety.'[147] Unlike the US constitution, the legal formulations of European democratic states provided for restrictions on press freedom in a context of a balance of powers.

Great Britain was characterised by the American System, linked to sensationalism and the use of photography, which took on a real informative function, often replacing

[145] Anania, F. (2007). *Storia delle comunicazioni di massa*. cit., 27-29.
[146] Ivi, 40.
[147] *European Convention on Human Rights*. (1950). 01-07-2024 from Council of Europe: **https://70.coe.int/pdf/convention_eng.pdf**.

the printed word. In contrast, the countries most affected by the war, such as France, Italy, and Germany, struggled to revive a publishing market that, in some cases, had never been particularly lively. In Germany and Italy, US-funded reconstruction gave the two countries some impetus, but both the press and radio risked economic disaster immediately after the end of the war. In West Germany, the priority was economic revival and the development of capitalism, stimulated by the Americans. The press followed this process of capitalisation and modernisation, rationalising publishing and wiping out companies operating under the Nazis. The Allies divided Germany into four occupation zones, developing the press according to the wishes of the different occupying armies. Initially, all publication and circulation were prohibited, with newspapers under the control of the military apparatus. As the Cold War escalated, the development of the press followed the criteria of the occupying countries: the Americans promoted a party-independent press, the British encouraged the role of the parties, the French had no clear position, while the Soviets only authorised publications close to the communist parties. From 1949, with the birth of the FRG, a transformation began with the enactment of laws defining the rules for the media. Regional parliaments controlled the media, reaffirming freedom of expression, limiting it only to protect privacy and defend young people. Journalists were also protected at national level by the possibility of not revealing their sources. The independent press agency Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) was founded. Despite the reforms, the post-1949 situation was not idyllic: the competition between old and new newspapers, between political periodicals and those imposed by the Allied Forces, caused many newspapers that were born after the war to disappear within a few years. Among the most important were Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1949), Bild Zeitung (1953), and Die Welt (1946).[148]

The potential of radio became evident when it began to enter homes, first in the United States, then in Great Britain, and Holland. Before institutions dedicated to programming were established, a network of amateur enthusiasts, known as ‘radio amateurs’, had already established national and international networks. In the early XX century, Lee De Forest, scientist, inventor, film director, and producer, recognised the need for a radio service and undertook to broadcast music in private homes. Following in his footsteps, Arthur Burrows and, across the ocean, David Sarnoff also realised the

[148] Anania, F. (2007). *Storia delle comunicazioni di massa*. cit., 65-68.

potential of radio. Sarnoff, who would become the first commercial director of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), had a clear vision: to turn radio into a domestic convenience, including not only music, but also news, lectures, and competition results.[149]

During the First World War, radio broadcasting was under state control and reserved for military use. In 1920, the number of radio enthusiasts around the world was about a thousand, with most broadcasting managed by the states. The turning point came between 1922 and 1923, when the number of radio stations in the United States increased from 30 to 540. In Europe, radio service began in 1921 with the German station Königs Wusterhausen. In November 1922, the British Broadcasting Company was founded. Another technology that began to emerge in these years, but which had to wait until the end of the Second World War to fully develop, was television.

In the 1930s, mass culture spreads in industrial societies, complicating and at the same time simplifying cultural patterns. On the one hand, society became more complex and the audience to which mass culture was addressed became larger and more uniform; on the other, the emerging consumer capitalism led to an increasing unification of taste, ways of living, and thinking. New technologies, if exploited wisely, foster the control and social integration of large segments of the population, creating common experiences of consumption that prefigure what will happen after 1945 throughout Western Europe. Phenomena such as urbanisation, the first pushes towards a capitalism increasingly oriented towards the production of everyday consumer goods, the diffusion of new mass media, and new forms of entertainment began to change behaviour, habits, and mentality, especially among the small and middle urban bourgeoisie, interested in transforming their life models.[150] World War I ended the competition between Europe and the United States: the American style triumphed in the fields of communication, entertainment, and culture in general. The term ‘mass-medium’ began to be commonly used in 1923 to define radio, the new device for communication dispersed in space and immediate in time. In this way, the masses are transformed into an audience.[151]

In the 1930s, radio was widely used not only by democracies, but also by dictatorial regimes, albeit in different ways, to create consensus and influence the masses. Most European countries decided to follow the BBC's example. The guiding idea of John

[149] Briggs, A., & Burke, P. (2002). *Storia sociale dei media: da Gutenberg a Internet*. cit., 189, 194-195.
[150] Tarroni, E. (1972). I mezzi di comunicazione di massa. cit., 742-745.
[151] Anania, F. (2007). *Storia delle comunicazioni di massa*. cit., 33.

Reith, director general from 1922 to 1936, can be summarised as follows: a state broadcasting organisation must be completely public but politically independent of the state, and broadcasting must not be subject to direct commercial pressure. Reith well understood the cultural and political importance of the new media, recognising that radio, by its very nature, had a pedagogical and cultural function. Broadcasting was seen as a powerful instrument of influence both nationally and internationally.[152]

In Germany, the first radio stations began broadcasting in 1923. In 1925, the Weimar Republic united the nine regional societies into the Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft (Reich Broadcasting Corporation) and, shortly afterwards, Deutsche Welle was founded with the aim of broadcasting educational and information content throughout the country. The Postal Ministry took control of the technology and management of the facilities, while the Ministry of the Interior supervised the content of the broadcasts. This model was opposite to that of the United States and, starting in 1933, centralisation allowed Nazi propaganda to immediately exploit this tool. In 1936, there were more than 10 million radio sets in Germany. Joseph Goebbels, head of the Propaganda Ministry, had a clear conception of propaganda, as he stated in his diaries: 'Propaganda has the sole aim of winning over the masses. Every means capable of achieving this end is good, every means that hinders it is bad'. Radio was one of these means, if not the most important, certainly the most pervasive.[153]

In 1940, most European radio stations were under Nazi control, and the demand for truthful news was stronger than ever. In this context, radio had a clear advantage over newspapers, something that was much appreciated in Britain. The BBC, which hosted many radio journalists from continental Europe, was known as the 'voice of freedom' and was responsible for keeping morale high. The BBC was distinguished by the way it interpreted wartime opinions, using many voices, mostly of non-professionals. American radio also increasingly relied on non-professional volunteers, a key resource for the propaganda of democracy. Between 1939 and 1945, war was fought as much with weapons as with words, and the microphone became a powerful weapon in both democratic and totalitarian countries. In his first Nazi radio broadcast in 1933, Goebbels declared that radio would be to the XX century what the press had been to the XIX

[152] Ivi, 34-35.
[153] Ivi, 35.

century, pledging to destroy the independence of the press. Radio was preferred because it could be controlled, and the equipment produced for the population in the late 1930s did not allow the reception of foreign broadcasts. Lenin and Stalin, however, were not actively involved in radio, and Soviet programmes were monotonous, full of dubious statistics, and appeals to party militants, with the press strictly controlled. During the war, the Soviet press was considered as much a weapon as machine guns and artillery, with poets, novelists, and lyricists mobilised for the cause. After the war, 'culture' would be defined and policed from above by Andrei Ždanov and his collaborators. In the United States, where the press was largely hostile to Roosevelt, the president used the microphone in a different way with his 'fireside conversations', trying to convey to listeners the feeling of being present in their homes. This use of the radio was not part of the British experience, as the BBC, in its international broadcasts, proudly continued to spread the truth, setting quality standards and bringing the best of human knowledge and achievement in every field into homes. In contrast, American radio had already taken a very different path: it was primarily an entertainment medium, where information played a secondary role.[154]

Before 1945, the Soviet system based on Marxist-Leninist principles did not serve as a model for other countries, any more than Nazi radio did. Even Italian radio, despite its propaganda character, did not offer a role model. It was the two very different occupying powers that established the structure of the broadcasting systems in post-war divided Germany. In Eastern Europe, radio and later television had the main function of 'forming a sense of the socialist state,' thus becoming a model in the Soviet bloc and Central Europe. In federal West Germany, after 1945, a highly decentralised radio system was conceived, largely influenced by the Anglo-Americans. Distrust of broadcasting, fuelled by the press dominated by powerful financial interests such as the Springer group based in Hamburg and Berlin, limited innovation in this field. Moreover, the existence of listeners and, later, viewers receiving Western broadcasts from the East had significant political significance before German reunification. The mass market, however, remained dominated by the press. [155]

[154] Briggs, A., & Burke, P. (2002). *Storia sociale dei media: da Gutenberg a Internet*. cit., 266-271.
[155] Ivi, 272-273.

After the Second World War, Europe lost its centrality while global balances were reshaped by the growing influence of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which played a crucial role in dividing the world. Strategically, the United States combined modernisation, social policies, and democratic administration with a never-ending effort to gain social consensus in an anti-communist perspective. They exported a lifestyle and economic and political ideas very different from those of Europe. To make themselves known to the peoples of Europe, the Americans mobilised the most powerful mass media, as the activities of the Office of War Information demonstrated. Before the creation and deployment of the USIS (United States Information Service) centres, in-depth investigations were conducted in various European countries by members of Congress and representatives of the State Department. The introduction of the 'Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations: A Resolution authorising the Committee on Foreign Relations to make an investigation on the effects of certain State Department Activities' highlighted the USSR's action in western countries and the need to respond with a policy to educate the peoples of Europe, where Communist parties seemed to have a strong presence. The main objective of this investigation was to understand how the United States could exercise leadership over the peoples of Europe through their history, ideals, and motivations, and how to reconcile this policy with a firmly aggressive attitude towards the USSR. The USIS centres carried out various activities, including opening libraries, publishing daily news bulletins, organising radio news broadcasts, editorials by American opinion leaders, and American music.[156]

A significant interaction would develop between radio and television, transmission of images as well as words. In its initial form, television did not offer viewers the possibility of accessing international programmes simply by turning a knob. Although the international market of images was growing, the production and control of television content remained in the hands of the same bodies that previously only dealt with sound, back in the days when cinema was silent. However, the era of television would not take hold until the 1950s.

In 1923, television was already seen as a popular means of home entertainment and recreation, similar to the cinema. In 1935, following the example of the United States, European specialised industries in France, Germany, and Great Britain, such as

[156] Anania, F. (2007). *Storia delle comunicazioni di massa*. cit., 61.

Telefunken and Baird, devoted themselves to mastering television technology. In Germany, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the simultaneous introduction of loudspeakers, radio, and television reflected the desire to create gathering spaces for the people and to redefine the Volkskörper (the body of the nation). The advent of television under the Nazi regime represented, in this context, a concretisation of the idea of simultaneous communication between leaders and population.[157]

In 1936, the BBC started the first regular television service in history, with programming limited to symphony concerts, short drama shows, gardening and cookery columns, and short news bulletins, broadcast for three hours a day between 6 and 9 p.m. However, the onset of the Second World War suspended BBC television broadcasts. By the end of the conflict, radio had achieved such stability that it was difficult to see how television could fit into the media landscape. Television did not arouse great enthusiasm among either radio or film professionals; on the contrary, there was a certain apprehension. In intellectual circles, the future potential of television was underestimated, believing that it would only appeal to the higher income brackets. Despite this, the production of television sets grew significantly, from 178,000 to around 15 million between 1947 and 1952, when more than 20 million were in operation. The growth of television audiences was exponential, while cinema audiences were declining. In the 1950s, in the United States, television broadcast more film material than live programmes, thus following a direction similar to that of radio, oriented towards entertainment. However, outside the United States, not all broadcasters followed this trend. The differences between European countries and the United States were evident, especially in terms of expansion beyond national borders. When the US domestic market seemed saturated in the mid-1950s, television interests began to turn abroad. In February 1955, there were 36 million television sets in the US, compared to 4.8 million across Europe. In France and Germany, television developed along predictable paths, given the precedents of post-war radio. In West Germany, television, like radio, was managed by the Länder governments at the behest of the Allies; the first television station, the Northwest German Broadcasting (Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk, NWDR), began broadcasting in December 1952. The explosion of television was imminent: by the mid-

[157] Barović, V. (2015). *Radio and Television in the Nazi Media System*.

1960s, more than 90 countries had television stations, and the global audience exceeded 750 million people. [158]

The significance of television was the subject of extensive debate. For some, it was considered the 'universal eye', while for others, like architect Frank Lloyd Wright, it was simply 'chewing gum for the eyes.' Newton Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1961, described network television as a 'great cultural desert'. Milton Shulman, a prominent Canadian author and critic, observed that watching television had become a habit rather than a conscious choice, turning television from a 'universal eye' into a 'voracious eye'. Still others considered it an 'evil eye,' harmful not only to the individuals who watched it, but also to the social fabric as a whole. In the 1960s, there was a widespread belief that television trivialised news and other programming content, distorting not only the information, but also the underlying issues.[159]

In the early years of post-war television, the Cold War was always present, influencing both propaganda content, and entertainment. The Vietnam War, for instance, was the first to be followed on the screens, albeit selectively. In the 1960s and 1970s, information became a central concern with debates oscillating between 'lack of information' and 'saturation'. In the US, information was beginning to be treated as a commodity and part of an 'information economy.'[160] In 1972, at the 17th General Session of UNESCO, a declaration on guiding principles for the use of broadcasting was adopted, promoting the free flow of information, education, and cultural exchange. The declaration emphasised the importance of cultural sovereignty and international control over the veracity of news. Fifty-five states accepted the declaration, while only seven, including the United States, opposed it. There were also 22 abstentions, including that of the Soviet Union.[161]

Public television is a national medium that allows viewers to feel an integral part of the state, with the aim of strengthening a sense of common belonging. Public broadcasters are in charge of offering diverse programming that includes entertainment,

[158] Briggs, A., & Burke, P. (2002). *Storia sociale dei media: da Gutenberg a Internet*. cit., 284-295.
[159] Ivi, 298-299.
[160] Stiglitz, J. E. (2000). The Contributions of the Economics of Information to Twentieth Century Economics. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115(4), 1441-1478.
[161] Cunsolo, F. P. (2021). L'azione dell'UNESCO per la protezione del patrimonio digitale. *Ordine Internazionale e Diritti Umani*, 1014.

information, and education. Governments exploit television to educate and train society, turning it into the main tool for political propaganda and election campaigns. In the 1950s, Western Europe experienced economic growth that led to significant social changes, such as the intensification of migration flows to more developed economic centres. This phenomenon forced the adoption of new social measures. Economic expansion also generated new forms of cultural and social consumption. With the birth of the modern family and its integration into new urban areas, the need for new leisure and entertainment forms grew. In this context, television became the main medium through which citizens could make sense of their lives and understand the economic and social changes taking place. While cinema suffered a rapid decline, television emerged as a powerful agent of social unification, helping to maintain stability and cohesion in a period of rapid economic growth.

The importance of information, which today is part of an essential trio comprising information, education, and entertainment, was already recognised long before terms such as 'information society' and 'information technology' became commonplace in the 1970s and 1980s.[162] Originally, the verb 'to inform', derived from Latin, was not limited to 'to report facts', but also included the meaning 'to form the mind'. For a long time, the press, supported by telegraph and telephone, was the only available medium of information, until it became part of a broader media landscape. Between 1950 and 1970, the lines between information and entertainment became progressively blurred, both in newspapers and electronic media, with this blurring further increasing in the following years. The concentration of media power in the XX century further blurred the distinction between information and entertainment.

3.2
Foreign Radio and the Dissemination of News Beyond State Control

The idea that the media, especially the Western media, played a decisive role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe is widely shared among scholars and politicians. However, it is surprising how widespread this view is, considering that empirical research on the impact of foreign media on the stability of authoritarian regimes is still at a preliminary stage and constantly developing.

[162] Ivi, 1013.

As described in the previous chapters, the Cold War represented the intensification of a long-standing conflict between East and West that began before the Second World War and was characterised by costly and potentially devastating competition in the economic, scientific, technological, and military spheres, with the nuclear arms race as the most striking example. Despite the consensus on these factors, the Cold War remains a historical period full of contradictions that historians still struggle to authoritatively periodise, mainly due to the failure to integrate social and cultural analyses. The Cold War not only involved treaties and summits, but practically every aspect of life, from the Olympics to opera, from literature to space travel, taking on political significance and being used as a weapon to influence domestic public opinion and condition foreign societies. In 1992, diplomatic historian Arthur Schlesinger argued that this geopolitical rivalry intensified to such an extent that it threatened our very existence, as the superpower blocs were built on opposing and deeply antagonistic principles, each side seeing the other as irredeemably hostile to its essence. In other words, the Cold War was an ideological war, shaped by perception, speculation, conjecture, and presumption. The media were at the centre of this war.

During the Cold War, the United States tried to reach audiences in communist countries through radio stations such as Voice of America (VOA), Radio Liberty (RL), and Radio Free Europe (RFE).[163] US international broadcasting policies were based on the idea that access to uncensored and reliable information would promote a more democratic and pro-Western public opinion, reduce communist militarism and adventurism, and weaken support for communist regimes in the long run. After the end of the Cold War, both scholars and politicians agreed that US international broadcasting, together with that sponsored by other Western countries such as Deutsche Welle and the BBC, contributed significantly to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. The democratisation literature argues that these broadcasts weakened communist regimes, giving citizens behind the Iron Curtain hope and certainty that the free world had not forgotten them. By offering information not available in the state-controlled national media, they allowed Eastern Europeans to confront communist propaganda with credible news from abroad. Western broadcasts addressed issues suppressed by the national

[163] Puddington, A. (2000). Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. *Cultural History*, 4.

media, such as the existence of dissident movements, human rights violations, and the involvement of communist countries in wars across the border. They also allowed Eastern Europeans to compare their standard of living with the (generally much higher) standard of living of capitalist countries in supposed decline. Through their coverage of the domestic politics of democratic nations, they familiarised listeners with the workings of democracy and introduced them to freedoms unknown under communism. According to this perspective, in the long run, Western broadcasts fuelled pro-democratic attitudes and undermined public support for communism.[164]

A crucial element of RFE/RL's success was its link to the broader Cold War strategy of the United States. In 1948, US diplomat George Kennan outlined a comprehensive strategy of containment and 'counterforce' aimed at pressurising the Soviet Union to limit its expansionist tendencies. This strategy operated on two fronts: strengthening Western Europe (and subsequently other regions) to deter Soviet expansionism and exerting pressure on Soviet control of Eastern Europe. Kennan believed that this strategy should be implemented through all spheres of national power, including economic (such as the Marshall Plan), military (such as NATO and other military alliances), diplomatic, and information activities. In his role as director of the State Department's policy planning staff, Kennan set up several organisations to lobby the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The main organisations dedicated to this cause were the National Committee for a Free Europe, later renamed the Free Europe Committee (FEC), and the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism (Amcomlib). The FEC's best-known and most significant activity was RFE, started in 1950. RL, financed by Amcomlib, broadcast in Russian and other languages of the Soviet Union, while RFE was intended for the people of Eastern Europe. These short-wave radio stations provided the citizens of the Communist bloc with an alternative source of news, as well as comprehensive programming including entertainment, cultural content, and commentary. A mixed team of Americans and émigrés, based in New York and Munich, edited the broadcast content. As with the general US strategy towards the Soviet Union, opinions on the role of RFE/RL were divided into two camps: revolutionary and evolutionary. The revolutionary camp included national security experts who

[164] Kern, H. L., & Hainmueller, J. (2009). Opium for the Masses: How Foreign Media Can Stabilize Authoritarian Regimes. *Political Analysis*, 17(4), 378-379.

promoted the liberation of the 'captive peoples' of Eastern Europe from communist 'slavery'. Eisenhower also supported, at least publicly, this policy. Psychological warfare was seen as the key to undermining communist domination in Eastern Europe without provoking a conflict between the superpowers. Jackson, an expert on psychological warfare and later an assistant to the president during the Eisenhower administration, believed that RFE's efforts were achieving results, especially in Czechoslovakia, and that with further engagement the country would be ready to revolt. Many other RFE supporters shared this view, believing that a public statement by the US government, conveyed by RFE, expressing the intent to liberate Eastern Europe by non-military means, together with a psychological warfare offensive, would be sufficient to trigger the process. RFE/RL's initial programming reflected this strategy, aimed at bolstering the morale of nations behind the Iron Curtain and stimulating a spirit of non-cooperation with Soviet regimes. From 1951 to 1956, radio stations also sponsored hot air balloon operations in communist Eastern Europe, launching leaflets, newspapers, stickers, and political souvenirs in line with the themes covered in RFE's broadcasts. These balloon launches were considered one of the few ways to break the total control of information by communist regimes. Initially, RFE/RL targeted workers and peasants, considered the backbone of communist regimes, and the ethnic divisions within the Soviet Union. By the end of the 1950s, RFE/RL was broadcasting in 17 languages, including Ukrainian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Belarusian, keeping alive the history and cultural identities of the Soviet peoples, often systematically erased by the government.[165]

The second camp, the evolutionary one, had a different vision of the role RFE/RL should play in confronting the Soviet Union, promoting a slower and more gradual approach. In the mid-1950s, US national security policy began to move towards this evolutionary vision. The long-term goals of this policy were twofold: first, to develop collective leadership that would allow the US to promote peaceful change within the Soviet system; and second, to make Soviet officials realise that the hostility of Eastern European peoples towards imposed governments would diminish the security of the communist bloc. The informational and cultural sphere was considered crucial to achieving this policy. US officials believed that the governments of the Soviet Union and

[165] Tkacheva, O., Schwartz, L. H., Libicki, M. C., Taylor, J. E., Martini, J., & Baxter, C. (2013). Information Freedom During the Cold War: The Impact of Western Radio Broadcasts. *Internet Freedom and Political Space*, 150-154.

