

BUILDING A SOCIALIST NEIGHBORHOOD: EFFORTS AT INTEGRATION AMONG
POLAND, EAST GERMANY, AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1969-1989.

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ABSTRACT

Michael A. Skalski: Building a Socialist Neighborhood: Efforts at Integration
among Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, 1969-1989
(Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

In the 1970s, the countries of the Eastern Bloc exhibited an increased interest in integration. Unlike the previous forms of cooperation centered on politics and economics, this new model of socialist integration focused on human interactions. Through open borders, guest worker programs, and youth exchanges, it aimed to bind the socialist community into an inseparable alliance. Despite imperfect conditions for such an arrangement, it worked for some time and contributed to better understanding among the neighbors. Nevertheless, the incompatible policies of socialist patriotism and communist internationalism, the economic inequalities of shortage economies, and the rise of antisystemic opposition brought tensions to the fore that eventually tore the Bloc apart. This dissertation explores the entangled history of Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia by analyzing the functioning of integration, its shortcomings, and consequences. It reveals that the simultaneous pursuit of national interests aimed at preserving the regimes' hold on power weakened whatever progress socialist integration might have achieved. This study concludes that the communists' use of nationalism to legitimize their rule permeated the transborder relations developed in these two decades and not only revealed ideological fractures among them, but also made the disintegration of the Bloc possible after 1989.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CHZ – Office of International Trade (Poland)
- CMEA, Comecon – Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
- CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- CRZZ – Central Council of Labor Union (Poland)
- CSSR – Czechoslovak Socialist Republic
- DM – West German *mark*
- DVP – German People’s Police (East Germany)
- FDGB – Free German Trade Union Federation (East Germany)
- FDJ – Free German Youth
- FMZV – Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Czechoslovakia)
- FRG – Federal Republic of Germany (West)
- FSZMP – Federation of Polish Socialist Youth Unions
- GDR – German Democratic Republic
- GUC – Main Customs Office (Poland)
- Kčs – Czechoslovak *koruna*
- KOR – Workers’ Defense Committee (Poland)
- KSČ – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
- MfS – Ministry of State Security (East Germany)
- MHV – Ministry of Trade and Supply (East Germany)
- MSW – Ministry of the Interior (Poland)
- POP – Elementary Party Unit (of the PZPR)
- PPR – Polish People’s Republic

PZPR – Polish United Workers Party

SB – Security Services (secret; Poland)

SED – Socialist Unity Party of Germany

SSM – Socialist Youth Union (Czechoslovakia)

StB – State Security (secret; Czechoslovakia)

ÚCS – Central Customs Bureau (Czechoslovakia)

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VEB – Publicly Owned Enterprise (East Germany)

WOP – Polish Border Guard

ZHP – Polish Scouting Association

zł – Polish *złoty*

ZV – Customs Administration (East Germany)

MAP



Places of interest in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

INTRODUCTION

In autumn 1971, the East German Committee for Television (*Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen*, SKF) issued a directive for journalists and artists to follow a specific agenda. “The mass media must use a plurality of formats to ascribe due significance to the historic process of socialist integration. In order to bring the peoples of the socialist community closer to one another, [it is] imperative to present the practices of integration, socialist patriotism, and proletarian internationalism in a vivid and thrilling manner.” As the Committee explained, this “battle for the minds” (*Kampf um die Hirne*) targeted young people in particular because socialist integration would shape their future. “Thousands of young proletarians from brotherly states live and work in our republic, FDJ [Free German Youth] brigades help out in the socialist abroad, and curiosity leads them to travel more than before.”¹ In the context of postwar European history, “integration” most frequently brings to mind the political, economic, and social processes that took place in Western Europe, not behind the Iron Curtain, which already seemed like a monolith to many. But clearly, the Eastern Bloc attempted to develop its own version of unity. What was socialist integration, then? How did it function under the conditions of communist dictatorships? What were its results?

Following the Second World War, the integration of the socialist community manifested itself mostly through Stalinist political consolidation as well as military and economic

¹ Konzeptionelle und methodische Gesichtspunkte der journalistischen und künstlerischen Arbeit, October 1971, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde [BArch-Berlin], DR 8/125.

cooperation within the framework of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, Comecon). Based on similarities of political ideology and a shared subservience to Soviet hegemony, it gave the communist countries of Central Europe a certain cohesion, as opposed to China or Yugoslavia, for example. In Joseph Stalin's idea of "*Pax Sovietica*," European satellites provided a buffer from the imperialist West that had begun waging a Cold War against the Soviet Union.² In the spirit of Marxism, economic integration constituted an important step toward full communism.³ Forging economic links between different countries bound not only the national economies together, but also created an international working class that helped to develop, to produce, and to consume products of a collective effort. What changed, then, that prompted the satellites to search for even closer cooperation?

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, internal and global dynamics gave the East European regimes an incentive for tighter integration. The incipient détente between the United States and the Soviet Union promised hope for the normalization of East-West relations, but it upset the ideological certainty of the communist anti-imperialist propaganda. Willi Brandt's *Ostpolitik* with its bilateral agreements between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and individual Soviet satellites made the claims of West German revanchism obsolete. Moreover, Brandt's overtures to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the reciprocal East German rapprochement with its brother in the west, left the other Bloc regimes questioning the stability of the communist camp. The progressing integration among the West European countries in the

² Vladislav Zubok, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9.

³ Margarita Maximova, "Socialist and Capitalist Integration: A Comparative Perspective" in C.T. Saunders (ed.) *Regional Integration in East and West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 27; Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (New York: W.W.Norton, 2005), 105-107, 871.

EEC seemed on the one hand like a successful solution for peaceful coexistence after decades of wars, as well as a show of the capitalist enemy's strength and unity on the other. Lastly, the Czechoslovak reform movement of 1968 and the subsequent squashing of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact forces not only threatened the continuing existence of the Bloc, but also soured the relations between Czechoslovak citizens and their neighbors who had invaded.⁴ Hence, a search for solutions to the problems of unity resulted in revolutionary changes.

Framing and Arguments

This dissertation examines the multifaceted cooperation among three of the Soviet satellites that pioneered the new model of socialist integration between 1969 and 1989. The novelty of that project was its focus on increased human interactions within the Eastern Bloc in contrast to previous years. It developed independently of the Soviet Union, although the big brother did give the satellites a push in that direction. The April 1969 Comecon's Special Council Session resulted in the creation of the *Comprehensive Program for the Further Extension and Improvement of Cooperation* (henceforth referred to as the Comprehensive Program), officially adopted in July 1971.⁵ A range of new transnational initiatives flourished, including mutually-funded factories, expanded trade, and the export of workforce to states with labor shortages. Tens of thousands of Polish men and women worked and lived in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, offering "fraternal help" to the countries in need, improving their own standard of living, and contributing to proletarian internationalism.

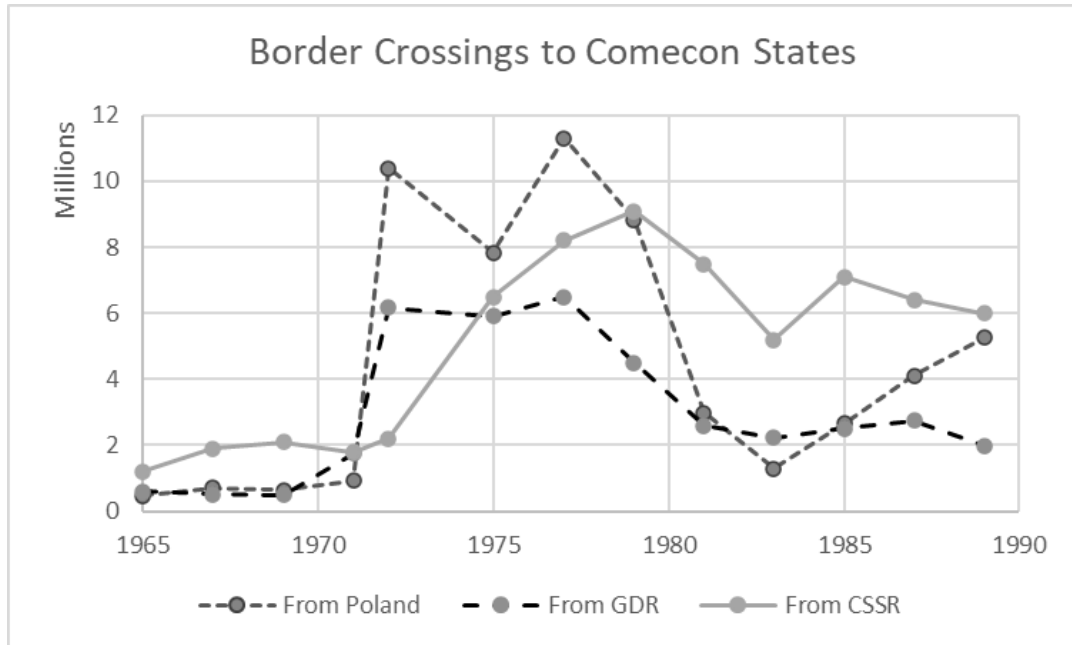
⁴ Robert Skobelski, *Polityka PRL wobec państw socjalistycznych w latach 1956-1970: Współpraca, napięcia, konflikty* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 475-477.

⁵ "Kompleksowy program dalszego pogłębiania i doskonalenia współpracy i rozwoju socjalistycznej integracji gospodarczej krajów członkowskich RWPG," (1971) Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) 290/KT 82/80.

In 1972, the regimes introduced an additional dimension to improve understanding and to create a sense of belonging to the Bloc: open borders. Officially known as “passport-and-visa-free travel,” this liberalization of border policies with the neighboring Central European states became the most distinguishing characteristic of socialist integration. Before 1972, the states of the Polish-Czech-German triangle dared only to rescind visa requirement for travelers and to expand the local-border-traffic in popular vacationing destinations, such as the Bohemian/Saxon Forest and the Karkonosze Mountains/Riesengebirge.⁶ Whereas in 1967, for example, six hundred thousand Poles visited the European socialist states, within the next decade that number surpassed the ten million mark every year.⁷ As the chart below indicates, similar trends followed in all of the three Bloc states. Border guards still checked identity papers, but one did not have to undergo the strenuous, costly, and arbitrary procedure of a passport application, hence making travel abroad possible for anyone. The GDR and Poland even initially agreed to forgo customs duties for travelers, although after several months the inspectors returned to looking through people’s baggage and cars. The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) showed a distanced attitude to opening its borders. Although it welcomed East German citizens as early as January 1972, a similar agreement with Poland did not enter into force until 1977.

⁶ Local border traffic refers to travel within an area restricted by a mutual state agreement, usually within a couple miles from the border. In different regions and at different times, crossing these borders was allowed only to inhabitants of these regions; in other places general tourists were issued a day or two-day pass.

⁷ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 261, 265.



This massive and relatively sudden growth of transnational interactions raises additional questions. How did average citizens, burdened with painful memories of the war and expulsions, as well as with the problems of existing socialism, interact with one another? How did the propaganda of “socialist patriotism and communist internationalism” that the SKF employed work in practice and what effects did it have on integration? Lastly, how does this project of integration enhance our understanding of late socialism, intra-Bloc relations, and the process of postwar reconciliation? It is the thesis of this dissertation that the groundbreaking project for achieving unity within the communist camp produced ambiguous results. On the one hand, it allowed transnational friendships, families, and illicit business dealings to multiply. On the other, the exposure to difference fortified nationalist sentiments and xenophobic behaviors. Integration also fostered close cooperation among the states, but it simultaneously highlighted the discrepancies between the divergent approaches to Marxist-Leninist ideology in the more-liberal Poland contrasted with the hardline demagoguery of the GDR and CSSR. Moreover, the

persistent nationalism fostered by the regimes alongside internationalism eventually tore the Bloc apart.

In the first half of the 1970s, the project developed enthusiastically but rather chaotically. As I will argue, however, a number of ill-thought-out agreements and subsequent policy reversals bred confusion among the states and their citizens. The pursuit both of idealistic goals parallel to pragmatic national interests caused political, economic, and social conflicts. The key to the transformation of relations among the region's states and peoples was the somewhat younger leadership of Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak communist parties who came to power at that time. Erich Honecker, Edward Gierek, and Gustáv Husák noticed that intra-Bloc interactions had hinged only on the propaganda of "friendship," which did little to assure actual cooperation. They wanted to put the slogan into practice.⁸ In private, however, each of the general secretaries sought gains for their individual regime. The GDR and CSSR profited from increased economic transactions and improved their international standing. Poland secured access to foreign markets, and this helped with the shortages at home.⁹ Moreover, all of the regimes scored high points from the citizens for expanding freedom to travel, although Czechoslovakia was hesitant to allow its own population to cross the border freely so soon after the Prague Spring, and the desired mobility to the West was still out of the picture.

In the second half of the decade, the project of new socialist integration faced numerous tests of its strength and viability. The internationalization of organized antisystemic opposition after the Helsinki Accords of 1975 sowed fear among the regimes, but the secret services quickly

⁸ Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations, 1945-1962* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), Dominik Trutkowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock: Die Grenzen der SBZ/DDR zu Polen und der Tschechoslowakei* (Colgone: Böhlau Verlag, 2011).

⁹ Cf. Mark Keck-Szajbel, "Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border" in Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 375-389.

adapted to enhance their cooperation against it. Historical memories proved to be still very much alive for some people and contributed to nationalist sentiments, but for several years communist propaganda kept them in check. More serious was the strain that foreign shoppers, especially Poles, put on the neighboring markets, which all suffered from the delayed effects of the 1970s global recession. The growing imbalance of supply and prices in stores contributed to mass buy-outs, smuggling, and speculation, which upset the locals. As I will argue, however, domestic supply in East Germany and Czechoslovakia was not in any danger, but in turn, the perception of aggressive consumers from abroad threatened the stability of “welfare dictatorships” that promised a good life in return for acquiescence.¹⁰ Even though the states managed to curtail smuggling and speculation by reimposing some customs and financial regulations, they did not do anything to tame rising nationalist sentiments. In fact, the regimes actively supported nationalist tendencies.

Nevertheless, socialist integration could not withstand the challenges of the next decade. Polish strikes in the summer of 1980 that resulted in the creation of the first independent trade union in the Bloc triggered the dissolution of the community by exposing the structural fragility of the communist project. “Solidarity” openly tested the system, pointing out the “workers state’s” neglect of actual workers and the contradictions of real-existing socialism. In an attempt to prevent the spread of counterrevolutionary ideas, the neighbors closed their borders to Poland. Simultaneously, they witnessed the moral and ideological breakdown of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) that highlighted the differences and conflicts between national versions of communism more than ever before. Despite the brief restoration of order in Poland during Martial Law, I argue, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and Czechoslovak Communist

¹⁰ Konrad H. Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 61.

Party (KSČ) lost trust in their ally and, with minor exceptions, excluded it from further integration. Isolated in the Bloc, the Polish regime pursued closer contacts with the West, which signified a stark departure from the policies that animated socialist integration in the aftermath of Prague Spring.

Despite structural shortcomings and unhealthy nationalism, socialist integration was not predestined to fail because the regimes continued to believe in the internationalist ideals. Rather, I contend, changing political and economic conditions in the Bloc overwhelmed the regimes and tipped the balance in favor of national interests at the expense of idealism. For over eight years, the Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak authorities managed to keep it alive in spite of ongoing problems. Additionally, by the 1980s the populations normalized the open borders, transforming the freedom to travel from a privilege to a customary right. By ending it, the regimes would have risked popular discontent. The Polish party-state under Wojciech Jaruzelski, who came to power in 1981, wanted to revive the cooperation and had some success with rekindling international youth exchanges that the hardliners in the GDR and CSSR thought to be innocent and pliable enough to impart “correct” visions of socialism to the adolescents. The endurance of the integration project was also exemplified by the East German and Czechoslovak continued collaboration after 1980. By 1988, however, that camaraderie also fell victim to the progressing economic crisis, social pressures, and the new line of thinking coming from Moscow.

Historiography

This study benefits from and contributes to several historical debates. While I reserve the discussion of particular historiographical arguments to the relevant chapters, broader trends in

the field inform this dissertation. The majority of scholarship has focused on individual countries and the peculiarities of their regimes.¹¹ Undeniably, the histories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany present very different cases due to the specific national circumstances such as the influence of West Germany on the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the initial popular support for the regime in Czechoslovakia, and the relative independence and significance of the Catholic Church in Poland.¹² These in-depth analyses of country conditions and interpretations of their dictatorships enhance our understanding of politics, society, and economics in individual states, but they tend to overlook the influences of the neighboring states. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to employ the methodology of entangled histories (*histoire croisée*) to connect the results of these specific studies to demonstrate how the three countries' developments intertwined and affected each other to provide an intra-regional explanation of the last two decades of communism.¹³

An increasing number of Central European as well as Anglo-American scholars have produced volumes that explore the individual aspects of comparative and transborder histories in postwar East Central Europe. Nevertheless, even the outstanding work by John Connelly about

¹¹ Jürgen Kocka and H-G. Haupt (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

¹² E.g. Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur 1962-1972* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Jeannette Madarasz, *Working in East Germany: Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961-1979* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); Kevin McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia, 1945-1989: A Political and Social History* (New York: Palgrave, 2015); Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield, 2004); Paulina Bren, *Greengrocer and his TV* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jerzy Eisler, *Polskie Miesiące czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008); Paweł Sowiński, *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej: Polityka Władz i Ruch Turystyczny, 1945-1989* (Warsaw: Trio, 2005); Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm* (Warsaw: Trio, 2001); Przemysław Gasztold, *Towarzysze z betonu: Dogmatyzm w PZPR, 1980-1990* (Warsaw: IPN, 2019).

¹³ For a discussion of theoretical approaches to entangled histories see Michael David-Fox, "Entangled Histories in the Age of Extremes," in Michael David Fox and Peter Holquist (eds.), *Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): 1-12, and Jani Marjanen, "Histoire croisée of concepts as transnational history: Undermining methodological nationalism," in Mathias Albert et al. (eds.), *Transnational Political Spaces: Agents-Structures-Encounters* (New York: Campus, 2009): 239-263.

the three countries and their universities under Stalinism is not an example of entangled histories, but rather a comparative study of separate national experiences.¹⁴ A range of inquiries discuss bilateral relations, but rarely consider the Bloc as a larger entity.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the comparisons do yield fruitful results. For example, Katarzyna Stokłosa's macro- and microlevel studies of the Polish-German neighborhood historicizes the issues previously dominated by sociological examinations. Volker Zimmermann's investigation of East German-Czechoslovak relations before 1969 suggests that Marxism-Leninism was indeed an important factor that shaped the foreign policy of socialist regimes, but different interpretations of ideology led to conflicts between these states.¹⁶ Ehrhart Neubert, Tomáš Vilímek, and Piotr Zariczny have focused on the contacts between dissidents,¹⁷ while Tytus Jaskułowski has explored the relationship between the Polish and East German secret services, concluding that by the summer of 1980, the tensions between the two counterparts reached a level that forced the GDR regime to treat Poland as a hostile country.¹⁸ Works by Padraic Kenny, Sheldon Anderson, and Dominik Trutkowski are notable exceptions and exemplify successful multilateral studies.¹⁹

¹⁴ John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹⁵ E.g. Helmut Fehr, *Unabhängige Öffentlichkeit und soziale Bewegungen: Fallstudien über Bürgerbewegungen in Polen und der DDR* (Opladen: Leske&Budrich, 1996), Konstantin Hermann (ed.), *Die DDR und die Solidarność: Ausgewählte Aspekte einer Beziehung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2013).

¹⁶ Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Grenzstädte in Ostmitteleuropa: Guben und Gubin 1945 bis 1995* (Berlin, 2003); Volker Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1969* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010).

¹⁷ Volker Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1969* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010). Tomáš Vilímek, *Solidarita napříč hranicemi: opozice v ČSSR a NDR po roce 1968* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2010); Piotr Zariczny, *Opozycja w NRD i w PRL – wzajemne relacje i oceny* (Gdańsk: ECS, 2013); Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1997).

¹⁸ Tytus Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń, której nie było: MBP NRD wobec MSW, 1974-1990* (Warsaw: WUW, 2014).

¹⁹ Padraic Kenny, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, 2002); ¹⁹ Anderson, *Cold War in the Soviet Bloc*; Trutkowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock*.

Other historians who have crossed borders examine the phenomena of socialist consumption, tourism, and intellectual opposition. Some of them argue that many of the contacts between socialist societies had an unofficial character.²⁰ This interpretation stems predominantly from the analyses of consumerist activities, which explore the illicit exchanges of goods across the Bloc.²¹ Some scholars suggest that the top-down enforcement of socialist internationalism through tourism played a significant role in establishing contacts among East Europeans.²² My contribution lies in an examination of a wider spectrum of contacts that ranges from government policies to everyday encounters between groups and individuals, in order to avoid *a priori* assumptions that the intra-bloc friendships were either “forced” and “dictated,” or essentially oppositional in nature.²³ In fact, I argue that the majority of the interactions between the citizens of Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia were devoid of state control, but the regimes paid considerable attention to discipline and the proper conduct of their nationals abroad.

Socialist tourism has been a popular topic of research that has yielded valuable insights.²⁴ Anne E. Grosuch’s work on Soviet tourists to Europe has enriched my understanding and

²⁰ For example, W. Borodziej, ed. *Bocznymi Drogami* (Warsaw, 2010); Sandrine Kott, Thomas Lindenberger, Marcin Kula, (eds.) *Socjalizm w życiu powszednim. Dyktatura a społeczeństwo w NRD i PRL* (Warsaw: Trio, 2006).

²¹ Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc;” Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi Drzwiami: “Czarny Rynek” w Polsce 1944-1989* (Warsaw, 2013); Adam Havlík, “Od pouliční šmeliny ke ‘strýčkům ze Západu:’ Černý trh pozdního socialismu v česko-německém kontextu,” *Soudobé Dějiny* (3/2014): 340-363; Krisztina Fehervary, “Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2/2009):426–459.

²² Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

²³ Ludwig Mehlhorn, “Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? - Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen” in B. Kerski, et al (eds.), *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft?* (Wrocław: Atut, 2003); Natalia Jackowska, “Spór graniczny NRD-PRL w Zatoce Pomorskiej” *Przegląd Zachodni* (3/2008).

²⁴ Among others see exemplary contributions to Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker (eds.), *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) and W. Bracewell, A. Drace-Francis (eds.), *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writings on Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008).

interpretations of popular mobility in the Soviet Bloc. Gorsuch argues that Soviet “Tourism to Eastern Europe was meant to encourage friendship and mutual understanding between ordinary citizens in the USSR and in Eastern Bloc countries, and to contribute to the Soviet Union’s ideological and economic appropriation and integration of recently acquired territories.”²⁵ While the intuitive thesis of rapprochement through contact requires little explanation, the element of power dynamics can also be applied to the study of interactions among the satellite states. Given the postwar border shifts and forced population movements, many Czechs, Germans, and Poles either did not feel secure on the recently “recovered” territories or continued to nurture the dream of returning to old homelands. Especially with the numerous visits paid by Germans to their former towns and villages in Poland, the consequences of this ambivalent dynamic of friendliness and threat require a deeper analysis.

The concept of socialist integration has received very little attention in the scholarship. The reasons for this gap stem from more interest in other aspects of East European and Soviet communism motivated by the social and cultural turns, which seemed more exciting than economics.²⁶ The majority of communist scholars before 1989 praised the cooperation, although Paweł Bożyk’s 1972 edited volume ventured into critical assessments of its structure.²⁷ In the more recent years, the reasons for the failure of the integration project have been the domain of economists and political scientists, who did not treat regional cooperation in the Eastern Bloc as a serious viable alternative. They argue that the push for the coordination of planned economies

²⁵ Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

²⁶ This is the conclusion reached at the panel chaired by Michael de Groot, “Comecon Revisited: Cooperation and (Dis)integration in the Soviet Bloc” during the 2020 ASEES Conference.

²⁷ Paweł Bożyk (ed.), *Integracja ekonomiczna krajów socjalistycznych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970, 2nd ed. 1974).

was meant to serve the Soviet Union's idea of autarchy, as it was easier to trade with states that had similar economic structures.²⁸ Others focused on individual methods of achieving economic integration, such as Janusz Kaliński in a study of transferable rubles, a fictional currency for Comecon. Kaliński contends that the separation of foreign and internal markets of the socialist states was unsuitable for multilateral trade agreements and that the incoherence of Comecon's institutions was a key factor in its own demise.²⁹ This dissertation concurs that the economic framework of the Bloc was unsuitable for a larger integrationist project, but it rejects the claim that it fostered its collapse.

Historians tend to explain the failure of socialist internationalism from a political perspective. Katja Rosenbaum and Miloš Rezník, for example, show in their volume on Czechoslovak-East German relations that Berlin and Prague were constricted in their mutual actions because they had to coordinate not only with Moscow and Bonn, but also with Warsaw and the other regimes in mind.³⁰ This interpretation, however, seems to suggest that somewhat to the contrary, that political integration was working, if the individual states considered each other's opinions. Dominik Trutkowski argues that fraternal friendship did not characterize cooperation in the region. Rather, the East German regime, mindful that its existence hinged upon the wellbeing of the Bloc, forced its ideas of order upon the other states.³¹ My findings

²⁸ E.g. Jerzy Łazor and Wojciech Morawski, "Autarkic Tendencies in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance" and Janusz Kalinski and Łukasz Dwilewicz "The Transferable Rouble and 'Socialist Integration' – What Kind of Relationship?" in Wilfried Loth and Nicolae Paun (eds.), *Disintegration and integration in East-Central Europe, 1919-post-1989* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2014); Laurien Crump and Simon Godard, "Reassessing Communist International Organizations: A Comparative Analysis of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in relation to their Cold War Competitors," *Contemporary European History* 27 (1/2018): 85-109.

²⁹ Kalinski and Dwilewicz "The Transferable Rouble."

³⁰ Miloš Rezník and Katja Rosenbaum (eds.), *DDR und ČS(S)R 1949-1989: Eine Beziehungsgeschichte am Anfang* (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2012), 17.

³¹ Trutkowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock*.

indicate that this was particularly the case in the 1980s, when the Polish PZPR struggled with stability, but as always, the SED's advice fell on deaf ears. More importantly, I will show that because the socialist community was of high importance to the GDR, they did not abandon integration in the 1980s, but effectively excluded Poland from it in an effort to salvage the project.

Therefore, this dissertation takes up the task of filling in some of the white spots of the historiography that experts in the field point out. First, it rejects the totalitarian school's preoccupation with the Sovietization of Eastern Europe and instead shows that integration was the predominant form of intra-Bloc relations under late socialism.³² Second, by focusing on the entanglements among the Bloc states and societies, it transcends the debate between why the dictatorships lasted so long and why they failed. Rather, it explains how the earlier cooperation made the disintegration of the alliance possible. Third, this dissertation bridges the gap between German and East European history that for the most part remained separate.³³ Unlike comparative studies, I place the GDR firmly in the Eastern Bloc and emphasize its role in and interactions within the socialist community. Lastly, my work contributes to the discussion of nationalism in Central Europe by studying the communists' abuses of national discourse under the guise of socialist patriotism that proved stronger than proletarian internationalism.

Conceptualizing Integration

Among several theoretical concepts that frame this dissertation, socialist patriotism is key. Often used alongside proletarian internationalism, they were intersecting ideas whose roots

³² Patryk Babiracki, "Interfacing the Soviet Bloc: Recent Literature and Paradigms," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2011), 394.

³³ Chad Bryant, "Habsburg History, Eastern European History... Central European History?," *Central European History* 51 (1/2018): 61.

reach back to Karl Marx. Contrary to widespread false understanding, Marx advocated for the strong engagement of workers in the national cause, thereby creating room for a “socialist nationhood.”³⁴ This brand of patriotism solidified as the official line of European communist parties under the direction of the Communist International (Comintern) in the 1930s and 1940s.³⁵ The propagated definition of socialist patriotism, in the words of one Polish party activist, was a “feeling of connection between one nation’s working class struggle with the struggle of the working class from another nation.” In this sense, socialist patriotism was the opposite of bourgeois nationalism, “the conviction of fundamental enmity among nations, postulating national egoism, spreading disrespect toward people of a different nationality... and thus greatly harms national interests.”³⁶ During the consolidation of communist regimes in the immediate postwar period, the concrete goal of squaring national pride with belonging to a socialist community was a justification of the alliance with the Soviet Union, which guaranteed “the security and welfare of our nations.”³⁷ While this aim remained a priority in the 1970s, the propaganda of socialist patriotism accrued a new dimension: the peaceful and friendly integration of the Bloc’s societies during an era of heightened cross-border contacts. The question to be explored is, how did it function in practice?

The dissertation’s analytical framing of socio-cultural entanglements is rooted in multidisciplinary studies of identity, borders, and “otherness.” While historians of nationalism, especially those focused on borderlands, explain the construction of nationhood, their

³⁴ Martin Mevius, “Reappraising Communism and Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers*, 37/4 (2009): 377-400.

³⁵ Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁶ Informacja pracy wewnątrz-partyjnej (1973), AAN, LXXVI/111.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, and Mevius, *Agents*, 6.

conclusions offer insight into the development of national identity in the late twentieth century as well. Although identity was still malleable for Tara Zahra's "nationally indifferent" populations, the Nazi onslaught on Central Europe forced the "amphibian" individuals, in Chad Bryant's terminology, to conform to clear-cut national categories.³⁸ The communists further solidified these distinctions by emphasizing socialist patriotism and coopting national symbols into their cause. Cross-border contacts that intensified in the 1970s pose an interesting case for the study of the development of national identity in East Central Europe. Peter Sahlins's argument about identities forming from "a dialectic of local and national interests" in which "frontier regions are privileged sites for the articulation of national distinctions" is especially important for understanding the implications of contact.³⁹ The interplay of the perceived national interests will come to the fore in the analysis of consumer good supply, security, and demographics that individual actors in this study highlighted.

Working with the assumption that in the age of expanded contact among the socialist neighbors, the frontiers somewhat lost their privileged status and opened more avenues for encounters with foreigners, the culturalist and postcolonial feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's theory is better suited to explaining broader interchange.⁴⁰ Border crossings transcend geographic frontiers and include concepts such as psychological, sexual, spiritual, and literary borderlands, or meeting points, for different groups. She contends that contact inevitably leads to a collision, transfer, and/or attack of the cultural "other," which in turn results in further

³⁸ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 8, 271.

⁴⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

fragmentation within the dominant cultures as new, hybrid subcultures are established.⁴¹ This perspective on cultural transfer suggests a hypothesis for how social integration within the Bloc could proceed. Heightened interactions among citizens of the Bloc, in theory, would lead initially to a cultural clash, from which a synthesized “internationalist” hybrid culture would eventually emerge. This study will test the extent to which this hypothesis had any potential in the late socialist period.

Knowing the results of the socialist integration project, this analysis must also contend with possible explanations for the failure of integration. While contact with others may produce a change in cultural behavior, a part of this study demonstrates that interactions with other nationals also leads to the strengthening of one’s cultural ties with their own group. Edith Sheffer posits that a border is a shared experience through which people may be more complicit in maintaining it or reinterpreting its functioning to the benefit of one group.⁴² The “mental borders” that firmly settled in the populations’ minds as a result of the Nazi occupation and postwar isolation, effectively separated Czechs from Germans, Germans from Poles, and so on. More importantly, during the economically and politically better times in the first years of the 1970s, the open borders in the Bloc enjoyed tremendous support from the citizens. As the social crises and consumer goods shortages resurfaced, however, popular voices shifted their tone toward exclusion and reintroducing border controls.

In order to answer why socialist integration encountered challenges on the individual level, I turn to the findings of social psychologists of identity. Particularly applicable is the interactionist theory of “the struggle for recognition” developed by German philosopher Axel

⁴¹ Ibid., 78.

⁴² Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans made the Iron Curtain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Honneth.⁴³ According to this framework, the level of social integration is determined by recognition from others. This process of obtaining and granting recognition develops in private, legal, and social spheres, but for the purposes of this study, only the latter one deserves particular attention. Honneth posits that the mutual appreciation of subjects is necessary for integration. “Individuals judge each other as a function of the values, practices, and cultural identities represented in the surrounding society. People are evaluated positively to the extent that they are perceived as possessing the qualities and abilities that are required to contribute positively to the common practices valued in the group.”⁴⁴

Fitting into socialist societies was not an easy task because the regimes placed enormous import on homogeneity, which the citizens accepted as common “social capital.”⁴⁵ Hence, inasmuch as Poles, Czechs, and Germans had a lot in common culturally (as opposed to, for example, guest workers from outside Europe), differences in language, behavior, expression of values, and consumption choices set them apart while abroad and oftentimes triggered the perpetuation of old stereotypes. Nonetheless, those individuals who put effort into adapting to the surrounding society, discovering and following its social norms, found themselves recognized as members of that society, effectively crippling the mental borders. This study will analyze the instances of successful and failed recognition of foreigners to pinpoint the changing similarities and differences between the citizens of the Bloc.

⁴³ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Laurent Licata, et al., “Identity, Immigration, and Prejudice in Europe: A Recognition Approach” in S.J. Schwartz et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer Science, 2011): 895-916, 897.

⁴⁵ Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, Patrice Poutrus, “Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: Zur Einführung“ in Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, Patrice Poutrus (eds.) *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2003): 9-21, 13. On social capital see Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

The analysis of the political and social dimensions takes as its foundation the concepts of socialist consumption, regime legitimacy, and nationalism. The new course that emerged in the 1960s, with its focus on the citizens' material needs as an incentive for higher productivity, might have been a "last-ditch attempt" at salvaging the regimes' legitimacy, as some interpreters argue, but in essence it was a reform that aimed at fitting Leninist thought to the existing reality of socialism.⁴⁶ Communist legitimacy has been naturally linked to economics because Marxist theory is centered around materialism and the class struggle over control of the means and fruits of production. Vladimir Lenin, who saw the theory as an instrument of political revolution, argued that the fight for the proletariat's economic interests could succeed only by instilling consciousness in the masses. The party, therefore, assumed the vital role as the vanguard of the revolution as well as the source of all truths and a compass for future progress.⁴⁷ At the time of the 1917 revolutions in Russia, ideology and the party's authority sufficed to obtain popular agreement to rule because Marxism was a religiously redemptive force in the eyes of the working class.⁴⁸ With the economy strained by years of the Civil War, however, Lenin's expedient introduction of the pro-market New Economic Policy (1921-1928) meant to stabilize the young regime and to secure continued support. For other doctrinaires like Stalin, though, the NEP allowed for "rightist deviations" that resulted in the stalling of Soviet industrialization and revolutionary momentum.

⁴⁶ Such interpretations betraying hindsight is put forth, e.g. by Kai W. Müller, "Die Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker: Anspruch, Realität, Scheitern" *Journal on European History of Law* 1 (2010): 32-40, and Mark Allinson, "More from Less: Ideological Gambling with the Unity of Economic and Social Policy in Honecker's GDR" *Central European History* 45 (1/2012): 102-127.

⁴⁷ Kołakowski, *Main Currents*, 661-669.

⁴⁸ Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 100.

Whether Joseph Stalin was a logical outcome or an aberration of Leninism is the subject of many debates, but undeniable is the fact that the brutality of his rule, as well as the focus on the leader's charisma, transformed the legitimizing mechanisms of the Soviet system, robbing it off its idealistic foundations.⁴⁹ Theory did not determine action anymore, but rather, the doctrine justified the state's actions.⁵⁰ As the first Soviet five-year plan shifted the economy's focus to heavy industry and collectivization, commodities of everyday use disappeared from the store shelves. While political leaders as well as ordinary people initially believed that these shortages were a temporary phenomenon linked to the transition from a market to a planned economy, they gradually realized that scarcity was there to stay.⁵¹ People's desires for consumer goods, not extravagant but even basic ones, were chastised by militant communists as "bourgeois."⁵² In its stead, making sacrifices was the proper "proletarian" virtue, delaying immediate and personal gratification for the promise of a distant utopia. For Stalin, communism's advance could continue only through intensified and more violent class struggle, which rendered coercion, fear, and propaganda, especially after the victory over Nazism, the principal modes of assuring compliance and loyalty.

In Central Europe, the initial legitimization of communist regimes followed the Soviet precedents, including the embrace of nationalism.⁵³ When the Red Army replaced the Nazis as

⁴⁹ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 162-63.

⁵⁰ Kołakowski, *Main Currents*, 818,791.

⁵¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12-13.

⁵² E.g. Karen Kettering, "Ever More Cosy and Comfortable': Stalinism and the Soviet Domestic Interior, 1928-1938" *Journal of Design History* 10 (2/1997): 119-135.

⁵³ For a discussion of Stalin's relationship with nationalism see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

occupiers, local communists relied on Soviet support and intimidation, but in Czechoslovakia or Germany, where the interwar communist parties enjoyed some popularity, the nascent postwar regimes found it possible to make alliances with other political parties and the population at large.⁵⁴ Faced with existing political culture and a collective identity, however, the parties adopted a self-portrayal as continuators of national traditions. Despite their peculiarities, Czech, Slovak, German, and Polish communists emphasized that their authority to rule emanated from the general will of “their” people.⁵⁵ By doing so, they harnessed the magical power of national ideology. It came in particularly useful in the 1970s and 80s, as the turn toward the well-being of the nationals was a response to the destabilizing effects of the increasing openness to the West and the reawakening of civil society.⁵⁶ Therefore, propaganda slogans that promised abundance consciously emphasized the nation as the object of the party’s care. As this dissertation will show, the “proletarians of the world” remained lodged in their national context, even if their production and consumption capabilities became internationalized.

At last, the concept of integration requires an explanation. Until the late 1960s, the official term for Comecon activities was cooperation. “Integration” was always avoided because of its connotations of monopolistic capitalist collusion. However, the Bloc’s common economic

⁵⁴ Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2015), 5.

⁵⁵ Jan C. Behrends, “The Stalinist *volonté générale*: Legitimizing Communist Statehood (1935–1952): A Comparative Perspective on the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany” *East Central Europe* 40/1-2 (2013): 37-73. See also by the same author, “Nation and Empire: Dilemmas of Legitimacy during Stalinism in Poland (1941–1956)” *Nationalities Papers* 37/4 (2009): 443-466. For a sustained discussion of the uses of nationalist rhetoric by communist regimes see Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm.*, Michal Kopeček, “Čeští komunističtí intelektuálové a „národní cesta k socialismu”” *Soudobé Dějiny* 23 (1-2/2016): 77-117, and Jan Palmowski, *Inventing A Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁶ Tomáš Vilímek, “Nástroj mocenské legitimizace i opatrovnictví: Sociální politika a její uplatnění v důchodovém zabezpečení v Československu a NDR (1970–1989)” *Soudobé Dějiny* 20 (1-2/2013): 89-119.

initiatives consciously accelerated in 1967 as a response to the progressing development of the European Economic Community in the West and its potential enlargement with the UK, Ireland, and Denmark resubmitting their accession applications.⁵⁷ Only with the adoption of Comecon's *Comprehensive Program* in 1971 were their mutual undertakings officially termed "integration." Verbatim, integration meant the equalization of "differences in relative scarcities of goods and services between states through the deliberate elimination of barriers to trade and other forms of interaction."⁵⁸ Those other forms of interactions, therefore, allow me to interpret the phenomena of open borders, labor exports, and heightened political cooperation as the new model of socialist integration. Speaking for the broad outreach of the official aims are press publications. Search results for "sozialistisch* Integration" in the database of the official SED organ *Neues Deutschland* places the first mention of the term precisely in 1968.⁵⁹ The frequency of usage increased steadily, reaching 538 counts in 1973, then diminishing to only 45 uses in 1977. Similar trends appear to the readers of the Polish and Czechoslovak equivalents, *Trybuna Ludu* and *Rudé právo*, signaling that the early 1970s was the period during which the communist states intensified intra-Bloc cooperation until the multifarious challenges in the second half of the decade proved too large and difficult to be overcome, and it all finally fell apart by 1989.

Pursuing the methods of the new political and social history, this dissertation analyzes a variety of sources of Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak provenance. In addition to the national and local press, the bulk of the materials comes from the party-state documents found at

⁵⁷ Józef Sołdaczuk, "Integracja czynnikiem pogłębienia współpracy krajów RWPG" in Paweł Bożyk (ed.), *Integracja ekonomiczna krajów socjalistycznych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970, 2nd ed. 1974), 25-28.

⁵⁸ "Kompleksowy program dalszego pogłębienia i doskonalenia współpracy i rozwoju socjalistycznej integracji gospodarczej krajów członkowskich RWPG," (1971), AAN, 290/KT 82/80.

⁵⁹ The digitized database of East German press can be found on the website of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/index.php?id=suchergebnisse>.

the Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw, the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, and the Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí in Prague. These sources enable me not only to determine the political aims and debates about integration and mutual perceptions, but also to analyze the situation on the ground, as they include reports from Elementary Party Organizations, specific ministries and institutions, as well as citizens' petitions and complaints. Security service materials from the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Stasi Unterlagen Archiv, and Archiv bezpečnostních složek constitute another significant underpinning of this study. As these reports, analyses, and denunciations tend to emphasize conflict and illegality, their critical reading helps to reconstruct people's conduct abroad, their interactions with foreigners, and their dealings with the state apparatus. Moreover, recognizing what the police deemed problematic at any given point is crucial for understanding the progress of integration from a novelty to normalized to a burden.

In order to grasp a fuller picture of socialist integration, I also analyze documents not produced by the central power organs. Toward that end, my findings in regional archives in Potsdam, Dresden, Altenburg, Mělník, and Ústí nad Labem yielded numerous insights into the international activities of local administrations, factories, and social organizations such the youth movements FDJ and SSM. In Warsaw, the Scouting Organization's repository at Muzeum Harcerstwa similarly provided me with diaries, letters, and reports that betray the ambiguous nature of cross-border interactions. The most unadulterated accounts of life under state socialism appeared in my research at the Ośrodek Karta in Warsaw, which houses unpublished diaries submitted for archivization after 1989, and the Museum für Kommunikation in Berlin that collects private letters sent to and from East Germany. Although anecdotal, I use these ego-documents to exemplify the attitudes that select individuals had toward the neighbors and the lessons that they had learned from living through socialist integration.

Organization

This dissertation proceeds in three chronological sections that reflect on the main themes of the argument. Part I begins with an exploration of political steps toward the new socialist integration and the initial difficulties the states faced in implementing the innovative policies. Chapter 2 then looks at people's experiences with crossing the open borders and their impressions of the abroad. It shows the ambiguous consequences of interactions that were fueled by the conflicting ideas of socialist patriotism and internationalism. Chapter 3 introduces the socialist guest workers, Poles who worked in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. It focuses on the economic and political goals behind the "worker exchanges," relations on the factory floor, and the clash between "fraternal help" and national interests. Part II investigates the challenges to socialist integration that arose in the second half of the 1970s. It starts with a discussion of further efforts at Bloc cooperation when it was losing its initial momentum. These attempts, however, were dampened by the rise of opposition, political fatigue, and upheavals in Poland that ultimately led to the suspension of open borders in 1980. Chapter 5 turns to transnational consumption as a serious test for the viability of integration to show that the shortage societies valued access to goods more than they did internationalist friendship. Chapter 6 then revisits the guest workers, this time focusing on their experiences living abroad, exploring their entanglements with locals to argue that the Polish authorities consciously worked to prevent integration.

Part III concerns itself with the developments in the 1980s and beyond. It opens with an analysis of international youth exchanges, which predated the closure of the borders but intensified after 1983. It shows that the regimes placed high hopes in the next generation to carry the socialist ideas and the integration project into the future, while simultaneously amplifying

national sentiments among the children. Chapter 8 explains the political disintegration by assessing intra-Bloc relations after Solidarity. Despite the general agreement that Bloc unity must be maintained, the GDR and CSSR excluded Poland from any further major interactions, and this helped the biggest neighbor to start on its own path. Chapter 9 serves as an epilogue that explores the legacy of socialist integration after 1989. It demonstrates how the newly reconstituted democratic and capitalist countries all turned to the West, abandoning each other for several years. Especially after the absorption of East Germany into the Federal Republic, not much has remained from the communist efforts at creating intraregional integration except for national prejudices, catch-up economics, and unresolved historical issues. Cooperation returned only with their full participation in the European Union in the 2000s, but as the most recent events show, that cooperation hinges on the shared nationalist and populist sentiments of the leading politicians and the societies still have to get to know each other better.

PART I
IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATION (1969-1976)



Worker Brigade at Tušimice celebrating International Friendship, 1974.
(Source: Bundesarchiv Berlin, DY 24/19249)

CHAPTER 1 – TOWARD NEW INTEGRATION

While the Polish and East German representatives of the various party-state institutions met in Warsaw in early November 1971 to discuss bilateral cooperation, a trade attaché at the GDR Embassy leaked some of the debate's content to his Czechoslovak counterpart. Besides the details of mutual industrial, technological, and agricultural coordination, the German diplomat remarked on a new border agreement that was under negotiation. "With this deal all obstacles to travel in both directions [GDR-Poland] are to be eliminated."¹ Although the Czechoslovaks were aware that East Germany planned some form of liberalization of its border policy, the actual extent of it surprised them. The agreement signed on 25 November 1971 introduced "passport-and-visa-free" mobility between both states and stipulated that a personal identification card was sufficient to travel and to remain in the other state for up to three months.² It took effect on 1 January 1972, and two weeks later a similar law opened the border between East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

"Open borders" within the Socialist Bloc may sound like a misnomer to many, but the developments of the early 1970s, compared to previous years, did enable a relatively uninhibited mobility. Exhibiting a nationalist, or what Ruben Zaiotti terms "Westphalian" culture of border control, the communist dictatorships in the postwar period relied on tight security around their

¹ Václav Dvořák, Informace ze setkání s ekonomickým radou ZÚ NDR ve Varšavě s. Ebersbachem, 8 November 1971, AMZV, TO-T 1970-74, NDR k.8.

² Agreement between the Government of the Peoples Republic of Poland and the Government of the German Democratic Republic about Mutual Travels of the Citizens of both States, Warsaw, 25 November, 1971. In *Dziennik Ustaw* [Journal of Law], 1971, vol. 35 no. 306. Accessed <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/1971/s/35/306/1>.

frontiers as a means of protecting their power that had been achieved as the result of a Marxist revolution against enemies from outside.³ Additionally, prohibitive exit policies in these regimes ensured that workers remained in their countries against their will to build communism, with the erection of the Berlin Wall as the most visible symbol of sealed borders. Traditionally, the states, each to a different degree, were not willing to grant their citizens the right to leave by issuing passports, even when these were not valid for all countries.

To circumvent that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, new types of documents appeared that enabled travel within the socialist camp.⁴ Since 1956, the countries of the Polish-Czech-German triangle stopped requiring visas for travel and expanded the local-border-traffic in select regions.⁵ The idea of using just a domestic personal ID (*Personalausweis*, *dowód osobisty*, *občanský průkaz*), obligatorily carried by every adult citizen, to cross international frontiers was, therefore, revolutionary for the Soviet Bloc. It indicated not only a changing “border culture,” but also the evolving character of socialist state dictatorships.⁶

The ultimate goal of the new policies was to create an open-border zone in the Socialist Bloc, in which citizens of the participating countries had the freedom of movement for touristic purposes with the least amount of bureaucracy involved as possible. Local police had the task of validating the ID cards for travel solely with a stamp and without any prolonged waiting. In defiance of the rigid Comecon currency provisions, “the national banks of both countries were to

³ Ruben Zaiotti, *Cultures of Border Control: Schengen and the Evolution of European Frontiers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁴ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 26.

⁵ Local border traffic refers to travel within an area restricted by mutual state agreement, usually within a couple miles from the border. In different regions and at different times crossing these borders was allowed only to inhabitants of these regions; in other places general tourists were issued a day or two-day pass.

⁶ Zaiotti, *Cultures*, passim.

exchange great amounts of money and the ability to purchase goods and souvenirs was not to be limited.”⁷ It appears, therefore, that the regimes willingly gave up some of their power. The unregulated crossing of borders constrained their supervision of the citizens as well as their control over the flow of financial assets and goods. With this realization in mind, why did the communists in Warsaw and East Berlin decide to pursue this project? How did they implement it? Lastly, what obstacles did they face?

This chapter analyzes the conditions under which the new model of socialist integration developed, its stated and ulterior goals, as well as the methods for putting it into practice. The most ambitious and visible element of integration was the opening of borders among these Bloc countries, which overshadowed the simultaneous increase in cultural exchange, bilateral trade, and streamlining of some legal practices. I argue that the project aimed to bind East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia with inseparable economic, political, and social ties as a response to foreign policy pressures and internal Bloc politics. The pioneers of this process, Erich Honecker and Edward Gierek, wished to realize the slogan of “proletarian internationalism” in practice, but they did not consider the situation fully. They had to work within the constraints of a planned economy and the established Comecon system, which allowed for decentralized cooperation but also restricted financial exchanges. Therefore, the not-thought-through decisions to convert grand concepts into practice resulted in an amalgam of contradictory policies. Makeshift agreements and rapidly-changing regulations that were meant to correct earlier errors bred chaos and confusion among the bureaucrats who handled the integration. Furthermore, the authorities in Prague enthusiastically embraced the heightened economic cooperation, but proceeded very carefully with regard to the open borders, which for the most part sheltered them from the

⁷ Agreement between the Government of the Peoples Republic of Poland and the Government of the German Democratic Republic about Mutual Travels of the Citizens of both States, Warsaw, 25 November, 1971, op.cit.

consequences of the rushed policies. It becomes apparent, therefore, that while the state administrations shared the objectives for Bloc unity, they disagreed on how to realize them.

Prelude to Integration

After a relatively peaceful decade since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, new challenges to the communist Bloc emerged in the restive year of 1968. The freshly-minted First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), Alexander Dubček, introduced sweeping changes to the orthodoxy of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship, which was met with enormous popular support.⁸ Despite assurances of loyalty to the Soviet Union, Dubček argued for “unity in diversity” within the Eastern Bloc, a codename for more independent policymaking.⁹ Moscow lost trust in the goodwill of “socialism with human face” after it relaxed censorship and initiated the removal of pro-Soviet party functionaries and military officers. Equally concerning was the Foreign Minister Jiří Hájek’s suggestion to stabilize relations with the Federal Republic by granting it official recognition. In East Berlin, Walter Ulbricht worried that Czechoslovakia might seek rapprochement with West Germany, undermining the East German negotiating position vis-à-vis Bonn. Support and admiration for Prague Spring crossed borders and took hold in Poland as well, which became engulfed in widespread student protests in March of the same year. One of the most prevalent slogans of the protesters became “Poland awaits its own Dubček” (*Polska czeka na swego Dubczeka*) and the regime of Władysław

⁸ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹ Kevin McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia, 1945-1989: A Political and Social History* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 138-144.

Gomułka realized that the “Czechoslovak bacillus” was spreading north.¹⁰ As a result, the Polish Gensek constituted himself as one of the most vocal supporters of a military intervention in the CSSR.¹¹

The subsequent Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the Brezhnev Doctrine meant to serve as an outward demonstration of unity among the Bloc countries, but internally it revealed multiple fractures. Most notably, Romania denounced the attack and the Czechs and Slovaks began to hold a grudge against the other “socialist brethren.” The KSČ was also divided internally, which prompted the conservative, firm, pro-Moscow Gustáv Husák to stage a coup and to replace Dubček as the head of the Party in April 1969.¹² At that point, Gomułka, Ulbricht, and Leonid Brezhnev understood that one way of preventing any country from escaping the Bloc was through more thorough integration of the socialist community.¹³

The integration was challenging, however, because each state pursued independent roads to socialism. Poland’s Gomułka, a national-communist par excellence, capitalized on the post-Stalinist thaw, the weakened position of the Soviet Union in the wake of the Sino-Soviet Split, and the turbulences of the Hungarian Uprising to pursue Polish political interests.¹⁴ While his halting of forced collectivization, concessions to the Catholic Church, and antisemitic purges in

¹⁰ Jerzy Eisler, “Wpływ praskiej wiosny na polski Marzec ’68” in Łukasz Kamiński (ed.), *Wokół Praskiej Wiosny: Polska i Czechosłowacja w 1968 roku* (Warsaw: IPN, 2004): 24-31.

¹¹ Robert Skobelski, *Polityka PRL wobec państw socjalistycznych w latach 1956-1970: Współpraca, napięcia, konflikty* (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 10-11.

¹² McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia*, 149-150.

¹³ Volker Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1969* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010), 549.

¹⁴ Skobelski, *Polityka PRL*, 10-11.

1968 might have solidified Gomułka's popular acceptance, the economic downturn, resulting price increases, and the murder of protesters on the Baltic coast in December 1970 led to his rapid ouster and replacement by the more socially- and internationally-minded Edward Gierek.¹⁵ In East Germany, Ulbricht's economic reforms of the 1960s, successful thanks to the investments in the chemical and electronics sector, pushed the German leader to seek more political independence as well, especially on the question of East-West German relations.¹⁶ The relative liberalization and distancing from the Soviet Union spurred resistance from the conservative circles of the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED), which brought Erich Honecker to power in 1971 with the Kremlin's blessing.¹⁷

The fresh set of leaders in the three countries still faced a major structural obstacle in the form of a rigid economic and financial system. Economic cooperation of the socialist states had been an ongoing process since the founding of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) in 1949. The basic principle of economic integration required participating countries to streamline their technical standards, to pool together resources, and to divide specific production tasks in order to manufacture goods more efficiently. The lower reliance on imports from outside the Bloc would translate into budgetary savings, which in turn could be invested in the development of new industries and, eventually, the export of the manufactured goods outside the region for profit. It appears, therefore, that socialist economic integration was grounded in capitalist market principles. Combining them with planned economy mechanisms, however,

¹⁵ Jerzy Eisler, *Polskie Miesiące czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), 28-37.

¹⁶ Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 119-132.

¹⁷ Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962-1972* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997).

inhibited any successful cooperation through a myriad of ineffective, bureaucratic, and at times absurd rules and regulations.

In the late 1960s, reformers within Comecon began to point out the systemic problems. One of the critics posited that “as a result of the forced industrialization in the years 1950-1960,” Soviet Bloc countries possessed a basic economic infrastructure for production, but they had a deficient financial organization.¹⁸ Integration required the convergence of economic policies and structures among different countries in order to establish successful cooperation. Since the mid-1950s, Comecon countries adjusted their five-year-plans to follow the same planning schedule, which was supposed to help with the coordination of trade and production. Nonetheless, practice proved to be more difficult than theory, mostly because there was no common accounting instrument between member states. Each countries’ internal prices did not reflect the real costs of production due to subsidies.¹⁹ Throughout the region, therefore, the price differential was so significant that smuggling and trading everyday-products across borders became a profitable but illegal business. Without the ability to compare costs and prices against each other easily, cooperating enterprises could not hold each other accountable for their productivity, which rendered international deals ineffective. Moreover, Comecon rejected supranational institutions regulating trade, citing protection of the members’ sovereignty as the reason. As a result, the Bloc states rarely entered into multilateral agreements. Instead, planning committees and ministries of foreign trade worked hard to balance trade accounts bilaterally.

The problem of balancing accounts will prove to be one of the largest obstacles to integration, especially during the era of open borders. No state held a reserve of another socialist

¹⁸ Söldaczuk, “Integracja,” 25-28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

country's money and no private individual could legally be in possession of foreign currency. Hence, in order to provide its citizens with the means for travel, East Germany, for example, had to buy Czechoslovak *koruny* (kčs) in bulk from Prague before exchanging it for the travelers' marks. The amount of foreign money purchased depended on the planning committees' estimates of how many people were expected to travel in a given year. Swapping an equal amount of marks for koruny or the Polish *złoty* (zł) was impractical because the popularity of destinations varied.²⁰ A lower number of Czechs and Slovaks going to the GDR compared to East Germans visiting Czechoslovakia resulted in a negative balance for East Germany, which had to be paid off with additional consumer or industrial products to Czechoslovakia. This put an additional burden on the German plan, which had to reallocate resources that might not have been there in the first place. When demand surpassed supply, the funds devoted to socialist exchange were became a "burden on the economy" and the states began to limit the amounts an individual could exchange.²¹ The result of these manipulations was the rise of the black market for socialist currencies that persisted throughout the two decades.

A related issue that made the Comecon system incoherent was the role of money in socialism. In his study of the East German economy, Johnathan Zatlin explained the convoluted way through which "the partial elimination of money only aggravated existing asymmetries between supply and demand, unleashing increasingly bitter distributional conflicts that

²⁰ This is how I explain the state's preoccupation with border crossing statistics. In order to make the planning more accurate, the border guards kept track of the traffic flow. However, each side counted people differently (e.g. as family unit, children not included), which led to discrepancies in the recorded numbers of travelers, which in turn led to contested claims over the total volume of traffic. See Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) BU 1596/57, 4.

²¹ The quote comes from Erich Mielke, Politisch-operativ beachtenswerte Probleme im Zusammenhang mit der weiteren Entwicklung des Tourismus mit den sozialistischen Ländern, 6 January 1988, BStU, MfS RS 670, 33. For examples of account balancing with regard to tourism see Ministerrat der DDR, Entwurf einer Einschätzung über die Entwicklung des pass- und visafreien Reiseverkehrs, March 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/10610.

eventually discredited central planning.”²² Understood from the Marxist point of view, “money” was a capitalist manifestation of oppression that did not have a place in a communist state. It served mostly as an accounting unit because a national currency’s buying power depended more on the availability of goods rather than on the customer’s ability to pay a price. Pure planning and the central allocation of resources without strict monetary constraints failed to hold producers responsible for their actions. In effect, this situation diminished productivity rates due to negligence and channeled state-owned resources or ready-made products onto the black market.²³ The draining of resources caused further shortages, propelling a vicious cycle. An alternative that developed was the usage of “hard” or convertible currency, desired by the state apparatus to make purchases in the West and by everyday people to obtain hard-to-get products illegally or to travel internationally. As the dependence on the US dollar and West German mark grew, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, a running joke in Poland claimed that elementary school children learned that there are two types of money: the real and the Polish.²⁴

The inconvertibility of socialist currencies significantly slowed down integration. National banks and bilateral trade agreements with Comecon states arbitrarily set different exchange rates for one currency, which did not reflect the currency’s real value measured by its buying power either domestically or internationally.²⁵ For example, in the early 1970s the bank exchange rate of Polish złoty vis-à-vis the Soviet ruble was artificially fixed at one ruble to 4.44 zł. This exchange rate functioned for most centrally-planned negotiations, but individual citizens

²² Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

²³ Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami: “Czarny rynek” w Polsce, 1944-1989* (Warsaw: ABC, 2015), 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

²⁵ Söldaczuk, “Integracja,” 40.

paid 15.30 zł for each ruble, a rate that corresponded more closely to the buying power of the ruble in commodity and service transactions.²⁶ Such a system of administered prices made international trade chaotic and complicated. Sellers could not rely on the monetary value of goods, which could be different abroad than at home, to make other purchases abroad in exchange for that money. Hence, accommodating these differences forced the CMEA countries to use world market (capitalist) prices for goods traded within Comecon, and to convert these prices at a stable rate to the artificial currency introduced in 1964 for accounting purposes, the transferable ruble. Administered by the International Bank for Economic Cooperation headquartered in Moscow, the transferable ruble provided each of the socialist countries with a means to balance accounts in bilateral trade and offered “credits” to cover temporary debts in accounts between two states if they arose.

The member states recognized the problems of such complexity and inconsistency of economic mechanisms but failed to address them effectively throughout the existence of Comecon. A major stepping-stone toward reform was the *Comprehensive Program for Socialist Economic Cooperation* adopted at the XXV Session of CMEA in late July 1971 in Bucharest.²⁷ For the first time in Comecon’s history, the Comprehensive Program provided detailed outlines for socialist integration in areas such as energy, chemical, steel, and machinery production, foreign trade, technological development, farming, transport, as well as coordinated planning. What made economic cooperation easier, in theory at least, was the Program’s focus on the decentralization of international projects. Toward that end, individual institutions, such as central

²⁶ Stanisław Rączkowski, “Pieniądz międzynarodowy krajów socjalistycznych” in Paweł Bożyk (ed.), *Integracja ekonomiczna krajów socjalistycznych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970, 2nd ed. 1974), 209.

²⁷ “Kompleksowy program dalszego pogłębiania i doskonalenia współpracy i rozwoju socjalistycznej integracji gospodarczej krajów członkowskich RWPG,” (1971) Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) 290/KT 82/80.

or local administrative committees, manufacturing enterprises, or other state-funded organizations could negotiate and carry out agreements with their Bloc partners. Such cooperation, however, was based within the framework of a nationally set five-year-plan and with the blessing of the Central Committees of the involved countries.²⁸

It was this liberalization of policy that contributed to the growing numbers of contacts, both economic as well as social, among Socialist Bloc denizens in the next two decades. An example of this cooperation was the joint Polish-East German cotton mill “Friendship” in Zawiercie, southern Poland.²⁹ Planning for its establishment began in 1972 and reflected the progressive achievements of the Program was systemic support for joint projects among member states, through which participating members invested in a national manufacturer elsewhere by providing equipment, resources, or labor to be repaid with the ready-made products. Toward the construction of the Zawiercie factory, the GDR and Poland contributed some fifty-five and fifteen million rubles respectively. East Germany delivered the state-of-the-art weaving and spinning machinery in form of credit that amounted to almost thirty million marks and Poland provided 3,200 laborers to operate it.³⁰ Raw materials would also come from Poland. Eventually, the investments would be paid off with ready-made products and any profits earned thereafter would be split equally. Cotton mill “Friendship” became operational in 1975.

While the Comprehensive Program offered solutions to some of the problems of socialist integration, it did not reduce much of the system’s complexity. The transfer ruble made account

²⁸ Paweł Bożyk, “Kompleksowy program integracji socjalistycznej” in Paweł Bożyk (ed.), *Integracja ekonomiczna krajów socjalistycznych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970, 2nd ed. 1974), 54.

²⁹ Eugeniusz Lubach, *Monografia Zawiercia* (Zawiercie: TMZZ, 2003), 234-235. In 1993, Polish government bought German shares and privatized the enterprise, which remained operational until the company announced insolvency on 29 October 2008. <http://www.pzsa.com.pl/>.

³⁰ Information zur Bereitstellung von Fonds in der Sicherung der Baumwolle Spinnerei “Freundschaft” in der VRP, 25 March 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/19919.

balancing clearer, but at the same it time created the need for additional calculations and negotiations of exchange rates. The coordination of national plans with other Comecon members further complicated the system of prognosis and resource allocation. The Program also did not specify measures for accountability of the investor and investment countries in joint projects. As one East German official confided to his Czech counterpart, by May 1974 the GDR and Poland did not succeed in concluding a common investment agreement after *Zawiercie* because “in the GDR it was not theoretically clear” how to secure product deliveries to the investor country after the principal credit amount had been paid off.³¹

Achieving economic integration in the Socialist Bloc along the official lines, therefore, proved to be challenging and ineffective as the guidelines either lacked precision or, on the contrary, drowned in complexity. Nonetheless, all members, besides Romania, exhibited significant efforts in the late 1960s to transform the political and military Bloc into a closer and more profitable union. Recognizing the limits of Comecon as a binding force, visionaries in East Germany and Poland transcended materialist thinking to push the Bloc in a new integrational direction, albeit without a realistic understanding of the financial considerations, which remained the key factor that influenced the regulations of contact and exchange within the socialist community.

New Integration

In the context of accelerating sympathy among the Soviet Bloc countries toward increased cooperation, as well as the global and domestic pressures for a new policy course, individual communist leaders sought novel methods for realizing socialist integration. The

³¹ Jan Mušal, *Záznam z rozhovoru*, 29 May 1974, Archív Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), TO-T 1970-74, Polsko k.7.

citizens of the different Bloc states often read in the daily press about “economic integration in action,” but apart from the few, the ordinary Poles, Czechs, or East Germans experienced little of that activity.³² In order to rectify this situation, personal contacts with the socialist abroad became the new focus. Heightened economic entanglements as outlined by Comecon’s Comprehensive Program inevitably contributed to an increased dialogue. Travel also offered the possibility to explore the neighboring countries. In Poland, for example, private getaways to socialist nations grew exponentially between 1956-1971 by an average of 20 percent a year to reach some 800,000 people traveling to the “fraternal abroad” in 1971.³³ Similar tendencies in East Germany prompted the state leadership to capitalize on the popular interest in visiting other states, eventually leading to a “revolution” in interchange among socialist societies.³⁴ Open borders, as the party functionaries frequently referred to it, became the main pillar of the new integration for the western Bloc countries in the 1970s.³⁵

The open border project was a personal idea of the SED’s First Secretary, Erich Honecker. It cunningly combined two interrelated goals, which were clear to the socialist community’s insiders. The Czechoslovak ambassador to Poland, František Penc, characterized the East German forays into opening the border with Poland first as “a certain counterbalance to the expected wave of West German visitors to the GDR.” He based his prognosis on the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin of 3 September 1971, which reestablished ties and normalized

³² Quote from Jan Legut, “Pod znakiem integracji” *Trybuna Ludu*, 14 February 1972, 5. It serves as an example of similar formulations appearing numerous in Polish, as well as East German and Czechoslovak press.

³³ Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*, 261.

³⁴ Krystyna Kostrzewa, “Na urlop za granicę” *Trybuna Ludu*, 5 January 1972, 3.