Eastern Europe were ideologically vulnerable and that these vulnerabilities could be exploited. They pointed to the desire of the intelligentsia within the communist bloc to be part of a world cultural community, and the alienation of young people from communist ideology. The US sought to use RFE/RL and other tools to break the isolation of communist peoples and correct the distorted image of the West presented by communist propaganda. It was hoped that contact with the outside world would introduce modern concepts and reform ideas to key social groups and stimulate open discussion of liberal ideas within the communist world. As a result, these discussions would steer Soviet policies in a US-friendly direction. According to the evolutionary camp, the main target of RFE/RL was to be intellectuals, including students, technicians, and managers. Kennan argued that although the intelligentsia were somewhat removed from the power structure, their ideas influenced the direction of society and could impose subtle restrictions on Soviet and Eastern European policies. These professionals were used to thinking independently and their economic status allowed them to buy books and radios capable of receiving foreign broadcasts. Isolated from the rest of the world, they were curious about the latest trends and foreign views on world events; they also harboured a scepticism towards party statements and could be susceptible to outside influences. For most of the Cold War, RFE/RL adopted the evolutionary strategy; however, some elements of the liberation strategy remained, in particular the focus on broadcasting to non-Russian republics within the Soviet Union.[166]

In 1980, it was estimated that 7.5% of the Russian population listened to RL broadcasts on a weekly basis. The overall weekly reach, which included Western broadcasts such as BBC, VOA, and RL, was about 25%, with RL recording a weekly audience of 10%. RL's audience tended to be older, rural, and slightly more educated than that of the other stations. VOA, with a greater emphasis on US entertainment and popular music, attracted a younger, more urban audience. RL did not expect to influence true communists, as there was no evidence that international radio could convert people with strongly held views. In contrast, Wilbur Schramm, a communications expert at Stanford University, was more confident about RL's effect on those who were already disaffected with the regime, believing that RL's messages could strengthen and consolidate their beliefs. For those who neither supported nor actively opposed the regime, RL could hope

[166] Ivi, 154-156.

to instil certain ideas and facts that could change the overall picture. In a 1984 study, the Soviet population was divided into five groups according to their attitudes towards civil liberties in the USSR: liberal, moderate, indifferent, conservative, and hardline. Not surprisingly, liberals were the most likely to listen to western radio, with about 80% of them tuning in to the broadcasts. 40% of moderates also listened to the radio. Liberals also used word of mouth as a source of information, thus amplifying the impact of broadcasts by RL and other Western stations. Listeners indicated several reasons for tuning in to Western radio broadcasts. The most cited reason was the desire to listen to uncensored news, followed by the need to obtain information not readily available from internal USSR sources. A third important reason was the desire to learn about the outside world through non-Soviet sources. Finally, another reason, less mentioned but still significant, was the verification or refutation of information from Soviet media.[167]

The first real test of US broadcasting policies occurred between 1953 and 1956, when a series of riots and uprisings shook Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, posing a major problem for the post-Stalin Soviet leadership. Many historians give undue credit to Western radio broadcasts, particularly those of RFE, for inspiring these riots. However, it is more accurate to say that the social, economic, and political conditions in Eastern Europe were the real causes of the riots, while Western radio stations played the normal media role of providing immediate news and coverage of events. In a communist society, where news is carefully censored, the mere reporting of unrest could still contribute to the spread of instability. The social and economic problems in Eastern Europe between 1947 and 1953 are well documented and the news environment was particularly favourable to foreign broadcasting. For instance, in Hungary in the late 1940s, the communist regime took control of the official Hungarian radio station, turning it into a propaganda tool, while trying to block foreign broadcasts that were extremely popular. This censorship only increased the credibility of foreign radio stations, especially RFE, which often provided the first news of significant events. For example, many people in Eastern Europe learned of Stalin's death thanks to RFE, even before the official Soviet announcement. These factors contributed to the popularity and influence of foreign broadcasts, with RFE's particularly popular. In October 1956, a crisis erupted in Hungary, which for those in the US government who were committed to the active liberation of

[167] Ivi, 159, 161-162.

Eastern Europe, seemed like the long-awaited moment: the entire Soviet empire seemed on the verge of collapsing. RFE openly supported the Hungarian revolution, with broadcasts giving detailed instructions on how to fight the Soviets, suggesting sabotage of railway and telephone lines, and advising local authorities to secure weapons depots for the Freedom Fighters. On 30 October, with hundreds of Hungarian and Soviet soldiers already dead, the Kremlin seemed to agree to the Hungarian government's demands, but unfortunately, we know the tragic outcome.[168]

During the social unrest in the 1960s and 1970s within the communist bloc, RFE/RL played a significantly different role. The repression of dissent and the official refusal to publish literary works not approved by the government led to the emergence of the samizdat phenomenon in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. When RL began to regularly programme samizdat material, it was inundated with documents from the Soviet Union and beyond. The samizdat authors aimed to smuggle their documents into the West so that RL could transmit them. At the beginning of the 1970s, RL devoted one-sixth of its Russian-language programming (58 hours per week) to broadcasting samizdat documents. By the end of the 1980s, RFE/RL had become a reliable news source for Eastern Bloc citizens. As revolutionary movements swept through Eastern Europe, RFE reported on events throughout the region. During the 1989 Polish elections, for example, RFE ensured that Polish citizens were informed about all non-communist candidates. The elections were held on a non-party basis, and RFE provided Polish citizens with detailed information on the candidates, highlighting who did and did not represent the communist party.[169]

Overthrowing an authoritarian regime is extremely difficult, as it implies citizens overcoming collective action problems and coordinating their behaviour against the regime. This coordination is complicated by the prevalence of preference falsification, which hinders an accurate assessment of anti-regime sentiments, and the lack of independent national media in authoritarian regimes. According to the theory of relative deprivation, people rebel when they perceive a discrepancy between their material expectations and the regime's ability to meet the standard of living they believe they are entitled to. This discrepancy was certainly present among many East Germans, who

[168] Ivi, 162-163, 167.
[169] Ivi, 169-170.

desired Western consumer goods and the freedom to travel to exotic places described by the radio and shown on television. However, relative deprivation alone does not explain the outbreak of revolution in East Germany (or other revolutions in Eastern Europe). Living conditions in West Germany had been significantly better than those in the East throughout the existence of the two German states, but mass protests did not occur until the summer of 1989. Similarly, the political opportunity structure theory, which argues that people do not rebel when they are most disgruntled, but rather when new political opportunities for change open up (such as Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union), correctly explains the external conditions favourable to the overthrow of the East German regime but fails to adequately explain the micro-level mobilisation process of anti-regime protest. Research indicates that friendship and family ties are crucial for the mobilisation of protests. Social networks play an important role in raising awareness among potential participants and motivating them to take part in the demonstrations, while access to politically relevant information through foreign media may have encouraged individuals to risk their lives for a common cause. Furthermore, the fact that there were no significant language or cultural barriers between East and West Germans and that the Western media had paid considerable attention to GDR politics prior to the German revolution certainly facilitated this process.[170]

From the very beginning, the GDR media were subject to strict control and surveillance by the regime through the Ministry for Postal and Telecommunication Services of the GDR (Ministerium für Post- und Fernmeldewesen der DDR, MPF), which was part of the Council of Ministers of the GDR (Ministerrat der DDR). The SED's control of information was a crucial element of government strategy and influenced every aspect of East German citizens' daily lives: no information could be published without government approval; censorship was severe and any content critical of the government or socialism was promptly blocked and removed. This censorship allowed the government to maintain an official narrative that extolled the successes of socialism and minimised, if not completely concealed, the nation's problems and difficulties. Propaganda was another key tool. The government used the media to spread a constant message in favour of socialism and against capitalism, with a particular focus on West

[170] Crabtree, C., Darmofal, D., & Kern, H. L. (2015). A spatial analysis of the impact of West German television on protest mobilization during the East German revolution. *Journal of Peace Research*, 52(3), 271-272.

Germany and the United States. Through this propaganda, the successes of socialism were exaggerated and celebrated, while failures were hidden or justified as temporary obstacles on the way to an ideal society. A crucial role in the control of information was played by the Stasi, which was omnipresent. The fear of being observed or denounced was a constant for anyone working in the media. Education and culture were also under strict control. School and university curricula were designed to promote socialist values, and artists, writers, and intellectuals who did not conform to the party line risked censorship, publication bans, and other forms of repression, up to and including expulsion. Ideological indoctrination started from an early age and extended through mass organisations such as the National Front of the German Democratic Republic and the Free German Youth, which promoted socialist values and party policies among the citizens.[171]

While the control of unauthorised newspapers and magazines was relatively straightforward, thanks to the frequent raids by the secret police on clandestine print shops and the confiscation of unapproved material across the Iron Curtain, the control of radio and television broadcasts proved to be much more complex. Radio and television broadcasts from West Germany could be received in many areas of East Germany, making it difficult for the government to block the spread of alternative information. The population, particularly in areas near the border, had access to news and programmes that contradicted official GDR propaganda. Despite efforts to disrupt or block these broadcasts through so-called 'jamming', many citizens still managed to receive the signals, finding in them a window to the outside world and an alternative to the reality presented by the state media.[172]

In 1946, the United States set up a radio service that became the model for the future RFE. This cable service, initially called Drahtfunk im amerikanischen Sektor or DIAS, later changed its name to Radio in the American Sector (Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor, RIAS) and was initiated for German residents in the American sector of Berlin (Berlin-Schöneberg).[173] Although RIAS's signals were initially weak, West Berlin's location in the heart of East Germany posed problems for the Communist

[171] Boyer, D. (2003). Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of Media Control in the German Democratic Republic. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45(3), 511-545.
[172] Grieves, K. (2021). *Cold War Journalism: Between Cold Reception and Common Ground*. Palgrave Macmillan, 35-36.
[173] Puddington, A. (2000). Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. cit., 13-14.

regime. The importance of RIAS grew considerably during the Berlin Blockade of 1948, when the station conveyed the message of the Allies' determination to resist Soviet pressure to an audience that included West and East Berlin and much of East Germany. The East German press described RIAS as an agent of the US government and a tool of the war-oriented western imperialists. However, instead of weakening RIAS, the Soviet blockade of 1948 helped to strengthen its position in several ways. Before the blockade, RIAS was in competition with the Berliner Rundfunk, a radio station based in East Berlin, and faced financial shortfalls and criticism over the quality of its programmes. Before the blockade, RIAS was preferred by 57% of West Berliners compared to 31% who preferred Berliner Rundfunk. In August, 80% of West Berliners listened to RIAS, while Berliner Rundfunk's ratings among West Berliners plummeted to almost zero. This dramatic change in listeners' preferences was largely due to the perception of RIAS as a reliable and accurate source of reporting on the blockade.[174]

After the Berlin Blockade, RIAS became an alternative domestic service for East Germans and started broadcasting from a new location in Hof in northern Bavaria. From Hof, RIAS's signals were able to cover much of eastern Germany, significantly extending the station's reach beyond the Berlin region. RIAS offered news, commentary and cultural programmes that were not available in the GDR's censored media. Initially supported by the Information Control Division of the Office of the Military Government of the United States (OMGUS), from 1949 the station was funded by the U.S. High Commission for Germany and, from the 1960s, came under the United States Information Agency (USIA), where it remained until the end of the Cold War. RIAS was staffed mainly by Germans, supervised by a small American management team. The station developed many of the broadcast strategies that RFE would later adopt. It maintained an extensive research operation, interviewing travellers from East Germany and collecting material from the communist media of the Republic, and broadcast programmes aimed at specific groups in East Germany, such as teenagers, women, and peasants, including programmes even dedicated to border guards. Among the well-known programmes was ‘Berlin speaks to the Zone’ (referring to the Soviet occupation zone), which continued until the 1950s. During much of the Cold War, RIAS enjoyed a huge following in East Germany, becoming the most popular foreign radio service among listeners. Only when West

[174] Grieves, K. (2021). *Cold War Journalism: Between Cold Reception and Common Ground*. cit., 41.

German television became widely accessible to East German audiences did RIAS's ratings begin to decline.[175]

As RIAS's transmitter power increased and engagement with East German audiences broadened, the regime perceived the station as a growing threat to its control. The SED was in the same predicament that Nazi Germany had been in during World War II, unable to maintain its narrative in the face of foreign broadcasts. Although East Germany did not officially ban the consumption of Western media content, hoping that citizens could develop more effective counterarguments, the legislation passed in 1950 for the protection of the peace allowed for the punishment of those who listened to RIAS, now considered an enemy station. The East German authorities did not only deter listening, but also built installations to jam the signal, succeeding in 1953 in temporarily interrupting the broadcasts. Between 1952 and 1953, the risk associated with listening to RIAS became more tangible. The GDR's Ministry of Information, Gerhart Eisler, strongly condemned those who broadcast and listened to what he called a 'gangster-station'.[176] In the early 1950s, with increasing numbers of East Germans fleeing to the West, the East German media specifically blamed RIAS for the social upheavals in the GDR. Even entertainment programming was viewed with suspicion and those who only listened for the music risked becoming trapped in the station's ideological web. The influx of fugitives, coupled with growing economic tensions, fuelled workers' frustration and anger in June 1953, a critical period for the SED which feared losing control. Eventually, the Soviet army intervened repressively to quell the protests. The GDR media tried to justify the military intervention by accusing RIAS of inciting the riots.[177] However, Western station managers claimed that their role was limited to accurate coverage of the events. A group of East Berlin workers asked RIAS for permission to broadcast an appeal for a general strike; although the station manager refused to air the appeal, he did provide an account of the uprising and the strikers' visit to the station. The next day, an even bigger demonstration took place at Potsdamer Platz, with participants ranging from 50,000 to hundreds of thousands. US military officers, who supervised RIAS, privately described the station as a powerful tool to stimulate the spirit of revolt in the Soviet zone of Germany. Although social scientists have found no concrete evidence that RIAS

[175] Ivi, 38-39.
[176] Ivi, 44.
[177] Hoyer, K. (2023). *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990*. Allen Lane, 128-136.

broadcasts caused the spread of protest, contemporary observers and later historians agree that RIAS helped turn the limited labour unrest in East Berlin into a nationwide mass uprising. This suggests that a better combination of social ties and access to modern information technology can facilitate collective action in a repressive regime such as the GDR. In response to the riots, the US government developed a media strategy for radio and television stations. The stations were to report the facts but emphasise that the demonstrations were spontaneous, and that the Soviet reaction revealed the true relationship between the Soviet communists and the East German workers. This strategy proved effective, as RIAS broadcasts of the events in Berlin provoked further demonstrations and riots throughout East Germany. News of the riots spread rapidly, like today's online media, with surprising consequences. In 1953, RL and BBC broadcasts also reached Soviet forced labour camps in remote parts of Siberia. Prisoners in Vorkuta, a mining complex, learned about the East Berlin riots and decided to go on a similar strike. On 29 July 1953, over 15,000 people were on strike, with local camp leaders intimidated and willing to meet with Communist Party officials in Moscow. Faced with increasing demands, the Communist Party intervened militarily to quell the strike, at the cost of many lives. Although the strike was suppressed, it had a significant impact. The Soviet government began to slowly dismantle the 'Gulag' system established by Stalin, speeding up the process after 1956, and decided to re-examine the entire Stalinist justice system on which the camps were based.[178]

In the following decades, disruptive actions and efforts to intimidate East Germans from tuning in to RIAS continued. After 1961, radio antennas directed towards West Berlin were systematically destroyed by members of the communist youth organisation. However, a decade later, such interventions had abated and jamming activity had decreased, reflecting a period of détente between the Eastern and Western blocs. In 1973, Erich Honecker, speaking to the Central Committee of East Germany's ruling SED, noted that East German citizens could now access western radio and television content without significant restrictions. This signalled a gradual loosening of the implicit ban on such activities, which, however, continued to be problematic until 1989.[179]

[178] Tkacheva, O., Schwartz, L. H., Libicki, M. C., Taylor, J. E., Martini, J., & Baxter, C. (2013). Information Freedom During the Cold War: The Impact of Western Radio Broadcasts. cit., 164-165.
[179] Buhl, D. (1990). Window to the West: How Television from the Federal Republic Influenced Events in East Germany. *Shorenstein Center Discussion Paper Series 1990 D-5*, 2-3.

Although Western politicians were initially optimistic, they soon realised that providing objective and truthful information was unlikely to put an end to communist regimes or change the opinion of many loyal citizens about the morality or effectiveness of the communist system. The ideological attachment of many citizens to the regime and the power of the security services were too entrenched to be overcome by opposition forces. Therefore, starting in the mid-1950s, politicians began to focus on other positive effects that western radio could have as alternative news sources. Firstly, they realised that providing outside information made it more difficult for the communist authorities to suppress and cover up embarrassing events.[180] A case in point was the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which the official Soviet media did not talk about until two days after it happened, and then continued to play down the scale of the tragedy. In this information vacuum, many Soviet and non-Soviet citizens turned to RL for accurate news. Secondly, politicians realised that outside information could correct inaccuracies spread by the official media. Much disinformation on US issues was spread by the government-controlled media. RFE/RL, rather than directly refuting communist media reports, merely reported world events accurately and impartially. Third, broadcasts describing life outside the communist bloc highlighted the fundamental differences between the communist and western systems. A recurring theme during the Cold War was freedom in the West. Illustrated broadcasts showed the public the everyday freedoms available to Western citizens, such as freedom of thought and conscience, individual legal rights, and the absence of personal restrictions. In addition, social justice was critically compared, analysing and questioning communist practices in areas such as workers' rights and the distribution of privileges. Communist practices were compared explicitly and implicitly with the greater social justice of Western society. In the long run, Cold War politicians believed that access to outside information could correct the distorted image of the West presented by Soviet propaganda. Moreover, they believed that this information could introduce modern concepts and ideas of reform into key social groups and stimulate open discussions on liberal ideas within the communist bloc.[181]

In the long run, US broadcasting had a significant impact on elites and public opinion in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Evidence from

[180] Hoyer, K. (2023). *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990*. cit., 283-288.
[181] Tkacheva, O., Schwartz, L. H., Libicki, M. C., Taylor, J. E., Martini, J., & Baxter, C. (2013). Information Freedom During the Cold War: The Impact of Western Radio Broadcasts. cit., 171-173.

audience surveys, testimonies of influential figures such as former president Václav Havel, and extensive countermeasures taken by communist regimes clearly demonstrate the effect of radio broadcasts. Many historians consider the US information and cultural strategies as one of the main factors that contributed to the West's victory in the Cold War. Western information programmes achieved considerable success during this period, achieved at a relatively low cost in terms of national security.

3.3
Television and National and International Coverage of the Protests

At a press conference on 9 November 1989, East German party official Günter Schabowski could not have imagined that his routine briefing would trigger a series of events that would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, irreversibly changing the geopolitical landscape of the Cold War. Schabowski's appearance in front of the national and international press was set in the context of fundamental changes in the Eastern bloc that took place that year: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia (February) and Hungary (April), Hungary's decision to open the Iron Curtain along its border with Austria (May), the election of the first non-Communist government in Poland (August), and the approval of the right to self-determination by Warsaw Pact members (October), which rendered the Brezhnev doctrine obsolete. In his role as information secretary and representative of the East German Politburo, Schabowski was tasked with updating the press on the tenth meeting of the SED Central Committee and the new plans for travel regulations, which were to be officially announced the following day to allow for adequate preparation of the border guards. However, in response to a question from Italian journalist Riccardo Ehrman about the new travel rules, Schabowski, visibly surprised and stammering, declared that all rules for foreign travel had been revoked with immediate effect (ab sofort). This declaration quickly became international news, with the Associated Press and the press agency of the Federal Republic following with similar statements. As a result, thousands of East German citizens poured into the border crossings, where the completely unprepared

guards were forced to give in to the demands of the population at 11.30 p.m., marking the beginning of the last chapter of the state's existence.[182]

When the Germans surrendered to the Allies in May 1945, the media system was in ruins or so compromised with the Nazi regime that the Allies decided to completely rebuild it. The postal and telegraph services had collapsed, and the Allied authorities also shut down other media sectors considered politically suspect, such as radio, press, cinema, and movie theatres. However, the media were considered potentially useful for the post-war occupation of Germany, so plans for their reconstruction began immediately. While radio, cinema, and the press were restored shortly after the war, television received little attention until 1948. Television appeared of little relevance to the Allied authorities, contributing little either to the military occupation or to the democratisation of the country. In contrast, radio, cinema, and the press had the potential to disseminate information about the occupation, coordinate the activities of the population, and broadcast re-education programmes, emphasising the defeat of the Germans and promoting democratic thinking. Television, like other components of the socialist administration in the GDR, developed slowly and haphazardly in the first post-war decade. The authorities had to deal with technological difficulties in the distribution and reception of signals, in a context of post-war territorial changes and increasing Cold War competition with West Germany. This competition was both concrete, in the expansion of broadcasting networks and reception media, and perceived, with each side concerned about the threat posed by the opposing broadcasting system. At this early stage, television was not seen as an instrument of manipulation or authoritarianism. Rather, it represented a means to counter West German influence in the new Republic and to lay the foundations for a pan-German reception. In other words, the decision to start television broadcasting in East Germany in 1952 was not motivated by the artistic or ideological value of the medium but reflected the growing importance of broadcasting in the context of the Cold War between the two Germanies.[183]

Soviet authorities in Germany began to develop television technology in 1949, when they assigned Director of Broadcasting Hans Mahle to set up a team of experts. A year later, the government approved plans to build the Television Center (Fernsehzentrum

[182] Gumbert, H. L. (2014). *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic*. University of Michigan Press, 159.
[183] Ivi, 14, 18.

Berlin, FZ) in Berlin-Adlershof. Meanwhile, the area around Hamburg had also emerged as an important media centre. On July 12, 1950, NWDR successfully broadcast the first postwar television pictures in Germany. In August, the regional directors of West German broadcasters founded the Association of German Public Broadcasting Corporations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, ARD), a federal body designed to coordinate regional television production and broadcasting throughout the FRG. Although there were initially few viewers, regular broadcasts were necessary to participate in the distribution of television frequencies, according to the provisions of the 1948 European Broadcasting Convention in Geneva and Copenhagen. In June 1952, the GDR started the first test signals from the Berlin transmitter. However, by the time television programs began to be broadcast, the Postal Ministry had been developing transmission technology for several years but had no clear idea of what television programs would look like nor had it invested much in ensuring adequate reception. Domestic reception was not a priority for government authorities before the late 1950s. Meanwhile, the East German television industry was producing thousands of sets (Leningrad model) for export to the East in accordance with repair agreements with the Soviet Union. Those who had access to GDR programming often owned one of the few television sets left over from the Nazi era, had purchased one on the black market, or had bought it in the West. Despite the high cost of the sets and the difficulties of reception, the demand for televisions was very high. Television service managers were surprised to discover a kind of 'television hunger' in places like Frankfurt-on-the-Oder. However, the limited production of television sets could not meet domestic demand. Between 1955 and 1957, the number of television set owners increased from about 13,000 to over 300,000.[184] This number doubled in 1959, and by 1960 the number of television sets exceeded one million. Despite high prices (3,500 marks compared to an average monthly income of 300 marks) and the relatively low quality of East German sets, TV ownership grew significantly, surpassing that of West Germany.[185]

In December 1952, the public 'test-program' began, providing two hours of daily broadcasting starting at 8 p.m. At that time, only about 60 sets across the country could receive the signal, all concentrated in Berlin. Each broadcast began with greetings from

[184] Hoyer, K. (2023). *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990*. cit., 226.
[185] Gumbert, H. L. (2014). *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic*. cit., 23-24, 28-29.

the announcers and directors, followed by the news program Aktuelle Kamera (AK), which continued to be broadcast without interruption until December 1990. In the early years, however, AK was not considered a mouthpiece of the SED, as television was still an elite media and not part of most people's daily lives. Over time, both ARD's Tagesschau and AK became more popular and influential than the news programs shown in cinemas. The 'right' information, however, was handled by Der Augenzeuge ('The Eyewitness'), the official news program of DEFA (Deutsche Film AG), the state-owned film studio. This was also evident during the June 1953 uprising, which led to the removal of Zilles, the news director, who was replaced by Heinz Adameck, who remained in charge until German reunification. To reach a wider audience, the repeater network expanded rapidly. In 1953, repeaters were activated in Berlin-Grünau and Dresden, and in 1955 those in Berlin-Mitte, Brocken, Großer Inselsberg, Helpterberg, Marlow and Chemnitz were added. In 1956, Berlin-Köpenick and two other repeaters, Brocken and Inselsberg, were also added, extending the signal to the FRG. Investments in television technology and studios were significant: in the summer of 1953, Studio I was opened in Berlin-Adlershof, and in 1955 the first mobile studio and the third studio were set up.[186]

In January 1956, the Berlin Television Centre's public 'test-program' was discontinued and Deutsche Fernsehfunk (DFF) programming began, with three-hour daily broadcasts. For political reasons, the station initially did not adopt the name Fernsehen der DDR, aiming to represent all of Germany. However, despite the presence of repeaters located near the border, DFF could not fully cover the territory of the FRG. Only later did ARD and ZDF (which began its broadcasts in 1963) manage to reach the entire territory of the GDR, except for the Elbe Valley (known as the 'Valley of the clueless' with Dresden) and the Northeast (Stralsund, Greifswald, Rügen Island). From 1958, DFF began broadcasting midday reruns to reach workers with extended hours. In 1969, on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the GDR, the second channel (DFF 2) was launched, marking the beginning of the colour television era for DFF.[187] With the launch of the second channel, the number of hours of programming produced increased significantly. In 1972, the station changed its name to Fernsehen der DDR.[188]

[186] Ivi, 68-69.
[187] Hoyer, K. (2023). *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990*. cit., 226.
[188] Grdešić, M. (2014). Television and protest in East Germany's revolution, 1989–1990: A mixed-methods analysis. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(1), 94.

In the essay ‘Thoughts on the Dramaturgy of Television’, Werner Fehlig, the first director of the Department of Television Drama, described television as a new and distinctive communicative technology compared to radio, film, and theatre. Fehlig identified four main characteristics that made television a particularly effective medium for political agitation. First, television was a visual medium that satisfied the public's desire to experience social, cultural, and political transformations directly and unfiltered. Second, it highlighted the attractiveness of visual simultaneity, or Aktualität, which combined event and experience, and which audiences expected from television. Third, each television program was seen as part of a continuous and evolving 'flow' (Programmgestaltung). Finally, television benefited from an intimate mode of reception: audiences tuned in at home, where they were more susceptible to persuasive and personal discourse, allowing television to connect with their 'inner essence' (inneres Wesen). Fehlig argued that television should not merely reflect reality, but rather represent the dynamism of the GDR's revolutionary development.[189]

In the early years of operation, the main types of programming were television drama, current affairs (political) programs, and entertainment. Dramatic programming, which was often inspired by theatre, film, or radio, represented the most advanced aspect of programming, as producers began to create original content specifically for television. Current affairs television, being focused on the immediate and seemingly direct transmission of everyday experiences, appeared to be the area with the greatest political potential for DFF staff. However, the difficulty of handling simultaneity made this type of programming less successful than others. In terms of entertainment, the television service faced significant challenges. Socialist authorities regarded entertainment as something kitschy and superficial, and this view was partly shared by the NWDR television staff. This staff believed that the British model of television was better suited to the system that was being sought to be established than the American model. While American television saturated viewers' daily lives with long-form daily programs, the British model offered shorter programs, no more than a couple of hours daily in the early 1950s. Popular entertainments, such as quizzes and games, were not considered suitable for German audiences, as the latter were thought to have a greater need for informative

[189] Gumbert, H. L. (2014). *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic*. cit., 47.

and in-depth content. Despite these reservations, DFF staff developed entertainment programs to address the need for low-cost content to fill the expanding schedule. Entertainment proved to be an effective means of raising the profile of the GDR's television service. The move toward educational entertainment reflected the Television Committee's attempt to attract viewers and establish a clear policy direction for future programming. Thus, the Television Committee devised shows that used television to attract and educate specifically 'socialist' audiences, educating them on the principles of socialist culture and modelling behaviours that conformed to the party's vision.[190]

In the 1960s, a large proportion of East Germans, including many SED members, regularly watched West German television (WGTV).[191] Due to East Germany's topography, Western television broadcasts were visible in much of the country, although not everywhere. Although it was never forbidden to watch West German television, the GDR authorities still tried to limit its broadcasting through propaganda campaigns and disruptive actions. The regime considered Western television an ideological threat and feared its impact on public opinion. For example, after the construction of the Berlin Wall, SED youth groups destroyed hundreds of antennas aimed at the FRG. However, the unpopularity of these actions quickly led to their cessation. As time passed, the regime had to accept that a considerable part of the eastern population (85-90%) regularly watched Western television. By 1984, 40% of households were connected to community antennas, while others used small antennas on rooftops. Some research suggests that, at certain times, exposure to West German television may have even helped maintain support for the East German regime. East Germans saw Western television primarily as an entertainment opportunity. In a society with limited entertainment options, the possibility to watch West German programs offered a real escape from shortages and ideological indoctrination, making life under communism more bearable and the regime more tolerable. However, it is important to note that this was a temporary escape from everyday reality in the Republic, which reappeared with renewed intensity once the screen was turned off.[192]

[190] Ivi, 49-50.
[191] Buhl, D. (1990). Window to the West: How Television from the Federal Republic Influenced Events in East Germany. cit., 3.
[192] Kern, H. L., & Hainmueller, J. (2009). Opium for the Masses: How Foreign Media Can Stabilize Authoritarian Regimes. cit., 393-394.

Other research, however, has sought to show how West German television played a crucial role in undermining public support for the East German regime over the long term and especially during the revolution.[193] These studies are part of a larger literature examining the impact of the media in authoritarian regimes. According to this literature, WGTV played an instrumental role in the revolution by broadcasting news about the deepening political crisis directly into the living rooms of East Germans. WGTV helped spread knowledge of successful protests and highlighted the unexpected vulnerability of the East German dictatorship, thus changing the perception of political opportunities and facilitating the activation and spread of protests. Several authors have highlighted the role of the WGTV during the revolution. Kuran, for example, describes how demonstrations that occurred in East Berlin during the 40th anniversary celebrations of the GDR were immediately broadcast by WGTV, alerting disgruntled citizens across the country to the spread of discontent and revealing the weakness of the government's response. Opp and Gern noted that the Monday prayers in Leipzig and related demonstrations contributed to the emergence of protest in other East German cities, as people, informed primarily by WGTV about the events in Leipzig, expected citizens in each city to spontaneously gather in the squares for the Monday demonstrations. Jarausch notes that Western television coverage allowed acts of symbolic defiance to reach a wider audience, further spreading discontent. Hirschman writes that images of the exodus of people fleeing the GDR, broadcast on Western television news, not only intensified dissident criticism, but also transformed average citizens, who had hitherto been passive, into activists. Finally, Opp, Voss, Gern and Grix point to WGTV's role in disseminating political information unavailable in the East German state media, thus helping to erode support for the regime.[194]

It is commonly believed that without the help of the West, the small East German opposition would not have achieved as much. The money, moral support, media attention, and protection provided by Western supporters may have had as significant an impact on the opposition as West German financial support for the East German state. However, although most East Germans watched Western television and obtained much information

[193] Buhl, D. (1990). Window to the West: How Television from the Federal Republic Influenced Events in East Germany. cit., 5-6.
[194] Crabtree, C., Darmofal, D., & Kern, H. L. (2015). A spatial analysis of the impact of West German television on protest mobilization during the East German revolution. cit., 272-273.

from it, there was a certain hostility toward Western media and those East German dissidents and émigrés, such as Ulrich Neumann (one of Arche's leaders), who tried to use it. Dissidents who remained in the Republic accused Western journalists and émigrés reporting on East German news of exploiting their subjects and criticized Arche leaders for using their appearances on Western television as a form of self-promotion. Although the desire for personal recognition played a role in the activities of East German opposition leaders, it is also true that Arche's increased presence in the media provided protection for all East German activists, as well as bringing in money and resources. In 1988, members of Arche, in collaboration with local environmentalists and filmmakers in West Berlin, made at great personal risk an unprecedented clandestine documentary on the impact of environmental pollution caused by chemical industries in the region around Bitterfeld, entitled 'Bitteres aus Bitterfeld. Eine Bestandsaufnahme'. ARD's TV program 'Kontraste' first broadcast excerpts in the fall of 1988, which were later shared by foreign broadcasters. The aim was to stir up opposition, and in the Bitterfeld region in particular, the broadcast became a topic of discussion. Stasi offices noted that many residents perceived the program as a way to stir up fear and insecurity. Two Arche activists wrote in 1992 that the people of Bitterfeld became aware of their reality only when they saw it broadcast in their living rooms at home. Finally, in 1993, American environmental economist Merrill E. Jones observed a threefold effect: viewers received previously inaccessible environmental information, became aware of the existence of the environmental protection movement in the GDR, and saw successful action against the authorities.[195]

West German television was part of a larger media system that also included East German television. The two television networks were ideologically rivals and competed for the same viewers in East Germany. Recently, the German literature on East German television has developed a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between East and West television. This new approach does not simply praise Western television over Eastern television but examines the interaction between the two. Research shows that West and East German televisions constituted two parts of an interactive system. East German television was the weaker partner in this asymmetrical relationship and often

[195] Cooper, B. (2003). The Western Connection: Western Support for the East German Opposition. *German Politics & Society*, 21(4), 74-92.

reacted to Western broadcasts, either in coverage of protests or in general comments on the other side's behaviour. However, this link was evident only in the first phase of the revolution (September, October, and November), when the two sides were still in a situation of intense political competition. In the second phase (from December 1989 until the first free elections on March 18, 1990), this dynamic was lessened.[196]

When asked what East Germans wanted from television in 1987, 72% of viewers said they wanted entertainment, while 59% wanted information about important political events. In December 1989, during the revolutionary protests, a similar percentage continued to want entertainment, but 77% of viewers expressed a desire for information about important political events. In summary, during the revolutionary fall of 1989, people became more politicized. These percentages show that the desire for entertainment could coexist with the desire to be informed and politically involved. Two important dynamics emerged from the statistical tests: first, West German television's coverage of the protests led to an increase in protests in the first phase of the revolution; second, once the repression subsided and the implicit coordination provided by Western television was no longer necessary, the link between Western television and protests broke down.[197]

As described in part in the previous chapter, the mass demonstrations in Leipzig, which took place for thirteen consecutive Mondays between September 25 and December 18, 1989, triggered a wave of political protests throughout the GDR. Protesters expressed their demands for political liberalization, open borders, and, toward the end of the cycle, unification of the two Germanies. Leipzig gained prominence over other cities in the Republic for three main reasons: the city and its environs suffered from a particularly decaying industrial structure and severe environmental problems; the Stasi apparatus was concentrated in Berlin, allowing Leipzig's citizens a little more breathing room than their compatriots in the capital; and the Leipziger Messe (Leipzig Trade Fair) regularly attracted Western businessmen and television crews, providing international media coverage for the protest events. A second round of demonstrations began on January 8 and ended on March 12, 1990, with demands for rapid unification. Three more rounds of protests took place in the fall of 1990 and early 1991. During this period, organized groups tried to harness the symbolic force of previous Monday demonstrations to protest the lack

[196] Grdešić, M. (2014). Television and protest in East Germany's revolution, 1989–1990: A mixed-methods analysis. cit., 93.
[197] Ivi, 94-95.

of public access to state security archives, the Persian Gulf War, and the negative economic and social consequences of unification. However, the initial momentum waned, and the demonstrations failed. Western observers were initially astonished by the rapidity of the economic and political collapse of the East German regime; however, upon closer examination, the collapse seems to have been inevitable, given the obsolete industrial structure and the state of environmental degradation. Similarly, the regime's political fate appeared sealed once its repressive state safety net dissolved.[198] Some research suggests that this combination of surprise and inevitability was due to the spread of information about the GDR's precarious economic and political situation. The East German population was generally dissatisfied with its standard of living and lack of political freedoms, and this dissatisfaction increased in the 1975-89 period. However, this dissatisfaction had no outlet: all avenues that could have made it public and thus induced political change were blocked (the freedom of the press, radio and television guaranteed by Article 27 of the Constitution was a farce). In the late 1980s, a series of critical events exposed the regime's heavy-handed and manipulative control over the population, contributing to a general sense of anger, bitterness, and frustration. In addition, the external constraints facing the regime, and its citizens changed dramatically. Gorbachev's political reforms in the USSR sowed discontent among the East German population, as they called into question the Soviet commitment to ensuring the regime's existence, thus reducing the cost of protest. They also liberalized several Eastern Bloc countries that opened their borders to the West, creating a cheap emigration opportunity for GDR citizens vacationing in those countries. The hard-line leadership of the SED showed no signs of yielding to the pressures generated by the exodus of its citizens. However, for those who remained trapped in the GDR, the emigration of their compatriots served as a signal. First thousands, then tens and hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protest.[199]

In detail, Tagesschau's coverage of the protests spurred further demonstrations the next day, but only in the first phase of the revolution as Aktuelle Kamera reacted to the Western news report. At first, Aktuelle Kamera avoided mentioning the protests altogether; when it began to talk about them, it described the protesters in derogatory terms as ‘troublemakers’ (Randalierer) and their demands as ‘hostile to the state’

[198] Hoyer, K. (2023). *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949-1990*. cit., 141.
[199] Lohmann, S. (1994). The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91. *World Politics*, 47(1), 42-101.

(republikfeindlichen Parolen). In contrast, Tagesschau regularly reported the location of the protests, the number of protesters, the main demands, and showed footage of police violence. In addition, Tagesschau gave visibility to opposition groups such as Neues Forum, particularly favouring the statements of painter and activist Bärbel Bohley. During its initial disparaging coverage of the protests, Aktuelle Kamera chose respectable citizens with education and high social status to comment on the protests. The interviewees called the protests 'appalling' (erschreckend) and talked about how the protesters provoked the police so that West German television could film the brutalities. A few days after Honecker's resignation, the Politburo announced extensive reforms and AK began an experimental phase. On October 16, AK aired its first 'neutral' report on a demonstration in Leipzig without pejorative or disparaging comments. Throughout the next month, AK oscillated between attempts to control the protests and simply reporting on the events. The day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, AK showed live footage from the Brandenburg Gate and, in the following days, followed in detail the visits of East Berliners to West Berlin. By the end of November, AK had adopted much of Tagesschau's style, reporting objective facts such as location, time, and estimated number of participants, combined whenever possible with an on-the-spot reporter and some statements from protesters. Moreover, AK can be compared favourably to Tagesschau in terms of the amount of protests reported in both the first and second phases of the revolution: 49 on Tagesschau and 56 on AK in the first phase, 56 and 94 in the second. Thus, it cannot be said that AK was complicit with the East German government in its attempt to downplay the protests in the second half of the revolution. Finally, AK reported neutrally on several controversial topics, never favouring the official government position and always trying to offer a balanced perspective.[200]

After being freed from state control, the media fuelled public outrage with their reports on environmental damage, political repression, corruption, and the lavish lifestyles of the SED elite. One indicator of the media's responsiveness to political changes was the coverage of Monday's demonstrations in the local Leipzig newspaper. Until mid-October, participation numbers reported by the Leipziger Volkszeitung were systematically underestimated. Subsequently, they quickly matched the figures reported

[200] Grdešić, M. (2014). Television and protest in East Germany's revolution, 1989–1990: A mixed-methods analysis. cit., 93-103.

by other sources. In a brief article relegated within the newspaper, the first September demonstration was described as a crowd with obvious anti-socialist tendencies. Subsequent demonstrations received wider coverage and appeared on the front page. In mid-October, the Leipziger Volkszeitung celebrated the dialogue initiated by the demonstrators and commented positively on their constructive proposals to improve socialism. At the same time, the legalization of opposition groups and political parties created pressure to hold free elections. Above all, the official opening of borders to the West caused a new wave of emigration that further weakened the regime. German unification became necessary to bring the exodus back to manageable levels. In this sequence of events, the Leipzig Monday demonstrations played a crucial role in the transformation and final collapse of the regime. These demonstrations functioned as an information cascade, making public previously hidden information about the nature of the regime. With the dissemination of this information, the viability of the regime was undermined. As a result, the Monday demonstrations also slowly lost relevance as their informational role diminished.[201]

[201] Lohmann, S. (1994). The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91. cit., 74.

CHAPTER 4

FROM THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL TO GERMAN REUNIFICATION

4.1

Because Even Just One Person Makes a Difference: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Friedliche Revolution

The 1989 Friedliche Revolution in East Germany represented a fundamental turning point in XX century European history. This series of peaceful protests culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall and marked the beginning of the end for the GDR. The term 'Wende' refers to the process of political and social transformation that led to the reunification of Germany in 1990.[202] With the significant exception of Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the FRG, the most important figures in 1989 resided in Washington and Moscow. But while individual Europeans, as well as the USA in the figure of President Bush, may have played marginal roles, 'Europe,' as an idea, aspiration, and historical example, was of great importance. How did the transformation of Europe after 1945 influence the timing and character of the end of the Cold War? At the heart of this transformation were two inseparable developments: firstly, the discrediting and eventual abandonment of war as a political instrument by European societies; secondly, the creation of new international institutions, centred on the European Economic Community, but encompassing a variety of other modes of cooperation, and mutual support. When, how, and why the Soviet empire and its satellite states collapsed is closely linked to these two developments.

In 1989, the peoples really took power, revolting democratically against the forces that had oppressively governed their lives. In June 1989, Poland held free elections, the result of years of internal struggles characterised by the decades-long rise of the Solidarity movement.[203] That same month, Hungarian crowds marched to honour Imre Nagy and the fallen heroes of 1956, whose failed rejection of Soviet rule left an independent streak finally exercised by the free elections of 1990. The discontent could no longer be isolated or contained. No longer wishing to act as prison guards for Eastern Europe, in the spring of that year Hungarian officials opened the border with Austria, a gateway used by thousands of disaffected and frustrated East Germans to head for the West (millions of

[202] Thompson, M. R. (1996). Why and How East Germans Rebelled. *Theory and Society*, 25(2), 263.
[203] Heyns, B. & Bialecki, I. (1991). Solidarność: Reluctant Vanguard or Makeshift Coalition? *The American Political Science Review*, 85(2), 351-370.

people across the country witnessed the dismantling of the Iron Curtain on live television).[204] Throughout the GDR, thousands of citizens demanded change in the autumn of 1989. Just as many thousands voted with their feet or as was often the case, with their small, underpowered Trabants, whose lack of speed and options symbolised the very society that had created them. They left their homeland in search of a better life in the West, leaving behind not only their lives, but also a dying regime, ill-prepared for change, and unwilling to relent. Those whom Honecker claimed to govern, inspired by events in the other socialist states and Gorbachev's broad rhetoric, gathered in their thousands to express their ideas. The once feared East German leader proved to be no longer in control by force and terror. While in September twenty-two thousand East Germans fled west in just three days, in October, crowds of equal numbers began to chant something new and probably more threatening to the faltering regime: 'We will stay here.' They would not abandon their homes and their homeland but would force change from within. Believing that opposition to his government was futile, Honecker authorised his troops to fire on the crowd, but they refused and within a week he was relieved of his post. Although the Wall collapsed on 9 November, the real end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe had come much less dramatically at a secret meeting months earlier, when Gorbachev informed his socialist counterparts that the Kremlin would never again forcibly crush the reformers of Eastern Europe. In the previous months he had publicly promised the same thing, but only when he made it clear to the die-hard communists in Eastern Europe that they were truly alone did the message seem real.[205]

Although the history of 1989 is largely a history of the masses, these were also formed thanks to the likes of Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping. Russia and China, however, chose different paths in 1989, mainly due to the individual personalities and inclinations of these two men. The world that developed after 1989 was also possible because certain figures helped to shape it, most often by simply responding to events beyond their control. Even those who look back on the communist era with nostalgia marvel at the generally peaceful manner in which Eastern European regimes ceded power. These were, in the famous phrase of Czech leader Václav Havel, 'velvet revolutions,'

[204] Malavolti, L. (1994). La transizione democratica in Ungheria: dalla nuova legge elettorale alle prime elezioni libere (1989-1990). *Quaderni dell'Osservatorio elettorale*, 31, 119-157.
[205] Pfaff, S. (1996). Collective Identity and Informal Groups in Revolutionary Mobilization: East Germany in 1989. *Social Forces*, 75(1), 91-117.

largely devoid of the violence and chaos that most often accompany radical change.[206] But 1989 could have been different. The events of Tiananmen could have been repeated in Europe and force could have been used. Ethnic tensions and long-standing hatred could have consumed democratic impulses, as happened in Yugoslavia only a few years after the fall of the Wall.[207] Fortunately, for the most part and at least in Europe, events did not spiral out of control and society did not collapse into anarchy. However, looking more closely at the events of 1989, a small push in another direction could have radically changed the world we live in today.

Faced with reformist impulses in Eastern Europe and within their own borders (reforms triggered in large part by Gorbachev's own efforts to improve and thus save the very Soviet society he cared about), Soviet officials refused to open fire on their own people or legitimise the allied leaders who maintained power through force and violence. While Beijing maintained control through the latter mode, Moscow witnessed the fall of its eastern empire, and the force of the collapse eventually toppled the Soviet Union itself. Poland voted to dismiss its communist government in June, surprisingly on the same day that tanks entered Tiananmen Square. The Hungarians also removed the communists from power, soon followed by the Bulgarians, Czechs, and Romanians. As Alexis de Tocqueville (a great observer of XIX century democracy) wrote about the period before 1789, the last moment of change comparable to 1989: 'The most dangerous time for a bad government is when it starts to reform itself.'[208]

European communism ended with a remarkable and surprising absence of violence. Each regime would have been able to hold on to power in the face of growing popular unrest, employing violent measures and tactics well honed from frequent use in previous decades. As noted earlier, the East German ruling party was unlikely to relinquish without a fight the control it had held for forty years. A leading East German official admitted only a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall that Honecker had given orders for a 'Chinese solution' to the protesters' problem. When Chinese tanks entered Tiananmen Square, East German officials publicly praised the way Deng's

[206] Stoneman, A. J. (2015). Socialism With a Human Face: The Leadership and Legacy of the Prague Spring. *The History Teacher*, 49(1), 103-125.
[207] Hockenos, P. (2019). Yugoslavia 1989: A Story of Unfated Events. *Reassessing 1989: Lessons for the Future of Democracy*, 27-29.
[208] Gates, R. M. (1996). *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 439.

government had dealt with the protesters. Likewise, Honecker's forced withdrawal at the hands of Egon Krenz and other party leaders later that month did not necessarily lead to a non-violent response to the protesters, who seemed to increase in number and volume with each passing week. In the tense atmosphere of the demonstrations, a shot fired in panic, or a stone thrown in the excitement could have triggered a violent clash. It was an extraordinary concurrence of individual decisions that kept the uprising peaceful and prevented the revolution from being diverted.[209]

Any reasonable explanation of why 1989 ended so peacefully for Eastern Europe must include both structural and personal reasons. On the one hand, from the very beginning Communism was perceived as a foreign body in Eastern Europe as it was largely imposed after 1945 by the occupying Soviet troops concerned above all with ensuring a large security border after the last German invasion. As a result, uprisings against the communist regimes in the region occurred regularly in the following decades (1953, 1956 and 1968). As a result, Eastern Europe may have seemed like a seething cauldron of democracy waiting for the moment and sufficient energy to cause an inevitable eruption; however, the heavy hand of Soviet rule was always present to suppress the forces of change. There is no doubt, therefore, that without Gorbachev's presence, 1989 would not have occurred in Eastern Europe, or at least it would not have occurred in the way it did. This is because as the events of 1989 unfolded, the Soviets were always left with the option of repressing protesters by force. After all, the previous Soviet leaders had done just that.[210]

The figure of Gorbachev, and with him the history of the Soviet empire leading up to the events of 1989, therefore demands attention. He came to power in 1985 fully aware that his homeland was in trouble and that its future was by no means assured. Consequently, lest we portray Gorbachev as the father of a new Europe or a new Russia, we should remember that his desires for reform, sincere as they were, were born out of necessity and an awareness that change was necessary to preserve the communist system he embraced wholeheartedly. Soviet economic growth had slowed over the past fifteen years, also affected by costly engagements in Eastern Europe, as well as Afghanistan, Cuba, and Vietnam. Falling global oil prices eroded the value of Soviet exports.