³⁵ E.g. Zollinspekteur Stauch in BStU, MfS RS 80, 064-66, and the lead article in a Polish youth biweekly, *Świat Młodych*, 4.2.1972 Nr. 10.

communication between the two parts of the city.³⁶ Second, Penc writes, the recent deal with Poland served as a way of establishing contacts between citizens of socialist states, connected to the idea of economic integration. The fact that the Czech diplomat positioned the intra-German motivations first in his report may be coincidental, but given East Germany's longstanding policy of demarcation (*Abgrenzung*) from the Federal Republic, it is possible to assume somewhat cynically that the overtures to the Bloc partners were a response to the normalizing of relations with West Germany under its new *Ostpolitik*.³⁷ Moreover, intense East German diplomatic maneuvering was linked to the ongoing campaign for accepting the GDR into the United Nations, and what could be a better way to signal belonging to the international community than by showing the masses of citizens intermingling with other societies. As Penc concluded, the open-border agreement drew the attention of the Bloc states, which were supportive of growing tourism but critical of the generous customs and currency exchange provisions in the deal.

The leaders in East Berlin also foresaw domestic benefits of the innovative travel policy. The easing of travel restrictions portrayed the SED First Secretary as more liberal, playing well into the framework of the “normalization” of life in the Bloc. In his memoirs, the PZPR's Gensek, Edward Gierek, remembered that the East German leader was aware of social pressures for liberalization, “especially the necessity to extend the liberty of foreign travel.”³⁸ This necessity arose from popular desires to travel to West Germany, which at that point was possible

³⁶ František Penc, Informaciá o problematike otvorenia hraníc PĽR-NDR, 6 December 1971, AMZV, TO-T 1970-74, Polsko k.1.

³⁷ Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Polen und die deutsche Ostpolitik 1945-1990* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2011), 343, and Wanda Jarzábek, *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa wobec polityki wschodniej Republiki Federalnej Niemiec w latach 1966-1976* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2011), 271.

³⁸ Edward Gierek, *Smak życia: pamiętniki* (Warsaw: BGW, 1993), 179.

only to a select few as well as older, retired people. Hence, Honecker asked his neighbors for help in opening the East German borders with socialist states. With the growing popularity of leisure, the German Baltic shore was “getting too small for domestic tourists and hence the Polish coast will be attractive to our [GDR] tourists,” one German diplomat remarked.³⁹ What to some people on the eastern banks of the Oder-Neisse might have sounded like a reinvigorated German expansionism, to the decision makers in Warsaw, Honecker’s idea sounded very exciting.

The Polish communists were eager to liberalize travel within the Bloc, as part of a larger integrationist impetus. The influence of the new and younger set of Party leaders with Gierek at the helm transformed Poland from a closed country to a more open one. Gierek, a prewar émigré to France and Belgium, did not fear foreign contacts as much as his counterparts trained in Moscow used to. This revitalized sense of internationalism combined with Gierek’s pro-consumerist attitudes reshaped Polish social policy with respect to travel. Proof of this new course was the PZPR Politburo’s agenda aimed at doubling the number of Polish citizens traveling abroad by 1975.⁴⁰ In fact Poland had the laxest travel policies of the three states and, in spite of a significant degree of repression and control, made travel beyond the Iron Curtain possible in the 1970s to a greater number of Poles.⁴¹ While the capitalist West was still beyond the reach of most citizens due to political or financial considerations, uninhibited travel within the Bloc demonstrated the level of confidence that the PZPR placed in its nationals. It also provided a continuity for the policy of more effective socialist integration, which characterized

³⁹ Václav Dvořák, Informace ze setkání s ekonomickým radou ZÚ NDR ve Varšavě s. Ebersbachem, 9 November 1971, AMZV, TO-T 1970-74, NDR k.8.

⁴⁰ Biuro Polityczne KC PZPR, Protokół posiedzenia, 18 May 1971, AAN, KC 1746/764.

⁴¹ Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia*, 263.

the late 1960s under Gomułka.⁴² Nonetheless, Poland's new leadership intensified this cooperation and gladly but blindly accepted the East German proposal for a more radical expression of internationalism.

The interpretation of what goals the authorities in Warsaw foresaw for the open borders is complex. Scholars often argue that Gierek and the PZPR viewed the free movement of people as an economic advantage, perhaps more so than the SED did.⁴³ An open border with the GDR was helpful in outsourcing the material needs of Polish citizens, who now had access to the superior internal market of East Germany. Despite these sinister motivations political considerations also played a role. First, binding East Germany stronger into the socialist community served as a counterbalance to the progressing German-German rapprochement and potential reunification, the thought of which triggered fear among many Poles, even a quarter of a century after the war.⁴⁴ Second, the expanded freedom of travel also addressed the domestic situation. The pressure to divert people's attention away from politics grew especially after the crisis of December 1970, during which the regime's bullets killed some fifty protesting workers in the shipyards in Szczecin, Gdynia, and Gdańsk. Third, Poland's greater involvement in the socialist camp meant to assure the other Bloc leaders that the situation was under control. Toward that end, the International Committee of the PZPR asked in early 1971 for a budget increase for its activities, which were connected to the stabilization of the country's image abroad.⁴⁵

⁴² Skobelski, *Polityka PRL*, 478-483.

⁴³ E.g. Mieczysław Tomala, *Deutschland von Polen gesehen: zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1949-1990*. (Marburg: Schüren, 2000), 512 and Mark Keck-Szajbel, "Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border" in Bren and Neuberger, 374-390.

⁴⁴ Stokłosa, *Ostpolitik*, 350.

⁴⁵ Wydział Zagraniczny KC PZPR, Informacja, March 1971, AAN, LXXVI/4.

For many years, Polish diplomats and Party representatives sought ways of making travel across the Polish-Czechoslovak frontier freer as well. Since 1956 the two states required a visa and passport for general travel and transit. Under the Tourist Convention, citizens obtained a card that allowed them to move freely in a select fifteen-kilometer-wide stretch across the border for a day or two. Until the 1970s, an average of half a million Poles and just over a million Czechs and Slovaks crossed that border each year. During the meeting of the First Secretaries of the PZPR and KSČ in early October 1971, Edward Gierek raised the issue of “creating conditions for the unrestricted mobility of citizens of the Poland and CSSR in both countries.”⁴⁶ Evading a commitment to or conflict with the Polish side, Gustav Husák suggested that deputy ministers should look into that matter at their next meeting. Despite numerous attempts at concluding an agreement between Poland and Czechoslovakia similar to that with the GDR the border between the two Slavic countries opened only in August 1977.⁴⁷

Although economic and security factors determined the Czechoslovak decision, a dose of nationalist prejudices also played a role in rejecting Gierek’s proposal. In Polish public opinion, the idea of a “zone of free travel” in the triangle of Poland-GDR-CSSR began to circulate in the early weeks of 1972, which frightened the Czechoslovak Consul General in Szczecin, Jaroslav Janoušek. In his report from March 1972, Janoušek referred to Poland’s much larger area and population size, judging that opening borders with Poland is “a threat to our demographically and territorially small fatherland.”⁴⁸ Janoušek belonged to the conservative wing of the KSČ and vehemently pursued post-Dubček purges in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as cadres

⁴⁶ Notatka z rozmów z przywódcami partii i rządu Czechosłowackiej Republiki Socjalistycznej (October 1971), AAN, KC PZPR/XI-A/652, 14.

⁴⁷ Chapter 4 discusses that process in detail.

⁴⁸ Jaroslav Janoušek, Zpráva o turistice mezi NDR a PLR a připravovaném otevření hranic s ČSSR, 22 March 1972, AMZV, TO-T 1970-74, POLSKO k.4/ob.2, 13.

controller.⁴⁹ His extremism, however, surpassed the expectations of his superiors who transferred him to head the diplomatic post in Szczecin. Janoušek's past and antireformist attitudes explain his fear of the bold, new integration and suggest the claim that orthodox communism of the 1960s and 1970s was nationalist in form.

The estranged diplomat, however, was not the only one cautioning against the Poles. As the German and Czech customs officials were getting to know each other during work in January 1972, a controller from Oberwiesenthal reported his Czech colleague saying: "The GDR makes travel with Poland and the CSSR easier, but no one seems to remember that foreigners like to buy things.... We had some bad experiences with the 'Poles' in the borderlands. They have too low of a living standard and buy up everything from us."⁵⁰ A stable economy was crucial to the centrally planned regimes in particular because it ensured a steady supply of consumer goods at low prices, which in turn prevented popular unrest. Scarred by a history of uprisings, such as the one in Plzeň in May 1953 or that of 17 June 1953 in East Germany, communist planners preferred to ensure stability by avoiding any rapid changes to the social benefits package – mistake they continued to observe their Polish colleagues make repeatedly, most recently in December 1970.⁵¹ The perception of voracious Poles effectively hindered policy liberalization in the CSSR, but because the number of Poles traveling to the GDR before 1972 was very small, East Germany ignored the warning from their southern neighbor. In this light, the GDR's agreement with Poland appears even more surprising.

⁴⁹ Jindřich Dejmek, *Diplomacie Československa, Díl II. Biografický slovník československých diplomatů, 1918-1992* (Prague: Academia, 2013), 390.

⁵⁰ BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2602.

⁵¹ On the lasting effects of June 1953 on East German social and economic policy, see for example Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 142-145.

While the new leaders in Prague were fervent proponents of fulfilling and improving on the official Comecon integration as outlined in the Comprehensive Program, they showed the most prudence and caution with opening the borders.⁵² The head of the Czechoslovak Federal Customs Administration (ÚCS), Jiří Brož already in June 1970 told his East German counterpart, Gerhard Stauch, that “in the future, tourist traffic in the socialist camp should be developed in such a way, as to make free currency exchange possible.”⁵³ When such a deal was in fact accepted between the GDR and Poland, neither Gustáv Husák nor the state administration shared the same enthusiasm for creating an open-border zone, arguing that their economy was not ready for these utopian schemes. Hence, during the negotiations between the GDR and CSSR about liberalizing travel in late fall of 1971, the Czechoslovak plenipotentiaries defended their strict customs policies and established limits on the exchange of marks and koruna.⁵⁴

The leaders in Prague exhibited their reluctance through difficult negotiations of open borders with the GDR. First, they insisted on requiring their own citizens to use a passport for travel, promising that a “passport for socialist countries” would be easier to obtain. Another point of contention was purely bureaucratic. The Czechoslovak Passport Bureau (*Správa pasů a víz*, SPV) voiced its opposition to East German citizens traveling with a personal ID. It suggested instead that the Germans introduce an attachment to the ID (*příloha*) to make controlling easier, because the border guards needed to stamp entry and exit and to revoke the right to travel if a citizen should be deemed not welcome in the CSSR.⁵⁵ The authorities could not confiscate the

⁵² Notatka z rozmów z przywódcami partii i rządu Czechosłowackiej Republiki Socjalistycznej (October 1971), AAN, KC PZPR/XI-A/652.

⁵³ BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2550.

⁵⁴ Zpráva o jednáních s Německou demokratickou republikou o ulehčení v cestovním styku, no date, ABS, A 6/2/1191.

⁵⁵ Zpráva o jednáních s NDR o ulehčení v cestovním styku, December 1971, ABS, A 6/2 1191.

citizen's ID, since everyone was required to carry one. German representatives did not agree to the Czech suggestion, requesting that the CSSR border guards only stamp the IDs.

The Czechoslovak side capitulated on that matter in December, but by 26 February the GDR reversed its position and indeed provided attachments to the IDs.⁵⁶ One reason for the sudden acquiescence to the ID supplement were the citizens' complaints that the Czechoslovak stamp was too big and would require them to obtain a new personal ID booklet more frequently, if they crossed the border repeatedly.⁵⁷ Additionally, the East German regime learned that doing away with bureaucracy did not help it exercise full control over the population, because certain individuals were not to be trusted abroad. Revoking the right to participate in passport-less travel became yet another method of ensuring socialist discipline. Although the Czechoslovak-East German negotiations for passport-less travel had been also taking place since the fall of 1971, the Czechs' tacit unwillingness to move ahead on the opening and disagreements about the details of the new travel policies delayed the opening of that border until 15 January 1972.

Implementing Integration

The grand ambitions of Erich Honecker and Edward Gierek to revolutionize travel and social interchange in the Bloc took effect on 1 January 1972. At midnight, bells chimed and fireworks lit up the sky over Frankfurt on Oder and Słubice not only to herald the start of a new year, but also the dawn of a new era in Polish-East German relations. The First Secretary of the regional Committee of the SED and the Head of the Regional Committee of the PZPR shook hands on the "Bridge of Peace" over the Oder River, initiating passport and visa free travel

⁵⁶ BArch-Berlin, DC/20/12595, 31.

⁵⁷ BStU, MfS BV Cbs AKG 3527, 280.

between the German Democratic Republic and the Polish People's Republic. Within the first fifteen minutes, some one hundred citizens crossed the previously strictly policed "Border of Friendship" on the basis of an identification card. In the morning hours, thousands of curious Poles and East Germans went for walks in the neighboring towns, visiting museums, eating in cafes, and making new friends. The state press in the GDR and Poland rejoiced over the opening of the border and its opportunities for closer political and social integration. As one inhabitant of Frankfurt put it, she was joyful that the "citizens of the two friendly countries can now learn to understand each other better."⁵⁸ Behind the euphoric façade, however, the reality proved to be more troubling than expected.

What in the minds of the party leaders up high seemed like a great idea, translated into a legal and administrative puzzle for the ministerial experts who were in charge of implementing the new policies. The opening of the border demanded significant infrastructural improvements in the borderlands, which helped to transform the once forbidding areas at the periphery into booming trade centers. Twenty-two additional border crossings were opened within the first eight months of the passport free travel, which among other things required the construction of new roads and buildings.⁵⁹ A 1969 agreement between Poland and the GDR had made both sides equally responsible for the costs of the border infrastructure. During a planning session in November 1971, however, the German delegation attempted to reduce their share of the expenses, arguing that the GDR invests heavily in secure border checkpoints with West Germany.⁶⁰ Such an approach led the Polish negotiators to conclude that the GDR designed the

⁵⁸ Siegfried Schmidt, "Visafrei in die Volksrepublik Polen," *Berliner Zeitung*, 2 January 1972; "Über Brücken des Frieden kommen Freunde zueinander," *Neues Deutschland*, 2 January 1972; "Pierwsi turyści z dowodami," *Trybuna Ludu*, 2 January 1972; "Tysiące turystów na przejściach granicznych PRL i NRD," *Trybuna Ludu*, 4 January 1972.

⁵⁹ B. Dewitz, *Analyse des paß- und visafreien Reiseverkehrs*, 24 January 1973, BStU, MfS HA VI, 4791, 9.

⁶⁰ Władysław Mirosławski, *Sprawozdanie z wspólnej komisji PRL i NRD*, AAN, GUC 18/46, 80.

passport-free travel to “maximize benefits” for East Germany. Hence, the project of integration began to exhibit a clash between national interests and the greater internationalist good.

The discrepancy in visions for the open-border-zone in the Bloc more broadly justifies the claim that the Polish regime entertained much grander plans than its neighbors to the west and south. The seemingly minor detail that kept the Polish-East German negotiators in heated debate until six o’clock in the morning of 13 November 1971 pertained to the classification of border crossings. The existing and proposed checkpoints along the Oder-Neisse border had an assigned category, first by type of vehicle (e.g. automobile, railway, or pedestrian) and second by type of traffic (individual or industrial GDR-PPR, individual or industrial transit). Whereas all of the checkpoints were open to the passport-free mobility, persons travelling through the GDR in transit farther west were restricted to particular border crossings, such as Frankfurt-Kunowice or Görlitz-Zgorzelec. Polish advisors argued that every checkpoint should be open for all citizens regardless if they were travelling to or through East Germany or Poland.

Moreover, Poles wanted the Germans to drop their insistence on reserving certain border crossings only for passport-free travel and to open them to nationals of all socialist states. They judged, for example, that if a Czechoslovak or Soviet citizen travelling through the northwestern part of the Bloc was to be turned away from a particular checkpoint and redirected elsewhere due to his or her nationality, then it would constitute blatant discrimination.⁶¹ The German side categorically rejected this argument, justifying it as an encroachment on internal affairs and interests of the other socialist states.⁶² In order not to stall the negotiations further, the Poles

⁶¹ J. Kulak, Notatka z przebiegu i o wynikach prac Komisji Mieszanej PRL-NRD, 16 November 1971, AAN, GUC 18/46, 87.

⁶² Krumbiegel, Bericht über die Verhandlungen zwischen der DDR und der VRP, November 1971, BStU, MfS HA VI 4845/1, 037.

withdrew their proposal. This contentious incident serves as a good focal point for comparing not only the two states' understanding of open borders, but also the role of the regimes in their citizens lives. While one pursued more openness and liberalization in the 1970s, the other remained a more traditional police state.

Certain details of the Polish-East German agreement unfortunately remained ambiguous and quickly led to conflicts between the two states. The offers of limited customs controls in the passport-less travel that the GDR extended to both Poland and Czechoslovakia are astounding given the realities of the shortages of consumer products under state socialism. The policy stipulated that “import or export duties are not to be paid on items, whose kind and amount indicate personal or household use, souvenirs, and gifts... within limits of reason.... Customs officials are to judge whether the kind and amount of transferred goods respects the policy.”⁶³ Moreover, as the internal documents of the Polish Main Customs Office (GUC) explicitly state, in practice the GUC controllers “treated the law [quoted above] very liberally.”⁶⁴ For this reason, people like Edward Apanel (discussed in Chapter 2) witnessed both Poles and Germans unashamedly buying large quantities of sought-after items abroad and bringing them home without any penalties.⁶⁵ Such a situation lasted for ten months and both sides excused it with ideological idioms of “improving an atmosphere of rapprochement between the peoples” (um die Atmosphäre zur Annäherung der Völker zu verbessern) and “a correct step and expression of friendship.”⁶⁶ Hoping that the situation would level itself out after a short time, the different

⁶³ Rozporządzenie Ministra Handlu Zagranicznego, *Dziennik Ustaw* (1972) nr.12 poz.88.

⁶⁴ AAN, GUC 18/46, 174.

⁶⁵ Edward Apanel, “Mój dzień powszedni,” 29.5.1972. *Ośrodek Karta*, 23Dz, vol. V-VI/1972, 79.

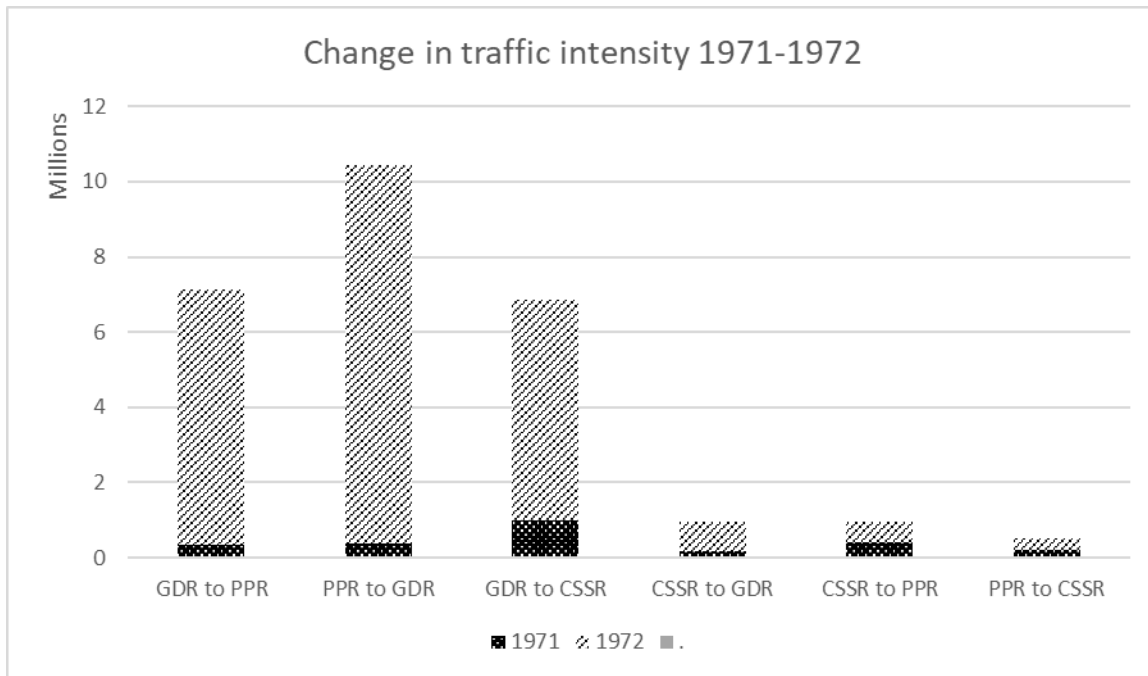
⁶⁶ BStU MfS HA IX 5352, 77-81 and MfS SdM 2393, 13-27.

branches of the administration tolerated the resulting buy-outs until they threatened economic and social stability.

Indeed, the popularity of open borders surpassed the expectations of the authorities. The level of transborder mobility rose significantly. For comparison, the number of Poles visiting the GDR in 1971 totaled only 200,000. In 1972, this number rose to nearly 9.5 million border crossings from Poland.⁶⁷ Similarly, East German tourists coming to Poland in 1971 numbered around 540,000; in 1972, the total reached 6.8 million. The chart below illustrates this dramatic rise in traffic. The reluctance of the Czechoslovak regime to liberalize travel, with seven million East Germans crossing to the CSSR, but only a million Czechoslovaks reciprocating in 1972, left an unbalanced account. For that year, the GDR “made” forty-five million marks on Polish tourists, but owed one hundred million marks to the CSSR.⁶⁸ The unequal distribution of tourists coming into Czechoslovakia paved the way for additional economic conflict between East Berlin and Prague.

⁶⁷ Jerzy Kochanowski, "Socjologiczny zwiad po otwarciu granicy PRL-NRD" in *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny* Nr. 2 (2001), 236. The statistics found in official East German and Polish documents vary slightly, which will be discussed in the following chapters, but the overall average appears accurate.

⁶⁸ Einschätzung der Entwicklung des pass- und visafreien Reiseverkehrs, January 1973, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/10610.



The reluctance with which the Czechoslovak regime approached the passport-free agreement with the GDR was responsible for the outcome. The disinterested attitude of the authorities in Prague comes through in an analysis of the official press, in which one can find hardly any publications about the changing border policy with the GDR. A high-ranking Stasi functionary in Karl-Marx-Stadt reported on January 20 that not only has there been no publicity, but also the Czechoslovak border and customs units were unprepared for the opening of the border. “In one case – major Frei writes – one CSSR customs official has a directly negative attitude.”⁶⁹ The head of the Dresden Customs Bureau also noted that even on the day of the new regulations taking effect, the Czech officers received no directives from their superiors about how to proceed.⁷⁰ Even Erich Honecker got frustrated with Prague for “being an obstacle to socialist tourism” and even rejecting the GDR’s offer of additional goods deliveries to cover the

⁶⁹ BStU, MfS AS 155/74/26, 38-9.

⁷⁰ BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2602.

cost of German travelers to the CSSR.⁷¹ These incidents suggest that the Czechoslovak party-state apparatus, while eager to pursue socialist integration through centrally regulated means, dragged its feet when it came to the decentralized mobility of Bloc citizens.

The opposite was true for Poland. The press reported widely on the new freedom to travel, which brought a total of 769,500 visitors from Poland to Germany between 1 January and 29 February. Collectively, they bought 79.4 million marks worth of East German goods (around 103 marks per person), but they did not cause major disruptions in supply, as they focused mostly on low-quality products, such as canned meats or sardines.⁷² For comparison, German tourists spent about a third of that amount in Poland, purchasing mostly items of higher quality but cheaper than in the GDR, such as meats, artisanal products like leather jackets, chocolate, and items of western provenience (magazines and newspapers), which were not prohibited on the other side of the Oder-Neisse. While the presence of German tourists in Polish stores bothered some of the other customers, they also did not inflict any major shortages due to increased demand, as local security forces reported.⁷³ Nonetheless, noticing these trends, both sides began preparations for the expected peak travel season during the summer by reallocating the highly-demanded goods from other parts of the country to the borderlands and other tourist destinations.⁷⁴ Given that the interpretation of rules for the duty-free transfer of products was at the discretion of the individual customs official, and that there were simply not enough customs controllers to cover the voluminous traffic, over time the citizens began to take greater advantage of a better supplied neighbor.

⁷¹ Dvořák, Telegram z Berlína, 11 July 1972, AMZV, TO-T 1970-1974, NDR k.5.

⁷² BArch-Berlin, DC/20/10610.

⁷³ IPN, BU 0365/102/t.1, 31 and Po 0038/99/t.12.

⁷⁴ IPN, BU 0365/102/t.1.

After the closing of the summer season, tensions between supply and tourism started to mount. The East German Stasi increasingly noted the dissatisfaction of the local populations, who blamed foreign tourists, mostly Poles, for gaps in product availability.⁷⁵ According to a report from Cottbus, people on the streets discussed imposing currency exchange limits on Poles and more diligent customs checks, just as the Czechoslovak ÚCS had been following the letter of the law toward East German citizens on the southern border.⁷⁶ The East Germans who had been going to Czechoslovakia also made a dent in supply, or it was perceived as such by the local Czechs. In the summer of 1972, the Regional Council in Ústí nad Labem studied the effects of socialist tourists on the local environment. The picture that emerges from the report suggests a rift between the theoretical goals of the internationalist project and actual experience. Since the opening of the border to East German tourists, Czechoslovak stores and restaurants began to fulfill the plan as their revenues increased by anywhere from 50 to 100 percent.⁷⁷ Local inhabitants, however, voiced their displeasure with the diminishing supply of produce, meats, sweets, and car parts, as well as longer queues everywhere.

As the complaints of East German citizens from the borderlands grew louder in the course of the year, the highest echelons of power intervened. The ZV resumed intensified controlling of Polish travelers to execute the rather imprecise law, which in turn caused an uproar among the travelers. On 23 November 1972, Erich Honecker wrote to Edward Gierek expressing his concern that, “if no decisive measures are taken by both sides, a good thing can be turned into its opposite.”⁷⁸ Admitting that the reasons for the problems inflicted by shopper-tourists lay on

⁷⁵ BStU, MfS BV Cbs AKG 1914, 85-94; or MfS HA IX 13554, 62-67.

⁷⁶ BStU, MfS BV Cbs AKG 3632, 99.

⁷⁷ AM ÚnL, ONV 4640/k.1195.

⁷⁸ BArch-Berlin, DY 30/2476, 42.

both sides, Honecker asked that the heads of state, Willi Stoph and Piotr Jaroszewicz, meet as soon as possible to discuss solutions. The fact that the party-state leaders decided in favor of working out the problems and not scrapping the project speaks volumes to the political role that passport-less travel played at that point already. Until 10 December 1972, some nine million Poles and nearly seven million Germans participated in the open cross-border exchange. Closing the borders again would have undoubtedly caused a popular reaction that would have further delegitimized the regimes. Moreover, a failure of Honecker's project after such a short time would also have been a personal slight to the SED chief. Hence, a lot of pressure was mounted on the members of the newly-created Mixed Committee for Coordinating the Development of Visa and Passport-free Traffic to reintroduce more control without reverting to a restriction of mobility.

The minutes of the Mixed Committee meetings reveal the intensity with which each country's representatives pursued national interests as some of the sessions lasted until the early morning hours.⁷⁹ In a hypocritical game of propagandistic accusation, both sides labeled the other as self-interested, losing sight of the larger idea. In a discussion of the problems of speculation and smuggling, a Polish Foreign Ministry representative brought up the examples of East German customs controlling Polish diplomats and of the complaints which some affected citizens submitted to the consulate. The ZV understood this point well, as it received 880 complaints (*Eingaben*) from Polish citizens but only seven from East Germans in the second half of 1972.⁸⁰ The GUC delegates criticized their German colleagues for discriminating against all Polish nationals, instead of those suspected of carrying unreasonable amounts of goods across

⁷⁹ AAN, GUC 18/46, 77 and BStU, MfS HA IX 5352, 77-81.

⁸⁰ BArch-Berlin, DL 203/3295.

the border. Allegedly (and in reality), the DVP randomly stopped Poles on East German streets and subjected them to searches. Relying on propagandistic idioms, the GUC representatives concluded, “that socialist states should band together to fight imperialism and not to allow any support for nationalist tendencies.” The nationalism card they played was a trump, as it resonated strongly among the East German ideologues, who built their own identity on the trope of a clean break from the Nazi German past and did not want to conflate explicit national self-interest with the appearance of chauvinism.

The result of the fall 1972 meeting of the Mixed Committee was the first in a series of steps aimed at the states’ reasserting control over passport-less travel. By the end of November, Poles could not exchange more than the equivalent 200 marks a month and were required at the border to show a proof of exchange in the form of a currency booklet with the officially recorded amount of monies carried. Such a system allowed customs to make sure that no one exported from the GDR more goods than the worth indicated in the booklet. The agreement, however, did not include reciprocal measures for the German side. Inhabitants in the Polish borderlands criticized their regime for this, saying for example, “Poland gave in way too much, because German citizens export a significant amount of goods. People from the GDR do their daily shopping here, buying bread, meat..., furs, cosmetics, and gasoline,” because it was cheaper.⁸¹ What seemed to be an unfair compromise had its inner logic. A still relatively high limit on marks for the citizens appeased the Germans, but more importantly it kept the coffers in Warsaw under control. Poland’s Ministry of Foreign Trade reported that the balance of payments against the GDR was in the red because, “our citizens have been spending considerable amounts in the

⁸¹ IPN, BU 0365/102/1, 323.

GDR.”⁸² Therefore, the open border experiment between Poland and the GDR quickly provided the leadership of both states with valuable lessons. First, they overestimated the complacency of and trust in some of the citizens, who took unwarranted advantage of the liberalized policies. Second, they realized that it was impossible to distinguish between separate financial activities, such as travel expenditures and bilateral trade, in the closed economic system.

Conclusion

The socialist project of passport-free travel was theoretically a commendable idea, but the economic conditions of the communist states clearly did not work in its favor. Nonetheless, it did constitute a significant step in realizing integration within the Bloc. By opening borders for the citizens to discover their neighbors, the regimes not only alleviated some social pressure for more liberalization, but they also increased the level of interstate cooperation. The Soviet Bloc-wide push for closer integration that emerged in the late 1960s and culminated in the Comprehensive Program’s guidelines for cooperation offered new avenues for economic and political exchanges, but it not enough for the party leaders in East Germany and Poland. Erich Honecker and Edward Gierek stood at the vanguard of the new socialist integration by experimenting with an unprecedented relaxation of control. While their motivations for opening the borders clearly spoke to the grander ambitions of uniting the Bloc, their national self-interest remained a guiding principle. Reconciling both proved to be more challenging than expected and in the end the domestic benefits trumped the integrationist goals. In this regard, a comparison of Polish or German adventurism with Czechoslovak protectionism makes it clear that the natural character of real-existing socialism was mostly national in content.

⁸² AAN, GUC 18/46, 174.

The open borders quickly reflected the shortcomings of the communist planned economy. Plans did not account for increased demand and the artificial price structures in different countries encouraged shopping abroad. Removing restrictions on customs, therefore, was a premature step that aimed to achieve too much and thereby contributed to the undermining of an otherwise good idea. In order to save whatever good open borders did, all the partners reverted back to controlling the traffic of goods, excusing it with ideological idioms of “improving an atmosphere of rapprochement between the peoples” and “a correct step and expression of friendship.”⁸³

The open-border zone was the key element of the new integration, but it was not the only one. Comecon’s Comprehensive Program provided an impetus for an array of initiatives that aimed to strengthen cooperation among the three northwestern Bloc countries. The decentralization of foreign contacts, encouraged by the *Program*, offered individual institutions the opportunity to work with their counterparts abroad on issues within their competencies, leading to an increase in the meetings of functionaries on various levels. The Czechoslovak partners were eager to intensify economic cooperation, especially in the realm of dividing specific production tasks among the allies. As of 1971, the KSČ First Secretary admitted that Czechoslovak industries had very few links with other socialist producers.⁸⁴ Noticing the lofty plans being made between Poland and the GDR, Prague’s leaders did not want to be left behind and explored areas of collaboration. Czechoslovakia, similarly to East Germany, had a shortage of workforce, but instead of investing in new industries in Poland, both countries preferred to keep production at home, instead hiring Polish export workers on short- and long-term contracts,

⁸³ BStU, MfS HA IX 5352, 77-81 and MfS SdM 2393, 13-27.

⁸⁴ Notatka z rozmów z przywódcami partii i rządu Czechosłowackiej Republiki Socjalistycznej (October 1971), AAN, KC PZPR/XI-A/652, 11.

who had a particularly close experience with their socialist neighbors. Liberalized travel and increased Bloc cooperation also accelerated the rise of internationalist education of the younger generations, which enabled a growing number of exchanges between the official youth organizations. The roles that these sub-forms of integration played for the history of the Bloc will come under scrutiny in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 2 – ENCOUNTERS WITH NEIGHBORS

In May 1972, Edward Apanel, a miner from Wałbrzych (Lower Silesia), vacationed on the Polish Baltic shore. Compared to his previous trips there, he noted one difference: a large number of visitors from East Germany. In his diaries, Apanel observed that the tourists from the GDR “are very confident and loud; have no inhibitions.... They devour ice cream, candy, and chocolate” but pay close attention to the prices.¹ Moreover, they go back home “loaded up” with goods. When Apanel crossed over to the GDR, he noticed that the neighboring town of Ahlbeck was similarly overflowing with Polish nationals, who “buy everything they can lay their hands on,” partly because “prices of some things are less than at home, although the selection is not that great, actually.... Our stores at the border in Świnoujście are better stocked than the ones in Ahlbeck.” Working through his “German” stereotypes, Apanel seemed surprised that the city “is not as clean as they say.” But as he walked around the town, he remarked on “the curtains hanging in windows, just like in our homes.”² Noticing these similarities and differences, learning about the neighbors first-hand became possible for average Poles, Germans, Czechs, and Slovaks with the unprecedented relaxing of intra-Bloc travel in the 1970s.

From the regimes’ point of view, Edward Apanel was an exemplary participant and beneficiary of the new socialist integration. He did not rush to deplete East German stores and to sell any foreign goods for profit at home, and he did not use invectives to curse the visitors at the

¹ Edward Apanel, “Mój dzień powszedni,” 29.5.1972. Ośrodek Karta, 23Dz, vol. V-VI/1972, 79.

² Ibid., 31.5.1972, 85-86 and 8.6.1972, 113.

resort. Instead, curiosity about the neighbors compelled the diarist to compare and to contrast the familiar with the unknown. In a way, Apanel fulfilled the goals of the passport-free travel as set up by the communist authorities in Warsaw and East Berlin: “to acquaint oneself with the neighbors’ achievements in building socialism, to visit their touristic and natural attractions, (...) and to understand better the people of socialist brother countries (*Brüderländer*).”³ Furthermore, by balancing a sense of pride in his homeland with a mindful appreciation of East Germany, Apanel exhibited the officially-professed “socialist patriotism,” a more appropriate version of love for one’s country than the “bourgeois nationalism” chastised by party ideologues in all Bloc countries.⁴

This chapter asks how the socialist-patriotic ideas affected encounters between the citizens of the neighboring countries? What did the ideologues envision and what happened on the ground? Finally, how did the contacts between Germans, Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks contribute to the project of socialist integration? The starting premise for this exploration is the paradox of simultaneously-inculcated socialist and nationalist values in the peoples of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland. Although the content of socialist ideas was the same, nationalist ones created multiple versions of patriotic sentiments, often hinged on historical experiences with the neighbors. Each of these nations had to explain to themselves the contradictions that emerged from socialist ideology and national memory. The Czechs dealt with the dichotomy of “brotherly allies” who invaded their country in the summer of 1968. East German citizens tried to balance the friendly visits abroad to Poland with a sense of outrage that “others” were now living in the homes from which they were expelled in 1945. For the Poles (as

³ “Mitteilung des Presseamts beim Ministerrat,” *Junge Welt* 23 December 1971, 1-2.

⁴ Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

well as the Czechs) the question was more complicated—how can the Germans living in the GDR be their friends, while the ones in the West were Nazis who murdered, pillaged, and destroyed their lives only twenty years ago?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter analyzes the various unstructured encounters between the citizens of Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia in the first half of the 1970s. Relying on ego-sources and piecing together stories from the press, party documents, and security files, it assesses the potential for socialist integration in the Bloc. Toward this end, the first part of the chapter will establish what constituted “exemplary” contacts from the perspective of the authorities, which will serve as a standard to measure the outcomes against the goal. The following section will focus on the actual experiences of meeting other nationals. Several samples of behavior recurring in the documents will illuminate those factors that determined the attitudes of visitors and hosts to one another, reasons for travel, and perceptions of the neighbors. Based on this approach, I argue that the participants in socialist tourism perceived most of their neighbors through a national, rather than individual, lens. Exposure to the near-abroad fleshed out cultural differences and fortified the sense of patriotism that the regimes had mandated. Hence, opening borders to travel certainly helped the national cause, but metaphorically speaking, the seeds of internationalism and integration did not fall on good soil.

Exemplary Contacts

Reconciliation among the Bloc nations at the social level was necessary for peaceful integration.⁵ The communist ideologues of the 1970s Eastern Bloc understood that utopian

⁵ On the topic of reconciliation see Veit Straßner, “Versöhnung und Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung – Ein Vorschlag zur Begriffsbestimmung und Konzeptionalisierung”, in Siegmund Schmidt, et al. (eds.), *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechtsverletzungen*, (Wiesbaden: VS, 2009), 23-36.

visions of workers' internationalism were unrealistic and that the legacy of national conflicts, trauma, and isolation could be overcome only through long and hard work. While officially the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other socialist states formed a "friendly alliance," in reality the burdened past left large swaths of the population distrustful of their neighbors. Multiple interstate agreements signed at that time included a preamble, which, with minor differences, repeated that the act undertaken is "guided by the desire to deepen the friendly and brotherly relations" between the two states and "to facilitate the rapprochement (*Annäherung, zblíženie, sblíženi*) of the people."⁶ While the formulaic language of state treaties pertaining to cooperation and opening of the borders may be dismissed as empty and vague, it reveals that the authorities recognized that integration was a work-in-progress. The goal of "rapprochement" and "deepening relations" implicitly acknowledges that the populations had problems with mutual appreciation, while omitting to name these problems explicitly in order not to open old wounds. The acts of liberalizing travel and intensifying economic, cultural, and political cooperation between these states and nations, however, were a step in the right direction.

The foreign policy of the Comecon states explicitly "treated tourism as a factor strengthening the integration of socialist communities."⁷ The authorities, however, did not have a clear plan as to how the rapprochement was supposed to progress, but individual pronouncements hint at what they had in mind. According to the East German Ministry of State Security (Stasi), citizens who "would not be worthy representatives of the GDR abroad" should

⁶ E.g. Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der CSSR über den visafreien Reiseverkehr vom 30 March 1978, BStU, MfS Abt. X 802, 30-39; Agreement between the Governments of the Polish Peoples' Republic and the German Democratic Republic about Travels of the Citizens of both States, 25 November, 1971. In *Dziennik Ustaw* [Journal of Law], 1971, vol. 35 no. 306, <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/1971/s/35/306/1>; Dohoda mezi vládou CSSR a NDR o činnosti o kulturních a informačních středisek v Praze a Berlíně, 2 October, 1974, Sbirka zákonů 139/1974, 519, <https://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/>.

⁷ Uchwała BP KC PZPR w sprawie dalszego rozwoju kultury fizycznej, 19 April 1977, AAN, ZSMP Jelenia Góra, 17/V/88.

not be allowed to participate in the open border traffic.⁸ The list of potential past behaviors that would eliminate an individual from obtaining the stamp in his or her identity card was substantial and pertained mostly to political and social transgressions, such as habitual drunkenness, suspicion of antisocialist engagement, or serious criminal activity. Naturally, the idea behind excluding people based on their criminal or antisystemic background served the purpose of preventing possible conflicts that such persons might cause while abroad. Polish border controllers, moreover, paid particular attention to the outward appearance of their own nationals leaving for East Germany. “Persons dressed shabbily are turned back” because as such they would perpetuate the negative stereotypes of poor, unkempt, and disorganized Poles.⁹ Similarly, at one point the border controllers prohibited several East German males from entering Czechoslovakia because their hair was deemed too long.¹⁰ Not vanity but an adherence to socialist values of uniformity and modernity informed these decisions. Above all, tourists visiting the neighboring socialist states ought to serve as ambassadors for their fatherlands.

The state press played a significant role in informing the citizens about proper travel etiquette. In the early 1970s East German, Polish, and Czechoslovak newspapers, articles about travel and life in the neighboring socialist states abounded. While a majority of them served the purpose of reporting about political events or the progress of socialism in the Bloc, numerous pieces aimed to educate the public on how to be a good visitor abroad. *Neues Deutschland*, for example, ran several stories exemplifying proper trips abroad. Going to Poland meant eating their food, observing their customs, sightseeing, and entering into conversation with the locals.¹¹

⁸ Verhinderung der Ausreise von Personen im Pass- und Visafreien Reiseverkehr, 1971, BStU, MfS RS 80, 7-9.

⁹ S. Macias (KWMO Zielona Góra), 30.11.1972, IPN BU 0365/102/1, 315-316.

¹⁰ Information über den Reiseverkehr zwischen der DDR und CSSR, 18 January 1972, BStU, MfS ZAIG 2113, 6.

¹¹ E.g. Ursula Rebetzky, “Spaziergang über die Grenze,” *Neues Deutschland* 15, 15 January 1972, 12.

In an anecdotal way, the press informed East Germans about respecting the laws and customs of the visited countries. For instance, one article presented an interview with a Polish police officer, who remarked on frequent traffic violations committed by drivers from the GDR but otherwise praised the East Germans as “lovely guests.” The different rules on the roads and driving customs practiced abroad, indeed caused a hundreds of accidents involving foreigners as reported by Polish, East German and Czechoslovak authorities.¹² Anticipating the opening of the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the summer of 1972, which did not happen until 1977, a writer for the Czech *Mladý svět* suggested solid cultural preparation for potential visitors to the northern neighbor because “despite the geographic and linguistic proximity, [the Czechs’] knowledge” of Poland was limited.¹³ These examples demonstrate the substantial effort the states put into achieving successful interchanges of their populations with the two-fold purpose of actually becoming acquainted with the people from across the border and their customs, as well as being proud representatives of their own homeland abroad.

The issue of representation abroad was particularly important for the Polish ideologues, who intensely inculcated “correct” forms of behavior by publicly stigmatizing the inappropriate ones. Smuggling and theft committed by Polish citizens, which will be the subject of another chapter, embarrassed the elites because they indicated poverty and shortages at home.¹⁴ More importantly, however, public opinion admonished disgraceful and sloven acts of drunkenness, dirtiness, and rowdiness. An article in the popular youth magazine *Zarzewie* from May 1973

¹² Reports of traffic violations were one of the most common across the decade. For examples see the responses from local police to a survey of the VB Headquarters “Bezvizový styk s NDR – vyhodnocení situace,” 22 March 1972, ABS, H 2-1 (II)/165. On the Polish side, reports included in IPN BU 0365/102/1.

¹³ Petr Prouza “Malování na skle,” *Mladý svět* 3, 7 January 1972, 5.

¹⁴ Mark Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border” in Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (eds.) *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 384.

captures the shaming dynamic the best. Quoting from correspondence of travelers submitted to the editors, the author references “our gentlemen” who upon disembarking from the bus in the CSSR, pulled out their bottles of alcohol and discarded the empties not into the trash bins, but onto an adjacent lawn. Before the sightseeing tour, the men relieved themselves against a church wall, attracting disdainful comments from passersby.¹⁵ As the article’s author moralized, “the locals do not think of us as ‘citizen Kowalski’ or ‘Mr. Nowak,’ but first and foremost as someone who came from Poland – and this is an important obligation.” In an effort to mold proper behavior, therefore, the regimes and its mouthpieces turned again to the national card. This time, however, the goal was not to legitimize its own power, but rather to strengthen Bloc cohesion by facilitating acceptance and recognition of one population in the eyes of another.

Propagating the ideal type of contacts took not only a negative form of prohibitions. The press frequently published the readers’ travel experiences and reported on officially organized international gatherings. In 1972, the East German *Junge Welt* and Polish *Sztandar Młodych* together ran an essay contest “Travel across the Oder” (*Auf Tour jenseits der Oder, Z plecakiem za Odrę*), which welcomed submissions from young people who had visited the neighboring country. The selected entries certainly varied in style and setting, but had one thread running through them: the neighbors are friendly, helpful, and generous; the natural landscape is beautiful; the tourist infrastructure is well developed.¹⁶ For example, Ewa, a third-year high school student from Silesia, described how a random East German family who saw the tired and sopping wet Ewa and her parents, “not only gave us a room for the night, but also prepared a

¹⁵ “Przekraczanie granicy,” *Zarzewie* 18, 6 May 1973, 20.

¹⁶ The contest was announced in early July 1972 and the final results were published in early November. Selections from the received letters appeared intermittently in both publications. For examples see: *Sztandar Młodych* 162 (9 July), 190 (10 August), 238 (5 October), 251 (19 October); and *Junge Welt* 12 August, 22 August, 15 September, 10 November.

bath for each of us and offered us dinner. When [Ewa's] parents wanted to pay them, the Jonas family refused to take any money.” In return, the Poles invited the Germans for vacation to their home and remained in contact through letters.¹⁷ Similarly, nineteen-year-old Karin from Brandenburg and her four friends were bicycling through western Poland. In Szprotawa, they stopped to observe a wedding and were drawn in to eat and to dance with the newlyweds.¹⁸ Although it is impossible to judge the veracity of these accounts, the imagery they create sends a relatively simple message to the readers. On the one hand, the neighbors across the border were friendly people who did not look upon the foreigners through a prejudicial lens, and on the other, the type of treatment with which the above travelers were met was a norm and should be reciprocated.

While these examples described private encounters among individual citizens, the media in the socialist states also presented a model of international harmony and friendship during multinational mass events. Visits of foreign party and state leadership always drew attention, but the 24 June 1972 meeting of Erich Honecker and Edward Gierek in the border towns of Frankfurt and Słubice had particular importance. *Neues Deutschland* devoted a whole page to a descriptive report of the events, entitled “On a border that is no more.”¹⁹ As usual, the authors conveyed the excitement of the onlookers, who cheered the party leaders and showered them with flowers. What sets this report apart from all previous ones is the story of the two First Secretaries touring both towns. Sightseeing, exploring stores, listening in to the Frankfurter Philharmonic Orchestra practice, and conversing with workers from both countries this time did

¹⁷ Ewa Totkegei, “Najcudowniejsza przygoda,” *Sztandar Młodych* 251, 19 October 1972.

¹⁸ Karin Rülke, “Hochzeitsgäst für eine Nacht,” *Junge Welt*, 15 September 1972.

¹⁹ Werner Micke and Claus Dömde, “An einer Grenze, die keine mehr ist,” *Neues Deutschland* 174, 25 June 1972.

not just serve purely political purposes. It provided an example of what neighbors should do during a visit abroad. The week before, the “Three-country meeting of friendship” in Zittau offered another opportunity for the propagation of exemplary contacts. Clearly less political in nature, but still organized under the motto of the “Consolidation of our Socialist Community” (*Festigung unserer sozialistischen Staatengemeinschaft*), it attracted nearly 1,500 campers from Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia.²⁰ As the article reported, numerous camping fans took up contact with their foreign fellow travelers to organize trips together around the socialist triangle. Most importantly for social integration, however, the reporter noted a “trilingual gang” celebrating good weather “with eggs and vodka.” The message to the readers was clear: cross-border relations were not elitist and political theatre, but a reality of everyday life.

State media and border authorities played a significant role in shaping the ideal type of contacts between socialist citizens. The content of that message is not surprising as it follows a commonsense set of actions: mutual appreciation of each other and the neighboring countries, encouragement of interpersonal relationships, and proud representation of one’s own fatherland. Worthy of consideration, however, is the top-down modeling of behavior. Because for over two decades the citizens of East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia had been in isolation from one another and from any encounters with foreigners, the communist ideologues attempted to teach their people proper behavior abroad. In essence, this model acquiesced to the slogan of “socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism.” While the people learned the communist version of patriotism since the mid-1950s, they might have lacked experience with actual internationalism. Hence, in order to assure the success of the new socialist integration, the regimes propagated a vision of how such contacts should develop because, conjecturally, they

²⁰ Manfred Knoll, “Treffen der Freundschaft,” *Junge Welt*, 23 June 1972.

did not trust the people and were aware of the consequences of nationalist sentiments and historical memory cultivated by the communist parties since the Second World War. The following section will explore how acquainting the socialist neighbors unfolded in practice.

Reality of Integration

Edward Apanel's experience, with which this chapter started, indicates that for some people the contact with the neighbors did not translate to the enthusiastic idealism conveyed by the state press, but it also did not deviate too much from what the authorities deemed appropriate. If the goal of integration was to create an interwoven internationalist social fabric, as the examples from newspaper articles suggest, then Apanel and most people did not contribute to its fulfillment.²¹ Nonetheless, the interchange emanating from more frequent encounters with foreigners did cause a better understanding of the differences between Bloc nationalities. The results of increased contact had ambivalent consequences. On the one hand, the exposure contributed to some individuals expressing appreciation and admiration of the neighbors. On the other, the same exposure reinforced long-standing stereotypes and disdain for the other countries and their citizens. Such generalizations had the opposite effect of the intended one and instead of facilitating friendships, they only strengthened one's sense of national belonging. While nationalism in the early 1970s did not strongly affect the attitudes of one group toward another, the perceptions formed during that time are crucial for understanding the fragility of social integration at the time of crisis in the decade's second half. The reality, naturally, was more complex and prejudices toward a country or a group did not necessarily prevent certain individuals from forming personal friendships. The examples that follow aim to present this

²¹ Edward Apanel's daughter, however, did by marrying a Czech worker and settling in Czechoslovakia, Apanel, "Mój dzień powszedni," *passim*, *Ośrodek Karta*, 23Dz, vol. III/1972.

intricacy of human interactions and to inform about the successes and failures of orchestrating socialist integration.

Edward Apanel's diaries, while representing only a single voice, offer tremendous insight into the mindset of Polish participants of socialist integration. The diarist submitted his notebooks to a competition "The times of PPR" (*Czas Peerelu*) organized by *Ośrodek Karta* in Warsaw in early 1994. Apanel's contribution stands out in the set of the archived entries because in contrast to other people, he did not typewrite, annotate, or rewrite his originals. A middle-aged miner from Wałbrzych in south-western Poland, Apanel reports on personal and family matters, reflects on day-to-day events, and offers his thoughts on the political and economic situations at home and abroad. The reader learns that the diarist was not a Party enthusiast, did not agree with some of its policies, but was not an anticommunist either.²² Apanel's daughter married a Czech citizen and settled in Czechoslovakia, which exposed the author to intimate encounters with the southern neighbors. Similarly, his curiosity and the opportunity to travel without a passport that brought him to East Germany for a day in late June 1972 resulted in multiple recorded subsequent excursions beyond the Oder-Neisse line. The miner's experiences, therefore, are an ideal starting point for the exploration of socialist integration in practice.

One of the first observations Apanel recorded from his trip to the Polish Baltic resort in Świnoujście was the East German vacationers' loud and confident behavior. Here, the diarist does not refer to drunken brawls, which were perpetrated from time to time by people of any nationality. Instead, Apanel reports on families visiting souvenir shops and grocery stores, who admonish their children for not paying attention to the deals on postcards. "Zwaj mark ist zuffil," (two marks is too much) the diarist notes the overheard conversation in a distorted rendition of

²² This sentiment comes through in a discussion of his court case in vol. V-VI/1972.

the German original and adds that the visitors “criticize the stores” but still “buy the Polish sausage.”²³ Apanel, however, was not the only one to realize the cultural differences in behavior. Masses of tourists from the GDR visiting Poland or Czechoslovakia left an imprint on the locals’ perception as predominantly loud, rude, and demonstratively superior to the hosts, as the authorities periodically assessed the mood in places frequented by foreigners.²⁴ The Ústí nad Labem National District Committee (*Okresní národní výbor*) generally praised the opening of the border in the summer of 1972, but noticed that the Czech service workers as well as the inhabitants criticized German tourists for their demanding and entitled attitude in stores and restaurants.²⁵ The Polish security apparatus reported in October 1972 multiple cases of East German citizens “throwing candy and chewing-gum in order to take photos of [Polish] children picking up that candy off the ground.”²⁶ While such behavior demonstrated the apparent economic superiority of the GDR, it predictably offended Czech and Polish sensibilities connected to the historical memory of Nazi occupation and subjugation.

More worrisome from the point of view of Polish and Czechoslovak state security and individual citizens were “revanchist” acts committed by East Germans, perceived as threatening to the stability of postwar borders. The passport-free travel offered an opportunity for the expelled Germans who had lived in the Sudetenland or east of the Oder-Neisse line before 1945 to see their former properties and thereby instill anxiety in the current – but still insecure – owners. Some of these visitors allegedly made remarks about the “impermanence of the Oder-

²³ Apanel, 29.5.1972., vol. V-VI/1972, 79.

²⁴ E.g. ABS, H 2-1 (II)/165; IPN BU 0365/102/t.1; Edward Apanel, vol. V-VI/1972, *passim*.

²⁵ Informace o výsledcích a názorech na turistický ruch v okrese Ústí nad Labem, no date [3rd quarter 1972], AM UnL, ONV 4640/k.1195.

²⁶ IPN, BU 0365/102/1, 212.

Neisse border and their future return” to their ancestral territories, while using invectives such as, “you Polish pigs, it’s not enough that you stole our lands, now you also keep coming to us!”²⁷ Similarly, the Czechoslovak StB reported multiple instances of East German tourists proclaiming that the “Sudetes are theirs and that they will return, all the while singing fascist songs” and carving swastikas on wooden tables.²⁸ Polish citizens in Gubin and the surrounding towns witnessed Germans buying postcards with shots from the Bloc-wide famous television series “Stawka większa niż życie” (“More than Life at Stake,” broadcasted in German under the title “Sekunden entscheiden”). Innocent as it may seem, one particular card garnered the most interest. It depicted the protagonist, a Polish spy who infiltrated the Abwehr in Nazi-occupied Poland, held at gunpoint by his nemesis, the ruthless SS-Sturmbannführer.²⁹ The symbolism of German tourists taking pride in the fictional uncovering of a Polish spy by Nazi perpetrators, combined with the real presence of the expellees in the Western Territories, not only awakened comments about revisionism and threats to the peace and stability of the Oder-Neisse line, but also poised the eastern neighbors against internationalist friendship with the GDR.

These fraught exchanges brought about a rearticulation of World War II rhetoric. In February 1972, Edward F. from Gubin caused turmoil at a bar across the border in Guben. He offended the local crowd gathered there with chants of “fascists, hitlerites, Germanic [sic!] dogs” and utterances like “you lost the war, so keep quiet.”³⁰ State security materials are full of similar examples, indicating the popularity of this sort of historical insult reviving memories of the

²⁷ IPN, BU 0365/102/1, 32 and Po 0038/99/t.12, 13.

²⁸ Zpráva o politické a bezpečnostní situaci v Severočeském kraji za měsíc listopad 1975, 9 December 1975, ABS, B 4/II 53, 133.

²⁹ Stanisławski to Naczelnik wydziału paszportów KWMO Zielona Góra, 1 February 1972, IPN Po 0038/99/t.12, 5.

³⁰ IPN, Po 0038/99/t.12, 16.

painful past. Before 1972, the expressions of hatred toward Nazism had been popularized through different movies and television series that were popular across the Bloc but contained mostly within the national borders. With the increased mobility in the 1970s, however, the prejudices and reactions against them were put into practice. When Poles wanted to see the continuities from the murderous Third Reich to the GDR and in such a way offend the neighbors, many GDR citizens wondered why. Since 1949, the system kept telling them that they were the “good” Germans, and the former fascists lived in the West.

Historically-minded prejudices in particular flavored the Czechs’ attitudes toward their socialist neighbors. Polish military participation in the squashing of Prague Spring in August 1968 left a bitter sentiment among the Czechoslovak population. Tadeusz Płaskowski, another diarist from the Karta Institute collection, was a former officer of the Polish Army, survivor of Nazi camps, long-time member of the Socialist Party, supporter of Gomułka’s national communism, but expressed healthy criticism of the regime.³¹ Although he had not participated in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Płaskowski followed the events closely, mostly because of family connections – his sister married a Czech and settled in the CSSR. Weighing arguments for and against the Warsaw Pact intervention, the diarist appears to have understood the invasion’s moral ramifications, but nonetheless saw it as a necessity at the time, which led to disagreements with his sister and acquaintances.³²

When travelling to Czechoslovakia, Płaskowski learned how begrudgingly the Czechs treated him as a Pole in the aftermath of 1968. He recounts that “store clerks in Prague, hearing the Polish or Russian language, hid the more attractive goods.” When his wife asked in Polish for

³¹ Tadeusz Płaskowski, “Trzydziestoletnia ścieżka żołnierskiego znoju w PRL,” Ośrodek Karta, AO II/63w.

³² *Ibid.*, 215-217.

a pair of gloves, “the clerk growled angrily: don’t have.” As a ruse, Płaskowski asked for gloves in German and received a whole selection from which to choose.³³ While this anecdote illustrates a seemingly benign form of hostile interactions, documented cases of passive and aggressive attitudes toward Poles abound.³⁴ Especially Polish workers employed in the CSSR faced harassment, not only from the fellow laborers and management, but also from state authorities. Complaints submitted to Czech and Polish security services reveal that even the local police assaulted the foreigners, calling them “Polish pigs” (*polské svině*).³⁵ In the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact intervention, therefore, the Polish-Czech social relations became more complex. Mixing sympathy stemming from linguistic, historical, and cultural proximity with stereotypes of poverty, backwardness (about Poles), ignorance, and paternalism (toward Czechs), now nationalist hatred of the occupants and the shared plight under communism began to coexist with one another.³⁶

Open borders allowed individuals to confront the long-held prejudices, but that confrontation did not always result in a change of mind. While some ideas about the neighbors might have been revised, other ones fortified the old stereotypes. Taking advantage of the passport-free travel and spending his vacation right at the border, one day Edward Apanel decided to satisfy his curiosity and walked over to the neighboring town of Ahlbeck. The diary entry betrays his excitement about seeing a foreign land, if only two miles away from the

³³ Ibid., 217.

³⁴ For example see Jan Kalous, “Reakcje społeczeństwa czechosłowackiego na udział Polski w interwencji 1968 roku,” in Łukasz Kamiński (ed.), *Wokół Praskiej Wiosny: Polska i Czechosłowacja w 1968 roku* (Warsaw: IPN, 2004), 117-137.

³⁵ Protokol o výslechu svědka obč. Jasinskeho Henrika, 22 March 1971, ABS, H 2-1 (II)/114, 8.

³⁶ Roman Baron, “Čech v polském zrcadle, Polák v zrcadle českém,” *Listy: Dvoutměsíčník pro kulturu a dialog* 5 (2009).

frontier.³⁷ The miner visited the local beach, again noted the loud behavior of German youth, and proceeded to the town center to experience East German restaurants and stores. Apanel's observations go against the grain of the general trend and claim that the supply was better at Polish shops in Świnoujście than in Ahlbeck, although some of the household products were actually nicer and better in quality.³⁸ While he does not make the connection explicit, Apanel notes hordes of Poles returning home with East German goods, which helps to account for the shortages in the stores across the border. The subject of another chapter, shopping-tourism was one of the motivating factors for any socialist nationality to visit the abroad. Nonetheless, natural curiosity, as it was in Apanel's case, and the desire to see what else the world had to offer was an important incentive to use the open borders.

During his spontaneous outing across the border to the neighboring Baltic town of Ahlbeck, Edward Apanel, for example, observed that the streets were as littered with cigarette butts as they were at home; "it is not as clean as [the newspapers] write."³⁹ Criticisms notwithstanding, the diarist praised the ubiquity of trash cans, which "is a rarity at home," and the upkeep of private houses. Travelling the other direction, Mrs. W. from East Berlin similarly found positives and negatives. In a letter to a West German pen pal, stemming from the mid-1970s (no exact year given), W. recounts her family's recent outing to Szczecin. "But we went once and won't go again. They are even farther behind the times than us here in the GDR. The offering in the stores was way worse than in ours. City life is totally primitive."⁴⁰ Nonetheless,

³⁷ Apanel, 31 May 1972, vol. V-VI/1972, 85.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁹ Apanel, 31 May 1972, vol. V-VI/1972, 86.

⁴⁰ Frau W. an Frau M., 27 November [no year], Museum für Kommunikation-Berlin (MfK), Post von drüben, Konvolut 3.2011.501.

Mrs. W. liked “the upkeep of old houses and churches” in Poland, which went against the stereotype of a ruined, slovenly landscape. Still, “as a vacation destination, Poland was out of the question” for her family. The inclination of socialist citizens to judge the standard of living elsewhere by access to consumer goods was common and betrays their contemporary desires and insecurities, as multiple scholars have already explored.⁴¹ Important here, however, is the appreciation of one’s own homeland, as the above cases suggest, which resulted from experiencing the differences elsewhere. Moreover, visitors had a chance to form their own opinions about the neighbors confirming or contradicting popular notions, even if they only saw a fraction of what there was to see.

Religion was one of the points of contrast. Apanel’s vacation at the shore coincided with the feast of Corpus Christi, a major religious holiday in Poland during which the faithful joined in monstrance procession through town. The diarist partook in the celebrations. The East German onlookers did not escape Apanel’s observant eye. “Their behavior was inappropriate. Laughs and ridiculing, also whistling (...). The faithful behave great and do not pay any attention to these people. Crowds, countless crowd in the procession singing [hymns].”⁴² Attitudes toward religion and faith varied considerably between Poles and their socialist neighbors as a result of strong historically- and traditionally-motivated ecclesiastical and popular opposition to the laicization policies of Polish communists.⁴³ While the Church in Poland was subjected to the regime’s

⁴¹ E.g. Krisztina Fehervary, “Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2/2009):426–459; Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79-84.

⁴² Apanel, 1 June 1972, vol. V-VI/1972, 87.

⁴³ Andrzej Grajewski, “Kościół katolicki w PRL i NRD: Podobieństwa i różnice” in Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, et.al. (eds.), *Przyjaźń nakazana? Stosunki między NRD i Polską w latach 1949-1990* (Wrocław: Centrum Studiów Niemieckich Willy’ego Brandta, 2009): 273-284, and Detlef W. Stein, William Totok (eds.), *Die Kirchen in Osteuropa im Kommunismus* (Berlin: OEZ-Berlin-Verlag, 2011).

harassment and persecution, it remained an important part of everyday life for the majority of people, including some state and party functionaries.

In the GDR, on the other hand, the Catholic Church with its small number of followers (roughly 8 percent) did not represent a significant social and cultural phenomenon and the Protestant Churches pursued compromises with the SED-dictatorship. More importantly, the East German state offered secular alternatives to religious life, most poignantly symbolized by the *Jugendweihe*, a socialist rite of passage celebration for young people entering adulthood, which replaced Lutheran Confirmation or Catholic First Communion. The western neighbors frequently demonstrated their lack of understanding of the Poles' religiosity or traditionalism. Workers and youth groups who had contact with their Polish counterparts criticized the fact that Poles observed so many church holidays in addition to Christmas and Easter.⁴⁴ Similarly, Polish citizens living or traveling in East Germany or the Czech lands found the areligious practices of the locals odd. Working on a Sunday, for example, in "dirty overalls" shocked even moderate Poles in Prague.⁴⁵ These different approaches to spiritual life had the potential for generating conflicts between the socialist citizens, and while they did not play a significant role in the early years of open borders, they certainly flared up in the times of crisis toward the end of the decade.

Whereas the average Pole viewed the GDR as the West with its proximity to western Europe, coveted consumer goods, and a higher standard of living, the average East German saw the West in Poland.⁴⁶ In the opinion of some GDR citizens, "Poland seemed closer to the West –

⁴⁴ E.g. D. Fritsch, Analyse zum Stand der Zusammenarbeit mit den im Kreis Guben arbeitenden ausländischen Jugendlichen, 29 June 1978, Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg at Potsdam (LHAB), Rep. 943/1017.

⁴⁵ Based on interviews analyzed by Ondřej Klípa, "Polskie robotnice w Czechosłowacji: czy przyjechały, by pozostać?" in Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski (eds.), *Bocznymi Drogami: Nieoficjalne kontakty społeczeństw socjalistycznych, 1956-1989* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2010): 279-303, here 302.

⁴⁶ Cf. Opiłowska, "Stosunki," 168.

men could wear long hair, girls shorter skirts.”⁴⁷ There, one could get hold of western magazines, such as *Der Spiegel* or *Times*, and be more open in forms of expression. This relatively higher degree of cultural and ideological liberalization attracted many GDR citizens.⁴⁸ Especially young East Germans wanted to “escape the petit-bourgeoisie narrow-mindedness” of GDR society.⁴⁹ Film offered one escapist pathway. The GDR Youth Office (*Amt für Jugendfragen*) reported in February 1972 that young East Germans “predominantly visit cinemas and discotheques” in the Polish border towns.⁵⁰ “Most popular are American films and those that are not allowed in the GDR. According to information from [the German border town] Görlitz, the Polish movie theater is constantly sold out” because the managers of that particular venue capitalized on visitors from beyond the Neisse River and began showing movies imported from the West either in German or with German subtitles. Akin to American students travelling abroad to drink legally underage, socialist youth of the 1970s crossed borders to experience something that was hardly possible at home.

Carnal business of all sorts was particularly popular with East Germans. Prostitution, legally unregulated in Poland and illegal in the GDR since 1968, presented a field for numerous Polish-East German exchange relationships. Polish women traveled to Berlin and stayed at fancier hotels in the hope of meeting West German tourists, whose payment in hard currency could pay for shopping in the GDR.⁵¹ East German men traveled across the border, where Polish

⁴⁷ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁸ Piotr Zariczny, *Opozycja w NRD i w PRL – wzajemne relacje i oceny* (Gdańsk: ECS, 2013), 11.

⁴⁹ Ludwig Mehlhorn, "Przyjaźń nakazana. Rozwój stosunków między NRD a PRL w latach 1949-1990," in Kerski and Kotula, 37.

⁵⁰ Amt für Jugendfragen, 18 February 1972, Probleme des visafreien Reiseverkehrs zwischen der DDR, der VRP und der CSSR, BArch-Berlin, DC 4/1219.

⁵¹ IPN, BU 0296/194 (Case of Maria W. in Interhotel).

girls and housewives supplemented their income by selling their bodies for 25 marks.⁵² In the GDR's borderlands the women complained that since the opening of the border, the husbands "are rarely at home in the evenings."⁵³ The men's frequent visits to "houses of pleasure," like the one located just three buildings down from the border checkpoint in Słubice where one could watch pornographic films for 5 marks, became a topic of public discussions and scandal in East German villages near the border.⁵⁴ The doctors from the Cottbus region rang the alarm in spring of 1972 after noting a spike in cases of sexually transmitted diseases.⁵⁵ The outrage against the Poles in the GDR grew, therefore, because East German women felt they competed with them not only for everyday products in the stores, but also for their unfaithful husbands. Moreover, the Polish regime disapproved of the loose sexual relations on the border because it harmed the "moral-political" standing of an individual and, more importantly, the national reputation.⁵⁶

Domestic as well as international crowds gathered annually for festivals, such as "Jazz Jamboree" in Warsaw, the largest event of its type in the Soviet Bloc that started running in 1958. Miles Davis, Ray Charles, and Duke Ellington were among the most prominent performers over the years. After the opening of the borders, jazz fans from the other Bloc countries could travel freely to Poland to attend the festival. Forty-three East Germans did exactly that in October 1973, but instead of enjoying the music, they encountered some overzealous and prejudiced Varsovian policemen. The officers acted out their anger on the visitors from the GDR, whose "decadent clothing and bodily appearance" indicated that it was a group of "hiepies" (sic!)

⁵² IPN, Po 0038/99/t.12, 13.

⁵³ BStU, MfS BV FfO KD Seelow 712, 8.

⁵⁴ BStU MfS BV FfO KD Seelow 712, 12.

⁵⁵ BStU MfS BV Cbs AKG 3511, 428.

⁵⁶ E.g. The case of Bogumila T., November-December 1974, IPN Po 0038/99/t.12, 457-59.

organizing an illegal manifestation.⁵⁷ The East German authorities responded to the victims' complaints and established that even though some members of the group were a "liability," most had a solid political background as FDJ or SED officers, good workers, students, and dedicated music fans.⁵⁸ The alleged hippies were arrested, interrogated, lightly beaten, and called among other things: "communist pig" (*Kommunistenschwein*) and "shit-Germans" (*Scheißdeutsche*; as opposed to the good, "real Germans" from the West).⁵⁹ Hidden behind these expletives is the stereotype of "red Prussians" sympathetic to the communist cause, which is somewhat counterintuitive when uttered by a functionary of a communist regime.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, when seen through a nationalist lens, it betrays foremost an anti-German sentiment. Although Polish real existing socialism might have appeared "more colorful" than its GDR counterpart, the Polish Peoples' Republic was still an *Unrechtsstaat* (unlawful regime) with an oppressive regime and arbitrary relation to the rule of law and respect of human rights.

While the state press propagated a positive image of the neighbors in the early 1970s and some people tried to overcome their prejudices, individual incidents with foreigners could have had a debilitating effect on internationalist friendship. Wolfgang W. from Dresden was driving back to the GDR after hiking in the Polish Karkonosze Mountains (Riesengebirge) in the summer of 1978. According to a protest letter he submitted to the East German Foreign Ministry, Wolfgang enjoyed spending time there, but after one incident, his "attitude toward people and

⁵⁷ Dzbański, Notatka Urzędowa, 25 October 1973, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/92860.

⁵⁸ Krusche to Herrmann (GDR Embassy Warsaw), 30 November 1973, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/92860.

⁵⁹ Norbert W., Eingabe an den Staatsrat der DDR, 30 October 1973, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/92860. The other complaints in this case mention similar course of events.

⁶⁰ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.

the neighboring Poland in general was marred.”⁶¹ Having misunderstood a policeman’s gestures at an intersection, Wolfgang made an illegal turn, for which he was fined. What angered the East German citizen, however, was the officer’s attitude. “He did not do anything when someone yelled ‘*Scheißdeutsche*’ at us and his behavior toward us was very anti-German [*deutschfeindlich*].” In a hyperbolic argument, Wolfgang W. extrapolated one instance to raise a broader question about the status of “Polish-German friendship,” employing the language of the regime in order to ascertain results.⁶² Lending credibility to Wolfgang’s words is precisely the vagueness of his goals for writing this petition, which calls for “recognition as GDR citizens” in Poland. It is precisely this recognition of foreigners that makes integration possible and its rejection fortifies the mental borders between nationalities.

Wolfgang W.’s case was by no means an isolated incident or restricted only to Polish anti-Germanness. Employed illegally at a bar in the German border town Bad Muskau, a secret informant for the Polish Border Guards (WOP), “Maria” offers in her reports a marvelous account of what happens when a German and a Pole meet each other at a bar.⁶³ Recruited in 1974 at the age of twenty-three to spy on Polish workers and smugglers in the GDR, Maria relayed to her handler everyday happenings, relevant or not to her assignment, but beneficial for understanding the cross-border interactions. Frequently, German guests harassed her and “wished to have German service,” once even slapping her in the face for her nationality.⁶⁴ The insults, however, also came from Polish citizens, who upon hearing Maria’s spoken German,

⁶¹ Wolfgang W., Eingabe an das MfAA Betrf: Visafreier Reiseverkehr, 22 August 1978, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/92870.

⁶² On the discussion of the role of *Eingaben* see Zatin. *The Currency of Socialism*.

⁶³ Teczka Pracy TW “Maria,” IPN Po 00138/12/t.2.

⁶⁴ TW “Maria,” 15 November 1976, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 57.

made fun of her for “getting Germanized.”⁶⁵ Despite her experiences with nationalism on both sides, Maria fell in love, married, and settled with a GDR citizen in the last years of the decade, ultimately ending her work for WOP in 1979. Although morally questionable, Maria’s willing and loyal cooperation with the regime’s security apparatus indicates a secure sense of socialist patriotism, even if a different set of motives, such as greed, naivete, or fear, guided her choices initially.⁶⁶ In contrast to others, however, Maria embraced foreignness and especially East Germany, accepting internationalism as an everyday practice.

Social contacts between Poles and East Germans developed positively whenever both parties had a common interest. On the one hand, some friendships, genuine in the sense that they were built on mutual attraction and shared values, survived even the period of the closed border in the 1980s.⁶⁷ These included, for example, the former mayors of Guben and Gubin.⁶⁸ In a number of cases the initial contacts even led to romantic relationships between Poles and East Germans. Some scholars measure the success of the civic rapprochement by investigating the transnational marriages contracted between 1972 and 1980.⁶⁹ In her sociological study, Julita Makaro found that in the bordering towns of Guben/Gubin alone, 64 unions between Poles and East Germans were forged from 1972 to 1979.⁷⁰ Out of all these couples, only one settled in the Polish Gubin. The decision about where to reside, as she convincingly explains, was based on

⁶⁵ TW “Maria,” 29 November 1976, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 59.

⁶⁶ Teczka Personalna TW “Maria,” IPN Po 00138/12/t.1, 25.

⁶⁷ Cf. Mieczysław Tomala *Deutschland von Polen gesehen: zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1949-1990*. (Marburg: Schüren, 2000), 513, and Opiłowska, “Stosunki,” 168-170.

⁶⁸ Julita Makaro, *Gubin – miasto graniczne: studium socjologiczne* (Wrocław: WUW, 2007), 107.

⁶⁹ E.g. Tomala, *Deutschland*, 512-513.

⁷⁰ Makaro, *Gubin*, 105.

economic factors as well as cultural ones. Brides (the majority of whom were Poles) were expected to join their husbands' households. On a national scale, scholars counted around ten thousand Polish-East German marriages, and the Polish Embassy in Prague estimated on average one thousand a year in the 1970s. It may not be a significant number in absolute terms but certainly is impressive given the history of the three nations and the rather short existence of the open borders.⁷¹ Nevertheless, as Chapter 6 will explain, the regime in Warsaw became increasingly skeptical of binational families.

In January 1973, the central publishing house of Poland, "Ruch," conducted a public opinion survey about the opening of the border with the GDR. The analysis was based on mail-in responses from a sample of 1,026 citizens of different regions, ages, urban settings, and education levels.⁷² According to the poll, 39.9 percent of the respondents had been personally or had a family member who had visited East Germany since the introduction of passport-free travel. The majority of those who traveled were younger than fifty and had completed technical school, high school, or university. The authors of the analysis note the correlation with the attitudes expressed in the responses. Over 60 percent of the survey participants approved of the new regulations that eased travel between the two countries. The approval rate, however, decreased considerably among people forty years of age and older, who often named a "lack of trust toward Germans." The same attitude toward the neighbors explains why most of the 60 percent of those surveyed did not want to visit the GDR. One farmer from the Warsaw region expressed his opinion that "the opening of borders with Slavic nations is more appropriate than

⁷¹ Stefan Lazarczyk, Notatka w sprawie zatrudnienia polskich pracowników w CSRS, 24 April 1979, AAN, LXXVI/169, 34.

⁷² Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych RSW "Prasa-Książka-Ruch," Opinie Polaków o ruchu bezwizowym PRL-NRD, January 1973, IPN, BU 0296/90 t.2.

with Germans – our enemies.”⁷³ While similar comments represented only a handful of survey responses, they nonetheless indicate that a lingering, historically-justified prejudice toward Germans informed the Polish population.

A curious finding of the pollsters sheds additional light on the nationality question during the time of open borders. From among those who had visited East Germany in 1972, critical comments take the opposite direction. Not fearful of the western neighbors, these respondents attacked fellow Poles for their inappropriate behavior abroad. Their write-in comments listed excessive shopping, speculation, and a general lack of manners as harmful not to socialist integration, but to the image of Poland.⁷⁴ In the words of one thirty-year-old from Bydgoszcz, “primarily speculators made use of [passport-free travel], who not only cleared out all the store shelves there, but with their bad manners ruined the reputation of us – Poles.”⁷⁵ While this response’s author might have overlooked the fact that Poles did not have too good of a reputation in the first place, she was certainly correct in observing that her compatriots’ actions intensified the negative attitudes in the GDR toward the eastern neighbors. The survey analysts calculated that every third respondent “stressed the element of ‘national pride’ (...) expressing the idea that Poles, who are not a bad nationality or a country of speculators, garner a bad name because of the behavior of a handful of people.”⁷⁶ Remarkable is the correlation emerging from the analysis of who voiced this sort of opinion and those who exhibited an anti-German attitude. It appears that the younger, better educated, urban dwellers were more attuned to the harmfulness of

⁷³ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

generalizations and stereotypes, which resulted either from their own travel experience or the successful inculcation of socialist rhetoric.

Speaking to the success of the regime's propaganda in instilling social norms was the repeated call to introduce more rigorous rules on the freshly opened border. As of 1 January 1972, the only obstacle to travelling across the Polish-East German border was the stamp in a citizen's ID card. The cumbersome visa and passport application process was no longer necessary and the customs limit on imports and exports across the border did not apply. Hence, the gates to the socialist consumerist paradise opened to opportunists. An almost immediate run on East German stores ensued, which Apanel described in his diaries and which caused grave concern to the regimes' planners.⁷⁷ By December 1972, the East German and Polish governments amended the original border agreement and reimposed customs and currency exchange limits. While it may be of no surprise that the Polish state media condemned the acts of speculation and unrestrained shopping, it is significant that similar voices appeared among a third of the survey responses. Citizens praised the liberalization of the border regime, but at the same time openly criticized any lack of control over who was allowed to travel and for what purpose. For example, a young woman from Gdańsk called for "a more rigorous selection" of people who could travel abroad.⁷⁸ Those survey participants who responded after December 1972 welcomed the state regaining control over the border and curbing speculation. If the honesty of the survey responses is to be trusted, the demands for increased regulation as a way of protecting the country's good name are a strong indicator of internalized socialist patriotism.

⁷⁷ E.g. Beschluß des Ministerrates 183/72, 16 February 1972, BStU, MfS SdM 2393, 13-27.

⁷⁸ Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych RSW "Prasa-Książka-Ruch," Opinie Polaków o ruchu bezwizowym PRL-NRD, January 1973, IPN, BU 0296/90 t.2, 28.

Nonetheless, for most people, internationalism in the form of friendship with East Germany was not high on the list of priorities.

Conclusion

Sadly, no similar polls could be found for the other countries. The East German state travel organization, *Reisebüro der DDR*, attempted a much more superficial survey in 1973, but with only 243 participants, it turned out to be rather unrepresentative.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the respondents shared similar pragmatic approach to internationalism, seeing Poland and Czechoslovakia as great vacation destination, but not very friendly places. The evidence compiled together from various sources, however, shows that the national dimension permeated encounters among the citizens of the Socialist Bloc. The manifestations of patriotism took various forms. In the case of Edward Apanel, Mrs. W. from Berlin, and other contemporaries, the comparisons between home and abroad resulted in a greater appreciation of one's own country. For some individual tourists, such as Wolfgang W., the hostility of the neighbors raised questions about genuine internationalist friendship of the communist states. The German expellees visiting their former possessions revived historical animosities and solidified mistrust among the Slavic populations. On the other hand, immersion in the cross-border environment became a natural element of life for people like the secret informant "Maria," who married and settled with an East German man but still exhibited allegiance to her homeland. Lastly, the travelers whose experiences abroad were published in the state press demonstrated to the wider reading public how to represent their own country respectfully in a foreign land.

⁷⁹ MfS HA VI 4791, 144.

Social integration was the cornerstone of Bloc development in the 1970s and the authorities were well aware that harmonious relations among the citizens of East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia constituted a crucial element necessary for success of the internationalist project. Several major challenges stood in the way of achieving this goal. First, the historical experiences with the neighbors pertaining to nineteenth-century imperialism, Nazi war and occupation, forced expulsions, and more recently the invasion of Czechoslovakia informed the citizens' attitudes toward the neighbor. Second, the material and cultural differences in all countries lent themselves to the drawing of distinctions between the nationalities and thereby fortified the mental borders. Despite continued state efforts to minimize these differences by an onslaught of media materials about life in the Socialist Bloc, oftentimes old prejudices colored the perceptions of the neighbors upon contact. Finally, the official state doctrine of socialist patriotism impeded in practice on the simultaneously proclaimed proletarian internationalism. The regimes' manipulation of nationalist tropes to legitimize their rule in the first postwar decades proved to be a more solid foundation of real-existing socialism than the more abstract "friendship of the peoples." After years of relative isolation, therefore, social integration inevitably required time and effort.

The first years of the new socialist experiment, therefore, had a mixed result. On the one hand, increased travel opportunities and intensified cooperation within the Bloc brought certain groups of people closer together. The open borders, moreover, allowed anyone to formulate his or her opinions about the neighboring countries, which carried the ambivalent potential for positive or negative evaluation. If it is possible to generalize, the younger, better educated cohorts of Poles, Germans, and Czechs contributed successfully to the Bloc integration by confronting and correcting stereotypical notions of the abroad, appreciating foreign lifestyles,

and occasionally forming lasting relationships with peers from across the borders. People with narrower horizons remained influenced by their prejudices, which led either to a full rejection of integration or further deepened the animosities felt toward other nationals. Nonetheless, the problems did not outweigh the benefits because none of the incidents essentially threatened the stability of the system or the security of any country—something that changed drastically in the summer of 1980.

Below the thin surface of cooperation, however, a serious threat to integration was developing. Under the patronage of the regimes, national sentiment under the guise of socialist patriotism emerged as one of the almost universal effects of socialist integration. A clash of cultures, customs, and behaviors on the one hand provided insight into a life elsewhere, but it also triggered a reflection about the self. In what social psychologists call “interactionist identity,” many Poles, East Germans, and Czechoslovaks used the cross-border interchange to solidify their own sense of belonging vis-à-vis their neighbors. In this sense, open borders were a victory for the regimes, which strove for a secure national and socialist identity of the populace. Swept under the rug, this same phenomenon later proved to be the undoing of the progress made in the first half of the decade, when more turbulent times in Poland led to a disassociation with the other two partners and an effective end to socialist integration, explored in the next part of this work.

CHAPTER 3 – BUILDING THE NEIGHBORHOOD TOGETHER: SOCIALIST GUEST WORKERS

In late May 1971, the participants and spectators of the XIV Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) in Prague saw a banner over the speakers' heads that read "Following Lenin's path toward further development of our socialist fatherland" (*leninskou cestou k dalšímu rozvoji naší socialistické vlasti*).¹ A month later, at the VIII Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in June 1971 in East Berlin, Erich Honecker introduced the Unity of Economic and Social Policy, which promised "to increase the material and cultural living standard of the people (*des Volkes*) based on the higher development rate of socialist production, efficiency, scientific-technological progress, and growth of labor productivity."² Similarly, the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR) held its VI Congress in December under the evocative slogan "So that Poland grows in strength and its people live in plenty" (*Aby Polska rosła w siłę a ludziom żyło się dostatniej*). With such foundations for the next five-year-plans, the communists in the three countries combined the expansion of social welfare benefits and the satisfaction of consumer demands in exchange for the hard work of their citizens. The three pronouncements above indicate similar goals and emphasize growth and abundance in only one country. While it would be difficult to expect Germans to work hard to give a better life to

¹ Photo on the first page of *Rudé právo*, 26 May 1971.

² Erich Honecker, Bericht des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands an den VIII. Parteitag der SED, 15 June 1971, BArch-Berlin, DY 30/2049, 47-53.

Czechs, for example, what did these nationally-minded economic and social policies mean for the developing integration of the Soviet Bloc?

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how national grand strategies functioned in those areas that intersected with another Bloc country's interests during this plan period (1971-76). Because the "new socialist integration," as discussed in the previous chapter, was part of and even the means for achieving the objectives of the expanded economic and social programs, the interactions between these two elements offer room for analysis of the cooperation and conflict among the three states. The case study that combines domestic strategies and border crossing is the workforce exchange that employed Polish laborers on short- and long-term contracts in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. How did the states balance national economic and political interests with international cooperation? How did the workers and citizens operate in a different national economy? Lastly, what were the consequences of the expanded economic and social policies for socialist integration?

The regimes planned to reach their objective of an improved living standard by initiating wide-ranging policies, the fulfillment of which was in part helped by international cooperation. Domestically, they raised pensions and wages, reformed (or in Poland's case, codified) Labor Laws, and shifted resource allocation toward the production of consumer goods including cars, household appliances, and clothes. In order to make this possible, however, the production quota had to increase, which was a problem for Czechoslovakia and East Germany since both countries had a shortage of workers. To make up for the missing laborers, both states hired foreign workers from other Bloc member states and "developing" countries, such as Hungary, Yugoslavia, Cuba, Vietnam, and Algeria.

By far the biggest group of socialist “guest workers” were Poles, delegated abroad in tens of thousands to reduce unemployment at home. The export of the Polish workforce to the neighboring socialist countries had been occurring since the mid-1960s but escalated significantly in 1971.³ Based on vague agreements between borderland administrative units of the PPR and CSSR, Czechoslovak industries employed Poles since 1964. Similarly, a deal between Polish and East German ministries from 1966 enabled mostly women living in the border areas east of the Oder River to work in the GDR. These laborers were commuters who returned home across the border after the shift. According to the PZPR Central Committee, their numbers in 1970 were not significant, namely 2,900 women and an additional 1,000 men in the GDR, with 11,000 women and 3,700 men in the CSSR.⁴ In September 1971, the East German side signaled its willingness to hire 25,000 more people, while Czechoslovakia expressed the need for 100,000 contract workers from Poland.⁵ While these numbers of hands for hire were unrealistic, such demands make clear the discrepancy between demographics and economic growth in the two countries. Although it is impossible to ascertain the precise number of laborers from Poland due to the contract system’s high fluctuation and complexity, by the best estimates at the height of “labor exports” nearly 25,000 Poles were employed in the GDR (as of 1978) and 20,000 in the CSSR (December 1974).⁶

³ Rita Röhr, “Die Beschäftigung polnischer Arbeitskräfte in der DDR, 1966-1991,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 42 (2002): 211-237.

⁴ Wydział Zagraniczny KC PZPR, Notatka w sprawie zatrudnienia polskich pracowników w zakładach pracy NRD i CSSR, September 1971, AAN 1354/LXXVI/4, 114.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶ Rademacher, Information über eine Konsultation mit dem Stellvertreter des Ministers für Arbeit und Sozialwesen der CSSR zum Einsatz polnischer Werktätiger, 23 September 1975, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/17213, 13-19. Based on reports from the Ministry of Labor and Social Programs, Rademacher places 19,788 Poles working in the CSSR. František Hamouz, Poznámky k zaměstnávání pracovníků jiné národnosti v NDR, 10 November 1978, AMZV, TO-T (1975-79), NDR/k.8/o.26. These numbers, however, do not reflect the number of commuting workers and student

This chapter argues that the worker exchange program was a significant contribution to and a reflection of new socialist integration. It was a serious effort at internationalizing the proletariat and creating stronger economic ties between the Bloc states. The initial idealism, however, diminished relatively quickly as each of the countries placed greater emphasis on exploiting the benefits the exported workforce provided. As the second part of the chapter will demonstrate, critics inside the Polish administration saw the “fraternal help” their state offered to the CSSR and GDR as too generous and worried about future development of their own fatherland. Undeniably, the Polish authorities wanted to secure the best working environment for its citizens, but the results often varied and led to the workers acting on their own initiative. To them, I argue in the last section, it was not important whether Poland, East Germany or Czechoslovakia grew in power and developed along socialist lines. The key, as frequently is the case, was to ensure that they “live in abundance” and happiness. In this light, Poland’s PZPR, its youth movements (most importantly *Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej*, ZMS), and the state Federation of Labor Unions (*Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych*, CRZZ) emerged as the vanguard and protector of “Polishness” and national interests.

The terminology for the topic discussed in this chapter deserves some consideration, as the sources do not use one term that denotes the sale-and-purchase of labor. One reason for the troubles with naming the phenomenon is bureaucratic. The officials in Poland most commonly referred to the contractual work abroad as the “worker exchange” (*wymiana pracowników*), even though East German or Czech laborers did not replace Poles at home. Three distinct forms of employment were hidden under this vague umbrella term. First, the “commuting” workers who had been working in the GDR and CSSR since the mid-1960s, regulated by provisions of

“internships” during the summers, who after 1972 were subjected to different intergovernmental regulations. Cf. AAN, FSZMP 1718/234.

bilateral treaties. Second, the “contract workers” who were hired by a home-based international-trade company that performed work abroad. A handful of service, construction, and retail enterprises, such as *Budimex*, *Rudex*, *Hydrokop*, and *PolSERVICE*, belonged directly to the Office for International Trade (*Centrala Handlu Zagranicznego*, CHZ), which held a monopoly on foreign trade.⁷ Beginning in the late 1960s, East Germany and Czechoslovakia contracted CHZ-run construction companies, among others, to carry out specialized infrastructural projects, which provided a complete service, including labor, and where applicable also the equipment and resources. Beginning in 1971, a third form of employment took shape regulated by bilateral state agreements. Under that deal, authorities in Polish Voivodships (*województwa*) with high unemployment levels advertised jobs in the GDR or CSSR to anyone looking for work. Groups of workers then were allocated to foreign factories depending on their skill set. As “state agreement” workers, these people were hired directly by the hosting company on a temporary (usually a three-year) contract and paid in full by the firm abroad. These distinctions are important because each form of employment had its peculiarities in terms of wages, benefits, rights, and privileges.

The second issue with addressing the export of workforce is cultural. The moniker “worker exchange” offered a sensitive approach to a potentially thorny situation, especially with regard to advertising recruitment to the GDR. While employment by the “Slavic brothers” to the south created little controversy, work in Germany evoked historically painful connotations related to forced labor under the Nazi occupation, which the previous generation had to endure. To minimize the sense that Poles continued to work for Germans and to support the

⁷ A similar agency existed in Czechoslovakia—*Podnik zahraničního obchodu*. In East Germany, different companies (*Außenhandelsbetriebe*) were subordinated directly to the Ministry of Foreign Trade or ministries related to the company’s specialty.

internationalist agenda of worker exchange, in the second half of the decade Polish and East German Labor Committees agreed to publish sham advertisements for job recruitment in Poland.⁸ Both the Czechoslovak and East German government and enterprise sources almost exclusively address the issue with “contract workers” or the “Polish workforce” (e.g. *Vertragsarbeiter, polnische Arbeitskräfte, polští pracovníci*). The program was officially justified as “fraternal help” with mutual benefits, through which German and Czech industries could satisfy their labor demand and Poland’s economy could exploit the skills the workers learned in more technologically-advanced enterprises abroad. Unofficially, however, each side vehemently pursued its own national interests to maximize profits and to deliver the promised abundance to its people.

Remarkable above all is the avoidance of the phrase “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter*). Officially used in the Federal Republic since 1955 to denote the millions of migrants recruited from developing European, Middle Eastern, and African countries for temporary work assignments, for the socialist states *Gastarbeit* became a symbol of revived West German imperialism and exploitation. Nonetheless, the foreign workers’ status in the Comecon countries fit the characterization as a “guest” more accurately, as the duration of the contract and a possibility to stay were strictly limited. One important difference to note in terms of the treatment of foreign laborers is nationality. While Vietnamese citizens, for example, had little opportunity for wider social integration, Poles for the most part worked hand-in-hand with their German or Czech colleagues in the so-called “mixed brigades” and often faced pressure from both the hosting authorities as well as the PZPR overseers to participate actively in local life. For

⁸ Bericht über die Gespräche und Verhandlungen mit dem Ministerium für Arbeit und Löhne der VRP zu Fragen der zeitweiligen Beschäftigung polnischer Bürger in der DDR in Warschau, 31 July 1978, BArch-Berlin, DQ 3/867, and F. Hamouz, Poznámky k zaměstnávání pracovníků jiné národnosti v NDR, 10 November 1978, AMZV, TO-T (1975-79), NDR/k.8/o.26.

example, in July 1975 the director of human resources at the VEB Chemie-Tankanlagenbau (VEB-CTK) in Fürstenwalde issued a circular to the employees that explained that the dissimilarity between the Western *Gastarbeiter* and the Polish workers lay in the latter's inclusion in the community's social, cultural, and political activities.⁹ For the reasons of proletarian class interests in building socialism, "it is the responsibility of all employees of our plant to secure a quick and comprehensive integration of Polish laborers into their work collectives." Reality proved to be a little different. A rather persistent and effective negotiation of conditions by the central authorities in Warsaw played a role in obtaining a special status for their citizens with more benefits than those of Vietnamese laborers.¹⁰ Owing to shared characteristics between the Western and Eastern guest work, I will use the term interchangeably.

Worker Exports in Theory

The expansion of temporary work abroad in the early 1970s was linked to the promises the new communist leaders made to their citizens in 1971 as well as the intensified Bloc integration as outlined in Comecon's *Comprehensive Program* from July of the same year. Sending—and receiving—workers from Poland was, at least initially, a resolute way of combining national economic interests with progressing regionalization of the East European economy. As the exploration of different motivations for this deal will show, the overlap between Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak interests in the areas of manufacturing and employment was considerable. For this reason, reaching the agreement was relatively smooth. Several factors, however, disturbed the tranquility of worker exports. First, realizing that leasing

⁹ Halbas, Information über den Einsatz polnischer Werkstätigen im Stammbetrieb des VEB CTK Fürstenwalde, 25 July 1975, Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg (LHA-B), Rep. 703/220.

¹⁰ Cf. Röhr, "Die Beschäftigung," 234.

labor can be a lucrative business, both sides explored maximizing profits, which in turn led to arguments on inter- and intragovernmental levels. Second, Polish state enterprises and regional employment offices, charged with recruiting laborers to send abroad, found it challenging to evoke enough interest among the population to commit to a temporary relocation abroad when shopping getaways to other socialist states were possible in 1972— though this situation changed after border customs were reintroduced. As a result, Poland was often unable to fulfill the agreed-upon quota for the worker exchange. Lastly, noticing the increasing need for labor at home and that it had the short-end of the stick, the administration in Warsaw began to backtrack from the agreements in 1975, leaving the GDR and CSSR scrambling for help.

The German Democratic Republic was one of the most industrially-advanced Bloc countries, but its capabilities were limited by a decreasing population size. With a total citizenry of about 18.5 million in 1949, the number of inhabitants dropped to 17.2 million by 1960.¹¹ After the erection of the Berlin Wall, the population decrease slowed down but did not halt. By the end of 1973, East Germany had fewer than 17 million citizens, creating a shortage of 140,000 laborers, according to the Polish Embassy in East Berlin.¹² For this reason, the East German administration, much like its capitalist brother to the west in the 1950s, turned to other socialist states for help in the form of guest workers. In addition to Poles, Hungarian laborers began arriving in the GDR in 1967, establishing a cohort of some 10,000 men by 1972.¹³ In 1978, there were also 3,800 Algerians, 1,200 Cubans, and 2,400 Yugoslavs, whose first appearance on the

¹¹ Based on information from the Federal Republic of Germany, Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1994 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1994), 50.

¹² K. Czaplą, Informacja o zatrudnieniu algierskich pracowników w przemyśle NRD, June 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111.

¹³ Kurzinformation, 24 October 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9919, 130-33.

East German labor market can be dated to 1974.¹⁴ The foreign workers from outside the Bloc usually arrived with few skills and little education, which only partially satisfied the East German employers.¹⁵ On the other hand, Poland and Hungary, due to the nature of the contracts, delegated a mix of unskilled, semi-skilled, and experts to the GDR, contributing significantly to the production and construction projects for which they were hired.¹⁶

Just how dire the need for laborers, especially qualified ones, was in the GDR is exemplified in the letter from the Deputy Minister for Civil Engineering (*Ministerium für Bauwesen*), Günter Oehlert, to the State Planning Committee (*Staatliche Plankommission*) from 23 September 1971.¹⁷ In his missive, Oehlert discussed the human resource situation at the *VEB Metalleichtbaukombinat* (light-weight metal structures enterprise, MLK) in Plauen, employing a dramatic tone and pleading on behalf of the plant's management to assign Polish help to the factory. "These plate radiators are of great significance" to the East German economy, the Deputy Minister prefaced his letter, "and the District Planning Committee (*Bezirksplankommission*) in Gera has no way of covering the demand for manpower." Because the allocation of contracted foreign laborers for 1972 had already been set and MLK-Plauen did not receive what it needed, the management used its contacts to influence a reconsideration of the unmatched wisdom of central planners. Hence, instead of any random fifty Poles, the company requested that thirty of them be skilled in metallurgical work, "and the other twenty can be taught the respective skills." The letter underscores three important threads of the nature of

¹⁴ Czapla, AAN, 1354/ LXXVI/111, Mrázek, Poznámky k zaměstnávání pracovníků jiné národnosti v NDR, 10 November 1978, and AMZV, TO-T (1975-79), NDR/k.8.

¹⁵ BArch-Berlin, DH 1/25716.

¹⁶ Z. Frelek (Ministerstwo Pracy, Płac i Spraw Socjalnych), Informacja w sprawie zatrudnienia pracowników polskich w przedsiębiorstwach CSSR i NRD, 17 January 1975, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/6.

¹⁷ Günter Oehlert to Staatliche Plankommission, 23 September 1971, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463/1.

guest work in the GDR. First, the labor shortage was universal, but the critical need for highly-skilled help speaks to the technological advancement of East German industry, as well as the focus on, perhaps stereotypical but very real, *Qualitätsarbeit* (quality work).¹⁸ Second, the shortage society thesis resurfaces in this episode as well, in which imported labor was scarce and therefore rationed, which resulted in competition between state-owned enterprises, much like with other resources used for production and consumption. Lastly, training unskilled Polish labor was one of the key premises of the states' agreement, but the East German economy did not have the time for that, later causing a rift between Warsaw and Berlin.

While Czechoslovakia was not affected by the same population decline as East Germany, its modest increase (estimated in 1971 at 0.7% annually of 14.5 million) did not satisfy the ambitiously-growing economy. During a meeting between the party-state leadership in Warsaw on 1 October 1971, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal confided that despite the one-percent over-fulfillment of the five-year plan, the workforce deficit was putting the brakes on its economy.¹⁹ For this reason, later in the conversation the Czechoslovak delegation raised the issue of finalizing an agreement for employing Polish laborers.²⁰ Explaining the need to satisfy their demand for manpower fully, the Czechoslovak side asked for “urgency in this matter,” postulating that Poland send 50,000 people to help with the next five-year plan (1971-1975). Using competitive marketing persuasion, the visitors from Prague added that they had offers for guest workers from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Egypt, but they “would prefer to solve

¹⁸ The focus on quality in production was one of the distinguishing factors in a comparative work on Polish-East German factories in Małgorzata Mazurek, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy: Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych* (Warszawa: TRIO, 2005). More on that topic will be developed in the next section of the chapter.

¹⁹ Notatka z rozmów z przywódcami partii i rządu Czechosłowackiej Republiki Socjalistycznej, 1-2 October 1971, AAN, KC-PZPR-Biuro Gierek/XI-A/652, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

this problem with Polish help.” While it remains unspecified in the document, the linguistic, cultural, and geographic proximity, as well as positive previous experiences, influenced the CSSR partners to use Polish laborers. The decision-makers in Warsaw, however, were dragging their feet somewhat, after quickly realizing that the conditions to which they just agreed on with East Germany in May 1971 required reconsideration.

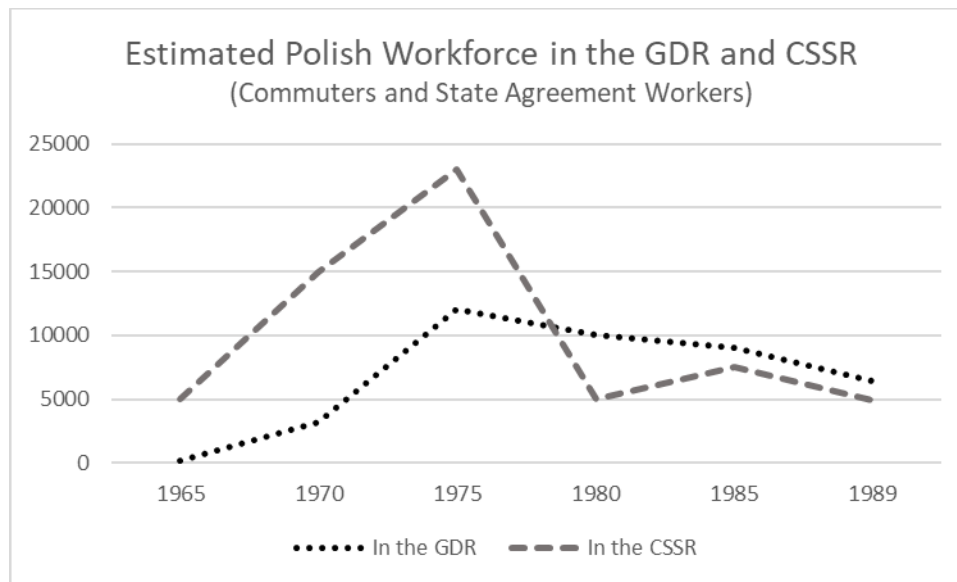
The elements of the party-state apparatus responsible for employment and the economy cheered on the idea of broadened labor exports. In contrast to its neighbors, Poland’s population in the early 1970s was approaching thirty-three million people and rising; its economic growth especially in the industrial sector was just picking up pace.²¹ Nonetheless, for 1971 the Central Planning Committee in Warsaw estimated the “surplus of workforce” – a codename for the officially nonexistent unemployment – to be between 100,000-150,000 people.²² East Germany and Poland approved two forms of employment abroad that were regulated by the intergovernmental treaty between the *Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne* and the *Komitet Pracy i Płac* (Secretary/Committee for Labor and Wages). The first one delegated the responsibilities for managing the labor exchange to cooperating regional committees for labor (voivodship and Bezirk level), which determined the size of a group sent over and oversaw recruitment on the Polish and employment on the German side. This type of cooperation aimed at reducing local unemployment, mostly in central and eastern Poland, which contributed a largely unskilled labor force.

The second set of guidelines for exporting workers was managed on the national level, with respective ministries working together and with state-owned enterprises that fell under their

²¹ Janusz Kaliński, *Gospodarka w PRL* (Warsaw: IPN, 2012), 76-78.

²² Z. Frelek, Informacja, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/6.

jurisdiction to provide skilled cohorts of workers who were assigned according to their qualifications. For example, the Ministry of Industrial Machinery of the PPR (*Ministerstwo Przemysłu Maszynowego*) and the GDR Ministry of Civil Engineering signed a contract in November 1972 for seventy persons to be hired by the *Metalleichtkombinat* in Niesky and Magdeburg for three years. The Polish side promised to recruit fifteen welders and fifty-five machinists with a minimum of one year of work experience at its daughter company, *Mostostal*.²³ Regardless of the form of employment, ministerial or regional, the overarching agreement prescribed that the guest workers were to be paid and granted the same social benefits (holidays, sick leave, bonuses, etc.) as their German counterparts.



The demographics had several specifications that contributed to the experience abroad and the shaping of the guest worker program. In the middle of the decade, there were about 6,200

²³ Protokoll der Verhandlungen zwischen dem Ministerium für Maschinenindustrie der VRP und dem Ministerium für Bauwesen der DDR vom 23.11.1972, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/25716.

laborers recruited country-wide by local employment offices and state enterprises based on the state agreement. Additionally, continuing the practice from the previous years, some 3,600 “commuters” from the Polish-German borderlands crossed over the Oder River daily to work. Roughly 2,000 “contract crews” in East Germany worked for Polish enterprises with a permit to fulfill construction or other service contracts abroad.²⁴ In Czechoslovakia, the official numbers indicate 17,848 (in mid-1975) of state agreement workers and about 4,500 commuters (1974).²⁵ These numbers, however, do not include seasonal labor and those people who took advantage of the open borders to find employment abroad illegally. Gender distribution was rather unequal, based on the different types of jobs for which the GDR and CSSR recruited, which not only corresponded to the country’s dominant production specialty but also exemplified the “traditional” and stereotypical division of labor: textile industries for women and mechanical or electronic sectors for men. Females, therefore, constituted nearly 75 percent of Poles working in Czechoslovakia but only 30 percent in East Germany (the majority of whom were commuters).

Across the board, the workers were young, between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five. Only about a quarter were older and these were the skilled laborers or party-appointed “group supervisors.” Age also posed several problems for the guest worker program. From the lack of skills, to rowdiness, to falling in love with a foreigner, biology frequently presented challenges that the Party units continuously attempted to solve (more on that in chapter 7). In terms of education, nearly half of the workers had completed vocational schools (*szkoła zawodowa*) in an array of disciplines, from gastronomical to electrotechnical. A third of all laborers had completed

²⁴ Zaproński (PPR Embassy Berlin), Sprawozdanie o zatrudnieniu polskich pracowników w przedsiębiorstwach NRD w 1976 roku, March 1977, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/154; Röhr, 230.

²⁵ Information über eine Konsultation mit dem Stellvertreter des Ministers für Arbeit und Sozialwesen der CSSR zum Einsatz polnischer Werkstätiger, 23 September 1975, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/17213; Uchwała Komitetu Zakładowego PZPR w Pradze, January 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98.

only eight years of elementary schooling, a handful possessed a college degree, and the remaining 20% finished arts-and-sciences high schools (*liceum*). Lastly, card-carrying members of the PZPR abroad were relatively absent. In the GDR in 1976, only 3.7 percent of delegated workers belonged to the Party and the situation in the CSSR was similar, although, according to the reports by the Party units established abroad, not all delegated people admitted that they had the PZPR membership upon arrival at their new workplace. This minority of communists, nonetheless, took upon itself the dual role of workers' representatives before local management and functionaries, as well as a moral compass for its countryfolk.²⁶

The recruitment of workers to go abroad had its own challenges, which resulted in the high fluctuation of the personnel and subpar fulfillment of the contractual quota. For the work organized under the state agreement, the Polish and German sides signed bilateral contracts on regional (*Bezirk-Voivodship*) levels, which the central powers then approved. Based on German needs, Poles delegated as many people as they could, but as the GDR Minister of Chemical Industry, Günther Wyschofsky, explained to the Deputy Prime Minister, Kurt Fichtner, in August 1972, their partners from the east had trouble enlisting workers because of poor material incentives.²⁷ “Since the recruitment proceeds on a voluntary basis, the Polish side cannot force the workers to take up work” abroad. Moreover, since the opening of the border in January 1972, “Polish citizens arrive in the GDR without needing to be employed [there].” The unregulated border regime, especially at first when customs also were lifted, was indeed a dramatic change from before 1972 when an official delegation even to the near-abroad was a sought-after privilege. Once customs duties and currency exchange limits returned at the end of the year to

²⁶ More detailed discussion of the topic of supervision and discipline appears in Chapter 6.

²⁷ Wyschofsky to Fichtner, 10 August 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9919, 140.

haunt the travelers, workers enjoyed broadened import-export privileges, which lent themselves to smuggling and to earning “on the side.” Such a situation, however, meant a higher percentage of people who took advantage of the law to make more money on the black market than at a factory.

Second, candidates for export-contract jobs that required a higher level of expertise and therefore were better paying usually lingered on “wait lists” for an appointment. This situation in particular left room for corruption among managers of the firms working abroad. For example, human resource officials of the Cracovian *Hydrokop*, a hydrologic engineering enterprise that carried out projects in the GDR as well as in remote parts of the world such as Iraq, demanded high bribes that reached tens of thousands of złoty from individuals who wanted to work abroad.²⁸ Delegating people who bribed the authorities or had connections with the decision-makers had a series of negative effects. These workers often disappointed the employers with a lack of skill, caused social conflicts among the Polish crews, and embarrassed the local Party units abroad with their behavior geared toward illegal self-enrichment and/or attitudes toward work.²⁹ Within the first three years of the worker exchange program, calls for the more thorough recruitment of workers multiplied, such as the one by Mr. M. working on the construction of the Slaughterhouse Combine in Prague: “Individuals ruin [the Czechs’] opinion about Poles. It is imperative to heighten the background checks before sending people to work in the CSSR.”³⁰ Hence, while to some guest workers the time abroad was about money and adventure, others

²⁸ E.g. Adam Teneta, “Korzyści z rezerwowej listy” *Dziennik Polski* nr 99, 27 April 1973, 3; and Anonymous to KW MO Kraków, no date [1973], Archiwum IPN w Krakowie [IPN Kr] 08/246.

²⁹ A multitude of examples can be found in the reports from PZPR cell meetings abroad and petitions written by workers to the Party cells in the fond AAN, 1354/LXXVI.

³⁰ Krzysztof Świeczkowski, Protokół z zebrania POP przy Oddziale Praga (Budowa Kombinatu Mięsnego Praga Południe, DPBP), 17 October 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/99.

took the opportunities more seriously, aspiring to gain experience, performing quality work, and securing a good name for the “fatherland” within the socialist community.

Worker Exports in Practice

The first Polish-East German agreement from May 1971 appears to be “truly a form of fraternal help” to the other countries for little in return.³¹ Motivated foremost by the need to reduce unemployment at home, the Committee for Labor in Warsaw readily agreed to send the surplus workforce abroad, whose wages and insurance were paid by the receiving side. Moreover, the benefit of leasing out unskilled laborers to the GDR and CSSR was the possibility of occupational training that, according to the agreement, the employers were obligated to provide. Another promised result of exporting workers to the Bloc countries was supposed to have been more tangible. The argument the East German partners put forth posited that if industry were not thwarted by a labor shortage, then production goals could be accomplished faster. Hence, East Germany could fulfill and surpass its trade agreements by actually delivering machinery, equipment, and “hard-to-find commodities” that Poland had ordered from the GDR.³² For example, the condition for providing an additional 200 people for the German heavy industry sector was extra deliveries of “valves, fans, screws, nails, and chains.”³³ Within the realities of state socialism and underpinned by the ideology of international solidarity as well as progressing socialist economic integration, such an arrangement seemed like a perfect solution to the problems on both sides of the border. Nonetheless, whoever negotiated for Poland in 1971 did

³¹ Frelek, Informacja, 17 January 1975, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/6, 13.

³² Wydział Zagraniczny KC PZPR, Notatka w sprawie zatrudnienia polskich pracowników w zakładach pracy NRD i CSSR, September 1971, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/4, 121.

³³ Niederschrift über die Beratung zum Abschluß des Jahresprotokolls 1972 zum Regierungsabkommen mit der VRP vom 25.5.1971, 20 December 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9918, 2.

not fully consider the situation. On the one hand, they overestimated Polish workers' complacency and satisfaction with merely higher wages in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. On the other, they drastically underestimated the demand for help across the western and southern borders, which could have been utilized as a trump card for securing real benefits "for the fatherland."

The first crews began arriving in the GDR in August 1971 and with them the first signs of dissatisfaction. In the morning hours of 27 August 1971, the Hoyerswerda county police station received a call from the manager of a workers' hotel, who informed the authorities that some three hundred Polish laborers declined to board busses to their workplace, the brown coal refining plant *Gaskombinat Schwarze Pumpe*.³⁴ According to the initial police report, the reason for their refusal was dissatisfaction with the wages. The day before the laborers had received less money than was promised to them during recruitment back in Poland. The workers did not cause an uproar or put up picket lines, but remained quiet in their settlement simply refusing to go to their posts. Nonetheless, the situation caused a major commotion in the East German bureaucracy. Within an hour, the plant management, local SED representative, and the county council (*Rat des Kreises*) met with the workers to negotiate. By eleven o'clock, an employee from the Polish Embassy in Berlin was already on his way to Hoyerswerda, one hundred miles south of the capital, and the local Stasi office started to conduct investigations. While the workers voiced their discontentment over the benefits package in Schwarze Pumpe almost immediately after the first group of Polish workers arrived in early August, the silent protest at the end of the month shocked and angered German authorities. The response quickly changed from negotiation attempts to an ultimatum given to the striking laborers: return to work and

³⁴ Matthey (BDVP Cottbus), Sofortmeldung, 27 August 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9918, 89. The informer must have miscalculated the number of protesters because later reports speak only of 120 men refusing to work that day.

agree to the present conditions or return to Poland right away.³⁵ Thirty-five men boarded busses home that same day and two of the “instigators” were brought to the border by car later in the evening as a disciplinary measure. No repercussions followed those who resumed work the next day because their participation, as the German Ministry of Mining claimed, was motivated by solidarity with or fear of ostracism from their Polish colleagues.

The workers brought forth four main grievances. First, they demanded extra pay for work in hazardous conditions as well as a separation bonus. While the Polish-East German agreement from May 1971 did not provide for such a compensation, the laborers claimed that additional money had been promised to them throughout recruitment in Poland.³⁶ Second, they demanded to earn according to the GDR salary bracket that took into account an individual’s qualifications and experience. This postulate was legitimate as it constituted a breach of the agreement, which obliged the German enterprise to conform to the legal standards of East German labor law. Third, the price for the dormitories was too high, which was established by the state contract at thirty marks per month. Lastly, the group requested that the foreign earnings be subjected to a higher exchange rate in Poland (7.48 złoty for 1 mark instead of 4.68), taking advantage of the arbitrary currency system (see chapter 1). Although none of these grievances were addressed at the time, they signaled the problems embedded in the labor export program. Especially the complaints about a separation bonus and the housing cost became the cornerstone of the Polish state’s renegotiation demands.

³⁵ Ziergiebel (Ministerium für Grundstoffindustrie), Information über den Einsatz polnischer Arbeitskräfte in den Betrieben des MfG, 29 August 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/11881.

³⁶ J. Chomętowski (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych PRL), Informacja dot. przerwania pracy przez grupę polskich pracowników zatrudnionych w NRD, 8 September 1971, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięi Narodowej w Krakowie (IPN-Kr), 060/41/4, 8-10.

The agency of the workers in securing their own benefits as well as giving their state representatives the upper hand in negotiations cannot be overstated. While a single incident might not have persuaded the East German decisionmakers to acquiesce to the demands, a row of similar instances in other factories employing guest workers made the matter serious. For example, a group of 120 laborers who recently arrived at the power plant Lippendorf (south of Leipzig) threatened a strike on 8 September 1971 over the same issues of separation bonuses and salary brackets.³⁷ Another forty men, protesting on 2 February 1972, felt dissatisfied with the lack of a professional training program and sub-standard housing at a screw factory near Erfurt.³⁸ These incidents of recurring organized action shocked and bothered the German authorities, who without hesitation extradited the main culprits and gambled that the fear of not being able to continue earning money in the GDR would detract others from causing problems again. In Poland, however, workers' grievances were taken more seriously and alerted the party and state authorities to the agreement's inadequacies.

Party criticism of the agreed conditions arose almost immediately. Within three months from signing the state treaty, the PZPR Central Committee International and Economic Departments began pointing out the flaws and missed opportunities. According to a confidential memo expressing the joint position of these two councils, "based on a wide range of Party membership and ministries," the conditions accepted in May 1971 "do not secure optimal benefits for the Polish side."³⁹ The main reservation was couched in abstract economic terms, as

³⁷ Ziergiebel, Information über den Einsatz polnischer Arbeitskräfte in den Betrieben des MfG, 8 September 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9918, 77-8.

³⁸ Gothe (Rat des Bezirks Erfurt), Weitere Information über das außerordentliche Vorkommnis am 10.2.1972 im VEB Schraubenwerk Tambach-Dietharz, 21 February 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/22652, 135 and other documents in that series.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

“not sufficiently considering the accumulated national income⁴⁰ (...) produced by Polish workers in the form of (...) income for society.” In simpler terms, Polish nationals created wealth for other countries (by helping to manufacture) and the coffers in Warsaw did not get any fuller from it. Even though the workers earned relatively more for comparable jobs in the GDR than they would have in Poland, it did not represent any real value for the socialist economy because it was the individual who accrued more money. Society, therefore, could not make use of it because it did not supply the budget from which that money could be redistributed to help “Poland grow and its people live in plenty.”

As a point of comparison, the PZPR economists emphasized the system used by the companies belonging to the Office for International Trade (*Centrala Handlu Zagranicznego*, CHZ). Holding a monopoly on foreign trade, CHZ operated several businesses in various service and retail sectors with access to capitalist currencies. Beginning in the late 1960s, East Germany and Czechoslovakia contracted the CHZ-run construction companies *Budimex*, *Rudex*, *Hydrokop*, and *PolSERVICE*, among others, to carry out specialized infrastructural projects. While individual workers were hired under the state agreement, Foreign Trade agencies sold a complete service that provided labor and, when needed, the tools and supplies in a so-called “contract works.” The customer paid a lump sum or equivalent trade credit through the International Bank for Economic Cooperation in Moscow. The CHZ then disbursed the funds, including wages for the worker brigade. The analysts cited that *PolSERVICE*, depending on the contract, received an average of 600 transfer rubles monthly per worker, which covered the worker’s wage (half paid in the currency of the country in which they worked, the other half transferred to an account at

⁴⁰ Differs from gross domestic product (GDP) in that the gross/net national income (GNI) adds the income flowing in from other countries as a result of a national’s work or ownership abroad.

home in złoty) and constituted revenue for the company, ergo the state.⁴¹ These earnings amounted to some 17,000 convertible złoty a year per worker (equivalent of 3,500 USD in 1971). It is no surprise, therefore, that in light of the Comecon-encouraged bilateral barter trade, which removed the need to engage the complicated process of exchanging inconvertible socialist currencies, East Germany and Czechoslovakia preferred to hire workers for the promises of industrial deliveries instead.

The cut for the Polish government, however, was not the only problem with the negotiated deal. Poland, the Central Committee departments seemed to argue, had shot itself in the foot by not concretely securing working conditions abroad.⁴² Enumerating the issues pointed out that social benefits, such as health insurance or paid leave, were not precisely regulated but left to the discretion of the hiring party; fees for housing (30 marks per person a month), taken out of the worker's paycheck, were too high for the low standards of dwellings that the German side provided. More importantly, by decentralizing recruitment to regional Labor Committees, supervision over the size of the delegations and the quality of laborers was nearly impossible. As a result, Poland sent people with little-to-no occupational training, which translated into being given "simple jobs" in the GDR that paid the least and offered no room for learning new skills. This thesis appears rather puzzling, given that the main motivation for expanding the workforce exports was the reduction of unemployment at home. One explanation for this contradictory stance is the Party economists' focus on long-term gains for their country. Starting with the assumption that the current five-year plan would invigorate economic growth in Poland, it might turn out that the labor tied up by long-term contracts abroad would not be able to satisfy the

⁴¹ AAN, 1354/LXXVI/4, 116-17.

⁴² Ibid., 117-18.

increasing demand at home. Essential for that growth would be cadres well-trained in “modern methods, technologies, and organization” that employment in East Germany could have, but did not, provide.⁴³ Hence, it is evident that for some elements within the party-state apparatus, socialist international cooperation was more a vehicle toward securing national interests rather than a goal in itself.

The critiques of the rushed deal from May 1971 quickly gained acceptance among the decision makers, effectively halting the expansion of worker exports to Czechoslovakia on similar terms and beginning a lengthy process of renegotiation with the GDR. During that October 1971 meeting between Gierek and Husák, for example, the Polish side did not flatly refuse Czechoslovak requests for arranging workforce exports. Rather, in a diplomatic way that exhibited more concern for national self-interest, they “presented the issue of employing Polish laborers from the perspective of both countries’ development, informing that in the coming years Poland might not have any surplus workforce.”⁴⁴ Such a stance gave Poland more of an advantage in later negotiations from November 1971, in which Warsaw demanded that the CSSR transfer into the Polish budget 6,000 kčs per worker a year (the equivalent of average monthly wages for four months) to cover social welfare expenses, in addition to the salary paid to the individual worker by the employer according to the Czechoslovak pay table.⁴⁵ Ultimately, both sides agreed to 3,500 kčs. In the 1973 revisions to the agreement with the GDR, Poles postulated for a “separation bonus” for married workers (4 marks/day), four paid trips home per year, premiums for the Polish government, as well as formalized occupational training and language

⁴³ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁴ AAN, KC-PZPR-Biuro Gierek/XI-A/652, 13.

⁴⁵ Ebersbach, Telegramm aus Warschau, 19 November 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9918, 22.

courses for the laborers.⁴⁶ While these new terms certainly appeased the critics in Warsaw and various elements of the agreements between the PPR and GDR as well as the CSSR continued to evolve every year, it did not prevent many opponents of the labor exchange program to argue that “financial results for our country are essentially null” and Poland should “back away from this business as fast as possible.”⁴⁷

The arguments that the state did not benefit from exporting its workforce were valid only from a macroeconomic perspective, but they did overlook the latent advantages to the individual workers. An East German or Czechoslovak salary alone had minimal appeal. An average monthly wage of a miner in the GDR in 1972 amounted to 670 marks or 3,200 złoty, which was 12.5 percent less than what the miner could have earned in Poland.⁴⁸ The situation was better in other industries. For example, Poles employed in machine-building or chemical manufacturing—East German specialties—brought home some 500 złoty more than they would have earned in their own country. Wages received in Czechoslovakia were comparable or slightly lower.⁴⁹ Going through the trouble of spending three years (or more if a worker renewed the contract) abroad, however, was worth it for those who knew how to capitalize on the opportunity. Thanks to the provision in the interstate agreements about salary distribution (one half transferred to a Polish bank account in złoty, the other paid out directly in foreign currency), the workers had easier access to the East German mark and Czechoslovak koruna than most other Polish citizens.

⁴⁶ Wydział Zatrudnienia przy Ambasadzie PRL w NRD, Informacja o zatrudnieniu polskich pracowników w NRD, 9 September 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111.

⁴⁷ J. Wiśniewski (PPR Embassy Prague), Załącznik do notatki, 10 February 1975, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/6.

⁴⁸ Wirtschaftspolitische Abteilung der Botschaft der DDR in der VRP, Vergleich des durchschnittlichen monatlichen Bruttolohnes polnischer Werkstätiger beim Einsatz in der DDR und VRP, 28 August 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9919, 73.

⁴⁹ Frelek, Informacja, 17 January 1975, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/6, 3.

Additionally, living in the GDR and CSSR opened doors to a more abundant market of consumer goods, which became a particular asset after the countries of the triangle reintroduced export customs on travelers in 1973 (more on that topic in chapter 3).

While the debates in Warsaw over the profitability of exporting workforce continued, the German and Czechoslovak administrations likewise calculated their costs and benefits. When in early 1972 the German negotiators requested an additional 2,600 workers, Poles demanded extra goods in exchange, including industrial technology, truck tires, refined metals and ores, and 10.5 million meters of steel cables, all worth 24.4 million Rubles (134.2 million marks). The comment in the German report from the negotiations was brief: "These suggestions are unacceptable" because such demands would have required each worker to generate 51,000 marks production efficiency, which was hardly attainable.⁵⁰ According to the *Plankommission*, the cost of wages, premiums to the employing country, and welfare provisions for the guest workers in 1972 amounted to 100,002,500 marks, with the average annual productivity of a single laborer being 44,500 marks.⁵¹ An earlier report of the GDR Ministry of Finances indicated additional hidden costs of preparing infrastructure (worker hotels) and consumption.⁵² The planners in East Berlin were well aware that the cost "for society" of hiring other Bloc citizens rose with their increased use and export of consumer goods (more on that topic in the next chapter). When a representative of the Polish Labor Committee stated during a 18 July 1978 meeting with East German counterparts that "Poland will not be making gifts to the GDR," the notetaker added on

⁵⁰ Wirtschaftspolitische Abteilung der Botschaft der DDR in der VRP, 28 August 1972, BArch-Berlin DC/20/9919, 73. Information zu Fragen, die mit der Vorbereitung eines Regierungsabkommens über den Einsatz polnischer Werkträger in Betrieben der DDR verbunden sind, no date, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9918, 189.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Einschätzung des MdF zu den Bedingungen des Einsatzes polnischer Werkträger in Betrieben der DDR (Anlage), 11 February 1971, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9919, 220.

the margin “but shopping in the GDR does not strain the market in the PPR.”⁵³ The pure numbers, therefore, indicate only a minor profit margin for the GDR budget, but the planners in Berlin saw imported labor as an investment that would allow average East Germans to live at a higher standard with more leisure time.⁵⁴

As one Czech diplomat in Warsaw noted after his conversation with the East German economic attaché, the GDR saw the payments for the worker exchange as “fraternal help” for its eastern neighbor, echoing the same slogan that Polish authorities used to justify their labor exports.⁵⁵ Also, as much as the Polish critics of the program suspected German and Czech profiteering behind the employment of guest workers, so did the state administration in Berlin notice the increasing Polish exploitation of the labor shortages in the GDR and CSSR. The bureaucrats on the Spree compared their deal with Poland to what the PPR negotiated with Czechoslovakia in mid-1972. They reached the conclusion that the two contracts differed considerably. Warsaw then, as “it became clear again” during a November 1972 meeting between representatives of Polish and East German labor committees, allegedly used these differences as leverage in further negotiations to “obtain the highest possible profit.”⁵⁶ Pressed for workforce, however, the GDR side offered considerable concessions at that point, including the separation bonus and one paid trip home for the guest workers.

⁵³ Handwritten notes, Beratung mit Gen. Dobosz, 18 July 1978, BArch-Berlin, DQ 3/867.

⁵⁴ For the discussion of reducing working hours as a part of the Unity of Social and Economic Policy see Mark Allinson, “More from Less: Ideological Gambling with the Unity of Economic and Social Policy in Honecker's GDR” *Central European History* 45 (1/2012): 102-127.

⁵⁵ Václav Dvořák, Informace ze setkání s ekonomickým radou ZÚ NDR ve Varšavě, 9 November 1971, AMZV, TO-T 1970-74, NDR, k.8.

⁵⁶ Bericht über die Durchführung des Abkommens mit der VRP zum Einsatz polnischer Werkträger in der DDR, 10 November 1972, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/9919, 51.

The parallel perceptions of the other side reaping the benefits of worker exports nicely illuminate the dynamics at work during the process of socialist economic integration. For sure, neither the German, Czechoslovak, nor Polish party-state organs were wrong in interpreting each other's motives for securing the most advantageous outcome for their country. In part, this situation was a legacy of over two decades of distrust and misunderstandings among the Bloc countries.⁵⁷ More importantly, they pursued conflicting national interests because, in the end, each regime had started the decade with promises of bounty for their citizens, which they aimed to fulfill by harnessing the energy of the working people. Both internationalist ideology and economic pragmatism guided the authorities in Berlin, Warsaw, and Prague toward cooperation, but it appears that nationally-centered thinking muddled the communists' understanding of regional integration. Instead of working together to complement their resources and to share the benefits, each side wanted to succeed on its own. Hidden behind the ideological slogan of "fraternal help" was a nationalist sentiment that hurt not only the integrationist momentum, but also the individual countries' economic performance. In sum, it appears that no state outplayed the others, but the ultimate victors of the situation were the workers themselves.

Worker Exports as Experience

Big politics provided an opportunity and a framework for the socialist guest worker program, but the laborers, their local colleagues, and company management shaped the actual experience of working abroad. This section will explore the conditions that Polish men and women found in East German and Czechoslovak factories, as well as labor relations between the foreigners and their workplace. Chapter 6 will focus on life outside the factory.

⁵⁷ Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations, 1945-1962* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).

The main link between the home country and the laborers was the Basic Party Unit (Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna, POP) established in places with a higher concentration of Polish workers. While only a small percentage of the laborers belonged to the Party, executives of CHZ contract sites and supervisors for state agreement workers had PZPR affiliation and managed the life and work of the brigades. The minutes from POP meetings reveal the issues with which the Party concerned itself on the ground.⁵⁸ One running thread throughout the discussions is the status and conditions of Polish workers. Noticing mistreatment or neglect on the part of the authorities abroad, the POP representatives appealed to their local counterparts in SED or KSČ, the embassy, or the Central Committee in Warsaw for help. As ideological and moral overseers, the Party also intervened in problems within the Polish brigades, wielding its power to recall “troublemakers” back to the country or to reward those with outstanding performance. For example, the PZPR Executive Committee in the GDR deposed Comrade J. from the office of the POP First Secretary in Boxberg and caused his eventual return to Poland in October 1973.⁵⁹ The reason for this dismissal was purely political, as J. refused to support the new candidate for the First Secretariat in Boxberg, directly nominated from Warsaw. One might say that this was nothing new on the Party front.

Nonetheless, the internal workings of the PZPR cells abroad differed from the domestic “power apparatus” of the Party in the intensity of securing better conditions for the laborers. The Party cadres who showed up in East Germany or Czechoslovakia without a doubt had preexisting notions of what the PZPR meant: careerism, political and social influence, financial benefits, but

⁵⁸ These are dispersed throughout the fond AAN, 1354/LXXXVI (KC-PZPR/Wydział Zagraniczny).

⁵⁹ M. Karpesiuk, Protokół z Zebrania Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 26 October 1973, AAN, 1354/LXXXVI/87, dok. 21.

also the more idealistic belief in enacting change and fighting for the working class.⁶⁰ Indicative of the workers' expectations from the Party is the case of Comrade H., First Secretary in Deuna, (near Erfurt, GDR).⁶¹ A collective of laborers subordinated to H. penned a petition to the PZPR Control Commission in Warsaw voicing their dissatisfaction with the First Secretary. "He doesn't care about our business and speaks with the workers only when he needs his car repaired," the workers alleged, providing further examples of misappropriated funds, neglected worker safety, and personal financial gains from illegal currency trade and wage manipulation. While opportunism still motivated many of the functionaries abroad, the realities of work in a foreign country influenced the tasks of local Party organizations to fend for themselves and their compatriots. Comrade Sitarski, the site director at the Czechoslovak power station Tušimice, openly admitted that the Party plays a different role abroad than it does at home.⁶² Justifying that statement, Sitarski pointed to the close scrutiny of PZPR cells and working brigades by the hosts, which as I will argue in the following chapter, was an important motivating factor for solid work because the image of Poland abroad was a top priority. Unspoken was also the sense of a particular comradeship among expatriates, which did not necessarily erase the line between Party members and the nonaffiliated, but made that division less important compared to the shared notion of "Polishness."

The Party cadres frequently exhibited real care about the practical needs of the workers. For example, POP delegates to a meeting of the Executive Committee in the Polish Embassy in Prague in early 1976 agreed that the Czech employers do not provide enough protective clothing

⁶⁰ Leszek Gilejko, "Członkowie PZPR – próba typologii" in Dariusz Stola and Krzysztof Persak (eds.), *PZPR jako Machina Władzy* (Warsaw: ISP-PAN, 2012), 119-137.