[209] Ramet, S. P. (2020). *Nonconformity, Dissent, Opposition, and Resistance in Germany, 1933-1990: The Freedom to Conform*. Palgrave Macmillan, 197.
[210] Ivi, 198.

Moreover, a country once envied for its agricultural potential found itself forced to import food from abroad, further draining its already deficit hard currency reserves. Alcoholism, still rampant however, was on the rise, as was infant mortality (average life expectancy was falling at an alarming rate throughout the Soviet state). Finally, the series of aged and sick leaders who occupied the Kremlin in quick succession in the 1980s made the state appear not only weak, but also lacking in new ideas.[211]

Aware that military spending was limiting his ability to deal with domestic economic stagnation, Gorbachev repeatedly offered Western leaders the chance to join Moscow not only in reducing military tensions in Europe, but also in eliminating the scourge of nuclear weapons. At home he promised 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' (transparency and reforms). A more transparent state and economy would further unlock the potential of socialism, making it more democratic and thus fairer. A reformed state would also have been more economically efficient, more politically open, and thus more able to embrace the future without giving up its most cherished values. To save Soviet society and the USSR itself from its internal problems, Gorbachev first had to change the country's international position. The arms race was financially unsustainable. American plans for a new Strategic Defence Initiative (colloquially called 'Star Wars') threatened to impose an additional financial burden on Soviet military officials determined to maintain strategic parity with the West. Unable to keep up, Gorbachev decided instead to change the rules of the game, proposing to transform the USSR from a combative presence outside Europe to an entity fully embedded in that increasingly vibrant continent. One of Gorbachev's first steps was therefore to convince Europe and the world that Soviet forces no longer represented an existential threat. He increasingly spoke of a 'common security' plan for Europe and an 'equal security' in which each side could reduce its military position to a more secure and less costly level. Gorbachev hoped to save the Soviet Union not only by diminishing its military position in Europe, but also by further integrating it with the prosperous Europe that lay just beyond the Iron Curtain. Eastern Europe had long been a financial burden for Moscow: opening up trade, and promoting links between the two halves of Europe would turn this liability into an asset.[212] Democratic changes and the liberalisation of communist economies foreshadowed a new

[211] Harrison, M. (2002). Coercion, Compliance, and the Collapse of the Soviet Command Economy. *The Economic History Review*, 55(3), 397-433.
[212] Kramer, M. (2011). The Demise of the Soviet Bloc. *The Journal of Modern History*, 83(4), 788-854.

era in European history in which socialists and capitalists could coexist in a new society distilled from the best qualities each system had to offer: Gorbachev's common European home.

Europe was more than a source of markets and money; it was an ideal. Long plagued by wars and conflicts (particularly its western half), it had undergone a fundamental existential transformation since 1945. In 1945, European societies had had enough of wars. Exhausted, defeated, fearful of the new atomic future, and with their internal disputes limited by the wider superpower conflict, post-war European leaders developed a comprehensive recipe for long-term peace and prosperity based on democratic rules, social justice, and transnational collective government. When Gorbachev unleashed the repressed reform forces within the Soviet empire, promising further connections with the West, he inadvertently provided Eastern Europeans and his own Soviet citizens with not only a means of escape, but also a place to escape to. For the men and women who built a European Union from the ashes of global war and the Holocaust, the largely peaceful revolutions of 1989 seemed the perfect confirmation not only of their wisdom, but also of the broad appeal of their system. The fact that Eastern Europeans and Soviet citizens were clamouring to join Europe, just as they were clamouring for freedom or democracy, seemed proof to Western Europeans that theirs was the best fusion of freedom, democracy, and concern for social justice.

Gorbachev's most profound promise, made not only at the United Nations in 1988 but repeated publicly and privately over the next two years, was Moscow's refusal to dictate affairs throughout the Soviet bloc. Previous Kremlin leaders had readily used force throughout Eastern Europe whenever communist regimes appeared in danger. In 1968 they had proclaimed their undying right to intervene with the Brezhnev doctrine. Gorbachev abandoned this doctrine and speaking at the UN in 1988 urged all states to follow Moscow's example by renouncing the use of force in the international arena. He said the same privately to Honecker and Ceaușescu when they pleaded for Moscow's military salvation. Finally, he repeated it publicly only a fortnight before the final fall of the Berlin Wall through a spokesman. In order to further transform Europe into a continent willing and able to accept full Soviet participation, Gorbachev first had to relinquish absolute control over the region between the Iron Curtain and the Soviet

border.[213] The changes that took place in Eastern Europe before and especially during 1989 were thus accompanied by the words of the Soviet leader. Words that in turn inspired indigenous leaders and movements.

The German question dominated international politics from the autumn of 1989 to the summer of 1990. It mixed international and domestic issues, combining questions about Germany's place in Europe with those about the country's political identity. Gorbachev's reforms activated both dimensions of the German question: how would perestroika affect the domestic politics of the GDR and thus the relations of the two German states? If, as Gorbachev told the UN, freedom of choice was, without exception, the principle of the new Europe, what would have happened if the Germans had chosen to live in a unified state? How would this state have been governed and how would it have fit into the new European Community that was taking shape in the West? In Germany, therefore, the two developments of the late 1980s, reform in the East and greater integration in the West, intersected.

In June 1989, as part of his new commitment to European affairs, Gorbachev travelled to Bonn to deepen the personal relationship with Helmut Kohl that had begun in Moscow the previous October. The two signed a series of cultural and economic agreements and on 13 June issued a joint declaration that can be seen as a kind of prologue to the great historical drama that was about to unfold. The two leaders rejected war as a political instrument, called for greater international cooperation, especially in Europe, and emphasised the importance of economic growth, and material progress. Perhaps the most striking passage was the one that upheld ‘the right of all peoples and states freely to determine their destiny and their sovereign right to shape their relationships to one another on the basis of international law.’ This link between Völker and Staaten, peoples and states, recalls the tension between stability and change that lay at the heart of détente. The right of peoples to determine their own destiny was potentially transformative, nowhere more so than in the two Germanies. Which rights, then, did the chancellor and his host seek to proclaim: the right of the German people to self-determination or the sovereign right to the existence of the two German states? The events in Hungary were the link between the crises within the Soviet bloc and the German question. The opening of the Hungarian border tested Gorbachev's promise not to interfere in the affairs of other states.

[213] Ivi, 806-808.

Continuing to show what often appeared to be remarkable indifference to the growing unrest along the western border, the general secretary made no effort to stop the Hungarians or to assist other communist governments as they confronted and eventually succumbed to pressure for reform.[214]

To sum up, two political changes increased the incentive to protest: the liberalisation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the dramatic migration from East Germany to West Germany due to the opening of the borders between Hungary and Austria. The most important event in the final phase of the protests was Gorbachev's visit and the celebration of the XL anniversary of the GDR on 7 October 1989 in Berlin. According to many citizens of the Republic the situation had become absurd but the regime refused to acknowledge the widespread discontent and continued the celebrations praising the achievements of socialism while many citizens fled the country. With dozens of foreign journalists watching, the crowd took to the streets chanting ‘Gorby! Gorby!' as police squads swung into action. West German television immediately broadcast these events to the rest of East Germany. The scenes alerted disgruntled citizens in every corner of the country to the pervasiveness of the discontent, while the government's weak response revealed its vulnerability. On 9 October, a peaceful protest broke out in Leipzig. Unsurprisingly, GDR television did not cover the anti-regime protests in Leipzig but the news spread anyway, thanks to journalist Siegbert Schefke and another colleague, who snuck up to the bell tower of a church in the centre of Leipzig and secretly filmed the mass protest below. The journalists were able to smuggle the footage to their West German colleagues later that night. Because many GDR citizens were able to tune in to West German television, they soon learned of the mass protest and the fact that openly opposing their increasingly weakened regime was now possible without having to fear for their lives.[215] As leader of the Eastern bloc and initiator of glasnost and perestroika, Gorbachev symbolised change and hope. His famous remark that 'life punishes those who fall behind,' was understood by the citizens of East Germany. His presence at the Berlin celebrations clearly increased citizens' perceptions of the likelihood of successful collective protests, increased feelings of personal efficacy, and made people feel more

[214] Adomeit, H. (2016). The Last Crisis. In H. Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev: An Analysis Based on New Archival Evidence, Memoirs, and Interviews* (2 ed., p. 463–682). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 471-472.
[215] Kuran, T. (1991). Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989. *World Politics*, 44(1), 37.

about the legitimacy of their desires for change. In this situation, people felt that the time for action had come. In general, this event increased political discontent and moral incentives to protest.

The rapid pace of mobilization in the East German revolution was possible in part because the population shared common ideological frames and value orientations in which grievances were understood. Beginning in the early 1970s, East Germans were led to believe in an implicit social contract between the party elites and the people. In return for compliance, most East Germans could expect improved living standards, social mobility, and an expanding social welfare network. By the late 1980s it had become clear that this contract was becoming impossible for the regime to fulfil, with obvious implications for its legitimacy. While the GDR state and party leadership saw itself as the champion of peace, justice, and social progress, it became impossible to ignore or accept the contradictions between these claims and the pervasive economic stagnation, officer hypocrisy, political corruption, and personal subordination in daily life. These contradictions were the basis of a new wave of discontent in the GDR and a growing willingness to express these grievances and criticize social justice.

4.2
The Role of Communications and Images in the Fall of the Wall

Few realized the depth of the East German crisis in early November 1989. After all, popular demonstrations in East German cities had remained peaceful; the regime seemed, albeit somewhat belatedly and reluctantly, ready to introduce reforms. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops remained deployed on German territory. It was easy to underestimate the disruptive potential of the constant flow of East Germans westward, both for the GDR and the FRG. Nor did people, including Gorbachev himself, understand the implications of the Soviet Union's apparent reluctance to come to the aid of the East Germans by closing the border or helping to suppress internal dissent. On November 1, Gorbachev, who remained sceptical of Krenz's competence and convictions, was not prepared to offer much help to the new East German leadership, but he could assure them that the Soviet Union would remain firmly committed to maintaining the existence of two German states. Gorbachev, in other words, still saw a solution to the German question, and to the growing unrest within Eastern Europe, in light of his hopes

for a common European home that would have room for a variety of reformed socialist regimes, including the German Democratic Republic.[216]

The slow and uncertain response of West German policymakers to the terminal crisis in the German Democratic Republic suggests the extent to which their vision of international politics continued to be shaped by the emphasis on stability that formed the heart and soul of Ostpolitik. The architecture of détente, including the guarantees of the Helsinki Accords, remained the basis of Western policy. As the situation in the East deteriorated further, Chancellor Kohl, while recognizing the self-determination rights of the East German people, continued to encourage reforms in the East German state.

All this began to change when, as a result of a miscommunication among the Communist Party leadership, the border posts of the Wall dividing East and West Berlin were opened on November 9. The immediate impact of this decision appeared on television screens around the world: peaceful, festive, and cheerful crowds filmed as they breached that ugly symbol of Cold War division. Although people were shaken by what was happening in Berlin, many did not grasp its full significance: in the Federal Republic, for example, opinion polls conducted in late November showed that while 30% of respondents expected to see national unification in their lifetime, 46% did not.[217] Western European policymakers, who had made much effort to learn to live with the international order created at Yalta, managing tensions and avoiding destabilizing surprises, watched this festive revolution with decidedly mixed feelings. Détente, in all its forms, had included the idea of change, which, however, had to be slow, cumulative, and carefully controlled by governments. Few prominent Europeans were willing to say that East Germans had no right to self-determination, but most hoped that they would exercise this right without destroying the East German state and thereby threatening European peace.

On the night of November 8-9, tens of thousands of East Germans fled to West Germany through Czechoslovakia. At the same time, large numbers took refuge in Western embassies in Prague to register as citizens of the FRG. Alarmed by the size of the exodus, the Krenz government convened a press conference to announce a new travel law that it hoped would counter the problem. Around 5:30 p.m., Berlin Party Secretary Gunter Schabowski met with Prime Minister Krenz to discuss the press conference set

[216] Ostermann, C. F. (2001). Bulletin 12/13. *Cold War International History Project*, 18-19.
[217] Merkl, P. H., & Glaessner, G.-J. (1993). *German Unification in the European Context*. Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 125.

for 6 p.m. The latter handed Schabowski a document containing the new travel law, enjoining him to stick to the 'script.'[218] However, nervous by recent events, Schabowski did not follow it properly, and, as we have seen above, at the end of the press conference the Party Secretary announced that East Germany would lift all travel restrictions as of now. It is unlikely that Schabowski had any idea what he had just said. When later a reporter asked if this law would lead to mass emigration, he replied, 'wir hoffen, dass sich auf diese Weise diese Bewegung selbst reguliert in dem Sinne, wie wir das erstreben' (we hope that in this way this movement will regulate itself in the sense that we are striving for).[219]

Only a few minutes after Schabowski's speech ended, the world's major news agencies had already picked up on his comments and were sending frantic reports around the world. While Reuters announced that there would be new rules on travel, the Associated Press Agency went even further, speculating that the borders would be torn down immediately. While the world's media had already decided the fate of the Berlin Wall, East Berlin passport officials remained sceptical. Harald Jäger, in charge of passport control at the Bornholmer Strasse checkpoint, refused to accept that Schabowski had committed anything other than a mistake. The ZDF television channel aired the news of Schabowski's speech at 7:17 p.m., but only as the sixth news story. At 7:30 p.m., the Aktuelle Kamera program covered the incident as the second news story, and news began to spread. Finally, the 8 p.m. newscast on the ARD network reported that the border was completely open. As Schabowski's speech was broadcast on national television, the number of people gathered at the Bornholmer Strasse checkpoint had gone from a steady trickle to a tide. Around 8:30 p.m. there were thousands of people at the checkpoint, this was because, unlike Checkpoint Charlie, Bornholmer Strasse was located in a busy residential area. A queue of cars stretched for several hundred meters along the main road, spilling into the side streets as well. Harald Jäger turned to headquarters and was ordered

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[218] *„Schabowskis Zettel": Zeitweilige Übergangsregelung des DDR-Ministerrates für Reisen und ständige Ausreise aus der DDR, 9. November 1989*. (1989). Taken from 10 20, 2024 Chronik der Mauer: **https://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/material/180400/schabowskis-zettel-zeitweilige-uebergangsregelung-des-ddr-ministerrates-fuer-reisen-und-staendige-ausreise-aus-der-ddr-9-november-1989**.

[219] *Internationale Pressekonferenz von Günter Schabowski (in Begleitung der SED-ZK-Mitglieder Helga Labs, Gerhard Beil und Manfred Banaschak), 9. November 1989 (Ton-Abschrift)*. (1989). Taken from 10 20, 2024 Chronik der Mauer: **https://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/material/180619/internationale-pressekonferenz-von-guenter-schabowski-in-begleitung-der-sed-zk-mitglieder-helga-labs-gerhard-beil-und-manfred-banaschak-9-november-1989-ton-abschrift**.

to let any troublemakers through to defuse the situation. The plan was to stamp their identity cards so that they would no longer be able to return to East Berlin. By around 9:30 p.m. several hundred people had been given the all-clear through the three passport centres on the West Berlin border, as the crowds left behind shouted for the gates to be opened.[220]

As people were massing at Bornholmer Strasse, a crowd of a few hundred had gathered on the west side of Checkpoint Charlie. These urged the guards to let people pass on the other side to get to West Berlin, but they were politely rebuffed. At 10 p.m. some people broke away from the crowd and crossed the demarcation line, technically entering East German territory. These were gently pushed back by the border guards since, until proven otherwise, the status of the Wall had not changed. ARD's nightly news announced the opening of the gates despite the fact that the checkpoints were still physically closed. The pressure was becoming unbearable at the border crossings, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for the guards to maintain order among the increasingly restless crowds.[221]

At Checkpoint Charlie the attitudes of the men chosen to guard the border crossing were visibly changing. Confused and stunned by what was happening they decided to disobey the order to close the Checkpoint walkway. People began pouring toward the Wall and started climbing up it. Bernie Godek, a major in the U.S. Army, recalls scenes of nonchalant people sitting astride the Wall. As this was happening, many guards took off their helmets and joined the tide of people pressing against the Wall, even agreeing to take pictures for the West Germans. In East Berlin, therefore, the pressure continued to build. A crowd of nearly 20,000 people was pressing at Checkpoint Bornholmer Strasse, encouraged by reports that Checkpoint Rudower Chaussee in the south of the city had been opened. As soon as Harald Jäger saw the dangers of detaining such large numbers of people, he gave the order to open the gates. These words released a jubilant torrent of

[220] *Chronicle 1989*. (s.d.). Taken from 10 20, 2024 Chronik der Mauer: **https://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/en/chronicle/_year1989/_month11/?month=11&year=1989&opennid=182521&moc=1#anchornid182521**.

[221] *Hans-Hermann Hertle, 9./10. November 1989: Grenzübergang Checkpoint Charlie: Druck von Ost und West.* (1989). Taken from 10 20, 2024 Chronik der Mauer: **https://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/material/180363/hans-hermann-hertle-9-10-november-1989-grenzuebergang-checkpoint-charlie-druck-von-ost-und-west**.

people from east to west. At 11:35 p.m. Checkpoint Heinrich-Heine-Strasse, still further south, was also opened.[222]

Similarly, Commander Gunter Moll was caught between two fires at Checkpoint Charlie. Consequently, at midnight on November 9, Moll made the decision to open the pedestrian crossing. By that time all the border guards had abandoned their posts, and were beginning to mingle with the crowd. Realizing that they had lost control and that what they thought they were protecting no longer mattered, they threw away their weapons. Overwhelmed by the joyous atmosphere, they celebrated the city's freedom with the other protesters. Drinks were passed freely through the crowd and, for the first time in 28 years, no one cared what part of Berlin they came from. They were all Berliners and nothing else mattered.

At 01:35 a.m. the thousands of people who had massed at Bornholmer Strasse began to cross the checkpoint, climb up and over the Wall. West Berliners pushed East Berliners to the top of the barrier where, in years past, people trying to cross had been killed. Chris Toft of the British military police reported that people were demolishing the Wall with hammers. In the East German capital, large crowds began to celebrate the Wall's collapse, hoping it would reunite the two Germanies. Citizens were also angry at the lies that had been told for years by their government and began to demonstrate. The demonstrators set fire to cars wrapped in the East German flag and chanted for the reunification of Germany. Eventually, the crowd began to disperse as more and more people headed west to see what was happening in the heart of Berlin. Many East Germans were eager to meet friends and relatives on the other side, some of whom they had not seen in years. As dawn broke, cars moved freely from East to West Berlin as many East Germans returned home after a night of revelry in the West. After all, after years of living content with only basic products, East Germans had filled their bags with fruit, cigarettes, and consumer items. Many could not believe what they found in the West, where supermarket shelves overflowed with every luxury imaginable.[223]

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[222] *Hans-Hermann Hertle, 9. November 1989, 20.30-24.00 Uhr: Grenzübergang Bornholmer Straße – „Wir fluten jetzt"*. (1989). Taken from 10 20, 2024 Chronik der Mauer: **https://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/material/180361/hans-hermann-hertle-9-november-1989-20-30-24-00-uhr-grenzuebergang-bornholmer-strasse-wir-fluten-jetzt**.

[223] Horten, G. (2020). *Don't Need No Thought Control: Western Culture in East Germany and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. Berghahn Books, 203.

On the evening of November 11, the first concrete slabs were removed. The following day, the borders were finally opened at Potsdamer Platz, once one of the busiest intersections in Europe. The West Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra played to celebrate the event. As the Berlin Wall was being torn down, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was visiting the Polish prime minister in Warsaw. When news of the night's events reached him, he left early in the morning and flew to Berlin to attend a rally. While Kohl was waiting to speak, he received a phone call from the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, who had a message from Gorbachev. The Soviet leader wanted to know if citizens were attacking Soviet bases in East Germany. Realizing that Gorbachev was receiving false information from his political opponents in Russia who opposed any reforms, Kohl told an aide to reassure the Soviet leader that there was no truth to these rumours.[224]

After the Wall came down, an estimated two million East Germans visited West Germany. Day passes were issued to anyone who wanted to travel to West Berlin, and thousands flocked to the free trains provided by the West German government. East German universities were forced to cancel classes as it soon became apparent that all their students were dropping classes to visit the West. Once there, East Berliners could go to any bank to get 100 Deutschmarks of 'welcome money,' the equivalent of several months' salary in the East. Volunteers could also be found on the streets handing out sweets to East Berliners, believing they were so poor that they could not afford to eat.

The fall of the Berlin Wall caused a wave that reverberated throughout Europe. In December 1989, former Solidarity leader Lech Walesa was elected president of Poland. In the same month, the Czechoslovak Communist Party resigned following a mass demonstration on November 17, 1989. In Hungary, the ruling Communist Party dissolved and announced free elections for March 1990. In Romania, a bloody revolution occurred in December that led to the execution of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena. In less than six months, the Iron Curtain had disappeared. In East Germany, newly elected Prime Minister Hans Modrow seized the mood by proposing a treaty community to increase cooperation between the two Germanies. However, he still believed that East Germany and West Germany should remain two nations, although East Germans continued to leave their country and head west.

[224] *Chronicle 1989*. (s.d.). cit.