⁶¹ Józef Iżycki to Lucjan Piątkowski, 14 February 1977, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/154, dok. 44.

⁶² Konferencja Sprawozdawczo Wyborcza KZ PZPR w Pradze, 23 November 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98.

to the workers, and when they do, the gear is “impractical, not functional... out of fashion, and the laborers dressed in them have a sordid appearance.”⁶³ Around the same time in the GDR, the Party heard workers’ complaints about the healthcare offered to the brigades. Not only was speaking with a German doctor through an interpreter problematic, but also the quality of treatment appeared to be insufficient, with for instance, an immediate tooth extraction when a root canal procedure would have worked.⁶⁴ The petitions for bringing Polish doctors to attend to the crews in Germany were addressed that same year, proving that the Party cells abroad could effectively respond to the laborers’ problems. While it is not clear to what extent the Polish Communists pressured the Czechoslovak employers for better safety equipment, the complaints reflect the actual conditions the workers faced in foreign factories.

Despite East German, Czechoslovak, and PZPR complaints about individual Polish laborers’ work ethic, skill, or behavior, the employers were generally happy with the timely and over-fulfilled results, but the crews often expressed dissatisfaction with the pressure put on them. CHZ contractors in the GDR and CSSR prided themselves in providing a finished product on time, incentivized by bonuses from the clients and from the home company. Factories that hired Poles based on the state agreement noted over one-hundred-percent efficiency. East German companies, such as MLK Plauen, kept detailed quarterly records of each crew member’s productivity, calculating the average plan fulfillment in 1976 at 102 percent.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, these successes came at high costs. The chemical factory “Spolana” in Neratovice (about sixteen miles north of Prague) contracted a number of Polish brigades for construction work throughout the

⁶³ Protokół 3/76 z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KZPZPR przy Ambasadzie PRL w CSRS, 4 March 1976, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/135, dok.6.

⁶⁴ Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 25 May 1976, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/141, dok.12.

⁶⁵ E.g. BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463 vol2.

decade. The official workers' newsletter, *Spolana* frequently featured articles about the fraternal help from socialist laborers, praising the quality and speed of Polish crews in finishing projects on time, as well as the good working relations between Czechs and Poles.⁶⁶ The reality as experienced by the guest workers, however, appears to be somewhat different. Summarizing the series of complaints from the brigades, a Spolana-based delegate to the PZPR conference in the PRL Prague Embassy, Comrade W. Woliński expressed the general attitudes best:

Comrades were just talking about the Czechoslovak clients in all superlatives. We are also happy with the cooperation. Our workers live well, there is an appropriate standard, cultural attractions, and we are not far from Prague. I must tell the Conference that in many cases the Czechoslovak client does not keep to the conditions of the agreements and contracts. They poison the air with SO₂ [Sulfur dioxide] and phenol, which bother us during installations and construction work. The crew must leave because it has no air to breathe.... It's only when we pin the client against the wall with stopping the work that the amount of SO₂ or chlorine goes down, but after a few days it increases again.⁶⁷

The working conditions, depending on the site, posed unique challenges. Even though parties responsible for drawing up the contracts foresaw possible problems and legally attempted to shield the workers from overexposure to harm, as in this case from chemicals, the employers did not always follow up on it. In a race to fulfill the production plan, the enterprise often had to look for shortcuts. At the same time, however, the foreign brigades also had a schedule to keep and a plan to accomplish, resulting in conflicts.

The nature of tensions between the Polish workers and their local employers differed considerably from place to place. Contract crews hired to erect a factory in Týnec nad Labou (Czechoslovakia) in the summer of 1973 arrived to a literal empty field. Although the agreement stipulated that the buyers provide minimal social facilities, including worker dormitories, none

⁶⁶ E.g. J.A., "U polských spolupracovníků," *Spolana-časopis pracujících* (no.36), 7 September 1973, Státní okresní archiv Mělník (SOA-M), Spolana.

⁶⁷ Konferencja Sprawozdawczo Wyborcza KZ PZPR w Pradze, 23 November 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98.

had been prepared. As a result, the contractors spent the first four months constructing rudimentary housing and pleading with the Czechoslovak authorities to furnish them, as opposed to focusing on the factory itself.⁶⁸ Housing was a recurring issue in both the CSSR and GDR. In the East German Chemical Combine Fürstenwalde, the lack of infrastructure not only limited the number of foreign help that could arrive there, but it also forced the 130 men to live three to a twenty-square-meter room.⁶⁹ Such a situation caused displeasure and aggravation, mostly because the phrasing of the agreements was murky. The East German Labor Union (FDGB) noted nine “work conflicts” between just January and June of 1973, caused mostly by the “arrogant behavior” of German management and the lack of clear explanations of working conditions.⁷⁰ Even after a better deal between Polish and East German Labor Bureaus emerged in 1973, occasional protests took place in response to perceived (or real) injustices. One of the most frequent reasons for this sort of disturbance was the workers’ dissatisfaction with living conditions and unequal pay vis-à-vis their German colleagues.⁷¹

Work relations between Polish laborers and their German or Czech counterparts, as seen from official reports, were either very appropriate and friendly or radically hostile. The communist propaganda might have overplayed how well the foreign crews integrated into the new factory environment, however, self-reported sources found in the press and relayed through the secret police informants corroborate the general notion that people got along, minding their work or sincerely participating in the mixed work-collectives, and even creating friendships

⁶⁸ W. Kusiński, Wypowiedź, 23 November 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98.

⁶⁹ Stein to Mehlhorn, 19 March 1975, (LHA-B), Rep. 703/220.

⁷⁰ Bundesvorstand FDGB, Bericht über den Stand der Verwirklichung der Verienbarung zwischen dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB und dem Zentralrat der Gewerkschaften der VR, 27 June 1973, BArch-Berlin, DY 34/25140, 79.

⁷¹ Röhr, “Beschäftigung,” 228.

outside of the workplace.⁷² This type of occurrence, however, was a rarity as most Poles remained secluded in their own brigades and groups and seldomly took an active part in the factory life.⁷³ To improve the situation, PZPR organs in the GDR in 1973 issued a call for better integration into the system. “Our brigades must feel a shared responsibility in the workplace, be the subject performing action, and not merely a workforce, on which others act upon.”⁷⁴ Seeing themselves as passive recipients of rules and regulations was not exactly true, as the workers with or without PZPR support frequently stood up for themselves. Nonetheless, their participation in determining the course of work and organization on the factory floor was inadequate for the most part. In East Germany, this was the case especially due to national prejudices. Authorities reported numerous cases of hateful or historically insensitive actions against Polish colleagues, which intensified toward the end of the decade.⁷⁵

The issue of language was a crucial factor in determining the quality of cooperation and integration among the workers. While in Czechoslovakia the problem existed, it was not as stark due to linguistic similarities as it was in Germany. Poor foreign language skills inhibited communication. Among the PZPR cadres in the GDR, three out of fifteen POP first secretaries knew German.⁷⁶ The situation with the laborers was comparable and made worse by a lack of interest in learning the host country’s tongue. While the state agreement stipulated that receiving

⁷² E.g. Teczka Pracy TW “Maria,” OIPN-Poznań, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, or Teczka Personalna TW “Janek,” OIPN-Wrocław, IPN Wr 0010/2142/1.

⁷³ Based on individual worker reports kept by factories such as VEB MLK Plauen, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463 vol2.

⁷⁴ “Informacja o stanie pracy politycznej POP polskich przedsiębiorstw budowlano-montażowych realizujących kontrakty w NRD,” no date [1973], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111.

⁷⁵ E.g. Information über ein besonderes Vorkommnis im Zusammenhang mit einem polnischen Staatsbürger im VEB Kaliwerk Zielitz, 12 April 1978, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/27552, 125.

⁷⁶ Informacja o stanie pracy politycznej POP polskich przedsiębiorstw budowlano-montażowych realizujących kontrakty w NRD, no date [1973], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111.

factories should provide language instruction, which they did to the best of their abilities, Polish workers did not take advantage of the opportunity. For example, in MLK Plauen in 1978, out of the thirty-six workers who arrived in January, only seven regularly attended the 200-hour course and passed it.⁷⁷ This disinterested attitude arose mostly because the instruction took place after the shift, when most had little energy left. Instead, relaxing at the dormitory with imported Polish films and newspapers had more appeal. As a result, misunderstandings and conflicts of a petty nature had the chance to arise not only at work, but also outside of the factory, which will be the topic of another chapter.

Conclusion

The analysis of the worker exchange program further highlights the development of socialist unity. The more cooperation there was between the states, the more room it opened to conflicts between them. Similarly to other regional policies of the time, the agreements to export Polish workforce abroad suggest a strong influence of idealistic thinking that led to rushed decisions. The political, economic, and social reality, however, played into the hands of skeptics of integration and proponents of national interests. As one Czechoslovak economist remarked, “integration can progress in other areas, but cannot touch domestic economies as long as the five-year-plans do not develop in unison with other Bloc states.”⁷⁸ Indeed, the plans for 1971-1976 stressed national economic and social progress both in form and content, despite the push for increased intra-Bloc activities. The persistence of nationally-centered thinking certainly made mutual projects more difficult.

⁷⁷ Bericht zum Einsatz polnischer Werkstätiger im VEB MLK Werk Plauen, 23 August 1979, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463 vol. 1.

⁷⁸ Křepelák, *Stručný záznam pro domo*, 21 February 1972, AMZV, TO-T 1970-1974, NDR, k.5.

The question of nationality in the workplace became both a blessing for the workers in need of a vocal advocate for rights and privileges, but also a hinderance that limited the workers' integration into factory life. While most men and women worked alongside their German, Czech, and Slovak peers, only a few sought additional contacts with the neighbors outside of factory floor. Also, negative attitudes motivated by national prejudices were sporadic at the time. In fact, the hosts generally praised the efficiency of Polish laborers, even if they did so only to avoid workforce shortages. The most consequential outcome of this analysis, however, is the extent to which the Polish party-state institutions placed their citizens abroad under their own tutelage. How exactly socialist patriotism intersected with internationalism is the topic of the next chapter.

PART II
CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION (1976-80)



East German shoes smuggled and sold in Warsaw, April 1978.
(Source: PAP-Archiwum)

CHAPTER 4 – CONTINUED EFFORTS AND NEW CHALLENGES: BLOC POLITICS AFTER 1976

On 4 January 1977, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Bohuslav Chňoupek traveled to East Berlin for a meeting with his East German counterpart, Oskar Fischer. The agenda for the four-day-long visit included discussions of furthering cooperation between the countries, a conference with the GDR's highest representatives, as well as tours of several factories and a festive banquet in honor of the guest.¹ Despite the pomp with which Chňoupek was welcomed, the visit was relatively uneventful, typical for such friendly calls. But the importance of that meeting did not lie in any agreements signed or plans developed. As the Czechoslovak minister expressed, the visit itself was the key element of forming a united front of the socialist community, "an instrument for coordinating actions and political integration among socialist allies." While the vagueness of this statement and of the visit overall is astounding, it is also revealing of the state of socialist integration in the second half of the decade.

The regime in Prague always expressed skepticism toward the highly ambitious social initiatives advanced by East Berlin and Warsaw and remained a passive participant of integration. Facing economic and political challenges, however, Czechoslovak powers sought tighter cooperation with the region. More important was the "spectacle of friendship," in Ludwig Mehlhorn's words, or the "performative dimension" of discourse devoid of meaning, as Alexei

¹ "Čs. ministr zahraničí v Berlíně," *Rudé právo* 5 January 1977, 1; "CSSR Außenminister in der DDR eingetroffen," *Berliner Zeitung* 5 January 1977, 1-2.

Yurchak phrased it.² The fact that a Czechoslovak figurehead was feted by his German hosts was enough to maintain an image of cohesion temporarily, even though the actual progress of integration stalled in the mid-1970s and by the end of the decade completely fell apart.

After a massive onslaught in the decade's early years, integrationist momentum dropped rapidly. Socialist media, previously widely reporting on cooperation within the Bloc and running pieces that praised the virtues of the immediate neighbors, shifted their focus away from East Central Europe to camaraderie with the Third World and other topics. A brief search for the term "integration" in the online repository of the GDR's *Neues Deutschland* yields over nine hundred hits for 1973 and 1974, but barely three hundred for 1977 and less than two hundred results for the remainder of the communist era.³ Perusing the Polish *Trybuna Ludu*, a reader can find proclamations such as "the year 1977 brought further strengthening of the community of socialist states" and the Bloc was gaining on cohesion, but these were nowhere near as enthusiastic as the ones from earlier years that invited citizens to visit the abroad.⁴ *Rudé právo* in Czechoslovakia reported even less about common undertakings than before.

Nonetheless, the planners in the three states continued to coordinate their mutual trade, various institutions increased intra-Bloc cooperation, and the Polish-Czechoslovak border finally opened to passport- and visa-free travel in the summer of 1977. Such a state of affairs suggests several questions. Why did socialist integration lose its excitement at that point? Did it reach its

² Ludwig Mehlhorn, "Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen," in Basil Kerski, et al. (eds.) *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen, 1949-1990* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2003), 40. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 50-53.

³ The online repository of the East German press can be found here: <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/>.

⁴ Andrzej Wasilowski, "Polska i socjalistyczni sojusznicy: Trwałe przesłanki współpracy," *Trybuna Ludu*, 4 January 1978.

limits and become a normal part of life in the Bloc or did the experiences of the past five years reveal its inadequacies? How did the regimes envision further development of regional cooperation and what were the results of the paths they chose to pursue?

This chapter's aim is to explain the history of political entanglements between 1976 and 1981 in order to understand how they affected socialist integration. Starting with the premise that Bloc building decelerated in the middle of the decade with only behind-the-scenes plans, trade deals, and delegations, it argues that the driving force behind new integration, the East German and Polish top leaders, wanted to move forward with the project. The opening of the Czechoslovak border to Polish tourists, the colossal "meeting of friendship" in Frankfurt-Oder, and the launching in 1977 of the "Intervision Song Contest"—a Soviet Bloc equivalent of the West European "Eurovision"—attest to the commitment to integration.

To the leaders' dismay, however, contingency factors interfered with grand plans and required ad hoc reactions. The global economic recession spurred by the oil shocks of 1973 finally reached Eastern Europe, causing disturbances on internal markets. The anticommunist opposition had sat quietly since 1968 but woke up again in Poland and Czechoslovakia, motivated by the Helsinki Accords, price hikes, the persecution of nonconformist cultural life, and the election of the Polish Pope in October 1978. This series of events had two paradoxically-interrelated consequences. First, it offered the regimes a reason for better cooperation in the realm of security. Second, it contributed to the mistrust among the allies and highlighted how distant the leaders in Berlin and Prague on the one hand, and Warsaw on the other, actually were from one another.

If the political distinctions between the GDR, CSSR, and Poland were not as pronounced in the first half of the decade, by the summer of 1980 these cleavages widened and split the

brotherly allied countries. Unable to stop the massive protests and strikes, the Polish *Sejm* offered wide-ranging concessions to the opposition, legalizing the first independent trade union in the Bloc, “Solidarity,” on 8 October 1980. Hardliners Honecker and Husák disdained Gierek’s and his successor’s handling of the Solidarity Movement. By the end of the month, the East German border was closed again and tensions between party leaders inhibited any constructive dialogue. Because Solidarity seemed contagious, Poland was excluded from socialist integration. While the project continued to function between the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and other Bloc countries, its goals and methods took a new form and its vigor did not match that of the previous years. The last part of the chapter asks how and why the crisis in Poland, known as the “carnival of Solidarity,” undid the great strides to regional initiatives. How did the political landscape of the Bloc’s western triangle change at the beginning of a new decade?

The reasons for closing the border in 1980 remain disputed. On the one hand, the strictly political interpretation presupposes that the civic unrest in Poland and the legalization of the first independent trade union “Solidarity” triggered a fear of oppositional behavior spilling over to the GDR.⁵ In order to contain “counterrevolutionary” ideas, they launched an anti-Polish media campaign and unilaterally closed the borders to Poland. On the other hand, the economic explanation instead suggests that the domestic markets in the GDR and CSSR could not bear the pressure of Polish citizens relieving their consumer needs abroad.⁶ This chapter offers an alternative argument that interconnects politics and economics. Drawing on the transcripts of conversations between the Polish and East German leadership as well as internal Stasi

⁵ Cf. Mieczysław Tomala, *Deutschland von Polen gesehen: zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1949-1990*. (Marburg: Schüren, 2000), 518; Basil Kerski, “Stosunki między NRD a Polską. Próba bilansu,” in Kerski et al., 21; and Julita Makaro, *Gubin – miasto graniczne: studium socjologiczne* (Wrocław: WUW, 2007), 111.

⁶ Mark Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border” in Bren and Neuberger (eds.), 385.

communiques and unofficial informers' (IM) reports, I conclude that the threat of disseminating an oppositional sentiment was the trigger behind closing the border as material shortages caused by Polish shoppers had already been a nuisance for several years. However, explaining the reversal of the liberal border policy in economic terms was a convenient propagandist move. It played well into the hands of the SED-regime because the population, directly affected by shortages, could better understand the motives behind why their right to travel across the eastern frontier was no longer a part of the welfare package.

Stagnating Integration?

By mid-decade, socialist integration became normalized and solidified along several tracks. These included the military alliance within the Warsaw Pact, economic and industrial cooperation under the auspices of Comecon, political consultations of “brotherly” party and state representatives, decentralized institutional contacts between government and factory workers, and the social bridge-building among nations made possible through relaxed travel policies. The last two elements were the key to the new integrationist project emerging in 1972 because they focused on including the average citizens in the creation of the Socialist Bloc. While the trade agreements and economic cooperatives developed further behind the scenes, no new popular measures were introduced after 1972. In fact, the open borders were subjected to the renegotiation of terms and the reintroduction of more restrictions, something hardly worth attention. To what extent, therefore, was the decreased media notice of integration a sign of stagnating effort at furthering the cooperation? How did the proponents of integration attempt to reinvigorate the project? One part of the answer lies in the evolving normalization of the status

quo.⁷ Another pertains to the careful balance of propagating appropriate socialist internationalism to counteract any potential oppositional activity from crossing the borders.

Once the excitement about the open borders settled, crossing borders between East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland became standard practice. Confirming this assertion was the increased pressure on the Polish and Czechoslovak lawmakers to allow East German citizens to traverse their mutual frontier without the need for a passport as well. The problem became noticeable already in 1972, when numerous citizen petitions reached the GDR authorities. Peter B. from Magdeburg, for example, was vacationing with his wife in the Polish Tatra Mountains and wanted to see the Slovak side, just on the other side of the ridge.⁸ In order to realize his plans, Peter would have had to drive back three hundred miles to the GDR, cross the East German-Czechoslovak border there, and return another three hundred miles to the Slovak Tatras. Moreover, he could not obtain a visa for the CSSR because “passport- and visa-free travel was in place.” Over the years, numerous complaints of this sort piled up, suggesting that there was not only a demand for more freedom of travel within the Bloc, but also that unrestricted mobility and not the obstacles became commonplace. East German diplomats repetitively pleaded with their Czechoslovak and Polish colleagues to grant third-country citizens the privilege of using their

⁷ For discussion of “normalization,” see Peter Hübner, “Norm, Normalität, Normalisierung: Quellen und Ziele eines gesellschaftlichen Paradigmenwechsels im sowjetischen Block um 1970” *Potsdamer Bulletin* 28/29 (January 2003): 24-40; Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Mary Fulbrook, “The Concept of ‘Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation’ of Rule?*, M. Fulbrook, ed. (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 13-14.

⁸ Peter B. to Mdi Berlin, Eingabe betreffend visafreien Reiseverkehr in die VR Polen und die CSSR, 4 May 1972, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/10542, 30.

identity card for border crossing. These efforts were futile because the decision makers in both Prague and Warsaw kept pushing off the discussion of this topic to a later date.⁹

That the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities did not want to engage in a conversation about the borders is not surprising. Since 1972, talks of opening the border between the two Slavic countries yielded no results, with one side rejecting the idea when the other suggested it. Before expanding the liberal travel policy, the CSSR wanted to take time to evaluate the experiment based on its own experience with the GDR, keenly observing the development of Polish-East German passport-free travel. Collecting intelligence on the ground, Czechoslovak diplomats gained the impression that the “whole thing was not thought through” and the open borders needed more regulations to function properly, especially with regard to the economic aspects of tourism.¹⁰ The Poles continuously insisted on introducing a liberal border regime with Czechoslovakia, citing “political benefits, tightening of integration, pan-European aspects (CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – MS]),” as well as “social pressures” to visit the neighboring states.¹¹ Husák and his people, however, did not see the issue from the same perspective and did not tie national interest to broader regional development.

After sufficient pressure both from Warsaw and East Berlin, the government in Prague finally agreed to open the border with Poland in the summer of 1974. At that point, however, the tables had turned and the Poles prevented a fruitful conclusion to the negotiations. Debates among the various Polish institutions reveal that while the Foreign Ministry, Central Committee for Sport and Tourism (GKKFiT), the Embassy in Prague, and even the Central Planning

⁹ E.g. FMZV ČSSR to Vasil Bil’ak, October 1978, FMZV, TO-T 1975-79, NDR K.2; F. Hanáček, Zpráva o cestovním ruchu mezi ČSSR a NDR v roce 1979, 29 November 1979, FMZV, TO-T 1975-79, NDR K.7/ob.35, 10.

¹⁰ Andrej Jedinák, Záznam o rozhovoru s mjr. Zbigniewem Dzbańskim, 29 December 1972, AMZV, TO-T 1970-1974, Polsko K.6/ob.1. See also a series of documents in AMZV, TO-T 1970-1974, NDR K.5.

¹¹ Henryk Handszuh, Notatka protkolarna 27 June 1975, AAN, 18/54, vol.2, 102-105.

Commission wanted to capitalize on Czechoslovak willingness and to push the project forward, the economic departments including the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Trade had the final say in stopping the border agreement. The imbalance in trade between Poland and Czechoslovakia, with Poles owing 180 million rubles for 1975, seemed to be the problem. The economists calculated that providing funds for tourism would have nearly doubled that deficit, “which would have to be paid off with the additional exports of goods... or getting a contract to build something in the CSSR.”¹² Citing estimates that Czechs and Slovaks would spend less money in Poland than Poles would in Czechoslovakia, the Finance Ministry put a halt to further discussions, explaining that “we are unable to pay for more trips abroad. Why should we tease the people by easing the crossing of the border, when we cannot give them money to travel there?”¹³ This argument, that any social or political benefits of opening the borders could be nullified if there were no means of providing Polish citizens with Czechoslovak currency, proved victorious and ultimately postponed any further negotiations first until 1975, then a year later, and finally until the dust of the Polish upheavals of June 1976 had settled.¹⁴ At that time, however, the CSSR was against moving forward, officially due to economic hardships.

In late March 1977, Gustáv Husák led a party-state delegation to Poland, where he met with Edward Gierek and other PZPR representatives, which pushed the border opening forward. The communist press informed about “the friendly meeting” during which both states explored ways of “furthering economic ties... especially in industrial cooperation and the creation of stable, bilateral economic relations in accordance with Comecon’s Complex Program of Socialist

¹² Ibid., 102.

¹³ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴ Notatka z konferencji w sprawie wprowadzenia dalszych ułatwień w ruchu podróźnych między PRL i CSRS, no date, AAN, 18/54, vol.2, 8.

Integration.”¹⁵ Left unsaid was the renewed discussion of borders. Gierek’s notes from the conversation show his attempts at persuasion. “I do not see a reason why individual travel between our countries has to be more difficult and smaller in scale than what we had for five years with the GDR,” Gierek exclaimed, further arguing that both he and Erich Honecker found open borders an excellent idea and “the problems that periodically arise, which are successfully solved, are incommensurate to the benefits.”¹⁶ The southern partners, while still skeptical about the move, used their stronger negotiating position to secure trade deals and payments that included additional workforce delegated to the CSSR and a lucrative exchange rate on zloty, not counting the imbalance in the number of visitors with more Poles travelling and spending money in Czechoslovakia than the other way around.

When the border finally opened on 20 August 1977, there was no pizzazz similar to that of 1 January 1972 when Poles and East Germans began crossing their frontier more easily. The Czech media did not publicize the move and the Polish press resorted only to small mentions of the new possibility to visit the southern neighbor without the need for a passport, visa, or an invitation. Actually, the new regulations on the Polish-Czechoslovak border did not motivate either of the nationals to rush abroad. Czechs and Slovaks never considered Poland to be an exciting vacation destination.¹⁷ In 1972, 540,000 CSSR citizens visited Poland and that number increased steadily to an annual 2.2 million by the end of 1977 and remained at the same level for the next three years. The easing of travel restrictions did not seem to have had any impact on the

¹⁵ These particular quotations are from “Freundschaftstreffen Gierek-Husak,” *Neues Deutschland*, 29 March 1977, 7.

¹⁶ Tezy do rozmów z tow. G. Husakiem, no date, AAN, KC PZPR/XI-A/655, 11-12.

¹⁷ E.g. Pavel Mücke, *Šťastnou cestu...? Proměny politik cestování a cestovního ruchu v Československu za časi Studené války 1945-1989*, (Pelhřimov: Nová tiskárna, 2017), 87.

turnout at the border crossings.¹⁸ According to a contemporary analysis of Czechoslovak tourism to Poland by Grażyna Boroń-Walczak of the Polish Tourism Institute, the main obstacles to creating increased interest were “the lack of trust toward accommodations offered, high prices, as well as the uncertainty of weather conditions on the Baltic shore.”¹⁹ Blaming low interest on purely touristic aspects, however, does not take into account the fact that the CSSR did not propagate the border’s opening and generally reduced the financial means for foreign tourism in the second half of the decade, responding to the increasing global economic crisis that belatedly touched the Eastern Bloc.²⁰

Coming from the other side, Poles similarly surprised everyone by not storming the southern border. In early January 1978, *Trybuna Ludu* printed an article on the first page entitled “Intense traffic at border crossings,” highlighting the increased mobility within the Bloc.²¹ With a sense of pride, the authors note that 10.3 million Polish citizens traveled to socialist countries in 1977, with 70 percent of that traffic going to the GDR, some half a million people to Hungary, 630,000 to the USSR, and 830,000 to Czechoslovakia. Boroń-Walczak’s study confirms these numbers, but contradicts the newspaper’s claim that the 60 percent increase in visitors to the CSSR compared to the previous year, “was a result of removing the necessity of having a formal invitation to travel to the CSSR.”²² Instead, Boroń-Walczak shows that the major currents of tourism to the neighboring state took place before the opening of the border in late August, and

¹⁸ Grażyna Boroń-Walczak, "Analiza ruchu turystycznego między Polską a Czechosłowacją w 1977 roku," AAN, 2706/1/1519, 9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mücke, *Šťastnou cestu*, 281-82.

²¹ “Duży ruch na przejściach granicznych” *Trybuna Ludu*, 3 January 1978, 1.

²² Ibid.

the real results of the new policy became clearer only in the following years.²³ The resulting question is why did the state press exaggerate the impact of the open border? The crux of the matter lies in the Gierek administration's aspirations. Despite growing economic problems and an increasing imbalance of trade between Poland and the other socialist countries, tourism to the "brotherly allied states" played an important political role that highlighted the ongoing integration process.²⁴ The more active its citizens were abroad, the more important Polish leadership was in the Bloc, seems to be the thinking at the time.

Indeed, an array of other initiatives in the decade's second half confirms this assertion, including the inauguration of the "Intervision" Song Contest (ISC) in Sopot in August 1977. The Baltic resort town adjacent to Gdańsk had hosted an international song festival since 1961, organized first by the composer, pianist, and head of the popular music department at the Polish Radio, Władysław Szpilman. Despite its "international" dimension, the festival's first decade was limited to foreign artists from within and outside the Socialist Bloc performing for a domestic audience. The idea of popularizing this musical event abroad first arose in 1971, when the Central Committee, now under Gierek's leadership, wanted to project a positive image of Poland after the workers' massacre in December 1970. The results were mediocre.²⁵

It took another social upheaval in Poland, as well as the political considerations of progressing West European integration and the normalization of East-West relations after Helsinki to launch a Bloc-wide project successfully, which offered a socialist alternative to the

²³ Boroń-Walczak, "Analiza ruchu turystycznego między Polską a Czechosłowacją w 1977 roku," AAN, 2706/1/1519, 36.

²⁴ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 260-265.

²⁵ Stanisław Mikulicz, Notatka dotycząca możliwości spopularyzowania w świecie festiwalu w Sopocie w roku 1971, 4 May 1971, AAN, LVI/612. See also Lidia Kopania-Przebindowska, "Zimna wojna w popkulturze: Czołówki festiwalu piosenki Interwizji i propaganda sukcesu," *Kultura Popularna* 3 (2018): 46-59.

western “Eurovision” song contest.²⁶ The Polish State Television (TVP), funded generously under Gierek, had the means and the ability to conduct the competition.²⁷ In order to internationalize it, however, the rebranded festival in Sopot ran under the auspices of the International Radio and Television Organization (OIRT, *Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision*, or *Intervision*, in Polish *Interwizja*, in Russian *Интервидение*), which was a cooperative network of broadcasters mostly from the Soviet Bloc. Seeing how popular music helped Western Europeans to integrate, the Bloc countries put their efforts together to achieve something similar.

The first edition of the ISC began on 24 August 1977 with several thousand spectators at the Forest Opera venue in Sopot, and millions more in front of their television sets around the Bloc. The viewers saw a ninety-second-long introduction featuring a bird’s-eye view of Sopot, Gdańsk, and the Baltic shore. Subsequent slides as well as a narrator proclaimed “Polish Television presents – Sopot 1977 – 70 singers, 150 songs, 450 minutes of singing, 120 musicians, 22 jurors, and 130 microphones.” Furthermore, the authors of the spectacle deemed it important to disclose that there were four thousand lightbulbs on the stage, no doubt an element highlighting the modernity and achievements of Polish socialism.²⁸ Although the festival was international, Polish organizations fully dominated the spectacle, with the show conducted in the Polish language and with inside jokes by local television stars. The performers, however, spanned the globe and attracted viewers. Naturally, all of the European satellite states, Yugoslavia, Finland, and Cuba sent contestants for the *grand prix*. Outside of the competition,

²⁶ See Anna Piotrowska, “About Twin Song Festivals in Eastern and Western Europe: Intervision and Eurovision” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 47 (1/2016): 123-135.

²⁷ Kopania-Przebindowska, “Zimna wojna w popkulturze,” 52.

²⁸ Retransmisja I Festiwalu Interwizji, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjTx1e05tNk> and Kopania-Przebindowski, 53-54.

the audience enjoyed the repertoire by Western singers, such as the American Peggy March, the British band “Lips,” and the French winner of Eurovision 1977, Marie Myriam. Welcoming the last artist, the host of the festival’s third night, Jacek Bromski, made an explicit linkage between the socialist ISC and the West European Eurovision, telling the public “we invited Marie Myriam particularly because we wanted to hear what the other side is up to.”²⁹ On the last day, the jury awarded the main prize, an amber nightingale, to the rising Czech star, Helena Vondráčková and her catchy song “Painted jug” (*Malovaný džbánku*), with the Cuban Farah Maria and the Polish band Red Guitars (*Czerwone Gitary*) as the runners-up.

The ISC was held only four times and stopped taking place in 1981 when political upheavals rocked Poland. The festival’s poor international reception also had something to do with not resuming the contest again.³⁰ Czechoslovak television, for example, did not broadcast the 1977 competition and the main state newspaper, *Rudé právo*, printed only a tiny blurb on the second page subsection “Cultural world” that read, “This year’s Grand Prix of the Intervisioin Song Contest in Sopot was won by Helena Vondráčková for her song ‘Malovaný džbánek.’ As she herself stated, she considers this achievement the greatest in her career.”³¹ It appears that the visit of the Iranian Shah to the CSSR, as well as reporting on the progress of harvests, overshadowed the event. The ISC gained more attention in the GDR, with the competition being televised every evening on the Second Channel. *Neues Deutschland* reported periodically on the preparations for the festival, *Junge Welt* enthusiastically praised the winner, and the *Berliner*

²⁹ Festival Interwizji Sopot 77: Koncert Laureatów, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MNZ7J9tdgk&t=37s>, (17:17-17:20).

³⁰ Piotrowska, “About Twin Song Festivals.” In the 2000s, Russian organizers picked up on the idea again, outraged by the “moral decay” of Eurovision, but the festival was also short-lived and ceased after one edition.

³¹ *Rudé právo*, 28 August 1977, 2.

Zeitung even offered an analysis of the GDR's contestant, Frank Schöbel, who reportedly should have chosen better songs from his repertoire to have done better in the competition.³²

The festival's subsequent editions similarly did not excite the public outside of Poland as much, perhaps with the exception of the 1979 performance of the legendary band "Boney M" and the Greek star Demis Roussos. The following year, the ISC featuring Gloria Gaynor started just a week after strikes in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyards erupted, which overshadowed the musical event.³³ With the deepening crisis in 1981, the show did not take place and resumed only in 1984, reverting back to its original form of the Sopot Music Festival. Overall, the imitation of the West European format appeared promising for socialist integration, but it did not have the time to develop into something more significant. Although political contingencies interfered with its short life span, the lack of the festival's initial appeal, as well as its not-so-inclusive organization—de jure international but de facto Poland-centered show—contributed to its tranquil demise. Nonetheless, the fact that no other Bloc state offered to recreate Intervision speaks to the collapse of the integration effort at that point.

In 1977, however, the Polish and East German communists sought to pump vigor into the integrationist project with other initiatives. For years, they had organized numerous "meetings of friendship" among German, Polish, Czechoslovak, and sometimes also Soviet, young activists. The event that took place in late May 1977 in Frankfurt/Oder and Słubice, however, surpassed all of the previous gatherings in its size, attributed importance, and scope of planning.

Preparations for the mass gathering of 150,000 people began in 1974, when the Polish Federation

³² "Intervisions-Festival auf Sopotter Waldbühne," *Neues Deutschland*, 28 April 1977, 4; "Helena gewann in der Waldoper den Grand Prix," *Junge Welt*, 30 August 1977; Anja Braatz, "Nicht alles groß genug für das große Festival," *Berliner Zeitung*, 31 August 1977, 4.

³³ According to interviews with the festival organizers, "Sierpień 1980 - Festiwal w Sopocie miał się nie odbyć," *Onet Wiadomości*, 17 August 2005, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/sierpien-1980-festiwal-w-sopocie-mial-sie-nie-odbyc/fxgfm>.

of Socialist Youth Movements (FSZMP) approached its East German counterpart, the Free German Youth (FDJ), with the idea of organizing “the Meeting of Friendship.”³⁴ Financial and organizational considerations, however, did not allow for the realization of this idea until 1977. The stated goal of the Meeting was “the deepening of friendship between Polish and East German youth,” but in reality the authorities aimed for a much broader manifestation of socialist brotherhood. During a 1976 meeting between the representatives of the youth organizations from both countries, they agreed “to initiate an appropriate propaganda campaign in the mass media in the period preceding the Meeting, including a televised competition” about the neighboring states.³⁵ Indeed, the Polish youth magazine *Sztandar Młodych* and the East German *Junge Welt*, as well as other state publications, widely reported on the preparations and the execution of the event, enticing young people and adults alike to partake in the display.

If political propaganda was not enough, the money spent on the Meeting of Friendship surely attracted attention. The officials did not skimp on the costs, allocating a budget of 3.5 million złoty to cover everything from transportation of the delegates, housing, decorations, food and refreshments, as well as top-tier artists performing during the celebrations.³⁶ Among the invited stars were singers Czesław Niemen, Maryla Rodowicz, Irena Jarocka, Andreas Holm, Hans-Jürgen Beyer, and the group “Kreis.” Official delegates were offered “an array of meals and beverages... characterized by a rich selection attesting to the high culinary culture,” and also the local stores had to be supplied adequately to sustain both the inhabitants as well as the

³⁴ Wydział Zagraniczny RG FSZMP, Spotkanie Przyjaźni młodzieży Polski i NRD, September 1976, AAN, 1718/316.

³⁵ Informacja o spotkaniu kierownictw RG FSZMP i Centralnej Rady FDJ, 24 September 1976, AAN, 1718/316.

³⁶ Tadeusz Kłós, Rozliczenie poniesionych wydatków na "Dni Przyjaźni Młodzieży PRL i NRD," [no date], AAN, 1718/316.

additional masses of attendees.³⁷ The city of Frankfurt estimated that 43.3 tons of meat and sausages, 1,065 hectoliters of beer, another 919 hectoliters of non-alcoholic drinks, 34,300 packages of flavored milk (for the youngest participants), and 26 tons of exotic fruit (*Südfrüchte*) among other things, had to be allocated to the town from the center.³⁸ Moreover, the Polish Ministry of Administration and Infrastructure apportioned an additional seven million zloty to the Gorzów Voivodeship from the ministry's reserves to conduct repairs, improvements, and renovations in Słubice.³⁹ Due to the time pressure, the government in Warsaw rescinded the limits on the regional authorities hiring private contractors to carry out necessary work. All of these measures indicate how high of a priority the Meeting of Friendship was not only for the youth movements, but for the Polish and East German regimes as well.

The grandeur of the program was astounding. On Saturday, May 28 at ten o'clock in the morning, hordes of communist youths opened the Meeting of Friendship by crossing the "Bridge of Peace" over the Oder that connected Słubice and Frankfurt to enter the East German city together, manifesting the "unbreakable alliance" of the two countries.⁴⁰ Thereafter, multiple venues in Frankfurt hosted various cultural exhibits, musical performances, and movie screenings. Selected delegates visited historical monuments, including the Seelow Heights battlefield memorial, laying wreaths in honor of "the heroes of the Red Army... fallen Polish fighters... and victims of German fascism." At eight o'clock that evening, the Ball of Friendship

³⁷ "Bal Przyjaźni," [no date], AAN, 1718/317.

³⁸ Hartlmeier, Stellv. des Oberbürgermeisters-Frankfurt/Oder, Maßnahmeplan zur Vorbereitung und Durchführung der ambulanten Handelstätigkeit in der Bezirksstadt anlässlich des Treffens der Freundschaft, 15 March 1977, Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg (LHAB), Rep. 671/27.

³⁹ Ministry of Administration, Infrastructure, and Environmental Protection to the Voivod of Gorzów, 26 February 1977, AAN, 1718/316.

⁴⁰ Harmonogram imprez Spotkania Przyjaźni, [no date], AAN, 1718/317.

for 2,500 hand-picked delegates and guests offered “predominantly fun” to the young people. Its organization was “based on the socialist style of life of the young generation,” enabling “meetings... and conversations” while dancing, playing, drinking, and eating. Those who still had the energy on the following day could listen to numerous beat, jazz, and pop concerts, visit souvenir and tourist information booths, watch the children’s groups (*Pioniere, harcerze*) show off their talents, admire a fashion show, compete in a 5k race, and in the evening, listen to the famous Polish and East German bands and soloists.

The Meeting of Friendship’s “central political event” also took place on Sunday morning. Marching across the Bridge of Peace behind a sign that read, “Freundschaft-Przyjaźń” (“friendship” in both German and Polish) with portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the Polish and East German First Secretaries took their places, flanked by another four hundred dignitaries, on a massive stage situated on the main street named after Karl Marx.⁴¹ On the opposite side of the street, 3,500 FDJ and FSZMP members cheered to the sounds of a three-hundred person choir and a fifty-instrument orchestra, which created the “optimal conditions for a political atmosphere among the participants.” Because the FDJ had a problem with volunteers, two hundred East German soldiers (NVA) donned the youth organization’s uniforms to fill the gaps. Flags, banners, portraits, and small decorative elements ornamented the spectacle. Then, 23,000 FDJ and 20,000 FSZMP members paraded in mixed groups, five-hundred people in one bloc, twelve in a row spread across the width of the street. Each bloc carried a slogan, such as “Heirs to the Communist Manifesto – the young generation of Poland and the GDR under the leadership of the SED and PZPR realize the legacy of Red October.” The finale of the manifestation, took place under a banner proclaiming “Socialism – happiness and a bright future for the youth of our

⁴¹ Przebieg manifestacji, [no date], AAN, 1718/317.

countries.” Three hundred fifty kindergarteners stopped in front of the stage to perform a choreographed dance. Right after, the orchestra started to play the “International” and “everyone joined the singing. On the main stage, the word ‘Communism’ appeared. On the opposite stage participants waved red flags and scarves. Everyone joined hands, raising them high. Then the manifestation of friendship ended.”

Of course, none of these actions were spontaneous. Extensive plans, charts, and scripts enabled the above reconstruction and provide a glimpse into the functioning of internationalist propaganda. The meticulous preparations and directions for every step that the marching parade was to take served the purpose of showing off exactly how close-knit the Polish-East German cooperation was and how the effects of socialist integration impacted life across borders within the Bloc.⁴² The organizers even recruited an engaged couple to be wed during the Meeting of Friendship, with one stipulation from Warsaw that the groom be from Poland and the bride from the GDR.⁴³ It is unclear to what extent the pair was willing to put their private life on public display. Hence, the idea of a “spectacle of friendship” accurately describes the events in Frankfurt, although some spectators of the show might have established genuine attachments to their peers and the neighboring country. Nonetheless, the citizens of Frankfurt and Słubice expressed more satisfaction with “the factors that affected the town aesthetics and the stores are properly supplied with groceries” than with the event itself.⁴⁴ In terms of political propaganda, however, the costly and highly-scripted manifestation of friendship suggests that for the two regimes, integration was still a high priority.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Wykaz ustaleń z konsultacji Frankfurt ’77 między FDJ a FSZMP, 21 April 1977, AAN, 1718/316.

⁴⁴ Płk. T Zalewski, Informacja, 28 May 1977, IPN Sz 004/8/1, 72.

Revival of the Opposition

The organizers of the Meeting of Friendship touted its success, in part because no scandalous antipolitical activity took place.⁴⁵ This was the result of the efforts of the security services of the GDR and PPR, which paid close attention to the quality of contacts between the citizens and intervened when necessary. In a report to the Ministry of the Interior (MSW), the Polish delegation proclaimed that the event had been successful due to a timely detection of political provocateurs and “the elimination of undesirable elements.”⁴⁶ Most of the interventions pertained to “hippies” and “decadent” youth concealed in dens, who experimented with drugs, drank too much, or attempted to bathe in the Frankfurter fountains.⁴⁷ More concerning, however, were two young men under the influence of alcohol who attempted to interrupt the speeches of Honecker and Gierek, a woman who recounted the Nazi atrocities, and seven handwritten flyers the SB found around Słubice that read “PZPR arrests workers” and were signed “KOR” referring to the Workers’ Defense Committee established by the intelligentsia opposition after the June 1976 upheavals in Poland.⁴⁸ The reports from the Meeting of Friendship vividly illustrate the preoccupation with socialist political correctness: at least for the security apparatus, the success of the festival was derived from the lack of open contestation to the system at a time when the opposition in Poland had begun organizing itself in civil society.

While antisystemic action had been taking place throughout Eastern Europe since 1945, most scholars agree that organized opposition to the communist regimes arose in the second half

⁴⁵ Ocena wyników i przebiegu Spotkania Przyjaźni, [no date], AAN, 1718/316.

⁴⁶ S. Kabaciński, Sprawozdanie z operacyjnego zabezpieczenia manifestacji młodzieży Polski i NRD – Frankfurt ‘77, 3 June 1977, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 133.

⁴⁷ E.g. Karweina, Abschlußbericht (Eröffnungsveranstaltung), 29 May 1977, LHAB, Rep. 671/26.

⁴⁸ Płk. Zalewski to Dyżurny Gabinetu Ministra SW w Warszawie, Meldunek, 29 May 1977, IPN Sz 004/8/1, 74; and S. Kabaciński, Sprawozdanie, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 132.

of the 1970s.⁴⁹ The subversive, antiregime spheres took various forms and acquired different nomenclature, one of the most famous terms being “dissent.” As Jonathan Bolton and Padraic Kenney argue in their studies, however, not all forms of resistance constituted dissent, which they define as an intellectual opposition born in a particular cultural environment.⁵⁰ That label, therefore, applies more accurately to the reformist movement within the Czechoslovak Communist Party of 1968, the Chartist Movement headed by Václav Havel, Ludvík Vaculík, or Jan Patočka, or the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) created to help the persecuted strikers legally and materially in 1976 Poland.

Another form of opposition was the moral challenge to the system stemming from the influence of the churches. Since their inception, the communist regimes regarded the ecclesiastical powers to be a thorn in their side, but the election of Karol Wojtyła to the papal throne in October 1978 intensified the clandestine and public work against the system and solidified the support of the masses for the Catholic anticommunist cause. In Poland, the nationalist opposition was closely tied to the Catholic one, but it was not the case elsewhere. Nonetheless, the nationalists worked, mostly in exile, to preserve their country’s sovereignty and culture from Soviet influence. Lastly, counterculture offered another pathway of refusing the system by rejecting the mainstream, whether in music, the arts, or lifestyle, which provided a community of like-minded people.⁵¹ The question is, how did the rise of the opposition affect the project of socialist integration?

⁴⁹ Barbara J. Falk, “Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe: An Emerging Historiography,” *East European Politics and Societies* 25/2 (May 2011): 318-360; Krzysztof Madej, “Opozycja w PRL 1956-1980: Stan badań,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2 (2003):227-252.

⁵⁰ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 10; Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent : Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 17.

⁵¹ This categorization based on Kenney, *A Carnival*, 10-11.

The answer is complicated in that, on the one hand, the regimes tried to intensify cooperation not only in the forms discussed earlier, but also in terms of security against cross-border oppositional activity. On the other hand, the differences between how Poland and the other states handled opposition drove a wedge between the allies on a political level. The political and social crisis had its deeper roots in the economic recession caused by the oil price shocks of 1973.⁵² The Eastern Bloc's increasing reliance on imports and loans from the West put a strain on its hard currency reserves and limited access to industrial, technological, and consumer goods. The imbalance of import to export prices grew by 20 to 30 percent in the mid-1970s, which required economic adjustments in a system that was resistant to any tinkering.⁵³ The PZPR bore the consequences of price increases multiple times, most recently in December 1970. Nonetheless, they did not learn from past experiences. In a conversation between the East German Chairman of the State Planning Commission, Gerhard Schürer, and his Czechoslovak counterpart, Václav Hůla, both politicians agreed that "the population reacts very sensitively even to the smallest price corrections."⁵⁴ Hence, the situation in Poland worried the neighboring planners. Hůla "touched upon the opinions of some Polish colleagues, who criticize the policy of stable prices as practiced in the GDR or CSSR," and instead raised the wages some 12 percent and expected to increase prices on basic foodstuffs. On 24 June 1976, Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz announced the "price corrections" in a televised address.

⁵² Ivan T. Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

⁵³ Ivan T. Berend, *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe: Economic Regimes from Laissez-faire to Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 182-83.

⁵⁴ Gerhard Schürer, Information über eine Beratung mit Genossen Hula am 7. Januar 1976 in Prag, 8 January 1976, BArch-Berlin, DE/1/56317.

A seemingly minor step, the decision had tremendous domestic and international consequences. The following day, workers in ninety-six factories went on strike, first in Radom then Ursus and elsewhere, which prompted the regime to rescind the price hikes, but the brutal pacification of the protests spurred more disgruntled citizens to take to the streets. The immediate result of these protests was the growth of Polish oppositional activity, centered mostly around the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) founded in September 1976 to collect money for the families of persecuted workers.⁵⁵ The regime quickly released the arrested protesters and members of KOR, suggesting that under Gierek a civil society had a space to develop, even though repression against oppositionists continued. The broader significance of KOR, however, lay in the solidarity of workers and intellectuals, which continued throughout the remainder of the decade and became the foundation for the "Solidarity" trade union in 1980. The Committee underwent several transformations in that time, but the core people and ideas remained the same. In 1978, KOR members held secret meetings with Czechoslovak dissidents from Charter 77 on the green border in the eastern Sudeten Mountains, exchanging samizdat and experiences with oppositional work.⁵⁶ Aware or fearful of the internationalization of dissent, the regimes were forced to cooperate to counter the emerging threat.

That cooperation, however, was not always smooth. As the reports from the Meeting of Friendship indicate, officers of the East German and Polish secret security worked together on the ground to identify potential threats, observing persons of interest and acting successfully to prevent any scandals, as long as the language barrier between German and Polish officials was

⁵⁵ For information about KOR and the rise of Polish opposition movement in English, see Jan Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁵⁶ Ondřej Nezbeda and Markéta Bernatt-Reszczyńska, "Tajné setkání československých a polských disidentů na Borůvkové hoře," <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/>.

overcome.⁵⁷ Problems appeared not in the procedural matters but more often among the higher levels of command, who were much more concerned with the larger implications of methods, political attitudes, and the perceived quality of the other security apparatus. The report from “Frankfurt 77” speaks to this inequality between the MSW and MfS. The Polish SB delegated 46 operative officers to Frankfurt and enlisted an additional five for the headquarters at home. The East German security service, Lt. Colonel Kabaciński wrote in his report, “approached the safety at the festival with tremendous organizational pomp, engaging for this work some 20,000 staff from the whole territory of the GDR.”⁵⁸ In contrast to the SB, the Stasi could approach the festival with the utmost seriousness, not only because the majority of the events took place on their soil, but also because the MfS had the people, money, and a strong ideological backbone.⁵⁹

Despite the loud proclamations of friendship, to the GDR regime Poland had become an ideological threat. The nascent East German opposition began to tap into international networks as well, seeing Poland, according to Erhart Neubert, as a “mobilizing factor” for the dissidents in the GDR.⁶⁰ The Stasi investigated any suspicious connections and reported them to its counterparts in Warsaw, with the hope that the SB would at least help to prevent the meetings between the dissident groups from the GDR and PPR.⁶¹ The MfS possessed wide knowledge of the contacts among groups like the KOR, the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK), and East

⁵⁷ Tytus Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń, której nie było: Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego NRD wobec MSW, 1974-1990* (Warsaw: WUW, 2014), see especially pg. 85.

⁵⁸ Kabaciński, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 134.

⁵⁹ Jens Gieseke, *Die Stasi, 1945-1989* (Munich: Pantehon, 2001), 71-73.

⁶⁰ Erhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1997).

⁶¹ Ciastoń, *Sprawozdanie z rozmów z przedstawicielami MBP NRD w dniach 12-14 czerwca 1978, 28 July 1978*, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 207.

German dissidents such as Ludwig Mehlhorn.⁶² In lengthy reports sent to Warsaw, the Stasi provided detailed lists of contacts he and others had abroad, as well as plans for shipping a duplicator and ink to Poland to produce samizdat, for example.⁶³ What clearly displeased the East German partners, however, was an apparent ignorance of this information and a lack of willingness to restore social and ideological order in Poland.⁶⁴ Aware of its geographic position as the transit country between dissident sympathizers in West Berlin/FRG and the hotbed of opposition in Poland, the Stasi saw itself as the sole fighter on the front to defend socialism in the Socialist Bloc.

Mindful of the potential consequences for the ideological well-being of the population, the Stasi vehemently pursued anyone who was unfortunate enough to possess publications that were deemed illegal in the GDR. After the protests in Gdańsk in August 1980 and the creation of the “Solidarity” trade union, the Stasi’s paranoia reached absurd levels. GDR border guards confiscated from Polish citizens travelling in transit from West Berlin or the FRG not only the West German *Spiegel*, *Stern* and pornography, but also gardening catalogs, automobile magazines, pictures of Pope John Paul II, and—from a renowned Polish sports commentator—sports magazines.⁶⁵ Naturally, samizdat publications and forbidden books often originated in West Berlin’s publishing houses, like the Mütz Verlag, and then traversed the GDR to reach

⁶² E.g. Wytwor, Informacja z korespondencji MBP NRD to MSW PRL, 15 December 1977, IPN BU 0296/194, 17; MfS to MSW, 29 August 1978, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 215; Mielke to Kowalczyk, 28 January 1977, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 74; Informacja, 16 August 1977, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 139-142.

⁶³ Informacja, 16 August 1977, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 140.

⁶⁴ Cf. Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 272.

⁶⁵ For example see the reports send by the MfS to MSW in IPN BU 1596/898. Due to privacy clause my providing any more detail would make the person publically identifiable. *Gesetz über die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, §32-34.

Poland.⁶⁶ The insistence on foiling any attempts to smuggle illegal literature can be explained by the Stasi's justified fears that a good portion of these works might find eager readers in East Germany.

Another explanation for the East German zeal in fighting subversive materials and consumer goods was a real concern for Polish communism, whose secret police appeared to the Stasi leadership as "revisionist" and too incompetent – or unwilling – to crush the opposition effectively. In his study of both secret services, Tytus Jaskułowski shows that, in fact, the Polish SB had more experience in its struggle with the political opposition. Contrary to the Stasi, however, the SB's main goal was not to eliminate the dissidents, but by using repression and operative tactics, to weaken dissent or to manipulate it for its own purposes.⁶⁷ The most vivid example of this approach was the SB's recruitment of and collaboration with Lech Wałęsa between 1970-1976, which most likely continued in the later years in the form of blackmail.⁶⁸ Erich Mielke, however, preferred to remain loyal to ideology and his deeply engrained old-school chekist tactics. The differences in operational approaches between the leadership of the

⁶⁶ E.g. Ciastoń, *Sprawozdanie z rozmów z przedstawicielami MBP NRD*, 28 July 1978, IPN BU 0296/194/5, 207.

⁶⁷ Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 260.

⁶⁸ The controversy around Wałęsa's work as a secret informant erupted already in 1992 when the Minister of the Interior, Antoni Macierewicz, announced a list of former collaborators, which brought down the government of Jan Olszewski. The Lustration Court subsequently cleared Wałęsa's name, but speculation continued. In 2008, Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk published *SB a Lech Wałęsa: Przyczynek do biografii* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), which in light of new documents suggested that the former Solidarity leader and Polish President was indeed a secret informant "Bolek." The book stirred a new debate around the issue and only in 2016, after gaining access to the documents that the former Chief of the SB, Czesław Kiszczak (died 2015), secretly kept at home, scholars and investigators established beyond a doubt that Lech Wałęsa cooperated with the SB. Wałęsa continues to refute this evidence. For more on the controversy see, for example, Witold Głowacki, "Lech Wałęsa, człowiek ze skazą? Co kryją teczki IPN na temat TW "Bolka"?" *Polska Times*, 31 January 2017, <https://polskatimes.pl/lech-walesa-czlowiek-ze-skaza-co-kryja-teczki-ipn-na-temat-tw-bolka/ar/11746339>; Kalina Chojnacka, "Friszke o „Bolku”: "Powinien zmierzyć się z tymi dokumentami. Nie może negocjować czegoś, czego zanegować się nie da," *Na Temat*, 25 February 2016, <https://natemat.pl/172519,friszke-o-bolku-powinien-zmierzyc-sie-z-tymi-dokumentami-nie-moze-negowac-czego-czego-zanegowac-sie-nie-da>. In English, Anna Koper, "Institute says Poland's Walesa collaborated with communist secret police," Reuters, 31 January 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-walesa/institute-says-polands-walesa-collaborated-with-communist-secret-police-idUSKBN15F16L>.

MfS and MSW inhibited cooperation between the forces of seemingly friendly countries. Moreover, Mielke was often obnoxious and paternalistic toward fellow chekists from Poland, instructing them in Marxism-Leninism, which at that time did not have much appeal even among the communists in the MSW.⁶⁹ Thus, on the security-political level as well, the stereotype of the “Polish economy” characterized the SED’s perception of its Eastern neighbor.

The different approaches to ideological fervor also determined the Czechoslovak views of Poland. The *Státní bezpečnost* (StB) officers similarly closed ranks with their Polish SB and East German Stasi colleagues in order to combat oppositionist ideas crossing borders.⁷⁰ This, however, did not mean that the regime in Prague had much faith in Gierek’s leadership abilities. The reports of the cultural attaché to the Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw, Rudolf Turňa, from the late 1970s reveal what caused their anxiety. Writing in early May 1976, for example, the diplomat analyzed the recent works and speeches of Polish artists such as Zbigniew Herbert and Stefan Kisielewski. These writers “publish in Western mass media their destructive and hostile opinions. They abuse the atmosphere of Helsinki and the fact that nothing is going to happen to them at home (their books still get published [in Poland]). Polish state organs have an extraordinarily patient attitude” toward these authors. “Even though they are sharply criticized at Party meetings, there are no real interventions against them.”⁷¹ Contrary to the approaches the KSCĚ took at home toward unruly artists in the aftermath of Prague Spring, who like Havel were prohibited from publishing, the situation in Poland appeared otherworldly to the Slovak

⁶⁹ For example, see minutes from the meeting between the delegation of the MfS and Mieleke with the leadership of the MSW in Warsaw on June 14, 1978; as well as the comments by Jan Wójcik, *Zapis służbowy*, 25 July 1978, IPN BU 0296/194/5 pg. 171-178. See also Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 124-160.

⁷⁰ Informace o služebním jednání náčelníka X. správy FMV ČSSR s náčelníkem XX. hlavní správy M StB NDR, 14 February 1979, ABS, A 2/9/589; series of documents in IPN BU 0296/195/1.

⁷¹ Rudolf Turňa, *Nejagresivnější politickí opozičníci z radov polských spisovatelov*, 3 May 1976, AMZV, TO-T 1975-1979, Polsko k.6/ob.25.

diplomat. Nonetheless, writing again already after the upheavals of June 1976, Turňa underscored the accuracy of his previous assessments. “The policy of separating artistic work from the political profile of the author did not pay... in practice it led to unlimited tolerance with negative political consequences.”⁷²

Another particularity of Polish communism that was incomprehensible to the brotherly allies was its relationship with the Catholic Church, which caused an uproar in 1978 when the Cracovian cardinal Karol Wojtyła became pope. While Gierek and the Central Committee initially reacted to the news from the evening of October 16 with panic, the masters of propaganda embraced the event of a Pole being elected the Bishop of Rome and spun a narrative of national victory.⁷³ A more serious threat was the imminent trip of John Paul II to his homeland, about which discussions arose already in October 1978. The Episcopal Conference presidium entered into negotiations about the pilgrimage’s timeline and program with party-state authorities, who did not want the papal visit, but given the social pressure, could not refuse it either. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, met with the Gensek in January 1979, using the same nationalist rhetoric of “our country’s significance on the international stage” to persuade the regime to agree to the visit.⁷⁴ Telephoning from the Kremlin, the very concerned Leonid Brezhnev advised Gierek to “tell the pope—he’s a smart man—to announce publicly that he is sick and can’t come.”⁷⁵ While the veracity of that statement cannot be corroborated, the

⁷² Rudolf Turňa, *Problémy polskéj ideovej a kultúrnej oblasti*, 8 September 1976, AMZV, TO-T 1975-1979, Polsko k.6/ob.25.

⁷³ Jan Źaryn, “Jan Paweł II: Pogromca żelaznej kurtyny” in Maciej Drzonek and Michał Siedziako (eds.), *Solidarność z Błog: Wokół nauczania społecznego Jana Pawła II* (Szczecin: IPN, 2016), 17-25.

⁷⁴ Quoted from Rafał Łatka, “Rada Główna Episkopatu Polski a pierwsza pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Ojczyzny w 1979 r.” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (2018): 229-262, here 236.

⁷⁵ E.g. Marek Lasota, “Lato 1979: Jan Paweł II w Krakowie,” *Znak* 598 (2005): 68-98, here 72.

high level of stress among the PZPR leadership and security services is undeniable. Under the codename “Lato-79” (Summer-79), the MSW mobilized hundreds of SB officers and thousands of secret informers to detect any potential antisocialist actions planned by KOR and other oppositionists during the Pope’s stay.⁷⁶ What they could not control, however, was what John Paul II told the millions of people lining the streets, squares, and fields where events were organized.

More significant for this work, though, is the intra-Bloc dimension of the papal visit. In early April, the Czechoslovak Embassy in East Berlin hosted the SED Department for Church Relations to discuss several matters. On the topic of the Pope’s trip, the GDR statesmen revealed that they would not preclude East German citizens from travelling to Poland to partake in celebrations with John Paul II.⁷⁷ Moreover, the SED comrades shared that the state would help to organize some of the trips to see the Pope, which no doubt served as a way of supervising at least some of the predicted one-hundred-thousand East Germans pilgrims. The KSCĚ took the opposite approach and strictly limited cross-border mobility in the first week of June 1979.⁷⁸ Despite these differences, the German and Czech interlocutors “expressed the need for the continuous deepening of cooperation between the GDR and CSSR in the realm of church policy because, among other things, in neighboring Poland the religious issues played an important role in politics.”⁷⁹ Reading between the lines, neither the SED nor the KSCĚ leadership trusted Polish communists to remain unaffected by the pressure of the Catholic Church and thereby successfully fend off any potential threats emanating from that direction. Although the régime in

⁷⁶ Lasota, “Lato 1979.”

⁷⁷ František Hamouz, *Záznam o rozhovoru*, 2 April 1979, AMZV, TO-T 1975-1979, NDR k.5.

⁷⁸ Ján Šimulčík, *Zápas o nádej. Z kroniky tajných kňazov 1968–1989* (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo M. Vaška, 2000), 55–6.

⁷⁹ Hamouz, AMZV, TO-T 1975-1979, NDR k.5.

Warsaw informed the Bloc allies of its actions and successes against Church-related antisocialist groups, to the Stasi and StB these reports did not relay any intelligence as much as “explained the stance of Polish authorities.”⁸⁰ Hence, the Czechoslovak and German chekists preferred to conduct investigations and operational work on their own, which alienated their Polish colleagues.

The Months of Crisis

The challenges of the late 1970s laid the foundation of political breakdown precipitated by the protests at the Gdańsk Shipyards in August 1980. In the aftermath of the events of 1976 and the rise of opposition groups encouraged by the Vatican, the rulers in Warsaw raised prices on foodstuffs again on 1 July 1980, without announcing the measure publicly.⁸¹ Several minor strikes throughout the country set the mood for workers to support another cause that erupted on August 14 at the Lenin Shipyards. Demanding that Anna Walentynowicz, a welder and crane operator fired for her oppositional activities, be returned to work, the laborers in Gdańsk started a wave of country-wide protests with most major factories paralyzed by the downing of tools and growing cooperation among all strikers. After a series of agreements between the workers and the state, by 17 September 1980 the first independent trade union in the Eastern Bloc, “Solidarity,” came into existence, attracting ten million members within months. The capitulation of the Party required changes within the PZPR to signal a willingness for reform. During the night of 5 September, Stanisław Kania replaced Gierek as the General Secretary. While the mood thereafter was euphoric, over time Solidarity brought forth more postulates and

⁸⁰ Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 296-97.

⁸¹ Jerzy Eisler, *Polskie Miesiące czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), 50.

nearly-continuous waves of protests took place until December 1981. To the neighboring countries, Poland had become a hostile country.⁸²

The strikes in Poland caused a political crisis not only domestically, but also between Warsaw and Berlin. The changing of the guard in the PZPR gave hope to the SED, which, both for ideological and economic reasons, was concerned with the Polish state's ability to deal with the strikes effectively. Because of the stoppage of work in major Polish industries, the GDR did not receive the promised amounts of coal that was so essential to East German industry and energy in the aftermath of the oil price shocks.⁸³ In a letter to Kania, dated 30 September 1980, Honecker expressed concern that the GDR had not received any coal shipments since 17 September.⁸⁴ It was, therefore, in Berlin's vital interest to stabilize the situation in Poland. It appears that between then and late October, both sides tried their best to come up with a solution that would address the problem of calming the bilateral situation. The party-state talks, however, failed to provide stabilization.⁸⁵ Honecker and the Central Committee of the SED did not approve of the new Polish Gensek for his lack of clear solutions (i.e. forceful intervention) and saw his election as "an attempt to cheat the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other brotherly parties."⁸⁶ In a letter to Leonid Brezhnev from 26 November 1980, the SED chairman urged that "we have to work out the collective means of supporting our Polish friends.... Your

⁸² Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 361.

⁸³ Cf. Konstantin Hermann, *Die DDR und die Solidarność: Ausgewählte Aspekte einer Beziehung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2013), 43, 54-59.

⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2-1859 in Kubina and Wilke, 73.

⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2/A-2358 in Kubina and Wilke, 92.

⁸⁶ Quoted from Jarosław Tarasiński, „Reakcje w Niemieckiej Republice Demokratycznej na powstanie i działalność NSZZ Solidarność” in Paweł Jaworski and Łukasz Kamiński (eds.), *Świat wobec Solidarności, 1980-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2013): 126-141, here 129.

good advice given [to Kania] unfortunately did not have any effect on the situation.

Counterrevolutionary forces continue their relentless attacks and any delay equals death—the death of socialist Poland.”⁸⁷ This accurate but highly emotional premise built up to the message’s goal, namely to organize a meeting, which Gustáv Husák and Bulgarian Todor Zhivkov also wanted to join. During one of the subsequent gatherings in Moscow with all representatives of the satellite states, Honecker pressed for the top-down removal of Kania, who wanted to resolve all matters politically “repudiating the Leninist principle that the party must be prepared to utilize all forms of combat to destroy the counterrevolution and to guarantee the socialist development of People’s Poland.”⁸⁸ Although concern for Poland might have motivated ideologues like Honecker, more pressing, it appears, was the protection of the well-being of his own country and the existence of the Bloc as a whole.

These fears were not unjustified. Much to the dismay of the East German regime, the people there were well aware of the events in Poland. Support for the “Solidarity” trade unions was not necessarily widespread, but it existed and manifested itself in multiple ways. For example, “Solidarity” emblems appeared on walls, flyers were distributed among workers, one man donated 200 marks to the Union’s fund in the Gdańsk Shipyards, and dissidents like Roland Jahn rode bicycles adorned with Polish flags with a slogan “Solidarity with the Polish nation” affixed to them.⁸⁹ The East German security apparatus persecuted such expressions of support vehemently and feared their further spread. Joachim Herrmann, a member of the SED Politburo responsible for propaganda and agitation, informed his Soviet counterpart and secretary of the

⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2-1868, k. 5–6 in Kubina and Wilke, 122-23.

⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, SED 41559, in Kubina and Wilke, 270-285.

⁸⁹ Zariczny, *Opozycja*, 21-23.

Central Committee of the CPSU, Mikhail Zimianin, that “anti-socialist elements from the PPR attempted to propagate nationalist, anticommunist, and anti-Soviet slogans on the GDR’s territory. We [the SED] had to put a stop to it.”⁹⁰ Even Honecker demonstrated considerable concern about the international support for the Polish counterrevolution. Complaining about Western television “broadcasting this all in a concentrated form to the GDR,” he compared the media reports to war correspondence in which “rowdies are celebrated as heroes.”⁹¹

In Prague, the reactions to the Solidarity crisis were even more aggressive because the KSĊ not only struggled with its own organized dissident movement, but also because the memories of 1968 guided the regime’s responses.⁹² In a 12 November 1980 meeting with the Hungarian János Kádár in Bratislava, Gustáv Husák reiterated his concerns about the influence that the situation in Poland may have on his country and also delved into the causes of the problems.⁹³ According to the Czechoslovak Gensek, “political work [i.e. propagandization of the party line and the teaching of Marxism-Leninism—MS] within the Party and among the workers was seriously neglected. We had similar experiences here in 1968-1969, that is why we pay a lot of attention to it.” Moreover, Husák explained that in contrast to Poland, the Czechoslovak security apparatus vigorously pursues Charter 77, other antisocialist activists, and the “reinvigorated efforts of the Vatican to support ecclesiastical opposition.” Similarly to the SED and other Bloc parties, the KSĊ blamed anticommunist influences for the crisis in Poland, but

⁹⁰ Joachim Herrmann, Anhang 1 zur Vorlage für das Politbüro, Arbeitsprotokoll Nr. 45/80, 4 November 1980, SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2/A-2361 published in *Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen: Geheimakten der SED-Führung über die Unterdrückung der polnischen Demokratiebewegung*, Michael Kubina, Manfred Wilke, eds. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 97.

⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2/A-2349 in Kubina and Wilke, 66.

⁹² Petr Blažek, “Československo a polská krize 1980–1981,” *Securitas imperii* 20 (2012): 58-75.

⁹³ Protokol z rozhovoru s. G. Husáka s Jánosem Kádárem, 12 November 1980, Národní archiv (NA), f. 02-1, Předsednictvo ÚV KSĊ, 158/155.

also primarily the PZPR leadership, which both allowed the opposition to enter the political stage and pursued devastating economic policies that led to social unrest.⁹⁴ Hence, Prague showed little love to the “brothers” in Warsaw, being the most vocal advocates, together with the comrades in Berlin, of a military solution to Polish problems.

Despite army mobilization and the growing threat of an intervention, without the Kremlin’s approval Honecker and Husák’s hands were tied. Military maneuvers of the GDR, CSSR, and Soviet armies “Družba-80” in December 1980 near the Czechoslovak-Polish border officially ended after three days, but several tank brigades remained there in case of emergency until 1982.⁹⁵ The tension among enlisted young men was high. Draftees in East German barracks began sending their belongings back home, assuming “they’re going to Poland” before Christmas 1980, and with that stirring up rumors in their hometowns of an imminent war.⁹⁶ The resulting popular opinions captured by the Stasi revolved around the question “if we have to help the Poles, why should our sons do it? Why not the Russians like in 1968 in Czechoslovakia?” This question, closely connected to whether the Martial Law imposed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski on 13 December 1981 prevented a potential Soviet invasion, is highly disputed among scholars.⁹⁷ One of the more recent and convincing studies by Patrizia Hey argues that Brezhnev was skeptical about the idea of intervention in Poland from the outset because of larger geopolitical consideration concerning the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, growing competition

⁹⁴ Blažek, “Československo a polská krize,” 60.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁶ E.g. Mjr. Krause, Information, 9 December 1980, BStU, MfS BV Ddn KD Sebnitz 4156, 22.

⁹⁷ For outlines of this debate see Vojtech Mastny, “The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980/81 and the End of the Cold War” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, No. 2 (March 1999), 189–211.

with China, as well as the potential domestic backlash.⁹⁸ Left helpless by the big brother, Honecker and Husák had to resort to the standard security means that would assure that the “revolutionary bacillus” would not cross their borders.

On October 24, Honecker informed Kania in a telephone conversation that the GDR was going to suspend passport-free travel due to the lack of a unified solution.⁹⁹ Honecker explained the motive behind this step by dwelling on the economic problems and the potential negative impact the events in Poland might have on East German society. Although Kania expressed understanding for Berlin’s decision, it appears that he tried to dissuade the GDR from closing the border, as this would further damage the reputation and image of East Germany internationally and domestically. The leader of the PZPR recalled that it was Honecker’s idea to relax travel regulations and that “it would not be right when Comrade Honecker would be now associated with the suspension” of that agreement. Nevertheless, the fate of the open border was sealed and any further diplomatic negotiation was out of the question. Interestingly enough, Honecker assured Kania that the closing would be a temporary measure “until a time when we could repeal these limits again.” It is hard to judge to what extent the regime in Berlin actually believed in the possible reopening of the border. However, the suggestion that the new policy was only temporary indicates that the SED Politburo hoped for an improvement in Poland.

The process of closing the border involved primarily the Ministry for State Security, which oversaw the border controls, customs, as well as foreign and domestic intelligence. On October 28 Erich Mielke issued a confidential communique No. 66/80, about the “temporary

⁹⁸ Patrizia Hey, *Die sowjetische Polenpolitik Anfang der 1980er Jahre und die Verhängung des Kriegsrechts in der Volksrepublik Polen: Tatsächliche sowjetische Bedrohung oder erfolgreicher Bluff?* (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2010).

⁹⁹ SAPMO-BArch ZPA, J IV 2/2/A-2358 in Kubina and Wilke, 92.

changes to the procedures in passport- and visa-free travel.”¹⁰⁰ The new measures took effect on October 30 due to “the situation that arose in Poland and its impact on the GDR” in order to “protect the interests of the citizens of the GDR.” In this document, Mielke explained the “situation” and the “interests.” First, he addressed the issue of economics, which continued to deteriorate in Poland. The purchasing of East German goods had a negative influence on the mood among the citizens of the GDR. Then, Mielke turned to the question of “counterrevolution.” He emphasized the abuse of the free travel agreement for the purposes of spreading subversive propaganda into the GDR. Only with regard to this topic did the chief of the MfS directly state that “it comes down to helping Polish communists by recognizing and stopping” any attempts at meddling by “hostile forces from abroad.” The “abroad” here certainly refers to supporters of the Solidarity movement from the capitalist West, who traveled across the GDR to reach Poland. At that point, the key element of the eight-year-long integrationist project ceased to exist. Surprisingly, the CSSR did not follow the GDR’s lead and maintained open borders with Poland for another year. As it turned out, it was a good thing that the Poles and Czechs could not agree a few years back about allowing East German tourists to traverse their mutual frontier without a passport.

Immediately after closing the border, the SED faced concerns over its citizens’ responses to the new policy. The Stasi instructed the secret informants to gauge public opinion on the topic of restricted travel. The reports should have reassured the GDR leadership. Even though some people expressed negative opinions that the travel restriction was “an intrusion into personal lives,” the majority of the information points to a widespread welcoming of the new policy.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Erich Mielke, Vertraurliche Verschlusssache, MfS 008 Nr. 66/80, 28 October 1980, BStU, MfS HA XXII, 5647/1, 216-227.

¹⁰¹ Lübeck, Quelle IMK „Uwe,“ 26 November 1980, BStU, Abt. XXII/3, 20-21.

The recurring theme in these reports is the satisfaction that the Poles would not “regularly buy up” everything and the hope that the “supply situation would improve.”¹⁰² The SED propaganda department could have then congratulated itself on a very successful maneuver. By capitalizing on the popular discontent among its citizens, and then presenting the reintroduction of restricted travel as a way to curb trader tourism, the GDR leadership not only did not want to admit that it feared subversion, but also averted negative attitudes toward the measures and gained popularity among those who disliked being in competition with Polish customers, a topic of the next chapter.

Conclusion

While the rise of Solidarity might have been the beginning of the end to real socialism, it certainly marked the end to the grand project of new socialist integration. Laying the blame for its failure on only Solidarity, Honecker, and Husák, however, does not do justice to the complexity of the situation. For one, since the initial euphoria of introducing passport-free travel, the issue of integration remained stagnant. The grand plans of deepening political, economic, and cultural cooperation either did not work out or had more form over substance, as the meeting between Chňoupek and Fischer with which this chapter started illustrates. Increasing financial problems inhibited the growth of bilateral trade and other undertakings, but accelerated the growth of the citizens’ discontentment and anti-systemic opposition. Several initiatives were meant to reinvigorate the project of socialist integration, but they proved to be ineffective. The opening of the Polish-Czechoslovak border to free tourist traffic did not gain much interest because the Poles preferred to travel west to the GDR and West to capitalist countries, while the

¹⁰² Bethig, Quelle IMB “Roland,” 18 November 1980, BStU, MfS Abt. XXII/3, 24. See also similar reports in the same file, pp. 12-14.

Czechs never considered Poland a worthwhile destination. The Intervision Music Festival failed to attract a wider audience in part because it was too Polish-centered, and partly because it disappeared after only four editions. The Meeting of Friendship in Frankfurt might have brought thousands of young Poles and East Germans together, but the event's scripted nature barely gave the chance for genuine relationships to develop.

Second, the rise of organized opposition hampered political cooperation between Poland and its neighbors. The strikes of June 1976, the creation of KOR, the birth of Charter 77, and the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope by themselves did not send the integrationist project into a nosedive, but they did reveal considerable fractures between the "brotherly allied" communist parties. Open borders certainly helped to internationalize antisocialist opposition within the Bloc, one of the unintended consequences of the communist project. Nonetheless, this situation offered room for the coordinated activities of Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak security services, another element of integration. Ideological and procedural differences in going about the "enemy," however, had the opposite effect. Hardliners in Prague and East Berlin did not trust the Varsovian chekists and doubted the correctness of the "Polish path to communism." From the perspective of Honecker and Husák, Gierek and his immediate successor Kania truly appeared weak and indecisive, unable to reassert the PZPR's dominance and to restore order in their house. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the massive wave of protests in August 1980 that continued for another fifteen months and resulted in the legalization of the independent trade union Solidarity, pushed the neighbors to call for extraordinary measures.

The most important outcome of the five years after 1976 was the gradual reconfiguration of alliances as well as of the idea of socialist integration. Since 1972, Polish and East German communists attempted to create a cohesive bloc of Central European states that surpassed the

economic cooperation within Comecon, the military alliance of the Warsaw Pact, and the political unity under one Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The opening of the borders for the populations was the crucial component of the social dimension of integration and its closing, therefore, signified a serious step backward. By locking Poland out of the group, both literally and politically, the project lost its main engine because the Czechoslovak comrades never shared the same enthusiasm for Honecker and Gierek's internationalist efforts. Nonetheless, the circumstances did bring Prague and East Berlin closer together, a relationship that became more obvious in their common uncompromising approaches to combatting dissent, focusing on a balanced economic plan, and reasserting unity by force if necessary. In this sense, socialist integration did not die with Solidarity, but rather transformed itself into an alliance of hardline doctrinaires focused on self-preservation and left Poland isolated and even more susceptible to its opening to the West.

CHAPTER 5 – ECONOMICS OF OPEN BORDERS: ILLCIT TRADE AND SMUGGLING

Procurement of products under state socialism constituted a challenging part of everyday life. Waiting in lines at the stores became a cultural phenomenon, reflected in many anecdotes popular throughout the Bloc. “What is the plural of human?” one of such jokes begins, “A queue.” In order to overcome the shortages, citizens resorted to creative ways of obtaining common, but hardly available goods like meat, toilet paper, clothing, or spare parts.¹ The period of open borders, therefore, witnessed an unprecedented rise in the volume of international travel and shopping. According to the East German statistics, between 1972 and 1976 the GDR citizens crossed the border to Poland 26.2 million times and to Czechoslovakia 22.7 million times.² At the same time, Polish visits to the GDR numbered 36.1 million and Czechoslovak trips reached 7.2 million. The majority of people shopped abroad to satisfy their immediate needs or common curiosity about foreign products.

The initial agreement between Poland and East Germany was predicated on such “innocent” transfer of products and removed all customs restrictions for several months in 1972, before both states gradually reimposed control. The Czechoslovak partners, however, maintained a strict customs regime on the border to the GDR since 1972 and Poland even after its opening in 1977 (for more details see chapter 1), which is one of the reasons for East Germany being the consumerist paradise and the focus of this chapter. Additionally, the material standard of living

¹ For more detailed analysis of that topic see for example, Małgorzata Mazurek, *Spoleczeństwo kolejki: o doświadczeniach niedoboru, 1945-1989* (Warsaw: Trio, 2010).

² Zollverwaltung der DDR, no date [January 1977], BStU, MfS HA VI 4845/2, 178.

in the GDR was considerably higher than it was in Poland.³ Such a relatively prosperous economy was crucial to the SED regime in particular, because scarred by the Uprising of 17 June 1953, the East German Communists preferred to ensure stability by avoiding any rapid changes to the social benefits package.⁴ Using the material stability argument, the East German state blamed the “worsening supply situation in the People’s Republic of Poland... that led to the rationing of basic goods, contributed to increasing buyouts of foodstuffs by Polish citizens in the GDR, and speculation” to justify the reintroduction of travel restrictions as a way to protect its citizens’ access to consumer goods.⁵ The problem with accepting the official explanation at face value arises from the fact that Poland already had been experiencing shortages for quite some time and put a strain on the East German market throughout the decade. To what extent, then, did the situation change in the fall of 1980? Asking more broadly, how did the illegal trade across borders affect the process of socialist integration?

Consumption in the Eastern Bloc has fascinated scholars for at least the last decade, providing insights into the role of consumer culture in real-existing socialism, conceptual differences between East and West, dynamics between state and society, as well as the eventual demise of communism.⁶ Researchers also paid a lot of attention to the illegal markets developed

³ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

⁴ On the lasting effects of the events of June 1953 on East German social and economic policy, see for example Fulbrook, *Anatomy*, 16, and Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 142-145.

⁵ Erich Mielke, Vertrauliche Verschlussache MfS 008 Nr. 66/80, 28 October 1980, BStU, MfS HA XXII 5647/1, 216-227.

⁶ E.g. Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev” *Slavic Review* 61 (2/2002), 211-252; Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Krisztina Fehervary, “Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2/2009):426–459; Małgorzata Mazurek and

in response to the ubiquitous shortages.⁷ Jerzy Kochanowski, for example, argues that smuggling and trading abroad not only helped tourists defray the costs of travel and supplement their budget of foreign currency, it also created new trade routes determined by demand for particular products, labeling these tourists as the “pioneers of free market.”⁸ It is hard to agree completely, however, with his assertion that to the socialist citizens, “only the price defined the trading partner, neither side sought other types of contact.”⁹ Others show that mass mobility of the 1970s affected young inhabitants of the Bloc in a different way. The people coming of age in the decade of open borders began to see connections to other people in the Bloc.¹⁰ Consumption of taboo products expressing a particular Western lifestyle, such as music or jeans, was one of the unifying factors. Despite the acknowledged threats emanating from cross-border trade and growing political subversion, interpreters such as Mark Keck-Szajbel contend that the borders in 1980 closed because of Poles “emptying the stocked shelves” in the GDR with their government’s approval.¹¹ While building on this previous scholarship, this chapter will challenge the widespread notion of trader tourists threatening the East German supply chain in order to offer a more nuanced interpretation of the economic interchange on socialist integration.

Matthew Hilton, “Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism: Consumer Protection and Consumer Movement in Poland” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2/2007), 315-43.

⁷ E.g. Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski (eds.), *Bocznymi Drogami: Nieoficjalne kontakty społeczeństw socjalistycznych, 1956-1989* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2010); Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami: “Czarny rynek” w Polsce, 1944-1989* (Warsaw: ABC, 2015).

⁸ Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 338-348; Jerzy Kochanowski, “Pionierzy wolnego rynku? Nieoficjalna wymiana handlowa między społeczeństwami krajów socjalistycznych. Lata siedemdziesiąte i osiemdziesiąte,” in Borodziej and Kochanowski, (eds.), 109-144.

⁹ Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 357.

¹⁰ Mark Keck-Szajbel, “A Cultural Shift in the 1970s: “Texas” Jeans, Taboos, and Transnational Tourism,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 29 (1/2015), 212–225.

¹¹ Mark Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border” in Bren and Neuberger, 377.

Tying together the loose ends of historiographical debates, this chapter analyzes citizens' activities on the illicit market and the broader consequences of that economic exchange between 1972 and 1980. It argues that the societal impression of mass shopping, smuggling, and speculation better explains the backward move to close the borders, rather than the oft-cited financial pressures on the supply chain in the GDR and CSSR. Undeniably, Polish shoppers did put a strain on East German and Czechoslovak domestic markets, but their actual economic impact was negligible. Moreover, for eight years the states effectively adjusted the customs policies of open borders to maintain the free flow of traffic despite the deepening economic crisis inside the Bloc. Illegal cross-border socialist consumption had less tangible and more serious effects. On the one hand, excessive shopping poised East German and Czechoslovak citizens against their Polish fellows, driving a wedge into social integration and thereby undermining the main tenet of the project. On the other hand, it twisted the purpose of socialist integration by linking together groups and individuals from different countries to conduct illegal business. From the regimes' points of view these were entropic enterprises that threatened the stability of a planned economy and the security of the communist states. Hence, consumption by other nationals *per se* did not cause the reversal of the passport-free policy. Political considerations did. Combined with the fear of oppositional activity spreading around the Bloc as well as mistrust toward the Polish leadership, as discussed in the previous chapter, concerns over the open-borders-economy factored into the ending of the integrationist project.

To prove that thesis, this chapter will first explore the different economic activities that the travelers were engaged in. For most people, shopping abroad allowed them to satisfy their immediate consumer needs as well as cravings for the unknown, exotic, or prohibited products at home. More notorious were the cases of speculation, which involved buying goods wholesale,

smuggling them across the border, and selling in retail at elevated prices. While the authorities tended to turn a blind eye to the first phenomenon, they vehemently pursued speculators for their intrinsically antisocialist behavior. After the initial miscalculation on the Polish-East German border, which rescinded all duties on import and export in passport and visa-free traffic, the two states continuously amended the regulations in response to the peoples' creative ways around the system. The second part of the chapter will probe the claims of a Polish assault on East German products. While there was undeniable pressure on the market, the statistical evidence shows that the reasons for widespread shortages lay elsewhere. Nonetheless, the visible presence of Polish tourists in East German shops created a perception of mass buy-outs, which in turn contributed to growing hostilities across the border. The last section will analyze the impact of illicit trade on social relations within the Bloc. From the angle of consumption, the resulting interactions defied all stated goals of socialist integration. Not only did they contribute to hostilities between different nationals in pursuit of scarce goods, but they also led to a rise of cross-border pseudo-capitalist cooperation among traders attempting to overcome the shortages. Both sets of responses tested the integrationist project because the first one contradicted "integration" and the other one negated "socialist."

Shopping and Speculation

Opening the borders within the Bloc provided more opportunities to satisfy consumer needs. For example, Eberhardt K. from Wainsdorf (East Germany) was installing a new heating unit in his house and it took him three years to collect all the necessary parts, most of which he bought in Czechoslovakia because they were unavailable in the GDR.¹² While K. does not

¹² Hans-Eberkhard K. to Paul N., 25 December 1984, MfK-Berlin, "Post von Drüben," Konvolut 3.2011.460.

mention it in his letters, the process he undertook in order to fix his heater probably did not infringe upon any regulations. There was no law anywhere prohibiting foreigners from making purchases in a neighboring land, and “even items embargoed from export but purchased legally and within the legal limit of foreign currency” were exempt from customs duties.¹³ Hence, the system of allocating foreign currency for travel to socialist states, according to which East German citizens travelling to Czechoslovakia in 1988, for example, could exchange up to 438 marks (1,320 Kčs) per year, attempted to protect the planned consumerist market from an influx of additional costumers.¹⁴ Problems arose, however, when people began to circumvent the official currency allocation in order to make the trip worthwhile, purchasing more than the official limits allowed and beyond the frequently-cited “reasonable quantity.”¹⁵ The border controllers’ mere suspicion of speculative intent of the reselling of foreign goods at higher prices elsewhere prompted an immediate reaction that included confiscating the products and fining the individuals, which contributed to rising hostilities between travelers and officials.

In the Polish-Czechoslovak tourist convention zone in the mountains, the neighbors bartered what they had for what they wanted. The Catholic Slovaks could buy religious literature, rosaries, and secular magazines from Poland for a good number of oranges (in season), coffee, cigarettes, candy, or meats.¹⁶ Others traded sheep skins for blueberries or sex.¹⁷ To some

¹³ No author, Fragen der Verbote und Beschränkungen in der Ausfuhr von Gegenständen, no date [1979], BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2563.

¹⁴ E.g. Erich Mielke, Politisch-operativ beachtenswerte Probleme im Zusammenhang mit der weiteren Entwicklung des Tourismus mit den sozialistischen Ländern, 6 January 1988, BStU, MfS RS 670, 33.

¹⁵ The vague and legally imprecise term used by the customs officers, especially in East Germany (*vernünftige Menge*), was used to allow or to prevent export of particular items arbitrarily. For example, see ZV DDR, Information, 5 December 1981, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2563.

¹⁶ IPN BU 003243/12/J.

¹⁷ IPN Rz 00321/32.

people, illegal exchange across the border was simply a matter of convenience. Józef C, a shepherd in a collective farm near Chełmsko Śląskie in southwestern Poland, spent many lonely hours in the meadows right by the Polish-Czechoslovak border.¹⁸ In order to pass the time, C. engaged with Czech farmers herding cattle just across the demarcation line, from whom he bought alcohol. The shepherd entered the Polish authorities' purview because one day in June he asked a coworker for a one hundred złoty loan to be spent on Czech liquor and revealed his transborder arrangement, unaware that the said coworker was a secret informant for the Polish Border Guards. Lieutenant Szwarc opened the investigative proceedings, even camping out in the rain for several hours in order to catch C. *in flagranti*, but with the seasons changing, the suspect stopped taking the flock to the meadows. As the documents' annotations indicate, Szwarc's superiors had doubts about the actual value of time spent on the case because in principle, C. was smuggling and crossing the border illegally, but in reality such an exchange did not cause serious harm. The usually stringent Czechoslovak authorities were not interested in the case either, further showing the arbitrariness of law enforcement and the normalization of small-scale illicit economic exchange on the local level.¹⁹

Big-scale speculation, however, did not receive as much sympathy from the officers. Indeed, cross-border trade had become a lucrative business for those who did not have a stable occupation, and who had not been deterred even by multiple arrests or other administrative measures.²⁰ The process involved bringing in goods from Poland and the sale or exchange thereof, usually in larger cities like Berlin, Leipzig, or Dresden for the purpose of obtaining more

¹⁸ Procedural folder: Materiały dot. nielegalnego kontaktowania się z obywatelami CSRS, IPN Wr 021/79.

¹⁹ Mjr. Zaplatílek, Poznatek k navazování styků na SH v prestoru osady Bečkov, 16 July 1980, IPN Wr 021/79, 20.

²⁰ Gerhard Stauch, Information, 9 August 1978, BStU, MfS HA VI, 16964, pg. 66; Zollverwaltung der DDR, Polnische Bestimmungen: Auswahl von Personen die wiederholt Rechtsverletzungen auf dem Territorium der DDR begangen haben... (no date, estimated late 1979, early 1980), BStU, MfS HA VI, 4845/1, 151.

East German marks at a better-than-the-official exchange rate.²¹ With all the money, speculators bought whatever they could and marketed it back in Poland for profit. That profit, in some cases, must have been substantial, if Franciszek T. from Wrocław, for example, was willing to pay a taxi driver 3,000 złoty for the hundred-mile drive to the East German town of Görlitz three times a week to fetch the imports.²² Although the actual scope of T.'s business does not appear in the sources, the East German Stasi documented exactly what Tadeusz and Ryszarda J. from Warsaw bought during their three-day stay in East Berlin in November 1972. Fourteen pairs of shoes, twenty-four blouses, jackets, and children's clothing, and over thirty pieces of other garments certainly did not aim to satisfy only one family's needs. Speculative shopping, therefore, not only upset the principles of socialism, but more importantly, it angered the locals witnessing foreigners leave with items allocated to their region.

Over the course of the decade, the customs policies fluctuated in response to a state's economy, bilateral agreements with the receiving country, and disciplinary measures against overzealous consumers. By December 1976, the GDR amended its customs law by adding new items to the export embargo list, which included products most frequently bought by Polish and Czechoslovak tourists, namely meat, lemons, raisins, spices, towels, stockings, and shoes.²³ The law clearly aimed at preventing Polish shoppers from buying up these goods because these new regulations were not to be enforced on the Czechoslovak border.²⁴ Nonetheless, the ZV controllers on the crossings to Poland also did not concern themselves with travelers exporting

²¹ E.g. „Ausgewählte Beispiele zu Feststellungen des Schmuggels und Spekulation, Zeitraum Dezember 1977,“ BStU, MfS HA IX, 3612.

²² H. Fennig, Informacja dot. Skutków otwarcia granicy z NRD, 20 October 1972, IPN, BU 0365/102/1, 203.

²³ 28. Durchführungsbestimmung zum Zollgesetz vom 3.12.1976, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2563.

²⁴ Fragen der Verbote und Beschränkungen in der Ausfuhr von Gegenständen aus der DDR, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2563.

small amounts of prohibited items, even if some overzealous customs officers might have confiscated these goods as well. For example, in a private conversation from late 1979, an East German diplomat assured the Polish officials that confiscation of small amounts of goods banned from export, “for example three packs of pepper or two pairs of stockings, in principle, do not take place.”²⁵ On the other hand, the state organs fervently persecuted those people they suspected of speculation.

The limits on the exchange of currency likewise decreased periodically and proved to be more effective both in curbing speculation as well as balancing the trade budget between two countries. In 1974, the maximum amount of marks that Polish citizens were allowed to buy dropped significantly, from 200 marks per month to 100 marks per quarter, and by 1980 to 350 marks annually. According to the East German Finance Ministry, the burden on commodities imposed by all socialist shoppers, of which Poles constituted 39 percent and Czechoslovak 19 percent, fell from 917 million marks in 1972 to 385 million marks in early 1975.²⁶ At the same time, however, the East German account with Poland suffered a setback. Whereas at the end of 1972 Warsaw owed East Berlin 150 million rubles, out of which 100 million was for tourism expenses, by 1975 the balance flipped and gave Poland a modest credit of 12.7 million rubles.²⁷ Therefore, the currency control mechanisms together with border customs inspections worked in limiting the unsanctioned shopping and trade, even if it did not completely eliminate all instances of speculative shopping.

²⁵ Heinz Fiedler to Erich Mielke, 29 October 1979, BStU, MfS Abt. X, Nr. 12, 429.

²⁶ Wilberg, Information über den paß- und visafreien Reiseverkehr mit der VR Polen und der CSSR per 31.12.1974, 28 February 1975, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/10676, 11-19.

²⁷ Pilna notatka MHZ o wymianie handlowej z NRD, 16 October 1972, found in *Polskie Dokumenty Dyplomatyczne 1972*, Włodzimierz Borodziej, ed. (Warsaw: PISM, 2005), 577-78. Wilberg, Information über den paß- und visafreien Reiseverkehr mit der VR Polen und der CSSR per 31.12.1974, 28 February 1975, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/10676, 12.

These financial regulations carried serious and counterproductive implications, reflected most importantly in the increase of illegal currency exchanges and smuggling. In order to have enough marks, crowns, or zloty for tapping into the official economy, trader tourists subverted the exploitatively high exchange rates in banks and supplemented their rationed allowances otherwise. The most common way to afford shopping abroad was to smuggle in goods from home then sell them to the locals. Germans frequently packed their suitcases with their used clothes, a procedure that customs would not find suspicious for anyone travelling abroad, and sold those clothes second-hand out of the trunk of their Trabants at markets and parking lots across the border. The Polish security services (both the SB and MO) observed these entrepreneurs, sometimes managing to fine them for illegal trade.²⁸ On the other side of the border, East German citizens were more interested in brand new furs, leather jackets, and lead glass ornaments, which Polish smugglers brought in to the GDR while leaving with East German shoes, stockings, and coffee.

Myths and Perceptions

Studying socialist tourism's impact on the East German economy in preparation for the opening of the border between Poland and the CSSR in 1977, the Czechoslovak embassy economists concluded that Polish shoppers accounted for only one to one-and-a-half percent of all retail trade in the GDR.²⁹ Such a surprising assessment coming from the most protectionist partner in the triangle is one of the strongest indicators that, despite the widespread opinions about Poles clearing out the shelves of East German stores, the reality was not as bleak. Even if

²⁸ Cf. IPN Po 0038/99/t.12, 48 and BArch-Berlin, DL 203/3076.

²⁹ František Hamouz, Informace a některé poznatky o turistice mezi NDR a PLR, 18 February 1977, AMZV, TO-T 1975-1979, NDR k.5/ob.25.

that ratio increased slightly during the Solidarity crisis in the summer of 1980, it might have affected individual pockets of populations in the borderlands or larger urban destinations, but not the domestic economy more broadly. Hence, it appears that the myth of Polish shoppers causing the shortages was of greater significance for the open borders' failure and that their large presence in East Germany contributed to the growing animosity between the two nations.

Although the East German market supply was not in danger, the prejudices against foreigners as well as perceptions of smuggling and speculation resulting from mass buyouts in certain areas posed more serious problems. Rooted in cultural and historical traditions of earlier centuries, negative stereotypes reinforced themselves thanks in large part to material inequalities between the neighbors. Owing to the Polish citizens' relentless purchases, many East Germans did not believe the official propaganda of friendship and in its stead perceived their eastern neighbors as thieves, alcoholics, and greedy, lazy, cunning blackmarketeers.³⁰ Such attitudes appeared throughout the country but were particularly prevalent among the inhabitants of the eastern borderlands, who absorbed most of trader tourism's effects and thus began to call for a closing of the border.³¹ In the GDR, people laughed at their neighbor's lower standard of living, circulating jokes, such as the one targeting low meat supply and rationing in Poland: "What is mean? Mean is when you give a Pole a meat grinder for Christmas."³²

Looking closely at another set of data corroborates the assertion that the Polish smugglers' impact on the East German economy was negligent. The East German Stasi

³⁰ Ludwig Mehlhorn, "Przyjaźń nakazana. Rozwój stosunków między NRD a PRL w latach 1949-1990," in Kerski and Kotula, 40-41; Makaro, 76-112.

³¹ Elżbieta Opiłowska, "Stosunki między Polską a NRD w pamięci mieszkańców pogranicza" in Kerski, 170. Also, Konstantin Hermann (ed.), *Die DDR und die Solidarność: Ausgewählte Aspekte einer Beziehung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2013), 27.

³² BStU MfS BV Cbs AKG 5868.

calculated that in 1978 alone 4,571,768 Polish citizens crossed the border to the GDR. In that same year, the ZV noted 10,238 Poles committing import or export violations.³³ From a statistical perspective, those who attempted to smuggle either prohibited items or large quantities of products across the border amounted to only 0.22 percent of the total number of Polish visitors in 1978. In the next two years, the number of recorded customs infractions doubled and hovered around 0.5 percent of all the border traffic to Poland. Naturally, the official counts do not consider all of the smuggling that went unnoticed. According to the head of the analytical group in the MfS Department VI (border control and tourism), for example, the rate of luggage control on trains was less than 3 percent.³⁴ At the same time, however, East German customs inspectors became more thorough due to the pressure from headquarters, which can partly explain the higher recorded rate of smuggling. Set in a comparative perspective, Polish citizens constituted the single most numerous group of smugglers in East Germany, accounting for nearly one-third of all customs investigations undertaken between December 1978 and November 1979, with the rest comprising West Germans, Czechoslovaks, and other socialist and Third World citizens.³⁵

Since the extent of Polish smuggling was a perceived threat to the East German economy, ZV produced very detailed reports of its ongoing border checks, confiscations, and investigations. Therefore, from these reports it is easy to determine the target products of Polish shoppers: nearly everything. In late February 1975, customs officers noted some seventy categories of goods within a week-long random-sampling inspection of Poles leaving the GDR through the Frankfurt-Oder checkpoint. These categories included foodstuffs, particularly meats

³³ Numbers are based on monthly reports by Gerhard Stauch, *Ergebnis der Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung und Zurückdrängung des organisierten Schmuggels und der Spekulation*, BStU, MfS HA VI 16962, 16963, and 16964.

³⁴ Hans-Georg Schneider, *Zusammenfassende Einschätzung*, 20 March 1980, BStU, MfS HA VI, 16959, 7.

³⁵ Wunderlich, *Zuarbeit zur Lage und Situation bei der Bekämpfung von Schmuggel und Spekulation...*, 2 November 1979, BStU, MfS HA IX, 5365, 4.

and exotic fruits like bananas, alcohol, toys, clothing, shoes, pillows, wallpaper, paint, auto parts, and a whole selection of other items that appeared less frequently.³⁶ In terms of volume, within that week of random sampling, the two hundred people exported 38 kilograms of meat, 31 kilograms of exotic fruit, 165 pieces of children's clothing, and other goods, all worth circa ten thousand marks.³⁷ When presented in this collective manner, as the ZV reports to the ministerial superiors did, the numbers look outrageous and potentially could justify stricter measures. From an individual perspective, however, it appears that each of the two hundred people carried only 200 grams (seven ounces) of meat, two oranges (150 grams/five ounces), and altogether bought 50 marks worth of goods each—all within a “reasonable” quantity. To use the old adage, statistics do not lie, and in this case they were certainly used to misrepresent the deeper causes of shortages arising in the GDR in the era of progressing economic crisis.

With the controllers' constant prejudices and suspicion of smuggling, the experience of crossing borders changed as well in the late 1970s. Gone were the days when the East German ZV “in principle” did not confiscate a package of ground pepper. For example, on the evening express train from Berlin to Warsaw in early December 1979, a group of seven Polish men carried altogether fourteen links of sausage, three children's jackets, and four pairs of shoes.³⁸ Although nothing hinted at speculative intention given that the amounts of purchased goods were well within reason, East German customs inspectors confiscated everything because these products were prohibited from export. In return, the travelers began calling the officials names,

³⁶ E.g. Pinkernelle, Information zur Ausfuhr von Gegenständen durch Bürger der VRP aus der DDR, 11 March 1975, BStU, MfS Abt. X, 12/1, 440-444.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Reconstructed based on Stauch to Dostojewski, 11 December 1979, BStU, MfS Abt. X/12/1, 143; Kebedies, Sachstandsbericht, 7 December 1979, BStU, MfS Abt. X/12/1, 87-94, and Ewert, Aktennotiz, 8 December 1979, BStU, MfS Abt. X/12/1, 100-101.

relying on the old invectives of “Gestapo” and “fascists,” which deeply offended the East Germans. A fist fight broke out and one of the Poles needed medical attention. Not an isolated incident, the episode in the train was indicative of the changing dynamics on the “border of friendship.”³⁹ Hostility, prejudice, and protectionism replaced the open and friendly atmosphere of internationalism.

Tensions rose not only between travelers and controllers, but also between Polish and East German officials. The regime in Warsaw, however, lacked the will to cooperate with East Berlin on curbing smugglers and speculators. By analyzing the press and other state publications, Mark Keck-Szajbel has argued that the Gierek administration used the “Border of Friendship [as] a safe – but short-term – solution to hidden inflation and empty shelves” by openly encouraging shopping in the GDR.⁴⁰ While it is hard to assess to what extent the Communists in East Berlin saw the actions of their partners in Warsaw as intentional, they certainly took note of the attitudes among Polish border controllers. The GUC officers were not as diligent, which prompted their East German colleagues to complain to their department about their Polish counterparts.⁴¹ Corruption, inefficiency, and a lax approach to duties on the part of Polish officials contributed to the strengthening of stereotypes of a “Polish economy” (*polnische Wirtschaft*), a nineteenth-century term implying disorder.⁴² In addition to accepting bribes from

³⁹ Gespräch mit Gen. Hadzik, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DL203/2588.

⁴⁰ Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc,” 381.

⁴¹ For example, “Auswahl von Personen, die wiederholt Rechtsverletzungen auf dem Territorium der DDR begangen haben, obwohl die Zollverwaltung der VRP über die einzelnen Vorkommnisse jeweils informiert wurde.” No date (est. late 1979), BStU, MfS HA VI, 4845/1, 151.

⁴² The term *polnische Wirtschaft* (Polish economy) is a stereotypical reflection of Polish social organization present in German language since the late eighteenth century. It is usually associated with a lack of order and planning. See Hubert Orłowski, *Polnische Wirtschaft: Zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 1996). Tytus Jaskułowski argues that on the level of secret services, the East German chekists did not trust the professionalism of their Polish counterparts, thus underestimating their operational capabilities. Idem, *Przyjaźń*, 127.

smugglers, the GUC controllers engaged in contraband themselves, drank on duty, and expressed negative opinions about the GDR and USSR.⁴³ Slowly losing faith in the system they were sworn to protect, they clearly considered it not worth the hassle and not in their interest to interfere with what the travelers brought back and forth.

A flurry of new regulations in the last months of the open border caused even more trouble by creating communicative chaos and a plurality of interpretations of the laws. In May 1980, state-level discussions resulted in the introduction of a minimum obligatory currency exchange for travel between Poland and East Germany.⁴⁴ Although the Communists in Pankow were rather pleased with the idea, which they had been using on the border with West Germany, they disapproved of Polish demands for reciprocity.⁴⁵ An absurd situation occurred because the officers on the ground did not know how to interpret the new regulations themselves. On 3 June 1980, an East German controller at the checkpoint in Pomellen reported a conversation with his Polish colleague, from which he learned that the Poles were given instructions to turn back all Polish citizens who had no evidence of the minimum exchange in their currency booklets. “This instruction was interpreted differently by the Polish controllers. [The interlocutor] said verbatim: ‘One minister says one thing, another something else and contradicts it. And when I send the citizens back, they go complain and I’m the one getting in trouble.’”⁴⁶ Similar disorder took place in Szczecin, where the bank cashiers were unsure whether one was allowed to exchange only twenty-five marks or more. Two weeks later, there were still inconsistencies, but the GUC

⁴³ Cf. Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 336.

⁴⁴ The idea was that all citizens of the PPR travelling west, upon crossing the border must show a proof of having exchanged 25 marks (East Germans had to exchange 200 zloty). The GDR had already in place the policy of minimum obligatory exchange for visitors from capitalist countries.

⁴⁵ Willi Stoph, *Beschluß des Ministerrates 166/I.21/80, 22 Mai 1980, BStU, MfS HA VI 4845/2, 238.*

⁴⁶ Brumshagen, *Fernschreiben, 3 June, 1980, BStU, MfS HA VI, 16960, 6.*

officers only “instructed” the East German visitors about the policy, letting them pass.⁴⁷ By doing so, they infuriated the GDR side, who sought to retain order and control over the border. Losing this control, therefore, factors into the decision to close the border in October even more than the exaggerated notions of relentless shopping and smuggling.

If the border could not have been secured, then by late 1979 the SED regime began to contemplate less conventional methods of restricting Poles’ access to consumer goods, existing already in practice in several locations. The Ministry of Trade and Supply (MHV) analyzed the measures in use at the “Centrum” store in Dresden as an example. There, improvisation was the key. If foreigners demanded a product that was already in short supply, such items were “removed from the display.”⁴⁸ On the days when tourist presence was the strongest, considerable amounts of merchandise were relocated from city centers to the suburbs. As the MHV pointed out, however, these methods had many disadvantages. They created shortages in densely populated cities, put a heavy burden on logistics, and did not deter trader tourists who adapted relatively quickly to the new circumstances. The MHV expressed more positive opinions toward redirecting the coveted goods from self-service areas of stores to areas that required assistance from sales clerks. The clerks and cashiers could then control the sales more easily and use the opportunity to remind foreign patrons about export regulations.⁴⁹

The ministerial analysts suggested additional and rather controversial options. Among them was the introduction of varying store hours tailored to the patterns of tourist flow, or the

⁴⁷ Stauch, Information zur Arbeitsweise der polnischen Zollorganen, 16 June, 1980, BStU, MfS HA VI, 16960, 10. Additional reports pertaining to that situation, same file, pp. 16-17, 20-22.

⁴⁸ Diskussionsgrundlage zu Maßnahmen für die Lenkung des Verkaufs von Konsumgütern an ausländische Touristen, no date, no author (from the document one can infer late 1979-early 1980, Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung), BStU, MfS HA VI, 16960, 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

relocation of merchandise to internal factory stores, which would ensure an adequate supply for native workers. Analysts also proposed the policy of rationing products to foreigners. The document discusses this measure and grapples with questions of what exceptions should be made and how to identify a foreigner. Requesting a person's identification card upon purchase was an option. However, "such a policy must apply to all foreigners and all of the GDR territory lest it will be perceived as a limited, unfriendly measure."⁵⁰ Similarly unacceptable was the initiative of shopkeepers such as those in Zittau, who deemed their enterprise "for GDR citizens only." As reports of this type of situation reached Warsaw, a diplomatic conflict broke out, in which a representative of the PZPR told his SED colleague that these symbols were "especially painful to those citizens who remember the Nazi occupation with its signs of "For Germans only."⁵¹ Implied in this discussion was an institutional discrimination against Polish shoppers, which would have legitimized the discrimination that already existed in the stores.⁵² Such a step, however, would have only exacerbated social and political tensions and probably would not have resolved the shortages.

To be sure, the actions of some Polish citizens did warrant a bad reputation for the rest of their compatriots and the perceptions of smugglers and speculators. The demographics of trader tourists sheds light on this issue. Contrary to popular belief, shopping in the GDR appealed not only to inhabitants of the borderlands, but also to residents of central and eastern Poland. The distance that these people had to cover affected the quantity of their purchases for the purposes

⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁵¹ BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2588.

⁵² Cf. Osękowski, "Stosunki," 152; and various accounts collected in Makaro, *Gubin*.

of hoarding or resale.⁵³ More importantly, the duration of travel potentially influenced the appearance of the travelers who reached their destination as quickly and as cheaply as possible. After six, eight, or even more hours without much sleep while in transit, the travelers who emerged from the trains, buses, and cars created an image that bothered some of their fellow Poles.⁵⁴ Moreover, as the results of the 1972 Polish opinion survey about the open borders revealed, domicile as well as level of education was negatively correlated with consumerist purposes for travel to the GDR. Whereas the inhabitants of smaller towns and villages without secondary schooling were more eager to shop in East Germany, the urbanites, who already had access to better supply, and more educated Poles condemned that behavior, frequently citing “national pride” being at stake.⁵⁵ Crucial here is also the finding that those people who traveled to the GDR solely for consumerist and speculative purposes held negative attitudes and prejudices toward the German nation. Such a population sample, therefore, helps to explain how and why some of the GDR citizens formed their first impressions of the neighbors.

Citizens of all age groups committed commercial offenses, including customs infractions, suspicion of speculation, and “property crime” – a euphemism for theft. According to statistics from the Neubrandenburg district, nearly half of all “property law” offenders from Poland were under the age of thirty.⁵⁶ As the report points out, females comprised the majority of offenders. Given the traditional gender roles and the availability of ready-to-wear clothing one could put on

⁵³ Ibid., the one hundred Poles from beyond the borderlands controlled in Frankfurt had with them not only more net value of goods than the hundred citizens from the bordering regions, but also a larger number of any products per person. For more examples, see J. Hoffman, Information..., 24 November 1972, BStU, MfS HA IX, 13554, 3.

⁵⁴ Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych RSW "Prasa-Książka-Ruch," *Opinie Polaków o ruchu bezwizowym PRL-NRD*, January 1973, IPN, BU 0296/90 t.2, in passim. See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the survey.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵⁶ Großman and Eder, *Einschätzungsbericht über Verfehlungen, die durch Bürger der VR Polen begangen wurden*, 8 February 1977, BStU, MfS HA IX 1104, 3-4.

while fitting, it is not surprising that women were overrepresented among the shoplifters. Most interesting is the occupational differentiation. Of all “property criminals,” over 35 percent were workers, followed by the unemployed (25 percent) and students (17 percent). These are groups that traditionally had to experiment with *Eigen-sinn* (self-will) to extract from the system what they believed they needed or deserved. Thus, their actions can hardly be explained as an embrace of communist ideology of common ownership and need-based distribution. More likely, a desire to have something not normally available to them – and a fear that the shortages might make these items unavailable yet again – motivated the thefts.

These rising tensions negated the whole idea of socialist integration and revealed the strong foundation of nationally-oriented mindsets. Between 1973 and 1976 in the Neubrandenburg region of East Germany, the police investigated 588 Polish citizens for theft from stores, in which the stolen goods ranged from a pack of cigarettes to several pieces of clothing.⁵⁷ The numbers yet again do not seem to be excessive, but the fact of theft committed by foreigners spurred the spread of negative attitudes among the locals. A saleswoman in a shoe store in Saßnitz (near Rostock), for instance, was reported to the MfS after she remarked to her colleague: “Look, here come the Polaks, the thieves. Stand over there and pay attention that they don’t steal anything.”⁵⁸ While the state authorities intervened in cases of slander in the initial years of the open border project, by the second half of the decade the SED regime itself began voicing negative stereotypes of “Polish economy,” which stifled the progress of socialism in

⁵⁷ Eder, Einschätzungsbericht über Verfehlungen, die durch Bürger der VR Polen begangen wurden, 8 February 1977, BStU, MfS HA IX 1104, 3-4.

⁵⁸ Hoffman, Information über Feststellungen zum pass- und visafreien Reiseverkehr, 24 November 1972, BStU, MfS HA IX, 13554, 10.

Poland due to constant popular protests.⁵⁹ From north to south in the GDR, citizens expressed satisfaction with the closing of the border in October 1980 and the hope that the “supply situation would improve” since the Poles would not “regularly buy up” everything.⁶⁰ Moreover, Czechoslovak intelligence observed that, “with regard to the situation in Poland, nationalist tendencies rose sharply among the East German population,” and began to fret over their own supply situation, now that the Germans would make greater use of the open border with the CSSR.⁶¹

Even though the supply situation did not improve after Polish shoppers stopped coming to East Germany *en masse*, the SED propaganda department could have then congratulated itself on a very successful maneuver. By capitalizing on the popular discontent among its citizens, and then presenting the reintroduction of restricted travel as a way to curb trader tourism, the GDR leadership both averted negative opinions about restricting mobility again and gained popularity among those who felt annoyed with outsiders buying their necessities. Unlike the presence of foreigners, growing debt was hidden from public view. As a result of the global energy crisis in the 1970s, the Soviet Union increased the price of oil, so essential to East German economy. In order to pay for these imports, between 1975 and 1985 GDR exports to the USSR doubled of goods that were suitable only for socialist markets (for quality reasons were not exported to the

⁵⁹ For East German anti-Polish propaganda in the late 1970s and early 1980s as reflected in the state press and official discourse, cf. Zariczny, *Opozycja*, 53, and Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc,” 387.

⁶⁰ Bethig, Quelle IMB “Roland,” 18 November 1980, BStU, MfS Abt. XXII/3, 24. See also similar reports in the same file, pp. 12-14, as well as MfS BV Ddn AKG PI 147/80 and others in the series.

⁶¹ Záznam rozhovoru: I. Sedlak and E. Babin, 22 January 1981, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.18; Miloš Vejvoda to Rudolf Rohlíček, 2 March 1981, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.4/ob.24.

West), which contributed to the shortages.⁶² Hence, economic factors lay at the root of the border closure, but Polish shoppers could be blamed only to a small extent for the empty shelves. Instead, the turn to nationalist protectionism and the deterioration of friendly relations across the Oder-Neisse border provide a more accurate explanation for the move that maimed the socialist integration project.

Surprising Integration

The picture of the illicit economic relations and the history of open borders would be incomplete with a sole focus on the competitive nature of transnational traders. Some entrepreneurial citizens established contacts with like-minded individuals from another country in order to pursue profitable exchanges. While most of this type of contact was limited to buying foreign currency from a trusted local, some people traded everything from foodstuffs, to stolen cars, to “subversive” lifestyle goods that had characteristics of antisocialist propaganda. The growing number of organized bands of smugglers and speculators worried the authorities in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia alike, not only because their actions harmed national economies. Also, with the expanding oppositional activity inside the Bloc after 1976, this form of unsanctioned integration put the secret services on high alert. Implicitly, these groups of international smugglers undermined the principles of new socialist integration and revealed an unintended consequence of open borders. A step that meant to bring people of the Bloc closer together in the spirit of socialist internationalism took a twisted turn to bind those individuals whose internationalist work had capitalist motives.

⁶² Ralf Ahrens, “Debt, Cooperation, and Collapse: East German Foreign Trade in the Honecker Years” in Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (eds.), *The East German Economy, 1945–2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 172.

A good amount of the smuggling operations would not have been possible without prior contacts with trusted partners on both sides of the border. For example, M., a supervisor at the Chemical Combine in Guben (*VEB Chemiefaserwerk Guben*), entered into a partnership with a Polish commuter worker, K., and her family in 1973, which involved stealing bags of Dederon, a synthetic fabric produced at the factory and quite popular in the Eastern Bloc, and smuggling them to Poland.⁶³ Upon returning home in the evenings, K. sewed window curtains and garments that were then marketed in both the GDR and Poland, bringing in substantial profit. Similarly, coworkers L. (German) and O. (Polish) at the same factory became good family friends, visiting each other in Guben and Gubin.⁶⁴ O.'s husband worked as mail delivery driver, which granted him access to fuel, also a valuable commodity on the socialist market. Driving efficiently allowed him to save petrol in his tank, which he subsequently pumped off and sold to L.'s spouse for East German marks. Therefore, work in the GDR neatly positioned many smugglers to conduct their businesses since they could both make lasting friendships with foreigners and enjoy expanded privileges during the border crossings, such as higher export and currency exchange limits.

A prior acquaintanceship was not necessary, though, for those who already traded illegally. All competition aside, speculators often worked in groups that consisted of both Polish and East German citizens. The case of Petra G., an East German citizen apprehended by the DVP in early 1978, exemplifies the opportunism of transnational connections.⁶⁵ Petra had been selling products smuggled from Poland in East Berlin for several years. Once in the hands of the DVP,

⁶³ Mańkowski, Notatka służbowa dot. podejrzanych kontaktów obywateli NRD, 28 September 1973, IPN Po, 0038/99/t.12, 48.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁶⁵ Gerhard Stauch, Entwurf eines Vortrages, 12 June 1978, BStU, MfS HA VI, 16961, 34-35.

Petra used her good knowledge of Polish to pose as a citizen of Poland, believing that as a “foreigner” she would receive a lighter penalty. Unfortunately for her, Petra underestimated the Stasi’s abilities. But upon her release in July 1977, she joined another group of Poles similarly conducting illicit trade in the GDR capital and offered them better knowledge of the target-market, logistics for storing goods, as well as the security apparatus’s weaknesses. Additionally, the more people involved in a scheme meant less risk for a single person because the valuable products were not concentrated in a single person’s hands, meaning they could be smuggled with less suspicion or hidden more easily if confiscation were to occur.

Nothing compares, however, to the enormous scale of smuggling Piotr B. organized across the Polish-Czech border in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁶⁶ Through drunken parties in a borderland hotel, Piotr, a twenty-year-old mechanic, enlisted the help of at least two soldiers of the Polish Border Guard, three Czechoslovak customs officers, and several other people in both countries to conduct a massive operation. As the suspect himself admitted to an SB spy strategically placed in his arrest cell, the smuggling business began with small items like gold chains and cigarettes. Eventually, B. expanded the assortment to exchanging Grundig radios, horses, and fox furs for Czechoslovak lemons. On multiple occasions, B. brought to Poland trucks filled with half a ton of the citrus at a time. A supplier delivered the fruit to the border checkpoint, where Hermine H., a Czechoslovak ÚCS inspector, helped B. to reload the 540kg of lemons onto his vehicle and send him off to Poland with the nod of approval from the Polish side. Naturally, all of the officials involved did not take the risk for the sake of friendship alone and also received between thirteen to fifty thousand zloty payment for each transport. Finally

⁶⁶ Files pertaining to Sprawa Operacyjnego Sprawdzenia “Kombinator,” IPN By 770/223.

caught in 1985, B. was sentenced to three years in prison for smuggling and illegal border crossing.

Deals with corrupt border officials, therefore, provided for very lucrative arrangements, which put pressure on the authorities to prevent individual inspectors from succumbing to the desire for quick enrichment. The East German ZV in particular ensured discipline by “convincing, rewarding, and punishing” the members of the staff.⁶⁷ The rewards for solid work were as high as the punishments for misdeeds. While the East German and Czechoslovak authorities often blamed Polish customs controllers for accepting bribes, the proverbial bad apples appeared within their ranks as well. Prompted by “single instances” of – most likely – corruption, the chief of the East German border guards, Heinz Fiedler, issued occasional memoranda about correct behavior, reminding his subordinates that “the acceptance of gifts and other gratuities (...) is irreconcilable with the work of representatives of the state and chekists.”⁶⁸ Even though the memo mostly concerned the officials on the East German frontier to the West, it also had its applications on the open borders. For example, some controllers from the Dresden headquarters were not interested much in the foodstuffs and other East German commodities but cared mostly for pornographic materials that travelers attempted to smuggle from West Germany to Poland, which they confiscated for personal use.⁶⁹

Instead of speculating with currency or consumer goods such as hard-to-obtain jeans, some young, entrepreneurial Bloc citizens soon realized that a burgeoning market existed in the GDR for politically subversive products. Items originating in the capitalist West or simply

⁶⁷ Jörn-Michael Goll, *Kontrollierte Kontrolleure: Die Bedeutung der Zollverwaltung für die politisch-operative Arbeit des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2011), 330.

⁶⁸ Heinz Fiedler to Leiter der Passkontrolleinheiten, 12 November 1976, BStU, MfS HA VI, 7760, 83.

⁶⁹ Bericht über den durchgeführten Arbeitseinsatz in der Abteilung VI, 1 February 1979, BStU, MfS HA VI, 4393.

alluding to a Western lifestyle became the source of profit. They included hoodies with “USA” stitched on the front, patches with emblems of the NATO states and armies, pennants of Western soccer clubs, rock music records – and even plastic shopping bags with “cowboy images.”⁷⁰ Especially in the wake of rising dissident movements in the late 1970s, the SED regime heavily battled any cultural subversion seeping in from both the West and now the East. For this reason, an insatiable yearning for freedom of expression and subtle political provocation flourished, which increased the demand on the “symbols of the West.” Only in the month of September 1978, the GDR customs confiscated these lifestyle goods from 111 travelers on the Polish-German border.⁷¹ While some people brought individual pieces of clothing or cassettes with Western music for personal use, others attempted to smuggle hundreds of stickers, pennants, and other knickknacks at once.⁷²

Noticing the increased interest in lifestyle goods, the East German ZV confronted the new GUC chief, Eugeniusz Dostojewski, about the issue.⁷³ Dostojewski “expressed regret that items of politically discriminatory nature... that were produced in Poland, were smuggled into the GDR.” Furthermore, Dostojewski remarked that, “as a Party member he did not understand why certain Polish institutions issued permits for the production of these things.” Given his history of corruption, however, for which he as well as numerous other officials were prosecuted after Gierek’s fall from power in 1980, Dostojewski’s words do not sound genuine.⁷⁴ Indeed,

⁷⁰ BStU, MfS HA VI, 16964, 66.

⁷¹ BStU, MfS, HA VI, 16964, 36.

⁷² See a series of monthly reports by Gerhard Stauch in BStU, MfS, HA VI, 16964.

⁷³ Günther Arndt, Bericht über den Antrittsbesuch des Präsidenten des Hauptamtes für Zoll der VR Polen, Genossen Dostojewski, beim Leiter der Zollverwaltung der DDR, 28 April 1978, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2610.

⁷⁴ E.g. Helena Kowalik, “Ty mnie, ja tobie,” *Wprost-Historia* 14 (2016).

working on Western licenses, several Polish factories manufactured various capitalist goods for export. Not only was this the regime-sanctioned way of securing hard-currency revenue to pay off the massive foreign debt, but it was also a proverbial venal hen that laid golden eggs for the nomenklatura.⁷⁵ Despite Dostojewski's assurances that the Polish customs controllers worked hard to prevent subversive materials from seeping to the GDR, the East German ZV continued to observe the same rate of western lifestyle goods being smuggled, further undermining the trust in the Polish forces' devotion to Marxist-Leninist principles.

The East German officials encountered more challenges in this matter than just the uncooperative attitude of Polish inspectors. As the petitions (*Eingaben*) submitted to the ZV show, GDR citizens also pushed back against the repressive and seemingly arbitrary confiscation of lifestyle goods at the border. In the second half of 1978, 146 East Germans officially complained about the customs' administrative measures.⁷⁶ These citizens put forth arguments centered on the fact that the products were purchased "legally in the stores of a socialist state." The *Zollverwaltung*, in turn, justified the confiscations with claims that the items in question "were bought with illegally exchanged Polish currency." The resulting situation angered mostly young people, who cited "tremendous financial losses" when their newly-bought cassettes of Western music or hard-to-get "Levi's" jeans were sequestered in the storage of the customs' buildings. From the material gathered, it is unclear if these young people consciously participated in political dissent or simply followed the trend of self-expression. Regardless, the

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the misappropriation of funds and corruption in the Gierk administration, see Krzysztof Lesiakowski, "Professional Negligence, Mismanagement and Malpractice: Polish Companies in the Light of Supreme Audit Office Materials in the Years 1976-1980," *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* 34 (2016): 149-164.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Stauch, *Analyse über die Bearbeitung der Eingaben, Beschwerden und Zuschriften der Bürger im Bereich der Zollverwaltung der DDR*, 9 March 1979, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/3289, 5.

SED-regime perceived their interests in the Western symbols and their cunningness in using the open borders to obtain them as a threat—emanating directly from Poland.

Especially in the second half of the 1970s, as more organized opposition arose in Poland, the content of goods carried across the border into the GDR concerned authorities as much as the quantities of products carried out. The East German customs duly noted and confiscated original or homemade lifestyle goods, Western magazines, pornography, and other “suspicious” materials. The Stasi notified its Polish counterpart, the SB, when Polish citizens were involved, but sources from the Polish side until 1981 and the findings of Tytus Jaskułowski do not indicate that the SB took any serious measures against these “subversive” elements.⁷⁷ The Stasi, on the other hand, and its unofficial collaborators (IM) reported any instance they observed.⁷⁸ Because the activities of these smugglers were illegal, the secret police sources reveal only those cases that the “sword and the shield” of the party managed to discover. Hence, it is logical to think that many of these illicit deals continued to take place, undermining the states’ claim to total control. Only once the Polish authorities lost control over its population during the “Solidarity” crisis in the summer of 1980 did the SED unilaterally decide to close the border to Poland again. East German citizens were left with Czechoslovakia, and later other countries of the Socialist Bloc, as tourist destinations.

Therefore, it does not do justice to the actual dynamics on the ground to encapsulate the transnational economic exchange among socialist states as a conflict-laden phenomenon, as most scholars have done before. The reality of shortages and prohibitions not only resulted in competition for scarce goods, but also in symbiotic relationships among different nationals

⁷⁷ E.g. reports in IPN Warszawa, BU 1596/898; T. Jaskułowski, *Przjaźń, której nie było: Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego NRD wobec MSW, 1974-1990* (Warszawa, 2014).

⁷⁸E.g. BStU, MfS, BV Cbs AKG 5792, 2.

cooperating in order to overcome the scarcities. The high degree of interest in the lifestyle goods that some citizens of the GDR expressed overlapped quite nicely with the interests of Poles. In the face of strictly curtailed exchange limits, selling lifestyle goods for marks injected extra cash into the hands of potential smugglers and speculators. Managers in foreign factories could more easily embezzle the socialist-owned products abroad with the help of willing guest workers, and the crooked border officials could get rich more easily by joining forces with the smugglers. Some cases of unofficial business cooperation stretched beyond disrupting the socialist economy and posed an ideological threat from the perspective of the communist institution, which in the era of growing dissidence in the Bloc after 1976, loomed even more dangerous.

Conclusion

On 30 October 1980, East German authorities introduced “temporary modifications to passport and visa-free traffic” between the GDR and Poland.⁷⁹ The Ministry for State Security, responsible for the East German frontiers, issued a confidential circular no. 66/80, in which it explained to all of its units that the changes were the result of the “worsening supply situation in the People’s Republic of Poland... that led to rationing of basic goods, contributed to increasing buyouts of foodstuffs by Polish citizens in the GDR and speculation.”⁸⁰ Only in the second paragraph did Erich Mielke mention the “counterrevolutionary” activity potentially flowing across the border. The East German state, therefore, used the economic argument to justify the reintroduction of travel restrictions as a way to protect its citizens’ access to consumer goods,

⁷⁹ “Mitteilung zum Personen- und Reiseverkehr zwischen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Volksrepublik Polen,” *Neues Deutschland* 29 October 1980, 1. Identical reports appeared in other major East German publications.

⁸⁰ Erich Mielke, Vertrauliche Verschlussache MfS 008 Nr. 66/80, 28 October 1980, BStU, MfS HA XXII 5647/1, 216-227.

something many people found more valuable than the freedom to travel to socialist Poland. These assertions, however, reveal more about East German insecurities rather than the factual impact of Polish shoppers on the economy. It is indisputable that Poles travelled by the millions to the GDR and bought everything from foodstuffs to space heaters, and that many of them shopped with speculative intent in quantities exceeding “a reasonable” amount. Nonetheless, statistical evidence shows that the trader tourists represented a miniscule percentage of buying power in the GDR.

Since 1972, Polish tourists flooded East German stores, distinguishing themselves not only linguistically, but also behaviorally, engaging in conspicuous consumption. The root of this behavior lay primarily in the economic differences between Poland and its neighbors. Financial realities were more favorable in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. This material inequality manifested itself in the extensive and largely single-sided phenomenon of trader tourism. In order to supply themselves with goods unavailable at home, many Polish citizens shopped abroad. Unlike a free market, which capitalized on extra consumers, a planned economy did not account for an unexpected demand. Hence, increasing shortages of the coveted goods began to disturb the inhabitants of the borderlands and larger cities. The scale of trader tourism and the ineffective measures taken against it complicated the developing civic relations. Nevertheless, neither side proposed to curtail the freedom to travel right away. Even the generally protectionist Czechoslovak regime did not act rapidly in the fall of 1980 but held off with closing the border for several more months. In this light, the economic explanation appears insufficient.

Instead, a more accurate and significant conclusion is that the perception of foreigners emptying the shelves precipitated the end of socialist integration. The societal consequences of cross-border shopping undid whatever successes the Bloc had achieved at the beginning of the

decade. The welcoming and happy atmosphere from 1972 gradually transformed into a hostile environment that severely undermined the initial goals of open borders and new socialist integration. The excessive shopping and smuggling perpetrated by some Polish tourists is partly to blame, but also the inherent problems of a shortage economy, arbitrary laws, and enduring nationalism. As long as the border remained open, it was easy for East German citizens to blame the foreigners for empty shelves in the stores because their actions were visible to the public, leaving behind an image of cunning blackmarketeers. After October 1980, however, there was no dramatic improvement in supply, as the deeper political and economic issues of rising debt, increasing energy prices, and lagging technological development remained the key reasons for the limits to consumption. Still, the freedom of movement and transnational consumption brought together different nationals who attempted to subvert—consciously or not—the economic and political system. As the next chapter will demonstrate, however, despite the lofty rhetoric of internationalism, the regimes made it increasingly more difficult for citizens to get along, fearing the dissemination of oppositional ideas and the loss of national identity.

CHAPTER 6 – LIVING AMONG NEIGHBORS

Beyond increasing economic and political cooperation, the new socialist integration aimed at fostering mutual social appreciation among the citizens of the Bloc through cross-border mobility and cultural interchange. So far, the analysis of Polish-German-Czechoslovak encounters has revealed ambiguous results of civic rapprochement. For some people, the opportunity to travel and to interact with neighbors directly contributed to the formation of positive personal relationships or a pursuit of illicit trade arrangements. For others, experiencing diversity led to a better appreciation of their own country or a mutual sympathy and a better understanding of different nations. Still for others, a clash of cultures and masses of tourists and shoppers revived old national stereotypes and strengthened prejudices against foreigners. The majority of interactions under the open borders, however, were ephemeral, as various statistics indicate that most people took only daytrips to the socialist abroad and stays longer than ten days constituted a rarity.¹ An even smaller number of individuals settled in the neighboring countries for an extended period, but their experiences serve as a particular lens for evaluating the process of socialist integration. To what extent did foreigners seek to fit in to their adopted society and, in turn, to what degree did the foreign environment welcome the newcomers? How did the state intervene in the lives of the migrants? Lastly, how did living abroad reflect the values of integration and internationalism?