In West Germany, people's attitudes toward Ossies (East Germans) began to change as the initial euphoria was replaced by everyday reality. Millions of East Germans poured into West Berlin every weekend, and the locals found their streets blocked by Trabants plying the city streets. They also had to face long lines at the bank behind East Berliners waiting to withdraw their welcome money. Many West Berliners were losing patience with their neighbours, and many East Germans somehow felt they had lost their dignity with the fall of the Wall.[225]

4.3
Free Elections and Negotiations for German Reunification

To succeed Willi Stoph in the position of GDR Council President was, on November 13, 1989, Hans Modrow, leader of the SED in Dresden. As early as four days later, contacts were initiated with the FRG and the EEC. In an interview published on December 4 by Der Spiegel, Modrow did not rule out the possibility of a German confederation. In general, the main goals of the protest movements that arose in the last months of 1989 in East Germany aimed at a democratization of the state, without questioning either the independence of the GDR or its socialist policies. On November 26, the appeal 'For Our Country' (‘Für Unser Land’) was published, signed by numerous public figures from the GDR, and read on television by writer Christa Wolf. The document reiterated the intention to maintain a socialist alternative to the FRG by means of an independent GDR. By January 1990 the document was reported to have been signed by nearly 1,200,000 people. And still on November 28, Helmut Kohl proposed to the Bundestag a 'Ten-Point Program for Overcoming the Division of Germany and Europe' that went no further than predicting a confederation between the two states.[226]

On December 7 representatives of the parties traditionally in power in the GDR met in Berlin with representatives of newly formed opposition groups, the largest of which was the Neues Forum. This working group was called the 'Round Table' (‘Zentraler Runder Tisch’). An extraordinary congress of the SED was held on December 9: Honecker's resignation had plunged the party into a state of confusion, while there was a

[225] Horten, G. (2020). *Don’t Need No Thought Control: Western Culture in East Germany and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. cit., 204.
[226] Giacché, V. (2013). *Anschluss. L’annessione: L’unificazione della Germania e il futuro dell’Europa*. Reggio Emilia: Imprimatur editore, 10-12.

stampede of members. The SED did not disband but chose to change its name: initially the name 'Party of Democratic Socialism' (PDS) was added to the old acronym, until all that remained was the new name. Gregor Gysi, a lawyer and member of the Neues Forum, became chairman of the SED-PDS. On December 17, the results of a poll commissioned by Der Spiegel were published: it showed that 73% of GDR citizens wanted to maintain the country's sovereignty, while 27% aspired to unification with the FRG.[227]

Meanwhile, the Modrow government had put in place concrete initiatives to steer the GDR toward a market-oriented planning economy. Specifically, the Kombinate (the GDR's state-owned enterprises) were given direct responsibility in their dealings with foreign counterparts, inside and outside COMECON. Rules were established for the creation of private enterprises and enterprises with foreign participation, as well as for the re-privatization of enterprises nationalized by Honecker in 1972. Initiatives were also taken to tackle industrial pollution. The Modrow government's reformism was geared toward the creation of a mixed economy, that is, an economy in which public, private, and cooperative ownership coexisted, with the non-superficial introduction of market elements (competition among enterprises rather than private ownership). In its four months in office, the Modrow government passed a substantial number of measures, but the situation in the country was critical, so much so that the very ability of institutions to function was in jeopardy. In late January 1990, Modrow decided to include some members of the Round Table in the government.[228]

On January 30, 1990, Modrow met with Gorbachev, presenting him with a plan according to which initially the two Germanies would regulate by treaty certain confederative elements, then form a confederation; finally, within three years, reunification would be achieved. A condition for this process was the neutrality of the reunified country with respect to the US-USSR blocs. Gorbachev approved the plan and Modrow publicly launched the idea on February 1. But as early as the following February 7 and 8, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker met with Gorbachev in Moscow and obtained a green light for a future unified Germany to join NATO. Also on February 7, Kohl publicly launched the idea of an immediate monetary union between the FRG and

[227] Pond, E. (1990). A Wall Destroyed: The Dynamics of German Unification in the GDR. *International Security*, 15(2), 59.
[228] Giacché, V. (2013). *Anschluss. L'annessione: L'unificazione della Germania e il futuro dell'Europa*. cit., 15-17.

GDR, a proposal that had been under discussion in FRG government circles since December 1989.[229] The nature of the proposal for an abrupt currency union was essentially political. Kohl, in fact, viewed with concern the approaching general elections in West Germany, scheduled for December 2, 1990. Closer still were the East German parliamentary elections, scheduled for March 18, 1990, where the new PDS appeared to be heavily favoured, while a defeat for the East CDU, for years in government with the old SED, was assumed by many experts. From a geopolitical point of view, it was most important to take advantage of the window opened by Gorbachev.[230] Certainly, it was clear that a techno-economic choice such as the currency union was also politically important. After all, as early as 1948 the division of Germany into two had been determined by the desire to create a currency union that would exclude the Soviet area of occupation. The political nature of the proposal was indirectly confirmed by the initial opposition of economists in both countries. The FRG government's Committee of Economic Experts warned the government of the consequences of a hasty union. Lutz Hoffmann, then president of the Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (one of Germany's leading economic research institutes) thought 2.5 to 3 million unemployed in the GDR was certainly possible. The Frankfuter Allgemeine Zeitung, in its Feb. 10 issue, speculated that a quarter to a third of workers, if not more, could lose their jobs.[231] These remarks, however, went unanswered because the leading members of the Kohl government were at that juncture engaged in campaigning for the March 18 general election in East Germany.

Generally, the question of why the FRG was so insistent on the desirability of a currency union without gradualism is answered in two ways: the adoption of a single currency was to halt the demographic flow from East to West; the offer of the West Mark to the citizens of the GDR was an act of political generosity by which the FRG rushed to the rescue of a 'Marode Wirtschaft' (‘ailing economy’), as the GDR economy was generally understood. Already at the launch of the proposed rapid currency union, Kohl had the rumour spread that the GDR was on the brink of insolvency. On February 9, his spokesman Horst Teltschik informally passed this idea to the press, and it later became

[229] Pond, E. (1990). A Wall Destroyed: The Dynamics of German Unification in the GDR. cit., 63.
[230] Giacché, V. (2013). *Anschluss. L’annessione: L’unificazione della Germania e il futuro dell’Europa*. cit., 37-38.
[231] Ivi, 43.

commonplace. Overall, however, the GDR was not facing a risk of bankruptcy: although it was a fragile economy and very sensitive to the instability of the socialist bloc countries, it was still able to export 50% of its national income.[232]

On March 18, 1990, the first and only free elections in the history of the German Democratic Republic were held for the total renewal of the Volkskammer; they produced a government whose main mandate was to negotiate the very end of the state it represented. A total of 400 deputies were elected, and the relative majority went to the coalition of centre-right pro-unification parties, the Alliance for Germany (Allianz für Deutschland), formed by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) with leader Lothar de Maizière and the new formations: German Social Union (Deutsche Soziale Union, DSU) and Democratic Awakening (Demokratischer Aufbruch, DA). By contrast, the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei in der DDR, SPD), which was refounded a few months before the elections and was given as the favourite in the elections, stopped at 22% of the vote. The former SED participated as the PDS and won 66 seats. On April 5, 1990, the new Volkskammer elected CDU member Sabine Bergmann-Pohl as its chairwoman, and since the Council of State had been dissolved, Bergmann-Pohl also became East Germany's head of state. On April 12, De Maizière became prime minister, head of a grand coalition consisting of the CDU, SPD, Association of Free Democrats (BFD), DSU, and unattached members. Regarding monetary union, in parallel with the multilateral negotiations, bilateral negotiations were held between the East and West German governments, who on May 18 signed an agreement for an intermediate step, a social, economic, and two-currency union, which came into effect on July 1, 1990 (Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion).[233]

Under De Maizière's leadership, East Germany negotiated with West Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union the conditions for German reunification. Although it was willing to reconsider its initial opposition to reunification, the USSR did not want East Germany to be absorbed into the NATO alliance. However, an agreement was reached that allowed Germany to remain part of

[232] Martens, B. (2020, 09 17). *Die Wirtschaft in der DDR*. Taken from 10 21, 2024 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: **https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/47076/die-wirtschaft-in-der-ddr/**.

[233] *German Democratic Republic. Parliamentary Chamber: Volkskammer. Elections held in 1990*. (1990). Taken from 10 21, 2024 Inter-Parliamentary Union: For democracy. For everyone.: **http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2121bis_90.htm**.

NATO on the condition that its troops would not be stationed in the former East German territories. On July 14, 1990, with a meeting in the Caucasus between Gorbachev and Kohl, the process got the final green light from Moscow. On August 23, the Volkskammer approved the proposed accession to the FRG. The Unification Treaty (Einigungsvertrag) was signed on August 31, 1990, by representatives of the GDR and FRG. On September 12, the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany was signed, officially restoring full sovereignty to both German states. Germany was officially reunified on October 3, 1990, when the five Länder, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia, which had already existed in the GDR but had been abolished and turned into provinces, were reconstituted and formally joined West Germany according to the provision of Article 23 of the Grundgesetz, i.e., the Basic Law for the FRG. From the moment the five new states declared accession to the Federal Republic, the area of application of the Grundgesetz was simply expanded to include them. The alternative would have been to create a formal union of the two German states, with a view to drafting a new constitution for a unified Germany. Of the two choices, the one adopted was objectively the simpler one, the one permitted by the 4+2 treaty (by which the former occupying powers gave up the rights they had won with the victory over Nazism and the Potsdam conference), but it caused a widespread feeling among East Germans that they had been occupied or annexed to the old federal republic. According to the doctrine of international law on succession between states, the survival of the West German constitution, institutions, and international treaties (e.g., NATO and EEC membership), and their extension to the territory of the former East Germany, made German reunification an incorporation of the latter by the former. It should be remembered, moreover, that in the Federal Republic of Germany a Basic Law had been adopted in 1949 and not formally a constitution, precisely signifying that a constitution could only be spoken of in a united Germany.[234]

To facilitate the reunification process and reassure other countries, the FRG passed some amendments to its Basic Law. Article 146 was amended so that Article 23 of the current document could be used for reunification. Then, once the reestablished eastern states joined the Federal Republic, the constitution was amended again indicating

[234] Frowein, J. A. (1992). The Reunification of Germany. *The American Journal of International Law*, 86(1), 154.

that there are no other parts of Germany, existing outside the unified territories, which have not yet acceded to the federation. On November 14, 1990, the German government signed a treaty with Poland setting permanent borders between the two states on the Oder-Neisse line and thus renouncing any claims to Silesia, Eastern Pomerania, Neumark, and the former East Prussia.[235] The following month, the first free elections of the entire German people since 1933 were held. They ended with an increase in the majority of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's governing coalition.[236]

[235] Ivi, 155.
[236] *Germany. Parliamentary Chamber: Deutscher Bundestag. Elections held in 1990*. (1990). Taken from 10 21, 2024 Inter-Parliamentary Union: For democracy. For everyone.: **http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2121_90.htm**.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRACY AND REUNIFICATION: LEGACIES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

5.1

The Contribution of the Media in the Preparation and Acceptance of Reunification

In contrast to previous years, the post-World War II period witnessed the establishment of a different relationship between Europe and Germany, sanctioned by the latter's involvement in the EU project, the realisation of which symbolised the overcoming of the difficult history between the German state and the European states participating first in the ECSC (1951) and then in the EEC (1957). Germany's acceptance into the European forum is, moreover, favoured by at least three factors. The first is undoubtedly the start of the Cold War, the division of the world and the continent into two opposing ideological blocs, which made it indispensable, albeit with appropriate guarantees, for Germany to join the western one, effectively renouncing punitive policies.[237] The Cold War gave rise to another element that facilitated the acceptance of Germany as an equal partner: the division of Europe went through the heart of German territory, in a partition that was painful for the country, but reassuring for all those for whom the German state in its entirety had represented a threat that was anything but theoretical. Thirdly, the EU project, which, in a kind of self-protection, put a great deal of energy into the metabolisation of Germany. What is certain is that nothing could have been achieved without the accession of Germany, which showed itself, with Adenauer's chancellorship, to be ready to seize the propitious opportunity to emerge from the quarantine to which it seemed destined after the outcome of the Second World War. It is therefore not only a political, but also a cultural renunciation of the hegemonic aspirations of the past.[238]

Germany does not merely accept the partnership with France, an innovation in itself fundamental to European history, but contributes to the formation of a true Franco-German pair by ensuring that this relationship, albeit asymmetrical, becomes the engine of the European integration process and helps to bring it out of the doldrums on more than

[237] Mammarella, G., & Cacace, P. (1998). *Storia e politica dell'Unione europea*. Bari: Editori Laterza, 31.
[238] Bolaffi, A. (1993). *Il sogno tedesco. La nuova Germania e la coscienza europea*. Roma: Donzelli, 37.

one occasion. It is evident that for Germany it was a matter of making a virtue out of necessity, but it is equally true that the efforts made to file away the painful past are so remarkable that, when the changed geopolitical conditions allow it to heal its internal wound with the reunification of the country, it can count on the support and endorsement without hesitation of its European partners. However, even if the new course taken by Germany does not lack the recognition of its European partners, the removal of the old fears seems to be favoured by the logic of the barbed wire that sanctions the division of Europe and with it of Germany, postponing the reconstitution of a German state that in terms of extension and power, even if only economic, could be comparable to the feared Bismarckian Reich.[239]

At the root, then, of Euro-German peace there is at least in part a fundamental misunderstanding that emerged in 1989 when suddenly the world turned to the right side, however, jeopardising the status quo considered by many to be the most effective bulwark against any German temptation to hegemony. As the Berlin Wall opens, Germany must, therefore, inevitably become aware that there are many accounts yet to be closed with a past that not only does not go away, but rather returns unexpectedly at the most inopportune moment, transforming its EU partners, and not only those, into as many guardians. The Germans therefore realise that they enjoy conditional freedom, not only and not so much because of the treaties, but because of the other European states' historical mistrust of them, which has subsided but never definitively disappeared. It is the weight of the past that once again takes centre stage in regulating relations between Germany and Europe, obscuring years of collaboration and effectively putting the possible reconstitution of a single German state at the heart of the continent 'sub judice.'

The subject of reunification returns to political debate and public discussion after the sterilisation imposed by the Cold War. It is Oskar Lafontaine who best expresses the perplexity about this when he declares that 'one must be cautious when speaking of reunification. The ghost of a powerful Fourth Reich frightens our neighbours in the East as well as in the West.'[240] It is understandable how within the debate, regardless of the positions taken, the dualism between national consciousness and European identity plays

[239] Fagiolo, S. (2006). Francia e Germania dalla caduta del muro di Berlino alla Costituzione europea. *Ventunesimo Secolo*, 5(11), 49-66.
[240] Lafontaine, O. (1989, 9 24). Das Gespenst des Vierten Reiches. *Der Spiegel* (39), 21, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/das-gespenst-des-vierten-reiches-a-240f90ff-0002-0001-0000-000013498334**.

a prominent role. Indeed, the last fifty years of their history have convinced Germans that there will be no European integration without German unification, but neither can there be German unification without European integration. Apart from these common elements, however, at least three different positions can be recognised in the debate, which can be described as pro-European, divisionist and autonomist. The pro-Europeanists are those who, like Foreign Minister Genscher for example, support the thesis that eventual unity will be welcomed but not necessarily sought, thereby reassuring the neighbouring countries and European partners about the otherness of an eventual reunified Germany compared to the state that had caused them far too much political and human grief in the past. In the divisionist thesis, on the other hand, are all those who, like Oskar Lafontaine, do not consider the time for reunification ripe or at any rate do not agree with the forms and ways in which it is proposed, convinced that the division of Germany was an achievement for European democracy.[241] To these positions can be added a third one intermediate to the previous ones, namely the autonomist position. The latter is expressed or shared by those who, like Chancellor Kohl, have reason to believe, for the most diverse reasons, that the Germans have provided sufficient proof of maturity to be able to take initiatives, within the limits that the situation obviously allows, and to manage on their own at least some aspects of this transition, which is so delicate and full of unknowns. Even a few months before the fall of the Wall, not only among the social democrats, but within Kohl's own party, the hypothesis of reunification was viewed for one reason or another more with ill-concealed concern or perplexity than with genuine and unanimous fervour.[242]

This means that when reunification returns to the agenda, politics seems to be driven not only, of course, by facts, but also by public opinion, which begins to question why precisely in Germany nothing should change, when in Eastern Europe things are moving everywhere, thus demanding a stronger commitment from the political class.[243] A political class that in July 1989, not long after the commemoration of the aggression against Poland, experienced an unfortunate sortie by Finance Minister and CSU president Theo Waigel, who declared that the recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as the eastern

[241] Bolaffi, A. (1993). *Il sogno tedesco. La nuova Germania e la coscienza europea*. cit., 31.
[242] Castronovo, V. (2004). *L'avventura europea. Una sfida con la storia e il futuro*. Torino: Einaudi, 80.
[243] Sommer, T. (1989, 9 22). Kleine Schritte oder große Luftsprünge? *Die Zeit* (39), 3, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/39/kleine-schritte-oder-grosse-luftspruenge**.

border of an eventual reunified Germany was still an open question, thus bringing the reunification discourse back to the headlines. The heated debate, sparked by these imprudent statements, immediately widened from the specific case to more general considerations concerning the conditions under which Germany might eventually acquire unity.[244] It therefore does not seem the right time to reintroduce, fifty years later, the antagonism between the German nation and Europe that was believed to have been somehow resolved and on which the weight of history rests and which, moreover, could have represented an insurmountable obstacle to overcoming the division. This explains why both the traditionally close to SPD positions, Der Spiegel, and the liberal Die Zeit, with an eye on both the future and the past of the country, openly criticised anyone who, directly or indirectly, seemed to endorse Waigel's impromptu statements, and from this perspective it is almost natural that in their efforts to archive the affair they did not devote any space to the story of the refugees. In the lead article in Die Zeit with the peremptory title 'Grenzen, die keiner mehr ändern kann', Robert Leicht, on the one hand, reproaches the Christian Democrats for a general, to say the least, clumsy handling of relations with Poland precisely at the time of the commemoration of the German attack and, on the other hand, joins in the call for unreserved acceptance of Poland's western borders on the basis of the Warsaw Treaty, which had normalised relations with its eastern neighbour for the first time in 1970. According to Leicht, Chancellor Kohl's hesitations and Waigel's statements on this sensitive issue cast a sinister light on Germany.[245] The most bitter and direct polemic in Der Spiegel, however, is entrusted to Rudolf Augstein, who in an article with the eloquent title 'Die Lebenslüge an Oder und Neiße' reproaches Waigel for having failed in his institutional role for purely electoral purposes, creating an embarrassing conflict between the interests of his party and those of the state he represents. For Augstein, therefore, Waigel's statements are misplaced and the debate on border definition should be closed without giving in to the sirens of nationalism.[246] Similarly, in

[244] Görtemaker, M. (1999). *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck München, 759.
[245] Leicht, R. (1989, 7 21). Grenzen, die keiner mehr ändern kann. *Die Zeit* (30), 1, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/30/grenzen-die-keiner-mehr-aendern-kann**.
[246] Augstein, R. (1989, 7 16). Die Lebenslüge an Oder und Neiße. *Der Spiegel* (29), 22, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/die-lebensluege-an-oder-und-neisse-a-6ed92f47-0002-0001-0000-000013494334**.

September 1989, Lafontaine[247] and Genscher,[248] a few pages apart in Der Spiegel, express criticism of Waigel. It can be said, in conclusion, that the result of Waigel's concessions is at the level of comments and reflections quite the opposite of what its author perhaps expected, and that Der Spiegel and Die Zeit go so far as to condemn any dangerous revanchist blinkeredness.

In the wake of Waigel's statements, in the months leading up to the fall of the Wall, a linguistic controversy also began on reunification, which helped animate the debate on the future of Germany. Indeed, the question arises as to which term between Wiedervereinigung (reunification), Neuvereinigung (neo-unification) and Vereinigung (unification) is, if not the most appropriate, the most neutral, and thus, in fact, the most reassuring, to define the process of reconstituting the unitary German state. In such a delicate transition, on the other hand, it is understandable how even lexical choices can play an important role not only in shaping and influencing domestic public opinion, but also in making intimidated neighbours and allies concerned about the possibility of reunification grasp the profound discontinuity between what the unitary German state was in the past and what it would like to be in the future. The first term, Wiedervereinigung, i.e. the word with the oldest coinage, is for this very reason also the most loaded with reminiscences that might appear inappropriate.[249] Pointifications, clarifications and purifications do not seem to be sufficient to rid this word of suspicious encrustations and there is, therefore, a need to coin a new term: Neuvereinigung, which was supposed to express more clearly the detachment from all past reminiscences. Der Spiegel offers a demonstration of the 'instrumental' use of the term Neuvereinigung in July 1989 when Rudolf Augstein uses it in response to fears expressed about the possible reconstitution of a German nation-state by US Foreign Secretary Eagleburger. In doing so, Augstein makes it clear that the term underlies the idea of a Germany that has learnt the lessons of history and is far from any temptation of revenge.[250] Finally, the particular circumspection that seems to be required in the use of the terms Wiedervereinigung and Neuvereinigung

[247] Lafontaine, O. (1989, 9 24). Das Gespenst des Vierten Reiches. cit., 21.
[248] Hier ist Engagement gefordert. (1989, 9 25). *Der Spiegel* (39), 26, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/hier-ist-engagement-gefordert-a-3edb41f1-0002-0001-0000-000013507123?context=issue**.
[249] Leicht, R. (1989, 7 21). Grenzen, die keiner mehr ändern kann. cit., 1.
[250] Augstein, R. (1989, 7 2). Antwort auf eine nicht gestellte Frage. *Der Spiegel* (27), 24, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/antwort-auf-eine-nicht-gestellte-frage-a-846b03bb-0002-0001-0000-000013492902?context=issue**.

may also be the reason why the use of Vereinigung, undoubtedly the most politically correct word, is encouraged, since it merely describes the process without reference or contrast with the past. So much attention and importance given to what may appear to be just a matter of prefixes may perhaps come as a surprise. It can, however, be better understood if one considers that in the foreign press the term Wiedervereinigung recurs, obviously in translation, almost exclusively, and is often dangerously linked to the term Reich or even Fourth Reich.

Consequently, when it became increasingly evident that, as in an unusual geopolitical domino, the obstacles that might stand in the way of reunification were beginning to fall, it became inevitable for Germans to devote themselves, on the one hand, to trying to understand the reasons of those who seemed unable to accept a reunited German state and, on the other hand, to making them understand the reasons why Germans wanted it instead. The dualism Germany/Europe, in general, and German reunification/European integration, in particular, thus became less and less a theoretical and more a practical topic of discussion, and Der Spiegel and Die Zeit, between the second half of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, dealt with it constantly, letting not only leading journalists, but also numerous interested guests, who broadened the range of opinions expressed, grapple with it.

Der Spiegel decides to offer a panoramic view of the convictions of others by publishing, in conjunction with important political passages, real reasoned excursuses on the reactions and comments of the foreign press and governments, also enriched by the reproduction of covers and cartoons. 'Traum der Wiedervereinigung,' a brief review of the foreign press, uncommented but certainly guided, reports the passages considered most significant from articles on the resurrected German question, ranging from the perplexity of the French 'Le Monde,' to the entire anti-German paraphernalia that, with the exception of 'The Independent', the British newspapers, including the 'Sunday Telegraph,' offer.[251]

Die Zeit takes a different approach, preferring to publish the contributions of foreign opinion leaders directly in the foreign press rather than reporting parts of them in summary articles, thus allowing its readers to form an opinion without any intermediation.

[251] Traum der Wiedervereinigung. (1989, 9 17). *Der Spiegel* (36), 19, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/traum-der-wiedervereinigung-a-f264e01e-0002-0001-0000-000013497591**.