¹ The high price for or shortages of available accommodations constituted the most often cited reasons for short getaways by all participants in the passport-less travel. For example, see *Information über die Entwicklung des Tourismus zwischen der DDR und der CSSR im Jahre 1973*, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DE/1/55187, as well as Irena Krawczak, *Turystyka Zagraniczna w Krajach RWPG w 1975 Roku*, [1976], AAN, 2706/1/1747.

Migration within the Eastern Bloc remains a white spot in the literature.² The majority of works on the topic focus on emigration to the West and escape from communism.³ The German case attracted particular consideration because of both the history of forced postwar resettlement and the existence of two German states.⁴ Also, scholars have examined non-European residents in East Germany, who came there to study, to work, or to escape persecution in countries such as Vietnam, North Korea, Algeria, Cuba, or Namibia.⁵ Immigrants to Poland and Czechoslovakia have received far less attention, despite the cohort of some 30,000 Vietnamese settling in the land on Vltava by 1981.⁶ The consensus emerging from these studies suggests that foreigners, regardless of their provenance, faced tremendous challenges in their new homelands. Not only did the surrounding population exhibit a range of attitudes toward them, from exotic curiosity to outward hostility, but more importantly, the regimes actively prevented assimilation in order to avoid conflicts between the foreigners and citizens. By denying the existence of racism and xenophobia, state authorities could continue their friendly propaganda of internationalism, but at

² A handful of short studies have been conducted e.g., Damian Henry Tone Mac Con Uladh, “Guests of the socialist nation? Foreign students and workers in the GDR, 1949-1990” (Ph.D. Dissertation) University College London, 2005; Andrzej Stach, *Ausländer in der DDR: Ein Rückblick* (Berlin: Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, 1994).

³ E.g. Vojtěch Jeřábek, *Českoslovenští uprchlíci ve studené válce: dějiny American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees* (Brno: Stilus, 2005); Thomas Lane, *Victims of Stalin and Hitler: The Exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Anna Mazurkiewicz, *Uchodźcy polityczni z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w amerykańskiej polityce zimnowojennej 1948–1954* (Warsaw: IPN, 2016).

⁴ E.g. Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen, 1945–1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1998); David Rock and Stefan Wolff (eds.), *Coming Home to Germany? The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).

⁵ E.g. Quinn Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Annegret Schüle, “Die ham se sozusagen aus dem Busch geholt: Die Wahrnehmung der Vertragsarbeitskräfte aus Schwarzafrika und Vietnam durch Deutsche im VEB Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei” in Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, Patrice Poutrus (eds.) *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2003), 309-24.

⁶ Eva Pechová, *Imigrace z Vietnamu do České republiky v kontextu problematiky obchodu s lidmi a vykořisťování* (La Strada, 2017), 16.

the same time they exacerbated the problem of increasing prejudices and misconceptions, which culminated in a nationalist backlash to the multicultural world that emerged after 1989.⁷

Contributing to these findings, this chapter offers a more nuanced argument. Analyzing the experiences of Polish guest workers in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, who constituted the largest group of semi-permanent migrants, it posits that in contrast to prejudice against migrants from the Third World, the East European regimes had a more differentiated attitude toward settlers from the neighboring socialist countries. Especially East Germany and Czechoslovakia welcomed young, single males and females who could potentially start a family with a local citizen and contribute to population growth. For this reason, I argue, the state of origin had a stake in limiting the integration more so than the hosts. Nonetheless, the receiving regimes also wanted to avoid conflicts between the different groups. Relying on Katherine Verdery's theory of "etatization of time," I intend to show how important it was for the social and political institutions to organize the workers' free time.⁸ Since the majority of potential conflicts between the Poles and local inhabitants erupted outside of the factory floor, local party functionaries continuously offered a range of supervised activities that kept the men and women inside their national bubble and effectively prevented integration into the surrounding society. As a result, between the extremes of successful assimilation and rejection of aliens, indifference prevailed as the most common form of relations.

To prove the thesis, this chapter will first reconstruct the living situation of the foreign workers inside and outside of their workplace, highlighting the paternalism of the state. The

⁷ Cf. Jan C. Behrends, Dennis Kuck, and Patrice Poutrus, "Thesenpapier: Historische Ursachen der Fremdfeindlichkeit in den Neuen Bundesländern" in Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, Patrice Poutrus (eds.), *Fremde und Fremd-Sein*, 327-333.

⁸ Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38-57.

following section will explore the relationships between the workers and the surrounding population and the hosting states. It will pay particular attention to the evolution of the attitudes toward Poles during times of political crisis that ensued in the summer of 1980. The last section analyzes the consequences of escaping the state-organized time and the attempts at private integration into the new country. In contrast to the early 1970s, the rising numbers of people settling permanently in the GDR or CSSR worried Polish authorities, who debated ways of curbing that phenomenon. From this angle, it will be evident that the nationalism posed another challenge to integration. While it promoted state cooperation and social rapprochement, Bloc cohesion could not rely on permanent migration.

Daily Life Abroad

In October 1975 Ada K., a twenty-six-year-old woman from Lublin, Poland, signed up for work in Czechoslovakia to earn better money and to gain skills and experience. Her hometown friend, Grażyna, joined the same group but was motivated by a desire to discover the neighboring socialist country.⁹ Both were delegated to the chocolate factory “Zora” in the Moravian city of Olomouc, which altogether employed seventy-two women from Poland at that time. After a long train ride from Lublin to Warsaw then to Olomouc, Ada and Grażyna settled in a workers’ hotel where they met the other members of the Polish team as well as the group’s advisor, Danuta B. The accommodations they found were newly constructed, with individual rooms housing two or three women, each of the rooms equipped with an electric mini-stove, and a communal bathroom on every floor. On the building’s ground floor, a spacious location served

⁹ Based on letters between Ada K. and mother, 24 November 1975; Grażyna K. to CC PZPR in Warsaw, 29 November 1975; as well as other documents pertaining to the case “Zora” found in AAN, LXXVI/135.

as an activity center where the workers could socialize and organize events, or watch television, listen to the radio, and read after a day in the factory. House rules demanded order, cleanliness, mutual respect, and prohibited outside visitors, especially men, from entering the private rooms. During the weekends, the groups engaged in activities together, such as trips around the country, visits with Party leaders, or *subbotniks* that entailed community service like street cleaning, maintenance of public spaces, or help with harvests. In this way, the workers' hotel for "Zora" in Olomouc did not differ much from any other accommodation offered to Polish laborers in Czechoslovakia or East Germany. With these confining characteristics, however, it limited the opportunities for any form of integration into the host country.

This arrangement produced a mixed reception. On the one hand, for the majority of guest workers, who went abroad to make money like Ada, it was fully sufficient. They earned higher wages than in Poland, paid little for relatively modern housing, and occasionally indulged in outings downtown to break the routine of everyday life, making the best out of their one-, two-, or three-year contracts. On the other hand, the "trouble-makers," according to one assessment, were predominantly younger people, who did not have families to support and did not care much about the legal or societal consequences of their actions.¹⁰ Grażyna and people sharing her perspective wanted to escape the "golden cage" and to live up to her aspirations of getting to know the neighboring country better. Instead of settling for the group activities with other Poles, Grażyna preferred to travel on her own and to hang out at local bars and restaurants, making friends with Czechs, Soviet troops, and even tourists from capitalist countries. This type of behavior brought on the wrath of the group supervisor, who saw it as demoralizing, disorderly, and unbecoming of a Polish national abroad.

¹⁰ Ratajczak, Notatka Służbowa dot. sytuacji i stosunków panujących wśród pracowników budujących elektrownię Janschwalde, 19 June 1977, IPN By, 770/215, 32.

The Polish state did not trust the workers abroad, believing that “too much free time after work is a destructive factor.”¹¹ In order to keep the people occupied and to have control over their daily routines, wherever a larger group of laborers was delegated, the PZPR ensured that several Party members were among them. An Elementary Party Organization (POP, introduced also in chapter 2), a basic unit of comprising the regional PZPR collectives headquartered at the local consulate or embassy, worked in cooperation with the group supervisors to oversee working conditions, fulfillment of contracts, and labor discipline. Additionally, the POP’s goal was to exert moral influence over the cohort of laborers, the majority of whom were not Party members. Toward this end, the cells organized talks, visits with Polish and local leadership, as well as educational events like excursions and film screenings to fill up the free time. Providing a budget for different activities and a direct connection to the diplomatic envoys, the POPs worked hard to channel the workers’ energies toward culture, education, and communal work and away from drinking, vandalism, and too close of contact with the locals.

After years of neglect and behavioral problems, in 1976 a new POP leadership at a construction site in the northwestern Czechoslovak town Litvínov revived constructive political, cultural, and educational efforts.¹² Noticing problems with occupational safety and health procedures, the POP organized competitions for the builders, testing their theoretical and practical knowledge. Responding to the workers’ pleas, they arranged for family visits, weekly shopping trips to the nearby city of Chomutov, and multiple weekend excursions around western Czechoslovakia. From the embassy in Prague, the committee regularly borrowed tapes of the

¹¹ Ireneusz Geranty, Ocena stanu dyscypliny na budowie Rudex w Wittenbergu, 11 February 1974, AAN, LXXVI/109.

¹² Ocena Pracy POP a w szczególności kształtowanie się stosunków w załodze oraz warunki socjalne i spędzanie wolnego czasu, [no date, 1978], AAN, LXXVI/99.

“newest Polish movies, currently screened in theaters at home,” in order to keep the workers up-to-date with the entertainment novelties. Newspapers from Poland arrived with a few-days delay, though no one seemed to complain that the regime mouthpiece lost its freshness. The builders especially valued the dance events that were prepared together with the POP at Vejprty, thirty miles west of Litvínov, where a group of Polish females worked at a machine factory. Therefore, this PZPR cell, like many others, created a small Poland in a foreign land, offering attractions for the free time, which nonetheless hardly contributed to internationalist ideals and did not eliminate instances of rowdiness.

The supervisors played a significant societal role, tasked with overseeing a group’s behavior, speaking on behalf of the team with local authorities, resolving conflicts, and organizing free time. When young women constituted a group, like in the case of the “Zora” workers, the supervisor Danuta B. was particularly watchful over the sexual decency of her dependents, something that all-male work units did not have to deal with and instead struggled with alcoholism, vandalism, and violence among the laborers.¹³ The people selected for this function, therefore, had to possess outstanding ethical, political, and social characteristics in order to fulfill their responsibilities successfully. On occasion, some bad apples fell through the cracks and instead of keeping order, they spent the money allocated for different activities on drunken banquets, engaged in smuggling, or altogether neglected the needs of the workers.¹⁴ While the actions of Danuta B. from “Zora” also could not serve as a good moral compass since she allegedly stole money from the women, to the outside world and the Polish party-state

¹³ E.g. Darstellung der Fluktuationsgründe der im VEB MLK Plauen beschäftigten polnischen Arbeitskräfte aus dem Jahr 1978, 24 October 1978, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463/1.

¹⁴ The files of the International Department of the CC PZPR are rife with complaints, investigations, and reports of such abuses. For examples, see Protokół... w sprawie przeprowadzonych dochodzeń na budowie Henningsdorf, 8 March 1973, AAN, LXXVI/87, 56-58.

functionaries the group supervisor “evoked authority and respect.”¹⁵ When a conflict arose between Danuta and Grażyna, Polish authorities sided with the supervisor and turned a blind eye to the allegations of the superior’s misdeeds. In the end, the workforce in the CSSR and GDR could not in any way endanger “the good name of Poland. In a foreign land [they] had to project a proper image of Poles.”¹⁶

In order to determine “who compromised the good name of Poland with their behavior,” Polish secret services conducted numerous operations investigating the contract workers.¹⁷ This knowledge stemmed from a set of informants recruited from among the laborers. For example, the secret collaborator (*tajny współpracownik*, TW) “Jaskółka” willingly reported on the supervisors and POP activists who engaged in speculation or trade, their contacts with capitalist countries, as well as the Soviet soldiers selling gold and the GDR police conducting discriminatory searches in Polish colonies. However, he only vaguely disclosed the doings of the regular builders.¹⁸ Similarly, TW “Fredek” in East German Heidenau informed on the group supervisor, who ran the worker hotel club and sold vodka for prices higher than retail.¹⁹ When the workers protested, the supervisor had them fired, which clearly upset “Fredek.” Thus, the extent to which the spies reflected the truth about the actions of their compatriots, as opposed to

¹⁵ W. Kutyba, Notatka Służbowa w sprawie spotkania z grupą polskich pracowników zatrudnionych w zakładzie czekolady ZORA, 13 January 1976, AAN, LXXVI/135/doc.43, 3.

¹⁶ Protokół z IV Zakładowej Konferencji Sprawozdawczo-Wyborczej, 19 June 1974, AAN, LXXVI/111/doc.42, 16.

¹⁷ Jan Pelc (KWMO Rzeszów), Wniosek o zakończenie sprawy obiektowej "Uczniowie," 5 October 1976, IPN Rz 053/87, 39. In addition, Sprawa Obiektowa “Balbinki” is found in IPN, Wr 032/603; Sprawa Obiektowa “Tama,” in IPN Kr 08/246; or Sprawa Obiektowa “Kontrakt” in IPN BU 0999/87/1 and IPN BU 0999/87/2.

¹⁸ Teczka Pracy TW Jaskółka, 1977-1978, IPN By 770/216, and Teczka Personalna TW Jaskółka, 1977-1978, IPN By 770/215.

¹⁹ Tw “Fredek,” Informacja operacyjna, 4 February 1978, IPN By 001/625/1.

seeking personal revenge against certain individuals, is debatable, but it reveals a focus on the internal dynamics of the groups rather than the groups' interactions in the foreign context.

Still, some collaborators expressed genuine concern for the behavior of Poles in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. TW "Adam," a priest ministering to the Polish workers in the GDR, provided the SB with a detailed picture of life abroad.²⁰ What motivated this informant to work with the security apparatus is unclear, as the personnel file of the TW was unavailable at the time of research. Nonetheless, his reports clearly indicate "Adam's" patriotic duty to preserve the nation's good reputation. He offered more nuanced information than the other TWs. For instance, "Adam" praised the eighty-person-strong team from Schmalkalden and especially its supervisor Broniszewski for creating an effective work and leisure environment. A group with employment contracts at a famous watch factory in Ruhla, however, "for sure ruined the locals' opinion of Poland." Most shameful was the vandalization of the newly remodeled House of Culture in Eisenach. On the eve of the May 1 celebrations, twelve members of the Ruhla team instigated a fight there, demolished the banquet hall, and set a fire in the restroom. The resulting police and fire department intervention further escalated the conflict between the Polish and German men. Incidents of a similar magnitude did not happen frequently, but like most of the bad behavior it was a result of widespread alcohol abuse and a lack of self-discipline. Conscious of its effects, self-proclaimed patriots first and foremost feared that any foreigner "will not say that 'Mr. X' is drunk, but that a Pole is drunk."²¹

²⁰ Z. Jabłoński, Wyciąg z notatki służbowej ze spotkania z TW Adam, 14 October 1972, IPN BU 0999/87/2. The folder contains numerous files from "Adam."

²¹ W. Korcz, Protokół z zebrania POP przy Budowie Silosów w Uści n/Łabą, 2 September 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/99.

Due to his missionary work, “Adam” had access not only to several centers of the Polish workforce in the GDR but also to the local Catholic churches, affording him multiple perspectives on the relations between the guest workers and locals. Discussing the situation in Ilmenau, where nearly 3,000 Poles were employed in the glassware factories and other state enterprises, “Adam” noted generally good discipline among the laborers and well-organized leisure time. The local pastor agreed to accommodate two Sunday masses said in Polish, “which regularly attracted 400-500 people.”²² The TW stressed the engagement of the Erfurt diocese bishop, Hugo Aufderbeck (whose name in the source is misspelled as Auftenbek) with the Polish community. In one homily during a visitation to Ilmenau, Aufderbeck “underscored the good work and achievements for the common good” that the contract workers had been doing and invited them to “feel at home in the GDR.”²³ Indeed, the Catholic Bishops Conference in East Germany supported this message but instructed Polish priests to adhere strictly to GDR laws and regulations pertaining to religious practice.²⁴ Despite an unofficial approval for this sort of work, both the SB and Stasi investigated the missionaries and faced a dilemma: was it more advantageous to curb the Church’s potential antisocialist influences or to allow it to continue with the hope that religion might exert positive pressure on the workers’ discipline and behavior?²⁵

The failure of the PZPR and the Catholic Church to keep the workers under control prompted Czechoslovak and East German employers and state officials to intervene. Toward the end of aiding the brotherly Party, which was weakened working in an expatriated setting, the

²² Z. Jabłoński, Wyciąg z notatki służbowej ze spotkania z TW Adam, 14 October 1972, IPN BU 0999/87/2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jan Grymuła, Wyciąg z notatki służbowej ze spotkania z TW Adam, 10 October 1973, IPN BU 0999/87/2.

²⁵ E.g. Operativer Sachverhalt, 27 January 1976, BStU, MfS BV Cbs Abt XVIII 609, 11-13.

SED party-state took upon itself the “educational responsibility to influence (*Verpflichtung zur erzieherischen Einflußnahme*) Polish workers.”²⁶ The method of accomplishing what sounds like an imperialist “civilizing mission” was an effort to integrate the guest workers better into the work collectives. The East German Labor Union (FDGB) offered membership privileges and in 1973 boasted that 84 percent of Poles employed in the GDR had joined the unions, a majority of whom never belonged to the Polish counterpart, CRZZ.²⁷ The foreign collectives nonetheless had a chance to improve their relationship with the hosting environment. The chemical manufacturing combine VEB CTK Fürstenwalde, for example, organized political lectures on the factory floor, outside social events, award ceremonies for high-achievers, and even a competition for the title of “Champion of Order and Discipline.”²⁸ Polish participation, however, was half-hearted most likely because these attempts still pertained to the workplace and did not appeal to those people who wanted to forget about the factory after their shift was over.

Over time, the German initiatives for the guest workers improved to fit their needs better, but the results still did not satisfy the authorities. Where the labor union failed at organizing outside-of-work attractions, the youth union FDJ had more experience in offering a diverse range of events, especially for younger men. For example, the VEB MLK Plauen and its FDJ cell staged regular sporting competitions as well as weekly discotheques for all interested workers.²⁹

²⁶ Musch (Ministerium für Bauwesen) to VEB MLK Leipzig (Generaldirektor Mielsch), 20 February 1978, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463/1.

²⁷ Bericht über den Stand der Verwirklichung der Vereinbarung zwischen dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB und dem Zentralrat der Gewerkschaften der VR Polen, 27 June 1973, BArch-Berlin, DY 34/25140, 70.

²⁸ Kaliga, Kultur- und Bildungsplan der Gewerkschaftsgruppe "Gasanlagen" des VEB CTK Fürstenwalde, 26 January 1976, LHAB, Rep. 703/220; and A. Enke, Bericht des Sekretariats des Bezirksvorstandes des FDGB Cottbus über die Arbeit mit den polnischen und ungarischen Werkträgern, 8 November 1973, BArch-Berlin, DY 34/25140, 19.

²⁹ See files of the VEB MLK Plauen, for example, Bericht zum Einsatz polnischer Werkträger im VEB MLK Werk Plauen, October 1978, BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463/2.

Especially when evening activities were concerned, the management made sure that “Polish colleagues received entry tickets first,” not only to make them feel welcome, but also to steer them into an organized and controlled setting away from independent structuring of free time. Indeed, entertainment in the form of dancing and socializing appealed to the visiting laborers, who, as another chapter will explain, were used to collective partying instead of the Party talking about collectives. Despite good attendance at the discos and soccer games, the functionaries at Plauen were not happy, at least officially. Most likely responding to pressure from above, the Plauen factory management bemoaned the “low quality of educational work” with Polish laborers. Dancing and sports clearly had a positive effect, but in the eyes of the ideologues there was not enough transmission of political values that could shape socialist personalities.³⁰ Because knowledge of German among most of the workers was cursory at best, the East German attempts to lecture on Marxism-Leninism were not geared for success either.

Some of the people abroad felt liberated from party influence and untouchable because the disciplinary consequences of unruly behavior were limited to a reprimand or in the worst case—deportation back home. Typical for any setting were drunken brawls at night, petty theft, or smuggling and speculation.³¹ More serious matters, such as fights with the local police or inhabitants, gained more attention from the POPs and even the secret services.³² The interests of East German and Czechoslovak companies that employed disorderly Poles problematized the issue. For example, one man vandalized public buildings in Wittenberg while under the

³⁰ E.g. A. Enke, Bericht des Sekretariats des Bezirksvorstandes des FDGB Cottbus über die Arbeit mit den polnischen und ungarischen Werktätigen, 8 November 1973, BArch-Berlin, DY 34/25140, 19.

³¹ E.g. Informacja na temat bezpieczeństwa, ładu, porządku i dyscypliny na terenie Biura Budów Kombex w Wittenberdze, 1974, AAN, LXXVI/128.

³² For example see file Přehled případů trestné činnosti spáchané na území ČSR polskými občany w roce 1973, ABS, H 2-1 (II)/332.

influence, but thanks to his otherwise positive work ethic, the director of the construction site pleaded with the local police only to fine the culprit, who then finished his one-year contract in the GDR and also took up further employment in the CSSR shortly thereafter.³³ The employers, therefore, pressed by workforce shortages, were more than willing to turn a blind eye to behavioral excesses outside of the factory floor.

The official sources, focused on reporting problems and conflicts, overrepresent the frequency of negative events, but their preoccupation with irreputable conduct and discipline reveals more about the nature of the dictatorships rather than the workers. As the authorities searched for explanations for the unruly behavior, they came up with several answers.³⁴ First, the employers were unwilling to dismiss Polish workers due to a lack of workers. Second, the majority of the workers were young and inexperienced in “managing their lives.” Hence, reliable supervisors or any sort of organization willing to offer the laborers activities outside of work were necessary. Lastly, there were no incentives to conform to societal rules. One SB analyst supposed that “in Poland these people would behave correctly because of the social pressure exerted on them, parental authority, or punishment by the police. In the GDR or CSSR, however, they do whatever they want with impunity because they know they are crucial to the factory management.” Even if the troublemakers would have received some sort of penalty back home, the issue of enforcing correct attitudes while abroad was of utmost importance. For this reason, pedagogical work and time organization became a focus of the PZPR cells, who did not trust—sometimes for good reason—their own citizens, and in turn resorted to paternalistic control over the laborers.

³³ Protokół z zebrania Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 25 October 1973, AAN, LXXVI/87, 21.

³⁴ Odpis doniesienia przekazanego przez TW "Spadochroniarz" dot. sytuacji wśród obywateli polskich zatrudnionych w zakładach Mess Elektronik Drezno, 6 September 1972, IPN Rz 053/87, 25.

Isolation and Assimilation

The Polish labor colonies, although often closed off from the outside world, still operated within the larger local society. While people like the previously-mentioned Ada felt content with their little national bubble, Grażyna and others wanted to escape and to explore life in a foreign country. How did the laborers who chose to include themselves in the East German or Czechoslovak environment navigate social relations in the host country? Also, how did the host population interact with the guest workers? The topic of inclusion versus exclusion poses a problem for interpreting the authorities' vision for the workers' life abroad. As Dennis Kuck argues, the SED regime wanted to isolate the foreign contract employees, especially those coming from the Third World, from the general public in order to avoid conflicts with the local society over access to consumer goods, German women, or racial belonging.³⁵ Integration into the factory collective, therefore, was the only sanctioned form of contact between the guestworkers and the German inhabitants. The structure of contracts for Polish laborers, with separate worker hotel housing and imposed free time activities, suggests that the same principles applied to the eastern neighbors as well.

Complete isolation of the guest workers from the local society was hardly possible and oftentimes undesired. Interactions between the contract workers and the hosts took a variety of forms. One of the PZPR comrades working in Halle noted in 1974 that a conversation with the GDR citizens "is easy when we talk about sports or music," but political or historical subjects frequently ended with an argument.³⁶ Sporting events indeed brought together men of different

³⁵ Dennis Kuck, "Für den sozialistischen Aufbau ihrer Heimat? Ausländische Vertragsarbeitskräfte in der DDR," in Jan C. Behrends, Thomas Lindenberger, Patrice Poutrus (eds.) *Fremde und Fremd-Sein in der DDR: Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2003), 280-81.

³⁶ Protokół z IV Zakładowej Konferencji Sprawozdawczo-Wyborczej, 19 June 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111, 42.

nationalities. Nonetheless, they had both creative and destructive potential. A soccer game between two local teams in the Czechoslovak Vrchlabí ended when drunken Polish spectators started a fistfight over the referee's controversial penalty kick call.³⁷ Since some Czechs still held a grudge against Poles for intervening in Prague Spring in 1968, this was a frequent discussion topic. TW "Juliusz" witnessed one of those conversations in a bar in Chomutov, where Stanisław H. grew increasingly frustrated with what he understood to be Czech accusations of Polish betrayal.³⁸ In a fit of rage, he reached for the gun of an off-duty police officer socializing with the group and thereby caused a threatening situation. TW "Maria" reported that Poles visiting the bar in which she worked tended to sit together, but some of the guestworkers struck up a conversation with East Germans in order to trade currency or consumer goods.³⁹

The use of transnational connections for economic benefit was widespread, as chapter 3 shows in more detail. In the context of the guest workers, however, such interactions had similar self-serving dimensions. For example, the supervisor of a construction crew at Hennigsdorf, near Berlin, organized drinking parties in his headquarters for some of the team members, but also invited East German managers of the site.⁴⁰ The close companionship yielded an illicit agreement, according to which the supervisor's friends could earn an additional hundred marks working overtime on Saturdays or Sundays and thereby help the locals in charge to fulfill the plan faster. A German liaison "paid the money to them in the basement, so that other Poles

³⁷ J. Łoś, Informacja, [no date], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111, 98.

³⁸ TW "Juliusz," Informacja, 8 June 1981, IPN By 0071/25.

³⁹ Cf. Stanisław Sutula, Notatka służbowa dot. odbytego spotkania z kandydatem na TW, 30 March 1974, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 19, and Stanisław Sutula, Notatka służbowa dot. odbytego spotkania z TW Maria, 5 October 1978, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 77.

⁴⁰ Reconstructed based on the testimony of Józef Z., no title, 16 February 1973, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/87, and related documents in the same folder.

would not” become envious and start asking questions. When one of these workers had a falling out with the supervisor and reported the deal to the POP and the embassy, the local management sent him back to Poland. TW “Maria” reported that another Polish worker avoided deportation thanks to the intimate relationship he initiated with Edda S., an East German restaurant manager from Bad Muskau.⁴¹ After his dismissal from a factory, Edda hired her lover at the restaurant and managed to legalize his stay in the GDR with the promise of marriage.

The East German Labor Union FDGB, SED functionaries, and company management encouraged Poles to enter East German society. Worker evaluations, in addition to recording productivity, also indicate praise for those individuals who developed close ties, friendly or romantic, to German citizens.⁴² Similarly, the poultry processing plant, VVB Geflügelkombinat Storkow near Berlin, bemoaned the fact that the majority of the Polish workers returned home to their families instead of engaging with the East German society.⁴³ More cunning was the human resources director of the Berlin Brewery (VEB Getränkekombinat Bärensiegel), who understood the labor shortages in the GDR and also liked the work of Polish contractors.⁴⁴ Wanting to keep as many of them as possible in the brewery, the management organized weekly get-togethers with young women. “Already one result of this manipulation was the engagement of a Pole to a German girl.” Although never officially stated, this practice of attracting young people in reproductive age to the GDR appears between the lines of the sources. The 1978 contract with Cuba, for example, specified that the delegated workers comprise people of both sexes and only

⁴¹ Stanisław Sutula, Notatka służbowa dot. odbytego spotkania z TW Maria, 14 June 1977, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 66.

⁴² E.g. VEB MLK Plauen, Formblatt zum Stand der Qualifizierung, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DH 1/27463 vol2.

⁴³ VVB Geflügelkombinat Storkow (Director) to Rat des Bezirkes Frankfurt/Oder, 23 October 1980, LHAB, Rep. 601/24838.

⁴⁴ K. Ziętała, Notatka służbowa z rozmowy z Naczelnikiem wydziału kadr Zjednoczenia Przemysłu Piwowarskiego, 9 November 1973, IPN BU 0999/87/2, 93.

between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven years old.⁴⁵ The acceptance of foreigners as potential residents of East Germany, however, was quite differentiated and ran along national and racial lines. Poles and Hungarians who married East German citizens could apply for residency and housing allocation, but Africans and Asians, even if they broke away from the isolation of the work camp, did not enjoy the same benefits.⁴⁶

Whereas the Poles and Hungarians were distinct in the eyes of East German or Czechoslovak society, they did not stand out as much as, for example, Cubans with their “Latin mentality.”⁴⁷ The factory magazine in the chemical plant Spolana in Neratovice devoted a page-long article to the thirty-four Cuban workers who had just arrived. The text’s main message asked the Czech colleagues and local population to be welcoming, “tolerant, and helpful in the period” when the foreigners learned not only the Czech language but also a different lifestyle.⁴⁸ According to the article, the main cultural differences were simplified to the idea that “Cubans are happier [than Czechs], readily sing and dance.” Even more problematic was the warning about “potential misunderstandings during dance parties” or other entertainment activities. Hidden behind this vague statement was a fear of sexual assault on local women, an occurrence that stirred the concern of the general public as well as the authorities. In East Germany, the Stasi did not seem to pay much attention to the mental and physical harm to rape victims, but instead

⁴⁵ Analyse des Abkommens mit der Republik Kuba zum Einsatz kubanischer Arbeitskräfte in der DDR, 1978, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2556.

⁴⁶ See Schüle, “Die ham se sozusagen aus dem Busch geholt,” and Rita Röhr, “Die Beschäftigung polnischer Arbeitskräfte in der DDR, 1966-1990: Die vertraglichen Grundlagen und ihre Umsetzung,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 42 (2002), 211-237.

⁴⁷ J. Kocianová, “Mladí Kubánci ve Spolaně,” *Spolana – časopis pracujících* no. XX, 24.10.1980, SOA-Mělník, Spolana.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

rang the alarm of spreading venereal diseases.⁴⁹ As Annegret Schüle shows in her analysis of Mozambican workers in the GDR, however, the fear of foreign men was prejudicial and they were only as likely to commit sexual crimes as their German counterparts.⁵⁰ Polish authorities were well aware that the relations between foreign laborers and East German society “had certain repercussions,” and initially feared that Poles would be categorized together with other third-world migrants in the local inhabitants’ eyes.⁵¹

It appears, however, that these concerns were unfounded mostly because with the large number of Polish workers, the broader public hardly even noticed the Cubans, Algerians, or Vietnamese.⁵² As a result, Poles dealt with a unique set of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, which often had to do with recent historical memory. For example, Zenon M., a thirty-one-year-old a Silesian miner in the potash extraction site in Zielitz heard his German colleague Burghard J. (28) call him a “Polish nigger” (*polnischer Neger*) due to M.’s dark complexion.⁵³ As the ministerial-level investigation into this incident suggested, M. did not understand enough German to comprehend J.’s words and “generally took everything very personally.” This dismissive explanation is hardly believable, but the authorities also did not really concern themselves with racial aspects of the case. Far more important was the nonverbal abuse. J. frequently greeted M. with the Nazi salute “Sieg Heil” and allegedly one time “demonstrated in

⁴⁹ For example see Bender, Bericht über eine Absprache mit dem Verbindungsoffizier Pelc, 3 April 1980, BStU, MfS BV Cbs Abt XVIII 609, 104.

⁵⁰ Schüle, “Die ham se sozusagen aus dem Busch geholt,” 315.

⁵¹ K. Czaplą, Informacja o zatrudnieniu algierskich pracowników w przemyśle NRD, [1974], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/111.

⁵² Günter Sommer, Bericht über die Entwicklung und Ergebnisse der Zusammenarbeit mit den Grundorganisationen der sozialistischen Bruderorganisationen, 12 June 1979, LHAB, Rep. 943/1017.

⁵³ Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat, Information über ein besonderes Vorkommnis im VEB Kaliwerk Zielitz, 12 April 1978, BArch-Berlin, DC/20/27552, 125.

the locker room how Poles and Jews were gassed by the Nazis.” Since J. did not bully other Poles in the mine, his testimony that “all he wanted to do is annoy M.” sounded truthful. Nevertheless, the “anti-fascist” state found these outbursts of youthful stupidity unacceptable and prosecuted the miner, first by revoking his SED membership.

Reports on popular opinion in the GDR suggest that the perception of Polish workers centered around their appearance, shopping culture, and work ethic. Especially younger Poles bothered some East German citizens with their “Western style of clothing and haircut.”⁵⁴ Surprising, however, was the lack of voices condemning alcoholism or related “negative conduct” about which the Polish authorities worried. In turn, consumption figured heavily in the public discussions, which extrapolated to the contract laborers the trope of Polish citizens using the open border to shop in the GDR. Especially in the eastern borderlands, the inhabitants opined that Polish “guestworkers constitute a disadvantage to the GDR because they ‘buy everything away from us.’”⁵⁵ The management and fellow coworkers frequently praised the discipline, norm fulfillment, and “quality work” (*Qualitätsarbeit*) of their eastern contractors.⁵⁶ The popular stereotype, on the other hand, held that “Poles are too lazy to work” and are oriented toward “maximal welfare and consumerist benefits.”⁵⁷ These types of ideas became especially prevalent in the summer and fall of 1980, when the Solidarity crisis erupted in Poland and the East German state embarked on an anti-Polish propaganda campaign.

⁵⁴ E.g. DVP Berlin, Information zur Lage auf dem Gebiet der Ordnung und Sicherheit, 8 November 1969, BArch-Berlin, DO 1/92859.

⁵⁵ Sommer, Bericht über die Entwicklung und Ergebnisse der Zusammenarbeit mit den Grundorganisationen der sozialistischen Bruderorganisationen, 12 June 1979, LHAB, Rep. 943/1017.

⁵⁶ E.g. VEB Schuhfabrik – Betriebsdirektor, Bericht des VEB SS hinsichtlich des Einsatzes polnischer Werkträger in unserem Betrieb, 4 September, 1984, LHAB, Rep. 601/24838.

⁵⁷ Stöß, Bericht über Erscheinungen und Probleme, 14 November 1977, BStU, MfS BV FfO AKG 472, 10-20.

These attitudes arose because hardly anyone explained to the inhabitants why Poles, or any foreign laborers for that matter, lived and worked among them. According to the official line, these people were there to learn the trade and to gain experience, hiding the fact from the average citizen that East Germany struggled with dire labor shortages. As it was with the case of third-world workers, the lack of proper and accurate information about the necessity of foreign labor in the GDR partly explains the natives' hostile attitudes. The chemical combine VEB Chemiefaserwerk in Guben, for example, employed 360 Poles in 1978, most of whom lived in company housing. The local population, however, expressed confusion over the need for foreign laborers, seeing their presence as a sign of poverty in their country of origin or a threat to their own subsistence.⁵⁸ The opinions that circulated in the public reflected disapproval of the state "providing housing to Polish workers" and the "foreigners buying everything from the stores."⁵⁹ Without specific knowledge of the conditions and any personal connections to the contracted labor, social tensions undermined the propaganda of friendship.

Another reason, however, lay in the self-imposed exclusion from the surrounding society. One of the reports from Erfurt concluded that "inability to speak the language creates problems at and outside of work. The laborers isolate themselves from society, which in turn leads to social conflicts."⁶⁰ Even though German employers frequently offered courses for the arriving employees, very few of them were willing to put in extra hours for structured learning of grammar and vocabulary. In Czechoslovakia, the false belief in the mutual comprehension of

⁵⁸ E.g. FDJ Kreisleitung, Differenzierte Wertung des Denkens der Jugend zur Freundschaft mit der Sowjetunion, 16 January 1975, LHAB, Rep. 943/729.

⁵⁹ D. Fritsch, Analyse zum Stand der Zusammenarbeit mit den im Kreis Guben arbeitenden ausländischen Jugendlichen, 29 June 1978, LHAB, Rep. 943/1017.

⁶⁰ Wyciąg z notatki służbowej, 14 October 1972, IPN BU 0999/87/2, 37.

Polish, Czech, or Slovak led not only to the factory managers dispensing with language courses, but also the workers' initial disregard for the differences.⁶¹ As a result, monolingualists found themselves excluded from any kind of "higher quality" engagements with their surroundings and in turn were pushed toward living in a parallel society of a Polish colony. Even worse, from the state security perspective, was the realization that "without the ability to speak the local language, the only radio program the workers can listen to is the Polish version of Radio Free Europe because the reach of Polish wavelengths is often insufficient."⁶² Hence, organizing time either within the laborer community or outside of it was also politically advantageous.

While in the heyday of integration linguistic handicaps that prevented a dialogue between the neighbors might have been a curse, by the end of the decade state authorities regarded them as a blessing. When the social and political crisis in the summer of 1980 in Poland led to the creation of the independent trade union *Solidarność*, Polish crews and PZPR functionaries abroad found themselves in a difficult situation. For the most part the guest workers heeded the call of the Party functionaries abroad to "limit the debates about our domestic affairs only to Polish citizens."⁶³ Internally, however, the atmosphere was tense. The builders at the Chomutov power plant "wanted to talk," asking questions about the future of their contracts in Czechoslovakia and the possibility of joining the independent trade union.⁶⁴ In multiple factories in the CSSR, Poles overwhelmingly declared their willingness to sign up for Solidarity, but the Party decisively rejected any agitation and threatened the workers with immediate deportation

⁶¹ W. Mołotkiewicz, Charakterystyka sprawy S.O. "Kontrakt," 21 September 1972, IPN BU 0999/87/1, 7.

⁶² W. Mołotkiewicz, Charakterystyka sprawy, 21 September 1972, IPN BU 0999/87/1, 7.

⁶³ Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 16 September 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/186, 19.

⁶⁴ Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 10 September 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 15.

back home. The result was “great anxiety and nervousness” among the crews, who were not sure as to what exactly was taking place in Poland.⁶⁵ The PZPR executive committee in Czechoslovakia agreed though that, “there was no more hooliganism, but rather a collective worry” about the fatherland.

Within their own collectives, numerous workers in the GDR and CSSR called for solidarity strikes with the protesters in Poland, but only a handful attempted to propagate the actions among German or Czechoslovak colleagues.⁶⁶ With the exception of one incident, during which a group of drunken Poles in Berlin-Biesdorf publicly instigated political action in a restaurant, the guest workers refrained from overt support for Solidarity.⁶⁷ The Party functionaries as well as the workers were well aware that both East German MfS and the Czechoslovak StB gathered intelligence not only to understand the mood among the workers, but also to prevent any potential subversion seeping into the local societies. According to several Stasi reports, the majority of Polish workers kept silent during that time “out of fear of having their contracts in the GDR rescinded.”⁶⁸ To the surprise of the chekists “the Polish workforce remained distanced and led no discussions on an open forum.”⁶⁹ The surrounding society and the secret services, however, wanted to know more about the events in the neighboring country. As

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 8 October 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/186, 25; and Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 10 September 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 15; Information, 10 December 1980, BStU, MfS HA XVIII 3980, 1-4.

⁶⁷ Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy Komitetu Partyjnego PZPR w NRD, 8 October 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/186, 25.

⁶⁸ E.g. Reaktionen der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Cottbus zur gegenwärtigen Lage in der VRP, 18 August 1980, BStU, MfS BV Cbs AKG 4398, 280-1.

⁶⁹ Schenka, Informationsbericht zu Diskussionen über die Lage in der VR Polen, 2 December 1980, BStU, MfS BV Cbs Abt XVIII 695, 98.

the POP secretary in Schwedt noted, “local authorities demanded more information” because they found neither the GDR media nor western broadcasters to be reliable.⁷⁰

The protests of 1980 had conflicting consequences on the relations between the guest workers and the local populations. Negative stereotypes of Polish shoppers and workers resurfaced relatively quickly. Whereas the Stasi’s opinion reports were fairly silent on Polish drinking habits before 1980, they appear more often in the fall of that year, linking alcohol consumption and perceived laziness to the concept of the “Polish economy.” One German worker in the Dresden region rejected the idea of the GDR’s financial assistance to Poland, saying, “we work from sunrise to sunset... Poles would fare better if they did not sit on a bench in the park with a bottle of schnapps after work.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, with the closure of the border in late October, management as well as some of the employees in East German factories began to voice concern over the fulfillment of production plans if Polish guest workers were no longer allowed in the GDR. In the Cottbus region, numerous companies pleaded with the SED authorities not to rescind labor contracts with Poles. The switch gear factory VEB SGW in Bad Muskau, for example, argued that the fifty Polish citizens employed there were not only necessary to fill the labor shortage, but also “had excellent productivity, were highly dependable, and well trained in handling the chemicals (poisons).”⁷² Thus, replacing them would have caused a lag in plan fulfillment. Similar petitions came from all around the GDR, suggesting that despite

⁷⁰ Protokół z posiedzenia egzekutywy KP PZPR w NRD, 26 August 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/186, 10.

⁷¹ Merkert, Information über Stimmung und Meinungen unter der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Dresden zur Situation in der VRP, 8 October 1980, BStU, MfS BV Ddn AKG PI 147/80, 4.

⁷² Schenka, Informationsbericht zu Diskussionen über die Lage in der VR Polen, 2 December 1980, BStU, MfS BV Cbs Abt XVIII 695, 98.

the widespread negative attitudes toward the neighbors, the value of Polish labor was high.⁷³ These fears, however, remained unrealized. Although Rita Röhr in her study of the Polish workforce in the GDR does note a slight decrease in the number of contract laborers between 1980-1981, government agreements allowed even more commuters and contractors to seek employment west of the Oder River between 1981 and 1985, peaking at 8,500 in 1983. Employment in the CSSR, however, dropped dramatically from 14,500 Poles in 1976 to 5,000 by 1980. The following section offers a possible explanation for the Polish regime's decision to cut its labor exports at that time.

Staying Abroad

While the overwhelming majority of the guest workers returned to Poland within two or three years after their contracts expired, some stayed in East Germany or Czechoslovakia permanently. The overall number of emigrants from Poland rose significantly from ten thousand in 1972 to nearly forty thousand by the end of the decade.⁷⁴ Around 8 percent of these migrants went to the GDR, even less to the CSSR. These numbers may not appear significant, especially in comparison to the emigration to the West, which was more appealing and became increasingly more possible at the time.⁷⁵ Moreover, the socialist regimes did not make it easy to achieve a legal alien status, posing numerous bureaucratic hurdles that involved exit and entry permits, extensive background checks, and officially-approved reasons for resettlement. Marriage with a

⁷³ E.g. VVB Geflügelkombinat Storkow to Rat des Bezirkes Frankfurt/Oder, 23 October 1980, LHAB, Rep. 601/24838.

⁷⁴ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 178.

⁷⁵ Dariusz Stola estimates that 58 percent of these emigrants ended up in West Germany and 15 percent in the US. See Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*, 177-180.

foreign national was the most frequent cause of emigration. Given the demographic problems in the GDR and CSSR, both states welcomed young Poles who would join the local economy permanently and produce offspring. Moreover, when faced with a choice of settling in Poland or in the neighboring countries, the majority of binational families chose East Germany or Czechoslovakia because of the relative perceived prosperity, access to consumer goods, and career prospects. The question is, how did the Polish authorities react to this phenomenon? This section will analyze the discussions among the PZPR officials, who became increasingly concerned with the number of Poles moving to the socialist abroad in the late 1970s and rapidly undergoing the process of “denationalization.”

One of the unintended consequences of exporting labor to the neighboring countries was the permanent loss of some of that workforce. The aim of the early “fraternal help” to the GDR and CSSR was the opportunity to train young Polish workers abroad who could apply their newly gained skills in factories at home. The Wrocław Voivodship, bordering both East Germany and Czechoslovakia, awarded 8,229 contracts for work abroad in 1969. Seventy percent of these people were females younger than thirty years of age.⁷⁶ Between 1967 and February 1970, five hundred women married Czechoslovak citizens and emigrated from the region. By 1974, the number of all Polish citizens who relocated to the CSSR surpassed 3,000 and in 1980 reached 8,000.⁷⁷ An additional seven hundred men and women from Poland domiciled in the GDR by 1976.⁷⁸ In contrast, only 668 Czechoslovaks and 451 East German

⁷⁶ SB KWMO Wrocław, Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonego badania n.t. wyjazdów obywateli polskich do pracy na terenie NRD i CSRS w latach 1967-1969, 25 May 1970, IPN, Wr 053/1598, 126.

⁷⁷ J. Łoś, Referat do Konferencji Sprawozdawczo-Wyborczej PZPR w CSRS, 23 November 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98; and Protokół nr 16/80 z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 6 November 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 19.

⁷⁸ Sprawozdanie o zatrudnieniu polskich pracowników w przedsiębiorstwach NRD w 1976, [no date], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/154.

citizens permanently lived in Poland in the early 1980s.⁷⁹ In order to accommodate the needs of the newly founded families and to make the stay of Polish nationals abroad possible, the socialist system relied on the so-called “consular passports,” one of the many forms of identification abroad.⁸⁰ This document proved continual Polish citizenship of its holder as well as permitted his or her stay in one given country provided that the host state granted an official long-term visa. Whereas the government in Warsaw in the 1970s significantly liberalized its passport policy and handed out consular passports at will, Czechoslovak citizens did not receive similar documents easily, which further explains the current of mobility out of Poland.⁸¹

Observing the growing tendency toward emigration, the party and state functionaries were unsure “whether this was a positive development or not.”⁸² At the 1974 PZPR conference in Prague, the Embassy Counselor J. Łoś remarked on the three thousand consular passports given out in the past five years. The resulting discussion showed that some members of the executive committee did not see a problem with the fact that many Poles remained in the CSSR, pointing out that these were the effects of “healthy internationalism” and served the purpose of strengthening social ties among the Bloc countries. Such voices, however, came from the lower-ranking party officials, mostly POP secretaries, who worked directly with the masses of laborers. Representing a more distanced perspective that took into account the political and demographic well-being of the fatherland, the diplomats as well as Warsaw’s officials from the PZPR’s International Department emphasized that the issue “cannot be trivialized.” The debate

⁷⁹ Biuro Paszportów, *Sytuacja obywateli polskich w Czechosłowacji, Sytuacja Cudzoziemców w PRL, Ruch Osobowy, 1984-1988*, [no date], IPN, BU 1616/458, 6.

⁸⁰ Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*, 141-196.

⁸¹ Protokół nr 16/80 z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 6 November 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 19.

⁸² J. Łoś, Referat do Konferencji Sprawozdawczo-Wyborczej PZPR w CSRS, 23 November 1974, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/98.

concluded that “the issue, for the moment, should be closely monitored.” In a short time, however, the antiassimilationist wing asserted its position that the emigration “of eight thousand young people to the CSSR, who had been educated in Poland, was an undeniable loss for the country and posed a moral and national problem.”⁸³

Once it categorized emigration as a negative consequence of the worker exports, the Party started a search for its causes and solutions. In 1977, the PZPR comrades in East Germany postulated that limiting the length of work contracts abroad to two years could prevent closer integration of the guest workers into the local society.⁸⁴ This move was a direct response to an growing number of young men and women asking for a renewal of their assignments in the GDR, some of whom had been there since the early 1970s. Naturally, not all of these people had the intention of starting families abroad. In fact, the majority of them saw work in the GDR or Czechoslovakia as lucrative in terms of both wages and access to consumer goods. The perceived low living standard in Poland, however, certainly constituted a push away from the homeland and into the arms of a foreign spouse. As one POP secretary in the CSSR stated, the worker exports “hurt young people, who gain excellent qualifications through hard work abroad but find no opportunities to employ their skills upon returning home.”⁸⁵ This and similar sentiments, therefore, again called into question the sense behind the guest worker program and its benefits for Poland. The functionaries were well aware, however, that restructuring the Polish economy into an appealing environment for young people was not immediately possible.

⁸³ S. Łazarczyk, Referat na posiedzeniu Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 6 November 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 19/3.

⁸⁴ Sprawozdanie o zatrudnieniu polskich pracowników w przedsiębiorstwach NRD w 1976, [no date], AAN, 1354/LXXVI/154.

⁸⁵ Protokół nr 16/80 z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 6 November 1980, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/181, 19.

The more pressing issue that the PZPR could have addressed was denationalization of the émigrés. Even if the economic situation miraculously improved at home, love and family considerations already anchored several thousands of Polish nationals in the neighboring countries. Additionally, contrary to the practice at home, the Czechoslovak regime prohibited dual citizenship and thereby “forced Poles to rescind their nationality” in favor of a local one.⁸⁶ The consular department of the Polish Embassy in Prague reported that the assimilation process for many of the workers who entered binational marriages was very rapid and the “attachment to the fatherland was unfortunately very weak.”⁸⁷

Concretely, it meant that these people decreasingly attended activities that the embassy organized, maintained fewer contacts with the Polish community outside of work, and were less willing to involve their mixed-heritage children in the embassy-run language school. Furthermore, the consulate in Bratislava rang an alarmist note that “a considerable part of the expatriates is beyond our influence; deeply assimilated into the Slovak society and disdainful of its Polish roots.”⁸⁸ The experience of life in emigration, however, suggests that that the dramatic representation is somewhat exaggerated and reflects the Party’s concern over demographic counts, the desire for direct control over the émigré population, as well as distancing from communist principles of internationalism and retrenchment into nationalism.

Even if those Poles who married and remained in Czechoslovakia or elsewhere grew into the local environments, it is unlikely that they completely abandoned their heritage. They might have forfeited their Polish citizenship and turned away from the official expatriate organizations,

⁸⁶ Protokół z posiedzenia egzekutywy KP PZPR w CSRS, 28 April 1982, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/201, 31.

⁸⁷ Protokół z narady partyjno-zawodowej, 7 February 1979, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/169, 14.

⁸⁸ Sprawozdanie z zebrania sprawozdawczo-wyborczego organizacji partyjnej przy Konsulacie Generalnym PRL w Bratysławie, 14 February 1979, AAN, 1354/LXXVI/169, 36.

but they still maintained contacts with families living in the old homeland. The proximity of the countries made travel possible and affordable. For example, Edward Apanel's daughter, who married a Czech in the late 1960s, visited her father in Wałbrzych on numerous occasions and the Apanels also travelled to the CSSR.⁸⁹ Similarly, Karin K. of Ludwigsfelde, whose father-in-law emigrated from Poland to the GDR already in 1956, happily took the family's *Trabant* to spend some holidays with her husband's relatives in the old country.⁹⁰ These contacts, therefore, show that not all émigrés lost the attachment to their heritage and in turn, they shared their heritage with their foreign spouses and children. In this sense, the fears of the PZPR functionaries appear to be misguided. Nonetheless, the perception of denationalization and increasing emigration poised the Polish party-state to question the extent to which socialist integration helped or hurt the country. As the official attitudes toward Bloc cooperation before and after 1980 indicate, however, the regime in Warsaw desired integration, but one that did not involve permanent outmigration.

Conclusion

Intuitively, therefore, the rise of multinational families and a growing sense of comfort living in other socialist states would seem to signify the success of integration, especially on the societal level. In the realities of late socialism, however, intuition and common sense did not always work. The growing number of émigrés concerned Polish authorities, who exhibited protectionist attitudes and regarded its citizenry as an asset. More importantly, the debates over

⁸⁹ For examples see the entries in his diaries, from 18 July 1972 and December 1972, Edward Apanel, "Mój dzień powszedni," *Ośrodek Karta*, 23Dz, Vol. 6.VIII-23.VIII/1972 and Vol. 26.XI-31.XII/1972.

⁹⁰ E.g. Karin K. to Ingrid K, 3 October 1977, Museum für Kommunikation-Berlin (MfK), Post von drüben, Konvolut 3.2011.491.

assimilation and denationalization indicate that state interests and continuing nationalist ideas imposed limits on the goals of socialist integration. Whereas friendly relations between the states and the peoples did receive the official blessing, permanent resettlement constituted a problem for the losing side. On the other hand, the receiving states welcomed an increase in population. Although this conflict of state interests remained subcutaneous and did not affect official inter-state relations, it did raise questions in Poland about the efficacy of the worker exports.

Since the Polish regime had a stake in limiting societal integration, it is not improbable to conclude that the organization of the workers' life abroad reflected some of these concerns. The etatization of the contract workers' free time certainly aimed at maintaining control and discipline over the crews. Nonetheless, the recreated Polish environment with a home press, books, films, and evening dances with fellow Poles from other factories served as a method for keeping the development of binational friendships in check. As the evidence indicates, though, the host states wanted to engage the contract laborers and invite them into the local society on a more pronounced scale than previous scholarship has suggested. Nevertheless, the GDR and CSSR authorities did not regard guest workers of all nationalities as equal. The experience of third world trainees differed from that of Poles or Hungarians for that matter due to racist prejudices and fears of conflict between the local populations and the African, Asian, or Latin colleagues.

The willingness of Polish nationals to remain in the socialist abroad, however, was marginal and the majority of workers did not seek to assimilate into the local society in any considerable way. People with the goal of taking work abroad for financial gain tended to save their money and to enjoy the entertainment that the authorities prepared for them. Their social interactions with the locals were limited to the factory and they were satisfied to spend time

around fellow Poles and to pursue illegal trade, as most of the SB informants indicated.⁹¹ People open to social integration, who sought more from their life abroad than financial gain, were keen to acquire better communication skills to explore the new world. Interactions with the locals either on the shop floor or, more effectively, during social events helped them to overcome the language barrier and contributed to more personal forms of contacts between members of the two groups. In extreme cases, self-inflicted exclusion contributed to frustration among some of the people, who found release in alcohol or violence.

Overall, therefore, the analysis of life abroad leads to the conclusion that social integration in the Bloc had strong potential for success, but it was thwarted by the same system that promulgated it. Fears of conflicts between the guest workers and locals, as well as distrust toward their own citizens, motivated the PZPR to enclose its exported laborers in a self-regulated parallel society. When an increasing number of workers escaped the home party's control and settled in the GDR and CSSR, the Polish authorities panicked about the denationalization of their citizens. Contrary to previous notions, the hosting states did not actively prevent Poles from integrating into their own environments, as they did with other nationals. Nevertheless, with the onset of organized opposition, the economic problems in Poland, the perception of a consumerist attack on East German supply, and finally the Solidarity rebellion of 1980, the attitudes in the socialist abroad toward Poles had changed. The results of these changes, as the next section will show, culminated in the exclusion of the largest state in the Bloc from pursuing any further integration.

⁹¹ E.g. Stanisław Sutuła, Notatka służbowa dot. odbytego spotkania z kandydatem na TW, 30 March 1974, IPN Po 00138/12/t.2, 19.

PART III

HOPES FOR RENEWAL (1981-1989 AND BEYOND)



Former oppositionists who became Presidents: Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa in Karkonosze, March 1990.
(Source: European Solidarity Center, Gdańsk)

CHAPTER 7 – THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM: YOUTH EXCHANGES IN THE BLOC

In the summer of 1978, a group of some twenty Bulgarian children between the ages of 10 to 15 years-old spent two weeks at a camp at their partner city of Częstochowa, Poland. Together with their Polish peers from the local Scout troop (*ZHP, Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*), the children engaged in various physical, educational, and tourist activities, all the while discovering each other's customs, language, and experiences. Bidding farewell to their Polish hosts, a caretaker of the Bulgarian group thanked the organizers and praised them especially for ascertaining that “there is no division between your children and my children. They are all our children, whom we have to give all the best.”¹ This phrase, on the one hand, beautifully captures the universal desire to bestow happiness, care, safety, and education on the young regardless of their origins. On the other hand, it brings attention to the underlying assumptions: that nationality was a factor influencing the children's upbringing and interactions, and that “what is best” for them depends on the values and ideas the adults held. Examining the robust international exchange programs for youth of the Eastern Bloc between 1972-1989, this chapter analyzes how those assumptions varied from one country to another, how they changed over time, and what impact they had not only on the young generation of socialist citizens, but also on the Socialist Bloc as a whole.

¹ Sprawozdanie opisowe z Międzynarodowej Akcji Zdecentralizowanej Częstochowskiej Chorągwi, 1978, Archiwum Muzeum Harcerstwa (MHAR), C I 7/M/235.

The role of mass youth organizations has been a topic of numerous studies, but their intra-Bloc cooperation has received only superficial attention. Scholars agree that the emergence of modern organizations for young people dates to the late nineteenth century. At that time, the state or other pronational groupings (in cases of limited statehood as in Poland and the Czech lands) feared the influence of “modernity” on the young, who instead needed physical health and correct patriotic attitudes.² With the rise of mass politics and aspiring totalitarian regimes, the need for adolescent support for the national cause became state policy, resulting in the establishment of the Nazi *Hitlerjugend* and the Soviet *Komsomol* that indoctrinated children from a young age by developing fascination with the activities the groups offered.³ In the postwar period, official youth organizations in Soviet-dominated countries played a crucial role in determining whether the new “people’s democracies” would be a willing “community of believers or a society held together mainly by force and fear.”⁴ To form a united front in education, they hijacked and destroyed alternative groups, for example those connected to the churches, making them instead a cog in the totalitarian machine.⁵ As some revisionist analysts argue, however, the youth organizations did not blatantly crusade for socialism, showing that their main work focused on organizing leisure-time activities for the war-devasted children and

² E.g. Jürgen Reulecke, ‘The battle for the Young: Mobilizing Young People in Wilhelmine Germany’, in Mark Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Wojciech Hausner and Marek Wierzbicki, *Sto Lat Harcerstwa* (Warsaw: IPN, 2015), and Mark Dimond, “The Sokol and Czech Nationalism, 1918–1948” in Mark Cornwall and R.J.W. Evans (eds.), *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918–1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 185-205.

³ E.g. Michael Buddrus, *Totale Erziehung für den totalen Krieg: Hitlerjugend und die nationalsozialistische Jugendpolitik* (Munich, K.G. Saur, 2003), xxiii.

⁴ Dorothee Wierling, “The Hitler Youth Generation in the GDR: Insecurities, Ambitions, and Dilemmas” in Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 316.

⁵ E.g. Joanna Sadowska, “The Socialist Youth Union (1957–1976) – Polish Counterpart Of Komsomol,” *Respectus Philologicus* 30/35 (2016): 147-156.

not on the discussion of politics and ideology.⁶ Moreover, as Gleb Tsipursky concludes in his study of Soviet youth, the central authorities of the Komsomol actively supported grassroots initiatives of local clubs in order to effect a sense of participation in state affairs and the young appropriated state structures for their own purposes.⁷

The historical development of socialist youth organizations varied from place to place, but each one tried to imitate the structure of the Soviet Komsomol. The Czechoslovak Youth Union, ČSM, emerged from the consolidation of multiple existing youth groups in 1949 and functioned effectively until the reformist currents in the KSČ in the mid-1960s stopped prioritizing “ideologically-pedagogical” work with youth.⁸ As a result of the Prague Spring, ČSM disintegrated and was replaced only in November 1970 with a revitalized *Socialistický svaz mládeže* (SSM, Socialist Youth Union). It took several years, however, for the SSM to regain the status of a mass organization, with 60 percent of young Czechoslovaks becoming members by 1972, for which the authorities blamed not only the mismanagement of the previous ČSM but also the political apathy of the parents. In the 1970s, therefore, the SSM could hardly participate in international exchanges and had to focus instead on domestic work, but it picked up the pace in the 1980s.

Internal rifts also shaped the Polish youth movement. The sole representative of the young people between 1948-1957, the Polish Youth Union (ZMP), did not survive the post-Stalinist thaw and splintered into six separate organizations that either had older historical roots (like the ZHP and the Union of Rural Youth, ZMW) or were newly formed, such as the Socialist

⁶ E.g. Ulrich Mählert and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, *Blaue Hemden—Rote Fahnen: Die Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend* (Opladen: Leske& Budrich, 1996), 195-6.

⁷ Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945-1970* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 100-2.

⁸ Ryszard Solski, Notatka nt. ruchu młodzieżowego w CSRS, August 1973, AAN, 1718/287.

Youth Union (ZMS). The apparent chaos of the Polish youth movement annoyed its neighboring counterparts, who found it hard to navigate the decentralized landscape when organizing transnational events.⁹ The attempt to federate the organization in 1973 (as FSZMP, the Federation of Socialist Unions of Polish Youth) somewhat ameliorated the problems, but the desire of individual unions to remain independent precluded full consolidation.¹⁰ In 1976, the Union of Socialist Polish Youth (ZSMP) formed from several other groupings and survived the restructuring of the movement after 1981. Due to social and political upheavals, however, the Federation fell apart and the only official unions standing were the ZSMP and the scouts of ZHP, which focused most of its work with children under the age of fifteen.

The Free German Youth (FDJ), founded in 1946, appears to have been the most disciplined and unified organization of the three. Despite the plurality of approaches to youth politics that shaped the FDJ in the aftermath of the 1953 Uprising, the East German organization remained devoted to one specific agenda.¹¹ “To declare one’s support for the German Democratic Republic as one’s fatherland” was the key mission of the FDJ, which set it apart from its Polish and Czechoslovak counterparts.¹² The formation of a proper “socialist person” and correct attitudes toward the socialist way of life characterized the official youth movements in all Bloc countries. In contrast to Poland, the Czechlands, or Slovakia where patriotic education

⁹ E.g. FDJ-Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, *Ergebnisse der Entwicklung der dezentralen Beziehungen*, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DY 24/10566.

¹⁰ Sadowska, “The Socialist Youth Union,” 155. When referring to the Polish youth movement in general, I will use FSZMP as the metonymy for all of the disparate organizations, but will name the individual groups in cases when it is relevant.

¹¹ On the early history of the FDJ, see Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹² Anna Saunders, *Honecker's Children: Youth and Patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979-2002* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 11-13.

was present but taken for granted since national identity was firmly rooted in the population, East Germany needed to establish that identity. With the existence of another German state to the west, the politics of demarcation (*Abgrenzung*) pertained to diplomatic maneuvers and even more importantly to instilling loyalty to the new state as the fatherland among the youth. In order to make the distinction between the two Germanies, the FDJ used socialist pedagogy not as a goal in itself, but as a method for creating national identity.

How, then, did socialist and patriotic education influence internationalist encounters among the Bloc's young generation? This chapter asserts that the youth exchanges succeeded in accomplishing their goals of providing children and young adults with fun activities, exposure to difference, and a change of landscape, as well as patriotic education. Furthermore, it argues that different organizers had different ideas for conceptualizing the exchanges, which occasionally led to conflict between the Polish, Czechoslovak, and East German unions. While the FDJ or SSM, for example, valued disciplined agendas, the FSZMP allowed more free time and entertainment. In terms of contributing to socialist integration, however, the results were ambiguous at best. International exchanges offered the potential for close contact between the youth of the Bloc countries, but instead of becoming better communists, the children returned more attuned to national differences. To develop on Anna Saunders's thesis about post-1989 developments, officially sanctioned socialist patriotism and outside ideological influences contributed to xenophobia, nationalism, and the continuing divides between western and eastern Germans, as well as to the disintegration of Central European civic relations in the 1990s.¹³

This analysis will begin with a discussion of preparatory, organizational, and structural work for the exchanges. Differentiating between the separate programs for children, teenagers,

¹³ Saunders, *Honecker's Children*, 6-7.

international working brigades, and official youth festivals, it argues that the plurality of formats for youth activities attracted great numbers of young people seeking adventures in the neighboring states. Moreover, the structure of international programs devoted a lot of room to the patriotic elements and proper representation of one's homeland abroad, which differed from one country to another. The second section will reconstruct how the exchanges looked in practice. Focusing on the experiences of the children, young adults, and their counselors, it will posit that while the camp participants carried out the organized socialist programming, they enjoyed setting their own schedules of physical and leisure activities over the educational and political agendas. The highpoint of the vacation exchanges for children was the "national day" when the foreign guests celebrated their own origins and traditions. The sources make it apparent that although the children were fascinated by the "other" and that cultural and even linguistic differences did not interfere with playtime, they preferred their familiar national culture, traditions, and cuisine.

The last part of the chapter will focus on the role politics and ideology played during children's vacations, especially across the changes after 1980. With Poland left isolated within the Bloc after the Solidarity crisis, officials in Warsaw sought ways of reintegrating back into the socialist community. Despite Berlin and Prague's skepticism and fear of ideological subversion, youth exchanges with Poland resumed in 1983 on an even greater scale. The SED regime saw this as an opportunity to impart lessons of Marxism-Leninism to Polish youth in a paternalistic way. At the same time, it guarded the East German youngsters from any potential antisocialist attitudes their Polish peers might have brought with them. Fueling these fears, however, were the observations that the Polish Catholic Church was starting to exert greater influence on the younger generation than the discredited Communist Party. Nonetheless, noticing the need to

sustain its own “welfare dictatorship” and to keep control over the children’s free time, the GDR regime sent and received thousands of young people for the exchanges. Just how popular these sojourns were for the children underscores the fact that after 1989 some local organizers wanted to continue cooperation with their partners abroad, but the changed political landscape and the opening to the West stood in the way of furthering Central European integration.

Organizing the Exchanges

International cooperation of the Bloc youth movements originated almost immediately after their founding in the late 1940s but expanded significantly only under the project of new socialist integration in the 1970s.¹⁴ The earlier forms of contact were limited to the organization officials’ discussions and participation in conferences, as well as larger experimental gatherings, such as “friendship trains” that traversed several countries but could accommodate only some two hundred people at a time. Similarly, the annual “Four-Country-Meetings” organized at the borders between Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia (with the participation of Soviet youth as the fourth country) since 1950, envisioned space for about fifty delegates each.¹⁵ Following up on the all-Bloc push toward tighter integration in the wake of the Comecon’s Complex Program, however, the youth movements began to search for ways to intensify the exchange, citing the need to “support the initiative of young peoples’ collective work toward accomplishing the goals” of socialist integration.¹⁶ Although it is impossible to determine the

¹⁴ Wydział Zagraniczny RG FSZMP, Informacja nt. kontaktów polskiego ruchu młodzieżowego z NRD i RFN, no date [1977], AAN, 1718/324, and Ryszard Solski, Notatka nt. ruchu młodzieżowego w CSRS, August 1973, AAN, 1718/287.

¹⁵ Materialien zur Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Vierländertreffen Polen CSSR, UdSSR, DDR von 1968-1972, DY 24/10427.

¹⁶ For example, Porozumienie o współpracy między FSZMP i FDJ na lata 1976-1980, [no date], AAN, 1718/323, and the files in DY 24/21627.

precise numbers due to the multiplicity of programs offered, by 1986, nearly 160,000 Polish children travelled to the GDR annually, and 140,000 East Germans reciprocated the visit.¹⁷ Czechoslovak participation was less robust, but the country served as a popular destination for tens of thousands of FDJ and FSZMP members.

The “decentralization” of international cooperation contributed to the growing number of contacts. The unions’ headquarters delegated the task of developing new initiatives for cross-border activities to individual localities, i.e. *Bezirke*, *Voivodships*, or *Okres*, which in turn partnered with administrative units abroad. For example, the East German Frankfurt and Polish Gorzów constituted one such pair. Both sides developed an annual plan for their cooperation. For 1978, their agenda included numerous meetings of the local leaderships to exchange information about their own activities, sending representatives for major holidays like May Day, overseeing children’s exchanges during summer and winter breaks, as well as organizing smaller events such as kayak races on the Oder River.¹⁸ The central leadership tasked every regional committee of the youth unions to develop this kind of rich programming aimed at increasing interactions with other Bloc states and contributing to socialist integration. Naturally, not all local units were equally devoted to the task. The cooperation between Neubrandenburg and Koszalin, for instance, “limited itself to official delegations,” mostly because their international work focused on other countries, such as Czechoslovakia.¹⁹

Decentralized cooperation, therefore, created a plurality of formats for international cooperation of the youth movements. Beyond the official visits of the organizations’ leadership

¹⁷ Wymiana wakacyjna z NRD, 28 April 1987, IPN BU 01323/213, 26.

¹⁸ WZ RW FSZMP w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim, Informacja o kontaktach RW FSZMP w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim z KO FDJ we Frankfurcie, [no date], AAN, 1718/326.

¹⁹ Informacja o współpracy FSZMP i FDJ, [no date, 1977], AAN, 1718/326.

and smaller events unique to each partnership, most of the unions pursued programs that were alike. One of them were work-related activities. International Working Brigades recruited young men and women from technical schools to gain hands-on experience, usually at construction sites, working beside their peers from all over the Bloc. The prime example of this sort of cooperation is the brown coal power plant in northwestern Czechoslovakia, Tušimice II. With plans for the construction developed in late 1970, the new power plant represented the youth's contribution to Czechoslovak development. Not only did the SSM take patronage over it, but in 1971 Comecon declared the project an "International Youth Construction Site of the CMEA."²⁰ Seventeen- through twenty-five-year-olds from all parts of the socialist world flocked to the Bohemian town to express internationalist solidarity, but more frequently to seek fun and adventure in a foreign land.²¹ An account of a Czech participant at Tušimice reflects the dynamics well: "most people work hard. There are good ones, bad ones, and those good for nothing."²² His collective took a liking toward a group of eighteen Bulgarians, with whom they partied after work. Communication was not an issue, even though the site was a "Babylon: Czech mixes with Slovak, German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, and Cubans were expected to arrive soon." Russian served as a *lingua franca* although interpreters were necessary to explain technical terms and to facilitate understanding between older engineers. Nevertheless, the labor was effective and the power plant went online in 1976, attesting to the feasibility of such international projects and linking young people in a common mission.

²⁰ Vorschlag für die Zusammensetzung der Brigade Tusimice 1975, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/13304.

²¹ This is the conclusion Christopher Ward reaches in his study of the Soviet project, the Baikal-Amur Railway. Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 9.

²² Karel Krtička, "Nevšední lidé v nevšedních rolích," *Mladý svět* 39, 15 September 1972, 12-13.

Less grandiose but more numerous were the international initiatives of the Polish Voluntary Labor Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*, OHP). Created in 1958 as a societal organization, OHP aimed to help the youth unions organize work with young people by directing their time toward rebuilding the war-torn country.²³ The programming usually involved combining labor and leisure for students of technical schools, high schools, and universities on summer breaks, allowing them to travel, gain working experience, and contribute to society. While most of the OHP activities took place domestically, by the 1970s a growing number of the participants went to work abroad. Since 1982, the OHP advertised its programs under the slogan “earn your own vacation,” attracting nearly 1.5 million teenagers each year. To workforce-hungry neighboring states, the OHP presented a lucrative opportunity. Between June and September 1986, for example, twenty thousand Poles ages sixteen to twenty-six reported to work at factories and collective farms in Czechoslovakia, and another thirty-two thousand in East Germany.²⁴ The students received minimal wages for performing mostly rudimentary tasks, such as sweeping floors, sorting tools, helping with harvests, or emptying bed pans in hospitals. Nonetheless, they were willing to work and the hiring institutions were eager to keep them. Prolonging the OHP brigades’ stay illegally (i.e. without the approval of the headquarters in Poland) became a significant problem for the authorities concerned not only with potential exploitation of the students, but also with the financial repercussions of breaking contracts.²⁵ More importantly, both the FDJ and its Polish counterparts criticized some of the employers for

²³ Historical sketch based on the “OHP: Krótka Historia,” <https://www.ohp.pl/>; and Die freiwilligen Arbeitsbrigaden, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DY 24/21683.

²⁴ Wymiana wakacyjna OHP, 23 April 1986, IPN, BU 01323/213, 19.

²⁵ See for example Bericht über die Gespräche und Verhandlungen mit dem Ministerium für Arbeit und Löhne der VRP zu Fragen der zeitweiligen Beschäftigung polnischer Bürger in der DDR in Warschau, 31 July 1978, BArch-Berlin, DQ 3/867, or Janusz Obodowski to KG OHP, 3 June 1977, AAN, 1718/324.

“paying attention only to the results of work and not the main goal, which is integration of socialist youth.”²⁶

Bilateral festivals of friendship became another popular form of the youth unions' cooperation. Taking place periodically, the national youth organizations hosted a mass social and political event with their peers from a neighboring state. The 1977 Polish-East German “Meeting of Friendship” in Frankfurt (discussed in detail in chapter 4) brought together 150,000 young people from both countries. Other festivals of this kind were less pompous but still offered a unique experience in internationalization. The Second “Days of Friendship” between Polish and Czechoslovak youth took place between 16 and 22 October 1978 in Katowice.²⁷ All of the 600 SSM members of all ages and even more of their Polish counterparts received a warm welcome, 200 złoty pocket money, and a festive commencement of the meeting in the form of a discotheque that evening. The delegates spent the remaining days touring Silesian points of interest, discussing the problems of young people, and in the evenings attending balls, dinners, and concerts with the most popular Polish, Czech, and Slovak performers. The official Czechoslovak youth press *Mladý svět*, reporting on the “Days of Friendship,” remarked on the enormous entertainment program with an underhanded compliment that the Czechoslovaks leaving Poland “did not only have memories of sightseeing embellished with discos... Polish friends wanted to present a young generation in its own context.”²⁸

The focus on play and fun indicated not only the differences in conceptualizing the festivals, but also implicitly brought to mind the experiences of the First Polish-Czechoslovak

²⁶ E.g. Józef Stuczyński, *Meldunek Sygnalny Sprawa Obiektowa ŻAK*, 12 August 1986, IPN, BU 01232/34, 17.

²⁷ See the folder “Dni Przyjaźni Młodzieży Polskiej i Czechosłowackiej 16-22.10.1978,” AAN, 1718/286.

²⁸ Jan Kaspar, “Most k přátelství,” *Mladý svět* 46, 2 November 1978.

“Days of Friendship” from 1975. The Czechoslovak hosts at that point focused predominantly on a political and ideological program, with minimal entertainment limited to “second-class performers from the local side,” to the disappointment of Polish delegates.²⁹ The SSM leadership did not learn much, however, with regard to responding to the needs of young people. During the “Days of Friendship” between the CSSR and GDR in late June 1987, which took place in the Czech town of Hradec Králové, the program included only one evening dance with the rest of the time filled with political conferences and manifestations. The FDJ supervisors, likewise preferring serious content over popular music, did not complain about the program. To their chagrin, however, Czechoslovak students showed enthusiasm only for partying and very little for the remaining activities, “so that the mass-political potential of the meeting was not fully realized.”³⁰ Although the students might not have cared much for speeches and manifestations under red banners, the festivals fulfilled their role of introducing young people from the Bloc to one another and the high-level publicity work ensured that international friendship piqued the interest of youth, even if they themselves did not attend.

Lastly, vacation exchanges functioned as the most popular form of youth integration, aimed mostly at children between the ages of eight and sixteen years old. The decentralized structure of cooperation among the FDJ, FSZMP, and SSM left all of the organizational work up to the cooperating localities. *Kreis* Altenburg, near Leipzig, for example, had well established contacts with the Nowy Sącz region (southeastern Poland), Ústí nad Labem region (northwestern

²⁹ Ryszard Kubiak, Notatka służbowa, 25 September 1975, AAN, 1718/288.

³⁰ Zentralrat der FDJ, Information über Verlauf und Ergebnisse der Tage der Freundschaft zwischen der Jugend der CSSR und der DDR in Hradec Kralove, 30 June 1987, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/11634.

Czechoslovakia), as well as two municipalities in the Soviet Union.³¹ During the school year, children involved in the PO's international clubs researched information about these different countries, sometimes started to learn a foreign language, and exchanged letters with peers from abroad. In the summertime, interested participants traveled in groups of around thirty at a time for a two-week camp abroad. Thanks to government subsidies, in the late 1970s, the cost to the parents of each child going on such a trip was minimal, figuring at around 50 marks.³² For this reason, the opportunity to spend time in a new setting was hard to ignore, which accounted for the huge popularity of these programs, reaching some 200,000 East German children on exchanges by the late 1980s.³³

The vacation exchanges required intense preparatory work. The first step involved making arrangements between cooperating local units and obtaining approval from regional headquarters of the unions that doled out funds for each undertaking. Initiating the contacts if no precedence existed presented particular challenges. A supervisor of an SSM Pioneer organization in Prague began his first letter written in his native tongue to the Varsovian ZHP with, "I do not know if you will make sense of my Czech message, but I don't speak Polish and hope that nonetheless we can understand each other."³⁴ Despite the similarities between the two languages, the Varsovian ZHP needed a translator to craft its response to invite the Czech club for a three-week stay in Poland the next summer, thereby creating a lasting exchange arrangement between

³¹ Politische Wertung des statistischen Halbjahresberichtes zur Entwicklung der Pionierorganisation E.Thälmann des Bezirkes Leipzig 1979, [no date], Thüringisches Staatsarchiv-Altenburg (TSA-A), FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 130, 91.

³² FDJ Kreisleitung, Brief an Eltern, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 79.

³³ Jürgen Hönow, Bericht des Zentralrats der FDJ über den Kinder- und Jugendaustausch zwischen der DDR und der VRP im Jahr 1987, 15 September 1987, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/11643, and Zuarbeit zum Treffen mit dem 1. Sek. des ZR des SSM, Gen. Vasil Mohorita, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DY 24/21634.

³⁴ Pavel Veselý to ZHP Warsaw, 3 October 1973, MHAR, C I 7/M/101.

the two units. Another organizational step concerned the selection of accompanying counselors. Usually, one youth union functionary was in charge of up to twenty children. The FDJ appears to have had the most stringent rules about cadre selection. Most importantly, the delegated caretaker had to be an FDJ member, with solid knowledge of domestic and international politics, familiarity with the history and goals of the FDJ, and an ability to play an instrument “to contribute to the cultural life of the camp.”³⁵ All of this was meant to ascertain that the delegate “will represent the Free German Youth abroad with dignity.”

The same prerequisites applied to the children as well. Before embarking on the exchange with the neighbors, participants underwent a preparatory training. Most of the time, a quick introductory course took place a few days before the trip, during which the union’s supervisors not only made sure that all documents were in order, children had their school IDs, and packed appropriate clothing, but also discussed issues of behavior and potential cultural activities they could initiate at the camp, especially their own “national day.”³⁶ Some ambitious FDJ leaders, however, began their exchange with a week-long preparatory camp at one of the PO’s major camps in East Germany. The Altenburgers used their time in the Saxon Forest town of Oybin “to inform the Pioneers of Polish particularities (non-collectivized agriculture/Church) [sic!] ... and to check what needs to be done in order to keep strict adherence to the regulations in the host country.”³⁷ With that, the FDJ wanted to prevent any inconvenient political questions from the children, which could lead to a potential conflict and appear as an “involvement in the domestic

³⁵ Hinweise für die Auswahl von Kader für Delegationen ins Ausland, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 87, 34.

³⁶ E.g. Anna Cheńska, Sprawozdanie z pobytu na międzynarodowym obozie pionierskim w Niemieckiej Republice Demokratycznej, [no date], MHAR, C I 7/M/113.

³⁷ Regine Löffler, Einschätzung Vorbereitungslager Oybin zur Vorbereitung der Delegation nach Nowy Sacz 1979, 21 May 1979, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 33.

affairs” of the host country, which was forbidden as it would be a disservice to the developing internationalist friendship among the youngest generation.³⁸

Representing one’s country with dignity, however, went beyond proper behavior and included flaunting of the children’s skills. For the caretakers of the Altenburg pioneers, the preparatory camp at Oybin served the purpose of sharpening the pupils’ physical condition and cultural aptitude. Practicing for the “GDR day” that was supposed to be carried out in Nowy Sacz, the supervisor noted “significant difficulties with singing” among the children, a problem that needed extra attention before going abroad.³⁹ The teacher’s efforts paid off because the Polish hosts in their own reports praised the German groups from Altenburg and also showed extreme satisfaction with their own children’s “good attitudes, taking care of the good name of the Country and the Organization.”⁴⁰ While showing off their talents and following instructions sufficed to safeguard their country’s reputation for the younger groups, for older teens participating in work-leisure activities or international festivals, the problems with correct representation often lay in labor productivity, drunkenness, lax sexual mores, illegal trade, or politically subversive undertakings. Regardless of the different pedagogical needs of different age groups, the organizations sending students abroad carefully nursed a sense of national identity among their youths. It served the purpose of strengthening socialist patriotism toward one’s own homeland, as well as to express solidarity between different nationalities sharing the same communist ideology, practiced with slight variations. Therefore, the preparation for camps

³⁸ The rule prohibiting open criticism of the host country appeared in the FDJ memos during Prague Spring and remained in place, especially with relation to Poland, until 1989. See FDJ Bezirksleitung to All Kreisleitungen, 9 May 1968, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 87, 38.

³⁹ Löffler, Einschätzung Vorbereitungslager Oybin zur Vorbereitung der Delegation nach Nowy Sacz 1979, 21 May 1979, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 33.

⁴⁰ Urszula Kochanik, Informacja dot. udziału Chorągwi Nowosądeckiej w Międzynarodowej Akcji Letniej, [1983], MHAR, C I 7/M/208.

made the children aware of any potential surprises and eased them into making friendly contacts abroad. Overall, from the organizational point of view, the exchanges in their various forms proved to be a successful and popular contribution to socialist integration.

Children at Play

How did the national differentiation, then, function in practice among the youth and how did the participants respond to the agendas set by the adults? This section will show that for the most part the children, steeped in patriotic discourse, felt a sense of pride in their country, but thanks to innate youthful curiosity they happily explored the “otherness” of their foreign peers, even if they occasionally preferred what was familiar to them. Nonetheless, conforming to the hosts’ customs was a part of the proper behavioral etiquette that was enforced for the sake of respect and the projection of a correct national image. The exchanges’ quality and impressions left on the participants clearly depended on the caretakers’ organizational skills, which had to consider both the age group of the visitors and their expectations for the program. The pioneers were quick to engage in games, sports, and conversations with their foreign peers, which resulted in overwhelmingly positive experiences with internationalism. Visual and written evidence indicates that strong emotional attachments formed among them, even if these emotions developed during the two or three-week vacations were ultimately fleeting.

Despite solid preparatory work, arriving in a foreign country could constitute a challenging experience. While the transportation arrangements worked relatively flawlessly for the most part, on occasion problems with getting to the destination immediately created negative impressions. A group of FDJ-ler from Cottbus felt perplexed when their train arrived in Piotrków

Trybunalski, twenty-five miles north of their intended target of Radomsko in July 1987.⁴¹ Even though the hosts quickly arranged additional transportation to pick up the German campers, the participants' mood was already dampened. Especially unhappy was the group's advisor, A., who left a scathing report about the three-week stay, contrary to the majority of documents of this kind. A. complained about a lack of official welcome for the FDJ group, as well as the poor accommodations, nutrition, and programming. The FDJ regional headquarters researched the case and left pencil annotations indicating gross exaggerations in A.'s report. For example, the comment about "daily problems with water supply" was labeled as "nonsense!" (*Quatsch!*). Similarly, the supervisor disputed A's claims of spoiled food giving the children stomach problems and the lack of interesting activities. Where the truth lay may be impossible to ascertain, but clear is the fact that the organizations on both sides took serious efforts to assure the well-being of their pupils. To be sure, most reports from exchanges included some criticisms or suggestions for improvement, but only rarely do they indicate a complete fiasco.

As long as they had fun, children did not seem to mind minor inconveniences or organizational mishaps. The Altenburger group of twenty-nine pioneers, between the ages of twelve and fourteen, was scheduled to spend two weeks in Nowy Sącz in August 1979. Due to unclear reasons, the promised spaces in a youth hostel did not work out and instead the exchange took place in the nearby mountainous village of Skrudzina, where the children had to sleep in tents.⁴² To the apparent surprise of the group's supervisor, "the accommodation in tents caused no problems at all... The positive thing was that our delegation could partake in the creation of

⁴¹ Auster, Information zur Betreuung Kinder und Jugendlichen in VR Polen, 29 July 1987, Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg (LHAB), Rep. 943/1037.

⁴² Regine Löffler, Abschlußbericht der Delegation Nowy Sącz 1979, 13 August 1979, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 42.

the campsite,” which included the set-up of the shelters, erecting flag masts, and decorating it according to the children’s own ideas. As the German counselor realized, this turn of events “substantially promoted the self-reliance and independence of the pioneers and FDJ-ler.” This example likewise represents an anomaly, since the agreed-upon conditions changed suddenly. In the majority of cases, these organizational problems did not occur, as the unions and local clubs highly prioritized the international events to maintain a solid national reputation.

The unusual start to the camp in Skrudzina did not mean any major revisions to the program envisioned for the Polish scouts and German pioneers, even though it facilitated the development of contacts between the children. Instead of the usual “icebreakers” and formal introductions, the children faced a mutual task of organizing their own campsite. As a result, “contact with the scouts was established immediately... and friendships among the children developed very quickly.”⁴³ Under camp conditions, the children were primarily responsible for the maintenance of the site, delegating specific roles to small brigades, such as cooking help, cleaners, or water providers, which the participants appreciated. Besides work for the common good, the students engaged in sporting activities, song singing, as well as skit performing, and took hiking trips in the mountains, boat rides on the Dunajec River, and an excursion to Cracow. Because of the success of this model of vacationing, the following year the Altenburg and Nowy Sącz partners decided to repeat the camping in tents in Skrudzina.⁴⁴ The new leader of the FDJ-ler in 1980, however, did not share the same enthusiasm for camping in the mountains and found the three-day trip to Cracow to be “too demanding” for the children. Nonetheless, the results for the pioneers were the same and the contact between the youths was very close.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kutschenreuter, Abschlußbericht Internationaler Schüleraustausch Altenburg-Nowy Sacz - Ausreisende Delegation 1980, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 70.

Although it may appear that the youth union functionaries' reports exaggerate the level of friendship among the children, photographic evidence as well as the pioneers' own writing indicate that in fact many individuals built emotional attachments to their peers from abroad. Archival collections of the youth unions sometimes hold scrapbooks detailing the experiences of an exchange. The troop leaders compiled and edited the diaries for public consumption, decorating them with drawings, glued-on postcards, and photos. The scrapbooks included little critical information, functioning as sanitized versions of the internal reports submitted to an organization's superiors.⁴⁵ The snapshots show children and teenagers of different nationalities, distinguished by their uniforms, engaged together in various activities, holding hands, or embracing one another all the while beaming with smiles. The most telling, however, are the photographs from farewell ceremonies, such as that from the final day of the exchange between Varsovian ZHP and Berliner FDJ/PO clubs from 1973.⁴⁶ Faces covered in tears and drooping with sadness, the German and Polish children exchanged last hugs and contact information with the hope of staying in touch in the future. Even if these relationships were ephemeral and dissolved after the summer, they certainly left an imprint on the young minds to whom the GDR, CSSR, or Poland were no longer abstract places or the enemies that the older generation might

⁴⁵ For examples, see [Journal of the Vacation Exchange Mělník-Liebenwalde in July 1986], Státní okresní archiv-Mělník (SOA-M), 502 OV KSČ Mělník/k.427; Brigadetagebuch -- Interlager des Energiekombinates Potsdam, 1986, LHAB, Rep. 543/112; [Journal of the Potsdam delegation to the CIMEA International Summer Camp in the Pionierrepublik Wilhelm Pieck in July 1978], LHAB, Rep. 543/1254.

⁴⁶ [No title], MHAR, 405/IM.

have disparaged, but rather specific people with whom they shared time, interests, and emotional attachments.



Images of the 1973 FDJ-ZHP camp in the GDR. MHAR, 405/IM.

Whatever the images could not capture sometimes appears in writing. Attesting to the deep social engagements between Polish and German youth, for example, was the excitement an FDJ-ler expressed in an anonymous survey about reconnecting during the “III Days of Friendship” (Cottbus ’86) with a Polish girl, whom they had met the previous summer at a work-leisure camp.⁴⁷ Similarly, a note attached in the files of the Altenburger FDJ, clearly by the hand of a teenager and appearing to be a draft of a letter about the experiences on one of the exchanges, reflects on the friendships the person made in Poland. In its conclusion, the author

⁴⁷ Information über Meinungsäußerungen von Teilnehmern am III. Treffen der Freundschaft, 17 May 1986, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/11631.

stated that “it was a time [he or she] would not want to miss out on, time full of diversity, with many high points [*Höhepunkte*], a very romantic time.”⁴⁸ What exactly took place during that trip that made it “romantic” remains a mystery, but in spite of raging hormones among fourteen-year-olds, it was probably nothing sexual. Nevertheless, in many instances especially among young adults, acquaintanceships developed into long-term relationships, not only among the campers. A ZHP unit from Wrocław, for example, “lost one of their valuable instructors,” who married an FDJ functionary and settled in the GDR.⁴⁹ Therefore, the internationalism propagated by the exchanges had some positive successes.

Naturally, not everything during the international initiatives was always rosy. The younger the children, the smaller were the complaints. A delegation of ninety SSM pioneers from the Czech Mělník enjoyed their time on the Polish Baltic shore alongside 290 local ZHP scouts, but their major issue was with nutrition. Not only did they find the local cuisine odd, but their rations were insufficient, which prompted the group leaders to intervene.⁵⁰ Occasional outbursts of juvenile stupidity resulted in accidents or fights that left some of the campers with bloody noses, broken arms, or—in the best case—disciplinary action. More serious infractions happened among the older groups and usually involved some form of criminal activity, excessive drinking, or political blasphemy. All of these types of incidents occurred during one multinational camp in the Karkonosze town Jelenia Góra in 1986. First, unknown suspects stole East German flags from the masts, which prompted the local authorities to dispatch additional police

⁴⁸ No author, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 79.

⁴⁹ Grzegorz Pisarski, *Metody i formy współpracy zdecentralizowanej w zakresie wychowania komunistycznego i internacjonalistycznego*, 12 February 1980, AAN, 1718/326.

⁵⁰ Jaroslav Kovář, *Naše děti v Polsku*, 22 September 1972, SOA-M, Spolana/38.

forces to patrol the campsite.⁵¹ Second, a drunken group of Polish and Czechoslovak teenagers accosted the supervisor of their Soviet peers with anticommunist invectives, “wanting to talk.”⁵² Because alcohol consumption was both against the rules and could lead to potential conflicts, the organizers quickly sent home the participants who violated the agreement or even precluded some people from signing up because of rumors about their use of alcohol.⁵³ The gravest of all sins, however, were insults against nationality. While infrequent, they did happen and led to disciplinary action against the perpetrators as well as bad impressions among the victims.⁵⁴

National identity played a tremendous role in socialist youth exchanges. Even if the children spending vacation in the neighboring country did not want to pay much attention to it, the organizers always assured that patriotism would be the focus, trying to achieve internationalism through nationalism. The hosts were tasked with presenting a proper image of their home country and the role of the guests was to introduce their homeland in as positive light as possible. During the vacation exchanges of pioneers, therefore, the culminating point, as described in nearly all of the reports, was their “national day.” During the course of the stay, local customs dominated the camp. One day, however, was devoted to the visiting delegation’s culture. For instance, the ZHP scouts from Kalisz visiting their East German peers in Rathsfeld in 1978, prepared for their “Polish day” well in advance, recording songs popular with the youth and practicing skits about Polish history. On the morning of 13 July, the whole camp woke up to the music, then tasted Polish specialties cooked with the help of the scouts, participated in

⁵¹ Józef Stuczyński, Meldunek Sygnalny nr 196, 12 August 1986, IPN BU 01232/34, 12.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ E.g. Information zum Verlauf und Inhalt des Ferien- und Urlaubssommers 1987, LHAB, Rep. 943/1038; and SB RUSW Szprotawa (por. Bebrys) to Naczelnik WUSW dept.III ZG, 8 May 1986, IPN Po 0038/163, 63.

⁵⁴ E.g. Bogdan Grabowski, Informacja Problemowa, 18 May 1987, IPN BU 01232/34, 49.

activities organized by the visitors, and in the evening attended a show put on by them.⁵⁵ The caretakers frequently praised the pioneers for conducting the national day successfully, “with pride and conviction,” assuring that the efforts at internationalist education do not overshadow the patriotic elements.⁵⁶ Sometimes the hosts’ program for the exchange did not envision this type of event—or any sort of national initiative—and left the visiting children and their supervisors disappointed. A leader of a ZHP group in the GDR had to plead with the locals to “allow us to celebrate 22 July [a national holiday of the PPR] the way we wanted.”⁵⁷ All they received was a ten-minute slot during the evening bonfire.

The efforts at highlighting nationality in such a way explored the cultural differences in more depth, while other markers of national belonging were more apparent. Besides local cuisine, uniforms, and traditional games, language immediately created distinctions in an international setting. Although certainly a barrier to understanding, the children hardly even needed to speak the same language in order to take a liking to one another. Whatever initial problems with understanding among the pioneers occurred, rudimentary knowledge of Russian came to be quite useful, especially between the German students and their Slavic peers.⁵⁸ Immersed in a bilingual setting, though, the children quickly learned from one another and occasionally even initiated impromptu courses of their mother tongues for the foreigners.⁵⁹ Most

⁵⁵ Elżbieta Sowińska, Sprawozdanie i ocena międzynarodowej akcji letniej w Komendzie Chorągwi Kaliskiej ZHP, 18 September 1978, MHAR, C I 7/M/235.

⁵⁶ Schuster, Abschlußbericht der Delegation Nowy Sacz 1978, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 2.

⁵⁷ Anna Cheńska, Sprawozdanie z pobytu na międzynarodowym obozie pionierskim w Niemieckiej Republice Demokratycznej, [no date], MHAR, C I 7/M/113.

⁵⁸ E.g. see Schuster, Abschlußbericht der Delegation Nowy Sacz 1978, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 2.

⁵⁹ Schuster, Abschlußbericht der Delegation Nowy Sacz 1978, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 2.

successful mode of communication, however, were “hands and feet,” in the words of an FDJ supervisor from Cottbus, “which led to numerous comedic situations,” but undoubtedly also contributed to occasional frustrations and conflicts.⁶⁰

Despite the best efforts to select polyglottic cadres for the exchanges, the elementary cells of the youth unions did not always have people with sufficient knowledge of the neighbor’s tongue, which presented a serious problem with decentralized international cooperation. Even if a handful of the counselors knew German, Czech, Polish, or Russian, they could not have possibly assisted all of the sixty or so children on a regular basis. Hiring outside translators was not always possible. An SSM club from the Pilsen region in Czechia hosted a ZHP group from Cracow and enlisted the help of an interpreter. To the surprise of the Polish guests, the woman knew only a few phrases and spoke Slovak instead, believing she could get by with it and still cash in an honorarium.⁶¹ This anecdote represents a typical dimension of Polish-Czech-Slovak language issues. The linguistic proximity of Polish, Czech, and Slovak makes them sometimes mutually comprehensible. But frequently people overestimated the level to which they actually could communicate with the Slavic neighbors, leading in turn to even more laughable misunderstandings, such as confusing the Polish word for “west” (*zachód*) with Czech “toilet” (*záchod*, whereas “west” is *západ*). According to the reports, however, the children got along just fine.

⁶⁰ Margarete Guschke, Informationsbericht zur Durchführung des Kinder-und Jugendaustausches mit der VR Polen (B-Gruppen), 13 August 1987, LHAB, Rep. 943/1036.

⁶¹ Janina Wunderlich, Sprawozdanie z pobytu delegacji ZHP na Międzynarodowym Obozie Pionierskim CSRS w Secz, [no date], MHAR, C I 7/M/101.

Youth and Politics

Although playing soccer, volleyball, or swimming in a lake did not require any advanced understanding of foreign languages, discussions of politics or Marxism-Leninism could hardly take place without the mastery of German, Czech, Polish, or Russian. As one participant of the 1978 international summer camp in the Pioneer Republic Wilhelm Pieck, a showcase FDJ campsite near Berlin, wrote, the delegations from all over the Bloc had to give a short presentation on the children's contribution to socialism in their homelands. Every group "presented in its mother tongue, but it was still understandable to everyone else."⁶² To be sure, as Alexei Yurchak argues, the performative aspects of real-existing socialism rendered the content of political proclamations subsumed to the "form of the ideological representations, [which] became fixed and replicated—unchanged from one context to the next."⁶³ Moreover, belonging to the same generation and growing up in relatively similar conditions of late socialism, the children "shared particular understandings, meanings, and processes" of politics regardless of the language they spoke.⁶⁴ Focused on the USSR, Yurchak's study, however, is built on the specific premise that the "last Soviet generation" came of age entirely during Brezhnev's stagnation period and had "not experienced any major transformations of the Soviet system and way of life until perestroika," which allowed them easily to recognize and to perform the "reproduction of the forms."⁶⁵

⁶² [Journal of the Potsdam delegation to the CIMEA International Summer Camp in the Pionierrepublik Wilhelm Pieck in July 1978], LHAB, Rep. 543/1254.

⁶³ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, *Everything was Forever*, 32.

The same applies to the GDR, which besides relatively minor course corrections from Ulbricht to Honecker, was not rocked by any serious upheavals. In the case of Czechoslovakia, Prague Spring and the subsequent invasion did constitute a transformative experience, but one that in the late 1970s and 1980s could be remembered only by older teenagers and young adults. “Husák’s Children” born in the 1970s, on the other hand, internalized the performative discourse of the “normalization” era, which in a way made them more akin to their Soviet or East German peers. The Polish “last generation” is more problematic as it did witness not only the creation of Solidarity and Martial Law, but also the upheavals of 1976 and the election of John Paul II, which brought the Catholic Church into the public sphere even more prominently. The changing political discourse, therefore, rendered Polish youth an outlier in the Bloc, preferring apolitical activities or even openly challenging political performances.

Differing approaches to conceptualizing the exchanges characterized the cooperation between the Polish youth movements on the one hand and the FDJ and SSM on the other. To illustrate the laxity of vacation programming offered by the FSZMP, a Czechoslovak group leader devoted a whole paragraph in his write-up, betraying surprise at what he and his pupils experienced. “The main feature of the camp was the liberty of the daily agendas. The set elements were the reveille, exercise, breakfast, and minor activities, which left plenty of free time for the participants.”⁶⁶ As a result, the pioneers could set their own schedules. “You want to do something interesting? Go for it. You want to swim in the sea and tan on the beach? You got it. You don’t want to go on an excursion? Then stay and play.” This model of vacationing had ambivalent reactions. The children enjoyed the freedom to choose those activities that interested them, making it a satisfying experience. The counselors, however, considered this freedom to be

⁶⁶ Jaroslav Kovář, *Naše děti v Polsku*, 22 September 1972, SOA-M, Spolana/38.

organizational and pedagogical chaos, not being able to supervise all that was going on directly. As the earlier example of the scouting camp in Skrudzina exemplifies, the FDJ-ler, being used to clear-cut agendas for the day, likewise found it refreshing to be able to set their own schedules and to feel more independence while in Poland.

On the other hand, Poles saw the East German system as too rigid, which reinforced mutual stereotypes. The FDJ organizers filled in the time with group activities aimed at exerting direct control over the participants, as Katherine Verdery's theory of "time etatization" presupposes.⁶⁷ Too much free time could leave room for unsanctioned actions and result in social, political, or national conflicts, which the organizers wanted to avoid. It angered the FDJ functionaries when "in spite of the agreed-upon conditions... Polish delegations suggest[ed] subjective changes to the program."⁶⁸ For the pioneers, these changes pertained to allocating more free time to relax, but for older groups, such as university student delegations, "the Polish side wanted receptions and parties," while the Germans needed "strictly to adhere to the laid-out agendas."⁶⁹ The GDR organizers were particularly taken aback by the Polish youth's desire to allow time for Mass on Sundays. Although one such request raised many eyebrows in the Cottbus FDJ headquarters, the teenagers received permission to attend church, which was located about seven miles from where they were staying. They had to figure out how to get there on their own.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38-57.

⁶⁸ FDJ-Internationale Verbindungen, *Hauptergebnisse der Entwicklung der dezentralen Beziehungen*, [no date], DY 24/10566.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, as well as Auster, *Information zum Kinder-und Jugendaustausch VR Polen- 1. Durchgang Aufnahme Lager Erholung und Arbeit*, 13 July 1987, LHAB, Rep. 943/1037.

⁷⁰ Winzer, *Abschlußbericht der Lehrlingsgruppen*, 28 July 1978, LHAB, Rep. 943/1036.

In the wake of the border closure between Poland and the GDR in October 1980 and the Martial Law that lasted from December 1981 until July 1983, decentralized cooperation of youth movements was suspended. Upon the initiative of the Warsaw regime, which wanted to break away from isolation in the Bloc, the children exchange resumed the following year to the satisfaction of the East German side because it alleviated some of the pressure to organize vacation for more people. The FDJ even proposed an increase in the numbers of children exchanged to 300,000 by 1985.⁷¹ Discussing the goals and methods of the reinvigorated cooperation, the FDJ directives stated that fundamental for preparing the children's vacation camps was the "creation of a cordial and friendly atmosphere" that would help the "enormous societal task of achieving the political goals" of the exchanges.⁷²

These explicitly-stated goals aimed to "consolidate the unity and coherence of the socialist community under the principles of Marxism-Leninism." Implied there was the burden that the East German state and its youth took upon themselves to show Poland a good model of socialist governance. Toward this end, the directive specified, it was important for the local FDJ units carefully to "consider what we want to show our guests in our homeland." On the other side, the FDJ had to pay particular attention to the programming of stays in Poland, which should focus on presenting the neighboring country to the East German children in the best light possible. As a result, the visits to Poland tended to avoid politically controversial discussions and focused instead on the development of major cities and natural landscapes. In contrast, Poles coming to the GDR encountered even more subtle political education.

⁷¹ Lektion zur Vorbereitung der Kinder- und Jugendaustausches zwischen der DDR und VRP im Jahre 1985, [no date], BArch-Berlin, DY 24/21644.

⁷² Ibid.

Beyond the usual fun and games, the FDJ placed even greater stress than before on showing factories, housing developments, and collective farms to Polish youth. Summarizing the 1987 summer experiences, the Central Committee of the FDJ stated proudly that “Polish children and young adults absorbed the development of the Unity of Economic and Social Policy (*Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik*) in the GDR with attention and appreciation.”⁷³ Allegedly, the Polish youth praised the progress in housing construction as well as the successful and efficient harvests that “secure the dynamic economic growth.” More genuine seems to be the claim that the children “were impressed yet again with the excellent supply of goods” in East German stores. Admittedly, some young people, especially older youth who believed in communism or were leaders in their unions, took great interest in this information. But it is hard to imagine that children cared much for the achievements of the GDR, even if they might have been impressed with what they saw. As a ZHP supervisor in the CSSR observed during one welcome ceremony, the speeches went on for too long, “ten minutes each. A marathon. Boredom crept in very quickly. The Czechoslovak pioneers were yawning and ours were not happy either.”⁷⁴

Seeing that the adults in Poland became more apolitical in the 1980s and broke with the performative script, Polish adolescents similarly sought escapes from ideology. Membership in the ZSMP at the time dropped below 30 percent of the young population.⁷⁵ The Catholic Church was ready to fill this gap and offer alternative ways of organizing time for children. Events in parishes, pilgrimages, and religion classes attracted ever more young Poles. Involving children

⁷³ Jürgen Hönow, Bericht des Zentralrats der FDJ über den Kinder- und Jugendaustausch zwischen der DDR und der VRP im Jahr 1987, 15 September 1987, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/11643.

⁷⁴ Jerzy Miller, Notatnik Instruktora przy Ambasadzie PRL w Pradze, 1976-1980, 9 October 1977, MHAR, ZHL/333, 65.

⁷⁵ DDR Botschaft Warschau, Zur Lage in der polnischen Jugend, 30 December 1987, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/21644.

and teenagers into the ecclesiastical activities was a clear and planned battle for the minds and souls, as well as “for the future of the Church and the nation,” as the internal circular of the Curia indicates.⁷⁶ One particular way of inserting itself into the socialist monopoly on youth care, the Church wanted to exploit the historical connections between itself and the ZHP, which dating back to the 1920s had strong traditions combining nationalist and Catholic agendas. When an Altenburger FDJ functionary was seeking to renew the contacts with Nowy Sącz after 1989, he received a strong warning not from the ZHP, but from the translator of the letter.⁷⁷ Writing on her own initiative, the translator did not know if the ZHP leaders would ever write anything back or what answer would they give him: “The new chief is very careful. As you know the ZHP from among all of the youth unions always shifted to the right and since 1980 it was even more pronounced. At this point, there is no more unity.... It will survive, but not with the old people and not in the leftist course.”⁷⁸

Even if the FDJ counselor from Altenburg did not realize the changing dynamics in the ZHP, the East German leadership did and grew increasingly concerned about the future of socialism in Poland. In December 1987, the GDR Embassy in Warsaw compiled an exhaustive report “On the situation of Polish youth” for the SED Politburo. Analyzing youth participation in the unions, in recent voting, as well as sociological studies and surveys that emerged, the envoys to Poland painted an alarming picture. While 56 percent of Polish 16-26 year-olds supported socialism, the rest either expressed dissatisfaction with the system or completely rejected it.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ DDR Botschaft Warschau, Zur Jugendseelsorge der römisch-katholischen Kirche, 4 December 1986, DY 24/21644.

⁷⁷ Andreas Hänse to ZHP Nowy Sacz, 3 September 1990, TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 153.

⁷⁸ Anna Wawrzyniak to Andreas Hängse, [no date], TSA-A, FDJ-Kreisleitung Altenburg 71, 155.

⁷⁹ DDR Botschaft Warschau, Zur Lage in der polnischen Jugend, 30 December 1987, BArch-Berlin, DY 24/21644.

These attitudes were allegedly the result of increasing “egoism” characterized by limiting interest in “social issues to the matters of personal material wellbeing.” A quarter of polled youngsters saw any “perspectives for better life only in emigration to capitalist countries.” Rising inflation, continued rationing of basic goods, and a shortage of housing did not make life in People’s Poland appealing, so to the East German analysts, the core of the problem lay in the inefficiency of the Jaruzelski regime in implementing a socialist course of action, such as that in the GDR.

Indeed, the political and ideological weaknesses of the Polish youth were of utmost concern. The resigned attitude toward politics was exemplified by the all-time low 32 percent turnout among young people at the polls in the November elections for the Sejm. The understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory and its application in practice was only “sporadic” among the students.⁸⁰ “The Party and youth movements had little success in changing this situation.” Instead, as the embassy points out, “more pronounced are the efforts at appealing to the patriotic feelings, in order to win over the youth for the socialist cause... because of this internationalist aspects are not always awarded their appropriate importance and nationalistic exaltations are not infrequent.” The SED regime’s worry about socialism in the neighboring country, however, was only partly motivated by broader ideas of Bloc unity. More importantly, the rulers in East Berlin fretted over their own youth, which similarly but to a lesser extent showed signs of distancing from the system. As Anna Saunders argues in her study of the GDR’s last generation, in the 1980s young people there also expressed dissatisfaction with real existing socialism and the methods of the SED governance, but “the fundamental principles of socialism, even amongst some groups, such as punks,” had been questioned only by a few.⁸¹ Similarly to

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Saunders, *Honecker’s Children*, 101.

Poland, however, young people in East Germany began to reject “socialist patriotism” in favor of alternative models of national identity stemming from right-wing ideas, environmental groups, religious teachings, or the capitalist West.⁸²

Conclusion

The socialist youth unions and their leaders without a doubt wanted to give the young people what they thought was best, to return to the Bulgarian counselor’s words with which this chapter started. FDJ, FSZMP, as well as SSM all shared the desire to offer their children and young adults an attractive way of spending time, to teach them to appreciate cultural differences, and all along to mold their sense of socialist patriotism. Where the national unions differed was the prioritization of these individual elements and the methods of realizing them. While the more ideologically orthodox East Germans and Czechoslovaks put greater stress on political engagement and rigorous time management, Polish pedagogues found that self-reliance and independence among the youth were developed better in unstructured settings. Sometimes a clash of these ideas angered the partners from abroad, but at other times it proved effective in teaching diversity. More importantly, however, these differences highlight the plurality of approaches to education within the Bloc, both suggesting a lack of homogeneity as well as promising varying results for the upbringing of the younger generation. By the late 1980s, the Polish ideas did not align with the FDJ’s unshaken belief in communism even more pronouncedly, contributing to the eventual swift disintegration of the Bloc.

The camp counselors might have treated the children of all nationalities like their own, but the distinction between Germans, Czechs, and Poles was very clear. The focus on patriotic

⁸² Ibid., 104.

education aimed to instill a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to one's homeland. The international programs were structured in such a way as to facilitate and to exhibit one's national pride. At the same time, however, the combination of socialist patriotism and internationalist solidarity ascertained that the exchanges left room for the appreciation of difference. Therefore, it appears that the socialist youth organizations worked with the premise that a secure attachment to the homeland was a necessary prerequisite for Bloc integration. A lot of the evidence from the children's experiences suggests that this model of internationalist education functioned well. Especially on an individual level, the young generation of Bloc citizens in great numbers got acquainted with someone from abroad. These relationships made the foreign lands less abstract and actually personified through the friendships made at the camps. Therefore, the robust youth exchanges in the last two decades of state socialism had the potential to contribute to a better understanding among the Central European nations.

As the subsequent history of the 1990s shows, however, that was not the case. Instead of continuing the cooperation among themselves, the attention of Central Europeans shifted to the West, where travel was no longer inhibited and greater economic potential attracted the young people. Moreover, the absence of the dampening impact of socialist solidarity on nationalism and the ensuing problems with economic transformation left Poles, Eastern Germans, Czechs, and Slovaks bitter and seeking comfort in right-wing traditions. To be sure, the communist reliance on nationality and patriotism contributed to that phenomenon. Since national identity played such a crucial role in contacts with foreigners, it left an imprint on the younger population, who internalized patriotic elements much better than the Marxist-Leninist ones. Additionally, as Anna Saunders shows in her study of the FDJ, the East German regime might have wished to have a monopoly on identity formation, but in reality, alternative influences, such as values learned at

home, in religious settings, or from Western culture, held more sway over young people.⁸³ For this reason, a growing number of FDJ members began to challenge the official version of patriotism in the late 1980s. Polish and Czechoslovak youth did the same.⁸⁴

Was this all for naught, then? No. The caesura of 1989 clearly affected the development of internationalism and relations among the former socialist neighbors. Old ties no longer held and creating new ones was problematic. Not only was there little willingness to pursue “good neighborly relations” with Germany at first, but also the freedom to confront the past without socialist censorship renewed conflicts over memory.⁸⁵ The first step, therefore, was to assure reconciliation between the neighbors, and only then to develop partnerships and actively to partake in the European integration project in the early 2000s.⁸⁶ By that time, the last socialist generation were approaching their thirties and forties and entered leadership positions, making it possible to reinstitute regional cooperation and dialogue within the Central European neighborhood. As the more recent developments indicate, however, the partnership in the former Eastern Bloc is still fragile. The challenges of the early twenty-first century, including the 2008 recession, the migration crisis, the EU’s policy assertiveness, and aggressive Russian foreign policy, brought nationalist sentiments to the fore again, polarizing domestic public opinion and destabilizing integration with broader Europe.

⁸³ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁴ For the Czech case of turning toward environmentalism as an alternative, see Christiane Brenner, “Mnoho odstínů zelené: Hnutí Brontosaurus v Socialistickém svazu mládeže Československa,” *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 10 (2/2018): 72-84.

⁸⁵ Katarzyna Kačka, “Dyplomacja symboli w stosunkach między Polską a Niemcami na przełomie XX i XXI wieku,” *Historia i polityka* 18 (2015): 75-91.

⁸⁶ E.g. Adam Hołub, “Stosunki polsko-niemieckie,” in Wojciech T. Modzelewski (ed.), *Polska wobec sąsiadów. Współczesne stosunki polityczne* (Olsztyn: INP UWM, 2009), 171-190; Vladimír Goněc, “From the Pro-Europeanism To the Euro-Realism? Czech and Slovak Experience 1989-2004-2014,” *Modelling the New Europe* 15 (2015):108-131.

CHAPTER 8 – FROM FRIENDSHIP TO ENMITY

Jan Macura, a Czechoslovak citizen of Polish nationality, lived all of his hard life in Ropice, a village on the two countries' border in the Cieszyn/Těšín region of Silesia.¹ Born in 1924, Macura witnessed multiple regime changes in his town, from Czechoslovak to Polish, German, and finally to communist Czechoslovakia, which separated his family, with some relatives remaining in the CSSR and others in Poland. Just like most people of mixed background in this region, Macura had a pass that enabled him to cross the frontier at will and after 1977 a personal ID card sufficed to move back-and-forth freely. For half-a-century families in the borderlands could visit each without any problems. As he recalled, “the border closed only twice—in October 1956 and August 1968. But after five days or so, everything came back to normal.”

All of that changed in the fall of 1980. The Macura family could not reunite for the funeral of the youngest brother, a wedding, and the oldest sibling's seventieth birthday. All along, Macura bitterly watched how Polish guest workers entered and left the CSSR even during Martial Law. On his and other Cieszyn people's behalf, Macura penned two long letters to Wojciech Jaruzelski and Gustáv Husák asking, if “the situation in Poland has normalized and bilateral relations [with the CSSR] are very good, as the press and television report,” then why could “the families on both sides not visit each other?”

¹ Jan Macura to Wojciech Jaruzelski, 22 August 1986, IPN BU 1594/537.

This chapter aims to answer Macura's question more comprehensively than the official response he received from Jaruzelski's cabinet. In just one paragraph, the Passport Bureau explained that the travel "limitations resulted from a unilateral action of the Czechoslovak powers. The Polish government, even at the time of Martial Law, did not employ any measures prohibiting Czechoslovak citizens from entering Poland (...) but is seriously engaged in negotiations aimed at returning to regulations from before 13 December 1981."² Although the Czechoslovak and East German decisions to close the borders in 1980 and 1981 are indisputable, to what extent was the Jaruzelski regime actually committed to reopening the borders? If, as Macura mentioned, the state media touted positive relations between the neighboring states, then why did the negotiations not yield any positive progress five years after the crisis? Lastly, if the Polish officials were eager to place the blame for the situation on the neighbor, how does it reflect the state of socialist integration in the 1980s?

Intra-bloc relations in the 1980s have not received extensive attention in the scholarship. Historians as well as political scientists have tended to focus on Solidarity and Martial Law's impact on Poland.³ As a derivative, foreign reactions to and interactions with Poland at the beginning of the decade fascinated scholars of political, social, economic, and security issues.⁴ The topic of oppositional contacts across the borders also resulted in several studies that

² Biuro Paszportów to Jan Macura, October 1986, IPN BU 1594/537.

³ Among the more recent works, see Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Andrzej Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe* (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2015), Antoni Dudek and Krzysztof Madej, *Świadectwa stanu wojennego: Relacje i wspomnienia* (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), and Hartmut Kühn, *Das Jahrzehnt der Solidarność: Die politische Geschichte Polens 1980-1990* (Leipzig: Basis, 1999).

⁴ The most robust collection of studies on this topic is Paweł Jaworski and Łukasz Kamiński (eds.), *Świat wobec Solidarności, 1980-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2013) and in German Konstantin Hermann (ed.), *Die DDR und die Solidarność: Ausgewählte Aspekte einer Beziehung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2013).

overwhelmingly agree on the increase in communication among dissidents in the 1980s, but also point out the limitations of their cooperation that resulted from national and ideological differences.⁵ The 1989 literature, while robust and multifaceted in its interpretations, looks for the causes of the communist demise in each country separately, in the foreign policy of Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union, or in the influences of the West.⁶ Acknowledging the importance of Soviet pressure (or lack thereof), Western meddling in East European affairs, as well as the role of popular dissent in delegitimizing real-existing socialism, this chapter offers an analysis of the political dynamics between the satellite states in the 1980s to explain how by the end of the decade, communist leaders abandoned internationalist pretensions that had held the Bloc together in the previous decades.

An exploration of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry's documents, in particular the diplomatic reports from Poland and East Germany, leads to the conclusion that neither of the neighbors considered the regime in Warsaw a politically and economically reliable partner. Although Prague and East Berlin were willing to resume cooperation in areas such as trade, labor exports, and industrial technology relatively quickly, they rejected Polish overtures to relax their border policies once again. Indeed, the issue of transnational mobility was the key element that soured the relations among the three countries. After a decade of passport-and-visa-free travel, this model of border crossing had become a customary right rather than a privilege. Suddenly

⁵ E.g., Tomáš Vilímek *Solidarita napříč hranicemi: opozice v ČSSR a NDR po roce 1968* (Prague: Vysehrad, 2010); Piotr Zariczny, *Opozycja w NRD i w PRL – wzajemne relacje i oceny* (Gdańsk: ECS, 2013), Erhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1997), and Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁶ E.g. Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (eds.), *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), Mark Kramer, "The Demise of the Soviet Bloc," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, (4/2011): 788-854, and Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

removing it upset the Polish population, which in turn pressured the PZPR leadership to relax its passport policy further. Stonewalled by the “brotherly parties” in the East who feared that the “revolutionary bacillus” would spread to their countries and the impoverished Poles would deplete the local markets, Jaruzelski increasingly allowed travel to the West.⁷ Observing this development, the SED and KSČ developed additional suspicions about the situation in Poland, waging a customs war on Poles in transit from Austria, West Germany, and West Berlin.

The spiraling antagonism among the ruling elites not only left Poland isolated in the Bloc but also pushed East Germany and Czechoslovakia into a closer union. With a shared antireformist mindset, the two states continued the integration project. Both noted a sharp increase in travel, which strained their budgets by the end of the decade. Nonetheless, travel in the Bloc for East German citizens remained an important pressure valve for the deteriorating social and political mood. Only on 4 October 1989 with the Hungarian piece of the Iron Curtain dismantled and mass escapes to the FRG through the Prague embassy did the last passport-free border between the GDR and CSSR close. The move was the *coup de grace* for the Bloc. In agony since 1980/81, by the fall of 1989 Czechoslovakia and East Germany had a diminishing number of allies with Poland and Hungary already beginning their transformations. Without the Soviet Union’s support for their hardline policies, Erich Honecker and Gustáv Husák were removed from power and the new leaderships of Egon Krenz and Miloš Jakeš had to navigate the domestic situation instead of engaging in Bloc politics.

Therefore, this chapter argues that the Solidarity crisis in Poland did not engender the breakup of the Bloc directly, but rather brought to light the structural problems of socialist integration. The cooperation hinged on trust, which the PZPR lost in the 1980s by pursuing

⁷ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2012), 333-335.

ineffective economic reforms, opening to the West, and allowing nationalist tendencies to rise to the surface. The chapter will begin with an analysis of the Bloc states' perceptions of Poland and its leadership in order to illustrate the diminishing trust in the leading role of the PZPR, which in turn assured the German and Czechoslovak communists in the apparent correctness of their approaches. The following section posits that the CSSR and GDR, motivated by their own self-preservation, proceeded very cautiously with Poland and only half-heartedly attempted to reintegrate their neighbor into the socialist community. It was a stark departure from the policies the communist leaders had pursued after 1968, when the new socialist integration aimed to bind Czechoslovakia into the Bloc after Prague Spring. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the continuing cooperation between East Germany and Czechoslovakia to show that both regimes were invested in the integration project, but could not overcome the challenges they faced by the end of the decade.

Something's Rotten in Poland

The analysis from 31 August 1980 penned by the East German ambassador to Poland, Günther Sieber, influenced the SED's perceptions of the Polish crisis. Writing at the moment of signing the August Agreements, Sieber notes that "the permission to found independent trade unions was the victory of counterrevolutionary forces and a tremendous defeat for the PZPR."⁸ In an alarmist tone, the East German diplomat predicted "the most profound deformation of the socialist system in all of Polish development." To support his thesis, Sieber pointed to the disintegration of numerous Elementary Party Units (POP) across the country and their inefficacy

⁸ Günther Sieber, "Politische Evolution der VRP zwischen dem IV und V Plenum des ZK der PVAP," 31 August 1980, in Michael Kubina and Manfred Wilke (eds.) *"Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen: " Geheimakten der SED-Führung über die Unterdrückung der polnischen Demokratiebewegung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 51-56.

in preventing strikes; “the predictable and primitive” removal from power of Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz; and the possibility of limited censorship, which would allow the publishing of antisocialist programs and fully delegitimize the Party. The threat to the “leading role of the Party” was of particular concern. Sieber incorrectly foresaw that Stefan Olszowski, a Politburo member and the unofficial leader of PZPR’s conservative wing, would take over the premiership. Olszowski, however, refused to become the face of a failing movement and also in several days voted to elect Stanisław Kania the General Secretary of the PZPR.⁹ The picture of the situation that reached East Berlin in late August, therefore, was disastrous but not completely hopeless.

The hardline influence that Olszowski and Jaruzelski could exert on the PZPR sounded promising to the neighboring parties. Both Honecker and Husák urged the Polish communists to overcome internal divisions and to proceed repairing the mistakes of the past. Toward that end, the KSČ boss delivered a lengthy monologue during his 15 September conversation with Olszowski in Prague, in which he continued to draw comparisons between the current situation and 1968.¹⁰ “Without wanting to impose his opinions” on the Polish leadership, Husák offered Olszowski his lessons from the previous decades. In addition to purging the Party of reformist members, fixing economic problems, and consolidating power in the hands of orthodox Marxist-Leninists, the most daunting task was “educating the people.” The renewed KSČ “had to squash anti-Soviet opinions... and force internationalism in the CSSR.” When mass protests erupted on the first anniversary of the Warsaw Pact intervention in August 1969, “they were put down by

⁹ Przemysław Gasztold, *Towarzysze z betonu: Dogmatyzm w PZPR, 1980-1990* (Warsaw: IPN, 2019), 75-78.

¹⁰ Protokół spotkania Gustava Husaka ze Stefanem Olszowskim, 15 September 1980, published in Łukasz Kamiński, et al. *Przed i po 13. grudnia: Państwa bloku wschodniego wobec kryzysu w PRL, 1980-1982* vol. 1 (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), 60-75.

the security forces, police, and military within three days.¹¹ Since then, nobody in Czechoslovakia has the courage to take to the streets and foment similar problems.” Although the Gensek admitted that “the times are different now” and the Polish case was more complicated, he believed that even this crisis could be overcome and offered help if needed.

When the Supreme Court in Warsaw legalized the functioning of the first independent trade union “Solidarity” on 10 October 1980, it also delivered to the East German and Czechoslovak leadership proof that Polish communists were incapable of dealing with the crisis. At the 6 September PZPR Politburo meeting, Kania was elected General Secretary unanimously because neither Jaruzelski nor Olszowski wanted to fulfill that function at that particular time. As a result, the leader of the “patriotic” wing of the Party pursued policies of minimizing the confrontation with the workers and keeping both reformist and conservative comrades from taking any decisive action, seeing them as “equally dangerous.”¹² It worried the SED and KSC dogmatists that even the highest representatives of the PZPR began to trivialize the threat stemming from an organization that called for economic and political reform of the system.

During a 13 November 1980 meeting with František Hanáček, the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Berlin, his Polish counterpart Tadeusz Sznurkowski defended his Party’s position. According to Sznurkowski, PZPR’s concessions to the opposition “were not about counterrevolution. It was about correcting the mistakes caused earlier by the party and the state.”¹³ This self-criticism, or more precisely the criticism of the already-departed Edward Gierek, was on the one hand an assertion that the Party controls the country’s development, even

¹¹ Ibid. During the demonstration in August 1969, five people were killed. For more details see Oldřich Tůma, “Ein Jahr danach: Das Ende des Prager Frühlings im August 1969” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 46 (8/1998): 720-732.

¹² Gasztold, *Towarzysze*, 76 and 86.

¹³ František Hanáček, *Záznam o rozhovoru*, 13 November 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.17.

if in reality it did not. On the other hand, it was an attempt at prostrating in front of the neighboring hardliners who were eager to use the Warsaw Pact forces to intervene in Poland, as chapter four has shown in more detail.

To convince the Czech diplomat further that the situation was not serious, Sznurkowski reported on the conciliatory stance of the Catholic hierarchy in Poland. He asserted that the “Church is not interested in worsening the political and economic situation” out of care for the well-being of the workers, even though it did support the Solidarity petitions.¹⁴ Referring to the homily preached by Cardinal Primate Stefan Wyszyński on 26 August 1980, Sznurkowski relayed only the part of the message that fit his narrative. The Cardinal indeed agreed that “the [strikers’] demands are righteous and legitimate, but it is never so, that everything can be done at once.”¹⁵ The subsequent communique of the Conference of Bishops posited that with the regime’s “guarantees to agree to the [twenty-one demands of the workers], the strikes should end and the functioning of the national economy and peaceful social life could return to normal.”¹⁶ As the historian of Polish Church-state relations Jan Żaryn found out, however, the censored media did not transmit the concluding remarks of the cardinal’s speech. Wyszyński underscored once more the need for peace and diligent work, “but in order to fulfill these tasks, we must have national, moral, social, cultural, and economic sovereignty.”¹⁷ The role of the Church in the Solidarity crisis, therefore, was ambiguous, most likely led by the intent not to alienate either

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stefan Wyszyński, homily, Częstochowa, 26 August 1980, Archiwum Polskiego Radia, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/87,Wyszynski/1169,Homilie-i-przemowienia>.

¹⁶ Komunikat 176. Konferencji Plenarnej Episkopatu Polski, 17 October 1980, in Jan Żaryn (ed.) *Komunikaty Konferencji Episkopatu Polski 1945-2000* (Poznań: Pallottinum, 2006), 235-236.

¹⁷ Quoted after Jan Żaryn, “Państwo-Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1956-1989” in Krzysztof Persak and Paweł Machcewicz, *Polski Wiek XX* vol. 4, (Warsaw: MHP, 2010), 79-80.

side. Wyszyński's realpolitical approach to the conflict was guided by the fears that too quick of a reform could indeed lead to foreign intervention and armed conflict, as he expressed in his last meeting with Gierek.¹⁸ Prague and East Berlin, however, did not trust the moderating influence of the Church and regarded it as the source of the problems.

Disappointed with the powerlessness of the PZPR, Honecker and Husák resorted to the Kremlin in the hope of affecting change. The appointment of Wojciech Jaruzelski to the premiership in February 1981 was received with some satisfaction, but the General quickly disillusioned the allies because of his support for Kania and additional concessions to Solidarity. Honecker lobbied in Moscow for an intervention that would place a conservative in power. At an ad hoc meeting between Honecker, Husák, and Brezhnev on 16 May 1981, the East German Gensek bitterly remarked that "the CPSU, KSČ, and SED have given the current PZPR leadership a lot of advice. Comrades Kania and Jaruzelski agreed with it... [but] not only did they not apply [the advice], rather they contributed to a violent destruction of the party and state apparatus."¹⁹ Honecker recalled that a few days before, "Jaruzelski said he [was] ready to give up his post. Well, one could grant him his wish." The question remained of who would fill his position. Honecker offered a list of four names that included his favorites, Olszowski and Andrzej Żabiński, a member of the Central Committee, as potential conservative and reliable First Secretary and Premier. Meanwhile, Brezhnev "saw no real personalities" in the PZPR worthy of trust and "no other path than strengthening the present leaders and applying [Soviet] pressure on them."

¹⁸ Ibid., 79.

¹⁹ Vermerk über das Treffen der Genossen Leonid Brezhnev, Erich Honecker und Gustav Husak am 16. Mai 1981 im Kreml, 16 May 1981, published in Kubina and Wilke, *Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen*, 270-276.

The inconclusive outcome of the conversation shed light on the internal Bloc dynamics. All of Poland's neighbors, including the Soviet Union, had very little faith in not only the Kania-Jaruzelski tandem, but also all of the PZPR higher echelons which could not produce an effective leader. Similarly, they all agreed that outside pressure was necessary to motivate the PZPR to act decisively against the "counterrevolution." The discrepancy appears, however, in the methods. Honecker, already dampened in his desire to intervene in Poland militarily, which "according to the Warsaw Pact was his right," agreed to Brezhnev's pragmatic and peaceful approach.²⁰ As the CPSU chief suggested, "all leverages are to be used," which included economic pressures from the Soviet Union and diplomatic maneuvers to influence the events inside PZPR. Honecker took the directive to heart and embarked on a campaign of meddling in Polish affairs. Filip Gańczak in his recent article details how in the months between the May meeting in the Kremlin and Jaruzelski's election to the First Secretariat in October, the East German communists and security apparatus effectively established contacts with numerous Voivodship Central Committees to force their will onto the PZPR.²¹

The SED's machinations, however, did not bring the expected results and in due time proved to be counterproductive. Although the MfS and SED politicians talked extensively with regional PZPR leaders and even received promises of support for Olszowski, at the IV Plenum of the CC PZPR Jaruzelski was elected with an overwhelming majority of 180 to 4 votes. This failure of East German influence can be blamed on the Soviets, who directly told Kania right

²⁰ On Brezhnev's distaste for confrontational policies see Donald J. Raleigh, "'Soviet' Man of Peace: Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev and His Diaries," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17 (4/2016): 837-868.

²¹ On the East German meddling in Polish politics between August 1980 and December 1981 see Filip Gańczak, "Walka o przywództwo w PZPR w roku 1981 w dokumentach aparatu władzy Niemieckiej Republiki Demokratycznej" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* (2/2014): 321-340.

before the Plenum that Brezhnev preferred the General over anyone else.²² Once the word of this decision spread around, the conservatives with whom the SED was scheming reverted to their instincts and followed the Soviet wishes. Jaruzelski himself was reluctant to take over the top post in Poland but understood that he faced strong opposition within the Party, as well as in the GDR. As a result, Jaruzelski demoted any conservative party functionary who had had contact with the East German organs because he did not want the return of an orthodox ideology that could undermine his policies.²³ The experience of distrust from the western neighbor, therefore, determined the new Gensek's caution towards Honecker in the coming years.

Despite the introduction of Martial Law on 13 December 1981 and a decisive crackdown on Solidarity, East German and Czechoslovak opinion about the General did not change much. Political correctness and overlapping interests gave only an appearance of good cooperation. The telephone conversation between the Polish and East German bosses on 16 December 1981 indicated a turnaround in the relationship. Honecker assured Jaruzelski of his "strong alliance and high regard for [the General's] abilities to lead the fight."²⁴ While the SED and KSČ seemed satisfied with the brutal repression of striking workers and jailing of the opposition, they saw that very little was being done with regard to the consolidation of the PZPR. The idea of "Party renewal," which Jaruzelski pursued immediately after December 1981, sounded as threatening to the SED as the reviled concept of "revisionism."²⁵ Stasi reports from Poland between 1982-1988

²² Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs Honecker mit dem Sekretär des ZK KPdSU Konstantin Rusakov, 21 October 1981, published in Kubina and Wilke, *Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen*, 377-383, here 379.