With regard to the view on Europe, in contrast to Der Spiegel, which tries to offer an overview of the opinions of the European Community partners, Die Zeit focuses almost exclusively on the relationship with France. This takes the form of a series of articles by the periodical's Paris correspondent, Joachim Fritz-Vannahme and others, devoted exclusively to examining French-German relations in an attempt to understand why France suddenly finds the Germans too impetuous in their albeit understandable interest in their eastern brothers.[252]

The content with which the media tried to counter 'established', although long since unspoken, fears was based on the following idea: the Germans must not give up on reunification if the opportunity presents itself, but they must completely renounce outdated territorial claims and any arguments that might undermine their reliability. Two authoritative voices agree on this: Genscher and former Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. The former argued that reunification should be integrated into European development,[253] the latter identified among Germany's strategic interests the rapid strengthening of the European Community by relying on France.[254]

To the objections that are made to the Germans' desire for reunification, responses are found at the most diverse levels. At the institutional level, the first partial response came with the concluding declaration of the European Council in Strasbourg, in which it was hoped that Germany would achieve reunification in a democratic and peaceful manner in accordance with the treaties and agreements and on the basis of all the principles laid down in the Helsinki Final Act in the context of East-West dialogue and cooperation, with a view to EU integration.[255] At the level of public opinion, as evidenced by polls, there is a renewed and growing confidence in the European Community, which is matched by broad support for reunification on the part of the peoples of Europe, so dissonant from the concerns expressed by the governments that the peoples of the victors have clearly outnumbered their governments.[256] Finally, there remains the space of public

[252] Fritz-Vannahme, J. (1989, 10 27). Zwischen Angst und Auftrumpfen. Die Zeit (44), 7, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/44/zwischen-angst-und-auftrumpfen**.
[253] Hier ist Engagement gefordert. (1989, 9 25). cit., 26.
[254] Schmidt, H. (1989, 7 14). Was ist der Deutschen Vaterland. *Die Zeit* (29), 4, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/29/Was-ist-der-Deutschen-Vaterland**.
[255] Conclusioni del Consiglio Europeo di Strasburgo 8-9 dicembre 1989. (1990). *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 57(1), 105-120.
[256] Deutschland, eine Supermacht?. (1989, 11 19). *Der Spiegel* (47), 167, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland-eine-supermacht-a-72176bef-0002-0001-0000-000013498109**.

confrontation and the media, in which attempts are made to explain and understand why Germans would be denied what is granted to others.

In the months following the fall of the Wall, the simplest division of opinion is between those in favour of reunification and those against it. The complexity of the situation allows, however, for a considerable number of variations on the theme, in which Europe and its integration process occupy a prominent place, both as a possible solution to the problem and as an alternative to reunification itself, and the relationship between past, memory and future. Among those opposed to reunification, the opinion with the greatest weight, and also the one most charged with moral values, is undoubtedly that of Nobel Prize winner and Auschwitz survivor, Elie Wiesel, which appears in Der Spiegel between December and January. According to Wiesel, there is a risk that Germany will somehow feel entitled, with reunification, to forget the horrors of the past. A unified German state can only be created, in his opinion, when it ensures that it is able to actively preserve and pass on the memory of what has been.[257] Other commentators, on the other hand, argue for maintaining the status quo on geopolitical grounds. The American columnist William Pfaff in an article with the cautionary title 'Bonn muß der Einheit abschwören' and the eloquent subtitle 'Wer die Einheit fordert, gefährdet die Zukunft Europas' argues, for example, that reunification must be renounced because nothing, least of all European integration, can neutralise the risks.[258] It would therefore be necessary for reunification to be replaced by a process of European unification and integration in which the two parts of the old German nation could regain their old intimacy without losing their sovereignty and characteristics. To avoid, therefore, a return to the past, Germany should, according to some, be required to renounce the most symbolic part of the dictate of its Basic Law 'tout-court.'

On the contrary, in response to Wiesel's article, in Die Zeit Dominique Moïsi argues in favour of reunification, also based on considerations in which personal experience is combined with general reflections. He argues that German history cannot be reduced to the Nazi years alone, which obscure Germany's contribution to the growth, also cultural, of Europe. For this reason, reunification appears to be a unique opportunity

[257] Deutschland ist noch nicht bereit. (1990, 1 1). *Der Spiegel* (1), 105-110, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland-ist-noch-nicht-bereit-a-4b1aed4c-0002-0001-0000-000013496491?context=issue**.

[258] Pfaff, W. (1989, 9 8). Bonn muss der Einheit abschwören. *Die Zeit* (37), 51, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/37/bonn-muss-der-einheit-abschwoeren**.

to free Germany from the ballast of the past, giving it back its rightful place in the European context.[259] There emerges, therefore, the need to distinguish between the old Germany, be it Bismarckian, Wilhelminian or Nazi, and the new one, which has emerged healed from the catastrophe. This is also, more generally, the fundamental discriminator that divides those opposed to reunification from those in favour of it: the former see the past as an open book from which the danger of the monster of German nationalism can always rise up to upset Europe, while the latter see it as a closed chapter that must not be forgotten, but neither can it constitute an unquenchable mortgage on the future of Germany and the continent.

In conclusion, it is the common opinion of both supporters and opponents of reunification that Germany is now embedded in a network of relationships, international and European, which must be taken into account. It is clear, however, that for the latter, these ties are not so strong that they could contain reunification; on the contrary, they could even be damaged and weakened by it to the great detriment of Germany itself. For the former, on the other hand, the pass for reunification is precisely the perseverance with which Germany has built these relations and the dedication it has shown in maintaining them.

In order to exorcise fears and bring about unification, Germany had no choice but to adhere to the project of monetary and economic union by offering, as a pledge, its own currency, the very symbol of the country's economic success, and in fact implementing a veritable barter. This step would prove to be doubly epochal because not only would it make it possible to reconcile national aspirations and the Europeanist project, but it would also change the very nature of this relationship by making the link between German unity and European integration an empirical fact. It can no longer be hidden from the Germans that accession to monetary union without further delay is crucial, especially after internal monetary unification. Indeed, a decisive step in this direction might finally have indicated Germany's willingness to give up its economic power for the sake of maintaining European equilibrium. The German response came, breaking all delays, at the European summit in Dublin, which sanctioned Germany's readiness to Europeanise the mark, effectively giving precedence to politics over economics in order to remove French and

[259] Moïsi, D. (1989, 12 15). Das Glück zu sich selbst zu finden. *Die Zeit* (51), 49, Taken from **https://www.zeit.de/1989/51/das-glueck-zu-sich-selbst-zu-finden**.

European concerns and get the go-ahead for reunification.[260] This opened the way for the Maastricht Treaty. Thus, after a journey lasting more than a century, Germany conquered a new role, very different from its predecessors, and thus sanctioned a geopolitical change that was in some respects epochal.

Public opinion was thus able to use these issues, presented not only in print media but also on television, to understand the challenges and imagine the benefits and risks of reunification. Public opinion already 'trained', as we have seen in previous chapters, thanks to the availability of West German media in much of East Germany as well. In detail, research by Tim Friehe, Helge Müller and Florian Neumeier, analysed how the sustained exposure of a random subset of GDR citizens to Western television broadcasts influenced their political attitudes by analysing regional variations in the share of votes gained by left- and right-wing extremist parties in the decade following reunification, beginning with the 1990 federal elections. The results suggest that voters residing in regions where West German TV was available prior to reunification are less likely to support left- or right-wing extremist parties, indicating stronger support for the democratic and economic transition brought about by German reunification, while people residing in regions with access only to East German TV show a stronger bias toward parties that (are believed) reject the democratic and/or capitalist system of the FRG in general and parties that openly support socialism in particular. The results are thus consistent with the idea that access to free media increased GDR residents' resistance to communist regime propaganda and led to an erosion of support for socialism, influencing political culture and helping people embrace the democratic transition.[261]

5.2
Social and Economic Effects of Democratic Transition

Years later, the following can be said: unification was not that painless operation that Kohl so successfully touted. It has had very high social and human costs, especially for eastern citizens, but also for western citizens. First, there was a very high cost of an economic nature. When Kohl expressed his initiative to form a currency union with East Germany on Feb. 6, 1990, there was already a conspicuous body of scholarly work on the

[260] Castronovo, V. (2004). *L'avventura europea. Una sfida con la storia e il futuro*. cit., 89.
[261] Friehe, T., Müller, H., & Neumeier, F. (2020). Media's role in the making of a democrat: Evidence from East Germany. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 48(4), 866-890.

economic issue of currency unions, which was based on developments following the pioneering work of Canadian economist Robert Mundell who published 'A Theory of Optimum Currency Areas' (OCA) in 1961. This theory stipulated that in order for there to be the necessary preconditions for forming an optimal currency area, hence a monetary union, it was necessary for the economic systems involved to enjoy at least one of the following characteristics: sufficient wage flexibility or labour mobility to which should be added the possibility of making massive transfers to regions affected by an economic shock by means of the provision of a common budget in order to mitigate its negative effects.[262]

Leading German economic experts expressed an almost unanimous negative opinion as to whether the listed features were present or not, stating that the wage differential between the East and West regions would lead to a demand for higher wages in the Eastern regions with the consequent effect of further decreasing the productivity of GDR enterprises, resulting in the failure of one of the key features envisioned by the OCA theory, namely that of wage flexibility. This would have implied a massive migration of workers to the West. Moreover, without the protection of the Eastern Mark, Eastern enterprises, suddenly exposed to international markets, would have become uncompetitive and many would have closed. This situation would have led to the gradual deindustrialization of the East and mass unemployment.[263]

The entry into force of the monetary, economic and social union on July 1, 1990, made East German manufactured goods overvalued, and the companies that produced them became uncompetitive overnight, recording a 42% drop in East German GDP.[264] All the predictions of the economic experts opposed to the monetary union realized too quickly came true and the eastern part of the country was hit by high unemployment rates, which from 0% (declared by the previous SED-led government) immediately rose to 15%,[265] and rapid deindustrialization, mainly due to the demands of East German workers for wage increases (supported by West German workers who feared the relocation of

[262] Mundell, R. A. (1961). A Theory of Optimum Currency Areas. *American Economic Review*, 17-27.
[263] Caldwell, P. C., & Shandley, R. R. (2011). *German Unification: Expectations and Outcomes*. Palgrave Macmillan, 72-76.
[264] Dornbusch, R., & Wolf, H. (1992). Economic Transition in Eastern Germany. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 23(1), 240.
[265] Burda, M., & Hunt, J. (2001). From Reunification to Economic Integration: Productivity and the Labor Market in Eastern Germany. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 32(2), 1.

companies to the eastern part of the country where labour costs were lower). This made it impossible for companies to pay wages and continue to stay in the market with the result that many of them had to close. Therefore, as economic theory and German observers themselves had predicted, the burden of resolving the crisis had to be placed on worker mobility and transfers from the central government. This resulted in the emigration of about one million workers to the West in the period from mid-1990 to the end of 1992[266] and a net transfer from the federal government, in the form of subsidies to the eastern parts of the country, of about 75 billion euros annually in the period 1990-2000.[267]

The federal government thus had to allocate a considerable part of its budget each year in order to support the welfare of its citizens in the eastern part of the country as it triggered a socioeconomic mechanism comparable to that affecting the South of Italy,[268] characterized by the emigration of young people and the concomitant presence of an impoverished labour market where people generally remain unemployable and dependent on state benefits, which results in the triggering of a vicious cycle that is self-feeding. The German government's decision to finance the cost of reunification through the state deficit rather than through its coverage guaranteed by increased taxation and the decision to set the exchange rate of the two marks at par thus caused a sudden rise in the German inflation rate.

The economic apparatus of the former GDR was then quickly dismantled with the introduction of a single market, which was also accelerated by the technological backwardness of its structures. The stark divide between state-assisted and capitalist economies became evident when Eastern enterprises found themselves exposed to the rules of the market: many of them were forced to close, causing a sharp rise in unemployment. The same happened in agriculture, which proved much more backward and unable to compete with the Western agricultural sector. Suddenly, most Eastern consumers abandoned the products they had been (forcibly) accustomed to for decades, preferring Western ones, even if they were not always superior or cheaper; this was especially true for agricultural products.

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[266] Caldwell, P. C., & Shandley, R. R. (2011). *German Unification: Expectations and Outcomes*. cit., 75.
[267] Burda, M., & Hunt, J. (2001). From Reunification to Economic Integration: Productivity and the Labor Market in Eastern Germany. cit., 11.
[268] Boltho, A., Carlin, W., & Scaramozzino, P. (1997). "Will East Germany Become a New Mezzogiorno?". *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 24, 241-264.

Statistical indicators attest to this process of dismantling with great clarity; in the last quarter of 1990 the index of industrial production in the former GDR halved compared to the previous year, and in the second quarter of 1992 the curve reached its lowest point, when industrial production was a little over 32 percent compared to the year before unification. Among other things, this meant the destruction of skills and professionalism, not all of which were despicable. The most macroscopic outcome of this breakdown occurred in employment, with nearly one-third unemployed, relative to the working-age population.[269] As mentioned earlier, the Western economy had to support the Eastern economy with heavy capital injections in order to enable its recovery. At the time of unification, it was estimated that the available capital per capita was DM 62,000 in the West and only DM 12,000 in the East. In June 1990 the Treuhandanstalt was created, a public agency entrusted with the pro tempore management of Eastern enterprises and their privatization in the most profitable manner. According to official statistics, 80 billion DM was transferred from West to East in 1990, more than 150 in 1991 and more than 180 the following year.[270]

Chancellor Kohl's calls for solidarity elicited lukewarm welcomes. Many Western citizens looked with ill-concealed sense of superiority at their new compatriots, accusing them (more or less veiledly) of a lack of capacity for sacrifice, of wanting everything and everything now, or of still being subservient to a 'subject spirit' that looks to the state as the solver of all problems. These were reciprocated by a widespread sense of inferiority, steeped in victimhood, on the part of Orientals. The spread of the pair of definitions 'Ossis' and 'Wessis' (to refer to citizens of the East and those of the West), though joking, betrayed a mutual distrust. Not a few people levelled criticism at their Eastern compatriots for failing to react, over forty years, to an oppressive regime, if not even accusing them of being complicit in the apparatus of repression and internal espionage. Frustrations and criticism all the more bitter in the face of what has been called the 'big lie,' that is, the assurance given at the time by the chancellor that unification would not cause excessive social costs and that his road would be paved with successes.[271]

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[269] Collier Jr, I. L. (1991). On the First Year of German Monetary, Economic and Social Union. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5(4), 179.
[270] Ivi, 183-185.
[271] Wiegrefe, K. (2018, 5 26). Kohls Lüge von den blühenden Landschaften. *Der Spiegel*, Taken from **https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/helmut-kohl-seine-luege-von-den-bluehenden-landschaften-a-1209558.html**.

On the other hand, reasons for frustration and disillusionment accumulated in the eastern citizens. Life in unified Germany proved to be quite different from the soap operas they had seen on television, and behind the glitter of Berlin's shop windows came to light a society of competition, of losers and winners, for which the citizens of the former GDR were by no means prepared. The eastern citizens, of what are conventionally called the 'new Bundesländer,' were decapitated of their ruling class and their intellectual elite in universities and research centres. Posts of greater political and administrative responsibility were given to figures from the West. This was certainly because the old SED ruling class was unusable, as well as for reasons of professional competence, but also because the speed of the unification process prevented the formation of a new core of political leaders and administrators. In addition to the political class, the society of the former GDR was also suddenly deprived of its intellectual and academic class, which was largely forced to step aside because of its democratic untrustworthiness. The citizens of the former GDR were thus deprived of the core values in which they had grown up, and it was only possible to partially replace them with new values, those of democracy and free market capitalism. For many of them it became difficult to come to terms with a life experience, with a memory, that from (partially) positive and rewarding had suddenly become all negative.

Two societies that were in many ways different were unified in a very short time, as we have seen. Two societies certainly with a common linguistic, cultural, and historical substratum, but also with profoundly different values; think, for example, of the conception of the family, the role of women, the weight of the religious factor. Two societies that for forty years have had little opportunity to get to know each other except through the distorting lenses of propaganda and the mass media.

5.3

The Impact of the Media on the Formation of the Historical Memory of the GDR: The Phenomenon of Ostalgie

Following the initial post-reunification euphoria, which spilled over into regaining the ability to buy products from the West, regaining freedom of opinion and thought, and the prospect of gaining an improved standard of living, East Germans faced some unexpected social and economic problems. It is at this point that one can begin to speak of 'Ostalgie'.

The following can be named as objective causes for the emergence of the phenomenon after German reunification: the worsening socio-economic situation in the East, the sharp rise in unemployment, and the displeasure resulting from the replacement of the former East German elite with West Germans. The ideal image of the FRG changed soon after reunification, abetted by the emergence of an exasperated consumer society that destroyed everything that had belonged to the former GDR past to accommodate the products of the new West and defaced the environmental landscape. Even for a part of the FRG intelligentsia, the former GDR represented an alternative to Western capitalism and the genuineness of German culture and typical German landscape, as it had remained immune to the Americanization prevailing in Germany.

Explaining a word like 'Ostalgie' is certainly not easy, especially if you do not live it. Its etymology is as simple as it is impressive: in fact, it comes from the union of the German words 'Osten' and 'Nostalgie,' which as it is easy to guess in Italian mean 'east' and 'nostalgia.' This term was first used in 1992 by Dresden cabaret performer Uwe Steimle and officially introduced into the German language in 1993.[272] Since then there has been much debate about the meaning of this word, starting with the Duden dictionary (the German counterpart of the Italian Treccani), which defines Ostalgie as 'Sehnsucht nach [bestimmten Lebensformen] der DDR,' i.e., a nostalgia for certain aspects of life related to the GDR. This definition may seem simplistic, but it is actually very precise. In fact, the crux of the matter lies in the 'bestimmten Lebensformen,' those aspects of life that vary for each person. This means that each former East German inhabitant has his or her own Ostalgie, linked precisely to moments and memories of his or her life, which are, by necessity, related to the GDR. A question mark brought up by those who lived through that era in the West, or by those who did not, is the idea of nostalgia, which appears inconsistent and at first glance inexplicable since it arises toward a country that in fact severely restricted the freedom of its citizens and disfavoured, at certain junctures, their well-being of life. Of course, these aspects are by no means disavowed by those who experience Ostalgie, for as seen in the definition, the feeling of nostalgia concerns only certain aspects of the GDR, and not the entire system. To further clarify this phenomenon, it is useful to reflect on the functioning of human memory: in fact, our brains are

[272] Cooke, P. (2004). Ostalgie's Not What It Used to Be: The German Television GDR Craze of 2003. *German Politics & Society*, 22(4), 134.

programmed to store positive emotions longer, while they tend to fade negative ones more quickly. On a practical level, what arouses nostalgia are the positive social aspects of the GDR, such as free health care and education or guaranteed jobs, which came to an end after reunification. In this case, nostalgia often results in disappointment and discontent. Another component of Ostalgie comes from products then in use that disappeared after reunification (consumer goods, means of transportation, food, etc...). Although they were almost always of inferior quality, it is still understandable to feel nostalgia for these items, not so much for the products themselves, but for the memories associated with them.

During the 'ostalgic wave,' everyday objects and symbols of the GDR fulfilled the function of an identity anchor. Some examples of such objects were: the GDR pioneer clothing, the Trabant car, DEFA films, the Sandmännchen cartoon, the traffic light man (Ampelmännchen), and the Plattenbau (prefabricated apartment).[273] Upon successful reunification, GDR products, which after all no one was willing to buy anymore, disappeared from the market. However, towards the end of 1992 the old products began to reappear in the eastern market, and while in GDR times many locally produced goods were sold as substitutes or replacements for the West German originals, they were now revalued as genuine and unaltered. Advertising helped to make this recognizable: highly successful was the marketing strategy of 'bekennenden Ostmarken' (recognized Eastern brands), whereby old GDR brands were modernized in aspects such as packaging, formulation, and quality, while retaining their original names and logos as well as (in the case of food and beverages) taste.[274]

Not only advertising, movies and TV series also contributed to the memory of the 'good old days'. Leander Haussmann's 1999 film 'Sonnenallee' was the first commercially successful film after the Wende. The film retrospectively traces life in the GDR and places much emphasis on nostalgic details and feelings. 'Sonnenallee' sparked a wave of other 'comedies of the wall,' which examine the former GDR from a totally different angle, ushering in a new way of talking to audiences about the GDR, no longer seen only as a

[273] Betts, P. (2000). The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture. *The Journal of Modern History*, 72(3), 742-743.
[274] Ostalgie als Methode Wie sich die Ostdeutschen stabilisieren und integrieren: HAMMER, ZIRKEL, KAFFEEKRANZ. (2000, 2 5). *Berliner Zeitung*, Taken from **https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/ostalgie-als-methode-wie-sich-die-ostdeutschen-stabilisieren-und-integrieren-hammer-zirkel-kaffeekranz-li.45951**.

repressive and dictatorial system.[275] In 2003 the film 'Good Bye, Lenin!' by director Wolfgang Becker appeared in theatres, followed by the tragicomedy 'Herr Lehmann,' in 2004 the East-West comedy 'Kleinruppin forever' appeared, in 2005 the comedy film 'NVA,' and in 2006 the romantic drama 'Der Rote Kakadu' was released.[276]

In the wake of the success of 'Good Bye, Lenin!', several 'DDR-shows', about life in the GDR, were introduced on TV networks in the second half of 2003, where the presenters often entered the stage from well-known personalities from the former Eastern Republic. At the DDR-shows, aspects of popular, everyday and consumer culture were addressed, objects, products, photos, historical episodes, and anecdotes about life in the GDR were shown, some aspects of the dictatorship were discussed, the topic of the Stasi was dealt with, and opportunities were given to open debates, but the main goal was to shed new light on the East German past. On August 17, 2003, ZDF launched the 'Ostalgie-Show.' There were 4.78 million viewers, that is, the show was watched by one in three people in the new federal states.[277] On August 22, 2003, the radio station (MDR) aired the first episode of the six-episode weekly broadcast of 'Ein Kessel DDR,' which achieved a 22.8% audience share. It followed Sat 1 on August 23 with the two-part program 'Meyer & Schulz - Die ultimative Ost-Show.' Starting September 3, 'DDR-Show - Von Ampelmännchen bis Zentralkomitee' was broadcast in four parts by RTL.

Most of the criticism toward the GDR was aimed by former West Germans, who did not understand and considered GDR nostalgia immoral. It is also true, however, that criticism of Ostalgie was not spared even in East Germany. Journalist Martin Z. Schröder, a citizen of the former GDR, says in his 2000 article published in the Berliner Zeitung that there were situations and characteristic aspects of life in the GDR that were anything but positive, which many nostalgics have forgotten. Among these he mentions both not very important details, such as the absence of the telephone and strawberries, and relevant facts such as state corruption and the farce of political programs. Schröder takes a harsh tone and is also unsparing about the role of the citizens of the East, who in his view have done nothing to change the situation and are now complaining about their own

[275] Gislimberti, T. (2007). Ostalgie, ovvero nostalgia del passato perduto. A proposito dell'identità tedesca orientale. *Metabasis*, 7.
[276] Horten, G. (2020). *Don't Need No Thought Control: Western Culture in East Germany and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. cit., 217.
[277] Cooke, P. (2004). Ostalgie's Not What It Used to Be: The German Television GDR Craze of 2003. cit., 134.

conditions.[278] Finally, experts also countered on the use of GDR symbols. Historian Hubertus Knabe initiated a nationwide debate for a ban on GDR symbols reminiscent of an SED dictatorship: the national emblem, SED badge, FDJ, Stasi, and hammer and sickle.[279]

In conclusion, the phenomenon of Ostalgie represents a complex interweaving of nostalgia and selective memory that has involved many former East German citizens, eager to preserve the link with a now vanished identity dimension. While these individuals do not ignore the limitations and difficulties of life under a repressive regime, they also focus on the positive and familiar aspects of their everyday life in the GDR, enhanced by the erosion of perceived authenticity in the market economy and post-reunification consumerism. In this process of collective memory construction, the media played an important role. Films, TV series, advertisements, and television programs such as the famous 'Ostalgie-Show' have helped to reconstruct and reinterpret life in East Germany, often exalting elements of that past in a nostalgic and idealized way. Successful film productions such as 'Good Bye, Lenin!' and 'Sonnenallee' offered a more nuanced image of the GDR, highlighting moments of authenticity and irony within a complex reality and arousing sympathy and nostalgia for a vanished era. These media opened up new perspectives and facilitated dialogue about a difficult past, transforming Ostalgie into a genuine cultural phenomenon that found wide public acceptance. The power of media storytelling, also supported by the rise of the Internet and social networks, has made it possible not only to share and preserve personal memories, but also to create public forums and virtual communities where nostalgic and curious people can discuss and re-enact life in the GDR together. Thus, Ostalgie is not just an individual feeling, but a media-fuelled collective memory that makes a controversial but deeply rooted cultural legacy alive and accessible to new generations.

[278] Schröder, M. Z. (2000, 1 22). Meine DDR war nicht kuschelig. Eine Polemik gegen den Jubelsturm der Erinnerung. *Berliner Zeitung*, Taken from **https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/eine-polemik-gegen-den-jubelsturm-der-erinnerung-meine-ddr-war-nicht-kuschelig-li.982674**.

[279] Stasi-Experte Knabe fordert Verbot von DDR-Symbolen. (2014, 1 3). *Berliner Morgenpost*, Taken from **https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/inland/article123527878/Stasi-Experte-Knabe-fordert-Verbot-von-DDR-Symbolen.html**.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to construct a historical, geopolitical and social account of the complicated phenomenon of media influence on the collapse of dictatorial regimes, with particular reference first to East Germany and the Eastern bloc and then to reunified Germany. It became clear from the research that the influence of the media was a key element in the processes of transition from the dictatorial regime in East Germany and the Eastern bloc to a new political reality, culminating in German reunification. This study has shown that, during the Cold War period, Western media, such as Radio Free Europe, RIAS, and ARD to name but a few, played an important role in conveying alternative information, and questioning the official narratives of socialist regimes. The clandestine dissemination of this information helped to gradually erode the legitimacy of the propaganda apparatus of the GDR and other Eastern Bloc countries.

A case in point is the broadcasting of the events surrounding the Leipzig protests in 1989. The local media, initially under strict state control, found it increasingly difficult to black out news of the growing peaceful demonstrations. At the same time, images broadcast on Western television, such as those of protesters filling the squares with candles in their hands, triggered a wave of international solidarity and encouraged other GDR citizens to join the protest movement. These information flows, although hindered by censorship, broke through the ideological iron curtain, fostering the social mobilisation that would eventually lead to the collapse of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.

The dissemination of documentaries on the economic and social decline of the GDR, such as the one made by the environmental organisation Arche in 1988, Bitteres aus Bitterfeld, helped to reveal the reality of a system in crisis, in stark contrast to the image of prosperity that the communist governments tried to convey. This discrepancy between propaganda and perceived reality accelerated the disintegration of popular trust in institutions.

In the period following reunification, the media then played a crucial role in the rebuilding of national identity. Through television programmes, reports and public discussions, attempts were made to deal with the GDR's past, addressing issues such as the Stasi, political repression, and the difficulties of integration between the two Germanies. However, this process has not been without contradictions: the media

portrayal of the GDR has oscillated between demonisation of the past and nostalgia for certain aspects of everyday life, as shown by the Ostalgie phenomenon.

In the light of these historical examples, this research underlines how the media have not been mere instruments of documentation, but real actors of social and political transformation. They played the role of witnesses, but also of accelerators of change, linking local instances with the global landscape. This analysis not only sheds light on the specific case of Germany and the Eastern bloc, but also offers valuable insights into the role of the media in other contexts of political transition, suggesting that the dissemination of information remains an indispensable element in the struggle for rights and democracy.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG AUF DEUTSCH

Diese Magisterarbeit befasst sich mit der Rolle der Medien im Demokratisierungsprozess in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, während und nach dem Fall des Regimes, und ihrem Einfluss auf die Neudefinition der internationalen Rolle des wiedervereinigten Deutschlands. Um einen 360-Grad-Blick auf das Thema zu ermöglichen und Denkanstöße zu geben, habe ich Quellen unterschiedlicher Art verwendet. Artikel aus maßgeblichen gesellschaftspolitischen und wirtschaftlichen Fachzeitschriften, Schlussakte internationaler Konferenzen, Bücher, Auszüge aus Interviews und Artikel von Journalisten der bekanntesten deutschen Zeitungen ermöglichten es mir, die Inhalte, Ideen und Meinungen der Protagonisten des so genannten „Kalten Krieges" zu erkunden und zu teilen.

Das erste Kapitel dieser Arbeit beschreibt zunächst die politische, wirtschaftliche und soziale Situation in Ostdeutschland sowie den internationalen Druck, dem der Ostblock ausgesetzt war, und führt dann in das Thema der wachsenden politischen und sozialen Spannungen ein, die den Block und die DDR selbst in den 1980er Jahren betrafen. Während des Kalten Krieges (1947-1991), war die Welt in zwei Blöcke geteilt: den Westblock, angeführt von den USA und der NATO, und den Ostblock, angeführt von der Sowjetunion und dem Warschauer Pakt. Diese Rivalität war durch politische, wirtschaftliche und militärische Spannungen sowie durch einen tiefen ideologischen Gegensatz zwischen dem westlichen Kapitalismus und dem sowjetischen Kommunismus gekennzeichnet. Die Truman-Doktrin von 1947 stellte eine Politik der „Eindämmung" dar, um die Ausbreitung des Kommunismus einzudämmen, wobei sich die USA verpflichteten, Länder wie Griechenland und die Türkei wirtschaftlich zu unterstützen. Kurz darauf bot der Marshall-Plan Westeuropa Wirtschaftshilfe an, um den Wiederaufbau zu unterstützen und eine kommunistische Expansion zu verhindern, und legte damit den Grundstein für die ersten europäischen Institutionen. Als Reaktion darauf gründete Stalin COMINFORM, um die kommunistische Einheit zu festigen und dem westlichen Einfluss entgegenzuwirken. 1949 wurde mit dem Nordatlantikvertrag und der anschließenden Gründung der NATO ein Militärbündnis mehrerer westlicher Staaten zur gegenseitigen Verteidigung beschlossen, worauf die UdSSR 1955 mit dem Warschauer Pakt, einem Bündnis kommunistischer Staaten, antwortete. Im Ostblock kam es jedoch

zu Aufständen wie der ungarischen Revolution von 1956 und dem Prager Frühling von 1968, die von der UdSSR in Anwendung der Breschnew-Doktrin, die eine militärische Intervention zum Schutz des Sozialismus rechtfertigte, brutal niedergeschlagen wurden. Der Kalte Krieg führte auch zu einem nuklearen Wettrüsten mit der Gefahr der „gegenseitigen gesicherten Zerstörung“ (MAD). In den 1970er Jahren führte der Dialog zwischen den beiden Mächten zu den SALT-I- und SALT-II-Abkommen zur Begrenzung strategischer Raketen. Die sowjetische Invasion in Afghanistan im Jahr 1979 machte diese Bemühungen jedoch zunichte, und das Wettrüsten setzte sich bis 1991 fort, als START I eine Reduzierung der Kernwaffen vorsah.

Im Kontext des Kalten Krieges beeinflusste die so genannte „deutsche Frage“ die europäische internationale Politik des 20. Jahrhunderts. Auf der Potsdamer Konferenz (1945) teilten die Alliierten Deutschland in Besatzungszonen auf. Deutschland wurde in eine sowjetische Zone im Osten und eine westliche Zone unter den USA, Großbritannien und Frankreich aufgeteilt. Berlin erlitt das gleiche Schicksal und wurde in vier Sektoren aufgeteilt. Zunächst wurde die „Entnazifizierung“ und „Entmilitarisierung“ des Gebiets vereinbart, doch schon bald kam es zu Konflikten über die Kriegsreparationen. Die wachsenden Spannungen zwischen der UdSSR und den USA veranlassten letztere und das Vereinigte Königreich 1946, ihre Gebiete zu „Bizone“ zusammenzulegen, während die UdSSR den Zusammenschluss der kommunistischen und der sozialdemokratischen Partei zur SED im Hinblick auf ein vereinigtes sozialistisches Deutschland förderte. Die wirtschaftliche und politische Teilung Deutschlands wurde 1947 auf der Außenministerkonferenz in Moskau formalisiert. Die Währungsreformen im Westen und die sowjetische Reaktion verschärfen 1948 die Spaltung. Die Blockade Berlins durch die UdSSR in den Jahren 1948-49 veranlasste die westlichen Alliierten, West-Berlin per Luftbrücke zu versorgen. Im Jahr 1949 wurde die Teilung Deutschlands mit der Gründung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD) im Westen und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR) im Osten am 7. Oktober endgültig besiegelt. Die DDR übernahm ein zentralisiertes System, das von der SED kontrolliert wurde, aber die wirtschaftliche Isolation und die Abhängigkeit von den sowjetischen Ressourcen führten zu sozialen Krisen und Spannungen, die zu dem wachsenden Wunsch nach Veränderungen beitrugen. Wirtschaftsreformen wie der „Neue Kurs“ und das „Neue Ökonomische System“ scheiterten, verschärften die wirtschaftliche Stagnation und

führten dazu, dass Ulbricht 1971 durch Honecker abgelöst wurde. Dieser führte eine neue Politik ein, die auf langfristiger Planung basierte, die letzten privaten Unternehmen verstaatlichte und die wirtschaftliche Abhängigkeit von der UdSSR verstärkte.

In den 1980er Jahren war die DDR mit sozialen und politischen Spannungen konfrontiert, die zu ihrer Krise beitrugen. Gorbachev Reformen wie Perestroika und Glasnost destabilisierten den sozialistischen Block und weckten selbst in Ostdeutschland, wo sich Honecker allen Reformen widersetzte, Forderungen nach Veränderungen. Der scheinbare Erfolg der DDR erwies sich als unhaltbar: Die schwierigen Lebensbedingungen und der Vergleich mit Westdeutschland verstärkten die Unzufriedenheit, insbesondere unter jungen Menschen. 1989 verstärkten sich die Bewegungen für Frieden, Umwelt, Menschenrechte und Meinungsfreiheit und gipfelten in Volksdemonstrationen für Demokratie, die zum Ende des DDR-Regimes beitrugen und den Weg für die deutsche Wiedervereinigung ebneten.

Das zweite Kapitel der Arbeit befasst sich mit dem Wesen der Oppositionsbewegungen. Es wird unterschieden zwischen Widerstand, der auf den Sturz des Regimes abzielt, und Opposition, die das Regime reformieren will, ohne es zu stören. Vor 1961 überwog der Widerstand, der hart unterdrückt wurde, während nach dem Bau der Berliner Mauer eine weniger radikale Opposition entstand, der die Stasi mit Strategien der Isolation und Einschüchterung begegnete. In den 1940er und 1950er Jahren äußerte sich der Widerstand durch Sozialdemokraten und Bürgerliche, junge Menschen, die Kirche und andere Formen des gesellschaftlichen Dissenses. Zum Widerstand gegen die Diktatur sowjetischer Prägung gehörten die Unterstützung des Westens, Jugendgruppen und die Junge Gemeinde der evangelischen Kirche, die das Regime kritisierte und Druck und Diskriminierung ausgesetzt war. Die Situation kulminierte am 17. Juni 1953, als die Proteste der Ostberliner Bauarbeiter in einen groß angelegten Aufstand mündeten, der durch sowjetische Intervention niedergeschlagen wurde. Die massive Flucht der Bürger in die BRD schwächte den Widerstand weiter, und in den 1960er Jahren ging diese Phase zu Ende. Die wirtschaftliche und politische Stabilisierung setzte sich durch, und infolgedessen wandte sich der Protest der Opposition zu, die auf innere Reformen abzielte, ohne das politische System der DDR zu untergraben. Unter Honecker schlossen die Bürger einen impliziten Pakt mit dem Regime: öffentliche Konformität im Tausch gegen private Autonomieräume, die ein Doppelleben zwischen äußerer Konformität und

persönlicher Freiheit ermöglichten. Ereignisse wie der Entzug der Staatsbürgerschaft des regimekritischen Liedermachers Wolf Biermann im Jahr 1976 markierten jedoch ein Scheitern der Kulturpolitik des Regimes und trieben viele Künstler und andere ins Exil. In den folgenden Jahren konzentrierte sich die legale Opposition auf die Grundrechte, den Umweltschutz und den Pazifismus, zum Teil unterstützt von der evangelischen Kirche, die Räume und Publikationen zur Verbreitung kritischer Ideen bot.

Die erste nennenswerte Oppositionsbewegung war die Friedensbewegung. Obwohl der Grundlagenvertrag von 1972 die Spannungen zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten in gewissem Maße abgebaut hat, bleibt die Befürchtung bestehen, dass die DDR und die BRD zum Schauplatz eines militärischen Konflikts zwischen den Supermächten werden könnten, insbesondere angesichts der Zunahme der Atomwaffenarsenale. Ab 1950 machte die DDR den Frieden zur Grundlage ihrer Politik, mit einem Gesetz, das Frieden und Sozialismus untrennbar miteinander verband. Die junge Generation wurde durch patriotische Erziehung und paramilitärische Programme, die von der FDJ (einer von der SED anerkannten Jugendorganisation) gefördert wurden, in die Wahrung dieser Ideale einbezogen. Nach dem Bau der Berliner Mauer wurden junge Männer aufgefordert, freiwillig zum Schutz der DDR zu dienen, und 1962 wurde die Wehrpflicht eingeführt. Dieser „bewaffnete Pazifismus“ steht im Gegensatz zu den Bestrebungen der Jugendlichen, die sich einen echten Frieden und ein vereintes, demokratisches Deutschland wünschen. Trotz der Initiativen des Regimes wanderten viele junge Menschen aus: Zwischen 1949 und 1961 siedelten rund drei Millionen Ostdeutsche in die BRD über, die Hälfte davon war unter 25 Jahre alt. Darin spiegelte sich die wachsende Unzufriedenheit mit der Politik der DDR wider, aber in jenen Jahren organisierte sich der Jugendwiderstand nicht offiziell. Erst nach dem Bau der Mauer begannen junge Menschen, sich zunehmend zu wehren und sich von den sozialistischen Idealen der DDR zu distanzieren. Ab Ende der 1960er Jahre und in den 1970er Jahren entstand eine Art jugendliche Gegenkultur: Die ersten „Hippies“ und später die Punk-Kultur waren ein Zeichen des stillen Widerstands. Obwohl sie nicht wie die westeuropäischen Subkulturen politisch organisiert waren, stellten diese Gruppen eine Form der symbolischen Opposition dar, indem sie die Integration in die sozialistische Gesellschaft ablehnten und die Rockmusik, die von dem Regime als „imperialistische Nicht-Kultur“ bezeichnet wurde, als Symbol des jugendlichen Dissenses begrüßten.

Um 1980 entstand in Ostdeutschland eine autonome Friedensbewegung, die sich durch Spontaneität und Dezentralisierung auszeichnete, ohne formale Organisation oder Unterstützung durch die Massenmedien. Die Informationen wurden durch Mundpropaganda und kleine geheime Publikationen verbreitet, ähnlich dem sowjetischen „Samisdat“. Die Bewegung setzte sich für alternative Formen des Zivildienstes für diejenigen ein, die den bewaffneten Militärdienst verweigerten, und wurde vor allem von der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche unterstützt, der einzigen Institution mit einer gewissen Autonomie im Lande. Parallel dazu nahmen die Proteste gegen die zunehmende Militarisierung von Gesellschaft und Bildung zu. Die Kirche wurde zu einem Bezugspunkt für junge Menschen, die sich gegen die obligatorische militärische Ausbildung aussprachen, insbesondere nach der Einführung des sozialistischen Verteidigungsstudiums in den Schulen. Die Friedensbewegung organisierte Treffen und Foren wie das Dresdner Friedensforum, das 1982 Tausende von Jugendlichen zusammenbrachte, um Themen wie Abrüstung und ziviler Ungehorsam zu diskutieren. Das Regime verschärfte jedoch nach und nach die Repressionen, schränkte die Aktivitäten ein und verbot Symbole der Bewegung wie das Abzeichen „Schwerter zu Pflugscharen“. Parallel dazu wuchs in den 1980er Jahren die Umweltbewegung, die zunächst auch von der Kirche unterstützt wurde. Die durch die intensive Nutzung der Braunkohle verursachte Luftverschmutzung und der Einsatz von Pestiziden in der Landwirtschaft stellten eine ernsthafte Gefahr für die Umwelt und die öffentliche Gesundheit dar. Nach der Katastrophe von Tschernobyl 1986 erlangten Umweltaktivisten Autonomie, indem sie in Ost-Berlin die Umweltbibliothek gründeten, die zu einem Zentrum des kulturellen Widerstands wurde. Diese geheime Bibliothek und die Zeitschrift „Umweltblätter“ förderten das Wachstum der Bewegung und stellten die Umweltpolitik des Regimes in Frage. Trotz der Repressionen konnten sich die Umweltgruppen ausbreiten und prangerten sogar schädliche Praktiken wie die Verbrennung von aus Westdeutschland importiertem Giftmüll an. Diese Bewegungen stellten einen wachsenden Protest gegen das Regime dar und markierten das Entstehen einer Zivilgesellschaft, die friedliche und umweltfreundliche Alternativen zu einem repressiven System suchte.

Die Allgemeine Erklärung der Menschenrechte (AEMR), die 1948 von der UN-Generalversammlung verabschiedet wurde, enthielt Grundsätze, die in krassem

Gegensatz zu der von der SED geführten politischen Struktur der DDR standen, wie z. B. die Unabhängigkeit der Justiz, das Verbot willkürlicher Verhaftungen, das Streikrecht und das Recht auf Auswanderung. Trotz anfänglicher ideologischer Widerstände nutzte die SED die AEMR gezielt als Instrument, um die Erfolge des Sozialismus zu preisen. Die westlichen Länder warfen der UdSSR und ihren Satellitenstaaten jedoch immer wieder Menschenrechtsverletzungen vor, da sie der Meinung waren, dass der Sozialismus nicht in der Lage sei, echte bürgerliche Freiheiten zu garantieren. In den 1960er Jahren tauchte das Konzept der Menschenrechte in der DDR wieder auf, und es wurde gefeiert und kritisiert, dass der Westen die sozialen Rechte nicht respektierte. Um im Zuge der Entkolonialisierung in Asien und Afrika Akzeptanz zu finden, bediente sich die sowjetische Führung der Sprache der Menschenrechte. In den 1970er Jahren argumentierten Denker in der DDR, dass die Rechte der sozialistischen Bürger einen tieferen und umfassenderen Wert hätten als die im Westen. Der Beitritt der DDR zur UNO und das Helsinki-Abkommen von 1975 begünstigten jedoch die Forderung nach demokratischen Reformen. In den 1980er Jahren begannen einige pazifistische Organisationen, interne Reformen zu fordern und dabei die Sprache der Menschenrechte zu verwenden. Ein wichtiges Beispiel war die Gründung der Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte (IFM) im Jahr 1986, der ersten unabhängigen Menschenrechtsgruppe der DDR, die Reise-, Versammlungs- und Meinungsfreiheit forderte.

Das dritte Kapitel befasst sich mit der Rolle der Medien bei der Förderung des kritischen Denkens. Nach einem kurzen Blick auf die Geschichte und die Funktionen der Medien im ersten Abschnitt geht es im zweiten und dritten Abschnitt um Radio und Fernsehen als Instrumente zur Verbreitung von Informationen und Nachrichten außerhalb der staatlichen Kontrolle. Die Vorstellung, dass westliche Medien eine entscheidende Rolle beim Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus in Osteuropa gespielt haben, ist weit verbreitet, auch wenn die empirische Forschung über ihre Auswirkungen auf autoritäre Regime noch nicht abgeschlossen ist. In den USA zielten Radiosendungen wie Voice of America (VOA), Radio Liberty (RL) und Radio Free Europe (RFE) darauf ab, unzensierte Informationen zu verbreiten und der kommunistischen Propaganda entgegenzuwirken. Diese Programme sowie die der BBC und der Deutschen Welle ermöglichten es den Bürgern jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs, sich über Dissidentenbewegungen, Menschenrechtsverletzungen und den Lebensstandard in den kapitalistischen Ländern zu

informieren, was zum Aufschwung pro-demokratischer Gefühle beitrug und die Unterstützung für kommunistische Regime schwächte. RFE/RL war Teil der von George Kennan konzipierten „Eindämmungsstrategie“. Kennan und andere Beamte glaubten, dass der Kommunismus auch auf kultureller und informationeller Ebene geschwächt werden könnte, indem man die Neugier der lokalen Intelligenz für demokratische Ideen ausnutzt. Im revolutionären Lager wurde RFE/RL als Instrument der „psychologischen Kriegsführung“ betrachtet, um die Befreiung der „gefangenen Völker“ Osteuropas voranzutreiben, während man im entwicklungspolitischen Lager einen allmählicheren Ansatz bevorzugte und versuchte, eine demokratische Öffnung des kommunistischen Blocks zu provozieren. Seit den 1960er Jahren sendete RFE Samisdat-Texte aus der UdSSR und wurde so zu einer maßgeblichen Quelle für Dissidenten. In den 1980er Jahren informierte RFE/RL die polnischen Bürger über nicht-kommunistische Kandidaten bei Wahlen.