²³ Cf. Gańczak, "Walka o przywództwo," 339, and Tytus Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń, której nie było: Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego NRD wobec MSW, 1974-1990* (Warsaw: WUW, 2014), 454.

²⁴ Niederschrift über ein Telefongespräch des Generalsekretärs Honecker mit dem Ersten Sekretär des ZK PVAP Jaruzelski, 16 December 1981, published in Kubina and Wilke, *Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen*, 392-393.

²⁵ Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń*, 425.

continuously informed about insufficient “ideological work” that could uproot the deep-seated revisionist tendencies plaguing the core of the PZPR.²⁶ Moreover, in April 1987 the General complained to Mikhail Gorbachev that “our friend Honecker has some beef with [him] and refused to meet.”²⁷ To Honecker, therefore, Jaruzelski was a hardliner in name only and so long as he stayed in power, the GDR could not revert to earlier forms of cooperation with Poland.

Poland’s Martial Law expired in July 1983, but beyond pushing Solidarity into the underground and victimizing thousands of people, it did not improve the image of Polish communists in the eyes of the brotherly parties. One telling example of the weakness of the PZPR functionaries figures in a conversation between the Czechoslovak General Consul in Katowice and Józef Gajewicz, the First Secretary of the Voivodship Committee in Cracow.²⁸ Preparing for the Pope’s second visit to Poland in June 1983, the diplomat asked how the preparations were going. After a lengthy summary of the security measures and details, Gajewicz began to complain about the pressure he was under and contemplated resigning. “Reacting to his statement, [J. Kromka] asked ‘who will fight for socialism in Poland then’? Gajewicz just shrugged his shoulders.” This attitude confirmed Honecker’s perception of communism in Poland. On numerous occasions he spoke of “defeatism” (*Kapitulamentum*) permeating the top, middle, and lower levels of the PZPR.²⁹ The resignation and loss of faith in the cause among the

²⁶ E.g. ZAIG, *Wocheneinschätzung*, 5 July 1982, BStU, MfS ZAIG 13320, 3.

²⁷ Zapis rozmowy sekretarza generalnego KC KPZR Michaiła Gorbaczowa z I sekretarzem KC PZPR gen. Wojciechem Jaruzelskim, 21 April 1987, published in Antoni Dudek (ed.), *Zmierzch dyktatury: Polska lat 1986-1989 w świetle dokumentów* vol. 1 (Warsaw: IPN, 2013), 123.

²⁸ J. Kromka, *Situácia v obvode GK pred príchodom pápeža*, 25 May 1983, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.16/ob.71.

²⁹ E.g. Vermerk über das Treffen der Genossen Leonid Brezhnev, Erich Honecker und Gustav Husak am 16. Mai 1981 im Kreml, 16 May 1981, published in Kubina and Wilke, *Hart und kompromisslos durchgreifen*, 283.

mid-level Party core was suggestive of the PZPR's poor health, which kept deteriorating over the next few years.

Searching for causes of the Polish Party's frailty, the neighbors isolated several factors. Soviet Consul General in Gdańsk Lev Vakhramayev theorized that the PZPR's inability to take action stemmed from poor support from the Polish working class, which he estimated to be "class conscious in only 20 percent."³⁰ The remainder of support comes from the villages, are young, unstable, and unprincipled." Any sort of political work teaching Marxism-Leninism would be hard and potentially counterproductive. Asked about the reasons for this situation, Vakhramayev posited that the "foreign tourism had a certain influence on the young people. Tourism developed very dynamically and led to consumerism, smuggling, and speculation." The Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw pointed to the Church's influence and estimated that "more than 65 percent of Party members are believing Catholics... and atheistic education remains one of the weakest elements of political work."³¹ Igor Basharin, the Soviet Consul in Szczecin, noted that the Jaruzelski regime altogether abandoned "class struggle as the foundation of communism" and used ideology "to replace real socialism with some kind of nationalist socialism."³² Finally, an East German envoy, Heinz Hanisch, argued in 1988 that the Party "only polemizes and theorizes without actually saying how to work and enforcing any work discipline."³³ As a result, the PZPR "let go of the leading role of the party and at this point hardly can repair the errors it has committed." Taken altogether, therefore, the PZPR was weak because

³⁰ Vasil Suchý, Záznam o rozhovoru, 12 February 1982, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

³¹ Informace o postupu konzolidačního procesu v ideologické oblasti v PLR, [1986], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.16/ob.76.

³² Milan Spáčil, Záznam o rozhovoru, 4 October 1985, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

³³ Imrich Sedlák, Záznam o rozhovoru, 17 November 1988, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

of the context in which it operated and developed. One could rhetorically ask then, how could the Party repair the errors without causing bloodshed?

The explanations for PZPR's failures, however, better reflect the mindset of the neighboring dogmatists than of Polish communists. Steeped in orthodoxy, they failed to recognize that by 1986 the Polish authorities were searching for a condominium with the opposition as a way of preserving any sort of hold on power.³⁴ In the fall of 1987, PZPR organized a referendum, in which the regime proposed "deep democratization" and the reintroduction of local government as well as profound economic change that aimed to expand the private sector.³⁵ Because of insufficient turnout (67%), even the overwhelming seventy percent "yes" vote rendered the plebiscite inconclusive.

This slap in the face of the ruling party, however, did not keep Jaruzelski from "seeking national understanding" and pluralizing social and political life on his and not on Solidarity's terms. Discussing the move with Kramec, the Szczecin PZPR First Secretary Stanisław Miśkiewicz and deputy to the Sejm defended the reform, "hoping that other countries of the Socialist Bloc will follow our lead, also you in Czechoslovakia."³⁶ Kramec reported that he frequently had to deflect questions about "Czechoslovak democratization, the influence of perestroika and glasnost, and the rehabilitation of Dubček" and distributed official clarifications (*poučenia*) of the KSC line to local press and Party committees.³⁷

³⁴ Gasztold, *Towarzysze*, 232.

³⁵ Cf. Notatka Zespołu Analiz MSW na temat ewentualnego przeprowadzenia referendum, September 1987, and Opracowanie Zespołu Analiz MSW na temat ewentualnego powołania nowych partii politycznych, 12 November 1987, both published in Dudek, *Zmierzch dyktatury*, 126-130; 133-139.

³⁶ Zoltán Kramec, *Záznam o rozhovoru*, 12 March 1988, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

³⁷ Zoltán Kramec, *Mienka a posudzovanie súčasnej vnútornej a zahraničnej politiky ČSSR obzvatelstvom funkcionarmi PĽR*, 12 July 1988, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.16/ob.72.

The reactions to Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost further prove the growing divide between Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia as well as the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's policies sounded ambivalent, initially calling for socialist unity, political, economic, and military cooperation, then changing to a more liberal course.³⁸ Deciphering the Soviet Gensek's intentions raised problems for the aging hardliners, who disagreed with the reforms. Debates over reforms led to Husák's replacement as the KSČ First Secretary in December 1987 by Miloš Jakeš, who favored economic changes but rejected political liberalization. Honecker, on the other hand, retained power but entered into conflict with the Soviet leader.³⁹ More importantly, the neighbors fretted over the fact that perestroika justified Jaruzelski's course and emboldened him to apply more drastic solutions. The CSSR Consul Kramec even noted in March 1987 that Polish media were creating a narrative that "it was precisely the events here that animated Gorbachev to institute changes in the USSR."⁴⁰ In the course of the decade, therefore, the Bloc underwent major transformations that corroded its unity. Because of the weakened relationships, Gorbachev and other satellite leaders pressed for the continuing importance of socialist internationalism and integration.⁴¹ How did it look in practice?

³⁸ Cf. Kramer, "The Demise of the Soviet Bloc," 796 and 800-819.

³⁹ For example, see the passive-aggressive exchange between Gorbachev and Honecker during the 16 July 1988 meeting of the Warsaw Pact Advisory Political Committee in Warsaw. *Zapis rozmów ze spotkania członków Doradczego Komitetu Politycznego Układu Warszawskiego*, 16 July 1988, published in Dudek, *Zmierzch dyktatury*, 269-290, here 278.

⁴⁰ Zoltán Kramec, *Záznam o rozhovoru*, 14 March 1987, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

⁴¹ Kramer, "The Demise of the Soviet Bloc," 796.

Excluded from Integration

The CSSR Foreign Ministry (FMZV) compiled in 1988 a set of “Plans and Main Tasks of Czechoslovak policy toward the Polish People’s Republic.”⁴² The document characterized the neighboring state as “complicated” in its development and a “prime example of how long-term and conscious policies of imperialism can weaken the socialist system.” During the period of consolidation after Martial Law, Poland got out of international isolation and rejoined the cooperation with the Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. But as the policy paper warned, “we should not underestimate the powers connected with the ideas of the 1970s, which prefer economic contacts with the West.” Despite this poor potential for further integration with Czechoslovakia, the FMZV, prodded by the Soviet Union, deemed it necessary to come up with “a new model of collaboration based on a deeper and rationally justified division of labor.” The result of this process was the creation of a “common socialist market” among all of the Comecon states. While the idea may sound appealing, the Czechoslovak administration could not propose any concrete suggestions that would make this “new model” work. In fact, the deteriorating economy in Poland with inflation jumping from 17.7 percent in 1986 to 60.2 percent in 1988 rendered Polish participation in the highly regulated Comecon financial system quite limited.

The Warsaw regime was certainly interested in economic cooperation because it hoped that with it the doors to the free movement of people within the Bloc could open again. The main challenge of the Polish economy in the 1980s was a stark imbalance in supply and demand. Rising wages did not increase productivity, but instead caused more shortages and extended the rationing of sugar (lifted in 1985), chocolate (1988), petroleum (January 1989), and meat (August 1989). Under these conditions, the black market grew to enormous proportions and as

⁴² J. Havlín and L. Hruža, *Zaměření a hlavní úkoly čs. zahraničné politiky vůči Polské lidové republice*, [1988], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.16/ob.72.

Jerzy Kochanowski argues, it significantly contributed to the growing inflation by hiking up prices on basic goods and establishing a quasi-market economy from the bottom-up.⁴³ If Edward Gierek in the 1970s had a motive to outsource shortages to the Socialist Bloc, as Mark Keck-Szajbel has posited, then it may appear that Jaruzelski saw it as a necessity in order to keep the population somewhat satisfied.⁴⁴ While it is a reasonable explanation for the diplomatic pressure to relax the border regime with the neighbors, it is also quite cynical. The general had a moral compass for his policies, even if at times it was a misguided one. Talking with Gorbachev in April 1987, for example, Jaruzelski considered the freedom of travel to be a part of “social justice” alongside welfare provisions, career aspirations, and wages.⁴⁵ The legacy of the open borders, therefore, lived on.

The Polish regime wanted to maintain open borders in the fall of 1980 and relentlessly lobbied for a return to the same privilege. In the immediate aftermath of the East German decision to suspend the agreement about passport-and-visa-free travel with Poland, the newly nominated Foreign Minister Józef Czyrek rushed to Prague to plead for restraint. “If you were to take similar measures like the GDR did,” Czyrek explained to the Deputy Minister Dušan Spáčil, “then a Polish citizen could travel without formalities only to Sweden.”⁴⁶ In the long conversation that immediately followed among the bureaucrats, the CSSR admitted that it feared oppositional contacts growing across the border as well as the economic repercussions of Poles’

⁴³ Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami: “Czarny rynek” w Polsce, 1944-1989* (Warsaw: ABC, 2015), 101-130.

⁴⁴ Mark Keck-Szajbel, “Shop around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border” in Bren and Neuberger, 375-390.

⁴⁵ Zapis rozmowy sekretarza generalnego KC KPZR Michaila Gorbaczowa z I sekretarzem KC PZPR gen. Wojciechem Jaruzelskim, 21 April 1987, published in Dudek, *Zmierzch dyktatury*, 118.

⁴⁶ Záznam o přijetí s. D. Spáčila ministrem zahraničních věcí PLR s. Josefem Czyrkem, 30 October 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.52.

shopping in their country during a time of political crisis at home.⁴⁷ The resulting compromise did not close the border, but forced Poland to minimize the selling of Czechoslovak currency to its citizens, effectively limiting the number of individual visitors. On 13 December 1981, Czechoslovak authorities fully closed the border to traffic with the exception of commuter guest workers, explaining this time that they “thought [they] were helping Polish comrades with bringing order in the country.”⁴⁸ The Military Council (WRON) indeed prohibited anyone from leaving Poland during the first ten weeks of Martial Law but did not officially seal the frontiers.⁴⁹ The neighbors had done it for them. By March 1982, the regime in Warsaw was ready to resume cross-border traffic.

While the East German regulations introduced in October 1980 were clear and required notarized invitations to leave or to enter the GDR and a recodified transit visa for people going to West Berlin or the FRG, the situation on the Polish-Czechoslovak border was “abnormal.”⁵⁰ There were no laws or regulations governing the frontier crossings. A de facto practice of notarized invitations serving as a prerequisite for mobility into the CSSR, which was in place in the first half of the 1970s, was reestablished but posed problems on the ground. Czechoslovak security forces noted many “abuses” of the invitation system. For example, Polish workers in the CSSR had their indigenous colleagues obtain the notarization, which they would then convey to their friends and families. Because no law existed, however, Czechoslovak controllers made

⁴⁷ Dušan Spáčil, Záznam z jednání, 3 November 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.52.

⁴⁸ Vladimír Kubát, Záznam o rozhovoru, 13 May 1982, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.52; and Záznam z porady, 7 May 1982, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.54.

⁴⁹ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949-1989* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 310.

⁵⁰ Zpráva k úpravě individuálního cestovního ruchu s PLR, 30 June 1982, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.54.

many Poles turn around, even if they had proper documentation.⁵¹ Passengers on the way to socialist Hungary or Bulgaria ended up in a gray zone because the 1977 agreement of open borders rescinded the need for a transit visa. Near-border traffic passes similarly became obsolete when personal ID cards enabled the crossing of the border, which placed families, like that of Jan Macura, in an inconvenient situation. The commuting laborers were the only ones untouched by the legislative debacle because they had their working papers and it was in the interest of the Czechoslovak state to keep them employed.

Unlike the GDR, the authorities in Prague did not want to introduce unilateral measures, which was a noble and effective gesture to the Polish comrades on the one hand, but initially stirred a conflict between them on the other. The reasons for the Czechoslovak insistence on negotiations are unclear. Based on the ministerial-level talks, one might speculate that the southern neighbors did not want to alienate the Poles in an East German manner and thereby sour the relations.⁵² When the Polish Embassy Prague official met with Spáčil in May 1982 to develop a common border regime, he conveyed the message that his government “does not need to offer any proposals because it never has made any changes” to the earlier agreements.⁵³ Wanting to pressure or to shame the Czechoslovak side, Polish diplomats continued to assert that as far as they were concerned, the 1977 passport-and-visa-free travel was still in effect. It seems surprising that the FMZV did not give up when the Polish counterparts exhibited such an uncompromising attitude in the matter. Only in early 1984 did the tone become more

⁵¹ Informacja dot. wymiany osobowej pomiędzy PRL a CSRS w okresie ostatnich dwóch lat, 29 June 1984, IPN BU 1594/537.

⁵² Cf. Záznam o přijetí s. D. Spáčila ministrem zahraničních věcí PLR s. Josefem Czyrkem, 30 October 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.52, and Zpráva o opatřeních ve věci cestovního ruchu mezi CSSR a PLR, [no date], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.54.

⁵³ Vladimír Kubát, Záznam o rozhovoru, 13 May 1982, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.52.

accommodating and the Poles accepted a rather strict set of entry policies that limited the number of visits, even for relatives, but—in the words of the Polish Passport Bureau—made the “southern border more humane.”⁵⁴

The brief *détente* did not mean, however, that the Polish authorities surrendered their goals. True to the promise given to Macura, they were notorious in seeking more liberalization. In the words of an SED functionary to a Czechoslovak diplomat, “Polish representatives of all ranks, during any meeting with the GDR, demand a renewal of regulations from before 1980.”⁵⁵ The East German side consequently refused any of these requests explaining that the “present situation was adequate to the needs... and that economic conditions in Poland do not speak in favor” of reopening the border. Faced with similar prodding, over time the Czechoslovak regime lessened some of the restrictions imposed in 1984, but also cited economic problems as the main reason for their hesitancy to return to passport-free travel.⁵⁶ Inasmuch as Poland’s neighbors did not agree to open borders, they did accept other forms of mobility, such as increased organized tourism and children’s exchanges (discussed in chapter 8), which significantly brought up the numbers of cross-border interactions. In terms of individual tourism (excluding transit) in 1986, about 900,000 Poles visited East Germany (compared to six million in 1980) and nearly 740,000 traveled to Czechoslovakia (down from 4.6 million in 1980). At the same time, tourism to Poland from either of these countries hovered at around half-a-million, another major drop from the previous years.

⁵⁴ Jerzy Kłosiński, *Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Polsce delegacji Biura Paszportów i Wiz MSW CSRS*, 10 July 1984, IPN BU 1594/537.

⁵⁵ Jaroslav Rejlek, *Záznam o návštěvě*, 25 February 1987, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.4/ob.24.

⁵⁶ *Informace o stavu a dalším postupu ve vzájemném cestovním ruchu CSSR-PLR*, [1987], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.54.

The Polish population's pressure on the borders was, therefore, substantial and the Jaruzelski regime could not ignore it. Since the Bloc countries, with the exception of Hungary, deemed Poland an economic and political leper, the PZPR increasingly opened to the West.⁵⁷ Czechoslovak diplomats noted already in 1984 that Jaruzelski pursued closer economic ties with the Scandinavian and West European countries, despite his promises of deeper Comecon integration.⁵⁸ Along with that, travel outside of the second world became relatively unhindered to those Poles who could pay for it. As Dariusz Stola's analysis shows, the number of rejections for a passport application dropped from 29 percent in 1982 to 7 percent in 1984, with the simultaneous increase in petitions by 50 percent.⁵⁹ A revolutionary move came in June 1988, when the PZPR regime issued instructions to the Passport Bureau to hand out the documents upon the citizens' request. Five months later, a new directive allowed the citizens to keep their passports and foreign currency at home, effectively ending the Polish state's control over cross-border mobility.⁶⁰ As some three million people rushed to West Germany, France, and Austria, however, they encountered another challenge in the form of hardline neighbors who did not appreciate their countries being used for transit between a nominally socialist Poland and the imperialist West. In order to alleviate the problem, an official announcement encouraged passengers to fly directly to their destinations using the now-expanded network of Lot Polish Airlines.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Haltung der Bruderstaaten zum Reiseverkehr mit der VRP, 1983, BStU, MfS ZAIG 4683, 104.

⁵⁸ E.g. Zoltán Kramec, Záznam o rozhovoru, 5 April 1984, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

⁵⁹ Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*, 333.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁶¹ Karol Placha-Hetman, *Historia Polskich Linii Lotniczych LOT, 1929-2009* (Cracow: Księży Młyn, 2018), 245.

Polish tourists commuting to and from the capitalist world posed an ideological and economic threat to the East German and Czechoslovak regimes. The establishment of “expatriate companies” (*firmy polonijne*) in 1984 legalized import-export business across the Iron Curtain and brought low-quality, but nevertheless “Western” products to Poland, which then could be sold-off to the socialist neighbors at higher prices.⁶² Moreover, as the Czechoslovak Consul in Szczecin learned, the expat companies gladly took up cooperation with local producers in Poland, imported raw materials, such as denim or electronics parts, from the West, and manufactured ready-to-use items already in socialist Poland.⁶³ The sale of lifestyle goods had been a profitable venture before then, but by the mid-decade the availability of this type of merchandise expanded the scope of this market. One of the witnesses of this trade scheme noted that even if Polish traders asked a minimum price, “they still make bank because [East] German women want to be fashionable and they cannot buy any of it in their own stores. The bestseller by far are jeans sewn in Łódź with labels of Western designers attached. The same thing goes for electronic watches.”⁶⁴ The East German Customs vehemently pursued the lifestyle goods traders, but as the petitions and complaints against their measures indicate, the citizens did not give up easily on their consumerist dreams.⁶⁵

In order to stem the black-market activities and to discourage Poles from traveling in transit, the neighboring states heightened customs proceedings, not only exacting the local laws but also going beyond the call of duty. In October 1988, the Polish Consul General in Ostrava

⁶² See Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 364-365.

⁶³ Zoltán Kramec, *Záznam o rozhovoru*, 3 April 1984, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.51.

⁶⁴ Wojciech Faściszewski, “Przemysł,” *Sprawy i Ludzie* 4/1984, quoted in Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 364.

⁶⁵ E.g. Gerhard Stauch, *Analyse der Bearbeitung von Eingaben*, 31 July 1985, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/3289.

reported “new facts and phenomena” happening in Czechoslovak Silesia.⁶⁶ The local security forces, VB, apprehended Polish citizens at random, especially those suspected of going to or returning from Austria. Unlawfully, the authorities confiscated all of their belongings, escorted them to the Polish border, and in several instances fined them for trumped-up charges of illegal trade, who nevertheless attracted hordes of Czech and Slovak customers. The consul likewise noted an increase in the number of “pseudo-tourist-traders” in Ostrava. Instead of explicitly condemning their actions as he probably would have done a decade ago, he took pity on them and intervened with the local KSC leadership on their behalf. Since the diplomat’s interventions did not amount to much and police actions against Polish nationals constituted harassment, “it would be wise to consider reciprocal measures” against Czechoslovak citizens in Poland. Judging by the markings on the document, the readers in Warsaw did not pay much attention to the Consul’s suggestions and focused more on informing the citizens travelling to the CSSR of its strict laws. Nevertheless, the report from Ostrava reveals deteriorating relations and a nascent conflict.

A customs war in the Soviet Bloc erupted three weeks later. Responding to the increase in Polish trader tourists, on 15 November 1988 the CSSR announced an embargo on the export of 366 types of goods.⁶⁷ Three days later, the GDR introduced a similarly long list of items prohibited from export. Even if they were excessive, the new customs limitations can be understood as a protective measure against shoppers buying local products. Nevertheless, these embargoes also applied to transit. If anyone travelling from Austria or West Germany could not provide a sufficient proof of sale, all of their foreign products were lost. Even if they could

⁶⁶ Jan Mielcarek, Notatka dot. nasilających się w ostatnich tygodniach zatrzyman polskich turystów w okręgu konsularnym Konsulatu Generalnego w Ostrawie, 24 October 1988, IPN, BU 1616/458, 24.

⁶⁷ Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 372.

produce the receipts, though, the arbitrariness of the customs officials did not guarantee positive results. Back at home, the state and the media talked about “national discrimination.”⁶⁸ The Foreign Ministry in Warsaw summoned the ambassadors of both states to clarify the situation, but instead of the expected results, Poles experienced even more thorough controlling on their western and southern borders.⁶⁹ By the end of the month, Warsaw counterattacked with its own “defense of the internal market” and targeted East German and Czechoslovak citizens with reciprocal actions. With diplomatic relations at a nadir and preparations for the Round Table discussions already underway, the Polish communists might have wished to remain a part of the Bloc, but the Bloc did not want a liberalizing Poland.

Lone Wolves

With Poland in turmoil, East German and Czechoslovak comrades continued their cooperation alone. The understanding between the two states, both located on the frontiers of the imperialist West, ebbed and flowed in the first thirty years of their existence.⁷⁰ In the 1940s, the Klement Gottwald regime had serious misgivings about an alliance with a German state, but the instructions from the Kremlin said otherwise. As long as the two neighbors pursued steady, conservative policies, their relations developed smoothly. Problems began to arise in the 1960s, when Antonín Novotný flirted with West Germany bypassing the GDR, and crashed during Prague Spring. Husák’s “normalization” in Czechoslovakia again established communist orthodoxy. The integration of the 1970s, as one of its aims, wanted to bring the CSSR back into

⁶⁸ E.g. “Nie mile widziany gość,” *Trybuna Ludu*, 18 November 1988, 3.

⁶⁹ Notatka informacyjna n.t. przeciwdziałania wywozowi towarów przez turystów zagranicznych, 1 December 1988, AAN, 18/125, 5.

⁷⁰ Volker Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1969* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010).

the fold. The Prague regime's opening of the border with East Germany in January 1972 shows that it considered East Berlin a more reliable partner than Warsaw. After 1980, this attitude was proven correct. A big test for the GDR-CSSR friendship came in the forms of the progressing economic crisis, political reform from outside, and social pressures from within.

Relatively similar economic standards and political ideals made the East German-Czechoslovak cooperation possible. Even though instances of smuggling and speculation plagued the passport-free travel between these two states as well, neither of the partners considered the phenomenon significant. As Adam Havlík suggests in his article on the black market in the CSSR and GDR, tourists from both countries dealt mostly in Western currencies and luxury products, unlike Polish shoppers who bought items destined for domestic mass consumption.⁷¹ For this reason, whenever the East German or Czechoslovak Customs tightened their export allowances, they also secretly assured the other side that “the recently issued regulations [did] not apply” to GDR or CSSR citizens.⁷² Nevertheless, the smuggling of foreign currencies, West German press, and music cassettes across the Bohemian border rose by about one quarter in 1982.⁷³ This change can be attributed to the shifting traffic pattern after the closure of the eastern border. Polish “exports” of subversive materials ceased, but the demand for them did not diminish, animating the lifestyle goods exchange between East Germany and Czechoslovakia instead.

⁷¹ Adam Havlík, “Od pouliční šmeliny ke ‘strýčkům ze Západu:’ Černý trh pozdního socialismu v česko-německém kontextu,” *Soudobé Dějiny* (3/2014): 340-363.

⁷² E.g. Information, 5 December 1981, BArch-Berlin, DL 203/2563.

⁷³ Übersicht zu ausgewählten Ergebnissen im paß- und visafreien Reiseverkehr an der Staatsgrenze zur CSSR, 15 April 1982, BArch-Berlin, DL203/2563.

Quite unrealistic was the East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer's prediction that the border closure to Poland "will not increase the tourist traffic from the GDR to CSSR."⁷⁴ During the November 1980 meeting between the highest East German diplomat and his Czechoslovak counterpart Bohuslav Chňoupek, the two discussed their stance toward Poland and the future development of their mutual tourism. Fischer seemed skeptical of Prague's negotiations with and concessions to Warsaw, but "asked not to be understood as the instigator of steps against Poland." In fact, it was in his interests that the Czechoslovaks and Poles maintained decent relations because he hoped that East German citizens could still use passport-free regulations to enter the CSSR through the Polish mountains. At that point, however, he also did not know how the situation would develop in the future and that Poland would be as unaccommodating as the GDR. Nevertheless, the flow of tourists from East Germany to Czechoslovakia skyrocketed. Whereas in the late 1970s until 1981 the number of GDR citizens travelling to the CSSR hovered at around four million per year, by 1986 it had doubled to 8.5 million.⁷⁵

The problem hidden behind this growth was a financial one. While German visits to Czechoslovakia surpassed all expectations, the traffic in the opposite direction remained stable at around 2.5 million people per annum. In order to supply the East German population with Czechoslovak koruny, East Berlin annually requested more of the neighbor's currency, creating a negative account balance for the GDR. In 1987, Berlin received 2.3 billion kčs for these

⁷⁴ Záznam z jednání při pracovním setkání ministrů zahraničních věcí ČSSR a NDR, 5 November 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.17.

⁷⁵ Cf. Langner (Botschaft Prag), Kurz-Information über die Entwicklung des paß- und visafreien Reiseverkehr im Jahre 1981, January 1982, BStU, MfS Abt X 1442, 44-5, and Informace o stavu a dalším postupu zahraniční politiky NDR vůbec ČSSR, [1988], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.13.

purposes, but sold only 1.2 billion Kčs (400 million marks) to Prague.⁷⁶ As a result, the GDR was obligated to pay off its debt with additional deliveries of products or resources, “which it has been doing with great difficulty or simply does not have enough materials to cover” their negative balance. Responding to this situation posed a serious problem to the rulers in East Berlin because they had not experienced this sort of crisis before. For the most part of the 1970s, they were the lenders, benefitting from the imbalance between Polish and East German tourists. The Polish payments, therefore, serviced the small debt that the GDR had with Czechoslovakia throughout the years. Even in the early 1980s, the GDR had a strong enough economy and surplus of production that could support the trips of four million of its citizens. It could not, however, afford any more than that.

The only reasonable solution, tested by Poland in the previous decade, was to limit the individuals’ access to foreign currency. The party-state apparatus understood that it could not allow for more exports to the CSSR as predicted in the five-year-plan if it wanted to maintain a “secure supply of goods on the domestic market.”⁷⁷ A balancing act of keeping the population satisfied with full store shelves on the one hand, and the ability to travel internationally on the other, led to an unpopular compromise. “In order to continue offering the possibility of individual tourism,” the central powers in East Berlin decided that effective 15 January 1988 each person could buy up to 1,320 Kčs (equivalent of 440 marks) per year. Similar reductions applied to travelers to Hungary, who could acquire only 2,300 forint (377 marks). The public

⁷⁶ Informace o stavu a dalším postupu zahraniční politiky NDR vůbec ČSSR, [1988], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.13.

⁷⁷ Erich Mielke, Politisch-operativ beachtenswerte Probleme im Zusammenhang mit der weiteren Entwicklung des Tourismus mit den sozialistischen Ländern, 6 January 1988, BStU, MfS RS 670, 33.

mostly reflected dissatisfaction and disappointment with the new regulations.⁷⁸ More dramatic was, however, the reaction of the comrades in Prague, who criticized the method of publicizing the reform. “The GDR used formulations that do not clearly explain the reasons for the limits and suggest instead that the ČSSR did not make more money accessible, whereas the truth is that the GDR cannot pay for its citizens’ travels.”⁷⁹ The events of January 1988, therefore, underscore the fact that East Germany was committed to cross-border mobility because it became a natural part of the welfare package the dictatorship had to offer. It also shows that despite the economic problems, the regime was not willing to consider reform.

At around the same time, the Czechoslovak party-state began to show signs of change. The KSČ formally launched its own economic reconstruction, *přestavba*, in March 1986, but no political reform followed.⁸⁰ Even though Miloš Jakeš replaced Husák in December 1987, he held on to his “normalizing” principles. Nevertheless, a subtle shift took place among some of the bureaucrats. In June 1987, Jozef Banáš, a Slovak writer who at that time served as the cultural attaché to the CSSR Embassy in East Berlin, authored a critical analysis of East German journalism.⁸¹ Banáš treaded a very thin line in his report, wanting to be both accurate and politically correct. He wrote, for example, “it is no secret that the [East German] society increasingly calls for the broadening of socialist democracy according to the Soviet pattern. The

⁷⁸ Information über die Durchführung der festgelegten Maßnahmen zur Durchsetzung der aus ökonomischen Gründen erlassenen Ausstattungssätze, 30 January 1988, BStU, MfS ZAIG 23074, 45.

⁷⁹ Informace o stavu a dalším postupu zahraniční politiky NDR vůbec ČSSR, [1988], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.13. The official announcement appeared in the GDR press (*Neues Deutschland*, *Berliner Zeitung*, and *Neue Zeit*) on 15 January as a short, three-paragraph statement printed in small font. Indeed, it did not address any causes for the limitations, but also did not explicitly indicate Czechoslovak complicity. See “Zum Valutaerwerb bei ČSSR- und Ungarn-Reisen,” *Neues Deutschland*, 15 January 1988, 2.

⁸⁰ Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2011).

⁸¹ Jozef Banáš, K súčasnej situácii v žurnalistike NDR, 22 June 1987, AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, NDR k.3/ob.16.

East German media does not manage to convince the citizens of the ignorant development in the USSR” because the people trusted Western broadcasters more. After talking with multiple journalists, Banáš noticed “split personalities: they mechanically write things that they get from the top, but they are conscious that none of it reflects reality.” The population lost respect for the domestic media because of this “uncritical self-praise” and “disproportionate glorification of E. Honecker.” The overall message of this report, therefore, points out the need to address political, economic, and social problems directly in order for the party to maintain its leading role. The KSC leadership did not heed the message and instead imploded from the pressure of the lower-level functionaries, organizations, and society.⁸²

The dissatisfaction with the regimes and oppositional activity surfaced in East Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1989, but the border remained open until early October. With the Hungarian decision to open the Iron Curtain in May and the Czechoslovak amendments to the “illegal border crossing” law, thousands of East Germans used the passport-free regulations to escape via the Socialist Bloc to Austria and then the Federal Republic.⁸³ Others sought refuge in the FRG’s embassies in Prague and Warsaw. In order to stem the exodus, the GDR unilaterally withdrew from the border agreement with Czechoslovakia and on 4 October reintroduced the passport and visa requirement for travel to and from all countries of the Bloc. At that point, the masses chanting “we want out” was a literal reference to a completely closed-off East Germany. Demonstrations in Leipzig, Dresden, Berlin, and other East German cities made it clear that the SED was required to change. When Egon Krenz finally replaced Honecker on 17 October, he

⁸² McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia*, 189-190.

⁸³ Trutkowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock*, 170-175.

sought to stabilize the situation. In early November, travel to other Bloc countries was allowed again, but it was a moot point as the citizens demanded freedom to go West.

Conclusion

While the events of 9 November 1989 symbolically stand for the fall of communism, the disintegration of the Socialist Bloc was completed several weeks before, when the regimes abandoned each other and focused on quelling domestic upheavals. This process began almost exactly nine years earlier. After the workers in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyards went on strike demanding fairness, economic reform, and self-representation, they exposed the structural weaknesses of the system that fragmented the Communist Party and eventually the whole Warsaw Pact. The East German and Czechoslovak regimes in particular feared that the “revolutionary bacillus” might spread to their countries and the impoverished Poles would deplete local markets if they sustained any form of contact. Closing their borders aimed to safeguard their own dictatorships, but in the end, it had the opposite effect. Stonewalled by the “brotherly parties” in the East, Jaruzelski increasingly engaged with the West, even allowing Polish citizens to travel there freely by mid-1988, and vigorously pursued perestroika reforms. The spiraling effect of the clash between a reformist mindset and orthodoxy drove a wedge between the old allies.

Jan Macura’s disrupted life is one of many examples illustrating the significance of the 1980/1981 caesura. He and millions of other people suffered because the ideological inflexibility of leaders and economic concerns prevented a constructive dialogue. The answer to Macura’s question with which this chapter started, therefore, lies in the distrust one country held toward the other. Relatives could not see each other across the borders because, as one Czechoslovak

diplomat phrased it, oftentimes “family visits were a mask for other purposes, so those family connections have to be proven.”⁸⁴ This was a stark change from the previous years when the regimes had let go of some of their control. The people quickly internalized the new freedoms, the reversal of which brought anger and disappointment, which finally boiled over at the end of the decade. As the case of East Germany shows, the leadership understood the importance of cross-border mobility and was willing to go into debt to maintain it for as long as it could.

The disintegration, however, was not inevitable. Jaruzelski was not a trojan horse of the West but a believing communist who wanted the system to survive. His constant pressure on East Germany and Czechoslovakia to resume cooperation at earlier levels, however, was as self-serving as the neighbors’ refusals. In turn, the CSSR and GDR offered different modes of integration, which were outdated, half-baked, and cautious. The attitudes of the Bloc leaders, therefore, changed tremendously over the course of a decade. When in 1968 Czechoslovakia struggled with its own crisis, the satellites not only came in with their militaries to squash the Prague Spring, but also sought to reintegrate the country into the socialist community. The result was a stable Husák dictatorship and—more importantly—an unprecedented level of interaction among the Bloc states and citizens. But in 1981 the neighbors shunned Poland and had to contend with it escaping the socialist sphere, which in turn suggests an abandonment of the internationalist communist principles that had held the Soviet Bloc together since 1949. As the next chapter will show, however, the comrades held onto a glimmer of hope that the next generation might revive the integration project.

⁸⁴ Informace o stavu a dalším postupu ve vzájemném cestovním ruchu CSSR-PLR, [1987], AMZV, TO-T 1980-1989, Polsko k.12/ob.54.

CHAPTER 9 – EPILOGUE

The New Year's Eve of 1989 was unlike the previous ones in the Eastern Bloc. On the one hand, most of the citizens were celebrating the year during which the communist era ended. On the other, they expressed anxiety over what 1990 would bring. The Czechoslovak *Rudé právo*, still functioning but under new conditions, wished its readers health, peace, and happiness, "and for all of us a mutual tolerance and understanding during the realization of democratic transformations."¹ Right below that message, the paper celebrated Václav Havel's election to the presidency and announced his visit to both German states in early January. The East German media published Hans Modrow's statement that shared similar sentiments.² A somewhat more liberated Polish press discussed ideas for celebrating the evening, ranking the different balls and calculating the rising costs of having fun. Starting on 1 January, the newspapers announced, the prices for electricity, gas, heat, and water were going up by 400 percent.³ Entering the new era of democracy and capitalism, therefore, seemed both exciting and frightening. But what remained of socialist integration in this new time?

What endured was nationalism unbridled by communist internationalism. This study concludes that despite the propagandistic veil thrown over it, socialist patriotism shaped the people's mutual interactions, undermined state cooperation, and finally tore the Bloc apart. New

¹ *Rudé právo*, 30 December 1989, 1.

² "Botschaft zum neuen Jahr: Mut zu Verantwortungsbewußtem Handeln ist die erste Bürgerpflicht," *Neues Deutschland*, 30 December 1989, 1-2.

³ Cf. front pages of *Trybuna Robotnicza*, 29 December 1989 and 2 January 1990.

socialist integration sprang from grander ambitions of Comecon's economic cooperation and Soviet nudging for Bloc unity, but also served national self-interests. As a check against the East German rapprochement with West Germany during Willi Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the Polish regime, already under Gomułka, pondered closer integration of the GDR into the Bloc as a protective measure.⁴ Similarly, post-Prague Spring Czechoslovakia had to be brought back into the fold so as to facilitate its own internal "normalization." Nevertheless, concerned about the national economy, the CSSR leadership only reluctantly opened the border with the GDR in 1972 and waited five years to do the same with Poland. Lastly, the SED comrades sought to stabilize their own dictatorship further by offering international travel, not to the desired West, but to the brotherly East.

The resulting cooperation in the 1970s had its successes and shortcomings, but by no means was predestined to fail.⁵ The millions of people who entered into contact with one another for the first time since 1945 had a chance to convince themselves that their old enemies might become friends. Personal relationships with other nationals, therefore, played a significant role in the reconciliation process. Unfortunately, many others perpetuated national and historical stereotypes within a new context, most frequently associated with consumption and work ethic. The interaction between the excesses of invasive trader-tourists and the perception of these smugglers threatening the local supplies contributed to the transnational tensions. It also underscored the challenges of open borders between dictatorial shortage economies that easily blamed the foreigners for the problems instead of admitting their own guilt. Nonetheless,

⁴ Volker Zimmermann, *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: Die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1969* (Düsseldorf: Klartext, 2010), 549.

⁵ Cf. Dominik Trutkowski, *Der geteilte Ostblock: Die Grenzen der SBZ/DDR zu Polen und der Tschechoslowakei* (Cologne: Böhlen, 2011), 180.

overcoming the issues of product availability prompted grassroots international cooperation among some smugglers who became the “pioneers of the free market.”⁶ Similarly, dissidents in the second half of the 1970s began to internationalize their activities, while they were still fighting predominantly in their own countries. New socialist integration also helped the Bloc economically with the generous Polish exports of its workforce to the GDR and CSSR, even if each state wanted to reap as much profit for itself as possible.

When the neighboring states closed their borders to Poland in 1980 or 1981, the workers could still pass even though both the SED and the KSČ stopped trusting the Polish people and the regime. The isolation of Poland in the 1980s highlighted, therefore, the loss of idealistic motivations replaced by instinct of self-preservation of orthodox regimes in a rapidly changing environment. In contrast to the Prague Spring, between 1980-1989 the Bloc states did very little to reintegrate the problematic satellite back into the orbit because at that point the political risk of doing so would have been too high. In the end, this neglect was a good thing because the enigmatic Jaruzelski could pursue his own nationalist-socialist policies, implement Gorbachev-like reforms, and eventually negotiate the exit strategy with Solidarity, while the unbending hardliners like Honecker and Husák were ousted from power by their own comrades. Even if their successors wanted to reform the system and to make it more livable, the support base, especially among the younger generation, was no longer there. Youth were the biggest losers of a stagnating system that offered them few prospects for the future, but they were also the biggest beneficiaries of and contributors to socialist integration. The internationalist education better

⁶ The term used by Jerzy Kochanowski, “Pionierzy wolnego rynku? Nieoficjalna wymiana handlowa między społeczeństwami krajów socjalistycznych w latach 70-80-tych,” in Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski (eds.), *Bocznymi drogami: Nieoficjalne kontakty społeczeństw socjalistycznych, 1956-1989* (Warsaw: Trio, 2010): 109-144.

equipped them for dialogue, but it imparted nationalist tendencies that prompted them to look inward.

The lofty idea of “bringing the peoples of socialist community closer to one another” animated the leaders of Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia to implement policies, for which neither the states, their economies, nor the populations were ready. Sudden opening of the borders between nationalities with fresh memories of war, occupation, and expulsion could hardly serve as an antidote for the nationalist discourse propagated by the communists for several decades. Even when the people overcame the initial prejudices and the quantity and quality of cross-border interactions began to rise after a few years, unequal economic development in the three countries undermined the previous gains. Warsaw and East Berlin did not account for the shortcomings of the planned economy, which was not suited for internationalization and was ill-prepared to respond to the recession creeping in from the West. Ad hoc regulations meant to stabilize the process, but instead bred confusion and frustration. As long as there was will on all sides to overcome the challenges, integration worked. But over time, that desire diminished.

Although the leaders of the newly-democratic countries recognized the ties among the neighboring countries from shared values, aspirations, and even similar challenges, they quickly backed down from the old treaties and agreements to pursue their goals independently. These goals included both the successful domestic transition and careful foreign policy decisions. “Returning to Europe” oriented Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany toward the West, but it had to be done without alienating the Soviets—eventually the Russians—in the East. The opening to the West, especially to Germany, reopened the wounds of the past through discussions about war reparations and restitutions for the expulsions, which hurt national pride. Similarly, a search for condominium with Russia enlivened patriotic feelings, particularly among

Poles. Uneven development between the GDR, now supported by the wealthy FRG, and its neighbors fueled economic resentments. Czech and Slovak differences resulted in the 1993 Velvet Divorce. Once all the members met their initial goal of joining the EU, the Visegrad Four began to cooperate again in areas such as energy security, defense, and economics, but in recent years they also have worked in unison to challenge the rest of the continent.

Shared Goals, Separate Ways

Four days after becoming Czechoslovakia's President, Václav Havel signaled the importance of Central European relations by travelling to the neighboring states. In early January, his first visit to East Berlin then to Munich indicated how important Germany was to independent Czechoslovakia. The rushed trip to the Germanies was largely symbolic, focused on initiating a dialogue with the SED and *Neues Forum* in the East as well as the Helmut Kohl government and the opposition parties in the West. The problems of reunification as well as the historical wounds of Nazism and expulsions dominated the conversations.⁷ The delegation to Poland on 25 January had much more pomp and substance. Havel was invited to lay wreaths and to speak in a joint session of the *Sejm*. Conversing in private with Wojciech Jaruzelski, they talked about all and sundry topics, from national stereotypes such as "Polish saber-rattling" and "Czech beer and sausage," or the economic transformation to the problems of the past and future.⁸ Of his own initiative, the Polish general mentioned Prague Spring as a "personal matter" since he served at that time as the defense minister. Just short of actually apologizing for the

⁷ Ralf Fücks, "Demokratische Verlangsamung: Nach dem Besuch des tschechoslowakischen Staatspräsidenten Havel in der DDR und der BRD," *taz. die tageszeitung*, 4 January 1990, 10. Also see a diary entry from 2 January 1990 on <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/cs/index/novinky>.

⁸ Notatka informacyjna o przebiegu i wynikach oficjalnej wizyty Prezydenta CSRS Vaclava Havla w Polsce (25.1.1990), 2 February 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

Warsaw Pact invasion, Jaruzelski explained the decision-making process among the Polish authorities and blamed it on “disinformation” and Gomułka’s fears of West German revisionism. Unlike the question of the Munich conference and Nazi aggression, however, to Havel the issue of 1968 “was not a priority... we need to look to the future, not the past.”

The future was deeply linked to the present. Preparing for his visit to Moscow, Havel asked Jaruzelski for tips about Gorbachev, wondering whether “some writer who just became a president of a ‘satellite’” would be taken seriously. Despite Havel’s overall skillful politicking, the inquiry betrayed a certain fear of the Soviet leader, a carryover from the old days, and doubt about positive Czechoslovak-Soviet relations. Jaruzelski assured his younger colleague that Gorbachev “easily makes connections with people who were on the other side of the barricades. In fact, he is on the other side himself.... Today we are talking in the spirit of ‘new thinking’ and visions of a common European home... in this sense you may be closer to him than many Soviet functionaries.” As an example of good relations, the general pointed to the experience of the Polish Solidarity Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. After his first foreign trip to the Vatican in October 1989, which allowed for consultations with the Polish Pope, Mazowiecki went to Moscow. There, he obtained not only Soviet documents and the acceptance of responsibility for the 1940 Katyn Massacre, but also guarantees of Soviet help against potential German revisionism following reunification. In return, the Polish Premier assured Gorbachev of friendly relations toward the USSR, as well as continued cooperation in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon.⁹

⁹ Michał Szukała, “30 lat temu premier Tadeusz Mazowiecki rozpoczął wizytę w ZSRS,” 22 November 2019, *Dzieje: Portal historyczny*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/30-lat-temu-premier-tadeusz-mazowiecki-rozpoznal-wizyte-w-zsrs>.

During Havel's trip to Warsaw, one of the leading questions was, in the context of the Soviet crisis and potential German reunification, "What's next for Comecon?"¹⁰ Mazowiecki argued for a gradual reform of cooperation, especially with regard to payments, which now operated under free-market conditions and transferable currencies. Poland and Czechoslovakia were highly reliant on Soviet oil and gas, the prices of which were no longer subsidized but calculated based on world market fluctuations. Havel worried that the slow transformation of Comecon cooperation might "tie the hands of faster-progressing countries" and that continuing integration with the Soviet Union "might inhibit our return to Europe." Mazowiecki and the Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski responded quite cynically that "integration is verbalism." The Soviets were more interested in a speedy setup of hard currency payments and the maintenance of economic relations with Central Europe, especially because of its increasing connections with the West. Therefore, the outlook for the Comecon and the Bloc overall seemed positive in early 1990. There was a general consensus about further cooperation among the former satellites, but it would take place under a different set of globalization rules, which made the economic organization dysfunctional and obsolete. At the 28 June 1991 Budapest Comecon conference, few opposed its dissolution, especially since the Warsaw Pact had disbanded four months before.¹¹

Another goal of Havel's visit to Warsaw was a discussion about a Central European "return to Europe." A common ambition of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and also Hungary, it could not have been realized without solid economic and political foundations. Jaruzelski appeared to

¹⁰ Spotkanie Vaclava Havla z Tadeuszem Mazowieckim 25. stycznia 1990, 2 February 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

¹¹ E.g. Laurien Crump and Simon Godard, "Reassessing Communist International Organizations: A Comparative Analysis of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in relation to their Cold War Competitors," *Contemporary European History* 27 (1/2018): 85-109.

have been ideologically in tune with Havel, who saw socialism not “as a system but as a set of moral values.”¹² Both statesmen criticized the Western “inequality between rich and poor, thoughtless consumption, and hedonism.” Jaruzelski added that “we are quite backward in many respects [in comparison to the West], but our return to Europe should happen without any masochistic complexes. Our nations have values that we must bring with us to the new Europe.” Central Europe’s low self-esteem, nevertheless, accompanied the whole process in the coming years, but in order to avoid it, they agreed that the “return” to Europe should be “coordinated.”¹³ The Polish idea for this coordination used the Benelux countries as an example. Their “regional union preceded the Common Market” and proved to be a successful model of economic collaboration. That argument found Havel’s support since he himself spoke of a “mini-integration” among Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, and as such, the triad could negotiate with the Soviets and the West from a stronger position. Meanwhile, the GDR was disappearing through German reunification.

Toward the end of realizing these mutual goals, Havel invited Polish and Hungarian representatives to Bratislava on 9 April 1990. The meeting led to the creation of a loose political alliance and “an ad-hoc regionalist” initiative meant to be a vehicle towards the EU.¹⁴ The Visegrad Group, alluding to the medieval congress of Czech, Hungarian, and Polish kings held at the Visegrad castle, was established in February 1991. Until 2004 the group focused on democratization efforts, decommunization, and the upholding of human rights—all elements necessary for membership in the Western club. While these vaguely-formulated aims provided a

¹² Notatka informacyjna o przebiegu i wynikach oficjalnej wizyty Prezydenta CSRS Vaclava Havla w Polsce (25.1.1990), 2 February 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

¹³ Spotkanie Vaclava Havla z Tadeuszem Mazowieckim 25. stycznia 1990, 2 February 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

¹⁴ Aliaksei Kazharski, “An ad hoc Regionalism? The Visegrád Four in the “Post-Liberal” Age,” *Polity* 52 (2/2020): 250–272.

loose outline of tasks they did not help to foster closer cooperation in any particular way.¹⁵ The only successful form of integration pertained to the economy. The signing of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) in December 1992 eliminated tariffs among the member states and contributed to a modest increase in mutual trade of 14 percent per year. The rosy picture, however, was muddled by disputes over subsidies to agriculture, which the Polish government employed to achieve an unfair advantage. Politically, rifts appeared when Slovakia, now an independent state, joined the Visegrad Four in 1993 and upset the consensus with Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar's pro-Russian, corrupt, and antidemocratic style. The Czech Premier Václav Klaus also weakened the V4 by "seeing no value in it for the Czech Republic."¹⁶ Hence, a promising restart of integration was soon dampened by conflicting interests.

It seemed that until the start of the new century, the neighbors were going in the same direction, but each of them proceeded separately. Václav Havel's grand ambitions for Central European cooperation dissolved into thin air because the more important goal of "rejoining Europe" took precedence and nationalist inclinations favored direct links with the West rather than with the "poor man's club."¹⁷ When Czechoslovakia and East Germany were relaxing their border regimes to passport-less travel, the government in Warsaw seethed with envy.¹⁸ Whereas Havel, his Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier, and other idealistic former dissidents who had participated in the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity under communism voiced no objections, Prague economists and liberals rejected similar petitions from Poland and even disagreed to

¹⁵ Monika Ślufińska and Agnieszka Anna Nitszke "Activities of the Visegrad Group in the context of the CFSP of the EU," *Historia i Polityka* 22 (2017): 9-27.

¹⁶ "Zastrzeżenia czeskiego premiera do Grupy Wyszehradzkiej," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 January 1993.

¹⁷ Vincent John Ella, "The Visegrad Countries of Central Europe - Integration or Isolation," *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 89 (1993): 229-269.

¹⁸ Włodzimierz Mokrzyński, Szyfrogram z Pragi 0-1877, 12 February 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

reinstitute the near-border tourist convention from 1955. Officially, they cited market imbalance as the reason, but off the record Czechoslovaks were anxious about “nationality issues and incidents of hostility” stemming from historical, economic, and ethnic conflicts.¹⁹ By 1992, even the Czech-German relationship cooled off when Bonn did not agree to condemn the Munich Agreement and Prague refused to consider reparations to the Sudeten Germans expelled after the war.²⁰

German reunification in October 1990 changed the landscape of the old Bloc completely. For Poland, the GDR served as a bulwark against presumed imperialist West German aggression that could reclaim its territories east of the Oder-Neisse Line. The “Two-Plus-Four” negotiations, therefore, hinged on German recognition of the postwar borders, which despite the passage of time still abounded in drama.²¹ Nonetheless, both Poland and Czechoslovakia needed good relations with the new Germany in order to join the EU. The revived case of restitutions for Germans expelled from former Prussia and Sudetenland, most vocally advocated by Erika Steinbach and the *Bund der Vertriebenen*, complicated the path to rapprochement.²² The reunification and collapse of the Soviet-dominated Bloc reawakened the *Mitteleuropa* concept, which envisioned Central Europe under German hegemony. Even though this was the case economically, as Germany was the biggest trading partner of all of the Visegrad countries since

¹⁹ K. Szumski, Notatka informacyjna, 1 March 1990, IPN, BU 1594/537.

²⁰ Marcin Czyżniewski, “Widmo przeszłości a współczesne stosunki czesko-niemieckie,” *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny* 4 (2011): 33-54.

²¹ Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff, *Germany's Foreign Policy Towards Poland and the Czech Republic: Ostpolitik Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2005), 51-54.

²² Dave Graham, “Angela Merkel's foreign policy headache, Erika Steinbach,” *Reuters*, 19 November 2009, <https://cn.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSTRE5AH2BO2009111>.

1994, there were no political or social preconditions for such a geopolitical alliance.²³ Escaping from the Soviet yoke, each nation sought sovereignty and independence. As eastern Germany turned firmly to the west, it left many discontents of the transition who rebelled in the form of xenophobic attacks and neo-Nazi traditions.²⁴ At that point, it was clear that the socialist transmission of internationalist values had not been fully successful.

Internationalism also failed in Czechoslovakia. Though an unpopular move according to polls, the binational state ceased to exist on 1 January 1993.²⁵ Nationalist motives did not play a direct role in this decision as only a tenth of the population supported the separation by voting for radical parties. Instead, uneven development between the Czech lands and Slovakia, the legacy of “Pragocentrism” dominating the political landscape for decades, and political expediency of the respective Premiers Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar pushed the electorate to vote for those parties that benefitted from independence. Klaus’ neoliberally conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Mečiar’s populist People’s Party (ĽS-HZDS) that won the June 1992 federal elections with unquestionable plurality presented different visions for the future of Czechoslovakia that were irreconcilable. Moreover, as Abby Innes argues, neither of the factions saw any incentives in keeping Czechoslovakia alive.²⁶ After almost three decades of separation, the opinions about the move vary from nostalgic longing to—in Mečiar’s words—helping “to like each other better than before.”²⁷ As a recent online survey determined, nearly

²³ CESTAT, “Statistical Bulletin,” 1998, 1.

²⁴ Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 264-265.

²⁵ Abby Innes, *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁷ “Rozpad Československa byl nevyhnutelný, mezi Čechy a Slováky bylo napětí, shodli se Klaus a Mečiar. Teď se máme radši než dřív, tvrdí,” *Hospodářské noviny* 11 December 2017, <https://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-65987020-rozpad->

half of Czechs and Slovaks “feel at home” in the other state and a bigger majority describes Czecho-Slovak relations as excellent.²⁸

Return to Cooperation

The achievement of the goals of joining NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004 opened room for actual cooperation among the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia, even if in recent years the Visegrad Four appear to join forces against Brussels. The creation of the V4’s International Fund in 2000 enabled numerous transborder projects in the cultural, educational, scientific, and tourist realms. One example is the “Coalition for Clean Beskids,” a grassroots Czecho-Polish environmental initiative that organizes “trash-pick-up trips” in the Beskid Mountains and hosts seminars, picnics, and film screenings predominantly for youth from both states.²⁹ The border towns, once a forbidding landscape, became booming centers of tourism, trade, and culture, such as Bad Elster in Saxony. German and Czech localities worked for several years to bring this old spa town into the greatness it had not seen since the days of Beethoven, welcoming tens of thousands of visitors per year as of 2016.³⁰ The Polish-German European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, founded in 1991, did not perform well until a combined boost of money from Warsaw and Berlin allowed it to garner more attention and higher

ceskoslovenska-byl-nevyhnutelny-mez-ic-ehy-a-slovak-lylo-napeti-shodli-se-klaus-a-meciar-ted-se-mame-radsinez-driv-tvrđi.

²⁸ Martin Novák, “A ted’ opravdu: Co si o nás myslí Slováci a my o nich?,” *aktuálně.cz*, 1 November 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/a-ted-opravdu-co-si-o-nas-mysli-slovaci-a-my-o-nich/r~i:article:681557/>.

²⁹ Jan Walczak, “Inicjatywy społeczno-kulturalne na pograniczu polsko-czeskim po 1989 r. a dziedzictwo Solidarności Polsko-Czechosłowackiej,” *Zeszyty Naukowe DWSTP* 4 (2011):107-129; 121.

³⁰ Jana Safarikova, “Kurorte an der deutsch-tschechischen Grenze,” *Deutschlandfunk*, 14 October 2018, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/baden-ohne-grenzen-kurorte-an-der-deutsch-tschechischen.942.de.html?dram:article_id=430384.

enrollments in 2005.³¹ Nevertheless, the open borders that returned to the region with the Schengen agreement in 2007 also opened doors for some illegal activity ranging from crystal meth production, to theft, to the smuggling of unvaccinated kittens as Christmas gifts.³²

The economic recession of 2008, migration crisis, and anxieties of globalization, as well as a host of other factors, brought to power populist right-wing governments such as that of Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland and Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic. Although generally pro-European, the V4 in the past decade openly challenged EU rules and directives, most famously the refugee quotas that would have allocated Middle Eastern migrants to Central Europe. On this topic, many eastern Germans are closer to their old Socialist Bloc allies than their own government in Berlin.³³ The Russo-German gas pipeline “Nordstream,” which bypassed the countries in between, raised not only historical concerns of Russian and German collusion above the heads of Poles, but also questions of energy security. As a response, the Three-Seas-Initiative developed in 2016 aims to construct alternative gas supplies for Central Europe from the Polish Baltic, Croatian Adriatic, and Bulgarian Black Sea coasts.³⁴ In the wake of the COVID crisis, the V4 spoke in unison against the proposed EU recovery package that would have favored larger,

³¹ Tytus Jaskułowski, "Stosunki Polski z Niemcami," *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* (1/2006): 97.

³² E.g. Martin Lutz, "Offene Grenzen erfreuen besonders Kriminelle," *Die Welt*, 12 February 2012; Volkmar Kabisch, "Giftküchen an der Grenze," *Der Spiegel*, 6 December 2013, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/kampf-gegen-die-droge-crystal-meth-an-der-deutsch-tschechischen-grenze-a-875994.html>; "Illegaler Transport von Katzenbabys aufgedeckt," *Märkische Allgemeine*, 12 December 2016, <https://www.maz-online.de/Nachrichten/Panorama/Illegaler-Transport-von-Katzenbabys-aufgedeckt>.

³³ "AfD wirbt um Stimmen von Russlanddeutschen und Polen," *Deutsche Welle*, 16 September 2016, <https://www.dw.com/de/afd-wirbt-um-stimmen-von-russlanddeutschen-und-polen/a-1955644>.

³⁴ "The Three Seas Initiative: Central and Eastern Europe takes charge of its own destiny," *Visegrad Post*, 28 August 2016, <https://visegradpost.com/en/2016/08/28/the-three-seas-initiative-central-and-eastern-europe-takes-charge-of-its-own-destiny/>.

more populous countries.³⁵ Even though Poland would have benefitted from this arrangement, Premier Mateusz Morawiecki stood in solidarity with the smaller neighbors, showing that even Central European nationalists can overcome their differences to form a united bloc against the Union that does not conform to their vision of Europe.

The “return to Europe” also meant the improvement of social relations between the Slavs and Germans. Despite political bickering over history, economics, and politics, opinion polls indicate growing trust and sympathy. Whereas the results of the Polish-German Barometer study in 2000 recorded that 40 percent of Poles and 30 percent of Germans viewed the other nationals favorably, by 2018 both of these numbers had risen to 55 percent.³⁶ At the same time, the explicit “aversion” to the neighbor had dropped from 25 percent to around 11 for both cases. Similar trends can be observed between Czechs and Germans.³⁷ Historical memory is still affecting the Czech opinions of Germany as a country, but that does not translate to unfavorable opinions about the people. To Germans, the Czech Republic is a popular tourist destination, something that has not changed since the 1970s, but only 60 percent of Germans (as opposed to 90 percent of Czechs) describe their mutual relations as positive.³⁸ Young people in particular benefitted

³⁵ Jan Lopatka, “Central Europe edges toward backing EU recovery plan but want more from pot,” *Reuters*, 11 June 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-visegrad-idUSKBN23I2JN>.

³⁶ The Barometer Poland-Germany is a public opinion project focused on monitoring the state of social relations between the two nationalities. It is organized by various academic and public institutions such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, and the Deutsches Polen Institut. <https://www.deutsch-polnisches-barometer.de/>.

³⁷ “Beziehung im Wandel: Tschechen haben meist keine Probleme mehr mit Deutschen,” Český rozhlas – Radio Prague International, 16 January 2017, <https://deutsch.radio.cz/beziehung-im-wandel-tschechen-haben-meist-keine-probleme-mehr-mit-deutschen-8203279>.

³⁸ “Public attitudes in the Czech Republic and Germany towards Czech-German relations,” STEM-Ústav empirických výzkumů, December 2016, <https://en.stem.cz/public-attitudes-in-the-czech-republic-and-germany-towards-czech-german-relations/>.

from the freedom to travel and to study abroad through EU programs like Erasmus, which also reflects on the younger generation's overwhelmingly sympathetic attitudes toward the neighbors.

The focus on East-West relations after 1990 contributed to a neglect of North-South rapprochement. Even though Poles see Czechs and Slovaks as the most likable of their neighbors, this sentiment was not reciprocated and only slowly improves. According to multiple comments on social media and online discussion forums, Czechs continued to believe in stereotypes that “Poles hate us,” “they are smugglers and parasitic middlemen,” but that “this is what the communists taught us to believe.”³⁹ The actual experiences of travel and contact with the northern neighbor oftentimes show that the opposite is true: “Poles love us,” stated Monika Alberovská, a young professional working for a German company in Warsaw.⁴⁰

An explanation of this phenomenon also lies in the communist era. The centuries-long legend of Slavic brotherhood augmented itself in the 1960s and 1970s when Czechs offered a cultural alternative to domestic, Soviet, and German productions. Films, television series, cartoons, and music from Czechoslovakia were and remain highly popular—Helena Vondráčková still garners thousands of fans at her concerts in Poland. This is sadly the extent of Polish knowledge of Czechs. As a recent study of mutual perceptions concluded, Poles and Czechs think they know one another, but in reality, they just work with old stereotypes that Poles

³⁹ See for example, “Diskuse k článku: Nevzdává se, nezávidí a nenadává na svou vlast. Co by Polák neudělal,” from 2015 on idnes.cz, https://www.idnes.cz/cestovani/kolem-sveta/co-by-polak-neudelal.A150403_132339_kolem-sveta_tom/di; also the Czech Television documentary “Češi očima Poláků, Poláci očima Čechů,” (dir. J. Večeřa), Česká televize, 2008, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1100627928-ta-nase-povaha-ceska/408235100011019-cesi-ocima-polaku-polaci-ocima-cechu/>.

⁴⁰ “Poláci se doma nepřezouvají. A oběd ve dvanáct? Na to zapomeňte, říká Češka,” *Lidovky.cz*, 27 March 2018, https://www.lidovky.cz/cestovani/aktuality/polaci-se-doma-neprezouvaji-a-obed-ve-dvanact-na-to-zapomente-rika-ceska.A180326_110628_aktuality_ape.

are fighters, religious, and xenophobic; Czechs are friendly, relaxed, and drink beer.⁴¹ The situation on the Polish-Slovak axis is even worse because there are not even any widespread stereotypes about each other.⁴²

It would be hasty to conclude that neither the socialist integration nor the European Union succeeded at bringing the Central European populations closer together. At the moment, both projects have had a similar lifespan nearing twenty years. The relatively positive effects of European integration continue to improve and as long as the Schengen borders remain open and the tensions plaguing the EU find a resolution, the future looks promising. Socialist integration, however, was interrupted first by the upheavals in Poland then by the revolutions of 1989, therefore it did not have the time to show significant results. Within that time, though, some people managed to establish pioneering transnational connections in private, business, and dissident spheres that lasted into the new era. The fact that Polish-Slavic mutual appreciation at the turn of century was not lower than the 40 percent indicated in the polls can be at least partly attributed to the massive development of social relations in the 1970s and 1980s.

Nevertheless, the conditions under which the socialist open borders functioned did not constitute a perfect setting for dialogue. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, the regimes rushed the process without assuring that the participating societies were actually ready for integration. The ideas of integration constantly had to compete with a wide range of problems that nurtured enmity. The planned economy created shortages that made nationals vie for everyday products; Comecon's framework for cooperation complicated trade between the states,

⁴¹ Anton Dragomiletskii, "Postrzeżenie kultury kraju goszczącego przez studentów uczestniczących w programie Erasmus+ w świetle wzajemnych stereotypów – na przykładzie studentów z Polski i Czech," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska* 32 (2/2019): 179.

⁴² Michał Lubicz-Miszewski, "Polacy i Słowacy - bliscy(?) sąsiedzi: Polacy w oczach Słowaków: Słowacy w oczach Polaków," *Wschodnioznawstwo* (2/2008): 153-176.

leading to conflicts of interest; ideological censorship prevented the free exchange of ideas and buried painful historical memories, which inhibited understanding; dictatorial powers lied about the state of domestic affairs, touting national greatness and blaming foreigners for problems instead; lastly, the propagation of socialist patriotism contradicted communist internationalism and strengthened nationalist sentiments that survived the system. Hence, the analysis of these interlocking ambitions apparent in the Bloc's experiment, offers valuable lessons for any unification process, showing that political and economic freedom, equality, openness, mutual respect, and time for change to take effect are necessary prerequisites for integration.

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