Der Umsturz eines autoritären Regimes ist schwierig, weil er die Koordination der Bürger erfordert, um die Zensur und das Fehlen unabhängiger Medien zu überwinden. Die Theorie der relativen Deprivation besagt, dass Menschen rebellieren, wenn sie eine Diskrepanz zwischen ihren materiellen Erwartungen und dem, was das Regime ihnen bieten kann, wahrnehmen. Dies war bei vielen Ostdeutschen der Fall, die sich von der Lebensqualität und den westlichen Konsumgütern angezogen fühlten. Die Revolte in der DDR brach jedoch erst 1989 aus, als sich neue politische Möglichkeiten eröffneten, wie die Reformen Gorbachev. Erleichtert wurde die Mobilisierung durch soziale Bindungen und den Zugang zu externen politischen Informationen, die durch die westlichen Medien vermittelt wurden und die Bürger dazu inspirierten, sich für eine gemeinsame Sache zu engagieren. Die DDR übte eine strenge Kontrolle über die Medien aus, zensierte jeden kritischen Inhalt und förderte die sozialistische Propaganda, unterstützt von der allgegenwärtigen Stasi und einem ideologisch orientierten Bildungssystem. Obwohl westliche Sendungen und Publikationen nur schwer zu blockieren waren, versuchten die Behörden, ihnen durch Zensur und Repression entgegenzuwirken. Der RIAS, ein amerikanischer Radiosender, der ursprünglich für die Bewohner West-Berlins gedacht war, wurde während des Kalten Krieges zu einer wichtigen Quelle alternativer Informationen für die Bürger Ostdeutschlands und erreichte große Teile des Landes. Besondere Bedeutung erlangten die Sendungen des RIAS während der Berlin-Blockade

und des Arbeiteraufstandes von 1953, der die sozialen Spannungen gegen das Regime schürte. Obwohl der Aufstand niedergeschlagen wurde, trug die Rolle des RIAS als unabhängiger Nachrichtensender zur Entwicklung eines politischen Bewusstseins im Osten bei und förderte abweichende Bewegungen.

Am 9. November 1989 erklärte das SED-Mitglied Günter Schabowski auf einer Pressekonferenz verwirrenderweise, dass die Reisebeschränkungen für Ausländer mit sofortiger Wirkung aufgehoben worden seien, und löste damit eine Reihe von Ereignissen aus, die zum Fall der Berliner Mauer und zum Zusammenbruch des Warschauer Paktes führten und die Geopolitik des Kalten Krieges veränderten. Dies geschah zu einer Zeit großer Veränderungen im Ostblock, wie dem Abzug der sowjetischen Truppen aus der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn, der Öffnung des Eisernen Vorhangs zwischen Österreich und Ungarn und der Anerkennung des Selbstbestimmungsrechts für die Mitglieder des Warschauer Pakts. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg bauten die Alliierten die Medien in Deutschland wieder auf, da sie sie als nützliche Instrumente für die Umerziehung und die Verbreitung demokratischer Ideen betrachteten, doch das Fernsehen wurde zunächst vernachlässigt. Erst in den 1950er Jahren begann die DDR, ein Fernsehsystem als Gegengewicht zu Westdeutschland aufzubauen. 1952 wurden in der DDR die ersten Fernsehprogramme ausgestrahlt, aber die Reichweite blieb begrenzt und Fernsehgeräte waren teuer und schwer zu bekommen. In den 1960er Jahren jedoch, mit dem Start des zweiten Fernsehkanals und der Einführung des Farbfernsehens, wurde das Fernsehen zu einem wichtigen Propagandainstrument für das sozialistische Regime. Das Westfernsehen, das in den meisten Teilen Ostdeutschlands zu sehen war, stellte eine ideologische Bedrohung dar. Die DDR-Behörden versuchten, seinen Einfluss zu begrenzen, scheiterten jedoch, weil die Bevölkerung es als Quelle der Unterhaltung und als Alternative zur staatlichen Information betrachtete. Gegen Ende der 1980er Jahre spielte das Westfernsehen eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Schwächung der Unterstützung für das Regime, indem es Nachrichten über Proteste und politische Krisen ausstrahlte, zu Widerstandshandlungen inspirierte und die Organisation von Demonstrationen erleichterte, die zum Sturz des Regimes beitrugen.

Es wird allgemein angenommen, dass die Opposition in Ostdeutschland stark von der Hilfe des Westens profitierte, der finanzielle Mittel, moralische Unterstützung und Medienaufmerksamkeit bereitstellte. Obwohl viele Ostdeutsche durch die westlichen

Medien informiert wurden, gab es immer noch eine gewisse Feindseligkeit gegenüber westlichen Journalisten und lokalen Dissidenten, die in diesen Kanälen auftraten und denen oft vorgeworfen wurde, die Situation auszunutzen, um sich persönlich zu profilieren. Doch gerade die Medienberichterstattung verschaffte den Aktivisten Schutz und Ressourcen. So riskierten beispielsweise 1988 Mitglieder der Gruppe Arche ihr Leben, um einen geheimen Dokumentarfilm über die Umweltverschmutzung durch die Industrie zu drehen, der von der ARD ausgestrahlt wurde, die Diskussion anregte und die Bevölkerung sensibilisierte. In den Jahren der Friedensrevolution (1989-1990) suchten die Bürger Ostdeutschlands nicht nur Unterhaltung, sondern auch und vor allem politische Informationen. Westliche Fernsehsendungen beeinflussten die Zunahme der Proteste nach dem Ende der systematischen Repression. Bei den Massendemonstrationen 1989, insbesondere in Leipzig, forderten die Bürger Liberalisierung, offene Grenzen und schließlich die Wiedervereinigung. Leipzig wurde aus Gründen wie dem industriellen Niedergang, der geringeren Präsenz der Stasi und der regelmäßigen Präsenz westlicher Medien zum Zentrum der Proteste. Die Tagesschau, die westdeutsche Nachrichtensendung, förderte die Proteste indirekt, indem sie ausführlich über die Ereignisse berichtete, während ihr ostdeutsches Pendant, die Aktuelle Kamera (AK), das Thema zunächst vermied oder die Demonstranten kritisierte. Mit der Verschärfung der politischen Krise wurde die AK allmählich neutraler und berichtete objektiv über die Fakten. Nach dem Fall der Mauer begann die AK, nun frei von staatlicher Kontrolle, über Themen wie Umweltverschmutzung und Korruption im Regime zu berichten, und die Lokalpresse erhöhte die Sichtbarkeit der Proteste. Die Montagsdemonstrationen in Leipzig waren für die Aufdeckung von Informationen über das Regime von entscheidender Bedeutung: Die während dieser Veranstaltungen verbreiteten Nachrichten vermittelten der Bevölkerung einen Einblick in die reale politische Situation und trugen dazu bei, die Stabilität des Regimes dauerhaft zu untergraben. Im Laufe der Jahre erwies sich der Einfluss der westlichen Medien als entscheidend, um die Propaganda der kommunistischen Regime zu untergraben, echte Nachrichten zu verbreiten, Fehlinformationen zu korrigieren und das Leben und die Freiheiten des Westens zu zeigen. Diese Medien hoben die soziale Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit in den westlichen Ländern hervor und verglichen sie implizit mit den Bedingungen in den kommunistischen Ländern. Der Zugang zu solchen Informationen förderte auch die Einführung von

Reformideen bei Eliten und Bürgern in den Ostblöcken, unterstützte kritisches Denken und öffnete den Weg für liberale Diskussionen. Nach Ansicht von Historikern und Persönlichkeiten wie Václav Havel waren diese Informations- und Kulturstrategien entscheidend für den Erfolg des Westens im Kalten Krieg, da sie mit geringem Kostenaufwand bedeutende Ergebnisse erzielten.

Das vierte Kapitel behandelt die Zeit zwischen dem Fall der Berliner Mauer und der deutschen Wiedervereinigung. Im ersten Abschnitt wird die Figur Gorbachevs beschrieben und hervorgehoben, im zweiten Abschnitt wird die grundlegende Rolle der Kommunikation und der Bilder während des Mauerfalls beschrieben und im dritten Abschnitt werden schließlich die Meilensteine markiert, die zur Wiedervereinigung führten. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg gab Europa den Krieg als politisches Instrument auf und gründete neue internationale Institutionen, wie die Europäische Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft (EWG), die Zusammenarbeit und Stabilität förderten. Diese Veränderungen trugen zum Ende des Kalten Krieges bei und schufen die Voraussetzungen für ein Europa ohne Grenzen zwischen Ost und West. Im Jahr 1989 verstärkten Protestbewegungen wie Solidarnosc in Polen und Demonstrationen in Ungarn gegen die sowjetische Unterdrückung den Wunsch nach Veränderung. In diesem Zusammenhang wurden die DDR und andere sozialistische Staaten von einer Welle von Forderungen nach Demokratie überrollt, wobei die Bürger begannen, interne Reformen zu fordern, ohne in den Westen auswandern zu müssen. Der sowjetische Führer Gorbachev, der den Einsatz von Gewalt zur Unterdrückung von Protesten ablehnte, gab die Breschnew-Doktrin auf und gestattete den Ostblockländern die Selbstbestimmung. Gorbachev, der sich der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Krise in der UdSSR bewusst war, versuchte, Europa durch die Förderung eines Klimas der gemeinsamen Sicherheit näher an die UdSSR heranzuführen. Seine Reformen, Glasnost und Perestroika, wurden im gesamten Osten als Symbole der Hoffnung und des Wandels wahrgenommen. In Ostdeutschland zeigten friedliche Demonstrationen im Oktober 1989, wie die in Leipzig, dass offener Widerstand möglich war. Diese Massenbewegung, die durch Gorbachevs Anwesenheit noch verstärkt wurde, beschleunigte den Zusammenbruch des Regimes. Die Bevölkerung, desillusioniert durch den gebrochenen „Gesellschaftsvertrag“ des Regimes, das sich schuldig gemacht hatte, nicht mehr in der Lage zu sein, einen akzeptablen Lebensstandard zu garantieren, schloss sich zusammen, um einen Wandel zu fordern.

Am 9. November wurden aufgrund eines Kommunikationsfehlers die Grenzposten der Berliner Mauer geöffnet, und Bilder von Ostdeutschen, die die Grenze überquerten, füllten die Fernsehgeräte in aller Welt. Viele erkannten jedoch nicht sofort die Bedeutung dieses Ereignisses, darunter auch westeuropäische Politiker, die auf allmähliche Veränderungen ohne den Zusammenbruch der DDR hofften. Die Menschenmassen, die sich an Grenzübergängen wie der Bornholmer Straße und dem Checkpoint Charlie sammelten, machten das Chaos unerträglich, und die Zollbeamten ließen die Menschen schließlich passieren. Je mehr Menschen die Mauer überquerten, desto größer wurde der Jubel: Soldaten und Bürger feierten gemeinsam, als die symbolische Barriere aus dem Kalten Krieg niedergerissen wurde. Die Medien heizten das Chaos noch an, indem sie live vom Fall der Mauer berichteten, was Hunderttausende von Menschen anlockte. In der Nacht vom 9. auf den 10. November wurden die Grenzübergänge geöffnet, und die Ostdeutschen erkundeten West-Berlin, wobei viele nach Jahrzehnten Freunde und Verwandte wiedersahen. Am 12. November begann der Abbau von Teilen der Mauer, gefolgt von einer Welle von Besuchen von Ostdeutschen in Westdeutschland. Der Fall der Mauer löste eine Welle politischer Veränderungen in Osteuropa aus: In Polen wurde Lech Walesa zum Präsidenten gewählt; in der Tschechoslowakei trat die Kommunistische Partei zurück; in Rumänien führte eine Revolte zum Sturz und Tod von Diktator Ceaușescu. Der Kommunismus brach überall zusammen. In Ostdeutschland schlägt Ministerpräsident Modrow, der am 13. November die Nachfolge von Willi Stoph antritt, eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten vor, spricht sich aber gleichzeitig für die Beibehaltung zweier getrennter Staaten aus. Die Übersiedlungswelle von DDR-Bürgern in den Westen machte jedoch den Wunsch nach Wiedervereinigung deutlich.

Modrow nimmt rasch Kontakte zur BRD und zur EWG auf und schlägt am 4. Dezember eine deutsche Konföderation vor. Die Protestbewegungen in Ostdeutschland zielen jedoch auf eine Demokratisierung ab, ohne auf die Unabhängigkeit der DDR oder den Sozialismus zu verzichten. Am 26. November wird der Aufruf „Für unser Land“ veröffentlicht, der sich für eine unabhängige sozialistische DDR einsetzt und 1,2 Millionen Unterschriften sammelt. Im Dezember leitete die Regierung Modrow Wirtschaftsreformen für eine marktorientierte Planung ein, mit Maßnahmen zur Teilprivatisierung und Umweltinitiativen. Am 28. November schlägt Bundeskanzler

Helmut Kohl ein Zehn-Punkte-Programm zur Überwindung der deutsch-europäischen Teilung vor. Der „Zentrale Runde Tisch“ bringt die Parteien und die Opposition zusammen, um über Reformen zu diskutieren, und die SED benennt sich in Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS) unter der Führung von Gregor Gysi um. Kohl warb für eine rasche Währungsunion zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten, um die Abwanderung in den Westen einzudämmen und die Wirtschaft der DDR zu sanieren. Dieses Projekt, das von Ökonomen als riskant angesehen wurde, wurde dennoch verwirklicht. Am 18. März 1990 finden die ersten freien Wahlen in der DDR statt, bei denen die Allianz für Deutschland, ein Bündnis von Mitte-Rechts-Parteien, die für die Wiedervereinigung eintreten, gewinnt, während die PDS nur 66 Sitze erhält. Die neue Regierung unter Lothar de Maizière nahm Verhandlungen mit der BRD und den internationalen Mächten über die Bedingungen der Wiedervereinigung auf, die am 12. September 1990 mit der Unterzeichnung des Vertrags über die abschließende Regelung in Bezug auf Deutschland abgeschlossen wurden. Die offizielle Wiedervereinigung fand am 3. Oktober 1990 statt, als sich die fünf Bundesländer der DDR gemäß Artikel 23 des BRD-Grundgesetzes mit der BRD vereinigten. Dieser Prozess, der von vielen als Annexion angesehen wurde, behielt die verfassungsmäßige Struktur und die internationalen Verträge der BRD bei. Um den Prozess zu erleichtern und andere Länder zu beruhigen, änderte die BRD ihr Grundgesetz und legte am 14. November 1990 auch die Grenzen zu Polen fest.

Das fünfte und letzte Kapitel der Arbeit untersucht zum einen den Beitrag der Medien zur Vorbereitung und öffentlichen Akzeptanz der Wiedervereinigung und zum anderen die sozioökonomischen Auswirkungen der Wiedervereinigung. Der dritte Abschnitt schließlich beschreibt die mediale Formung des historischen Gedächtnisses der DDR, wobei das Phänomen der Ostalgie untersucht wird. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg wurde ein neues Verhältnis zwischen Europa und Deutschland geschaffen, das durch die Beteiligung Deutschlands am Projekt der Europäischen Union sanktioniert wurde. Die deutsche Beteiligung an der europäischen Integration, zunächst durch die Europäische Gemeinschaft für Kohle und Stahl (EGKS, 1951) und dann durch die EWG (1957), symbolisierte die Überwindung historischer Spannungen. Mehrere Faktoren erleichterten die Integration Deutschlands in den Westen: der Kalte Krieg, der Europa in Blöcke teilte und den Beitritt Deutschlands zum Westblock notwendig machte; Deutschlands eigene

territoriale Teilung, die als Beruhigung für die europäischen Staaten empfunden wurde, die ein Wiederaufleben des deutschen Nationalismus befürchteten; und schließlich die europäische Verpflichtung, die deutsche Rolle zu verändern. Mit Adenauers Kanzlerschaft verzichtete Deutschland formell auf die hegemonialen Ambitionen der Vergangenheit und bildete zusammen mit Frankreich ein Paar, das den europäischen Integrationsprozess vorantrieb. Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung löst jedoch latente Ängste sowohl in Europa als auch in den Nachbarländern aus, die die Entstehung eines Vierten Reiches befürchten. In der Debatte kristallisieren sich drei Hauptpositionen heraus: die Pro-Europäer, die für eine schrittweise Wiedervereinigung im Rahmen der europäischen Integration eintreten; die Teilungsbefürworter, die in der Teilung eine Stabilitätsgarantie für Europa sehen; und die Autonomisten, die an die deutsche Mündigkeit bei der Bewältigung des Prozesses glauben. Der Weg zur Wiedervereinigung ist auch von einer Kontroverse über die sprachlichen Begriffe geprägt: Es wird diskutiert, ob man von Wiedervereinigung, Neuvereinigung oder Vereinigung sprechen soll, um den Bezug zur nationalistischen Vergangenheit zu verringern. Schließlich lässt sich Deutschland auf einen symbolischen „Tausch“ ein: Es gibt seine nationale Währung, die Mark, für die europäische Währung auf und beschleunigt damit den Prozess der Währungsunion. Diese Geste ist ein entscheidender Schritt, der ein neues Gleichgewicht zwischen den nationalen Bestrebungen und dem europäischen Projekt herstellt und im Vertrag von Maastricht gipfelt. Im Zusammenhang mit der Wiedervereinigung erwies sich der Einfluss der westlichen Medien auf die ostdeutschen Bürger als bedeutend. Untersuchungen zeigen, wie DDR-Bürger, die vor dem Fall der Mauer dem Westfernsehen ausgesetzt waren, eine größere Resistenz gegenüber der kommunistischen Propaganda entwickelten, was den demokratischen Prozess und die wirtschaftliche Integration nach der Wiedervereinigung erleichterte.

Jahre nach der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands wurde deutlich, dass diese Operation nicht so schmerzlos war, wie Kohl es versprochen hatte. Die Wiedervereinigung war mit enormen sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Kosten verbunden, vor allem für die Bürger im Osten, aber auch für die Bürger im Westen. Eines der Haupthindernisse war die Entscheidung, eine Währungsunion zwischen Ost- und Westdeutschland zu schaffen, ohne die entsprechenden wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen wie Lohnflexibilität und Mobilität der Arbeitskräfte. Dies führte zu Forderungen nach

höheren Löhnen im Osten, was zu Lasten der Produktivität der dortigen Unternehmen ging, die auf dem internationalen Markt nicht konkurrenzfähig waren, was zu einer raschen Deindustrialisierung und hohen Arbeitslosenquoten im Osten führte. Als im Juli 1990 die Währungsunion in Kraft trat, wurden die Ostprodukte plötzlich zu teuer, so dass das ostdeutsche BIP um 42 % sank und die Arbeitslosigkeit auf 15 % anstieg. Viele Arbeitnehmer wanderten in den Westen ab, und die Bundesregierung musste enorme Subventionen zur Unterstützung der Wirtschaft im Osten bereitstellen, was in den Jahren 1990 bis 2000 zu einem jährlichen Nettotransfer von rund 75 Milliarden Euro führte. Dieses Subventionssystem schuf einen ähnlichen Mechanismus wie in Süditalien, der durch die Abwanderung junger Menschen, einen stagnierenden Arbeitsmarkt und die Abhängigkeit von staatlichen Subventionen gekennzeichnet ist. Die Entscheidung, diese Kosten durch öffentliche Defizite zu finanzieren, anstatt die Steuern zu erhöhen, führte ebenfalls zu einer höheren Inflation. Technologisch rückständige landwirtschaftliche Betriebe und Strukturen im Osten waren nicht mehr konkurrenzfähig und mussten schließen, was zu einem Verlust an lokalen Fähigkeiten und Fachwissen führte. Die Wirtschaftsindikatoren zeigten einen Einbruch der Industrieproduktion im Jahr 1992 auf etwa ein Drittel des Niveaus vor der Wiedervereinigung. Die kulturellen und sozialen Unterschiede zwischen den Bürgern in Ost und West traten deutlich zutage: Viele Westler blickten auf die Ostler herab, während sich die Ostler minderwertig und unzufrieden fühlten. Diese Gefühle spiegelten sich in den Spitznamen „Ossis“ und „Wessis“ wider, und viele im Westen kritisierten die Orientalen, weil sie sich nicht gegen das repressive DDR-Regime wehrten. Außerdem mussten sich die Orientalen an eine Wettbewerbsgesellschaft anpassen, in der die Werte und Strukturen fehlten, in denen sie aufgewachsen waren, und es fiel ihnen schwer, die neuen Werte der Demokratie und des Kapitalismus zu integrieren. Die Wiedervereinigung führte also zwei zutiefst unterschiedliche Gesellschaften mit gegensätzlichen Wertvorstellungen zusammen, ohne dass genügend Zeit für eine echte Integration blieb.

Nach der anfänglichen Wiedervereinigungseuphorie, die durch die Möglichkeit, Westprodukte zu kaufen, die Meinungsfreiheit und die Aussicht auf einen besseren Lebensstandard gekennzeichnet war, sahen sich die Bürger der ehemaligen DDR mit unerwarteten sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Problemen konfrontiert. In diesem Zusammenhang wurde das Phänomen der Ostalgie geboren. Zu den objektiven Ursachen

dieser Sehnsucht gehörten die sich verschlechternde sozioökonomische Lage, die steigende Arbeitslosigkeit und die Unzufriedenheit, die sich aus der Ablösung der ostdeutschen Elite durch die Westdeutschen ergab. Der Begriff „Ostalgie“ wurde 1992 von dem Kabarettisten Uwe Steimle geprägt und 1993 offiziell eingeführt. Er bezeichnet die Sehnsucht nach bestimmten Aspekten des DDR-Lebens, darunter kostenlose Gesundheits- und Bildungsdienste und garantierte Arbeitsplätze. Diese Aspekte verschwanden nach der Wiedervereinigung, was Enttäuschung und Unzufriedenheit schürte. Darüber hinaus wird Ostalgie auch mit den damals konsumierten Produkten in Verbindung gebracht, die zwar von minderer Qualität sind, aber Erinnerungen an das Alltagsleben in der ehemaligen DDR wecken. Symbolische Gegenstände der DDR wie der Pionieranzug, der Trabant, DEFA-Filme und das Ampelmännchen sind zu Identitätsankern geworden. Ab 1992 wurden einige dieser Produkte wieder auf den Ostmärkten eingeführt, oft mit neuen Werbestrategien, die sie als authentisch aufwerteten. Die Medien trugen dazu bei, die Nostalgie mit Filmen wie „Sonnenalleee“ (1999) und „Good Bye, Lenin!“ (2003) zu schüren, die das Leben in der DDR auf ironische und nostalgische Weise nacherzählten und eine neue Sicht auf die Vergangenheit eröffneten, nicht nur als eine Zeit der Unterdrückung, sondern auch als eine Zeit der Authentizität. Fernsehsendungen wie die Ostalgie-Show beschäftigten sich mit Aspekten des DDR-Alltags, lösten Debatten aus und erinnerten an die Vergangenheit. Dieses Phänomen wurde jedoch sowohl von ehemaligen Bürgern des Westens kritisiert, die die Nostalgie für ein autoritäres Regime als unmoralisch ansahen, als auch von einigen Bürgern des Ostens, die diese Nostalgie kritisierten und auf die negativen Aspekte der DDR hinwiesen, die in Vergessenheit geraten waren, wie staatliche Korruption und politische Repression. Zusammenfassend lässt sich sagen, dass Ostalgie eine komplexe Verflechtung von Nostalgie und selektiver Erinnerung darstellt, bei der die Menschen die positiven und vertrauten Aspekte des Lebens in der DDR bedauern, die durch die Veränderungen im Konsumverhalten nach der Wiedervereinigung hervorgehoben werden. Die Medien spielten eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Rekonstruktion und Neuinterpretation dieser Realität, was Ostalgie zu einem kulturellen Phänomen macht, das weiterhin Interesse und Diskussionen hervorruft.